

Click on bookmarks icon at the left in the PDF Reader
for quick access to each article.

Wesleyan Theological Journal

Volume 18, 2 – Fall – 1983

John Wesley and Natural Theology <i>E. Elton Hendricks</i>	7
John Wesley's Doctrine of Justification <i>Charles W. Brockwell Jr.</i>	18
The Doctrine of the Trinity in Nineteenth Century American Wesleyanism 1850-1900 <i>Sam Powell</i>	33
Original Sin and Sanctification: A Problem for Wesleyans <i>Vern A. Hannah</i>	48
Marxist and Wesleyan Anthropology and the Prospects for a Marxist-Wesleyan Dialogue <i>John C. Luik</i>	54
The Emotional Evangelical: Blake and Wesley <i>Barbara S. Worden</i>	67
The Epworth Women: Susanna Wesley and her Daughters <i>Samuel J. Rogal</i>	80
Thomas Merton's Concept of Sanctification <i>Gerard Reed</i>	90
Book Reviews	100

Editor
Alex R. G. Deasley

**Digital texts copyright 2008
Wesley Center Online
<http://wesley.nnu.edu>**

JOHN WESLEY AND NATURAL THEOLOGY

by
M. Elton Hendricks

I

Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, following in the wake of Karl Barth, have usually denied the possibility of a natural theology. A number of students of John Wesley working in this milieu have interpreted his work as having an anti-natural theology bias. Colin Williams observes that Wesley "shows his belief as to the existential irrelevance of natural theology." Harald Lindstrom says that Wesley's views "cannot be taken as a premise for a *theologia naturalis*. " And J. Weldon Smith claims that "Wesley completely rejects natural theology..."¹

In contrast to these views, it is the thesis of this paper that Wesley's concept of Preventive Grace is equivalent to a natural theology. This view is more in line with suggestions of Martin Schmidt and Albert Outler² who call Wesley's *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*, or a *Compendium of Natural Philosophy* a natural theology.

Wesley's views are equivalent to a natural theology if a "soft" rather than a "hard" definition of natural theology is assumed. The "soft" view of natural theology, as defined here, claims that man can have some but not a sufficient knowledge of God apart from revelation. This view was given its most famous expression by Aquinas in the thirteenth century when he argued that although some truths about God can be known through reason divine revelation is still necessary for man's salvation. The soft view has been the one most commonly accepted in Christian history. It is consistent with the position of Brunner in the Barth-Brunner natural theology debate of the early days of neo-orthodoxy.³ Wesley's view agrees with the claim that while natural man can know certain things about God, such knowledge is not adequate to provide, nor a replacement for, saving faith.

The hard definition of natural theology is interpreted here to mean an adequate or saving knowledge of God completely independent of revelation. This was generally the view of Deism which rejected the idea of revelation. Wesley's idea was certainly not a natural theology in this hard, Deist sense.⁴ But such sharply limited criteria for natural theology are not the normal ones.

Wesley did not address directly ⁵ the natural theology issue nor bother to refute in a thorough way the extreme position of Deism, ⁶ although "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," and "A Further Appeal" and the letter to Dr. Middleton in which Wesley denounces skepticism regarding miracles, can be viewed as attacks on Deism. ⁷ The failure of Wesley to engage Deism with the same intensity that he attacked other threatening ideas may seem strange when its prominence in the eighteenth century is considered. The fact that Wesley generally ignored the Deist movement is instructive. The polemical character of many of Wesley's writings indicate that he tended to respond to those ideas that were likely to threaten the faith of the Methodist people. Even though Deism was widespread among the intellectuals of Wesley's day and thoroughly entrenched among the clergy of the Church of England, it was not a powerfully engaging set of ideas among the people responding to Wesley. ⁸ Wesley had no practical need to deal extensively with Deism and thus he has little to say that deals directly with the "hard" view of natural theology.

As with Deism, Wesley did not devote a single treatise to the concept of Prevenient Grace, despite the fact that Prevenient Grace played a more important role in Wesley's thought than in that of any other Protestant theologian. ⁹ His practical orientation was such that, unless confronted by a challenge, he did not devote time or energy to an unnecessary topic. ¹⁰ Prevenient Grace was never the object of direct attack and, therefore, never the subject of an isolated, systematic treatment. Wesley speaks of it in many places, and with consistent meaning, but never extensively in any one place. When the many widespread references to Prevenient Grace are pulled together, however, they seem to constitute a "soft" natural theology.

II

There are two elements that characterize natural theology: (1) Universalism. The ability to know God is available to all men. To be human is to have access to this possibility. No special state of mind nor any particular religious experience is required." (2) Independence of Special Revelation. Natural theology is part of a general knowledge that does not depend on any special revelation or saving faith. It is a kind of knowledge that can be found outside of "all that is special to a particular community." ¹² Natural theology recognizes that the ability to know God is part of the givenness of the human condition.

Wesley, in the fashion of the eighteenth century, saw Creation as evidence for the existence and work of God. His Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation ¹³ is an example of contemporary science being marshalled into the service of theology. Wesley saw God's handiwork in all of Creation. Such an approach to theology, however, has been given very little attention in the twentieth century by most Protestant theologians. Emil Brunner is something of an exception. He has been a spokesman for the "soft" view of natural theology believing that such a theology is a part of the general revelation or the revelation in Creation. Wesley's view is consistent with that of Brunner who observes that the God who created the world is recognizable in the creation. "The artist is known by all his works" ¹⁴ says Brunner, and Wesley declares "The world around us is a mighty volume wherewith God hath declared himself" ¹⁵ or "nature is the art of God." ¹⁶

For Wesley¹⁷ and Brunner the revelation of God in creation cannot be grasped adequately except in the light of the revelation of God in Christ. It can never stand alone. God reveals ". . . Himself through His work in creation, hence He leaves no man without a witness [although] . . . sinful man is not capable of grasping what God shows him in His work without turning it into something else."¹⁸ Natural theology for Brunner means a real, but inadequate view of God. It is in this sense that Wesley's Prevenient Grace can be understood as a soft natural theology. Knowledge of God is available to all men, but such natural religion is not sufficient for their salvation.¹⁹

III

To understand Wesley's Prevenient Grace as a type of natural theology, it is necessary to understand his view of Original Sin. Wesley's view is basically that of the Reformation, leavened with the English-Enlightenment, plus the Roman Catholic element of the High Church Anglican tradition. Wesley was, as he says, "within a hair's breadth" of Calvinism."²⁰ Original Sin has corrupted man, and the image of God has been lost. In his treatise on Original Sin,²¹ Wesley gathered an abundant catalog of evidence to demonstrate man's sinful nature. And in one sermon²² he suggested that Original Sin is one of the fundamental distinctions between heathenism and Christianity.

Wesley accepts basically the Calvinistic concept of human depravity. Depravity, however, pushed too far, threatens the idea of Free Will which was dear to Wesley. Prevenient Grace was the means by which Wesley maintained a concept of "total depravity" without losing his hold on the idea of Free Will. In the Lutheran and Calvinist views, total depravity with an irresistible logic leads to election and to its corollary, reprobation. Free Will is eliminated. The Arminian Wesley avoided this unpleasant conclusion by asserting an essentially Catholic view which regarded sin as a disease to be healed in contrast to the more orthodox Protestant view in which Original Sin is understood to have destroyed any trace of the *imago Dei*.²³

Wesley claims for "natural man" the same depth of depravity characteristic of Calvinism. But for Wesley what is lost in Original Sin-the capacity to know and to respond to God-is restored to all men, without any action or response on their part, by God's Prevenient Grace. This restoration has the two characteristics of natural theology: it is universal, and precedes any religious faith.

Man as restored by God's Prevenient Grace has some knowledge of God and the ability to respond to His love. It is interesting to find Brunner when he discusses "preserving grace" using language that is strongly reminiscent of Wesley. "The manner in which God is present to His fallen creatures is His preserving grace. Preserving grace does not abolish sin, but abolishes the worst consequences of sin."²⁴ This sounds remarkably similar to Wesley's idea that God has counteracted the consequences of Original Sin and "restored the capacity for attending to God"²⁵ and his view that Prevenient Grace has been given to "balance the corruption of nature." While preserving and prevenient grace are not identical, they are sufficiently similar that in the above passage from Brunner, prevenient could be read for preserving without loss. For Wesley, such grace precedes saving

faith, and in fact it establishes the necessary although not the sufficient condition for such faith.

The references in Wesley's writings to natural man's ability to recognize and respond to God are numerous. "Proofs of a wise, a good and a powerful Being are deducible from everything around us." ²⁷ "Some great truths, as the being and attributes of God . . . were known . . . to the heathen world." ²⁸ God endowed man "with the understanding to discern what is good, and the liberty either to accept or refuse it..." ²⁹ "His first step is to enlighten the understanding by that general knowledge of good and evil." ³⁰ "God created man an intelligent being; and endued him with will, as well as understanding." ³¹ Even after the Fall the existence of a powerful and eternal Being may still be inferred from the works of nature "leaving the atheist without excuse." ³²

Wesley is always careful to portray God's Prevenient Grace in such a manner as to indicate that it creates an opportunity for man to respond in faith but it does not seal the case. Original Sin does not damn any man, nor does an irresistible grace redeem any. God's Prevenient Grace only guarantees for man the free opportunity. ³³ Wesley displaces the Calvinist concept of election with that of Prevenient Grace. ³⁴ In the Calvinist view, election is coupled with irresistible grace, given to some and denied to others. In contrast, Wesley's Prevenient Grace is both universal and resistible. ³⁵ God is "willing that all men should be saved, yet not as trees or stones, but as men, as reasonable creatures endued with understanding to discern what is good and liberty to either accept or refuse . . . it." ³⁶ "There is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light [conscience] which lightens every man that cometh into the world. But indeed whether this be natural or no . . . it matters not." ³⁷ Although ". . . in one sense it may be termed natural, because it is found in all men; yet, properly speaking, it is not natural, but a supernatural gift of God, above all his natural endowments." ³⁶

No man, claims Wesley, maintains the untarnished image of the Edenic Adam. In concert with Calvin and Luther he denies the presence of a "natural" free will in man untarnished by Original Sin; but in contrast to the main thrust of the Reformation, he claims that every man has had a measure of free will restored to him by grace. ³⁹ Man, though fallen, nevertheless has a "spiritual nature, endued with understanding." ⁴⁰ Wesley's position is not that man's spiritual nature survived the Fall; it is rather that it has been restored through Prevenient Grace. ⁴¹

Wesley's divergence from the Reformation is seen in his understanding of the term "natural man." In fact, it is not entirely clear that the term is appropriate in Wesley's anthropology. Lee suggests that it is not, contending that for Wesley, "natural man is a logical abstraction . . . and does not exist." ⁴² If the term natural man is used, what does it mean for Wesley? It implies neither the "natural Adam" before the Fall, ⁴³ nor the totally depraved Adam after the Fall but prior to the affects of the redeeming work of Christ. ⁴⁴ The term natural man can appropriately be urged to refer to men without faith living in the age of grace, i.e. all men after Christ and proleptically even those before Christ but after Adam. Such natural men in Wesley's view are not without knowledge of God or conscience. For Wesley, such men are not like Adam before the Fall, free from Sin; neither are they

the totally depraved creatures of Calvin and Luther who after the Fall are without ability to comprehend, respond or accept the gracious gift of all, a Calvin and Luther left man on the far side of the gulf created by the Fall, a gulf that can be bridged only by God's redeeming grace. For Wesley, however, Prevenient Grace has spanned the gulf and set man on the edge of the stream, still in danger, but able to respond. At this point man must (and most significantly, can) trust in faith or he will slip into the torrent.⁴⁵ Wesley's Man, the recipient of Prevenient Grace, is fundamentally different from Man as viewed by the Reformers.

No other Protestant theologian has given to Prevenient Grace the important role assigned by Wesley. It was the means by which he maintained a Reformation-like depravity without losing the concept of free will; it is also the means by which he avoided advocating a "works righteousness" without falling prey to an irresistible grace and election. Man as the object of Prevenient Grace has had restored to him many of the capacities lost in the Fall. Thus, for Wesley, as Lee points out, "...Man exists as a natural man plus the Prevenient Grace of God. And this grace is not the forgiving favor of God granted in what the Reformed theologians called justification; this grace is the empowering grace."⁴⁶ Wesley expresses It thus:

For allowing that all souls of men are dead in sin by nature this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the Grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But thus is not natural: It is more properly termed, preventing grace...So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.⁴⁷

Although Prevenient Grace is present in all, even the heathen outside of Christendom, Wesley hesitated nevertheless to call such knowledge and a conscience "natural." For though it is found in every man it is "conferred" as we see in the following:

For though in one sense it may be termed natural, because it is found in all men; yet properly speaking, it is not natural, but a supernatural gift of God, above all His natural endowments. No; it is not nature, but the Son of God.... So that we may say to every human creature, "He" not nature, "hath showed thee, O man, what is good."⁴⁸

The Universality of grace for Wesley stands in sharp contrast to Calvinism. Wesley understand that grace, including Prevenient Grace, is not restricted to the elect, but "free for All, as well as free in All."⁴⁹ Wesley is always careful to avoid a hint of suggestion that any man is excluded from the elect. God's love and justice are such that the acceptance or rejection of saving grace is always possible.⁵⁰

He writes,

That text "as by one man's disobedience all men were made sinners, so by the obedience of One, all were made righteous we conceive means: By the merits of Christ, all men are cleared from the guilt of Adam's actual sin.

We conceive farther, that through the obedience and death of Christ, (1) The bodies of all men become immortal after the resurrection. (2) Their souls receive a capacity of spiritual life. And, (3) An actual spark of seed thereof. 51

The restored conscience, a result of Prevenient Grace, exists in all men. Even the barbarian is aware of the distinction between good and evil. ⁵²

The characteristics of natural theology, i.e. universalism and independence of special revelation, are present in Wesley's view of Prevenient Grace suggesting the conclusion that his views constitute a natural theology.

IV

Recognizing that Wesley's stance is equivalent to a natural theology is not a claim that Wesley would advocate "proofs" in theology. Outler and Williams suggest with good justification that Wesley never took seriously the traditional arguments for the existence of God. ⁵³ A statement in the sermon, "The Case of Reason Considered," suggests that Wesley knew the traditional arguments for God's existence but found them unconvincing and insufficient. Wesley says that "After carefully heaping up the strongest arguments . . . either in ancient or modern authors for the being of God..." that he was not convinced of the validity of these arguments. ⁵⁴

Wesley's lack of interest in the traditional logical arguments for the existence of God may appear puzzling, given his otherwise strong interest in logic, argument and debate. During his days as an Oxford tutor, Wesley was a teacher of logic and apparently enjoyed a strong reputation for his skill. He was also a moderator in the frequently held college disputations. He valued the study of logic as a means of developing clear and precise thought and, long after Wesley left Oxford, the syllogistic reasoning which he had learned and taught there was still a part of his thinking and writing style. ⁵⁵ Yet, in contrast to the primary thrust of the eighteenth century, reason was for Wesley not a final and complete path to God. It provided only the ancillary support.

Wesley's approval ⁵⁶ of the natural theology of Bishop Butler ⁵⁷ is instructive and would establish prima facie a case for Wesley as a natural theologian in the absence of any other evidence. Wesley describes Butler's *Analogy of Religion: Natural and Revealed*, published in 1736, as a "fine work," although he opines that it is too hard for the "free thinkers" for whom it is intended. Such free thinkers, said Wesley, are seldom close thinkers.

The distinguishing feature of Butler's work is his unusual means of joining Revelation and Nature. In contrast to the physico-theologians for whom the world is bright and beautiful and obviously the creation of a wise and good God, Butler emphasizes that nature and revelation are both baffling. Butler's theme in the *Analogy* is taken from Origen who says that the Scriptures and nature have proceeded from the same author and therefore the same type of difficulties encountered in one will be found in the other. In short, natural religion presents the same difficulties in proving God as revealed religion. For Butler the evidence for God is visible in nature but he stresses the difficulties and the inconsistencies of nature at least as much as the insights.

Butler's natural theology is in sharp contrast to all the pervading rationality of his Deist contemporaries. Reason was for Butler not the final authority but only the handmaiden of revelation. Natural knowledge of God was possible but it was not sufficient for Salvation. Wesley's acceptance of the ideas of Butler classes him as a "soft" natural theologian of the same ilk.

Wesley's attitude toward nature and the scientific understanding of nature are exemplified in the Survey.⁵⁸ In this work, as in Butler, pictures of the incomprehensibility of nature abound. For example, at the conclusion of the Survey Wesley writes ". . . the more I knew, the more I knew my own ignorance. I was more and more convinced, that I was ignorant, even in what I thought I knew."⁵⁹ "Though I knew much . . . yet still I found there was much more, whereof I was ignorant, than what I knew, even in the compass of the most inconsiderable subject."⁶⁰ At times Wesley's main goal in Survey seems to be to abolish human confidence in our discovered knowledge. He constantly stresses how little we know.⁶¹ He lists a large number of unanswered⁶² questions without implying (as do the writers of the French Encyclopedia,) that it is only a matter of time until such questions are answered. Nature's revelation of God is far from complete. But it is a very real revelation and the underlying motivation for Wesley in the Survey is to proclaim that the wisdom of God is visible in creation to all men. In the concluding section of Survey⁶³ Wesley notes that all natural knowledge of God, which he calls "the light of nature" flows from "preventing grace." This natural knowledge is correct, valuable and includes "the foundation and substance of all revealed religion, . . . but it is incomplete depending upon revelation for evident improvements of that knowledge which we have by the light of nature."

V

There are two reasons that Wesley never worked out the implications of his views on natural theology. First, Wesley was not a systematic theologian and never developed a detailed or systematic statement of his beliefs, despite the existence of a few major treatises which deal thoroughly with particular topics.⁶⁴ Wesley devoted little attention to the traditional subjects of systematics. Indeed his approach of the "plain truth for plain people"⁶⁵ discouraged theological speculation unless a point of faith was under attack.⁶⁶

Second, much of the natural theology of the period just before Wesley had been grossly overdone. The "Insect and Water Theologies"⁶⁷ were not only unconvincing but subject to the merciless attack of philosophers such as Hume. Nevertheless, as the Survey shows, Wesley was not unmoved by the appeals to design and order in the Universe; but for him such insights could only accompany and never replace revelation. In a sense Wesley did not need to defend natural theology. Its validity was assumed in his day. It was revealed religion that had to be defended. Ian Barbour suggests that Butler in his Analogy assumed that natural theology was so widely accepted as to not need vindication.⁶⁸ This suggestion is probably applicable to Wesley also.

The support of Butler's natural theology and the major thrust of Wesley's⁶⁹ Survey are direct consequences of Wesley's concept of Preventient

Grace which proclaims that all men have been restored to the point that prior to faith they are capable of having some knowledge of God. This universal knowledge, available independently of revelation, shows Wesley to be a natural theologian. That such knowledge is not adequate for salvation limits Wesley to a soft natural theology.

Notes

- 1Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), p. 31. Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Nashville: Abingdon, n.d.), p.47. J. Weldon Smith, "Some Notes on Wesley's Doctrine of Prevenient Grace," *Religion in Life*, 34 (Winter 1964), 79.
- 2Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley*, trans. Denis Inman, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) II, pt. 2, 111. A. C. Outler, "John Wesley as Theologian-Then and Now," *Methodist History*, XII, (July 1974), 66.
- 3Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace" in *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel, (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), pp. 15-64.
- 4Although Wesley's Catholic spirit enabled him to tolerate a wide variety of opinions, and on many issues to "think and let think," this breadth did not include Deism. He sharply distinguished between Deists and Christians. Cf. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. by Thomas Jackson 3rd ed., (1831, rpt. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Baker Book House, 1978), VII, 196, cited hereafter as *Works*.
- 5Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), p. 84.
- 6There is a brief treatise by Wesley "An Extract of a Short and Easy Method with the Deists" [cited in *A Preservative Against Unsettled Notions in Religion* (Bristol. William Pine, 1770) pp. 5-171 in which Wesley discusses directly the "perversion" of Deism although he does not "enter deep into the controversy" because in this work his intent is not to "reclaim but to preserve; not to convince those already perverted, but to prevent the perversion of others." This brief attack on Deism is not comparable to Wesley's attack on Predestination or his defense of the doctrine of Original Sin.
- 7*Works*, VIII, 1-45; *Works*, VIII, 4~201; *Works*, X, 1-79.
- 8Cf. William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1964), p. 9.
- 9Eric von Eicker in a dissertation cited by Umphrey Lee [*John Wesley and Modern Religion* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1936) p. 127 note 26] suggests that as Wesley grew older the concept of Prevenient Grace became more important and caused Wesley to modify his more extreme views regarding man's total depravity. In Lindstrom's view op. cit. p. 45, Prevenient Grace appears only infrequently in Wesley's thought in the period immediately after Aldersgate, but becomes increasingly important as Wesley diverged from Calvinism.

- 10Williams, op. cit., p. 39; Albert C. Outler, ed. John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 33.
- 11John Cobb, *Living in Options in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) p. 73.
- 12John Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) p. 259. Although Cobb recognizes the continuity of this definition with the traditional usage, he finds the definition unappealing.
- 13John Wesley, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation or A Compendium of Natural Philosophy*, B. Mayor, ed. (2 vols., New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1823).
- 14Brunner, op. cit. p. 24.
- 15Survey, Vol. I, 313.
- 16Ibid., p. 378.
- 17Works, VIII, 277f.
- 18Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics, II*, trans, Olive Wyon, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), p. 6.
- 19Lee, op. cit., p. 134.
- 20Works, VIII, 284.
- 21Works, IX, 192-464.
- 22Works, VI, 62-63.
- 23Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*(Nashville: Tidings, 1975) p. 34.
- 24Brunner, op. cit., p. 28.
- 25Works, VI, 446.
- 26Works, IX, 268.
- 27Survey, I, 312.
- 28Works, VI, 506.
- 29Works, X, 232.
- 30Ibid.
- 31Works, X, 468
- 32Works, IX, 322-
- 33Arminianism rejects the Calvinist views of limited atonement (the claim that Christ died only for the elect), irresistible grace and the idea of the final perseverance of the elect. It claims Universality for the atonement, that salvation depends on faith, that those who believe are saved, and that those who reject God's grace are lost. Wesley's Arminianism is always evident. It is perhaps the case that any Arminian is at heart a natural theologian. If man is free to respond as an Arminian claims, then his response is based on some knowledge (or else the response is not actually a response) but such knowledge implies a type of natural theology.

34Outler, *Theology*, p. 37.

35The grace that establishes man's free will is irresistible. In this sense Wesley agrees with Calvin, although I am unaware of any place where Wesley addresses this specifically. Wesley claims, unlike Calvin, however, that after free will is established, man can resist subsequent grace. *Ibid.* p. 56; *Works*, X, 232.

36*Works*, X, 232.

37*Works*, X, 229-30.

38*Works*, VII, 187-

39*Works*, IX, 273.

40*Works*, VII, 345-

41Although free-will and conscience are usually described by Wesley as resulting from Prevenient Grace he is not always consistent. Cf. Lindstrom, *op. cit.*, note 7, pp. 46-47.

42Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

43*Works*, VIII, 289.

44John Fletcher, Wesley's close friend, his chosen successor, and next to Wesley the most capable theologian of the revival wrote "we believe that no child of Adam is a natural man . . . i.e., absolutely destitute of all saving grace." John Fletcher, *The Works of John Fletcher* (London: T. Cordeaux, 1815), III. 444.

45Concerning Natural Man and Prevenient Grace, Wesley diverges not only from Luther and Calvin, but also from the Church of England. Article X of the Thirty-nine Articles employs the idea of Preventing Grace, but the articles continue to picture man in a "natural" state devoid of grace. [Cf. Robert E. Cushman, "Salvation for All" in William K. Anderson, ed. *Methodism* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1947), pp. 106-08.]

46Lee, *op. cit.*, 125.

47*Works*, VI, 512

48*Works*, VII, 187-8.

49*Works*, VII, 374.

50To establish the claim for the universality of grace is a major aim of his "Predestination Calmly Considered," *Works*, X, pp. 204-259.

51*Works*, VIII, 277-8.

52*Works*, VII, 187-

53Albert C. Outler, ed. *John Wesley "A Library of Protestant Thought"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 29; Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-1.

54*Works*, VI, p. 356; Cf. Robert G. Tuttle, Jr. *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), p. 34.

55V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley* (London: E. Arnold, 1961), pp. 130-33.

56Works, II, 7; Works, III, 323-24. These references come from 1746 and 1768 respectively. That Wesley remembered and referred to Butler over the span of twenty years, at different theological periods in his life, is interesting.

57Butler's work is summarized in Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1940), pp. 77-84.

580p, cit. passim.

59Ibid, I I, 458.

60Ibid

61Ibid, II, 460-464.

62Cf. Survey, II, p. 462. "how is . . . [light] communicated to us? Does it flow in a lucid river . . . ? Does . . . [light] gravitate or not . . . ? Is light subject to the general laws which obtain in all other matter?" These particular questions were not answered until the twentieth century with the development of the Theory of Relativity and the Quantum Theory.

63Survey, II, 449-450.

64E.g., "Predestination Calmly Considered," Works, X, 204-259; "Original Sin," Works, IX, 191-464.

65Works. V, 2.

66Outler, ed. John Wesley, p. 332, for example, suggests that an absence of attack on Wesley's view of the sacraments explains why Wesley only restates with little elaboration the basic Anglican position.

67Cf. Ian Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 84.

68Ibid, p. 61.

JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

by
Charles W. Brockwell, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

Justification is an acquittal, an exoneration, a setting right, a correcting. Justification is unnecessary if there is nothing wrong, nothing off center, nothing out of balance in the first place. Thus, our study of John Wesley's doctrine of justification opens with a synopsis of his anthropology, under the rubric of The Human Problem.

Now the good news from God for humans is that in Christ Jesus a way to become justified has been provided. Therefore, the second part of our study sets forth Wesley's theory of the atonement as God's Provision For a Solution to the Human Problem.

Only then, it seems to me, are we prepared to explore Mr. Wesley's understanding of justification. In his case it is to be construed as The Divine-Human Appropriation of God's Solution For the Human Problem.

That treatment of problem, provision, and appropriation will reveal an underlying assumption made by Mr. Wesley. That is to say that Wesley insisted upon the dynamic quality of the divine-human relationship, from birth to and beyond "the article of death." Finally, the concluding summary sets forth the argument of the paper as a whole.

Wesley's Theological Anthropology: The Human Problem

John Wesley's doctrine of salvation is controlled by his doctrine of sin. He traces the necessity for the new birth back to the fall. The controlling concept is that of the image of God and the effects that sin had upon it. Wesley analyzed the image of God as comprising three aspects. The natural image was "a picture of His own immortality; a spiritual being, endued with understanding, freedom of the will, and various affections." The political image was man as governor of this world. Most important was the moral image; in Paul's words "righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24; "The New Birth," I.1).

Thus was man created "able to stand, and yet liable to fall" ("The New Birth," II.2). Fully warned of the consequences of disobedience to the

Creator, Adam nonetheless willfully rebelled against his Sovereign. Adam chose to be governed by his own will rather than the will of God. "In that moment he lost the moral image of God, and, in part, the natural..." ("On the Fall of Man," II.6). "The natural consequence of this is, that every one descended from him comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God, wholly dead in sin; entirely void of the life of God; void of the image of God of all that righteousness and holiness wherein Adam was created. Instead of this, every man born into the world now bears the image of the devil, in pride and self-will; the image of the beast in sensual appetites and desires. This, then, is the foundation of the new birth-the entire corruption of our nature" ("The New Birth," I.4).¹

Such is the condition of what is often referred to as man in his natural state. Turning to Isaiah 1:5-6 Wesley employed the analogy of disease to illustrate the state of natural man.² For diseased humanity the religion of Jesus Christ is *therapeia psuches*, treatment and healing of the soul. The medicines of the great Physician serve "to restore human nature, totally corrupted in all its faculties" ("Original Sin," II.1; III.3). Above all, "the great end of religion is, to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total 1099 of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent" ("Original Sin," III.5.)

In attempting to show the state of natural man and how Christian faith changed that state, Wesley used images of contrast: from death to life; from sickness to health; the infant in the darkness of the womb and the infant now in the light of the outside world.

Wesley, however, did not think that the so-called absolute natural state of man was the actual historic condition of anyone. In an absolutely natural state, man was unassisted by the grace of God, and there was no person who was not somehow aided by grace. To clarify this, Wesley discerned three states of man: "the natural man neither fears nor loves God, one under the law fears, one under grace loves Him" ("Original Sin," IV.1, italics in original). These states, then, are the natural, the legal, and the evangelical ("The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," III.8; IV.1). The several states of soul are often mingled in the same person. The point is that God does not leave man in the absolute state of nature. He remembers our frame and gives help so that we will not be sunk in total darkness, hopelessness, and chaos. For that matter, the political image of God was not lost in the fall, and the natural image was only lost partially. It was the moral image which was wholly lost; the moral image as Wesley thought of it in Paul's words from Ephesians, "righteousness and true holiness." In room of the moral image of God we have conscience. "And according to the meaning wherein it is generally used there [in Scripture], particularly in the Epistles of St. Paul, we may understand by conscience, a faculty or power, implanted by God in every soul that comes into the world, of perceiving what is right or wrong in his own heart or life, in his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions" ("The Witness of Our Own Spirit," 5).

Conscience is a benefit of God's prevenient grace. As theologians such as Colin Williams and William Cannon have seen, prevenient grace is the hinge of John Wesley's theology.³ Even natural man is not abandoned to the consequences of his willful disobedience to the known commandment of God. The children of Adam have been given conscience so that they may know right from wrong and have a sense of morality.

The concept of prevenient grace provided Wesley a way to affirm both original sin, its communication to Adam's posterity, the continuing moral responsibility of people, and their inability to save themselves. Whenever Wesley spoke of the freedom of the will it was in the sense of a "freed" will. The American Methodist theologians of the first half of the nineteenth century employed the phrase "gracious ability" to express the combination of *sola gratia* and human responsibility in Wesley's evangelical Arminianism.⁴

Prevenient grace is not saving grace. Prevenient grace makes possible a sense of morality, but it does not provide a way for man to be freed from the condemnation of original sin or to overcome the guilt of actual sin. "And what wilt thou do to appease the wrath of God, to atone for all thy sins, and to escape the punishment thou hast justly deserved? Alas, thou canst do nothing: nothing that will in any wise make amends to God for one evil work, or word, or thought. If thou couldest now do all things well, if from this very hour till thy soul should return to God thou couldest perform perfect, uninterrupted obedience, even this would not atone for what is past. The not increasing thy debt would not discharge it. It would still remain as great as ever. Yea, the present and future obedience of all the men upon earth, and all the angels in heaven, would never make satisfaction to the justice of God for one single sin. How vain, then, was the thought of atoning for thy own sins, by anything thou couldest do! It costeth far more to redeem one soul, than all mankind is able to pay. So that were there no other help for a guilty sinner, without doubt he must have perished everlastingly" ("The Way to the Kingdom," II.5).

The twin human problems of alienation from God and from other people are intransigent to human solution. The good news of the gospel of grace is that in Christ Jesus a solution has been provided: atonement is an historic fact; reconciliation is a potential reality, and restoration to the image of God is the gift and the goal for human beings.

At-One-Ment: God's Provision of a Solution to the Human Problem

The major branches of the church have been content not to define too closely the theory of the atonement. They affirm the ministry of Christ as the mediator between and reconciler of God and man, and then reflect upon that through the use of imagery drawn from both the Old and New Testaments. Christ as substitute, sacrifice, ransom, victor, example: these are the metaphors which have recurred in atonement theology. Altogether it would appear that the common theme of these images is that of Christ as humanity's representative before God and as the representative person whose life exhibits the true meaning of humanness. John Wesley was catholic in this regard. He did not insist upon one of the standard ways of explaining atonement to the exclusion of others. The fact of atonement was to him more important than the detailed explanation of how atonement was effected.

What we discern in Wesley's atonement theology is a distinction between objective and subjective aspects of the atonement. To describe the former he employed the traditional concepts of satisfaction, ransom sacrifice, and substitution. Among these the most important was satisfaction. The Wesleyan theology of atonement is essentially Anselmian, with

other themes playing secondary, albeit significant, roles in his thinking. He believed that God was morally offended by human sin. The divine wrath meant an angry God. Sin was an affront to God and a failure of man to fulfill his role in the scheme of creation. The justice of God required that the affront be propitiated. The morality of God required that the failure be corrected. Man, however, had no way to correct this situation for which he alone was responsible. He could neither allay nor flee the wrath of God.

To get clear on this point about Wesley helps one to understand why he instructed his preachers to preach the law first, and only then to preach the gospel.⁵ Wesley would have understood Bonhoeffer's hostility to "cheap grace." Atonement is an irrelevance to those (such as the majority of the rich) who lack the awareness of their need for it. "Awake, Thou That Sleepest" was the alarm of the revival. Wesley apparently believed that most persons required first to be stabbed into wakefulness by the impossible demands of the law before they could appreciate or appropriate the comfort afforded by the gospel.

It was the perfect life of Christ—the only life ever lived which was obedient unto death—that satisfied the demands of God's justice. It opened the way to reconciliation between God and man. It is in speaking of how Christ made satisfaction for the sins of the whole world that other classical themes are introduced into the discussion. Christ sacrificed Himself in our place, as our substitute. His obedient suffering was the ransom which when paid opened the doors of freedom from the prison house of sin. He willingly suffered the penalties which were our due ("The Way to the Kingdom," II.8).

Harald Lindstrom and Colin Williams have noted that for Wesley the atonement was an historic event, an act which had taken place in the past. Lindstrom in particular contrasts Wesley's view with Luther's appreciation of the ongoing quality of the atonement.⁶ There was in Wesley's turn of mind a proclivity to categorize, label, and list steps. It appears to me, however, the difference in this instance is more that of degree and of expression than one of substantive teaching. Wesley's emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life witnesses to his appreciation of the continuation of the benefits of the atonement in the life of the believer.

Williams comments as well that the theme of Christ the example is important but not primary in Wesley's atonement doctrine.⁷ It appears that what is operating at this point is Wesley's propensity for identifying moments in the divine-human encounter. His orderly mind worked to sort out and to clarify the stages in the process of salvation. Thus, he outlined the progression: creation, original sin and fall, natural man, man under the law, atonement, justification and new birth, the sanctified life in the Spirit leading to entire sanctification. He spoke frequently of justification as what Christ does for us and of sanctification as what the Holy Spirit does in us ("Justification By Faith," II.1).

The themes of Christ the example and Christ the victor are important in Wesley, but he uses them in his treatment of what it is to live in the Spirit. If one were asked to give in one sentence Wesley's understanding of what it means to be a Christian, perhaps the best way to state it would be to say, "For John Wesley, to be a Christian meant to have the mind that was in Christ Jesus." So, the objective fact of the atonement reset the terms

within which the divine-human encounter takes place. It appeased the wrath of God and satisfied His justice. By faith a person comes under the terms of the atonement. Then one begins the new life in the Spirit, and as he grows into the fullness of the stature of Christ (comes more and more to have the mind which was in Christ Jesus) the example of Christ (His victory over sin, death, and the devil) provides the pattern. Again, if one were asked to reduce to a single sentence Wesley's comprehension of day to day discipleship, perhaps one would say, "For John Wesley discipleship is the imitation of Christ."

So there is a clear distinction in Wesley's thought between objective and subjective aspects of atonement. He emphasizes the objective and historic atonement that changes the terms in which God and man relate to each other. Moreover, Wesley's atonement theology is dominantly Anselmian. Of course, the example of Christ could help to move one to repentance, but that example and our imitation of it is placed by Wesley after justification. Wesley was careful to insist upon *sola gratia* and he did not want to compromise that by too early a stress on imitatio Christi.

Justification: The Divine-Human Appropriation of Atonement

Wesley's doctrine of justification is part of his comprehensive teaching concerning salvation. He analyzed the interaction between God and man into stages from repentance to final salvation. The progression as he saw it was: repentance, faith, justification and the new birth, life in the Spirit which produces sanctification and entire sanctification, final salvation. The several stages, however, were relational conditions, not static ones.

The personal appropriation of the benefits of atonement begins with repentance and believing, the gospel. That repentance Wesley defined as "conviction, or self knowledge" ("The Way to the Kingdom," I.13; II.1). The workings of conscience and the preaching of the law bring one to that point. The sleeper is then awakened to the twin realities of his corruption and his peril. Only if he is aware of both his need and his helplessness will he be ready to cast himself upon God's mercy, bringing nothing in his hand, and asking only for forgiveness and new life. The faith through which we are saved "with an empty hand, and without any pretence to personal desert, receives the heavenly blessing" (Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, Ephesians 2:8).

Salvation is by grace; faith is the means by which we open our lives to grace. One of the problems for Wesley's insistence upon both salvation by grace and the freed will was the question of whether or not faith was a meritorious work. Did God reward the good work of faith, thereby revealing that for all his denials Wesley did in the last analysis preach works salvation?

Wesley was aware of the danger here and sought to escape it by defining faith in the terms found in Hebrews 11:1. Faith in general, he said, is "a divine, supernatural elengchos, evidence or conviction: 'of things not seen,' not discoverable by our bodily senses.... Justifying faith implies, not only a divine evidence or conviction that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,' but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that He loved me, and gave Himself for me" ("Justification by Faith,"

IV.2. Italics in original). Of course, Wesley included in his definition of faith intellectual assent to all that God has revealed in Scripture ("The Circumcision of the Heart," I.7). Nevertheless, the essence of Christian faith was the application of general faith to the action of God in Christ.

Christian faith is "not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart.... Christian faith is then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of His life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon Him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us; and, in consequence hereof, a closing with Him, and cleaving to Him, as our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,' or, in one word, our salvation" ("Salvation by Faith," I.4-5). "A string of opinions is no more Christian faith than a string of beads is Christian holiness" (A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity, II.5 in Outler (ed.), John Wesley, p. 189.)

Faith is the condition of justification, and the only necessary condition of it. But faith does not deserve a reward, it does not place God under moral obligation to man. It is a gift from God, albeit a gift that is given to all who by repentance are open to receive it ("Justification by Faith," IV.5). In the analogy already cited, faith is like an empty hand, open and ready to receive whatever is placed in it.

Upon meeting the necessary and essential condition of faith, two simultaneous but distinct events occur in one's life. A person is both justified and regenerated: ". . . 'faith is imputed to him for righteousness' the very moment that he believeth.... [God] counteth us righteous from the time we believe in [Christ]-that is, he doth not punish us for our sins; yea, treats us as though we were guiltless and righteous" ("Justification by Faith," IV.5.)⁸

"But though it be allowed, that justification and the new birth are, in point of time, inseparable from each other, yet are they easily distinguished, as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real change. God in justifying us does something for us; in begetting us again, He does the work in us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image, of God. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin; so that, although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures" ("The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God," Intro. 2).⁹

Wesley made much of the analogy between physical birth and the new birth. The unborn child has the potential to feel, hear, see, and exercise the other senses. Until it is born, however, it does not actually use its senses or even know it possesses them. As birth activates the physical senses, so the new birth makes us sensible to God. With the new birth a "new kind of spiritual respiration" begins. "The spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returning to God: as it is received by faith, so it is continually rendered back by love, by prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving; love, and praise, and

prayer being the breath of every soul which is truly born of God" ("The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God," I.8).

Just as faith is the necessary and the only essential condition for justification, so it is the mark of the new birth ("The Marks of the New Birth," I.1). However, faith that was an empty hand open to receive the gift of justification is now an active agent in the soul's growth. Faith is the eye, the ear, the palate, the feeling of the soul (An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, 7).

It is within this context that we are to interpret Wesley's exaltation of feeling or experience, and his belief in assurance of present salvation. Feeling or experience is part of the appropriation of the gospel of grace in the heart of an individual. Its function is to confirm doctrine, not to create it.

Wesley was firmly rooted in the institutions of the church: order, liturgy, university-these protected him from falling victim to fanaticism. He was as much offended by outbursts of Schwarmerei as Luther was. When faced with such outbreaks in the Methodist societies he investigated and "opposed them with [his] might" (Journal, V. 11).

For all of his mystical-sounding expressions concerning the personal assurance that flows from experience Wesley never asserted the value of experience or feelings not conformable to more objective standards. Only if feeling or experience was within the parameters of scripture, tradition, and reason could it be accepted as "an inward proof, which is nothing short of self-evidence" ("The Witness of the Spirit," I.11). Untested feeling might be merely "the presumption of a natural mind [or] the delusion of the devil" (Ibid., II.1). Nevertheless, Wesley rejoiced that ". . . faith necessarily implies an 'assurance' (which is . . . only another word for 'evidence,' it being hard to tell the difference between them) that 'Christ loved me, and gave himself for me' " ("The Scripture Way of Salvation," II.3. Italics in original).

The Wesleyan synthesis of objective and subjective in the appropriation of atonement is well expressed in one of Charles's hymns. First published in 1746, it had had a place in virtually every Methodist hymn book.

Spirit of faith, come down,
Reveal the things of God;
And make to us the Godhead known,
And witness with the blood.
'Tis thine the blood to apply
And give us eyes to see,
Who did for every sinner die
Hath surely died for me.

No man can truly say
That Jesus is the Lord,
Unless thou take the veil away,
And breathe the living Word.
Then, only then, we feel
Our interest in His blood,
And cry, with joy unspeakable,
"Thou art my Lord, my God!"

O that the world might know
The all-atoning Lamb!
Spirit of faith, descend and show
The virtue of his name.
The grace which all may find,
The saving power, impart;
And testify to all mankind,
And speak in every heart.

Inspire the living faith
Which whosoever receives
The witness in himself he hath,
And consciously believes;
That faith that conquers all,
And doth the mountain move,
And saves whoe'er on Jesus call,
And perfects them in love.¹⁰

This brings us to the consideration of what, in Wesley's view, follows the experiences of justification and the new birth. Much has been made of the divergent interpretations by Luther and Wesley as regards the doctrines of justification and sanctification. Wesley himself underlined that difference. He asked whether anyone had spoke more ably than Luther on justification. But then he declared that with regard to sanctification Luther exhibited "total ignorance" ("On God's Vineyard," I.5, in Works, VII).

It would appear that the issue is the Wesleyan teaching about imputed and imparted righteousness. Wesley rejoiced in the possibility of the renewal of a person in righteousness and true holiness. It begins with justification which is present forgiveness, pardon of sins, and acceptance with God. (A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I.I.1). It continues in holiness of heart and life toward the restoration of the image of God; the life of God in the soul of man; participation of the divine nature; possession of the mind that was in Christ Jesus; entire sanctification; perfect love (Journal, II. 275-76).

Combined with his belief in imparted righteousness was Wesley's activist, indeed compulsive, personality in regard to the use of time and resources for ministry. Prior to his evangelical liberation-represented in the pivotal Aldersgate experience-he worked to earn God's acceptance. Freed from that pressure Wesley nevertheless continued to engage in the same types of ministry ("works") as he had before. The difference was that what had previously been done in hope of salvation was now performed in thanks for and as evidence of salvation. We see here the expression of his differentiation between the single action of the atonement of Christ on the one hand, and the continuing example of Christ the victor on the other. He stated this by saying that justification, which imputes righteousness to us, is what Christ does for us; the imparted righteousness of the life of discipleship, initiated by the new birth and leading to entire sanctification is what the Spirit does in us ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount-Discourse IX," 21).

Wesley felt that Luther had come only part way in the evangelical revolution. To him the concept of *simul justus et peccator* represented a

settling on the slope when one could have gone to the top of the mountain. In fact Wesley thought that Luther's view had deleterious pastoral effects by cutting the nerve of the activist sort of discipleship which the life of holiness requires. Just like predestination it produced the antinomianism which Wesley 80 feared and despised among Christians. In 1741 he recorded reading Luther's "miserable commentary" on Galatians, and blamed Luther for the Moravian insistence on "no work; no law; no commandments." In language quite strong for him Wesley accused Luther of speaking "blasphemously " in regard to good works and the law of God. The next day he attacked the commentary in a sermon on the text "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor un-circumcision, but faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6. See Journal, II, 467-68).

Here, then, was no small matter for Wesley. He was truly offended at a point which was central to his interpretation of the Christian religion. Is it possible, however, that given the opportunity for a "Bristol Colloquy" the reformer and the evangelist might have found mutual understanding, if not full agreement of expression? Luther, the Augustinian monk, knew first hand what it was to pursue the medieval monastic ideal of perfection. He experienced personally the Ruin of that vision of spirituality. It would seem that his interpretation of works was wholly determined by their place in that approach to God. In such a case Luther's reaction against works is understandable. Clearly, however, he did not abandon standards of morality or the claims of the neighbor upon the Christian.

Wesley, living two centuries later in a land where monasticism was an historic memory, inevitably had a less immediate experience of the medieval pursuit of perfection. To be sure, he strove mightily before his evangelical liberation to present himself holy and acceptable to God. Yet his austerities would hardly compare with those of Luther. Neither did Wesley live in the physical and spiritual enclosure of the cloister.

Thanks to the Lutheran theological revolution (albeit Wesley nowhere cites Luther as a formative source for his own theology) Wesley knew the gospel of grace from the very beginning of his own quest. *Sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura* were parts of the theology which he inherited. The intellectual re-appropriation of Paul's evangelical message was not new for him as it was for Luther. Perhaps it was that difference in the theological environments of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries which allowed Wesley to read with appreciation the major works of medieval catholic spirituality.

Now prior to the experience represented by Aldersgate Wesley was of course intellectually a protestant. Nevertheless, he was pursuing a modified form of the medieval monastic ideal of Christian perfection: a sort of intramundane monasticism that he hoped would make him acceptable to God. Aldersgate stands for a deeper level of knowing "the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ." He was freed "to trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation." The gospel of grace came home to him and, like Luther, he was overwhelmed with the fact that what Christ did was pro me; "and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death" Journal, I.475-76. Underlining in third quotation is in original.)

In time Wesley would comment on Romans 4:5; "Hence we see plainly how groundless that opinion is, that holiness or sanctification is previous to

our justification. For the sinner, being first convinced of his sin and danger by the Spirit of God, stands trembling before the awful tribunal of divine justice; and has nothing to plead, but his own guilt, and the merits of a Mediator- Christ here interposes; justice is satisfied; the sin is remitted, and pardon is applied to the soul, by a divine faith wrought by the Holy Ghost, who then begins the great work of inward sanctification.... If a man could possibly be made holy before he was justified, it would entirely set his justification aside . . ." (Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament). This was the major issue in Wesley's break with William Law, a man whom he had earlier looked to as a spiritual mentor.

Yet Wesley did not abandon the doctrine of Christian perfection. In fact it took on a new attractiveness for him, because it became the pilgrimage of the redeemed instead of the petition of the condemned. Repentance was the porch of the house of Christian religion, and faith was the door to that house, but sanctification was the house itself (Works, VIII. 473 and Letters, IV. 302).

Justification removed the guilt of original sin and gave one victory over outward sin. The simultaneous new birth started one on the way of sanctification, freed from the power of sin and victorious over inward sin. ("The Marks of the New Birth," I.4). "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free," wrote Charles, in the poem which has traditionally stood as the first entry in the hymnals of Methodism (The United Methodist Hymnal).

At this point the logical development of the argument would lead to a treatment of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. [Since that is the theme of Pastor Nausner's paper I will not enter upon it.] Instead I wish to close this section of my paper by pursuing the question of whether or not Luther and Wesley were closer together in their understanding of the Christian life after justification than Wesley thought they were.

The interpreter of Wesley has to keep in mind that he was fundamentally concerned with the change God works in the heart. For him the great joyous full effect of grace was that we could experience the kind of life that Jesus recommended in His summary of the law in Mark 12 and Luke 10. We can love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. We can experience that life in which every thought, word, and deed is motivated by love for God and for the neighbor. The Christian is a new person: God's re-creation in righteousness and true holiness.

Such optimism of grace, however, which caused the Methodists to sing their affirmation, did not blind Wesley to the continuing need for repentance.

Wesley preached and wrote about sin in believers, the need to pray daily for the forgiveness of trespasses, the unceasing demands of growth in grace, and the constant danger of backsliding.

Even though Wesley thought of justification and sanctification as "the two grand branches" of Christian salvation, it would seem that he over-stated his disagreement with Luther ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation," II.1). Luther did not place as much emphasis on I John as Wesley did. His experience of both the gospel of grace and the realities of life after justification led him to affirm that we are at the same time justified and sinners. Wesley exalted the great change wrought by God in the heart and so

preached entire sanctification as the fullness of the New Testament promise. On the other hand he too encountered the daily reality of sin in believers. It is noteworthy that while Wesley's assertion of perfection rests upon the evidence of Scripture, his explanation of sin in believers is based largely upon the evidence of experience. Thus, if Luther spoke of *simul justus et peccator* it appears that Wesley developed a teaching that the believer is *simul sanctus et penitentia*. What Luther probably would not agree to is Wesley's assertion of the possibility of entire sanctification. But Wesley knew that we never reach the point in life where we no longer need to pray for the forgiveness of our trespasses. As long as we live our soul is connected with the body and its imperfect organs. We are, therefore, ever liable to mistakes, both intellectual and practical, which can lead us into a wrong temper, and "for all these we need the atoning blood...." (Journal, IV.471).

One final issue remains to be lifted up. I have already noted that Wesley fiercely criticized Luther on the place of works in the evangelical economy. But if Wesley is clear enough on the point of justification by faith, does he sustain that clarity in his view of the necessary conditions surrounding final salvation? Does Wesley come "within an hair's breadth" of works salvation? Since this topic is also one which is at the center of the exposition of sanctification, I will only indicate my conclusion on the matter.¹¹

Briefly put, Wesley's principle was that, whatever might be the case in other types of faith, in faith specifically Christian love of God embraces love of neighbor. Faith without works-in more contemporary idiom, intellectual belief without active ministry-is by definition unscriptural and unchristian. "Our gospel . . . knows no other foundation of good works than faith, or of faith than Christ . . ." ("The Circumcision of the Heart," II. 4).

Moment by Moment: The Relational Quality in Wesleyan Theology

By now we can see the full emergence of a fundamental assumption of Wesleyan theology: that the nexus between God and man is a dynamic relationship involving the full person-hood of both. Within the parameters set by God, Wesley asserted that there was real human responsibility and decision making power. Whatever the dispensation of grace under which one is living-preventing, justifying, or sanctifying-the freed will possesses "gracious ability."¹²

This quality of life with God moment by moment is reflected in Wesley's advocacy of the complementary ideas of grace resistible and assurance of present salvation.¹³ Of course, the classical representation of the relational quality of the divine-human nexus is his teaching of the concurrence of the witness of the Holy Spirit and the witness of the human spirit. He dealt with that theme in two of the Standard Sermons: "The Witness of the Spirit" based on Romans 8:16, and "The Witness of Our Spirit" from II Corinthians 1:12. Wesley did not try to explain how the Holy Spirit and our hearts make their joint testimony, any more than he tried to explain how the condemnation of Adam's sin is upon us all. Nevertheless, the fact of the witness had for him the nature of "an inward proof, which is nothing short of self-evidence" ("The Witness of the Spirit." I.11-12). Thus did he affirm a relationship which was both dynamic and

stable- That is how Wesley sought to hold together divine sovereignty and human responsibility; grace and freedom; the potential for either growth or regression in the spiritual life.

Did John Wesley find a way between Pelagianism and predestination; between works salvation and antinomianism? Those are the questions on which Methodists have so frequently been thrown on the defensive by representatives of the major churches whose roots lie in the thought of the magisterial Reformers. On the other hand they have also been the occasion for the confident claim that Wesley's real greatness as a theologian is to be found in the unique way in which he combined patristic, medieval, and Reformation motifs to fashion a viable third option in Western Christian theology.¹⁴

The examination of Wesley's doctrine of justification provides opportunity to ask whether or not the inner logic of his theology coincides with the New Testament. The answer we give will determine whether we think that his theology of the divine-human relationship is an aggressive, moralistic, privatistic, enthusiastic Pelagianism; or a type of orthodoxy which is simultaneously evangelical, catholic, and reformed, and thereby seminally relevant to the church in an ecumenical age.

Summary Conclusion

The study of John Wesley's doctrine of justification begins with a review of his theological anthropology. He saw the image of God as having three parts: the natural, the political, and the moral. It was the moral image (righteousness and true holiness) which suffered most from the fall of Adam. Owing to the disobedience of the first man all of humanity is under the condemnation of original sin.

Natural man so-called is actually man under the dispensation of prevenient grace; grace given by God after the fall to preserve some of the moral image of God. Conscience is a product of prevenient grace.

The unyielding human problem resulting from the fall is alienation, both from God and from other persons. Alienation from God finds expression in God's wrath, which will justly condemn man to eternal punishment.

Despite Adam's sin, however, God remained a God of love and mercy, as well as a God of justice. That love and mercy found a way to restore the image of God, thus producing at-onement in place of the old alienation. The suffering of Christ Jesus reset the terms of the divine-human encounter. Wesley's theology of the atonement is essentially Anselmian. Following atonement the life of Christ serves as the model for daily Christian living.

Salvation has two grand parts: justification and sanctification. It begins with justification and the regeneration which occurs at the same time. It continues to entire sanctification and final salvation. Justification restores us to the favor of God; sanctification restores us to the image of God. In justification righteousness is imputed to us; we are counted righteous for the sake of the merits of Christ and through faith in Him. In sanctification righteousness is actually imparted to us; we become righteous; we receive and grow daily in righteousness and true holiness. Justification is what Christ does for us; sanctification is what the Holy Spirit does in us.

Justification is preceded by repentance, a response to the leading of prevenient grace. Faith is the only condition for justification. Regeneration is simultaneous with but separate from justification. The change which comes about as the result of justification and regeneration is so great that one can sensibly experience it and be inwardly assured of it.

Assurance and sanctification do not provide immunity from ignorance, mistake, infirmity, or temptation. We must pray daily for forgiveness of our trespasses. Moreover, we must be constantly alert to the danger of backsliding. Such transgressions, although they violate the absolute justice of God and need the atoning blood for their covering, do not break the conscious relationship between the believer and God.

Final salvation is as much dependent upon faith as is justification. Good works (ministry) earn nothing; God is never obligated to us. Works are part of and evidence of that growth in righteousness and true holiness which never ends, even for one who is entirely sanctified.

From beginning to end Wesley's view of the relationship between God and man is that of a synergistic, dynamic, personal, stable interaction. The boundaries of the relationship are set by God; first in the creation, and then in His provision of preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Nevertheless, moment by moment in his life with God a person has genuine freedom and responsibility. We do have "gracious ability" to accept or reject our invitation to "the gospel feast," to "participate in the divine nature," and "having done all to stand [entire at last]."¹⁶

This is John Wesley's "evangelical Arminianism." It is the central point in the accusation that Wesleyan theology is at root Pelagian. It is also the core of the Methodist assertion that the Wesleyan theological methodology yields a creative and synthesizing tradition of ecumenical orthodoxy.

Notes

1Wesley declined to offer an explanation of how original sin was communicated to Adam's posterity. For him the evidence of it was enough to establish the fact, and that was all that was needed. See *The Doctnne of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, VII (Works, IX.335).

2Isaiah 1:5-6 (New English Bible):

Where can you still be struck if you will be disloyal still? Your head is covered with sores, your body diseased; from head to foot there is not a sound spot in you - nothing but bruises and weals and raw wounds which have not felt compress or bandage or soothing oil.

3Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 39-46- William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946), pp.107-08.

4Emory S. Bucke (ed.), *The History of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 3 vols.,1964), I.355.

- 5See his 1751 letter to Ebenezer Blackwell (?) (Letters,) III.78-85) as well as the two Standard Sermons on "The Law Established Through Faith."
- 6Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Stockholm: Nya Bokforlags Aktiebolaget, 1946), p. 92; Williams, *Wesley's Theology Today*, pp. 81, 87-89.
- 7Williams, *Wesley's Theology Today*, p. 83.
- 8Wesley's use of the phrase "righteousness of God" corresponds to that of Luther. It is the righteousness that God gives to the man of faith. See the sermon "The Righteousness of Faith," II.7.
- 9For a similar expression see "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," II.1, which is Sermon LXXXV in Works, VI. Albert Outler contends that this view "goes back to Melancthon's famous *causa concurrens*, and to *Bucer's iustitia duplex* (both of them indebted to Erasmus)" (*Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, Nashville: Tidings, 1975, p. 100).
- 10The Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1966), number 137.
- 11Among the important sources for this topic are: Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testamenz-, James 2:14-16; A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I. III; The General Rules of the United Societies; "The Scripture Way of Salvation"; "The Circumcision of the Heart," and the two sermons on "The Law Established Through Faith."
- 12One expression of the place of human responsibility in the economy of the Christian life may be found in "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse IV," III.7-8. In fact Wesley's thirteen discourses upon Jesus' Great Sermon comprise the core of his teaching on daily Christian living.
- 13Don English, "The Theology of the Wesleyan Movement," (unpublished paper, n.d.), p. 9.
- 14Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, pp. 33-43; English, "The Theology of the Wesleyan Movement," p. 9.
- 15The Methodist Hymnal, numbers 102 and 250; Journal II. 275-76.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PRIMARY SOURCES CITED

- Outler, Albert, ed. John Wesley. (A Library of Protestant Thought). N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Wesley, John, ed. *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists: With a Supplement*. London: John Mason, n.d.
- _____. *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*. ed. Gerald R. Cragg. (The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 11). Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1975.

- _____. Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament. London: William Bowyer, 1755. rpt. Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1958.
- _____. The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. ed. Nehemiah Curnock. London: Robert Culley & C. H. Kelly, 8 vols., 1909-16.
- _____. The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. ed. John Telford. London: Epworth, 8 vols., 1931.
- _____. Wesley's Standard Sermons. ed. Edward H. Sugden, London: Epworth, 2 vols., 1921.
- _____. The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. ed. Thomas Jackson. London: John Mason, 14 v019., 1829-31; rpt. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan. 1979.

**THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY
IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN
WESLEYANISM
1850-1900**

by
Sam Powell

Introduction

They do not like to think about it. It is a part, but not a part of their thought. The doctrine of the trinity among 19th century American Wesleyans is like a vulgar joke in polite company. Or a pointed question posed to a politician. An issue of importance, which needs to be addressed. But of course it's a purely positive notion and cannot be understood at all. It is the Christian's antique: to be admired, but not used.

Why do they have this attitude? Why does the doctrine of the trinity have such modest use among the Wesleyans' theological weaponry? We all know the average answers: these were a preaching folk, their message a simple one of full salvation, designed for a simple, unlettered audience; the heart of Wesleyanism is the heart strangely warmed-speculation is not fitting for piety; the Wesleyans were Protestants: they know only the accommodated God. To these we routinely add: the controversy with the Calvinists stamped the character of 19th century Wesleyanism, so that all their time and energy was consumed in fighting for free will and gracious ability.

Is there a true answer? Such an answer would include all the reasons given above, but would have to go beyond them, for many in the 19th century were content to hide their trinitarian talent in the ground lest its value be lost through commerce. The doctrine of the trinity at this time was not a popular doctrine if one means by this a doctrine which enters deeply into the systems of theologians. (And of course we are speaking of the immanent trinity: persons, nature, relations of origin and the like.) Calvinists, Methodists, and many others all had little use for the speculative development of this doctrine. But the historian of Wesleyanism wants to know why in particular the Wesleyans made so little use of the doctrine. What was the force which united all the various influences and conditions into that optimistic uncertainty which characterized the Wesleyans?

The debate with the Calvinists over will. This is the issue but not because this debate consumed all their energies and talents. And not

because this controversy shows that the genius of Wesleyanism is existential, rather than speculative. The debate with the Calvinists was decisive because the defense of free will established the conceptual parameters of Wesleyanism, parameters which excluded a priori a fruitful understanding of the trinity. (Perhaps not a priori: but it would have taken theological genius, or theological sleight of hand, to accomplish such an understanding with the conceptual tools at hand. Practically a priori. Conditioned a priori.) The debate did this by forcing the Wesleyans to declare personality to be the highest level of being in the universe, and this presupposed a community of personal beings, one of whom was infinite. So the Wesleyans took as their ultimate principle for the defense of freedom the personality of God.

But if God is a person (or the Person), how can God be three persons? To this the Wesleyans found an answer in the creeds, and Richard Watson had already shown them that for such topics the best method was scriptural exposition. So the Wesleyan theologian, although occasionally critical of the Nicene formulation, concluded his thoughts on the matter by allowing that, after all, the creeds stated the best possible solution, given the limitations of human thought. And beside that, scripture gives us the fact of the trinity. Our task is to believe it, and defend it as best as possible.

The contemporary Wesleyan will dutifully and sympathetically acknowledge that the 19th century fathers did well with a difficult situation. But we cannot remain satisfied with their solution, because it is not a solution. A doctrine which is absolute in the strict sense can never be an important doctrine. And it was not for the Wesleyans of the last century. It was a defensive weapon used to beat off the infidel whenever they dared show their faces. It was an educational degree from an inferior school: it said something, but not much, and more than anything its worth was merely to proclaim that the owner was ignorant of the degree's low value.

What is needed is a doctrine of the trinity which will operate in the theological system in the same way that any mechanical part works in a machine. In other words, what is needed is a truly systematic theology. The body of this essay is divided into two sections, an exposition of the doctrine of the trinity as held by 19th century Wesleyans, and an attempt to show why the Wesleyan doctrine of the trinity was so barren. The essay concludes with exhortation to Wesleyan theologians on the issue of the trinity.

The theologians whose views are discussed are mostly those who contributed articles to the Methodist Quarterly Review. In addition, John Miley has been chosen because he summarizes 90 well Wesleyan theology. Everything spoken on the topic before him is present in his Systematic Theology in a clear and consistent way. Daniel Whedon is also included, not because he had anything significant to say about the trinity, but because his writings on the freedom of the will show so well that the conflict over the personality of God was not fought with the pantheists or atheists, but with the Calvinists. Whedon's works illustrate the truth that the dominance of the category of personality effectively precluded a fruitful understanding of the trinity.

Why these and not others? For one reason, there is an amazing paucity of works devoted to the study of the trinity in this period. But even if there had been many, the result would have been the same. There is little difference between Mattison's A Scriptural Defense of the Doctrine of the

Trinity (1850) and Miley's treatment in 1892. So the choice of authors and even their historical order is not crucial for understanding the Wesleyan doctrine.

Exposition

Theological Method

To understand the Wesleyans' approach to the trinity, it is necessary to grasp first their concept of method, for it was their pursuit of scientific rigor which allowed them to have a doctrine of the trinity at all.

The attitude of all the theologians was all the same: as with every science, there is a body of relevant facts which before study are unorganized. The task of the scientist or theologian is to organize the facts in a way which will be both inclusive and harmonious. For example, William Nast, writing in 1860, states that his purpose in the essay is to "harmonize with the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ his true humanity."¹ Nast, who by this time had been a Methodist preacher for 25 year was hardly a theological rustic: he had attended Tübingen and taken classes with F. C. Baur, and by the time he emigrated to America was quite a sceptic. Becoming a Methodist changed his thinking on more than one issue. D. W. Clark, 1843 graduate of Wesley University and soon to be bishop in the M. E. Church, also writing in 1851, is even more explicit: the teachings of Christ are not in the Bible "given in the scientific forms of dogmatic theology."²

Miley's Systematic Theology contains the most thorough treatment of the topic among the Wesleyans. He states that any proper definition of science will embody a sense of certitude which grounds the science. Further, there must be a "generalization in some principle or law which interprets the facts" covered by the science.³ Two facts which ground the possibility of theology as a science are the existence of God and the religious nature of humanity.⁴

Having established that theology has a claim to be a science, Miley considers faith. "Faith is not a blind acceptance of any alleged fact or principle, but its acceptance on rational grounds." Thus faith follows on evidence. The existence of enigmas among the evidence is no more a problem for theology than for any other science. The facts may not be completely understandable, but they must be accepted as long as they come from a source deemed authoritative. So it is not irrational to believe in the trinity since its source has a demonstrable certitude of truth.⁵

In summary, the method of theology first consists in an organization of the relevant facts, then in showing their systematic inter-connections. Whether the doctrine can then be further understood depends on the nature of the doctrine. Some are amenable to the power of reason; others are purely a matter of revelation.

Reason and Revelation

The typical Wesleyan view of the relationship between reason and revelation in theology is Thomistic: there are truths which are revealed, yet which reason can also attain, and there are truths which can only be known by finite minds through revelation.

On this topic Miley states that the error of rationalism is to think that human reason is the sole judge of truth, so that every doctrine depends for

its acceptance on rational comprehension. Actually, reason functions in theology as that faculty which organizes the various truths given in revelation, and in grasping the rational certitude of theology. While reason does not encompass revelation, still revelation does not contradict reason. Many doctrines cannot be understood, but can be accepted as true because they have their origin in scripture, which can be rationally shown to be true.⁶

Having shown the reasonableness of religious truth, Miley proceeds to draw the lines of demarcation between truths known by natural reason and those not. The existence of God can clearly be known apart from revelation. "The idea of a divine existence is a necessary intuition of the mind. By a necessary intuition we mean one that springs immediately from the constitution of the mind."⁷ Further, "Our intuitions give objective truth. This may be denied, but only with the implication of agnosticism or utter skepticism."⁸

The knowledge of the trinity, however, is another matter for all of these Wesleyans. For example D. W. Clark states that the believer asserts the trinity because of scripture, even though the fact of God's plurality cannot be explained in relation to other facts of revelation. The trinity is not settled by "logical inductions, by metaphysical distinctions, nor yet by scientific demonstrations."⁹ W. P. Odell wrote in 1896, "Undoubtedly a philosophy of the trinity is impossible. The idea transcends human powers of comprehension.... Here is a great mystery, which ... cannot be pictured to the imagination."¹⁰ In even stronger terms, G. P. Disosway wrote,

Christ's Sonship is a sublime and incomprehensible mystery, a divine secret. To dive into it men may pretend to learning and knowledge, but betray their presumption and ignorance. The pious and humble will not search after things too difficult and too high for human comprehension."

Miley is in complete accord. "In the doctrine of the trinity there are questions of fact, and also a question of harmony in the facts.... We do not think it open to full explication in human thought. It is not wise to attempt more than is attainable."¹² At the close of the section on the trinity Miley says, "We may still learn the unwisdom of attempting a philosophy of the trinity.... The incomprehensibility of the doctrine is only one of many incomprehensibilities in God."¹³

So not every doctrine is directly reasonable in the sense that it is discoverable by reason, but every truly Biblical doctrine will be reasonable in the sense that belief in it is warranted. Reason rightly used will never conflict with doctrine truly stated. For example, Odell, having just explained the transcendence of the doctrine and its incomprehensibility, goes on to say that this does not mean that the doctrine is either self-contradictory or even unbelievable." William Nast takes it as his task to discover whether the hypostatic union implies a contradiction, and takes as a methodological principle the rule that an inability to explain something does not of necessity imply a contradiction.¹⁵ As usual, Miley follows suit. "Were the constituent facts of the doctrine in contradictory opposition, it would be incredible.... The facts as posited by Trinitarians are not contradictory."¹⁶

The Understanding of Faith

Having disarmed the claim that the doctrine involves a contradiction the theologians go on to give their various understandings of the truth. Clark takes a fairly radical position by criticizing the traditional creeds of the church. "We are not calling into question the Trinity.... Our inquiry relates only to the form of the statement . . . to the symbol that has been adopted to express it." He goes on to say that although the truth itself is incomprehensible, the doctrinal (scientific) form used by the early councils, being a creation of rational minds, must be subject to rational scrutiny and criticism, and that the traditional symbols are vague, defective, and open to serious challenges. In fact, as Clark understands the case, the critiques of Unitarianism, Schleiermacher, and Bushnell are based on the inadequacies of the creeds, not of the doctrine itself.¹⁸ Clark allows that it is difficult to conceive of the union of two natures, but argues that a solution may be deferred until it is discovered how in a single human person a soul and body are united. In effect, Clark is arguing for a negative analogy: since the human person is incomprehensible, the God-man concept cannot be accused of incredibility.¹⁹ Thus the task at hand is to solve problems linked to the doctrine, such as how Christ could assume human nature without assuming a sinful nature, and why God, who is so great, should condescend to become incarnate in a creature so small.²⁰ Having accomplished this goal, "all then we have to do is to set forth the simple scriptural fact of Christ's divinity, assured that this fact must in some way be harmonious with" the divine unity. The interpretive key is to accept the authority of revelation, and to keep in mind that God even as revealed is incomprehensible-a fortiori God must be even more so unrevealed.²¹

Apart from his considered rejection of the traditional symbols of the trinity (and his rejection of the notion of eternal generation), it is clear that there is little attempt at understanding the doctrine in Clark. For him the understanding of faith in this case means simply ascertaining what the scriptural doctrine is, then solving the problems which arise from it. In other words, the duty is to show that the doctrine is not contradictory-all further, positive understanding is eschewed.

Another writer at this time, James Strong, attempts to go farther than Clark, but actually remains within the latter's bounds. Strong tries to show that the notion of sonship in God does not involve the notion of inferiority in order to uphold the equality of the persons. He argues that by analogy with human generation, there is no essential inferiority tied to ontological derivation, since even in human generation there is an equality or sameness of natures.²² He considers that the only sort of inferiority connected with generation is two-fold: the anteriority of the father (implying superiority over the minor), and the fact that the generation lay with the father's will, the child having no consent. However, since both scripture and the creeds testify that the divine persons are all eternal, any notion of anteriority is excluded.²³ Further, the divine generation is not according to will, but by the nature of God, i.e. by necessity. The Son is not generated by the will of the Father. Rather, both have their existence from the nature of divinity. For these reasons, and also because of the equality of divine properties, the elements of inferiority attached to derivation are not essential, but accidental.²⁴

Strong next considers whether any real meaning can be given to the term person as applied to the divine. After stating the usual proviso that the divine nature is far beyond human comprehension, Strong gives a definition of person very similar to the classical descriptions: "A certain mutual relation essentially subsisting in the Godhead: and 'persons' are those SUBSTANTIVE FORMS of Deity thus distinguished."²⁵ Although Strong shows more theological sophistication than Clark, it still seems that he is mainly content merely to demonstrate that the doctrine is not contradictory. He does argue analogically from human generation, but he does so only to prove that inferiority does not necessarily connect itself with derivation. Virtually no positive understanding of the trinity is gained through this maneuver.

William Nast represents an interesting case, for he appears to hold different views on the subject. He first notes that although the doctrine of the hypostatic union is difficult, it is unique to God's design to reconcile opposites, e.g. grace and liberty. He then repeats the familiar axiom that the divine reality is beyond human comprehension and, regarding the incarnation, plainly says that "there is nothing analogous by which it could be explained; it is an object of faith. The philosophy of the fact we must leave to God." Although he is not here speaking specifically of the trinity, the case is the same, for the unrevealed divine nature is incomprehensible.²⁶

With this introduction, one might suppose that a simple statement of the scriptural texts would be all which could be hoped for. On the contrary, Nast argues that it is against the fundamental principles of evangelical Protestantism to assume that the church has once and for all times decided "the terms concerning the mode of the two-fold nature." This would mean that all searching after truth would be useless. Rather, "Although we can never fathom this mystery . . . it is nevertheless our sacred duty to learn to understand so much of it as the Scriptures enable us to know."²⁷

He goes on to say that a failure of comprehension may be due either to the transcendence of the doctrine to human understanding, or to the fact that the scriptures have not yet been thoroughly understood-the essential definition may not yet have been located.²⁸ Thus what he denies on the one hand, the understanding of faith through the use of analogy (and how else is the faith to be understood?) he allows on the other hand-but only in the mode of harmonization. "The proper conception of the God-man" is gained by harmonizing the divine and human natures.²⁹ In practice, this means that, regarding the kenosis of the divine nature in the incarnation, "Only so much of his divine self-consciousness as was necessary for his mediatorial office" was shed by the Son.³⁰ Again it seems that the only understanding allowed is that involved in the resolution of conflicts inherent in the statement of the doctrine in the Bible.

Although it might be argued that all theology operates in this manner, still it must be allowed that Christianity has often sought to positively understand by means of systematic, reasonable categories. The search for understanding would likely have been undertaken anyway, as evidenced by the work of St. Thomas. The adoption of Aristotelian categories as an interpretive structure was not primarily for the defense of faith against heretics, but rather because of the intrinsic superiority (in Thomas' opinion) of the Aristotelian conceptual system for the understanding of faith.

The Wesleyans stand in the theological tradition of Calvin, who likewise relied on scripture and its harmonization, but whereas Calvin is completely at home in the classical language, and uses it to advantage, the Wesleyans seem embarrassed by the need to defend the trinity conceptually, and have a tendency to neglect the power of the Nicene terminology. Tendencies and embarrassments are difficult to measure, and in fact Miley's theology contains a greater percentage of space devoted to the trinity than Calvin's Institutes, but the impression is still given of a reticence about the doctrine. Perhaps it is the case that sustained reflection on theology and creative understanding can occur only in the absence of noteworthy critique. Yet in this same period (and the preceding fifty years) the Wesleyans were carrying on a highly creative polemic against the Calvinists (both traditional-Edwardians and New School) on the issue of free will; criticism in this case did not hinder, but caused to flourish, theological speculation. By comparison with doctrines such as free agency and the governmental theory of the atonement, the treatments of the trinity appear to be merely delaying actions, designed to hold territory rather than advance the church's mission.

The only article in the Methodist Quarterly Review in this period to concern itself primarily with the trinity was written in 1894 and occupies six pages. While it is not different in method from the other articles studied, the author does include reflection on the nature of personality which is of aid in interpreting the thinking of Wesleyans on the trinity.

Edwin Sherwood begins his essay by noting that the trinity is a product of revelation not reason, and that its mystery does not lie in either contradiction or in the distinction between being and person, for this latter is clear. The mystery lies in two areas incomprehensible for human thought, namely the distinction between personality and person in God, and the existence in God of persons without individuated beings.³¹ He notes that it is not enough to say that the divine persons are personal within the divine unity, for this yields an impersonal unity and a personal plurality. What is demanded is also a personal unity.³² He therefore concludes that the best formulation of the divine reality is to say that one personal substance (not one person) exists in three persons. This can be the case, for unlike humans, where every person is a personality, in God personality is broader than person. That is, in God individuation of the persons is not complete as it is in humans.³³ This lack of analogy with humans is no bar to credibility, for there is nothing about person and personality which necessarily implies that each person is an individuated being, or that person is essentially co-extensive with personality. Human experience may give only the accidents of the case, and since it cannot be proved that the human mode of personality is the rule, belief in the trinity is not incredible.³⁴

Before an interpretation of the Wesleyan view of the trinity is given, it will be well to examine Odell's opinions. Actually, he mentions only briefly one thing which distinguishes him from the other theologians, and apparently nobody ever developed his idea, but his thought is this: it seems that a plurality is implied by God's moral nature, since "one cannot love without an object of affection.... There must have been eternally present an object of regard" as the object of divine love.³⁵ This is, of course, the argument of Richard of St. Victor, and is used by him to demonstrate not only the

second person, but also the third person. Odell, unfortunately, does not expand his views, nor did anyone else. This remark, practically an aside, apparently did not commend itself to Wesleyan theologians.

The Problem

Why is this? Why were Wesleyan theologians so loathe to use analogies and philosophies to gain understanding of the trinity? Throughout the paper several reasons have been postulated, and all of them contain some truth. But another reason may lie in the issue with which Sherwood struggled, namely, how do the persons of the trinity stand to the personality of God? What Sherwood wants to say is that the operations of the trinity ad extra are according to essence, that is, that all the persons act in a unified way. However, by posing the question in the way he did, Sherwood has virtually asked how a divine person (implying personal) can be fully personal. That is, the central concept of God for Sherwood (and for most Wesleyans of this period) was that of person/personality. The problem arose when three persons/personalities were posited. Sherwood's answer is to speak of partially individuated persons after the manner of Richard Watson, but, apart from the question whether this signifies anything intelligible, it can be claimed that the adoption of personality as the chief concept for God was a strategic error (at least as regards the trinity), because the notion of personality, as understood by the Wesleyans, was not capable of bearing a strong trinitarian interpretation.

This can be clearly seen in Miley. The force of the proofs for God's existence is that they demonstrate the personality of God, especially the teleological and moral/anthropological arguments. The teleological shows God's intellect and sensitivity to ends, while the moral shows God's own moral nature.³⁶ In his critique of anti-theistic agnosticism, Miley devotes much space to make the point that the Absolute described by philosophy cannot be the personal God, although in fact, the personal God is the only real absolute.³⁷ At one point Miley states that "if God is not a personal being, the result must be either atheism-or pantheism."³⁸ A little farther he says that "Personality is the most determinate conception of God . . . the only conception of God which immediately gives his attributes."³⁹

Explanation

In 1864, Daniel Whedon, editor of the Methodist Quarterly Review fixed his biggest theological guns on the Calvinists, and launched a frontal assault on their stronghold in *The Freedom of the Will as a Basis of Human Responsibility and Divine Government*. In it he presented the Arminian position and the points of criticism against the necessitarian argument. Why did Whedon engage the Calvinists? From the writing of a 438 page tome we must infer that he had been considering his strategy for some time, and the eagerness with which he lunges at the enemy speaks for a certain zealotry.

The preliminary clashes which occasioned *The Freedom of the Will* constitute a veritable trench warfare between Whedon and B. N. Martin. The latter in 1859 wrote a lengthy essay in *The New Englander*⁴⁰ in which he argued that Nathaniel Taylor had introduced an improvement into the thinking of New England theology by emphasizing the notion of God's

moral government. Among other benefits, Taylor's suggestion overturned the dictum that sin was a necessary component to the best of all possible universes. As an aside, he noted that this axiom was not unique to Calvinist divines, but could for example be found also in Wesley. Of an essay of some 60 pages, the remarks on Wesley occupy several paragraphs."

In November 1860, Whedon, in the Synopsis of the Quarterlies section of *MQR*, took note of the article and allowed that it showed much ability. However, Whedon observed, Martin had attempted to maintain Taylor's originality by misstating Wesley's views. First, the passage quoted from Wesley was irrelevant. Second, the issue was not the reality of sin itself, but rather of the possibility of sin, free will.⁴² The enemy's maneuvers having been checked, Whedon returned to the business of editing.

The real battle, however, had just begun. Within a few months the shooting broke out afresh as Martin wrote a "Reply to the Methodist Quarterly Review." Far from being a defeated foe, Martin mustered his weapons to claim that not only had he not misrepresented Wesley (here he quoted from sermons numbers 68 and 69 in the Emory edition),⁴³ but that

All that is most obnoxious in the extreme Calvinistic view of this subject is surpassed and outdone by the boundless extravagance of both the Romish and the Wesleyan theology.⁴⁴

Whedon closed ranks and readied his ordnance for a fight. He immediately wrote a reply to the upstart in which he repeated his charge that Martin's purpose was "to exalt Dr. Taylor at the expense of Mr. Wesley." He also rejected the claim of Martin that for Wesley "sin is the necessary means of the highest good of the universe."⁴⁵ Whedon had several arguments to contest Martin's claims, and of course his task was made more difficult given the nature of Wesley's theologizing. But whereas Wesley himself was relatively light artillery, Whedon had considerably larger guns which he now brought into use. While Wesley had no opinion as to the necessity of Adam's sin "to the best possible system for our own race," Fletcher was quite emphatic. After a few remarks about the Manichean character of the Calvinist God, the issue turned to whether the fact of sin involved divine permission in order to bring about a greater good, or involved the necessity of sin for the highest good (implying divine causation and hence culpability). Fletcher of course opted for the former, arguing that God could bring about the best without any individual's sin.⁴⁶ Whedon admits that for Wesley God has the power to prevent sin, but not without destroying freedom.

It was a fundamental principle of Mr. Wesley's theodicy, expounded by him passim, as our extended extract above shows that it was Fletcher's, that it is impossible for even omnipotence arbitrarily to control free agency.⁴⁷

Martin had begun by making a specific point about Wesley himself. Whedon had escalated the conflict to include the entire Wesleyan tradition, especially Fletcher.

Martin tried one more time to get Whedon to capitulate. In his second reply, he covers again the old ground and notes that the issue at stake in

the original Wesleyan-Calvinist debate (namely the one in which Wesley himself participated) was not free will 90 much as free grace.⁴⁸

Whedon blasted back a reply, but for the most part reiterated his earlier contentions, except that he stressed in this reply the role of Fletcher as the "authorized expounder of Wesley's Theology."⁴⁹

The debate as such ended with Whedon's second reply. However, in early 1862 *Bibliotheca Sacra* announced a series of essays on different theological perspectives, to be written by experts within those perspectives. In the July 1862 edition of *MQR* Whedon announced that he would write the article on the Doctrines of Methodism.⁵⁰ The article appeared in the April 1862 volume, and was basically expository in character, as opposed to polemic. There was no mention of the clash with Martin, but the topics discussed were almost exclusively those dealing with the Calvinist-Arminian controversy.

It must have been around this time that Whedon was writing *The Freedom of the Will*, and it is reasonable to suppose that at least part of the reason why he wrote the book was to declare conclusively that Wesleyans stood, and had always stood, for free agency and moral government.

In this book he notes that, contrary to the position assumed by Calvinists, "All atheists, Pantheists, Materialists, and professed Fatalists are necessitarians."⁵¹ Further,

The doctrine that one principle of causation or fixed invariable sequence rules all things, material or mental, and all events of Will or of physics, is central with the d'Holbachian Atheism and Edwardean Calvinism.... The doctrine that there is no soul and no [free] Will . . . that there is no God who does not come under the same inflexible inalterable law of matter, levels the whole into one system of fatalistic materialism.⁵²

The moral consciousness demands freedom, immortality, and God as a Person. Only a personal God could be the sort of God demanded by this consciousness.⁵³

Whedon argues that a god which wills of necessity "is thus an infinite substance, with no power but to be passively moved as external causation acts up on him."⁵⁴ If this is so, then what God has actually created is the measure of His power: "God and not-God are fixed correlatives: absolute counterparts of each other."⁵⁵ The point is obviously that Whedon finds that Calvinist God to be such a God, and hence to be no God at all, since this would conflict with moral government and hence with the moral consciousness.

Unlike the Calvinists' God, who cannot deviate from perfection and who thus has no claim to morality, the Arminian God is "an infinitely free, excellent, meritorious Person," and so can be conceived as either good or bad morally. Further, Whedon notes almost parenthetically that "the Infinite of the Pantheist is all comprehending, of evil and good alike. Nay, Calvinism itself has never yet been able to extricate itself from the charge of placing the intentional primordial authorship of evil in God."⁵⁶ The point for Whedon is that naturalistic systems have difficulty accounting for a good God. So as far as Calvinism links God with responsibility for sin, there is evil in God and Calvinism is a naturalistic or pantheistic system.

Whedon's last word on the subject is that "the necessary CONDITION to the possible existence of a true Divine Government is the Volitional FREEDOM, both of the infinite and the finite Person." ⁵⁷ His argument is that the Calvinist God is more like a pantheist absolute principle than the Christian God. The former has a monopoly on causation, and is itself inwardly determined. The latter exercises moral government, and shares both freedom and causation with creation. The Arminian God is truly a person, and has moral qualities.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the personality of God, a concept which played so important a role for Miley and others, did not conceptually arise from conflicts with pantheists or natural science, but rather from the debate with the Calvinists. As the Wesleyans saw the problem, the Calvinist God just could not be a personal God. The affirmation of moral consciousness implied an acceptance of freedom, and this in turn required a God who limited Himself, who allowed a measure of causality to creation, and who was not internally necessitated: an infinite person.

The point of all this for the doctrine of the trinity is that the concept of the personality of God assumed such an integral place in the Wesleyans' thinking that it became the central theological category. I contend that the polemic situation was so decisive for Wesleyanism that they were conceptually unable to make use of the trinity in a systematic way. Not only were they trying to construct theology by means of philosophical tools, but the tools themselves were faulty.

Clearly personality was an important notion for Miley, and thus undoubtedly for most Wesleyan thinkers. Personality in general for Miley includes essentially rational intellect, sensibility, and will.⁵⁸ Miley gives little elaboration of sensation as an essential element of personality, and he could have, if he wanted to, subsumed it under intellect, at least in God, for the divine intellect may be supposed to have an intuitive knowledge of even concrete facts. At any rate, the inclusion of sensibility in personality disrupts the classically held psychology of intellect and will, with the result that a trinity of procession from the divine essence as an act of understanding (as in St. Thomas), namely Word/concept and Love/will, is impossible.

But Miley appears not even to want to proceed analogically. In the section on the trinity he states that previous attempts to reason analogically about the trinity are misguided, and specifically cites the psychological analogy. "Intellect, sensibility, and will unite in the personality of mind. True: but no ground remains for any personal distinctions either in the mind or in the powers which constitute its personality." ⁵⁹ Yet, working along similar lines, theologians such as Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas did discover personal distinctions among the powers, namely, distinctions of origin and procession. A likely explanation for this feature of Miley's thought is that "person" is for him so bound up with personality that to think analogically would be to either divide the substance by assigning each person to a faculty to create a virtual tri-theism, with each person being a completely individual personality. This is the problem which concerns Sherwood. The battle to demonstrate the personality of God had been fought for so long that the personality of God (intellect, sensibility, will) became more important than the trinity of God, especially since the latter could not be interpreted within the personality of God.

This can be seen if Miley's concept of the image of God is examined. For Miley, the image of God in which humanity was created is primarily a holy personality. "Personality is the central truth of man's original likeness to God." 60 Whereas Augustine had argued from humanity's psychological composition as the image to the trinity, Miley argues from it to God's personality and does not mention the trinity. While this is consistent with what he had previously said concerning analogy and personality, it does show that his primary concern is not to understand the trinity, even in a rudimentary way, but rather to show that there is an analogy between the human soul and the unity of God.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Wesleyans' controversy with the Calvinists so stamped their thinking that they were unable to deal conceptually with the doctrine of the trinity. There were many components which conspired to render the Wesleyans incapable of thinking in a trinitarian way, but the factor which united these components into a historical force was the debate over free will. The Wesleyans were poorly served by the polemic, at least concerning the doctrine of the trinity. Instead of constructing their theology along trinitarian lines, they first proved the personality of God, then attempted to locate within God three personalities. Given this, it is no wonder that the dominant trend was simply to state the facts of the doctrine and to defend it against charges of contradiction.

There remains only the task of stating the implications of the essay for the contemporary construction of Wesleyan theology. I argue that Christian theology must be trinitarian from the foundation. Wesleyan theology in particular has erred in relying on two lines of defense: the doctrine of the trinity as a revealed truth, and the claims of theism as rationally grounded. The thinking has always been that if the first line were breached, at least the second line would hold, being grounded on the sure rock of rationality.

This attitude has left us like Thetis standing on the beach watching Peleus setting sail: unable to believe what is happening before her eyes. So we in theology have watched in disbelief as the ship of philosophy has sailed for other seas. In brief, philosophy and reason are no longer able or willing to do the job we ask of them. Spoiling the Egyptians is one thing, but we have traditionally reversed the roles between Israelite and Egyptian: under Pharaoh the people of God did the hard work: Wesleyans want Pharaoh to do the hard intellectual work under the guise of spoiling the Egyptians.

In summary, the theology of 19th century Wesleyanism cannot be reconciled with the truth that the God encountered in Jesus Christ is not just any God to whom the notion of trinity has been connected as an adjunct. The God of Christ is always the trinity.

Notes

- 1 "The Divine Human Person of Christ," Methodist Quarterly Review 42(1860):441. [Hereafter MQR]
- 2 "The Incarnation," MQR 33(1851):116.
- 3 Systematic Theology, 2 vols., (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 1:22.
- 4 Ibid., 1:26-29.
- 5 Ibid., 1:37-38.
- 6 Ibid., 1:43-47.
- 7 Ibid., 1:68.
- 8 Ibid., 1:71.
- 9 Clark, MQR 33:133.
- 10 "The Christian Conception of God." MQR 78(1896):731.
- 11 "The Apostles' Creed," MQR 41(1860):484.
- 12 Miley, 1:223.
- 13 Ibid., 1:231.
- 14 Odell, MQR 78:731.
- 15 Nast, MQR 42:442.
- 16 Miley, 1:271.
- 17 Clark, MQR 33:122.
- 18 Ibid., p. 123.
- 19 Ibid., p. 130.
- 20 Ibid., p. 131.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 133-134-
- 22 "The Doctrine of the Logos in the Introduction to John's Gospel," MQR 33(1851):543-544.
- 23 Ibid., p. 544.
- 24 Ibid., p. 545.
- 25 Ibid., p. 547.
- 26 Nast, MQR 42:443.
- 27 Ibid., p. 445.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 445-446.
- 29 Ibid., p. 443.
- 30 Ibid., p. 457.
- 31 "The Mystery of the Trinity," MQR 76(1894):584.
- 32 Ibid., p. 585.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 586-587.

- 34Ibid., pp. 588-589.
- 350dell, MQR 78:732-
- 36Miley, 1:109.
- 37Ibid-, pp. 148-149-
- 38Ibid., p. 173.
- 39Ibid., p. 177.
- 40"Dr. Taylor on Moral Government," New Englander 17(Nov. 1859):903-967.
- 41"Ibid., p. 948.
- 42MQR 42(Jan., 1860):146.
- 43New Englander 18(May, 1860):477.
- 44Ibid-, p. 479.
- 45"Wesleyanism and Taylorism - Reply to the New Englander," MQR 42 (Oct., 1860):657.
- 46Ibid., pp. 660-661-
- 47Ibid., p. 665.
- 48"Theology of Wesley - Reply to the Methodist Quarterly Review," New Englander 19 (July, 1861): 640.
- 49Wesleyanism and Taylorism-Second Reply to the New Englander," MQR 44(Jan., 1862): 143.
- 50Bibliotheca Sacra 19(1862):241-273. For the announcement see MQR 44(1862):336-337 and 506.
- 51D. D. Whedon, Freedom of the Will (New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1864), p. 108.
- 52Ibid., p. 109,
- 53Ibid., p. 110.
- 54Ibid-, p. 312.
- 55Ibid.
- 56Ibid., pp. 315-316.
- 57Ibid., p. 436.
- 58Miley, 1:169.
- 59Ibid., p. 269.
- 60Ibid., p. 407.

ORIGINAL SIN AND SANCTIFICATION: A PROBLEM FOR WESLEYANS

by
Vern A Hannah

An Old Testament theologian has rightfully stated that "What a religion affirms concerning the meaning of sin is a highly suggestive clue to its entire creed." This is especially true of the relationship between the ideas of sin and sanctification.

There is an urgent need within the modern Wesleyan movement to rethink the concept and terminology of original sin in relation to sanctification. Thirteen years' pastoral experience and ten years of college teaching convince me that there is widespread confusion about the traditional teachings on original sin and entire sanctification.

Why are so few members able to articulate an unequivocal and lucid understanding of the concept often held to be "cardinal" in our tradition? I believe the primary reason lies in the error of trying to wed a traditional (i.e., a mechanical-and to my mind faulty) concept of original sin with the dynamic work of the Spirit in sanctifying a believer's heart.

The traditional understanding of original sin-which is basic to the "eradicationist" view of entire sanctification-appears to be the assumption of most modern holiness advocates. This traditional view came into the mainstream of Christian thought principally through Augustine's influence and it describes the condition by various terms such as "sinful nature," "inherited depravity," "carnal nature," "adamic corruption," "inbred sin," or, simply, "original sin," etc. This condition, it is held, originated with the sin of Adam and Eve and was passed on to all their descendants with the result that we are all now born in a state of moral depravity. I am going to argue that neither logic nor the scriptures support the implications of such concepts and terminology, and that the most charitable thing that can be said about this view is that it is extremely fatalistic.

Terminological and Theological Problems

One of the implications often associated with terminology such as "inherited depravity," or "inbred sin," etc., is the thought that somehow this condition we inherit is a "something"-and hence is seen in substantive or quantitative terms. This something is thought to be removed in the

experience of entire sanctification. Thinking in such terms, in spite of efforts to explain that "this is not what is meant," gives rise to confusion and disillusionment on the experiential side of sanctification and a "magical" view on its theological side.² There is a hiatus or at least a tension between the experience and the description of it. The problem of terminology is not new, of course, nor can it ever be fully solved. There are, however, ways of preaching and teaching the concept in personal, dynamic, and relational terms³ which make it easier for the man in the pew to understand. Precisely because terms convey meanings ipso facto they need to be selected with care in order to convey as much precision as possible.

But there is a suspicion that the problem is deeper than semantics. It is more likely an acutely theological and philosophical problem. The designation, "original sin," is a curious expression at best. The problem is compounded when expressions like "inherited corruption" or "inherited depravity" are used as synonyms. Unless one is content to be a fatalist there is something fundamentally askew in the notion that anything truly moral can be inherited. Morality is a quality of responsible human action. So is immorality. Most people would accept this without question. In spite of this the notion has prevailed among many Christians that human beings inherit a sort of "corruption" or "depravity" from Adam. But terms like these are moral terms and they convey concepts that are deeply moral. In view of this it must be said that one can no more be corrupted by the act of another human being (be it Adam or his own father) than he can be held guilty for the act of another human being. There is no way that one can discuss original sin in terms of inherited "corruption" or "depravity" and at the same time maintain that he is discussing a mere abstraction or even using the terms metaphorically. Such terminology makes no sense in a truly moral context.⁴

In the opinion of this writer the basis of the theological and practical problems vis-a-vis sin and sanctification stems in part from the rather curious anomaly in Wesleyanism of blending an Augustinian/Reformed concept of original sin with the Arminian/Wesleyan view of grace and human responsibility. Although Wynkoop makes an admirable attempt to show that Wesley's view of original sin is basically moral and spiritual,⁵ it must nevertheless be said that Wesley was essentially in the Augustinian/Reformed camp on this matter.⁶ Lindstrom makes this clear in his excellent study.⁷

One might ask what difference for a theology and experience of sanctification might result if a more truly Arminian rather than Augustinian view of the effects of the Fall were followed. It is a too-little-noticed fact among Arminian / Wesleyan advocates that Arminius himself does not follow the historic creeds of the church in seeing original sin primarily in terms of a depravation. Rather, he views the effects of the Fall primarily in terms of deprivation or the "absence of original righteousness." This has been noted specifically by Carl Bangs in his valuable study on Arminius.⁸

In "Private Disputations" 31, Arminius makes the statement:

. . . we permit this question to be made a subject of discussion: Must some contrary quality, beside (*caerentiam*) the absence of original righteousness, be constituted as another part of original sin? Though we think it much more probable, that this

absence of original righteousness, only, is original sin itself, as being that which alone is sufficient to commit and produce any actual sins, whatsoever. ⁹

It is further illuminating in this regard that Arminius considered any discussion on the question of the propagation of original sin to be "useless."¹⁰ This supports the position noted earlier that a moral condition cannot in any intrinsic way be transmitted from one person to another. It makes better sense to see the condition of the posterity of Adam in terms of a privation of any positive orientation to God than it does in terms of a positive corruption or depravation." The implications of Arminius' view for the concept of sanctification will be shown later in this essay.

Scriptural Problems

It is doubtful also that one can make a strong case from scripture to support the traditional understanding of original sin as inherited depravity. Frequently passages such as Gen. 6:5, Ps. 51:5, Jer. 17:9 and Rom. 5:12-21 are appealed to in support of the traditional position. Particularly is Rom. 5 interpreted as Paul's view of the aetiology of sin as being rooted in the sin of Adam. But this is questionable. ¹² The passages in question are largely descriptive of man in the general sense of his sinful predicament and do not strictly teach that sin is inbred or inherited. The Romans passage in particular needs to be seen in light of the two spheres: man in Adam = sin/death, while man in Christ = righteousness/life. Paul is emphasizing the contrasts of conditions in the sense of the two typical environments or spheres which each "Adam" represents. There is not strictly an aetiology of original sin presented here-i.e., not in the sense that Paul is teaching that a positive depravation is inherited from Adam. ¹³

Part of the problem with the Romans passage, is the expression *eph ho* (inasmuch as) in verse 12d. Käsemann points out that the older Latin translation which has so influenced Western thought since Augustine is *in quo* (in whom). This is to be rejected in favour of rendering *eph ho* as "because," in which case the meaning is "concrete sinning," says Käsemann. ¹⁴ The result of this is that "Adam is thus the cause for himself alone; each of us has become his own Adam, each for himself" (2 Apoc. Bar. 54:15, 19). "Clearly," says Käsemann, "the emphasis here is on personal responsibility." ¹⁵ Paul does not say in v. 12 that sin passed on to all men but that "death passed unto all men," i.e., death is universal because sin is universal. The point is not therefore that all sinned when Adam sinned, but, rather as Lightfoot has said the "disease was communicated to the whole race' not inasmuch as all were descendants of Adam, but inasmuch as all sinned." ¹⁶ All have turned astray after Adam's example

A further problem is posed by v. 19 which on the surface seems to teach both fatalism and universalism: through Adam's disobedience "the many" were made sinners, while through Christ's obedience "the many" shall be made righteous. The analogies of Adam and Christ cannot be strictly pressed to their logical implications, however. To do so would be to disregard the teaching of Paul elsewhere-and of the NT generally-that man is to respond to God's offer in Christ. If universalism is in view here then the clear teaching of condemnation for the unbelieving elsewhere in the NT is erroneous. Since Paul cannot, therefore, mean that all men inherit

righteousness from Christ, neither can he mean that all men inherit a sinful nature from Adam. Plainly what Paul means is simply that Adam introduced sin into the world which brings death, while Christ introduced a saving righteousness which brings life. One's orientation to the two "Adams" is to be viewed as dynamic not mechanical, and the orientation to the respective "Adams" determines whether one is sinful or saintly.

The dynamics of the "Fall" are seen clearly illustrated in Romans 1:18 ff., especially vv. 21-25, 28. This passage reveals remarkable affinities with Gen. 1-3, and with Rom. 5, a fact pointed out some time ago by Morna Hooker.¹⁷ Man, who was created as "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 9:7) is pictured in Rom. 1 as exchanging this "glory" for "images resembling mortal man or birds. . .," etc. (v. 23). This exchange included "the truth about God for a lie" and the worship and service of "the creature rather than the Creator" (v. 25). As a result of this exchange-this failure "to acknowledge God" (v. 28)-man's condition degenerated to a tragic depravity (vv. 29 ff). Claiming to be "wise" he became a "fool" (v. 22). The central point of Paul's emphasis here is the idolatry of man. "Original sin" is the potent tendency of man to "serve the creature rather than the creator"-meaning essentially a fixation upon himself-which inevitably leads to a positive moral depravity. It should be emphasized that this account is not merely a description of what happened "once-upon-a-time" in the distant past, but it is primarily a description of the existential situation of man throughout history.¹⁸

But does this view mean that man is born into the world in a neutral position unaffected by the sin of Adam? No, man does not simply sin like Adam; he is born into an environment of sin and in a state of spiritual impotence which means that he inevitably does sin. Ernest Best states it well when he says that

this sin of Adam was the first sin of all, and once it had entered no one was able to escape its power: just as a child picks up the words and gestures of those among whom it is reared, so it picks up the sin that is already in the world. Thus though all men have indeed sinned by their own personal acts, these sins can-not be dissociated from the sin that entered the world when Adam disobeyed. No one can ever be back in the position of Adam when there was no sin in the world and so be unaffected by the sin of Adam.¹⁹

Conclusion

If, as it has been argued in this essay, man cannot on logical and Biblical grounds be described as having a congenital corruption or depravity, then how can his condition be described? The answer is that he is in a state of privation of all those positive qualities which would truly make him "man the image of God." His basic reference point is himself. He is, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 3:12 RSV). C. K. Barrett describes the condition as follows:

Sin could never be a private matter, but corrupted the whole race,
which consisted of men born out of true relation with God

and condemned constantly to worsen their relationship whether they carelessly ignored it or self-righteously essayed to mend it. Like planets robbed of the center of their orbit they could not possibly keep a proper course.²⁰

As such man stands under the imperative of the new birth. In such a state he inevitably becomes "dead in trespasses and sins" and positively depraved.

James Denney once said that

nothing has been more pernicious in theology than the determination to define sin in such a way that in all its damning import the definition should be applicable to "infants"; it is to this we owe the moral atrocities that have disfigured most creeds, and in great part the idea of baptismal regeneration, which is an irrational unethical miracle, invented by men to get over a puzzle of their own making.²¹

While many may take objection to this strong statement there is a relevant overtone sounded here which has some parallel to the problem which the traditional doctrine of original sin poses for the idea of entire sanctification. It has already been stated in this essay that the traditional way of understanding original sin is at the heart of a widespread confusion-and in many cases a disillusionment-over sanctification as taught in holiness circles. This is because of the faulty and simplistic way in which the traditional view sees sanctification primarily in subjective terms as the removal of some "foreign" element from the person. This places sanctification primarily in a negative framework and implies that once the culprit (inherited depravity) is removed the door is open for victorious living. The "fly in the ointment" is that most people do not experience sanctification quite that simply and furthermore they still have to cope with self. The emphasis on crisis sanctification seen in terms of the traditional view of original sin, undermines the essential Wesleyan and scriptural emphasis of process²² and human responsibility, and contributes to a chronic immaturity among many Christians.

But what are the implications for sanctification if a more truly Arminian view of original sin as privation is followed? First it does not mean that either the crisis or the secondness aspect is sacrificed. Second, it means that sanctification can be presented as a much more positive, realistic and desirable experience. No longer is it seen primarily in terms of the extraction of something from us but rather it is seen as (1) the regeneration of the believer to spiritual life, which is initial sanctification, and (2) the orientation and integration of the responsible self in a depth relationship of love under the Lordship of Christ following regeneration. This is living in the fullness of the Spirit which is dynamic and entire sanctification.

Notes

- 1O J. Baab, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Abingdon Press, 1949), p. 84.
- 2The problems associated with thinking of original sin in substantive terms have been well pointed out by M. B. Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972), pp. 50, 157-164.
- 3Cf. Wynkoop's chapter "The Meaning of 'Moral,'" *op. cit.*, pp. 165-183.
- 4Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-20 should be illuminating here. Also related to the principle under discussion is the (faulty) notion that Adam was created holy, i.e., in the moral sense. But God does not create holy robots. Adam, at his creation, was a man standing before possibilities—he was neither holy nor unholy. There is no such thing in the moral universe as created holiness—and on the same basis there can be no such thing as inherited sin. The story of Adam is the story of every man.
- 5Wynkoop, pp. 160-163.
- 6Commenting on Rom. 6:6 in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Wesley states: "Coeval with our being, and as old as the Fall; our evil nature; a strong and beautiful expression for that entire depravity and corruption which by nature spreads itself over the whole man, leaving no part uninfected." That he viewed original sin as a congenital condition can be seen clearly in his comments on Rom. 5:19 (cf. also "The Doctrine of Original Sin," *Works IX*, p. 335). However, he also described the condition in moral/dynamic terms on occasions—eg. as "pride, self-will, unbelief, heart-idolatry" (cf. his sermon "On Sin in Believers").
- 7Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (London: The Epworth Press, 1946), pp. 19ff.
- 8Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 339-340.
- 9James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius, II.* trans. by J. Nichols (Baker Book House, 1956), p. 79.
- 10Ibid.
- 11The idea of privation of course does not imply any less ultimately serious spiritual condition for man. One who suffers a privation of the Spirit or of a positive orientation to God is just as spiritually needy as one who is morally corrupt. Man's congenital condition cannot logically be described in terms of moral depravity. Rather it is self-centeredness which invariably leads him to a "me first" syndrome and an ultimate moral corruption. In other words it is inherited "deprivity" and acquired depravity.
- 12Cf. Jerry McCant, "A Wesleyan Interpretation of Romans 5-8" in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 16:1 (Spring 1981), pp. 70-71.
- 13Cf. Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, Translated and edited by G. Bromiley (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), who states that "the western theory of original sin and death . . . is much too rationalistic,

especially when both are taken to be sexual transmission" (p. 147). Further he states that "the apostle does not know of an inheritance of sin and death in the strict sense" (p.148). Ernest Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 60-62, holds a similar position.

14Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 147-148.

15Ibid, p. 148.

16J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* "Classic Commentary Library" (Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), p. 289.

"M. D. Hooker, "Adam in Romans I," *New Testament Studies* 6:4

17July 1960), pp. 297-306: "In his argument (Paul) moves from all men (1:18-2:16) to the Jew (2:17-3:20), from the Jew (4) back to all men (5). The theme of chapter V is the same as that of 1:18-2:16, but considered from the point of view of justification instead of wrath, and it is framed in both passages in terms of man's solidarity with Adam." (p. 306)

18It is not clear in Paul's thought precisely how he conceived of the relationship between Adam's Fall and the sin of men in general. There is a solidarity with Adam but the solidarity should not be viewed as aetiological, but rather as existential.

19E. Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, p. 60.

20C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to The Romans*, *Black's New Testament Commentaries* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962), p. 119.

21James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," *The Expositor's Greek Testament Vol. II*, ed. by W. R. Nicoll (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 627-28.

22There is no question but that the modern holiness movement lacks the balance between process and crisis that we find in Wesley.

MARXIST AND WESLEYAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE PROSPECTS FOR A MARXIST-WESLEYAN DIALOGUE

by
John C. Luik

Once the essential reality of man in nature, man as the existence of nature for man, and nature for man as the existence of man, has become evident in practical life and sense experience, then the question of an alien being, of a being above nature and man-a question that implies an admission of the unreality of nature and man-has become impossible in practice. Atheism as a denial of this unreality, has no longer any meaning, for atheism is a denial of God and tries to assert through this negation the existence of man; but socialism as such no longer needs this mediation; it starts from the theoretical and practical sense-perception of man and nature as the true reality. Karl Marx¹

From all these texts it manifestly appears, (1) That man was created in the image of God. (2) That this image consisted, not only in his rational and immortal nature, and his dominion over the creatures, but also in knowledge, actual knowledge, both of God and of his works; in the right state of his intellectual powers, and in love, which is true holiness. John Wesley²

I

It is by now a theological common-place, if not quite yet a theological convention that Christians and Marxists ought to be engaged in some sort of dialogue with the view to either minimizing major methodological and substantive differences or indeed, eliminating such differences entirely. Whereas this proposition would have scandalized both nineteenth century Christians and Marxists, it is 90 routinely advanced by many of their twentieth century successors that at times it must appear as if only the most theologically primitive would offer any sort of objection to the process of reconciliation.

However, at the risk of appearing unreconstructed, we wish to suggest that this dialogue, at least from the Christian perspective (we do not have the space to explore the Marxist position), might well be misconceived and misguided; misconceived in its premises and intentions and misguided in terms of its fidelity to the central and orthodox claims of Christianity.

This is not to suggest that dialogue is by definition suspect. Christians, as committed hearers and doers of the truth that sets men free can hardly eschew the process of confronting divergent readings of reality. But there is dialogue and then there is dialogue. Dialogue as mutual commitment to clear and careful analysis, to critique, to question and answer, dialogue with a view to conceptual clarification, to resolving unnecessary ambiguity and contradiction, dialogue as enlightenment, is most certainly never amiss. But dialogue which proceeds on the underpinning of epistemological relativism, dialogue which assumes that any position is negotiable and amendable seems incompatible not in merely some peripheral but in some deeply fundamental sense with the essence of Christian belief.

But unfortunately, many of the Christian participants in the contemporary Christian-Marxist dialogue seem unaware that historic Christian belief contains any significant non-negotiables.³ Indeed, one of the curiosities of the current state of Christian-Marxist relations, is that those in the centre, who actually engage in dialogues, whether exponents of liberation theology or defenders of the "young" humanist Marx, seem willing to go to extraordinary lengths to conceptually accommodate those who view reality in a fundamentally different way, while those on the outside of the dialogue, those who occupy the "extremes," whether fundamentalist Christians or Stalinist Marxists, seem unwilling to consider even dialogue, let alone a modification of their position. Both of these positions display a certain sort of ignorance. For those Christians and Marxists committed to dialogue it is most often an ignorance of their own tradition while for those Christians and Marxists opposed to dialogue it is generally an ignorance of their opponent's tradition.

Seen within this perspective the Wesleyan tradition, firmly rooted in Reformation Christianity and possessing both a sophisticated grasp of the non-negotiables of evangelical theology and a history which has sought to address many of at least the social and economic questions raised by Marx's account of man, seems peculiarly well-fitted to play a central role in the Christian-Marxist dialogue. This paper then is a modest effort at exploring the possibility for Wesleyan-Marxist dialogue through an examination of what is certainly a central element of both belief systems, anthropology. Both systems offer anthropologies which in their various aspects are conceptually normative for the system's entire range of claims. Thus if there is any possibility of a Wesleyan-Marxist dialogue which is to be more than simply a clarification of fundamentally incompatible positions, that possibility is most likely to begin with anthropology.

II

At the outset it is important to clarify precisely in what direction a comparison between Marx and Wesley should proceed. A good deal of the naivete which characterizes the positions of those who see few theoretical (as opposed to practical) difficulties in the reconciliation of Christianity and

Marxism stems from a failure to differentiate between the ways in which opposing belief systems may be compared.

One sort of comparison might be termed structural, that is an analysis of the ways in which the conceptual components of the two systems function. Thus, with Christianity and Marxism, it might be argued that both belief systems have a similar structure. Both, for instance, are rooted in certain fundamental metaphysical and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality, both offer reasonably comprehensive accounts of the nature of man, both offer analyses of the central problems of men and the societies and both suggest strategies of renewal and reform. When the two systems are compared in this fashion, a Christian-Marxist dialogue which will finally result in a fairly substantial amount of agreement appears quite likely, precisely because the systems seem to be so conceptually similar.

This, however, ignores a second sort of conceptual comparison which might be termed substantive. In a substantive comparison it is not the structural similarities of rival belief systems which are the centre of attention, but rather the actual truth claims that are advanced about knowing and believing, about ultimate reality, and about man and society. And it is these claims, which, though organized in intriguingly similar ways, may turn out to be quite surprisingly resistant to compromise. Far too many Christians seem to have championed the conceptual merits of Marxism on the basis of a superficial acquaintance with the young, humanistic Marx or a simplistic conflation of Marxist alienation with Christian sin, rather than with a clear understanding of the differences between patterns of belief and belief. This analysis of Marxist and Wesleyan anthropology, though not adverse to structural comparison, will concentrate primarily on substantive comparisons, for however structurally compatible Marxism and Wesleyanism may be, these structural similarities are finally valueless in terms of conceptual compatibility without substantive similarities.

III

One of the more difficult aspects in coming to terms with both Marxist and Wesleyan anthropology is that neither system lends itself to ready compartmentalization. Concepts and explanations must be seen not simply in their immediate context but in the larger framework of the entire belief system. This is true not simply about anthropology in general in the sense that in their anthropologies we have the essence of what Marx and Wesley believe about not only man, but the world in general, but also with respect to the components of anthropology itself in which each part stands to the whole as simply a miniature of the same.

This characteristic is particularly evident in the ontological and epistemological foundations of both anthropologies.

According to most standard works, the most fundamental claim that Marx advances is that reality is either wholly material, or that the most significant aspects of reality are determined by material elements, the most important of which is the mode of production. Any good commentator on Marx surely knows that "The mode of production of material life determines the social, political, and intellectual life process in general."⁴ But this excessive concentration on the materialist foundation of the Marxist conception of reality has had the unfortunate consequence not only of

distorting Marx's general claims (a good many interpretations of Marx which reduce his thought to a system of economic determinism, historical materialism or dialectical materialism - all labels that Marx never used in connection with his thought - are really caricatures) but in diverting attention away from what is surely Marx's central ontological presupposition, namely, that reality is relational. By relational Marx means that the existence of things is understood only through their qualities, which are nothing more than their relations with other things. Thus Marx tells us that "the thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man,"⁵ and he describes man as an "assemble to social relations."⁶ Such a conception is even more apparent when Marx notes that "man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself."⁷

As is to be expected, this characterization of reality has important epistemological consequences. Most crucially, it means that our understanding of the world, our knowledge of reality is gained through concepts which are themselves products of the reality which they seek to describe. The qualities of things which we learn of through both common sense perception and scientific study are human products, products of man's needs. Reality, like man himself, is the product of the interaction of man and nature. The world, in effect, is determined through man's consciousness. This is not to say that man creates the objects of reality, but rather that he classifies and conceptualizes the world in an effort to give form to an otherwise formless and conceptually bewildering environment. There are thus no pre-existent forms which structure reality in precedence to human consciousness. Thus while Marx acknowledges that there is an external world and sense perception is generally reliable, he insists that the structure of the world is but another product of human creativity.

Here then is the basis for Marx's attack not simply on the substance but on the structure of bourgeois truth. Truth is not some constant agreement between a proposition and a state of affairs in the world, but rather the product of a particular set of relations understood through a particular construct of historical categories and the capitalist simply cannot perceive himself to be in error for his conception of truth is the product of "capitalist reality." It is not simply that man is a product, for Marx, of his own work, but that nature, indeed, reality in its entirety is a product of man's conceptual efforts.

Thus in the sketchy and oft dismissed ontology and epistemology is the conceptual foundation for Marx's radical attack on religion. Religion is false because it seeks to interject a new relational element into the man-nature relation. Whereas Marx sees man creating himself and nature through a constant tension between what each now is and will yet be, a relationship in which man, if not nature is within limits sovereign, religion seeks to account for both man and nature within a relationship of subordination in which God alone is sovereign and man and nature though important, have no independent intrinsic value. Marx's atheism is thus unlike most traditional forms of religious skepticism, which at least allowed that the question of God's existence could be legitimately posed, in its assertion that the proposition of a relation between nature, man and a being above both is incoherent. As he notes in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts

Once the essential reality of man in nature, man as the existence of nature for man, and nature for man as the existence of man, has become evident in practical life and sense experience, then the question of an alien being, of a being above nature and man—a question that implies an admission of the unreality of nature and man—has become impossible in practice. Atheism, as a denial of this unreality, has not longer any meaning, for atheism is a denial of God and tries to assert through this negation the existence of man; but socialism as such no longer needs this mediation; it starts from the theoretical and practical sense-perception of man and nature as the true reality.⁸

Historic Christianity, the Christianity of John Wesley, would, of course, dissent from this vision of both nature and man. Marx's humanism, which at bottom is the claim that man's construction of reality is the only construction and that the only coherent conception of truth is man's conception of truth, stands squarely opposed to Wesley's epistemology. For Wesley, truth like the reality to which it corresponds, is the product of God's creative activity, exercised either directly or indirectly through human capacities. While there might be something justifiably labeled human truth, it is truth in the strong sense only as it corresponds with God's knowledge, a knowledge mediated to man through the Bible.

For Wesley it is not man in relation to a nature which he also shapes, who determines reality, but rather God who defines reality. This is not to suggest that Wesley ignores the role of man's needs in shaping reality, for Wesley would allow that man's need for God is determinative in his acceptance of the truth which liberates him from his false consciousness. But while man's needs might shape man's reality, man's needs are for Wesley, as they can never be for Marx, the product of God's purposes.

But it is not simply on epistemological grounds that Marx and Wesley appear incompatible: there is also a radical ontological incompatibility. Indeed, it is this ontological incompatibility which accounts for the epistemological differences. Wesley would agree with Marx that reality is fundamentally relational, but he would insist that it is relational in a very different sense from Marx.⁹ For Wesley the only ultimately crucial relation is the relation of subordination and dependence between God and man. It is man's misperception of this relation and God's lengthy and costly efforts at correcting this misperception which comprise the central theme not only of Wesley's anthropology, but of his theology as a whole. For Saint Paul as for Wesley, the Christian is one who regards "no one from a human point of view."¹⁰ For Marx, however, there simply can be no question of any other view, for man and nature are in the end the product of man's efforts alone. Marx is thus but the most recent heir of Protagoras' dictum that reality is nothing more than the sum of anthropology. To posit God is to make nature and man unreal. But for Wesley, man and nature inasmuch as they owe their existence and structure to God, make sense only in the context of their relation to God. In essence, Wesley will allow anthropology only in the context of theology, whereas for Marx the very question of such a relation is incoherent.

These differences for all of their abstractness, are hardly peripheral. Indeed, it could well be argued that these ontological and epistemological prolegomena to Wesleyan and Marxist anthropology are the most substantial examples of what we have above called the non-negotiables of the two belief systems. But on a merely structural comparison of the two systems, this can be easily overlooked. Structurally, both Marx and Wesley think of the world in terms of relations, and thus structurally there appears to be a certain degree of compatibility between the two systems at even the ontological and epistemological levels. But if we penetrate beyond the superficialities of structure to substance, we find that "relation," "know," and "true" are defined in such fundamentally different ways as to make any talk of compatibility seem decidedly curious.

It might, however, be argued that in concentrating on ontology and epistemology we have unnecessarily sharpened the differences while ignoring the very significant ways in which the systems of Marx and Wesley are similar enough to allow for useful dialogue. Both systems it might be suggested, for instance, offer surprisingly similar structural and substantive accounts of man's nature, man's predicament and man's recreation, and it is to an examination of these areas which we must now turn.

IV

The key to understanding Marx's concept of man is Marx's ontology. As we observed above this ontology centers on the notion that reality is relational not in the sense that all things, men and objects, are defined by their relationship to some transcendent being, but in the sense that each element is defined by its relations with every other element. Understanding proceeds finally not on the basis of isolation and abstraction but through all-encompassing synthesis. Man, for Marx, then, cannot be made sense of apart from his relations with nature, fellow men, and himself. Man, as it were, can only be defined relationally. This does not mean, however, despite the fact that it has often been maintained, that Marx does not really have a theory of human nature, that what passes for human nature in Marx is really nothing other than a particular historical configuration of human needs and abilities. Marx implicitly rejects such a view in his criticism of Bentham where he notes that "he that would criticize all human acts, movements, relations, etc., by the principle of utility, must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch."¹¹ Human nature in general, is thus human nature outside of or more precisely at the beginning of history.

Man qua man, for Marx, is defined primarily in terms of his needs and his abilities which must themselves be viewed relationally. Needs are always viewed in the context of powers in the sense that it is through man's needs that his abilities come to fruition. Man's needs and powers are thus not mismatched in that man has the power to fulfil all of his needs. Marxist man may well suffer, but his suffering is not rooted in a radical disjunction between his needs and abilities and the character of reality.

Marx groups man's needs and powers under two headings, natural needs and powers and species needs and powers.¹² The former are those aspects of man which relate him to the natural world in general and the animal world in particular, and include his desires and capacities for work,

sexuality and nourishment. The latter are those characteristics of man which separate man as a species from the rest of the natural world. They are, as it were, what makes man unique. Marx never compiled a definitive list of man's species powers but crucial to man as a species being are at least two capacities, man's ability to recognize himself as man, that is to say his self-consciousness, or the ability to distinguish himself as animals are unable to from his activity, and man's ability to shape himself and the world through his own efforts.

Man, then is not a *tabula rasa*, he enters the world with certain natural needs and capacities, but this does not imply that man is determined, for characteristic of his species nature is the ability to quite literally make himself in a fashion determined only by himself. There is quite simply no need for a transcendent creator in this model, for man can be fully accounted for, according to Marx, through this analysis of the relationships between needs, capacities and the objects in which those needs and capacities find expression. Human nature is finally the product of the interaction of man's natural powers with nature. Human nature is thus the third term in the relation of human and nature in that it is applied to a being who has both transformed nature and in turn been transformed by nature.

Man is essentially a child of nature . . . the objects of his impulses exist outside him, independently, but these objects are necessary to him to allow him to bring his energies into operation and to affirm them, and are indispensable and significant. To say that man is a being that is corporeal, has natural strength, is alive, real, sentient, and objective means that real, material objects are the object of his being and of the expression of his life, or that he is capable of expressing his life only in relation to real, material objects.¹³

Marx does not then abandon 90 much as re-orientate teleology. His teleology is not derived from the transcendent purposes of God but from the immanent needs and powers of species man. Ends are not imposed except by man himself. While it is true that nature for Marx seems to assume many of the determining abilities that are exercised by the Christian God, nature itself is humanized in that it is finally simply another of man's constructs.

Marx's conception of history is quite obviously closely linked to this conception of man's essence. History, for Marx is the process by which man's general nature, his pre-historical character is modified. It is the framework within which man's species character is developed. Just as each historical epoch confronts man with the task of developing novel needs and capacities, so each period represents a new man-nature synthesis. While man retains his general nature, it is not the past which is normative for what he should yet become, but only the future, a future which according to Marx contains an ever richer realization of his species powers. Man's creation as ongoing thus differs substantially from the Christian vision of creation. Christian creation is properly recreation and though reaching its fulfillment in the future, it will in essence be only a recapitulation of the past. The Marxist future, it might be argued, is thus very open, for it will center on but the most recent of man's human natures, a nature which has

yet to emerge. If this is correct, it is easy to understand why Marx was so vague in describing the future communist state and unalienated man. Precise accounts of human nature are possible only to a transcendental theology with an easily interpreted revelatory tradition. For the Marxist, the doctrine of man's self creation if taken seriously must logically rule out all but the vaguest generalizations about the future.

But most of Marx's conceptual efforts were directed not to the future, but to the present and the past, for it was there that man's crucial problem lay. The historical process has, according to Marx, produced a social and economic system which instead of furthering man's species capacities has rather atrophied them. Marx characterizes this condition as one of estrangement or alienation and while he describes this condition as one of estrangement or alienation and while he describes it in different ways, alienation in its most fundamental sense involves a disruption of the characteristically human relations between man and himself in the sense that man finally loses his conception of himself as a man. Alienation is thus both the process and the consequence of the destruction of man's species capacities.

. . . man . . . no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions-eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuine human functions. But in the abstraction which separates them from the sphere of all other human activity and turns them into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal. ¹⁴

Despite the parallels in imagery-the trading of human and animal nature-this is not the Christian conception of sin, in that the relations which are estranged are fundamentally different. In the Christian notion of sin it is the god-man relation which has been disrupted by man's rebellious re-ordering of the divine precedence of love, namely, God, fellows, and self, while in Marx's conception of alienation, it is primarily man's estrangement from himself, and from his species needs and powers which is central. This is to say that the sources and objects of Christian and Marxist alienation are distinct.

There is, however, one intriguing parallel in terms of sources. Although Marx is often represented as attributing the evils of alienation to ignorance, this is not strictly accurate. Alienated men, and in particular alienated capitalists appear to have genuinely evil dispositions which are not attributable to mere ignorance, but might be taken to represent a fundamental corruption of human capacities. But the ultimate origin or source for such evil dispositions is as conceptually unanswerable for Marx as it is for Christians.

But while unable to provide an ultimate source for alienation, Marx is certainly able to suggest its proximate origin in private property, money and the State itself. And it is this diagnosis that suggests the prescription for change. All of the sources of man's estrangement are firmly within his own powers to put right. The elimination of alienation for Marx does not

hinge upon either supernatural knowledge or mediation, though it does require a correct reading of reality. Because man's nature is fashioned in relation to the institutional arrangements in which he participates, if those institutions are changed, then surely man's nature must also change. The task is to bring sensitivity, intelligence and skill to the re-ordering of society and thus indirectly to the reordering of man himself. All of this is not so much re-creation or reconstruction as it is liberation, and it is significant that Marxist accounts of the future society and the future man center on the concept of freedom rather than recovery. Whereas the new Christian man is simply Adam restored, newness being essentially oldness recreated, the new Marxist man, man freed from alienation is not man restored to any past nature which is constitutive of humanness, but man once more aware of himself as man, and open to the fullest realization of his species needs and capacities, whatever that might entail, that the future might bring.

Just as Marx's conception of man derives from his ontology, so with Wesley. But inasmuch as the ontologies are radically different, it is not surprising that the images of man are also substantially different. Whereas man for Marx has an essence as a species being that he alone has brought into being, man for Wesley in what may be termed his species sense is a being who is the product of God's creative purposes, both initially in creation and subsequently in the new birth. Both Wesley and Marx are thus teleologists, but teleologists of a fundamentally different sort. Both history and man have an end for Marx, but the end is wholly immanent, it derives from nothing more than the characteristic purposes of man displayed in the historical process. Wesley, on the other hand sees man's end as his beginnings, as something wholly transcendental in the sense of finally conforming to God's purposes. This teleological ordering of man's end must not, however, be pushed too far, lest it entail a contradiction of Wesley's emphasis on freedom. Wesley's anthropology, like that of much of historic Christianity, exhibits a tension between God's teleological ordering and man's freedom to make himself in defiance of God's purposes. Wesley, of course, rejects the extreme teleological determinism of predestination, but it is not obvious that he thereby secures the libertarianism which he desires. As long as he insists on a traditional reading of the doctrine of original sin in which man enters the world with sinful dispositions derived from Adam, dispositions which are uniformly translated into sinful actions, then it is difficult to see how Wesley can avoid some form of soft determinism. Implicit then in a transcendental teleology is a limitation on freedom. Wesley's man has no role in his initial making, either in terms of the first man who was perfectly made or subsequently in his corrupt descendants. Man's freedom, for Wesley is strictly limited to consenting to and assisting with his remaking in the processes of regeneration and sanctification. But even this is a curiously qualified sense of freedom in that the shape of re-made man is determined not by man himself but rather by God. Freedom then for Wesleyan man is the freedom to either accept or to reject a divinely conceived teleology.

This is all the more important in Wesley's distinction between man as defined by the image of God and man "in a mere natural state."¹⁵ Man defined by the image of God is the Wesleyan counterpart of Marx's species man; it is man in his distinctive sense, man with all of his needs and powers properly ordered.

Now, "man was made in the image of God." But "God is a Spirit;" So therefore was man. (Only that spirit, being designed to dwell on earth, was lodged in an earthly tabernacle.) As such, he had an innate principle of self-motion. And so, it seems, had every spirit in the universe; this being the proper distinguishing difference between spirit and matter, which is totally, essentially passive and inactive, as appears from a thousand experiments. He was, after the likeness of his creator, endued with understanding; a capacity of apprehending whatever objects were brought before it, and of judging concerning them. He was endued with a will, exerting itself in various affections and passions: And, lastly, with liberty, or freedom of choice; without which all the rest would have been in vain, and he would have been no more capable of serving his Creator than a piece of earth, or marble; he would have been as incapable of vice or virtue as any part of the inanimate creation.¹⁶

Sharply contrasted to man in the image of God, however, is natural man, a being who is radically defective.

Accordingly, in that day he did die: He dies to God,-the most dreadful of all deaths. He lost the life of God: He was separated from Him, in union with whom his spiritual life consisted. The body dies when it is separated from the soul; the soul, when it is separated from the soul; the soul, when it is separated from God. But this separation from God, Adam sustained in the day, the hour, he ate of the forbidden fruit. And of this he gave immediate proof; presently showing by his behavior, that the love of God was extinguished in his soul, which was now "alienated from the life of God." Instead of this, he was now under the power of servile fear, so that he fled from the presence of the Lord. Yea, so little did he retain even of the knowledge of Him who filleth heaven and earth, that he endeavoured to "hide himself from the Lord God among the trees of the garden:" (Gen. ii. 8:). So had he lost both the knowledge and the love of God, without which the image of God could not subsist. Of this, therefore, he was deprived at the same time, and became unholy as well as unhappy. In the room of this, he had sunk into pride and self-will, the very image of the devil; and into sensual appetites and desires, the image of the beasts that perish.

.....

While a man is in a mere natural state, before he is born of God, he has, in a spiritual sense, eyes but sees not; a thick impenetrable veil lies upon them - he has ears, but hears not, he is utterly deaf to what he is most of all concerned to hear. His other spiritual senses are all locked up: He is in the same condition as if he had them not. Hence he has no knowledge of God . . . either of spiritual or eternal things; therefore, though he is a living man, he is a dead Christian. But as soon as he is born of God, there is a total change in all these particulars....¹⁷

Notice what it is that characterizes natural man. It is not simply the natural processes the "sensual appetites and desires, the image of the beasts that perish," which natural man according to Wesley shares with the rest of the natural world, but rather the fact that natural man is "alienated from the life of God." Thus while it is true to observe that both Marx and Wesley have a theory of alienation, the substance of their respective theories is quite distinct. Here again, the differences derive from different ontologies. While Wesley would acknowledge other aspects to alienation, the root of all of man's estrangement is his alienation from the "life of God," from God's image. Whatever other sorts of alienation may exist, they are all subsequent to and dependent upon this fundamental alienation. Thus, while Wesley would allow that man is alienated from his fellow men, and that this has the most unfortunate consequences for the life of men together, this alienation is but an effect of man's primary alienation from God's purposes. Similarly, while Wesley might agree with Marx's contention about the estrangement of man from his work and the natural world, he would insist that these are but symptoms of a more profound incompleteness which inheres in his relationship with his creator. Moreover, Wesley would even allow, with Marx, that man is alienated from himself, from his species nature, but it is a species nature which is ordered by God. Thus even if we were to read Wesley as arguing that man's essential alienation is alienation from his true self, we would yet be obliged to note that man has no role in defining his true self. However construed, the doctrine of alienation will not bring us any closer to rendering Marx and Wesley compatible for alienation for Wesley is alienation from God's image, which is indisputably normative for what man is to be.

As is to be expected, the differences between Wesley and Marx regarding man's essential nature and defect do not disappear when we turn to prescriptions for reconstruction and renewal. Man's task, according to Wesley, is the recovery of his rightful image, God's image. Man's task is not the initiation, the creation of a distinctively human nature, but the imitation of the divine nature.

By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy and truth." ¹⁸

The process of recovery though a cooperative venture between man and God, is initiated and directed by God. It is begun, according to Wesley, by God's grace, which is both cognitive and affective, beginning as it were a reordering of both man's knowledge and his loves. In this sense, renewal again harkens back to epistemology, for renewal can begin only with man's recognition of his radical alienation and incompleteness before God. Knowing reality as it is, knowing the truth is the beginning of the recovery of the divine image. As Wesley noted: "So had he lost both the knowledge and the love of God, without which the image of God could not subsist." ¹⁹ Although the truths which make renewal possible are radically different, both Wesley and Marx allow that it is truth which frees man from his false image of himself.

Renewal and recovery thus shape for Wesley as they do for Marx, the structure of history. History for Wesley, is not primarily the record of man's deeds, but the process of divine disclosure and redemption. In this sense both the past and the future are foreclosed. The future is as much given, in that it is determined by God's purposes, as the past has been. Man's recovery of God's image and God's recovery of the world though future are also past in that what man is to become is nothing more than what he once was. Thus while for Marx it is the future which is normative, the future communist society which is unalienated and in which man's species powers reach their fullest potential, for Wesley it is really the past which is normative. Man's goal is to be renewed which is nothing more than the recovery of his, read God's, lost image. History then for Wesley is moving towards its origins, towards its beginnings, in which Adam will once more inhabit Eden.

IV

In light of this all too cursory examination of Marxist and Wesleyan anthropology what are the prospects for Marxist-Wesleyan dialogue? Certainly dialogue as a mutual mapping of unfamiliar conceptual terrain is to be welcomed. There are substantial areas of confusion and ignorance in both Marxist and Wesleyan perceptions of the other's positions which can only be eliminated through a close, sympathetic and sustained grappling with the alternative belief system. Then too, the process of dialogue may yield some quite genuinely novel insights into the structure and substance of one's own positions. There is, for instance, much in Marx's analysis of man's alienation from his fellows and from his creative capacities that might be "appropriated" by a contemporary Wesleyan seeking to be true to Wesley's vision of social reform and renewal. On the other hand, there is much in Wesley's account of man's original state of perfection that, shorn of its unacceptable ontological associations, could well provide the Marxist with the basis for a much richer notion of what unalienated man is to be. But the prospects for a dialogue which moves beyond a clearer understanding of the alternative belief system and a more creative interpretation of one's own tradition toward conceptual convergence is unlikely. It is unlikely because the most fundamental ontological claims of each position are simply non-negotiable. We noted above that one of the intriguing aspects of Marxism and Wesleyanism is their structural similarities. This is true not simply in the more obvious sense that both have certain key ontological and epistemological assumptions, that both present accounts of man's nature, that both point to a central defect within that nature and that both prescribe strategies of reform and renewal, but in the less obvious sense that the ontologies of both, and to a lesser extent, the epistemologies of both are structurally determinative of the other aspects of the theories. Thus, for instance, both Wesley's and Marx's conceptions of alienation are inextricably linked to their respective ontologies. Structurally neither system has any significant elements which are detachable and capable of independent conceptual employment within an alternatively conceived ontological framework.

If this is correct, then it is more than simply Marxist or Wesleyan ontology, which is incompatible; it is the entire range of substantive claims of each theory. And, as it is exceedingly unlikely that either system will alter its ontology, the prospects for a dialogue culminating in fundamental compatibility are exceedingly slight.

Notes

- 1Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in Karl Marx's Early Texts*, D. McLellan, Trans. & Ed., Oxford, Blackwell, 1971, pp. 156-157.
- 2John Wesley, *Works*. Third Edition, Grand Rapids, Baker, Vol. IX, p. 293.
- 3See, for instance, Jose Miranda, *Marx Against the Marxists: the Christian Humanism of Karl Marx*, J. Drury, Trans. New York, 1980.
- 4Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, N. Stone, Trans. Chicago, 104, p. 11.
- 5Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. M. Milligan, Trans. Moscow, 1959, p. 103.
- 6K. Marx & F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, R. Purcel, Trans. London, 1942, p. 118.
- 7 1844 Manuscripts, Milligan, p. 74.
- 8Economic & Phil. Manuscripts, McLellan, pp. 156-157.
- 9See Mildred Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, Kansas City, 1972, Chap. 6
- 10 II Corinthians, V:16.
- 11K. Marx, *Capital I*. S. Moore & E. Aveling, Trans. Moscow, 1958, p. 609.
- 12See Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx 's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, Cambridge, 1971.
- 13K. Marx, *National Economy and Philosophy in Marx, Early Writings*, Stuttgart, 1953, p. 274.
- 141844 Manuscripts, Milligan, p. 73.
- 15Wesley, *Works*, VI, p. 70.
- 16Ibid, p. 242.
- 17Ibid, pp. 67-70.
- 18Wesley, *Works*, VIII, p. 47.
- 19Wesley, *Works*, VI, p. 68.

THE EMOTIONAL EVANGELICAL: BLAKE AND WESLEY

by
Barbara S. Worden

When Leigh Hunt openly disapproved of William Blake's "Emotional evangelicism," he further defined this term of opprobrium as a type of "Sacro-sensualism" and "amatory Methodism."¹ However, it is possible that like such older epithets as "Quaker" and "Christian," this intended slur contains a profound truth. What Hunt perceives as a defect is in fact a real relationship between certain of the ideas presented in the writings of William Blake, especially Milton, and some of the ideas presented in the writings of John Wesley. This relationship can be seen with particular strength in Blake's and Wesley's formulations of three major concepts: the nature of fallen human life, the process of attaining salvation, and the effects of salvation once achieved.

The strong relationship between these men is not simply one of those strange similarities that forms an accidental irony of literary history. Rather, the perception of these similarities is supported by solid factual evidence of Blake's acquaintance with the ideas of Methodism. The Methodist movement spread rapidly.² By 1804, the composition date of Milton, it had not only resulted in the formation of a separate denomination, but Methodism had permeated the Church of England, helping to inspire a powerful evangelical movement in the Mother Church.³ Not only did Blake have an opportunity to know of the ideas of Methodism through its wide and rapid spread in England, he also knew Methodist doctrine from one of its sources. It is a matter of fact that in 1790 Blake owned a copy of John and Charles Wesley's first hymn book, *Hymns for the Nation* in 1782,⁴ a work full of their joint efforts in poetry, poetry whose goal was the exposition of Methodist doctrine in a pleasing form.⁵ Scholars such as Martha England in her illuminating series of articles for the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* have acknowledged the influence of the hymns on Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.⁶

There is also evidence of Blake's parents' attendance at one of the numerous Moravian chapels in London, chapels which had been founded by John Wesley in association with the Moravian leader Peter Böhler. The list of members for the Fetter Lane Society in 1743 includes the name Blake in

the Married Men's Life and C. Blake in the Married women's List. No Christian names are given for the men, but the evidence is strong that these two people were Blake's parents since they resided in this neighborhood at the time.⁷ Wesley's involvement with Moravians began on his first voyage to Georgia, when he was impressed by the faith and calm fortitude of a group of Moravians who were travelling on the same ship. This experience was crucial for the development of Wesley's doctrine of justification by faith.⁸ When Wesley returned from Georgia, he spent an extensive period of study in Germany with Moravian leaders, June 13 through September 16, 1738.⁹ He met with Peter Böhler on the day the latter arrived in England, February 7, 1738, and together they drew up the statutes for the first Society of Brethren which met in Fetter Lane Chapel.

Thus, it is possible to say Blake was acquainted with Methodist ideas as a child through his parents and as an adult through his knowledge of the hymns of the Wesley brothers and the wide appeal of evangelical ideas in England. In addition to this evidence, there are Blake's works, especially Milton where Wesley and Whitefield, Methodism's most famous preacher, are made part of the symbolism of the poem:

Heaven as a Punisher & Hell as One under Punishment:
With Laws from Platon & His Greeks to renew the Trojan Gods,
In Albion; & deny the value of the Saviours blood.
But then I raised up Whitefield, Palambron raised up Wesley,
And these are the cries of the Churches before the two Witnesses'
Faith in God the dear Saviour who took on the likeness of men:
Becoming obedient to death, even the death of the Cross
The witnesses lie dead in the Street of the Great City
No Faith is in all the Earth: the Book of God is trodden underfoot:
He sent his two Servants Whitefield & Wesley; were they Prophets
Or were they Idiots of Madmen? Show us Miracles!
Can you have greater Miracles than these? Men who devote
Their whole life's comfort to intire scorn & injury & death
Awake thou sleeper on the Rock of Eternity Albion awake
The trumpet of Judgment hath twice sounded: all Nations are awake
But thou art still heavy and dull: Awake Albion awake!¹⁰

This passage is significant because it crystallizes Blake's attitudes towards Wesley both as a historical person and as part of the poet's mythology. The speaker of this passage, Rintrah, refers to one of the most important Methodist doctrines immediately before mentioning the two major Methodist leaders by name. He speaks of the fallacy of denying "the value of the Saviour's Blood," as one of the major sins of deist thought. This reference is significantly coupled with repetitions of the phrases "the Lamb of God" and "the Divine Lamb" which refer to the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice which Blake mentions in connection with the supposed death of the two Servants. It is natural to infer in this case that Blake derived his idea of the value of sacrifice from Methodism." Rintrah is the first of the sons of Los and Enitharmon, one of four who are described as "Rintrah fierce, and Palambron mild & piteous/Theotormon filled with care, Bronion loving Science" (Milton 24.11-12). When Rintrah raises up

Whitefield and Palambron Wesley, the varying characters of the two historical servants are functions of the variation in the personalities of their respective sponsors.¹² The differentiation between Wesley and Whitefield on the basis of wrath and gentleness is an accurate reflection of their historical characters. Wesley was steadfast in maintaining that he had no desire to break with the Church of England, and in fact remained a minister in it to the end of his life, never eager to help the Methodists withdraw from the older church.¹³ On the other hand, Whitefield was often openly in defiance of the church establishment from the beginning of his ministry. In holding meetings in Bristol during March of 1709 for the coal miners and factory workers who were largely ignored by the Established Church, Whitefield defied the Bishop of Bristol and his council who ordered him to stop preaching in a diocese where he had no license or face suspension and excommunication. Whitefield ignored this order as he ignored others like it many times and soon thereafter broke definitively with the Church of England. Thus, the historical Whitefield amply deserved the fiery character Blake attributed to him as the servant of Rintrah, while Wesley was accurately portrayed under the milder character of a follower of Palambron.

The inclusion of the historical persons Wesley and Whitefield is an obvious sign of a deep affinity between the ideas of John Wesley and those of William Blake. This affinity is especially strong in three areas: first, ascribing man's limited physical powers to the Fall; second, determining the process man must undergo to attain spiritual salvation; and finally, describing the effects of salvation on man. One of the most striking aspects of Blake's vision of the Fall is that it is as much physical as it is spiritual. In the third plate of Milton, Blake summarizes Urizen's role in man's fall exactly as it is portrayed in *The Book of Urizen* and *The Four Zoas*. In Blake's Fall, all the senses become limited, "stony hard" (Milton, 3:9) and as a result are capable of receiving only limited impressions:

Ah weak & wide astray! Ah shut in narrow doleful forms
 Creeping in reptile flesh upon the bosom of the ground
 The Eye of Man a little narrow orb closed up & dark
 Scarcely beholding the great light conversion with the Void
 The Ear, a little shell in small solutions shutting out
 All melodies & comprehending only Discord and Harmony
 The Tongue a little moisture fills, a little food it cloys
 A little sound it utters & its cries are faintly heard
 Then brings forth Moral Virtue the cruel Virgin Babylon
 Can Such an Eye judge of the stars? & looking thro its tubes
 Measure the sunny rays that point their spears on Udanadan
 Can such an Ear filled with the vapours of the yawning pit
 Judge of the pure melodious harp struck by a hand divine?
 Can such closed Nostrils feel a joy? or tell of autumn fruits
 When grapes & figs burst their covering to the joyful air
 Can such a Tongue boast of the living waters? or take in
 Ought but the Vegetable Ratio & loathe the faint delight
 Can such gross Lips perceive? alas! folded within themselves
 They touch not ought but pallid turn & tremble at every wind

(Milton 5.19-36)

It is not surprising that such limited senses can be reformed only by a miracle, the inspired words of a prophet, or an inspired act like Milton's, total self-sacrifice to attain union with the divine. The repetitions of "little" in the first half of the quotation and of "such" in the second half show that it is the limited physical powers of the lips, eye, ear and tongue which are responsible for the feebleness of these organs. These limitations were created by the fall of man implied by the fall of Urizen or Reason. In the second half of the quotation, the limited nature of the sense organs is repeatedly balanced against the beauties of eternal vision which they are incapable of appreciating. "Can such an ear . . . judge of the pure melodious harp struck by a hand divine?" (Milton 5:28-29). Even before the questions are answered (35-36) the response is already supplied in the reader's mind. The senses of the fallen man are almost hopelessly limited to the "Vegetable Ratio" and only a miracle can free them to perceive eternally.¹⁵

In describing man's fall in "Sermon LXII," John Wesley puts himself along with Blake among those who believe that the mental and physical consequences of the Fall are simultaneous, interrelated, and equal in importance:

Such was man with regard to his corporeal part, as he came out of the hands of his Maker. But since he sinned, he is not only dust, but mortal, corruptible dust. And by sad experience we find, that this "corruptible body presses down the soul." It very frequently hinders the soul in its operations; and, at best serves it very imperfectly. Yet the soul cannot dispense with its service imperfect as it is: for an embodied spirit can not form one thought, but by the mediation of its spirit; but the act of a spirit connected with a body and playing upon a set of material keys. It cannot possibly therefore, make any better music than the nature and states of its instruments allow it. Hence every disorder of the body, especially of the parts more immediately subservient to thinking, lay an almost insuperable bar in the way of its thinking justly.... Mistake, as well as ignorance, is, in our present state, inseparable from humanity.... And by the mistake which is occasioned by the defect of my bodily organs, I am naturally led so to do, [to err]. Such is the present condition of human nature: of a mind dependent on a mortal body.¹⁶

The repetitions of "complete" and "imperfect" in the first part of the quotation highlight Wesley's concern with the fall of the body which accompanied man's spiritual fall. The middle of the quotation uses a musical metaphor as does Blake for a different purpose. The poet emphasizes the perception of music through limited organs while Wesley emphasizes man's actions, calling the human spirit a musician, forever condemned to playing on the imperfect piano of the body. Wesley's pianist of the spirit must have an instrument to play his music however fallible or remain mute, and Blake's fallen man is condemned to the limited perceptions of a narrow hardened ear. Both men are aware of man's limitations though they emphasize different aspects of those limitations.

Both Blake and Wesley strongly emphasize the limitations of the body as implied in the words "hardened" or "petrified," a narrow limited body

imprisoning the spirit in the hard walls of its caverns. In Blake's vision of the creation of the human body the eyes are "two little Orbs & closed in two little caves" (Milton 3.14). The ears are corrupted as they grow, "Two Ears in close volutions? Shot spiring out in the deep darkness & petrified as they grew" (Milton 3.17-18). Wesley also saw the process of human life as a petrification, hardening and narrowing unto death:

God has indeed provided for the execution of his own decree, in the very principles of our nature. It is well known the human body, when it comes into the world, consists of innumerable membranes exquisitely thin, that are filled with circulating fluids, to which the solid parts bear a very small proportion. Into the tubes, composed of these membranes, nourishment must be continually infused otherwise life cannot continue, but will come to an end almost as soon as it is begun. And suppose this nourishment to be liquid, which, as it flows through these fine canals, continually enlarges them in all their dimensions; yet it contains innumerable solid particles, which continually adhere to the inner surface of the vessels through which they flow; so that in the same proportion as any vessel is enlarged, it is stiffened also. Thus the body grows firmer, as it grows larger, from infancy to manhood. In twenty, five and twenty, or thirty years, it attains its full measure of firmness.... As age increases, fewer and fewer of the vessels are pervious, and capable of transmitting the vital streams; except the larger ones, most of which are lodged within the trunk of the body. In extreme old age, the arteries themselves, the grand instrument of circulation, by the continual apposition of earth, become hard, and as it were bony, till, having lost the power of contracting themselves, they can no longer propel the blood, even through the largest channels, in consequence of which, death naturally ensues. Thus are the seeds of death sown in our very nature! Thus from the very hour when we first appear on the stage of life, we are travelling towards death; we are preparing, whether we will or no, to return to the dust from when we came.¹⁷

Wesley's vision of human life petrifying to a close was based on the science of his day, nonetheless it is startlingly parallel to Blake's vision of the eye and ear hardening in their creation until in frustration Albion "enraged & stifled without & within: in terror & woe, he threw his/right arm to the north, his left arm to the south, & his Feet / Stampd the nether Abyss in trembling & howling & dismay? And a seventh Age passed over & a state of dismal woe" (Milton 3.24-27).

Faced as they were with the physical and spiritual fall of man, it is not surprising that both Blake and Wesley demand a new birth as a preface to salvation. In "To the Deists," the introduction to the third chapter of Jerusalem, Blake condemns those who preach the essential goodness of natural man:

You O Deists profess yourselves the Enemies of Christianity; and you are so: you are also the Enemies of the Human Race & of Universal Nature. Man is born a Spectre of Satan & is

altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary. But your Greek Philosophy (which is a remnant of Druidism) teaches that Man is Righteous in his Vegetated Spectre; an Opinion of fatal & accursed consequence to Man, as the Ancients saw plainly by Revelation to the intire abrogation of Experimental Theory, and many believed what they saw, and Prophecied of Jesus (Jerusalem. 52).

This quotation contains two ideas important to the attainment of salvation in Wesleyan thought: the necessity of salvation to man sunk in corruption; and that attainment of perfection, while difficult, is not impossible.¹⁸ The contrary to sin, perfection, can be achieved, but both Blake's Milton and Wesley know it is a long and difficult struggle.

As has been shown previously, Wesley's sermons were eloquent on the subject of man's corruption, but the founder of Methodism could be equally eloquent on the possibility of man's redemption. He constantly calls his hearers to true religion, emotional union with God even though a complete and constant union with God in this life is very difficult to attain.¹⁹ To John Wesley, such perfection is the possession of true "religion" which "is a participation in the divine nature; the life of God in the soul of man; Christ formed in the heart; Christ in thee, the hope of glory; 'happiness and holiness; heaven begun upon earth' a kingdom of God within thee."²⁰

Such salvation is "Christ in thee," a union with God which drives out the old man, feeble and spiritually corrupt. To Wesley, the primary condition necessary to justification, the first step of salvation, is faith.²¹ Blake would understand this insistence on faith. Milton's decision to go down to "Eternal Death" at the close of the first book of Milton (14) is an enormous act of pure faith in the saving power of the expected Jesus. Significantly, Milton makes his decision after the Bard who had been praising the "Divine Humanity," Jesus, "terrify'd took refuge in Milton's bosom" (14.9). In this way, Milton acquires the Bard's faith in Christ and calls, "When will the Resurrection come; to deliver the sleeping body/ From corruptibility: O when Lord Jesus wilt thou come?" (14.17-18) Milton combines his own faith with the Bard's and decides to take the risk of death once again in the chance of attaining a permanent salvation. He risks losing his life in order to gain it.

Blake and Milton knew that faith is a matter of the inspired heart rather than of the intellect. The brain is the Idiot Questioner that misleads man into the eternal death-filled round of queries, queries that lack the single certainty of faith. The intellect is part of the "warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming" which Milton fears will trap him in the bonds of death when Christ comes again to judge the world. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance Blake places on casting off the old man, the satanic self composed of old religious law, memory and old ideas. It is to escape that self that Milton announces to the Assembly:

I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave.
I will go down to the sepulcher to see if morning breaks!
I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,

Lest the Last Judgement come & find me unannihilate
And I be seiz'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood.

.....

What do I here before the Judgement? without my Emanation?
With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of inspiration (?)
I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!
He is my Spectre! in my obedience to loose him from my Hells
To calm the Hells, my Furnaces, I go to Eternal Death
(14.20-4, 28-32)

The repetition of "I will go down" and "I will" emphasize Milton's determination to escape his satanic selfhood. He knows that he must die to opinion, intellect and judgment before he can reject his old Self and acquire the new regenerated life in union with Jesus, the "Divine Humanity." Wesley also realized that the "daughters of memory," factual knowledge, are no help in ascertaining whether or not an individual is truly in possession of salvation:

Neither does religion consist in orthodoxy, or right opinions; which, although they are not properly outward things, are not in the heart, but the understanding. A man may be orthodox in every point—he may not only espouse right opinions but zealously defend them against all opposers; . . . and yet it is possible he may have no religion at all . . . he may be almost as orthodox-as the devil, . . . and may, all the while, be as great a stranger as he to the religion of the heart. This alone is religion, truly so called, this alone is in the sight of God of great price. The apostle sums it all up in three particulars, "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."²²

Both Blake and Wesley realize that intellectual orthodoxy is not incompatible with the diabolic, that the heart is the primary standard for judging the force of an individual's spiritual life. The wording of the above quotation from one of Wesley's sermons contrasts "orthodox" with "religion" and "religion of the heart." The dash in the sixth line of the quotation was probably delivered as a pause. One can imagine the surprise of the listeners when Wesley yoked orthodoxy with the devil. Ascribing to the devil the role of exemplar of orthodoxy is a way of emphasizing the primary of the "religion of the heart" over theological knowledge and the primary proponents of such knowledge, the ministers of the English Church. For both Blake and Wesley, the heart stands at the door of salvation and only the heart unhampered by the sceptical brain can cross the threshold.

For the complete and cosmogenic results of salvation in Blake, one must turn from Milton to Jerusalem. However, Blake does present an introduction to his final doctrine of salvation in the Beulah section of the second book. Beulah is the place where war ceases, a rest from the strife between the forces of creativity and repression, generated by Eden, and symbolic of the final marriage between Ololon and Milton.²³ The beauty of Beulah contains the expanding moment, with its almost infinite power to save, that provides one of the major points of union between the doctrines of salvation

of Blake and Wesley. To Wesley, the beauty of God and to Blake the beauty of God's creation stand at the knife point where eternity begins. From this point, one may pass over easily into eternal time, salvation, and union with God.

This vast change to eternity is to Wesley, a change from "darkness to light," "from death to life." The sudden vision of glory is the "open, uncovered, face" of God "the evil now being taken away." It comes in a moment and a moment is sufficient to change man into the "Glorious image wherein thou wast created, . . . the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of God." ²⁴ An account of a factual occurrence of this amazing spiritual transformation at the knife point of eternity is found in the Journal of John Wesley for Monday, January 1, 1739. The scene is the same Fetter Lane Chapel where the Blake parents were probably members:

Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Inghram, Whitefield, Huchins and my brother Charles were present at our love feast in Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord!" ²⁵

The use of the phrase "the power of God came mightily upon us" indicates that the spiritual transformation was a matter of a very few minutes. The experience of salvation comes in the midst of normal worship for it is comparatively easily attained by ordinary people in ordinary life and requires no particular rites or specialized knowledge. The people's reaction, their praise to God and falling to the ground indicates the overwhelming nature of their feelings. In this moment men's eyes expand to see worlds of the spirit and of eternity to which they were blind before. The natural eye can not see this, only the Holy Spirit can expand the senses in the necessary way. ²⁶ A selection from Wesley's sermons will show what importance he placed on such spiritual experiences; they were the touchstones of a true faith:

This repentance, this faith, this peace, joy, love, this change from glory to glory, is what the wisdom of the world has voted to be madness, mere enthusiasm, utter distraction. But thou, O man of God, regard them not; be thou moved by none of these things. Thou knowest in whom thou hast believed. ²⁷

The sentence structure of this selection opposes "peace, joy, and love" to "madness, mere enthusiasm, utter distraction." In the opposition of the triads, one the opinion of the inspired heart, the other the voice of the orthodox detractors, it is easy to see that the heart is the victor, for it alone is the judge of what it finds true from personal experience. The expanded moment of eternity, the change implied in the word "repentance" is an observable fact while the wisdom of the world is a "vote." Considering the universal corruption of elections, which included the disenfranchisement of more than seven-eighths of the population on the eve of the Reform Bill and the selection of representatives at the whim of the local aristocrat, the use of

the allusion to voting is subtly damning.²⁸ The wisdom of the world like the voter's decision is based not on truth, but on the selfish desires of the establishment, religious or political. Thus, the truth of the moment of glory shines bright in the midst of the corruption of the opposition. Wesley speaks of the work of salvation as an expansion like the physical expansion that takes place when a baby grows into an adult. The saved individual receives the "sincere milk of the word and grows thereby," becoming a "perfect man" in the faith of Christ.²⁹ Wesley expresses the contrast between the moment of acceptance of God and the moment preceding it as the difference between "sleep" and "awareness" and between bondage to sin and freedom. Both of these contrasts express the radical difference made by the acceptance of faith. Wesley asks "Have you heaven in your heart" or are you "overwhelmed with sorrow, and fear," calling his hearers to the expansion of soul implied in holding all of heaven in one's heart.³⁰

To Blake, eternity is also a wondrous expansion in the dimensions of ordinary human life. Eternity and everyday life meet at natural beauty, for the right perception of this beauty can help man to cross over into eternity as suddenly as the worshippers in the Fetter Lane Chapel passed over into their vision of God: "Thou perceivest the Flowers put forth their precious Odours/ And none can tell how from so small a center comes such sweets/Forgetting that within that Center Eternity expands" (31.46-8). As in Wesley's doctrine of salvation, the individual moment is overwhelmingly powerful. It renews all the time past and enables one to live perfectly in the future. One can cross over into eternity at any time, but it is particularly easy to do so when one is conscious of the beauty of God's creation:

There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find
 Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
 This moment & it multiply, & when it once is found
 It renovates every Moment of the day if rightly placed,
 In this moment Ololon descended to Los & Enitharmon
 Unseen beyond the Mundane Shell Southward in Milton's track.
 Just in this Moment when the morning odours rise abroad
 And first from the Wild Thyme, stands a Fountain in a rock
 Of crystal flowing into two Streams, one flow thro Golgonooza
 and thro Beulah to Eden beneath Los's western Wall
 The other flows thro the Aerial Void & all the Churches
 Meeting again in Golgonooza beyond Satan's Seat
 The Wild Thyme is Los's Messenger to Eden, a mighty Demon
 Terrible deadly & poisonous his presence in Ulro dark
 Therefore he appears only a small Root creeping in grass
 Covering over the Rock of Odours his bright purple mantle
 Beside the Fount above the Larks nest in Golgonooza
 Luvah slept here in death-here in Luvah's empty Tomb
 Ololon sat beside this Fountain on the Rock of Odours
 (35 42-60).

In this moment when all eternity can be renovated, Ololon, Milton's feminine emanation, takes a vital step towards union with him, she descends in Milton's path to where he lies on his death couch beside Los and Enitharmon.

In making this descent Ololon is showing her willingness to sacrifice herself in order to gain eternal life and reunion with Milton. At this moment, when the preparations are being made for Milton's ultimate salvation the earth is at its most beautiful and all perceptions are heightened. "The morning odours rise abroad," above all from the wild thyme which with lark is a symbol of perfect perception, the gate to eternity. The wild thyme is a demon but only to Satan who wants human perception to remain narrowed and the senses to remain locked. Describing the wild thyme in this way is an ironic shift to Satan's mode of perception (54-7) as a means of expressing the contrast to ideal perception. The fountain, the crystal stream, is not only a part of perceived beauty, but a reference to the "waters of life" (Milton is to bathe in immediately before his reunion with Ololon) (40.1). This one place is well suited to be the site of the moment of perception for here the thyme grows, here the water springs, and here the lark has built her nest. Immediately following this passage the Lark starts its journey to meet the twenty-seven other Larks who will be the messengers to the churches. From this lovely place which includes the water and the thyme along with the lark, all the symbols of eternal perception, the creative idea will begin its series of reascensions to perfection. The thyme and the lark reappear immediately after the Six-fold Emanation's union with Milton and Jesus' reunion with mankind, "Immediately the Lark mounted with a loud trill from Felphams Vale/ And the Wild thyme from Wimbletons green & impurpled Hills" (42.29-30). These two symbols of perception are harbingers of the "Human Harvest" of man which is to come and symbolically include all the work of God in time and eternity, the work which begins in the moment when the senses expand to perceive the sound of the lark and the scent of the wild thyme.

This vision at the moment of expansion is not self-centered but God and ultimately man-centered. Again and again Wesley states that the vision of God becomes union with God and results in an increased love of neighbor:³¹

The necessary fruit of this love of God is the love of our neighbour; of every soul which God hath made; not excepting our enemies; not excepting those who are now "despitefully using and persecuting us;" a love, whereby we love every man as ourselves; as we love our own souls."³²

This union of God and man and man and man is expressed through the image of the vine and the branches, "These, 'who have redemption through his blood,' . . . are joined unto the Lord in one Spirit. They are ingrafted unto him, as branches into the vine. They are united." ³³ A practical result of this spirit of union is the experience in Fetter Lane when all present praise God with one voice.

In Milton one of the results of the right perception of eternity, is in addition to Milton's union with his female emanation, Jesus' union with mankind, "Jesus stept & walked forth/ From Felphams Vale clothed in Clouds of blood, to enter into/ Albions Bosom" (42.19-21). As a result of the eternal vision, a man can sympathize even with the lowly fly and see in it an analogy of himself:

Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?
It has a heart like thee; a brain open to heaven & hell.
Withinside wondrous & expansive; its gates are not clos'd
I hope thine are not: hence it clothes itself in rich array;
Hence thou art cloth'd with human beauty O thou mortal man.
Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies: (20.26-31)

Even the brain of a fly can be the tiny center which expands to reveal eternity if rightly seen, hence the warning (28) that the brain of man must be as open as that of the fly. The final line of the quotation (31) contains still another warning that eternity opens up in the here and now, in small real things like the fly not in some vaguely realized place beyond the earth. Because anything here on earth can open the vision of eternity to the poet-man, he cannot ignore any being human or animal. Thus, in the perception of eternity all created things are one, all share humanity, the divine Humanity of Jesus. Such is the power of the sympathetic eternal mind that it can even perceive sympathetically one of the satanic forces of the world. After wrestling with Urizen who has tried to freeze his brain with the cold water of his logic, Milton is able to perceive his enemy well enough to give the great gift of a form:

But Milton took of the red clay of Succoth, moulding it with care
Between his palms; and filling up the furrows of many tears
Beginning at the feet of Urizen, and on the bones
Creating new flesh on the Demon cold, and building him,
As with new clay a Human form in this Valley of Beth Peor.

The fact that this is a creative act, not submission to Urizen can be seen in Blake's use of a place name. Succoth furnished clay for casting metal ornaments for Solomon's temple (I Kings VII,46). Only divine vision can create a great work of art, a temple or a human form.

To both Blake and Wesley, salvation is the response of the heart. This response may be either to God's creation in Blake or to pure love of God in Wesley. After the movement of the heart is obeyed, man passes over to eternity, stepping from this narrow round of ordinary fallen human life into the infinite world of salvation. This expanding moment is the primary effect of salvation. As a result of such a passage from darkness to light, from petrification to perception, man is united with all other men in the divine man, Jesus Christ.

Notes

- 1 Deborah Dorfman, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 47.
- 2 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Nineteenth Century in Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 335-36.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 257-58.
- 4 S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965), p. 444.
- 5 Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1950), p. 88.
- 6 Martha England, "Blake and the Hymns of Charles Wesley," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 60.
- 7 Margaret Ruth Lowery, *Windows of the Morning* (New York: Archon Books), p. 15.
- 8 Maximin Piette, *John Wesley and the Evolution of Protestantism* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1937). DD. 295-96, 307-8.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 294-96, 307-8.
- 10 William Blake, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965), p. 117, plate 22, 11.52-62, Plate 23, 11.1-5. Further citations from Milton will be from this edition and will be included in the text in Darentheses.
- 11 Frederick C. Gill, *The Romantic Movement and Methodism* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), p. 149.
- 12 Damon, *The Blake Dictionary*, p. 321.
- 13 Latourette, *The Nineteenth Century in Europe*, p. 335.
- 14 Piette, *John Wesley*, p. 346.
- 15 This vision of the Fall as primarily physical with a spiritual decline as a consequence is widely divergent from conventional ideas particularly as epitomized in *Paradise Lost*. Both *Paradise Lost* and *Genesis* hold the first and most important consequences of the Fall to have been spiritual. In *Paradise Lost* (9.1009-59) the relationship between Adam and Eve deteriorates into alternate lust and quarreling while in *Genesis* (5.7-20) Adam and Eve show their sin first by being ashamed of their nakedness and secondly by being reluctant to confront God openly as had been their custom. Only later when God judges them does He decree that their bodies will be changed as a punishment for sin; they will be made vulnerable to death.
- 16 John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. II* (New York: Eaton and Mains), 34.
- 17 *Ibid.*, II, 35.
- 18 William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 201-43.

- 19Charles Wesley thought he knew only one person who had attained Christian perfection in this life, his children's nurse. Blake spoke of himself as one who had attained perfection at the cost of great strife. In a letter to Mr. Butts written shortly before the writing of Milton on November 22, 1802 he calls himself a "champion," one who had "travel'd thro' Perils & Darkness," strong in Jesus who had "conquer'd, and shall still Go on Conquering." *The Letters of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 509f.
- 20Wesley, *Sermons*, I, p. 64.
- 21Ibid, p. 113.
- 22Ibid., pp. 6-7.
- 23Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1963), p. 341.
- 24Wesley, *Sermons*, I, p. 209.
- 25piette, John Wesley, p. 331.
- 26Wesley, *Sermons*, I, p. 345.
- 27Ibid., p. 152.
- 28See D. F. Macdonald, *The Age of Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), pp. 44-5 and E. L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 23-28.
- 29John Wesley, *Sermons*, I, p. 34.
- 30Ibid, p. 190.
- 31Ibid., p. 161.
- 32Ibid., p. 375.
- 33Ibid, p. 160.

THE EPWORTH WOMEN: SUSANNA WESLEY AND HER DAUGHTERS

by
Samuel J. Rogal

There exists hardly the slightest doubt that had not Samuel Wesley the elder been partly responsible for bringing three noteworthy sons into the world, both his name and the mediocrity of his heavy literary labors would have remained as obscure as the two hamlets in Lincolnshire where he was forced to act out his role as agent of the Church of England. Indeed, the path from Oxfordshire upon which he had trod after becoming, on 19 June 1688, Bachelor of Arts seemed lined with ample promise of success. Thomas Sprat, Bishop of Rochester and Dean of Westminster, ordained him deacon at Bromley (outside London) on 7 August of that year; Henry Compton, Bishop of Oxford and London, ordained him priest at St. Andrews, Holborn, on 24 February 1690. Following some months at sea as chaplain aboard a man-of-war, Wesley obtained a curacy in London (worth £30 per annum), married and moved to South Ormsby, Lincolnshire, as rector at £50 per year. There, Samuel Wesley remained for five years before his final appointment, in 1695, as rector of Epworth, Lincolnshire—a living worth £200 per year.

Unfortunately, the father of the Wesleys was £150 in debt when he arrived at Epworth. The addition of the rectory at nearby Wroote, in 1721, came too late and proved too little to relieve him of any financial burden. In fact, it merely broadened his responsibilities to the point where he could not handle the two posts and son John had to leave (temporarily) his post at Lincoln College, Oxford, and come to his father's rescue. However, the elder Wesley never really paid that close attention to finances. Two prison terms, a like number of fires, two crop failures, and an unruly mob for parishioners failed to shake Samuel Wesley's poetic temperament or to cast even the slightest shadow over the golden image that he had conjured for himself as the anointed "Poet of the Isle of Axholme." Arguments with his wife resulted in a series of eventual reconciliations which, in turn, resulted in a series of children: nineteen in all between 1691 and 1710, ten of whom managed to survive infancy. On 4 June 1731, Samuel Wesley the elder was thrown from a wagon; for the next four years he suffered from the effects of

his injuries, compounded by recurring attacks of the gout. Mercifully, he died on 25 April 1735, thus bringing to conclusion more than four decades of struggle and failure.

Despite the dreams of Samuel Wesley-political, poetical, and theological-that never materialized, despite his bumbling and his overall incompetence, his family survived Epworth rectory. It survived because his wife Susanna Annesley Wesley (1669-1742), provided more than enough strength to compensate for her husband's weakness. As did her spouse, Susanna Wesley came from Nonconformity, the twenty-fifth and last child of Dr. Samuel Annesley (1620-1696)-nephew of the first Earl of Anglesea, a product of Queen's College, Oxford, vicar (before his ejection in 1662) of St. Giles, Cripplegate (young Daniel Defoe was a member of his congregation), pastor of a Nonconformist church in Little St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, and the so-called "St. Paul of the Nonconformists." Her mother, Dr. Annesley's second wife, was the daughter of John White (1590-1645), the Puritan lawyer and Member of Parliament for Southwark (1640). In 1662, the year of her sister Elizabeth's marriage to the bookseller, John Dunton, the thirteen-year-old Susanna determined to reject her father's religious dissent and to cast her theological lot with the Church of England. Despite the religious liberty achieved at an early age, she remained anchored to her father's household until her marriage to the recently ordained Samuel Wesley; then, she settled into (or, more than likely, she became resigned to) her new life, raising her husband's children, enduring her husband's hardships and misfortunes, bearing up under the unnecessary weight of his idiosyncrasies.

On 11 October 1709 - that year had seen the destruction, by fire, of Epworth rectory and periodic visits of the rector to London-Susanna Wesley wrote to her eldest son, Samuel, then a young scholar at Westminster School: "There is nothing I now desire to live for, but to do some small service to my children: that, as I have brought them into the world, I may, if it please God, be an instrument of doing good unto their souls.² Thus, we see a summary of the woman's real and total contribution to history, the contribution filtered through the ancient institution of motherhood. If British Methodism sprang from the formation, in 1729, of the Oxford Holy Club, its seeds were planted by Susanna Wesley at Epworth rectory during the opening decade of the eighteenth century. She alone dressed and undressed her infants and changed their clothes, all at fixed hours of the day. She alone rocked each child to sleep at a specified hour. When an infant Wesley became old enough to sit and to eat without assistance, she included that child within the strict circle of the family table; there that child asked for and ate everything that its mother provided. She prohibited any drinking and eating between meals. At Epworth rectory, evening prayers at 6:00 P.M. preceded dinner, which took less than one hour. At 7:00, she prepared each child for bed - the youngest first; by 8:00, all Wesley children had been stored beneath their blankets.

In assuming responsibility for educating her children-a responsibility ceded to her by virtue of the rector's attentiveness to more esoteric matters - Susanna Wesley relied even more heavily upon method. In a letter to her son John (dated 24 July 1732 and addressed to him at his tutor's lodging at Lincoln College, Oxford), written ten years before her death, the

mother of British Methodism explicated the principles upon which she maintained order in a world constantly under siege by the harbingers of chaos. Her thesis focused upon pure obedience: "I insist upon conquering the will of children . . . because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents, till its own understanding comes to maturity and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind."³ The thesis then yielded eight by-laws that formed the frame for her method: (1) a full confession of a fault, with a promise to correct it - eliminating lying and needless beating; (2) no sinful act to pass without punishment; (3) no child to be beaten twice for the same fault; (4) a significant act of obedience to be recognized and even, on occasion, rewarded; (5) an intention toward obedience, even if the performance was not as well as it should have been, to be accepted and encouraged; (6) respect for the privacy and the property of others; (7) promises to be strictly enforced and observed; (8) no girl to be put to work (e.g. sewing) before she could read.⁴

The specifics in support of the by-laws took the form of instruction in prayer, blessing by signs, collects, Catechism, and Scripture. When a child reached the age of five, the mother-tutor turned her attention to matters practical: the alphabet, spelling, reading, and mathematics. However, her most noteworthy technique - one that became a fixture within the regimen of her most famous offspring - concerned the allotted time for private discussion with each child: "I take," she wrote to her husband in early 1712, "such a proportion of time as I can spare every night to discourse with each child apart. On Monday I talk with Molly; on Tuesday with Hetty; Wednesday with Nancy; Thursday with Jacky [John]; Friday with Patty; Saturday with Charles; and with Emily and Suky together on Sunday."⁵ Thus did Susanna Wesley both cope with and escape from the disorder surrounding the "Poet of the Isle of Axholme." She established her own island, her own independent state, whereon she reigned, alone and absolute, preparing daughters to marry Anglican clergymen and sons to become Anglican bishops. She left Samuel Wesley the elder to soar among the clouds of his own insignificance.

Perhaps it was the times, perhaps it was the unnatural isolation in which Epworth rectory existed: at any rate, Susanna Wesley never seemed able to convey to her children that, no matter how thoroughly they had been "methodized" in infancy and in youth, they could not simply launch upon and then restrict themselves to pre-ordained channels of fortune and existence. The three boys held fairly true to form, but not all of the seven girls managed to attain even a semblance of the desired end. The eldest, Emilia (1691-c. 1770), quickly grew to detest her father and the circumstances into which he had placed the family. Her marriage to an Epworth apothecary, Robert Harper, proved no better; he died early, leaving her without money or children, which only increased her bitterness. "I am ready to give up the ghost with grief," she wrote to her brother John on 24 November 1738, at the same time chastising him for spending so much of his time and money among the Moravian brethren of Count Nicholas Zinzendorf. "How is it possible, in such extremities, to think of anybody's concerns but my own till this storm be blown over some way, or my head

laid low in Gainsborough churchyard?"⁶ Her tragedy seems not to have been the loss of her husband or even her poverty, but a renewal of that dependence upon Epworth from which she seemed never to escape. As her sister Mehetabel poetically described her condition,

Fortune has fixed thee in a place
Debarred of wisdom, wit and grace;
High births and virtue and equally they scorn,
As asses dull on dunghills born;
Impervious as the stones their heads are found,
Their rage and hatred steadfast as the ground.
With these unpolished wights thy youthful days
Glide slow and dull, and Nature's lamp decays:
Oh, what a lamp is hid 'midst such a sordid race!⁷

The next surviving Wesley daughter, Susanna (1695-1764), did not fare much better. Familiarly referred to as "Suky," she married, in 1721, Richard Ellison (d. 1760), a landowner of some means. However, in April 1752, John Wesley reported that "all his cows are dead, and all his horses but one; and all his meadow-land has been under water these two years (which is occasioned by the neglect of the Commissioner of the Sewers, who ought to keep the drains open): so that he has very little left to subsist on." Husband and wife parted company shortly thereafter, their two sons and two daughters having been grown. In describing her death, her younger brother stated that "Sister Suky was in huge agonies for five days, and then died in the full assurance of faith. Some of her last words (after she had been speechless for some time) were, 'Jesus is come! Heaven is here!'"⁸

Those same last words may well have been applicable to the desires of two other Wesley daughters, Mary and Mehetabel (Hetty), although perhaps not for the same reasons. The former (born in 1696 and known as Molly), on 1 November 1734, accompanied her infant child to the grave. Only that January she had married John Whitelamb (1707-1769) - native of Wroote, principal scribe in the preparation of the elder Samuel Wesley's *Dissertahones in Librum Jobi* for the printer (1735), the rector of Epworth's curate at Wroote and his successor there (1734-1769), and a former pupil of John Wesley at Lincoln College, Oxford.⁹ Hetty (1697-1751), on the other hand, experienced quite a different form of suffering. The eighth child, fifth daughter, and the first Wesley born at Epworth rectory inherited her father's bent toward the muse; in fact, those pieces of her verse that survive (in such niches as *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Poehcal Register*, *The Christian Magazine*, and *The Arminian Magazine*, as well as in several eighteenth-century British hymnals) seem to surpass, in quality, the poetic ramblings of Samuel Wesley the elder. However, circumstances forced her to marry (1725) a drunken plumber-glazier, one William Wright;¹⁰ money advanced by Dr. Matthew Wesley, the rector's affluent brother-physician. established the incompetent mechanic in a London shop situated in Dean's Street, Soho Square. There, Mehetabel gave birth to four children - three of whom died at or shortly after birth, while the fourth, Amelia, lived but several years before her mother's own departure from earthly misery. As the rector of Epworth had found relief in his verse and erudite literary projects, so did his daughter turn to her poetry - not so much to escape from or

to relieve the stench, the squalor, and the tragedy of her Soho surroundings, but to try to comprehend the meaning of her miserable existence. Thus, after the death of her third child on 28 September 1728, she writes,

Tender softness! infant mild!
Perfect, purest, brightest child!
Transient lustre! beauteous clay!
Smiling wonder of a day!
Ere the last convulsive start
Rends thy unresisting heart,
Ere the long enduring swoon
Weigh thy precious eyelids down;
Ah, regard a mother's moan,
Anguish deeper than thy own.
Fairest eyes, whose dawning light
Late with rapture blest my sight,
Ere your orbs extinguish'd be,
Bend their trembling beams on me!
Dropping sweetness! verdant flower!
Blooming, withering in an hour!
Ere thy gentle breast sustains
Latest, fiercest, mortal pains,
Hear a supplicant! let me be
Partner in thy destiny!
That whene'er the fatal cloud
Must thy radiant temples shroud;
When deadly damps, impending now,
Shall hover round thy destined brow,
Diffusive may their influence be,
And with the blossom blast the tree!¹¹

Although the piece is far too personal for general congregational use, its tone and its imagery possess definite hymnodic qualities. In fact, the overall emphasis upon personal trauma and suffering reminds the reader, after only a superficial glance, of the more polished poetic accomplishments of her younger brother Charles.

At some point following the death of her fourth child, with her spirits undoubtedly at their lowest, Mehetabel Wesley Wright took the time to compose her own epitaph:

Destined while living to sustain
An equal share of grief and pain
All various ills of human race
Within this breast had once a place.
Without complaint she learn's to bear
A living death, a long despair;
Till hard oppress'd by adverse fate,
O'er charged, she sank beneath the weight
And to this peaceful tomb retired,
So much esteem'd so long desired.
The painful mortai conflict's o'er
A broken heart can bleed no more.¹²

Certainly, the piece (either as epitaph or poem) may be vulnerable to the charge of reeking with self-pity. Nevertheless, the lines do function clearly as another example of Hetty Wesley's unpolished but still honest and intense poetic feeling. In an age dominated by masculine wit, masculine genius, and masculine poetic expression, there was very little that Mrs. Wright could do with whatever raw talent she possessed.

Of Anne Wesley (b. 1702), referred to occasionally as Nancy, details are hard to come by. Perhaps the most significant facts may be her name and the year of her birth: realizing Samuel Wesley's loyalties to his sovereign (whomever he or she might have been at the moment), we can easily assume that this Wesley daughter was named for the last of the Stuarts, who succeeded her brother-in-law William to the throne in 1702. In 1725, Anne married John Lambert, an Epworth surveyor of some education, intelligence, and financial resources; the couple then moved to London, where Lambert found more than one occasion on which to join his brother-in-law William Wright in the latter's dipsomaniacal exercises. Anne appears to have been present, on 23 July 1742, at her mother's deathbed, but nothing further about her turns up after that date.¹³

Martha (or "Patty" - 1706-1791) presents a totally different situation, although she seems to have inherited the usual marital problems associated with the daughters of Epworth rectory. In 1735, she married Westley Hall (d. 1776), another of John Wesley's former pupils at Lincoln College, who went on to become rector of Wootton Rivers, Wiltshire. Originally, he was to accompany the Wesleys and James Oglethorpe to Georgia, but his marriage forced the cancellation of his participation in that evangelical misadventure. Hall's problem - which obviously became Martha's - focused upon the second of the wine-women-song trinity, as opposed to his brothers-in-law, who inclined toward the first. Even before the marriage, he had an affair with Keziah Wesley who, strangely enough, moved in with the Halls almost immediately following their union. The rings of this domestic circus became complete in 1739, when the widowed Susanna Wesley joined the Hall household. During that year, everyone removed to London, where Westley Hall became the overseer of the London Methodist society recently formed in the English capital. In the interim, he sired an illegitimate child by way of a liaison with his wife's seamstress; then followed several more affairs (also resulting in children) ranging, geographically, from Ireland to the West Indies. Hall's attentiveness to his own wife took the form of ten offspring, only one of whom survived infancy. In matters of religion, the former scholar of Lincoln College and (also former) rector of Wootton Rivers evidenced an equally urgent need for sampling the various fruits of the orchard: he drifted in and out of Methodism and Anglicanism, finding time, also, to try his luck with the Moravian Brethren, the Quietists, and the Deists.¹⁴

Little wonder, then, that Martha Wegley Hall, after her husband's death, sought some form of compensation for forty years of social and intellectual inertia. After placing Westley Hall safely into the earth, she drifted toward the theological, literary, and cultural scenes that prevailed within the London residence of her brother Charles at Chesterfield Street, Marylebone. There she met the pious but intellectually active Hannah More and the young social reformer and parliamentarian William Wilberforce, as

well as the laurels of British letters: David Garrick, Joshua Reynolds, Oliver Goldsmith. Through Mrs. More - writer of drama, fiction, and social and religious prose tracts - Martha Hall came, sometime in 1780 or early 1781, to the circle of Samuel Johnson, who then resided at Bolt Court, Fleet Street. James Boswell describes in detail a dinner and discussion held on Sunday, 15 April 1781, in which Martha Hall participated. The Scottish biographer depicts her as resembling John Wesley, "both in figure and manner," and she spent the evening trying to draw out Johnson's views on "the resurrection of the human race in general." When at one point in the discussion Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Hall begin talking simultaneously, their host asks for quiet and addresses the two as ladies, which (when he noted the incident later in his journal) prompted Boswell to remark, "The term ladies applied to the two old animals was truly ludicrous."¹⁵

However, the relationship between Martha Wesley Hall and Samuel Johnson was not to end on such a derogatory note as that resounding from Boswell's journal and biography. Beneath the heavy and rough exterior that seemed to typecast the sage of Bolt Court lay a kind, mellow, and deeply religious soul; he saw Martha Hall in her late seventies, an essentially unhappy and obviously financially restricted woman, but one thoroughly virtuous. Thus, in the first week of December 1784 - perhaps only seven days before his death - Johnson determined to invite the sister of Methodism's founder and leader to come live in his house, to occupy the room once belonging to Anna Williams - herself a woman whom death had rescued from further suffering. Unfortunately, he was simply too ill to carry out his intentions. Martha became dependent first on her brother Charles, then (after his death in March 1788) on her brother John. In his will,¹⁶ John Wesley bequeathed, from the sale of his books, £40 to his sister; she lived but three months after his death, the last survivor of Samuel and Susanna Wesley's Epworth brood.

Although Martha could lay claim to being the last of the Epworth Wesleys, she was not the last born; that honor went to Keziah, or "Kezzie" (1710-1741). Apparently, her affair with Westley Hall proved to be her closest brush with marriage; this nineteenth and final Wesley child became the only one to reach adulthood and then pass on to the grave, unwed. Brother John placed the responsibility for her unhappiness and even for her death directly upon Rev. Hall; in fact, six years after her passing, he hurled a stinging barb at his brother-in-law's conscience, the tone of which seems a radical departure from his usual willingness to forgive and to forget. Thus, from London on 22 December 1747, he accused Westley Hall to the degree that

... in spite of her [Keziah's] poor, astonished parent, of her brother, of all your vows and promises, you shortly after jilted the younger and married the elder sister. The other, who had honoured you as an angel from heaven, and still loved you much too well (for you had stole her heart from the God of her youth) refused to be comforted. From that time she fell into a lingering illness, which terminated in her death. And doth not her blood still cry unto God from the earth? Surely it is upon your head.¹⁷

Whatever the cause of Keziah Wesley's relatively early death, the blame could hardly have rested solely with Hall. She passed away quietly and

insignificantly on 10 March 1741, more likely the result of a delicate constitution than a broken heart.

Lest anyone feel the urge to rise up in indignation against what could be termed "injustices" brought down - by God, fate, or some other unknown reason - against the Wesley daughters, he or she must remember that those women were, essentially, undeniable facts of eighteenth-century life. They were daughters of a country parson and destined, despite Susanna Wesley's dream of seeing them settled within the upper echelons of the enlightened establishment, to grace the living quarters of other country parsons or perhaps country squires. The times in which they lived and the situations in which they were placed dictated that they could as easily be shackled to a Westley Hall or to a William Wright as to an honest, loving, kindly, intelligent, and affluent Lincolnshire squire or vicar. Their brothers were, literally and swiftly, launched forward from the Epworth nest, at no small expense or sacrifice to the rector and his wife, in the direction of Westminster School, Charterhouse, Oxford, Georgia, Germany, wherever; the daughters had to remain at Epworth rectory until someone came to remove them. And, as was the case with the majority of the young Wesley females, marriage did not mean an automatic severing of the Epworth cord. Only Martha found a real opportunity for social and intellectual intercourse, but that one moment - that fling, as it were - came to her too late in life for her to derive any significant degree of pleasure or enlightenment from it. Even the poetic expressions of Mehetabel submitted to the rude sounds of her husband's hammer and to the clanking of his ale cups; what she did manage to create seems devoid of life, wasted on the corpses of her babies and upon thoughts of her own demise. In essence, then, there existed, as one twentieth-century biographer entitled her labor, only sons to Susanna. The Wesley daughters, as did their mother, simply endured their respective lots, and whatever talents they possessed were never permitted to bear fruit. They became, in the end, simply so many names to be added to the mortality bills of neoclassicism.

Notes

¹During the period of Samuel Wesley's residence, Epworth was a market town of approximately 2,000 people, the principal place in a strip of land formerly enclosed by five rivers: Idle, Torr (west and south), Trent (east), Ouse, Don, Humber estuary (north). The strip was known as the Isle of Axholme (axe being Celtic for water). For a description of the area and the rectory at Epworth, see John Telford, *Life of Charles Wesley* (London: Methodist Book Room, 1900), pp. 12-13, as well as Telford's *Life of John Wesley* (London: Hodder Stoughton, 1886), pp. 11-13.

²See Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* (1820; rpt. London: George Bell and Sons, 1901), p. 8.

³Nehemiah Curnock (ed.), *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909-1916), III, 36. John Wesley inserted into his journal for 1 August 1742 - the day upon which Susanna Wesley was buried in

Bunhill Fields, London - two letters written by his mother. The first is to Samuel Wesley the elder (6 February 1712), the second is the one from which I have cited. Both epistles refer to the education of her children.

4Journal, III, 38-39.

5Journal, III,33. Those who keep track of numbers will notice that two children are missing from the list: Samuel the younger and Keziah. The former was then at Oxford, while the latter was not yet two years old when the letter was written.

6Journal, II, 152. Gainsborough, where Mrs. Harper was then living, is some fifteen miles northwest of Epworth. It is, roughly, the setting for George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860).

7See George J. Stevenson, *Memorials of the Wesley Family* (London: Methodist Conference Office, 1876), pp. 263-267.

8John Wesley to Ebenezer Blackwell (Epworth, 16 April 1752); Wesley to Charles Wesley (London, 7 December 1764). See John Telford (ed.), *The Letters of John Wesley* (London: The Epworth Press, 1930), III, 87; IV, 277.

9Although the Wesleys could ill afford to do so, they contributed to finance Whitelamb at Oxford. John Wesley was pleased with his student's scholarly habits, as he reported them to his father on 11 June 1731: "He reads one English, one Latin, and one Greek book alternately and never meddles with a new one in any of the languages till he has ended the old one. If he goes on as he has begun . . . by the time he has been here four or five years, there will not be such an one of his standing in Lincoln College, perhaps not in the University of Oxford" (Letters, I, 85). At one time the brothers-in-law were fairly close, but the leader of the Methodists became disturbed over certain unexplainable shifts in Whitelamb's religious views. Thus, upon hearing (two months after it occurred) of the death of the rector of Wroote, Wesley exclaimed, "Oh, why did he not die forty years ago, while he knew in whom he had believed! Unsearchable are the counsels of God, and His ways are past finding out" (Letters, V, 151).

10Apparently, one of Wright's drinking companions was Richard Ellison, then husband of Susanna Wesley the younger.

11Quoted in John Julian (ed.), *Dictionary of Hymnology* (London, 1907; rpt. New York: Dover Press, 1957), II,1258-1259. There is no extant collection of Mehetabel Wesley's poems; thus, one must take them where he can find them.

12Quoted in Southey's *Life of Wesley*, p. 266. See also the elegy that she wrote "To the Memory of Mrs. Mary Whitelamb," in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 6 (1736), 740, as well as an epitaph for the same sister, printed in Stevenson's *Memorials of the Wesley Family*, p. 294.

13The journals, diaries, and letters of Samuel the younger, John, and Charles Wesley each contains mention of "Anne"; however, Susanna's sister, Anne Annesley, also lived in London between 1725 and 1750, and thus it is not easy to identify positively the brothers' vague references.

- 14 Quietism came from France in the latter part of the seventeenth century; its basic tenet became the condemnation of all human effort. To be perfect, one tried to attain complete passivity and annihilation of will, abandoning himself to God to the extent that he ceased to care even about his own salvation. The Quietist practiced a form of mental prayer, at which point the soul rested, in pure faith, in the presence of God. In that state, the believer found outward acts unnecessary and sin impossible. A fairly clear discussion of Quietism is found in the historical novel, *John Inglesant* (1881), by Joseph Henry Shorthouse (1834-1903), set during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649) and the Commonwealth period (1649-1660). The Deists of Westley Hall's day held, generally, to the view of God the creator, but with no further interest in the world that He created. Some followers did accept all of the truths of natural religion, including belief in a world to come - but they all rejected revelation. The reader may wish to consult John Toland (1670-1722), *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696).
- 15 See James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed. R. W. Chapman, rev. ed. J. D. Fleeman (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 1136-1137. In his journal, Boswell noted that Martha Wesley Hall was "very like" John Wesley, "and preaching at table in his manner" (Joseph W. Reed and Frederick A. Pottle [eds.], *Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck, 1778-1782* [New York: McGraw Hill, 1977], pp. 324-326). In addition to Boswell, Johnson, and Mrs. Hall, the diners were Anna Williams (1706-1783) Johnson's blind companion and house partner; Edmund Allen (1726-1784) printer and Johnson's landlord; Mrs. Elizabeth Desmoulins (n. 1716), another of Johnson's female confidants; Robert Levett (1705-1782), a close friend of Johnson, for whom the latter undertook several literary tasks; and Alexander Macbean (d. 1784), Johnson's one-time amanuensis. The fare included soup, hashed veal's head, bacon-ham, fowls, broccoli, roast lamb, asparagus, pudding, porter, and port.
- 16 See John Wesley's *Journal*, VIII, 343.
- 17 Wesley's *Letters*, II, 111-112. Judging from the tone and the context of the lengthy letter, Wesley chose this particular moment for a general lambasting of his brother-in-law, prompted by Westley Hall's inclination toward polygamy and his sampling of various religious denominations.

THOMAS MERTON'S CONCEPT OF SANCTIFICATION

by
Gerard Reed

While there has been a certain "rediscovery" ¹ of the doctrine of sanctification in contemporary Protestant thought (exemplified by Karl Barth's linking "an actual liberation from the committed sin" with "the forgiveness of sins"), ² it has attracted little serious theological reflection or practical teaching in mainline, Reformation-rooted churches.

I. The Catholic Position

The Roman Catholic Church, however, while acknowledging its adherents' imperfection, has both defined the nature of holiness and encouraged the faithful to pursue it. The Second Vatican Council, in its Constitution on the Church, devotes a chapter to "The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church." which states:

The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as "uniquely holy," loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her. He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God's glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."

.....

The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole

soul, with all their mind and all their strength and that they might love each other as Christ loves them. The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints," and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience," and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness.

.....

"God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God, and God in Him." But, God pours out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us; thus the first and most necessary gift is love, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor because of God. Indeed, in order that love, as good seed may grow and bring forth fruit in the soul, each one of the faithful must willingly hear the Word of God and accept His will, and must complete what God has begun by their own actions with the help of God's grace. These actions consist in the use of the sacraments and in a special way the Eucharist, frequent participation in the sacred action of the Liturgy, application of oneself to prayer, self-abnegation, lively fraternal service and the constant exercise of all the virtues. For charity, as the bond of perfection and the fullness of the law, rules to these same means. It is charity which guides us to our final end. It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ. 3

II. All Are Called

Such clear definition and call, given by the highest authority of the Church (an ecumenical council), indicated the value assigned to the doctrine and appropriation of Christian holiness. Echoing his church's call, the late Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk whose writings have influenced a wide variety of believers, urges all Christians to seek "sanctity and union with Christ, by keeping the commandments of God." ⁴ All should experience "a mystical transformation in which we will be perfectly conformed to the likeness of Christ. The Second Adam will live entirely in us. We will be 'the New Man' who is, in fact, one man-the One Christ, Head and Members"⁵ Salvation, properly understood and experienced, is a healing, sanctifying process whereby we find, in "the inner recesses of our conscience," that we are created in God's image and hunger for union with the Living God who made us. Salvation comes from "the God Who becomes One Spirit with our own soul! This alone is the reality for which we are made." ⁶

This process promises self-discovery and self-realization, but it involves cleansing and crucifying, for "To reach one's 'real self' one must, in fact, be delivered by grace, virtue and asceticism, from the illusory and

false 'self' whom we have created by our habits of selfishness and by our constant flights from reality." ⁷ One is, in fact, as a baptized Christian, . . . to renounce sin and to give himself completely, without compromise to Christ, in order that he may fulfill his vocation, save his soul, enter into the mystery of God, and there find himself perfectly "in the light of Christ."

As St. Paul reminds us (I Cor. 6:19), we are "not our own." We belong entirely to Christ. His Spirit has taken possession of us at baptism. We are the Temples of the Holy Spirit. Our thoughts, our actions, our desires, are by right more his than our own. But we have to struggle to ensure that God always receives from us what we owe him by right.⁸

In reality, "the only true joy on earth," he says "is to escape from the prison of our own self-hood ... and enter by love into union with the Life Who dwells and sings within the essence of every creature and in the core of our own souls "⁹

III. Needful Definitions

Merton defines holiness according to the Thomistic teaching of the perfection of being: holiness is the perfection of the being one possesses in potency at birth. Deprived of Adam's perfection by Adam's sin, "our purpose in life is to discover" life's meaning by becoming what God has designed us to be. ¹⁰ The quest involves "terrible wrestling" in the "battle of life and death" provoked by sin, but honest persons, longing for Truth, sensing within a longing to actually be an "image of God," longing for "perfect freedom and peace with God," will prevail."

Sin, consequently, must be understood as privation of good rather than depravity of nature. In Merton's view:

Human nature is not evil. All pleasure is not wrong. All spontaneous desires are not selfish. The doctrine of original sin does not mean that human nature has been completely corrupted and that man's freedom is always inclined to sin. Man is neither a devil nor an angel. He is not a pure spirit, but a being of flesh and spirit, subject to error and malice, but basically inclined to seek truth and goodness. He is, indeed a sinner: but his heart responds to love and grace. It also responds to the goodness and to the need of his fellowman.¹²

Thus:

Sin is the refusal of spiritual life. The rejection of the inner order and peace that come from our union with the divine will. In a word, sin is the refusal of God's will and of his love. It is not only a refusal to "do" this or that thing willed by God, or a determination to do what he forbids. It is more radically a refusal to be what we are, a rejection of our mysterious, contingent, spiritual reality hidden in the very mystery of God. Sin is our refusal to be what we were created to be-sons of God images of God. Ultimately sin, while seeming to be an assertion

of freedom, is a flight from the freedom and the responsibility of divine sonship.¹³

Once freed from sin's bondage, we become free to cooperate with the Spirit in perfecting our being. There is, one may say, such a thing as "Christian perfection," though Merton prefers to use the word "holiness because a 'holy' person is one who is sanctified by the presence and action of God in him." Should one focus on "perfection," a "subtly egoistic attitude" may develop. There is, in fact, a terrifying, insidious danger in seeking perfection, for it easily elevates self rather than God.¹⁴ Though often draped with orthodoxy and piety, perfectionistic "spirituality may be completely self-centered," practiced by high-minded men who have "forgotten the terrible paradox that the only way we become perfect is by leaving ourselves, and, in a certain sense, forgetting our own perfection, to follow Christ."¹⁵

Whenever, then, we speak of Christian perfection, we must understand it as limited, finite, flawed. Only in heaven will we find absolute perfection, where "our love will always actually and totally be directed to God." In this life, however, we can live free from mortal sin and all "impediments to true love."¹⁶ By refraining from deliberate sin, by loving God and man in authentic ways, we can be "perfect." Yet those who are "perfect" or holy are still plagued by imperfection, infirmities, and failures. They still do wrong. They still commit venial sins. But such imperfections do not nullify holiness so long as love indwells and motivates one's heart.¹⁷

Central to Merton's concept of sanctification abides this truth: we are holy by virtue of a holy God residing and presiding within us. Thus "perfection is not a moral embellishment which we acquire outside of Christ, in order to qualify for union with Him. Perfection is the full life of charity perfected by the gifts of the Holy Ghost."¹⁸ Consequently, "the true saint is not one who has become convinced that he himself is holy, but one who is overwhelmed by the realization that God, and God, alone, is holy."¹⁹ Holiness comes to us as a gift from a gracious God, for "if holiness is beyond our natural power to achieve (which it certainly is), then it follows that God Himself must give us the light, the strength, and the courage to fulfill the task He requires of us."²⁰

The Holy Spirit sanctifies us. He "is the One Who makes us sons of God, justifying our souls by His presence and His charity, granting us the power to live and act as sons of God."²¹ Thus "the Christian life is nothing else but Christ living in us, by His Holy Spirit."²² By virtue of an actual, ontological indwelling of God, persons who open their hearts to His spirit experience actual cleansing and sanctity. Saving and sanctifying grace are clearly imparted, not merely imputed, to the receptive, consecrated believer.

IV. Steps to Sanctity

From Merton's standpoint, five components intertwine to constitute holiness: 1) faith in God's grace- 2) an inner conversion which creates a "new man"; 3) a self-surrender which establishes a mystical bond with God; 4) an ever-deepening process of growth in grace; 5) a dependence upon the Church and her sacraments.

Since sanctity comes from God, we receive it in faith. God works in invisible ways deep within our being, often undetected by anyone, ourselves

included. Thus holiness results not from doing certain things but from "faith: the interior, anguished, almost desperately solitary act by which we affirm our total subjection to God by grasping His word and His revelation of His will in the inmost depths of our being, as well as in obedience to the authority constituted by Him.

To "be perfect" then is not so much a matter of seeking God with ardor and generosity, as of being found, loved, and possessed by God, in such a way that his action in us makes us completely generous and helps us to transcend our limitations and react against our weakness. We become saints not by violently overcoming our weakness, but by letting the Lord give us the strength and purity of his Spirit in exchange for our weakness and misery.²⁴

Consequently, "we must therefore begin by believing God is our Father: otherwise we cannot face the difficulties of the Christian way of perfection. Without faith, the 'narrow way' is utterly impossible."²⁵ Sanctifying faith is more than intellectual assent or volitional response, though it involves both. It is, in a sense, "an intellectual light by which we 'know' the Father in the Incarnate Word (Jn. 14:7-14). Yet faith is at the same time a mysterious and obscure knowledge."²⁶ It is an enlightened response to revealed truth, but it also emerges from an encounter with God which gives us courage to push ahead into the unknown, trusting His Spirit to guide us. Whatever its essence, Merton insists, "the Divine Spirit purifies the image of God in my soul by faith."²⁷

Such faith allows God to inwardly transform one into a "new man" in Christ. An actual impartation, "an inner transformation," takes place: "Jesus not only teaches us the Christian life, He creates it in our souls by the action of His Spirit."²⁸ Thereby we "recover the divine image in our souls."²⁹ We experience "a conversion, a *metanoia*, which reorientates our whole being after raising it to a new level and even seems to change our whole nature itself."³⁰ We become, quite simply, a "new creature."³¹ Inwardly regenerated by God's grace in conversion, the Spirit of God immediately begins His sanctifying work within us. If we cooperate with that process, we must pass through some critical points of self-surrender and deep-level crucifixion. "Our response to Christ," Merton says, "means taking up our cross, and this in turn means shouldering our responsibility to seek and to do, in all things, the will of the Father. This was, in fact, the whole essence of Christ's own earthly life, and of his death and resurrection."³² Such self-denial, "in the fullest sense," means "to renounce not only what we have but also what we are-to live not according to our desire and our own judgment but according to God's will for us."³³

Inwardly surrendered, we can will God's will. We learn that love for God means loving to will His will. "Sanctity does not consist merely in doing the will of God. It consists in willing the will of God. For sanctity is union with God, and not all those who carry out His will are united with His will."³⁴ So long as we will God's will, "our intentions are pure" and we seek to glorify and serve God. "Pure intention identifies our own happiness with the common good of all those who are loved by God. It seeks its joy in God's own will to do good to all men in order that He may be glorified in them."³⁵

Truly converted and totally committed to the will of God, we discover an intimate, mystical union with God which gives us joy and strengthens us for service, all of which come from the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. United with Christ through His Spirit, we discover "the perfect coalescence of the uncreated image of God with our created image not only in a perfect identification of minds and wills in knowledge and love but also above all knowledge and all love in perfect communion. 'I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me!'"³⁶

In those converted and consecrated wholly to God, a sanctifying process guides His children on a journey which costs them not less than every thing they have and are. To find our way home, back to our Father, we "must reverse Adam's journey," turning away from self-centered illusions in order to finally "find God."³⁷ The sanctifying process begins at conversion and permeates successively deeper layers of our being as we fully surrender them to God. The actual state of sanctity comes at the end, not the beginning of the purifying journey. As Merton describes it:

Our whole person, body and soul, is raised sacramentally to participation in the passion and resurrection of Christ in baptism, and this implies a preliminary interior justification by faith, which spiritualizes the soul in its intimate substance. The faculties of the soul nevertheless, as well as the body with its senses, remain subject to the "wisdom of the flesh." This demands an ascetic struggle, in which our spirit, united with the Spirit of God, resists the flesh, its desires and its illusions, in order to strengthen and elevate us more and more, and open our eyes to the full meaning of our life in Christ. Finally, however, there will come a mystical transformation in which we will be perfectly conformed to the likeness of Christ. The Second Adam will live entirely in us. We will be "the New Man" who is, in fact one Man-the One Christ, Head and Members.³⁸

Faith equips us for the journey, but faith alone does not entirely sanctify us. Faithfully willing God's will launches and sustains the sanctifying process, but entire sanctification comes only through devotion and discipline. Only as we give of ourselves, as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit within us, do we actually become holy.

From start to finish, the sanctification of believers takes place within the context of the Church, for "we receive the Holy Spirit through the Church and her sacraments."³⁹ While we must believe in order for the sacraments to inwardly transform us, the sacraments are essential for our sanctity inasmuch as God has ordained them. "We should not forget," Merton says, "that the sacraments are mystical signs of a free spiritual work of divine love in our souls."⁴⁰

V. Evidence of Holiness

Finally, the fruit of the holy life is love. "The most exalted manifestation of God's holiness is not to be found in the flaming theophanies of the Old Testament but in the charity of Christ towards men."⁴¹ Such love is not defined by inward feelings of pious peace, however, for "Christian charity is meaningless without concrete and exterior acts of love."⁴² Love is evident in

attitudes and actions. It stands revealed in personal humility, devotion to justice, and acts of compassion.

Holiness means humility. Without humility there is no holiness. To be humble is simple to be down-to-earth, to be human. Christ was perfectly human, so "sanctity is not a matter of being less human, but more human than other men."⁴³ To see ourselves as human, all too human, involves accurate perception and utter honesty, which is the essence of humility. Once we acknowledge our own poverty, our own emptiness apart from God, accepting "completely the reality of life as it is," Christ can effectively transform and sanctify us. As a consequence, such holy humility brings us "a greater capacity for concern, for suffering, for understanding, for sympathy, and also for humor, for joy, for appreciation of the good and beautiful things of life."⁴⁵

Holiness of heart flows inevitably into channels of concern for justice. "There is no charity without justice."⁴⁶ This means "social justice" must be pursued.⁴⁷ Merton himself, much to the surprise of those who imagine Trappist monks isolated and insulated from their world, took an active role, through his writings, in the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960's. As a Christian he felt compelled to oppose all racism and violence, and he wrote with prophetic insight and power concerning the social fabric of the United States.⁴⁸

Love inspires works of righteousness as well as social concern, for "Christian charity is meaningless without concrete and exterior acts of love. The Christian is not worthy of his name unless he gives from his possessions, his time, or at least his concern in order to help those less fortunate than himself."⁴⁹ Such love "is neither weak nor blind. It is essentially prudent, just, temperate, and strong. Unless all the other virtues blend together in charity, our love is not genuine."⁵⁰ But holy, virtuous, love makes a difference. It transforms us inwardly as persons. It transforms those individuals and social structures we encounter. It, and it alone, enables us to contribute to the Kingdom of God.

VI. Concluding Comments and Critique

As one outside the Roman Catholic Church, yet sharing by tradition and conviction Merton's concern for holiness, let me offer a few concluding comments on the ideas the paper tries to illustrate.

First, a study of Church history reveals an enduring concern for sanctity in the Catholic Church. Whether one examines the statements of the Early Church Fathers, the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council, or Thomas Merton, one finds the Catholic call for imparted grace which inwardly regenerates and sanctifies believers. A study of Merton reveals ancient Catholic doctrine expressed in contemporary thought-forms. It further helps those who sense the Biblical call to "follow after holiness" to also sense their commonality with Catholic Christians from Ignatius of Antioch to Mother Teresa.

Second, though one may agree with Merton as he calls believers to follow after holiness, he may differ with him concerning crucial definitions. Though Merton clearly takes the position that original sin consists of deprivation rather than depravity (a theological stance Catholic thinkers as different as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have shared) those in the

holiness churches, more rooted in the somber notions of Luther and Calvin may debate Merton's definition and thus reject his idea that sanctification simply perfects human nature. Consequently, for many holiness teachers, sanctification means the total death of man's fallen human nature and a radical creating of a "new creature" in Christ. However, Merton's notion of original sin may better suit the Anglican-Wesleyan tradition than does the Reformed emphasis of *simul justus et peccatur*. When Merton defines holiness as the purifying presence of the Holy Spirit, attributing sanctity to God alone, it seems he shares one of the central concepts of holiness churches.

Third, in the overall sense, Merton's notions of how one experiences salvation parallel those of evangelical holiness churches. Beginning with sanctifying faith, stressing conversion, consecration, crucifixion and growth, he indicates the same basic pattern outlined by holiness thinkers. He does not, however, emphasize "crisis" experiences (particularly where they are understood as the consummation of sanctification). And, of course, Merton's concern for, and reliance upon, the Church has no acknowledged counterpart in the evangelical tradition, where everyone may, as his own priest, work out his own salvation in a private "personal relationship" with God.

Finally, Merton's stress on humility and love as marks of sanctity should certainly be acceptable to most holiness advocates. Ignoring aberrations which have skewed the theories and quest for holiness in both Catholic and Evangelical traditions, sanctity has in fact shone through the lives of God's devoted servants.

Thus Merton can both teach and challenge holiness people. His work easily forms the basis for meaningful dialogue between Catholic and Evangelical scholars as well as for better understanding between separated Christians.

Notes

1William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), I, 96-113.

2Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1958), IV, 2, 505.

3Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Church* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1964), 43-47.

4Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 4.

5Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Mentor{}mega Books, 1961), 94.

6Ibid., 70.

7Ibid, 7.

8Life and Holiness, 3.

- 9Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Celebration* (New York: New Directions, 1949), 77.
- 10Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island* (New York: Image Books, 1967), 9.
- 11New Man, 9.
- 12Life and Holiness, 41.
- 13Ibid., 4.
- 14Ibid., 16.
- 15New Man, 27.
- 16Life and Holiness, 150.
- 17Ibid., 165.
- 18Ibid., 65.
- 19Ibid, 23.
- 20Ibid, 10-11.
- 21No Man Is An Island, 57.
- 22Thomas Merton, *The Living Bread* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959), 34.
- 23Life and Holiness, 68.
- 24Ibid, 31.
- 25Ibid, 32.
- 26Ibid, 102.
- 27New Man, 99.
- 28Ibid, 97.
- 29Ibid, 75.
- 30Ibid, 76.
- 31Ibid, 120.
- 32Life and Holiness, 36.
- 33Ibid, 146.
- 34No Man Is An Island, 56.
- 35Ibid, 54.
- 36New Man, 99.
- 37Ibid, 85.
- 38Ibid, 73.
- 39Life and Holiness, 65.
- 40No Man Is An Island, 58.
- 41Life and Holiness, 76.

42New Man, 60.

43Life and Holiness, 116.

44Ibid 21.

45Ibid, 116.

46Ibid.

47Ibid 117.

48cf. Thomas Merton, Faith and Violence (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968) and Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (New York: Image Books, 1968).

49Life and Holiness, 116.

50No Man Is An Island 21.

BOOK REVIEWS

Wesleyan Theological Perspectives. Volume I: An Inquiry into Soteriology from a Biblical Theological Perspective. ed. John E. Hartley and R. Larry Shelton. Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 1981. xiv and 263 pp. Reviewed by Charles N. Dillmann, Ph.D., Professor of Religion, Spring Arbor College, Spring Arbor, Michigan.

In recent years the quality of books by evangelicals has been improving. The three Grand Rapids publishers, and a few other houses, have been vigorous both in cultivating writers and in developing - and expanding - markets for books with a conservative Biblical and theological orientation. For many of us, these publishers have been a mainstay: we have only wished that they were broader in their appeal, consciously seeking to meet the needs of evangelicals who are Wesleyan and/or Arminian, rather than assuming that to be evangelical is also to be in some measure Calvinistic as well.

Many of us, therefore, have been aware of the need to publish a series of works which can be both informative in their own right and models of a style of Biblical interpretation characteristic of the best in Wesleyan scholarship. Current moves in this direction by the Zondervan Corporation seem promising. The present book, and two others in the Wesleyan Theological Perspectives series, are now in print. Within the past few months the series has been given a clean, matched, new look through redesigned dust jackets. In the bookstores, you should now look for the title *Salvation*, though I believe book catalogs and order listing will retain the more unwieldy full title *An Inquiry into Soteriology from a Biblical Theological Perspective* (edited by John E. Hartley and R. Larry Shelton).

Within this volume are found articles by nine different writers, dealing with the doctrine of salvation as developed in seven separate divisions of Scripture. Articles are included dealing with three different aspects of Paul's thought on salvation, rounding out the line.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The article which begins this work seeks to describe practical and theological aspects of salvation in the entire Old Testament. Such a task cannot be accomplished in only fifty pages, and the wonder is that it is accomplished as well as it is. In this article Hartley takes first a philological approach, adds theological dimensions, and then moves to Isaiah 40-55 as

representative of the best Old Testament thought on soteriology. This study is useful and well-designed; I wish, however, that it had given more consideration to the insights of the "salvation-history" approach to Old Testament study; that it developed the concept of soteriology in the Psalms; and that Covenant as a leading salvific concept had been explored. Still, this chapter is one of the best in the book from the standpoint of contemporary evangelical scholarship.

Hartley's exposition of Isaiah 41, with its Trial Speeches, Oracles of Salvation, and formal Proclamation of Salvation, is technical but clear, making it possible for the layperson or the undergraduate student to follow the skillful use of the tools of Old Testament exegetical study.

Hartley also includes a necessarily short treatment of the four Servant Songs in this section of Isaiah. "Each one details a specific role that the servant will fulfill: king, prophet, teacher, priest respectively" (p. 43).

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

In some twenty-five pages Joseph S. Wang explores the soteriology of the Synoptic Gospels. He considers primarily the aspects of the topic which relate to sin on the one hand, and the Kingdom of God and eternal life on the other. Wang's discussion does not treat any distinctions of emphasis, focus, approach, or doctrine between the three synoptics. Surprisingly, Matthew is referred to more frequently than Luke. The wealth of relevant source-material from Luke's fifteen or so unique parables has been largely left unnoticed.

As far as it goes, the chapter (the reader is really encouraged to see these as separate articles rather than chapters, for they are not given numbers) is basically accurate, with a minimum of redundancy. Its weakness is that it seeks to find only harmony - both within the synoptics themselves and between the synoptic Gospels and the remainder of scripture; it fails to look at these books to find their unique contribution to the teachings of the Bible. Aside from this, Wang's writing is reminiscent of a "proof-texting" approach, and thus not exactly apropos of the Biblical Theological perspective projected in the book's title.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

George Turner, in the section on soteriology in John's Gospel, sets a five-fold agenda right from the outset. It is a "problem"-centered article rather than one inductively developed from the materials in John: Turner nevertheless has such a feel for John's thought and pattern of expression that he is able to respond briefly but accurately to questions which have been raised by a selection of scholars.

Rudolf Bultmann has pointed out that John omits any reference to the terms repent and repentance, suggesting the reason to be "an eagerness to avoid a 'moralistic misunderstanding.'" To this Turner responds, "For John the basic sin is unbelief; therefore, belief involves the turning that repentance involves. The 'coming' also involves repentance, or turning, and thus the idea of repentance, if not the terminology, is all-pervasive in the Fourth Gospel" (p. 89).

I wish Turner's article were longer - it is only ten and one-half pages - both because there is much left unsaid. and because some of the topics

addressed deserve more thorough treatment. In addition, as I have indicated, it does not seek to examine the soteriology of the Gospel of John either comprehensively or systematically. Nonetheless, readers will find this chapter instructive.

THE PAULINE LETTERS

Three separate articles are dedicated to Pauline studies: "Justification by Faith in the Pauline Corpus," by Larry Shelton; "The Pauline Doctrine of Sanctification," by Bert H. Hall; and "Glorification in the Pauline Letters," by Robert Wall. By far the strongest of the studies is the one by Shelton. His concern is "to examine the foundations of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and its relationship to union with Christ and ethical righteousness with a view toward suggesting Biblical implications for the Wesleyan theology of salvation" (p. 99).

It seems to me an oversight, on the basis of Stephen Neill's argument (in *Jesus Through Many Eyes*) to continue to speak of justification in terms of "acquittal." It seems more in keeping with the definitive statement of Paul in Romans 3:25f, and incidentally more consistent with Wesleyan theology - including the very ideas Dr. Shelton seeks to develop - to discuss justification in terms of the concept of pardon.

Shelton's article is the product of thorough research, a fact which is both evident in the study itself and supported by the quantity of supporting documentation: there are fully six pages of reference - notes at the end of the article, running to one hundred thirteen entries.

Shelton has rightly emphasized the link between justification and righteousness - actualized righteousness - in the believer, accomplished through relationship with God and in Christ. He eschews the traditional "imputation-impartation" approach as being inadequate to express the reality of which Paul wrote, and shows that justification has not only to do with forgiveness, but also with "making one actually righteous in Christ" (p. 123).

Bert H. Hall's article, *The Pauline Doctrine of Sanctification* builds much too strongly upon the idea that the "aorist is the Greek tense for punctiliar action, action of a moment, a crisis" (p. 139). This statement while true, cannot be made to mean that every use of the aorist is punctiliar in sense. We must take issue with the reference to the aorist particularly here, since the form he points to is not in the indicative (it is indeed aorist), but the significance of that most utilitarian of Greek tenses in the infinitive or the imperative, or as here, in the optative, [hagiasai] has more to do with the way the action is viewed than with its being "the action of a moment, a crisis." The standard - and generally trustworthy - Greek grammar-attempt to make this clear with such descriptions as: "the aorist imperative [or infinitive, or subjunctive] refers to the action without saying anything about its duration or repetition...." It seems to me to be time for us either to come to grips with the masters of Greek grammar and correct them, or stop making assertions about the grammar - and in particular about the aorist tense - which are out of tune with the matters.

Hall proposes that sin, referred to 90 frequently by Paul in the key passage Romans 6:1 - 7:6 is not a principle but a state of life. Using this interpretation, the study then interprets the passage as a series of

metaphors or illustrations. These are (1) the old life, Romans 6:5-11; (2) sin as a tyrant, 6:13; (3) sin as a taskmaster, 6:16ff; and (4) deliverance from sin is also deliverance from the law, 7:1-6.

Dr. Hall develops his discussion along familiar lines, describing sanctification as process, as crisis, and as state. Though the argument is forced at times, at the conclusion of the study the following points are made. "From the passages we have cited it seems evident that no single definition of sanctification can be given that will be equally applicable to the variety and multiplicity of meanings that Paul gives to the word." "Paul never considers sanctification as a doctrine to be believed for its own sake." And one hopes it is with a bit of hyperbole that the author says in the final paragraph, "Paul views sanctification as a result of all that God does, can do, and will do for the Christian" (these three final references are all from p. 153).

The article loosely fits the purpose of the book, which is to present studies within the general topic "from a Biblical Theological perspective." However, it is not certain that the study is presented in such a way as to build bridges in the world of Biblical interest at large.

Robert W. Wall, in "Glorification in the Pauline Letters," focuses on the glory of Yahweh in the Old Testament as formative in Paul's thought concerning Christian life and the Church. "God's salvation and therefore his glory was revealed 'in Christ.' That is, the old 'glory of God' formula was recast into a new 'in Christ' formula . . . [which] is fundamental to the whole gospel of hope" (p. 158f.).

Paul attributes ultimate glory to God; Christ makes concrete God's transcendent glory; and the Church, through the Spirit also is to make the glory of God "known in the world and indeed [is to vindicated his reputation before the evil dominion" (P. 162).

Wall concludes with a rather labored argument intended to sharpen certain important distinctions (e.g. that between *sarx* and *soma*, or the Hebraic versus the Greek idea concerning the body). He succeeds in part in his clarification, but this portion of the discussion could have profited from a more thorough review prior to publication. It is possible that something fell out on the typesetter's floor, as for example footnote sixteen did. We note also the order of footnote references: 14, 17, 15, 16.

But in fact some of Wall's emphasis is choice, even though some of his actual wording is awkward and a bit of it is obscure. He is to be commended for raising our sights above certain key- and code-words to larger and overarching concepts of Pauline thought; and he is to be congratulated for tying these concepts together in creative and stimulating ways with major concerns in Wesleyan theological discussion.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Wayne McCown has provided a study of the soteriology of the Epistle to the Hebrews which would rank high in any collection of essays in N.T. Theology. McCown demonstrates a thorough mastery of the tools and techniques of exegetical research, and also of the style of argument in the epistle at hand.

McCown has divided his study into three parts. The main thrust of the work is contained in the first two sections: "the Person and Work of

Christ," dealing of course with the Christological foundation of the epistle, and " Provisions and Imperatives of Salvation, " which integrates the kerygmatic and the hortatory in the message of Hebrews, with emphasis on the practicable aspects of salvation theology. The final third of the article is entitled "Some Practical Questions and Problems." It is, as its heading would indicate, miscellaneous in nature.

The doctrine of salvation, particularly in a document as tightly-reasoned as Hebrews, necessarily begins with a clear development of Christological understanding. The epistle begins there, and includes one of the most formal expositions of the meaning of the life of Christ in the New Testament. McCown summarizes this teaching, organizing it under the heads (1) Pioneer of Salvation (total identification with humanity, incarnation, forerunner who has entered the inner shrine of God's presence on our behalf); (2) Source of Salvation (obedience, suffering, and death); and (3) High Priest (involving the reasoning in Hebrews 5:1-10 and that in chapter 7, as well as consideration of the significance of sacrifices in other passages, and finally moving to the topic of the new covenant).

In the central segment of the study McCown begins with the development in 10:19-25, with its three imperatives, namely, "draw near," "hold fast the confession," and "stir up one another to love and good works," based on the two great privileges mentioned, which are the confidence to enter the sanctuary, and the great high priest.

Also within this middle section of the study a concise outline of other exhortations is put before us and then expanded. The subjects treated are:

- (1) Holding fast
- (2) Growth unto maturity
- (3) Persevering faith
- (4) Subjection to the discipline of God
- (5) The exercise of communal oversight for those who are weakening.

The third major portion of McCown's work ("Some Practical Questions and Problems") contains in straightforward question-and-answer format four questions of theological interest which relate to subjects like the absence of the word justification, the meaning of the terms sanctification and perfection in Hebrews; the doctrine of rest, and the teaching of the epistle on the possibility of apostasy and the possibility or impossibility of a second repentance after falling away. All of these questions are relevant to laymen and ministers, and have their bearing on the understanding of the soteriology of the epistle.

In twenty-two pages Wayne McCown has summarized concisely and with a good deal of clarity the approach taken toward salvation in the Epistle to the Hebrews. His penultimate paragraph is a quotation from John Calvin on the possibility of apostasy, which shows us Calvin at his sin-fearing best ("Thus gradually we slide, until at length we rush headlong into ruin. We may observe this daily in many"). The same quotation shows us two things in McCown: his ecumenical approach to evangelical scholarship, and his wry wit in selecting precisely this writer to quote on the subject of falling away from Christ.

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

Gilbert W. Stafford has written his study titled "Salvation in the General Epistles" fully aware that these seven N.T. books address varied

concerns. Thus at the outset he explains, "Instead of considering the whole soteriological theme in each book, we will focus on those particular dimensions of each epistle's soteriological theme that uniquely contributes to the composite view of salvation found in James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude" (p. 95). He terms this a "composite study," stating, "it is a matter of seeing Biblical salvation from the unique perspective of these seven epistles. The Christian canon of Scripture came into existence not in order to give a multiplicity of salvific options, but as the multidimensional proclamation of the one canonical doctrine of salvation" (pp.195f).

It is hard to see how these seven epistles from several different writers can offer a perspective on salvation which has quite the unity Stafford suggests: but if they do, it is even more difficult to set it forth as a "unique perspective." Surely if we are reducing our statements to common ground - a not unworthy endeavor, surely - then we must be cautious in our claims to uniqueness.

From the Epistle of James, Stafford has selected six key themes. These are Obedient Faith; the Word (or Law) of Liberating Truth; the Wisdom of God; Persistence in Obedience; Hamartia, and Perfection of the Will. I found the last two enlightening in spite of much prior study of James.

The most significant part of the treatment of I Peter is entitled "Universal Ministry of the Holy Spirit" (pp.203ff.), dealing with the difficult passages in 3:18-19 and 4:5-6. Not all readers will agree completely with Stafford's theological construction here (in what he terms I Peter's "supraincarnational concept of salvation"), but his emphasis on the universal work of the Holy Spirit in the world of humanity, without regard to time, geography, or cultural connection, is a reasoned interpretation of the passages under consideration; and it is consistent with the idea of prevenient grace.

Stafford's treatment of I John focuses on the problem of sin: "some begin with the 1:7 - 2:2 passage about the inevitability of sin, and in so doing emphasize a life of continuing struggle, while others begin with the 3:4-10 passage about our sinlessness and emphasize the blessed victory that belongs to the believer."

On this problem, Stafford summarizes along the following lines. He distinguishes on the one hand between a sinful status and particular sins; and on the other between what he terms a "Christly" status and particularities of life which are consistent with that status. Then he says, "However, a person having a Christly status may nevertheless be afflicted with manifestations of unrighteousness in the particularities of life, just as those not of Christ can give forth externally righteous manifestations" (p. 215). One incidental note: Dr. Stafford seems to have a weakness for what I can only term "private cliches" - such as "Christly status," "Christly salvation," and Jesus Christ as "the victory person."

One further noteworthy portion in Stafford's study concerns his distinction between "sin unto death" and "sin not unto death" (hamartzapros thanaton and hamartia ou pros thanaton), found on pages 216-218.

Most readers will find in Gilbert Stafford's studies presented here stimulation for their own thought and reflection. He has thought carefully about the issues raised concerning soteriology in these epistles. My own observation is that his writing is more formed by the considerations and

agendas of systematic theology than by those of exegesis, and thus while many of his conclusions are theologically worthy and philosophically stimulating, they have about them the ring of good illustrative material as much as of exposition.

THE REVELATION

"Most readers probably do not approach the Book of Revelation with the expectation of finding a well-defined doctrine of salvation within its pages." Thus begins Fred D. Layman's 30-page treatment of "Salvation in the Book of Revelation."

This study is in essence a careful analytical approach to the statements regarding salvation and their accompanying implications within the Apocalypse. Layman's work is thorough, and shows the Revelation to be thoroughly saturated with soteriological teaching which is doctrinally "well within the mainstream of N.T. soteriology."

The first section establishes God as sovereign Lord who has worked in the world decisively in the coming of Christ, and in his sacrificial death. "The Christology of Revelation . . . does not center in Christ's divine status and attributes although this is the background.... Rather, it focuses on his redemptive work carried out within the historical arena. The most representative Christological title in the book - used twenty-eight times - is the "Lamb" (p. 238). For John, all of salvation history from the Cross through the final, future eschatological conquest, is the outworking of this one decisive act. Though it may be hidden to the world, Christ's lordship and activity are over the Church: its "messianic world ruler is present in the midst of the people" (p. 239).

In the present age, salvation is an experience which involves liberation from sin, and holy living as both priests and servants of God and of Christ. There is a focus both on the present and on the future. God's eschatological work has begun; but it has not yet come to fullness. In the present there is much implicit warning against faithlessness and cowardice.

On the other hand, in the promised age of "final salvation" and triumph, there will be reward and reunion for faithfulness. Final salvation is not awarded for righteousness based on works: "[h]uman obedience is not the cause of God's grace in salvation - the cause is based in His sovereign love - but human obedience is the condition of its effective reception" (p. 246).

The greater share of Layman's study, as in the Book of Revelation itself, is concerned with future, "final" salvation. However, there is in both documents a surprising quantity of direct and indirect information concerning the act, the effect, and the life of salvation in the present age. Layman's study will serve as a reminder that no part of Holy Scripture is either accidental or incidental.

CONCLUSION

The editors have done an admirable job of assembling a book which represents a spectrum of Wesleyan viewpoints and methods without apology, and causes the reader to come to grips with the Scriptures as the appropriate source for the theological task. The editors have not screened out all typographical errors, nor have they sought uniformity of either

expression or method. The quality, as in all collections of this nature, is uneven: but the strengths far outweigh weaknesses. This is a book which should have wide distribution, both within and outside of the Wesleyan theological family.

It is to be hoped that the publisher, Warner Press, will publicize this book and others in the series, and will give close attention to distribution. When one bookstore phoned to place an order for nearly two dozen copies the publishing house seemed to have lost track of the fact that they had even published it. The qualities of the volume deserve promotion.

A Theology of Personal Ministry: Spiritual Giftedness in the Local Church, by Lawrence O. Richards and Gib Martin. Zondervan, 1981. 332 pp. Reviewed by Howard A. Snyder, Ph.D., Irving Park Free Methodist Church, Chicago, Illinois.

Larry Richards is always clear and usually helpful when he writes on practical church life. And as one who has thought deeply and Biblically about the nature and pattern of the church, he frequently comes up with insights which challenge traditional thinking. This latest book, written in cooperation with Gib Martin of Trinity Church in Seattle (where many of Richards' ideas have been put into practice) is one of Richards' best and most useful.

Thirteen years ago Richards' A New Face for the Church outlined an alternate (more Biblical!) vision of church life which was very helpful to many of us who at the time were seeking to rethink the church. His was one of the best and most balanced of the spate of "church renewal" books to appear in the late Sixties and early Seventies, and certainly the best by an Evangelical. Since then he has continued to elaborate his vision of the church and church renewal, most notably in A Theology of Christian Education, A Theology of Church Leadership, and now A Theology of Personal Ministry.

Many of Richards' ideas are quite radical when compared with contemporary church practice, especially in the area of leadership. A good example which goes to the heart of much that Richards and Martin say in the book is the following: "In this text we have purposely and consciously rejected the clergy/laity distinctions that have grown up in the church over the centuries. We have suggested that the whole *laos* is called to minister, that each believer is personally responsible to the Lord for developing his or her ministry. This teaching clearly challenges the understanding of authority and leadership in the congregation - at least as they have been traditionally perceived." From this base, Richards argues (among other things) for basing ministries in the church on the giftedness of all the believers, and for servant leadership whose function is to coordinate, guide, disciple, and help the local Body discern, by consensus, where Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, is leading.

The book is designed as a textbook. It is divided into two major parts, "Theological Core: The Identity of the Believer" and "Practical Implication." Both sections, however, include both theological reflection and practical suggestions. In the first part, Richards develops concepts of the

church as gifted, empowered, servant People of God and God's Kingdom. This part is extremely well done and, for the most part, is consistent with a Wesleyan theology or ecclesiology. It is especially encouraging to see a helpful and practical development of the theme of the Kingdom of God. Richards rightly insists that "we must treat the kingdom as a present reality," not just as future, and that "the works that the believer performs are in actuality the works of Jesus Himself in us, just as the Father expressed Himself in Jesus."

The greatest strength of the book, however, is in providing a theoretical base and practical teachings for developing "personal ministries" in the church - in other words, for actually "equipping God's people for ministry" (Eph. 4:12). "Equipping for personal ministry involves the creation of a context within which growth into personal ministries can take place in a natural and healthy way," Richards argues. He gives workable principles on how, for example, to guide believers into initiating and taking ownership of local outreach ministries.

The usefulness of the book is enhanced by a "probe" section at the end of each chapter giving case histories, discussion questions, and other resources.

I highly recommend this book as a training text, either for classroom use or within a local church which is seeking to operate on Biblical principles. I have only two reservations: The theology of the Kingdom is a bit narrow and seems at one point to identify the Kingdom too closely with the church. Relatedly, the over-all vision of the church is perhaps too comfortably middle-class, even though Richards does put some stress on ministry to the poor. I would have liked to see the concept of church and Kingdom developed a bit more radically and counterculturally, especially since most of what the book argues for is consistent with a Biblically more radical vision for the church.

Even with these reservations, I would hope to see this book used broadly in Wesleyan circles.