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## THE PRESENT FRONTIERS OF WESLEYAN THEOLOGY

by  
Rob L. Staples

In 1893 the noted historian Frederick Jackson Turner of the University of Wisconsin wrote a book entitled *The Frontier in American History* in which he challenged the prevalent view that the American character was molded predominantly by the culture which the white settlers brought with them from Europe. Instead it was Turner's thesis that it was the challenge of the continually advancing frontier which made this nation what it is. "This perennial birth," said Turner "this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character."<sup>1</sup>

It is not my purpose here to discuss American history even if this is our Bicentennial year. Nor do I necessarily wish to promote Turner's thesis. Perhaps a true reading of American history would be less "either/or" and more "both/and" than was his. But translated into theology what he had to say is valid for present-day Wesleyanism. The original character of Wesleyan theology was molded by the innovative experimental genius of the Wesleys as they faced the challenge of the frontiers of eighteenth-century thought and culture.

Wesley was no systematic theologian in the technical sense. He was rather a theologian of "counter-action" (not *re*-action in the pejorative sense in which one merely repeats old cliches from the past, but *counter*-action in the sense that his theology was shaped by his response to the challenge of the threatening forces). In short, Wesley's theology was molded not in a speculative ivory tower, but on the frontier (sometimes literally in the saddle). His was not a "hothouse" theology but a "horseback" theology. And I believe that the degree of our sensitivity to the challenges of today's frontiers of thought and the dedication with which we face these challenges will decide whether Wesleyanism will be a viable alternative amid the growing multiplicity of options available today in the realm of belief, or unceremoniously confined to the theological museum as a quaint relic of a bygone era.

In developing his thesis of the frontier, Turner spoke of the "fluidity of American life." Likewise in the theology of John Wesley there was a rich *fluidity* of thought. His ideas were in constant ferment reshaping themselves in the crucible of experience, testing themselves by immersion in the acids of reason and enriching themselves in an interminable exploration of God's Word. It is the plight of much of modern Methodism that it has allowed this "fluid" to become a *vapor* in which the call to perfection has evaporated into a nebulous and far-off ideal. But it is the plight of the Holiness movement that too frequently this fluid has been

frozen into a *solid*, a "hardening of the categories," a deadening fixity of doctrinal forms in sacrosanct terminology.

I am not suggesting that Wesleyanism change its message. On that score, I will "out conserve" the most rigid conservative among us. But I am suggesting that there are some modern frontiers on which Wesleyan theologians ought to be working. I am suggesting that there are crises in our contemporary culture to which Wesleyanism can speak effectively *if it can find its voice*. And in order its voice it must of necessity listen to what is being said in the "profane" world around it (the Latin *pro-fanum* means "before the temple") In an unfair expression, and certainly an uncouth one, an opponent of the Wesleys once accused the early Methodists in their Class Meetings of spending their time looking at their own navels." Wesleyan theology dare not be caught doing that today. It must get modern man's attention and enter into dialogue with him. And this will require an understanding of his "profane" (outside the temple) language. Only thus can there be brought to fulfillment the true frontier spirit of Wesleyanism.

Of course there are dangers here. Merely to say something novel is the worst possible reason for "doing theology" at all. On my first trip to England to trace the steps of Wesley, I chanced one day to find myself passing through the city of Crewe, and I remembered the old limerick that I had learned in childhood:

There was an old fellow from Crewe  
Who discovered a mouse in his stew,  
Said the waiter, "Don't shout, or wave it about,  
Or the rest will be wanting on too "

In recent years an amazing number of so-called theologians have announced the "discovery" of some new "mouse" in the theological stew. In rapid succession we have been treated to liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, biopolitical theology, story theology and futurist theology to name only a few of these "theological mice." No sooner does one gourmet wave his mouse before the public than the next would-be scholar gets into the act and fins a new one. Certainly we Wesleyans must beware lest we seek novelty for novelty's sake.

But I must insist: *There is no final theology*, even for Wesleyans. Theology is not handed down from heaven on golden tablets. Theology is a human activity -- a work of man the thinker as he reflects upon his faith and seeks to express the content of this faith in the most meaningful language available in the contemporary human situation. Since man's situation is in continual flux, and since his perception of reality is being continually modified, theology, if it is to speak to men, must meet head-on the challenges which lie at the frontiers of human thought. Let us be clear on one distinction: God's Revelation is final, perfect, complete; but man's theological construction is never finished. We have no final theology. We only have a *Final Word!* It is *God's Word*, and we are commissioned to "go into all the world" proclaiming even to "the uttermost part of the earth," or in the words of Frederick Jackson Turner "on a continually advancing frontier line"<sup>2</sup>

The question now arises: Where is the frontier line today? What are Wesleyanism's frontiers?

First, I would hope that we would not waste our time and energy at the *wrong* frontiers. For instance the most significant challenge to Wesleyan theology today is no longer *Calvinism*, for the simple reason that Arminianism is already winning. And although the many aggressive members of Christ's Church who have Genevan genealogies would not allow the label "Arminian" to be applied to their vastly modified Calvinism, the fact remains that the kind of deterministic *weltanschauung* implicit in Calvinism is out of place in today's scientific and philosophical milieu. Furthermore within the framework of Christianity's confrontation with to-

day's culture we do well to remember that on the pertinent issues of sin and grace Wesley himself engaged in a "theological brinkmanship" coming to "the very edge of Calvinism"<sup>3</sup> and differing from Calvin "not a hair's breadth."<sup>4</sup>

Nor is the most serious challenge to the Wesleyan faith to be found in *Pentecostalism*-- "neo" or otherwise. This is one battle (if it is a battle) that we will best win by refusing to take up arms -- by taking a leaf from Gamaliel's notebook (Acts 5:38) and letting the wind blow where it wishes (John 3:8) and having made our own position crystal clear letting our lives demonstrate our Wesleyan conviction that the Spirit's *fruits* are ultimately more persuasive than the Spirit's *gifts*.

Nor should Wesleyanism spend its ammunition fighting "The Battle for the Bible" -- at least not in the terms in which Harold Lindsell has thrown down the gauntlet. To be sure, biblical authority is a vastly important issue in Wesleyan theology (and I will have more to say about this later), but we must resist all tendencies which would polarize Wesleyans in the way that Lindsell has sought to polarize Evangelicals as a whole.

No, our greatest challenge does not come from movements or ideas which, in common with Wesleyanism, are theistic and biblically oriented, however, much they may differ with us in interpretation. These are not sufficient targets to warrant the firing of all our weaponry. To discern the real frontiers we must scan the horizon more carefully.

The real frontier, I believe, lies in *the secularistic, humanistic, subjectivistic bent of our contemporary culture*. To put it simply the frontier on which Wesleyan theology ought to be working is the thought-world in which modern man now finds himself.

Today there is a widespread questioning of traditional belief stemming from the massive shifts in man's perception of his world and of himself that have taken place in modern times. The classical Christian tradition consisted of the inter-weaving of the biblical revelation with the science and philosophy of the ancient world. The system of theological ideas in which the Christian faith was first expressed naturally drew upon the mind of Graeco-Roman antiquity. Progressively refined, this edifice of ideas endured for over a millennium with its scientific and philosophical assumptions largely intact. Then about three hundred years ago the rise of experimental science triggered a rapid expansion of knowledge in all fields, accompanied by the upsurge of a spirit of invention exploration and social revolution. Profound transformations have occurred in the entire mind-set of modern man (or "post-Cartesian man" as Helmut Thielicke prefers to call him<sup>5</sup>).

At least three ingredients of this modern mind-set can be identified. They are (1) an assertion of the dignity and autonomy of free personhood, (2) an affirmation of the goodness of life in this world, and (3) an awareness of the reality of process and change.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, these three great revolutionary energies were identified by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* where he stated that the three fundamental questions raised by the mind of man are: (1) What can I know? (2) What should I do? (3) What may I hope?<sup>7</sup> The first question is that of *epistemology*; the second is explicitly the question of *ethics* and, implicitly and derivatively that of *ecology*; the third is the question of *eschatology*. If we remember that, as William Hordern has pointed out, the twentieth century did not begin *theologically* until after 1914, it is quite striking that thus far in the twentieth century theology has successively (I did not say successfully!) dealt with these three questions. The first of Kant's questions ("What can I know?") was the problem with which neo-orthodoxy mainly grappled. Epistemology was in the forefront, as Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, and the other greats wrestled with the question of hermeneutics and the problem of revelation.

Then in the sixties, Kant's second question ("What should I do?") gained the headlines. Radical, or secular, theology was the result, with its catchword "God is dead." There was really nothing we could *know*, only something to *do*. Since there was no God to do it for us, man, now "come of age," must get busy and feed the hungry, and create justice. Theology became ethics--social and situational—but strangely and sadly an ethics with no theological underpinning. The positive value of this otherwise negative outlook was a recovery of the Hebraic and Reformation insights that the realm of the secular was not evil but good. Along with this reaffirmation of the goodness of life in this present world there was also the recognition that the natural world itself was good. This has factored out into the current theological interest in ecology and the possibilities of a theology of nature.

And now in the seventies we are right in the middle of a great surge of interest in Kant's third question ("What may I hope?"). The answer to this eschatological question has taken two forms. In Germany we have seen the rise of the "Theology of Hope," with Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg as two of its main leaders, relying to some extent on the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, but finding antecedents in the thought of Henri Bergson, Pierre de Chardin and others. In America the answer to this question has relied mostly on Whiteheadian philosophy. Charles Hartshorne was one of the main early theological interpreters of Whitehead's philosophy. Contemporary thinkers such as John B. Cobb and Schubert Ogden have made serious attempts to find in Whitehead a philosophical base for Christian theology.

Now to return to the starting point of this essay: I suggest that the proper frontiers on which Wesleyan theology ought to be diligently working, it is to speak effectively to this age, are precisely these three revolutionary ideas in the mind-set of modern man, namely (1) the assertion of autonomy, (2) the affirmation of worldly life, and (3) the awareness of the reality of change. What I am pleading for is a Wesleyan apologetic which will be a true "theology of mediation" or "correlation theology" which seriously relates the Wesleyan message to man's present perception of reality. It is my conviction that Wesleyan theology is uniquely suited both to profitably appropriate from, and to offer needed correctives to, modern man's self-understanding. Because of both its content and its methodology, Wesleyan theology can push into these frontiers in a way that is impossible for other Christian traditions.

To spell out all the details of such a program is obviously too big an undertaking for a short essay. I can only offer suggestions. But it is hoped that such suggestions will be sufficiently heuristic to point the way that such an exploration into these frontiers should take.

Above, I have listed these three suggested frontiers in Kant's order --which is also the chronological order in which they have been developed in twentieth century theology. I wish now to reverse this order to reflect the degree of urgency with which each frontier, as I see it, beckons to Wesleyan pioneers. Thus I will deal, in an ascending order of importance with modern man's (1) awareness of evolutionary change, (2) affirmation of worldliness, and (3) assertion of autonomous Freedom. Not every aspect of each frontier can be adequately dealt with; therefore, some further narrowing of the subject is necessary. Perhaps the extrapolation of just one problem in each frontier will suffice to illustrate the sort of "Wesleyan correlation theology" I have in mind: (1) Central to man's awareness of the reality of change is the current interest in Process Philosophy. (2) At least one expression of man's affirmation of life in this world is the current concern for the natural environment --the ecological crisis. (3) And lying at the heart of man's assertion of freedom is the problem of authority, particularly *religious* authority. Within these parameters, then, we will proceed.

## I. Process Thought and the Wesleyan Way

The hottest thing in town today is process theology, which refers specifically to reflection on the content of Christian faith in the context of the metaphysical vision of Alfred North Whitehead. Actually it is no newcomer. But just at the time when process theology might have flourished, it was pushed onto a back burner by neo-orthodoxy. Only with the demise of the neo-orthodox consensus about 1960 did process theology come into its own.

Ancient thought tended to equate the real with the unchanging. The great thinkers Plato and Aristotle, who influenced all subsequent science and theology, acknowledged the fact of motion and change but judged them inferior in the scale of being. They saw real, true being as that which was eternally unmoved and unchanging. But Whitehead, in the 1920s and 1930s, challenged these assumptions. The roots of process thought can be traced back to Heraclitus, who once observed that one could not step into the same river twice. The basis of reality, said he, was change and flux. This idea was in sharp contrast with Parmenides, who held that "being" was prior to "becoming," and that underlying every change was some more fundamental reality that endured. By a fateful choice of history, Parmenides became the father of metaphysics and the basis of most of Western thought, while Heraclitus was largely ignored. As a result Western thought and the entire Christian tradition was cast into the mold of the static concepts of "being" and "substance" rather than the more dynamic concepts of "becoming" and "process."

Until very recent times we were content with the way Parmenides viewed the universe. There was an underlying stability to our institutions, our culture, and our lives. But in recent years we are being confronted with a suspicion regarding the capacity of our culture to deal with radical change. All this has created for us a new perception of reality. No longer is reality seen as fundamentally stable, with change being merely an accidental alteration of its makeup. Today reality itself is experienced as being in constant flux, so that the basic category of reality is process, not stability. We have returned to the insight of Heraclitus: we cannot step into the same river twice because our world is not the same world twice.

Under Parmenides' categories of "being," if someone were asked to identify the smallest unit of reality, he would probably name the smallest bit of matter, an atom or an electron. But under the process category of "becoming," Whitehead suggests a new model: the fundamental elements of reality are "actual occasions" or "moments of experience." And with this "experience model" we come immediately to a point of contact with Wesleyan theology, with its emphasis on experience and the "moment-by-moment" life of holiness.

I have some severe questions about process theology. Its concept of God, at least in Whitehead, seems inadequate -- although Hartshorne's bipolar theism in which God embraces *both* "being" *and* "becoming" may bear some resemblance to the traditional Christian insight that God is both transcendent and immanent. The concept of immortality in process thought is, I believe, sub-Christian. A process Christology, which appears to be the central interest right now among the process theologians, seems to result in either an adoptionism on the one hand or else a neo-Apollinarianism on the other. Process thought *may* offer some possibility for a Christian ethics which steers between a legalism on one hand and a situationism on the other.

But I do strongly suspect that these process categories offer some models which will help us to clarify our Wesleyan doctrines of man, sin, and sanctification. Regarding the latter, Wesleyans have always insisted that sanctification is both a *crisis* and a *process*. But exactly how these two are to be related has not been made conceptually clear. Perhaps the Whiteheadian concept of "actual occa-

sions" together with his related concept of "prehension" could enable us to show how sanctification is not merely a crisis, not merely a process, not merely *both* a crisis *and* a process held in some loose and undefined conjunction, and not merely a *series* of crises unrelated to one another as in the Oberlin theology and as in a strictly existentialist interpretation. With this suggestion I pass on to the next frontier:

## II. The Ecological Crisis and the Wesleyan World

The second frontier which we mapped out above is modern man's affirmation of life in this present world and the essential goodness of the natural world itself.

This has not always been the case. In past ages religious wisdom, as it was conditioned by Greek philosophy, tended to be pessimistic about the here and now. This life was merely a place to prepare for the next. The spiritual took exclusive preference over the material, the heavenly over the earthly. In spite of its Hebraic heritage, early Christian theology was conditioned by this atmosphere, due to the Platonic notion that this world was only a shadow of the *real* world which was spiritual.

Today a drastically different attitude prevails. Human history and life in this material world are celebrated as meaningful and good. Along with this mood there has come about an intense concern for the natural environment.

It would be presumptuous of me indeed to claim to speak with authority on all the ramifications of Ecology. Although I am deeply interested in the subject of ecology as a "science", I have no qualifications along that line. My concern is that of a theologian -- to see to it that the scientific and technological solutions to the problem are not grounded on presuppositions which are incompatible with biblical and Christian truth. It is my conviction that Wesleyan theology has at least a helpful comment or two to contribute to the search for a solution to the Ecological Crisis. At least Wesleyans need to be aware of whatever resources their faith contains for a relevant "theology of ecology."

Wesleyan theology has always recognized the validity of *experience* as a guide to truth. John Wesley himself was willing to modify his theological formulations, even the doctrine of Christian perfection, if experience clearly showed such modification to be necessary. I recognize that one could push this principle too far. But it would seem safe to say that as today our human experience is teaching us how essential is man's interrelatedness with his natural environment, it may be necessary to reformulate and enlarge some of the customary expressions of Wesleyan theology. At least it will be necessary that we seek to make applications of our theology in areas of life previously ignored.

There are some principles inherent in Wesleyan theology which, we believe, offer *implicit* help toward shaping a proper Christian theology of the environment. The first of these principles is what I would call the *continuity between nature and grace*. In more theological language it is the doctrine of prevenient grace. We do not *identify* nature and grace as do romanticists, deists, and pantheists. But neither do we posit a radical discontinuity between the two, as traditional Protestant theology, through Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, has sometimes tended to do. In Wesleyanism, nature is, as my colleague Dr. J. Kenneth Grider calls it, "a residency of grace."<sup>9</sup> Francis Schaeffer makes much the same point. Nature *is* valuable because God made it. Jesus taught that God is aware of the sparrows, i.e. they are valuable as His creatures. But in the same breath Jesus said that we (humans) are of more value than the sparrows.<sup>10</sup> As Schaeffer says it, the Christian, unlike the pantheist, has *categories*. Such a view would seem, however, to be more logically consistent in a Wesleyan framework in which nature and grace have a con-

tinuity between them, than in Schaeffer's Calvinist orientation with its "pessimism of nature" and its postponement of total deliverance from sin to the other world. Also the tendency of Calvinism to locate sin in the "flesh" undercuts any positive view it might otherwise have of the relation between nature and grace.

Wesleyan theology, then, when true to its own best principles, will take a respectful, almost reverent, attitude toward the natural world -- not as an end in itself but as the residency, the vehicle, of grace.

A second Wesleyan principle which has relevance for ecology is the *doctrine of Christian perfection* or Perfect Love which is the distinctive Wesleyan tenet. John Wesley always defined Christian perfection in terms of *love* -- love to God and neighbor. Christian perfection meant nothing more nor less than loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving one's neighbor as oneself. Martin Buber points out, and we believe Wesley would agree, that Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as oneself, which is quoted from Leviticus 19:18, does not mean, in the Hebrew language, "love your neighbor as you love yourself," but rather "love your neighbor *as one like yourself*." Buber further says, and again we believe Wesley would agree:

Creation is not a hurdle on the road to God, it is the road itself. We are created along with one another and directed to a life with one another. Creatures are placed in my way so that I, their fellow-creature, by means of them and with them find the way to God.<sup>11</sup>

Thus as Wesleyans the direction is already mapped out for us regarding our proper attitude toward the environment. Wesleyans have always professed "love to neighbor" as the way of Holiness. But today our human experience in the world is teaching us that the neighbor cannot be separated from his natural environment. It would seem a very legitimate extension of our doctrine of Perfect Love to say that if we truly love our neighbor, our concern for him will not stop with "saving his soul," or even with feeding his body, but will extend also to the saving of his world, i.e. his physical environment. We cannot consistently love our neighbor if we permit the destruction of his life-support systems.

### **III. The Problem of Authority and the Wesleyan Word**

The third frontier for Wesleyan theology today lies in modern man's assertion of the dignity of free personality and the right of all persons to do "their own thing" and find fulfillment in their own way. Ancient philosophy could scarcely see any exalted meaning in the exercise of human freedom. Such a philosophical climate encouraged a theology of predestination.

Here again a vastly different mood prevails today. No value is more highly esteemed than human freedom and creativity. This is all to the good. But along with such gains there is a widespread and virulent epistemological subjectivism that permeates our post-Cartesian world, and an accompanying moral relativism which leaves man without a final standard to which he can appeal for authority. In theory there are as many standards as there are individuals.

History amply demonstrates that man seems unable to bear the burden of absolute freedom and autonomy. Clyde Manschreck says of man:

He is social as well as individual, and to have society he *must have authority*. Absolute freedom with its overtones of relativism, chaos, and nihilism is not tolerable. Any such situation has to be overridden in order to have society -- hence the rise of totalitarianism at a time when agreement on purposes and goals has collapsed. Authority is necessary for human community, but the obedience that undergirds authority must be made freely and responsibly. To have authority in this sense depends on a return to a consensus of values. What sym-

bols, myths, epistemologies, events, or structures will bring this about ... is not yet evident.<sup>12</sup>

Even to hint that Wesleyan theology might be able to present to the world a view of authority that could become a "consensus," and thus a rescuer of society, might appear to be an impossible dream. Nevertheless, we Wesleyans need to be aware, and to be able to make others aware, of the epistemological resources explicit and implicit in our particular understanding of authority. I speak especially of *religious* or *theological* authority, but what we believe about this has implications for other types of authority as well -- political, social, economic, etc.

The ability of Wesleyanism to speak to this problem lies in the emphasis it places on *experience* as a way to truth. Roger Shinn has written: "There can be in Christian faith no authority that does not either arise out of human experience or somehow enter into that experience."<sup>13</sup> With this statement, both Wesleyans and "moderns" would agree. But Shinn goes on to state an opposite but equally valid truth: "the whole message of the Cross is that authority in some way stands over against us and our experience -- especially the experiences that we are likely to assert most dogmatically and confidently."<sup>14</sup> With this statement Wesleyans would agree but modern man would not. Modern man cannot accept this "over-against-ness" of authority. It is the genius of Wesleyan theology that in its view of authority it is able to make a place both for the truth that "authority arises out of experience" and the truth that "authority stands over against our experience."

We are treading here on unplowed ground. Theological methodology is a great unworked area in Wesleyan theology. One reason for this is that since the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy there has been a major, although sometimes unconscious, shift in methodology in Wesleyan circles. Wesleyanism has been fenced into a ghetto, with reference to epistemology, and any contribution it might have made to the authority crisis of our time has gone unnoticed. Wesleyanism has been trapped into "allowing its emotional ties with the *aims* of Fundamentalism to saddle it with a Fundamentalist doctrine of the Scripture that is quite out of place in Wesleyanism."<sup>15</sup>

John Wesley had a well-balanced view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the area of *soteriology*. But sometimes his followers have forgotten the essential Christocentricity of Wesley's doctrines of salvation, especially the doctrine of sanctification. In almost every instance, Wesley's descriptions of holiness were given in terms of Christlikeness. And certainly this was in keeping with the emphasis of his favorite New Testament writer, John, for whom the Paraclete would not bear witness to himself but to Christ. The preservation of this Christocentricity will be our strongest bulwark against the aberrations of neo-Pentecostalism.

It is now equally urgent that Wesleyanism recover John Wesley's emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the area of *epistemology* as well. We must avoid describing the Holy Spirit's work in inspiring the written words of Scripture in such a way that we detract from the understanding that we have only *one* Revelation -- Christ Jesus. The authority of Scripture lies not merely in the fact that its written words were inspired, but that the Living Word by way of the written words has been heard in the Proclamation of the Church and witnessed to by the inner testimony of the Spirit in the heart.

This *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum* fulfills the basic requirement of modernity, that authority must "arise out of experience." But since it is *the Spirit*, and not man himself in his subjectivity, such authority also "stands over against" human experience. In a letter to Dr. Conyers Middleton in 1749, John Wesley discusses the merits of inward experiential authority compared with the external tradition authority of Christianity. By external authority he means the creeds and doctrines of the historic church in which Scripture is interpreted. Though he re-

spects this kind of evidence, priority belongs to the *inward* evidence because it is contemporary, comprehensible, and intimate.<sup>16</sup> Again and again Wesley stresses the experiential nature of true religion.<sup>17</sup> He uses such phrases as an "experimental knowledge and love of God"<sup>18</sup> and "an experimental knowledge of Christ."<sup>19</sup>

Of course Wesley had a strong doctrine of the *external* authority of the inspired Scripture. Said he: "The best way to know whether anything be of doctrine authority is to apply ourselves to the Scripture."<sup>20</sup> The Scriptures, for Wesley, constituted the "Oracles of God"<sup>21</sup> and thus "stand over against" our own experience. One would suppose that Wesley's strong emphasis on the full inspiration of the written Scriptures would have made any further authorization superfluous and unnecessary. Nevertheless he often speaks of the Holy Spirit's inspiration of those who read and hear the sacred text, as in the words of Charles's hymn:

The meaning of the written word  
Is still by inspiration given,  
Thou only dost Thyself explain  
The secret mind of God to man.  
Come then, Divine Interpreter,  
The scriptures to our hearts apply.<sup>22</sup>

And again:

Spirit of Faith, come down,  
Reveal the things of God,  
And make to us the Godhead known,  
And witness with the blood.

No man can truly say  
That Jesus is the Lord,  
Unless Thou take the veil away,  
And breathe the living word.<sup>23</sup>

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is needed for a saving understanding and believing of the Scripture. Wesley says: "The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer."<sup>24</sup>

We see then that, although in Wesleyan thought the authority of experience always has reference to the *Holy Spirit* (and this is its corrective of modernity), such authority is nevertheless not merely externally imposed but "arises from experience" (and this is its continuity with modernity).

Fully as important to Wesley as the fact that the Holy Spirit inspired the *writers* of Scripture is the correlative fact that the same Spirit inspires the *readers*, and hearers, of Scripture. Sometimes he does seem to use the Scriptures as, in the words of Sangster, "an arsenal of proof-texts." And he even sounds like a Fundamentalist when he says: "If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand."<sup>25</sup> But such "inerrancy" was not, for Wesley, the foundation of his belief in the Scripture's *authority*. He had a higher view of Scripture than that.

Wesley would understand well Luther's statement that Christ is Lord and King of Scripture. He echoed Luther's dictum that "Scripture is its own interpreter." Furthermore, he would approve Luther's idea that the scripture interprets itself Christocentricity, and his metaphor that the Bible is the manger in which Christ is laid." Wesley would agree also with Calvin who sounds so heteronomously authoritarian in many of his utterances but who so clearly stated that the Bible becomes our true authority only as the Spirit witnesses to it. Where this *testimonium* is lacking, the Bible becomes merely an external (heteronomous) authority, obedience to which would be mere subjection and not inward personal experience.

Squarely at the core of Wesleyan theology is the significance of experience – experience with real authority as a way to truth. But this similarity which Wesleyanism has with the modern mind is balanced by the corrective insight of Wesleyanism that this experience is not mere *human* experiences alone but is rather experience of the Living Word of God. This Living Word is the *Living Lord*. But obedience to this Living Lord is not heteronomy. For the Living Lord is none other than the Spirit who indwells the believer. This is what William Temple called "the immanence of the transcendent." But the Holy Spirit is never a whit less transcendent when most fully immanent, no more easily exploited because He is "closer to us than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." Always His domain is the *human* and the *historical*. The Spirit does not speak of himself, but takes what Christ has said and discloses it to us (John 16:13-14). The unique ministry of the Spirit is the realization of the effects of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in the hearts and lives of men.

The Spirit answers to the blood,  
And tells me I am born of God.

Perhaps Paul said it best, in II Cor. 3:17-18:

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.  
But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord,  
are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from  
the Lord, the Spirit.

The Spirit lives within us when we open our lives to Him. Therefore our authority (the Lord) is not an external, heteronomous, on-the-Throne authority. The authority is an Other, but an Other who is within us. And as we obey that Authority, we soon find we are obeying the very laws of our own essential being. We find *our* freedom in *His* will. Autonomy truly finds itself in theonomy. When we do His will, we do our own deepest will. The Authority then wills our own deepest interests. By losing ourselves we find ourselves. And *this* is freedom. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

If Wesleyanism will develop this with intellectual vigor and spiritual conviction, it can speak to the authority crisis in today's world. At the same time it can avoid the bloodletting of the "Battle for the Bible" being fought among evangelicals. Wesleyanism does not quarrel with the concept of biblical inerrancy, providing such inerrancy is understood as Wesley would understand it, and kept within the context of the entire Wesleyan understanding of authority. But true Wesleyanism *does* quarrel with those who define inerrancy in such a way that it can only be attributed to some nonexistent "autographs" and who then base their entire structure of biblical authority on such a definition. The inerrancy which Wesleyans affirm of the Bible is an inerrancy which can be affirmed of the extant texts. Any discussion of any other kind of inerrancy is merely academic and a *non sequitur*.

The sons and daughters of John Wesley, saturated with the spirit of their father in the faith, can say to other Evangelicals: "Look, you who are fighting down there on the plains of this needles hermeneutical Armageddon. You may kill each other off if you insist! But we are saddened by such a possibility. We wish you would lay down your arms and join us up here on the Mountain. For we have *an authority greater than inerrancy!*"

#### IV. Conclusion

I have enumerated the present frontiers of Wesleyan theology as I see them. In each of these areas Wesleyan theology is, I believe, the best-equipped of all theological traditions both to creatively appropriate from and to constructively offer

correctives to, the central insights of modern man. Such a Wesleyan "correlation theology" is the crying need of the hour. The frontiers beckon. Let us be on our journey!

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), pp. 2-3.
2. *Ibid*
3. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, A.M., ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room, 1831), VIII, 285. Cited hereafter as *Works*.
4. *The Letters of Rev. John Wesley*, A.M., ed. John Telford (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), IV, 298. Cited hereafter as *Letters*.
5. Cf. Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974).
6. Cf. A. Durwood Foster, *The God Who Loves* (New York: Bruce Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 6-8.
7. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1934), p. 457.
8. The latter is one possible reading of John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975).
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10. Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), p.85.
11. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 52.
12. Clyde L. Manschreck, "Authority and Skepticism: An Introductory Essay," *Erosion of Authority*, ed. By Clyde L. Manschreck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 32.
13. Roger L. Shinn, "The Locus of Authority: Participatory Democracy in the Age of the Expert," *Erosion of Authority*, p. 9.
14. *Ibid*
15. Paul M. Bassett, "Conservative Wesleyan Theology and the Challenge of Secular Humanism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Spring, 1973, pp. 74-75.
16. *Letters*, II, 383-88.
17. *Works*, V, 186; VII, 461; VIII, 204; Cf. *Letters*, III, 41, 47; VI, 136; VII, 47.
18. *Works*, VII, 283.
19. *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), Phil. 3:8; Eph. 4:13. Cited hereafter as *Notes*.
20. *Letters*, III, 128-129.
21. *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, ed. Edward H. Sugden (2 Vols.; London: The Epworth Press, 1921), I, 245. Cf. *Notes*, Rom. 12:6; *Works*, VII, 294, 296.
22. Osburn, G., editor. *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* (13 Vols.; London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference Office, 1868-72), VII, 249.
23. *Ibid.*, IV. 196.
24. *Notes*, II Tim. 3:16; cf. Acts 7:38; John 15:3; Heb. 4:12
25. Cf. Harold Linsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

# THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT: PROMISE OF GRACE OR JUDGEMENT?

by  
Willard H. Taylor

The current interest in the ministry of the Holy Spirit among Christians in the Wesleyan, Keswickian, and Pentecostal sectors of the Church has evoked numerous studies on the subject of the Holy Spirit in personal experience.<sup>1</sup> Pentecostalism, or neo-pentecostalism in particular has focused sharply on the New Testament's teaching on the baptism with the Holy Spirit. By no means is this a new subject; it has been treated in depth many times in the past. However, the influence of the parties promoting the experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit accompanied with certain gifts has driven some New Testament scholars to take a fresh look at the biblical material which speaks of the Spirit.

The major NT saying on this subject springs from the ministry of John the Baptist and reappears at two places in the book of Acts. According to Mark 1:8, John announces, "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (RSV). Mathew and Luke also record this prophecy but add "and fire." In Acts 1:5 Jesus uses the statement but does not use the words "and fire." In Acts 11:16 Peter reminds his Jerusalem hearers that Jesus spoke of the Spirit's baptism which he reported the Gentiles at experienced at Caesarea.

Even a casual view of this logion would suggest its importance to the Early Church's view of salvific experience. John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter quote it in contexts which uniquely relate to an experience of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the episode in Acts 19, in which the Ephesian disciples are queried by Paul regarding the Holy Spirit, has distant relevance to the issues raised in the interpretation of this tradition.

In this paper I shall analyze textually this distinctive logion and explore again the question: Is the baptism with the Holy Spirit a baptism of grace or judgment? I am not prepared to offer a new solution to an old problem, but I hope to update our thinking on it and thus enrich our long-standing position on the Spirit's baptism.

## Textual Analysis

Significant differences appear in the several recordings of this tradition. Assuming Mark's gospel to be the first one written, we begin there. Mark 1:8 reads: *ego ebaptisa humas hudati, autos de baptisei humas en pneumati hagio*. Two variations from other texts are to be noted: (1) *en* does not appear with *hudati* and (2) Mark admits *kai puri*.<sup>2</sup>

The Matthean account reads: *ego men humas baptizo en hudati eis metanoian; ho de opiso mou erchomenos ischuroteros mou estin ... autos humas baptisei en*

*pneumatic hagio kai puri*. The variations here are several but not all of them are significant. (1) The affirmative particle *men* is used correlatively with *de*, obviously to emphasize the contrast between John's baptism and the Coming One's baptism. (2) Mathew uses the present tense in speaking of John's work (*baptizo*) where as Mark employs the aorist tense (*ebaptisa*).<sup>3</sup> (3) *En* is added to *hudati*. (4) The experiential result of John's baptism is expressed in the phrase *eis metanoian*. (5) The statement of deference to the Greater One (s) power and position intercepts the contrast between John's ministry and that of the Coming One. (6) The addition of *kai puri* is perhaps the most important difference and, interestingly, there are no textual variance in the extant manuscripts of this Gospel related to this addition. (7) Mathew follows the statement with the dramatic picture of the Coming One's act of spiritual threshing. "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (3:12).

Luke's record of the baptism logion also contains some significant variations. (1) The crowds that came out to hear him are not identified as to religious persuasion; he simply refers to the multitudes (3:7, 10). (2) The people are responsive to his message to the degree that they want to know what "fruit" would befit the required repentance (3:10-24). (3) John's word on the two baptisms is an answer to the expectation of the crowds that he might be the Christ (3:15-16). (4) Luke's rendering of the tradition is identical to Mathew's with the exception of the word order in the first part and the omission of *en* before *hudati*: *Ego men hudati baptizo humas ... autos humas baptisei en pneumati hagio kai puri* (3:16). Then follows the special threshing analogy. (5) It is noteworthy that the next pericope leads with the word, "So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news (*euangelizeto*) to the people" (3:18).

Strange things happen to this saying when the Fourth Evangelist records it. It appears in a principal section of the first chapter in which John the Baptist is compelled to identify himself to priests and Levites who had been sent from Jerusalem by the Pharisees. The issue of identity arises within the context of messianic interests (1:19-34). When the Baptizer denies that he is the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet, his inquisitors then want to know why he is baptizing, since he does not carry the authority of one of these messianic persons. Strangely, John replies, "I baptize with water (*ego baptizo en hudati*); but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" (1:26-27). The contrast of John's baptism with the Coming One is missing. In fact, at this point the writer adds a geographical note and introduces another pericope the substance of which is an event which occurs the following day. Time will not permit an exposition of this unique paragraph; suffice it to say, the Baptizer declares that his coming to baptize with water was to the end of revealing "the Lamb of God" (1:30-31). John further asserts that he did not know this One until the Spirit descended on Him. God had instructed John: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (*houtos estin ho baptizon en pneumati hagio*, 1:33). As we all know, the purpose of the writer of the Fourth Gospel is multifaceted and this passage shares in that purpose. Nevertheless, for our interest, it is sufficient to point out that John makes it clear that the One who possesses the Spirit is the One who rightly can baptize with the Spirit. The Lamb of God is the Baptizer with the Spirit because the Spirit has authenticated Him as the Son of God.

John definitely identifies the Coming One as the Son of God "who baptizes (*baptizon*, present tense) with the Holy Spirit" (1:33-34). In referring to Christ's ministry of baptism the Synoptic writers use the future tense. Jon employs the present tense but with a future denotation, the baptizing by Christ not having taken

place yet but being so certain that it may be contemplated as already happening.

Moving to the book of Acts we discover two instances of this logion, both of which follow the Markan abbreviated version. The first one appears in the opening pericope of the book. This opening paragraph was intended to link the new document with Luke's Gospel (1:1-2), to authenticate the resurrection of Christ to the reader (1:3), and to assure the reader that what happened at Pentecost and subsequently in the life of the embryonic Christian community was promoted and predicted by the risen Lord (1:4-5). The supportive word for this last note is the baptism logion.

Christ charges the disciples not to leave Jerusalem "but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, *hoti Joannes men ebaptisen hudati, humeis de en pneumati baptisthesesthe hagio ou meta pollas tautas hemeras*'" ("for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy spirit," 1:5, RSV).

Along with a slight change in word order there are five significant notes in this appearance of the baptism tradition. First, Christ associates "the promise of the Father" with the baptism with the Spirit. Second, He reminds the disciples that He has spoken of this matter previously (*hen ekousate mou*), in all likelihood referring to Luke 24:49. However, in that case nothing is said about baptism. Third, Christ indicates that their baptism with the Holy Spirit will occur shortly (*ou meta pollas tautas hemeras*,) literally, "not after these many days"). Fourth, Christ does not say explicitly that He will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Fifth, the risen Lord acknowledges the propriety of John's baptism, and for that matter, the whole ministry of John, which was focused in the waster baptism, but Christ's disciples stand at the entrance of the new age of the Spirit in which they will see the fulfillment of the promise of the Father and be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The last reference to the logion appears in the speech of St. Peter in which he recounts the story of the amazing ministry of the Spirit in the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:16). He tells his Jerusalem brethren, "And I remember the word of the Lord, how he said, *Joannes man ebaptisen hudati, humeis de baptisthesesthe en pneumati hagio*" ("John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit"). With the exception of a correction in the placement of the phrase "with the Holy Spirit," the two Acts accounts are identical. Noteworthy, however, is Peter's recognition of Christ as the source of the logion.

Why does Peter employ the saying? Evidently it is to authenticate to the Jerusalem critics the experience of the Gentiles. Peter is responding to criticism from the circumcision party in having gone to the house of Cornelius (11:2). His answer includes not only his testimony to divine direction by means of the housetop experience but also the fact that the Lord had spoken of the baptism with the Spirit. Confidently and rhetorically Peter asks, "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" The gift is the same as that received by the disciples at Pentecost, namely, the Holy Spirit.

In summary, this unique logion on the Spirit's baptism apparently is one of the major kerygmatic and didactic guides for the early church's ministry. The salient features are several, and they all in one way or the other govern the interpretation of the saying across the centuries. First, in each instance a contrast is intended between the baptism with water and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Two different baptizers perform these baptisms. This contrast comes through succinctly in the emphatic use of the pronouns *ego* and *autos*. Second, the Synoptic accounts speak of the Coming One who will baptize with the Spirit, but John's Gospel specifically identifies Christ as the baptizer. However, when Christ uses this traditional saying, He does not refer to himself as the administrator of the Spirit

baptism. Third, only Mathew and Luke add the phrase *kai puri* to the saying and follow it with the threshing analogy. Fourth, Jesus unites "the promise of the Father" with "the baptism with the Holy Spirit."

According to James D.G. Dunn, the history of exegesis has followed essentially four lines of thought. I shall review these four interpretations in a slightly different order for reasons germane to my interests.<sup>4</sup>

### **Baptism with Fire**

In 1894 C.A. Briggs published a monograph entitled *The Messiah of the Gospels* in which he propounded the view, after an attempt to reconstruct the Aramaic behind the Matthean and Lukan saying, that we are not to read "with the Holy Spirit" but simply "with fire." The original contrast was not between water and Holy Spirit but between water and fire. Numerous prominent scholars have accepted this interpretation, among whom are Wellhausen, J. Weiss, Bultmann, Creed, Flemington, T.W. Manson, and V. Taylor. Taylor concludes that this view is strongly supported by the saying about the fan, the wheat, and the chaff which is found immediately following the logion in Mathew and Luke. "in this context a reference to the fire as judgment is natural. Probably, then, the reference to the Holy Spirit has introduced under the influence of the Christian practice of baptism."<sup>5</sup> Based upon the usage of fire in I Cor. 3:13, Creed suggests that the "baptism be fire" can also carry the thought of fire as a testing as well as a destructive force, which would more readily relate the baptism to believers.<sup>6</sup>

Ernest Best asserts that there is no reference in the Jewish tradition to the Holy Spirit as the gift of the Messiah. The Testament of Levi, 18, and the Testament of Judah, 24, are exceptions; but they are not conclusive since it cannot be established that they are free from Christian influence. Also while we cannot press the passage because of its peculiar difficulties, Acts 19: 1ff. Suggests that the disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus had not even heard about the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The conjecture is that a transformation from a fire baptism to a Spirit baptism took place, and Best conceives the process as follows:

John began by contrasting his baptism with that of a future baptism in fire by the Messiah; the means of the carrying out of John's baptism was water; the means of the carrying out of the Messianic baptism will be fire. This continued to be the tradition concerning John's teaching. Meanwhile baptisms were taking place within the Christian community and those who were baptized received the Holy Spirit; such baptisms were in the name of Jesus the Messiah; thus Christians were described as baptized with the Spirit; hence the origin of the Marcan tradition which was then added to the Q to produce the present form in Matt. And Luke.<sup>8</sup>

This interpretation places heavy weight upon the "back projection" of later Christian thought, so that Mark's statement represents a recasting of the original saying of baptism by fire. Mathew and Luke's source, on the other hand, simply conflates the fire and Spirit traditions. Dunn's reaction to this view is deft and sound, "But the fact remains that we have no text which speaks of baptism in fire; it is a purely hypothetical construction."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, if we grant the priority of the Matthean and Lukan source, and if we conceive Mark as having access to it, we might justifiably conclude that Mark "abbreviated the fuller saying (*pneumati kai puri*) in the light of the Christian fulfillment." This would also account for his omission of John's emphasis on judgment, especially in the threshing analogy.<sup>10</sup>

### **Double Lustration**

Origen took the prophecy of John to denote that those who repented were to

be baptized with the Holy Spirit but those who failed to repent were to be baptized with the fire of everlasting punishment. In this view Mathew and Luke give the full rendering of the prophecy, whereas Mark typically abbreviates it.

The scholarly support of this interpretation is extensive, including such names as Buchsel, Easton, Michaelis, Lohmeyer, Lang, Brownlee, Leenhardt, R. E. Brown, Bornkamm, J.A.T. Robinson, Ray Summers. Most recently, Eldon Ladd has taken this view. Depending heavily on the context, he asserts that John announces a single baptism that involves two elements. "The Coming One will baptize the righteous with the Holy Spirit and the wicked with fire."<sup>11</sup> The novel element in John's message is that the Messiah will pour out the Spirit upon God's people. But there will also be a baptism of fire. The wheat will be gathered into the granary but the chaff will be burned up with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). "Unquenchable" points to an eschatological judgment, "for it extends the limits of the ordinary means of consuming chaff (cf. Isa. 1:31; 66:24; Jer. 7:20)."<sup>12</sup> The coming of the kingdom, therefore, means radical separation: "some will be gathered into the divine granary – theirs will be a baptism of the Spirit; others will be swept away in judgment – theirs will be baptism of fire."<sup>13</sup>

The major argument against the twofold view rests with the preposition *en* and the pronoun *humas*. With respect to the preposition, it is not repeated before *puri*, which if included, would have carried the implication of a second dimension of the baptism. *En* embraces both elements, so "there are not two baptisms envisaged, one with Spirit and one with fire, only one baptism in Spirit-and-fire."<sup>14</sup> The repeat of *humas* in the saying indicates that both John's and the Christ's baptisms are to be administered to the same people. "Spirit-and-fire baptism is not offered as an alternative to John's water-baptism, nor does one accept John's baptism in order to escape the messianic baptism. Rather one undergoes John's water-baptism with a view to and in preparation for the messianic Spirit-and-fire baptism."<sup>15</sup> As we shall assert later, fire carries the purificatory meaning for the baptism which is a ministry by the Coming One in behalf of believers. Moreover, John the Baptist viewed the Coming One's baptism as a complement or fulfilment of his own baptism which was a gracious act.

### Wind Versus Spirit

This view is a modification of the previous one and it asserts that *pneuma* does not refer to the Holy Spirit but to the fiery breath of the Messiah which will destroy his enemies,<sup>16</sup> or the wind of judgment which will blow across the threshing floor and separate the wheat from the chaff.<sup>17</sup> Writing in the *Expositor's Greek Testament*, A. B. Bruce concludes that "the whole baptism of the Messiah, as John conceives it, is a baptism of judgment... I think that the grace of Christ is not here at all. The *pneuma hagion* is a stormy wind of judgment, holy, as sweeping away all that is light and worthless in the nation... The fire destroys what the wind leaves."<sup>18</sup> Bruce thinks that John's prophetic imagination led him to think that the three elements of water, wind, and fire represent the functions of himself and of the Messiah. He baptizes with water but the Messiah will baptize with wind and fire.<sup>19</sup>

The major weakness of the "wind not Spirit" theory relates to the message of John the Baptist. Unquestionably, John thundered judgment: "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" he asked the multitude which went out into the wilderness to hear him (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). He also declared, "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9). What often goes unnoticed in this discussion are the positive values in John's preaching. He offered a "bap-

tism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Moreover, the threshing analogy promises that the grain will be brought into the granary (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). A. E. Airhart catches the thrust of the passage. "Only the chaff is burned, and this only in order that the wheat – the genuine values in personality – may be garnered and set to use." He goes on to speak of "the chaff of an unsanctified nature."<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Luke adds a heartening word, "So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people" (3:18).

Dunn severely and justly criticizes T. W. Manson's view of John's message as asserting a last chance of escaping the coming judgment. "There is no 'or else' linking the two arms of the Baptist's antithesis. The recipients of John's baptism are not threatened with messianic baptism as a fearful alternative, nor is John's baptism a way of escaping from the Coming One's baptism."<sup>21</sup> At the heart of John's proclamation was a promise of grace and not judgment. People readily received baptism from him in preparation for the greater blessing of the Coming One's baptism. All this gives credibility to the Gospel accounts which retain the idea of a Spirit-baptism.

### **The Purifying Spirit**

From the earliest centuries of the Church, the phrase *kai puri* has been viewed by many as being not only syntactically but theologically related to "the Holy Spirit" in the Matthean and Lukan versions of this logion. Chrysostom made this connection when he understood John "to be speaking of the fire of the Holy Spirit – an inflaming, purifying, but essentially gracious outpouring of the Spirit." Throughout the centuries his interpretation has prevailed for the most part, and there are substantial reasons. John's word as given in the Gospels was taken as prophecy. In Acts 1:5 the Lord picks up this prophetic word and applies it explicitly to Pentecost when the Spirit will be outpoured, the experience being symbolized by tongues of fire descending on the disciples' heads. Furthermore, the prophecy with its fulfillment in Pentecost receives interpretative reinforcement by the word of Peter in Acts 11:16.<sup>22</sup>

Several lines of evidence need to be pursued in support of this interpretation of the logion. First, in response to the question "What led John to administer his baptism?" Jeremias says we need to begin from the Jewish doctrinal statement that on Sinai Israel was prepared for receiving salvation by means of a bath of immersion (cf. I Cor. 10:1f.). Israel in the wilderness was regarded as a type of the eschatological community of salvation. The tenet of their bath of immersion included the expectation that in the end-time Israel would again be prepared for salvation by a bath of immersion. Jeremias concludes, "John the Baptist may have felt this purification of the people of God at the eschatological hour to be his task."<sup>23</sup> While Jeremias views Ezekiel 36:24ff. as giving guidance to John with respect to immersion, I am more inclined to say that John, like others in his religious society, drew heavily upon the Old Testament in interpreting what God was about to do through the Messiah as the Age of the Spirit was introduced. Peter's amazing insight into and application of Joel at the time of Pentecost suggests that a residual expectation of salvation through the ministry of God's Spirit existed at that time. It seems reasonable to assert that John's unique contribution was the prophecy of the Spirit's baptism. One need not look for a strange contextual or textual conflict here. The heart of John's proclamation was indeed the baptism with the Spirit.

Second, does "fire" mean judgment, or, is it a symbol of refining grace? Such extensive studies of *pur* as Lang's in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* clearly show that fire broadly refers to judgment, immediate or eschatological, in both the Old and the New Testaments.<sup>24</sup> Eldon Ladd also assumes this understanding of fire in his twofold view of John's baptism.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the positions of these formidable witnesses, it can be shown that fire in the prophetic thought of the OT is used to denote both destruction and purification. Several passages indicating purification are worth quoting. Isa. 1:25: "I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy." Zechariah prophesies that God will purify one third of the land with fire: "And I will put this third in the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested" (13:9). Malachi's famous prophecy about the Messenger who will sit as "a refiner and purifier of silver" to "purify the sons of Levi" is related to John the Baptist's ministry (Mal. 3:1-3; cf. Mark 1:2).<sup>26</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide further evidence that the Spirit was conceived as a cleansing agent. In the Manual of Discipline it is said that "God will cleanse by His Truth all the members, and purify him by all wicked deeds by the Spirit of holiness; and He will cause the Spirit of Truth to gush forth upon him like lustral water" (1QS 4:20f.). Spirit and water are used in parallel in another statement. "By the Holy Spirit of the Community, in His truth, shall he be cleansed of all his sins; and by the Spirit of uprightness and humility shall his iniquity be atoned; by his soul's humility towards all the precepts of God shall his flesh be cleansed when sprinkled with lustral water and sanctified in flowing waters" (1QM 7:6.; 17:26; see also 16:12). We need not assume that the Baptizer derived his views from the Qumran theology, but we must acknowledge that he shows conceptual affinities with that particular sector of the Judaistic religious scene.<sup>27</sup>

Third, no other Christian term has received more attention from scholars than the word "baptize," for a number of reasons but not least of which is its sacramental importance in the Church. Recently I. Howard Marshall has explored this transliterated term with the expectation of demonstrating that the notion of immersion or dipping is less than satisfactory for water baptism.<sup>28</sup> Be that as it may (a view which is not congenial to my own thought), he raises the question of whether or not it is proper to speak of a person being dipped in the Holy Spirit. He searches for a more appropriate translation for "baptize." The first clue he finds in passages in the OT and Jewish literature which describe a river or lake as consisting of fire (cf. Isa. 34:9f.; Gen. 14:10; Dan. 7:10 [NEB]; 4 Esdras 13:10f.; 1 QH 3:29:32). In Revelation John speaks of the "lake of fire" (19:20; 20:10; 14; 21:8). Marshall concludes that "the verb 'baptize' can be used with the concept of fire, since 'fire' can be regarded as a stream or liquid. There was, therefore, no incongruity in using a verb that had a literal reference to water with a metaphorical reference to fire."<sup>29</sup>

Marshall then raises the question, Can the Spirit also be regarded as a "liquid"? "At first sight this is unlikely, since the word for 'Spirit' also means 'wind'.<sup>30</sup> We need not belabor a point that verbs suggesting a liquid are frequently used of the Spirit in the OT, e.g., Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:25-27; 39:29; Joel 3:28f.; Zech. 12:10. In the NT we have the clear case of Jesus speaking of the Spirit as water which may be drunk and which may flow as a stream from the inner being of the believer (John 7:37-39). "By the one Spirit we were baptized into one body," writes Paul, "and all were made to drink (*epotisthemen*) of one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:13). The "liquid" concept appears also in Acts. Peter declares in 2:33: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out (*execheen*) this which you see and hear."<sup>31</sup> Marshall finally determines that "both fire and Spirit are capable of being conceived in liquid terms, and therefore can be used in parallel with water in regards to baptism."<sup>32</sup>

Each of these lines of evidence lends support to the view that John indeed related "Spirit" and "fire" in this logion. We need not assume a breakdown in the

transmission of the tradition nor postulate a form-critical reading back of a later view of the Church. The ingredients for this understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit are available in the old scriptures and the current thought patterns of John's day. Thus, it is proper to interpret the Baptism with the Holy Spirit as a fiery baptism in which we must be immersed as it were or one which results from the "pouring out" of the Spirit upon us. As Dunn observes, it is "a smelting furnace" which burns up all impurity.<sup>33</sup>

The terminology of John's prophecy conveys essentially the promise of grace and not of judgement. It is the grace of purity, cleansing from all sin. To be sure, the coming of the Holy Spirit means judgment upon all our ways and the ways of all men. The impact of that judgment arises out of its eschatological character. The end-time evaluation of all things is proleptically being realized in the Spirit's address. Every new divine intervention has had its comic and ecclesiastical effects. The world and God's people are judged. But essentially the word of John, reasserted and specified as to a moment in history and personal experience by Jesus, related to the lives and ministry of the early followers. The Spirit's baptism would result in a remarkable inward cleansing. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, *even* with fire." That speaks of a baptism of grace rather than judgment.

### **The Language of Pentecost**

All of us have wrestled with the shift from the pre-Pentecostal language of baptism to the Pentecostal language of infilling with respect to the Spirit's ministry. Acts 2:4 does not declare, "And they were all baptized with the Holy Spirit." Rather, it employs the word "filled" (*eplesthesan*). The verb derives from *pimplemi* which suggests saturation, as in the case of a sponge thoroughly infiltrated with water, or drenching. This verb does not convey the notion of the total occupation of one object by another, as in the case of water which completely fills a cup (cf. Acts 2:2: *eplerosen*). What seems more proper here is the notion of pervasion of permeation. In Luke 5:25, this verb is used to express pervasion with fear. To be filled with the Spirit means to be pervaded with the Spirit's love and power. To be filled means "to be touched in every dimension of the person by the love and purity of the divine."<sup>34</sup> To the degree that the disciples were "filled" with the Spirit at Pentecost, as understood in the usage of *pimplemi*, to that degree they were baptized with the Spirit. The concept of baptism may justifiably be considered a synonym of "filling."

Other comparable terms describing the experience are used by Jesus. "But stay in the city until you are clothed (*endusethe*, metaphorically, 'take on the characteristics, virtues of') with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon (*epelthontos*, metaphorically 'take control') you" (Acts 1:8). Finally, it seems quite clear that what happened at Jerusalem and Caesarea was considered by the Early Church a fulfillment of the baptism prophecy of John and Jesus (Acts 1:5; 11:16).

"The tongues like as fire" (*glossai hosei puros*) often is used to support the Baptist's reference to fire. Wesley's comment on Matt. 3:11 carries this idea: "He shall fill you with the Holy Ghost, inflaming your hearts with that fire of love which many waters can not quench. And this was done, *even with a visible appearance as of fire*, on the day of Pentecost."<sup>35</sup> The distributed tongues like fire obviously are signs of the presence of God, much like the Burning Bush in Moses' experience. Moreover, the firelike tongues resting on each one suggests the unity of the group under the power of the Spirit and the universal gift of the Spirit. Each one was filled with the Spirit. The complete availability of the Spirit to all men, or,

to put it in other words, the democratization of the Spirit is intended by this emblematic feature of Pentecost.<sup>36</sup>

Adam Clarke's identification of "the cloven tongues" as "the emblem of the languages they were to speak" has merit. The distribution of the tongues "pointed out the *diversity* of those languages; and the *fire* seemed to intimate that the whole could be a spiritual gift, and be the means of bringing *light* and *life* to the souls who should hear them preach the everlasting Gospel in those languages."<sup>37</sup>

The firelike tongues of Pentecost is an enigmatic feature, and I feel that the interpretive base is not as firm as we have sometimes thought it to be for explicating the Baptizer's logion.

### Conclusion

The baptism tradition, about which we have spoken, is unquestionably one of the important kerygmatic and experiential links between Jesus and the Early Church. While there are serious critical issues related to its explication, it nevertheless provides a strong foundation for our Wesleyan view on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. (1) The logion is an early one and is recorded by each Gospel writer. (2) Two biblically noteworthy persons, namely, John the Baptist and Peter, as well as Jesus himself employ the logion in contexts pertaining to personal, as well as corporate, experience. (3) Jesus associates Spirit baptism with "the promise of the Father" and thereby roots it in the long sweep of holy history. The offer of the Baptism with the Spirit is not a late redemptive measure on the part of God. (4) But at the same time, futuristically, Jesus designates Pentecost as the moment of experience of the baptism. (5) The Fourth Gospel's emphasis upon the descent of the Spirit upon Christ as identifying the One who shall baptize with the Spirit advances the assurance that this experience is also a post-Pentecostal one because the risen Lord, possessed with the Holy Spirit, is among us to accomplish it. (6) Peter's recall of the baptism logion in recounting the reception of the Spirit by the Gentiles, according to Acts 11:16, further demonstrates that this is an ongoing promise for all believers. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a baptism of grace – a fiery cleansing from sin and a constantly remarkable infilling with *agape*.

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### FOOTNOTES

1. F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970). C. W. Carter, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974). George B. Duncan, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Believer* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975). J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1970). Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975). Anthony A. Hoekema, *Holy Spirit Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972). Norman Pittinger, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1974).
2. Some Markan mss. add *kai puri*. The judgment of Aland, Black, Metzger, and Wikgren that the addition reflects the influence of the parallels in Matt. 3:11 and Luke 3:16 is sound. Cf. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 74.
3. Cf. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 157: "ebaptisa may be 'the aorist of the things just happened' ....., but more probably represents the Heb. stative perf. 'baptize'".
4. "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism," *Novum Testamentum*, XIV (1972), 81-92.
5. Mark, p. 157.
6. J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1953), p. 54.
7. Ernest Best, "Spirit-Baptism," *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 4 (1960), 236-243.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 85
9. "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism," p. 84.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
11. G. Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 36ff.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

13. Ibid
14. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 11.
15. Ibid
16. Cf. C. H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Scribner's, 1951), pp. 61-63.
17. The Hebrew word *ruach*, like the Greek *pneuma*, literally means "wind."
18. "Mathew" (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1967, reprint), I, 84.
19. Ibid. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: S.P.C.K., 1947), p. 126: Barrett finds slight support for this view in the few manuscripts of Luke 3:16 which omit the word *hagio*. Cf. Also R. Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, (1931), pp. 274-279; E. Schweizer, *Expository Times*, 65, (1953-54), 29.
20. "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit," *Preacher's Magazine*, XXXVIII (May, 1963), 14.
21. "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism," p. 86; cf. T. W. Manson, "The Saying of Jesus" in Major, Manson, Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1938), p. 333.
22. Cf. Best, who favors the "wind and fire" view, but who suggests that Jesus may have corrected John's statement. His disciples "may have asked Jesus about it and he may have replied to the effect that whereas John says 'wind,' i.e. Destruction, the true Messiah says 'Spirit', i.e. redemption," "Spirit-Baptism," p. 422.
23. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 44.
24. VI, 928-952.
25. Cf. *A Theology of the NT*, pp. 37-38.
26. Dunn points out that *ruach* also represents judgment as well as blessing in the prophetic corpus: Isa. 4:4; 30:28; Jer. 4:11; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28f.; "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism," p. 87.
27. Cf. Wm. L. LaSor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 150-151, for a contrary view.
28. "The Meaning of the Verb 'to Baptize'," *Evangelical Quarterly*, XLV (1973), 130ff.
29. Ibid., p. 134.
30. Ibid.
31. Cf. Acts 10:45, *ekkechutai*, "poured out."
32. "The Meaning of the Verb 'to Baptize'," p. 136.
33. *Baptism in the Spirit*, p. 13.
34. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Armanian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1967), pp. 106ff.
35. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenton, Inc., 1950, reprint), p. 24.
36. Cf. Charles Carter's comments on this feature of Pentecost, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 170-171.
37. "Acts," I, 692.

**"GOD'S WILL ... FOR YOU"**  
**Sanctification in the Thessalonian Epistles**

by  
Wayne McCown

**Introduction**

Several of the great biblical texts on holiness are to be found in the Thessalonian Epistles. The doctrine would be much impoverished without them. And yet these texts have been accorded little serious attention and study. A review of scholarly publications over the past two decades<sup>1</sup> has turned up but one article concerned with their interpretation, and that study was focused on a relatively minor point.<sup>2</sup> (Of course, all full-scale commentaries include some treatment of these passages.<sup>3</sup>)

Although the Wesleyan movement does not exhibit the same general avoidance of these passages, this author has been unable to find any specialized treatment of them.<sup>4</sup> The reference by its scholars to the great holiness texts of the Thessalonian Epistles is generally incidental and/or supportive.<sup>5</sup> One senses that they are regarded as important texts, comprising part of the biblical basis for the doctrine of sanctification. However, they are seldom accorded an extended expositional treatment (except in the commentaries<sup>6</sup>).

Thus we proceed from the conviction that these great texts of Scripture deserve a more serious hearing. We also have an interest in the thematic development of this doctrine, as one of the major motifs of the Thessalonian correspondence. In this connection, it may be noted that one of the advantages in the study of this subject is the possession of good reports on the historical situation of these two particular letters (in Acts 16-18 and I Thessalonians 1-3). Thus we believe an exegesis which embraces contextual as well as grammatical considerations can greatly enrich our doctrinal appropriation of these great holiness texts.

Three key passages have been selected for special study: I Thessalonians 3:12-13; 4:3-8; 5:23-24. The major subject of these three texts -- there can be no questioning of this fact -- is sanctification. A fourth text, II Thessalonians 2:13-14, also speaks of sanctification in a significant affirmation concerning salvation. Moreover, no less than a half dozen other passages<sup>7</sup> reflect such close parallels in wording and intention to the major sanctification texts that they, too, must be accorded someplace in the development of the subject.

**I Thessalonians 3:12-13**

1. *Prayer and Sanctification.* We observe, in the Thessalonian Epistles, a close relationship between prayer and sanctification. Two of the three primary texts are, in fact, benedictory prayers.<sup>8</sup> They represent an expression of the apostles' wish before God on behalf of his young converts (from whom he had been so

untimely bereaved<sup>9</sup>). While he expresses thanks to God for a good report concerning them, their faith and love, he earnestly desires their further progress in the gospel unto Christian maturity. Thus he prays that he might be granted an opportunity for further ministry to them. But that he must leave in the Lord's hands. And so he comes to the essential concern of his heart. Whether he be personally present or absent, he prays that the Lord will make their love to "increase and abound."<sup>10</sup> As Klopfenstein suggests in the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, "the two verbs suggest vast area of the spirit which the Thessalonians have yet to explore and make their own."<sup>11</sup> In so expressing his desire for them, Paul directs their attention to the limitless potentiality for growth and love to one another and to all men.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he points to the practical realization of such *agape*-love in his own life and ministry as an example to them ("as we do to you").

2. *Love and Holiness*. We know with Earnest Best that "...love and holiness are not in our context to virtues among other virtues but are umbrella words for the whole of Christian activity."<sup>13</sup> Their order in Paul's prayer also suggests that the way of holiness is marked by an increasing love. Indeed, growth in the *agape*-love of God leads unto holiness. And Paul looks to holiness as the grand objective of the Christian life and experience. Thus, the apostle prays for the maturation of his converts, to the end that God may establish their hearts unblamable in holiness before His presence.

On the basis of grammatical analysis alone, it is not possible to say whether or not in this instance the apostle refers to a present realization of holiness in this life. However, two contextual considerations confirm this inference as correct. In the first place, one must reckon with a parallel, in the prayer of I Thessalonians 5:23-24.<sup>14</sup> There Paul prays not only for sanctification but preservation as "blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Moreover, in view of the personal appeal to his own life and conduct in this prayer, we are drawn to give attention to the testimonial of I Thessalonians 2:10-12: "you are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to your believers." No doubt this was the kind of life Paul exhorted and encouraged and charged each of them to lead (see verses 11-12) "as a life worthy of God." He also prayed for them to this end.

Paul's choice of wording in this prayer connotes, further more, a certain steadiness<sup>15</sup> and uncompromising inner resolve with respect to holiness.<sup>16</sup> The quality of blamelessness, it may be noted, is particularly attributed to the heart. Thus Paul refers to more than a certain blamelessness of outward behavior. Holiness is an inward purity before God. It is not man's judgment but God's presence which is an inward purity before God. It is not man's judgment but God's presence which is the standard. Leon Morris's comment is apropos: "We should be in no doubt as to the high standard that is set before us."<sup>17</sup>

In the final phrase of the prayer, Paul seems to infer that only those who are so sanctified will have a share with God's saints at the coming of our Lord. We do not wish to debate here the identification of "the saints," whether they be angels or men.<sup>18</sup> The important point is that they are described as "his holy ones." It is such as these that accompany His presence. Thus we conclude that when Paul speaks of holiness in relation to the *parousia*, he has in view that holiness or sanctification "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrew 12:14).

### **I Thessalonians 4:3-8**

1. *Holiness vs. Immorality*. Our interpretation of the preceding prayer is confirmed by the verses which follow, in I Thessalonians 4:1-2 (which prepare for verses 3-8). Here Paul calls to mind and exhorts the Thessalonians to live in accordance with the instructions he had given them.<sup>19</sup> He beseeches them as they are doing, so to do more and more. Thus he urges them to grow, particularly in the area

of love (see 3:12 and 4:10). "The emphasis is on achieving, going forward, making faster progress."<sup>20</sup>

Paul's focus and interest is, in this section, on practical instructions for the Christian life. They are under obligation, Paul affirms,<sup>21</sup> to live as "to please God."<sup>22</sup> And what manner of life is pleasing to God? Certainly not a life characterized by immorality or uncleanness!<sup>23</sup> Rather – Paul here makes the point so very clearly – "this is the will of God, your sanctification..."

Almost all the commentators recognize that in these words the apostle has set forward a general principle for living of the Christian life.<sup>24</sup> He points to the will of God as "the ultimate guide to, and motivation for, behaviour."<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the form of the Greek word used here for sanctification implicates a process of growth.<sup>26</sup> And the threefold emphasis in context on the theme of abounding more and more (3:12; 4:1, 10) emphasizes this aspect of sanctification.

It is also to be noted that Paul is speaking of holiness in a very practical sense. He moves from statement of a general principle, to specific application(s) of it in the affairs of life. It is not our purpose here to debate a particular view of interpretation relative to the several difficulties posed in this paragraph.<sup>27</sup> Rather we call attention to the dominant thrust of the passage. Clearly Paul teaches that sanctification embraces the sexual realm of man's experience. His conduct in these regards is to be characterized by holiness.

As Morris says, "This is true of all of life, but we must not overlook its relevance in the sphere of sexual morality."<sup>28</sup> The pagan world displayed its decadence in various forms of sexual aberrations (cf. Romans 1:24-32). But the apostle asserted, the Christian is to have no truck with such evil practices. They are incompatible with God's will. They are incompatible with Christian sanctification. And sanctification is what God requires of us in every part of life.<sup>29</sup> On the interpretation of some, in verse 6, Paul himself extends the application to include other relationships in life as well.<sup>30</sup> Be that as it may, the words "the Lord is an avenger in *all* these things," certainly do suggest a broader application of the principal illustrated.

This passage reminds us that there is a negative side to holiness. We are exhorted, by use of a strong verb, to "abstain from" immorality, passion, lust, transgression of a brother, and uncleanness. Thus, we are called to separate ourselves from all evil (see I Thessalonians 5:22). We are expected to exercise self-control over our bodies and minds, as well as the other faculties of our personality.<sup>31</sup> And we are to conduct ourselves in all things with a view to holiness and honor, as is pleasing to God.

2. *A Fourfold Appeal.* The apostle supports his exhortation to holiness with a fourfold appeal.<sup>32</sup> Following their order of presentation in the paragraph, we note that he urges their serious attention to sanctification in consideration of a) the will of God, b) the judgment of God, c) the call of God, and d) the Spirit of God.

The apostle describes sanctification as "God's will...for you." Since he does not use the article, we are not to infer that sanctification represents, as it were, *the* whole will of God for man. But, it is included in that which God wishes or desires in his people. "This is what God wants them to do, and there can be no higher sanction."<sup>33</sup> The exhortation to abstain from *porneia* (i.e., fornication), in this context, implicates the idea of devotement to God, and God alone. The term "fornication," of course, includes all sorts of uncleanness, in particular sexual impurities and license. Paul knew that in the Thessalonian context (as in ours), one of the most difficult hurdles that any pagan convert had to clear was the area of sex. The culture of the day was saturated with polygamy, adultery, homosexuality, and promiscuity. Many of the religious cults even practiced sacramental fornication as part of their worship. But Paul exhorts the Christian community in clear words (as

reflected by Phillips' paraphrase): "God's plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean cut with sexual immorality."

Next, Paul introduces a negative incentive to holiness of life. He forwarns his readers of God's judgment or vengeance upon all these things. In this connection he appeals to his previous words of testimony to them (evidently, this appeal had common place in his ministry). He urges them to consider the righteousness and holiness of God himself. The Lord cannot tolerate the practice of immorality or the transgression of men against one another. These are wrongs which He will rectify by the execution of righteous judgment. Thus, no man can reckon on escaping the consequences of his evil deeds.

"For," the apostle continues, "God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness." Here the ethical quality of holiness is set forward very clearly, in the contrast with uncleanness or impurity. Let no man say that God's calling has led him into a life of immorality and licentiousness. Rather, let him heed the exhortation in Scripture: "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (I Peter 1:15). God's purpose in and for our lives is realized only when we walk in holiness<sup>34</sup> (i.e. "the most thorough purity"<sup>35</sup>). The argument here is that for a Christian not to pursue a life of holiness is for him to deny the divine purpose in saving him in the first place.<sup>36</sup> Commentators frequently call attention in this statement to the interchange of prepositions: from "for uncleanness," to "in holiness." Paul's choice of "in" before holiness does seem intentional. Thereby he describes holiness as the sphere or atmosphere in which the believer is to live and act. So Vincent concludes: "Sanctification is the characteristic life-element of the Christian, *in* which he is to live."<sup>37</sup> Thus sanctification is not merely a goal set before us by reason of God's call, but a process to be implemented and realized now in our present lives in fulfillment of that call. Holiness is to be, as it were, the very atmosphere in which we live and breathe.<sup>38</sup>

The final appeal is important for its direct correlation between the work of sanctification in the life of the believer, and the Person and presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> By his ordering of words (in the Greek), the apostle has placed marked emphasis on the adjective "holy" as descriptive of the Spirit. Phillips has caught this intonation and translated it in a splendid fashion: "It is not for nothing that the Spirit God gives us is called the Holy Spirit." Whoever thus despises, that is, sets aside and thus disregards the divine call and injunction to holiness disregards God in his ministry to and within us<sup>40</sup> through the presence of His Spirit. Impurity is "more than simply a failure to keep some man-made rule. It is a sin against the living presence of God."<sup>41</sup> Seen in its proper light, sin is rejection of God the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, "if the Spirit's ministry is not rebuffed (cf. 5:19), but rather lovingly received, he will lead unerringly to the entire sanctification of the whole person (cf. 5:23-24)."<sup>42</sup> Through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit, God is at work to accomplish the process of sanctification in the believer's life – as he cooperates with and responds in obedience to God's working in his heart. Thus God not only calls but enables us to live the life of holiness.<sup>43</sup> With this appeal Paul brings to a climax the argument of the paragraph. His main point has been to demonstrate the utter incompatibility of a life of impurity and sin with a life which conforms to God's will for His people. "Paul's words are strong: the rejection of God's will is the rejection of God."<sup>44</sup> And – let it be stated again: God's will...for you, is sanctification.

### **I Thessalonians 5:23-24**

1. *Sanctified Wholly.* Again, we enter the context of prayer.<sup>45</sup> In this case

there are two distinct petitions followed by a note of confident assurance. The first petition is for sanctification; the second, for preservation. The accompanying assurance acclaims the faithfulness of God for the realization of both in the life of believers.

We discern significance in the prayer's description of the Lord as "the God of peace" (cf. II Thessalonians 3:16). As a translation of the Hebrew *shalom*, "peace" connotes complete personal and spiritual prosperity of well-being. As such, the word is nearly synonymous with salvation and encompasses all the blessings associated with it. Thus the petition may be read as follows: "May the God of salvation and wholeness sanctify you wholly..."<sup>46</sup> The word here translated "wholly" is a double compound and signifies, as John Wesley has observed, both "wholly and perfectly; every part and all that concerns you; all that is of or about you."<sup>47</sup> It specifically refers to that which is total or complete in a qualitative sense.<sup>48</sup> Morris agrees with this interpretation, affirming the word brings out the thought of reaching one's proper end, the end for which one was made.<sup>49</sup> Thus the petition is for the consummation of God's saving work in the life of the believer. In this connection, it is to be noted that God's call and purpose embrace the complete sanctification of every Christian (see II Thessalonians 2:13-14).<sup>50</sup>

2. *Preserved Blameless.* In this instance, the apostle goes on to speak of sanctification in a further dimension.<sup>51</sup> He now speaks of the blameless preservation of the entire person – spirit, soul, and body – at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not our purpose here to debate the question of man's trichotomous constitution.<sup>52</sup> The stress of the passage clearly is directed to encompass every part of man's nature.<sup>53</sup> It represents Paul's way of insisting that the whole man, and not some part only, is to be entirely set apart to God. Morris calls attention to the interesting sacrificial associations of the added qualifier "the whole" (or "entire")<sup>54</sup> in this second position as well. In the Greek Old Testament (and elsewhere), it was used as descriptive of both the stones of the altar and the victims which were offered. Thus, its usage here may suggest the entire surrender or consecration of a man to God involved in sanctification.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, the emphasis in this text is on God's faithfulness to accomplish this sanctifying work in the believer. The whole being of man, now referred to in a quantitative sense,<sup>55</sup> is to be made holy. "The cleansing is to reach into every part of a man's nature: his affections, his will, his imagination, the spring of his motive life. His body is included as the body of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19) and as the vehicle and instrument of personal life (cf. Romans 6:12-13, 19)."<sup>56</sup> Thus Paul emphasizes the comprehensive reach of sanctification. As Robertson has stated: the adjective translated "whole" means "complete in all its parts....There is to be no deficiency in any part."<sup>57</sup>

Entire sanctification, however, is not to be deferred until the Lord's coming, at this passage makes clear.<sup>58</sup> For Paul proceeds to speak of preservation<sup>59</sup> – as blameless in that day. This further petition also implicates the possibility of falling away from sanctification. It implicates the need for perseverance and diligence. It implicates, finally, a growth in holiness until the consummation of God's sanctifying work throughout our whole being, including our body as well as spirit and soul.

The brief affirmation to this great prayer for sanctification has about it the ring of a magnificent confidence. By its inclusion Paul affirms that sanctification is God's work in the believer. God is "the Doer" as well as "the Caller" in sanctification.<sup>60</sup> We are reminded of the text of I Thessalonians 4:7-8 which speaks of God as the One who has called us in holiness, and then proceeds to speak of the indwelling ministry of his Holy Spirit. The thought of II Thessalonians 2:13-14 may also be in mind here. There Paul speaks of sanctification in relationship to God's

purpose for our salvation. It is the fulfillment or consummation of His design and calling upon our lives. Our assurance of sanctification, therefore, is based upon the character of God.<sup>61</sup> He is faithful; He will do what He says; and His purpose is calling men in that they may be holy. Sanctification does not rest upon the achievements of men.<sup>62</sup> It is, from start to finish a work of grace.

### Conclusion

The sanctification of his coverts represents one of the chief concerns of the Apostle in I Thessalonians. He directs their attention to sanctification, and prays to God for the realization of holiness in their lives. Moreover, we discern in II Thessalonians 1:3-4 an indication that his prayers on their behalf had been granted.<sup>63</sup>

In conclusion, we outline summarily the major teachings of these holiness texts, as an aid to their doctrinal appropriation.<sup>64</sup> In the first instance, Paul has described sanctification as a) experiential, b) ethical, and c) entire. He also has characterized the life of holiness as a) pleasing, b) practical, and c) progressive. It is to be noted how comprehensive the treatment really is (we have merely outlined it in this brief essay).

Certainly the subject of sanctification in the Thessalonian Epistles is deserving of serious attention and further study.<sup>65</sup> We also believe it is important to appropriate and proclaim these great truths today. How timely this message... "in times like these"!

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### FOOTNOTES

1. *New Testament Abstracts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Weston College School of Theology). 1956-1976.
2. P. A. van Stempvort, "Eine stilistische Losung einer alten Schwierigkeit in I Thess. V. 23, *New Testament Studies* 7(3, '61), 262-265.
3. We give special attention in this article to two significant "newer" commentaries (1) Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); (2) Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).
4. Our survey included all the published issues of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (WTJ) and the *Asbury Seminarian* (AS) as well as several standard collections of holiness articles, such as *Insights into Holiness*, *Further Insights into Holiness*, and *The Word and The Doctrine* (Kansas City, MO.: Beacon Hill Press, 1962, 1963, and 1965).
5. See, for example: J. Harold Greenlee, "The Greek New Testament and the Message of Holiness," in *Further Insights*, p. 86; Bert H. Hall and Armor D. Peisker, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation," in *Word and Doctrine*, p. 190; Kenneth E. Geiger, "The Biblical Basis for the Doctrine of Holiness," WTJ 1(1966), pp. 47-50; William M. Arnett, "Entire Sanctification," AS 30 (Oct, '75), pp. 36-37.
6. We have reference, in particular, to two (additional) "holiness" commentaries of recent publication: (1) W. O. Klopfenstein, in the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); (2) Arnold E. Airhart, in the *Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9 (Kansas City, MO.: Beacon Hill Press, 1965).
7. Consider the following: I Thessalonians 4:1-2, 9-12; 5:21-22; II Thess. 1:3-5, 11-12; 2:16-17; 3:3-5, 16.
8. I Thessalonians 3:(11) 12-13; 5:23-24. Compare with respect to form and content, II Thess. 2:16-17; 3:3-5, 16.
9. See especially I Thessalonians 2:17—3:10.
10. Our references to Scripture generally follow the translation of the Revised Standard Version.
11. Klopfenstein, p. 528.
12. See Airhart for a good treatment on this point (pp. 471-472).
13. Best, p. 151. This author goes on to state: "Paul holds the two in tension; in reference to men total behavior is characterized as love, in reference to God as holiness." Cf. Mildred Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love; The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO.: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).
14. See further below.
15. Morris comments on the verb "establish": "The prayer here is that God will so supply the needed buttress that the Thessalonians will remain firm and unmoved whatever the future may hold" (p. 113).
16. Cf. II Thessalonians 1:11-12.

17. Morris, p. 113. The author also states: "Nothing less than the very highest standard will do for the Christian." (Such comments are particularly noteworthy, in that they were not penned by a "holiness" author.)
18. A lengthy discussion of this matter is presented by Best (pp. 152-153).
19. Cf. I Thessalonians 2:10-12.
20. Airhart, p. 473.
21. The word "ought" is a strong one. It is often translated "must," as descriptive of a compelling necessity. Cf. Morris, pp. 118-119.
22. Cf. Colossians 1:9-10; Hebrews 13:15-16. "Pleasing God" represents a significant motif in the ethical appeal of the New Testament. Airhart interprets and applies the appeal as follows: "...to glorify God and to do His will is the heart of Christian living" (p. 473).
23. Cf. Ephesians 5:1-10 (many other supporting passages could be adduced).
24. See, e.g., Klopfenstein, p. 530.
25. Best, p. 159.
26. Best comments that the form of the word (*hagiamos*) "lays emphasis on the process of sanctification, the activity associated with it, rather than on sanctification as a completed state" (p. 160). Hall and Peisker, *loc. cit.*, simply state that the apostolic reference here is to "progressive sanctification."
27. Two significant questions have never been resolved: (1) Does the word "vessel" in verse 4 have reference to one's own body, or to one's wife? (2) Does "matter" (*pragma*) in verse 6 refer to sexual relations, or to practical (i.e., business) dealings?
28. Morris, p. 121.
29. Cf. Best, p. 165.
30. See n. 27 above.
31. Note that "self-control" is included among the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Note especially Wilber T. Dayton's discussion of the subject: "This is the crowning glory of the life in the Spirit..." (*Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 359).
32. This original insight came to light in the course of a careful study of the Greek text on the Thessalonian epistles. The four clauses referred to in the passage are all introduced by conjunctive particles used to indicate a substantive reason, for, or supportive explanation of, the preceding affirmations. English translations generally these thoughts as "for," "because," and/or "therefore." Cf. James E. Frame, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), pp. 145, 153-155.
33. Morris, p. 122. Airhart amplifies the idea, as follows: "The will of God may be seen as precept (unalterable law or commandment, to which men must submit); *as purpose* (divine wisdom and love seeking their sublime ends); *as power* (divine efficiency working out what is purposed); *and as promise* (utter dependability in the fulfillment of its purpose)" (p. 474).
34. Cf. Morris, p. 128: "When God called the Thessalonians it was not aimless procedure. He had a very definite purpose, and that purpose is not uncleanness."
35. Phillips' paraphrase.
36. Airhart, p. 478.
37. Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 37.
38. Cf. Morris, p. 128.
39. John Wesley, in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (p. 759), becomes very excited over I Thessalonians 4:8. His emotion overreacts the bounds of both brevity and prose: "Who hath also given you his Holy Spirit—to convince you of the truth, and enable you to be holy. What naked majesty of words! How oratorical, and yet with what great simplicity! A simplicity that does not impair, but improve, the understanding to the utmost; that, like the rays of heat through a glass, collects all the powers of reason into one orderly point, from being scattered abroad in utter confusion" (1954 reprint; London: Epworth Press).
40. The Greek text in the better manuscripts speaks of God as "giving (not aorist but present, continuing tense) the Holy Spirit (not simply 'to' but) *into us*."
41. Morris, p. 128.
42. Airhart, p. 479. Best (p. 169) states boldly: "...the Spirit is the Spirit of sanctification (Holy and sanctification come from the same Greek root)"; similarly, Frame (p. 156) explains: "This indwelling Spirit is a power unto holiness, a consecrating Spirit."
43. Cf. Klopfenstein, p. 532.
44. Best, p. 169.
45. See I Thessalonians 3:12-13 above.
46. Cf. Best, p. 2442: "...peace is practically equivalent to salvation; and such salvation and oneness with god require the complete sanctification of the Thessalonians." Stempvort (p. 262) describes "peace" as a great word which embraces "die Totalität des Heiles" in a nearly untranslatable manner.
47. Wesley, p. 763. Luther translated it, "durch und durch" through and through).
48. Stempvort, p. 263.

49. Morris, p. 180.
50. It also may be noted that the consummation of God's purpose in our salvation is described by use of the verb "to sanctify."
51. At this point we do not agree with Morris (p. 180) that Paul merely "repeats the prayer in another form." This is a *continuation* of his prayer for the entire sanctification of the Thessalonians. It presumes the previous petition and enlarges upon it.
52. This description of man by reference to both "spirit and soul" (not just one or the other) as well as "body" is unique to the New Testament.
53. Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1929), p. 108: "This is not a systematic dissection of the distinct elements of personality...[but] emphasizes the totality of the personality."
54. Morris, p. 181.
55. See Stempvort, p. 263. Adam Clarke comments: "The apostle prays that this compound being, in all its parts, powers, and faculties...everything that constitutes man and manhood, may be sanctified and preserved blameless till the coming of Christ" (*Holy Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 [New York: Methodist Book Concern, n.d.], p. 555).
56. Airhart, p. 501.
57. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931), p. 39.
58. Airhart, p. 501.
59. "In doing so, he makes clear that God not only consecrates the believers, but keeps them..." (Frame, p. 211).
60. Cf. Morris, p. 183.
61. Cf. Phil. 1:6.
62. Cf. Airhart, p. 501.
63. See Morris, p. 195 (commenting on II Thessalonians 1:3): "It is significant that the two matters for which he now gives thanks are both mentioned in the former letter as subjects for improvement. In 3:10 he had spoken of his desire to perfect what was lacking in their faith, and in 3:12 he had prayed that their love might abound. Now he is able to thank God for the growth of their faith and the abundance of their love...The verb 'aboundeth' is the one used in the prayer of I Thess. 3:12, so that he is recording the exact answer to his prayer." We ought to be reminded, moreover, of one additional fact: this prayer found its terminus in the apostolic petition for sanctification. Thus we conclude that the vigorous growth of the Thessalonian in faith and love is evidence of their progress on the way of holiness.
64. At this point, we call the reader's attention to the outline of I Thessalonians 5:23-24 suggested by Arnett, *loc. cit.*
65. We are convinced the principle set forward here constitute a significant biblical basis for the Wesleyan message.

## **THE "STRAW" IN THE BELIEVER**

### **--I Corinthians 3:12**

by

Leo G. Cox

My mind began to search out the meaning of Paul's use of the building materials in I Corinthians 3:12 some twenty-five years ago. I was in Australia and heard a sermon on this passage by a Calvinist. He said that after conversion if a person fell back into wicked sins, he was building "wood, hay" or "straw" rather than "gold, silver, costly stones." Since the believer was on the foundation, verse 11, the fire could not hurt him for he shall be saved, verse 15; only his works will burn and he will suffer the loss of reward.

My Wesleyan understanding of Scripture would not let me believe this preacher's exegesis, but his interpretation inspired me to seek the true meaning of this passage. Surely Paul had a clear view as to what he meant by "hay, wood, straw" and "fire" and loss of reward. I wanted to know to what he was referring.

#### **On the Foundation**

In the first place Paul made very clear that these Corinthians to whom he was writing were believers. The church was "sanctified" and "called to be holy" (1:2) and was classified with the other Christians in all places. God's grace had been given to them (1:4) and they were "enriched in every way" (1:5). Paul was assured that God would keep them "strong to the end" and they would be blameless in the day of His coming (1:8).

Even though Paul knew of serious defects among these people at Corinth, he was very confident about their being chosen by God (1:27) and that they were "in Christ Jesus" (1:30) and that their faith rested in the power of God (2:5). Though these Corinthians were still needing to be fed with milk – "infants in Christ" (3:1-2), still they were planted had been watered, and were growing (3:6). They were clearly "God's field, God's building" (3:9).

Paul was concerned that the right foundation should be laid. After using the figure of a field, he changed to that of a building (3:6-9). Before a building could be erected, there must be a foundation. Paul as "expert builder" had laid the foundation (3:10). He knew that the one he laid was the only one that could save and that it was Jesus Christ (3:11).

Jesus revealed the same truth in His statement "and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Mathew 16:18). He also emphasized the same truth when He pointed out that the house will stand in the storms only if it is founded on the rock (Mathew 7:24-25). Peter believed this when

he declared that "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), or when he quoted from the Scripture, "See I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (I Peter 2:6).

That these Corinthians to whom Paul wrote were believers and truly born-again Christians is quite clear. It is true that some of them could have backslidden and lost their faith, but Paul is addressing himself to those on the foundation (3:12). They were in Christ; they had been planted; they were on the foundation, and in the end they would be saved. Only children of God can be spoken of in this manner.

### **Building Materials**

It is clear in the context that Paul was addressing primarily the Christian believers at Corinth who had become partisans with their leaders. Following verse nine, he talked about the builders of materials on this foundation he had laid. Many exegetes conclude that Paul is warning only the leaders who succeeded him about their faulty building. In this case only the leaders would be saved; all faulty material would be burned.

However, it is clear in chapter three that Paul addressed himself especially to the believers in general in verses 1-3. In verse 5 and 6 he refers to Apollos as a servant through whom they believed, and who "watered" the planting. The real cause of growing was "God, who makes things grow." Paul saw himself at one with Apollos, and together they were not anything, because the church was "God's field, God's building" (v. 9).

From verse 16 to the end of chapter three, it is again very clear that Paul addresses the believers of Corinth in general. To make verses 10-15 to apply only to the leaders creates an inconsistency in Paul's whole purpose. He wants the believer to know that leaders are not important enough to divide over. In fact, they are one with the leader and all work together. In chapter 12 Paul said that God's gifts are given for the common good at to each one as God determines. In fact, all parts of the body participate in the building process. So I will consider here that all believers are builders.

There is quite a variety indicated in the quality of these building materials. Some are "gold" and some are "straw." There are some Christians who build "gold, silver, costly stones" with their work and there are those who build with "wood, hay, or straw" (3:12). With such a variance in Christian work, one finds it difficult to judge one another's grace by the kind of building he is doing! No wonder Jesus said, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Mathew 7:1).

Since it is fire that tests this work, it is plain that there are only two kinds of material – that which stands the fire and that which burns. When a Christian builds on the foundation, he is either doing that which will last or that which will perish. It is possible that any one Christian could have a little of both, or there may be believers who are building all gold, or all straw.

What is this straw? Contrary to my Calvinist preacher, I must say it cannot be acts of deliberate and willful sin. If a person falls back into willful sinning, there is no biblical basis for believing he is still a child of God. In Hebrews 10:26 we read, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgement out of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." Or in I John 3:9 it is written, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."

One matter that Scripture speaks clearly to is that a Christian believer does

not practice sin – that is willfully and knowingly transgress God’s law. If he falls back into such acts after believing, he falls from grace and is no longer on the foundation. This kind of sinning cannot be the "straw" builded onto the foundation.

In the context of this passage Paul pressed home the same thought. In chapter six, verses 9-11 he wrote, "Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexual immoral or idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Here Paul in just three chapters after claiming that the Corinthians were building straw on the foundation declared that they were no longer doing wickedly. From the old life they had been washed and were now heirs of the kingdom. Building straw did not put them back into the old category of wicked sinning.

What, then, is the "straw"? Surely it is not a difference in talents. God endows persons with differing talents and bestows His gifts as He will. Because a child of God is gifted for service which brings superior results is no proof he is building with gold while another saint with little or no gift is building with straw. In fact, it is quite possible that the gifted person with many visible results may be building "straw," while the unnoticed child of God may be building "gold."

Careful analysis of this passage reveals that it may not be known *now* as to what the materials are in a person’s life, at least to the casual observer. The Word declares that "the Day will bring it to light" (3:13). There will be surprises when that "Day" comes. However, there is indication in the passage that one can know how "gold" is builded on the foundation, and what the "straw" is. The difference goes deeper than what may show on the surface.

In verse 10 Paul warned that each one "should be careful how he builds." The word "how" emphasizes the method or manner of building more than what is done. When the fire comes, it "will test the quality of each man’s work" (3:13). Obviously Paul thought more about the motivation for work than the actual work. It is quite possible that the gifted person with many visible results may be building "straw," while the unnoticed child of God may be building "gold."

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It should also be noted that Paul used the singular of the word "work". The reward is "according to his own labor" (3:8). It is "his work that will be shown for what it is" and it is the fire that "will test the quality of each man's work" (3:13). Such language implies it is not so much the works one does that determines quality, but the nature of the work itself. It is the overall quality of one's working that determines the reward.

To get at Paul’s meaning even more, the total context of his letter is important. He was writing to a church which, though gifted by the spirit (1:7), had quarreling and divisions (1:10-11). Their problem was not that they were poor, or foolish, or weak, or lowly (1:26-28). God can take such persons as these to demonstrate His power and wisdom (2:4-5). Their problem was the boasting in men rather than in the Lord (1:30).

Actually Paul saw two kinds of Christian builders. In 3:1-3 he could not write to these Corinthians as "spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ." They could not endure the solid food because there were "jealousy and quarreling" among them. They act like men rather than saints.

The epistle to the Hebrews pictures Christians in a similar fashion. The author wrote, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you the elementary truths of God’s Word all over again. You need milk not solid food! ... But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:11-14). Here

the two classes are babes and mature people. Maturity may not be so much a result of age as willingness to learn and become teachers. It is a perfection of heart motive.

Paul explained to Corinthians (I Corinthians 2:10-16) that the things of the Spirit are spiritually discerned. Man in his natural state cannot perceive these spiritual things – "They are foolishness to him" (2:14). But when salvation comes, and the "mind of Christ" is bestowed, the ideal is to possess immediately the spiritual mind – the full mind of Christ.

But Paul saw these Christians, as he did in other churches, falling short of that ideal. In fact they fell so far short as to be called "infants" and to be acting as "mere men." He claimed them as "infants in Christ" (3:1), as (God's field, God's building" (3:9). They were on the foundation, but were building in a wrong manner. Rather than building in the Spirit, they were acting in the flesh. Some of the old life still clung to their actions. They were being led by fleshly desires, rather than by the Spirit.

Here a careful distinction must be made. A person acting as a mere man, or allowing a place for carnal desires, is not necessarily guilty deliberate and known disobedience to God. Though this line may be hazy to observers, God who knows the heart can witness to saving faith which removes guilt while He condemns the yielding to fleshly desire. Apparently "straw" is that remaining fleshliness in the heart that reveals itself in jealousy, pride, envy, anger, and other marks of the flesh. There is nothing attractive about these traits, and they need the covering of the blood. They so contaminate our work that it can be called "wood, hay or straw."

One can pinpoint this carnal ailment by asking these questions, (Why do I do this work? Do I preach this sermon to gain applause, to show skill, to entertain, to fulfill a duty, or do I preach to bring glory to God and to edify the church? When I perform in music or other ways, am I motivated completely by God's glory, His name and the good of others, or do remuneration, applause, and human glory predominate?"

If a person boasts in men and man's abilities and wisdom, then he builds with "straw." If he builds for self and selfish ends, or for human glory or earthly gain, then he builds "wood, hay or straw." However, if God is his chief aim, and God's glory has his exclusive purpose, then he builds "gold, silver, costly stones." "So then," Paul wrote, "no more boasting about men" (3:21). If one wants his building to be eternal, then he should "be careful how he builds."

### **The Fire**

In that day the fire will reveal the sort of work one has done. All that has been done with carnal motives will burn. This is not the fire of hell that consumes the wicked; this is God's fire that destroys faulty work. To await that day to learn that one's building is faulty could be shocking, although God should wipe away all tears from the eyes.

If the work "is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (3:15). To be saved in the end is no small thing, even though "through the flames." Here the blood of the covenant atones even when Christians fail to attain a pure heart. Their failure to become holy could result from ignorance of the promises, a weakened faith to appropriate God's best, or a confused mind growing out of unfortunate experiences. Many lose the blessing of holiness after it is attained, and others just fail to press on to victory. As a result too many Christians continue to build "straw."

It is easy to condemn where God does not. He alone knows the heart. To

classify all who are "infants" and "walk as mere men" as backslidden and lost is more than Paul did. Anyone who loves God, obeys when light is clear, and trusts in Christ will not be lost. He may lose his reward, but he will be saved.

We know that holiness is necessary to get to heaven (Hebrews 12:14). We also know it is God's fire through the Holy Spirit that purges the heart (Acts 15:9) and burns up "the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11-12). It is doubtful that the fire here (I Corinthians 3:13) purges the heart at this time. The "Day" is a day of judgement and the time of revelation. God's fire, though, not only reveals, but punishes sinners and purges away sin in the believer. If the purging flame has not removed all evil from the heart in life, it must before there is entrance into heaven. Wesley believed it would occur for such believers just before death through the blood of the covenant. He taught that one could live on this lower way, which is a good way, and be saved in the end, but would not attain as "higher a place in heaven" (*Works*, VI, 28-29). In other words there would be less or no reward.

However, God wants to purge the heart completely *now*. Paul in II Timothy 2:20-21 wrote, "In a large house there are not only articles of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some are ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work." The "straw" can be purged away even in this life so that only the "gold" remains.

Paul implied that believers need not build straw in this chapter three. They were carnal when they ought to be spiritual; they drank milk when they should have eaten meat (3:1-2). He exhorted them to be careful "how" they built. Such language implies that with care they could have done otherwise. Paul told them one "should become a fool so that he may become wise" (3:18). These believers were acting foolishly in their building; they should change that pattern!

A classical example of these two kinds of believers is found in Abraham and Lot. When it became necessary for them to separate, Lot chose the plains of Jordan and pitched his tent toward Sodom. He may have justified his choice as good business, or even as his having good influence on the wicked. In any case he followed human desires and human wisdom, rather than spiritual ones.

That Lot was righteous is clear in II Peter 2:7. Lot is called a "righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men" and was "tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard." Yet in the end, he lost most of his family, all his property and influence. He was saved, but his work was burned up. Abraham exemplifies the spiritual, while Lot is a type of the carnal or "worldly" Christian.

In summary, these are Paul's thoughts in this passage:

1. God through his servants begins a good work in the believer
2. Each person is placed on the solid rock, Christ Jesus, when he begins the Christian life.
3. Every Christian begins to build materials onto the foundation already laid.
4. The material identifies the work as anything from gold to straw.
5. A Christian should take heed how he builds.
6. The fire at the end will reveal the kind of work one does.
7. The work that endures results from living and acting in the Spirit, rather than in the flesh.
8. Believers may have their work destroyed, but they will be saved.
9. "Infants in Christ" can become "spiritual" and build with holy lives.
10. God's fire will burn the "straw in that Day," and leave only the gold.
11. Building with gold results from a heart made pure from fleshliness.

## WESLEY'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN HIS DOCTRINAL TEACHINGS

by  
John N. Oswalt

When one sets out to write a paper on Wesley's use of the Old Testament in his doctrinal teachings, one must first delimit those of his writings understood to be doctrinal. Fortunately, expert opinion is generally agreed. The *Standard Sermons* and the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* were put forward by Wesley himself as being the compendia of his teachings which all Methodist preachers were required to master.<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, his two treatises: *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, and on, and *Original Sin* have been widely seen as his finest, and most clearly doctrinal, works.<sup>2</sup> Richard Green, the Wesleyan biographer, adds a slight disclaimer when he asserts that "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" and "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" have a "unity of design, a close concatenated reasoning and a brilliancy" which *Original Sin* lacks.<sup>3</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, then, it was determined to consult the *Standard Sermons*, including all 53 published in 1771, the *Plain Account*, *Original Sin*, and the two "Appeals." To these was added "Predestination Calmly Considered" because of the significant use of the Old Testament in that writing. No attempt was made to study the *Explanatory Notes* in a systematic way in the light of their very limited "use" of the Old Testament.

As the study developed, it became clear that an exhaustive investigation of all the uses of the Old Testament in each of these writings was not possible in the time available. It was therefore decided to study the *Sermons* in depth (particularly since no index of Old Testament quotations is available), and to allow those findings to form the substance of the paper, supplementing them with the results of more cursory study of the other writings. Since Wesley's general use of the Old Testament was found to be the same in all the writings, and since the number of usages upon which doctrinal teachings are directly based is rather small (and thus easily identifiable), it is believed this approach to the work has yielded valid results.

A review of Wesley's general attitude toward, and method of approach to, the Bible will be helpful. Here four secondary sources, while not often specifically referred to below, provided invaluable guides to the location of many key statements. They are: William M. Arnett's *John Wesley, Man of One Book*,<sup>4</sup> Paul O'Brien's *Sources of Authority in The Theological writings of John Wesley*,<sup>5</sup> W. E. Sangster's *The Path to Perfection*,<sup>6</sup> and George Turner's *The Vision Which Transforms*.<sup>7</sup>

Those present will hardly need to be reminded of Wesley's estimate of the

Bible's place in the world. It is the source of authority, like which there is no other. Numerous passages can be adduced in evidence of this, but three in particular are worth quoting.

[the Bible] is a lantern unto a Christian's feet and a light in all his paths. This alone receives as his rule of right or wrong; of whatever is really good or evil. He esteems nothing good, but what is here enjoined, either directly or by plain consequences; he accounts nothing evil but what is here forbidden, either in terms, or by undeniable inference.<sup>8</sup>

[the only things sure are] those things which God Himself has been pleased to reveal to man. I will speak for one. After having sought for truth with some diligence, for half a century, I am, at this day [1768], hardly sure of anything but what I learn from the Bible. Nay, I positively affirm, I know nothing else so certainly that I would dare sake my salvation upon it.<sup>9</sup>

I believe all the Bible as far as I understand it and am ready to be convinced. If I am a heretic, I became such by reading the Bible. All my notions I drew from thence.<sup>10</sup>

This attitude issued in his oft-repeated demand that every statement be supportably by Scripture. An example is found in his sermon "The Means of Grace": "I pray, where is this written? I expect you should show me plain Scripture for your assertion; otherwise, I dare not receive it; because I am not convinced that you are wiser than God."<sup>11</sup>

It was the conviction that William Law had replaced his own institutions for Scripture which led to Wesley's eventual break with his earlier mentor and an uncharacteristically heated letter in which, among other things, he challenged Law to "speak neither higher nor lower things, more nor less, than the oracles of God."<sup>12</sup>

As has often been pointed out, Wesley's conviction that the Bible came from God and was inspired by God led him to accept the syllogistic reasoning that the Bible was therefore inerrant. The *Journal* entry of July, 24, 1776, is well know. "Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that Book, it did not come from the God of truth."<sup>13</sup>

By the same token, he argued that "every part [of the Bible] is worthy of God and all together are one body, wherein is no defect, no excess."<sup>14</sup>

But his observant and analytical mind was never the prisoner of his logic. He was, as Turner says, "candid enough to recognize the possibility of error in the sources used by Matthew."<sup>15</sup> He was equally candid when it came to explaining why he left out several whole Psalms and parts of numerous others from his liturgy for American Methodist. He said such things were "highly improper for the mouths of a Christian congregation."<sup>16</sup>

All of this indicates that for all his undoubtedly high view of Scripture, Wesley was no naïve Biblicist, treating every text as an isolated gem of truth independent of every other text. His method of interpretation bears witness to the fact that he recognized the Scriptures to be amenable to the same kinds of analysis which one would apply to a merely human book. For instance, he understood the fact that its statements are conditioned both by time and culture and that a correct interpretation of any statement demands taking both of these into account. "I apply no Scripture phrase either to myself or any other without carefully considering, both the original meaning and the secondary sense, wherein (allowing for different times and circumstances) it may be applied to ordinary Christians."<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, he recognized that the plain rules of grammar and syntax gave the meaning of any statement without recourse to any esoteric spiritualizations.<sup>18</sup> To arrive at this plain meaning, one had to take into account not only the immediate context, but also the entire biblical context. For the Scriptures, bearing a mes-

sage of God's relatedness to human beings, are not themselves a group of unrelated statements.<sup>19</sup>

To be sure, he sometimes assumed a greater theological unity overall in the Scriptures than might be accepted to day, and, as a result, had no qualms about reading back into the Old Testament certain aspects of the New. But, by and large, he was very restrained in this. Much more to the point, he had a feel for the wholeness of biblical theology which obtrudes itself in every expression of his, whether sermonic, didactic, or controversial. This explains his sermon style especially. While he rarely expounded a text or passage of Scripture, his sermons were profoundly biblical. Any one sermon or a subject would cover the whole range of the relevant biblical teaching, so that one writer says, "His method was Biblical-ex-pository, not text-expository."<sup>20</sup>

One of the most characteristic aspects of Wesley is seen no less in his biblical interpretation than elsewhere. That was his relentless logic, or as he called it, reason. It must have taken either a courageous or a foolhardy person to contend with him and brave that razor-edged analysis. He was a master both of decimating others' premises and formulating his own. And given certain biblical information, he would follow out the logical conclusion as steadily and remorselessly as ever did John Calvin.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, there is more of a humaneness about Wesley in the end, for he was never trapped by his logic. If the logical interpretation was not borne out in daily experience, it was the interpretation which was subjected to experience, rather than the evidence denied for the sake of the interpretation. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in the *Plain Account* when he says,

If I were convinced that none in England had attained what has been so clearly and strongly preached by such a number of Preachers, in so many places, and for so long a time, I should be clearly convinced that we had all mistaken the meaning of those scriptures.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, anyone who has read much of Wesley knows that a great deal of the talk about the "Wesleyan quadrilateral"—Scripture, Reason, Experience, and Tradition—which, in effect, places Scripture on a par with the other three is utterly misleading. Scripture is the authority. And while reason, Experience, and Tradition provide the interpretive keys to the meaning of that Authority, they never stand on their own, independently of it, nor are they allowed to nullify it.<sup>23</sup>

How did Wesley use the Bible as a whole? It will be well for us to summarize the findings of others on this subject so that they might serve as a backdrop for the specific analysis of Old Testament usages which follows.

First of all, he wove biblical quotations all through his speech, as much in his letters as in his sermons or other writings.<sup>24</sup> Sugden notes that his sermon "Scriptural Christianity" has hardly a sentence which is not directly derived from the Scriptures.<sup>25</sup> The same could be said for several other sermons. Sangster sums it up when he says, "He seems to have lived in the Scriptures so long that Bible phrasing has become second nature to him, and he swims from one citation to another with effortless ease."<sup>26</sup> The investigator cannot help but be amazed and awed at such familiarity with the Bible that even obscure passages can be quoted as freely, and apparently, as undesignedly as the more familiar ones. It is evident that his talk about the Bible as supreme source of truth was not just talk, but was matched by a lifetime of poring over that source.

A second use of Scripture was his determined statement of his doctrines in biblical language.<sup>27</sup> He says in one letter, "Now you and I are bigots to the Bible. We think the Bible language is like Goliath's sword, that 'there is none like it.'"<sup>28</sup>

It is perfectly characteristic of the man that this statement of the superiority of biblical language is itself couched in biblical language! In the sermon "On Perfection" he says he will not use the word "suspended" of the sinful nature because the Bible nowhere uses that word.<sup>29</sup>

A third use of Scripture was what may be called an illustrative one. The biblical experience or statement is used to illustrate the present situation or the point being made. Turner is referring to such a usage when he says,

His use of the Bible resembles the alleges use of the Old Testament by Peter at Pentecost, where present experience is represented as illuminated by scriptural passages which seem to have even more relevancy to the present experience than to the original historical situation.<sup>30</sup>

Kallstad, in his study on the impact of the Bible upon Wesley's psychological makeup, also notes this usage. He comments, "We might say that Wesley employs biblical constructs to interpret hi world and to anticipate events."<sup>31</sup>

Such a use may quickly become abuse if due attention is not paid to the sense of the passage and the contextual setting. But most analysts agree with turner when he says, "It is difficult to find an instance where Wesley has clearly misinterpreted or erroneously turned a passage to his own advantage."<sup>32</sup> In view of the immense number of quotations used, this care is all the more praiseworthy.

A fourth use might be called exegetical. Although Wesley did not often base his own teachings upon an exegesis of a particular verse or passage, his controversial writings make it abundantly clear that he could do so if he wished.<sup>33</sup> Again and again, he would take the scripture passages his opponents were hurling at him and demonstrate by reference to context and grammatical analysis the invalid interpretations they were drawing. A fine case in point would be his controversion of the Archbishop of York in the "Father Appeal."<sup>34</sup>

In summary, Wesley seems not to have used the Bible so much as the immediate source form which to develop each concept, but as the breadth or lifeblood which flowed through the totality of his thinking. His normal pattern was more inferential or implicational than narrowly exegetical. Yet his inferences and his logic are not pre-exegetical, but post-exegetical. There is every evidence that he has done the hard, slow exegetical work and that if it is not now on the surface of his work, one does not have to go far beneath the surface to find it.

With these general statements forming the backdrop, let us turn to an analysis of the uses made of the Old Testament in the *Standard Sermons*, after which additional material from the other writings will be shared.

Since the writer could discover no index to the quotations of the Old Testament in the *Sermons*, one was created. The result forms an appendix to this paper. It is not possible to claim completeness for this index because of the nature of the material. The vast majority of the quotations are without reference. Thus, the investigator had to determine first of all whether a given quotation was likely to be from the Old Testament. If he decided in favor, a concordance had to be consulted in most cases. If the passage contained all common words, the search became a tedious, and sometimes, a fruitless, task. In cases where biblical phrases are repeated exactly, but without quotation marks, the possibility of overlooking them became even higher. Therefore, although the author sought to take every care and believes the results to be almost complete, he is under no illusions of having achieved absolute perfection, perhaps not an inappropriate position for a student of Wesley!

Two hundred ninety-five quotations were identified and indexed, both according to biblical occurrence and as to occurrence in the *Sermons* (Sugden edition). An attempt was made to classify the quotations according to use.

	Five	basic	cate-
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gories were chosen: allusive, illustrative, supportive, expository, and exegetical.

The writer is conscious that his use of the term "allusive" is not precisely in keeping with the contemporary definition: and indirect reference. Surely if all Wesley's indirect references to the Old Testament were identified, they would run into the thousands! Rather, this term is used of those direct quotations which have no particular cognitive weight. A typical example appears in "The Use of Money" where Wesley announced that those who had amassed wealth through distilling liquor would soon be destroyed and "their memorial will perish with them" (Ps. 9:6).<sup>35</sup> This quotation does not support or prove his point, in that the Scripture is not talking about distillers at this point. At the same time, he is not abusing the quotation, for the passage is talking about the wicked whom God has destroyed. This is typical of the care with which he used even these rather casual references. As noted above, he was convinced that the very language of Scripture had an impact which could not be gainsaid. This kind of use, of which there were 83, or slightly less than one-third of the total, illustrates that conviction.

A second major category was called illustrative. Here the preacher used some Old Testament incident or teaching to illustrate the point he was making. He did not appeal to it as a basis for his point or as proving the point, but as collateral evidence for the kind of thing he was talking about. So, when he encouraged the believer accosted by Satan to react in faith, he told them to cry out, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job. 19:25).<sup>36</sup> Job's faith illustrated the kind of faith the preacher was commending. Fifty-one references were used in this way.

The third category was called supportive. Here Wesley sought to draw specific support for the point he was making from the Old Testament reference. This is not to say that the point arose from the Old Testament, but rather, having been made, normally from the New Testament, it is supported from the Old. Thus, having argued that the will of God is the only rule of action for us, he appeals to Ps. 100:3, "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves."<sup>37</sup> This demonstrates that we are creatures and thus must obey the Creator's will. This use was slightly more frequent than the allusive, appearing 96 times.

The remaining two uses were much less common than the previous three. They were the expository and the exegetical, occurring 8 and 13 times, respectively. In these cases there was effort made to draw the point from, or at least to support the point unusually heavily from, the text. The two usages were differentiated in this manner: whenever there was extended treatment of the quotation with regard to its meaning for the present, that usage was classed as expository. Whenever the grammar, context, etc., were consulted to determine *the* meaning of the text, that usage was classed as exegetical.

An example of the expository usage is found in "Justification by Faith" where Isa. 53:4-5, and 10 are applied to the hearers as explaining what Christ has done for them.<sup>38</sup> It should be said that most usages of an Old Testament quotation as the sermon text were classed as expository, although the actual exposition may have been very limited (as for instance that of Ps. 94:16 in "The Reformation of Manners"<sup>39</sup>).

The exegetical usage was commonly restricted to a negative aspect, as noted in the survey above. Several examples occur in "The Means of Grace" where Wesley takes passages supposed to teach total withdrawal from all good works and shows they teach nothing of the kind.<sup>40</sup>

Inevitably, in any classification scheme such as this, there are occurrences which do not fit precisely into any one category. It was sought to keep such to a minimum since any great number would destroy the usefulness of the whole

scheme. Nonetheless, it was felt worthwhile to create four "middle" categories for those references where precise classification was unusually difficult. Three of these involved the supportive category: where it was felt the usage was slightly more extended than merely support, supportive/expository was used (8 occ.); where it was difficult to decide whether the quotation was really being used to support the point, supportive/illustrative (11 occ.) or supportive/allusive (18 occ.) were utilized. The fourth "middle" category was called illustrative/allusive and 6 references were classed in this way.

When one examines the Old Testament books from which Wesley drew his quotations in the *Sermons*, the breadth of his intimate knowledge of the Scriptures becomes apparent. Of the 39 books, only 8 are not represented: Joshua, Ruth, Esther, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Haggai. And it may be that one or more of these is indeed referred to, but that the reference was overlooked.

Nor are the references necessarily to the most familiar passages. To be sure, many of the familiar references are there (Deut. 6; Ps. 51; Isa. 53), but many more unfamiliar, yet always apt, ones are there. An interesting case was the strange appellation of "daubers with untempered mortar" to those who indiscriminately preached the promises of God as a cure for a state of spiritual darkness.<sup>41</sup> This phrase occurs only in one place in the Bible: Ezek. 13:10-12. Yet, like most of the other quotations which this writer has styled allusions, it is given without any biblical reference and in the midst of other allusions. It is asking too much to believe that he scoured his Bible looking for appropriate allusions to every point and thus, in this case, happened on this phrase which, by the way, Ezekiel applies to false prophets. Surely, the truth is that he knew even the obscurer parts of the Bible well enough, in *context*, that such a phrase as this would come to the surface at the appropriate time.

If most of the Old Testament books are represented, it is also true that Wesley had his favorites. Psalms has, by far, the most references (78), followed by Isaiah (52). Of the sections of the canon according to the English arrangement, references to the poetic section are most frequent (121). It is interesting to note that Ecclesiastes, a book some of whose teachings troubled Wesley (see below), is referred to only once fewer (10) than either Exodus or Ezekiel (both 11). So also Job is referred to 19 times. This probably indicates what has been noted before, namely, that the value of any particular reference for a given circumstance was judged on its own merit rather than upon the total teaching of the book in which it occurred.

Beyond these points, when it is recognized that most of the references to the prophetic books come from poetic sections of that material, it becomes clear that Wesley made a disproportionately small use of the prose section of the Old Testament (100 references to prose versus 195 to poetry). This is probably reflective of the kind of use Wesley was making of the material. The poetic writings lend themselves more easily to the allusive, illustrative, and supportive usages. By the same token, however, it might be argued that the reverse is true: that the kinds of materials he remembered shaped the uses he made of the material and that this explains why so little exegesis or exposition is found. However, 10 of the 30 expositional or exegetical uses are more poetic passages, so one must raise at least some question about such a hypothesis.

It may be that one explanation for Wesley's startling familiarity with the Old Testament, and the poetic portions especially, has to do with its inclusion in the Anglican ritual in which Wesley took part daily. Sugden's note that many of the quotations of the Psalms are from the Prayer Book version lends some support to this thesis.<sup>42</sup>

Certain sermons have significantly more references than the others. Particular cases in point are: "Scriptural Christianity" (24);<sup>43</sup> "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption" (15);<sup>44</sup> "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: VII" (21);<sup>45</sup> "Christian Perfection" (12);<sup>46</sup> "The Wilderness State" (14);<sup>47</sup> "The Great Assize" (15);<sup>48</sup> "The Reformation of Manners" (12).<sup>49</sup> Only 7 of the 53 sermons (or 6 of the 44), appear to have no Old Testament quotations, and allowing for errors of the indexer, there may be fewer than that.

In the sermons just cited, where more numerous references appear, varying uses are made. Of the 24 in "Scriptural Christianity" fully 18 appear in point III in which the preacher argues that the Bible predicts a Christian world and uses various millennial prophecies of the Old Testament to reinforce his claim. One may argue the merits of premillennial or postmillennial theory,<sup>50</sup> but the fact is that Wesley uses these statements in a forceful way to show his hearers how far short of God's standards they fall. Several of the occurrences designated allusive/supportive are in this passage. They are not appealed to in a directly logical way, yet their cumulative force is such as to clearly support the point being made.

A similar use is made in "The Great Assize" where Wesley draws extensively from the Old Testament for his picture of the Last Judgment. Sugden protests, and with some reason, that the references are drawn from everywhere without questioning what event is in view.<sup>51</sup> It does appear that the quotations are used as much for impact as anything else. At the same time, without excusing Wesley for whatever might be his errors, it must be pointed out that the precise reference of many eschatological statements is not as easy to pin down as Sugden might imply.

In "Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: VII" almost all of the references are used to illustrate or support what Wesley is saying about the proper and improper uses of fasting. One is impressed with the careful and logical analysis of each of the incidents or teachings he adduces. This would be an appropriate place to observe that Sugden seems overly harsh when he says that Wesley takes no opportunity to relate the Sermon on the Mount to the Old Testament.<sup>52</sup> He surely does at this point, and to a lesser extent, in several of the other sermons as well.

In "Christian Perfection" ten Old Testament references appear in four passages, but all to disprove the claims put forward on the basis of these passages that a Christian *must* sin. He argues that Christians have a fuller revelation of God's love and power than did Old Testament saints. Only three references are used to positively support the doctrine (see below).

In the other sermons where an extraordinary number of quotations appeared, no particular pattern emerged.

Several of Wesley's basic attitudes toward the Old Testament became clear during the study. It is plain that, despite his obvious familiarity with the Old Testament, he was primarily a man of the New Testament. Only 6 of the 53 sermons (or 4 of the 44) are built upon the Old Testament texts. And even these are not lengthy expositions of the text, for the most part. Rather, having briefly explained it, he quickly moves to New Testament ground. It is plain that he saw the Old Testament as a background to the New, supplying literary, illustrative, and supportive underpinning, but not as teaching doctrines on its own which could be confirmed or amplified in the New. In this respect, Sugden's previously quoted comment on the sermons, on our Lord's Sermon on the Mount is appropriate.<sup>53</sup>

This concept of the relationship between the Old and New Testament is clearly indicated in "Christian Perfection" as noted above. When it is urged upon him that saints of the Old Testament sinned, he responded, on the basis of Matt. 11:11, that

We cannot measure the privileges of real Christians by those formerly given to the Jews...So that whoever would bring down the Christian dispensation to

the Jewish standard...and infers that they who have "put on Christ" are endued with no greater strength doth greatly err, neither "knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God."<sup>54</sup>

The same concept is illustrated in his willingness to correct Solomon for saying there is no wisdom in the grave (which Wesley takes to mean the afterlife).<sup>55</sup> It is fascinating that he makes this an occasion to affirm the absolute authority of heavenly (or scriptural) wisdom, and then proceeds to reword the verse in a way which is clearly not in agreement with the plain sense of the passage!

A final example is seen in his attitude toward tithing. He says,

Do not stint yourself, like a Jew rather than a Christian, to this or that proportion. Render unto God not a tenth, not a third, not a half, but all that is God's, be it more or less; by employing all on yourself, your household, the household of faith and all mankind, in such a manner, that you may give a good account of your stewardship...in such a manner that whatever you do may be "a sacrifice of sweet smelling savour to God"...<sup>55a</sup>

Surely this is an entirely appropriate understanding of the relation between law and grace, Christian duty and Christian liberty, but it does show a distinct modification of the above-quoted statement that "the Scripture is equal in all its parts."<sup>56</sup>

These findings, however, must not obscure Wesley's deep and fundamental respect for the law of God as proclaimed in the Old Testament. Hear him, when, commenting upon II Tim. 3:15-17, he says,

How far then was St. Paul...from making light of the Old Testament! Behold this, lest ye one day "wonder and perish," ye who make so small account of one half the oracle of God! Yea, and that half of which the Holy Ghost expressly declares, that it is "profitable" as a means ordained of God for this very thing, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," to the end, "the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."<sup>57</sup>

Or again,

[the moral law] is the face of God unveiled; God manifested to his creatures as they are able to bear it; manifested to give, and not to destroy, life—that they may see God and live. It is the heart of God disclosed to man.<sup>58</sup>

Wesley demonstrated a remarkable ability to keep law and gospel in balance. So, in his "The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law" he maintains that it was God's love which move Him to proclaim the law to a fallen humanity,<sup>59</sup> in order to bring us face to face with ourselves and our need of a Saviour.<sup>60</sup> And when the Saviour comes, although the ceremonial aspects of the law are abolished as having achieved their purpose, the moral aspects are lifted to new glories.<sup>61</sup> So law and gospel are inseparable. "'Though shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,' when considered as a commandment is a branch of the law; when regarded as a promise, is an essential part of the gospel—the gospel being no other than the commands of the law, proposed by way of promise."<sup>62</sup>

One must confess, however, that when one comes to inquire of Wesley precisely what is contained in the moral law, beyond Deut. 6:5 (as quoted in Matt.), he is vague at best. Although he talks at great length about the law in "The Law Established Through Faith,"<sup>63</sup> he does not identify any specific passages. It appears that be "law" he means the general demands of God for righteousness, which, if not kept, issue in judgment.<sup>64</sup>

Of greater concern is his treatment of the covenant of works. As Sugden points out, there is no biblical evidence for this covenant with Adam, and it only appears in the Westminster Creed.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Wesley describes this covenant at great length, and that resting on one misapplied text, Lev. 18:5, "Ye shall there-

fore keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord."<sup>66</sup>

It is rather clear that Wesley's logic has gotten him into trouble at this point. When exegeting Romans 10:5-8, he noted that Paul quoted the above passage as referring to the righteousness of the law. But he also noticed that Paul used Moses' words about the Mosaic covenant (Deut. 30:11-12, 14) to describe the righteousness that is by faith. Therefore, Wesley concluded that, as Paul was talking about two different covenants, Lev. 18:5 could not be talking about the Mosaic covenant. He was furthered in this error by his own previously mentioned conclusion that the Mosaic law was a gift of God's grace. Therefore, Paul could not be talking about the Mosaic code as the bearer of death.

Nevertheless, even cursory examination of the context of the Leviticus passage makes it abundantly clear that it refers to the Mosaic code. What Wesley failed to take into account was Paul's rabbinic style of exegesis, wherein he felt free to find in the words of Deuteronomy a "hidden" meaning. So Moses' words to the effect that the law is not some far-off, impossible thing are reinterpreted to say that Christ is not far off. Wesley was tripped up by the fact that Paul's rules of logic and his own were different at this point and by the fact that Paul seems to make a distinction between the call to godly living which he issues in his letters and the "law," a distinction Wesley did not draw.

Of course Wesley's estimate of the Law was related to his own conviction of the unchanging nature of God's call to righteous living (to which Paul is equally committed, but with a different kind of logic). This leads us directly into a consideration of Wesley's use of the Old Testament with relation to the doctrine of Christian Perfection. At this point we will also draw on the *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.

For the most part, as far as direct exegesis is concerned, this doctrine is made to rest upon the New Testament. The three sermons most clearly related to it: "Christian Perfection,"<sup>67</sup> "Repentance of Believers,"<sup>68</sup> and "The Scripture Way of Salvation,"<sup>69</sup> have, apart from the negative references already mentioned in "Christian Perfection," relatively few Old Testament quotations (5, 5, and 4, respectively), while "Sin in Believers," which has an at least preparatory function, has none.

The same situation prevails in the *Plain Account*. Sangster reports 224 New Testament references used in the work (189 different texts), whereas only 24 Old Testament quotations (22 different texts) appear.<sup>70</sup> (The writer's investigation yielded slightly different figures from Sangster's. He discovered 25 quotations, of which 19 were different.<sup>71</sup> But the relative disproportion between Old and New Testament references is unchanged.)

Despite the rather infrequent use of the Old Testament, its general impact is clearly felt. And a few texts are made to do yeoman duty. They are Deut. 6:5<sup>72</sup> and Lev. 19:18;<sup>73</sup> Deut. 30:6<sup>74</sup> and Ezek. 36:25-29.<sup>75</sup> Also important are Ps. 130:8<sup>76</sup> and Jer. 31:31-34.<sup>77</sup> Somewhat unaccountably, Sangster dismisses all of these except Ezek. 36:25-29, and of this he says, "It is dubious whether this passage provides Wesley with support of that idea of burning ethical purity which lies at the heart of his doctrine of Christian perfection."<sup>78</sup>

It is, of course, clear that Wesley uses some of these in a very broad and general way, assuming that since the Church is the Israel of God, they are addressed to Christians in all times and conditions. A case in point would be Ps. 130:8: "And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." That this refers in any way to a Christian's being made pure in heart is, to use Sangster's word, "dubious," as Turner agrees.<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, the other key passages cited above seem to this author to be used by Wesley in their primary sense. Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18 are surely picked up in the New Testament and applied to Christians. Their spirit and character breathe all through the Sermon on the Mount. It may be fairly said that these sum up true religion for Wesley and that the belief that they were achievable shaped his whole concept of ministry.<sup>80</sup>

By the same token, his understanding that the new covenant involved an internalization of the law as predicted in Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34, and Ezek. 36:25-29 is surely agreed to both specifically and by implication throughout the New Testament.<sup>81</sup> If there is a question which must be addressed to these, it is whether *perfect* purity or perfect love are necessarily implied in them. And made to stand by themselves, perhaps not. This may be what Sangster was referring to in his comment about Ezek. 36:25-29. On the other hand, when put alongside the other ethical demands of the Old Testament and the glorious promises of the New, what other implication does such a statement as "I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes...and I will deliver you from all your uncleanness" have? As mentioned above, Wesley's forte was in drawing together and applying the total impact of Scripture in a given area. It seems to the writer that the implications which Wesley draws from these are quite correct in the light of all of Scripture. Turner expresses himself very astutely at this point.

The absence of any critical approach to these sources is to be explained not only by the fact that such questions were then comparatively unknown, but also because these "inspired" words found a response in the Christian consciousness of the majority. These phrases were descriptive of, as well as pattern for, their deeper experiences in the Christian life.<sup>82</sup>

It is interesting to notice that three passages which the descendants of Wesley have been wont to quote as illustrative of the doctrine and experience of Christian Perfection are conspicuous by their absence. They are: the entire book of Joshua; Ps. 51; and Isa. 6. Joshua's absence is perhaps easiest to explain. One only arrives at the teaching by spiritualizing the historical experiences involved. This Wesley only rarely did.<sup>83</sup> His sermon "The Wilderness State" takes its title from the fact that many people saw spiritual darkness as analogous to the wilderness wanderings of Israel; but after noting that fact, Wesley makes no further mention of the wandering.

The neglect of the other passages is more puzzling, for both seem to be directly related to the doctrine. One can only speculate upon the possible reasons, and one speculation seems no more probable than any other.

When one turns to the doctrine of Original Sin as taught by Wesley, the same general observations may be made as were made concerning Christian Perfection. All of Wesley's study of life led him to the conviction that human beings in general chose the evil rather than the good; his study of the New Testament confirmed this and gave him a reason for the phenomenon: inbred sin. When we went to the Old Testament, while he did not find many references which explicitly taught this doctrine, he did find many whose implications were entirely in keeping with his understanding of the New Testament.

So in *Original Sin*, as well as in the sermon by the same title, he makes extensive use of the Old Testament to illustrate the fallen condition of man and asks what accounts for this.<sup>84</sup> When Dr. Taylor protests that the Old Testament passages by themselves are ambiguous, Wesley argues that one cannot take them by themselves but must interpret them in the light of Scripture and reason.<sup>85</sup> And of course the primary Scripture in this instance is the New Testament.<sup>86</sup>

Typically, most of the exegetical work is in contradiction of another position, here that of Dr. John Taylor. A good example of his best work is seen in his treat-

ment of Ps 51:5.<sup>87</sup> Taylor had argued on several grounds that the Psalmist is only using figurative language to express the sense of alienation which resulted from his sinful act. Wesley ranges from word studies to parallel passages to context to show that David is saying something much deeper than that, and that what he is saying is entirely consonant with the New Testament teachings.

At the same time Wesley was capable of straining his point too far. His exegeses of Job 14:4 and 15:1 seem to be causes in point.<sup>88</sup> They may imply original sin, but Wesley, in good debating style, will not surrender a point and maintains they teach a doctrine. Similarly, he makes the poetic statement "though a man be born a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12) be a demonstration that human beings are born perverse.<sup>89</sup> Again, this is not impossible, but it is much less sure than Wesley depicts it. In general, there seems to be more of this kind of straining in Original Sin than in other writings studied. Perhaps this is so because this work more nearly approximates debate style.

The treatise "Predestination Calmly Considered" follows the patterns already noted. Overall, however, there is proportionately more use of the Old Testament and more use of it upon its own. He uses numerous Old Testament passages to demonstrate that God is too just to decree unconditional reprobation.<sup>90</sup> One of these (Ezek. 18:2, etc.) he quotes at length, commenting upon it as he goes.<sup>91</sup> True was just noted, the Testaments are appealed to about equally.

In terms of exegesis and exposition, his treatments of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the supposed reprobation of Esau are masterful in their brevity, yet precision. He shows that Pharaoh himself refused to repent, having been given every reason to do so.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, he points out that Malachi 1:2-3, "Esau have I hated," does not refer to Esau, the individual, but to Edomites, Esau's descendants, who have brought just punishment upon themselves.<sup>93</sup>

In his study of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, he showed how the benefits of each are conditional upon obedience.<sup>94</sup> And, by means of an analysis of Ezek. 18:24, he demonstrated that one who has enjoyed God's covenant blessings can, nevertheless, be lost.

All in all it is the writer's conclusion that "Predestination" shows Wesley as his best in his use of the Old Testament.

In conclusion, how may we summarize Wesley's use of the Old Testament? Put it in outline form, it would be as follows:

- 1) He revered the Old Testament as a part of the Oracle of God. Therefore he regarded its language and conceptual framework as providing a part of the fundamental fabric for thought, illustration, and illumination.
- 2) He believed the Old Testament to be entirely consonant with the New. Therefore he used the Old Testament to support New Testament teachings.
- 3) He believed the Old Testament by itself was inferior to the New. Therefore,
  - a) He made little systematic use of the Old Testament.
  - b) He interpreted or reinterpreted Old Testament statements in the light of the New.
  - c) He read the New Testament into the Old.
- 4) He believed the Old Testament (with the New Testament) to be an inherently unified book. Therefore,
  - a) He systematized Old Testament statements with liberal use of inference and implication.

- b) He felt free to fill in "gaps" without any clear indication of where the text left off and the filling began.
- 5) He believed the Old Testament to be an inherently rational book. Therefore,
  - a) He shunned typological or spiritualized exegesis.
  - b) He held strenuously to the literal sense of any passage in its context.
  - c) He sometimes rationalized his exegesis to the point of overworking the text.
- 6) He believed the Old Testament to have been given by God into certain specific chronological and cultural situations. Therefore he sought to understand those situations before making indiscriminate applications of Scripture.

How did he use the Old Testament? With deep reverence, great care, and conscientious thought. But above all, he used it in such a way that, linked with the New Testament, its power as the Word of God was unleashed in the lives of men and women.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. Cf. Sugden's discussion of this in his edition of the *Standard Sermons*, vol. I, pp. 17-19.
2. Eg., Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography* (Vol. 2, Pt. 2, tr. Denis Inman; New York: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 80.
3. R. Green, *The Works of John and Charles Wesley* (London, 1896), p. 101.
4. William M. Arnett, "John Wesley: Man of One Book" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University: Madison, N. J., 1954).
5. Paul O'Brien, *Sources of Authority in the Theological Writings of John Wesley* (unpublished S.T.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, Baltimore, Md., 1957).
6. W. E. Sangster, *The Path of Perfection* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943).
7. George A. Turner, *The Vision Which Transforms* (Kansas City, MO.: Beacon Hill Press, 1964).
8. *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley* (ed. E. H. Sugden, fifth edition; London: Epworth Press, 1961), Vol. I, p. 225f. (Hereinafter referred to as *Sermons*.)
9. *Sermons*, vol. II, p. 470.
10. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, A.M. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), Vol. IV, p. 216; cf. also *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 126.
11. *Sermons*, vol. I, p. 253.
12. *Letters*, vol. III, p. 370.
13. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, A.M. (ed. Nehemiah Curnock; London: Charles Kelly; n.d.), Vol. VI, p. 117. Cf. Also *Sermons*, I, p. 249f., and II, p. 279.
14. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press; 1958 reprint), p. viiif.
15. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
16. *Journal*, vol. VII, p. 18n.
17. *Letters*, vol. II, p. 206.
18. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 129; cf. also vol. VI, p. 245 and "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, reprint of 1872 edition), Vol. XI, p. 429.
19. *Works*, vol. VII, p. 470; vol. VIII, p. 87; vol. X, p. 142; vol. XI, p. 429; *Sermons*, vol. I, p. 32.
20. Wm. Pellowe, *John Wesley, Master of Religion* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, n.d.), p. 20.
21. Cf. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 237.
22. *Works*, vol. XI, p. 406; cf. Also *Sermons*, vol. I, p. 32; 196n.; and Benjamin Garrison, "Vital Interaction: Scripture and Experience," *Religion in Life*, 25, 1956, p. 570.
23. *Works*, vol. X, p. 242; cf. Also *Sermons*, vol. I, p. 33; and F. Hilderbrandt, *From Luther to Wesley* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 30.
24. Arnett, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
25. *Sermons*, vol. I, p. 91.
26. Sangster, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
27. Pellowe, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
28. *Letters*, vol. V, p. 313.
29. *Works*, vol. VI, p. 419f.
30. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 239f.

31. Thorvald Kallstad, *John Wesley and the Bible: A Psychological Study* (Stockholm: Nya Bokforlags Aktiebolaget, 1974), p. 232.
32. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 240; cf. also Sangster, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Pellowe, *op. cit.*, p. 75; and Hilderbrandt, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
33. Cf. Pellowe, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-67.
34. *Works*, vol. VIII, pp. 58-111.
35. *Sermons*, vol. II, p. 403.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
38. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 118.
39. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 182.
40. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 255.
41. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 256.
42. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 305n.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-111.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-198.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 448-470.
46. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 147-176.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-263.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 398-419.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 481-505.
50. Cf. *Works*, vol. XII, p. 319.
51. *Sermons*, vol. II, p. 399.
52. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 313.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 160; cf. Also *Letters*, vol. VII, p. 252; and *Explanatory Notes*, p. 893 (II Pet. 1:19).
55. *Sermons*, vol. II, p. 470.
- 55a. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
56. See above, note 14.
57. *Sermons*, vol. I, p. 250.
58. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 45.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
61. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 399f.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 403.
63. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 58-83.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.
65. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 131.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 116; 134f.; and vol. II, p. 43.
67. *Op. cit.*
68. *Sermons*, vol. II, pp. 379-397.
69. *Ibid.*, pp. 442-460.
70. Sangster, *op. cit.*, p. 36, n. 5.
71. According to the classification used for the OT reference in the *Sermons*: 3(A); 8(I); 9(S); 1 (EXG); 1 (S/EXP); 2 (S/I); 1 (I/A).
72. Used eight times in the *Sermons*, twice in PA (*Plain Account*).
73. Used once in *Sermons*, twice in PA
74. Used three times in *Sermons*, once in PA
75. Used three times in *Sermons*, four in PA
76. Used once each in *Sermons* and PA
77. Used three times in *Sermons*, once in PA
78. Sangster, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
79. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 263f.
80. Cf. *Sermons*, vol. I, p. 410.
81. Cf. Rom. 2:29; 6:15-19; Col. 2:11ff., etc.
82. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
83. Cf. His use of Ps. 115:17 in *Sermons*, vol. II, p. 522.
84. *Works*, vol. IX, pp. 196-202.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 272-273.
86. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 252.
87. *Works*, vol. IX, pp. 275-277.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 300f.
90. *Ibid.*, vol. X, pp. 211-212.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 239-242.
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-244.





# THE RELEVANCE OF JOHN WESLEY'S DISTINCTIVE CORRELATION OF LOVE AND LAW

by  
Charles R. Wilson

This is an endeavor to thrust into prominence two ideas which have been generally presupposed when discussing Wesley's thought. This effort aims to show that John Wesley regarded the ideas of love and law as indispensable in Christian thought because they refer to integral elements in the redemptive activity of God.

The plan to be followed in discussing the ideas of love and law in Wesley's thought includes both historical and analytical approaches. These are expected to provide the basis for some remarks regarding the perennial relevance of Wesley's views when consideration is being given the problem in Christian thought of the relation of love and law.

## I. Historical

Until he was twenty-two, John Wesley's interest in the Christian religion was largely the product of his training. He was taught a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, a respect for the Church, and a profession of piety. The dominant religious note of his parents had come to be High Church Anglicanism.<sup>1</sup> In its religious aspect the term *High Church* meant belief in the undivided church of the first three centuries of the Christian era, including the rituals, creed, and practices. High Church also meant the Anglican Church as reformed first by Cranmer and later by Laud.<sup>2</sup> High Church leaders in Anglicanism appealed to the Ante-Nicene church fathers against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the continental reformers, Luther and Calvin, on the other.

The year 1725 was a very eventful year in the religious development of the twenty-two-year-old Wesley. It began with his expressing to his parents his desire to enter holy orders. It was given considerable impetus through the influence of Thomas a Kempis. He wrote to his parents on May 28, 1725: "I was lately advised to read Thomas a Kempis over which I had frequently seen, but never much looked into before. I think he must have been a person of great piety and devotion."<sup>3</sup> As he read *The Christian Pattern* by a Kempis, Wesley was stirred by deep religious feeling. The effect which it had upon Wesley was to show "that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as our words and actions."<sup>4</sup> Here is the dawning of the realization that God's law covers the whole of one's life.

During the same eventful year of 1725, Wesley was greatly influenced by another writer, Jeremy Taylor, and his *Rules and Exercises for Holy Living and*

*Holy Dying*. He related the effect in the following words: "Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God ... being thoroughly convinced ... that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil."<sup>5</sup>

A year or two later Wesley began reading William Law's *Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Through Law's influence, Wesley came to see more clearly than ever the comprehensive of the law of God, inward as well as outward, he could consider himself in a state of salvation.

Law, as well as a Kempis and Taylor, had awakened Wesley to religion; however, the influence of these men upon him was to encourage undue as well as unwarranted emphasis upon man's duty and obligation. This emphasis was injected into the little society which he and Charles helped form for the purpose of cultivating religion and Bible study. One of the first items to be executed by these young men was a drawing up of a system of rules. This little group of ordered lives quickly drew public attention and became known for rigorous discipline. In conjunction with a disciplined life-style, there was great emphasis placed upon the Bible. This was directly related to the High Church influence of ready acceptance of biblical authority.

From 1735 to 1738, Wesley was a missionary in Georgia. It appears that he has come to the New World with expectation of carrying out the purpose of the Holy Club among the Indians. The Holy Club made apparent the kind a spiritual life that was considered the ideal, that ideal being a life of personal sanctity. Righteousness before God was to be sought by means of the rules of the Holy Club and the works of the law. The result was disillusionment. In despair of spirit concerning his religious activities in Georgia, Wesley wrote: "It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why, what I the least of all suspected, that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God."<sup>6</sup> In later years and in a calmer mood Wesley reviewed these sever words of self-indictment. He somewhat modified the verdict he wrote against himself. In a footnote Wesley said, "I had even then the faith of a *servant*, though not of a *son*." Wesley's experience in Georgia was the final outcome of the religious development that had its beginning in 1725, when he had set out resolutely to live the Christian life according to the law of God. He recognized that the law was spiritual and that it was good. Moreover, he had sought to live according to its mandate, Yet, he had been compelled to confess failure. He found his experience a counterpart to that described by Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans. "I was still 'under the law,' not 'under grace';...for I was only striving with, not freed from sin."<sup>7</sup>

The year 1735 was important for Wesley for another reason than going as a missionary to Georgia. On board the ship *Simmonds* Wesley met Moravian missionaries bound for Georgia. In the course of the voyage, the ship encountered very stormy weather. That ordeal awakened Wesley to the contrast between his Christianity and that of the Moravians. While he contemplated the positive threat of death, he observed the Moravians having no fear and no sense of guilt. He never forgot that voyage.

Upon returning from Georgia, Wesley made acquaintance with Moravians in London, and on February 1, 1738, met Peter Bohler. This young man emphasized that true faith in Christ has two inevitable results: "holiness and happiness." Wesley looked upon this teaching as a new gospel. He resolved to seek it. On May 24, 1738, at Aldersgate, he experienced it. During the reading of Luther's *Preface to*

*the Epistle to the Romans*, wherein is described the change which God works in the hear through faith in Christ, John Wesley said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation...He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."<sup>8</sup> Speaking of this event as an evangelical conversion, J. Earnest Rattenbury says: "Wesley's conversion was that of a man who despaired of fulfilling his religious ideals and had given up all dependence on what he himself could do,...and who was found by Christ, when he was expecting nothing. He went to Aldersgate Street very reluctantly...He knew in that luminous moment that God had forgiven his sins, even his."<sup>9</sup>

Events which cluster around Aldersgate caused Wesley to shift his understanding of salvation from his own personal acts to the act of God in Christ. This represented a shift from understanding salvation in terms of meeting the demand of the law of God to receiving the love of God in Christ for salvation. This shift was from faith in self to keep the law to faith in Christ who made possible God's love in forgiveness. The shift may be explained as movement from the religion of law to the religion of love.

The year 1739 was of exceptional importance in the life of John Wesley because the events of that year show him relying upon the High Church Anglican sources and also separating himself from the mystical excesses of the Moravians. He had formed a religious society in London on May 1, 1738. From the first, this society had felt the Moravian influence through Peter Bohler. Although it was connected with the Church of England, it maintained a definite admiration for the doctrine of the Moravians. While loyalty to the Church of England predominated, there were Moravian influences which gave cause for concern and later led to dissension in the Society of Fetter Lane. Twice in January of 1739 Wesley recorded in his *Journal* that he had met "enthusiasts."<sup>10</sup> By this term Wesley consistently meant those who sought the end of religion, namely, forgiveness and salvation, without the ordained means of grace provided through the Church.<sup>11</sup>

As Wesley endeavored to cope with the problems accompanying the growth of the society, he found that many new converts were brought into confusion by Moravian teachings. At this, Wesley refused to follow the Moravian teachings regarding Christian living and relied instead on his High Church Anglicanism. He exercised care that the societies which he formed should not be substitutes for the ordained services of the Church of England.

Wesley had come into possession of the great truth of the Reformation, justification by faith, through the Moravians, even though he had a knowledge of doctrine from the Articles of the Church of England. When some of the Moravians made certain deductions from the doctrine of justification by faith, such as the deduction that the law is made of none effect and the further deduction that the means of grace ordained by the Church are useless, Wesley rejected the deductions and relied upon his Anglican doctrine and practice. That is, he shifted the doctrine of justification from the context of Continental Protestantism to that of High Church Anglicanism with its stress on the Bible, the teachings of the elderly Fathers of the undivided Church, and the formularies of the Church of England. While this resulted in Wesley parting from the Moravians, it also resulted in helpful structuring of the societies which Wesley established for the nurturing of his converts.

We have sketched briefly the historical situation, beginning in 1725 with Wesley's awakened interest in the Christian religion, in which he recognized the law of God as the basis of Christianity. The High Church Anglicanism of his parents together with that of William Law dominated Wesley's life for about ten years until Moravian influence appeared. For about three years, Wesley was confronted with

a new view of Christianity in which the love of God was the basis. Justification was by grace. Such Moravians as Peter Bohler and Wesley's own experience at Aldersgate in 1738 confirmed this new view. However, because of the Moravian rejection of the ordained means of grace given through the Church, Wesley was confronted with a major decision. He chose to separate from the Moravians and continue with the Church of England. This decision necessitated recognizing the law of God as essential for the Christian. It is now necessary to explore Wesley's explanation of both the love of God and the law of God as essential in Christianity.

## II. Analytical

A clear statement of the differentiation which Wesley made between love and law appears in a letter written in 1751. He wrote: "I mean by 'preaching the gospel' preaching the love of God to sinners, preaching the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ, with all the blessings which in consequence thereof are freely given to true believers. By 'preaching the law' I mean explaining and enforcing the commands of Christ briefly comprised on the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>12</sup> In *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, written in 1744, Wesley identified the essential element of love as manifested by God: "Whatever expressions any sinner who loves God uses, to denote God's love to him, you will always upon examination find that they directly or indirectly imply forgiveness. Pardoning love is still the root of all."<sup>13</sup> Dr. Scott Lidgett has found Wesley's *Journal* filled with references to the love of God for man. Lidgett says, "The discovery of the love of God gives the key-note to Wesley's preaching."<sup>14</sup> Wesley's understanding was that love is an inevitable and inseparable fruit of faith.

Moreover, Wesley understood faith as establishing the law. He devoted two sermons to this subject and gave them the general theme, "The Law Established by Faith."<sup>15</sup> While Wesley was decidedly within the tradition of the Moravians and also of the continental reformation in maintaining that justification by faith is separated from the law, he also maintained that the law was not abrogated insofar as sanctification is concerned. In the celebrated quotation on Luther's view of the law and good works Wesley: "Again how blasphemously does he speak of good works and the law of God – constantly coupling the law with sin, death, hell, or the devil; and teaching that Christ delivers us from them all alike... Here (I apprehend) is the real spring of the grand error of the Moravians. They follow Luther, for better, for worse. Hence their 'No works; no law; no commandments.'<sup>16</sup>

Wesley held that the law was associated with sanctification. The law has three specific uses in promoting sanctification in the believer. First, it convinces of the sin that remains in the believer. That sin is called "idolatry" and expresses itself in "pride" and "self-will."<sup>17</sup> Second, the law impels the believer to Christ, in whom he finds strength for doing what the law requires. Third, it establishes hope on the basis that whatever the law commands we shall receive "grace upon grace, till we are in actual possession of the fullness of His promises."<sup>18</sup>

More important for Wesley than the exercise of faith for the purpose of experiencing salvation in a moment was the continual exercise of faith for the purpose of experiencing final salvation. Continuing in the faith is essential for the believer in both justification and sanctification. These are to receive "equal stress."<sup>19</sup> Wesley sought to maintain these two elements of salvation in a correlative relationship. The key point in the correlation is that faith in a loving, forgiving God is the ground for both justification and sanctification.

Faith alone in God is sufficient for justification; here Wesley is in the Reformed tradition. However, Wesley's distinctiveness is regarding sanctification. Here he maintained that faith for sanctification establishes the law as essential for

accomplishing sanctification. Wesley devoted two sermons to the general theme, "The Law Established by Faith."<sup>20</sup> Also his series of thirteen discourses on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount reinforced the view that faith establishes the law. Since Jesus Christ affirmed the law in His Sermon, all who believe in Him also believe in the law.

This cursory analysis of Wesley's view regarding the indispensability of the ideas of love and law in Christian thought will need to suffice, under the present circumstances, in order that some remarks may be made concerning the relevance of his view for contemporary Christian thought.

### III. Relevance

A normative statement as to the perennial relevance of Wesley's religious thought is given in the Methodist Discipline: "The gospel which Wesley thus found for himself he began to proclaim to others...His message had a double emphasis, which has remained with Methodism to this day. First was the gospel of God's grace, offered to all men and equal to every human need. Second was the moral ideal which this gospel presents to men."<sup>21</sup> Such a statement as this indicates Wesley's perennial relevance.

While it is true that his message was at variance with the largest part of eighteenth-century Anglican preaching, it is also true that his preaching brought Revival to England. It is highly significant that Wesley's legacy consists mainly of *Sermons* and a *Journal*. These are primary sources in searching for Wesley's contribution to Christian thought. Throughout the writings attention is given again and again to the ideas of love and law. Wesley treated these two ideas theocentrically and correlatively.

First, Wesley viewed love and law theocentrically. This lifted their origin out of the realm of the natural where there are distortions of true love and true law because of the presence of sin. Wesley did not view these as human inventions. Rather, he viewed them as divinely given. He accepted their supernatural origin. Moreover, he did not consider that one may have been derived from the other. They were separate and distinct, but their origin was in God. They are expressions of God and as such have an inner unity exclusively in God himself.

Second, Wesley viewed love and law in correlation. The correlation involves God's redeeming love and His disciplining law, both of which are necessary and available for salvation. They interlock in a relation which provides for a maximum of both. Because of this interrelationship, love provides the basis for the liberty which there is in Christ, while law provides the incentive for the discipline which is necessary for the development of sanctification and moral character.

In viewing Wesley's thought, we must see clearly that the issue is theocentricity and correlation. It is God who comes as love and as law. Wesley saw the righteousness of God in its activity of love and law, combating sin by providing a redemptive relationship with man, thus renewing him in the image of righteousness. Wesley could not understand the reason for the resistance which he encountered. His words are as relevant for our times as his. "Let not the children of God any longer fight against the image of God . . .Why should devout men be afraid of devoting all their souls, body, and substance to God? Why should those who love Christ count it a damnable error to think that we may have all the mind that was in Him? We allow, we contend, that we are justified freely through the righteousness and blood of Christ. And why are you so hot against us, because we expect likewise to be sanctified wholly through His Spirit?"<sup>22</sup>

Wesley's appeal was theocentrically based. Righteousness is the work of God through His love and law with man responding in faith to both. Faith in the love of

God is the basis for justification. Faith which works by love establishes the law and is the basis for sanctification. In the development of Christian thought, this may be viewed as a synthesis of the Reformation doctrine of justification and the Catholic doctrine of sanctification.

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**FOOTNOTES**

1. J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Conversion of the Wesleys* (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), p. 47.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
3. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), I, 15.
4. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock (New York: Eaton and Maine, 1909), I, 466.
5. "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," *Works*, XI, 366.
6. *Journal*, I, pp. 421-22.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 470-71.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 472.
9. Rattenbury, p. 112.
10. *Journal*, II, 130, 136.
11. "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others," *Works*, VIII, 316.
12. *Letters*, III, 79.
13. "Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I," *Works*, VIII, 24.
14. J. Scott Lidgett, "Fundamental Unity," *A New History of Methodism*, ed. W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman, G. Eayrs (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), II, 429.
15. "The Law Established Through Faith: I, II," *Standard Sermons*, I, 398.
16. *Journal*, II, 467.
17. "The Repentance of Believers," *Standard Sermons*, II, 381-382.
18. "The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law," *Sermons*, II, 54.
19. "On God's Vineyard," *Works*, VII, 205.
20. "The Law Established through Faith: I, II," *Sermons*, I, 398.
21. *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1956), p. 3.
22. "Christian Perfection," *Works*, XI, 445.

## Wesley's Approach to the Law in Discourse XXV, On the Sermon on the Mount

by  
Charles N. Dillman

Like the rest of us, John Wesley wrestled with the knotty problem of the role of the law in the life of the New Testament believer. And as the rest of us do, Wesley had the Sermon on the Mount particularly to contend with in the shaping of his view. The passage which provides a point of focus for that problem is Mathew 5:17-20.

This paper does not purport to be a thorough analysis of all that is said by Wesley on the law, but it does intend to be a fair report of sermon XXV published in his *Works* (volume I of the older edition, volume V in a newer printing) on that text.

Harvey K. McArthur has listed a series of some twelve different interpretations which have been placed on the Sermon by interpreters. The five which are most prominent may be summarized as follows:

1. It is a law which must be followed to the letter
2. It is an "interim ethic" intended for a brief interval before His return, which Jesus expected to be almost immediate.
3. It is not possible for us to obey it, but it inspires us to greater efforts and nobler thought.
4. It is the law for the Kingdom Dispensation, the Millennium, and not for Christians in the Dispensation of Grace.
5. It is a continuing call to humility and repentance because though we take it seriously we fail to live up to its radical demand.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley, in his sermon, quoted Mathew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." His first observation then is that this verse does not refer to ritual or ceremonial law, and this is supported by an appeal to the analogy of Scripture, specifically using the statements of Barnabas, Saul, and Peter in Acts 15:6, 10, and 24.<sup>2</sup>

Wesley then turns to "the moral law," which he terms a law that can never be broken, and which Christ "did not take away": the ritual law

was only designed for a temporary restraint upon a disobedient and stiff-necked people; whereas this [the moral law] was from the beginning of the world, being "written not on tables of stone," but on the hearts of all the children of men, when they came out of the hands of the Creator.<sup>3</sup>

The "letters once wrote by the finger of God" are now somewhat defaced by sin, but they cannot be blotted out. To quote again:

Every part of this law must remain in force upon all mankind, and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to

change, but on the nature of God, and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other.<sup>4</sup>

Wesley refers to Jesus' statement, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil," and responds that Jesus' meaning is "I am come to establish it in its fullness, in spite of all the glosses of men: I am come to place in a full and clear view whatsoever was dark or obscure therein: I am come to declare the true and full import of every part of it; to show the length and breadth, the entire extent of every commandment contained therein, and the height and depth..."<sup>5</sup>

He continues: "...the great author of it himself condescended to give mankind this authentic comment on all the essential branches of it; at the same time declaring it should never be changed, but remain in force to the end of the world."<sup>6</sup>

And again: "...no one commandment contained in the moral law, nor the least part of any one, however inconsiderable it might seem, [will] ever be disannulled..."<sup>7</sup>

With emphasis such as this, Wesley builds strong the case for the abiding validity of *every point* of Old Testament moral law in the Church and in the life of the believer. He says there is no "contrariety" between law and gospel:

Neither of them supersedes the other, but they agree perfectly well together. Yea, the very same words, considered in different respects, are part both of the law and of the gospel: if they are considered as commandments, they are parts of the law; if as promises, of the gospel. Thus "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," when considered as a commandment, is a branch of the law; when regarded as a promise, is an essential part of the gospel; -- the gospel being no other than the commands of the law, proposed by way of promise. Accordingly, poverty of spirit, purity of heart, and whatever else is enjoyed in the holy law of God, are no other, when viewed in a gospel light, than so many great and precious promises... The gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the law.<sup>8</sup>

It is probably worthy of note that Wesley refers to several scriptural statements which he treats as statements of law, but none of them is either from the Decalogue or from any part of the Old Testament which is not directly quoted in the New. The Old Testament passage he selects is in fact more familiar to Christians from the New, and is what Jesus called the First (Great) Commandment; the other passages are not even that directly linked with the Old Testament, for they are from the Beatitudes. One could wish that Wesley the preacher had either reached to the OT law to illustrate his point, or illustrated in the context that what he means here by "Law" was in fact the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. If here, Wesley means the latter, he does not mean precisely what Jesus means in the context of Matt. 5:17-20.<sup>9</sup>

In regard to verse 19, on loosing one of these least commandments, Wesley says, "Can any preach the law more expressly, more rigorously, than Christ does in these words? And who is he that shall amend them? Who is he that shall instruct the Son of God how to preach?"<sup>10</sup>

... "These commandments," we may observe, is a term used by our Lord as an equivalent with the law, or the law and the prophets, -- which is the same thing, seeing the prophets added nothing to the law, but only declared, explained, or enforced it, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

...What God demands is, an entire obedience; we are to have an eye to all his commandments; otherwise we lose all the labour we take in keeping some, and our poor souls forever and ever.<sup>11</sup>

Further, on the phrase, "he shall be called least in the Kingdom of heaven," Wesley says (here, as he also does in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*) "that is, shall have no part therein."<sup>12</sup> The question is  
a small one perhaps,

whether it is *significant* that Jesus did not say such a person, who loses one of the least of the commandments – and who goes that next terrifying step "and teaches men so" – would "lose his poor soul forever and ever." Jesus did not say it: that is true. But then is being "called least in the kingdom of heaven" really the equivalent of not reaching the kingdom at all? The question may be minor, but to the person who will be called least in the kingdom it is a question of destiny!

To suggest an answer to this question, I would call attention to two other Matthean passages which speak of *least* and *greatest* in the kingdom. In 18:1-4, the statement is that "whoever humbles himself like this child...is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." In 11:11, Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Here at least, to humble oneself like a child gives one immediate status as "greatest," and yet one who is "least in the kingdom" appears to have made it in. (In his note on Matt. 11:11, Wesley speaks on both sides of the question. First he grants that he that is least in the kingdom has received Christian regeneration. Then he qualifies, and indicates that the phrase may refer to "the least true Christian believer" who is greater than John the Baptist merely in that he has a more perfect *knowledge* of Jesus Christ, of his redemption and kingdom, than John the Baptist had, who died before the full manifestation of the gospel.<sup>13</sup> Wesley truly appears quite reluctant to accept one who is "least in..." to be "in" at all.)

Mathew 5:20 says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Wesley enters into a rather full and generous description of scribes and Pharisees and their kind of righteousness.

Sincerity, Wesley will give them. A good conscience before God, he grants. Even that they may live free from any outward sin, and from anything for which their own hearts condemn them, Wesley admits, is included in the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees – this along with constant attention to the means of grace, fasting, and tithing<sup>14</sup> (Wesley here appears to enjoin a double-tithe). With all this the believer merely *equals* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. How can it be *exceeded*?

Wherein does the righteousness of a Christian exceed that of a Scribe or Pharisee? Christian righteousness exceeds theirs, first, in the extent of it... They were extremely punctual in keeping the fourth commandment, -- they would not even rub an ear of corn on the Sabbath day; but not at all in keeping the third; making little account of light, or even false swearing. So that their righteousness was partial; whereas the righteousness of a real Christian is universal. He does not observe one, or some parts of the law of God, and neglect the rest; but keeps all his commandments, loves them all above gold or precious stones.<sup>15</sup>

If some scribe or Pharisee were blameless in keeping the whole law, the Christian's righteousness exceeds that in that he, and not the scribe or Pharisee, keeps also the *spirit* of the law. "The Pharisee labored to present God with a good life; the Christian with a holy heart."<sup>16</sup> So Wesley's final advice to the Christian is first of all not to fall short of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, in regard to good and evil.

Secondly, the Christian is admonished to at least equal their diligence with regard to the "ordinances of God," viz., *fasting* (twice a week or as often as strength will permit); prayer (at every private and public opportunity); the sacrament of bread and cup; searching the Scriptures; meditation therein; embracing every opportunity in the hearing of the Word.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, the Christian is exhorted to at least equal the Pharisee in doing good:

i.e., in gifts of alms, food, clothing, and other gifts and acts of mercy.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, one is to keep all the commandments with all his might.<sup>19</sup>

Fifth, Wesley's rule is to exceed their righteousness in purity and spirituality.

Let thy religion be the religion of the heart. Be thou pure in spirit; little, and base, and mean, and vile in thy own eyes; amazed and humbled to the dust at the love of God which is in Christ Jesus thy Lord! Be serious: let the whole stream of thy thoughts, words, and works, be such as flows from the deepest conviction that thou standest on the edge of the great gulf ... just ready to drop in, into either everlasting glory or everlasting burnings! Be meek ... Be thou a lover of God, and al mankind. In this spirit, do and suffer all things. Thus exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and thou shalt be called great in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

It is not the purpose of this paper to contradict the position of John Wesley on the place of the law in Christian doctrine. It must be said however that the principles used by Wesley himself in the exposition of Scripture, if legitimate at all, may be used as well by his interpreters.

In discussing Mathew 5:17-20, Wesley stayed close to the passage at hand. At one point he clarified a point by recourse to the principle of the analogy of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> Let us do the same, if we can.

The writings of Paul to the Galatian Christians have as one part of their express purpose the clarification of this very matter, the relevance of law for the believer. The apostle says, among other things:

"Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (3:2)

"All who rely on works of the law are under a curse." (3:10)

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law." (3:13)

"Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring [that is Christ] should come to whom the promise had been made." (3:19)

"Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed." (3:23)

"So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith." (3:24)

"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian." (3:25)

"But if you are led by Spirit you are not under the law." (5:18)

This series of scriptural quotations is compiled, I believe, in the spirit of their context;<sup>22</sup> and demonstrates a somewhat different approach to law than that taken by Wesley in Sermon XXV.

But of even more pertinent concern for our purpose is the use of the law in Mathew's Gospel as a whole. Jesus in the Great Commission, for example, tells His disciples to "[teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you." We note incidentally that it is what Jesus commanded, not what the law commands. In chapter 23, Jesus told the crowds to follow the *teachings* of the scribes and the Pharisees, though not their actions, for they did not practice what they preached.

Further, the ethic of Jesus – particularly as it is developed in the Gospel according to Mathew – comes forth in the final two pericopes in the Sermon on the Mount, Mathew 7:21ff and 7:24-27: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven ..." Thy key here is doing God's will.

Every one who then hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock...And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand...

In this pericope "*these words of mine*" are the same in both cases: They are the words of Jesus, especially those in the Sermon on the Mount. The hearing is also the same. The difference is simply the distinction of doing Jesus' words or not doing them. Incidentally, the Sermon on the Mount is not a word on conversion, so the "doing" is not to be found in that doctrine.

The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount includes a significant amount of "doing" and "not doing," and indeed has much to do with the moral law of the Old Testament. But the moral law is not merely redeclared, reemphasized, or repeated. It is reinterpreted and given new application. While the Decalogue had said "do not murder," Jesus said that calling one's brother a fool is equally to be condemned, and that anger with a brother or the insult of a brother makes one liable to judgment or "the council."

Further, the Old Testament moral law has forbidden adultery: Jesus applied this proscription likewise to the look of lust. Upon which principle did Jesus make these radical demands? The missing element in both cases is love. If you "put down" your brother, you aren't occupied in loving him. If you look on a woman as an object of sexual gratification, you look on her as just that – an object. She is to you no longer a person made in God's image, but merely a thing to be used. Love is missing. The key point in at least five of the six antitheses of Mathew 5:21-48, for example, is *love*. And it is, I submit, precisely this in which your righteousness can exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

With this principle kept central, the other difficulties of Mathew 5:17-20 come into their proper perspective. The word *plero'o* is often used by Mathew, and always the appropriate meaning includes the idea of "filling up" (perhaps with new meaning). In 5:17, if we may test that translation, Jesus may be saying, "I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fill them up with greater significance."

Interestingly enough, Wesley's usual way of speaking of ethics for the Christian is aptly summed up in the words "faith working through love." It is beyond dispute that love was central to Wesley's thought. Yet in this sermon, first published in 1747 and republished in 1771, that principle is drowned out with an extreme legalism.

It is one of the problems with which Wesleyans have to contend that this sermon is left for us. But it is in the collections of Wesley's *Works*, and in the collection of his sermons. We have the task of either affirming it or explaining it.

The sermon was first published at a time when Wesley was struggling with the problem of antinomianism; and it was republished in a similar time some twenty-four years later. One might suggest that the best way to counter antinomianism is not with legalism, but that begs the question. An aunt (not my own) who was so proud of her dark fine hair in advanced age plucked out the two or three gray hairs, and everybody thought she dyed her hair. She had robbed herself of the flaw which would have proved authenticity. Similarly, the larger perspective of Wesley comes through his writings - and is driven home with greater force because we know that the man, though a giant, was not larger than life.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960) pp. 91ff.
2. Wesley, *Sermon*, XXV, I.1.
3. XXV, I. 2.

4. Ibid.
5. XXV, I. 3.
6. XXV, I. 4.
7. XXV, II. I. In several places Wesley's discussion on "law" might be interpreted as signifying the law of Christ, especially from the Sermon on the Mount. In the present reference it is plain that he means the *entire* moral law.
8. XXV, II. 2-3.
9. It seems evident to me that Jesus, in 5:17-20, meant to designate the law as it would have been understood upon the occasion. The latter half of chapter five, known commonly as the Antitheses, is the nearest Jesus comes to so-called "New Law"; and he certainly is pointing out the central principle of the old.
10. XXV, III. I.
11. XXV, III. 2.
12. XXV, III. 3.
13. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, Matt. 11:11, pp. 58-59.
14. XXV, IV. 3-9.
15. XXV, IV. 10.
16. XXV, IV. 11.
17. XXV, IV. 12.
18. Ibid.
19. XXV, IV. 13.
20. Ibid.
21. At that place (XXV, I. 1) Wesley indicated, by reference to Acts 15:6, 10 and 24, that the Christian is not bound to the ritual or ceremonial law: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost (and to them) to lay no such burden on them...[this] hand writing or ordinances our Lord did blot out, take away, and nail to his cross." (Ibid.) He is correct in this interpretation for the point at issue at the time of the Jerusalem Council was whether Gentile converts should be bound by the Jewish law, viz., those commandments concerning circumcision and abstinence from certain foods.
22. It is true of course that one part of Paul's polemic concerned the rite of circumcision (5:2) and observing days, months, seasons, and years (4:10). But surely these are not the law which he called the "custodian", or the "schoolmaster" to bring us to Christ.