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Editor  
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# **PRACTICAL DIVINITY—JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINAL AGENDA FOR METHODISM**

by  
Frank Baker

In some circles, even theological circles, there has long been skepticism as to whether John Wesley's name should be included among the theologians: an evangelist, yes; a church founder and leader, yes; but surely not a theological thinker! More than twenty years ago Albert Outler had to stretch his persuasive eloquence to the limits to convince the Editorial Board of A Library of Protestant Thought that Wesley merited a volume devoted to his theological writings - whereupon Outler's John Wesley became the best-seller in that series. Moreover, Outler's description of his writings as "folk theology" 1 became a commonplace in Methodist scholarship, more familiar, indeed, than Wesley's own definition of his major publications, which we use in our title - practical divinity.

John Wesley's largest work was in no fewer than fifty volumes, entitled: A Christian Library: consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity (1749-55). Although the closing term was important to Wesley, and chosen very deliberately, it is no longer widely used, though Tom Langford again chose it - again deliberately - for his own anthology: Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition. Yes, "divinity" was indeed a valid synonym for "theology," and the earliest English use of both words six hundred years ago implied alike the academic study of the nature and attributes of God, and of His relations with man and the universe. Wesley himself does not seem to have used the term theology at all, but referred instead to the various types of divinity, such as "positive divinity" and "comparative divinity," 2 somewhat scathingly to "mystic divinity," 3 and affectionately to "plain old Bible divinity." 4 Wesley would also quote an unknown early Father of the Church: "God made practical divinity necessary, the devil controversial." 5

Controversial divinity is self-explanatory. Wesley believed himself to have been dragged into this willy-nilly by the devil. But what exactly was his preferred practical divinity? He had approached middle age and had become the founder of a new religious community before he fully

realized that this was the true goal of his creative thinking. During this process he had been involved to varying degrees in other types of theology. Parsonage parents passed on to him dogmatic theology, the authoritative formulation by the Church Fathers of traditional teaching about God. Strongly allied to this was biblical theology, and the Authorized Version of the Bible formed the primer by which he learned to read and write at his mother's knees. She instilled into him a strong emphasis upon its authority, as containing "all things necessary to salvation." His more formal education away from home at the London Charterhouse and Oxford University speedily reinforced this with the touchstone of reason, dialectical theology, the logical working over of the arguments of others. In this he delighted, and showed great skill.

In preparing for Holy Orders, first as a necessary step towards academic promotion, but later as a genuine religious vocation, John Wesley became much more devout and spiritually minded. He was ordained deacon on September 19, 1725, was elected a fellow of Lincoln College the following March, and in February 1727 became a Master of Arts. He served as lecturer in Greek and in logic, and from 1730 as lecturer in philosophy. 6 Academically he had certainly arrived. Both in theology and in Christian experience, however, he knew that he was still lacking. He had become furiously engaged in the pursuit of outward holiness as a human venture, especially after his ordination as priest in 1728, but still knew little of its inward power.

On March 12, 1726, his new spiritual commitment prompted him to begin experimenting with what became a lifelong dedication to early rising. His correspondence with his mother shows that he was reading very widely, but apparently still flirting with purely intellectual pursuits, including speculative theology. She had discussed predestination with him on Aug. 18, 1725, and on Nov. 10 "the nature, properties, and expressions of zeal"; on April 22, 1727, she applauded his drawing up of a scheme of studies, but on May 14 that year she felt it necessary to warn him against taking philosophical essays into the pulpit: "However curious you may be in searching into the natures or distinguishing the properties of the passions or virtues, for your own private satisfaction, be very cautious of giving definitions in public assemblies, for it does not answer the true end of preaching, which is to mend men's lives, not to fill their heads with unprofitable speculations." 7

Perhaps she was partially misjudging him here, though the advice itself was eminently sound. There were varying facets to his pastoral commitment, one of which was his concern, even passion to understand and serve the complete personality, body, mind, and soul, of those who came under his oversight. This formed an important element in the development of his theology. The study of anatomy and medicine had been a hobby throughout his Oxford years, and when he prepared to go as a missionary to Georgia he studied them in earnest, believing that he "might be of some service to those who had no regular physician among them." 8 During that same Oxford period he had dabbled also in what we would call psychology - though that term did not come into general use until long after his death. From the time of his ordination this was transformed from a purely intellectual to a pastoral study, and he took very seriously "the cure of souls." From every personal experience, from every pastoral interview, he sought to learn something more about human nature and the ways of God with man. Although Wesley never

developed a handbook of spiritual first aid to match his *Primitive Physick*, his religious insights are scattered profusely throughout his hundreds of publications and thousands of personal letters. He never became a systematic theologian in the widest sense of that term, but he did become a specialist in the doctrines of sin and salvation, and these were certainly important elements in what he called practical divinity.

Theology is always colored by human experience, and usually derived from meditation and close thought upon it. Wesley's particular brand of theology was avowedly and inextricably interwoven with human experience. Practical divinity was that branch of theology which dealt especially with the Creator's interactions with the creatures made in His image.

Wesley's pastoral activities in Epworth and Wroot (1727-29), Oxford (1729-35), and Georgia (1735-37) brought a few new ideas, such as that of prevenient grace, but many new experiences, of which the most influential was his introduction to the Moravians. Their spiritual witness was far more crucial to his theology as well as to his religious experience than was their ecclesiastical history. At last he began to wonder whether orthodox belief and an array of ancient practices was really going to get him anywhere with God - actual experience demonstrated that the Moravians had something which he lacked, something that he longed for. Clearly the secret of true Christianity was not faith in credal statements nor arduous religious exercises, but faith in a saving Christ.

A few months later his spiritual fumbings in Georgia culminated in a personal experience of a living Savior, when in all humility he confessed that for over ten years he had been engaged in a "struggle between nature and grace," and that he was "still 'under the law,' not 'under grace.'" Eventually, on May 24, 1738, he rejoiced: "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; 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." 9 From late childhood to a middle-aged Anglican ministry he had faithfully trodden the way of holiness, defined as obedience to God's will in a context of orthodox belief and conventional piety. Now the burden of his thought and preaching became faith. There were few changes in his devotional practices, but a remarkable change in theological emphases. The attempt to understand the hazards and the way-stations traversed by a pilgrim along the path of salvation, from his loyal obedience to God's law to his humble acceptance of God's grace in the gift of His Son as Savior - this we might term pastoral theology or soteriology; this was, in fact, the essence of what Wesley called practical divinity.

From 1738 onwards Wesley was constantly expounding different aspects of the life of faith. His first University Sermon after his return from Georgia was preached on June 11, 1738, less than three weeks after his epochal experience in Aldersgate Street. He utilized the occasion for a controversial manifesto of his new evangelical preaching. In *Salvation by Faith* - which was speedily published, and went through at least thirty-five editions during his lifetime - he explained that faith was "not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart, . . . a recumbency upon [Christ] as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us; . . . as our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,' or, in one word, our salvation." 10 He

even claimed that through this faith they could be saved "from the power of sin as well as from the guilt of it." 11 In addition he claimed that salvation was "necessarily productive of all good works and all holiness." 12 In his *Journal* and elsewhere he constantly attempted to

forestall the criticism "You preach faith without good works,"<sup>13</sup> by claiming that the two were inseparable, "faith, holiness, and good works [being] the root, the tree, and the fruit, which God had joined and man ought not to put asunder." <sup>14</sup>

He still continued a loyal member and minister of the Church of England, of course. This loyalty was greatly reinforced when he began to inquire carefully "what the doctrine of the Church of England is concerning the much controverted point of justification by faith." <sup>15</sup> He speedily discovered it, set forth in the Edwardian Homilies of 1547, especially the first five, almost certainly written by Cranmer. These Wesley edited for publication only a few weeks after his sermon on salvation, as *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works*, extracted from the Homilies of the Church of England.

The more careful study of the doctrinal formularies of the Church of England, drawn from the ancient Creeds and enshrined in the Homilies, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, contributed much to his new theological orientation, including his favorite definition of faith: "The right and true Christian faith is not only to believe that Holy Scripture and the articles of our faith are true, but also to have . . . a sure trust and confidence in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God." <sup>16</sup>

"A sure trust and confidence." That is what for years he had been seeking. And that was probably the major element in his experience on May 24, 1738: "An assurance was given me...." The Moravians in Georgia had taught him to expect this. Peter Böhler convinced him that this inner certainty was indeed scriptural, that it was still possible, and that it could occur in an instant. He could only pray, "Lord, help thou my unbelief!" <sup>17</sup> When that prayer was answered, he knew that he would face many critics. These included the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of London, who maintained that for anyone to claim that he knew that he was saved was spiritual pride and rank enthusiasm. Wesley defended himself in various works, and analyzed "The Witness of the Spirit" - his other principal title for Christian Assurance - in two discourses on Romans 8:16, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." <sup>18</sup>

Here was a new landmark along the way of salvation. And probably it was the infusing of new assurance into his proclamation of "this new doctrine, 'Salvation by Faith,' " which brought new success to Wesley's ministry. In *The Principles of A Methodist Farther Explain'd* (1746), he analyzed the response to his preaching during different periods: 1725-29, "no fruit"; 1729-34, "laying a deeper foundation of repentance, I saw a little fruit"; 1734-38, "more fruit." He continued: "From 1738 to this time, speaking continually of Jesus Christ, laying him only for the foundation of the whole building, making him all in all, the first and the last; preaching wholly on this plan, 'The kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel,' the 'Word of God run' as fire among the stubble; it 'was glorified' more and more; multitudes crying out, 'What must we do to be saved?' and afterwards witnessing, 'By grace we are saved through faith.'" <sup>19</sup>

These multitudes, of course, needed a more searching and disciplined

pastoral care than most of the parochial clergy were prepared to offer. Thus were born the Methodist societies, for Wesley was never content to gather converts without training them. And then, in default of sufficient sympathetic clergy, he felt compelled of God to train laymen also to assist in his arduous pastoral responsibilities. The Methodist organization rapidly became national, and in 1744 Wesley invited his chief helpers, clergy and laity, to join him in a conference which might discuss and agree upon a plan of operation - what they should teach, and how they should organize their societies. He prepared for this gathering very carefully, sending out invitations, and drawing up his agenda for Methodism.

The doctrinal agenda is brief, but both illuminating and challenging:

- "1. Are we justified by faith alone? The only condition?
- "2. What is implied in being justified?
- "3. What is justifying faith? Assurance? Or - ?
- "4. What must go before? Repentance? Works meet for repentance?
- "5. What must follow? Peace, joy, love, power? In what degree?
- "6. Is faith, seeing God? A divine elenchus [proof, conviction]?
- "7. Does anyone believe who has not the witness in himself? Or any longer than he sees, loves, obeys God?
- "Must a man come into darkness or the wilderness after he is justified?
- "win he, unless by unfaithfulness?
- "Need a believer ever doubt or fear?
- "How is faith 'made perfect' by works?
- "Do we think or speak high[ly] enough of justification?
- "Are works necessary to the continuance of faith? . . .
- "Is the 'first love' the most perfect?
- "Is every believer a scriptur[al] 'new creature'?
- "What is sanctification?
- "Is not every believer 'born of God'?
- "Can a believer fall totally and finally? How?
- "Is inbred sin taken away in this life?
- "How can we know one that is thus saved?
- "Is the second Preface true?" [about which we shall say more later]20

This, then, was the doctrinal agenda of Methodism, the study of sin, repentance, faith, works, assurance, sanctification, and their links with Christian living. This was practical divinity.

In 1746 John Wesley began an avowed effort to publish a series of discourses incorporating his main theological emphases, a mixed collection of preached sermons and brief treatises, all comprised under the heading *Sermons on Several Occasions*. Originally he thought that he could do this in three volumes, but they stretched to four, published in 1746, 1748, 1750, and 1760. These contained the "standard sermons" referred to in the deeds of his "preaching-houses," as exemplifying "what those doctrines are which I embrace and teach as the essentials of true religion." 21 He set this out in more detail thus: "I have . . . set down in the following sermons what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven.... I have endeavored to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion, so as to omit nothing which is a real part thereof, and to add nothing thereto which is not." 22 Salvation by Faith was No. 1, *The Witness of the Spirit* Nos. 10-11, *Christian Perfection* No. 40. The headings of other typical sermons show the essence of this

major publication on practical divinity: "Scriptural Christianity," "The Firstfruits of the Spirit," "On Sin in Believers," "The Means of Grace," "The Marks of the New Birth," "The Lord our Righteousness," "The Law established through Faith," "A Caution against Bigotry," "Catholic Spirit," and a series of thirteen discourses upon the Sermon on the Mount.

Thus in his spiritual maturity the driving force behind Wesley's approach to theology was assuredly not that of academic excitement and stimulus in the acquisition or sorting out of new knowledge about the fundamental human urge towards religion, nor the prestige that this might generate. It was rather the deep concern for spiritual values, for understanding God's purposes for His creatures, with His gift of free will to enable the growth of personality, accompanied of necessity by the danger that such a creature might seek his own will rather than that of his Creator-the selfishness which is sin. He sought to understand also the intricacies of the manner in which God had laid out a pathway to salvation, both from the penalties exacted by sin and from its power over human beings. He came to see that all this began with God, with His unmerited love for His creatures, His grace, beginning with the prevenient grace for human beings in general, and culminating in sanctifying grace available to those who had responded to God's love by their own absolute love for Him. In the utter self-forgetting of holiness lay true human peace and happiness, as Wesley constantly reminded himself and others in the words of Augustine: "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." 23

From 1738 onwards it had also become clear to Wesley that God's initiative was needed from the beginning to the end of a Christian's experience, and that this experience should continually be enriched, in spite of occasions of spiritual loss - that there should be not one religious peak, but many, with almost inevitable plateau and perhaps valleys, but a general upward gradient. He had also become increasingly certain that the goal of Christian perfection was possible in this life rather than at the moment of death. This certainty was developed more strongly under the influence of bitter criticism, fuller pastoral research, and deeper theological study. The prefaces of all three volumes of Hymns and Sacred Poems published by John and his brother Charles, in 1739, 1740, and 1742, dealt in varying ways with this conviction. The first emphasized the difference between holiness as the fruit of faith and the mystic pursuit of the hermit: " 'Holy solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection." 24

The second preface (1740) was a majestic scriptural description of what was implied by Christian perfection, which he later described as "the strongest account" that he and his brother ever wrote, though he felt that in some details it needed toning down, as perhaps in section 7: 'So that God is to them all in all, and they are as nothing in his sight. They are freed from self-will; as desiring nothing, no, not for one moment, . . . but the holy and perfect will of God.... They are freed from evil thoughts, so that they cannot enter into them.... They are freed from wanderings in prayer.... They are freed from all darkness, having no fear, no doubt, either as to their state in general, or as to any particular action.... At all times their soul is even

and calm." 25 It was this kind of declaration which he urged his colleagues to discuss at the opening Conference in 1744.

The preface to the 1742 volume began with a cautionary apologia: "We willingly allow, and continually declare, there is no such perfection, in this life, as implies either a dispensation from doing good and attending all the ordinances of God; or a freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, and a thousand infirmities necessarily connected with flesh and blood." Nevertheless he closed by claiming that the scriptural "perfect man" could indeed do the will of God "on earth, as it is done in heaven." 26 With all its modifications through the years, in 1789 he maintained: "This doctrine is the Grand Depositum which God has lodged with the People called Methodists, and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us Up. 27

Undoubtedly John Wesley's mature theology as a whole was an interweaving of countless disparate elements. He may have been a man of one Book, but into his practical divinity were woven a hundred strands from a thousand books of all preceding centuries and many nations and denominations. He drew heavily on the Fathers of the faith, on the mystics of the Roman Church, on the Reformers, on the Puritans, on the Anglican theologians of the previous century - on any writers' works in whom he could find congenial or challenging thought. He never claimed for himself an experience of Christian perfection, but his was indeed a life lived on the upward gradient, heaven begun on earth, practicing the presence of God, summarized in love from and to God, to and from man, knowing, following, and joyfully embracing the will of God. His detailed theological research was devoted to this field. He was not interested in the metaphysics of the Royal Society, seeking to discover how many angels might stand on the point of a needle, but on learning the secret of the cures wrought by the Great Physician. He sought to understand the fundamental problems of the human condition, and the finer points of Christian living - the care of souls - armed with all the theological sophistication of a specialist in the ways of God with men, and man's way to God—practical divinity.

He was content not to understand the mysteries of speculative theology, for instance, how the death of God's Son worked the miracle of a new spiritual life for mankind; he simply accepted the fact, and urged others to do the same. It is instructive to follow his search for a satisfactory theory of the Atonement. On Dec. 31, 1764, he confessed: "I do not yet find anything on the Atonement fit for a deist." 28 On Feb. 7, 1778, he wrote: "Nothing in the Christian system is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement. It is properly the distinguishing point between Deism and Christianity.... But it is true I can no more comprehend it than [Lord Huntingdon, a free-thinker].... Our reason is here quickly bewildered.... But the question is (the only question with me; I regard nothing else), What saith the Scripture? It says, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself'; it says, 'We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the atonement for our sins.'" 29 He remained completely without rancor for others who held different views upon such mysteries, however: "As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think." 30

Both in his approach to the Bible and to the formularies of the Church he held some reservations. Anything implying a lack of love in God he



abhorred and could not accept. He had learned to interpret the Bible by the canon of "the analogy of faith" - his translation of Rom. 12:16 - namely the general message of Scripture: "according to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein, touching original sin, justification by faith, and present inward salvation." 31 Clearly he believed that "God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists," "to spread scriptural holiness over the land," was thus a fulfillment of the central purpose of the Bible. 32 He applied this same canon also (negatively) to any cruelties in the Old Testament which seemed to be contrary to God's revealed purposes. Similarly to him a God of love must offer the opportunity for universal salvation. It can hardly be doubted that his own concern for human suffering colored his picture of God, and thus led to his occasional rejection of teachings in the Bible and in the Church formularies which he believed were less than inspired.

At his early Conferences, beginning in 1744, he had defined, and discussed with his preachers, the doctrinal foundations of their preaching, and expressly challenged eight of the Thirty-nine Articles, "Of the three Creeds," "Of works before justification," "Of Christ alone without sin," "Of sin after baptism," "Of predestination and election," "Of the authority of General Councils," "Of ministering in the congregation," and "Of baptism." 33 In 1755 he had publicly rejected "the damnatory clauses" of the Athanasian Creed, the passages in the Ordinal which implied an essential difference between bishops and presbyters, and their supposed power actually to remit sins. 34

In 1784 he prepared The Sunday Service of the Methodists, and felt no qualms in announcing in the preface that he had omitted "many Psalms . . . as being highly improper for the mouths of a Christian congregation." From this volume he omitted also the eight Articles challenged in 1744, except that on baptism, which was abridged, and Article 16, whose title was changed from "Of sin after baptism" to "Of sin after justification." In 1784 he also went on to omit a further nine. 35 The pruned and revised Articles which Wesley bequeathed to American Methodism tell us a number of things about his theology as a whole. He omitted nothing from the Apostles Creed except Christ's conjectural descent into Hell (Art.3), a point which still distinguishes Methodist usage from that of other Churches. He omitted also beliefs or practices peculiar to the Roman Catholic Church, and even to the Church of England, such as the reference to the Homilies. His revisions to the Articles seemed to imply "a doctrinally liberal iconoclast [with] a somewhat low view of church, ministry, and sacraments." 36

Far more important is it, however, to consider, not these negative aspects of Wesley's theology, but those special emphases on the lifelong way of salvation, practical divinity, Wesley's vision of the beating heart of religion. This is the true essence of his teaching, which he repeated time and time again, in similar words - and even occasionally repeating the same words. I close with some extracts from The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explain'd (1746), in which the first part is new, the remainder repeated with variations from An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion:

"I have again and again . . . declared what our constant doctrines are, whereby we are 'distinguished' - only from heathens, or nominal Christians, not from any that worship God in spirit and in truth. Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of

holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third is religion itself....

"Religion we conceive to be no other than love: the love of God and of all mankind; the loving God with all our heart and soul and strength, as having first loved us, as the fountain of all the good we have received, and of all we ever hope to enjoy; and the loving every soul which God hath made, every man on earth, as our own soul.

"This love we believe to be the medicine of life, the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries and vices of men. Wherever this is, there are virtue and happiness, going hand in hand. There is humbleness of mind, gentleness, long-suffering, the whole image of God, and at the same time a peace that passeth all understanding, and joy unspeakable, full of glory....

"This religion we long to see established in the world, a religion of love, and joy, and peace; having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing forth, not only in all innocence - for love worketh no ill to his neighbor - but likewise in every kind of beneficence, spreading virtue and happiness all round it." 37

## Notes

1P.vii.

2Sermon 92, "On Zeal," II.5.

3Journal Apr. 10, 1747.

4Letters, June 18, 1757.

5Journal, Nov. 19, 1751; Letters, July 31, 1773.

6Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, 14:154.

7Letters, 25:217.

8A Plain Account of the People called Methodists, 1749, XII.2.

9Journal, May 24, 1738, sects. 10, 14.

10Sermons, ed A. C. Outler, Vol. I, pp. 120-21.

11Ibid., p. 123.

12Ibid., p. 125.

13Journal, Nov. 1, 1739.

14Ibid., Aug. 30, 1739.

15Ibid., Nov. 12, 1738.

16Homilies, On Salvation, Pt. 3.

17Journal, Apr. 22-23, 1738.

- 18Sermons, 1:267-98.
- 19The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explain 'd (174ff), VI .4, 6. Cf. "A Short History of the People Called Methodists" (1781), sects. 8, 11.
- 20Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, 13:201-02.
- 21Preface, sect. 1.
- 22Ibid., sect. 6.
- 23Confessions, I.1; cf Journal, July 12, 1739, etc.
- 24Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739), Pref. 5.
- 25HSP (1740), Pref. 1-11, pp. iii-xi of orig.; cf. A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (1766), sect. 13.
- 26HSP (1742), Pref. 1, 5.
- 27Letter to R. C. Brackenbury, Sept. 15, 1789 - not 1790, as in Telford's Wesley's Letters (the original is in the Methodist Archives at Manchester).
- 28Letter to his brother Charles (Telford, IV.281).
- 29Letter to Miss Bishop (Telford, VI.297-98).
- 30The Character of a Methodist (1742), sect. 1.
- 31Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament (1755) on Rom.12:16. His mother had used this phrase in a letter to him on Aug. 18, 1725.
- 32"Large" Minutes (1763), p. 2.
- 33Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (1970), pp. 108, 366.
- 34Ibid., p. 331.
- 35Nos. 3, 18, 20, 26, 29, 33, 35, 36, and 37.
- 36Baker, op.cit., pp. 107-08, 249-51.
- 37Principles (1746), VI.4, 6, quoting Earnest Appeal, sects. 2-4.

# **THE PRECIOUS INSTRUMENT: A Study of the Concept of Law in Judaism and Evangelicalism**

by  
Paul W. Livermore

In his discussion of Genesis 1 Philo of Alexandria, that prolific spokesman of hellenistic Judaism, asks why Moses began with the creation account rather than with the commandments. He explains:

His exordium, as I have said, is one that excites our admiration in the highest degree. It consists of an account of the creation of the world, implying that the world is in harmony with the Law, and the Law with the world, and that the man who observes the Law is constituted thereby a loyal citizen of the world (Op. 3).

Though we might dispute his claim, we cannot help but admire Philo's ingenuity. And, lest one think that the correlation of "nature" with "Law" appeared only in hellenistic Judaism due to the influence of Stoicism, there is a mishnaic statement, attributed to Akiba (c. A.D. 50-135), making much the same point.

Beloved are Israel, for to them was given the precious instrument, still greater was the love, in that it was made known to them that to them was given the precious instrument by which the world was created, as it is written, "For I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not my law" (mAb. 3:15).

Already we can see that the idea of the law was far larger for Jews than is often imagined. What, then, did they think of when they referred to the law and how did they believe that it functioned in their religious lives and community?

The major task of this paper is to study the use of the law in Judaism at the time of Jesus and the centuries immediately surrounding Him. At the very end of our study we will make some comparisons concerning the

Jewish view of the law and the way in which contemporary Evangelicals view it.

We might think that we ought to undertake such a study because the Jewish position on this subject stood, and stands, in contrast-if not sharp opposition-to the Christian one. However, I doubt that this is the case in any significant degree. Why?

To begin with, it is doubtful whether "legalism," as generally understood, is a sufficiently distinct term so that, when we use it, we have clarified matters at all. The presence of commandments, standards, and other legal forms cannot, by themselves, merit the opprobrious term legalism. No social entity can survive without rules that are standardized and accepted by the group. The next step is usually to dodge the force of this by claiming that legalism arises not because of the presence of legal obligations alone but because of a certain attitude and ethos. This may be true, but what are the criteria by which we can judge when this appears? Can we really condemn Judaism of legalism because its ethos is more judgmental and oppressive than Christianity?

Our task is especially difficult when dealing with a religion such as Judaism which is not our own and possesses a large and at times unwieldy literature. The formidable nature of Jewish literature, in fact, contributes greatly to the temptation Christians have failed to resist time and again, to ignore the primary sources and interpret the religion largely on the basis of the debates going on in the New Testament or on unsympathetic, secondary sources.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising that we do this. What ought to cause us concern is how readily we accept the results of such studies as anything beyond special pleading. Of course, we cannot avoid the use of secondary sources to guide us, but the Jews have a right to speak for themselves, and we owe them a hearing. When they claim that Christians misrepresent what they understand it to mean "to live under the yoke of the law," they are largely correct.<sup>2</sup> I shall follow, then, two methodological principles: (1) Primary sources and contemporary Jews (or Gentiles sympathetic with the Jewish viewpoint) give us better clues than Christians generally do about the nature of Judaism. (2) We will consider the context as well as the individual questions of the nature of the law and Judaism.

### **A Religion of the Book**

Judaism in the post-exilic era had become a religion of the Book. The religious life of the average Jew revolved around a corpus of literature. Of course, the history of the making of this Book is fascinating and deserving of attention in its own right; but long before the time of Jesus the decision of what belonged in the first division, the Torah, was accepted by all Jews. There were debates concerning the authority of the Prophets, but for large portions of the people, they also had great authority. And for some of the same people what belonged in the third division, the Writings, was settled except for a few fringe documents. While there were debates, then, about which books had authority, such differences must not obscure the larger issue at stake-the Book was at the center. Authority had shifted from the living voice, *viva vox*, to the written word, *scriptura*.

This phenomenon of post-exilic Judaism accounts for a number of developments we can trace. For example, now the conveyers of the

authoritative word were not specifically the priests, whose work was largely confined to the *cultus*, or the prophet, but the scribe (*sopher*) whose responsibility was the written Word and the interpretation of it (cf. Neh. 8).

With the formation of the scribal class technical methods were developed. That is, hermeneutics arose as a discipline. The norms (*middoth*) attributed to Hillel and later authorities suggest that some Jews were not only interpreting Scriptures but thinking systematically about the way they did so—obviously to distinguish valid interpretations from erroneous ones.

By the first century of the present era, then, whether we look at what was happening in Diaspora or Palestine, Judaism had become a religion which, in most respects, found the source for its spiritual nourishment in a book which it read, pondered, interpreted, and applied in a sophisticated way. If there was a "living voice," it was the interpreter's and not the prophet's.

### **The Book Is Studied**

The Book, the written text, provided the source for both faith and practice. This was the place where Judaism looked for answers and nourishment. It was examined with minute attention paid to words, letters, concepts, and whatever other literary clues might be discovered in it. We will take three examples to show how the Jews used the Book as their source.

The Loeb Classical Library contains twelve volumes from Philo of Alexandria. Volume 1 treats Gen. 1:1-3:19- vol. 2, Gen. 3:24-6:4- and so on through parts of the Joseph story in vol. 5. Then, vol. 6 again looks at some of the heroes of the Genesis story and Moses from Exodus. Vols. 7 and about half of 8 discuss the laws, both the decalogue and special laws (as circumcision or kosher laws). The rest of vol. 8 deals with various themes (such as rewards and punishments), again using the Torah as the source for proofs and illustrations. The two supplemental volumes contain questions and answers on Genesis and Exodus. Only vols. 9 and 10 are not specifically biblical and contain treatises of various kinds. What we have from Philo, then, is primarily exposition of the text of the Torah. We might argue with him and say that popular Stoicism has seriously colored his interpretation. Philo was aware that he saw things in the light of his philosophical milieu. But he considered the biblical text as the source and norm for understanding reality and determining conduct. He would have repudiated the accusation that he had departed from the Book.

Our second document comes from the rabbinical world. The Mishnah which we use is that attributed to Rabbi Meir, codified somewhere around A.D. 250. Some material from at least the first century B.C. is in it, though a good deal also comes from later times. Laying aside the issue of precise dating for a mishnah, we can observe that the Mishnah is the result of a process begun before Christ and continued long after. It is primarily halakic, discussing the proper way to fulfill the 613 commandments revealed in the Torah, the rules for civil and personal life as well as the cultus. It has six divisions (on seeds, set feasts, women, damages, hallowed things, and cleannesses) which in turn have 63 tractates or chapters. To give one example, the division on seeds, the first one, contains the tractates: benedictions, gleanings, produce not certainly tithed, diverse kinds, the seventh year, heave-offerings, tithes, second tithe, dough-offering, the fruit of the young trees,

and first fruits. A full listing of the data would be tedious but would prove what was going on in rabbinic Judaism. Often diverse opinions of the rabbis who do not quite agree are recited. However, disagreement on how a regulation is to be applied does not negate agreement on the importance of obedience. In fact, it is the intensity of the conviction that the law provides revelation and must be pondered which compels them to discuss the issues so thoroughly and respect the various opinions.

Our final example comes from an earlier period, around 180 B.C., and was written in Palestine by the teacher. Ben Sira.

Wisdom will praise herself, and will glory in the midst of her people. In the assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth, and in the presence of his host she will glory: " I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. . . . Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.' . . . Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with my help will not sin." All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. It fills men with wisdom, like the Pishon, and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits.... Just as the first man did not know her perfectly, the last one has not fathomed her; for her thought is more abundant than the sea, and her counsel deeper than the great abyss (24:1-3, 8, 22-25, 28-29).

This wonderful panegyric, working from Prov. 8:22ff. and fusing Torah and Wisdom motifs, shows how powerful was the conviction of the Book's value. All three of our examples show the devotion with which Jews went about the task of studying the Torah. For them it was a source of endless wisdom, a certain guide to life. If we had time, we could go on to show from many sources how Jews returned to the text to examine and think about it in the smallest detail, with loving care and childlike eagerness. This was God's great gift to Israel.

Now we must ask two questions: Given that the Book was intensely studied, where was it studied and what was it believed that the study of the Book achieved?

The principal place for familiarizing oneself with the Book was through hearing it read in the local synagogues. At this time in the history of humankind the capacity to hear and understand was more highly cultivated than it is by us who depend so much on the written word. In fact, much of scripture was originally written to be heard not read by the masses, as the contemporary model of everyone having a Bible and following the Scripture lesson might suggest. Thus, the principal place to hear the reading and explanation of the Book was in the synagogue. This would apply equally to Palestinian and Diasporan Judaism. There also developed, separate from synagogue worship, schools of study. Rabbinic Judaism called such a school, the *beth ham-midrash*.<sup>3</sup> Here more intensive study of the text was pursued. And, of course, study became even more detailed

and complex as great teachers drew disciples around themselves. Thus the same kind of phenomenon occurred in Judaism as has happened, *mutatis mutandis*, in Christianity. All the way from public worship and church school to advanced, graduate work, the study of the Book gripped the energies and imaginations of the people. The place where the average person, however, became acquainted with the Book was the local synagogue and the *beth ham-midrash*.

Our next question is even more important for it concerns the motive for such intense study. What was believed to result from the study? I have already suggested that, in simple terms, the Jews believed the Word gave them guidance; it was a revelation of God's will. Let us pursue this line of thought further. To begin we take a statement from the oldest mishnaic tractate, Pirke Aboth (1:2):

Simeon the Just was one of the remnants of the Great Synagogue. He used to say: By three things is the world sustained: by the Law, by the [Temple]service, and by deeds of loving-kindness.

This saying suggests that the Law is one among a number of fundamental components of the world. In other passages there are references to the seven things which God created before the world was made, one of these being the law.<sup>4</sup> These were the things which the rabbis considered necessary, apart from physical requirements, for human life. Taking these two observations together with the citations from Philo and Akiba given at the first of this paper, we can see the inner logic of how the concept of the Law fit within the total complex of Judaism.

The Law reveals God's will for humankind in a complete way. At the same time it is a verbalization of the plan by which the world is put together and the rules by which it is run. Every element in the cosmos (nature, human relationships, the relation between humans and nature and humans to God) is outlined in the Law so that we can know how to go about life and fulfill our destiny. There is no division here between the natural and the supernatural. We cannot go into the philosophical question which, since the Enlightenment especially, such a viewpoint raises. We merely point out that in an important way the two worlds of the natural and the supernatural overlap, and that the Law deals with both worlds, not sharply distinguishing them. Thus, the study of the Law, Jews believed, put one in touch with both God's will and the ways of nature at the same time.

With this in mind we consider one other element found in the use of the law which was important to Jews, its capacity to guard us against the inner impulse to sin. In brief it worked like this: There were in their view, both good and evil forces working from within human beings. Without some positive guidance, however, the evil influence would prevail. This evil force was understood as a kind of inner influence that motivated and drove people to sinful acts. In one way or another this force had to be checked. Without such control, apostasy (and thus damnation) would result. As a rule, Judaism taught that one of the functions of the study of the Book was to enable mastery of this evil impulse. I have, in fact, found only one example from Jewish documents which considered the problem of inner sin so profound that the study of the Law would not overcome it (cf. 2 Esd. 3:20-22; 4:30; 7:45-48; 7:92, 116-119). The more common opinion is represented by this fascinating statement from the rabbinic world.



R. Levi b. Hama says in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish: A man should always incite the good impulse in his soul to fight against the evil impulse. For it is written: "Tremble and sin not" [Ps. 4:4]. If he subdues it, well and good. If not, let him study the Torah. For it is written: "Commune with your own heart" [Ex. 24:12]. If he subdues it, well and good. If not, let him recite the Shema. For it is written: "Upon your bed." If he subdues it, well and good. If not, let him remind himself of the day of death. For it is written: "And be still, Selah!" (b. Bet. 5a).

In this passage study of the Law is one among a number of methods used to resist the influence of the evil impulse, the others mentioned here being: simple resistance, recommitting oneself to God, and remembering the final judgment. Such advice is pastoral in character and, given the nature of Judaism, not all that different from Christian counsel. 6

Thus, in Judaism, the study of the law had two related goals: to give guidance in life by revealing God's will and to guard against the destructive influence of inner sin. For point of interest, note the remarkable similarity between these ideas and Calvin's "third use of the Law":

The third use of the Law (being also the principal use, and more closely connected with its proper end) has respect to believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already flourishes and reigns .... For it is the best instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge.... Then, because we need not doctrine merely, but exhortation also, the servant of God will derive this further advantage from the Law: by frequently meditating upon it, he will be excited to obedience, and confirmed in it, and so drawn away from the slippery paths of sin. In this way must the saints press onward, since, however great the alacrity with which, under the Spirit, they hasten toward righteousness, they are retarded by the sluggishness of the flesh, and make less progress than they ought.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Book Is Interpreted**

We turn now to consider the fact of interpretation or updating to which we have already referred. If the norm for faith and practice is found in a book, when the situation changes the word not only will be transmitted but also must be interpreted into the new situation. 8 This, however, may happen in different ways. There may be cases where there is a fairly high consciousness that interpretation is happening and, as a result, methodological rules will be established to provide controls. On the other hand, there will be occasions when there is little consciousness that interpretation is going on and it may even be claimed that what is said (the interpretation) is exactly the same as what was written. We take three examples to illustrate how this worked in Judaism.

We have already mentioned the rabbinical middoth. 9 It is unnecessary to enumerate these; and, I think, would be more useful to explore where the necessity for them lay. According to the rabbis the Torah gives 613 commandments. The whole will of God for human life is covered in these. However, the possible situations which we can encounter are almost an infinity. Therefore the 613 have to be expanded and applied, either explicitly or

implicitly, so that the intent of the commandment is understood for every conceivable situation. For example, the fourth commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work...." The question this raises is, what constitutes work? Thus, the 39 classes of work are set out in mShab. 7:2. Then again, not all the cases in which one might work, according to these classes, are necessarily the same. Suppose we find ourselves working, having temporarily forgotten that it was the Sabbath? The rabbis answered: Such an act is sinful and produces guilt but this guilt is forgivable through the offering designed for the unintentional sin (cf. Lev. 4). However, culpability is increased if we acted while remembering that it was the Sabbath (mShab 7:1). The rabbis also believed that there were occasions when the Sabbath not only could, but ought to be profaned: to save life, to assist in child-birth, and to circumcise on the eighth day (mShab 18:3). It is clear from these statements that they had thought deeply about the meaning of this commandment. When it was broken they could see various degrees of guilt. And there were even occasions when the commandments had to be set aside because something else took priority. It is interesting that in two of the three cases mentioned, obligation to human beings-the sanctity of human life-took priority over obligation to God.

Further, it is wrong to view the regulations concerning the Sabbath as a kind of burden. Of course, on occasion it may have been perceived as oppressive, but these can be balanced with other observations that indicate a relief and joy which was brought to working people by this day of rest. In fact, the Sabbath acquired a festive quality. Fasting, mourning, and even intense prayer for divine intervention were forbidden except on occasions of extreme necessity lest the joyful spirit of the day be dampened. 10

What we see, then, in the *halakoth* regarding the Sabbath is more than meticulous care to protect from impending judgment. That would suggest that the compelling motive was fear. Rather, the compelling motives were love for God and belief that His Word held the key to understanding life. The working principle was that no commandment in the text was given carelessly. If we think about it, seek to understand its precise meaning and application, the rewards in this life and the life to come are enormous.

We can hardly avoid raising a question now: What authority did these rabbinical *halakoth* have? Were they merely opinions or were they views which carried weight? In the rabbinic world, oral tradition, the official teaching transmitted from the great teachers of Israel, were placed alongside the written Word as the authoritative interpretation of the written Word. In some respects this concept is analogous to the idea of the *magisterium* of the church. In any case, it was from these oral traditions that the later rabbis codified their written documents, the halakic materials being found primarily in the Mishnah, the Tosephtah, and the Talmudim. As far as they were concerned, these interpretations were not additions or departures from the written text, although they were perfectly aware that at times the letter of the text had to give way to maintain the spirit. 11 Their view of the high value of the oral tradition finds expression in the teaching that on Sinai Moses transmitted both the written and the oral law. Even if we should challenge such a dogma, it is important that we appreciate how they understood what

they were saying. At the time of Moses, revelation was complete. Nothing needs to be added to it, rather only to explain and expound it. 12

For a second example, we turn again to Philo. It is not surprising that he correlates the biblical text with the intellectual heritage of philosophy more systematically than the rabbis. 13 Exactly how this is worked out and how hebraic or hellenic Philo is, remains a question beyond the scope of our essay. What we observe is that he has read deeply in both worlds, does not see them as ultimately incompatible, and develops methods for relating them to one another. That his stated task is to explain the Torah, I have already shown. His working hypothesis is simple to put down: Scripture has two meanings, a literal and a spiritual, and we discover the spiritual meaning by the use of allegory. The literal meaning may be satisfactory for the average person, who is dull of intellect, but if we are to plumb the depths of the text we seek it out by allegory.

So we must turn to allegory, the method dear to men with their eyes opened. Indeed the sacred oracles most evidently afford us the clues for the use of this method. For they say that in the garden there are trees in no way resembling those with which we are familiar, but trees of Life, of Immortality, of Knowledge, of Apprehension, of Understanding, of the Conception of good and evil (Plant. 36).

However, while Philo obviously sees allegory as the method to get to the deepest meaning that Scripture possesses, he does not necessarily see that the literal and the allegorical meanings must contradict. He generally urges adherence to the letter of the Law and rebukes Jews who, in their enthusiasm for spiritual values, fail in concrete obedience, "as though they had become disembodied souls" (Mig 89f.). On the other hand, while Philo demands the observance of circumcision, when it comes to explaining its value, he speaks in hellenistic terms, symbolizing it as the excision of "desires and sensual pleasures and other passions of the soul" (QE, II, 2).

The conscious clash of two world-views, the hebraic and the hellenistic, both of which offer insight into reality, has resulted in Philo's enormous productivity. Wolfson developed the fascinating thesis that Philo's thought is the fountain for the philosophical agenda of the next seventeen centuries in the western world: the dialogue between the hellenistic and biblical heritages from Philo to Spinoza. 14 His thesis may be disputed, but it is hard to deny that the energy with which Philo undertook his enterprise is tremendously instructive and inspiring.

We turn to a final example, the sectaries of Qumran. 15 We will focus on one aspect of their thought, their treatment of prophecy. In looking at the portions of prophetic documents which predict future events, it is easy to see how the sectaries might have unconsciously updated them. They could hardly have known the historical events to which, for example, Habakkuk referred. For them, the prophet was writing about the events which were at the historical origins of their own community. So they interpreted as follows the first chapter:

(1:4) "So the law is slacked." This means that they rejected the law of God. "And justice never goes forth, for the wicked man encompasses the righteous man." This means that the wicked

man is the wicked priest, and the righteous man is the teacher of righteousness.... (1:6) "For lo, I am moving the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation." This means the Kittim [either the Macedonians or the Romans] who are swift and men of valor in battle. 16

The confidence with which the sectaries updated the prophet is naive and direct, almost disarming. Of course that is not what Habakkuk was writing about. But their very naiveté ought to cause us pause. It implies a conception of the Book which has imbedded itself in their minds. They interpreted the text as centering its meaning on themselves because, in their opinion, there was no historical or cultural gap between the two worlds. To them, Scripture was a *viva vox*, a living voice. Its meaning was obvious. A systematic methodology, such as used by the rabbis in one way or by Philo in another was not followed because the meaning of the text was derived in a straight-forward fashion. There was no self-consciousness in the Qumran community that what they were doing was interpretation. In their opinion they were reading the plain and simple meaning right out of the text.

We can make some broad observations in comparing these three Jewish hermeneutical styles. Philo, whom we can take as a representative of hellenistic Judaism, and the rabbis, whom we can take as representing a form of Palestinian Judaism, both have methodological principles by which they interpret the text. They are aware that they are saying things which are not stated there. They are also aware that they are speaking in language and forms which are foreign to the Biblical patterns. To some degree at least they know that they are making trans-cultural and trans-historical shifts. This cannot be said of the sectaries of Qumran. They are extremely naive. Not only have they changed the meaning of the text to apply it to themselves, they are unaware that they have done so. Perhaps the circumstances surrounding the founding of the community account for some of the peculiarities of this methodology. They were on the defensive from the beginning, and thus they justified their existence by setting themselves apart as the true covenant people who fulfilled what the Book had promised.

In this section of the paper I have reduced an enormous amount of material to a bare outline which, if it were to be pursued, would need to be made more precise. My goal, however, is simply to point out how, by its very nature, the doctrine that the spiritual life of a people derives its normative informational source and guidance from an ancient book inevitably results in the appearance of hermeneutical techniques. 17 Further, if that religion seeks to nourish the life of a large number of people, including within it classes such as rich and poor, learned and unlearned, there will also appear various schools of thought on methodology. Some will develop techniques which employ foreign categories to a high degree (e.g. Philo). Others, who are committed to intellectual and precise thought but want to stay more within the traditional confines of the religion will develop norms that appear more conservative (e.g. the rabbis). Finally, at the more popular level, there will be many who interpret the word in a more naive way accepting the traditional understanding of the word found within their group (often of quite recent origin, but firmly established) as the virtual equivalent of the written word—that is, not even aware that they are interpreting (e.g. the sectaries of Qumran).

## The Law As Commandment and Standard for Judgment

We turn now to what is in one sense the major consideration of our paper, the commandments and requirements which the Book contains. This is what Christians generally think of when the discussion concerns the Jewish view of the law, and it is certainly a significant component.

The commands are viewed as expressions of God's will, given for our good. We have already noted that the rabbis counted the commandments and gave the total as 613. They did not consider the number as so great that it created a burden trying to remember or carry all of them out. Rather, the number had to be sufficient to cover all of life, treating every area and thus never leaving us in the lurch. On occasion, the number could be reduced to fundamental commandments. Thus the rabbis, for example, held that Gentiles without the aid of the written Torah had revealed to them through nature the so-called seven *noachic* laws. The *goyim*, apart from special revelation, should know of God's spiritual nature and obey His will in certain fundamental areas of life (not unlike the point Paul makes in Rom. 1:18ff.).<sup>18</sup> Also, there is the rather famous story of Hillel the Great being asked by an inquiring Gentile whether he could state the whole law while standing on one foot. To this the learned sage replied: "Do not do to your fellow what you would not have done to you. This is the whole law, entire; the rest is explanation. Go, learn!" (bShab. 31a). The observation that stating this rule, the golden rule, in the negative form shows the inferiority of the Jewish ethic to the Christian has no merit. It is sheer special pleading. Jews actually did believe that the primary requirement was concern or love of one's neighbor. Buechler earlier in this century showed that terms used of pious persons, such as *hasid*, were generally attributed because of generosity, not because of meticulous religious observance.<sup>19</sup> For Judaism, as for Christianity, love was the supreme commandment.

It is, however, in consideration of the doctrine of retribution that Christians especially see the Jewish viewpoint. Here the Law is the standard for judgment and the means of gaining merit.

The doctrine of retribution appears within the Old Testament (Deut. 4:40; Prov. 24:12), in Judaism (Sir. 35:19; 2 Macc. 5:9f.; Philo, Flac. 115); and in the New Testament (Mt. 16:17; 2 Cor. 5:10). Nowhere, in fact, is it expressed more clearly than in Rom. 2:6: "For he will render to every man according to his works"-from the pen of Paul who is supposed by some to have overthrown this doctrine once and for all.<sup>20</sup> Thus again the presence of a doctrine or teaching is not, by itself, peculiar to Judaism. Most Christian scholars are somewhat aware of this. The question is, can we assume that this doctrine gives the clue for understanding the character of Judaism? And does Judaism have a doctrine of grace which moderates the impact that the doctrine of retribution would have by itself?<sup>21</sup>

For those who would answer affirmatively the passages in Jewish literature which express the doctrine of retribution are clearly legalistic. In fact, this charge against Judaism surfaces so regularly that we must set the issue in sharp focus. It is assumed here that in Judaism God had an artificial and mechanistic relationship with His people. He no longer dealt with them in a personal way but instead used a juristic system in which He did little more than tally debits and credits and hand out punishments or rewards.<sup>22</sup> Such

observations are made with great assurance and by noted authorities. Are they accurate?

While there were probably some Jews who prided themselves on their moral achievements and others who may have been crushed with a sense of guilt, it is doubtful whether their numbers (or the percentages) exceeded those with the same tendencies in Christianity. In any case, we are working on hunches-psychological projections-which are very hard to verify or dispute. Our question must be: What did Jews say about this subject and how did they understand the idea of retribution? We will get at these questions in two ways.

The first is to examine what Jews indicate the term merit to mean. The word would seem to suggest that, according to them, God would grant some kind of reward for obedience. But what kind of reward? And should the reward be sought for? Three statements from the Mishnah will help us to clarify the problem:

Ab. 1:3: Antigonus of Soko received (the Law) from Simeon the Just. He used to say: Be not like slaves that minister to the master for the sake of receiving a bounty, but be like slaves that minister to the master not for the sake of receiving bounty; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.

Ab. 2:8: Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai received (the Law) from Hillel and from Shammai. He used to say: If thou hast wrought much in the Law, claim not merit for thyself, for to this end wast thou created.

Mikk. 3:16: R. Hananiah says: The Holy one, blessed be He, was minded to grant merit to Israel; therefore hath he multiplied for them the Law and the commandments.

These passages, and others like them, suggest that a merit is the natural result which arises from a deed. It is, in one sense, inherent in the deed. Thus to obey God is to set in motion a chain of events which results in good things in life because they follow quite naturally. <sup>23</sup> This conforms to the way that a good and gracious God has made and sustains the world. The reverse applies to disobedience and punishment. However, ethical motives are also to be considered. At the popular level they can arise from simple eudaemonism. The rabbis, however, talked about lifting the vision so that the reason for obedience becomes more idealistic. It should really be offered because love and trust for God pervade the life. We want to please Him.

A second element which bears on this issue concerns the doctrine of forgiveness. What is the place for such an element within Judaism? Again we can mention that Christian scholars often misrepresent Judaism by ignoring this component. We are supposed to learn from such observations what the true experience of Jews was. Because their perfectionistic ethic always broke down on the hard reality of human sinfulness, they must have gone around all day long in despondency. This misrepresentation is aggravated because Christians, seeing atonement and forgiveness granted solely through the death of Jesus Christ, cannot imagine Jews having any significant doctrine of atonement. <sup>24</sup> They refuse to believe that the Jewish experience of atonement and forgiveness could have been satisfying or brought any significant, psychological relief from guilt. On occasion Christians will see the

temple cultus, which was still functioning at the time of primitive Christianity, in relation to this question, often telescoping the entire cultus into the ritual for the Day of Atonement. This, however, obscures the way in which atonement worked for them and places far too much weight on particular and vicarious concepts of atonement.<sup>25</sup> The result of this is that Christian scholars assume there was a great lacuna in Jewish theology and that as soon therefore as it would have been pointed out to the Jews that they had no atonement, they could not help but have been persuaded to accept the Christian solution. In the light of this assumption, it is amazing how little is made of this argument in the New Testament. Other than in the Epistle to the Hebrews, there is little polemic against the Jewish doctrine. And even here the argument is not so much against Jewish thought and practice as against the adequacy of Old Testament provision. Generally in the New Testament it is not argued but assumed that the death of Christ provides atonement for sin.<sup>26</sup>

This point is so critical that I need to pursue it a little further. A number of years ago Professor Fritsch of Princeton Seminary reported to me a personal conversation he had had some time before with the great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber. The essence of their discussion was something like this. He asked Buber why Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. He replied, "We don't need Him." In other words, they experienced what they understood as salvation without Jesus of Nazareth. However surprising such a statement is to most Christians, it represents the general feeling of Jews and explains why the Jewish mission has, as a rule, proved so fruitless. Jews did not hope for salvation on the basis of perfectly fulfilling the 613 commandments and despair because they might have failed at one or another point. They were among those, they believed, guaranteed salvation through election and the means provided within the Law for atonement for sin.

### **Proselytism**

The final major issue which we address concerns proselytism. In some respects this issue might seem to revolve around the question whether, according to the Jews, Gentiles had any possibility of inheriting the life of the world to come apart from becoming proselytes. We have already seen that, according to some rabbis, Gentiles could know and keep the seven *noachic* commandments. But did this mean that Gentiles, as Gentiles, could inherit the world to come?<sup>27</sup> For Gentiles, who were not the beneficiaries of covenantal promises, the possibility of sharing the world to come, it would seem, hinged entirely upon merit. Election, forgiveness, and grace had no bearing on their cases.

The evidence on the subject of Gentile salvation is not as clear as we might hope. In fact, it suggests that there was more than one opinion. For example, there is reported a debate between R. Joshua b. Haninah and R. Eleazar b. Hyrcanus, scholars from the second generation of the Tannaim (c. A.D. 90-130). Said R. Eleazar:

No Gentiles have a portion in the world to come, as it is said, "The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the Gentiles who forget God" (Ps. 9:19). The first clause, those who "return to Sheol"

are the wicked of Israel; the second, "who forget God": includes all Gentiles.

R. Joshua responded:

If the verse had said, "the wicked shall go into Sheol and all the nations," and had stopped there, I should have agreed with you (that non-Jews have no share in the world to come), but as it goes on to say, "who forget God," it means that there are righteous men among the nations who have a share in the world to come" (tSanh. 13:2).

Having accepted, however, that some Jews might have believed that righteous Gentiles could receive the future reward does not entirely close the question. That is, we cannot assume from this that for a Gentile the option is only salvation by works while for the Jew there is both works and grace. We must explore this issue from several angles.

To begin with, beyond the possibility of sharing in the world to come without proselyting, were there other advantages which might encourage a Gentile to take this step? All Jews would have argued that there were. For example, the doctrine of election, for all practical purposes, guaranteed a future inheritance. as stated in mSanh. 10:1.

All Israelites have a share in the world to come, for it is written, "Thy people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands that I may be glorified." And these are they that have no share in the world to come: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law, and [he that says] that the Law is not from Heaven, and an Epicurean.

The exclusionary phrases here refer to people who, in the opinion of the rabbis, were not real Jews—those who denied the future world (Sadducees), those who denied the divine origin of Scripture, and those who lived like pagans. Such Jews, in their opinion, had apostatized. The Jewish concept was not that much different from what Christians would say: All Christians will enter into heaven. This is meant to exclude people who identify themselves as such but are really not: those who deny life after death, those who reject the authority of the Bible, and those who abandon themselves to vice. Even traditions, such as the Wesleyan, which emphasize the quality of life do not teach that all sins automatically forfeit a share in the inheritance. There is atonement. And Jews, as Christians, safeguarded atonement theology from abuse. The final observation in the mishnaic tractate for the Day of Atonement (Yoma 8:9) is pertinent here. It states that one who sins with the intention of later repenting or who sins saying, "the Day of Atonement will effect atonement," does not receive atonement. Presuming, however, that there is genuine repentance, atonement was guaranteed.

But how are we supposed to imagine that Gentiles, apart from becoming proselytes, would be righteous? How would they qualify according to R. Joshua's criteria? Through sheer moral effort? Hardly. It would not happen apart from the influences of the synagogue. Jews welcomed Gentile inquirers at several stages of interest. Here we could enter into the interesting debate whether the term "God-fearers" concerns an actual class of



Gentiles in a quasi-official relationship to Israel or only refers to devout Gentiles who had not, as yet, become full proselytes. 28 In either case the essential components in identifying Gentiles as God-fearers were the practices which they followed: to forsake idolatry, to worship the one and only living God, and to abandon pagan life-style. That is, whether they had become full proselytes or not, they related themselves to the synagogue and it is from here they received spiritual support to live as they ought. A Gentile outside of any relationship to the synagogue would inevitably think and live like a pagan. "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" in Jewish terms meant "*extra synagogam nulla salus*."

What did the synagogue in turn do to educate and encourage God fearers? As already suggested they were welcomed to participate in synagogue worship and also were taught the basics of Israel's faith, partly in sermons and perhaps also in the beth ham-midrash. In any case, the instruction to the God-fearers, and even inquiring Gentiles who had not gone that far, seems to have centered around these topics: the nature of God, social ethics, and sexual ethics. The Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26) provided the biblical basis for such catechical instruction. 29

However, to enjoy all the benefits promised to Israel required, as stated above, full conversion which involved additional steps. According to the classic rabbinical pattern these were: baptism, circumcision, a gift to the temple (as long as it stood), and a commitment to obey all 613 commandments of the Torah. A passage from bYebamoth 47a-b describes a view of the process from a time several centuries later than the New Testament but certainly reflecting the concerns and procedures of the earlier period.

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: "What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised harassed and overcome by afflictions?" If he replies, "I know and yet am unworthy," he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments. He is informed of the sin of the neglect of the commandments of Gleanings, the Forgotten Sheaf, the Corner, and the Poor Man's Tithe. He is also told of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments. Furthermore, he is addressed thus: "Be it known to you that before you came to this condition, if you had eaten suet you would not have been punishable with kareth, if you had profaned the Sabbath you would not have been punishable with stoning but now were you to eat suet you would be punished with kareth; were you to profane the Sabbath you would be punished with stoning." And as he is informed of the punishment for the transgressions of the commandments so is he informed of the reward granted for their fulfillment. He is told, "Be it known to you that the world to come was made only for the righteous, and that Israel at the present time are unable to bear either too much prosperity, or too much suffering." He is not, however, to be persuaded or dissuaded too much. If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith. Should any shreds which render the circumcision invalid remain, he is to be

circumcised a second time. As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects.

This is a remarkable passage and has a bearing on many aspects of our study as well as the New Testament. 30 For example, we do not know for sure whether the Judaizers with which Paul debated in the Galatian controversy were of the opinion that Gentiles had to fully convert in order to inherit eternal life. They may have been of the opinion that full conversion was a significant advantage but not absolutely necessary. It is equally possible that they believed full conversion necessary. This, in fact, seems more likely in view of Paul's argument that those who have faith are the true children of Abraham. In either case, however, Paul departed from them not only in the view that proselyting was not necessary for salvation 31 but that it was no advantage. In the view of Judaism conversion provided an enormous spiritual benefit. Such is not to be understood in a mechanical, artificial sense then. By becoming proselytes, Jews believed, Gentiles gained two great advantages: First, they were guaranteed all the benefits promised to Israel through the fathers, both within this life and in the next-they became children of the covenant. Second, they gained the full value of the Law, to guide them in this life and to protect them from inner sin.

### **Conclusions and Considerations**

This part of the paper will be broken into two sections: The first is a brief summary of our study of the Jewish view of the Law and the second records some of my considerations which grow out of the results of the study in relation to some *theologoumena* in contemporary Evangelicalism. This second part is, of course, meant to be suggestive.

#### *Conclusions*

1. Judaism was an entire religion with all of the components in it that make up a religion: a world-view, ethical standards, cultus, domestic rituals, and so on. Thus the notion of the law must be understood in terms of its place within this complex. It is especially important that we see, for example, the doctrine of retribution in relation to the doctrines of election and atonement. To atomize the components, as is typical of Christian studies, will inevitably result in a distorted view, generally one in which retribution is seen as the most characteristic doctrine of Judaism. And this is then taken to support the view that Judaism is essentially a legalistic religion which, because of the inescapability of human sinfulness, left its people in a hopeless situation of either falsely believing themselves righteous or despairing in their guilt. Such caricatures of Judaism, however comforting to us because they may seem to buttress our conviction of having a superior faith, are inaccurate.

2. Judaism was a religion of a book. Of course there were other components by which the religion lived, as the temple or synagogue rituals and domestic rituals (such as *haburah* meals), and these had powerful, formative influences. But the theoretical and cognitive bases for the religion centered around a corpus of literature. Every theological conviction had, in one way

or another, to find its origin and support in this written Word. Considerable energy was spent examining this Book, in various settings, and with various degrees of sophistication. The working assumption was: The Book holds within it the answer for all questions, the clue to the mystery of the universe and life. Careful examination of its words and obedience to its guidance will pay rich dividends.

3. As time passed different methods of interpreting the Word began to shape themselves into traditional forms, and we have looked at three kinds: the hellenistic Jewish (Philo), the rabbinic, and the sectarian (Qumran). It would be possible to further clarify our study and sharpen the unique characteristics of each one of these schools, but our purpose has been fulfilled if we have shown in broad terms that, within this religion which based its thought on a corpus of literature and belonged to a large population, observable differences arose in opinions which hardened themselves into theological traditions and interpretative methodologies.

4. By its very nature the Book discussed such topics as ethics and ultimate human destinies. It defined who is inside and who is outside the select group of people, and it outlined how one who is outside may come inside. It described how one who is inside may remain inside, and how failure to live up to some minimum standard would result in exclusion.

The different traditions examined these items found within the Book and interpreted them according to their own viewpoints. In many respects they agreed, but we are not surprised to see some disagreement, at least in some details. At times disagreement is so strong that they may want to exclude one another.

5. To put the matter sharply: Judaism as a whole saw the value of the Law in two respects: First, it expressed the mind and will of the Creator so that, if we study and reflect upon it, we can sufficiently understand the mystery of the universe and human life so that we can live in a way which agrees with nature, conforms to God's expectations, and results in good within this life and a share in the world to come. Second, by faithfully studying the law we can counteract the powerful, negative influence of inner sin which, otherwise, would drive us into self-destruction through sin and apostasy.

### *Considerations*

1. Any religion which is basically a "religion of a book" will, over the course of time, develop traditions. These arise because the social situation has changed, the number of cases not covered explicitly by the written word requires application or clarification, and different interpretations will surface. Conservatives tend to see that the new situation does not modify the literal force of a *theologoumenon* or a commandment. Liberals tend to see some situations as so different that to keep the spirit of the written word we must depart from the letter. The actual fact is that with the passage of time, both conservatives and liberals develop traditions which to one degree or another depart from the written word. As the new traditions are formed, they are gradually laid over the old, often so skillfully that, in the debates, both parties can no longer read the book without reading their traditions right into it. And the peculiar phenomenon has happened, then, that within the Protestant church, as in Judaism, sectarians, who vehemently denounce the Roman Catholic understanding of "tradition" or liberal departure from

Biblical teaching have themselves created non-Biblical traditions that are equally normative as the Book (in the life of their movement) but are not acknowledged to be traditions.

2. Traditions are inevitable. Evangelicals need to be more honest about how powerful their traditions are in shaping their theology. Further, they must come to terms with how important the historical and social milieu are in forcing new traditions to arise. Because of the high value Evangelicals place on the Word, they tend to view all traditions, when recognized as such, as departures from the pure Biblical norm. Evangelicals, if they wish to use the Bible as the norm, must become more sophisticated in using Biblical thought and models. They must sharply distinguish between using the Bible as a norm and the impulse to repriminate. They tend to think that reprimination - a return to primitive Christianity-would save the day and help us to remove all theological and religious problems. This is utterly naïve and impossible. It is naive when we consider the historical setting and the complexity of primitive Christianity. The sociological milieu within which the early church arose is gone forever. Further most Evangelicals cannot think themselves behind the Aldersgate experience or the Westminster or Augsburg Confessions, let alone to Augustine, Nicea, or Paul. That is, what they call Biblical is really not Biblical but North American Evangelicalism read into the Biblical text. Further, and this is the critical issue, to merely repriminate something which was appropriate in the early church is not necessarily adequate for us today. We have to adapt to be faithful to the Gospel. In my opinion, Evangelicalism is a legitimate tradition within the Christian church, but it would be quite another thing to say that it is the only legitimate tradition or, strictly speaking, the Biblical one. Yet, because Evangelicalism has taken a certain position on the normative character of the Word in opposition to ecclesiastical traditions, we find ourselves spending enormous amounts of energy trying to prove that our viewpoint is the "Biblical" one rather than the more important task-in my opinion-of using our tradition as a way of addressing contemporary needs.

3. How can we update a Biblical *theologoumenon* into a new situation which is faithful to the old and yet appropriate to the new? At times such updating, at least on certain levels, can amount to a contradiction of the old. For example, when Paul argued with the Judaizers about the practice of circumcision for Gentile converts, he had no explicit Scripture to support his claims while they did. Merely pointing to a written passage, therefore, cannot end the discussion. The Protestant battle cry, *sola scriptura*, while it makes good polemics, simply does not work in every case and has never really been followed, even by those who claim ardently that they are following it. An updating therefore would require: (1) that we allow the Bible to speak for itself in its own forms and traditions that are, in many respects, foreign to the modern world; (2) that we own up to our tradition as an extension beyond Scripture but powerfully shaping how we do theology; and (3) that we listen to the contemporary world as possessing legitimate forms for Understanding reality. That is, the theological task of today must include dialogue with at least these three sources.

4. If I were to write a definition of legalism, I would say that it arises when there is an attempt to follow the directives of the written Word but the situation has so changed that enforcement amounts to an inappropriate

hardening of the written commandment or of a tradition which has developed from the Word. Legalism depends upon the written Word and always justifies itself by reference to the written Word. It claims that it is faithfully carrying out what the normative Word requires. Whether that is so, of course, is where the debate arises.

I indicated in my definition that legalism appears when the standard or commandment is no longer appropriate—that is, it does not result in freedom and righteousness but in bondage and persisting sin. But how do we determine when that is the case? To answer that is of course the problem. It happens, as a matter of fact, in all denominations and it is quite beside the point to absolve ourselves by heaping guilt on those who adhere to "traditions" as being spiritually weak and rebellious against God. They may be wrong, in cases, but they may also be deeply committed. The Pharisees perpetrated some vicious crimes, but they did so because they really did want to serve God. Paul granted them this (cf. Rom. 10:2).

5. In its classical form the Roman Catholic Church has developed some forms of legalism which are no longer appropriate. Whether they ever were appropriate is an important question and must be considered separately in each case. Once a tradition is started and has secured its place, it develops a life of its own and continues to grow. What may have been an understandable and helpful tradition at one point can, over the course of time, change to the point that it defeats its original purpose. (It is interesting, for example, to trace in Catholic practice what has happened over the centuries with the penitential system and the attempts of Vatican II to restore its practice to something more helpful.)

6. Evangelicalism is a more recent historical phenomenon and consequently has not had so long for its traditions to develop. However, even in it we can see, on occasion, considerable growth and change. The movement which arose as the Great Awakening created in North America some trends reacting to the deadness of Protestant scholasticism and has in our century evolved into a kind of Christianity that sees the touchstones of genuineness in a correct faith and the experience of being "born again." The historical development of this came about something like this: The Reformers, protesting the Roman Catholic understanding of how salvation is granted, emphasized salvation by faith. In time, whatever the Reformers intended, the concept of faith was split into two categories: right belief and trust in God— and the pietists, protesting what they understood as an error in Protestant tradition and the neglect of genuine Christian life emphasized experience. Thus, there came to exist in Protestantism at least two traditional understandings of "faith." These two great streams have resulted in powerful grass roots movements in North American Christianity which certainly cross one another at points but are also distinguishable—e.g. the Bible church movement emphasizing right faith and Pentecostalism right experience. Both of these streams have developed distinct forms of worship, hermeneutics, and ethos. Both of them claim to represent true Christianity around which other Evangelicals should rally. And both of these are theological traditions, not Biblical Christianity per se, as they so fervently claim. They use the Book as their guide and resource to promote their traditional concerns. For many people, life within these traditions is liberating and helpful. For others they have been paralyzing—that is, they have become legalistic. These forms of

Christianity, by definition, do not allow for diversity. In this respect they are analogous to the Qumran community. They cannot see or admit the differences between their traditions and the Bible or that there are other ways of interpreting the Bible. In my opinion, the legalistic danger within Evangelicalism arises from the right which: (1) confuses its traditions with the written Word and (2) tries to make its tradition the norm for all those who use the written Word as the norm. There is, of course, a danger to the left; but that is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

### Notes

1Examples of this are numerous. What is disconcerting is the influence such primary studies have. For example, Bultmann's characterization of where Jesus (vol. 1, pp. 12f.) or Paul (p. 273) differed from Judaism gives an unreliable picture of Judaism (Theology of the New Testament, ET [1952]). He depends, however, as do so many others, on the specialized works which presumably give accurate pictures, such as F. Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palaestnischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud* (1880); W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (1903). This judgment applies even to the somewhat better *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (1924 and the following years) by H. Strack and P. Billerbeck.

2I mention only a few works which have been sharply critical of Christian summaries of Judaism: G. F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *HTR* 14 (1921), pp. 197-254; S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1909); and E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977).

3See G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (1971, first published 1927), vol. 1, pp.312ff.

4See Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 526.

5Cf. also. Test. Levi 13:1f.; 19:1; Dan. 5:1; Asher 3:1; CD 2:14-16; Wisd. 6:10f., 17-20; 4 Macc. 1:30b-35; Philo. L.A. 3 18ff. and Abr, 3-5.

6I dealt with this whole issue at some length in my dissertation, "The Setting and Argument of Romans 1:18-3:20" (1978), pp. 78-140.

7Institutes of the Christian Religion, ET of 1559 edition by John Murray, Book II, chpt. 7:12.

8See the fascinating article on this subject by Renee Bloch, "Midrash," in *Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplement*, vol. 5 (1951), coll. 1263-1281. Bloch also discusses how interpretation occurs in the Bible itself, as the Chronicler's revisions of deuteronomic history show. This subject, which is also important, stands outside of our study which is dealing with the Book as a closed entity.

9See H. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrasch*, ET (1931), PP. 93-98. D. Daube has argued that even the rabbinic norms arose under the influence of the hellenistic world in "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *HUCA* 22 (1949), pp. 239-264.

10See Schechter, pp. 152ff.; Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 2, pp. 37f.

11Cf. Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 2, pp. 142-146.

12See Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 251ff.

13For example, consider the vigorous debate between E. R. Goodenough, *By Light* (1935) and H. Wolfson, *Philo* (1948), and Goodenough's review of Wolfson in *JBL* 67 (1948), pp. 87-109.

14Wolfson, vol. 1, p. v-viii.

15See W. H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BA* 14 (1951), pp.54-76. Note also the detailed studies in the halakoth at Qumran by Lawrence H. Schiffman, *The Halakah at Qumran* (1975) and *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1983).

16I am using the translation found in Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (1955).

17See Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 235-248.

18See my dissertation, pp. 30-40, 142-180.

19A. Buechler, *Types of Jewish-Palestinian Piety* (1921), pp. 7ff.

20In his commentary on Romans C. K. Barrett cannot accept the obvious meaning of the language in 2:1ff. He ends his discussion of Paul's use of the doctrine of retribution by standing it on its head (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [1957], pp. 46f.). Says Barrett: "The reward of eternal life, then, is promised to those who do not regard their good works as an end in themselves, but see them as marks not of human achievement but of hope in God." E. Kaesemann is more sensitive to the dilemma but discusses the passage in such an obscure way that we hardly know where he ends up (*Commentary on Romans*, ET [1980], pp. 57-61). We cannot help, then, but smile with approval of J. Huby's rather biting criticism of the awkward way in which Protestants generally stumble on Paul's words. He observes that it would have been strange for Paul to deny to the Jews (salvation on the basis of God's favoritism and election [see 2:1-5]) what he is soon to grant to Christians (favoritism on the basis of God's gift in Christ apart from obedience) with the argument that the Jews are found wanting according to the doctrine of retribution (2:6-11) (in *Epître aux Romains* [1940], p. 110)!

21See my dissertation, pp. 59-77.

22Consider the offensive, smug, and inaccurate observations made on this subject in W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, ET (1967), vol. 2, pp. 421-423.

23Cf. H. Odeberg, *Pharisaism and Christianity*, ET (1964), pp. 30-39.

24E.g. Eichrodt, vol. 2, pp. 412-413.

25Cf. the massive study by A. Buechler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement* (1927).

26Note how this works even in Pauline literature. For example, many scholars believe, and I agree, that in Rom. 3:24f. we have a pre-Pauline formula dealing with the vicarious atonement achieved by Christ's death which is not the conclusion of Paul's argument but its premise; that is, something already accepted by his auditors.

27See on this entire issue the important study by B. Baumberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (1939).

28Two examples: one who believes that the God-fearers formed a distinct class is Baumberger, pp. 135-138, and one who does not is Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 1, pp. 339-341.

29See the relevant sections in P. Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Catechism* (1940), A. Seeberg, *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit* (1930) and *Die Didache des Judentums und der Urchristenheit* (1908), and H. Daxter, *Roemer 1:182:10 im Verhaeltnis zur spaetjudischen Lehrauffassung* (1914).

30See a discussion of this passage from *bYebamoth* by David Daube in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (1956), pp. 109-111.

31C. G. Montefiore argues in *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays* (1915), pp.85-100, that Paul was following a trend in hellenistic Judaism. Obviously there were some who felt that circumcision was not necessary for conversion, but did their numbers become so great that they amounted to an actual movement? Compare the interesting story of the Gentile king, Izates, who was first counseled against and then strongly for circumcision as the path to conversion as it is reported by Josephus (*Ant.* 20:34-38).



# **LAW AND GOSPEL, CHURCH AND CANON**

by  
Robert W. Wall

This essay envisages two tasks. First, in a macroscopic way, we will attempt to understand the New Testament tension between law and gospel. 1 Second, we will relate the NT teaching to today's church by using the perspectives of canonical criticism, a recent field of Biblical scholarship and one which holds great promise for academy and church alike. 2

In completing these two tasks, we will discuss four issues: we will first identify problems and define decisive terms. Indeed, the title of this paper, "Law and Gospel, Church and Canon," stakes out a plethora of thorny and complex issues. The second part of the essay will draw attention to a decisive clue for interpreting the Biblical discussion of law and gospel which emerges during the Jerusalem Council. In the next two parts of the essay, we will try to articulate two "canonical conversations": one within the multiple Gospel and another within the multiple Letter of the NT. Each of these two canonical conversations will bring into interplay differing although normative and useful construals of law and gospel, which will lead to a final section which relates these interplays to the Wesleyan church in prophetic and hopefully in redemptive ways.

## **I**

There are two problems facing the hermeneut who wishes to articulate singular and unqualified definitions of law and gospel, and of the relationship between them as forwarded by the NT. First, there is the problem of the diverse ways the NT itself understands God's law and the Church's gospel. For example, the recent work of James Dunn has sought to distinguish between the different, indeed differing gospels which made up the earliest church and which are now reflected in our canon and among those who read it as authoritative. 3

The problem is often made more difficult by the church's tendency to understand the relationship between law and gospel in particularistic ways, usually in accord with traditional teaching. The ongoing relationship between law and gospel differs from communion to communion. Yet, across the church universal, believers are inclined to stake out one Biblical version of law and

gospel as their own and exclude other Biblical notions from their accounts. The point must be made that the NT enshrines an inspired diversity; competing kerygmata and differing accounts of the usefulness or validity of law found within the Bible are all normative for the community of faith. 4

The second side of this two-sided problematic is the effort of Christian theologians to systematize and make uniform what is in fact a multivalent whole. Nowhere does the NT make a systematic distinction between law and gospel, between ethics and theology. For example, while Matthew's Sermon on the Mount includes Jesus' teaching about the law, it is but one part of His larger proclamation that the kingdom of heaven has come near with the inauguration of His messianic mission. Paul's concern with the status of the law for the Gentile mission is never discussed apart from the gospel for the Gentile mission; in fact, the good news is that God in Christ has ordained a new age in the history of his salvation during which time Israel has become a new creation with a new, pneumatic law to obey.

Further, the literature of the NT is occasional. Whether the preaching of Jesus or that of the apostles, the gospel of God and its demand are always adapted to the life of a particular people: Biblical proclamation always intends to make the norms and values of God's reign relevant for a specific *Sitz im Leben*. Thus, the canonical kerygmata and their variegated descriptions of divine law, while always centered on the stable features of God's eternal attributes and the effects of His righteous action within history, take on the character of life itself: dynamic, living, unfolding. 5 Perhaps the recent trend toward narrative theology and ethic underscores this point: any articulation of law or gospel must finally attend to the life of a particular people, Israel, and of a particular individual, Jesus from Nazareth. 6

It goes without saying that the Bible, if not also the Spirit, resists any reductionistic effort to bifurcate divine law from divine gospel, and to "freeze" each into abstract and arcane summaries of Biblical teaching. Whatever our understanding of law and gospel, we must seek to retain in it the same sort of dynamic always found in ongoing conversations between a stable text and a changing context, between sacred canon and believing community, which is suggested by the non-systematic and multivalent character of the Biblical Word itself.

In stressing the Bible's diversity, we are not saying that the Bible's own theologies or ethical programs contradict each other in any fundamental way. The Bible's diversity is understood in terms of the writer's own theological conceptions or emphases. Such emphases, parts or contours of the larger canonical whole, form an inner "theo-logic" or moral logic which is decisive in understanding the ways in which a particular writer relates, for example, the law to the gospel. It is true that a particular church's theological or ethical tendencies are shaped by the "theo-logic" or moral logic of those writers or books which have generally guided its tradition. For example, the tradition of the Protestant church by and large has been forged from its reading of Paul (and in particular Romans and Galatians). Paul's ethical emphases shape a particular ethos, 7 which moves the church, if left unchecked, toward antinomianism. However, within the whole canon we do find those checks appropriate to balance the antinomian *Tendenz* of the Pauline-oriented church. 8 We will return to this point later in the essay.

It should be clear that our "hermeneutical principle" which makes our

discussion of law and gospel useful for the church is a canonical rather than a purely historical, thematic, or rhetorical one. Canonical critics wish to elevate the idea as well as the ongoing function of a Biblical canon as decisive for Biblical hermeneutics. What is of primary importance for the proper interpretation of the Bible is its "norming" role within the community of faith.

For the purposes of this essay, let us quickly sketch four elements of a canonical hermeneutic which will then control our subsequent treatment of the relationship between the law and gospel in particular, and, the canon and church in general. First, by emphasizing the canonical function of the Christian Scriptures for the Christian community, we wish to draw attention to the authority of the Bible for construing a Christian life and faith. That is, the Bible's authorized function within the life of God's people is to provide the true church with a standard against which theological or ethical claims and their justifications can be evaluated—either to approve them as orthodox (i.e., apostolic) or to correct them as heterodox.

In this regard, we should again underscore the pluralism which characterizes even the apostolic witness to Christ. It is a pluralism which James Sanders has rightly understood as self-correcting.<sup>9</sup> That is, a canonical epistemology recognizes that a single Biblical theology, while incomplete since no one theological conception encompasses the whole, nevertheless marks a valid account of God's Gospel. On that basis, it is possible to accept the truthfulness of all the Bible's theologies as multiple perspectives which mutually inform and correct each other. Thus, we should not be alarmed to find different conceptions of law and gospel in the NT; we should learn to celebrate such differences as divinely inspired "checks-and-balances" which continue to guide the whole church.

Further, the historic formation and the final literary form of the Bible, the inspired process and the inspiring product, envisage many clues which in turn should inform our "hermeneutical principle." That is, the final form of the NT represents a discrete and legitimate interpretation of God's Gospel. Further, the entire formation of the NT occurred under the aegis of God's Spirit, who at each point guided the church to a right understanding and appropriation of God's Word: from the Jesus-event; to the first witnesses of Him; to their original proclamation and writing; to the later editorial reshaping of the record for new *Sitze im Leben*; to the selecting and collecting activities of the second and third century church; to the final formation of these various collections into the Christian book we continue to use in translated versions. How the church interprets its sacred texts at each moment of its life provides important clues for the "next generation" of tradents as they stand before their Bible as a normative medium of God's Word.

Second, the diversity within the church is not only an inevitable but necessary reflection of its canon's pluralism. Diversity between denominations is firmly rooted in the NT itself. But more important in our view is that this ecclesial diversity, which reflects the Bible's self-correcting apparatus, also provides a normative context for identifying the Church's communions and for guiding self-correcting ecumenical conversations between them. Even as the parts of the NT make an inspired whole greater than the sum of its parts, so also the church catholic must learn to listen to its own

distinctive parts in order to understand more fully what it means to be the church and to do as the church ought.

Third, Biblical interpretation always involves an ongoing conversation between the canon in all its diversity and the church in all its diversity. Hermeneutical theory seeks to find some logical structure by which to make sense of this diversity. Given the function of the Bible as the church's canon, once its own diversity is established, the posing of such "conversations" must find their way back into the church's life. Any structure which tries to make sense of the Bible's own diversity must focus ultimately on the church's use of the Bible. The fundamentalistic "hermeneutics of harmonization" or the critical "hermeneutics of reductionism" are attempts to locate logical coherence between Biblical texts rather than in the conversation between church and canon. 10 In such cases, the Bible's authority for believers depends upon the character of Biblical propositions rather than on the Bible's ongoing usefulness as the conduit through which a living God continues to address His people in matters of their faith and practice. A truly Biblical (i.e., canonical) hermeneutics must find a way to conjoin text and context, canon and community in meaningful ways.

Rather than looking outside the Bible for such a logic, a canonical hermeneutic looks to the Bible's own unrecorded hermeneutics: how Biblical writers and their communities used and continue to use their Bibles, and how the church has continued to relate its Bible to faith and life. The crucial point to be made here is that both Biblical writers and Christian communities have always followed midrashic method when relating their bibles to Christian faith and life. By "midrash," we mean something more than its strict definition, a commentary on a Biblical text. It rather is a commentary on how a particular text interprets a particular context of faith. Assumed in midrash is the dynamic adaptation of sacred and stable text to living and changing context. God's Word is finally made clear within life, when the text or texts are re-interpreted and re-signified in ways meaningful for or analogous to a particular people living in a particular context, confronted with particular crises of faith and contingencies of life. The constraints operating in midrash are theological. Whatever new meaning is derived from a Biblical text for a new context, the new interpretation of law or gospel must "tell the Tell"- it must be consistent with the Biblical story of a covenanting God who in Christ calls a faithful people into a saving relationship with Him.

In this sense, the Bible teaches that God's Word is something "caught, not taught." The hermeneutical principle is concerned more with the meaning of the sacred text for the living context (midrash) than with the meaning of the sacred text qua text. Midrash then stands opposed to the sort of ethical or theological abstraction which removes God's Word and will from the sorts of things we actually deal with in our lives. Midrash also opposes a casuistry which imposes rules in an arbitrary manner upon a particular people without being sensitive to their living conditions, their religious tradition, their cultural myths and the Like. To be sure, our understanding of a text's significance today is controlled by past meanings and intentions; canonical hermeneutics does not call for an end to historical and literary critical work with the sacred texts. However, to assume that the past meaning either has no meaning for the present, or the past can somehow move into

the present in some static way is to deny the inspiring action of a living God. The Bible must always be understood as the conduit of God's Word for the present age. We are not interested, then, in what the New Testament writers thought about the law and gospel in isolation from today's community of faith; nor are we interested in reconstructing the tradition the writer received or passed on. Rather, we are interested in how the traditioning process, and the understanding of God's law and gospel it enshrines, can be adapted in useful ways for the present age. Indeed, Biblical scholarship which is not intended for nor shaped by the worshiping community fails to interpret the Bible as the church's canon. When this occurs, in my view, God's Word for His people is silenced.

Finally, the canonical function of the Bible envisages a distinctively prophetic impulse. 11 Unlike its "scriptural" function, which is more pastoral in effect, the Bible's "canonical" function evaluates, judges, corrects, and measures those who read it as normative in matters of life and faith.

Approaching the whole Bible as canon, the church comes with a renewed sense of honesty and humility; it is reminded of what has been excluded from its own "Bible within the Bible"; from its own notions of orthodoxy and orthopraxis; and how such exclusions have distorted the Gospel in its real life. We will illustrate and apply this important point to the Wesleyan church later in the essay.

## II

Any discussion of law and gospel in the NT must begin with the Gentile mission. In earliest Christianity, believers retained Judaism's Torah as normative for faith and life. In fact, for them Torah was interpreted and observed by God's messiah, Jesus from Nazareth. This made sense to these first Christians, who as converts from Judaism had always followed the essentially ethical form of religion which predominated Second Temple Judaism. Thus early Jewish Christian believers continued to prove their devotion to God by being zealous to the demands of Israel's Torah as it was interpreted by Messiah.

It is against this backdrop that Luke narrates in Acts the most decisive event (and problem) in the history of the early church—the conversion of Gentiles by the preaching of a law-free gospel. According to Luke, the watershed event of apostolic Christianity was the Jerusalem synod (Acts 15), which convened to tackle the relationship of the law to the law-free gospel as first preached by Peter to Cornelius (Acts 10) and now by Paul and Barnabas to the goyim of Asia (Acts 14). The ensuing apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-21) is of great importance not only in understanding how the first church related Israel's law to the church's gospel; it also became the apostolic (and thus continuing) paradigm according to which the canonizing church shaped its Bible for future generations of Christians.

The relationship between the Cornelius conversion and the subsequent Jerusalem Council, and then its purpose within the overall narrative and theology of Luke-Acts is a storm-center of Lucan scholarship. 12 Briefly summarized, Peter is pictured in Acts 10 as a pious, law-observant Jew: he is offended according to Acts 10:14-15, when in a vision he is told to eat food that God had previously forbidden through Torah. Of course, the vision functions in the narrative context as a divine decree that in the new age even

as non-kosher food is now fit to eat, non-kosher people, the Gentiles, are now fit to receive the gift of salvation on terms equal with Jews. More profound than a reversal of previous revelation, the demand strikes at the very heart of Torah since it is by following the demand of Torah that an elect people was distinguished both religiously and socio-politically. The issue is one of identity: who is Israel? When other Jewish believers in Jerusalem-among them Pharisaic Christians-hear Peter's story, they object because for them the law is the gospel; that is, law-observance and circumcision are necessary requisites for entering into eschatological Israel. 13

For the readers of Acts 15, the conversion of Cornelius is preparation for Luke's report of the debate following the inauguration of Paul's Gentile mission and the preaching of his law-free gospel. Evidently the debate which followed the conversion of the Gentile, Cornelius, apparently settled in Acts 11:1-18, has resurfaced among Judean believers who have heard that Paul is not demanding of Gentile converts what Judaism demands of Gentile proselytes. Surprisingly, it is James, and not Peter (who merely rehearses the Cornelius episode; 15:7-11) nor Paul (who remains a minor player, perhaps even allowing Barnabas to recount the "signs and wonders" of the new age they have witnessed together; 15:12), who offers the resolution.

In keeping with Luke's use of his Bible (LXX) throughout Acts, James' speech centers on a prophetic text (15:16-17 - cf Amos 9:11-12) as the Biblical (i.e., normative) justification of his decree (15:19-21): for Luke, the Gentile mission is the fulfillment of God's promise of an eschatological Israel which is comprised of both Jews and non-Jews. What is critical to note about the decree, (which is the Lucan James' "drosh" on the Amos text), is that the Gentile gospel is law free (15:19) while the Jewish gospel is law observant (15:21).<sup>14</sup> Fellowship between the two groups, their apostolates and missions, was guaranteed by maintaining certain "social" sensibilities: that is that Gentile believers respect certain food habits and sexual constraints (15:20), suggested by the apostles, in order to insure social solidarity within the church.

While the decree's intent is clear enough, the four requirements (15:20) which make it up are obscure. They are not found together in any Jewish source, nor do they reflect current Jewish halakah. Further, James points to himself (15:19; and by implication to the Jewish apostolate) as their source; it is quite simply an apostolic decree. Further, as Wilson persuasively argues, the unity James wishes to maintain is not theological nor ethical in a normative sense, but socio-political. <sup>15</sup> Luke's James is concerned about maintaining fraternal unity in light of the diversity of missions and gospels within the church which so easily angered and threatened to divide it. It goes without saying that such social stability would have been deemed requisite for the young church's progress.

This agrees with Paul's apologia of the same event in Galatians 2:1-10. According to Paul what fellowship is achieved at Jerusalem is a socio-political understanding between the two apostolates. Recall that according to Paul, he had gone to Jerusalem because of a revealed directive (2:2), and there, as in Antioch (2:11-14), he defended his call, his mission, and his gospel before the Jewish apostolate. Their political agreement was rooted in their mutual awareness that God had ordained two discrete missions and *kerygmata* (2:7-9), with two different understandings of the relationship of Israel's law to

the church's gospel. In the case of Titus, his identification with the crucified Christ (2:15-21) has been secured by faith and not by observing the Jewish laws as proselyte (6:11-16). At the same time, Luke's Paul is pictured as a law-observant Jew when fellowshiping with other Jews (Ac. 18:8; 21:23-27; 23:1-9; 24:10-21; cf. 1 Cor. 9:20)! 16

The point we are making is that from the very beginning the church has struggled with the relationship between law and gospel, God's demand and God's grace. It is always a struggle over God's desire to have communion with all persons-especially the outcast. The Gentile mission was in fact a theological problem-a point which Paul intensifies by locating his law-free gospel explicitly in divine revelation (i.e., in the Damascus Road christophany; Gal. 1:11-12, 15). God's solution, given through revelation to Peter and James, Paul and Barnabas, is that law and gospel are conjoined in different ways according to different audiences: indeed, God's gospel and His demand find His people in many different ways. Yet, what is the singular purpose of all such arrangements is that God has reconstituted a new and true Israel for the new age of His salvation.

The canonizing community always looked back to the first church for guidance in forming the Bible for future generations of believers. This same diversity found at Jerusalem is also envisaged by the NT canon. Thus, in the two corpora of letters, Pauline and non-Pauline, which make up the whole NT Letter, we find law and gospel conjoined in differing ways according to Jerusalem's different apostolates. 17 Again, in the four-fold Gospel, we find Matthew's view of law different from that of Luke or John. Yet, each and all together the purpose remains the same: to provide the ongoing community of faith with an inspired medium through which God continues to make His Word known. To this prospect we now turn.

### III

In this section of the essay, we will develop the idea of law within the gospels of the evangelists Matthew and Luke. It is axiomatic to Biblical exegesis, but an axiom which bears repeating, that it is one thing to speak of the evangelists' view of the relationship between law and gospel and still another to inquire after the historical Jesus' view of Israel's law and the gospel of God He proclaimed. Since our focus is with the final form of the canonical gospels, we are primarily interested in how the evangelists understand Jesus' teaching of the law and how that relates to their understanding of the gospel. Our reason for this is rooted in both practical as well as theological soils: the final form of the fourfold Gospel is what the church reads and uses to articulate its perception of what Jesus taught and did. Further, it is this fourfold narrative of God's Son and messiah which the church continues to recognize as inspired by God and therefore normative, indeed, trustworthy, for Christian discipleship. 18

We will follow the consensus and assume that Matthew's gospel was shaped within Jewish Christianity and Luke's within Gentile Christianity. 19 The diversity we will find, then, within the NT's multiple Gospel canon regarding the relationship between law and gospel in Jesus' messianic ministry reflects the diversity of the early church's mission.

*Matthew's Gospel and the Law.* 20 The question of the law and its relationship to both Jesus and His followers are matters of fundamental

importance for the evangelist. Clearly, for Matthew the entire law remains authoritative and thus the community's concern with what is lawful and what is an authorized interpretation and application of the law continues to be important (5:17-48; 12:1-14; 15:1-20; 22:34-40). The legal content of Torah and the scribal tradition to which the evangelist likely belongs are critical guides in the community's life (12:1-14; 14:4; 19:3; 22:17; 27:6). Houlden is therefore correct in arguing that "the Law is accepted in principle and largely in content" by Matthew and his Jewish church. 21

Further, since Jesus' messianic work is always viewed from within the framework of the law and His righteousness stems from His obedience to it, His followers find God's grace within and not outside of Israel's Torah. Christian discipleship is lived out in continuity with Torah's authority and is guided by the scribal tradition to which rabbi Jesus also belonged. Ironically, perfect (both in outward action and inward motive) obedience to the law, to which all will be held accountable at the end of time, is an "easy yoke" (11:28-30) because of the disciples' relationship to God's Son who is Immanuel, the presence of God's compassion and forgiveness with them always (1:23; 18:20; 28:20).

Matthew's nomism is consistent with that of later Judaism which understood law within the framework of God's covenantal relationship with Israel. In this sense the evangelist's demand for obedience to the law as interpreted by Messiah assumes that God's heavenly reign has graciously come near in the life and ministry of Jesus who is the new offer of God's covenantal salvation. Salvation is a divine initiative. Yet, to enter into salvation at Christ's parousia requires that the disciples obey the law (5:19-20; 7:21-24; 19:16-17; 25:30-46).

Matthew's understanding of the function of law in the Christian's life is introduced in the difficult although definitive passage, 5:17-20, followed by the so-called "antitheses" in 5:21-48, which envisage Jesus' "binding" interpretation of the law. There are several thorny issues to stake out in 5:17-20. The most critical is the meaning of Jesus' statement that *ouk elthon katalusai alla plerosai* (i.e., *katalusai ton nomon e tous prophetas*) (5:17b; I did not come to abolish [the law and the prophets] but to fulfill [them]). It is a critical text because *plerosai* remains contested as to its meaning in this particular passage: in what way does Jesus "fulfill" the law and the prophets? It is generally agreed among scholars that we cannot use *plerosai* to advance an antinomistic or Paulinistic (cf. Rom.10:4) meaning; Jesus did not come to complete the law in either an ethical or *heilsgeschichtlich* sense. Both Matthew's understanding of the law and the immediate context preclude this. In fact, it would seem that the entire law remains valid in at least three senses. First, 5:18-19 must be understood as an affirmation of the entire law and its continuing authority until Christ's parousia (5:18; *heos anpanta genetai*). Moreover, the commandments Jesus refers to in 5:19-commandments which must not be abolished-can only refer to those commandments which comprise the Scriptures. Second, the following antitheses (5:21-48) seem to qualify Jesus' statement about the "greater righteousness" in 5:20. Here Jesus is pictured as not abolishing the law but actually demanding a more radical, perfect obedience to it, involving action and motive, body and heart. Thus, we should say that it is not Israel's Torah-the law of the pharisees and scribes 22 - which has continuing validity; rather, it is the Torah



as interpreted by God's Son, for it is He alone who discloses God's will for the present age. Finally, Jesus' Torah is valid in an eschatological sense. Within the context of Matthew's futurism, those who fail to attend to those commands which comprise the "greater" righteousness-which is God's will for the new age-will fail to enter the future Eschaton.

Yet, what is so striking about this emphasis is that the "greater" righteousness required of the true disciples, while perfectionistic (5:48), is not legalistic. The character of a righteous disciple is formed by obedience to the whole law; and the righteous life, which is patterned after the righteous life of Jesus and His teachings of righteousness, maintains a right relationship with a righteous God. The true disciple is not preoccupied with doing righteous acts nor with making deliberate choices. The true disciple has a righteous character and so the capacity for righteous deeds. Thus, in the vision of the sheep and the goats, the righteous who enter into eternal life are actually surprised by the king's favorable judgment (25:37-40). The true disciple is compelled, even unconsciously, by what s/he understands of the transcendent kingdom to act in righteous ways, and so is allowed to enter God's kingdom (25:46).<sup>23</sup>

One final point must be made. Matthew's conception of the law is further radicalized by his conception of spirituality. The true disciple, whose moral vision is "heavenly," whose character is righteousness, and who can act in right ways, is shaped within a personal relationship with God (Mt.6). In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, the evangelist has located Jesus' teaching of the law (5:17-48) within His teaching of the disciple's relationship to the future reign of God (the Beatitudes; 5:3-12) and to a God whose rewards are personal and spiritual (acts of piety; 6:1-34). Moral formation is conjoined with spiritual formation; obedience to Jesus' Torah is the yield of a life which is profoundly theocentric.

Luke's Gospel and the Law. <sup>24</sup> Because Luke works with traditions of the historical Jesus, similar to those of Matthew, we should expect to find some similarities in how each depicts the law in relationship to Jesus and to those who follow after Him. Like Matthew, Luke includes several traditions which tell of Jesus affirming the commands of the law (10:25-28 par Mt.22:34-40; 16:16-17 par Mt.5:18,29-31; 18:18-20 par Mt. 19:16-20; et al)<sup>25</sup> or rebuking those who disobey the law (11:37-12:3 par Mt.23:15:2-3; 16:14-15; 18:9-14; 19:39, 45-46; 20:1-26 par Mt. 21; et al). His unqualified affirmation of the law's validity in 16:17 is seen by some as even stronger than Mt.5:18 <sup>26</sup> (however, see above). Luke's version of Jesus' birth story (Lk. 1-2) emphasizes the adequacy and even necessity of the ethical and ceremonial functions of the law in a way that Matthew does not. In this light, Jervell's comment about Torah seems appropriate that "Luke has the most conservative outlook within the NT because of his concern for the law as Israel's law, the sign of God's people." <sup>27</sup>

Yet, in comparing the idea of law in Matthew and Luke, it is clear to us that the opposite is true in this essential sense: Luke's concern is with a practical piety and not with preserving the law's status within the community of faith. When Luke's Jesus discusses the law, He is more inclined to talk of positive and negative responses to the law rather than involve Himself in more theological discussions of right or wrong interpretation (which is the emphasis of Matthew's Jesus). In general, Luke is less interested in

law as a requirement which must be met to enter into God's future reign and more in law as a description of the right response to a God whose mercy has already been disclosed in the life of Jesus.

More to the crucial difference, while Matthew's Jesus employs the scribal hermeneutic in order to teach His disciples the "way of righteousness," Luke's Jesus employs the hermeneutic of Israel's prophets in two different senses. First, in the sense of prophecy that Israel's law enshrines the promise of God's salvation which is now fulfilled in the life of Jesus, God's messiah (24:27, 44). Luke's use of *plerosai* in 24:44 is radically different from its use in Mt. 5:17. Here Luke affirms the predictive character of the law. In fact, more than a prophecy of Jesus' life and work, it is part of the Biblical authority by which the gospel, along with its central claim that Jesus is the salvation of God, is justified. According to Luke, the continuing validity of the law is understood by the drama of Jesus' messianic mission which repeats the old, old story and fulfills its promise. In this prophetic sense, Torah is the gospel; the two are different only in form-Torah is promise and gospel is fulfillment.

Second, the prophetic Jesus interprets the law as a call for "official" Judaism to repent. His prophetic critique of current Judaism is quite easily seen in His ongoing indictment of the pharisees and scribes for not living up to Torah's demands. Jesus' rebuke of the scribal tradition does not have to do with its interpretation (as in Matthew) but with the lifestyle of those who control it: their piety is not a practiced piety. Thus, Jesus' prophetic interpretation of the law intends to bring about Israel's repentance so it can receive the promised salvation of God.

With respect to this second point, we also mention the attractive thesis first advanced by C. F. Evans and further refined by James Sanders and others. According to Evans, the entire Central Section of Luke's gospel (9:51-18:14) is a "Christian Deuteronomy." By this he means that the evangelist shapes this section of the gospel, composed largely of Luke's own gospel traditions, to resemble in content and scope the deuteronomic treatment of Mosaic teaching (Dt. 1-26).

Using common catchphrases and sequence of topics, Luke fashions an interplay between Jesus' discipleship of His followers and those used by the deuteronomic Moses to prepare Israel for its entrance into the Promised Land. According to Evans, Luke's theological intent for using such a complicated literary scheme is to portray Jesus as the long awaited prophet-like-Moses promised in Dt. 18:18: Jesus is the one sent by God to guide the new Israel into its Promised Land (i.e., God's kingdom).

It is James Sanders who re-presents the Evans thesis in terms of Luke's ethics. 28 According to Sanders, Luke's Jesus re-presents the deuteronomic law in such a way as to disclose God's true will: "Be merciful even as your Father is merciful" (6:36; cf. Mt. 5:48). Thus, when placed against its deuteronomic background, the teachings of Jesus in the Central Section actually fashion a law of mercy, 29 which reverses the pharisaic understanding of law in later Judaism—a law of election which excluded Israel's least and lame. The law of mercy includes all, even the outcast and lost of Israel. 30

This prophetic use of the deuteronomic law is not prescriptive; rather the law is both promise and paradigm which bids faithful Israel to respond in merciful ways toward others. Deuteronomy, as it is followed and taught

by this prophet-like-Moses, is transformed into a Christian Deuteronomy which teaches about God's mercy and shows how His true Israel should respond in love both to God and neighbor. In this regard, notice Luke's version of the love command pericope in contrast with Matthew (10:25-28 par Mt. 22:34-40). While each synoptic evangelist tells of Jesus' positive commendation of the Shema and the levitical love command, it is only Luke who relates it to active service and then uses the Good Samaritan parable and Martha-Mary episode to illustrate. 31 Matthew, on the other hand, relates it to the law as its summary and fulfillment. Moreover, whenever Luke's Jesus calls the law into question on His way to Jerusalem (11:41; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 16:18), or adds to it (18:18-19), the deuteronomic texts which provide the hermeneutical key for the Central Section intend to clarify the merciful response for the true follower of Christ's "way."

Luke affirms the law, then, in both a prophetic and in a practical way; it is finally the active response of a disciple that measures his/her commitment to God and to God's Christ, and not where s/he stands with respect to a proper understanding or interpretation of the law. This relative disinterest in a "Jewish" understanding of law, and in the debates over law within Judaism, and his pronounced interest in a more practical "doing" of the law might be further underscored by the relative disinterest in the Jewish debates shown by Luke's Jesus. For example, while Luke confirms the validity of the law in 16:17, in the verse before and after he seems to call the current relevance of that very law into question. Further, Luke's emphasis on prayer might suggest that Jesus depended upon unmediated conversations with God as well as upon the law for divine guidance-perhaps a reflection of Luke's pentecostal emphasis.

In summary, then, like Matthew, Luke's conception of the law is dominated by his christology and eschatology. Both understand Jesus as God's messiah, and that through His life of service to God, He ushers a new age of God's salvation into history. Both understand that Jesus' proclamation of God's Gospel makes clear this new reality and that an eschatological Israel is formed by following after Him. The evangelists' understanding of law must be located, then, within their respective christologies and their view of salvation's history. Thus, even as Luke understands Jesus' ministry as inaugurating a period of *Heilsgeschichte* during which God's promises are fulfilled, it is Torah which is the community's depository of the promises and so predicator of Jesus' messiahship. Even as Luke's Jesus is God's prophetic messiah, it is Torah which provides Him with ample justification for His criticism of official Judaism and the basis of a better "way." We will return to these points below.

*Law and the NT's Gospel.* Before we compare how Matthew and Luke view the law differently, let us make the fundamental point again of how they view the law similarly: both evangelists agree that Israel's Torah has continuing validity in the new age of God's salvation.<sup>32</sup> The church's identity must continue to be formed by its obedience to God's law. Yet, while agreeing about the law's status in the present age, they re-signify the law's function and its relationship to Jesus in differing ways. At the risk of unqualified generalizing, we want to underscore in a positive way what those differences are, potential dangers with each, and how when brought together these differences actually form two self-correcting, mutually-informing interplays

which yield a normative and fuller understanding of the law for the present age. In constructing these interplays, we want to point out how the Bible's own inspired diversity establishes a complementary (rather than adversarial) relationship between Biblical writers and their theologies.

Matthew locates Jesus within the scribal tradition of Judaism: he is the messianic teacher of righteousness whose oral Torah establishes God's will for the present (and future) age. Jesus' relationship to the law, then, is as its teacher and interpreter. The true (i.e., righteous) disciple is the one who follows Jesus' interpretation over and against the scribes and pharisees of "official" Judaism. Matthew's Jesus also sets down a code of rules to guide the conduct of a "greater" righteousness which the disciple must obey in order to enter into the future consummation of God's kingdom

The emphasis of Matthew's Jesus is toward debating the law with others who employ a scribal hermeneutic to Israel's Torah. Its movement is toward a new casuistry which clarifies the conditions of obedience and service to God; its purpose is to establish a way of life which is "other worldly" (i.e., heavenly). In this way, the evangelist directs his readers toward the future consummation of this age when God's heavenly reign will break into human history in a final and cosmic way. Those who obey will enter God's future salvation, and those who do not follow the messiah's instruction will be like the fool who built his spiritual house upon a weak foundation, and was destroyed on the day of judgment. In brief, Matthew's conception of law is "Jewish."

The Jesus of Luke's gospel is God's eschatological prophet. By the obedience of His own life and through His prophetic interpretation of the Torah, Jesus bids Israel to repent and enter into the mercies of God, which were first promised in Israel's Torah, and now are being fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus and His followers. The true disciple is actively engaged in works of mercy such as are envisaged by the God of Torah.

Luke's Jesus is not interested in battles for right interpretation between scribes and rabbis; nor is he interested in establishing a Christian casuistry. Rather, Jesus is more interested in an active response of merciful deeds and pious prayer-to a law of mercy which responds to God and to outcast alike out of an awareness of God's mercy already bestowed in the life of His Son and Spirit. In this sense, the salvation of God is not something to strive for, but to respond to.

This summary makes clear not only the tension within the fourfold Gospel between Matthew's view of law and that of Luke; it also suggests conflicts inherent to each gospel tradition. Within Matthew's Jewish church, the twin emphases on the theoretical discussion of the law and then on rules to ensure righteous conduct locate the value of law both in the abstract sphere of scribal debate and in the concrete sphere of the disciples' life. Further, the evangelist's emphasis on the spiritual side of discipleship and on the future of God's salvation tends all the more to emphasize the transcendent or abstract nature of the law's role within the community of faith.

This can result in a dangerous *Tendenz* toward a moral realism which intellectualizes and so obscures the heavenly source of the law while elevating at the same time the importance of current realities. The code of rules becomes a casuistry, emptied of good news, divorced from our devotion to the heavenly Father and His commitment to others. Rules become requirements to meet, tests to pass, a standard of external holiness necessary to

enter God's future salvation. Christianity becomes a moralistic religion, without a vision of transcendent power to challenge and change life within and without.

Understood in this light, Luke's understanding of law is Matthew's "check and balance." His emphasis is on a law which promotes an active mercy—one which attends to the needs of the least, the last and the lost of Israel, not out of a frenzy to gain or maintain God's salvation, but out of a profound sense of gratitude that God's mercy has already found us. Luke presses not only the reality of God's salvation in the present age, but its historical fabric: the community of disciples is empowered by God's mercy to act, concretely and historically, in ways which can transform society for the good. His salvation is jubilarly even as it is prophetic. For Luke, divine law is for this world, not for the "other world."

Yet, the danger of Luke's view of law, perhaps exemplified by his Jesus' apparent ambivalence to it, is that it tends toward irrelevance. Indeed, this sort of antinomistic *Tendenz* is at the heart of the Jewish concern with the Gentile mission. For Luke as for Paul, there is a sense that the law is a promise which Jesus has already fulfilled; the law is a useful paradigm of God's mercy and of our merciful response toward Him. The law might even promote our devotion to God and His redemptive interests; but it is not critical for maintaining our right relationship with Him. Torah is less a demand than a revelation. The mark of authentic discipleship is a life of merciful actions, in obedient response to a merciful God who is disclosed in Torah.

Such a concern for the "act" (praxis) of discipleship can also truncate a concern for the character of the one who acts: an ethics of doing often demotes an ethics of being. Too often, a theological vision of morality, a way of "seeing," is replaced by the juridical concern for the rightness (=mercy quotient) or the wrongness (=apathy quotient) of human responses to situations of need. Morality, then, is measured by how many Good Samaritan acts one can produce during a lifetime. Matthew's view of law envisages a different morality, for in the law, Jesus finds a certain kind of life—one which flows from the righteousness of the heavenly kingdom and its heavenly King. Matthew's casuistry is not merely a code of rules but the contours of God's righteous demand that informs and forms a righteous character (= "heart"), which can naturally see what is the will of a just and justifying God and which empowers a life which transcends the present evil.

Further, Matthew's desire to rid his own church of an emergent antinomistic spirit by a Christian casuistry works well within the canon's Gospel to enhance Luke's ambivalence toward a rule oriented view of law. It is possible that Luke's emphasis on praxis at the expense of rules, ends instead of means, might result in moral confusion at best or cynicism at worst—a clear danger for immature audiences.

Together, in dynamic interplay, the fourfold Gospel argues for a law which shapes both the disciple's righteous character and his/her merciful responses to human need. It argues for a law which guides disciples to a salvation not yet realized and for one which bids them to respond to a salvation already real. Matthew's emphasis on theory is balanced by Luke's emphasis on praxis; Matthew's construal of law as the requirement for a coming kingdom is checked by Luke's stress on law as conveying the

promise of salvation already fulfilled. We will come back to these canonical interplays later in this essay for their importance for Wesleyan Christianity.

#### IV

Our second conversation arises from within the NT's multiple Letter collection. On the one hand, we will try to recover the core teaching of Paul with respect to the relationship between the law and the gospel; on the other, we will summarize our findings from the non-Pauline corpus of letters, finally emphasizing the canonical interplay between Paul and James, historically the location of the fiercest battle over the Letter's understanding of law, and its relationship to the gospel. As is true for the Gospel, what diversity we find in the Letter reflects the multiformed character of the gospels proclaimed by the first apostles of the church, whose collective witness has been canonized and preserved for Christian faith. While differing in specifics we would argue as a general principle that the Jewish-Gentile pluralism has been maintained at a canonical level, with Matthew's view of law (and Jesus' understanding of it) continued in the non-Pauline letters and Luke's view of law (and Jesus' understanding of it) contained in the Pauline letter. Also as a general principle, we would accept the assessment of the canonizing community which elevated the importance of the Paul and the Gentile mission and positioned his writings first among the apostolic witnesses. However, we do this so as not to exclude the non-Pauline witnesses from their critical role of checking and balancing the Pauline tradition.

Paul's view of law and gospel. It is the consensus of Pauline scholars that the Pauline corpus forwards an inconsistent view of the Torah and the relationship of law to Paul's gospel. For that reason, James Sanders says that "Paul's attitude toward the Law has been one of the most puzzling and seemingly insoluble in Biblical study." 33 Essentially, the conflict is this: on the one hand, Paul speaks of Christ as ending the law; to try to follow Torah as a means of entering into or even of maintaining right fellowship with God is bankrupt, a curse, for the crucified and risen Christ has abolished it (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 2:19; 3:13; 2 Cor. 3:4-17; Eph. 2:14-16; et al). On the other hand, Paul also speaks as a Jew who sees Israel's law as holy, as the instrument of divine revelation, and as moral advice to follow (Rom. 3:31; 7:8-13, 22; 1 Cor. 7:19; 9:8, 21; 14:34; cf. 1 Tim. 1:8).

Most explain Paul's apparent inconsistency historically, either in terms of Paul's own theological development 34 or in terms of the different *Sitze im Leben* Paul encountered in the early churches to which he wrote. 35 It is conceivable that Paul's view included both a negation and affirmation of law depending on how the community of faith used it. 36 Whatever the historical reality, (which resists a consensus of scholarly speculation and is impossible to reconstruct in any case,) the canonical level of Paul's gospel contains different accounts of the law, and our exegetical task is to make some sense of this canonical inconsistency for the church. 37

We begin our discussion by claiming that Paul's letters were all occasional; that is, they were written in response to particular audiences who were facing real crises, most often theological. In general, his references to law were part of larger controversies between believers. Thus, we must first try to reconstruct the controversy as best as the textual evidence allows

in order to understand the "theo-logic" which lies behind the adaptation of his view of law to a particular space-time. Moreover, his view of law, whether negative or positive, always functions as part of his defense for his Gentile gospel and his apostolic mission. His opponents are both insiders (typically, nascent gnostics) or outsiders (typically, Judaizers). This is a battle waged over the law's legitimate function within the Gentile mission.

In Paul's Judaism (and in some quarters of the Jewish church), Torah observance had become the essential identifying mark of a true Israel. Sanders argues that the halachic (or ethical) aspect of Israel's Torah was stressed "almost to the exclusion of its haggadic (or the story of God's saving grace in Israel's history) aspect." 38 In other words, Judaism's perception of its relationship to God was informed by a legalistic and cultic reading of Torah to the exclusion of the narrative of God's salvation. Once divorced from its theological mooring, the codes of rules had no "theo-logic." The result was a religiousness identified by its ethos (i.e., what it means to behave as Israel) rather than by a mythos (i.e., what it means to be Israel). Obedience to rules was elevated over authentic piety as the mark of devotion to God and membership in the true Israel. In a word, such a community understands its relationship to God nomistically.

Against this religious milieu, Paul's demotion of law's *heilsgeschichtlich* importance envisages his concern to shift the emphasis back to one which retained Torah's inherent balance between ethos and mythos—indeed, a balance which Paul achieved only by an overemphasis in the other (i.e., theological) direction. His concern is not to remove God's demand from the gospel; he is not antinomistic. Rather, it intends to check the dangerous legalistic and moralistic tendencies of a version of God's gospel which somehow elevates demand at the expense of grace or which separates demand from grace as if obedience is ever possible without first becoming a new creature by the transforming grace of God. For Paul, obedience to God is impossible outside of a relationship with Him; thus, one cannot logically speak about ethos without first (and foremost) speaking about mythos.

It is also no doubt the case that the Jewish *Tendenz* militated against the gospel he received through the Damascus Road christophany. Further, it is no doubt true that Paul felt an overemphasis on ethos had earlier led him to persecute the church (Gal. 1:11-16). Therefore, there may very well be a sense that Paul's emphasis on mythos, on the story of God's saving grace disclosed through the dying and rising of Christ, reflects both divine revelation as well as his own psychological pain.

According to Paul's law-free gospel Torah no longer functions as a way of approaching God. Even as a legal code, believers are no longer obliged to obey Torah's rules; only the God Torah narrates, and the Christ it foretells. Indeed, trying to obey the law during the new age is only doomed to frustration (Rom. 7:14-8:2). Even though Paul fought against an emergent antinomism within his own church (e.g., 1 Cor.), such a *Tendenz* is the natural result of a gospel which emphasizes mythos over ethos.

Paul also articulates a more positive view of law. In doing so, he retains the Jewish idea that Torah enshrines God's revelation in a way not unlike Luke's prophetic use of the law (see above). Even as God is good, so must Torah be intrinsically good. Thus, in the law Paul finds evidence that Jesus is Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promised salvation (Gal. 3:16-6:1); and

in the law Paul finds that faith is the way of entering into right relationship with Yahweh (Rom. 3:27-4:25). Faith in Christ, then, is faith in Torah, since to trust that God has revealed His salvation in Torah will naturally lead one to trust Christ in whom God's salvation has finally and fully come.

We can understand Pauline paraenesis in this way as well. The apostle does not hesitate adding lists of rules to several of his letters; however, these rules do not vary much from the paraenetic tradition Paul received within Judaism-rules based upon if not echoed in Torah's Code of Holiness and Judaism's catechesis. 39 What has been changed is not the content of God's demand, but the "heart" of God's Israel. That is, as a new creation, the true Israel, the church, can now obey by faith what God has promised in Torah (i.e. salvation by faith in Christ) and there revealed to be His will (i.e. a life of holiness).

Thus, such rules are not commands given by Paul to obey; they do not comprise an heteronomy, a list of precepts from God (or apostle) to obey in order to maintain a right relationship with God (or apostle). Rather, they comprise a description of the new life which God's Spirit now effects within the believing community. In this sense, Pauline paraenesis is regulation rather than prescription. God's righteousness, revealed "faith unto faith" (i.e. from Christ's faith in God to the community's faith in God's work through Christ), now becomes a lived righteousness under the aegis of the Spirit of holiness (Rom. 8). The church's righteousness now discloses God's righteousness. The church's new way of life testifies to the eschaton which is "becoming" in its midst and to this evil age which is "passing away" as a result of the church's witness to God's powerful reign. 40 Paul's paraenesis is, as has often been said, an imperative hidden within the gracious indicative of God's salvation during the new age. Thus, we would argue that in Paul's view of law the community's ethos has finally given way to the gospel's mythos. 41 Paul's discussion of law, whether positively or negatively construed, is really a defense of his gospel: God's righteousness is now revealed in the righteous (=law / paraenesis observant) life of those who depend upon the dependable work of Jesus through whom God's forgiveness and human transformation are possible. We should insist, then, on a moral calculus which views faithfulness as the natural yield of faith, righteousness as the logical manifestation of God's right-wising action through Christ and in the Spirit. It is on this ground that we would also insist that Paul's essential understanding of the law is in continuity with that of Luke's Jesus.

Law according to the non-Pauline corpus. Of the non-Pauline letters, only two (Hebrews and James) refer to the law and its relationship to the believing community in a specific way. Yet, 1 Peter is largely paraenetic, and the Johannine letters, like the fourth gospel, transform the law (i.e., God's "commandments") into Jesus' "new commandment" which is "love one another." 42 2 Peter, probably written much later, envisages law as consisting of certain ethical logia from the Jesus/gospel tradition (2 Pt. 3:2; cf 2:21). The point is that all the Jewish apostles emphasize the "rule" of the Christian's life. We would also argue that according to the non-Paulinists, Israel's-law remains more than a valid form of God's will for the church; it maintains a saving relationship with God especially in times of suffering. 43 Law, then, is both ethical and redemptive.

While each writer offers an interesting if not compelling version of this



general construal of Christian conduct, we want to focus our attention on James whose ethical programme is clearly the most conservative version of law within the apostolic witness to the gospel and the one most in contrast to Paul's. James teaches that Israel's law has not been superseded by Christ; rather, it continues as a norm for the believing community. Indeed, Christ is not mentioned except in passing (1:1; 2:1); and even those who claim that the book's paraenesis is rooted in Jesus' moral tradition do so only on the shakiest ground. 44 We would argue that James' idea of law is not christologized; but that Israel's Torah remains the church's law as well. 45 We would also propose that James' interpretation of the levitical Holiness Code is quite pastoral if not also traditional, filtered as it through Jewish Wisdom. It is not through Christ that God liberates the true Israel, but through the heavenly word (1:17-18) of wisdom (1:19-20). Such Wisdom brings the community more squarely within the traditional instruments of Israel's covenant-"quick to hear and obey the law for liberty" 46 (1:22-2:26); slow to speak earthly wisdom but rather with the virtues of "pure speaking" (3:13-18); and slow to anger over mammon but rather to submit in worship to God (4:1-12).

Further, the paraenesis of James is thoroughly eschatological; it is an "apocalyptic paraenesis." Thus, James posits liberation at the end of time, at the parousia of the Lord (5:7-9), when God will judge Israel according to their obedience to the law, either to bless them (1:25; cf. 1:12) or to judge them (2:13; 47 cf.4:11-12; 5:1-6). Eschatological liberation is granted to those who act mercifully (2:13), in obedience to the law's center, the levitical law of love, which will gain God's approval at the end of time (2:8; 1:27; cf.2:19a, 1:26).

For James, religious faith is works-oriented (1:26-7); the law is gospel (1:25; 2:12); God recognizes those who serve and obey Him by what they do. For Paul, faith yields works; God recognizes those who serve and obey Him by whom they believe. 48 For James, God's saving righteousness is given to those who obey God's law-such as Abraham and Rahab (2:21-26). Faith alone, even though pious (2:14-17) and orthodox (2:18-20), is not recognized by God, rather, God recognizes the faithful (or faithless) by what they do (or do not do). For Paul, God's saving righteousness is given to those who by faith participate in Jesus' dying and rising and thus in God's triumph over evil and death. James does speak of faith in the Christ of glory (2:1); by doing so, he locates the coming triumph of God and those who follow His law at the parousia of Christ. It is not so much a belief "in" Christ as with Paul; but an apocalyptic belief "that" through messiah God will triumph over evil.

We admit these are cursory discussions of complex issues. In so doing we have attempted to introduce a crucial point in comparing the Pauline idea of law to the non-Pauline one. The content Paul gives to Israel's law, whether viewed negatively or positively, is ethical; it is the will of God and demands obedience. In reacting to this, Paul positions law and its ethical demand under God's saving work through Christ and in the Spirit; ethos becomes mythos in the new age. The non-Paulinists, as exemplified by James, view Israel's law as an essential part of God's salvation. With Paul, James assumes that Israel's law reveals God's mercy; however, unlike Paul, James assumes that divine mercy is revealed in rule rather than in Christ. Thus,

law has the capacity to mediate God's mercy and so to maintain a right relationship with God until the end of time.

*The law and Hebrews.* We conclude our discussion of the epistolary view of law with Hebrews. To do so only underscores the importance of Hebrews in terms of both its canonical function and its content with the NT Letter. Hebrews functions within the NT Letter as a "linking book." On the one side stands the Pauline corpus of letters, while on the other stand the letters of the Jewish "pillars," James, Cephas and John (cf. Gal. 2:91). There is a sense in which the vocabulary of Hebrews sides with Paul. Indeed, early in the canonizing process, Hebrews circulated within the Pauline corpus, even though as an anonymous letter. Yet, by titling the book, "Letter to the Hebrews," the canonizing community ultimately positioned the book among the letters of the Jewish mission. 49 The contested history of Hebrews' canonization suggests this same ambivalence: it is at once neither and either fish or fowl. For us the position of Hebrews within the canon of NT letters suggests in a symbolic way that the presence of Hebrews betwixt and between the corpora of letters reminds the hermeneut that the whole in which diversity is found must be taken as seriously as the diversity itself. A part of the whole cannot be truncated or elevated without distortion to the whole's truth. 50

This is true of Hebrews' attitude toward Israel's Torah. Hebrews shares Paul's christologizing of law: law has been superseded by Christ and is now abrogated in these last days of Israel's history. Yet, at the same time, Hebrews' view of law is non-Pauline in that it locates the center of law in soteriology rather than in ethics. That is, by subordinating his/her discussion of the law to the priestly work of Christ, the writer transforms the content of law from ethical to theological in that it regulates the cultus through which God reigns over Israel and redeems it.

Thus, according to the priestly christology found in Hebrews, the Torah's cultic legislation only points to the good news disclosed through the priestly work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in heaven; "the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-not the realities themselves" (10:1). It should be noted that the writer's discussion of law falls within that section of the argument which develops the idea of the new covenant, the idea of atonement it embodies, and the idea of priesthood all of which the law regulates (cf. *nomos* in Heb. 7-10). The maintenance of the covenant between God and Israel, mediated by the priests, demands obedience to cultic rules especially those which guide Israel's Yom Kippur (Lev. 16; cf. Heb. 9-10)- for its atonement.

This emphasis differs from that of Paul. In Hebrews, Torah is viewed as the instrument which establishes the earthly cultus, and through the cultus, the old covenant, and through the covenant, God's forgiveness. Law mediated God's atonement of old Israel. For Paul, on the other hand, Torah demanded obedience to a righteous God; it was the very act of obedience which according to Paul established a covenantal relationship with God. While Paul can retain some of the law's ethical teaching (e.g. sexual code), the writer of Hebrews, for whom the law's center is cultic, makes it clear that the law in its entirety has been superseded by Christ and the Christian gospel. In this sense, Raymond Brown is correct in calling Hebrews the New

Testament's most "liberal" document with respect to Israel's law, more liberal even than Paul.  
51

When comparing the writer of Hebrews' negation of the law with Paul's negation of the law, then, we find a common emphasis but a different understanding of it. While agreeing that the Christ event should radically transform how the church should view the law, the interest of Hebrews clearly is the law's usefulness in forging a cultus through which sins were atoned, and access to God provided. For Paul, on the other hand, the center of law is largely (although not exclusively) ethical rather than soteriological. In short, Hebrews views the law in Pauline and in non-Pauline ways, and thereby symbolizes the interrelationship between the Pauline and non-Pauline corpora within the NT canon.

Law and the NT Letter. We have taken up the canonical conversation between Paul and James in other articles. 52 In this essay, let it suffice to bring them together once again in a dialogue over law and gospel similar to the one already envisaged by Matthew and Luke. Matthew and James both deposits of Jewish Christian preaching, have a more positive view of the law's ongoing function within the church. By this we mean that God's demand and obedience to it is elevated in salvific importance, so that the church's righteousness (and so eschatological fitness) is not something "given" apart from law observance, but something which accrues from human obedience to a code of rules (whether Jesus' interpretation of rules or James' apocalyptic paraenesis). Quite simply, law is something to obey; it has moral authority but also covenantal authority in that by obeying it the righteous life is formed and eternal life is therefore granted.

While neither James nor Matthew are legalists in the strictest sense of that word, both are nomists. 53 The church still stands under the law. There are rules to follow for they formulate the manner of life to live in the new age; indeed, the blessings of the new age are found within and not outside Israel's Torah. We should also say by way of qualification that Matthew's view of Torah is more "liberal" than that of James in that Matthew does recognize that Jesus' radical reinterpretation (and not the "official" scribal tradition) of Torah has final moral and redemptive authority over the church. James, as far as we can tell, resists any kind of subordination of Torah to Christ. For him, Jesus is messiah whose parousia marks God's final judgment of those who neglect the "doing" of Torah.

The tendency of nomistic faith is an ethos characterized by casuistry and when distorted, by legalism. Observance of codes of rules which govern various aspects of the community's life is elevated in importance and even reified as the mark of authentic faith and spirituality. This is not to say that a rule-oriented construal of human conduct militates against devotion to God; rather, it is to say that devotion to God is manifested by obedience to the community's codes of right conduct.

We would also suggest that a nomistic orientation has distinct advantages, along with well-known disadvantages. God's demand is not left to guesswork; a deontology such as found in James' view of law or in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, posits morality in the rules themselves. Nor is the community's understanding of God's merciful actions toward it unclear, since the moral logic is that such codes of rules enshrine the conduct of a righteous God toward His people and creation. Thus, obedience to the rules insures

a life which not only guides a people in the right direction, but which also guides them to bear witness to God's salvation. 54

Even as a nomistic faith corrects and balances an antinomistic faith, so also an emphasis on what God has done in Christ corrects and balances the nomistic tendency toward legalism and its tacit denial of God's gracious acceptance of us. It is too often the case that even a well-intended casuistry forms an ethos which demotes the current authority of the Spirit and neglects the dynamic nature (if not ambiguity) of trying to discern under the Spirit's aegis God's will for an ever-changing context. What tends to be abrogated in any legalism is not merely the moral authority which transcends space-time, but also the believer's own responsibility for working through a particular moral dilemma. The believer's morality is determined by whether or not s/he follows the law.

In this sense, Paul's emphasis on mythos (i.e., on the community's theological vision) is a helpful focus. His traditional paraenesis does not stand alone but rather is situated within a conceptual world which makes law observance the yield of and impossible without commitment to the sacred Story. His gospel forces its readers to understand what ought to be done in any given situation not in terms of the community's rules but in terms of God's grace and forgiveness. In this sense, Paul posits moral authority outside of the human community and in God whose holiness has been revealed first in Torah, then definitively through Christ and now in the Spirit's life within the community. Because it is the metaethical concern which controls Paul's discussion of the law, the decision of what then is normative falls upon the believer who as a new creature and as part of a Spirit led community is called on to discern the will of God in the new situation of grace (Rom. 12:1-2).

## V

We come now to the most critical section of the essay. Because these conversations between Biblical writers over the law and the gospel are found within the church's canon, they all must be accepted as normative and appreciated as useful for the formation of Christian faith and life. The hermeneut's essential task is to conjoin text with context in ways which both identify and evaluate current faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16), and which then can form in God's people the "wisdom" of His salvation (2 Tim. 3:15) and the "good works" which bear witness to it (2 Tim. 3:17). In proposing this, we are especially concerned with how the canonical conversations discussed above relate to the formation of Wesleyan Christianity.

Let us begin with a rather bold statement: *the Wesleyan church is identified by the Jewish church envisaged within the NT*-by its nomistic understanding of the law, and its elevated relationship to the gospel. By this we do not mean that the Wesleyan church looks only to the gospel of Matthew and the non-Pauline letters for its moral advice. Rather, we mean to suggest that the moral logic by which the Wesleyan church organizes all the Bible's moral advice is analogous to the nomism found in the early Jewish church. Thus, whenever the Wesleyan church appropriates the Bible's moral teaching, even from Pauline paraenesis or the lips of Luke's Jesus, it tends to be interpreted nomistically - as demand rather than description, as ethical obligation rather than theological revelation.

It is no doubt the case that the Wesleyan tradition relates the law to the gospel in nomistic ways precisely because its gospel stresses sanctification, even as the non-Pauline corpus enshrines the Jewish Church's emphasis on Judaism's halachic reading of Torah. The community's discernment of the demand of God, which is guided by Biblical and traditional rules, is the recognition of a holy God whose purposes are pursued within history by obeying the law, the embodiment of God's holiness.

The Reformed side of Protestant Christianity posits the work and outworking of God's salvation exclusively with God. 55 Whether this is reflected by the "divine election" *leitmotif* of Calvinistic Christianity or by the "divine justification" of Lutheran Christianity, salvation is located where God is located—in heaven, outside of history. Salvation is finally God's responsibility, a responsibility met in Christ, and so we now "boast in Him." As such, law observance is an unnecessary focus, since salvation is not a human endeavor. Our relationship with God is not entered into nor maintained through a life made righteous by obedience to some external standard. The moral logic of this theological orientation, informed largely by Paul, forms an antinomistic ethos. If not antinomistic, certainly law is construed more theologically with the result of a more diffuse, ambiguous role given to law as an ethical norm. 56

In contrast to this theological orientation, Wesley locates God's salvation within history, as a social as well as a spiritual process, with a specific telos (i.e. perfection) as the church's social and spiritual goal. 57 Salvation includes sanctification, even as sanctification includes believers in the redemptive process in partnership with God's Spirit and the church's sacraments. Because of this orientation toward an historical process, Wesleyan Christianity emphasizes work—the work of God and the work of the believing community in concert with Him. Sharply stated, God's sanctifying grace is discerned within history by the holy acts of God's people. In emphasizing this point, Wesleyan anthropology is quite optimistic: hardly paralyzed by a fallen nature, hardly made inadequate by imperfection, believers are transformed by God's inward work and are empowered to work for and with Him within history.

While it is true that the personal piety of the holiness branch of the Wesleyan tradition emphasizes the individual's sanctification and the spiritual, inward side of salvation's historical progress, the larger tradition is more holistic than that. While it is true that entire sanctification functions on a spiritual and individual level, the sanctified individual participates in the ongoing perfecting of all things, most especially the community of believers.

This keen emphasis on a working discipleship tends toward an emphasis on the "works of the law." Especially if the law embodies the revelation of a holy God, to follow the law, itself inherently holy, yields works of holiness necessary to participate in the sanctifying of all things. One should further suspect that this impulse toward praxis, toward the historic out-working of God's salvation, shapes a rule-oriented ethic. Rules themselves are historically conditioned; rules intend to guide human conduct within history. Rules also evaluate whether a person/community is actually participating with a holy God in the outworking of his salvation within history. A fundamental orientation toward history, therefore, will desire if not demand a casuistry of some kind. Nomism is more than a concrete disclosure of this transcendent,

holy God; it has in view the possibility of actually living a holy life toward the end of participating with God in the sanctification of all things. The church's life articulates God's righteousness and promise in deed, not in faith alone.

This is not to say that Wesley nor the tradition which follows him has eliminated the Reformed emphasis on justification by faith alone. We have rather subordinated it to the perfecting process of sanctification by works alone which is the *telos* of justification. Thus, the true disciple expresses God's justifying righteousness in works of righteousness, not merely in words of faith; in orthopraxis, not merely in orthodoxy. In this way, the Wesleyan impulse toward working out God's salvation is legitimized by the canonical James and Matthew.

It should not surprise any of us, then, to find in our various Wesleyan communions the codification of law rather than of gospel. Fraternal debates tend to be over how to construe the sanctified life rather than over how to confess orthodox faith. It should not surprise us that generally Wesleyan communions stress ethos, so that their salvific calculus focuses attention on holy living as the authenticating mark of a vibrant faith. It should not surprise us to find the language of accountability and praxis. It should not surprise us to find an enlightened anthropology and pneumatology. It should not surprise us to find Wesleyans engaged in process or liberation theology of a profoundly Biblical sort. And within the church universal, it should not surprise us that the Wesleyan tradition is a critical check and balance to those Reformed communions and confessions which deemphasize a rule-oriented life as an important, concrete guide in the church's ongoing relationship with God and all things historical and spiritual. Those Christian traditions which promote a "positive" gospel sometimes at the expense of God's demand, forgiveness to the exclusion of repentance and responsibility, can fall easy prey to an antinomistic faith. 58 The fear of stressing "works-righteousness" even for ethical gain can lead to a moral immaturity, or a concern with general ethical principles but not with those rules which actually guide right conduct in specific, historical dilemma. Therefore, Wesleyan believers should be involved in a prophetic way in a variety of ecumenical discussions and endeavors, not with a self-righteous or triumphalistic manner, but in all humility to bring some balance to the whole people of God in this regard.

Indeed, it should not surprise us to find that Wesleyans struggle with their own distortions of the law's role in Biblical Christianity-with legalism, with judgmentalism and division, with shattered self-esteem, with workaholic frenzy, and with other dangerous tendencies of nomistic faith. The *Tendenz* of nomism always is to elevate the importance of law and ethical obligation so that the formation of the Community's ethos finally replaces the primary concern for faith formation. When this happens, the *ordo salutis* is perverted and justification becomes the *telos* of sanctification instead of its ground. Even as the Wesleyan tradition is identified by the Jewish church, so also these dangerous moral tendencies are checked and balanced by those ecclesial (i.e. Reformed) traditions which are more closely identified by Paul and Luke's theological orientation and its emphasis on gospel.

In listening to the remnant of Pauline Christianity in our midst, Wesleyan preaching should come to stress afresh those checks which balance

nomistic faith and so prevent heretical distortions from eroding our church's life and faith. In concluding this essay, we will mention three themes from the Lucan / Pauline matrix which check certain dangerous tendencies of Wesleyan Christianity, and which will deepen and preserve our distinctive witness to the church universal.

(1) Our tendency in emphasizing sanctification is to locate God's acceptance of us at the *telos* of salvation's history-in the future, the "not-yet" of human experience. The result is often a failure to perceive that God has already accepted us and that God's forgiving grace is currently for us and ever present in human experience. To proclaim entire sanctification without God's forgiveness is a message which shapes a self-centered construal of life, doomed to self-destruction. Our preaching must recover the power of Paul's idea of justification by faith alone-this radical dependency upon God's forgiving grace disclosed in the Christ event-to balance and deepen the idea of sanctification by works alone. 59

(2) The reductionism of nomistic faith replaces the inward character of holiness with an orientation toward holy works. Both Paul and Luke emphasize a "responsive" version of law whereby the holy life is the natural yield of a righted relationship with God. An emphasis on human acts as somehow separate from divine empowerment detracts from God's grace. Devotion to God ultimately rests on what God has already accomplished through Christ and continues to accomplish through the Spirit's sanctifying work in us. Our preaching, then, must become more theocentric and less anthropocentric, more gospel and less law.

(3) Nomistic faith is juridical; it tends to speak about the Christian's obligated duty and about the overt acts of a sanctified believer. The codes of rules set forth the external standard of what is right and what is wrong. Such standards make clear how one should behave in historical conflicts, and what decisions to make during personal crises. Nomistic faith tends to prescribe specific remedies rather than to describe a theological framework within which believers can work through a responsible action. Frankly, a nomistic ethos, while helpful in directing moral traffic, is not conducive to moral development, learning how to think ethically and to be morally responsible is thwarted. Wesleyan preaching should therefore articulate a vision of the Christian life, which makes more coherent the moral logic of our tradition. Believers should be able to compose new rules for new situations; however, such freedom requires a transcending power that enables them to see the "old" and the "new" as God sees it.

A visional perception of law's relationship to gospel also underscores the fundamental importance of the formation of a character which can act in ways that sanctify all things. This shift of focus from "doing" to "being" enhances the prospects of dismantling both the legalism ("doing" the law) and the battered self-esteem (not being able to "do" the law's demands) which too often characterizes the Wesleyan tradition.

Of course, all these themes are found in Wesley's preaching; they are an often neglected part of the self-correcting apparatus found within the Wesleyan tradition. Prophetic preaching sometimes, perhaps always, is reactionary rather than revolutionary in that it reminds a people of what God's gospel proclaims and what God's law has always demanded. Prophetic preaching calls a people to repent and change back to what they once were in order to be restored once again into a right relationship with God.

## Notes

1The phrase "law and gospel" summarizes the content of God's Word, since that Word, whether in Christ, in Scripture, or in Sacrament, takes the forms of demand (law) and gift (gospel). "Law and gospel" also summarizes the covenantal relationship between God and God's people since it is a relationship conditioned by God's response of saving grace (gospel) and His people's response of grateful obedience (law). This more theological construal of law and gospel does not deny that a more specific, historical form is sometimes in view, e.g., Judaism's Torah or a particular evangelist's gospel. Our tendency for this essay, however, is to speak of "law" as God's demand/will and "gospel" as the story of God's gift of salvation, unless we want to underscore a particular document, such as Torah, as a particular form of God's demand/gospel. Luther remarked that maintaining a proper dialectic between the two was the central theological task of the church. While there is much to commend Luther in this regard, he was inclined to set the two in adversarial relationship, as law versus gospel. The result with the Protestant tradition is to focus too much on the casuistry of "law" leading to legalism and a tacit denial of divine grace; or to focus too much on the gift of God's forgiveness and unconditional acceptance of us leading to a limitless freedom and to a moral individuation which is again a tacit denial of divine grace. We rather find in Scripture that law is always located with the gospel. Thus, God's demand is an aspect of good news, not bad news. God demands our redemption, which we can now enter into because of Christ's obedience and because of our obedience to Him. While the literature which tackles this issue is enormous, I like very much Lewis B. Smedes' sensitive introduction to it in his book, *Mere Morality* (Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 239-43. On "gospel," see my little article, "gospel," in *Beacon Dictionary of Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 1983), p. 239; and my essay, "Introduction: New Testament Ethics," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 5.2(1983) 49-94.

2The two pioneers in the field are Brevard S. Childs, whose seminal book, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) started the discipline, and James A. Sanders, whose recent book, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), is perhaps the best introduction to it. While both seek to promote the hermeneutical importance of the idea of canon, Childs tends to emphasize its final, canonical product, while Sanders tends to emphasize its canonizing process and the ongoing interaction between the believing community and its Bible. My own introduction to canonical hermeneutics, "Ecumenicity and Ecclesiology," is forthcoming in *Christian Scholars Review*, 16 (1987).

3James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

4See my "The Canon and Christian Preaching," *The Christian Ministry* 17/5 (1986) 13-17.

5Cf. Paul D. Hanson, *The Diversity of Scripture* (OBT, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

6While most narrative theology works off of a theological (i.e., eschato-



logical) or historical perspective which views life as presently moving from somewhere to someplace, it seems to us that the Bible itself envisages the same sort of dynamic, beginning with Genesis, a book about the "beginnings" of creation and of Israel, of covenant and of promise, of evil and of redemption, and concluding with Revelation, a book about the apocalypse of God's triumph over evil and the final fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. The eschatological/historical drama of human and salvation's history from its beginning to its conclusion is a canonical one. The normative way we view our own stories, then, is as the Biblical story casts life: not as if there is no end, as if the existential moment is of ultimate importance; rather, in light of a conclusion when issues we address are finally resolved by the righteousness of God. For a good introduction to narrative theology, see Michael Goldbert, *Theology and Narrative* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981-2).

7At several points in this essay, we will use *ethos* instead of *ethic(s)*. By *ethos* we mean to refer to the moral behavior or logic which a particular writer's moral advice, or *ethic*, tends to form. While an *ethic* is construed as specific rules or *paraenesis* which guide human conduct, an *ethos* is the moral *Gestalt* which takes shape in a people who use a particular *ethic*. We would argue, for example, that the terms, *nomism* and *antinomism*, do not refer to an *ethic*, but to an *ethos* which is formed by following a particular gospel and its version of law. Paul's gospel tends to shape an *antinomistic ethos*, then, not because Paul fails to provide an *ethic*, a *paraenesis*, for his readers; rather, because his *paraenesis* is so construed by the logic of his gospel as to subordinate law to gospel, even to abrogate it from the Christian's life. Likewise, we will use the complementary term, *mythos*, to refer to the theological conception of a particular writer or ecclesial tradition. Again, what we have in mind is the "theo-logic" of such a conception, or how the various pieces of the whole gospel are so fitted together as to make the relationship between *mythos* and *ethos* coherent.

8In this paragraph I have introduced two related terms of importance for adequately understanding my proposal: a Biblical "emphasis" and a church's "tendency" (or *Tendenz*). Particular ethical emphases, especially when placed within a theological framework, will form certain perceptions of Christian existence which in turn tend to motivate certain actions. This is not to say that the consequences of certain ethical emphases are themselves imagined or authorized by the Biblical writer who forwards them. While I would argue that Paul's understanding of the Christian life, given his theological commitments, forms a moral logic which tends people toward *antinomianism*, I would also argue that Paul himself was not an *antinomian*. Clearly from 1 Cor. 9-10, Paul is well aware of this potential danger in his churches, the result of distorting his moral programme: his emphasis on God's accepting love in Christ and his deemphasis of Law promotes the illusion of a lawless Christianity. Yet, the point still must be made in light of the church's continuing struggle with "works righteousness" that an appropriation of Paul's gospel to the exclusion of his own correctives or the emphases of other Biblical moralities will "tend" the church in dangerous directions.

9Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 46-60.

10We are using "logical coherence" in a philosophical sense as a criterion for conveying truth in rational (i.e., in non-contradictory) ways. Discussing the problematics of using this criterion as a measurement of Biblical truth will take us too far afield in this current essay. We would only comment that Biblical hermeneutics must be controlled by a set of criteria which emerges from the Bible itself and not from the Western philosophical tradition. While recognizing that the idea of coherence is multifaceted and that it allows for "apparent" contradictions, it is an altogether inadequate formula for construing the realities of the Biblical texts and the multivalent truth it forwards. Further, such a criterion promotes an inadequate view of divine inspiration—one which tends to demand of God and the Biblical texts a monolithic rather than a multivalent Word. In saying this, we do not want to deny the importance for recovering a coherent core of those Biblical commitments or themes which are non-negotiable (i.e. to hold to them as true is what it means to be Christian) and which lie close to the surface of all Biblical theologies. In the case of an "hermeneutics of harmonization" we mean to deny the validity of those programmes which are concerned, even preoccupied, with the demand that the Biblical text be coherent down to the tiniest detail; or that it be coherent, or inerrant, in scientific and historical ways. The rules of such programmes do not allow for the complexity language or for differences between the text's "horizon" and the hermeneut's.

11In making this point, I am using a point developed more carefully by Charles M. Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), pp. 82-105. Gaylord Norce reflects on the importance of Wood's monograph in "Stimulating Faith by Way of Contradiction," *Christian Century* 103 (August 13-20, 1986) 703-04; Noyce draws similar conclusions to those presented in this essay.

12R. W. Wall, "Peter, the 'Son' of Jonah: The Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of Canon," *JSNT* 49 (1987), 79-90; in general, I follow J. Jervall over G. Lohfink in the current debate.

13There is considerable debate over this point between those who follow the lead of E. P. Sanders, who in a set of influential monographs argues that early Christianity in accord with Palestinian Judaism was shaped by covenantal nomism. That is, the function of the law was to maintain Israel's covenantal relationship with Yahweh; however, it was by trust that the true Israel actually entered into covenant. See especially *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), and *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). James D. G. Dunn has recently argued in an important article, "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65(1983) 95-122, that the Sanders thesis makes no sense of Paul's polemic against the Judaizing opponents in Galatians and in Romans. The issue is what is required for entrance into the covenant, and not what is necessary to maintain a relationship already secured. Further, Dunn rightly argues that the whole idea of law-observance transcended merely religious or spiritual concerns, Jews and Jewish Christians were fundamentally concerned with their political identity and social stability within the Greco-Roman world. To give up what Paul wanted to would have, they thought, serious socio-political consequences.

14See Stephen G. Wilson's highly illuminating and informed discussion of the Council and the history of its interpretation in his *Luke and the Law* (SNTSMS 50, Cambridge: University Press, 1983) 71-102

15Wilson, 101-02.

16There is considerable debate over this point. Robert Maddox, for example, says that "It is indeed remarkable . . . that Luke is at such pains to have Paul emphasize that he himself has always lived according to the Law including the oral, Rabbinic *halakah*. But it is also clear that Luke has no real understanding of what this law is;" *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (T&T Clark, 1982) p. 38. J. Jervell makes the opposite point in *Luke and the People of God* (Augsburg, 1972) p. 169. With Jervell, we think the central point is Luke's desire to underscore at once the Jewishness of Paul and the inclusiveness of God who through Paul called a people out of the non-Jews to himself in a "new" way with a "new" gospel.

17R. W. Wall, "The Problem of the Multiple Letter Canon of the New Testament," *HorBT* 8.2 (1987), 1-31.

18Such a focus does admit to a difference between the gospels and their stories of the historical Jesus, and what Jesus actually said and did. We would argue, however, that there is fundamental historical and theological continuity between the life and teaching of the historical Jesus and the fourfold narrative of the canonical Christ.

19Here we follow Stephen Wilson's thesis that Luke wrote his gospel "mainly, if not solely, for Gentile Christians for whom those aspects of the law discussed in the Gospel were not a problem," *Luke and the Law* (SNTSMS 50, Cambridge: University Press, 1983) p. 57-8. J. Jervell's contention that Luke's view of law is rather quite Jewish and no doubt written to appease Jewish believers is more true for Acts which was probably written later when the Lucan church's *Sitz im Leben* was more catholic and faced with the controversy (among Jewish believers) of Paul's law-free mission; see Jervell's *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972).

20I have found Roger Mohrlang's monograph, *Matthew and Paul A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (SNTSMS 48, Cambridge: University Press 1984), pp. 7-47; 72-93, quite helpful both in guiding and in confirming my reading of Matthew's gospel as well as of the Pauline letters. This essay builds upon Mohrlang's study by suggesting ways to utilize the obvious differences in matters of law and grace as posed by Matthew (the Jewish mission) and Paul (the Gentile mission). Mohrlang also includes a good bibliography for further study in this area.

21J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 49.

22The pharisees and scribes as leaders of "official Judaism" are Matthew's "foils." Their interpretations of Torah as well as their legalistic piety represent a righteousness which is opposed to God's reign. For Matthew, observance of God's law should be an "easy yoke" to bear, not harsh; it should

produce a life characterized by the spirit of the Beatitudes (5:1-12) and the life of piety (6:1-34).

23There is a sense in which Matthew's ethic is deontological, while his ethos is visional. That is, the antitheses clearly set out a list of rules which if obeyed will yield a righteous life; because they are the messiah's interpretation of Torah, they constitute an inherently righteous rule. Such a deontology might even be "rigorist" since Jesus' casuistry is limited to a set of exceptionless rules. However, at the same time there is operating a vision for a righteous life which clearly transcends juridical considerations. The sheep, who enter the kingdom because of their righteous life, apparently have no "sense" of obeying certain rules as the measure of such moral fitness. An intriguing tension that we do not have time to work through; I am grateful to my colleague, C. Stephen Layman for pointing it out to me.

24Of the many works which deal with Luke's view of the law, I have found Wilson's work, *Luke and the Law* the most helpful. In the same series, Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 28, Cambridge: University Press, 1975) is helpful in comparing Luke with Matthew, and Hans Huebner's *Das Gesetz in der synoptischen Tradition* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1973) is especially helpful in setting the synoptic law against Qumran and within Second Temple Judaism. While Jacob Jervell is Wilson's conversation partner, Jervell's work is more interested in Acts than in the gospel and tends to assume uncritically that Luke's view of law in Acts is consistent with the gospel; see his *Luke and the People of God*

25However, we must also note that Luke omits several passages about the function of law within the community of disciples found in Matthew's gospel. For example, Luke omits Mt. 15:1-20 (par Mk. 7:1-21) and Mt. 19:3-12 (par Mk. 10:2-12) both of which address rabbinic controversies within later Judaism; passages which narrate Jesus' interaction with scribes over what is *exon* (i.e. over what is oral Torah), "lawful," within Judaism (Mt. 12:2, 4, 10, 12; 14:4; 19:3; 20:15; 22:17; 27:6; cf. 7:29; 15:1-20; 16:11-12; 23:4-12). Jesus' admonition to His disciples that they observe the scribal tradition (23:2-3, 23) underscores for Matthew the scribal premise that Torah is always in need of interpretation. Interestingly, it is only Matthew who calls attention to converted scribes within the community of Jesus' disciples (13:52; 23:34). Further, when playing Jesus against that tradition at decisive points in the narrative, Matthew argues that it is the Son's interpretation of the Father's will and not the scribal tradition of official Judaism that is normative for the church. Of course, this polemic might in fact suggest that Matthew wrote for a church for whom Jesus' relationship to Israel's law was a problem; or perhaps for a church in conflict with the synagogue and thus for whom a precise understanding of the law's validity in the messianic age was crucial.

26Esp. Huebner, *Gesetz*, pp. 16-19.

27Jervell, p. 141.

28James A. Sanders, "The Ethic of Election in Luke's Great Banquet

Parable," in *Essays in Old Testament Ethics* (ed. J. Crenshaw and J. T. Willis, New York: KTAV, 1974), 247-271.

29In our own work with the Evans/Sanders thesis, we suggest the law of mercy has three rules: single-minded in serving the interests of God; attentive to the gift of the eschatological Spirit; and a rejection of the materialistic desires of those who oppose God's reign. Obedience to these rules is the condition of Lucan discipleship.

30Mercy is always historically specific and results in a jubilar community in which all is shared, one with another.

31Against the deuteronomic backdrop, the good Samaritan parable is interpreted by Dt. 7 and its command not to show mercy to the outcast—a demand which is reversed in the new age where the outcast becomes the object of mercy. The Martha-Mary episode is interpreted by Dt. 8:1-3 and its recounting of the Manna story; with Mary, the true disciple is not nourished by bread alone but loves God by listening to the Word which proceeds from the Lord's mouth.

32There is a marked difference it seems to us between the synoptic claim that Israel's law has continuing validity and the fourth gospel which replaces Torah with Jesus. In a more radical sense than the synoptic evangelists, John claims that in Christ God's will has been infleshed. The result is that Christ displaces Torah as divine law for the eternal age, so Israel's Torah has ceased to function as a part of *Heilsgeschichte*; cf. Eldon Jay Epp, "Wisdom, Torah, Word: The Johannine Prologue and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation* (Tenney FS, ed. by G. F. Hawthorne, Eerdmans, 1975) pp. 135-141. We would also call attention to John's intriguing way of speaking of Israel's Torah as "their law" (8:17; 10:34; 15:25; 18:31; cf. 19:7) in tacit contrast to Jesus' ministry as "our law."

33James A. Sanders, "Torah and Paul," in *God's Christ and His People* (Dahl FS, eds J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 132. Sanders provides us with a helpful discussion of the various attempts to understand the dilemma; 132-137.

34Perhaps the best known in this regard are Hans Huebner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984) and John W. Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist?* (London: SPCK, 1975). This view depends on a particular chronology of Pauline writings which is highly speculative and a dubious reconstruction in my view. Rhetorical critics have also pointed out how Paul's apologetical language in Galatians tends toward an uncritical and no doubt inaccurate description of his opponents' positions. Yet, we consider it highly likely that Paul's various controversies did force him to constantly rethink his positions and as a result lead him to new positions, especially regarding issues contested between Jewish and Gentile believers.

35This particular position would no doubt argue for a coherent idea of law which then is adapted to the ever-changing contingencies of his churches. Apparently discrepant accounts of the law in the believer's life, then, can be understood as a dialectic between "coherence and contingency," to use

Christian Beker's term, in *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 11-19; also "Contingency and Coherence in the Letters of Paul," *USQR* 33 (1978) 141-51.

36Typically, such harmonies divide the law into various codes: there is a cultic code, a legal code, an ethical code and the like. Paul's view of the law changed depending on which code was on the table for evaluation. This is a highly dubious solution to the problem of Paul's inconsistency, however, since it is not at all apparent from Paul's letters nor from Paul's Judaism, (and certainly not from Torah itself that such distinctions were ever intended by the apostle.

37Cf. James D. G. Dunn, "The Levels of Canonical Authority," *HorBT* 4 (1982) 13-60.

38Sanders, "Torah and Paul," 136.

39We acknowledge the fact that Paul rarely mentions Torah in conjunction with moral precepts, and when he does, usually only as support rather than as a primary justification for following a particular rule. In point of fact, Paul seems always to drive the reader back to the story which obligates the rules. When, for example, in 1 Cor. 8-10, or in Rom. 14-15, he argues against Jewish food injunctions, or even in 1 Cor. 5-7 when he argues for Jewish sexual injunctions, his intent always is to support his preaching of the gospel. With Mohrlang we would say that "Paul wants to arouse a deeper, more internalized moral response and sense of ethical obligation than that based on mere submission to the demands of law;" 42.

40For this, see Thomas W. Olgetree's brilliant discussion, in *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 140-46.

41For an extensive discussion of this point, see my *The Nature of Obedience in the Ethics of Paul* (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979).

42That is, into a sectarian demand which encourages love between disciples.

43For the non-Pauline ethos as *Leidenethik*, see my "Introduction," 79-81.

44The gospel tradition closest to James is Matthew's, cf. Massey H. Shepherd, "The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 75 (1956) 40-51. Yet, there is much in the teaching of Matthew's Jesus which seems more radical than that of James. For example, James understands the levitical demand to love neighbor in traditional (i.e. sectarian) ways. There is even the tacit injunction to "hate" (or expel) the enemy in 2:1-7. This contrasts with Jesus' radical interpretation of neighbor as enemy in Matt. 5:43-44.

45L. T. Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *JBL* 101 (1982) 391-401; also, his superb study, "Friendship with the World/ Friendship with God: A Study of Discipleship in James," in *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed F. F. Segovia, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 166-83.

46We understand the genitive *tes eleutherias* (1:25; 2:12) as a genitive of purpose, and thus as specifying the purpose for which the law exists.

47We cannot take time to comment on the contested passage, James 2:14-26, except to say that within the sermon, it functions as a "footnote" to 2:13, which is the virtual center of this section of James' argument. God's endtime mercy (2:13) is given to those who are recognized by their merciful deeds (2:14-26). Those who claim their eschatological fitness by their pious words (2:14-17), by their Jewish orthodoxy (2:18-20), or by their "paulinized" (Christian?) faith (2:21-263), and do so without observing Israel's law, are simply not recognized by God at the end of time. We cannot help but notice how fundamentally different James' use of the Abraham tradition is from that of Paul in Rom. 4. In each case, midrash has been employed to justify a particular point of view. Because I view James as earlier than Romans, it would seem to me that Paul has transformed the Judaizer's use of Abraham (following Pastor James) to serve his own gospel-something he is inclined to do in Romans since his opponents are Judaizers (16:17-20).

48I do not place much stock in the distinction between Paul's "work of the law" and James' "works." Certainly in the context of James, "works" refer to obeying the law. While, "work of the law" refers to the results of law observance rather than to obeying the law per se, I think the distinction is moot in fact. Law observance, perceived soteriologically, is not an option for Paul; it denies the "work of Christ" and is therefore bankrupt.

49Book titles are "canonical properties" rather than authorial superscriptions. This is a theological rather than a purely historical claim in that the titles reflect the community's own commitments toward a book's apostolicity and its inspired content. Whether 2 Peter was written by Peter or the Pastorals by Paul is not a canonical issue; rather, the community in recognizing their inspiration did so within the theological "world" of the apostles, Peter and Paul, of Jewish and Gentile Christianity respectively.

50We would go on to argue that the Pauline corpus, which comes first, is the "greater of two equals," with the non-Pauline corpus functioning to check and balance the church's normative (i.e. Pauline) understanding of the Gospel.

51Raymond Brown, "Introduction," in *Antioch & Rome* (New York: Paulist, 1982) 1-9, esp. 6-8.

52Let me note three: "The Liberated Legalist," *Christian Century* 100 (1983) 848-89; "Introduction," 81-83; "Biblical Foundation for Social Justice and Human Liberation," in *The Church in Response to Human Need* (Monrovia, Ca: MARC, 1983) 343-72.

53However, we note Gerhard Barth's important essay, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Phil: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 58-164; and especially draw attention to the distinction Barth makes between the nomism of Matthew and that of James, as well as between their antinomian opponents (159-64). On the whole, however, Barth's work supports and deepens our own thesis: that the Jewish Christian matrix, represented in the New Testament by Matthew and James, corrects an antinomian *Tendenz* within the earliest Church.

54Without speculating too much in this regard, moral development theory (e.g., Kohlberg) which places such a rule-oriented ethic, with its rewards and punishments, at a more immature stage might help us adapt this paradigm to discipleship. An emphasis on law might serve a people who are new to faith, who need the sort of clarity which a casuistry brings to the moral life.

55James M. Gustafson has given us an excellent summary of Christianity's perspective toward law in his *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: University Press, 1978) 1-29. In his discussion, Gustafson notes the fundamental difference between the juridical approach toward law within Roman Catholicism and the more theological or spiritual focus of Protestant Christianity. In fact, he argues that neither law nor its precise interpretation has ever been important to the Protestant tradition. Yet, his analysis fails to consider the non-Reformed Protestant trajectories such as Wesleyanism. Interestingly, he locates exceptions to his general observations of the Reformed (i.e. Lutheran and Calvinistic) view of law in both the Anglican/Puritan and Anabaptist traditions, which along with the Wesleyan tradition stress sanctification and consequently have a more ethical view of law. It would be an interesting study to contrast the Reformed and non-Reformed orientations found within the Protestant church, also, to compare the juridical, halachic approach toward law found within Wesleyanism with that found within Roman Catholicism. Because Roman Catholicism locates God's salvation more squarely in the ministry of the church and its priesthood, it would naturally assign more of the salvific process to the human domain. I suspect very important similarities with and differences to the Wesleyan idea of sanctification would emerge from such a study. But I leave that for another essay!

56It does seem true that the Lutheran communion is more fearful of law than the Calvinist side of Reformed faith. No doubt this reflects Luther's reaction toward what he perceived to be Roman Catholicism's use of canon law in an accusatory manner. As a result, the *Tendenz* toward antinomian religion has historically been a greater concern for Lutherans than for Calvinists. Further, Lutherans see the law as teacher of sin and the gospel as announcing God's forgiveness of that sin. Thus, it is logical that they should see more tension between the law and gospel than other traditions. We should say that Calvin's "third use" of the law, valuable for Christian discipleship, parallels the more positive, "prophetic" use of law within the Pauline / Lucan matrix. As a result, Calvinists tend to view law in less threatening and more profitable ways than do Lutherans. In this regard, see the important work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), whose social ethic is rooted in his interpretation of the Calvinist tradition. It must be emphasized, however, that the Reformed tradition as a whole shifts attention from an ethical construal of law to a more theological construal, from human response to divine response. Thus, the ultimate purpose of law is not to serve God, qua the Wesleyan tradition (and the James/Matthean matrix), but to increase one's awareness of his/her need for God's forgiving/electing grace. In our view, the result is the Reformed *Tendenz* of emphasizing mythos to the exclusion of *ethos*.



57This point is developed by a set of solid essays in *Sanctification & Liberation* (ed. Theodore Runyon, Nashville: Abingdon, 1981). The book develops Wesley's idea of sanctification and compares it with the social praxis orientation of liberation theology.

58Various Lutheran theologians discuss this very tendency in a self-critical way in *Dialog* 22 (1983) 246-83. A contemporary and influential exemplar of this tendency is Robert Schuller; cf. "Hard Questions for Robert Schuller about Sin & Self-Esteem," *Christianity Today* (August 10, 1984) 14-24.

59Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983) 27-32, 39-43.

# **THE QUESTION OF "SINS OF IGNORANCE" IN RELATION TO WESLEY'S DEFINITION**

by  
Richard S. Taylor

In the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law, so-called “sins of ignorance” were treated very seriously, and also required atoning sacrifices in order for the guilty person to receive forgiveness. Regulations respecting such sins are found in Leviticus 4—5; in Numbers 15; and to a lesser degree Deuteronomy 21. These regulations apply to the nation as a whole, to priests and rulers, and to private persons. Let us read the prescription concerning the latter (NASB in the following references): “Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty, if his sin, which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed” (Lev. 4:27-28). After detailing the priestly procedure the Word says: “Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven” (v. 31b). Even stronger is the following: “Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty, and shall bear his punishment” (5:17). The chapter ends with: “It is a guilt offering; he was certainly guilty before the LORD” (v. 19). Numbers 15 is equally strong.<sup>1</sup>

In view of our traditional Wesleyan insistence that sin per se requires knowledge and can only be committed willfully, what are we to make of this?

The purpose of this paper will be to show that the challenge to Wesley's definition is more apparent than real. The argument will unfold as follows: (1) a reminder of the very fundamental watershed between a legal approach to sin and an ethical; (2) the clear distinction between willful sin and unintentional sin which underlies these rules governing sins of ignorance; (3) the relation of atonement to "sins of ignorance"; (4) the flexibility which must be granted the term "sin" in view of the variety of Hebrew and Greek words used; (5) the clear dominance of the ethical view point in the New Testament; and (6) - as perhaps a serendipity - the basis which evolves from these considerations for a true doctrine of imputed righteousness.

First (1) then, a brief reminder of the difference between a legal concept

of sin and the ethical will be helpful. The legal approach defines sin totally in terms of objective law. The ethical defines sin in terms of law plus subjective factors-knowledge, intelligence, opportunity, and intention. This of course produces Wesley's basic definition of sin per se, a willful transgression of a known law.

It is easy for Wesleyans to forget that the legal approach has a legitimate claim. There is a standard: the holiness, will, and revealed law of God. Any deviation whatsoever is serious and potentially calamitous, whether intentional or not. The actor is "guilty" in the sense that the deed is his not another's, and he alone must bear the responsibility. God may not impute the sin to him in the sense of condemnation, but the fact of legal guilt is not thereby annulled. No matter how accidental is the killing or injuring of a pedestrian, the driver is still legally liable - as the insurance company well knows. 2

With this brief reminder in our minds, we can (2) examine the regulations relating to sins of ignorance and related accidental sins more closely. As we do we will discover that the distinction between intentional sinning and unintentional transgression underlies them, and that, moreover, they remarkably preserve the claims of both legal guilt and moral innocence.

In this connection it should be noted first that the obligation to offer sacrifice for sins of ignorance arises only if and when the offense becomes known. In the cases of the general assembly, the leaders, and the common people the condition is the same: "When the sin which they have committed . . ." and "If his sin, which he has committed is made known to him then he shall...."

This simple ethical obligation is still with us, not to offer blood sacrifices (for we have Christ's atonement), but to acknowledge responsibility and make amends. Examples are everywhere, as, for instance, the amending of an income tax filing when an item is remembered or comes to light which was inadvertently omitted. It is thoroughly Wesleyan to acknowledge that when we discover errors and make no effort to correct them, we bear full guilt respecting them-not only legal but ethical.

Furthermore, as Gerhard von Rad points out (quoting Quell), "unwitting sin can only be spoken of on condition of a good will on the part of the agent." 3 It is this assumption of good will, or genuinely pious intention, which underlies God's relatively mild requirements. Thus even the rules governing "sins of ignorance" imply an essential moral difference between them and willful sinning.

This becomes more apparent when we compare the prescription respecting inadvertent and unconscious sins with the regulations governing willful sinning. In this category are two distinct levels, the forgivable and the unforgivable. The forgivable include such sins as robbery, extortion, lying and swearing falsely (Lev. 6:1ff). In such cases not only an atoning sacrifice is demanded but restitution, plus a fine of 20%. Another example is sleeping with a betrothed slave girl-a sin requiring both punishment and atonement but not death (Lev. 19:20-22). Doubtless most sins were in the class of the willful but forgivable on condition of not only proper sacrifices but evidence of real repentance. It was this demand for repentance which governed the ministry of John the Baptist.

But the more serious level of willful sinning was the presumptuous,

impudent, persistent, and impenitent breach of the law. All of these adjectives are implied in Numbers 15:30-"But the person who does anything defiantly [*be-yad ramah*], whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people." For the unintentional failure there is generous provision for atonement; for the willful but repentant sinner there is forgiveness, but with more stringent conditions attached; for the defiant rebel there is no provision for forgiveness at all. 4

Adam Clarke observes: "Probably the presumption [KJV] mentioned here implied an utter contempt of the word and authority of God, springing from an idolatrous or atheistical mind. In such a case all repentance was precluded, because of the denial of the word and being of God." 5

It thus becomes clear that the moral concept of sin governed God's dealings and provisions. He made a difference between accidental infractions and intentional disobedience.

This is highlighted even more dramatically in the divine provision for the six cities of refuge (Deut. 21:1ff; 22:26). God's regulations concerning these cities provided a perfect elucidation of the dual claims of law and of moral innocence. They were provided for the innocent manslayer. His innocence was his claim on the protection of these cities; but that ethical innocence did not cancel the equally legitimate claim of the avenger of blood (Deut. 19:1-10; cf. 4:41-43). A human life had been taken; that fact could not be ignored; the *lex talionis* was legal too. But the cities of refuge were God's way of teaching the Israelites to distinguish between innocence and ill-desert-"though he was not deserving of death" is the way Moses put it (19:6; cf. Matt. 12:5).

A related kind of case is seen in Deuteronomy 21:1-9. Here a murdered person is found in the field, with no clue as to the murderer. The nearest city is presumed to be legally liable. To expunge such legal guilt a detailed formula of denial and blood sacrifice is prescribed, which the elders of the city must perform, testifying, "Our hands have not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it" (v. 7). Atonement was required because a murder had been committed, yet at the same time innocent people must be absolved of liability to punishment or revenge. Here we have the legal aspect of sin side by side with the ethical aspect. Legal liability and moral blamelessness are simultaneously acknowledged, and each given its proper due. This would be a demonstration of what modern jurisprudence would call the principle of equity.

It would seem apparent therefore that the Wesleyan doctrine of sin per se is validated rather than undermined by the principles governing these various laws concerning "sins of ignorance" or similar unintentional infractions.

But (3) our study thrusts before us the question of the relationship of atonement to legal sin. Two things are clear: The divine standard must be declared without any license for deviation; and violations must be covered, whether intentional or unintentional. The grand reference in all of these Mosaic details is to the supreme covering for human failure and defect made by the blood of Christ.

At this point there is tension in Wesley's doctrine of sin. On the one hand he was unwilling to call human infirmities and the mistakes stemming

from them "sins." He says that many shortcomings are "in no way contrary to love," and therefore are not "in the Scripture sense, sin." Later: "Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please; I do not, . . ." and "Let those who do call them so, beware how they confound these defects with sins, properly so called." 6 Yet in this same discussion he insists that human shortcomings, or unintentional transgressions, need the Atonement. He says:

The best of men still need Christ in his priestly office, to atone for their omissions, their short-comings, (as some not improperly speak,) their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds. For these are all deviations from the perfect law, and consequently need atonement. Yet that they are not properly sins, we apprehend may appear from the words of St. Paul, 'He that loveth, hath fulfilled the law; for love is the fulfilling of the law.'" 7

Here is a sharp tension between two views of sin, one ethical, the other legal-with an attempt, moreover, to hold on to both. On the one hand love fulfills the law; on the other hand only the letter of absolute perfection fulfills the law. Where love reigns there is no sin, even when the letter of the law is unwittingly violated; yet these "sin-less" violations require atonement! This is indeed a puzzling moral maze. Why should sub-moral defects require a blood atonement? If Adam and Eve had steadfastly obeyed God, yet later on made minor mistakes in judgment, would Christ have had to come and die for those mistakes? Does finiteness require atonement? It is inconceivable.

The riddle perhaps has at least a partial solution in the fact that the kind of shortcomings and failures most damaging in the sanctified are the step-children of sin, not finiteness; as such they in some degree defile God's universe and dishonor God no matter how unintentional. They are sin's contrail. Indeed, they are more substantial than a contrail, for in many respects they are hurtful to the church, misrepresent God, and result in distressing injury to other people. Moreover, as pointed out by Adam Clarke there is often in the unintentional breach an element of heedlessness. For God not to require strict accounting would be to breed progressive and cumulative carelessness. We sense the justice of this; for when we step on another's toes do we not say in all sincerity, "Please pardon me!" - no matter how unintentional the offense was? And-on a more serious level-if we find ourselves in debt through a combination of poor judgment and unforeseen setbacks, do we say to our creditors, "Sorry, gentlemen. Because I didn't mean to get into this mess I'm sure you will forgive my overdue accounts. You will kindly 'take the will for the deed.' " No, we know that our good intentions do not annul our obligations. If necessary, we refinance, or find a generous friend to cover for us. There must be a covering-which is what atonement means. Therefore the words of Adam Clarke are appropriate: "Even sins of ignorance cannot be unnoticed by a strict and holy law; these also need the great atonement; on which account we should often pray with David, *Cleanse thou me from secret faults!* Psa. xix.12." 8

Here then are two divergent positions in our own Wesleyan history, as exemplified by Adam Clarke and John Wesley. Adam Clarke, controlled more by philological considerations, did not scruple to call unintentional infractions

sin. John Wesley, on theological and philosophical grounds, was very unwilling to call such infractions sins.

Admittedly (4) the Hebrew and Greek words behind the English word "sin" are in many cases highly ambiguous, and permit great flexibility in the use of the term sin. The most common Hebrew word is *hata'* and its cognates, which can mean "miss, miss the way, sin, incur guilt, forfeit, purify from uncleanness." 9 This, or one of its cognates, is the word normally used for "sins of ignorance." Clearly it is so imprecise that it can bear either an ethical connotation or a legal connotation. Other words which are similarly flexible are *asham* and *shagah*. But lest we concede too much to Clarke's breadth we should note that the words *'awa* (or *'awon*) and *pesha* which carry the strong ethical meanings of rebellion, perversity, moral evil, iniquity, are never used for "sins of ignorance." When Proverbs 28:13 warns, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper," *pesha* is the word used, obviously referring to the deliberate attempt to hide willful wrong doing. Therefore flexibility in the use of the word sin has its limits.

A similar situation prevails in the New Testament with Greek terms. Behind the English word "sin" are only two Greek terms, *paraptoma* and *hamartano*. 10 The first means literally a side-slip, and may be either an unintentional fall or deliberate disloyalty. It is the word used in Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness." While the word is not translated "sin" its ambiguity is nevertheless illustrated, for the meaning could be either legal or ethical. *Hamartano* is equally a word of all colors, meaning etymologically "without a share in," hence "to miss the mark." Thayer adds, "then to err, be mistaken, lastly to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor." 11 This word is the basic word for sin in the New Testament. With its various cognates (*hamartema*, *hamartia*, *hamartolos*) it is found at least 267 times, and expresses various meanings all the way from unintentional faults to deliberate transgressions to the inbred principle of sin.

In view therefore of the legitimate claim of a legal approach to sin, and in further view of these philological considerations, it becomes understandable why young people from the state church in West Germany would be shocked when a holiness Bible school student flatly declared, "I do not commit sin." From their standpoint he was committing sin at that moment by lying! We should therefore seek to understand that segment of the evangelical world which is horrified at a profession of sinlessness. On the one hand are the careless antinomians who treat sin lightly, hiding behind the imputed righteousness of Christ; with that element we need have little patience. But on the other hand are devout Christians who hate and fear sin in the moral sense, and live righteous lives, who nevertheless continue to use the word for they apply it to human shortcomings. And since Adam Clarke did also, we can hardly withhold from them our fellowship.

But (5) in spite of Adam Clarke and the flexibility of words, there is insufficient ground for surrendering our basic Wesleyan concept of sin. Understanding is needed, but not concession. For we have seen that even the words are not entirely ambiguous, and that God's regulations in the Old Testament support the moral view of sin more than undermine it; and now in addition we must remind ourselves that the New Testament supports Wesley more than Clarke, for therein the emphasis on an ethical view of sin

becomes unmistakably dominant. The ethical was never absent from the Old Testament, and was implied even when the legal claims were to the fore front. But in the New Testament the legal concept of sin drops out almost completely. Sin is seen as something blameworthy, out of keeping with the redeemed life, and completely unnecessary. First John is representative of the basic New Testament attitude toward sin, and there sin and sinning are simply not allowable. And when Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery, "From now on sin no more" (John 8:11) he was not meaning this sin only, but any sin.

Now (6) for the "serendipity." This lengthy inquiry into the knotty problem of "sins of ignorance" not only tends to reconfirm Wesley's doctrine of sin, but incidentally (a very huge "incidentally") gives us a handle for grasping a truly Biblical concept of imputed righteousness. The concept (a) fundamentally means to be credited with real righteousness, as Job was credited by God Himself with being "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8). Then (b) the Bible teaches that our faith is imputed or credited to us as righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Romans 4). But (c) also the atoning merit of the blood of Christ is put to our credit in justification; i.e., an undeserving sinner is declared righteous before God. His standing is clear before God.

Calvinists have gone astray by overextending this justification to mean the complete imputation not only of the atoning blood but of Christ's personal obedience and righteousness, in such a way that His holiness is credited to us while our ongoing iniquity is perpetually imputed to Him. This quickly becomes an automatic, nonforfeitable covering for willful unholy living.

However, if we can thrust aside this distortion, we can rejoice to know that it is compatible with the wonders of Biblical religion to see the merit of Christ supplying the gap between our present state and Adamic perfection. It is in this sense that Christ's blood becomes the answer to the Old Testament sin offering, not only for willful sins but for unintentional shortcomings and violations. When there is basic obedience, when there is full trust in the atoning blood, and when there is quickness to correct what needs to be corrected when seen, God imputes or credits to us, even in our imperfection, the full perfection for which we are striving but which we have not yet reached. It is on this basis that a justified believer will go to heaven, not in spite of willful unforgiven disobedience, but in spite of unconscious faults and numerous human failures.

Perhaps the last phrase of 1 Peter 1:2 is more pregnant with meaning than we have realized. It reads: ". . . who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood." 12

## Notes

1 Admittedly liberal scholars do not take these passages seriously, but view them as primitively cultic, to be outgrown as Israel's "concept of guilt became more ethical and spiritual" (S. J. DeVries, "Sin, Sinners," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962). The stance

of this paper is that the ascription of these instructions to God is accurate, and that therefore they are fully relevant to a Biblical doctrine of sin.

2Gottfried Quell comments: "To incur guilt one does not have to be a sinner in the sense of a man who rebels against the divine order on the basis of a decision of the will. Guilt is incurred unintentionally through a mistake... Nevertheless, the consequences of such error are taken no less seriously than in the case of other sins." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed Gerhard Kittel, tr. and ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1, p. 280 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964).

3Old Testament Theology, tr. D. M. G. Stalker, vol. 1, p. 267 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962).

4While in the ultimate sense all sins excepting continued rebellion are forgivable by God (Exod. 34:7) yet even divine forgiveness will not exempt from capital punishment in all cases. Cf. Numbers 14:20-23.

5Commentary, vol. 1, p. 668 (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.).

6A Plain Account of Christian Perfection pp. 51-67 (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966).

7Ibid.

8Commentary, vol. 1, p. 520. He says: "How little attention is paid to this solemn subject! Sins of this kind-sins committed sometimes ignorantly, and more frequently heedlessly, are permitted to accumulate in their number, and consequently in their guilt; and from this very circumstance we may often account for those painful desertions, as they are called, under which many comparatively good people labor. They have committed sins of ignorance or heedlessness, and have not offered the sacrifice which can alone avail in their behalf."

9G. Herbert Livingston, "*hata*," *Theological Work Book of the Old Testament*, ed R. Laird Harris, vol. 1, p. 277 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

10There are of course many other words essential to a full-orbed doctrine of sin, but, in the KJV at least, they are not translated by the English word sin"-which is particularly commanding our attention.

11Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 30 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963).

12Commenting on 1 Peter 1:2 H. Orton Wiley says: "Here it is clear . . . that walking in this obedience, the elect dwell constantly under the sprinkling of the all atoning and sanctifying blood . . . walking in the light of obedience we are the recipients of a progressive or continuous sanctification, which renders even our obedience acceptable to God." *Christian Theology*, vol. 2, p. 485 (Kansas City, Missouri: Nazarene Publishing House, 1941).



# **THE THEOLOGY OF A MOVEMENT: THE SALVATION ARMY IN ITS FORMATIVE YEARS**

by  
John R. Rhemick

The concern that spawned this research is quite simply expressed. The preeminence of things spiritual cannot be missed by anyone seriously considering The Salvation Army. Somehow theology had to be at the forefront of the movement. What role did theology play in the formation of The Salvation Army as an international religious denomination?

This question took our family to England for four months of research and the research took us to Victorian England, a country of contradictions of which its people and its leaders were aware and by which they were greatly troubled. Alongside incomprehensible wealth was incomprehensible poverty. Neighborhoods of mansions were juxtaposed with ghettos in which people daily died from starvation and the innumerable diseases associated with abject poverty. Opposite the entrepreneurs of the Industrial Revolution were the masses out of work or working for less than subsistence wages. Englishmen began to ask, why, in the midst of unprecedented economic growth leading to vast individual and national wealth, were there so many desperately poor people?

This question was raised with deep concern as there developed among the poor a moral, ethical and spiritual poverty. Some writers referred to Christian England as Heathen England, and there was great reservation in calling these masses Englishmen. They were misfits who did not belong to Victorian society. They were disfranchised, cut off from the benefits of their society. Worse, Victorian society had no solution for the disfranchised, only a number of programs.

By the time the Army came to town, some people were ready for a more apocalyptic approach. Perhaps God was a way out, and perhaps He did care and was still personally involved in the human predicament. The Army took the evangelical faith and clothed it in ideas which opened up its most precious treasures to the most common people. Many of those without vision

and hope, aliens in their own world, began to think that there might be a light shining at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

Why this theology was a theology of grand ideas must be left for another time as must we defer consideration of the specifics of that theology. To summarize as background for this paper, it was a theology of salvation and sanctification wed in such a way as to imply a doctrine of God and man. In this understanding of God and man many of the disfranchised who felt disowned for so long, found a new comfort, a new sense of belonging, a home, so to speak, and a new hope.

It would be misleading to suggest that the Army alone espoused the doctrines of salvation and sanctification or that they alone preached them with urgency. There was something more than preaching that confronted a spiritually alienated public and won them as converts to God and the Army.

The Army confronted a deeper cultural need among the masses than economic, social and religious disfranchisement. It confronted a cultural need, metaphysical in essence, a deprivation of the faith side of human nature, resulting from the philosophical world-view of the day.

It is not an overstatement to say that theologies and philosophies of history have moved the world toward self-understanding. Theology and philosophy alone have the capacity for discussing the essential concerns of knowing and being. Through these two conceptual areas, mankind has tried to come to a knowledge of itself and that which is around and beyond it. In nineteenth century England, the theological and philosophical exercises grappling with "knowing" and "being" resulted in a peculiar cultural context. In a very real, though unconscious sense, two different cultural expressions were brought together. Two unique perceptions of reality confronted each other in tense conflict.

One of these cultural expressions is characterized primarily by faith, emotion and the infinitude of truth and reality. It is an image culture. In an image culture, essential truth and reality are seen through symbols and not directly. In this sense, truth and reality can never be fully grasped. They are infinite, defying the limitations of finite mind. The individual is caught up in an idea of truth and reality which is infinitely greater than he or she.

However, truth and reality are not to be thought of as plums dangling just beyond one's reach, always enticing but ever eluding one's grasp. Truth and reality form the very world of which the person is a part. Truth and reality are all around and a part of the person. They form a plot of land, the bounds of which can never be reached, but the grounds of which can be traversed and investigated to the heart's content. The more one travels through life, the closer one observes it, the better is one's discernment and the more one understands himself and defines his place in the world. This is culture in which the emotive character of a person is primary and where reason nurtures and develops that emotional character of human nature.

This cultural phenomenon is seen in art where the representative figures are not analyzed to break down the picture into respective parts, but rather studied to build a picture of infinite perspective. To look at the art of the roof of the Sistine Chapel is to bring forth a response of awe that defies words. The heart is left pounding, the mind racing in a hundred directions at once, not in an effort to capture and contain everything before its eyes, but to explore and be a part of it all.

This culture is found in the monastic life. The monastery was the seat of learning, but it was much more than that. It was a way of life, in fact, the best way of life reserved for only a few. The disciplined life characterized by worship and contemplation was primary. These emphases answered the emotional needs of human nature firstly and the rational needs secondly. The monk felt his place in God's economy and felt God's presence close to him. It was for the feeling that he came apart from the world.

To stand in the cathedral was to be immersed and dwarfed in the infinite magnitude of Almighty God. The theology of the cathedral spoke to the worshiper through the panorama of sight that moved the emotions rather than in rational discourses of philosophical and theological constructs.

The feudal system embodied an image culture. It pulled society together into one dominant expression of life characterized by order. Everyone belonged to the whole.

With the invention of the printing press and the widespread dissemination of knowledge in written form, a change in culture took place. The world moved from an image culture to a culture dominated by the "word." Somehow, written words seemed to have the capacity to capture truth, to analyze it and define it. Culture dominated by the printed word argued that anything that could not be put into print and explained was less real, less important and less worthwhile. Could reality be so objectified as to make its meaning absolute? Victorian England suggested strongly, yes!

The quest for knowledge became an occupation or exercise rather than a way of life. Analysis was a key concept and words were the vehicles for detailed explanation. The scholastic endeavor was to take the complex and break it down into its simplest form. The vision of one immersed in an inexhaustible sea of reality, there to explore, search, study and find one's being, was replaced by the idea of man attacking the problems of truth and reality in order to dominate them and put them to useful service.

Man could master reality, see it as it is and in that mastery gain the answer to every problem of the human situation. The mystery of life was not so much something that awed a person and inspired a reverence for life, it was more a problem to be solved. Truth and reality were no longer sacred and approached in fear and trembling. Now, the person was sacred, truth and reality the mud and clay to be discovered through his intellect and molded by his ingenuity. Symbols were no longer lenses through which to view reality even though dark and blurred. They were forms to be analyzed, studied and explained away in words that revealed reality in its "naked truth." Individual man was pre-eminent, and reason was the means of his exaltation. It was this cold, analytical culture that depreciated the emotive aspect of human nature resulting in problems for others as well as the poor.

The intellectuals found that they too were alienated. However, what the poor could not do, the intellectuals accomplished. They discovered the cause of their disfranchisement. A utilitarian society seemed to have captured the mystery of life in the discovery of the mechanical nature of the universe, a view the intellectuals regarded as partial and destructive.

Carlyle's *Signs of the Times* asserted that this mechanistic view could not embrace man's highest interests, for only the dynamic, emotional character of man could delve into ". . . the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital

and infinite character," 1 In Sartor Resartus Carlyle called people back from the empiricism, materialism and mechanism of middle-class philosophy, once more to pursue God in a reverence for nature where the infinite blends with the finite. Tennyson's In Memoriam affirmed the existence of a spiritual reality not on any rational basis but rather on an intuitive basis of faith. Faith alone can understand the spiritual.

Both the intellectuals and the poor were imprisoned in a world view which was too narrow for them. The intellectuals lived in a philosophical and social climate where all of the parameters of truth, right, and good, seemed to have been uncovered. This left very little room for the expression of imagination and creativity which were pre-eminent concerns for this select group of people. They and that which was most dear to them were put in the background for something more "useful," more practical, the tangibles of life like wealth and power. The intellectuals fought this restructuring of reality in their writing and this in itself gave them hope.

It was another story for the poor. They did not think in terms of the restructuring of reality. They were faced with survival itself. Their lives hung on the thread of abject poverty, threatened with extinction by a way of life that seemed to have all the answers and regarded poverty as an ill with its roots only in the individual and not in the very concepts of reality that reigned. The poor were left not only without a home in their land, but also without a hope in their hearts.

These impoverished masses were the remnants of an image-oriented culture. They still lived at the emotional and mysterious edge of reality. The lives of the poor who labored from night to night and had nothing, and the millions who did not even have a job at which to labor, were filled with questions that seemed to have no answers. Their lives were filled with anguish, anxiety, anger, fear, shame and hopelessness. They could appreciate emotion and drama far more than rational argument or doctrinal discourse. They could understand truth and reality much better in symbol but had little appreciation for philosophical or theological oration. But, there was little place for that emotion which formed the very core of their being.

Sensationalism was a dirty word in Victorian England and it seemed to be applied to anything that touched the emotions. When sensationalism was charged it was the appeal to feeling that was being largely criticized. Feeling in religion was seriously suspect. In a culture dominated by the word, society was looking for comfort in objective truth. If one went according to a prescribed formula or set of instructions, one could assume that things would work out properly. One need not worry about feeling which could be terribly misleading. Applied to salvation it resulted in a sort of instrumental approach accomplished through proper understanding and obedience to religious principles of respectability.

However, the Church's ineffectiveness in reaching the masses, made this view suspect. In Christianity and the Working Classes, one author described the Church as patronizing and stiff. "This stiffness goes with, and accounts for, that self-repression and objection to showing emotion, which has been the cause of many of our blunders at home and abroad." 2 ". . . there is no inconvenient expansion, and we try no new thing." 3

"It cannot adapt itself; it would like to catch the ear and heart

of all, but it is clumsy, and out of its element and therefore fails. The workers want to be moved and excited. In our people there is a deep well of wholesome emotion." 4

The Salvation Army brought into the religious circles of Victorian England an expression of theology that directly confronted the emotive nature of man. It was expressed in images and ideas that were powerful and peculiarly appropriate for the poorer classes caught up in a word culture that left them emotionally destitute. This was a theology dramatically expressed.

Nowhere is this dramatic expression of the Army more clearly set forth than in its own literature. Sunday School Teachers' Manuals contained short plays to be performed to help Sunday School Teachers learn how to study their lessons at home. These short plays emphasized teaching through illustration and story-telling. Aspiring ministers were told how to prepare for their ministry in language that enabled them to see what they were being exhorted to do. Let me try to illustrate this dramatic language in comparing two ways of saying substantially the same thing. The first statement on lay involvement in evangelism is typical of a more intellectual expression with little, if any, dramatic appeal.

What our famed Liverpool Minutes say of every Methodist Minister is applicable to every Christian: he is bound to be in spirit 'a Home Missionary,' eagerly doing all he can to bring his kinsfolk and neighbors to Christ. 5

This second statement is from *The Officer* magazine and is highly dramatic in nature.

Upon the rocks of sin the immense ship "Humanity" has struck. Millions upon millions of doomed souls move about its decks and shriek for help. We cannot save them without risk, without suffering; it may be in saving them we may lose our own lives. Shall we hold back or press forward? Face the raging seas of opposition and rescue thousands. 6

Early Army literature was filled with metaphors, dreams, visions, biographies. The message was clothed with actors and images so that those reading could see what they were reading and in seeing it feel it even more keenly.

Central to the Army's message was the most dramatic literature of all, the Bible. The cornerstone of Salvation Army theology was a literal sense of Scripture. Compatible with Aquinas, this view made a place for metaphor if that is what Scripture required, and along with Aquinas asserted that any other sense of Scripture must be based on the literal sense if confusion and contradiction were to be avoided. The literal sense was primary and definitive. Included in this literal sense was a faith in the historicity of Scripture and the truth of revelation. It is not hard to understand why this sense of Scripture provided an appropriate foundation for a dramatic expression of theology. The literal sense of Scripture is sensational, but not superficially so. Bairstow asserts:

The ten plagues of Egypt - the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud by day, and a fire by night; the thunders and lightnings of Mount Sinai, the mount altogether in a smoke:

the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud and long, and waxing louder and louder; Moses speaking, and the living God answering him by a voice - all this was sensational, but the startling record thrills human hearts still, . . .7

The dramatic form of Army literature was rhetorical and inspirational, rather than methodical and rationalistic. Resting on the literal sense of Scripture, it conjured up in the mind's eye dynamic, dramatic images. Imagine in your own mind's eye a world dying in sin and poverty, sickness and degradation, and an Army marching with trumpet and drum and flags flying, to vanquish evil and save the lost. Even more than your imagination, even more than Ezekiel who had a vision of bones being clothed with flesh and new life, the early salvationists saw an Army of real people like themselves, raised up and marching forward.

When Scripture becomes so embodied in human lives, we must have the most powerful, dramatic expression possible. What is drama except a description of life? The foundation of drama is life. When we look at life and find that it manifests God, then this is dramatic theological expression.

This dramatic expression of theology brought the Scriptures to life among a most needy segment of society. It also helped to awaken a word culture from its preoccupation with form, order and propriety to the truth that people were more complex than Nineteenth Century Utilitarianism had suggested. It argued that God was far more tolerant of the peculiarities of human nature and far more approving of genuine, non-traditional spirituality than many supposed. In this it helped many of those disfranchised to regain a sense of purpose for their future. In addition to finding a place to belong-a home so to speak-they found a hope; they did have some influence on the future before them.

We have already stated the most dramatic expression of theology. It is human life. The Army's theology was life-centered because it was lived, and it was lived in a very different way culturally. In the industrial age of Victorian England, people were learning to work and play. As the economy improved, more people could play. More time for playing as well as more things to play came into being. Philosophically, this word culture implied that reality lay outside a person in things and events. The key concept became "doing." Work was a means to happiness, but happiness came by doing as much of life as possible. Today we work for retirement so that we can do all the things we could not do while we were working.

In an image-oriented culture the key concept is "being." Here reality is located within the person. The world is important as it contributes to the enrichment and development of one's personhood. This was the cultural context to which the early members of the Army were more suited. In a day when work and play were opposites to many, these soldiers were finding pleasure and deep joy in the work of this movement. For them work and play were not so distinct, and since their work was a source of real joy, they were very teachable. Walter Ong ascribed this relationship of work, play and learning to a pre-word or oral culture. He wrote:

In an oral culture, verbalized learning takes place quite normally in an atmosphere of celebration or play. As events, words are more celebrations and less tools than in literate cultures. Only

with the invention of writing and the isolation of the individual from the tribe will verbal learning and understanding itself become "work" as distinct from play, . . .8

For the early salvationists the practice of their faith was a way of life that brought great joy and satisfaction. They became the living dramas. To those filled with anxiety that seemed to defy resolution, the Army held out a hope that could be seen and felt. People were reaching out to people in a way that brought their spirits into dynamic relationship with each other. Booth brought his lay people so completely into the salvation ministry of the Army that one writer reported of Booth: "He directs and controls the preaching of 15,393 evangelists, of whom 645 are paid 'officers.' "

The Salvation Army was a way of life expressed in community action. A word culture dominated by reason is the realm of the thinker, the individual. An image-oriented culture dominated by the emotion is the realm of the community. The dramatic nature of the Army's theological expression was underscored by its community life. It saw itself living in a hostile world, not only distinct from the masses but also from dead churches, a lonely bastion surrounded by and in spiritual warfare with the powers of evil. The Salvation Army understood that God called all of His people to the vocation of priests with all of the divine authority and responsibilities assigned to that position. This radical sense of the priesthood of the believer contributed significantly to the Army's revolutionary and dramatic expression. It was revolutionary in its acceptance of the laity for the ultimate work of the kingdom and dramatic because an Army of clergy and laity came into being for all the world to see.

Salvation Army expression caused writers to report its events in mental images. One reporter wrote:

Shortly after 7 o'clock last evening a "squad" under the command of a captain who at intervals blew a trumpet, a "call to sinners," were perambulating the streets of Bermondsey preparatory to proceeding to the "Salvation Factory" to "find peace." The processionists, as usual, went along singing hymns, and were preceded by a couple of youths armed with a long pole, from which were suspended a couple of naphtha lamps lighted, such as were used by street traders at night to display their wares on their barrows. 9

Another writer said specifically: "There is just one other point on which I should like to touch, in order to complete the mental picture with which Salvationism has impressed me."<sup>10</sup> However, with all of this fervent emotional character, the Army remained essentially conservative, and with the exception of sacraments, quite orthodox.

It was the clear understanding of its mission and a genuine, total surrender to that mission that kept the Army's theological expression essentially dramatic rather than sensational. The methods were never primary and for this reason the sensationalism of those methods never gained the pre-eminent place in the Army's theological expression. The methods, whatever they might have been, were subservient to the inner conviction of salvationists. The methods always clothed the spirit of salvationists. Bramwell,

quoting his mother, put it this way: ". . . the exuberance, the noise, the laughter of a Salvation gathering is not a putting on but a letting out." 11

This inward fire of the message of Salvation, soberly understood and dramatically expressed, was the soil in which the seeds of self-sacrifice, Christian love, and a commitment to world evangelism at any cost, rooted. There was a place for the sensational, but it was never allowed to degenerate into a pervading sensationalism. It ever remained a dramatic expression of Salvation Army theology.

Nurtured by the seed ground of its social, philosophical, and religious origins, cultivated through the teachings of its theological constructs, and pruned through the dramatic expression of those notions of God and man, a new idea evolved in Victorian England. It was an idea of an Army of God called into service. Military language was utilized in mission days, but it was more rhetoric than reality. With the name change to The Salvation Army, the notion of war became a literal reality and the language far more emotionally and dramatically charged. Its world-wide mission was a real goal, not pep talk.

Undergirding the notion of an Army of God engaged in world conquest, was the absolute conviction that the Army had been divinely called into being. Individual salvationists believed that God was calling them apart for this special ministry. The most powerful proclamation of this divine call to mission came from the Founder himself. Booth was perceived in the prophetic mold of days past. And this sense of the prophetic was carried over to many others in the movement, not only the top leaders but those working in small and difficult neighborhoods. A letter to the editor of the *Consett Guardian* speaks of the leader of a Salvation Army meeting.

"Their leader seemed to be greatly favored by the earnest appeal of love she was constrained to deliver to the audience, for she spoke with authority, and not as a scribe. I may go further-that is, more like the mouthpiece of the unctious of the Divine spirit, for the power of God was over all." 12

However, there was one characteristic of the prophetic nature of Booth and his movement that carried the notion of the movement beyond that of an Army of God. Booth's son Herbert isolates this characteristic although he does not use the term prophetic or any of its derivatives.

"Now how often, dear General, we have all heard you say that the government of the Army was in its nature more paternal than military? How often you have reminded us that this spirit was its sole guarantee of permanence." 13

"When the Army grew, the family spirit and method grew with it. In the early days you were as a father in the midst of your people. You are regarded as such today. The movement will never know the full power of the spell of your personal influence until you are gone." 14

The paternal spirit of Booth the Founder was much more a prophetic than a militaristic trait. Booth was no war lord. He was a spokesman of God. This paternal spirit brought to the movement a family sense whereby Booth's following understood themselves to be not only an Army of God but more



significantly, *a new people of God*. Regarding the Army's understanding of itself, Wyndham Heathcote, one-time officer, quoted from the "Field Secretary's Notes."

To a Salvationist, the birth of the Army in Whitechapel appeared to be a renewal of Pentecost. It was a genuine outburst of spiritual enthusiasm. It was as though Christianity was thrown into its first simplicity and zeal into the heart of the crowded metropolis, to shape and form itself once more. 15

This notion of a new people of God was dramatically expressed in *The Officer* of 1893 in an article on the work of officers. "Our work . . . to create a new people for God out of the raw material around us." 16 Like Ezekiel our Army is to come ". . . from the dead." 17 ". . . dead in sin, dead to their highest interests, dead to God's claims, dead to the dangers of eternity without God; . . ." 18 "To definitely get a sinner converted and enrolled and in fighting form, is a greater victory than putting a dozen people on the rolls, who are members of churches and missions, . . ." "Go for the dead, and out of those ranks create a force who shall stand for God." 19 "Nothing calls attention in the house so much as the new baby." 20

The most powerful notion, and that to which all of the drama of the Army's theological expression led, was this notion of a new people of God. The early salvationists would understand I Peter 2:9-10 quite literally.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## Notes

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5 "The Claims of our Large Towns on the Churches," *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, I (June, 1877), pp. 450-51.

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- 13Ford C. Ottman, *Herbert Booth* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1928), p. 285.
- 14*Ibid.*, p. 286.
- 15Rev. Wyndham S. Heathcote, *My Salvation Army Experience* (London: Marshall Brothers, 10, Paternoster Row E.C., 1891), p. 59.
- 16"Three Words To Officers," *The Officer*, I, 2(February, 1893), p. 41.
- 17*Ibid.*
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# CHARACTERISTICS OF WESLEY'S ARMINIANISM

by  
Luke L. Keefer, Jr.

Grasping essential elements in any aspect of John Wesley is a little like catching a greased pig. For a man of plain words, Wesley is elusive without intending to be so. He lived so long and wrote so much that one must have massive persistence to pursue him through successive decades and endless volumes. This is the fourth time for me to go after Wesley's Arminianism in a concerted fashion. It is like chasing a receding horizon. Considerable territory is covered, but one is conscious of how much needs to be done. Most recently I have focused on the volumes of the *Arminian Magazine* that Wesley personally edited before his death. The characteristics that are shared in this paper are derived from his entire written corpus, but what is most immediate are the impressions that have newly emerged from or been strengthened by these fourteen volumes.

## **Wesley's Arminianism is Anglicized and Personalized**

Wesley clearly links himself to the seventeenth century Remonstrants. The title of the *Arminian Magazine* is one evidence of this. But how well did he know Arminius and the early Remonstrants who popularized the movement? I have yet to pinpoint when Wesley read any of Arminius' writings. The clear implication of his short treatise "The Question, 'What is an Arminian?' Answered by a Lover of Free Grace" (1770) <sup>1</sup> is that he had personally read somewhat in Arminius. For he defends Arminius so particularly on the issues of original sin and justification by faith, that one feels he must have had some grounds for his trust in Arminius' orthodoxy on these points. <sup>2</sup> More to the point is his challenge near the end of the treatise: "And how can any man know what Arminius held, who has never read one page of his writings?" <sup>3</sup> Wesley stands self-condemned if this were his own case.

The extant diaries, however, give us no hint about the time or the extensiveness of his personal reading of Arminius. Possibly the diaries from the outbreak of the Calvinistic controversy in 1770 through the first number of the *Arminian Magazine* in 1778 contain the needed evidence. But they

are among the missing volumes of Wesley's life. His preface to the first volume of the magazine laments the virtual ignorance people commonly have of Arminius, owing to the fact that no good biography on his life was available. 4 The first article of the fledgling magazine, therefore, is Wesley's attempt to provide a short life of Arminius. It is an extract of the funeral oration delivered by Peter Bertius. 5 Part of this sketch refers to Arminius' "Declaration of Sentiments" and his debates with Junius and the English Puritan, William Perkins, on the question of predestination. 6 Probably Wesley was simply following Bertius in these references. By themselves they are no proof that he had personally read these treatises of Arminius.

Wesley was a compulsive extractor of those writings he felt most profitable on a given subject. Why then did he never extract anything by Arminius, not even in the fourteen volumes of the magazine named after him? Nor have I yet encountered in Wesley's writings a direct quotation from Arminius. What we have are general statements about Arminius' life and thought. The strong suspicion is that Arminius' works were rare in England, even in the eighteenth century, 7 and that consequently Wesley was not well versed in his writings.

What Wesley knew of Arminius came to him through two basic sources. First, he knew something of Arminius through Remonstrant spokesmen. In the year Wesley was ordained a deacon at Oxford (1725), he read Hugo Grotius' *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*. 8 Then, in the midst of his first Calvinistic controversy in 1741, while in the Lincoln College Library, he came by chance upon the works of Simon Episcopius. He happened to open the book at the description of the Synod of Dort and was thoroughly shocked by the actions of the Calvinists toward the Remonstrants. 9 His journal comments only upon this segment of the book. If he read any more of this volume, *Opera Theologica*, he encountered a full exposition of Arminianism. For Episcopius was both the student of Arminius at Leiden University and the chief spokesman for the Remonstrant party at the Synod of Dort. Boshears characterizes this work of Episcopius as the "systematization of Arminian thought." 10 Here at least were two opportunities for Wesley to learn of Arminius from his close followers.

Wesley's second source of Arminian theology was the English Church in general, particularly the writers of the seventeenth century. This was by far his predominant source, a fact which is amply demonstrated in the materials selected for inclusion in the *Arminian Magazine*. 11 This should be no surprise to us, for Wesley's preface to volume one clearly stated his intention to present the best treatises on the subject from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 12 Of the articles available to him in English, most were compiled by Anglican churchmen.

Several factors combine here to make this a significant insight as to the particular cast of his Arminianism. James the First had sent representatives of the English church to the Synod of Dort. They were a moderating force on the synod both in spirit and theology. Nonetheless, they joined in the council's rejection of the Remonstrant position. Not long after the Synod, however, both James I and the leading English bishops did a radical about-face. Scandalized at the persecuting spirit of the synod's proceedings, and now convinced that Arminius was more correct than the Calvinists, they moved the English church decisively in an Arminian direction.

Two religious factors lay at the heart of this about-face. Archbishop Laud was a convinced latitudinarian in ecclesiastical polity, the very opposite of restrictive Calvinism. More to the point was the desire of the English Church to legitimize itself as neither Roman Catholic nor Radical Protestant by establishing its doctrine, liturgy, and polity on the first centuries of the Christian Church. And the church before Augustine was uniformly supportive of universal redemption.

Wesley was quite aware of these facts, for the version just presented is taken from his own *Ecclesiastical History*, published in 1781 as an English extract of von Mosheim's work on the history of the Christian Church. 13 Steeped as he was in the Caroline divines, when this Anglican Arminianism had triumphed over aggressive Calvinism, he was conscious of his own sympathy with Arminianism because it was harmonious with the testimony of the early Church. Furthermore, he shared the deep revulsion that the Carolinian divines had for the Puritan involvement in the English Civil War, when the spirit of Dort had taken flesh and shed blood on English soil. To his dying day, Wesley deprecated the destruction caused by the reforming Calvinistic troops of that bitter war. Some of his intense emotional vehemence against Calvinism is better understood in terms of seventeenth century English history than it is in strictly theological terms.

This points to the conclusion that Wesley's Arminianism was mediated to him by means of the Anglican Church. Basic ideas of Arminius were passed along, but they had taken on a distinctive English accent. The Methodists would call themselves Arminians, but they were more the cousins of Arminius than they were his direct descendants.

Yet we must resist the temptation to define Wesley merely as the product of his sources. His own creative thought in the development of his theology, as well as his reflections upon the course of the Methodist Revival, had as much to do with his brand of Arminianism as did the English context of his religious formation. We can acknowledge that Wesley's context predisposed him to Arminianism; but we should never concede that it predestined him to it!

Every attempt to label Wesley has had to acknowledge that in certain respects he doesn't fit the mold. Thus he has been painted as a Catholic, Anglican, Pietist, Calvinist, Lutheran, Puritan, Moravian, etc. depending upon the author in question. Every attempt has ended with its "sic et non," alike in some respects and different in others. His Arminianism is no different. From the point of his studies for ordination, when the seventeenth article of the English Church troubled his thoughts, 14 until the last years of his oversight of the Methodist societies, he was giving periodic thought to this issue.

His fundamental perception of God as holy and loving, rather than primarily sovereign as in Calvinism, gave him a different perception on grace. It was without limit, both in terms of those who could be reached by it and in terms of how far it could penetrate into the human heart in its triumph over sin. 15 His particular development of prevenient grace allowed him to walk a narrow ledge between Calvinism and Pelagianism in regard to sin, free will, and the nature of saving faith. His keen attention to the psychology of religious experience made him nearly a singular religious thinker in his time. He grasped, then, what it has taken the rest of the Christian world

nearly two more centuries to acknowledge fully. Dogmatic theology cannot be done in isolation, for the Word of the living God always confronts real people in specific human contexts. The truth of a doctrinal proposition was to be tested, he believed, at least in part, by its correspondence with Christian experience. When Wesley objected to the effects of Calvinist preaching upon both sinners and saints, he was doing more than questioning its pragmatic influence; he was challenging the very truthfulness of the doctrines involved.

More should be said on these points, but enough has been mentioned to indicate that Wesley contributed theological insights to Arminian thought as well as derived them from the heritage. He stands as a leading figure in the ongoing debate between Arminianism and Calvinism. He did more than cast his vote of "aye" for the Arminian understanding of the Christian faith. He took his turn in the debate, speaking as an Englishman and persuading others by his particular arguments. Those who truly heard the debate sensed that in Wesley Arminianism was Anglicized and personalized.

### **Wesley's Arminianism Is Integrative Rather than Systematized**

In Paul K. Jewett's book, *Election and Predestination*, he expresses the conviction that Calvinism enjoys the advantage of the best theologians of the ages being on its side. 16 While he finds Wesley to be more to his liking than Arminius, he fails to see in Wesley a real threat to Calvinistic logic. "Wesley's rejection of predestination," he writes, "was-fortunately-more emotional than critical. Not given to the rigors of thought of which dogmatics is made, he never pursued the implications of his Arminian view of salvation." 17 If we can get past the injudicious lack of scholarly objectivity in Jewett's statements, we will discover an important element, a half-truth, that illustrates a characteristic aspect of Wesley's Arminianism.

Jewett's charge against Wesley is an old libel. It is that Wesley is not a systematic theologian, and here many of Wesley's friends are as likely to agree as are his foes. But we must not quit the field at this stage of the contest. There are many turns in this game before the final score is known.

Systematic theologies often involve a first principle, a theological prime mover from which all other Christian truths get their start. For Luther the key issue is justification by faith. It casts its shadow over all areas of his thought. Calvin is an even better example of a systematics person. Here God's sovereignty is the starting point, and all other doctrines fall in step to the beat of this drum. One will search in vain for such a controlling principle in Wesley. Neither Arminianism nor Christian perfection, to cite some prime candidates, function this way for Wesley.

So far Jewett's charge still stands. But if systematic theology is the best form of Christian thought, then the Bible is an inferior product by comparison. And Moses, David, Isaiah, Paul, John, and Jesus, also, stand condemned as sub-par thinkers. For the Bible is an integrative book, seeing issues wholistically, dealing with them naturally as the occasion demands. Wesley, who aimed to be a man of this book above all else, is in the same mold.

This is not to say that the Biblical writers could not think systematically when the occasion demanded. They could demonstrate the interrelation of truths and pick their way through complex issues to reasonable answers. But that is not the only way to present truth, and most of life is

not so rigidly systematized. The Bible sets, therefore, the true pattern for theological discourse when it addresses the human condition as it is. So we need not quail under the charge of Wesley's lack of a system. He keeps some very good company in sacred history. It matters not that he presents his theology in sermons, letters, conference minutes, hymns, and tracts for the times. If his theology is Biblical, logical, understandable, and helpful, is it any less valuable because it is not titled *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* and cannot be reduced to a five point acrostic?

It is my hunch that theological preferences are determined more by psychological disposition than we often like to admit. There are systematizers by nature, who must reduce every issue to a paradigm, a syllogism, or a category. Nothing so annoys them as ambiguity or complementary truths. It upsets their whole mental universe. Give them their system and all of life falls in place.

The other fifty percent of the human race thinks just as accurately, but it thinks differently. These people see things wholistically, impressed by how matters are in the course of things. Their orientation is toward practics rather than theoretics, and they are more synthetic than analytic in thought.

Now, I suspect that many great Christian systematizers belong to the first group. And many others belong to the second. In terms of the brain research of recent decades, it is time now to challenge the nonsense that systematizers are better thinkers than are the integrative thinkers. Jewett will not likely approve of the move, but it is time for the Christian world to invite to more worthy places those whom the systematizers have consigned to the lowest seats at the feast.

It is instructive to see how Wesley approaches Arminianism integratively. In general, his Arminianism is implicit rather than explicit. He goes about his task as a Christian, assuming the truth of the Arminian understanding. He feels an obligation to every person he encounters. His evangelistic preaching is full of hope, even for the worst of sinners. His nurture of believers is motivated by the fear that having begun the Christian race they will not persevere until the end. For the most part, he does not attempt to develop a full-blown Arminian theology, at least not in print. Rather, he addresses the practical issue of the topic that the particular situation demanded.

His writings against Calvinism can be grouped in four periods. During these times his Arminianism is given a somewhat more explicit expression. The first period could be called the "initial Calvinistic controversy." It began in 1739 and ran through his rift with Whitefield in the 1740's. Wesley had barely discovered his vocation as an evangelist before predestinarian ideas, strong in the Bristol area, threatened to limit the scope of his declaration of good news. Wesley's response is charged with emotion, revolting against the consequences of particular redemption on evangelistic preaching, but also venting personal frustration over the strife occasioned in the young revival movement over doctrinal disputes.

His sermon on "Free Grace," 18 published in Bristol, and the "Hymns on God's Everlasting Love," 19 jointly published by the Wesley brothers in 1741, reflect the emotional intensity of their feelings on the issue. John also wrote "A Dialogue Between A Predestinarian and His Friend" 20 during this period. To these publications of their own composition, he added three

published extracts of other authors who helped to champion his cause against particular redemption. 21

In the decade of the 1750's, Wesley published two new pieces on the subject. They were "Serious Thoughts Upon the Perseverance of the Saints" (1751) and "Predestination Calmly Considered" (1752).<sup>22</sup> As the titles themselves suggest, the mood now was a calmer one. The Wesleys and Whitefield had covered their differences for the sake of revival harmony. The treatises seem to be directed more to the teaching need of the Methodist Societies than toward outside adversaries, <sup>23</sup> though the first of these involved Wesley in a brief pamphlet battle with Dr. Gill on the subject of the perseverance of the saints. His final response to Dr. Gill was a twelve page pamphlet, composed entirely of selections from the "Hymns on God's Everlasting Love." <sup>24</sup> Such was the confidence of Wesley in these hymns as statements of theology!

The third period, generally confined to the 1760's, was a particular conflict over the meaning of "imputed righteousness." <sup>25</sup> It started innocently enough with Wesley's exchanges with James Hervey, his Oxford pupil and friend. Before it had run its course, it spread to Scotland, where Wesley was now alienated from some of the clergymen who had formerly aided his ministry there. It was a harbinger of things to come. Smoldering beneath the surface were deep doctrinal differences between Calvinistic and Arminian Methodists.

The fourth period began in 1770 and continued to the end of Wesley's life. Two events made 1770 a fateful year: George Whitefield's death and the Minutes of the Methodist Conference, declaring how Wesley's Societies had heretofore leaned too near Calvinism. The issue now was the antinomian effect Calvinism could have among the Methodists. A pamphlet war resulted, with Wesley's new adversaries being Augustus Toplady and the Hill brothers, Richard and Rowland. <sup>26</sup>

The temper of these new, younger opponents convinced Wesley that there was no peace to be found with the Calvinistic party. After several exchanges with them in controversial treatises, he decided on a different course. On one hand, his friend, John Fletcher, issued his Checks to Antinomianism. Here was the Arminian cause set forth systematically and with good Christian spirit. Wesley enthusiastically endorsed it as the response of his party to Calvinism. On the other hand, Wesley decided to begin publishing a periodical called the Arminian Magazine. Begun in 1778, it was to be his sustained effort to refute Calvinism and support universal redemption. Indeed, he published nothing on this topic in the last fourteen years of his life apart from the articles in the magazine.

Wesley composes very little that is new for the magazine apart from sermons that are included from time to time, most of which do not directly relate to the subject. He reprinted many of his earlier publications, both his own compositions and extracted treatises on the subject. To this he added new extracts, some stretched out through the various numbers of the magazine for a year or more. Most of these were by English authors, though he included a long excerpt of Sabastian Castellio against predestination. <sup>27</sup> Some were fairly heavy going, requiring not only a thorough grasp of Scripture, church history, and theology, but also an ability to follow the methods of argumentation current in the European universities from the sixteenth to



the eighteenth centuries. These more weighty articles prompted letters of protest to which Wesley replied in letters and prefaces to subsequent volumes of the magazine.

As one wades through the articles in volume after volume of the magazine, he is impressed that there is nothing new under the sun. The most familiar arguments on both sides of the question are stated and examined. The relevant passages of Scripture, plus some that cannot be so characterized, are cited and explained, not only once, but several times over. It is clear Dr. Jewett had expended no energy in the Arminian Magazine. For if Wesley did not have the time to write systematic theology, he certainly had the mind to understand it and to perceive what sources set forth his sentiments with the greatest force. And time did seem to be the issue for Wesley. Systematic theologians are rarely to be found among those who preach on a daily basis, while also tending to pastoral duties for literally thousands of souls.

The Arminian Magazine is a veritable body of divinity on the controverted points between Calvinists and Arminians. It is not reduced to confessional statements, nor is it presented in discrete chapters under particular headings. But it is there, nonetheless, most of it being in composition and length such as simple readers could take in. It was for such an audience Wesley intended the magazine as he did most of his publications. One who wishes to write for the popular audience must excel in practical divinity, theology so integrated with the concerns and the language of the masses that it can communicate with them. What, in the final analysis, we might ask Dr. Jewett reflects the largeness of one's mind? Is it the ability to write learned tomes for the students of systematics? Or is it the ability to express the most sublime truths of theology in ways that the masses will understand? However one might be disposed to judge the issue of mental ability, one might be forgiven the impression that Wesley has chosen the better part.

### **Wesley's Arminianism Is Pastorally Motivated**

The substance and style of Wesley's Arminianism is closely linked to his ministerial motivations. Thus, there is a natural relationship between the second and third characteristics, which have a mutual impact upon one another.

A statement in Wesley's letter of July 30, 1773, to Mrs. Woodhouse, helps to introduce us to the issue.

The point they aim at is this-to make Calvinists. Our point is to make Christians. They endeavour to convert men to the dear Decrees; we to convert them to God. 28

This is as much a half truth about the Calvinists as Jewett's remarks were about Wesley. For Calvinists then, as now, had as their purpose the making of Christians. But the half truth contains an insight into a difference in style between the two systems and, consequently, their motivations in ministry. Sensing this difference helps us identify another of the characteristics of Wesley's Arminianism.

If one's approach to Christianity is highly motivated by systematics, then the exposition of that dogmatic formulation holds a primary role in communication. A Calvinistic preacher or writer is readily recognized, for his dogmatic structure is inextricably linked with his presentation of the

gospel. Such communication can be compared to looking at a human skeleton. The entire bone system is immediately open to view. All the parts are clearly seen, their points of connection, and the entire configuration. Herein lies its appeal to certain thinkers and its compelling power as a system of Christian truth.

Wesley's Arminianism is quite different. It is like looking at a human body, where the skeletal system is assumed but not immediately obvious. In fact, one would be hard put to demonstrate the existence of some bones of the body in a living person. The other parts of the human system disguise the skeletal system. Yet that skeletal system is present, fulfilling its function in relation to all the other bodily systems. This is the key issue. It is only one system along with all the other systems of the body, important in its own right and capable of particular investigation, but not fundamental in any sense that the others are not also co-fundamental. This is the important issue that Wesley's half-truth statement illustrates.

Wesley did not often preach on the topics in dispute between the Calvinists and the Arminians. At the height of the last controversy he admitted he should preach on it more frequently, saying that heretofore he scarce preached on it once in every fifty sermons. 29 He cautioned his ministers at this time against getting caught up in the issue and preaching against Calvinism too frequently. Opposing false doctrine was not to occupy too much of their time or thoughts. They were to keep to the key issue: "Christ dying for us and living in us." 30 Calvinism was to be resisted calmly, not by controversial sermons, but by "visiting the people from house to house, dispersing the little tracts as it were with both hands." 31

Wesley's pastoral approach was motivated by the fact that he considered Calvinism to be an opinion and not a fundamental doctrine of Scripture. His letter to John Newton 32 makes this very point. Both Calvinists and Arminians were leading people to true Christian faith. Thus, their doctrinal views must not have touched the fundamental issues of Christianity. He admitted that thirty years earlier he and Charles had felt differently about Calvinism. Experience had made them wiser. They still thought these opinions were wrong, but they were not the fundamental kind of wrong that merited all one's opposition, especially in public. The more secluded pastoral settings were more suited to guarding against them.

The place of dogmatic theology in preaching was one of the key issues in the final Calvinistic controversy of Wesley's life. Augustus Toplady had translated and published Zanchius' treatise on the doctrine of absolute predestination. It defined the key terms of the Calvinistic system and closed with arguments why this doctrine should be preached publicly to both sinners and saints. The reasoning was that these doctrines were fundamental to the entire gospel and that the gospel would be distorted if these items were not included. 33 Rev. John Erskine of Scotland criticized Wesley concerning this. He felt it was Wesley's duty to preach on these topics even if it resulted in controversy, for otherwise Wesley was guilty of not preaching the full gospel according to his own convictions. 34

Wesley felt insisting upon differing opinions interfered with the real business of converting men's souls. His approach made Arminianism a penultimate issue and not the ultimate one. Calvinistic dogmatics had made its systematic theology identical with the gospel. At least in Wesley's day, it

had found no way to effectively distinguish them. Thus, making people Christian was synonymous with making them think Calvinistically. For Wesley the issue was to make people Christians, hopefully in the Arminian persuasion, but not necessarily so. Thus, what is often called a matter of Wesley's evangelical pragmatism is really motivated by this more fundamental reason.

Another aspect of this pastoral conditioning of Wesley's Arminianism was its care of souls. Wesley states the issue in one of his letters to Mary Bishop.

How grievously are they mistaken (as are well-nigh the whole body of modern Calvinists) who imagine that as soon as children are born they need take no more care of them! We do not find it so. The chief care then begins. 35

It was the Arminian branch of the Methodist revival that developed the Methodist discipline and the small group structures for nurture. Whitefield and the Calvinistic Methodists did not see the same necessity for them. Consequently, as Wesley observed early on and Whitefield lamented later, many of Whitefield's converts were as a rope of sand. Again, on the surface it looks like a merely pragmatic difference in ministerial style. Underlying the two approaches, however, was a vital difference in theology over the perseverance of the saints. The practice of both groups was a reflection of their doctrinal convictions.

One could say with some justification that the first Calvinistic controversy at Bristol in 1739 was evangelistically motivated. In the last three decades of his ministry, and throughout all the controversy raised by the Minutes of 1770, the issue was Calvinism's impact upon the believers. Wesley's charge was that it fostered antinomianism. This was in direct conflict with his emphasis upon Christian perfection. Many of his statements during these years reduced the struggle to this one point: Calvinism or Christian perfection. He felt Calvinism tended to let people rest in their election; he wanted his people to strive for Christian perfection. Wesley's linkage of Arminian theology to the doctrine of Christian perfection often has been overlooked in assessing the motivation of his pastoral care.

The Arminian Magazine is a vivid testimony to Wesley's pastoral Arminianism. One is immediately struck by the material that comprises the various numbers of the magazine. In his most concerted attempt to explain and enforce Arminian theology, by far the greater part of the magazine does not relate directly to the doctrinal issues in question. This becomes even more pronounced after one gets past the first two volumes. But even in the first two volumes there is much that does not relate to the Calvinism-Arminianism debate.

Wesley's preface to the first volume, however, has notified us of this fact. He indicates that each number of the magazine will have four parts. The first part will be "a defence of that grand Christian doctrine, 'God willeth all men to be saved.' " The second part will be the exemplary life of some Christian, regardless of his denominational association. The third part will be of letters which contain the "experience of pious persons." Poetry would fill the fourth part. 36 Early on much of the poetry came from the "Hymns on God's Everlasting Love." Later, poetry of all kinds became more

prominent. Thus, only half of the early numbers address the issue of Arminian thought. The proportional space given to doctrinal defense diminishes in time, until it makes up barely twenty-five percent of the magazine. Wesley himself was sensible of this drift. In the preface to the seventh volume, he says the magazine's sub-title was misleading. In the first six volumes it read, "Consisting of Extracts and Treatises on Universal Redemption." He would change that by adding the word "chiefly," so henceforth it would read, "consisting chiefly," etc. 37

One observes, however, that the later volumes were only a confirmation of his primary concern throughout. True, his first number reflected his determination that a sufficiently vigorous response should be given to the Calvinism of his day. 38 But there, already, at least half the magazine was concerned with "practical, heart Christianity." That this practical Christianity was his supreme interest is quite clear in his preface to the third volume of the magazine.

In the following, some pages will always be bestowed (as was originally designed) in proving the grand doctrine of universal redemption, and clearing it of all objections. But this will not take up so large a compass as it has done in some of the preceding numbers. I do not intend that the controversial part of any future number shall exceed sixteen pages. By this means there will be more room for what is more to my taste, and I believe more for the profit of the serious reader; I mean such Lives as contain the height and depth of genuine, scriptural, rational religion. 39

Again, the truth of his letter to Mrs. Woodhouse is verified. Making Christians is the central concern; promoting Arminianism is secondary to it.

A final example of this pastoral orientation is seen in his visits to Holland. 40 Twice after he began the Arminian Magazine, he went to Holland for several weeks at a time. One might have expected that he was after Dutch materials of the Remonstrant cause for the magazine. This, however, was not the case. Rather, his time was wholly given to visiting small groups of pious people who had learned of him through his writings. Christian perfection was often the focus of his comments, but his journals make not one reference to Arminianism, even though his diaries indicate that he was preparing copy for the *Arminian Magazine* during these trips. Even his visits to Leiden, where Arminians had taught theology in the university, seemed not to have stirred any historical interest in the dramatic events of the preceding century. What an eloquent testimony to his pastorally motivated Arminianism!

Did the style of his theology motivate his pastoral orientation? Or did his pastoral context fashion his style of theology? Both are likely true, for their mutual influence was characteristic of Wesley. Seeing the relationship between the two is essential to understanding Wesley's Arminianism.

### **Afterword**

Neither the Calvinism nor the Arminianism of our day parallels that of eighteenth century England. Thus, some of our interest in Wesley's Arminianism is a more narrowly focused scholarly issue. The direct relationship of Wesley to Arminius is an issue in this vein. But the integrative

character of Wesley's theology and the pastoral orientation that accompanied it are more instructive for our own time. They help us understand differences in theological substance and style that still persist in our time. Two centuries of dialogue and ecumenical effort have reduced the differences between Calvinists and Arminians may God be praised, but they have not succeeded in casting us in a common mold. Wesley's Arminianism is as much a challenge today to Wesleyan ecclesiology as it is to Calvinist doctrine. Wesley has not had his last word with us in regard to Arminianism.

### Notes

1The Works of John Wesley. 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958-59), X, 358-361.

2Ibid., 359.

3Ibid., 360.

4John Wesley, ed., *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*, 14 vols. (London: Fry, Para more, et.al., 1778-91), I, v.

5Ibid., I, 9-17.

6Ibid., I, 13 and 15.

7This fact is well stated in Carl Bangs' *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985), pp. 18-19.

8V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley* (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 1961), p. 306.

9Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* 8 vols. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909-16), II, 473.

10Onva K. Boshears, Jr., *John Wesley, The Bookman; A Study of His Reading Interests in the Eighteenth Century*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1972, pp. 217-18.

11One can quickly verify this by scanning the tables of contents in the various volumes of the magazine under Wesley's editorship. Or one can get the picture even more speedily by reading through Green's summary of the contents of the various volumes. Richard Green, *The Works of John and Charles Wesley, A Bibliography: Containing an Exact Account of all the Publications Issued by The Brothers Wesley Arranged in Chronological Order* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1896), pp. 196-8, 200-1, 204-5, 212-13, 218-19, 221 2 224-5, 227-8, 232-3, 234-5, 238-9, 241-2, 245, 248.

12Arminian Magazine, I, v.

13John Wesley, *A Concise Ecclesiastical History, From the Birth of Christ to the Beginning of the Present Century*, 4 vols. (London: J. Paramore, 17 III. 100-104.

14See his letter to his mother. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols., (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), I, 22-23.

15Both Deschner and Lindstrom agree, though from different perspectives, that Wesley's own theology gives a particular cast to his Arminianism when applied to the subject of salvation. John Deschner, *Wesley's christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), pp.18-23; Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (London: The Epworth Press, 1950), pp. 19-104

16Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 3, 62, 66.

17Ibid., p. 17.

18Works, VII, 373-386.

19G. Osborn, ed., *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols., (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1869), III, 3-106.

20Green, *Works of John and Charles Wesley*, p. 18.

21Ibid., pp. 16, 18, 19. Two of these treatises were included in early volumes of the *Arminian Magazine*. II, 105-119; V, 617-623.

22Green, *Works of John and Charles Wesley*, pp. 74, 76.

23Ibid., pp. 76-77.

24Osborn, *Poetical Works*, III, xx; Green, *Works of John and Charles Wesley*, p. 87.

25"Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ" (1762), "A Treatise on Justification: Extracted from Mr. John Goodwin" (1765), "An Answer to all that is Material in Letters Just Published, Under the Name of the Reverend Mr. Hervey" (1765), "The Lord our Righteousness: A Sermon Preached at the Chapel in West Street" (1765), and "Some Remarks on a Defence of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of *Aspasio Vindicated*" (1766). Green, *Works of John and Charles Wesley*. DD. 120. 128-129. 133-134.

26For the titles in question, see Green's bibliography. Ibid., pp. 147-148, 154-156, 160, 166-168, 170, 175-176, 189-190.

27*Arminian Magazine*, vols. IV and V. The series of excerpts extends through twenty-one numbers of the magazine for these two years.

28Letters, VI, 34.

29Ibid, VI, 295. Note also his letter May 14, 1765, to John Newton. He says he preaches eight hundred sermons a year and probably not more than eight a year on Calvinistic subjects. Of the fifty sermons then in print only one explicitly opposed Calvinism. Ibid.. IV. 297.

30Ibid., VIII, 69.

31Ibid., VII, 136.

32Ibid., IV, 297-300.

33Works, XIV, 190-198.

34Letters, IV, 294-296.

35Ibid., V, 344.

36Arminian Magazine, I, vi-vii.

37Ibid., VII, ii.

38Ibid., II, vii-viii.

39Ibid., III, v.

40Journal, VI, 415, f.n.l.; 416-430; VII, 195-204.

# **WESLEYAN THEOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIAN FEMINIST CRITIQUE**

by  
Randy L. Maddox

The Wesleyan tradition, in both its Methodist and Holiness forms, is generally considered to have played an instrumental or, at least, supportive role in the modern struggle to affirm women in Christian ministry. 1 Its contribution to the reevaluation of women's status and roles in the family and the larger social setting is less clear but some positive influence is arguable here as well. 2

## **THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS**

One should be careful, however, about drawing from these historical generalizations any sweeping conclusions concerning the correlation between Wesleyan theology and recent Christian feminist theology. 3 In reality, many of the apparent feminist actions of Wesley and his followers were instituted in spite of some of their central Biblical and theological affirmation.

For example, it is true that Wesley allowed women to preach. However, he did this despite the fact that he was convinced this practice was contrary to the normative teaching of Scripture. At first he justified women speakers by means of a questionable distinction between "testifying" and "preaching. Eventually, he simply appealed to the obvious giftedness of the women and God's blessing of their ministry as evidence that God did allow women preachers in "extraordinary" situations such as his revival. 4 Similar circumstances and parallel arguments can be found in the later holiness movement. 5

This qualified endorsement of women's ministries undoubtedly formed the background for the subsequent embarrassment about and resulting marginalization or denial of women's ministries in both the Methodist and Holiness traditions as they became establishment churches. 6

As the preceding example suggests, any adequate consideration of possible affinities between the Wesleyan traditions and the contemporary Christian feminist critique will ultimately have to move beyond questions of fluctuating historical practice to the level of central theological commitments.



## THE SITUATION AT THE LEVEL OF THEOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS

What is the situation at this level of theological affirmations? In a recent paper, I summarized the most basic theological concerns of the Christian feminists and attempted to assess these concerns from an evangelical standpoint. My assessment was generally positive, concluding that the feminists' concerns often entailed valid, Biblically-warranted, critiques of traditional theological positions and formulations. At the same time, I admitted that each of the various Christian theological traditions would find differing points of tension, if not incompatibility, with the feminist critique. 7

To my surprise (at the time) one of the original respondents to this paper suggested that it was easier for a Wesleyan to dialogue with or appropriate the feminist perspective than for those of other traditions. On further reflection, I have come to believe this may be the case.

Indeed, in the original paper I had highlighted Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism as examples of traditions which would find significant tension with at least some aspect of the feminist critique but had said nothing about Wesleyanism. 8 While this omission had not been intentional, it did reflect unconsciously a conviction which I would now like to argue more explicitly: namely, that the Wesleyan tradition shares a distinctively kindred theological spirit with contemporary Christian feminists. While there are many traditional Wesleyan practices and theological formulations that would be viewed critically from a feminist perspective, I would contend that the two movements are attuned in their most *fundamental* convictions.

### SYSTEMATIC COMPARISON OF CHRISTIAN FEMINISM AND WESLEYAN THEOLOGY

Support for the preceding claim can best be suggested by a brief systematic comparison of the fundamental theological convictions of the Christian feminist critique with those of the Wesleyan tradition. 9

#### A. The Nature of Theology

Christian feminists have repeatedly criticized abstract, theoretical and deductive models of theological reflection. By contrast to such models, they emphasize the praxis-related and constructive nature of all theological expressions. Among other things, this emphasis entails the realization that all theological formulations are fallible and thus continually open to critical reformulation.

While the Wesleyan traditions have occasionally been influenced by other theological currents to adopt deductive fundamentalist or abstract metaphysical approaches to theology, the founder and the central stream of the tradition both have favored a more praxis-related and constructive model of theology. Indeed, they have often been judged pejoratively due to this option. 10

#### B. The Sources of Theology

The primary feminist concerns regarding the sources of theology are two: 1) that we self-consciously admit the role that experience, reason and tradition play in our reading of Scripture—thereby shattering any "Bible-only" pretensions; and 2) that we attempt to recover and utilize the neglected areas of women's experience and tradition in our theological reflection.

The Wesleyan tradition is sympathetic with the first concern, having long given at least lip-service to the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." 11 We have not yet, however, addressed adequately the exclusion of women's experience and

traditions in our theological reflection, though works like *Women in New Worlds* are an important step in that direction.

### **C. The Doctrine of the Trinity**

There is an emerging conviction among feminist theologians that the medieval shift, seen clearly in Thomas Aquinas, from a foundationally trinitarian understanding of God to the focus on God as a unitary supreme being who is only subsequently acknowledged to have trinitarian aspects, was a disastrous detour for theology. 12 In particular, this move has fostered a hierarchal monistic understanding of reality-monarchism, and a correlated individualistic and elitist view of human social structures. By contrast, Christian feminists argue that a truly trinitarian understanding of God and its correlated relational understanding of reality are more Biblical.

Many Wesleyan summaries of theology never directly address the issues of monotheism and the trinity because of their focus on the *ordo salutis*. However, those that do deal with these issues tend to follow the lead of Aquinas, treating first the doctrine of the One God (Theism) and only subsequently the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>13</sup> We would do well to devote careful consideration to the feminist claims that a more foundationally trinitarian approach to theology is more Biblically sound.

### **D. The Doctrine of God (Father / Creator)**

It is often popularly assumed that feminist theologians want to replace worship of the male God (Father) with that of the Goddess (Mother). This is clearly not the concern of most Christian feminist theologians. Rather, they are primarily interested in reaffirming the classical theological doctrine that all language about God is analogical, including the designation "Father." As such, neither gender should be attributed to God in any literal sense. On the other hand, both male and female analogies for God have Biblical warrant and provide instructive disclosures of truth about God and God's relationship to humanity.

In addition to this basic concern, feminists are critical of certain traditional theological models of God. In particular, they reject models that are hierarchical and abstract such as "First Cause" and "World Governor." Even more specifically, they reject the hierarchical understanding of God's omnipotence which construes it as power over, opting instead for a more egalitarian understanding of power as power for or enabling power. In each of these cases they argue their alternative model is both more Biblical and more inclusive of women's experience which, Carol Gilligan has shown, focuses more on relationships and empowering than on authority and independence. 14

Wesleyan theology can make no claim to having consistently remained conscious of the analogical status of God-language, thereby avoiding the tendency to construe God as more properly male than female. 15 Nor has it been distinctively suspicious of abstract and hierarchical models of God. 16 However, the protest against absolutistic understandings of God's omnipotence which undercut human responsibility is at the heart of Wesleyanism. 17 This is a significant area of correlation between Christian feminism and Wesleyanism, in stark contrast to several theological traditions.

### **E. The Doctrine of Christ**

There are two distinctive elements in the feminist discussion of Christology. First, on analogy with their understanding of God as Creator, they are

suspicious of abstract and authoritarian models of Christ. Their model of preference is Christ as Representative—both Representative of God to humanity and Representative of True Humanity. Implicit in this model is a rejection of any substitution Christology or soteriology that would undercut our human responsibility to become our selves re-presentations of true humanity.

Secondly, they have struggled with the question of how women can relate to or find themselves represented by a male savior. While a few have appealed to the idea of androgyny in this regard, the majority have instead insisted that Christ's maleness, while a historical fact, was not a theological or soteriological necessity.

Neither of these positions could be construed as uniquely Wesleyan or anti-Wesleyan. At most, one could argue a basic shared sympathy for avoiding models of soteriology that undercut human responsibility. However, most Wesleyans would be suspicious that a model of Christ as Representative could easily become Pelagian. Thus, there is room here for a fruitful dialogue between Wesleyans and Christian feminists

## **F. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**

In the history of Christian tradition the Holy Spirit has often been conceived as female, both analogically and literally. In general, feminist theologians resist any literal identification of the Spirit as female, because of their understanding of the analogical nature of God-language, while they appreciate female models of God as Spirit. However, even this appreciation has a limit if these female models are used to "feminize" the Spirit. Feminists argue that the Spirit has all-too-often been construed through the patriarchally-distorted image of the feminine as being quiet, recessive and dependent. By contrast, they find in Scripturean understanding of the Spirit as the Power of the very Presence of God. Clearly, such a model would be more likely to entail reformist views of Christian life in the Spirit.

The other major concern of Christian feminist theologians relative to the Holy Spirit is to emphasize that the Spirit's work is inclusive; i.e., the Spirit gives both the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit to both women and men.

While not without some reservations, feminists have generally found the Wesleyan emphasis on the transforming power of the Spirit and the Wesleyan recognition of the inclusive nature of the gifts to be exemplary of a proper understanding. 18

## **G. The Doctrine of Creation**

The primary goal of Christian feminist reflection on theological understandings of creation has been to expose and overcome the residual elements of "male" hierarchical and dualistic thinking in the traditional Christian worldview. Examples of such dualism would include: God versus world, spiritual versus physical, humanity versus world and culture versus nature. Feminists not only consider such dualisms unBiblical, they argue that they are an underlying cause of our contemporary ecological and social crises.

Perhaps Wesleyans are not the worst offenders in this regard. Wesley's Anglican roots gave him a high sacramental view which mitigated at least the spiritual/physical dualism somewhat.<sup>19</sup> In general, however, Wesleyan theology shares the guilt of the rest of the Western world in overplaying

these dualisms. Here we have much to learn from the feminists and other. Fortunately, we are already beginning. 20

## **H. The Doctrine of Humanity**

Obviously, the feminist critique of hierarchical dualism in general would apply as well in the area of theological anthropology. Its most pointed focus in this regard is the male/female hierarchy that characterizes human society at large. It is undeniable that most of Christian tradition has also operated in terms of an assumed male/female hierarchy and has attempted to justify this by Scripture. Nevertheless, Christian feminists argue that the patriarchy in Scripture is descriptive of sinful human life and that the clear call of the Word of God is to egalitarian relationships. 21

It should be noted, however, that this argument for male/female equality does not exhaust the feminist critique of traditional theological anthropology. At an even more foundational level, they consider traditional ("male") understandings of humanity to be individualistic, abstract and alienating. By contrast, they argue that a truly inclusive and Biblical anthropology would construe humanity in intrinsically social and relational terms. We are human only in and through relationships with God, others, self and world.

We noted in our introduction that the Wesleyan tradition has an ambivalent history regarding male/female relationships. For this ambivalence to be overcome, we must undertake the careful exegetical work which can convince us and our people that God's Word calls unambiguously for egalitarian relationships. 22

What about Wesleyans and a relational/social understanding of humanity? The situation of Wesley himself is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, he has been accused by feminist and liberation theologians of having an incurably individualistic anthropology. 23 On the other hand, many Wesleyans argue that the primacy of the category of love in Wesley's theology entails a fundamentally relational perspective. In fairness, it appears the feminists are right about Wesley's explicit formulations and those of most of his followers. 24 At the same time, there is no apparent inherent problem in transforming Wesley's anthropology in a relational direction. Indeed, the attempts at such a transformation already underway seem to provide anthropologies more consistent with Wesley's other commitments. 25

## **I. The Doctrine of Sin**

The feminist commitment to a social understanding of human nature is clearly evident in their discussion of sin. Resisting the privatistic, dualistic and individualistic definitions that are so common in Christian tradition and piety, they stress the social, structural and systemic forms that sin can take. Ultimately, sin is anything that dehumanizes us and leads us to dehumanize others. Such evils can easily become institutionalized or otherwise socially-embodied.

In addition to stressing the social and structural nature of sin, feminists have also alerted us to the contextuality of sin. That is, they have shown that the particular forms of sinful destruction of relationships can vary relative to the experience of males and females, rich and poor, slave and free, etc.

The emphasis on the social and structural nature of sin highlights another paradox in Wesley. On the one hand, he was very concerned about particular social evils of his day such as slavery and alcoholism. 26 On the other hand,

it is undoubtedly true that Wesley was unable to see the structural nature of the problems with which he was trying to grapple, and that his sensitivity to the social evil of patriarchy in particular was not very keen. 27 A greater awareness of the structural and systemic nature of sin remains a pressing need among Wesley's descendants. 28

## **J. The Doctrine of Redemption**

The implications of our preceding discussion for a feminist perspective on the doctrine of redemption should be obvious.

In the first place, feminists reject any type of cosmic, social or individual determinism or antinomianism that would undercut our human responsibility for engaging in reformist activity. God may be the ultimate source of all redemption but God calls us to become responsible mediators of that redemption.

Secondly, feminists stress the wholistic and social nature of redemption. For them, conversion is never simply an inner spiritual affair. It is a turning of the entire person from a dehumanizing way of life to a liberating and serving way of life. Moreover, salvation deals with more than the conversion of individuals. Distorted social structures must also be redeemed.

To put the preceding points in a traditional framework, feminists see salvation as embracing both justification and sanctification - i.e., both our acceptance while yet sinners and the gracious transformation of our sinful lives. If anything, their emphasis is on sanctification.

It should come as no surprise that this is the point of affinity between Christian feminism and the Wesleyan tradition that is most often mentioned. 29 The emphasis on sanctification as a real transformation is one of the most distinctive elements of Wesleyanism. Moreover, Wesley constantly stressed that this transformation was not simply personal, it had social implications. At the same time, it must be admitted that Wesley formulated these implications almost totally in terms of social service, not social transformation. 30 While the emphasis on perfection or holiness per se may be implicitly reformist, 31 feminists would encourage Wesleyans to make it more explicit and systematic. 32

## **K. The Doctrine of Church and Ministry**

An obvious feminist concern regarding ecclesiology is the defense of the participation of women in all areas of ministry, including the ministry of Word and sacrament. However, their most fundamental concerns lie deeper than this. Ultimately, they see the exclusion of women from ministry as simply one of the many destructive and self-crippling effects of traditional hierarchal and clerical conceptions of Church and ministry. Feminists consider all such hierarchal models to be unBiblical and dehumanizing. They reject any type of clergy/laity distinction that overlooks the variety of ministries present in the whole community and that makes laity dependent on clergy. Their clear preference is for models of Church and ministry which emphasize empowerment and service rather than exclusiveness and authority.

Such concerns are obviously not foreign to the Wesleyan tradition. Indeed, we noted that Wesleyans were among the first in the modern age to ordain women. Likewise, it could easily be argued that Wesley's classes and the holiness prayer-meetings and revivals were often egalitarian and mutually empowering arenas for ministry. 33 However, we have also noted

that the practice of ordination was ambivalent. Likewise, most of the early experimental forms of ministry in the Wesleyan traditions were soon replaced by more traditional institutional churches. Apparently, early Wesleyan practice had run ahead of its theological and exegetical underpinning. 34 If contemporary Wesleyans are to develop more enduring egalitarian expressions of ministry and worship, we must provide a thorough exegetical and theological base for women's ministries 35 and for alternative models of Church and ministry. 36

## **L. The Doctrine of Eschatology**

Christian feminist perspectives on the doctrine of eschatology are direct implications of the preceding sections. They stress that the ultimate eschatological hope must include a just and egalitarian transformation of the entire created order. More importantly, they reject all other-worldly futurist eschatologies and all spiritualized realized eschatologies, in favor of an inaugurated eschatology which preserves the tension between the already and I not yet status of the hoped-for transformation. Thereby, they retain the reformist nerve that is central to their critique.

While Wesley's eschatology is primarily implicit, it can easily be argued that he also preserves this "inaugurated" tension. 37 Unfortunately, many of his liberal descendants have veered toward realized eschatologies while many of his conservative descendants have been attracted to futuristic dispensational eschatologies. Thereby, both have lost Wesley's more Biblical balance.

## **CONCLUSION**

What conclusions emerge from the preceding survey? In the first place it does indeed appear that the Wesleyan tradition shares a distinctively kindred theological spirit with contemporary Christian feminists. We note several areas of explicit agreement in fundamental convictions. More importantly, while we also noted several areas of traditional Wesleyan theology and practice which feminists would view critically, none of these areas were necessarily implications of essential Wesleyan convictions.

Thus, to a degree significantly greater than much of the Reformed tradition (with its distinctive emphasis on the sovereignty of God—often at expense of human freedom), Roman Catholicism (with its distinctive endorsement of hierarchical views of Church and non-reformist views of tradition) Lutheranism (with its distinctive stress on justification by faith (sic) which often renders talk of sanctification problematic), Wesleyanism present Christian feminists a theological tradition with which they will find strong affinities and on which they can build.

At the same time, the Christian feminist critique, if taken seriously, could help us in the Wesleyan tradition to rethink many of our practices and convictions with the goal of making them more Biblical, more inclusive and faithful to our vision of the Coming Reign of God.

## **Notes**

1For an extensive collection of positive evaluations of the role of Wesley and Methodism in supporting women in ministry see *Women in New*

*Worlds* (2 vols.), edited by Keller, Queen & Thomas (Nashville, IN: Abingdon, 1981-2). Other helpful works include Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983); *idem*, "Feminist Theology and the Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism," pp. 143-50 in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, edited by T. Runyon (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1985). Nancy Hardesty, "The Wesleyan Movement and Women's Liberation," pp. 164-73 in *Sanctification and Liberation*, edited by T. Runyon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981); and Jean Miller Schmidt, "Toward a Feminist Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition: Insights from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Wesleyans," pp. 137-42 in *Wesleyan Theology Today*. For similar surveys of the holiness tradition see Donald Dayton and Lucille Sider Dayton, "Your Daughters Shall Prophecy: Feminism in the Holiness Movement," *Methodist History* 14 (1976): 67-92; Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1976); Nancy Hardesty, D. Dayton & L. S. Dayton, "Women in the Holiness Movement: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition," pp. 226-54 in *Women of Spirit*, edited by R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979); Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984); Rosemary Keller & Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, "Women and Revivalism: The Puritan and Wesleyan Traditions," pp. 316-28 in *Women and Religion in America*, Vol. II, edited by R. Ruether & R. Keller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983); and Letha Dawson Scanzoni & Susan Selta, "Women in Evangelical, Holiness and Pentecostal Traditions," pp. 223-65 in *Women and Religion in America*, Vol. III, (1986).

2For an argument that his mother provided John Wesley with a nontraditional model of the woman in the home see Frank Baker, "Susanna Wesley," pp. 112-31 in *Women in New Worlds*, Vol. II. For a rather tenuous argument that it was Wesley's "liberated" attitude toward women that was at the base of the notorious "Sophy Hopkey affair" see Alan Hayes, "John Wesley and Sophy Hopkey: A Study in Wesley's Attitudes Toward Women," pp. 29-44 in *Ibid*. By contrast, clear evidence of Wesley's rather traditional views on women in family and society are noted in Brown, *Women*, pp. 52, 75-7. On the resulting role of mothers in Nineteenth-Century Methodism see Joanna Bowen Gillespie, "The Sun in Their Domestic System," pp. 45-55 in *Women in New Worlds*, Vol. II. Likewise, while it is true that the evangelical revivals had a "leveling" effect that created for women a sense of release from prior restraints in worship and a new self-esteem (cf., Schmidt, "Feminist Theology," p. 137), the overall status and roles of evangelical women in family and society were not significantly changed.

3Our criterion for distinguishing "Christian" feminist theologians is whether *they* believe their expressions of feminism are in line with the critically-assessed central teachings of Scripture.

4A detailed analysis of this issue can be found in Brown, *Women*, pp. 25-31. Cf. Earl Kent Brown, "Women of the Word," p. 69-87 in *Women in New Worlds*, Vol. I.

5While there were occasional attempts in the Holiness Movement to argue that a "better" reading of the Biblical texts supported women's ministries,

it was usually by an almost exclusive appeal to Gal. 3:28. Moreover, it is clear that the truly *decisive* factor in motivating and justifying women preachers was their *experience* of the work of the Holy Spirit and a strong stress on the need to testify to that experience in order to keep it. Likewise, there were many appeals to the argument that God would not give gifts that could not be used. Cf. Hardesty, *et.a.l.*, "Women in the Holiness Movement," pp. 243-46; and Hardesty, *Women*, pp. 78-103.

6As Methodism became established, following Wesley's death, there was clear embarrassment about the existence of women preachers (cf., Brown, *women*, p. 175) which led to the denial of ordination for women in the main Methodist church until the mid-twentieth century. While the early holiness "sects" were progressives, with as many as 25% of their clergy being female, this number dropped steadily as they became "churches." It is now closer to 5% (cf. Hardesty, *et al.*, "Women in the Holiness Movement," pp. 244-46; and Dayton, *Evangelical Heritage*, pp. 97-8). While ordination is still allowed in most holiness denominations, it is exceedingly difficult to get churches to accept women pastors. *Ironically*, this has led to a circumstance that women in holiness traditions who are interested in ministry are now often counseled to transfer to the United Methodist or other main-line churches! Cf., *Herald of Holiness*, August 1, 1986, pp. 16-17.

7Randy L. Maddox, "Toward an Inclusive Theology: The Systematic Implications of the Feminist Critique," *Christian Scholar's Review* 16(1986), 7-23.

8Ibid., p. 23. These traditions were chosen for mention on a primarily impressionistic basis-there being few explicit studies available of the affinity or conflict between specific theological traditions and feminist theology. It is interesting to note, however, that a study of Lutheranism and feminism has since appeared which confirms my impressions relating to that particular example. [Cf. issue 24.1 of *Dialog* (Winter 1985). Note in particular Mary Pellauer's comments about the incompatibility of a feminist perspective and the common dualistic understanding of law and gospel in much Lutheran theology-an understanding which makes them suspicious of those who emphasize sanctification. Ibid., p. 24.1

9Our summary of the major concerns of the Christian feminist theologians is drawn from Maddox, "Inclusive Theology." Documentation and more detailed demonstration of these concerns can be found there.

10Cf., Randy L. Maddox, "Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19.2 (1984): 7-22; or *idem.*, "Responsible Grace: The Systematic Nature of Wesley's Theology Reconsidered" *Quarterly Review* 9 (1986): 24-34.

11For a helpful discussion of the dynamics and problematics in the quadrilateral, see William Abraham, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral," pp. 119-26 'fl *Wesleyan Theology Today*. For an identification of the Wesleyan emphasis on experience and on the need to evaluate Scripture in light of experience, reason and tradition as a point of contact with feminism, see Hardesty, *Wesleyan Movement*," pp. 165-67.



12This move has been perceptively chronicled and critiqued in Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Beyond Theism* (New York: Oxford, 1985).

13As three representative examples, note Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1983); L. Harold DeWolf, *The Case for Theology in the Liberal Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959); and H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, Vol. I (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1940).

14Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

15To cite one example relevant to this audience, H. Orton Wiley never defends the analogical status of God-language in his *Christian Theology*. Indeed, in his discussion of God's attributes, he is highly suspicious of any attempt to suggest the human-situatedness of God-talk (cf., Vol I, pp. 321ff). This no doubt helps explain the dearth of female images of God in his work.

16Cf., *Ibid.*, pp. 255ff, 430ff.

17Cf., the discussion of "responsible grace" in Maddox, "Responsible Grace," pp. 12-14 (27-29).

18Cf., Hardesty, "Wesleyan Movement," p. 171; and Rosemary Keller, "The Transformed Life in Jesus Christ: Toward a Feminist Perspective in the Wesleyan Tradition," pp. 192-201 in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, p. 200.

19Cf. the classic study: Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1985).

20Howard Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1983) is an important milestone among Wesleyans. An exemplary study (not explicitly Wesleyan) is Wesley Grandberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

21For a survey of Christian feminist approaches to hermeneutics Randy L. Maddox, "The Word of God and Patriarchalism," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 14 (1987): 197-216.

22The outstanding pioneer effort in this regard is Nancy Hardest Letha Dawson Scanzoni, *All We're Meant to Be* (Revised; Nashville, Abingdon, 1986). The most convincing current presentation of an egalitarian reading of Scripture is Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985).

23See especially Jose Miguez Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," pp.47-63 in *Sanctification and Liberation*, pp. 50, 55. This charge is reiterated from a feminist perspective in Sheila Greeve Devaney, "Feminism, Process Thought and the Wesleyan Tradition," pp. 105-16 in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, pp. 108-9.

24Note the essentially individualistic anthropologies in Carter, *Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, chapter 6; and Wiley, *Christian Theology*, Vol. II.

25See especially, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1972).

26Cf., Warren Thomas Smith, *John Wesley and Slavery* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986).

27Cf. Miguez Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine," p. 58. As Miguez Bonino notes, Wesley simply shares a blindness of his time in this regard.

28As a positive step in this regard, note Albert Truesdale, "Christian Holiness and the Problem of Systemic Evil" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19 (1984): 39-59.

29Cf., Keller, "The Transformed Life," p. 192; Jean Lambert, "Towards a Wesleyan-Feminist Christology," pp. 170-79 in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, p. 170; and Schmidt, "Towards a Feminist Theology," p. 137.

30Compare Miguez Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine," p. 55 with Hardesty, "The Wesleyan Movement," p. 247.

31Cf. Hardesty, *et al.*, "Women in the Holiness Movement," p. 247.

32Cf., Keller, "The Transformed Life," p. 200.

33Cf., Lambert, "Wesleyan-Feminist Christology," p. 171.

34Cf., David Scholer, "I Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Churches' Ministry," pp. 193-219 in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelson (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1986) p. 215.

35I would suggest that it is no longer enough to argue Wesleyans can support women's ministries because we are more open to change and do not see Biblical injunctions as eternal norms (cf., Donald Dayton, "The Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Tradition," pp. 121-36 in *The Use of the Bible in Theology*, ed. R. Johnston, Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1985, p. 135). We need to demonstrate that ordination of women is an exegetically legitimate action. For an historical survey of the Biblical justifications of women's ordination that have been offered in the- Wesleyan traditions, see Hardesty, *et al.*, "Women in the Holiness Movement," pp. 244-46; and Susie Stanley, "Response to Klyne R. Snodgrass," pp. 181-88 in *Women, Authority and the Bible*. The best exegetical defense of women's ordination presently available is *Women, Authority and the Bible*.

36The most promising work in this regard is that of Howard Snyder: *The Problem of Wineskins* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1975); *The Community of the King* (Downer's grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1977); and *Liberating the Church*.

37See Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1960), pp. 191-200. Cf., Devaney, "Feminism," p. 108.

# TOWARD A WESLEYAN ECCLESIOLOGY

by  
H. Ray Dunning

There are several reasons why a doctrine of the church is on the theological agenda for today. Not the least is the rent condition of the seamless robe of Christ. This concern is expressed on many fronts. Hans Kung puts it well, "Ecumenical efforts spring not from indifferentism, much though this might suit our modern age, but from a new awareness of God's desire that all might be one." 1 Others have been preoccupied with the ineffectiveness of the church in today's situation and have proposed new forms of church structure to enable the church to be the church.

My proposals attempt to address the issue of ecclesiology as a component of Wesleyan systematic theology. It would seem that in this way the distinctives of a Wesleyan understanding can best be brought to light. In the Fall of 1981 I presented to this Society my perceptions of what it meant to do systematic theology in a Wesleyan mode. The further I went in my own work the more convinced I became that those proposals provided a valid norm for authentic Wesleyanism and were firmly grounded in the theological commitments of Mr. Wesley himself.

At that time I suggested that the primary concern of the systematic theologian was the identification of a distinctive point of view from which doctrines could be developed and which could even be used, when necessary, to criticize Wesley on particular teachings. This is what Nicholas Wolterstorff and others have called a "control belief." In brief, my suggestion was that this control belief was soteriology perceived as an ellipse with two foci: justification and sanctification. This balanced relationship between the two major soteriological doctrines can be found repeatedly in Wesley's works. A statement from his sermon on "God's Vineyard" is representative:

It is, then a great blessing given to this people, that as they do not think or speak of justification so as to supersede sanctification, so neither do they think or speak of sanctification so as to supersede justification. They take care to keep each in its own place, laying equal stress on one and the other. They know God has joined these together, and it is not for man to put them asunder: Therefore they maintain, with equal zeal and diligence, the

doctrine of free, full, present justification on the one hand, and of entire sanctification both of heart and life, on the other; being as tenacious of inward holiness as any Mystic, and of outward, as any Pharisee. 2

This central focus is to be interpreted in the setting of prevenient grace I through and through informed by Christology.

Clarence Bence has demonstrated that this center informs Wesley's ecclesiology. He says, "the most striking and ever-relevant feature of Wesley's ecclesiology is its soteriological focus, an emphasis that shaped almost every aspect of his thought and action." 3

Two major elements must be addressed in seeking to formulate an ecclesiology: (1) the nature and (2) the function of the church. The former explores the identifying marks of the church while the latter speaks to God's purpose in calling into being a people for His own possession. Unfortunately, some discussions concentrate on one to the exclusion of the other. But both are needed for a full-orbed picture. In a simple putting of it, the church is both a "saved" and "saving" community.

It is terribly easy to commit an ad hominem fallacy when attempting to work with Wesley's own understanding. That is, it could be argued that his views were the result of his peculiar situation *vis-a-vis* the Church of England. There is doubtless much truth in this but I would hope that we can discover that many of his pronouncements were more fundamentally derived from his wide-ranging theological commitments.

There is also an imminent danger of falling victim to a red herring but neither the nature of the church nor the shape of its function can be confused with particular historical, cultural or sociological forms. This seems so obvious as not to need mentioning, but it is a trap so often not avoided. It is no doubt this situation which gave rise to Wesley's statement that "a more ambiguous word than this the church, is scarce to be found in the English language." The institutional church so often identifies its structures and methods of carrying out its mission with eternal verities and as a result ceases to be a viable expression of the body of Christ. The way out of this trap is to insist on understanding the church theologically.

What I would suggest is that Wesley took the multiple traditions which he inherited and sought to appropriate them in a creative eclecticism to which his soteriological focus gave coherence. Perhaps they always remained in some tension with each other but then the *via media* always holds divergent views in tension-that is its genius. One truth is balanced by another to avoid a one-sidedness.

By Wesley's day, three major ecclesiologies had emerged. There was the Catholic view which defines the church in terms of ministry and which insists that the true church is in the Apostolic tradition. This approach emphasizes the objective holiness of the church and the presence of Christ maintained in the church through the sacraments.

There was also the Classical-Protestant interpretation which emphasized the Word and the sacraments as creative of the church. Third was the Believer's church position where the emphasis was upon the personal experience and holiness of the individual believers who then constitute the church.

All these appear to find their appropriate place in Wesley's thought.

Frank Baker's analysis could really encompass them all even though he speaks explicitly of only two when he refers to the basic views to which Wesley seemed to give support:

One was that of a historical institution of bishops and inherited customs, served by a priestly caste who duly expounded the Bible and administered the sacraments in such a way as to preserve the ancient tradition on behalf of all those who were made members by baptism. According to the other view the church was a fellowship of believers who shared both the apostolic experience of God's living presence and also a desire to bring others into this same personal experience.<sup>4</sup>

There were also present, at least among Protestant groups, four emphases which Wesley also appropriated for his own: "living faith," Biblical preaching, the sacraments and discipline. Usually the emphasis was upon one or two of these to the disparagement of the others. One can also connect these with our particular formulation of Wesley's soteriological center and thus understand how each could have its proper place in his ecclesiology. Three of them are obviously present in the Anglican article of faith to which he gave loyalty:

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

I would suggest that while all four of the elements are present in Wesley's understanding and are essential to a full orb'd Wesleyan ecclesiology, the priority of place goes to "living faith." In explicating the Anglican article he points to the fact that an authorized Latin translation renders "faithful men" as "a congregation of believers" thus showing that it refers to men endued with living faith. In his sermon on the church, he uses as a text Ephesians 4:1-6 and interprets the "one faith" of which the text speaks as that faith "which enables every true believer to testify with St. Paul, 'the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.'" <sup>5</sup>

This claim is further supported by his emphasis upon the Spirit which indwells, with different degrees of completeness, all persons who are of the church. Thus the church is composed of all "persons in the universe whom God hath so called out of the world . . . to be 'one body,' united by 'one Spirit'; having 'one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in them all.'" <sup>6</sup>

The centrality of "living faith" is further highlighted by his refusal to acknowledge the second article of the Anglican creed which excludes, among others, the Church of Rome. As Daniel Berg points out, Wesley's refusal to approve this paragraph is because of his catholic spirit, and points out furthermore, how he was unwilling to identify the preaching of the word and the duly administered sacraments as exclusive marks of the church. Both points defer to the priority of "living faith." As Wesley described his reasons:

I dare not exclude from the Church catholic all those congregations in which any unscriptural doctrines, which cannot be

affirmed to be the "pure word of God," are sometimes, yea, frequently preached; neither all those congregations in which the sacraments are not "duly administered." Certainly if these things are so, the Church of Rome is not so much as a part of the catholic church; seeing therein neither is "the pure word of God" preached, nor the sacraments "duly administered." Whoever they are that have "one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith and one God and Father of all," I can easily bear with their holding wrong opinions, yea, and superstitious modes of worship: Nor would I, on these accounts, scruple, still to include them within the pale of the catholic Church - neither would I have any objection to receive them, if they desired it, as members of the Church of England. 7

Thus, as Dan Berg argues, unity is a more Biblical mark of the church than either word or sacrament. But, we might add, this unity is the product of the "living faith" of the believer which knits him into a bond of love with all other believers. If the substance of "living faith" is love, as Wesley often insists, the result is a catholic spirit since love sets aside differences of opinion, modes of worship or forms of church government as nonessential and embraces every believer with the words: "If your heart is right as my heart is right, give me your hand."

In his notes on Acts 5:11, he describes the church as ". . . a company of men, called by the gospel, grafted into Christ by baptism, animated by love, united by all kinds of fellowship, and disciplined by the death of Ananias and Sapphira." Thus, along with living faith we have introduced here the element of discipline. In the text for his sermon, mentioned above, he finds in the exhortation to "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called" a basis for stressing the importance of a disciplined life as essential to the church being the church.

This brings us to speak about the element of discipline. A powerful theological support for his inclusion of discipline as an important ingredient in the church is the place of sanctification in his soteriological center. This would entail a call for the church to be a holy community.

Paul Bassett points out that a major cause of divergent ecclesiological understandings between Luther and Calvin is the latter's teaching on the "third use of the law." Finding no positive place for the law in the Christian life, Luther did not include discipline in his understanding of the church, whereas Calvin's view gave him a more positive doctrine of sanctification and an important place for discipline in the church. 8 Wesley agrees with Calvin against Luther here and thus consistently includes this element in his ecclesiology.

Howard Snyder makes much of the place of discipline in Wesley's societies and attributes the rapid growth of Methodism to it. 9 Of course it should be added that Wesley's discipline was teleological in nature and not legalistic. Its purpose was to hasten one along in his pursuit of holiness.

If "living faith," with the concomitant of discipline, is central to Wesley's ecclesiology, how could he or Wesleyan theology affirm the "churchly" ecclesiology of bishops and sacraments? Is this an unresolvable tension? I think the answer may lie in his confidence in prevenient grace. The established

church with its rituals and ministry and measure of continuity with the church universal, past and present, provides a stability that guards against the splintering of the body of Christ. Also there is a sense in which objective holiness is maintained in this connection. It is true that Wesley is never content with imputed, but insists upon imparted holiness as a true evidence of the church. But these churchly settings would provide a context within which prevenient grace could function with the possibility of the renewal of the church. Schism from the church would limit the possibility of those with a "living faith" serving as leaven to influence the larger body.

This brief discussion centers on Wesley's complex understanding of the being of the church. But, we would argue, the function of the church is also perceived from the same soteriological perspective. Wesley declares in a letter:

What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in His fear and love. Order, then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is worth nothing. 10

Frank Baker notes how early on Wesley came to a pragmatic understanding of the function of the church, form being subservient to mission. He also calls attention to the interesting note that this is the result of the use of the element of experience as one component of the so-called quadrilateral. 11 Hence his full theological methodology comes into play when one takes into account the whole perspective on the church.

Colin Williams is at least partly correct when he observes that for Wesley, "mission is the primary mark of the church." 12 Thus we may conclude by noting that while there are distinctive features created by his peculiar circumstances, Wesley seems to have captured the central emphasis of the New Testament that the church is a community of people called into being by God for the purpose of carrying out His redemptive mission in the world.

In this light, we may see a new dimension to the traditional mark of the Church known as Apostolicity. Rather than interpreting it to mean some highly questionable line of apostolic succession handed down from the apostles, it may be seen as the continuation of the apostles' mission. This mark is present in the church when, empowered by the Spirit, the members of the body exercise the apostolic witness to the Gospel. Hence it is in the event of function that the church becomes apostolic.

The church has both being and function. It is a community of persons created by the Spirit, called to be witnesses to the Resurrected Christ and messengers of His conquest of the powers of the present age.

## Notes

1Hans Küng, *The Church* (N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1967), xii.

2Works, 7:204-204.

3Clarence Bence, "Salvation and the Church: The Ecclesiology of John Wesley," *The Church* ed. by Melvin E. Dieter and Daniel N. Berg (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1984), 299.

4Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1970), 137.

5Works, 6:395.

6Ibid., 395-396.

7Ibid, 397.

8Paul Bassett, "A Survey of Western Ecclesiology to about 1700," *The Church*, ed. by Dieter and Berg (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1984), 211ff.

9Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1980), 57ff.

10Quoted by Bence, "Salvation and the Church."

11John Wesley and the Church of England, 24f.

12Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1960), 209.



## BOOK REVIEWS

*Exploring Christian Holiness, Volume 3, The Theological Formulation*, by Richard S. Taylor. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1985, 260 pp. Reviewed by Wayne McCown, Th.D., Conference Superintendent, Free Methodist Church, S. California-Arizona.

This volume completes a trilogy published by Beacon under the title, *Exploring Christian Holiness*. It was preceded by and presumes on *The Historical Development* by Paul M. Bassett and William M. Greathouse.

The proper use of the definite article in the title is overstatement. More properly what we have in this case is a theological formation. Richard S. Taylor is an exponent of old school holiness. So while his formulation will resonate with some (as "a bell-ringer"), others will find it quite disturbing (more like "a clanging cymbal").

Dr. Taylor argues that the original sin is transmitted genetically. He believes in the eradication of the original sin nature. He develops a "Theology of Secondness," and devotes one of two appendices to an apology for "The Two Natures." Christian perfection can be described (and is) a "level of performance."

There is little interaction with other (Wesleyan) interpretations of holiness. The substantive versus relational question, for example, is acknowledged, but given only one page. Taylor quickly concludes: the two interpretations are "complementary, not contradictory" (p. 100).

Dr. Taylor does modify (and soften) the presentation of classical doctrine by defining the several (key) theological terms used as "models." This concept he borrows from Ian Ramsey (cf. Alden Aikens, "Wesleyan Theology and the Use of Models," WTJ, 1979). This "model" concept introduces "some breathing space" (p. 156) into the use of such typical holiness terms as baptism, sanctification, and eradication. Otherwise, Dr. Taylor's theological formulation is airtight.

The book has a ring of authority, because what the author says is rooted in deep personal conviction.

At times, Taylor's declarations are so sweeping and courageous as to prove breathtaking. For example: "Wherever theology makes divine sovereignty the keystone of its system instead of divine holiness, it goes astray"

(p. 17); "A theology without sanctification is not fully evangelical, no matter how zealously it waves the banner" (pp. 112-113).

Detailed specification is this author's forte. In this arena, too, there are many declarations which arrest the reader's attention. For example: ". . . certain observable marks belong to any true holiness from the beginning: genuine spiritual-mindedness, a strong moral concern, and a highly visible religious life-style. The church, the Bible, prayer, and witnessing will constitute the polarities of the daily routine" (p. 45); "Adjustments of habit, manner, interpersonal relationships, spending, recreation, or, most of all, attitudes, are the day-to-day response to the tutoring of the Spirit" (p.46); "Loudness, immodesty, crudeness, and otherwise disorganized and haphazard lifestyles He [the Holy Spirit] will rebuke and shame" (p. 193). The book is replete with this kind of analysis and clarification, in conceptual matters as well as practical applications. Some will judge it pedantic in the first arena, and petty in the second. Others will appreciate and applaud both.

Whether or not you agree with Taylor's interpretation of holiness, this is an important book. The author is well read: the Selected Bibliography contains more than two hundred titles (although only a handful of journal articles). This theological formulation represents the crystallization of a lifetime of studying-and living-Christian holiness.

A trinitarian approach is taken to the subject. Special emphasis is given to the work of the Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is equated with entire sanctification.

Hermeneutically, chapter 10 is key to this theological formulation. Titled "Pentecost and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit," it posits the following conclusions: (1) Pentecost (Acts 2) was the disciples' second experience; (2) Pentecost is "personal as well as historical"; (3) Pentecost (i.e., the fulness of the Spirit) is the norm of experience for all believers.

Theologically, the formulation is based on Taylor's two-fold definition of sin. Practically, it is anchored in his conviction that holiness is real and experiential, and must be fleshed out in life.

Richard S. Taylor is a careful, analytical theologian. In the end, however, he humbly acknowledges: "The reality of holiness can only be experienced; it cannot be known by verbal dissection alone. No matter how correct and Biblical our exposition may be, if readers do not seek and obtain the experience for themselves, doctrinal exactness will avail nothing" (p. 186).

Every book has its flaws, I suppose, and this book is no exception. Some of the more pervasive and disconcerting should be mentioned. The reader must be prepared for an extraordinary mixing of styles, ranging from pedantic stiltism to campy preacher-talk. On the one hand, Dr. Taylor analyzes "agapeic [sic!] love" from (a) to (g). On the other, he inquires whether marital fidelity is not more satisfying than "puppy love," then answers: "Ask the 'puppy' and he will say no . . ." (p. 38).

Colloquial language (homely sermonic illustrations) are intermixed with scholarly discourse on pages 38, 55-56, 88, 101, 148, 188-189, etc. But the style is not consistently popular.

At times, by contrast, not only the language but the argument is obscure. Consider, as an illustration, the following: "Man cannot speak of having a 'spark of divinity' in any pantheistic or theosophical sense. He is not a

fragment of God and can never achieve such a mystical union with God that the Wholly Otherness of God on the one hand, and the unique distinctiveness of man on the other are blurred" (p. 29). Maybe "puppy love" is better after all!

The use of a sermonic style within scholarly discourse sometimes leads to unsatisfactory results. Compare, for example, the following generalizations: "This [human sin] is the kingpin of everything that follows in the Scriptures" (p. 48); "Herein [holiness] is the kingpin of all Christian theology" (p. 26). Somebody better check the kingpin!

Elsewhere, commenting on the significance of Acts 15:6, it is asserted: ". . . 'heart purity' can be seen as a model that helps us to understand the state resulting from the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It can mean nothing less than the removal of inbred sin" (p.162). Really? (The point is not argued: Dr. Taylor assumes it is self-evident.)

The argument equating entire sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Spirit is presented in similar fashion. Within a single (brief) paragraph, the following generalizations are laid down: (1) a definition of "sanctify" as separation from sin; (2) a diagnosis of this as the disciples' need; and (3) the identification of Pentecost as their cleansing. Then (within the same paragraph), this conclusion is drawn: "It is scarcely possible, therefore, to separate entire sanctification from the baptism with the Holy Spirit." "Furthermore," the next sentence asserts, "our entire sanctification today is as dependent upon the immediate, personal, and radical action of the Spirit as it was in their case" (p. 165).

This is theologizing by declaration, rather than reasoned argument.

*Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, edited by Richard S. Taylor, Vol. III: Great Holiness Classics, Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1985. Reviewed by Laurence W. Wood, Ph.D., Professor of Systematic Theology, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

This work is volume three of a series of six volumes on Great Holiness classics. Its intent is to present some selected "leading Wesleyan thinkers" who have been influential in interpreting the doctrine of Christian perfection. No claim is made that this selected list of writers is the best, though it is obvious that the editor believes they do represent the most representative of those writers who are "standard, Methodistic, and Wesleyan theologians."

These writers include "thinkers" from Richard Watson (1781-1833) whose theological Institutes intended to be the Wesleyan corollary to Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion to J. Paul Taylor (1885-1973), a bishop of the Free Methodist Church who is described as "an eloquent preacher, and able administrator, and above all . . . a powerful defender and exponent of Wesleyan doctrine." Other "leading Wesleyan thinkers" included in this volume are Jabez Bunting, Thomas N. Ralston, Luther Lee, Samuel Wakefield, Miner Raymond, William Burt Pope, Benjamin Field, John Miley, Randolph S. Foster, Daniel Steele, Olin Curtis, Wilson Thomas Hogue, Solomon Jacob

Gartsfelder, Aaron M. Hills, Albert Frederick Gray, and H. Orton Wiley who is "the plumb line of the entire volume."

The editor is obviously concerned about several key issues surrounding the doctrine of Christian perfection. His editorial notes intend to correct some false notions about certain of these "Wesleyan thinkers," such as the opinion that Richard Watson moved more toward a gradual interpretation of entire sanctification instead of an emphasis upon the instantaneous-crisis aspect. The selection of writings from Watson and others of these "leading Wesleyans" intends to show that they affirmed the doctrine of "two works of grace" and that entire sanctifying grace is received instantaneously. The editor also points out that many of these writers equate the fullness of the Spirit with entire sanctification, another obvious point of view which the editor wants to stress.

One possible weakness of this work is that it restricts Wesleyan thinking too narrowly in terms of the doctrine of holiness, while other Wesleyan distinctives are bypassed or are only slightly mentioned.

Another possible weakness is that the book may be misnamed. The title suggests that the reader should look for those influential Wesleyan thinkers who have been the theological pacesetters and who have engaged in serious dialogue with the best of theological scholarship. Actually, this work is more of a chronological sequencing of Wesleyan writers who may have been more or less influential during certain periods of time. To call them "the leading Wesleyan thinkers" may be an overstatement in some instances, though clearly several persons included in this volume may be said to be leading Wesleyan thinkers at a particular time and were competent scholars.

If by "leading" is meant enduring relevance, then not many in this list are really "leading thinkers." If by "leading" is primarily meant representative holiness thinkers who have had some measure of influence during their life time, then this work succeeds in fulfilling its goal. However, some of the most influential Wesleyan "leaders" of the past were not even "thinkers" but primarily evangelists and preachers whose sermons are nonetheless theologically substantive. Perhaps some justification could be given for including them in this volume, especially since many believe that Wesleyan "thinking" takes place more appropriately in the sermon than in a textbook. To be sure, the editor points out that a primary reason for the selection of persons included in this volume is their having written a "systematic theology." While this point is well taken, some would say this goes against the spirit of Wesleyan theology. Some would say this attempt to identify "leading Wesleyan thinkers" with systematic theology is rationalistic. Perhaps a balance could have been achieved by including some "biographical, devotional, expository, or evangelistic readings."

One cannot help but ask why the contemporary period is largely bypassed with the exceptions of H. Orton Wiley and J. Paul Taylor, neither of whom are recent writers. It may be, in the judgment of some, that the "leading Wesleyan thinkers" should include more contemporary and recent theologians who have a direct bearing on Wesleyan interpretation in the contemporary setting. In fact, the title of this work could suggest to the reader that this expectation is what is intended. To be sure, volume six of this series on *Great Holiness Classics* deals with the subject of contemporary holiness

teaching. But it does not deal directly with the leading holiness thinkers as such.

There is also a glaring absence of contemporary British Methodist writers as well as American United Methodist holiness writers. My judgment is, without attempting to take away from the significance of this present volume, that focusing more on the leading Wesleyan scholars who have a more enduring, or at least a direct relevance, to our contemporary understanding of Wesleyan thought would have been helpful.

It is obvious this volume intends to acquaint the reader with some representative holiness "thinkers" throughout the Wesleyan tradition who exerted some influence in their time. Whether or not this feature qualifies calling them "leading Wesleyan thinkers" is a matter of perception. Regardless, this is a helpful volume and it will cause one to be better informed of some of our forgotten theological forefathers. We are indeed indebted to the editor of this volume, as well as to the editors of the entire series, for making available to us these writings on holiness thinking of the past.

*No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century*, by Janette Hassey. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986. 150 pp. plus appendices. Reviewed by Randy L. Maddox, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Religion, Sioux Falls College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The counter-traditional opening of ministry to women by Wesleyans during the last half of the nineteenth century is a source of pride for Wesleyan feminists. By contrast, the significant restriction of this openness in the same Wesleyan circles during the first half of the twentieth century is a source of chagrin and perplexity. What caused the reversal? The most commonly suggested culprit is the influx of a fundamentalist "leavening" into Wesleyan circles. Hassey's study both substantiates and nuances this explanation.

Indeed, the burden of Hassey's investigation is to demonstrate that there was a beginning acceptance of and then growing disassociation from women in ministry within early fundamentalist circles as well. To make this case, Hassey first surveys the Bible Institutes that were the primary sources of continuity and leadership for the early evangelical and fundamentalist movements. She demonstrates convincingly that they were nearly unanimous in accepting women for ministerial training and in supporting their alumnae in ministry during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This fact is particularly noteworthy since many of these schools now prohibit women from their "ministerial" programs and claim historical precedent for this practice (see especially her chapter on Moody Bible Institute).

To further substantiate her claim, Hassey analyzes the various denominational approaches to women in ministry. Her analysis provides one of the best surveys available of the "earliest" openings of ministry to women in America: from Quaker openness to women preachers (without ordination, of course), to the first licensing of a woman to preach by the Free Will

Baptists in 1815, to the first full ordination of a woman by the Congregationalists in 1853. What is most intriguing about this survey is Hassey's focus on conservative traditions like the General Conference Baptists and the Evangelical Free Church—demonstrating some early openness to the full ministry rights of women in these denominations, even though they now deny such rights.

Hassey dates the reversal on acceptance of women's ministry which she has highlighted in evangelical and fundamentalist circles to the time "between the wars" (10). This context provides her suggestion for the primary causes of the change. World War I had pressed American women into the public "working sphere" and American men into unfamiliar cultures in unprecedented numbers. These new experiences led to a sense of social relativity and a wide-spread challenge of traditional social values following the war. It also led to a strong conservative Protestant call to reject these "innovations" and uncertainties in favor of old standards. When such a call was not heeded by the culture at large it encouraged the emergence of separatist sub-culture mentalities and a search for an unquestioned source of truth and order in the midst of the shifting times. These developments were particularly evident in fundamentalist circles. Indeed, they characterize the emergence of "fundamentalism" in its most precise sense from the broader evangelical arena. More importantly, these developments also undercut the fledgling support for women in ministry since such was construed as a concession to "modern" culture which contradicted a literal (i.e., unquestioning) reading of Scripture.

Obviously, part of the value for Wesleyans of Hassey's study is the insight it provides into the context of the related developments in Wesleyanism. In addition, she provides an excellent summary of early evangelical feminist Biblical exegesis, including many Wesleyan representatives (chapter 6). Her most important contribution, however, is to those Wesleyans who wish to defend the continuing practice of women's ministry against the common criticism that it is an unscriptural concession to present social pressures. Hassey has shown convincingly that the conservative position is equally a product of cultural forces and motivations. Thereby, she undercuts its pious assertions about merely affirming the "obvious" literal meaning of Scripture.

Indeed, Hassey ultimately argues that the issue of women in ministry is not whether evangelicals should let the teachings of Scripture critique their culture or not but whether evangelicals are sufficiently sensitive to how subtly culture affects their "literal" readings of Scripture. Her hope is that an exposure to this segment of evangelical history will help cultivate such a sensitivity. We join her in affirming both this need and this hope.