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On the Cover: The cover painting is entitled "Calming the Storm," by Hanna Cheriyan Varghese of Malaysia. She painted the work in 2001, inspired by Mark 4:39: "He (Jesus) woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace be still.'"

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TED A. CAMPBELL

The "Way of Salvation" and the Methodist Ethos Beyond John Wesley: A Study in Formal Consensus and Popular Reception

Abstract

It has been well documented that the “way of salvation” was central to John Wesley’s thought. But how did Methodists in the nineteenth century express a theology and spirituality of the way of salvation? This article examines formal doctrinal materials from Methodist churches (including catechisms, doctrinal statements, and hymnals) and the testimonies of Methodist men and women to discern how teachings about the way of salvation were transmitted after the time of John and Charles Wesley. Based on these doctrinal works and personal testimonies, the article shows a consistent pattern in Methodist teaching and experience involving a) conviction of sin, b) conversion, c) struggles of the soul following conversion, and then d) entire sanctification.

KEYWORDS: conversion, salvation, John Wesley, Methodist

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1. Introduction and Background

We find ourselves now at a critical juncture in the fields of Wesleyan and Methodist studies. On the one hand, something that Methodist historians and interpreters have long desired is at last coming to pass, namely, widespread recognition of the prominent cultural influence of Methodism in the USA and its influence on the broader Evangelical movement. Beginning with Nathan Hatch’s study of *The Democratization of American Religion* (1989), a series of historical studies have explored the cultural impact of the Methodist movement in the nineteenth century and beyond. John H. Wigger’s *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (1998), Ann Taves’s *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (1999), and David Hempton’s *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (2005) all depict Methodism as a vigorous, popular spiritual movement that has had a decisive effect not only on North American religious culture (Wigger) but also on the global culture of Evangelical Christianity (Hempton).

On the other hand, these newer interpretations of Methodist culture may leave the impression that once the Methodist movement grew beyond John Wesley, its popular spirituality had little connection to the more formal structures or formal theological commitments and expressions of Methodist denominations, and thus that the true heirs of Methodism as a spiritual movement, “boiling hot religion,” are to be found in the Holiness and Pentecostal movements rather than the institutional structures of Methodist denominations or in the doctrines or theologies or liturgies formally espoused by them. This is not an oversight because Wigger, Taves, and Hempton decided intentionally to focus on popular spirituality, at least after the time of John Wesley. Hempton, for example, has a chapter on “The Medium and the Message,” which offers (in his words) “an attempt to get to the heart and center of the Methodist message and how it was heard and experienced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.” The chapter itself proceeds by summarizing John Wesley’s theology, then moves to popular spirituality expressed in personal narratives, hymns, and sermons, mentioning the development of more formal systematic theologies at the end of the chapter. Wigger also discusses John Wesley’s theology briefly, then deals with more popular expressions of Methodist piety.

Moreover, I question whether these more recent historiographical accounts
have actually demonstrated “the heart and center of the Methodist message” (Hempton). Hempton comes closest in stating that the three consistent foci of Methodist spirituality were “conversion, sanctification, and holy dying.”

“Holy dying” was indeed an important aspect of Methodist spirituality, an expression of sanctification in articulo mortis, but Methodists’ own accounts of their central message, the message of the “way of salvation,” was consistently given as “conviction, conversion, and [entire] sanctification,” as one traveling preacher explained the Methodist message to Jarena Lee in an account considered below. I will try to show in this paper how the rich spirituality of the “way of salvation” was a consistent theme in Methodist theological literature, hymnals, and catechisms, and how it structured the spiritual autobiographies of Methodist people.

It may well be, however, that Taves, Wigger, and Hempton have actually taken their cues in this from more traditional interpreters of Methodism who have focused on John Wesley’s theology and then on the institutional history of Methodist churches after Wesley, the latter epitomized in Frederick Norwood’s *Story of American Methodism*. Even accounts of theological developments beyond John Wesley, like Thomas Langford’s study of *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (originally published in 1984), have not elucidated the distinctive spirituality of the Wesleyan movement represented in the “way of salvation” in any depth. Langford chose to focus his work on theologians who happened to be Methodists, and in doing so, he included many theologians (such as Borden Parker Bowne) who did not identify themselves with the narrative of Methodist spirituality. Also, Langford did not consider such materials as hymnals and catechisms which, I think, do reveal much of the substance of the Methodist message. This is surprising, given the insight in Langford’s title, *Practical Divinity*. One would think that “practical divinity” would privilege such first-order accounts of Christian teachings as those found in hymnals and catechisms, but Langford chose to focus on “professional” theologians. Not surprisingly, given Langford’s choice of subject matter, his conclusions about the central theological themes of the Methodist movement are very weak, and the “way of salvation” itself does not merit sustained attention beyond accounts of Holiness theology and Langford’s more generalized conclusion that the center of Wesleyan theology is “the grace of God in Jesus Christ.”

So I’d venture to say that if you were to read Thomas Langford’s account of sophisticated Methodist theologians and then read John Wigger’s account of the “boiling hot religion” of “shouting Methodists,” you might feel they were describing two vastly different universes. You would perceive at least a chasm between accounts of popular Methodist spirituality and the formal teachings of Wesley and later Methodist theologians.

It is this appearance of a significant disjunction between popular spirituality
and formal church teachings that I want to address in this paper and in a larger work in progress entitled *The Shape of the Wesleyan Tradition*. The perspective I bring is that of a United Methodist elder who writes unapologetically from my perspective as one who takes responsibility for the doctrinal, liturgical, and moral commitments of my own and other Wesleyan denominations, including those of our Pan-Methodist partner churches. I also approach this, however, as one who experienced an evangelical conversion as a result of a Lay Witness Mission in my home congregation and as a participant in the Charismatic renewal movement of the 1970s. In my own scholarship, then, I cannot jettison either the critical study of Methodist doctrine, liturgies, and moral claims, nor the various forms of popular spirituality that have been associated with the Methodist movement.

My methodology, then, will work with both formal doctrinal consensus and with popular spirituality. It takes seriously the study of doctrine as formal, communal consensus on what to teach and practice, but also insists on the critical role of what in the ecumenical movement we call the “reception” of teachings and practices on the part of the whole people of God. This marks a departure from the way in which I and others have studied doctrine in the past, where we focused primarily on formal, communal consensus.12 “Communal consensus” means that we study the teachings of a community in whatever ways communities come to formal consensus about what to teach and practice, as contrasted with the opinions of particular individuals, but “reception” connotes activity on the part of the people of God beyond formal consensus.13 Reception means that even when teachings are formally affirmed through a community’s own processes, they must also be “received” by the community itself. That is, teachings must be actually taught and practices actually affected to constitute authoritative doctrine and authoritative practices on the part of a community.

There are many cases in which teachings and practices have been formally affirmed but failed to be received in churches. Perhaps most notable as a classic instance of the lack of reception was the union between Eastern and Western churches supposedly affected by the Council of Florence. This union insisted on the use of the *filioque* clause in the Creed, but this teaching and practice was not “received” in most of the Eastern churches. Hence, it lacks in these churches the status of authoritative teaching and practice, despite the fact that Eastern church delegates (bishops) at Florence formally approved these measures.

It can be debated whether Methodist churches (including The United Methodist Church) have acknowledged the importance of reception in doctrinal authority. But taking my cue from the importance of reception in ecumenical life, I argue that studying formal consensus and popular reception together offers a very fruitful historical and descriptive methodology for getting
at the heart of a theological and spiritual tradition. What I’m looking for in my study of *The Shape of the Wesleyan Tradition*, then, is the correlation between formal consensus, on the one hand, and popular spirituality signaling reception of formal teachings on the other. In this paper I focus on the theology and spirituality of the “way of salvation” as reflected in the schemata or outlines of Methodist hymnals, catechisms and systematic theologies authorized for the training of preachers as a way of exploring formal consensus. I then examine five popular autobiographies from Methodist people as a way of correlating this formal consensus on the “way of salvation” with the ways in which these teachings were (and perhaps were not) received in popular religious culture. I would note, moreover, that this is primarily a study of nineteenth-century sources, although there will be a few eighteenth- and twentieth-century sources to which I refer.

2. The “Way of Salvation” in Formal Consensus as Revealed in the Structures of Methodist Hymnals, Catechisms, and Authorized Systematic Theologies

2.0 Background

I turn, then, to a consideration of the “way of salvation” as it is revealed in the schemata or organizational structures of Methodist hymnals, catechisms, and systematic theologies authorized by Methodist churches for the training of Methodist preachers. An earlier essay in *The Shape of the Wesleyan Tradition* will have shown that there was an important precedent in the works of pietistic Puritan authors, who explicated the out-working of election in the stages of “effectual calling” or vocation, justification (including assurance of one’s election), sanctification, and glorification. This scheme was formally taught in such Puritan works as William Perkins’ *A Golden Chaine* and William Ames’ *The Marrow of Theology*, and it was reflected in the popular literature of Puritan diaries and in John Bunyan’s imaginative allegory of *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to the Next.* Moreover, the earlier essay shows that John Wesley consistently identified teachings about “the way of salvation” as the distinctive content of the Methodist revival. These typically utilized the three categories of repentance, faith, and holiness (or elsewhere, “preventing grace,” justification, and sanctification) as short-hand descriptions of the Methodist understanding of the progress of the spiritual life.

2.1 Hymnals

John Wesley himself designed the first Methodist hymnal to be widely used. So we may begin a consideration of the “way of salvation” in the schemata of Methodist hymnals by noting John Wesley’s own, well-rehearsed comment on his organization of the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*:
[The Collection] is large enough to contain all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; ye, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason. And this is done in a regular order. The hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is in effect a little body of experimental and practical divinity.16

The main headings in the book are: introductory hymns (part I), “convincing” hymns (part II), hymns for mourners and backsliders (part III), hymns for believers (part IV), and hymns “For the Society” (part V). A perusal of the subheadings reveals that parts II, III and IV comprise the essence of the “way of salvation,” what Wesley apparently meant in referring to “the experience of real Christians.” Moreover, parts II and III contain hymns addressed to “mourners” or “sinners,” that is, persons who had not yet experienced justifying faith or who had experienced justifying faith and had fallen away from it (“backsliders”).17 Part IV contains hymns specifically designated for “believers,” that is, those who had experienced justification. Within this category are hymns for believers rejoicing, fighting, praying, watching, working, suffering, seeking full redemption (that is, seeking entire sanctification), “saved” (which denotes those who have experienced entire sanctification), and “interceding for the world.”18 The outline of the 1780 Collection, then, set the precedent for subsequent Methodist hymnals as they explicated the “way of salvation.”

Almost every one of the Methodist and Wesleyan hymnals I have studied, including hymnals from historically African-American Methodist denominations and hymnals from churches of the Holiness tradition, have a lengthy section singing sinners and Christians through the “way of salvation,” including repentance, faith, assurance, and the quest for sanctification or Christian holiness. The comparative table of Hymnal schemata that I have distributed separately shows how this scheme is worked out in eleven different hymnals, including the 1780 Collection of Hymns and then subsequent British and American hymnals from 1793, 1837, 1849, 1905, 1910, 1932, 1933, 1964, 1983, 1989, and 1993. In this respect the subsequent Methodist hymnals do follow the basic pattern set by John Wesley in his organization of the 1780 Collection. In introducing the Methodist Hymnal of 1964, Dr. Carlton Young noted this consistent organizational structure of Methodist hymnals:

A third distinctive trait of a Methodist hymnal is the prominence placed upon hymns that reflect, in Wesley’s words, “the experience of real Christians.” In maintaining this topical format in a hymnbook, Wesley expressed the view that the book was to be
used by Methodists and must reflect the experiences of Christians within the context of the Wesley revival.19

Although the Pocket Hymn-Book published by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1793 does not clearly follow this pattern, the Wesleyan Collection remained in print in this early period.20 The 1837 Hymn Book of the Methodist Protestant Church has a long section on the “Process of Salvation” with sub-headings on repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, adoption, “witness of the Spirit,” “graces of the Spirit,” sanctification, “triumph in death,” “glory in the resurrection,” “approved in the judgment,” and “immortality in heaven.”21

Methodist hymnals after 1840 typically followed the specific pattern set by the 1780 Collection in dividing hymns between those appropriate to “sinners” (Parts II and III of the 1780 Collection) and “believers” (Part IV of the 1780 Collection).22 The 1848 collection entitled Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church has a section on “The Sinner” followed by a section entitled “The Christian Life,” with sub-sections on “justification by faith,” “adoption and assurance,” and “sanctification.”23 The same general division between “The Sinner” and “The Christian” can be seen in the 1877 revision of this Methodist Episcopal hymnal.24

As of the 1905 hymnal jointly sponsored by the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, these two sections are entitled “The Gospel” and “The Christian Life,” and I would note that a Free Methodist Hymnal from 1910 follows this pattern closely.25 Both of these hymnals place entire sanctification rather early in the section on the Christian life, reflecting the prominent place of the Holiness movement in this period.26 The British Methodist Hymn-Book of 1933 and the US Hymnal of 1935 (jointly produced by the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church) have a section on “The Gospel” (US) or “The Gospel Call” (British) followed by a section on “The Christian Life.” But we may note two important shifts that occurred with these early twentieth-century hymnals. In the first place, the weight given to the two sections had shifted. In the 1933 Hymn-Book, the section on “Gospel Call” has only 28 hymns, whereas the section on “The Christian Life” has 300 hymns.27 The joint American Methodist Hymnal of 1935 has more hymns in the section on “The Gospel” (72 hymns in this section), but this is tempered by a second factor that appears in both of these hymnals: that is, the first section on “The Gospel” or “The Gospel Call” is not strictly limited to “sinners” as was the pattern in earlier Methodist hymnals. Both have sections on faith in the first section on “The Gospel,” and the American hymnal even has hymns on “forgiveness” and “consecration” in this earlier section. The American hymnal of 1935 does not have a sub-section explicitly
labeled “sin” or “depravity,” although it does have a sub-section on “repentance.” Moreover, in the American hymnal of 1935, the sub-section on “Christian perfection” is placed at the very end of the section on “The Christian Life,” and this probably reflects the backlash against Holiness teaching that had gone on in these denominations in the early twentieth century. The same organizational division between “The Gospel” and “The Christian Life” is followed in the 1984 Bicentennial Hymnal of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The weakest Methodist hymnal with respect to the sequence of hymns on the “Way of Salvation” was the 1964 Hymnal of the Methodist Church, subsequently re-titled The Book of Hymns of The United Methodist Church. In this hymnal, although there were sections on “call” and “repentance and forgiveness,” these were actually included as sub-headings under “The Gospel of Jesus Christ” along with other hymns on the theme of christology and atonement. Also, they were severed from the section on the Christian life, which begins with “faith and regeneration” and runs through “Christian perfection” to “death and life eternal.” This hymnal reflected the very strong momentum of the liturgical renewal movement, which was pressing Methodists in the direction of organizing their hymnals according to the seasons of the Christian year. In fact, an original proposal was to do away with the “Christian Life” section entirely until the elderly Bishop Nolan Harmon pleaded, “The Christian Life is all we have,” meaning that the section on “The Christian Life” had been the most consistent and distinctive mark of Methodist hymnals.

The most recent British and American Methodist hymnals have a stronger recognition of this distinctive trait of Methodist hymnody and hymnal organization. The British Methodist hymnal, Hymns and Psalms (1983), has a section on the Christian Life (hymns 661-751), though I note that repentance is conspicuously absent from its schema. The 1989 United Methodist Hymnal has consecutive sections on “prevenient grace,” “justifying grace,” and “sanctifying and perfecting grace.” This reflects the resurgence of interest in Wesleyan theology and spirituality that had been going on through the 1970s and the 1980s. The most recent hymnal of the Church of the Nazarene (1993) follows this precedent of organizing hymns on Christian experience by the categories of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.

This survey of the outlines of Methodist and Wesleyan hymnals shows that there has been a consistent pattern in them, explicitly acknowledged from the time of John Wesley's arrangement of the 1780 Collection of Hymns. In accordance with this pattern, a substantial portion of hymns are arranged in a sequence following the Wesleyan understanding of the “way of salvation.” Specific organizational schemes vary from the two-fold distinction of hymns addressed to “sinners” and “believers” in earlier hymnals to the flat pattern
that embraces hymns on evangelical repentance under the category of “The Christian Life” to the more recent pattern according to which hymns are organized under the headings of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. But throughout these schemata, a sequence of moments in Christian experience appears fairly consistently: namely, evangelical repentance, followed by justification, regeneration, assurance, sanctification, trials and difficulties, and finally entire sanctification.

2.2 Catechisms

A similar pattern of sequential moments in Christian experience can be seen in catechisms designed for the formation of children by Methodist and other Wesleyan churches. There has been a long and continuous tradition of Methodist catechisms, beginning with John Wesley’s Instructions for Children (1745) and continuing in most branches of Methodist churches with the exception of the United Methodist Church. Some of the most important catechetical works to be considered here are the following:

*A Short Scriptural Catechism* (1793, Methodist Episcopal Church), a revision of John Wesley’s *Instructions for Children* officially sanctioned by the Methodist Episcopal Church and reprinted consistently up until 1852, when it was superseded by a series of ME catechisms.33

“Catechism on Faith” (1817, AME Church), a revision of the shorter minutes of the early Wesleyan conferences (sometimes called the “Doctrinal Minutes”) which deals with specific issues concerning justification, faith, regeneration, assurance, good works, and sanctification, though not in the sequence of Christian experience that appears elsewhere.34

*Catechisms of the Wesleyan Methodists* (1824, Wesleyan Methodist Church [UK], also used in the Methodist Episcopal Church), three catechisms of which the first two are “graded,” that is, designed for children at different ages. The third is a more sophisticated instruction on Christian apologetics designed for youth. These were reprinted through the nineteenth century, and at some points prior to 1852 were printed in the U.S. on behalf of the ME Church.35

*Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1852, Methodist Episcopal Church), an expansion of the earlier *Short, Scriptural Catechism* in three graded catechisms. These catechisms were consistently reprinted on behalf of the ME Church and the ME South Church through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.36
“The Ten Doctrines of Grace” appended to Catechism No. 1 with Other Lessons for Young People in the History, Doctrines, and Usages of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1884, Methodist Episcopal Church), a document appended to the ME Catechisms which offers another view of the “way of salvation.”

The 1817 AME “Catechism on Faith” discusses most of the critical points of the “way of salvation” (justification, faith, regeneration, assurance, sanctification), but because it follows the pattern of the early Methodist conferences, it does not deal with these in sequential order.

The other catechisms examined here have a series of questions which follow sequentially the “way of salvation,” and these can be laid out synoptically as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1793 Short Scriptural Catechism</th>
<th>1824 Catechisms of the Wesleyan Methodists</th>
<th>1852 Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church</th>
<th>1884 “Ten Doctrines of Grace”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>repentance</td>
<td>repentance</td>
<td>justification and adoption</td>
<td>justification (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[prayer] (8)</td>
<td>faith in general</td>
<td>adoption</td>
<td>adoption (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>faith in Christ</td>
<td></td>
<td>witness of the Spirit (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[justification by faith] (9)</td>
<td>justification</td>
<td>adoption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[assurance] (10)</td>
<td>justification and adoption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[regeneration] (11)</td>
<td>regeneration</td>
<td>regeneration</td>
<td>regeneration (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[the divine law] (12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[sanctification, including entire sanctification] (13)</td>
<td>sanctification</td>
<td>sanctification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[sanctification begins]</td>
<td></td>
<td>entire sanctification</td>
<td>entire sanctification (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[possibility of falling away] (14)</td>
<td>danger of falling</td>
<td></td>
<td>final perseverance (10)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

There is a consistent pattern here despite some distinctive nuances. The 1793 Short Scriptural Catechism has sections on prayer and the divine law which do not appear in the other catechisms. The 1852 Catechism of the M.E. Church puts questions on justification and adoption together, and the 1884 appended list of “Ten Doctrines of Grace” has a separate section on the witness of the Spirit and places regeneration after justification, adoption, and the witness of the Spirit. These two catechetical documents do not have separate questions on evangelical repentance. The “Ten Doctrines of Grace”
utilizes the term “final perseverance,” although the content of this section describes the same content as that of the other catechisms where they discuss the possibility of falling from divine grace. Beyond these distinctive nuances, however, we can see a common sequential pattern of moments in the “way of salvation,” which runs as follows:

- evangelical repentance
- justification
- regeneration
- assurance (adoption, witness of the Spirit)
- sanctification
- entire sanctification
- danger of falling from divine grace

These form a temporal sequence, although in Wesleyan teaching, justification and regeneration and the assurance of pardon were thought of as normatively occurring at the same moment, so it is not surprising that the order of these three items is sometimes changed. Moreover, “falling away” or “falling from grace” was a danger that could present itself at any point after justification, so its location at the end of the sequence is not necessarily temporal. As we shall see, the sequence of these moments in Christian experience parallels the sequence in Methodist hymnals.

2.3 Authorized Works of Systematic Theology

Methodist preachers and ordained clergy were trained utilizing formal works of systematic theology authorized by the Methodist denominations and printed by their publishing houses, beginning with Richard Watson’s *Theological Institutes* (1823). The officially sanctioned works of systematic theology considered here are the following:

- Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (1823), a work by an early British Methodist theologian widely reprinted and used in Britain and America for the training of pastors.45

- Thomas N. Ralston, *Elements of Divinity* (1847), the first American systematization of Wesleyan theology, also reprinted by Methodist denominations for the training of Methodist clergy.44

- William Burt Pope, *Compend of Christian Theology* (1881), the work of a British Methodist theologian of the Victorian age used in training schools in the UK and also published on behalf of the M.E. Church in the US.45

- Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology* (1888), which became the standard systematic theology for preparation of preachers and ordained ministers in the ME South Church.46
With the exception of Summers, these works of systematic theology are organized in a pattern common to theological textbooks, including prolegomena (Watson’s “evidences”), doctrinal theology (“doctrines”), ethics (“morals”), and ecclesiology (“institutions”).47 Within this framework, however, they devote a great deal of attention to the defense of the Wesleyan and Arminian belief in the universal availability of grace,48 and they devote considerable space to the explication of the “way of salvation.” The exception to this is Summers, who organized his two-volume Systematic Theology as lectures on the Articles of Religion, and so does not have an extended discussion of the “way of salvation.”49 This could explain why Ralston remained in print in Southern Methodist churches for decades beyond the publication of Summers’ textbook.

Richard Watson discusses moments in the way of salvation under “Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures.” He deals with justification in chapter 23, and in chapter 24 he discusses “Concomitants of Justification: Regeneration and Adoption (Assurance).”50 Four chapters (25-28) defend universal availability of grace, then he deals with “benefits of redemption” in chapter 29 with an extended discussion of entire sanctification.51 Thomas N. Ralston also dealt with moments in the “way of salvation” under the general topic of biblical doctrines. He has a long sequence under the general heading of “The Remedial Scheme—Its Benefits” (Part I, Book IV), where he discusses the influence of the Holy Spirit (chapter 25), repentance (chapter 26), faith (chapter 27), justification (chapters 28-33), regeneration (chapter 34), adoption and the witness of the Spirit (chapter 35), perseverance of the saints (including the possibility of falling from grace, chapter 36) and Christian perfection (chapter 37).52 This outline answers almost exactly to the sequence given in the 1852 Methodist Episcopal catechisms that we have examined above.

William Burt Pope divided his material somewhat differently. His work has a Trinitarian schema, indeed, we might say an “economic” Trinitarian schema in which specific moments in the “way of salvation” are dealt with as aspects of christology under the category of “The Administration of Redemption” and other moments are dealt with as aspects of pneumatology. Under christology in the second volume of his work, Pope deals with the “preliminaries of salvation,” including free will, conversion, repentance, and faith.53 Under pneumatology in the third volume he discusses “the state of salvation,” including regeneration and adoption, and then “Christian sanctification,” including entire sanctification.54

The specific content of these works of systematic theology from Watson through Pope reveals a consistent defense of the Wesleyan teachings on the “way of salvation” in a dialectic with other Christian traditions. For example, the teaching about justifying faith as heart-felt trust in Christ is contrasted with beliefs in “baptismal justification” (despite the fact that Wesley believed
in a version of this) and with the notion of a merely objective faith (fides quae creditur) attributed to Lutheran and Reformed traditions. Thomas Langford comments on the lack of originality among nineteenth-century interpreters of the Wesleyan message, finding little doctrinal development between Wesley and William Burt Pope in the 1880s. Langford faults Pope in particular for his failure to deal with critical cultural issues, such as the rise of Freudian thought, facing the churches in his day. But however we may fault them, we may take their lack of originality as indicating a rather remarkable consistency in Wesleyan thought from Wesley’s own time through the early twentieth century. These nineteenth century interpreters were telling their own internal story: the story of the “way of salvation” that had structured the distinctive spirituality of the Methodist movement.

2.4 Summary: The “Way of Salvation” in Formal Doctrinal Consensus

In fact, if we consider all of these officially sanctioned documents—hymnals, catechisms, and works of systematic theology—together, we may perceive a relatively consistent and stable pattern to teaching about the “way of salvation,” according to which Christian experience was understood as embracing the following typical moments in this temporal sequence:

- evangelical repentance, followed by
- justification by faith, occurring simultaneously with
- regeneration and
- the assurance of pardon (including “the witness of the Spirit”), followed by the process of sanctification,
- including trials and difficulties and the need for the
- repentance of believers and even the possibility of
- falling away, but culminated hopefully in
- entire sanctification.

Consider, then, a Methodist laywoman in 1855, who would have regularly sung hymns laid out in the “way of salvation,” who might attend quarterly meetings or camp meetings where the preaching followed the sequence of the “way of salvation,” 57 keeping “a strict account” of how many souls were awakened, converted, and sanctified during the meeting, whose family might own a copy of one of the 1852 Methodist catechisms detailing the “way of salvation” in questions and answers that could be posed to children as an exercise in the evenings and on the Lord’s Day, and whose circuit-riding preachers would have studied the “way of salvation” as it was explicated in a more sophisticated way in Watson’s Theological Institutes or Ralston’s Elements of Divinity (and possibly also in Wesley’s Standard Sermons in addition to Watson or Ralston). There’s little doubt in my mind that if she hung around Methodists very long—and she’d have been required to hang around for
between three and six months to pass her “probationary membership” in the local society—she would have been well familiar with the “way of salvation” as Methodists understood it.

3. The “Way of Salvation” in Popular Reception as Illustrated by Five Spiritual Autobiographies

We turn now to ask how the “official” teachings of Methodist churches, represented in hymnals, catechisms, and officially sanctioned works of systematic theology, may have been “received” and understood by people in Methodist churches. Methodists produced a voluminous literature of personal conversion narratives, diaries and journals, spiritual autobiographies, and the distinctly Methodist spin on the genre of obituaries, which were also used as a way of describing personal religious experience. Just as Wesley’s *Sermons* and his arrangement of the 1780 hymnal set precedents for subsequent Methodist theology about the “way of salvation,” so his own published *Journal* set a precedent for the recording of personal religious experiences.

One way to test the level of reception of teachings about the “way of salvation” is by examining some specific spiritual autobiographies of Methodist people. Fortunately, we now have a series of published spiritual autobiographies from early American Methodist people, and I will use five autobiographies published in critical editions. The first two are from a Native American, William Apess, a Pequot Indian from Massachusetts born in 1798, and his wife, Mary Apess, who was Euro-American and was born in 1788. These are published in a volume entitled *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot.*

William Apess had been a licensed preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church but united with the Methodist Protestant Church at about the time of its organization in 1830. The next three autobiographies are from a volume entitled *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century,* and it includes the autobiographies of three black Methodist women, Jarena Lee (1783-after 1849), Zilpha Elaw (ca. 1790-after 1845) and Julia A. J. Foote (1823-1900). Jarena Lee was associated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the time of its founding by Richard Allen, and she was an early advocate of the right of women to preach in that denomination. Zilpha Elaw ministered as a lay preacher and evangelist in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and Julia Foote was a preacher in the AME Zion Church. In fact, shortly before her death in 1900, she became the first woman ordained as an elder in the Zion Church. Lee, Elaw, and Foote were all free black women from northern states.

These five autobiographies illustrate the classic Methodist understanding of the “way of salvation” and show how the formal teachings of Methodist churches were received at a popular level. The fact that four of these individuals came from minority cultures (Native American and African American) is, in
my view, a significant indication of how the Methodist message was received and internalized even across significant cultural frontiers.

3.1 Evangelical Repentance

William and Mary Apess, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote all recount in detail the struggles of their souls leading up to conversion, including their awareness of God's impending judgment, their intense awareness of their own sinfulness, and their need for divine grace. A few excerpts will illustrate the intensity of their experiences of evangelical repentance.

William Apess: “My heart now became much troubled, and I felt determined to seek the salvation of my soul... a conviction settled on my mind, more and more; and I was more serious than usual... when I considered how great a sinner I was before God, and how often I had grieved the good Spirit of the Lord, my distress for mercy was very great.”

Mary Apess: “This was the first time I had been warned to seek the salvation of my soul. [The preacher's] words sank deep on my mind; I began to weep as soon as he had left me; I went out, and for the first time I ever felt the need of praying or of a Savior; I knelt and poured out my soul to God, that he would have mercy upon me; although I had never seen anybody kneel, yet it was impressed on my mind that I must, and from that time I cried to God earnestly every day, during some months.”

Jarena Lee, recounting an experience in early life after she had told a lie to the woman in whose household she worked as a domestic servant: “At this awful point, in my early history, the Spirit of God moved in power through my conscience, and told me I was a wretched sinner. On this account so great was the impression and so strong were the feelings of guilt, that I promised in my heart that I would not tell another lie.”

Zilpha Elaw: “I never experienced that terrific dread of hell by which some Christians appear to have been exercised; but I felt a godly sorrow for sin in having grieved my God by a course of disobedience to His commands.”

Julia Foote: “All this time conviction followed me, and there were times when I felt a faint desire to serve the Lord; but I had had a taste of the world, and thought I could not part with its idle pleasures... [She attends a dance, and] I had taken only a few steps when I was seized with a smothering sensation, and felt the same heavy grasp on my arm, and in my ears, a voice kept saying, 'Repent! Repent!' I immediately left the floor and sank into a seat...”
3.2 Conversion (Justification, Regeneration, and Assurance)

Each of our five Methodist autobiographies recounts a conversion narrative, usually involving a single moment in which the narrator feels her or his sins forgiven. This moment answers to justification and the "assurance of pardon" in more formal Methodist lore and probably also includes regeneration, although the term "conversion" is more common in popular Methodist literature.66

William Apess: "The result was such as is always to be expected, when a lost and ruined sinner throws himself entirely on the Lord—perfect freedom. On the 15th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1813, I heard a voice saying unto me, in soft and soothing accents, 'Arise, thy sins that are many are all forgiven thee; go in peace and sin no more.' There was nothing very singular, save that the Lord stooped to lift me up, in my conversion."67

Mary Apess: "The plan of salvation was now open to my view. The Son of God was revealed to me by faith, in all his offices as prophet, priest, and king... My load of sin and fear of hell were gone... My burden of sin now left me; my tears were dried up. I felt a sweet peace in my soul...68

Jarena Lee, after hearing Richard Allen preach: "That moment, though hundreds were present, I did leap to my feet, and declare that God, for Christ's sake, had pardoned the sins of my soul. Great was the ecstasy of my mind, for I felt that not only the sin of malice was pardoned, but that all other sins were swept away altogether. That day was the first when my heart had believed, and my tongue had made confession unto salvation..."69

Julia Foote; "I was converted when fifteen years old. It was on a Sunday evening at a quarterly meeting [where she felt a sense of conviction]... I fell to the floor and was carried home... In great terror I cried: 'Lord, have mercy on me, a poor sinner!' The voice which had been crying in my ears ceased at once and, and a ray of light flashed across my eyes, accompanied by a sound of far distant singing; the light grew brighter and brighter, and the singing more distinct, and soon I caught the words: 'This is the new song—redeemed, redeemed!'... Such joy and peace as filled my heart, when I felt that I was redeemed and could sing the new song. Thus was I wonderfully saved from eternal burning."70

In contrast to these accounts of instantaneous conversions, Zilpha Elaw makes it clear that her experience of conversion was gradual rather than instantaneous, involving a growing recognition of forgiveness. Nevertheless, this culminates in an ecstatic moment in which she sees a vision of Christ that
assured her of her acceptance. “After this wonderful manifestation of my condescending Saviour, the peace of God which passeth understanding was communicated to my heart, and joy in the Holy Ghost...”

3.3 Sanctification and the Trials of the Soul

Each of the five autobiographies considered here recounts the trials of the soul after conversion, including moments of “darkness” and doubt, sometimes involving “falling away” or “backsliding” into sin. William Apess recounted that he did not have the support of a local class meeting immediately after his conversion and soon fell back into sin, from which he was later delivered in another dramatic religious experience. Mary Apess continued to experience doubts and melancholy after her conversion, and as she recounts this she attributes it to the fact that she had not been willing to share with her mother and others the joy of her conversion. Jarena Lee noted that “From the day on which I first went to the Methodist church,” (and this was the day of her conversion) “until the hour of my deliverance,” (and this refers to her subsequent experience of entire sanctification) “I was strangely buffeted by that enemy of all righteousness—the devil,” and she went on to recount how she eventually came to a full consciousness of her conversion (still prior to entire sanctification). Zilpha Elaw recounts continuing trials and persecution on account of her identification with the Methodists: “But notwithstanding this tide of divine comforts so richly replenished my soul, Satan, my great adversary, frequently assailed me with various trials and temptations, and the young folks often derided me as being a Methodist...” Julia Foote offers several chapters in her autobiography recounting her spiritual struggles: some of her chapter titles following her conversion narrative epitomize the content of these struggles: “A Desire for Knowledge—Inward Foes,” “Various Hopes Blasted,” “Disobedience—But Happy Results.”

3.4 Entire Sanctification

Mary Apess, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote describe how they came to understand the possibility of entire sanctification as a moment in which one can love God completely as a gift of divine grace. Mary Apess indicated that she did not believe this doctrine at first but was eventually convinced of it on the grounds that to deny it would be to deny the power of God to bring about that which God desired, namely, our complete love and dedication to God. Jarena Lee was taught the doctrine of sanctification by a traveling preacher. Julia Foote had learned about sanctification but understood at first that it was only to be expected near death. Later she learned that due to the unlimited power of God, entire sanctification is immediately available. This reflects the development of Holiness theology in the mid-nineteenth century.
Mary Apess, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote all offer testimonies to the moments in which they experienced entire sanctification.80

Mary Apess: “But before the [camp] meeting closed, God in Christ showed himself mighty to save and strong to deliver. I felt the mighty power of God again, like electric fire, go through every part of me, cleansing me throughout soul, flesh, and spirit. I felt now that I was purified, sanctified, and justified.”81

I would note that the use of the term “justified” is eccentric in this passage, since formal Methodist teaching would have associated justification with the earlier moment of her conversion, and this shows how language about religious experience could become fluid in popular contexts (see below).

Jarena Lee: “But when this voice whispered in my heart, saying, ‘Pray for sanctification,’ I again bowed in the same place, at the same time, and said, ‘Lord, sanctify my soul for Christ’s sake?’ That very instant, as if lightening had darted through me, I sprang to my feet and cried, ‘The Lord has sanctified my soul’ ... [After being tempted by Satan] But another spirit said, ‘Bow down for the witness—I received it—thou art sanctified!’ The first I knew of myself after that, I was standing in the yard with my hands spread out, and looking with my face toward heaven.”82

Zilpha Elaw: “It was at one of these [camp] meetings that God was pleased to separate my soul unto Himself, to sanctify me as a vessel designed for honour... Whether I was in the body, or whether I was out of the body, on that auspicious day, I cannot say; but this I do know, that at the conclusion of a most powerful sermon... I became so overpowered with the presence of God, that I sank down upon the ground, and laid there for a considerable time... I distinctly heard a voice speak unto me, which said, ‘Now thou art sanctified; and I will show thee what thou must do.’”83

Julia Foote: “The second day after that pilgrim’s visit, while waiting on the Lord, my large desire was granted, through faith in my precious Savior. The glory of God seemed almost to prostrate me to the floor. There was, indeed, a weight of glory resting upon me... I lost all fear. I went straight to my mother and told her I was sanctified.”84

3.5 Use of Technical Language to Describe the “Way of Salvation”

Each of the persons whose narratives we have considered here were keenly aware of their racial, social, and cultural backgrounds. William Apess wrote explicitly from his experience as a Pequot Indian and refers to Native Americans as “the children of the forest.” He contrasts the native morality of American
Indians with the corruptions of Euro-American culture and society he recounts severe persecution at the hands of Euro-Americans, including stinging prejudice based on skin color; and he sometimes uses native expressions, such as "the Great Spirit" as a way of referring to God.85 Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote all recount the prejudicial treatment they received at the hands of white families for whom they worked, and Zilpha Elaw narrates the particular dangers faced by a free black woman traveling (as an evangelist) in slave states.86 Mary Apess recounted her own struggles growing up as a poor, orphaned white girl.87 None of these five persons had any formal education beyond a rudimentary knowledge of the English language for reading and writing and then the training they received at the hands of Methodist preachers and society members.

And yet each of these persons also knew and used the technical language that Methodists taught concerning the stages of the "way of salvation." We might say that they had become "biculural" or even "tricultural" in their ability to use the language of the Methodist subculture in addition to the language of the majority Euro-American culture and their native ways of speaking. They speak, for example, of "the plan of salvation" (William Apess)88 and they could recount in strikingly similar language the general scheme of the "way of salvation." Jarena Lee could write that "I have now passed through the account of my conviction, and also of my conversion to God; and shall next speak of the blessing of sanctification."89 She recounted how a visiting black preacher, William Scott,

inquired if the Lord had justified my soul. I answered yes. He then asked me if he had sanctified me. I answered no and that I did not know what that was. He then undertook to instruct me further in the knowledge of the Lord respecting this blessing... He told me the progress of the soul from a state of darkness, or of nature, was threefold; or consisted in three degrees, as follows:—First, conviction for sin. Second, justification from sin. Third, the entire sanctification of the soul to God.90

Similarly, Julia Foote wrote that "In giving my first testimony [in Boston], I told of my thorough and happy conversion, and of my sanctification as a second, distinct work of the Holy Ghost."91

Reading these spiritual autobiographies, one becomes aware of the fact that in popular parlance, a number of short-hand expressions were used to describe particular moments in the "way of salvation": "conviction" is frequently used as a short-hand term for evangelical repentance, and "sanctification" is used as a short-hand term for what would be termed "entire sanctification" in more formal Methodist doctrinal phraseology. "Conversion" is the most frequent term for the moments discreetly described
in formal Methodist literature as justification and assurance and regeneration, though it was natural to see these as a single moment because formal Methodist teaching from the time of John Wesley had spoken of these three events as normally occurring simultaneously. Moreover, there is some evidence of popular usages of terms that appear confused in contrast to more formal usages: in one sentence, for example, Mary Apess refers to her experience of entire sanctification as embracing “justification” as well as sanctification, and although it is true that justification remains when one is sanctified, the term would be out of place in a more formal scheme of the “way of salvation.”

But even noting these differences in vocabulary, one cannot but note the strong correlation between the formal theological consensus about the “way of salvation” which we have seen in the schemata of hymnals, catechisms, and officially sanctioned theologies, on the one hand, and the narratives of personal religious experience given by these five witnesses on the other hand, and these five are only a small sample of the wide body of Methodist testimonial literature that bears out these correlations. The more formal theological pattern, it is true, separates justification and regeneration and the assurance of pardon but all the while notes that these normally appear simultaneously in the experience of believers. It is to be expected, then, that these three elements of the “way of salvation” should be collapsed into the one moment of “conversion” in the actual testimonies of Methodist people.

4. Conclusion(s)

In conclusion, I return to what I’ve described as a disjunction in contemporary accounts of the Methodist ethos between those who have focused on popular spirituality and those who have focused on more formal theological developments. The narratives of William and Mary Apess, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote fit very well into the descriptions of popular Methodist spirituality offered by Nathan Hatch, John Wigger, Ann Taves, and David Hempton. Indeed, Wigger and Hempton have used the autobiographies from Sisters of the Spirit as part of their larger sketches of Methodist spirituality. But considered in direct dialogue with the formal literature reflecting Methodist consensus on “the way of salvation” in hymnals, catechisms, and authorized works of systematic theology, these autobiographies show how ordinary Methodist people, even across the frontiers of subcultures, had “received” and internalized the teaching about the “way of salvation” that John Wesley had considered to be the distinctive mark of the Methodist movement.

I argue, then, that by examining the correlation between formal consensus and popular reception, we can see that this disjunction, at least as respects the critical teaching on the “way of salvation,” is only a perception, a mirage created by the absence of critical reflection on the voluminous body of
literature, including hymnals, catechisms, and more formal theological treatises, by which Methodist churches consistently taught the spirituality of the “way of salvation,” a spirituality that also appears in popular accounts of personal religious experiences. This takes us to the heart of the Methodist message and the distinctive essence of what this spiritual and theological tradition has stood for.

**End Notes**


4. Wigger’s subtitle indicates his primary interest in popular spirituality, “Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America,” and his book carries this through. Hempton’s introduction makes clear his desire to focus on popular spirituality, concluding with his hope that he will make a substantial contribution to historiography “by examining the rise of Methodism as a transnational movement of ordinary people not easily confined to particular times, places, and institutions” (p. 10).


6. Hempton, pp. 56-60 (Wesley’s theology), pp. 60-68 (popular spirituality expressed in personal narratives), pp. 68-74 (hymns), pp. 74-79 (sermons), and p. 84 (development of formal systematic theologies).

7. Wigger, pp. 15-20 (John Wesley’s theology), and (e.g) pp. 104-124 (“Boiling Hot Religion”).

8. Hempton, p. 60 and following in chapter three.

9. Russell E. Richey argues that there were four distinct “languages” in early American Methodism: the language of popular evangelicalism, Wesleyan language, episcopal or Anglican language, and republican language (*Early American Methodism* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], chapter 6, pp. 82-97). With respect to his categories, I would see formal consensus as reflecting Wesleyan language (although consistently revised and restated by American Methodist churches) and popular narratives as reflecting the language or culture of popular evangelicalism, but I will argue for a strong correlation between these “languages” as regards the content of the “way of salvation” (see the conclusions below).

10. I am grateful to Randy Maddox for this insight. Maddox has consistently argued for the nature of Wesleyan thought as “practical divinity” which would privilege first-order theological activities; cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books imprint of Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 15-18. The expression “practical divinity” came from a letter from Susanna Wesley to John Wesley at the time of the latter’s decision to seek holy orders in
1725, and by this term she denoted the literature of the Anglican “Holy Living” tradition and of late medieval works of the *Devotio Moderna* tradition (such as Thomas à Kempis), which had been favored by advocates of the “Holy Living” tradition. The term, then, did denote what Maddox calls “first-order” theological activities (Susanna Wesley, letter to John Wesley, 23 February 1724/25; in Charles Wallace, Jr., ed., *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], pp. 106-107). John Wesley also used the term “practical divinity” in the preface to the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for Use of the People Called Methodists* (see the quotation in the text below), and used it to refer to the *Collection* itself, another instance that would suggest that “practical divinity” ought to privilege such first-order theological work.


17. Ibid., section II comprises hymns 88-95 (in Hildebrand and Beckerlegge, eds., Collection, pp. 188-200); section III comprises hymns 96-181 (in Hildebrand and Beckerlegge, eds., Collection, pp. 201-307).

18. Ibid., section IV comprises hymns 182-465 (in Hildebrand and Beckerlegge, eds., Collection, pp. 308-648).

19. Carlton R. Young, An Introduction to the New Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House/Graded Press, 1966), p. 7. The quotation from John Wesley is from the preface to the 1780 Collection of Hymns, given above in the text. Young describes the topical layout of the 1780 Collection as a precedent for the organization of subsequent Methodist hymnals. However, in using the term “real Christians” Wesley seems to have denoted his sense of an ideal, i.e., what a “real” Christian ought to be, where Young takes this expression as referring to the actual or lived experiences of Christians.

20. A Pocket Hymn Book: Designed as a Constant Companion for the Pious, Collected from Various Authors (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1800; original printing was 1793). This hymnal, designed as an inexpensive alternative to the Wesleyan Collection, follows some of the categories of the 1780 Collection but is quite jumbled, with (for example) three different sections marked “penitential.”

21. Hymn Book of the Methodist Protestant Church: Compiled by the Authority of the General Conference (14th edition; Baltimore: Book Concern, Methodist Protestant Church, 1852; original printing was 1837).


23. Ibid., hymns 261-330.


25. In the The Methodist Hymnal: Official Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (New York and Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1905), the section on “The Gospel” comprises hymns 241-297, and the section on “The Christian Life” comprises hymns 298-567 In the Free Methodist Hymnal: Published by Authority of the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church in North America (Chicago: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1910), the section

26. In the 1905 MEC and MECS hymnal, the sub-section on entire sanctification is entitled “entire consecration and perfect love” and comprises hymns 353-381. In the 1910 Free Methodist Hymnal this sub-section is entitled “entire sanctification” and comprises hymns 333-386.


30. The quotation from Bishop Harmon is from the recollection of Professor James Logan of Wesley Theological Seminary, who was part of the process leading up to the 1964 Hymnal. The quotation from Carlton Young (in the text above) was given in a pamphlet introducing the hymnal of 1964 and reflects at least his recognition that the hymnal did succeed in incorporating “the Christian life” as an organizational pattern consistent with historic Methodist hymnals.

31. I was present when the suggestion was made that we use this structure: the suggestion was made in a meeting of the Wesley texts subcommittee at Duke Divinity School by Scott J. Jones, whose mother Bonnie Jones Gehweiler was chairing the session, and the suggestion was passed from that group to the hymnal committee. All of the classic loci of the “way of salvation” appear under these three headings in the Hymnal. However, it might also be noted that the total number of Charles Wesley hymns in the 1989 hymnal is relatively low, second only to the 1964 hymnal.


33. The version consulted here is *A Short Scriptural Catechism Intended for the Use of the Methodist Societies* (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory for the M. E. Church; Azor Hoyt, printer, 1825).

34. The “Catechism on Faith” is included in every AME *Discipline* since 1817; the version consulted here is from *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1996-2000* (Nashville: AMEC Sunday School Union, 1997), pp. 21-35.

35. The version consulted here is *The Catechisms of the Wesleyan Methodists: Compiled and Published by Order of the Conference for the Use of Families and Schools Connected with That Body* (London: J. Mason, 1842). Catechism no. 1 is “For Children of Tender Years”; Catechism no. 2 is “For Children of Seven years of Age and Upwards”; Catechism no. 3 is “For the Use of Young Persons” and carries the subtitle, “On the Evidences of Christianity, and the Truths of the Holy Scriptures.”

36. The version consulted here is *Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Number 3* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe for the Sunday-School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1852). This carries an approbation by Bishops Levi Scott, Nathan Bangs, and Joseph Holdich. It also gives the text of Catechism Number 1 (pp. 1-18).
37. The version cited is given in *Catechism No. 1 with Other Lessons for Young People in the History, Doctrines, and Usages of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Phillips and Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1884).

38. In the version cited, lessons 7-14 (pp. 11-26).


41. In the version cited, pp. 30-31.

42. “Evangelical repentance” denotes the repentance that precedes justification, as contrasted with “the repentance of believers” in Wesleyan lore.


46. The edition cited is Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity Consisting of Lectures on the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1888). On Summers, cf. Langford, pp. 95-96. I would have to differ with Langford’s conclusion about Summers’ reliance on Watson, because Summers’ outline follows the Articles and so assumes a very different shape than Watson’s. The lack of sustained treatment of the “way of salvation” in Summers shows the significant difference between his approach and that of Watson.

47. But note that Ralston places the doctrinal section ahead of the “evidences” (what we would think of as prolegomena).


49. Summers does have discussions of regeneration (2:73ff), “preventing” grace (2:77ff), justifying faith (2:102ff And 2:125 ff), and the admissibility of grace (2:173ff).

50. Watson, pp. 242-452 (chapter 23) and 453-461 (chapter 24).

51. Watson, pp. 544-553 (chapter 29); the discussion of entire sanctification is on pp. 544-548.

52. Ralston, pp. 329-472.


54. Pope, 3:1-27 (on regeneration and adoption) and 27-61 (on sanctification, including entire sanctification).

55. Watson distinguishes the Wesleyan conception of heart-felt faith from
other options, pp. 424-453; Ralston devotes six chapters to this topic, pp. 367-416; Pope makes a similar distinction between living faith and "dead faith" in his discussion of the "preliminaries of salvation," 2:358-385; Summers elaborates a similar argument about justifying faith in 2:102ff and 2:125ff.

56. Langford, pp. 62-63 (on Pope), 95 (on Ralston and Bascom), and 96 (on Summers).

57 Russell E. Richey's study of The Methodist Conference in America: A History (Nashville: Kingswood Books imprint of the Abingdon Press, 1996) makes the point that early Methodist conferences (quarterly as well as annual conferences) were primarily occasions for preaching, worship, hymn-singing and generally matters related to spirituality rather than business meetings (chapter 6, pp. 51-61).


59. He actually gives the date of his joining the Methodist Protestant Church as 11 April 1829, and this was during the period when the MP denomination was becoming separate from the ME Church but prior to its formal organization (p. 133).


61. Apess, pp. 126 and 127; the entire section from p. 121 through p. 127 recounts the period of mourning over sin leading up to William Apess' conversion.

62. Apess, p. 134; the entire section from p. 133 through p. 139 recounts the period of mourning over sin leading up to Mary Apess' conversion.

63. Jarena Lee, in Sisters of the Spirit, p. 27


66. Lester Ruth's recently published collection of early Methodist materials includes a number of testimonies to conversion experiences in language similar to these, pp. 72-82.

67 Apess, p. 129.

68. Apess, pp. 139-140.


70. Julia Foote, in Sisters of the Spirit, p. 180 (the conversion narrative continues through the next page).

71. Zilpha Elaw, in Sisters of the Spirit, pp. 55-57; the quotation is on p. 57.

72. Apess, pp. 130-132.

73. Apess, pp. 140-142.


76. Julia Foote, in Sisters of the Spirit, chapter titles on pp. 182 (chapter eight), 184 (chapter nine), and 186 (chapter ten).

77 Apess, p. 142.
79. Julia Foote, in *Sisters of the Spirit*, p. 186, “They told me that sanctification was for the young believer, as well as the old.”
80. Lester Ruth’s collection of materials exhibiting early Methodist life includes a number of testimonies to entire sanctification, pp. 115-130.
81. Apess, p. 143.
82. Jarena Lee, in *Sisters of the Spirit*, p. 34.
84. Julia Foote, in *Sisters of the Spirit*, pp. 186-187
85. Apess, pp. 119-121. He refers to God as “the Great Spirit” on p. 121.
88. Apess, p. 122.
92. Apess, p. 143.
93. This is consistent with Russell Richey’s argument that Methodist conferences and other institutional structures in the nineteenth century were primarily concerned with spirituality rather than business matters; see his conclusions in *The Methodist Conference in America*, pp. 199-204.
Extending the Conversation

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P. Raniero Cantalamessa

The Preaching Ministry

Raniero Cantalamessa is a Franciscan Capuchin Catholic Priest. Born in Ascoli Piceno, Italy, 22 July 1934, ordained priest in 1958. Divinity Doctor and Doctor in classical literature. Former Ordinary Professor of History of Ancient Christianity and Director of the Department of religious sciences at the Catholic University of Milan. Member of the International Theological Commission (1975-1981). In 1979 he resigned his teaching position to become a full time preacher of the Gospel. In 1980 he was appointed by Pope John Paul II Preacher to the Papal Household in which capacity he still serves, preaching a weekly sermon in Advent and Lent in the presence of the Pope, the cardinals, bishops and prelates of the Roman Curia and the general superiors of religious orders. He is frequently invited to speak at international and ecumenical conferences and rallies. The following are based on addresses he gave in the Asbury Theological Seminary chapel in the fall term of 2006.
The First Letter of Peter calls the apostles “those who preached the gospel through the Holy Spirit” (1 Peter 1: 12). In this definition we see the two constitutive factors of Christian preaching: its content and its method. The Gospel is the object to be proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is the method, that is, “the medium” or “the way” in which to do it. In my exposition I shall follow this scheme, speaking first of the content and then of the method of Christian preaching.

I. The content of Christian preaching

1 We preach a Crucified Christ

The First Letter of Peter sums up the entire content of Christian proclamation with the word “Gospel.” This word has taken different meanings. It can mean the four canonical Gospels, that is, the good news proclaimed by Jesus, but it can also mean the Good News about Jesus. In the first case Jesus is the subject of the Gospel, in the second he is the object. The same distinction is expressed today by distinguishing the preaching Jesus from the preached Christ.

In this second connotation the term Gospel indicates the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection for our salvation. The Gospel is Christ! Saint Paul encloses in this name the whole content of Christian proclamation: “We preach a crucified Christ” (1 Cor 1: 23), “It is not ourselves that we are proclaiming, but Christ Jesus as the Lord” (2 Cor 4:5).

With this in mind we try now to understand the challenges Christian preaching is facing in our time. What place does Jesus have in our society and our culture? I believe we can speak about it as a presence / absence of Christ. On a certain level—that of entertainment and mass media in general—Jesus Christ is very present and is even a “Superstar,” according to the title of a famous musical about him. In an interminable series of stories, films, and books, writers have falsified the figure of Christ, sometimes under the pretext of mysterious new historical documents about him. The Da Vinci Code is the latest and most aggressive instance in this long series. It has now become a fashionable trend, a new literary genre. People take advantage of the vast resonance associated with the name of Jesus and what he represents for a large part of humanity in order to ensure a lot of publicity at minimal cost. This is literary parasitism.

St. Augustine asked what pagans did when they did not succeed at resisting
vices (or even try to). Very simply, they attributed them to God! And so they made a god for lust, Venus, a god for violence, Mars; and so on, feeling themselves justified in practicing these vices. The same thing is happening today with regard to Christ, and it is one of the most disturbing signs of regression into paganism. There is no weakness or obsession in modern culture that is not somehow attributed to Jesus in a way that makes people feel justified in cultivating it.

From a certain point of view, then, we can say that Jesus Christ is very present in our culture. However, if we look at the arena of faith, where Jesus belongs more than anywhere else, we note, on the contrary, a disturbing absence if not an outright rejection of his person.

What do those who call themselves “believers” in Europe and elsewhere really believe in? Most often, they believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, a Creator, and in an “afterlife.” However, this is deist faith but not yet Christian faith. If we take into account Karl Barth’s famous distinction, this is religion but not yet faith. Various sociological surveys highlight this fact even in countries and regions with ancient Christian traditions, like the region in which I was born, the Marches (in central Italy). In practice, Jesus Christ is absent in this kind of religiosity.

The dialogue between science and faith, which has recently aroused so much interest, tends, without meaning to, to put Christ between parentheses. Its focus is God the Creator; the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth has no place there. The same thing occurs in the dialogue with philosophy which prefers to deal with metaphysical concepts rather than with historical realities.

On the whole, what happened at the Areopagus in Athens when Paul preached there is being repeated on a global scale. As long as the apostle spoke of “the God who made the world and everything in it” and said that “we indeed are his offspring,” the learned Athenians listened to him with interest. But when he began to speak of Jesus Christ “being raised from the dead,” they responded politely, “we will hear you about this at another time” (see Acts of the Apostles 17:22-32).

We only need to take a quick look at the New Testament to understand how far we are now from the original meaning of the word “faith.” For Paul, the faith that justifies sinners and confers the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:2), that is, the faith that saves, is faith in Jesus Christ, in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection. For John as well, the faith “that overcomes the world” is faith in Jesus Christ: “Who overcomes the world if not the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (I John 5:4-5).

Given our current situation, our first task is to make a great act of faith. “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33), Jesus told us. He not only overcame the world of his time but the world forever in terms of what is impervious and resistant to the gospel in people. Therefore, we
should not be afraid or resign ourselves in any way to the current situation. The recurring prophecies about the inevitable end of the church and of Christianity in a future technological society make us smile. We have a much more authoritative prophecy to hold on to: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

We cannot, however, remain passive; we need to do something to respond in an adequate way to the challenges that faith in Christ is facing in our time. To re-evangelize the post-Christian world, I believe it is essential that we know what the apostles did to evangelize the pre-Christian world! The two situations have much in common. And this is what I would now like to try to highlight: What was the first evangelization like? How did faith in Christ overcome the world?

2. Kerygma and Didaché

All the New Testament authors clearly presuppose their readers’ knowledge of a common tradition (paradosis) that goes back to the earthly Jesus. This tradition has two aspects or components: a component called “preaching” or proclamation (kerygma) about what God did through Jesus of Nazareth and a component called “teaching” (didachë) that presents ethical norms for right conduct on the part of believers. Various Pauline letters incorporate this twofold structure, with kerygma in the first part and exhortation and practical advice flowing from it in the second part.

Preaching, or kerygma, is called “the gospel.” On the other hand, teaching, or didachë, is called the “law,” or the commandment, of Christ that is summed up as charity. Of these two, it is the first—kerygma or gospel—that gives the church its origin. The second—the law or charity—flows from the first and outlines an ideal of moral life for the church; it “forms” the faith of the church. It is his preaching that the apostle refers to when he distinguishes his work as a “father” in the faith in his meetings with the Corinthians from the work of the “teachers” who came after him. He says, “I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Faith like that, then, arises only in the presence of kerygma or proclamation. Referring to faith in Christ, the apostle asks, “How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14)—literally “without someone who proclaims the kerygma (chóris keryssontos).” Paul concludes, “faith comes from what is heard” (Romans 10:17), and “what is heard” refers precisely to the “gospel” or kerygma.

Faith, then, comes by hearing the preaching of the word. But what exactly is the object of “preaching”? On the lips of Jesus the good news that is the basis for his parables and from which all his teaching arises is this: “The kingdom of God has come upon you!” But what is the content of the preaching by the apostles? The work of God in Jesus of Nazareth! That is
true, but there is something even more specific that is the vital nucleus of
everything and that, with respect to all else, is like the blade that goes before
the plough to break up the soil so that it can turn over the ground and make
a furrow in it.

That more specific nucleus is the exclamation “Jesus is Lord!” proclaimed
and received in the wonder of a faith statu nascenti, that is, in the act of being
birthed. The mystery of this word is such that it cannot be said “except by the
Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). By itself, it leads whoever believes in his
resurrection into salvation: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be
saved” (Romans 10:9).

“Just as the wake of a beautiful ship,” Charles Péguy said, “grows wider
and wider until it disappears and loses itself, / But begins with a point, which
is the point of the ship itself,” so too, I would add that the preaching of the
church expands until it constructs an immense doctrinal edifice, but it begins
with a point, and this point is the kerygma: “Jesus is Lord!”

What Jesus preached—”The kingdom of God is at hand!”—becomes, as
the apostles preach it, the exclamation “Jesus is Lord!” However, there is no
opposition but rather perfect continuity between the Jesus who preaches and
the Christ preached because to say “Jesus is Lord!” is the same as saying that
the kingdom and sovereignty of God over the world has come to pass in the
crucified and risen Jesus.

We need to understand this thoroughly to avoid an unrealistic
reconstruction of apostolic preaching. After Pentecost, the apostles did not
travel around the world just repeating, “Jesus is Lord!” Instead, what they
did whenever they were about to preach the faith in a certain place for the first
time was to go straight to the heart of the gospel, proclaiming two facts—
Jesus died, Jesus is risen—and proclaiming the reason for each of these facts:
He died “for our sins”; he was raised “for our justification” (see 1 Corinthians
15:3; Romans 4:25).

Paul records what he had proclaimed to the Corinthians when he first
came to them this way: “Now I would remind, you, brethren, in what terms
I preached to you the gospel, which you received For I delivered to you
as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in
accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the
third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This is
what he calls “the gospel.” This is also the core of Peter’s sermons in the Acts
of the Apostles: “You killed Jesus of Nazareth; God has raised him and
made him Lord and Christ” (see Acts of the Apostles 2:22-36; 3:14-19;

The proclamation that “Jesus is Lord!” is clearly nothing but the conclusion,
sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, of this brief story told in an
always-lively new way (even if it is substantially the same), and, at the same time, it summarizes the story and becomes operative in the one who hears it. “Christ Jesus emptied himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him [so] that every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:5-11).

The proclamation “Jesus is Lord!” does not, by itself alone, constitute the entirety of preaching, but it is nevertheless its soul, so to speak, the sun that illuminates it. It establishes a kind of communion with the story of Christ through the “host” of this proclamation, and it makes one think by analogy of the communion that is achieved with Christ’s body through the host of the Eucharist.

To come to faith is the unexpected and wondrous opening of a person’s eyes to this light. Recalling the moment of his conversion, Tertullian describes it as a startling exit from the dark “womb of common ignorance to the one light of Truth!” It was like the discovery of a new world. The First Letter of Peter describes it as being called “out of the darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9; see Colossians 1:12ff).

3. Rediscovering the Kerygma

Let us look at some essential characteristics of kerygma. As the exegete Heinrich Schlier has explained so well, it has an assertive and authoritative character—not a conversational or dialectical one. Thus, it does not need to justify itself with philosophical or apologetic arguments; one accepts it or not—that is all there is to it. It is not something that we may dispose of because it is kerygma that judges everything. It cannot be established by anyone because it originates in God himself, thus becoming the foundation of existence. It is prophetic speech in the strongest sense of the term.

Celsus, a pagan writer of the second century, says indignantly that Christians act like people who believe without reason. He is affronted that some of them do not wish to discuss the reasons for and against what they believe but keep repeating, “‘Do not examine, but believe!’ and ‘Your faith will save you!’ [and] ‘the wisdom of this life is bad, but foolishness is a good thing.’”

Celsus (who on this point seems extraordinarily close to post-modern proponents of radical relativism) would like Christians to present their faith in a dialectical manner, thereby submitting it entirely to investigation and debate. Thus, Christian faith could re-enter the general framework—acceptable to philosophy as well—of humanity’s effort to understand itself and the world, an effort that always remains provisional and open-ended.

Of course, the refusal by Christians to give proofs and to have discussions did not pertain to the whole path of faith but only to its initial beginning. During this apostolic age they did not shy away from debate and from “giving reason for the hope that is within them” even to the Greeks (see 1 Peter 3:15).
The apologists in the second and third centuries are also proof of that. Rather, they believed faith was not able to spring from that debate but should precede it as a work of the Spirit and not of reason. Rational arguments could, at the best, serve as a preparation for faith and, once faith was accepted, demonstrate its “reasonableness.”

Another characteristic of kerygma: It has an explosive or germinative character, so to speak. It is more like the seed that becomes a tree than the ripe fruit at the top of the tree, whose fruit in Christianity is constituted by charity. One does not obtain if by distilling or summarizing tradition, as if it were its marrow. Rather, kerygma stands apart, or better, at the beginning of everything. Everything else develops from it, including the four gospels that were written afterwards precisely to illustrate it.

There has been a change concerning this point due to the current situation of the church. To the extent that Christianity is dominant in any given place and everything is Christian or is regarded as Christian, people are less aware of the importance of the initial choice by which they become Christian. What is stressed the most is not so much the initial moment of faith, the miracle of coming to faith, but rather the completeness and orthodoxy of the faith itself.

This situation has a strong bearing on evangelization today. Churches with a strong dogmatic and theological tradition (like the Catholic and other traditional Christian Churches) risk finding themselves disadvantaged if, beneath the immense heritage of doctrine, laws, and institutions, they do not rediscover that original nucleus that is able to generate faith by itself.

Presenting people today, who often lack any personal knowledge of Christ, with the entire range of doctrine is like putting one of those heavy brocaded mantles worn at one time by the clergy on the shoulders of a baby. We are more prepared by our past to be “shepherds” than to be “fishers” of men, that is, we are better prepared to nourish people who come to church than to bring new people into the church or to bring back those who have drifted away and live on its margins.

There is a need, therefore, for the basic proclamation to be presented to people clearly and succinctly at least once in life. The grace that some renewal movements incorporate for the Church today consists precisely in this. Within these movements adults finally have the opportunity to hear the kerygma, renew their baptism, consciously choose Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, and commit themselves actively to the life of the church.

The proclamation of Jesus as Lord should retain its place of honor in all the critical moments of Christian life. The most propitious occasions are perhaps funerals because in the face of death people ask themselves questions, their hearts are open, and they are less distracted than at other times. Nothing speaks to people more pointedly about death than the Christian kerygma.
There is a story by Franz Kafka that is a powerful religious symbol. It tells of a dying emperor who calls one of his subjects near him. He whispers a message in his ear: “All the obstructing walls have been broken down”\(^9\) to make place for the crowd gathered around him. It is such an important message that he orders the messenger to repeat it back to him. Then he confirms the message with a nod and the messenger quickly sets out. But let us hear the rest of the story from the author:

Now pushing with his right arm, now with his left, he cleaves a way for himself through the throng; if he encounters resistance he points to his breast, where the symbol of the sun glitters; the way is made easier for him than it would be for any other man. But the multitudes are so vast; their numbers have no end. If he could reach the open fields how fast he would fly, and soon doubtless you would hear the welcome hammering of his fists on your door. But instead how vainly does he wear out his strength; still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be gained; he must next fight his way down the stair; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be gained; the courts would still have to be crossed; and after the courts the second outer palace; and so on for thousands of years; and if at last he should burst through the outermost gate—but never, never can that happen—the imperial capital would lie before him, the center of the world, crammed to bursting with its own sediment. Nobody could fight his way through here even with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself.\(^{10}\)

On his deathbed—on the cross—Christ also confided a message to his church. There are still so many people at their window who dream of a message like this. The church must never become like that complicated and suffocating palace from which the messenger is unable to exit.

The main obstacle to “racing off” with the Word is the division among Christians, “the dividing wall” that Jesus tore down at the moment of his death (see Ephesians 2:14) but that Christians have rebuilt. Other obstacles include the abundance of and confidence in human resources—too many tunics and too many purses that weigh the messenger down (see Luke 10:4). There is also an excess of bureaucracy, a clericalism that dulls the incisiveness of the Word and makes it seem remote from real life, language that is abstruse and incomprehensible, all constituting an insurmountable obstacle.

The apostle Paul exhorted the Christians of Thessalonica to pray, so that the Word of the Lord might be able “to run its course to the end” (cf. 2 Thess 3:1). The image suggests a sort of race of the Word, from Jerusalem to ends of the earth Rome. To be able to complete such a race, the Word should not
find too many obstacles in its path; it should be free and naked, like an athlete.

II. The method of Christian preaching

In this second lesson we want to deal with the problem of the method of Christian preaching, meaning by this word, as I said at the beginning, the way or the medium through which a certain goal is pursued and achieved. I do not intend to speak in this moment on the techniques, the different forms and the practical problems of Christian preaching. These too are part of the method, but I prefer to leave them for questions and answers. Here I want to speak of the method in its more general and spiritual meaning.

4. “The medium is the message”

If I wish to spread a piece of news, my first concern is how to transmit it: by means of the press? by radio? by television? The medium is so important that the modern science of social communications has coined the slogan, “The medium is the message.” If I say a few words away from this microphone, you will hear nothing; there will be no communication between us.

Now, what is the primordial and natural means by which the word is transmitted? It is with breath, the sound of my voice. This is what takes the word formed in the secrecy of my mind and carries it to you. All other means only strengthen and amplify this first means, the breath of my voice. Written words come afterward, since letters of the alphabet are only symbols for sounds.

Even the word of God observes this law. It is transmitted by means of a breath, by a sound. What is, or who is, the breath of God, the Ruah Yahweh, according to the Bible? We know the answer: it is the Holy Spirit. Can my breath transmit your word, or your breath transmit my word? No, my word can only be pronounced with my breath and your word with your breath. Thus, in an analogous way the word of God can only be transmitted by the breath of God which is the Holy Spirit.

This is a very simple and almost obvious truth but of the utmost importance. It is the fundamental law of every message and of all evangelization. Our human news is transmitted in various ways: through radio, cable, satellite, etc., while sacred news is transmitted via the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the real, essential means of communication, without whom only the human content of the message is perceived. The words of God are “spirit and life” (Jn. 6:63), and, therefore, one can only transmit and receive them “in the Spirit.”

This fundamental law is manifested throughout the history of salvation. Jesus began to preach “in the power of the Spirit” (Lk. 4:14). He himself
declared: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk. 4:18). After the Passover, Jesus warned the Apostles not to leave Jerusalem until they had received power from above: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses” (Ac. 1:8). The whole account of Pentecost serves to highlight this truth. The Holy Spirit comes; then Peter, with the other Apostles, begins to speak in a loud voice about the crucified and risen Christ. His words have such power that 3,000 people feel their hearts pierced. The Holy Spirit, having descended upon the Apostles, energizes them with an irresistible impulse to evangelize.

St. Paul affirms that without the Holy Spirit it is impossible even to proclaim that Jesus is our Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12:3), which is at the very root of every Christian message. No one will ever be able to express the close bond between evangelization and the Holy Spirit better than Jesus himself. Appearing to the Apostles in the Cenacle, he said: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Then he breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:21-22). After conferring on the Apostles the mandate to go out into the world, Jesus also granted them the means by which to fulfill it—the Holy Spirit—and he conferred it, significantly, with the sign of breath.

I have explained, quickly and briefly, these theological considerations on the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelization because I am more interested in developing a second point: what we ourselves can do to procure the Holy Spirit in our evangelizing, what we ourselves can do to receive power from above, as in a “new Pentecost.”

5. **Prayer**

I will highlight two means essential to this end: prayer and the right intention. It is easy to show that the Holy Spirit is received through prayer. This is how Jesus received the Holy Spirit and how the church itself did on the day of Pentecost. Luke describes the baptism of Jesus in this way: When “Jesus was at prayer after likewise being baptized, the skies opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him” (Lk. 3:21-22).

According to St. Luke, it was the prayer of Jesus that tore the heavens asunder and made the Holy Spirit come down. A little farther on in the same Gospel, we read: “Great crowds gathered to hear him and to be cured of their maladies. He often retired to deserted places and prayed” (5:15-16). The contrast is very eloquent between the pressing crowds and the decision of Jesus not to put aside his dialogue with his Father.

If we now move on to the church, we notice the same thing. The Holy Spirit at Pentecost came down on the Apostles while they were together and persevering in prayer (Ac. 1:14). Likewise, our only influence on the Holy Spirit, the only power that we have over him, is to call upon him and pray to
him. There are no other means. Yet this “weak” tool of prayerful invocation is, in reality, infallible: “In such a way your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Lk. 11:13). God is bound to give the Holy Spirit to the one who prays.

Personal prayer, though, is not sufficient; that of the entire community is also needed. Many times I have discovered how the word of God delights in coming down on a preacher in prayer with other believers. Once I was searching for the best message to give as the sermon I deliver each year at the Good Friday services of St. Peter’s Basilica in the presence of the Pope. About this same time in a prayer group, a brother read a passage from Philippians 2. On hearing the words “every knee must bend,” I suddenly had my answer. It was as if somebody had said: This is the word that you must proclaim. I did just that, and the outcome revealed it to be truly a word from God.

There isn’t a single gift more precious for a messenger than to have around him a group of people with whom he can pray in all simplicity, like a brother among brothers without any show of rank. This was how the Apostles prayed with the women and the disciples in the Cenacle before going out into the streets of Jerusalem. Only after they were among the people did they resume their roles of authority. In chapter four of the Acts of the Apostles, one sees what a community in prayer is like: how the gifts of the Holy Spirit restore courage to the Apostles Peter and John, threatened by the Sanhedrin and uncertain what to do, thus enabling them again to carry the message of Christ with parenesis, that is with freedom and boldness.

Jesus said something which has always made Christians tremble: “A person will be held accountable for every idle word on the Day of Judgment” (Mt. 12:36). What does “idle word” mean? Perhaps a trifling word, a critical word or a calumny? Parallel texts (cf. Mt. 7:15-20) make it clear that Jesus was referring to false prophets who speak in his name. The Greek word that is usually translated “idle” or “trifling” literally means “ineffective, sterile, that which doesn’t create or produce anything.” Therefore, it is an empty, sterile word, in contrast to the word of God so often described by the Bible as “eneige,” vigorous, effective and creative (cf. 1 Th. 2:13; Heb. 4:12). The “idle word” which everyone will have to account for on the Day of Judgment isn’t any and every idle word; it is the worthless, empty word spoken by the one who should instead be proclaiming the life-giving words of God. It is the word of the false prophet, who fails to speak God’s word while seducing others into believing he is doing so. We must account for every idle word spoken about God. This is the meaning of this solemn warning by Jesus.

6. A prophetic speech

Evangelization requires an authentically prophetic spirit and this depends on prayer. There are two ways of preparing a sermon. I can sit down at a table and choose, on my own, the words and the theme, relying on my own
knowledge and preferences. Then, once the speech is prepared, I can kneel down to ask God to give power to my words, to add his Spirit to my message. This is a good method, but it isn’t prophetic. To be prophetic, I must do the reverse. First, I kneel and ask God for the word he wants to say; afterward, I sit down at the table and place my learning and my skills at the service of God. This changes everything: it is no longer a question of my word, but the word of God; it is no longer God who makes my word his own, but I who make the word of God my own.

The fact is that God has his word ready for every occasion. He never fails to reveal that word to the minister who asks him humbly and insistently. At first there is no more than an almost imperceptible change of heart: a little light that glows in one’s mind, a word from the Bible that begins to catch one’s attention and illuminate a situation. Though it seems to be only a tiny seed, it contains everything we need, even thunderbolts to tear asunder the cedars of Lebanon. The power of the Holy Spirit is at work. Afterward, you sit at the table, open your books, consult your notes, gather your thoughts together, consult the Fathers of the church, the teachers, the poets, but now it is no longer the word of God at the service of your learning, but your learning at the service of the word of God. Only then does the word of God release all its power.

Let me explain what is it that actually happens in this way. While the preacher is speaking, at a certain point, quite apart from any decision of his, he becomes aware of an intervention, as though a signal on another wavelength were coming through his voice. He becomes aware of this because he begins to feel deeply stirred, invested with a strength and an extraordinary power of conviction that he recognises clearly is not his own. His words come out incisive with greater assurance.

He experiences a touch of that “authority” that all recognised when they listened to Jesus speaking. If he is speaking of sin, for instance, he feels such zeal for God, such indignation, that it is as though God himself had appointed him his advocate to the sinful world. It seems to him that in that strength he would be able to stand up to the entire world and truly “make mad the guilty and appal the free.”11 If he is speaking of God’s love, or about the sufferings of Christ, his voice resounds with something of the very pathos of God himself. Paul gives a very clear description of this experience:

In my speeches and the sermons that I gave, there were none of the arguments that belong to philosophy, only a demonstration of the power of the Spirit. And I did this so that your faith should not depend on human philosophy but on the power of God (2 Corinthians 2, 4 – 5).
When we brought the Good News to you, it came to you not only as words, but as power and as the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

The Apostle is speaking not only of his own experience, but of one shared by the whole community. In fact, when it is the Spirit who puts the words on the preacher's lips, the effects, even though wholly spiritual in their nature, are quite evident and easily seen. The listener is brought to a point of total concentration into which no other voice can reach: he too feels "touched", and a shiver goes often through his body. We are reminded of what the Letter to the Hebrews says, "The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts more incisively than any two-edged sword: it can seek out the place where soul is divided from spirit, or joints from marrow; it can pass judgment on secret emotions and thoughts (Heb. 4:12).

In a moment like this, the human speaker and the human voice fade out of the picture to make place for another voice entirely. "The true prophet, when he speaks, remains silent." The prophet is silent because, at that moment, it is not he who speaks but another. A mysterious silence comes about within him, as when somebody stands respectfully aside to allow the king to pass. The prophet himself is fascinated by the word he is speaking, and if for human considerations he tries to keep a certain thought from being spoken out loud, he seems to feel "a fire burning in his heart ... imprisoned in his bones" (Jeremiah 20:9); he simply cannot restrain it, and he says those words with even greater emphasis.

God says to his messenger, "You shall be as my own mouth" (Jer 15:19), and the thought of it makes his messenger tremble. Of course, this is not sustained at the same level of intensity through the whole time that the prophet is speaking or preaching. There are special moments. God needs only one phrase, one word. The speaker and the listeners have the feeling that drops of fire mingle at a certain point with the preacher's words as they are spoken, and the words become white-hot and shining. Of all images, fire is the one that is least handicapped in expressing what the Spirit does in this kind of situation. So it was that at Pentecost, he showed himself as "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:3). We read of Elijah that "he arose like a fire, his word flaring like a torch" (Ecclesiasticus 48:1), and in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, God himself declares, "Does not my word burn like fire? It is the Lord who speaks? Is it not like a hammer shattering rock?" (Jeremiah 23:29).

7 Seeking God's glory

In addition to prayer, the other essential attitude for allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us is to have the right intention. For God, the intention is what counts. Man looks at the exterior, but God searches out the intentions of the heart (cf. 1 Sm. 16:7). The Holy Spirit cannot act in our ministry if our
motives are twisted. So it is necessary to ask ourselves: Why do we desire to preach? I will mention two means for purifying our intentions: humility and love.

St. Paul highlights the fact that one can proclaim Christ for reasons that are not equally good or just. Some people, he says, “preach Christ from motives of envy and rivalry” (Ph. 1:15-16). There are two motives for preaching the word of Christ: for oneself or for Christ. Knowing this, the Apostle solemnly declares: “It is not ourselves we preach, but Christ Jesus as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5).

We know that Luke in the Acts of the Apostles wanted to contrast Pentecost and Babel so he could present the church as the antithesis of Babel. How does this contrast work? Why at Babel do the tongues become confused so that nobody understands anyone else, although all are speaking the same language? Why at Pentecost does everyone understand one another, though different tongues are being spoken?

The explanation is given in the passage itself. The builders of the tower of Babel prepared themselves for the enterprise by saying: “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth” (Gn 11. 4). Did you hear what they said? “Let us make a name for ourselves,” not “Let us make a name for God!”

By contrast, at Pentecost everyone understands the Apostles because they proclaim “the marvels of God” (Ac. 2:11). They don’t proclaim themselves but God. They are radically changed. They no longer argue about who is the greatest; they are concerned only about the greatness and majesty of God. They are elated by his glory. This is the secret of that mass conversion of 3,000 people. This is why the listeners felt their hearts pierced at the words of Peter. The Holy Spirit filtered through his words without any obstruction because his intention was upright, that is, pure and selfless.

In ancient times, it was thought that the builders of Babel were heathens whose intention was to challenge God. If so, then today we would read this passage as a contrast between atheists and the church. But this was not the case. Today we know that the builders of Babel were pious and religious men. The tower that they wanted to construct was in reality a temple to the divinity. It was one of those temples with terraces one above the other, a ziggurat, the remains of which can still be seen in Mesopotamia. The fault of the men of Babel is that they built a temple “to” God but not “for” God. They built it to make a name for themselves, for their own glorification. They exploited God.

Every spiritual work, every pastoral initiative and activity can be pursued in the spirit of Babel or of Pentecost. We are in danger of making use even of the service of God for our own personal affirmation. How confused and surprised I was the day I tried to discover the identity of the builders of
Babel. All of a sudden I saw quite clearly that I myself was among them! It was no longer necessary to dig among the ruins of Mesopotamia; it was enough to delve within myself, into my own heart.

Here is the secret to an authentic ecumenical understanding of evangelization. As long as we strive to make a name for ourselves, for our particular religious order or Christian denomination, we will continue to experience ongoing divisions among ourselves as Christians. This is what always happens when we allow ourselves to be consumed by a spirit of competition and rivalry, as history clearly shows. However, when we are converted to serving only the glory of God, we find ourselves free to announce his great works in fraternal concord with other believers.

We must ask God to give us the same searing experience of his glory that he gave to certain prophets. Isaiah, on seeing the holiness and the glory of God, cried out, “I am doomed!” (Is. 6:5). Ezechiel fell to the ground as if he were dead (Ez. 1:28). After this, God was able to speak his mind: “Go now, and prophesy to my people!” These prophets were men truly born again, dead to their own glorification and therefore free. The word cowers before such men. It cannot assert its powers of seduction and flattery over them.

Jesus once said, “I do not seek my own glory “ (Jn. 8:50). We need to make these words our own and to repeat them over and over again to ourselves. They have an almost sacramental power to bring into reality the very thing they signify. Let’s make these words our secret strategy. Let us proclaim these words of Jesus, as a kind of battle cry: “I seek no glory for myself!” This cry can rattle the gates of hell.

One strong reason for remaining humble while proclaiming the great deeds of God is to consider the distance between what we say and what we do. St. Seraphim of Sarov, a much-loved saint of the Russian people, said that preaching is easy: It’s like throwing stones from the top of a belltower. Putting into practice what one preaches, that’s difficult. It’s like carrying those same stones from the ground to the top of the belltower.

8. Love for God’s people

Once self-glorification, the main obstacle to a pure intention, has been removed, we still have to face the task of perfecting our intentions. Our intention to preach Christ can be tainted by certain character defects. Chief among these would be a lack of love. St. Paul says: “If I speak with human tongues and angelic as well, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 1:11).

Experience has led me to discover that one can proclaim Christ for reasons which have little or nothing to do with love. One can do it to proselytize, to legitimize one’s own small church or sect or religious organization, especially if founded by oneself only recently. One can also proclaim Christ in order to
increase the number of the chosen, or to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, and thus, hasten the return of the Lord.

Naturally, some of these are good and holy reasons, but they alone are not enough. Still missing are genuine love and compassion for all human beings, the true spirit of the gospel. Why did God send the first missionary into the world, his Son, Jesus? For no other reason but love: “Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn. 3:16). Why did Jesus preach about the kingdom? Solely for love, for compassion. “I have compassion for these crowds,” he said, “because they are like sheep without a shepherd” (cf. Mt. 9:36; 15:32).

One can announce the gospel of love only out of love. If we don’t love the people we approach, the words of the gospel are easily transformed into stones that do injury. We are often like Jonah. Jonah went to preach to the people of Nineveh, but he didn’t love them. God had to do more to bring about the conversion of Jonah, the preacher, than to convert the inhabitants of Nineveh! Jonah was obviously happier shouting, “Another 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed!” than when he had to witness God’s forgiveness. He was more worried about the tree that offered him shade than about the salvation of the city. “You are concerned over the plant,” says God to Jonah, “and should I not be concerned over Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot distinguish their right hand from their left?” (Jon. 4:10).

In efforts to evangelize others, we must be motivated by our love for them, and even more so by our love for Jesus. “Do you love me?” says Jesus to Peter. Then “Feed my lambs” (cf. Jn. 21:15ff). The nourishment and preaching that can feed them must flow from a genuine friendship with Jesus. We must love Jesus because only those who love him can proclaim him to the world with deep conviction. No one speaks with passion about someone he does not love. Love makes us poets and to spread the gospel one needs to be some-thing of a poet. Søren Kierkegaard wrote,

As God has created man and woman, so too He fashioned the hero and the poet or orator. The poet cannot do what that other does, he can only admire, love and rejoice in the hero. Yet he too is happy, and not less so, for the hero is as it were his better nature, with which he is in love, rejoicing in the fact that this after all is not himself, that his love can be admiration. He is the genius of recollection, can do nothing except call to mind what has been done.

He follows the option of his heart, but when he has found what he sought, he wanders before every man’s door with his song and with his oration, that all may admire the hero as he does, be proud of the hero as he is.13
For Kierkegaard the hero is Abraham and he himself is the poet. But how much truer this is when applied to the hero that Christ is and to the poets and orators who need to be his preachers. He is the one true hero of history and of the world. He is unique because he is also God.

9. *Preaching ministry and theology*

A final remark about the preaching ministry. The office of preaching must be given back its place of honor in our church! I was struck by these words of the French theologian Henri de Lubac:

The ministry of preaching is not a popularization of the doctrinal teaching which exists in highly abstract form and is somehow anterior and superior to preaching. On the contrary, preaching is itself doctrinal teaching in its highest form. This was true at the time of the first Christian proclamations, spoken by the Apostles, and it is equally true of those who have followed them in the church: the Fathers, the Doctors and our pastors at the present time.

Hans Urs von Balthasar states decisively that the “theological mission is subordinate to the mission of preaching in the church.”

Such statements impress me because it seems that in our actual situation the reverse is true, at least in my Catholic Church. Most would say that preaching is only the popularization of a more technical and superior teaching, namely, theology. Yet St. Paul, the model for all preachers, certainly put preaching first; all else was subordinate to it. He put his theology into practice by preaching, not by leaving to others the task of extracting from his thoughts the more basic truths to be passed on to the faithful in sermons.

In the occasion of the Worldwide Priests retreat held in Rome in 1990 and attended by 5,000 priests and deacons, I plucked up my courage and cried out: “Theologians, back to preaching! Don’t spend all your time reading books and visiting libraries and academic institutions. Perhaps they have already given you all they have to give. There is another source of knowledge concerning the kingdom of God, another school: that of ministering to souls! They will teach you more than books and human masters are able to teach.

There’s a need only you can satisfy! There’s a need for people who are well prepared to synthesize and apply the gospel message to the world of today, to give our people doctrine at its best and not just a collection of second-hand ideas. There’s a need for leaders with a sound formation and good pedagogy to open for God’s people the vaults of Christian tradition, where immense treasures of experience, doctrine, saintliness and discernment are stored.”
I do not know how much you future Methodist preachers need to be reminded of this, but I let the calling resound among you as well. This, after all, is what your founder John Wesley did when he undertook the task of translating some classics books of Christian spirituality, including Catholic and Orthodox authors: helping ordinary people in getting in touch with the treasures of Christian holiness.

The service which theology already renders evangelization is certainly immense and varied, but it isn’t enough. It is too indirect. It leaves to other ministers the development of a synthesis which theologians are better equipped to produce. Theologians are needed for action on the battlefield and not just behind the lines.

Would these men then be lost to research and high theology? To the contrary, I say there would be gain! Were not Origen, Augustine and Basil good theologians? Yet what did they do all day long if not preach to and educate the people? The most sublime theological treatises were born from their pastoral activities! Their marvelous clarity and relevance came from a need to explain their ideas, day after day, to a people who were often illiterate. They followed the maxim attributed to St. Augustine: “Malo intelligi a piscatore quam laudari a doctore,” “I prefer to be understood by a fisherman than praised by a learned man,” and in this way they ended up achieving both: being understood by simple people and admired by scholars.

Not everyone, of course, will be called to leave the world of research for direct preaching and the pastoral ministry—these would be trouble if that ever happened, but every theologian is called to assume a more active role in evangelization.

Proclaiming the Gospel can be the source of immense joy. When I was prayed over for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon me, someone spoke these words over me: “You will experience a new joy in proclaiming my word.” It was true! Even in the spiritual domain, few joys are comparable to that of becoming a father of souls. Paul compares it to the joy of a man when he procreates. “It was I,” he says, “who begot you in Christ Jesus through my preaching of the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15).

At one conference, after I had spoken, I felt somebody from the crowd tug at my habit. I turned around. It was a young man who only had time to shout: “Father, I am a Christian thanks to you!” Then he disappeared from my sight. Oh, what a sense of excitement, what a sense of awe and gratitude toward God, who calls us to be his collaborators in generating incorruptible and eternal life!

At times every joy is taken from us and we feel only fatigue, anguish, tribulation and, above all, shame for the incompatibility between our words and our lives. Then we want to be silent and evasive. Yet that moment is the most precious, a chance to leave all the joy to Jesus!
Once, while I was preparing for a talk, I opened the Bible and these words came to me. I don’t think they are meant just for me, but for all of us called to rediscover our vocation as preachers: “Like the coolness of snow in the heat of the harvest is a faithful messenger for the one who sends him. He refreshes the soul of his master” (Pr. 25:13)

These metaphors of heat and coolness made me think immediately of Jesus on the cross, who calls out: “I thirst!” He is the great harvester, thirsty for souls, souls which we are called to revitalize with our humble and devoted service. He is the hero for whom we are called to be poets and singers.

Lord Jesus Christ, we are men of impure lips living among a people of impure lips. Still, if you accept us, each one of us will sing with joy, “Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? If you call me I will hold your people in my heart.”

End Notes


2 See Charles Harold Dodd, History and the Gospel (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), pp. 36-37

3 See, for example, Mark 1:1; Romans 15:19; Galatians 1:7

4 See Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 7:25; John 15:12; 1 John 4:21.


7 Heinrich Schliiter, Die Zeit der Kirche [The Time of the Church] (Freiburg: Herder, 1958), chapt. 15.


10 Kafka, p. 4.

11 W. Shakespeare, Hamlet, II, Scene 2.


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MARCEL DUMAIS
Translated from the French by DAVID R. BAUER

The Sense of the Scripture: Re-Examined in Light of Philosophical Hermeneutics and Recent Literary Approaches*

Abstract

In the context of romanticism in which scientific exegesis emerged in the nineteenth century, the psychological interpretation proposed by Schleiermacher and the positivistic postulates that characterized the theory of understanding set forth by Dilthey have influenced the concept of the literal sense of the Bible, conceived as “the sense intended by the author.” But hermeneutics has undergone a decisive shift under the influence of the phenomenology of knowledge. The intrinsic and cyclic relationship between the object known and the knowing subject, explored by Heidegger, has been taken up and developed by Bultmann (preunderstanding), Gadamer (appurtenance/fusion of horizons), and Ricoeur (distanciation, cycle of explication-comprehension). The recent literary methods propose certain procedures of the analysis of texts in order to advance the understanding of the sense of the text. The quest centers on the intention of the work rather than the intention of the author and on the role of the subject-reader, which leads to the recognition of multiple readings and the tradition of the effects of the sense. The reflection on the biblical sense requires us, however, to bear in mind some specific characteristics of biblical texts, notably the historical reality at their source and the recovery of the notion of the spiritual sense.


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In the still recent past, one could encounter exegetes who had spent their lives interpreting the biblical texts, “engaging the sense,” as one might put it, without ever posing the fundamental questions: What is a text? What is an interpreter? What do we have in mind when we talk about the sense of the text? There was a general consensus around implicit answers to these questions. Today, the multiplication of methods and approaches to reading the Bible, as well as new developments in the questions of a theoretical framework that underlies them, create an obligation to explain and clarify, to give attention to the reevaluation of the presuppositions of exegesis. In response to the invitation I received to present a “major paper,” I have chosen—not without naivete—to assign to myself the central and yet difficult question of the sense of the Scripture. I present some reflections that I discuss around three questions, which dominate the three parts of my exposition.

1. What hermeneutical philosophy underlies the current concept of the literal sense of Scripture that has dominated scientific exegesis since its beginnings?

2. What displacements in the notion of the sense of biblical texts have been effected by contemporary philosophical hermeneutics and recent literary theories of exegesis that have affinities with this hermeneutic?

3. Is the Bible completely subject to philosophical and literary givens or do its specific characteristics require a particular approach to its interpretation and understanding of its sense?

If these questions are simple, their answer is anything but simple. My proposals will be modest. They will emphasize certain displacements, certain arguments, certain questions. It does not seem to be yet the time for synthesis. My desire is that they will contribute to the necessary debate with a view toward filling up the present lack of an adequate theory of the sense or senses of Scripture, a theory that is adequate in that it takes account of the positive benefits of philosophical hermeneutics and the new literary methods.

In this vast field there is the need to circumscribe the scope of the inquiry and to choose an angle of approach. I will engage some of the most significant current thinking and some of the most prominent authors. The crux of my reflection is the relationship between author-text-reader in interpretation, i.e., in the determination or elaboration of the sense of scriptural passages.
The Intention of the Author

In *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, which appeared in 1990, Raymond Brown affirms that “most exegeters, if we may judge from the commentaries on Scripture, would be working with a definition of the literal sense closely resembling the following: *The sense which the human author directly intended and which the written words conveyed* (author’s italics). Two testimonies will suffice to confirm that this vision of the literal sense seems to have been indisputable in the last fifty years. In a special number of the journal *JBL*, in 1958, dedicated to the exegetical task, all the authors considered the task of exegesis to be the reconstruction, as faithful as possible, of the sense that the human author wished to communicate to the audience he envisaged. *L’Introduction à la Bible*, by Robert and Feuillet, which appeared in 1959 and which became a classic in the French-speaking world, expressed it thus: “It remains to enter into the psychology of the author himself, to discern what he intended to signify when he drafted his text under this form and in these circumstances. It is here finally where the sense of the biblical books reside.” But historical-critical exegesis, which has invested its energies in the pursuit of this conception of the literal sense in the process of demonstrating that the biblical books are generally the product of multiple contributions in form and redactions by many authors, has brought out the ambiguity that affects this definition of sense: Exactly what author is involved? To what kind of authorial intention is it possible to attribute the literal sense of a text, that sense to which it is possible to assign a normative function? Whatever the response might be, scholars have maintained that the literal sense of the Bible is defined in terms of the intention of its authors.

The definition given of the sense of Scripture springs from the way one understands the one who comprehends a text, the interpreter. What approaches to the biblical text, what dominant hermeneutical currents held sway at the moment when scientific exegesis emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century? The driving suspicion in the humanistic movement and in the Reformation of the sixteenth century in relation to the allegorical exegesis of the Fathers of the early church, considered overly influenced by the subjectivity of the readers, was propelled by the Rationality of the age of the Enlightenment and led to a search for a sure and certain sense of the biblical text, a sense that was objective, unique, and scientifically verifiable. The historical sense that the author had placed in his text appeared to offer the necessary characteristics. But the thought of two hermeneutical theorists has particularly contributed to orient the hermeneutical quest in the direction of the intention of the author: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. These two have brought forward a model of cognition in the human sciences that bore the stamp of the romantic vision that permeated their age: to understand a text is to enter into the subjectivity of its author; it is to know
the thoughts, the sentiments, in short the lived experience of the person who expresses himself in a text. But some specific explication is necessary.

Some recent studies on the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher have established that his hermeneutics are complex and have been improperly simplified. Without doubt, one is able to recall this phrase frequently cited by those who have appealed to the "father of modern hermeneutics": the purpose—which is clearly never attained—is to come to "understand the discourse every bit as well as the author has framed it, and then even better than he has framed it." But the hermeneutical course that he proposes consists of two complementary and interrelated procedures, operating in a circle: a grammatical interpretation, i.e., a study of the text and of the language that composes it; and a psychological interpretation that consists in the laying hold of an author and of his thought as they have been communicated by the linguistic medium. The psychological interpretation, he says, is answerable to intuitive perception. It is this that persons typically identify as being at the center of the romantic period that followed Schleiermacher's work. Perhaps forgetting the equilibrium and the connection that Schleiermacher wanted to make between the psychological understanding of the author and the critical analysis of the text, the accent has necessarily been placed on the author and his intention.

If Schleiermacher cultivated his thought at the dawn of the romantic period, it was at the twilight of the Romantic period and marked by the Romantic period that his disciple Dilthey wrote his magisterial hermeneutical works. He pushed much farther than his predecessor a hermeneutic of the text centered on the comprehending of the author: the interpretation must in some sense bring to life once again (nacherleben) the experience of the author, placing ourselves, as it were, in his skin by the mode of empathy (hineinversetzen). The final aim behind the interpretation is not that which a text says but that which is expressed by it. It follows, Paul Ricoeur will say, that "by a single blow, the object of hermeneutics is directly removed from the text, from its sense and its reference, toward the lived experience that is expressed by it." Dilthey had the great merit of responding to the domination of the empirical model of the natural sciences which, in the middle of the nineteenth century, imposed its scientifically objective criteria to every other form of knowledge. The distinction he elaborated between two modes of knowledge, the explanation (erklären) in the natural sciences and the understanding (verstehen) in the human sciences, has marked all subsequent hermeneutical reflection, at least that of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. But Dilthey remained influenced by the postulates of the natural sciences of a positivistic type; he sought to develop a theory of understanding that would lead to an "objectively valid knowledge." Gadamer is one of those who reproached him for seeking for the human sciences a model that was parallel to the scientifically objective "method." When Dilthey was elaborating his
hermeneutic, the subjectivity of the reader in his world was not yet held to be a consideration in the act of knowing, and consequently in the interpretation and determination of the sense of a text.

Let us return to our question of the sense of Scripture. It seems to me that both the pretension to an objective knowledge, without the influence of the knowing subject, and the psychologizing theory of the understanding of texts have largely depended on the concept of the literal sense of the Bible that was imposed, so to speak, in conjunction with the development of scientific exegesis in the nineteenth century. The literal sense is the original sense of the text, that which is directly intended by its author. The corresponding method to this perspective of sense, the historical-critical method that became the scientific method accepted in the human sciences at that time, naturally became the method employed for the interpretation of the Bible. The specific characteristics of the biblical text were permitted solely to support this conception of the sense of the text and the employment of the historical method. The Bible, in fact, is a book whose sense is intimately tied to certain historical events that are reported in it. It is thus an inspired book. The theology of inspiration, at the same time the cause and effect of the perception of the literal sense that was in circulation, placed the accent on the psychology of inspired writer, his thoughts and his intentions, rather than on the inspired text as the Fathers of the early Church generally developed the notion of inspiration. Let us acknowledge that this hermeneutic of Scripture that was elaborated in the last century has had the great merit of embracing fully the role of the human authors in the production of the Bible, the Word of God.

In the course of the twentieth century, the tools of historical exegesis were refined, and the accepted communication theory of the literal sense benefited from some new developments. From the side of method, we should note, in particular, the application of sociological analysis to the corpus of the Bible has lead to a better understanding of the world of the authors and of its original recipients: their historical, cultural, social, and religious world. As for that which has emerged from the theory of meaning as it relates to the intention of the author, two new contributions should be mentioned. First, the psychologizing that affected the question for the intention of the author is more and more abandoned; one recognizes that that which an author intended to say is truly accessible only through his text; it is a matter, therefore, not of communicating the mental processes of the author but of retrieving his intention such as it is expressed in the text. This movement bound by the text opens more largely the way for contributions from the new literary methods, which are progressively incorporated into the historical-critical method in biblical studies.

A second development should be taken into account. The historical
interpretation has led to a recognition of the distance between the world of the text and of its authors on the one hand and our world today on the other. After having established by exegesis the literal sense of the text, one encounters the necessity of proceeding to a second hermeneutical process: that of an actualization or application of the literal sense to our situation so as to render it significant for us. Hence, various propositions related to the sense have been advanced in the attempt to span the historical and cultural distance that separates us from the biblical texts and their authors. Eric Donald Hirsch, the principle proponent of the “intentionalist” theory in the 1960s, has proposed a distinction between “meaning” and “significance.”

“Meaning” is that which the author intended to transmit, that which is represented by the linguistic signs of the text and is fixed and determined. “Significance,” on the other hand, pertains to the relationship that an interpreter establishes between the “meaning” placed in the text by the author and all other reality. Although warmly received by a number of exegetes concerned with the objective character of the biblical text, the model of Hirsch has been rejected by the dominant current of philosophical and recent literary thinking. According to the exegetes, the distinction proposed by authors such as Krister Stendahl and Raymond Brown between “what the text meant” and “what the text means” pertains substantially to the same arena of application as Hirsch’s distinction between “meaning” and “significance.” R. Brown confines explicitly the literal sense to “what the text meant.” By proposing distinctions that in no way detract from the connection between the literal sense of the text and the intention of the author, these interpreters desire to safeguard a sense of the text that would be unique, objective, verifiable, while entirely recognizing the necessity of an actualization understood as an application of the sense already constituted that is the same for everyone.

For this hermeneutic of sense, the historical paradigm remains dominant and the literary paradigm is subordinate to it. The purpose of exegesis is to know in the best possible way that which the historical author wished to transmit to his reading community and, consequently, what this community was able to comprehend. The model of application for the biblical text is that of the communication of a message (=sense) that a transmitter (=author) wants to convey to his receivers (=readers). Interpretation consists in decoding that which has been encoded without in any way modifying or supplementing. The literal sense of the biblical text is its original sense, its pristine historical sense.

II. The Dialectical Relationship Between Text and Reader

The usual theory of the literal sense of Scripture has today been questioned as much by the philosophy of hermeneutics as by the new literary methods.
For the latter, the sense is a matter of thinking in terms of a text-reader connection rather than a text-author connection. Let us examine this a little more closely.

1 Contemporary Philosophical Hermeneutics

A decisive turning point occurred with the development of the phenomenology of knowledge, which put in question positivistic and romantic epistemology. On this new foundation, in fact, is built the hermeneutics of philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Ladrière, without neglecting the theological hermeneuticians who were inspired by these philosophers: Jeanrond, Schneiders, Tracy, for example. The phenomenology of Husserl has dissolved the subject-object cleavage in knowledge while affirming that reality is known only as it traverses the consciousness of the knowing subject and that the latter, in turn, comprehends in his or her "I" only by way of the knowing of an object.\(^{18}\) Without doubt, Husserl made it his project to place in parentheses (époque) the historical and social factors that determine human consciousness in order to arrive at a sort of pure consciousness. Some philosophers who have followed, most notably Heidegger and Ricoeur, have demonstrated that such is not possible, that all consciousness is marked by the impression by a subject situated in his/her historical world.\(^{19}\)

The intrinsic and circular relationship between the object known and the knowing subject—the hermeneutical circle—has been explored by Heidegger in the ontological phenomenology that he elaborated in Sein und Zeit. To understand a work is to understand oneself, to open oneself to new possibilities of existence. Moreover, the understanding of a work is based always on previous experience (Vorhaben), on previous insight (Vorsicht), and on previous apprehension (Vorgriff).\(^{20}\) It is well known that Bultmann took over this theme in applying it to biblical exegesis: there is no exegesis without presuppositions that direct the understanding.\(^{21}\) This necessary preunderstanding does not prejudice results. It is a matter "of a vital relationship of the interpreter with the matter of which the text speaks,"\(^{22}\) i.e., to employ a term used of Gadamer's, an "appurtenance" (Zugehörigkeit): an interpreter can enter into the world of a text and appropriate it only in the measure that, in his world, he possesses a fundamental affinity with that of which the text speaks. If the subjectivity of the interpreter comes into play in the determination of sense, it is not a matter of subjectivism to the extent that, in dialogue with the text, the interpreter allows his or her pre-understanding to be deepened and enriched, to see it modified and corrected by his or her communion with the world of the text. For Gadamer, who adopts these perspectives on the dialectical movement between a text and a historically situated reader, the true comprehension or apprehension of a text
operates in a fusion of the different horizons of the text and its reader (Horizonverschmelzung). The correct interpretation enlarges and transforms the horizon, the world of the reader, as this interpretation is situated within the interior recesses of the reader. Let us specify that the horizon of a reader that he or she brings to the reconstruction of the text is constituted, for Gadamer, by the tradition that bears it along, i.e., by the combination of the historical and cultural givens that form its vital context. The text is thus presented to the reader borne along by a tradition (Überlieferung), a history of its effects of sense (Wirkungsgeschichte).

The hermeneutic of Paul Ricoeur is situated in this way of thinking opened up by Heidegger and Gadamer. Nevertheless, it is characterized by certain characteristics of its own. In terms of that which touches upon the interpretation of texts, their sense, I would emphasize two developments that are specific to him, and it is because of them that I term this little jaunt philosophical. The term “distantiation” that Ricoeur employs picks up the emphases here underlined. A distance is established between a text and its author and between this text and its readers. The correct interpretation does not consist in suppressing this double distance established between the author and the reader of the text, as Schleiermacher and Dilthey wished to do, but rather in acknowledging it.

There is an open distance between a text and its author. For, in a text, the intention of the author is objectified in the forms of language, and these forms of language transcend his conscious aims. Once produced, the text assumes a certain autonomy in relation to its author; it no longer pertains exclusively to his or her own horizon and it commences on a course of sense that is bound up with its successive readers. The sphere of sense is displaced from upstream to downstream, i.e., from the world behind the text, the world pertaining to the origin of the text, to the world in front of the text, a world composed of its successive readers. To express the sense is not to recover the unknowable intention of the author but to appropriate for oneself the intention of the text in its world of the reader. It is precisely because the writing establishes a distance with the initial context of composition that the text assumes a surplus of sense and that, thus, the world of the text and the historical experience at its source can be comprehended in a new context. In the terms of Ricoeur, in decontextualization the text allows the recontextualization, i.e., the appropriation of the world of the text.

The second distance, that between the text and its readers, led Ricoeur to develop the binomial explication—comprehension. He has demonstrated the necessity of the circuitous path from the explication towards the comprehension of a text. There is a circular movement, a constant coming and going, between the explication and the comprehension. The scientific explication makes possible the knowing of that of which the text speaks and
protects the latter from all undue projection back into its sense. “To interpret more fully is to comprehend better,” as Ricoeur has frequently repeated.27 Ricoeur has long depended upon literary procedures to overcome this distance between the text and the reader and to enter into the world of the text. He has devoted a number of studies to questions of linguistics, of semiotics, and of narratology. Dilthey had taken a great step in hermeneutics when he distinguished comprehension and interpretation, but he proposed a theory of comprehension as something immediately grasped. Gadamer took up the distinction of Dilthey and maintained it in terms of disjunction. Paul Ricoeur has been able to develop a hermeneutical theory that integrates interpretation and comprehension, the objective dimension and the subjective, the rigor of method and the subtlety of personal implication, in the course of the determination of sense.28 The recognition of the necessary scientific interpretation of the text leads us to speak of the new literary methods and of the conception of sense that underlies them.

2. The Recent Literary Approaches

In the 1930s certain literary critics began to emphasize that the traditional approach centered on the author was unsatisfying. In the 1940s the American movement known as “New Criticism” insisted on the autonomy of the text in relation to its author and designated the text as the locus of the sense.29 An expression came into vogue, not without creating debate: “intentional fallacy.”30 In our time, the term “formalism” remains associated with the methods that consider the forms and structures of the text as the source of the sense.31

In the 1960s philosophical hermeneutics, more specifically the thought of Gadamer, exercised an influence on literary theories of interpretation that were at that time progressively elaborated.32 In contrast to the new literary criticism of the 1930s through the 1960s, which did not inform biblical exegesis, the recent literary methods have made their way into the interpretation of the Bible. While remaining centered on the text and its world, these methods applied to the Bible have progressively integrated into the course of their procedure the horizon of the subject reader. In the 1980s the increasing employment of the word “reading” to speak of interpretation (“semiotic reading,” “narrative reading”...)33 testifies to the displacement of emphasis in the quest of sense: the latter appears situated in the act of reading, i.e., in the relationship between a text and a reader. In that, the literary methods join with the preoccupations of philosophical hermeneutics for which interpretation is operative in a dialectical relationship of text—reader. I allude briefly—in view of the question of sense—to some elements of three literary methods recently employed in biblical studies: semiotic analysis, narrative criticism, and the “reader-response” approach.34
In semiotic analysis, one is now far removed from the time when
interpretation, entirely centered on the text outside of which one did not
envision any place of safety, led to the death of the subjects, author and
reader. The perspective, in fact, is entirely otherwise when one examines a little
of the semiotics of Umberto Eco in Italy and that of Algirdas Greimas in
France as developed by the CADIR of Lyon which has applied it to the
biblical texts. I limit myself to those proposals drawn from the authors of
CADIR, in relation to the question that occupies us. The semioticians affirm
repeatedly that their method does not lead one to speak of the sense but to
engage the structures of the text that have produced the sense: discursive, narrative, logico-semantic structures. Nevertheless, the semiotic practice at the
CADIR has opened the question, considered fundamental, of the enunciation
and of the subject that it implies. The interrogation bears on the work of the
reader and on that which happens in the act of reading.

According to the semiotician Louis Panier, "the sense of a text is not
'given,'" is the object of a construction, regulated by models tested on the
text: there is no evidence of the sense, but construction of hypotheses" by a
reader who "must measure the resistance of the discourse to the proposed
models." After "the formal description of the structures of the signification,"
one can proceed to "a task of interpretation." The latter "is elaborated in the
construction of models of the signification and in the acceptance when a
reader, agreeing to these articulations of the sense, is actualized as 'subject.'"36

"To read is to pass from sign to sense. To express the perceived sense is
already to interpret," writes Jean Delorme in the recent article "Semiotics" in
DBS.37 He specifies that "the text hollows out an appeal to the interpretation
that is not able to be filled in, to put it otherwise, to a speaking subject visited
by a speech that this one does not know how to master […] so that one is not
able to conclude by saying: here, clearly, is the sense of the text, here is the way
it must be understood."38 Does not semiotics here join the hermeneutical
project by formulating certain procedures for successfully actualizing the sense?39

Narrative criticism—the counterpart of semiotics in English-speaking
settings—likewise proposes certain strategies, certain procedures, so that a
reader might enter correctly into the world of the text.40 I mention simply the
two notions of the implied reader and the implied author.41 The first pertains
to the manner in which the text appeals to and conditions the response the
reader. It is a matter of a literary solicitation. By a series of signs, the text
indicates to its potential readers how to operate so as to enter its
perspective. The portrait of the implied reader can be established by assembling
the survey of the competencies that the narrative requires for reading it well:
predispositions, attitudes, linguistic, historical, and religious knowledge, etc.
The interpretation thus becomes controlled by the text. We meet here again
the literary plan, the attention to the correct presuppositions, which is the
concern of hermeneutics.\textsuperscript{42}

The textual strategies are the expression of the implied author, a parallel notion to those of the implied reader in narrative criticism. The implied author is the textual manifestation of the real historical author. He is internal to the narrative and must therefore be inferred from it. The vision of the world, the values and beliefs that one can discern in a text are so many indications of the implied author. In order to interpret well, the real reader must therefore be joined to the implied reader, i.e., to enter into the intention of the work, to discover the strategies of reading that are the manifestation of the implied author.\textsuperscript{43}

Reader-response criticism is viewed by many as a type of narrative criticism. It is, moreover, one of its principle representatives, Wolfgang Iser, who has provided the most significant elaboration of the notion of the implied reader.\textsuperscript{44} This school of thought considers the text as an act of communication. It is interested in the real reader, it elaborates the dynamics of the process of reading, which actualizes in a creative way one or the other of the dimensions of sense which exist potentially within the text.\textsuperscript{45} But various currents compose reader-response criticism. For the moderate current, of which Iser is an example, the text furnishes to the reader signs and gaps—in short, a code—that provokes and channels his/her creative participation. The radical current, represented in particular by Stanley Fish, is interested in the effects of sense produced by the reader, and establishes their validity, not on the givens of the text but on the specific community of the reader.\textsuperscript{46} If the moderate wing depends on a philosophy,\textsuperscript{47} it is not so with the radical wing for which the sense of texts is absorbed into its pragmatic effects; sense does not exist in the joining of the horizons of the text and the reader, as in the thought of Gadamer, but it is founded in the horizon of the community of readers.\textsuperscript{48}

3. The sense of the biblical text

The givens of philosophical hermeneutics and of recent literary theories lead us to some considerations on the sense of the biblical text. Let us approach the question from the three components of author, text, reader.

In the quest for the senses of literary texts—and, therefore, those of the Scripture, that which is in view is not the intention of the historical author, but the intention of the work produced by a historical author; one can just as well put it this way: it is the intention of the implied author, who is identified with the intention of the work. The latter goes beyond the intention willed by the historical author for his reading community. The literal or textual sense is therefore much larger than the historical or original sense, i.e., the sense perceived by the group of readers for whom the text was produced. Without doubt, for successive generations of readers, the sense of the text could not be in contradiction, but rather must be in vital continuity with the original
historical sense. But how today could this original historical sense be anything other than a hypothesis derived from the text?

The text must guide and control the interpretation. It possesses its constraints, its possibilities, and its prohibitions in the effectuation of the sense. This can be correctly achieved only with the aid of rigorous literary methods. Is it necessary to distinguish two steps as Ricoeur suggested in 1968 in his “Preface” to Jesus by Bultmann, based in this case on Frege and Husserl: the objective step of sense, called the “ideal” sense—the “sense of the work,” the “immanent sense of the text,” as he otherwise specifies it—and the step of the signification, “which is the moment of recapturing of the sense by the reader, of his/her effectuation in existence.” But it is necessary to recall that the subjectivity of the reader is active toward the work in the course of the course of explication itself, for the interpreter utilizes those methods which are within his/her horizon and proceeds from his/her own presuppositions. Moreover, the sense of the work always remains potential; its real existence is actualized only in particular significations. The sense of a text emerges when a reader causes the significations to spring forth, i.e., creates in some sense a new text. The text determines, therefore, a trajectory—a path of sense—on which different routes become inscribed.

Two questions are posed. First, can one speak of an objective sense when, in one’s elaboration, one interposes a reader as subject? A good interpretation can be neither purely objective nor purely subjective. The sense is produced by a reader in the very act of receiving it. The hermeneutical circle—the circle of sense—is however not a vicious circle. The horizon of the reader permits propositions of sense opened up by the text to take shape and the horizon of the text critiques and enriches the horizon of the reader, which must be submitted to the objectivity of the text in its constraints and its prohibitions. For if the presuppositions nourish interpretation, the prejudices, by contrast, cause it to atrophy.

Another question, subject to debate: Is it necessary to speak of multiple senses? The biblical texts do not have a fixed sense. They possess the possibility of engendering diverse significations without end in the minds of the readers in their situations. They may be understood, not as a reservoir of sense, but as a source from which the sense springs forth in constantly different ways. Their sense remains in some ways inexhaustible. I prefer, nonetheless, to speak of multiple reading rather than of multiple senses. The number of good readings of a text is not infinite. All of them must be inscribed in the direction of sense indicated by the text.

The various good readings of the biblical text in the course of the centuries have the effect of enriching the text, adding to its sense certain new determinations. The “history of the effects of the text” (Wirkungsgeschichte) in the life of the Church is in some ways constitutive of the sense of the
Scriptures and contributes to the horizon of the interpreter. One can only rejoice to see appear, in our own time, new collections of commentaries, such as the Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, that give great attention to the history of the effects of the sense of the texts. The interpretive tradition must, however, be submitted to a hermeneutic. The Bible remains normative for discerning the proper unfolding of its authentic sense.

A final reflection. This more recent approach to the sense of texts joins together practically the reading of the Holy Scripture to our Jewish and Christian origins. It is implicit in the historical process of the formation of the biblical text. At the birth of the New Testament, the traditions from the past—oral and written—the promise, the election, the covenant—were without exception actualized in a new way functionally out of a historical situation of the people. These re-readings opened up new aspects of sense and engendered new Scriptures. The New Testament was not produced otherwise. In its essential texture, it is a reading of the event of Jesus Christ in light of the Scriptures of the First Testament and a re-reading of the latter in light of that event recognized as eschatological. The phenomenon of the history of effects of the sense of the Scripture originates therefore from the biblical text itself, which incorporates it and canonizes it. The first interpreters of the canonical text, whether Jews or Christians, continued to consider that the sense of the text which comes out of the past is never closed. In the Jewish tradition this contextual interpretation has given birth, notably, to the Targums and the Midrashim. The exegesis of the fathers of the church sought, with certain allegorical procedures that are strange to our rationalism, to release the meaning of the texts for the believers in their time and in their situation. These contextual and actualizing readings proceeded from the conviction that the texts were expressions of the living speech of God and, consequently, were bearers of present sense for their generations.

III. Specific Traits of the Biblical Sense

Do the particular characteristics of the biblical text require that we nuance or expand our proposals on the sense of the Scripture, prompted as they are by the general hermeneutics of texts? I turn briefly to the question of the historical dimension of the biblical sense and that of the spiritual sense.

1. The historical dimension

The problem is not that of the cultural and therefore the historical character of the words and of the literary genres of the Bible. It is understood that, in order to explain the text, the primary literary procedure involves the philological requirement: to recognize the signification of the words in the cultural context out of which the text emerged. Likewise, in order to have access to the world of the text, certainly if it is a matter of an ancient text strange to our
own cultural universe, one cannot spare any effort to recognize its literary genre, a procedure emphasized in the historical-critical method (Formgeschichte). For the interpretation of the biblical texts, the understanding of the literature of the ancient near east is essential. In this semantic process, a delicate question is nevertheless posed: to what extent does the signification of the words and of the literary codes of a text depend upon their original linguistic context (the world of the author and of his first readers) and/or their literary context in which they were inserted (the world of the text)? But this entire enterprise lifts up the literary paradigm, not the historical paradigm.

The historical problem that I am posing is specific to the biblical texts. The historical reference is inscribed at the heart of these texts: it stems from the "world of the texts" of the Bible; it is the source of their sense. The whole biblical sense, in fact, rests on certain historical events that are presented as events of salvation for successive generations, i.e., that turn back to the effective presence of God in our own history. It is necessary therefore to bear in mind the historical paradigm in the interpretation of the texts. That means to consider on the one hand the historical referent (the active God, Jesus Christ, events of salvation), on the other hand the authors in their community, understood according to their witness to the history, to the events. For, in the Bible, that is the issue: the testimonies to the events. The biblical writers never wished to write history as such but to testify to that which they had experienced in history. Their witness relies on the existence of foundational historical events—or trans-historical, as the resurrection of Jesus—and on the human and spiritual interpretation of these events.

The historical quest aims, without doubt, to know the verity of the events of salvation, insofar as that is possible. But first and above all it seeks to understand the testimonies of the events. For we have only a mediated access to the historical events through the faith-testimony that has been given to us. Moreover, what makes sense to us and are transmitted to us are the interpreted events: for example, in each Gospel, it is the Jesus-event interpreted in the light of the resurrection and in terms of the function of a community that is historically and culturally situated.

These testimonies are historical. They are able to be verified and to be comprehended. It is necessary to verify the quality of the testimonies and the accuracy of their witness. But certainly it is necessary to comprehend what is the interpretation given of such an event for a specific historical community. One owes it to oneself to attempt to retrieve as much as possible the world behind the text and the origin of the text — as much as possible, since it is through the literary that one attains the historical, which places the historical study of the Bible in a particular category. The apprehension of the sense of the event for the author and his community can be, at most, the more probable hypothesis drawn from the text. But to aim at this probable hypothesis is
important because the world of the text refers back to a double experience: that of the authors of the text in their community and of us in our community. Our experience can be authentic only if it is situated in continuity with that of the first witnesses at the origin of the text.\textsuperscript{62} It seems to me that some studies continue to plumb the language of testimony and develop a theology of historical biblical testimony, which is of a singular nature.\textsuperscript{63}

The quest of the sense of a biblical text must therefore be to lay hold completely of the biblical authors and their ecclesial world. It is not possible to confine oneself to the consideration of the relation of text-reader. There is a circularity between three parameters: author, text and reader. In such a case, how does one connect the study of the world of the text and the study of the world at the origin of the text, i.e., the quest of the historical witness of a community? How does one relate the particular sense given to the event by a community-source and the unvarnished sense that is offered by the text arising from original historical considerations?

The problem may be formulated in yet larger terms: how do we harmonize our historical studies and our literary studies of the biblical text? How may they be mutually probed effectively so as to lead to a better expression of the sense? It is necessary to pursue the study of a biblical hermeneutic that conjoins historical explication and literary explication, i.e., the use of historical methods, for example sociological ones, and the use of literary methods, which remain primary.

2. The Spiritual Sense

I am offering a few words about the spiritual sense, which is, in my judgment, the literal sense of the Scripture understand in profundity. Emerging from the Church Fathers and from the Middle Ages, the nomenclature “spiritual sense” has served to designate the reading of the Old Testament in light of the Christ-event. This presentation appears today to be unsatisfactory, and many are proposing to do away with the notion of spiritual sense. I think it is necessary to retain it but by defining it differently.

The expression “spiritual sense” may denote three realities:

1. The Bible insofar as it speaks of God. God is the fundamentally ultimate referent, and everything in the Bible revolves around God. The world of the text is essentially related to God and God’s project of life for humanity. One can therefore say that the literal sense of the Bible, in its essential givens, First Testament and New Testament, is a spiritual sense.\textsuperscript{64} But it would be better to speak in this case of religious sense, which corresponds to the object of the Bible as a religious text.\textsuperscript{65}

2. The Bible as the Word of God. This is the reading adopted by the believer, Jew or Christian. For such a reader, the Scripture is the
sketch or the memoir of the presence of God in the history of Israel and, for the Christian, in Jesus Christ, and this speech, constantly actualized, defines the identity of the reader. In order to hear the Scripture as the Word of God, the prerequisite for comprehension is faith and openness to the same Spirit that inspired it. Faith and the Spirit create an existential connection with the world of the text understood as the Word of God; they make it possible to know the referent of the text as real, present. To speak of the “spiritual sense” is at the same time to appropriate it. This is, according to my perspective, the spiritual sense properly speaking. Within the proposition that there is a meaning of the text, there is a declaration about the truthfulness of the text, i.e., about its claim to communicate accurately the extra-textual reality and its significance.  

3. The Christological Sense of the Old Testament. This is a specification of the spiritual sense. It involves a reading in the Christian faith of the First Testament that permits one to recognize the meaning of it, i.e., its Christological significance. The sense constructed in this canonical reading of the text, which is inscribed beyond the immediate beyond the immediate literal sense, may be called simply the Christological sense or the ultimate sense of the Old Testament. 

A long tradition, of which Thomas Aquinas is witness, affirms with reason that the literal sense is the basis of the spiritual sense, which can only be constructed by and through the letter of the text. There is no authentic spiritual sense without the inner content of the formulation of an authentic literal sense. The Christological reading of the First Testament, however, poses particular problems and obligates one, among other things, to reflect on the scope and procedures of a canonical reading of the Bible.

By Way of Conclusion

I do not conclude. My purpose is to open, not to close, the question. I end with a final reflection.

To interpret the biblical text, to express its meaning, is a complex enterprise, because the intended objective is rich and will always in some ways escape us. All the tools, all the literary and historical methods, must make their contribution. All exegetes in their own domains play an important role. But it is necessary for each one of them, modestly, to recognize the necessity of, and to understand what is involved in, situating his or her own contribution in the entire quest. To interpret the Bible is a collective task. It is the work of exegetes but also of people of faith in solidarity. It is a human work but also a work of the Spirit who enables us to hear the Word as a word of life and of liberty and to allow it to inhabit us and transform us by its incisive power.
End Notes

1 I was interested very early in the questions of method and biblical hermeneutics, and I made in some ways “the point” almost twenty years ago when I produced an essay that addressed the question of sense: L’Actualization du Nouveau Testament: De la réflexion à la pratique (LD 107; Paris: Cerf, 1981).


4 J. A. Fitzmyer, who accepts and comments on the definition given by R. Brown, specifies this “human author”: “the last one responsible for the final form of the phrases or words in a given statement or story”; “The Senses of Scripture today: ITQ 62 (1996-97) 102. R. Brown appears to propose that we consider the author to be both the “substantial writer of the parts” and the “redactor/editor of the whole”: “Hermeneutics,” 1148-9.


6 F. Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977), 112. Schleiermacher employs the word “divination” in order to signify that one is never able to comprehend fully the singularity of a text and its author. This term is prone to some misunderstanding.


10 The Bible was viewed as an inspired book because it was the product of an inspired author. The prophetic model was applied to the inspiration of the Scripture.

11 Some Catholic authors have depended upon Thomas Aquinas for the connection of meaning to the intention of the author. But for him it is a matter of the author being God, and the presentation he makes of the literal sense is not without ambiguity if one reads accurately the passage which is repeatedly referenced: “Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, who by one act comprehends all things by his intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says (Confessions, xii), if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses.”: Summa Theologica 1, qu. 1, art. 10 (New York: Benziger, 1947).

13 Hirsch admits, however, that the authors intended to signify more than that of which they were conscious. See *Validity*, 48, 51, 61; *Aims*, 74-92.

14 More recently, a work on hermeneutics has presented the theory of Hirsch on meaning as being the most appropriate for biblical interpretation: E. E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Academic, 1990) 54-69.


17 “What it meant, either when it was written (literal sense)” (Brown, *Critical Meaning*, 35); “What ‘Matthew and Luke meant’ is the literal sense of their Gospels” (ibid., 36).

18 The major property of the phenomenology of knowledge is intentionality: the knowledge of the self is at the first knowledge of something.

19 See P. Ricoeur, “Phénoménologie et herméneutique: en venant de Husserl,” *Du texte à l’action*, 55-73. Is not the Husserlian desire to place between parentheses or to suspend (époché) the concrete historical experience of the conscious subject and to extricate the essences out of their historical context (réduction eidétique) a vestige of idealistic philosophy?


22 Ibid., 172.


24 Ibid., 321-2, 368 and throughout. The translator has rendered *Wirkungsgeschichte* sometimes as “histoire de l’action,” sometimes as “histoire de l’influence.”

25 Ricoeur, *Du texte à l’action*, 54, 116-17

26 The circular process of explication and comprehension is constantly repeated: pre-comprehension, explication, new comprehension, etc. The circle is actually a spiral, for one cannot ever pass again the same point; normally, one enlarges and deepens. Literary analyses will validate and modify interpretive hypotheses that one constantly makes as one progresses through the reading process.

27 While following Bultmann completely on the enunciation of the hermeneutical circle, Ricoeur has criticized him for short-circuiting the process of critical interpretation and proceeding too quickly to an existential interpretation of the text.

28 The “Yale School” (H. Frei, W. Lowe, etc.) has criticized Ricoeur for connecting the biblical texts to the subjectivity of the readers and not giving proper attention to the sense that these texts have for themselves and in themselves.
Their position towards Ricoeur is largely determined by an intratextual conception of meaning (and by Barthian presuppositions?).

29 R. Wellek and A. Warren, Theory of Literature (London: Penguin Books, 1949) is probably the most influential work that reflects this current.


31 The practitioners of these methods are as anxious to assure objectivity in the interpretive act as the historical-critical exegetes who connect meaning to the intention of the author.


33 Without considering “psychological,” “feminist,” “liberationist” readings, which are presented not as literary methods but as ways of approaching the text from a particular contemporary perspective.

34 Mere evocation, because anything like a suitable description would require an exposition of each method that situates in their contexts those elements that are here discussed.

35 CADIR=Centre pour l’Analyse du Discours Religieux.


39 The semiotics of reception of U. Eco recovers the hermeneutical principle requiring that a work be enriched from the interpretations that have been given to it, on the condition, however, that these interpretations are connected to the profound intention of the text. See U. Eco, “Intentio lectoris. Appunti sulla semiotica della recezione,” I limit della interpretazione (Milano: Bompier, 1990) 25.

40 J. Delorme ends his article in DBS on semiotics by expanding on narrative criticism. He employs, in particular, the notions of “implied author,” of “implied (or ideal) reader,” of “narrator (omniscient or not),” of “point of view,” and of “focalization”: “Sémiotique,” 308-10.


42 Adele Berlin, a pioneer in biblical narrative criticism, writes: “Just as no reading is free from input from the reader, so no reading is free of input from the text”: “The Role of the Text in the Reading Process,” Semeia 63 (1993) 144.
The semiotician Umberto Eco writes, in the same way: "As for the model author, that is the one who by way of textual strategy strains to produce a certain type of model reader. Here therefore at this point the research on the intention auctoris and that of the intention operas coincide.": Notes sur la sémiotique de la reception,” Actes sémiotiques, Documents IX, 81 (Paris: Hadès-Benjamins, 1987) 22.
By the same author: “Reply,” Interpretation and Overinterpretation (ed. S. Collini; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992) 139-51.


One of the leading representatives of reader-response criticism writes: “No Longer can meaning be understood to be a stable, determined content that lies buried within the text, awaiting excavation. Rather, meaning becomes a dynamic event in which we ourselves participate.”: R. M. Fowler, Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 3.

S. Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

A phenomenology of perception, which is rooted in the thought of Ingarden and Husserl, underlies the theory of Iser. One might regret, however, that Iser sets forth barely any methodological tools for the reading of texts.

Among the literary methods, one may also consider ancient rhetoric which is enjoying a renewal in biblical studies as well as the “new rhetoric.” Rhetorical analysis aims to discern the strategies of communication and of persuasion of the text.


We should note that many today are calling into question this supposedly total objectivity of knowledge even in the spheres of science and nature. Shortly after the publication of the magisterial study of Gadamer, one work has come play a significant role in the raising again of this question: T. S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

If this is the case with every literary and philosophical writing that deals with the human person, it is even more true of a religious text like the Bible, written in symbolic language, which evokes constantly more profound dimensions of the meaning of its primary sense.

After having finished the present exposition I obtained access to the studies on some biblical passages in the First Testament that Paul Ricoeur and André LoCocque are going to publish jointly. In the short preface where they explain their approach to the texts, the authors write that the “multiplicity [plurivocité] of texts” and their “multiple reading [lecture plurielle]” are connected phenomena: Penser la Bible (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 13.

One may without doubt read as a hyperbole the affirmation of Pier Cesare Bori in his fine book concisely entitled L'interprétation infinite (tr. fr. Paris: Cerf, 1991) 60: “Thus every biblical text contains potentially infinite meanings; it is infinitely polysemous.” We appreciate that this author has well drawn upon the suggestive formula of Gregory the Great: “The Scripture develops with those who read it.”
The open character of the text makes possible the reading of the Bible in the multiple languages and cultures of the world, i.e., to employ a term that has recently gained currency, its enculturation.

The Bible was produced by and for a believing community; it is, therefore, within the life and faith of the ecclesial community that one is able adequately to interpret it, i.e., to correspond to the “implied reader” of the text.

It is increasingly recognized that the principle of Sola Scriptura “turns out to be untenable even on the hermeneutical plane”: Ricoeur and LaCocque, *Penser la Bible*, 10. Just as the breadth of a conception of the literal sense upon which there is no agreement leads Protestant exegetes to recognize a greater role for tradition in interpretation, so on the other hand the acknowledgement of a unique literal sense, determined once for all, has without doubt contributed to the inclination of Catholics prior to the Second Vatican Council setting forth tradition as a source of meaning distinct from the Scripture (and among others, to propose the theory of “sensus plenior”).

The historical-critical method, in distinguishing the stages of redaction—the history of the meaning—of the biblical texts, prompted a reconsideration of the open and dynamic character of the meaning of the Scripture.

The midrashic rules of Jewish interpretation and the allegorical procedures of the Church Fathers and of the Middle Ages do not correspond to our scientific criteria. But are not our recognized literary methods stamped with the cultural presuppositions of our occidental western-European and North American world of the twentieth-century? In their purpose and their perspective and aim Jewish and patristic readers may serve us as model and inspiration.


For example, how to interpret correctly the Gospels without knowing the nature and function of a parable in the Palestinian milieu?

To testify to an event is not only to attest the existence of a fact; it is also to interpret that fact: it is to recognize for oneself a significance in the course of human history. As in the Bible, the attestation of events is inseparable from a faith-interpretation, research into the veracity of certain facts with the aid of the historical methods must recognize its insufficiency.

The authors of the biblical texts put forth their own testimonies to the events conveyed in the oral and written tradition which bears them. But a distance separates the testimony of the first witnesses and that repeated by those who attest it through writing.

There will be a further pressing forward of studies already aptly undertaken in philosophy and theology, for example in E. Castelli, ed., *Le témoignage* (Paris: Aubier, 1972).

Obviously, some of the multiple propositions of the text do not bear directly upon God and our relationship to God. There are some affirmations of a geographical or chronological order, etc. The immediate sense of these propositions is not a spiritual or religious sense.

All, believers and unbelievers, may engage in this religious reading of the Bible. The prerequisite for entering into the world of the Bible and eventually to appropriate it is an attitude of openness to the transcendent.
How far in the process of interpretation does the cognitive function operate out of faith? Is this question unanswerable?

The Fathers read the Bible from the perspective of God as author. The meaning of texts intended by God, the author of all the Scripture, in which God makes known progressively his plan, surpasses, therefore, in their eyes, the thought of the human authors of each book, which demands to be read in its relation to the others.

The term “ultimate sense” is proposed by Paul Beauchamp.

Let us merely note that, received as canon, the Scripture in its totality forms one text; it is only as we take up the whole canon that we plainly confront the biblical world in its totality (and that one may adequately speak of biblical meaning?).
John Wesley in Conversation with the Emerging Church

Abstract

As the Emerging Church is one of the most significant developments in current popular Western ecclesiology, it is important that it be engaged theologically. As part of this engagement, this paper brings the Emerging Church into a constructive dialogue with John Wesley, a theologian who shared similar passions and faced comparable challenges. It maintains that Wesley would applaud the spirit and creativity of the Emerging Church, especially its mission to reach contemporary seekers and its desire to recapture an ancient-future faith. However, he would also challenge some potentially harmful tendencies and exhort the Emerging Church toward maturity in these areas. The paper begins by exploring several commonalities between Wesley and the Emerging Church, including: (i) resistance to Enlightenment rationalism and an embrace of religious experience, (ii) a passion for evangelism, (iii) a commitment to a kingdom worldview and values, and (iv) a spirit of ecumenism. Subsequently, the paper offers a critique of certain aspects of the Emerging Church in light of Wesley’s theology and ministry and then concludes by proposing a way forward on the basis of insights gained from Wesley.

Keywords: Emerging, Emergent, Church, Wesley, McLaren, postmodern, post-Christendom

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I. Introduction

A growing number of Christians in the Western world are seeking non-traditional expressions of church. One of the most significant examples of this is the Emerging Church, which is the primary focus of this article. This article is also concerned with John Wesley, who may be regarded as something of a kindred spirit to the Emerging Church, since he shared similar passions and faced comparable challenges. In the following sections, I will endeavour to bring Wesley into conversation with the Emerging Church, first, by discussing some of the commonalities between the two; subsequently, by offering a critique of the Emerging Church through the lens of Wesley’s theology and ministry; and finally, by suggesting a way forward in light of Wesley’s contribution to the conversation.

Some preliminary comments about the Emerging Church are pertinent. First, the Emerging Church is difficult to define, as it is comprised of a diverse network of individuals, churches, theologians, pastors, and others. It is also geographically dispersed, appearing in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. While some generalizations about the entire phenomenon could be drawn, I have chosen to limit the scope of this article to its North American manifestations. Second, adherents of the Emerging Church prefer to portray it as a ‘conversation’, rather than a movement or ideology. Dan Kimball, a leading voice in the conversation, cautions that there is no single structure or blueprint for the Emerging Church; it is more of a mindset than a model. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some of the dominant values and practices common to its proponents. The Emergent Village website lists the following core values: commitment to God in the way of Jesus, commitment to the Church in all its forms, commitment to God’s world, and commitment to one another. One might also add, based on Emerging Church writings, a commitment to a postmodern critique of modernity. These five values are reflected in the following analysis.

II. Commonalities

One commonality between Wesley and the Emerging Church is their resistance to Enlightenment rationalism and, correspondingly, their promotion of religious experience as necessary for knowledge of God. In particular, Wesley challenged the deistic natural reductionism of his day and proclaimed a personal God who transforms hearts and lives. Particularly
disturbing for Wesley was the moral impotency of eighteenth century English Deism to affect social change in a culture which desperately needed it. Amidst such religious indifference and apathy, he preached a “religion of the heart” characterized by fervent love for God and neighbour demonstrated in concrete acts of service. For Wesley, true religion involves much more than rational thought and assent to formal doctrines. It also ‘enlightens’ heart and hands, affections and behaviour. He wanted to cultivate not only Christian thinking but Christian life in its wholeness. Wesley believed that Christianity is, at its essence, a social religion of love. It is the nature of the Church to infuse the world with love and holiness, just as it is the nature of salt to season whatever it touches. Thus, he “engaged in serious experiments in catechesis and group spiritual direction that would be effective in making robust disciples of Jesus Christ. . .”

The Emerging Church also resists Enlightenment rationalism, espousing instead an experiential approach to faith and knowledge. However, unlike Wesley, who challenged the dominant faith-epistemology of his day, the Emerging Church attacks rationalism by means of a contemporary epistemology, namely postmodernism. It contends that modern Evangelicalism is in need of reform, having capitulated unwittingly to the assumptions and methods of modernity, which are obsolete in the postmodern era. While much could be said about a postmodern critique of modernity, I propose that the Emerging Church embraces the following components. (1) Postmodernism denies absolute truth (or at least our access to it) and the objectivity of knowledge, especially the concept of the dispassionate observer. (2) Instead of modernity’s optimism about truth (its inherent goodness, its tendency toward system and clarity), postmodernism is sceptical about metanarratives, or ‘totalizing’ claims, and prefers paradox and difference. Metaphors are preferred over propositions and narratives over systems. (3) In modernity, truth is accessible to the individual through rational methods as opposed to tradition or revelation, while in postmodernism ‘truth’ is discerned through shared experiences of humanity. It is relational, culturally tolerant, and non-hierarchical. (4) While modernity is sceptical about the supernatural (i.e., does God exist?), postmodernism is open to spirituality, ritual, and mysticism (i.e., which god(dess)?). In modernity, mystery should be resolved, but in postmodernism, mystery is welcomed and celebrated. (5) Modern methodology stresses compartmentalization and specialization, whereas postmodernism emphasizes integration, inter-disciplinary inquiry, and the interconnectivity of life. Modernity tends toward dualism (private/public, spirit/body, etc.), while postmodernism embraces tension (not either/or but both/and).

A second commonality shared by Wesley and the Emerging Church is a passion for evangelism. Both endeavour to proclaim the gospel in a manner
relevant to their contemporary contexts, particularly to people who are ostracised from the organized religious establishment. In 1738, at a meeting in Aldersgate, Wesley experienced a deep, personal encounter with God and suddenly understood the significance of the doctrine of justification by faith for his own life. In his words, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that had had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” Wesley’s warmed heart made him an evangelist and fuelled within him a sense of mission which became the core element of Methodism or, as one writer puts it, “Methodism’s true distinction.” However, Wesley soon discovered that most people in the Church of England did not appreciate his newly-awakened passion for personal faith in Christ. Indeed, he was shunned for espousing a ‘new doctrine’ and was prohibited from preaching in many places. So at the invitation of George Whitefield, he began to preach outdoors to large numbers of common people (whom the Church largely ignored), who were desperate to hear his message of grace and hope. Wesley especially loved and had compassion for the poor, regarding them as sheep without a shepherd. He became a mass-evangelist with a gruelling mission, travelling nearly a quarter of a million miles on horseback, delivering some 40,000 sermons, and suffering persecution in many forms, including ridicule, slander, threats from riotous mobs, even violent assaults. In the midst of this, he wrote over two hundred books on a wide variety of subjects.

The Emerging Church also possesses evangelistic fervour. Its mission is to reach a world that has become disenchanted with modern Christianity, and especially the Church. Kimball observes, “what was once a Christian nation with a Judeo-Christian worldview is quickly becoming a post-Christian, unchurched, unreached nation.” One of the reasons for this, according to Emerging Church thinkers, is that the Church is still trying to preach a ‘modern gospel’—one that is loaded with modern assumptions and packaged and promoted through modern methods—to a postmodern world. For example, Emerging Church writers are critical of the Seeker Sensitive Movement for capitulating to a consumerist mindset in its evangelism strategies. By adopting modern values of success, excellence, growth, and efficiency, it has become a “vendor of religious goods and services.” This is problematic because over the last century, peoples’ basic assumptions, commitments, and values have shifted dramatically. As Brian McLaren writes, “Postmodern people don’t want a God shrunk to fit modern tastes.” They are disappointed when they come to church seeking authenticity and mystery, only to find a neat, professionally pre-packaged service. They feel patronized when they come seeking spiritual depth, only to be offered the cliché-ridden and self-help tactics of modern ‘relevant’ sermons. They are dismayed when they sense a call to make a difference in the world for peace and social justice but instead encounter self-serving
organizations interested mostly in conversion and numerical growth. Consequently, Emerging Church leaders envision a different kind of Church, one that is ‘relevant’ precisely because it is authentic, one that is evangelistic precisely because it is distinctively and unapologetically Christian. This Church’s witness flows out of the reality of God’s presence in its midst: “Vintage worship gatherings are for believers to fully worship God and be instructed, equipped, and encouraged, even to a deeper level than ever before. This same very spiritual, experiential worship gathering can be a place where nonbelievers can come and experience God and learn about the practises and beliefs of Christians firsthand.”

Third, both Wesley and the Emerging Church exhort Christians to reclaim a kingdom worldview and commit to kingdom values. A kingdom approach is compromised whenever salvation is conceived statically as a one-time spiritual transaction between God and the sinner (i.e., justification is over-emphasized and sanctification under-emphasized). To overcome this error, Wesley tirelessly proclaimed the doctrine of Christian Perfection, stressing that the gospel promises not just forgiveness of sins but also cleansing of all unrighteousness (1 John 1.9). Christ’s command to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5.48) is meant to be taken seriously because God empowers people to do what he commands. For Wesley, “every command in Holy Writ is only a covered promise.”

To understand Wesley’s position, it is important to know what he meant by ‘perfection’. Accordingly, Victor Shepherd makes the helpful distinction between the Greek teleios (which captures Wesley’s use of ‘perfection’) and the Latin perfectus. While perfectus typically refers to things, teleios more characteristically refers to persons. Furthermore, perfectus is a fairly static term, which connotes faultlessness, of not admitting further development, while teleios is a highly nuanced term meaning ‘mature’, ‘complete’, or ‘whole’. Wesley did not mean sinless perfection because a believer never outgrows the need for the atoning mediation of Christ. Nor did perfection rule out continual growth into maturity and wholeness. Rather, “Scripture perfection is, pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions.”

Again, “It is perfect love (1 John 4.18). . . its properties, or inseparable fruits, are, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks (1 Thess. 5.16).” Thus, for Wesley, the Christian life is a dynamic relationship of loving God with all of one’s being and doing.

A kingdom approach is also compromised whenever salvation is conceived primarily as being about the afterlife (under-realized eschatology) rather than being about God’s future kingdom invading the present. In his sermon, The Scripture Way of Salvation, Wesley writes,

What is salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal
happiness. It is not the soul’s going to paradise. . .It is not a blessing which lies on the other side [of] death, or (as we speak) in the other world. The very words of the text put this beyond question. ‘Ye are saved?’ [Eph. 2:8] It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing, a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of. . .29

This passage would surprise anyone tempted (too hastily) to dismiss Wesley as a tent meeting revivalist interested only in saving souls. Actually, his understanding of salvation was profoundly holistic.30 Certainly, salvation reconciles an individual’s soul to God, but it involves exceedingly more than that. Wesley goes on to argue that justification leads naturally and necessarily (in this life) to sanctification—to doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God (Mic 6:8).31 Moreover, sanctification has corporate and social dimensions.32 Thus, salvation in its wholeness entails becoming part of the Church, which is conceived as a redemptive ethical fellowship with a mission to overcome the unholiness, alienation, and hopelessness of the present world.33 It is no accident that Methodism became a potent agent of social change in America, bringing hope and empowerment to women, African Americans, and the working classes.34

A number of Emerging Church leaders also advocate a return to kingdom living. Kimball argues that evangelistic efforts need to focus on disciple making, not merely conversion. He suggests that evangelists should give invitations into the kingdom, not just for the forgiveness of sins and entrance into heaven.35 Scott Bader-Saye claims that there is a “conscious reframing of redemption in terms of the kingdom of God” in Emerging Church thought.36 Salvation is conceived as being communal as well as individual and temporal as well as eternal. Evangelism is seen as a conversation, not a conquest or a project. Outreach entails both engaging postmodern culture and challenging it with kingdom values. Or as Bader-Saye puts it, “relevance must always walk hand in hand with resistance: incarnation must be balanced by the cross.”37

One of the clearest endorsements of a return to a kingdom worldview is McLaren’s book, The Secret Message of Jesus. McLaren explores the meaning of Jesus’ message about the kingdom of God for the original Jewish hearers. He highlights the misunderstandings of various first-century Jewish religious and political groups, all of which believed that the kingdom of God would materialize only after the Romans were expelled or eliminated (though they differed as to how and when this would take place).38 Common to each of these misunderstandings was the belief that the kingdom of God would restore sovereignty to a Jewish theocratic state. McLaren worries that modern American Evangelicalism has similarly bought into theocratic assumptions (he is particularly concerned about a theology of empire seeping into American thought). However, Jesus’ message was not about establishing a theocratic
Christendom, though it did have political implications. He proclaimed a different kind of revolution, one in which the power of God is demonstrated through weakness, love, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This kingdom operates subversively and sacrificially, not through (human) power and prestige.

A fourth commonality between Wesley and the Emerging Church is a spirit of ecumenism. In many ways, Wesley was a mediating theologian, both in thought and practice. He synthesized Eastern and Western Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, Calvinism and Arminianism, tradition and innovation, reason and experience, spirituality and service. He brought together rich and poor, men and women, free and slave, and united Christians of various denominational commitments. A few examples will illustrate this point. First, Wesley’s theological and spiritual influences were broad, from the patristic theologians of both East and West to Puritans like John Owen and Richard Baxter to mystics and moralists like Jeremy Taylor, Thomas à Kempis, and William Law; to reformation theologians such as Luther and Calvin. Second, while he esteemed the insights of those who came before him, he was not afraid to challenge their views when he deemed it necessary. For Wesley, the key to fruitful theological dialogue is to seek agreement on the essentials and practice gracious tolerance on the non-essentials, not that one should avoid formulating opinions on these matters, but one should leave room for disagreement and tension. In his sermon on Catholic Spirit, Wesley writes, “Although every man necessarily believes that every particular opinion which he holds is true (for to believe any opinion is not true is the same thing as not to hold it), yet can no man be assured that all his own opinions taken together are true.” Such an approach allows one to maintain and articulate truth claims without demanding absolute agreement on every point. Thus, while disagreeing with the Calvinist George Whitefield on the doctrine of predestination, Wesley could affirm that in essential matters “there is not a hair’s breath difference between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield.” Third, Wesley was deeply committed to unity and deplored schismatic intentions. In A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, he warns: “Beware of schism, of making a rent in the Church of Christ.” Wesley was emphatically not interested in starting a new denomination; his goal was renewal within the Church of England. Accordingly, he deliberately planned Methodist meetings on weeknights and Sunday evenings in order to avoid scheduling conflicts with regular church meetings. He also spoke out against those who advocated separating from the mainline Church.

Emerging Church leaders demonstrate a similar ecumenical spirit. By delving into the rich traditions of the Christian heritage, they hope to revitalize and deepen contemporary Christian spirituality. The subtitle of Kimball’s book sums this up well: Vintage Christianity for New Generations. Similarly, McLaren promotes “looking for ways ahead for the Christian faith by looking
back at the same time.”45 Many in the Emerging Church feel that the modern Church (especially in Evangelicalism), in its attempt to make faith credible and relevant to modern people, has stripped Christian expression of its experiential, corporeal, historical and incarnational qualities. This is epitomized in the Seeker Sensitive service, which “often involves removing what could be considered religious stumbling blocks and displays of the spiritual (such as extended worship, religious symbols, extensive prayer times, liturgy, etc.)...”46 In Contrast, Kimball, proposes that an Emerging worship gathering (he dislikes the term service, which he believes has absorbed consumerist connotations), “promotes, rather than hides, full displays of spirituality ...”47 Thus, in the Emerging Church, there is a renewed interest in spirituality, tradition, liturgy, creeds, and sensual expressions of worship (i.e. the use of the arts and other visuals). Those who unfairly criticise the Emerging Church as being simply a trendy turn toward candles and incense fail to see these deep ecumenical convictions.

Another reason for the Emerging Church’s ecumenical spirit is a desire to transcend theological impasses of modern Christianity, to find a ‘third way’ by deconstructing modern dualisms.48 In this endeavour, the Emerging Church is influenced by the postmodern critique of metanarratives, epitomized by thinkers like Jacques Derrida.49 Scott Bader-Saye identifies three of these dualisms, including the liberal/conservative impasse, the traditional/contemporary worship impasse, and the cultural resistance/relevance (or withdrawal/syncretism) impasse.50 A number of other dualisms could also be mentioned, such as theology/philosophy, method/mysticism, inclusive/exclusive soteriology, spirit/body, science/art, Catholic/Protestant, believing/belonging, evangelism/discipleship, and so forth.

III. Critique

Having surveyed a number of commonalities, it is now appropriate to consider what critical questions and concerns arise from a conversation between Wesley and the Emerging Church. Before proceeding, it should be stated that the following criticisms will not apply equally to all who identify themselves with the Emerging Church, and, to a degree, making general assertions will be unfair to some. On the other hand, since its advocates have resisted a clearly defined identity, whether in terms of doctrine or membership, the Emerging Church has left itself open to such a critique (recall that ‘conversation’ is their preferred designation, not movement, ideology, or model).51

First, in its ecumenical ardour, the Emerging Church tends to settle for theological superficiality. In seeking to be broad, it sacrifices depth and ends up promoting a sort of theological smorgasbord. This weakness is clearly evident in the book A Generous Orthodoxy, in which McLaren mines a wide spectrum of traditions and theologies in order to construct his own blend of
Christian orthodoxy. While his spirit of creativity and charity is inspiring, I am inclined to conclude with D. A. Carson that McLaren, in several instances, misrepresents the traditions from which he claims to draw. For example, McLaren is clearly not a Calvinist or a fundamentalist, yet he claims these titles for himself by redefining their meaning. By means of subtle word-play, McLaren identifies with these traditions by ignoring their distinctiveness. In effect, he achieves unity by erasing diversity (which ironically seems a very un-postmodern thing to do!). Now if the leaders of the Emerging Church fail to achieve depth, their followers fair much worse. Robert Webber, who is sympathetic with the movement, expressed his disappointment with an Emergent Convention he attended: “There’s nothing here in the public face that lifts you theologically or lifts you into liturgy or anything that has historic connection or depth or substance.” Even the leaders of the Emerging Church were uncomfortable with the conference, but perhaps this discomfort ought to challenge their deliberate avoidance of clarity.

Wesley also interacts with various traditions and theologies, but in contrast to the Emerging Church, he recognizes the complexities and difficulties involved in such an endeavour. Wesley argues that true catholicity is not “speculative latitudinarianism.” It is not indifference to all opinions, nor is it wavering between options or blending truths together. Such inconsistency does not amount to catholicity but demonstrates “a muddy understanding.” Wesley was successful as a mediating theologian precisely because he knew where he stood. True dialogue necessitates reflective self-awareness. It means knowing what one believes, what others believe, what is the common ground, and what are the differences. Perhaps the best way for the Emerging Church to make a contribution in this area is simply to bring conversation partners together and facilitate genuine dialogue.

Second, the Emerging Church overstates the importance of experience in religion and downplays other means of attaining religious knowledge. One frequently encounters calls to abandon propositional approaches to truth in favour of experiential ones. To defend his own experiential and contextual approach, McLaren appeals to Michael Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowledge. A musician playing a musical piece does not focus consciously on her instrument (i.e. on the rudimentary techniques involved in playing), but rather indwells the instrument tacitly and through it attends to the notes. Similarly, McLaren sees orthodoxy as “a kind of internalized belief, tacit and personal, that becomes part of you to such a degree that once assimilated, you hardly need to think of it.” But McLaren’s application of Polanyi misses the mark. Indeed, it is true that a great musician does indwell her instrument tacitly, but this is only possible because she has spent countless hours in rigorous practice and diligent attendance to technical details (including studying music theory). It seems that McLaren skips the details and jumps straight
into tacit indwelling, which is rather like a beginner pianist trying to play an advanced concerto.

McLaren is convinced that orthodoxy in the postmodern context “will have to grow out of the experience of the post-Christian [meaning post-Christendom], post-secular people of the cities of the twenty-first century.”\textsuperscript{57} This preference for experience is in keeping with its postmodern leanings. If the modern approach to religion can be summed up with Kant’s refrain, “Dare to know!” the postmodern slogan might be “Dare to experience!”\textsuperscript{58} However, such a contextual approach would quickly (albeit unintentionally) reduce theology to anthropology, and ecclesiology to sociology. As an extreme example of this, an Emerging Church in New Zealand is founded upon a ‘communitarian hermeneutic,’ in which “authority has shifted, now located neither in scripture nor in tradition, but in the identity of the group as a community.”\textsuperscript{59}

John Wesley also placed a great value on religious experience, rejecting the sterile rationalism of eighteenth-century deism. He stressed personal conversion, inward assurance, and the cultivation of perfect love for God. The Wesleyan hymns passionately and coherently expressed these convictions, warming both heart and mind. He also understood the importance of communal religious experience, which was reflected in his Methodist societies. Furthermore, after reading Jonathan Edwards, he became convinced that unusual outbursts and manifestations during worship were legitimate expressions of the work of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{60} However, Wesley did not overemphasize the role of religious experience. In pursuing religious knowledge, he advocated a synthesis of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience (with Scripture being primary and the others aiding its interpretation and application).\textsuperscript{61} This later came to be known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral.\textsuperscript{62} Accordingly, he structured his societies in such a way as to attend to each of these elements. As D. Michael Henderson shows, Wesley’s class system was brilliantly conceived to affect holistic transformative change. Wesley provided a venue to foster the sanctification of the whole person through participation in the interlocking groups of society (cognitive mode), class (behavioural mode), band (affective mode), select society (training mode), and penitent bands (rehabilitative mode).\textsuperscript{63} The Emerging Church would do well to follow Wesley’s example of a balanced approach to religious knowledge.

Third, there is an unfortunate tendency in the Emerging Church toward being culturally trendy. In the spirit of Schleiermacher, the Emerging Church is trying to reach contemporary ‘cultured despisers’ of modern Christianity.\textsuperscript{64} Along these lines, Andy Crouch describes the Emerging Church as being “entangled with the self-conscious cutting edge of U.S. culture.” He characterizes the demographics of Emerging churches as “frequently urban, disproportionately young, overwhelmingly white, and very new—few have
been in existence for more than five years.”65 Philip Harrold quotes one Emerging Church blogger, who admits that the Emerging Church is caught up in what he calls “hepatitis [sic], an addiction to a smug coolness and hipness.”66

This desire to be fashionable sometimes leads to an elitist mentality which results in a reactionary departure from traditional Evangelicalism. Those who agree with Emerging Church views are included in the “conversation,” while those who disagree simply “don’t get it.” As Harrold points out, one of the common features of Emerging Church enthusiasts is the experience of ‘deconversion’, a process of disillusionment with the traditional Church, usually due to intellectual doubt or moral criticism.67 Accounts of deconversion are common in Emerging literature and often are formulated as ‘narratives of disaffiliation’, recounting how someone valiantly overcame barriers erected by the traditional Church and discovered a more authentic experience of Christian expression and community.68

Wesley, by contrast, was suspicious of a bourgeois approach to Christian faith. His spiritual journey was quite different from many in the Emerging Church; he began among the educated elite at Oxford but later found his true calling among the poor, the ostracised, the sick, the imprisoned, and the common people of England.69 He counselled others to do likewise, instructing his assistant preachers to go not where they desired, nor where they would be comfortable, but rather where they were most needed (i.e. among the poor). Furthermore, Wesley was a practical man and was more interested in putting faith into practice than being preoccupied with theoretical discussions about the latest ideas. He disliked ‘speechifying’, or sermons which probed abstract or obscure doctrines but were weak in application and failed to inspire in hearers a commitment to action. Wesley always had the common person in mind.

Wesley’s ministry among the poor and lowly classes was extremely fruitful. As people accepted the gospel and devoted themselves to kingdom principles, they discovered new freedom to change their plight. Alcoholics recovered and found work. Criminals repented and social conditions improved. Lower class labourers began to save their money and prospered. However, as people climbed the social ladder, Wesley noticed a disturbing trend. As affluence increased, motivation to do good works decreased and spiritual apathy began to settle in. Wesley protested, “What hinders? Do you fear spoiling your silken coat?”70 The gospel had lifted them out of their destitute condition, given them hope and inspired resourcefulness and prosperity. But now this same material comfort, which they received by sheer grace through the gospel, filled them with pride and indifference and prevented them from reaching out to others. Thus, Wesley came to a poignant understanding of the ambiguity of wealth and influence.71 Such things are profitable so long as
they are pursued with humility and shared generously; indeed, Wesley counselled: Earn all you can, save all you can, but most importantly give all you can.\textsuperscript{72} The Emerging Church could stand to benefit from Wesley’s insight here and develop a more critical stance concerning the dangers of being trendy or cultured.

\textbf{IV. Wesley’s Contribution to the Conversation}

A dialogue with Wesley’s theology raises several implications for the Emerging Church. First, the spirit of renewal in the Emerging Church and its desire to recapture an authentic experience of ancient-future Christianity should be applauded. Second, its evangelistic fervour should be affirmed, as emerging generations, previously alienated from mainstream Evangelicalism, are resonating with the Emerging Church’s message and re-connecting with Christian communities. Third, the creativity and innovation evident in the Emerging Church’s best leaders should be encouraged. Finally, while the movement has great potential, it is also in need of guidance, correction, and accountability. Particularly, I suggest that Wesley’s theology and ministry offer the following exhortations to the Emerging Church:

1. \textit{Stay intimately connected with the traditional, established Church.}\textsuperscript{73}

Throughout his lifetime, Wesley cautioned against schism and separation. He believed that Methodism would remain a more powerful force as a renewal movement, a counter-voice within the larger Church of England, than as a religious establishment in its own right. This conviction was warranted because as Methodism developed into its own denomination after Wesley’s death it became increasingly institutional and eventually lost much of its original transformative power. This seems to be a pattern for many Protestant groups which begin as radical agents of change but subsequently lose their power when they become an end in themselves (rather than remaining in dialectical tension with the established Church).\textsuperscript{74} Thus, the caution arises that if a dialectical tension between the Emerging Church and the traditional Church is lost, what is now innovative will inevitably become the establishment (and both parties will lose an opportunity for growth).\textsuperscript{75} Therefore, the Emerging Church should intentionally build relationships with traditional evangelical churches (and vice-versa) and engage in genuine dialogue with mainstream evangelical theologians.\textsuperscript{76}

2. \textit{Be rigorously disciplined in the pursuit of truth.}

While some postmodern thinkers have provided a necessary and helpful critique of modernity, at the popular level, postmodernism tends to open a door to intellectual laziness, theological fence-sitting, and experientially-fixated spirituality. Both modern and postmodern culture are incredibly complex
and understanding their nuances and subtleties is exceedingly difficult.\textsuperscript{77} One wonders whether much of the popular discussion of postmodernity has left people confused and paralyzed, afraid to commit or take a stand on important issues of truth (this is not to deny that, for some, postmodernism has brought freedom from legalistic moralism or oppressive fundamentalism). Wesley offered an integrated approach to truth, positing a dialogical synthesis of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. In addition, he recognised the importance of mystery and tension in seeking religious knowledge but equally stressed the need for assurance, conviction, and commitment. In describing our relationship to truth, he would side with Gadamer over Derrida: truth is ‘inexhaustible’, not ‘undecidable’.\textsuperscript{78}

3. \textit{Be wholeheartedly diligent in the pursuit of holiness.}

What ultimately drove Wesley’s passion to renew the Church and reach out to his nation was not a desire to be cultured or relevant but a zeal for Christian perfection or wholeness, defined in terms of ardent love and insatiable desire for God. This love for God wells up in one’s heart and overflows in loving outreach to one’s neighbour. Such an emphasis on holiness, or perfection in love, could help ensure a proper perspective of our (i.e. the Church’s) role in God’s redemptive work. God initiates, we respond; God opens hearts and minds, we bear witness and serve. Furthermore, since holiness and unity are intimately linked together (Wesley’s insight that Christian perfection is a corporate reality reflects the New Testament teaching that the \textit{Holy} Spirit is the bond of unity in the Church), the pursuit of Spirit-holiness also protects us against pride and division. As we draw near to God, we will also draw near to one another. Loving God includes loving others. Finally, fulfilling the Great Commission involves much more than communicating ideas about God in relevant, postmodern ways. It means pursuing and experiencing the transformative power of God’s sanctifying love and living out that reality sacrificially and concretely in our world.

\textbf{End Notes}


2. In North America, Brian McLaren is widely regarded to be the \textit{de-facto} leader of the Emerging Church [hereafter designated EC]. Other recognized voices include Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, Leonard Sweet and Rob Bell. Theologians such as Stan Grenz, N. T. Wright, Robert Webber, and Dallas Willard have influenced the thought of EC leaders.


5. For greater detail on these values and their accompanying practices, see http://www.emergentvillage.com.

6. While Wesley and the Methodist revival resisted certain aspects of the Enlightenment (i.e. rationalism, a benevolent view of the nature of man, naturalistic assumptions, etc.), Wesley was still a man of his times and thus also a product of the Enlightenment. According to Henry D. Rack, his thinking was consistent with eighteenth century empiricism and his appeal to experience resonated with the emerging Romanticism. Thus, Rack refers to Wesley as a "reasonable enthusiast," being "rational in form but enthusiast in substance" (*Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. [London: Epworth Press, 2002], 32-33, 167-169, 383-388). See also F. Dreyer, "Faith and Experience in the Thought of John Wesley," *American Historical Review* 88 (1983): 12-30.

7 Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 34.


12. For an introduction to postmodernism commonly cited by Emerging Church writers, see Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). For a more scholarly introduction, see K. Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-25. Vanhoozer identifies six descriptors of the postmodern condition, including (see 14-18): (1) the contextualization of reason within particular cultures and times; (2) a protest against the modern concept of "the natural" (what we regard as natural is historically and politically conditioned); (3) a rejection of metanarratives, which according to Lyotard breed totalitarian systems; (4) an embrace of the "other" or the oppressed; (5) a recovery of "the beyond," a post-secular embrace of prophetic and mystical discourse; and (6) a refusal of Christian orthodoxy.

13. For example, Brian McLaren writes, "A Warning: as in most of my other books, there are places here where I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated, and that shock, obscurity, playfulness, and intrigue (carefully articulated) often stimulate more thought than clarity" (*A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional + Evangelical + Post/Protestant + Liberal/Conservative + Mystical/Poetic + Biblical +*)

14. For a critique of the EC’s analysis of culture, see D. A. Carson, Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 57-86, 125-156.


19. Ibid., 25. However, Kimball distinguishes the best innovators of the seeker approach (i.e. Rick Warren) from those who employ a ‘one size fits all’ church strategy.


21. Kimball discusses these shifting values in Emerging Church, 105, 175, 201, 215.


23. Kimball, Emerging Church, 114.


27. Ibid., 401.

28. Ibid., 442.


30. Perhaps ‘integrated’ is a better term, since it avoids the New Age connotations and philosophical baggage of ‘holism’ See Charles Ringma, “Holistic

31. Wesley’s Sermons, 373.


34. For a detailed account of American Methodism’s impact on such groups, see Andrews, The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 99-183.

35. Kimball, Emerging Church, 203.


37 Ibid., 20.

38. McLaren mentions three views: military conquest (Zealots), moral transformation (Pharisees), and political compromise (Herodians and Sadducees). The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2006).


40. Wesley’s Christian Library included fifty books from a variety of sources and traditions.


42. Wesley, “What is an Arminian?” WJTF, vol. 10 (1958), p. 359. Wesley agreed with Calvinism on original sin and justification by faith alone, and his doctrine of preventing/prevenient grace protected him against the charge of Pelagianism.


45. McLaren, A Generous Orthodoxy, 18.

46. Kimball, Emerging Church, 25.


48. The subtitle of McLaren’s A Generous Orthodoxy, though somewhat convoluted, expresses this intention to transcend dualisms.

49. One of the basic features of Derrida’s deconstruction is to expose totalizing tendencies by demonstrating that the logic of a particular text or idea undoes itself in the paradoxes and contradictions inherent within it. While the traditional mode of reading attends to that which is presented, deconstruction attempts to extract what is absent or latent. See Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-27.

51. Could this resistance to clarity be an avoidance of theological accountability? Calvin observed that ambiguity of expression can be a kind of hiding place. See Institutes of the Christian Religion I.XIII.4-5 (ed. Henry Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 112.

52. Carson, Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church, 157-182.

53. Scott Bader-Saye, “The Emergent Matrix,” Christian Century 121, no. 24 (2004): 20. Bader-Saye comments, “the Emergent music was hipper, the videos faster, the clothes trendier, the technology more sophisticated. But for many of the Emergent leaders, the convention's flashiness did more to confuse than to clarify the nature of the emerging church.”


56. A Generous Orthodoxy, 33.

57 Ibid., 92.

58. Interestingly (and perhaps worthy of reflection), this theme of ‘daring’ to be different is common in EC literature. At its best it reflects innovation and creativity of spirit but it could, if unchecked, degenerate into an elitist sort of martyr complex. For example, McLaren slyly warns his reader: “You are about to begin an absurd and ridiculous book.” See A Generous Orthodoxy, 27 Matthew Guest and Steve Taylor approvingly quote an Emerging Church document which says, “We have discovered a source of hope and excitement among newly emergent communities of faith… who have dared to exercise creativity and imagination in their pursuit of Christ…” (emphasis mine) (“The Post-Evangelical Emerging Church: Innovations in New Zealand and the UK,” IJSCC 6, no. 1 [March, 2006]: 50). Philip Harrold cites examples of people referring to their transition to Emerging Church contexts as ‘outgrowing’, ‘wrestling with’, ‘disentangling from’, or ‘being wrenched out of’ traditional church contexts (“Deconversion in the Emerging Church,” IJSCC 6, no. 1 [March, 2006]: 84).


61. Randy L. Maddox suggests that Wesley's quadrilateral could be described as “a unilateral rule of Scripture within a trilateral hermeneutic of reason, tradition, and experience” (Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology [Nashville: Kingswood Books / Abingdon Press, 1994], 46).

62. For a more detailed discussion of Wesley’s use of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience, see Ibid., 36-47


including an emphasis on ‘feeling’, a disdain for rationalism or ‘cold argufying’, a rejection of perceived legalism, an intuition for the inter-connectivity of all things, and a distrust of institutional religion. Also, notice the similarities in Schleiermacher’s audience: they are well-to-do, middle class, educated people; they appear to be relatively moral and just; and they object to religion (especially the established Church), regarding it as corrupt, unenlightened, and narrow. Bader-Saye also notices a trend toward “neo-Romanticism” (“Improvising Church,” 17).


67 Ibid., 81-83.

68. Ibid., 84-86.

69. However, even at Oxford Wesley served among such people.

70. Quoted by Victor Shepherd, John Wesley (1703-1791): Features of His Spirituality, 7, http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Wesley/

71. Similarly, Francis Asbury was cautious about building chapels: “[It will] make rich men necessary and they will rule you and impede your discipline if you are not well aware.” Andrews, The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 159.

72. Ibid., 156.

73. This applies particularly to ‘post-church’ groups discussed by Frost and Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come and Alan Jamieson, “Post-Church Groups and Their Place as Emergent Forms of Church,” IFSCC 6, no. 1 (2006): 65-78.

74. Roman Catholicism is, perhaps, less inclined toward division because it has room within the mainline institution for renewal groups and counter-movements (i.e. various monastic orders and convents, mystics, spiritual directors, etc.), allowing for a healthy dialectical tension and a richness of diversity within unity.

75. In a recent article, K. Steve McCormick discusses the significance of Spirit-Christology for maintaining a healthy tension in ecclesiology between institutional and fluid elements, tradition and innovation, unity and diversity, familiarity and otherness. He argues that the Church’s being and mission are constituted by the Spirit and instituted by Christ. Overlooking the former leads to uniformity and control, while overlooking the latter leads to an unhealthy tendency toward distinctiveness and novelty (“The Church an Icon of the Holy Trinity? A Spirit-Christology as Necessary Prolegomena of Ecclesiology,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 41, no. 2 [Spring, 2006]: 227-241).

76. Anderson stresses both continuity and discontinuity with the traditional Church: “Emerging churches must continually argue their theological continuity with Christ in the context of critical discontinuity with religious forms and traditions…” (Anderson, An Emergent Theology, 28).

77. Popular postmodern writers often underestimate the complexity of modernity and their attacks on it tend to be one-sided (modernity has benefits too—technology, medical discoveries, democracy, etc.). They also fail to acknowledge how deeply modernity is entrenched in Western culture. See William

78. Cited by Stephen M. Feldman, “Made for Each Other: The Interdependence of Deconstruction and Philosophical Hermeneutics,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26, no. 1 (January, 2000): 67. Feldman provides a stimulating discussion of the similarities and differences between philosophical hermeneutics and deconstruction. The claim that ‘inexhaustibility’ is more faithful to the Wesleyan quadrilateral than ‘undecidability’ is my own persuasion; Feldman grants equal value to both.
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MARK A. LAMPORT

Unintended Outcomes, Curious Inventions & Misshapen Creatures:
Juxtapositions of Religious Belief and Faith-Formed Practice & the Renewed Case for the Educational Mission of the Church

Abstract
Christianity is fundamentally a peculiar way of life. Christian initiation is the process a person goes through within a Christian community of being formed and transformed into a new being, modeled after the likeness of Christ. Yet, two facts need faced. First, after almost two thousand years after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the vast majority of the world’s population has not accepted the Gospel. Second, after almost two thousand years of performing baptisms in the church, the lives of the baptized are not significantly different than the lives of the non-baptized. Fact two explains fact one, but the root of the problem lies in a fundamental misunderstanding of Christian faith formation and the church’s attempts to educate its adherents. Foiled attempts at Christian teaching have often resulted in unintended outcomes, curious inventions, and misshapen creatures. The Church needs to understand how belief and practice juxtapose to better form its strategy to more effectively produce faith in its eager but undereducated adherents.

Keywords: Religious belief, Christian practice, educational mission

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The only acceptable end game of Christianity springs from the apt interplay of orthodox belief and faithfully-executed practice. For the gospel to seep into any society, believers must attentively act upon the precepts of the historic faith. If the Christian religion overemphasizes belief without enough concern for practice, it becomes a verbally-oriented dogma which focuses lopsidedly on cognitive understanding to the exclusion of its ethical dimension. It then sadly lacks the moral example to salt society. Correspondingly, if the Christian religion overemphasizes action-oriented practice without due concern for cogent theology, it becomes too experientially-based and loses its groundedness. It then appears lamentably devoid of the requisite absolute truth and moral authority necessary to guide society.

A Blatantly Bombastic Premise:
The Educational Structures of the Church Are Flawed

“The church is always more than a school, but the church cannot be less than a school.” (Jaroslav Pelikan 1971: 1:1)

While this regard for dual balance has long been a concern for the Church, at the start of the twenty-first century, it is author’s contention that based on verifiable data the results of church educational practices might fairly be assessed as less than stellar, and as a consequence, might better reconsider its mission, vision, and strategy.

Is this rather jaded pronouncement fair? If not, then how is it that:

- Theologian Ronald Sider observes that scandalous behavior from within is rapidly destroying Christianity. “By their daily activity, most ‘Christians’ regularly commit treason” (2005: 8).

- Author Michael Horton laments that in survey after survey there is evidence that evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the world in general (1993: 3).

- Scholar Alan Wolfe claims today’s evangelicalism exhibits so strong a desire to copy the culture of hotel chains and popular music that it loses what religious distinctiveness it once had. The truth is there is increasingly little difference between an

- Missiologist Lamin Sanneh concludes the cultural captivity of the Church in the West is nearly complete, and with the religion tamed, it is open season on the West’s Christian heritage (2003:112).

So which is most flawed in the Christian communities you observe: misguided beliefs, incongruent practices or a mixture of both? Four tendencies are bound to spiral from the interaction of belief and practice – and three of them are not worthy outcomes for faithful communities of the gospel to exhibit to its surrounding society (see Table 1.). First, one may display right belief but wrong practice, which betrays the true meaning of the gospel. Second, one may believe wrongly and act wrongly, which seduces from the true meaning of the gospel. Third, one may hold wrong beliefs and surprisingly exhibit right practice, which confuses the true meaning of the gospel. These three perversions of authentic Christian education comprise “Part One.” The fourth tendency, however, is the one to which the Christian educational ministries aspire. Simply put, the educational mission of the Church is to nurture faith in its adherents such that their minds and wills embrace right beliefs, which contribute to their lives being marked by right attitudes and practices. The judicious exhibition of right belief interplaying with right practice powerfully illustrates the truest meaning of the gospel.

This is the theme which constitutes “Part Two.”

Table 1. Juxtapositions of Religious Belief and Practice

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Tendencies</th>
<th>Characteristic Inferences</th>
<th>Corresponding Results</th>
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<tr>
<td>Right Belief/ Wrong Practice</td>
<td>Betrays True Meaning of Gospel</td>
<td>Unintended Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrong Belief/ Wrong Practice</td>
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<td>Wrong Belief/ Right Practice</td>
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<td>Right Belief/ Right Practice</td>
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"Does our life together in the church, including our ways of talking, behaving, organizing ourselves, and relating to one another...refer to anything other than ourselves?...Or is it all something that has no grounding beyond our own thinking and doing?" (Craig Dykstra, 1999:9).

Three profound errors appear when belief and practice are wrongly related. The tragic results are manifested in unintended outcomes, curious inventions, and misshapen creatures, but most alarmingly, a repugnant distortion of the Christian message to the surrounding culture.

Error One: Right Belief/Wrong Practice
Fickle Jonah and the Case of the Impotent “Statement of Faith”

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...” Despite the articulate, time-honored beauty of such oft-repeated “statements of faith,” the lack of correspondence between a typical confessor’s words and actions is disquieting. As is all-too-painfully observed, mere assent to orthodox formulas does not guarantee faithfully-executed expressions of the Christian way. Yet the Christian world revels in its creeds. How do we then best engender proper coalescence between belief and practice?

There is a temptation to turn to exemplary cases when talking about the relationship between religious beliefs and practices. But there is also something to be said for looking at efforts by less than exemplary believers to bridge the troublesome gaps that keep appearing in the disparity of stated belief and lived behavior. In doing so, we see the struggles of slippage and compromise. Less exemplary believers point us away from notions of heroism and mastery in religious practice. They draw our gaze instead toward the gracious God who works in and through them.

Obviously it is coherence of belief and practice that is sought. The ordinary struggles of religious people lay bare the ligaments that hold beliefs and practice together. Their struggles reveal how easily these connections become strained and broken when admirable fails to nurture admirable practice, or when vibrant practice fails to stimulate vibrant belief (Pauw 2002: 34).

Practices shape religious beliefs, but religious beliefs also shape practices. It is a tensive relationship, which means beliefs influence but are not reducible to certain actions, attitudes, and interests.

As the case of Jonah demonstrates, belief in divine mercy frequently coexists in religious life with the failure of resolve to be merciful, revealing that this psychological fact is not the truth content of this belief. The history of Christian thought is littered with examples of self-justifying appeals to
religious beliefs. Yet in their role of helping us make sense of the world, beliefs often put a certain resistance to our current desires and practices, and may, at times, interrogate or even temporarily disband them (Pauw 2002: 37).

Jonah holds admirable beliefs but struggles mightily with how to live them out. Jonah's inclusion in the books of the prophets, specifically for his less than exemplary record, has served as an ongoing source of encouragement to generations of believers who know the same struggles in integrating belief and practice. The book of Jonah is filled with miraculous events: a man swallowed by fish and remained entombed for three days, the sudden growth of a gourd, and the repentance of Ninevites. Another miracle however is that in spite of wrong behavior (on the part of the begrudging messenger), God brought salvation. Ultimately, this book, and specifically chapter 4, is about the revelation of God's character...and Jonah's.

Wrong practice is observed in Jonah but not wrong belief. Jonah's orthodox religious beliefs are evident throughout the story. Jonah pronounces: "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" (1:9), and "Salvation comes from the Lord" (2:9). Further, he correctly offers: "You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:2). Yet Jonah's beliefs fail to shape his practice. God summons Jonah to the practice of testimony, yet his practice lacks integrity.

Regardless, the whole city repents, even the livestock! But true beliefs and good results are not sufficient conditions for excellent practice. How many wrong practices have been justified in the name of good results? A religious community's best insight into the possibilities and deformities of its beliefs and practices often comes from the outside. Critical theological reflection is required in order to unmask perennial human tendencies to triumphalism and self-deception, and those within the circle of communal self-understanding may not be sufficiently alert to these tendencies in their midst.

Excellence in belief involves the critical self-knowledge that we are often antagonistic towards the good and prone to self-deception. Excellence in practice involves confessing our inability to practice our faith in a consistent way. When belief shapes practice in an excellent way, we celebrate God's grace, not human effort. For us as a people of faith who want to love God, the communal settings of proclamation, sacraments, and confession frame our hopes for closing the gap between beliefs and practice. In those settings, we can reaffirm the truth about our dependence on the richness of God's grace and pray for greater integrity between our beliefs and our practices (Pauw 2002: 48)

Engagement in these practices with other people over time can give rise to new knowledge and new capacities for perception that are not accessible otherwise, especially as individuals are left to their own devices.
The problem is not that Jonah fails to believe the right things; he fails to desire the right things. As the Augustinian tradition insists, the link between belief and practice is forged by human desire and attitude. The most accessible indication of my spiritual state is not in my words but in my thoughts. Our thoughts are the most accessible — and terrifyingly so — moral thermometer of our character.

This is why “statements of faith” make me nervous. All denominations and Christian organizations have carefully constructed them to serve as a test of right belief — orthodoxy. And when people submit to them verbally and mentally the church or organization then takes some measure of assurance of allegiance to commonly-held beliefs. I am not concerned that we have these guiding documents, only that we attribute too much to the assent given and what that assent actually means for right practice — orthopraxy. Jonah could have signed an orthodox “statement of faith.”

**Error Two: Wrong Belief/Wrong Practice**

**Alluring Secularization & the Case of the Overly-Optimistic Prediction of Religious Doom**

That the untoward influence of a culture bent on the doctrines of hedonism, narcissism, self-aggrandizement, and destruction pervades modern society is not at question. Certainly, it is beyond dispute that pervasively damnable teachings have direct correspondence to atrociously evil behavior — some of this miseducation and loathsome action mystifyingly oozes from the Church as well. The blasphemy of false proclamation wreaks daily havoc on the vulnerable of our world. This teaching stands as a formidable challenge to Christian view of the world. While it would be easy to proffer how derailed the world culture has become through wrongly-held beliefs and logically misguided practices, it may also be instructive to detail how the demise of the Christian religion, so confidently prophesied, has never eventuated.

Nineteenth and twentieth century pundits confidently predicted that the death of religion would be the natural consequence of secularization. As Stark and Bainbridge (1985:1) puckishly tease: “[M]ost Western intellectuals have anticipated the death of religion as eagerly as ancient Israel awaited the messiah.” Indeed, one still encounters evolutionary accounts of secularization scheduled to execute a decisive death-blow for those dinosaurs who believe they still live under Peter Berger’s “sacred canopy.” It is maintained that religion, and most notably the Christianity dominating Western modernism, simply cannot survive in a rationalized society. Indubitably, the neurosis of superstitious faith would be outgrown. The bleak vision of this seemingly inevitable cultural reality led Max Weber to gloomily paint it as a “polar night of icy darkness and hardness.” And in this vein, Berger foresaw a “world without windows” to describe the resultant effect of the increasing prominence of
rational calculation, typical of science and technology, thus shutting out the light of life-sustaining wisdom. Those who have held to a strong version of secularization see it as an irresistible force, moving steadily forward wherever modernity has a foothold and having more-or-less the same effects in all contexts.

Despite such a cocksure forecast, outbursts of Christianity across the globe are definitively robust, unexpectedly diverse, and surprisingly innovative. The hallowed secularization doctrine has predicted a vanishing not in evidence. Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche have been seen rolling in their graves. Martin Marty called them "the bearded god-killers." The World Christian Encyclopedia assesses the percentage of Christians worldwide to have been 33% to 34% for the last several generations and projects the same proportion in the coming half-century (Barrett & Kurian, 2001). Admittedly, the attenuation of religion in some quarters is found to be disconcerting, yet the sustaining Christian vitality appears to be more than a mere evolutionary freak, which has evaded rationalization or the encroachments of the secular state. In fact, theories of post-modernity generally and of contemporary religion more specifically, are predicated on the belief that Western societies have moved beyond what was understood as modernization and industrialization and most of what those overarching transformations entailed. Ironically, according to postmodernist writers, a new liveliness of religion results from the uncertainty of meaning produced by the postmodern condition. And as a result of this liveliness spurred by secularization, two countervailing processes have historically occurred: revival and religious innovation.

Yet, while secularization studies cannot ignore the thick and resilient undergrowth of common religion that has outlived the moribund atrophy of the Churches' public impact, secularization is a valuable tool for assessing the state of Christianity. Secularization opens our eyes to the cultural isolation of Christianity. And England offers a model case study of dechristianization and its flailing attempts to reintroduce the Christian religion afresh to its alienated postmodern citizens. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, says England has developed something of an allergy to religion. David Lyon (1985, 1) grieves the lessening shadow of the land's church steeples: "Once a respected and central pillar of society, the Church has been demoted from prominence, and relegated to the social fringes."

Marty in The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular (1969: 19) deduces: "England knew a few minor god-killers and now and then provided a home for continental ideas or advocates of ideas about the deaths of God, Church, and Christian culture. But twentieth-century heirs of the legacy of those ideas do not have to deal seriously with the thought about the death of God in England. Rather, they have to reckon with people who began to ignore Christian claims, to become impervious to them; people who found that
God, Church, and Christian teaching were superfluous to their thought and action.” In contrast with the French version of secularizing, he characterizes the English experience as drab and bland. Marty concludes that secularization did not mean the disappearance of Christianity so much as its relocation. This observation—made a generation ago—still persists, yet with a postmodern twist.4

Carroll and Roof (2002) argue that religion only survives by accommodating cultural values and by proving relevant to the experiences of individuals. Hence the advance of achieved, or self-created, religious identity is primarily based upon personal lifestyles and tastes. The importance of identity construction can be seen in the locus of religious belonging. Some contemporary church congregations are becoming what Bibby (1993) refers to as “homogeneous clubs.” People are increasingly opting to belong to religious groupings that are constituted by “people like me,” which enforce and sustain identity formation. Such developments are consistent with the market model of religion. People may be on an individual spiritual journey; nevertheless, they converge on religious associations with the like-minded and those of similar experience.

In the postmodern, post-Christian era, Davie (1994: 17) in Religion in Britain Since 1945 asserts that belonging to the community of faith will often precede believing in that community’s gospel.

Permit the following use of the Church in England, which may have some representative elements of the formerly Christianized Western culture as an extensive case study for this subpoint. The English Church has been described as a punctured balloon, a deflated remnant of a grand idea. The ostentatious cathedrals are tourist Meccas for the curious but anathema for the young—historically interesting, culturally irrelevant. Peter Ball, Co-National Youth Officer of the Church of England resonates with this gloomy depiction, and he wonders aloud if the imposing and historic buildings, hierarchical ecclesiastical structures, and seeming inflexible practices of worship have alienated youth. He may be right. Regardless, the English Church is languishing and youth are fleeing. Estimates of up to one thousand young people leave the church every week.

Secularization as a modernist metanarrative is dead, or at least the popular interpretations of Weber and his ilk. While the ending of Christendom did indeed play out, it did not seal the fate of institutional religiosity nor its social or cultural irrelevance. Granted, organized religion, especially in its modern, denominational forms, is not generally in healthy shape in the affluent Western societies, especially in England. While mainline religious groups may have fallen on hard times, the curtain has yet to fall on faith, spirituality, and the quest for transcendence. Relevant innovations and reactionary movements in search of comfortable expressions of faith in a postmodern world are
symptomatic of an emerging cultural resistance to staid, arcane versions of Western Christianity. Truly one of the Church's most compelling tasks at the start of the twenty-first century is to find ways of accurately and contemporarily expressing the intended meaning of the gospel. Without the faithful, uncompromising proclamation of the gospel, salvation will not come.

Error Three: Wrong Belief/Right Practice
Culturally-Familiar Jessuses & the Case of the Savior Who Looks, Acts, and Thinks Like Me

Perhaps the more expedient among us would settle for right practice even though resulting from wrongly-held beliefs. After all, they might ruminate, as long as in the end good occurs for the sake of the faith, that is what is most important. (If this were the acceptable case, the Mormon religion would not be viewed as heretical by rest of the Christian world.) But the toleration of sloppy theology, even when acts of faith are the result, is still not acceptable. Shoddy interpretation and its misguided application of versions of Christian truth is rife and observed in religious broadcasting, the superstitions and uncritical folk theology of under-informed believers, and in some of our celebrated theological schools.

Although this juxtaposition of belief and practice may seem less innocuous compared to the other two, it is insidious and it is built on slipshod thinking and lazy exegesis. Permit the lengthy following example – some thoughts on contemporary, revisionist considerations of Jesus as a case study of wrong beliefs held by right-intentioned Christians.


No religious personality has captivated so many for so long. In the two thousand years since Jesus lived, more books have been written about him in the last twenty-five years than in all the previous years combined. Indeed, Jesus is the one religious figure so many, whether Christian or not, past and present, have embraced.

Many have a mental picture of a Jesus who looks, thinks, and acts remarkably like themselves: non-judgmental and anti-authoritarian, with dashes of socialism and cynicism. Perhaps it is Jesus' enduring appeal that confirms the still-lingering Christian character of Western civilization even as it also demonstrates its growing religious diversity. From Thomas Jefferson's cut-and-paste Bible to Jesus Christ Superstar, from the feminized Christ of the Victorians to the "manly redeemer" of Teddy Roosevelt's era, from Buddhist bodhisattva to Black Moses, in a myriad of ways, many have remade Jesus in their own image.
Historians have commented on the shallowness of personal commitment that accompanied much of the post-World War II religious resurgence in Europe and America. Church membership could mean little more than respectability and belief in a civilized way of life.

The middle-class subculture has existed in such a close relationship with Christianity it sometimes is difficult to distinguish what is culturally valued from what is Christian. And the newly modernized self-styled Messiah is crowned prince of a new religion—civil religion, environmental faith, cultural Christianity.

The result? Sociologist Peter Berger speaks what church-people know is true but afraid to admit: “The spirit has gone out of many religious institutions to reshape and rather have been shaped by society’s agenda.”

Friedrich Nietzsche lambastes those who re-label the divine in comfortable button-down, middle-class tones: “You have caged Jesus, tamed him, domesticated him. The roaring bull has become a listless ox. You have gelded God!” God is then no longer the universal monarch who inspires confidence and awe but a weak mascot who goes along with the crowd.

I take no delight in arguing that because of the continuous exposure of Christianity to Western civilization, it has been rendered largely immune to the real disease—authentic Christianity.

The gospel, as represented in the teachings of Jesus, is characterized in the New Testament as an “offense,” but today’s strip-mined version seems anything but offensive. The cross is generally adopted as a popular symbol. Theologian Carl Henry warns: “American evangelicalism is being spiritually thwarted by its affluence. No group of Christians has...more to learn about sacrifice. Our lifestyles are clearly non-Christian...marked by greed, extravagance, self-gratification, and lack of compassion for the needy.” The striking words of Jesus are blunted.

Hard to explain, impossible to forget, and defiant of nearly all categories—this is a perfect description of Jesus of Nazareth. Why has Christianity, particularly its evangelical forms, tried so hard to sand off the hard, impossible, category-defying edges of its incomparably personal Messiah?

Why do our literature, conferences, and media so much more celebrate scale and uniformity than they do persons, those fearsome God-bearers who upset our expectations, frustrate our desires for domination, and don’t stay where you put them? The “personal Savior” of evangelical piety is in fact an awesome and untamed incursion of the real into our abstracted, flattened cosmos—so threatening to the machinery of Jerusalem and Rome that he invited and still invites crucifixion.

It is no wonder that we find knowing him, following him, and becoming like him less appealing than learning a new technique. After a century of depersonalized modernity inside and outside the Church, can we, should we,
propose a new version of Christianity? We must.

When I was ten, I reasoned that if I could become an archeologist and finally locate Noah's missing ark that as a result—certainly and universally—our skeptical world would have no choice but to believe. Young and naïve. Perhaps I feel the same again. Because of the misconstrued notions that much of our world has about the real Jesus, I wonder, older but maybe still naïve, if only the Church could stand up and lucidly re-announce the genuine Jesus then belief would come in droves. But alas, things aren't that simple with arks or cultural religions or Jesuses.

A Personal Excursus: Relics, Religion, and Cultural Meaning

I am unabashedly a Europhile and enjoy exploring new slices of the continent every chance I get. As an outsider, an American by cultural-upbringing, I attempt to pay close attention to social mores and historical rules in the places I visit. One may deduce a great deal by uncovering what a society treasures and safeguards.

Recently my youngest daughter and I visited Bruges, a well-preserved medieval town outside of Brussels, Belgium. We stepped into a church—Basilica of the Holy Blood—which, as legend has it, contains a phial of a few drops of Jesus’ blood from the crucifixion. The drops had been brought there, locals explain, in 1149 by Derrick of Alsace and have been kept by succeeding generations and are shown each Friday.

Shortly thereafter we took the train to Trier, Germany, and found ourselves inside the great Cathedral. Trier is the first city north of the Alps to have built a church. Inside, in a climate-controlled space, is “The Tunic of Christ,” reputed to be the garment stripped off Jesus before he was nailed to the cross. The tunic, a large scratchy-looking fabric (that I could only see from the postcard I bought) is about four-feet wide with its sleeves extended and more than five-feet high, was said to be procured by Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine and donated to Trier in 327. The holy tunic is shown only on average once a generation, about every 30-40 years. Helena is also alleged to have purchased the nails used in crucifixion and the actual cross from Jerusalem.

I remember as a young lad watching the 1960s American-made black-and-white version of the movie of The Robe starring screen legend Victor Mature. The novel from which the movie was made still appears in the recesses of many church libraries. He plays a Roman soldier and gambles with other centurions for the rights to this seamless garment stripped from Jesus—the same tunic, it would follow at least in theory, now housed in Trier. As Jesus dies and the darkness begins to descend and the rains come, pierced in my mind is the image of the soldier’s visceral sensation when he comes in physical contract with the robe. It appears electric and supernaturally powerful, rendering
him confused and emotionally riveted given this apocalyptic epiphany.

These relics—blood drops, tunic, nails—are natural human attempts to connect with and touch divinity in the absence of other material links. I suppose it the same reason so many Christians wish to sojourn to their version of spiritual Mecca by traveling to The Holy Land, Israel. It is a chance to walk where Jesus walked and be where Jesus was. Not surprisingly, for some, the experience is disappointing (me included.) There are so few real assurances that any place or site purported to be authentic, that ultimately most attractions are guesswork and tourist-placating supposition.

Throughout the centuries countless artists have tried to fashion their versions of visual representations of their Savior. In the most heralded museums of the world paintings, and sculptures provide us images of how the Christ-Child or the man Jesus might have looked. The cultural influences of the artists can be seen in the ways he is sketched. According to which portrait you might see, Jesus could appear Asian, Hispanic, African, European, even feminine. Based on pictures shown to us as children in Sunday School, many Christians develop an image of what Jesus may have looked like. It is what pre-abstract thinkers must do to conceive of an unseen being. Children intuitively anthropomorphize God and assign human features to the invisible Jesus as well.

When one reads a narrative passage from the gospels, say Jesus feeding the five thousand, what mental picture is envisioned of Jesus’ face and hair and body? Of those growing up in the late 1950s and 1960s, many of us had a very familiar portrait of Jesus hanging on the walls of our Christian homes. Do you know the one I mean? I am thinking of the darkish-brown head-and-shoulders side-shot of Jesus as drawn by Warner Sallman, first released in 1940. Or perhaps you have in mind another equally common picture of by the same artist of a solemn but expectant Jesus waiting patiently at a closed door (with no outside latch because, as it was explained theologically to me, the door can only be opened from the inside, not barged from the outside) for someone to open it so that the Savior may “come in and sup with him.” The face of Jesus is naturally envisioned as being like us—with our ethnic features, even speaking our first language.

To make Jesus fit into our preconceived conventions is what humans of any culture naturally do. God made us in His own image, and we certainly have reciprocated, as the saying goes. And not only do we reinvent Jesus’ image according to ours, but we also tend to attribute our values, customs, and social traditions onto Him as well. Friedrich Nietzsche, certainly no friend of Christianity, nevertheless an astute observer, accuses some of domesticating God, of gelding him, of taming him into a more palatable and culturally accommodating God. Our vision of who Jesus is and what he stands for, whether scripturally accurate or not, then has a powerful influence on how we
"read" the Bible and apply its implications in our attitudes and actions and how we represent our versions of this message to those around us.

I have often claimed in the presence of seminary students that "Hermeneutics" is the most dangerous course in the curriculum. By engaging in the activity of interpretation we must be quite certain that our presumptions of how to do so are sound and not merely loaded with cultural accretions that distort the meaning of the gospel.

**Part Two: Fulfilling the Educational Mission of the Church:**
**Three Forms of Education to Nurture Christian Formation**

Religious education is not. .something that is to be done to make us Christians, or something done after we have become Christian. Rather, it is ongoing training in the skills we need in order to live faithful to the Kingdom *that has been initiated in Jesus*" (Stanley Hauerwas 1985: 187).

In taking me to church, my parents were affirming everything that was American. Church was, in a sense, the only show in town. Church, home, and state formed a vast consortium working together to instill Christian values. The people I knew seemed to grow up Christian, simply by growing up American. While my parents or their forebears assumed that the culture would help prop up the church, almost no one believes that today. Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, Catholics – everyone knows that something has changed. It is not "our" world – if it ever was. Maybe that was never your experience as a child and maybe the relationship of the nation you grew up in does not have this same cozy relationship with the church.

Nevertheless, *the time has come when the church must again take seriously the task of making Christians — of intentionally forming a peculiar people.* The Church and the world are littered from our best-intended yet marginally-resultant efforts at educating Christians – unintended outcomes, curious inventions, and misshapen creatures. What the world needs are those who are sufficiently informed the foundations of their historic faith and who are motivated to actively engage the surrounding culture with faith-motivated practices of love and redemption.

The gospel is a story about something that has happened to us – something that has come to us from the outside. This story claims that by rooting around in our own egos or by reflecting upon our life experiences as men or women, whites or blacks, we really won't discover much that is worth knowing unless we know this Jew from Nazareth who is the way, the truth and the life and are part of a people who follow him. It is only by listening to this story and allowing it to have its way with us that we learn anything worth knowing.
As Augustine said, when we look at our lives without Christ, they look like a chicken yard full of tracks in the mud going this way and that. But in the light of his life, our lives take on meaning, pattern, direction.

Thus, George Lindbeck reminds us that being Christian (or for that matter, being anything more than merely me) is much like learning a language. We learn certain words, grammar, and syntax that enable us to say certain things and not say others. The enculturation that this language provides gives us a new perspective on life and forms us into a particular person. So the first task of the church is formation rather than education—not to bring out, but to bring to. The task of Christian educators is not to develop an individual's potential (as if the world were not already developing all sorts of potentials in us), but rather to induct us into the faith community, to give us the skills, insights, words, stories and rituals that we need to live this faith in a world that neither knows nor follows the One who is truth.

A culture is a people's acquired understanding of life. Through enculturation and socialization, people acquire a particular culture and are able to sustain it within the wider society. The Christian faith is a way of life together, membership within a people, discipleship. Acceptance or rejection of this faith is a "Yes" or "No" to the enculturation of the church. Formation and socialization are not optional matters for human beings; a person must have some culture. The question is not, "Will some community have its way with us?"—for some community inevitably will. The question is, "Will the community that forms us and identifies us be true or false?"

In a pluralistic society, the predominant culture is more concerned with openness than identity. Thus, a person's biological family becomes extremely important since the family is the only unit left in our society that takes identity seriously. If the biological family fails—as many now do—then the developing person is left at the mercy of other subcultures: the imperialistic "peer group." Or culture becomes a matter of ethnicity, gender or social class. We are historical beings who not only make history but are also made by history. We are products of the interactions of others—more than we like to admit. We Americans enjoy thinking of ourselves as independent, free shapers of our own destiny. Such evangelical slogans as "I made my decision for Christ" or "I have decided to follow Jesus" imply that it is my decision, my heroic act of will that is at the heart of my relationship to Christ rather than my formation by the Body of Christ.

Decisions are fine. But decisions that are not reinforced and reformed by the community tend to be short-lived. A Christianity without Christian formation is no match for the powerful social forces at work within our society. Of course, we must make decisions for or against this faith. God has no grandchildren; this faith cannot be inherited. As Tertullian said, Christians are made, not born. The Christian community makes it possible for a person
to walk this path for the rest of life, but it cannot guarantee that those who put their hand to the plow will not look back.

We know that before the fourth century the church at Rome insisted on a long period of instruction and examination by the community before an individual was admitted to baptism. The new convert was allowed to experience the Christian lifestyle under the care of the community. The church knew that it could not survive as the church without careful attentiveness to how it made disciples. Enculturation was an integral part of conversion – a long process of “detoxification” in which the church helped the catechumen critically to examine classical culture and gradually to extricate his or her life from it.

*What the Church has done instinctively, must now be done intentionally.* We must be serious about the task of Christian formation. Our youth must come to see themselves in a sort of master-apprentice relationship with older Christians, in which the young look over the shoulders of those who are attempting to be Christian in today’s world. Christian education should provide opportunities for developing believers to model their lives upon those of developed believers. It should also encourage all Christians to realize that we have the sacred responsibility to fashion our lives and thoughts upon distinctively Christian convictions. Christian development is best understood not as the ordered progression through various “stages of faith” (as in the work of James Fowler) or as instantaneous, momentous conversion (as in evangelicalism) or as articulate self-expression (as in liberalism), but rather as apprenticeship in the art of discipleship. Being Christian is more like learning to paint or to dance than it is like having a personal experience or finding out something about oneself. It takes time, skill and the wise guidance of a mentor. Discipleship implies discipline – forming one’s life in congruence with the desires and directives of the Master.

Many of us have been acculturated to think of religious experience as something that is deeply personal and intensely private – something we discover or uncover. I am arguing that such understanding distorts how we become believers and perverts the fundamental nature of the Christian faith. Becoming a Christian more likely means becoming incorporated into the Christian faith, made members of a body. Any theory of Christian education, any strategy for the formation of new Christians, must begin with ecclesiology – reflection upon what the church is and how it survives.

When one asks people how they became Christians, one is often impressed by how unspectacular and mundane is the process of formation: an admired Sunday school teacher; the habit of being brought to church by parents; a pastor who was attentive during a particularly difficult time in life; the desire for fellowship with others, which blossomed into a community of faith. Therefore, the church must be attentive to the myriad of seemingly little
things that it does to make people feel a part of a community – the daily, unspectacular acts of caring and living together: the hospital visit, the covered-dish supper, the birthday card, the hour spent preparing food at the church’s soup kitchen.

One reason why formation has been deemed unimportant by many churches is that we have assumed that our community is roughly continuous with the society as a whole. We live in a society in which individualism is valued over community and personal autonomy and freedom mean more than truth. Thus, the chief pluralistic virtues are tolerance and affirmation – virtues that the liberal church has absorbed to its peril.

Formation implies the existence of an intentional, visible community made up of people who are willing to pay the price of community. Anyone who has tried to form a closely knit, truly caring, identifiable community knows the risk and the difficulty of such endeavor. It is much easier to be another voluntary organization of open-minded people than to be the Body of Christ in which members assume responsibility for one another’s faith and morals.

In any average church, all the resources and people exist to form Christians. What is needed is an honest admission of our changed status. The church must now compete in an open market with other claimants for the truth. Any church that allows itself to be pushed to the periphery of the struggle, waiting for some socially approved function to perform, unsure of its purpose and lacking confidence in its mission, will perish. In our new situation, we have the opportunity to learn again that the church is the place where Christians are formed.

Christianity is fundamentally a peculiar way of life. Christian initiation, or “christening,” is the process a person goes through within a Christian community of being formed and transformed into a new being, modeled after the likeness of Christ. Yet, two facts need faced. First, after almost two thousand years after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the vast majority of the world’s population have not accepted the Gospel. Second, after almost two thousand years of performing baptisms in the church, the lives of the baptized are not significantly different than the lives of the non-baptized. Fact two explains fact one, but the root of the problem lies in a fundamental misunderstanding of Christian faith formation and the church’s attempts to educate its adherents (Lamport & Yoder, 2006).

To be clear, the educational ministry of the Church is best accomplished by the intentional implementation and careful blending of three forms of Christian learning: formation, education, and instruction.

1. Formation (transformational), which induces persons into the body of Christ, is intended to shape and sustain persons’ faith or perception of life and their lives, their character or identity and behaviors. Formation is a natural
activity known as enculturation or socialization about which we are intentional. Christian formation or nurture involves the practice and experience of Christian faith and life, and, while it is a lifelong activity for the whole community, it is especially necessary and appropriate for children.

2. Education (reformational), which helps persons to develop and actualize human potential and achieve individualization, makes possible the reformation of personal and communal faith and life. As such, Christian education is best understood as critical reflection on practice and experience in the light of Christian faith and life. Education reforms but requires a basic knowledge of Christian faith.

3. Instruction (informational) assists persons to acquire knowledge and skills or abilities useful for responsible personal and communal Christian life in church and society. Instruction requires the ability to engage in mental processes that are developmentally limited until early adolescence.

Without proper instruction (#3), Christian education is impossible. Without good education (#2), faithful formation is impossible. Without formation (#1), instruction makes little difference and education alone is simply inadequate for making Christians. Formation remains foundational. It also is the most complex, least understood, sloppiest, tends to defy measurable programming, most difficult to assess, and admittedly most problematic of the three forms of learning. However, it demands our attention, for without it we will have no possibility of making Christians.

Conclusion: Resurrection and the Story of Faithful Gestures

The consequence of Christian teaching sometimes produces poor results, even countervailing to the mission of the gospel. Where such conditions exist, resurrection is urgent. What it means to be Christian is that we are a people who affirm that we have come to find our true destiny only by locating our lives within the story of God. Hauerwas says, “The Church is but God’s gesture on behalf of the world to create a space and time in which we might have a foretaste of the Kingdom. It is through gestures that we learn the nature of the story that is the very content and constitution of that Kingdom. The way we learn a story, after all, is not just by hearing it. It must be acted out” (1985: 186). Simply put, Christian education is the training in those gestures through which we learn the story of God and God’s will for our lives. The primary task of being educated better Christianly is not the achievement of better understanding but faithfulness. Indeed we can only come to understand through faithfulness as the story asks for nothing less than our lives.

Humans are created with remarkable potential because God has designed them in his image and bestowed many gifts upon them. He desires for them to love him, love their neighbors, and carry out the cultural and redemptive
mandates. However, because of the Fall, humans are depraved in their thoughts, actions, and loves and are unable to love or live rightly. This means of restoration is found in the Church’s ministry of Christianly educating its members. Through transcendent worship, the faith community, thoughtful reflection upon God’s revelation, and engagement with the world, believers can be transformed to think rightly, do rightly, and love rightly.

Endnotes

1. While many people of Christian faith will find it hard to appreciate much of Harris’s book (2004:12), I find great satisfaction in his metaphorical description of how one’s beliefs should manifest themselves in how we live. He says, “A belief is a lever that, once pulled, moves almost everything else in a person’s life. Are you a scientist? A liberal? A racist? There are merely species of belief in action. Your beliefs decide your vision of the world; they dictate your behavior; they determine your emotional responses to other human beings.”

2. This camp took another hit recently when renowned British atheist philosopher Anthony Flew, then 81, abandoned his former strongly held convictions and now believes that God does exist. The scientific evidence compelled him.

3. Philip Jenkins (2002) compellingly articulates why global Christianity is decisively shifting its movement from north and west to south and east, which seems to ring true with those who postulate that as societies gain wealth, the practice of Christianity diminishes.

4. Of a population of 60 million, the number adhering to non-Christian religions is still not large. Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus combined represent no more than 5 percent of the British total, roughly the same non-Christian proportion as in the United States. But we cannot safely conclude that the remaining 95 percent of British people should be classified as Christian. According to a survey taken in 2000, 44 percent of the British claim no religious affiliation whatever, a number that has grown from 31 percent in 1983. More worrying still for the churches, two-thirds of those ages 18 to 24 now describe themselves as non-religious: almost half of young adults do not even believe that Jesus existed as a historical person. Only 40 percent of British identify themselves as Christians, and the degree of this identification is often slight. While 25 million are believed to be members of the Church of England, under a million of these supposed Anglicans can ever be found in Church, even for Easter or Christmas. Between 1989 and 1998 alone, Sunday church attendance for all Christian denominations combined fell from 4.7 million to 3.7 million, a decline of 22 percent just a decade. In a recent dispute over using faith-based charities to provide social welfare, prominent Labour Party politician Roy Hattersly protested that “This is an agnostic nation. People don’t take [religion] seriously.” It is difficult to argue with his assessment—and the fact that he could offer it so uncontrovertially amply illustrates the weakening of a Christian English conscience (Lyon 1985: 94).
Bibliography


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Abstract

The early Methodist movement—above all else—was evangelistic. However, the contemporary language of mission and evangelism with which we are familiar was not in use during the 18th century. In the “Large” Minutes, John Wesley summarized his understanding of Methodism’s purpose: “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists? A. To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” The early Methodist movement offers resources to local congregations among Protestant denominations in the contemporary North American context preoccupied with a shallow connotation of evangelism as merely advertising towards the goal of membership recruitment rather than a comprehensive set of practices for Christian initiation and formation. These congregations often confront obstacles to faithful and effective ministry practices such as: (1) preoccupation with rapid numerical growth to reverse the trend of membership decline, (2) lack of theological reflection, (3) disinterest in sustained Christian practices or spiritual disciplines, and (4) reluctance to engage the other, particularly across socio-economic boundaries including wealth-sharing. This essay engages four aspects of the early Methodist movement in Great Britain as resources for responding faithfully to such obstacles.

Keywords: evangelism, mission, practices, Methodist, Wesleyan, Christian formation

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Scholars have asserted that the early Methodist movement—above all else—was evangelistic. While other denominational traditions often trace their roots to disagreements regarding confessional or theological points, the Wesleyan tradition emerged from an evangelistic and missional imperative. However, the contemporary language of mission and evangelism with which we are familiar was not in use during the 18th century. In the “Large” Minutes, John Wesley summarized his understanding of Methodism’s purpose: “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists? A. To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”

This essay engages aspects of the expansion of the early Methodist movement in Great Britain and their subsequent implications for faithful and effective participation in God’s present mission in the world as messengers of the gospel through disciplined practices of Christian formation. The early Methodist movement offers resources to local congregations among mainline Protestant denominations in the contemporary North American context preoccupied with a shallow connotation of evangelism as merely advertising or hospitality towards the goal of membership recruitment rather than a comprehensive set of practices for Christian initiation and formation.

These congregations and denominations often confront obstacles to faithful and effective ministry practices such as: (1) preoccupation with rapid numerical growth to reverse the trend of membership decline, (2) lack of theological reflection, (3) disinterest in sustained Christian practices or spiritual disciplines, and (4) reluctance to engage the other, particularly across socio-economic boundaries including wealth-sharing. Four aspects of the early Methodist movement offer resources in light of these obstacles:

(1) ‘Growth’: While much of contemporary ‘evangelism’ is quantified by the rapid increase of local church attendance, the early Methodist movement, despite staggering numbers of listeners to open-air preaching, acknowledged a relatively slow growth through an intense process of Christian formation in small group gatherings resulting in changed lives.

(2) Doctrine: The doctrinal foundation of the Methodist movement did not prioritize technical distinctions from other traditions. Instead, a simple authentic scriptural Christianity framed
the movement. Exposure to doctrine, particularly through Charles’ hymns, evangelized and nurtured individuals in the Christian faith.

(3) Organization and practices: The intentionality of the early Methodist movement’s organization and practices, particularly classes, bands, and lay preachers, emerged from doctrinal frames for the purpose of facilitating intentional and meaningful growth among participants.

(4) Wealth-sharing: Theological consideration of economics and its implications for personal and communal faith was an important if not essential discipline required of early Methodists that contributed significantly to changed lives—among both givers and receivers.

By reflecting upon these aspects of the early Methodist movement in light of contemporary obstacles to Christian formation, this project aims to contribute to discernment of the church’s mission and vocation “to serve the present age.”

John, Charles, and Evangelism

John Wesley, seen as the architect of the early Methodist movement, navigated sometimes treacherous landscapes of doctrinal and ideological polemics while remaining focused on the evangelistic task. Though John lived and died within the Church of England, his decisions, for example regarding his ordination of Coke, Whatcoat and Vassey, while evangelistically motivated, contributed to the differentiation of Methodism from the Church of England.5 John’s strong doctrinal commitments to an authentic Christianity and innovative leadership within the early Methodist movement, including his facilitating lay preachers/exhorters (including women), building gathering spaces, and ultimately ordaining a select few, encouraged renewal within the Church of England and at the same time created a distinctive Methodist movement.6

Charles differed strongly from his elder brother John on the related issues of ordination within the early Methodist movement and its separation from the Church of England. In light of the brothers’ distinctiveness on such issues and the connection of John’s innovative leadership to the early Wesleyan tradition’s evangelistic imperative, does this imply Charles did not share John’s evangelistic imperative? No. Charles’ commitments to the Church of England and its renewal, specifically the deepening of faith and discipleship among its adherents through preaching and hymnody, were distinctly—if not dramatically—evangelistic.7 Some would argue that maintaining ecclesial unity was the evangelistic and missional imperative—since disunity arguably undermines the witness of the Christian gospel.8

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5. John’s strong doctrinal commitments to an authentic Christianity and innovative leadership within the early Methodist movement, including his facilitating lay preachers/exhorters (including women), building gathering spaces, and ultimately ordaining a select few, encouraged renewal within the Church of England and at the same time created a distinctive Methodist movement.

6. Charles differed strongly from his elder brother John on the related issues of ordination within the early Methodist movement and its separation from the Church of England. In light of the brothers’ distinctiveness on such issues and the connection of John’s innovative leadership to the early Wesleyan tradition’s evangelistic imperative, does this imply Charles did not share John’s evangelistic imperative? No. Charles’ commitments to the Church of England and its renewal, specifically the deepening of faith and discipleship among its adherents through preaching and hymnody, were distinctly—if not dramatically—evangelistic.

7. Some would argue that maintaining ecclesial unity was the evangelistic and missional imperative—since disunity arguably undermines the witness of the Christian gospel.
Charles Wesley’s evangelistic leadership within the early Methodist movement included traditionally identified practices such as preaching and visitation as well as the strong influence of his hymns upon the Christian formation of early Methodists. In addition to these, his commitment to the Church of England through his opposition to separation demonstrated evangelistic commitment. Accounts of early Methodism featuring the ministries of both John and Charles, though their styles remained distinct, demonstrate a shared purpose for renewal. This shared purpose benefited from the complement of each brother’s gifts and perspective for the large portion of their lives and ministry in a common evangelistic cause—to spread scriptural holiness.

**Counting Conversions: Growth of the Movement**

It may be worth stating that, for me, there is nothing wrong with numerical growth. Ultimately the message of salvation is good news resulting in the expansion of the reign of God. However, focusing so narrowly upon quantitative growth, specifically congregational membership, reveals a myopia overlooking the true telos of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the reign of God. A further bereavement occurs when many local churches in their desire to add members look only to similar demographics and/or similar or higher social status, neglecting Jesus’ ministry with the marginalized, including children, the infirm and impoverished.

This is all to say that ‘growth’ in early Methodism did take account of numbers but ultimately remained focused upon growth in grace through relationship with God and neighbor in the unfolding reign of God. This section surveys the expansion of early Methodism related to participation in field preaching and the networks of societies that composed circuits. This section relies upon statistics gleaned and interpreted by Richard Heitzenrater in his *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Subsequent sections will unpack the interconnectedness of a steady, and sometimes slow, growth in the early Methodist movement emerging from doctrinal foundations and facilitated by organization and practices, including wealth-sharing.

The Evangelical Revival in England, of which the Methodist renewal movement was a part, included such themes as strong preaching, evangelical conversions, and spiritual demonstrations. The Methodist renewal movement began modestly early in 1739 in Bristol with the inauguration of field preaching by George Whitefield among the coal miners of Kingswood, soon followed by class meetings. Upon Whitefield’s invitation, John arrived in Bristol in late March 1739 to take Whitefield’s place among the societies. When John learned of Whitefield’s preaching in the open air, he wrote that he could “scarce reconcile [himself] at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields.” While open air preaching, often called field preaching,
not necessarily limited to fields, was not illegal, it was highly irregular, especially among respectable Anglican clergy. John claimed he had been "so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that [he] should have thought the saving souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church."\textsuperscript{19}

However, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, John's text for April 1, provided a persuasive precedent alongside witnessing Whitefield preach to approximately 30,000 persons.\textsuperscript{20} The following afternoon John "submitted 'to be more vile'" and preached in the open air by his estimate to 3-4,000.\textsuperscript{21} During his first month in Bristol, John estimated a total attendance of 47,500 persons at his field preaching, an average of 3,000 per event.\textsuperscript{22} Charles was skeptical of the practice of field preaching, particularly the excessive numbers reported by Whitfield and his brother.\textsuperscript{23} His skepticism waned following his albeit reluctant—claiming he "broke down the bridge" and became desperate—preaching at Moorfields on June 24, 1739, to a crowd he calculated at 10,000. The large crowd convinced him it was a work of God's will.\textsuperscript{24} John, Charles, and Whitefield continued to preach in the open air attracting tremendous crowds, Whitefield usually attracting the largest. In addition to the 'fields,' these itinerant preachers and their cohorts addressed crowds in a variety of contexts such as prisons, gallows, grave yards, market squares, mines, as well as an occasional advantageous acoustical spot under a tree.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite the staggering numbers reported at such gatherings, in 1744, John cautioned against excessive field preaching as his leadership turned to consolidating the movement and creating a foundation of doctrine and discipline.\textsuperscript{26} As Heitzenrater observes, the aim of John's leadership of the early Methodist renewal movement to "spread scriptural holiness" was not to create a "wildfire" but rather to manage an intentional and steady pace of growth.\textsuperscript{27}

Although Whitefield and the Wesleys' preaching, particularly in the open air, is well documented for its evangelistic impact upon British as well as North American Christianity, their preaching did not stand alone as an effective method of evangelism. Significant to understanding preaching as one aspect of the early Methodist renewal movement is the practice of preaching alongside the creation of societies and/or preaching in areas where religious societies such as bands and class meetings existed. In 1745 the Methodist Conference under John's leadership decided to experiment with preaching wherever opportunities arose, first in Wales and Cornwall, and then later in the north, without forming societies, or regardless of the presence of societies, to nurture those responding.\textsuperscript{28} The results of the experiment were unequivocal. Christian formation provided by the Methodist small groups organized by John Wesley allowed a significant number of those moved by the revival's preaching to be nurtured and maintained in the faith.\textsuperscript{29} When these groups were not accessible, those moved by the preaching were often lost. The experiment ceased in
1748, and the Conference turned its focus to the formation of societies.  

By 1750 the Methodist revival was a recognizable feature in Britain. Centered mostly in London with societies there consisting of approximately 2,000, Methodism was sizable, but with 10,000 members nationwide was only one-half of one percent of the total population of ten million. Nearly three dozen preachers in England, Wales, and Ireland were preaching on nine circuits, which served almost one hundred societies. Into the 1760s, Methodism was quite different from twenty years earlier with over thirty circuits in England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. Nearly one hundred traveling preachers encouraged 20,000 society members—still a relatively small number, the membership growing nationally by less than 1,000 per year.

By the middle of the 1770s, Methodism was growing steadily in America, although in both North America and England the political views of John and Frances Asbury could result in the occasional loss of membership, for example, their anti-slavery stance. In England, societies were steadily growing by approximately 1,600 members per year. However, about a quarter of the circuits showed a yearly decrease (and were marked with an asterisk in the Minutes) while some remained stable and others grew. In 1775, Leeds was the second circuit to surpass 2,000 members with London, which was still at 2500 after twenty years.

In 1781, with continued steady growth there were 178 preachers, one for every 250 members, a constant ratio since 1767 The number of circuits had nearly doubled to sixty-three (in England), but only about a dozen had over 1,000 members. Interestingly, the asterisks in the Minutes formerly marking declining circuits marked growing ones. Perhaps because more than twice as many circuits as in the worst previous year had lost members. While growth was steady overall, this did not preclude the possibility for local decline or other setbacks.

In his letter to Vincent Perronet in December 1748, later published as a pamphlet entitled, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” John described the emergence of the early Methodist renewal movement with little, if any, reference to quantitative growth. Instead, the document tracked a rich tapestry of themes embodied by and characteristic of the movement, namely, theology, organization, and mission growing from a shared commitment to spreading scriptural holiness.

“Following Only Common Sense and Scripture”: Doctrinal Foundations

According to scholars, in the last two centuries a steady decline in theological aptitude has occurred among those interested in evangelistic ministries. This has resulted in a lack of theological reflection related to Christian practices, especially evangelism. John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards are both considered great scholars and practitioners of evangelistic theology and ministry of their
generations. However, the beginnings of a major shift may be detected during the nineteenth century toward a growing apathy for the intellectual pursuits and lack of interest in theological discourse by those related to evangelistic thought and practice.39

In the contemporary context this shift manifests itself in the prioritizing of social scientific methods, including marketing techniques, in “doing” evangelism.40 While there is nothing inherently wrong with psychological/therapeutic or business/marketing tools, these must not take precedent over the salvation narrative of scripture, Christian theological tradition, and spiritual formation experiences. These tools can be helpful, but only if viewed through the lens of faith and practice—of being Christian in communities of accountability.

Despite their social status, privileged education and theological formation, the Wesleys did not emphasize a sophisticated doctrinal distinctiveness for the Methodist movement. Instead, John described a shared desire with Charles in his “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists” to preach and “to convince those who would hear what true Christianity was and to persuade them to embrace it.”41 John seemed to emphasize the unexpected emergence and expansion of the early Methodist renewal movement. Within this seemingly unexpected emergence, he named the following as important resources for the early Methodists: “following only common sense and Scripture; though they generally found, in looking back, something in Christian antiquity.”42 The following four points were “chiefly insisted upon”:

First, that orthodoxy, or right opinions, is at best but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all; that neither does religion consist in negatives, in bare harmlessness of any kind; nor merely in externals, in doing good, or using the means of grace, in works of piety (so called) or of charity; that it is nothing short of or different from the ‘mind that was in Christ’; the image of God stamped upon the heart; inward righteousness, attended with the peace of God and ‘joy in the Holy Ghost.’

Secondly, that the only way under heaven to this religion is to ‘repent and believe the gospel’; or (as the Apostle words it) ‘repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Thirdly, that by this faith, ‘he that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, is justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ.’

And, lastly, that ‘being justified by faith,’ we taste of the heaven to which we are going, we are holy and happy, we tread down sin and fear, and ‘sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.’43
In this way, John with Charles emphasized Christian doctrinal foundations of relative simplicity, particularly justification while hinting at sanctification, from a perspective that resonated with persons’ spiritual experiences.

Following their rather dramatic spiritual experiences in 1738, John and Charles tended to emphasize justification, with Charles focusing five of his six first sermons on the theme. The Wesleys asserted the doctrine was under-represented during their time and context. In his 1739 sermon “On Justification,” Charles argued that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was clearly represented in the Articles and Homilies suggesting that this essential Christian foundation had been abandoned. Charles argued that evangelism was not a novelty of the revival era but rather intrinsic to Christian doctrine and grounded in scripture and tradition.

In his “The Character of a Methodist,” John answered the questions, “Who is a Methodist?” and “What is the mark?” with this response: “A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in [one’s] heart.” For the Wesleys the marks of Methodism were not religious opinions or distinctive doctrinal commitments setting them apart from other Christians. Grounding his comments in “all sufficient” scripture, John turned not to technical distinctions but to a broad doctrinal foundation of salvation by faith and holiness of heart and life. A shared focus upon justification and sanctification provides a helpful resource for contemporary congregations with little if any doctrinal frame beyond a decision-based evangelism for the purpose of membership recruitment in local congregations.

In his essay, “Formation for Christian Leadership: Wesleyan Reflections,” Randy Maddox ably connects John’s reflections near the end of his ministry in his sermon “Causes of the Inefficacies of Christianity” to the contemporary context. John opens the sermon with the assertion that Christian communities across the world had done so little good because they produced so few real Christians. Wesley outlined three obstacles faced by the church which contributed to this plight. Christians in such communities often lacked: (1) a sufficient understanding of doctrine, (2) adequate discipline, and/or (3) self-denial. According to Wesley in this later sermon, an inadequate view of salvation too confined to forgiveness of sins or too narrowly focused upon justification led Christian communities to nurture few real Christians.

The Wesleys’ theological reflection was strongly influenced by their own and others’ spiritual and life experience. The Wesleys’ approach to ministry included continual study and theological discourse in conversation with fellow scholars, ministers, and believers around issues of faith and doctrine. While John may receive more attention in many cases, the theological integration and foundation of the movement is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the composition and use of Charles’ hymns. A revisiting of the role of Charles Wesley’s hymns composed for the people called Methodists can
contribute to a positive shift towards theological integration in contemporary Christian practices such as evangelism.

The primary purpose of hymn-singing in the early Methodist renewal movement was Christian formation through catechism in scripture and doctrine.50 Though Charles did not write all of the poetry to accompany such hymns, he wrote much of it. As scholars have noted, Charles’ poetry sung widely as hymns more than anything else formed the early Methodists. Brian Beck asserts that despite the scriptural doctrinal content and influence of the hymns composed largely by Charles, the hymn books of the early Methodist movement did not receive doctrinal status.51 In 1784 the Deed of Declaration granted doctrinal status to John’s Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of Sermons, however no such status was given to a hymn book. Beck argues,

We deceive ourselves, I believe, if we imagine that John Wesley’s extensive theological writings were the decisive influence in the formation of the Methodist preachers or their hearers. Their importance in the controversies of the time and their influence on the preachers who read them cannot be denied, but the words that lingered in the minds of the society members. were not snatches from [sermons or notes] .but [hymns].52

In contemporary United Methodism, the United Methodist Hymnal and Book of Worship are recognized informally as doctrine by virtue of each receiving approval by the General Conference prior to publication, although the United Methodist Hymnal includes only fifty-two Wesleyan hymns.

In his hymns, both instruments and products of the movement, Charles drew heavily from scripture both in verbal allusions and imagery.53 John’s arrangement of hymns in the 1780 hymn book follows a pattern of spiritual experience that is instructive for a context lacking in exposure to and knowledge of Christian scripture.54 As Ernest Rattenbury observed, everything is written within the framework of an eighteenth century Arminian evangelical theology.55 In spite of their lack of doctrinal status, Rattenbury argued John treated the hymns as doctrinal documents.56 The hymns consistently focus upon atonement and personal salvation as central to the gospel and Christian scripture.57 Thomas Langford described the Wesleyan hymns as leading one back to basic themes and emotions of the formative faith: the soteriological center, the emphasis on God’s grace and human appropriation, the challenge for growth and missional responsibility.58 According to Langford,

Charles Wesley is important not because he added new thoughts or insights to theological discourse, but because he creatively provided for the Methodist revival a theological character suited to its self-
understanding. He added a distinctive theological dimension; or, perhaps better, he helped provide a new dimension to theological expression for the Methodist revival; that is, he kept theology immediately and ineluctibly related to the worship and service of God.\textsuperscript{59}

In this distinctive theological dimension, Charles, with John, maintained a solid doctrinal foundation for the dynamic missional components of the early Methodist movement—connecting doctrine, with practices, for the purpose of spreading scriptural holiness.

\textit{“To Watch Over One Another in Love”: Organization and Practices}

Not unlike John’s observations in “Causes of the Inefficacies of Christianity,” contemporary congregations often demonstrate apathy for sustained Christian practices, or in John’s words—discipline—preferring instead techniques promising immediate results.\textsuperscript{60} However, John, with Charles, oversaw the organization of the early Methodist movement with intentional connectedness, not merely to one another for mutual support and accountability, but also to the movement’s aim to form believers in holiness of heart and life. John consistently urged that authentic spiritual formation could not take place, “without society, without living and conversing with [others].”\textsuperscript{61} The distinctiveness of the early Methodist movement was not in its novelty or innovation but a simple, yet profound, integration of doctrine and discipline towards an authentic Christianity through an intentionally comprehensive program of preaching and small groups.

In John’s \textit{“A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists”} much of the pamphlet addresses organization and practices of the movement, particularly small group gatherings for spiritual nurture. In response to pleas for guidance and prayer, John facilitated regular gatherings of interested persons. Only one condition was required of those requesting admission, “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.”\textsuperscript{62} These gatherings resembled religious societies common among the Church of England, as well as Pietists, and grew into networks of Methodist circuits across Britain.\textsuperscript{63} These gatherings, namely united societies, specifically class meetings alongside penitent, select and other bands, provided opportunities for early Methodist lay persons, including women, to assume leadership roles such as class and band leaders, lay assistants, stewards, and sick visitors.\textsuperscript{64} More importantly, such small groups provided a context in which most early Methodists experienced spiritual conversions facilitated by consistent practices of piety and mercy.

The General Rules for the United Societies describe the gatherings as “a company of men [and women] having the form and seeking the power of
godliness, united in order to pray together, receive words of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”65 The one condition for admission remained, “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.” Continuance in the societies then required a bearing of fruits to that effect facilitated by the following three general rules: (1) by doing no harm, and avoiding evil of every kind; (2) by doing good; and (3) by attending upon the ordinances of God.66

The latter consisted of what John often referred to as the means of grace or works of piety and mercy. In the context of bands and classes, individuals encouraged one another in their Christian journeys through public and private prayer, study of scripture, confession, and fasting, as well as praise and worship. These activities, also known categorically as works of piety, were means of grace through which individuals might come to know faith in Jesus Christ. Participation in works of piety also provided avenues through which faith might be nurtured and encouraged to grow. In addition to works of piety, members of religious societies, classes, and bands also engaged in works of mercy, addressing the bodies as well as souls of persons. Whereas works of piety emphasized individual spiritual growth, works of mercy included feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the imprisoned, sick and afflicted. Interestingly, John prioritized works of mercy over works of piety.67

While John, Charles, and Whitefield attracted substantial crowds with their field preaching, these venues were less often occasions for spiritual experiences, though they sometimes contributed to an individual’s awakening to an ongoing process of conversion.68 According to Thomas Albin’s illuminating study, lay people were more influential than clergy in facilitating key spiritual experiences such as conviction or awakening, new birth, and sanctification.69 The social environment of the new birth was significantly different from that of the awakenings, with the most frequent social context for early Methodist conversion occurring in solitude, followed by small groups.70 In Albin’s study, most individuals began participating in Methodist societies prior to their experience of the new birth. While more than half received a spiritual experience within the first year, one individual in the study received such an experience after 48 years, creating a mean of two years and four months between conviction and conversion in this study for overall time participating in society prior to receiving a spiritual experience.71

Regular preaching in societies, at times by lay persons, complemented the singing of hymns and other means of grace with a consistent exposure to doctrine inviting individuals to cultivate deeper spiritual formation and to bear fruit in Christian discipleship.72 John legally named Charles his successor in 1746 in charge of Methodism upon his death.73 As second in command, Charles often cared for lay preachers, including recruitment and examination.74
Charles felt that participants in societies were less likely to wander and those already departed might return if skilled competent preachers were maintained. In 1751, John left the examination of preachers largely to Charles with instructions to discern “grace before gifts.” However, Charles was disturbed by a seeming proliferation of insufficient gifts among lay preachers.

As Charles fulfilled his responsibility for “purging the preachers,” traveling through the Midlands and the North of England, his letters expressed a deep worry for the possible separation of Methodism from the Church of England. His concern related to separation arose from a prevalence of lay preachers obtaining licenses as nonconformist ministers and administering the Lord’s Supper. Charles wrote to John Nelson, “Rather than see thee a dissenting minister, I wish to see thee smiling in thy coffin.” Some lay preachers argued that their pastoral role would be strengthened if they were permitted to administer communion in the Methodist societies. John encouraged Methodists to regularly receive communion in Anglican parish churches. For Charles, increased attendance at communion demonstrated the effectiveness of the early Methodist renewal movement and fulfillment of the evangelistic imperative shared by the brothers. Many participants would not go to their parish churches, missing an opportunity to participate in a primary means of grace, unless lay preachers in societies enabled access to the sacrament, increasing the possibility of separation. In addition to letters, Charles expressed his views on such lay preachers in a series of ten hymns published in 1758.

John addressed accusations of schism in “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists.” To those who asked, “Is not this making a schism? Is not the joining these people together gathering Churches out of Churches?” He replied, “If you mean only gathering people out of buildings called churches, it is. But if you mean dividing Christians from Christians, and so destroying Christian fellowship, it is not. That which never existed cannot be destroyed.” Both itinerant preachers and Anglican priests, John and Charles, though perhaps Charles more than John, were loyal Churchmen. Some scholars seem to portray these two commitments, itinerant evangelical preaching and loyalty to the Church of England, as a dichotomy, supposedly at odds with one another. However, it seems plausible, even viable, that these relate directly to one another since the Methodists and their societies were a community within the Church of England hoping to spread scriptural holiness by calling the Church to repentance.

“Give All You Can”: Early Methodist Practices of Wealth-sharing

A study of Protestant denominations in the United States revealed as much as a 35% decline in benevolence giving since 1968. As American wealth has increased, giving as a percentage of total income has declined. Some
argue that a postponement of ethical awareness has also occurred, particularly among seeker oriented congregations, in the midst of an increasingly individualistic and consumer-driven context in which self-sacrifice and community responsibility have become unpopular, or at least unneeded.98

The Wesleys’ context was not entirely different from contemporary American Protestantism with the dawning of capitalism and the flourishing of England’s colonial trade markets, though the majority of Methodists and English society were relatively poor. John consistently addressed issues of poverty, wealth and benevolence in his writing. Following scriptural themes, he encouraged generosity among Methodists of every socio-economic class. Scripture includes five hundred verses on prayer, less than five hundred verses on faith, yet over two thousand on money and possessions. Approximately 10% (228 verses) of the gospel texts focus upon the use of money.89

John was not interested in providing a systematized outline of his own economic ethic. However, by examining often repeated themes, Maddox suggests four cornerstones of John’s message concerning wealth and possessions: (1) the source of all things is God and so all things belong to God; (2) earthly wealth has been placed in human hands to be stewarded on God’s behalf; (3) God expects that we use what we are given to provide for our own necessities and then the necessities of others; and (4) to spend our God given resources on luxuries while others are in need of necessities is to misuse what God has given us.90

In his sermon, On Use of Money, John outlined the proper actions of a Christian approach toward wealth in his famous, and often misused quote, “Gain all you can, without hurting either yourself or your neighbour. Save all you can, by cutting off every expense which serves only to indulge foolish desire. Give all you can, or in other words give all you have to God.”91 This is not, as is sometimes claimed, an endorsement for the laissez-faire capitalism introduced by Adam Smith.92 John’s writings on similar economic themes, such as Thoughts on the Scarcity of Provisions (1773), were roughly contemporary with Smith’s publication of Wealth of Nations (1776). However, John Wesley and Adam Smith articulated different ultimate goals concerning economics.

Smith advocated the retention of wealth as the basic means of accumulating more wealth. John encouraged the gaining of wealth so that it could be shared among the kingdom of God.93 In the sermon, On Use of Money, the first two points—make all you can and save all you can—John resonates with Smith’s advice for individuals to acquire capital. Even on the third point that once wealth has been acquired it must be used to best advantage, John and Smith agree. However, John turned this budding economic theory on its head with his last instruction to give all one can. For John, money is used to best advantage to meet the basic needs of one’s neighbor, and not simply used as a tool to accumulate more wealth. In a world where the rich get richer,
Wesley admonished excess accumulation as theft from God. Wesley applied this definition with unyielding strictness, accusing those who accumulated wealth as stealing from the poor.

Do you not know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessaries for your families) to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind. How can you, how dare you, defraud your Lord by applying it to any other purpose?  

Wesley had quite a strict definition of wealth that can be found in his sermon on The Danger of Increasing Riches. In sum, if anyone held goods above the necessities, then one was rich. Wesley applied this definition with unyielding strictness, accusing those who accumulated wealth as stealing from the poor.

Wealth is a gift from God, supplied to humanity to meet basic needs (food, shelter, clothing) and then to be given to others to assist in meeting their basic needs. Wesley saw this ordering not as a viable system of secular communalism, but rather as the requirement of God, lived out in the example of Christ. In his sermon, The Good Steward, Wesley makes this connection explicit.

But first supplying thy own reasonable wants [necessities], together with those of thy family; then restoring the remainder to me [God], through the poor, whom I had appointed to receive it; looking upon thyself as only one of that number of poor whose wants were to be supplied out of that part of my substance which I had placed in thy hands for this purpose; leaving the right of being supplied first, and the blessedness of giving rather than receiving.  

It is a significant point that one restores the gift of money to God through the poor. Once again Wesley had made clear the spiritual dimension of providing for physical necessities and the physical dimension of the spiritual life and growth. Money is a gift from God that is used for God’s purposes. These purposes are outlined in scripture and modeled in the life of Christ.

Opportunities within the Methodist renewal movement for demonstrating love of neighbor through works of mercy included charity schools, orphanages, medical clinics, shelters, meals, zero interest loans and other programs to help people meet their most basic needs and to better their condition. Such programs were formed to assist people according to five general categories: (1) the impotent or helpless poor who needed the most basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing; (2) the unfortunate or able poor who needed
assistance in bettering their economic situation; (3) the children who needed education for mind, body, and spirit; (4) for the literate but uneducated adults who could benefit from Wesley's publishing program; and (5) to help the poor and infirm with hospitals, pharmacies, and free medical advice.\textsuperscript{97} It is important to note that Methodist efforts for assisting the poor initially targeted those within the Methodist societies.\textsuperscript{98} This later expanded to some outside the movement through Stranger's Friend Societies.

In keeping with Wesley's idea of community after the example of Christ, he encouraged his wealthy patrons not merely to give money to the poor but also to become personally involved with their plight. Miss March had well grounded apprehensions about having physical contact and conversation with the poor. Wesley empathized with her objections but urged her to make such connections after the example of Christ. Wesley was not asking her to befriend the poor but to:

visit the poor, the widow, the sick, the fatherless in their affliction; and this, although they should have nothing to recommend them but that they are bought with the blood of Christ. It is true that this is not pleasing to flesh and blood. There are a thousand circumstances usually attending it which shock the delicacy of our nature, or rather of our education. But yet the blessing which follows this labour of love will more than balance the cross. (JWL, 6:208-9)\textsuperscript{99}

Giving to those in need was not just a magnanimous gesture on behalf of the rich to succor the poor; it was a deep spiritual discipline that carried spiritual benefit to both giver and receiver.

Wealthy and poor alike were expected to participate in these disciplines. In this way John Wesley universalized the response to poverty. All were expected to offer assistance, including the poor themselves, including the widow with her mites.\textsuperscript{100} Added to Wesley's impressive personal record of giving, outlined in detail throughout his diaries, Wesley demanded that his followers give generously and often even when they themselves stood on the brink of poverty. John was so bold and so constant in his requests for money to be used on behalf of the poor that Charles complained.

How many collections think you has my brother made between Thursday evening and Sunday? No fewer than seven. Five this one day from the same poor exhausted people. He has no mercy on them, on the GIVING poor I mean; as if he was in haste to reduce them to the number of the RECEIVING poor.\textsuperscript{101}

John's insistence upon strict financial discipline is one of the primary reasons Methodism did not attract a larger membership during his lifetime.\textsuperscript{102} However, John was more interested in renewal through spreading scriptural
holiness than large numbers. Such strictness eroded slightly over time and was greatly relaxed after John’s death, a situation predicted by John as he neared the end of his life.103 It does seem that by the 1760s, John softened his stance indicating that it was permissible to accumulate a bit beyond the bare necessities of life as long as this was not the primary goal being pursued.104 In any case, there seems a strong correlation between the relaxing of expectations particularly related to wealth-sharing and the swelling of numbers among Methodists, especially in the United States.

Renewing the Church: Conclusions

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the early Methodist movement can offer resources to local congregations confronting obstacles to faithful and effective ministry practices such as: (1) preoccupation with rapid numerical growth to reverse the trend of membership decline, (2) lack of theological reflection, (3) disinterest in sustained Christian practices or spiritual disciplines, and (4) reluctance to engage the other, particularly across socio-economic boundaries through wealth-sharing. Four aspects of the early Methodist movement that address these obstacles include:

(1) ‘Growth’: While much of contemporary ‘evangelism’ is quantified by the rapid increase of local church attendance, the early Methodist movement, despite staggering numbers of listeners to open-air preaching, acknowledged a relatively slow but steady, intense process of Christian formation in small group gatherings resulting in changed lives.

(2) Doctrine: The doctrinal foundation of the Methodist movement did not prioritize technical distinctions. Instead, a simple authentic scriptural Christianity framed the movement. Exposure to doctrine, particularly through Charles’ hymns, evangelized and nurtured individuals in the Christian faith.

(3) Organization and practices: The intentionality of the early Methodist movement’s organization and practices, particularly classes, bands, and lay preachers, emerged from doctrinal frames for the purpose of facilitating intentional and meaningful growth among participants.

(4) Wealth-sharing: Theological consideration of economics and its implications for personal and communal faith was an important, if not essential, discipline required of early Methodists that contributed significantly to changed lives—among both givers and receivers.

While there is not a quick and easy recipe for spreading scriptural holiness, or in more recent language within United Methodist, to make disciples for the transformation of the world, Christian communities of accountability
grounded in scripture, doctrine, and faithful practices cannot but offer an evangelistic witness to their neighborhoods and the world.

End Notes

1 This paper was presented to the Christian Formation Working Group of the Twelfth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, Christ Church, Oxford, England, August 14, 2007.


3 Albert C. Outler, “A New Future for Wesley Studies: An Agenda for ‘Phase III,’” in Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, eds., Essays of Albert C. Outler: The Wesleyan Theological Heritage (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 125-42. In this essay, Outler outlined previous and possible phases of Wesley Studies as well as the issues confronting the work Phase I: The Methodist Cocoon (in which Methodists were basically content to leave their patriarch on his pedestal), Phase II: Selective Interpretations (which demonstrated a lessening emphasis upon the Wesley-Methodist symbiosis); and Phase III: Historical Context and Ecumenical Relevance (in the midst of historiographical and hermeneutical issues.

Outler goes on to argue that serious Wesley studies must also seek relevance for contemporary Christians as well as Methodists). This essay, building on others in a similar vein, pursues what may be categorized as Phase III Wesley Studies related particularly to the theme of evangelism. Randy Maddox proposes the theme of forming Christian leaders, lay, clergy, and scholarly, as a Wesleyan agenda for the future in his essay, Randy L. Maddox, “Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Some Wesleyan Agendas,” Richard Sykes, ed., Methodism Across the Pond: Perspectives Past and Present on the Church in Britain and America (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 2005), 45-60.


5 From 1745, John Wesley was convinced of Lord Peter King’s argument in Enquiry that bishops and presbyters were from the same order, providing a rationale


7 Charles has even been called “the first Methodist.” See Frederick C. Gill, *Charles Wesley: The First Methodist* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964). However, not without dissent. See also Frank Baker's review in Duke Divinity School Review 30 (Autumn 1965), 212-13.

8 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 205-10. In his discussion of the missionary paradigm of the Eastern Church, Bosch explains, “If mission is a manifestation of the life and worship of the [Orthodox] church, then mission and unity go together.” See Bosch, 208.

9 John R. Tyson, “Charles Wesley, Evangelist: The Unpublished New Castle Journal,” *Methodist History* 25:1 (October 1986), 41-60. The journal describes Charles' persistent practices of traditional evangelism, such as itinerant preaching, prison visitation, and care for the outcast.


11 David Bosch explains that evangelism is “not a call to put something into effect, as if God’s reign would be inaugurated by our response or thwarted by the absence of such a response... In light of this, evangelism cannot be defined in terms of its results or effectiveness, as though evangelism has only occurred where there are ‘converts.’ Even so, evangelism does aim at a response.” See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 412-13.

12 As Walter Klaiber notes, the good news is not necessarily good in its initial hearing. Therefore, he suggests language from biblical foundations of message of salvation to describe the concept of evangelism. See Walter Klaiber, *Call and Response*, 22-26.

13 According to Lesslie Newbigin, although the earliest accounts of the Christian church in Acts highlight numerical growth, “the rest of the New Testament furnishes little evidence of interest in numerical growth.” Newbigin argued, “The emphasis falls upon the faithfulness of the disciples rather than upon their numbers.” He continued, “In no sense does the triumph of God’s reign seem to depend upon the growth of the church.” See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, revised edition 1995), 125. Newbigin offers these remarks in a constructive response to Donald McGavran and The Institute of Church Growth of the School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary, particularly content of a presentation by McGavran made to the International Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne, 1974).

14 Jones, *Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor*, 41-2. This focus upon similar demographics can echo church growth techniques based on a homogenous unit principle.

15 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 97

16 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 97. As Heitzenrater explains, Bristol was a growing industrial center and port of nearly 50,000 (about

17 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 98.


21 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 100.

22 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 100. Presumably, these field preachers felt some need to justify their irregular practice, leading to the emphasis upon such staggering numbers.

23 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 100.


26 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 99-100. According to Heitzenrater John suggested, “To avoid giving needless offense, we never preach without doors when we can with any conveniency preach within.” The expansion was to be gradual, to “go a little and a little” from the society meetings “so a little leaven would spread with more effect and less noise, and help would always be at hand.” (Minutes, 23).

27 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 149.


29 Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 115. Runyon argues that despite George Whitefield’s larger crowds and greater public attention, Wesley and his religious societies most likely preserved more fruits from the eighteenth century revival preaching as a result of their Christian nurture and discipleship.

30 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 165. John noted in the Minutes: “Almost all the seed has fallen by the wayside; there is scarce any fruit of it remaining.” According to Heitzenrater quoting John, “The preacher had little opportunity for instructions, the awakened souls could not ‘watch over one another in love,’ and the believers could not ‘build up one another and bear one another’s burdens.’” A more detailed discussion of spiritual formation and small groups occurs in the subsequent section “To Watch Over One Another in Love: Organization and Practices.”

31 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 181.

32 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 181, see also map, 180.

33 Still facing occasional persecution, Methodism was considered fanatical by many and not well understood by most. See Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 181.

34 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 216-17


37 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 276.


43 "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," I.2. Works, 9: 254-55. See also Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1960), 401. According to Finney, "The church is mighty orthodox in notions, but very heretical in practice, but the time must come when the church will be just as vigilant in guarding orthodoxy in practice as orthodoxy in doctrine, and just as prompt to turn out heretics in practice as heretics that corrupt the doctrines of the gospel." Abraham argues that Finney marks a shift away from serious theological reflection among practitioners. He summarizes, "In other words, we not only need to attend to the experiential, communal, and moral dimensions of initiation; we also need to deal with its intellectual, operational, and disciplinary aspects." (Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 9, 142). For a provocative discussion of epistemology of conversion, particularly Wesley's bi-focal attempt looking to God's being as an indication of God's love experienced in the present, or as salvation now, see William J. Abraham, "The Epistemology of Conversion: Is There Something New?" in Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, eds., *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 175-91.


45 Albin, "Charles Wesley's Other Prose Writings," 90.


49 Maddox, "Formation for Christian Leadership," 116. Maddox goes on to unpack the twofold natures of sin, grace, and salvation in his instructive essay.

50 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 231. Hymn singing also gives believers an opportunity to testify spiritual experiences.

51 Brian Beck, "Rattenbury Revisited: The Theology of Charles Wesley's Hymns,"
Epworth Review 26:2 (April 1999), 71.

52 Beck, “Rattenbury Revisited: The Theology of Charles Wesley’s Hymns,” 71. Exposure to Charles’ hymns are demonstrated by impressive printing statistics, for example, Hymns on the Lord’s Supper (ten editions in just under fifty years) or the Large Hymn Book of 1780 (seven editions in twelve years). Charles, with John, also published widely in addition to hymns. For example, Charles Wesley’s “Awake Thou that Sleepest,” written in 1742 and preached before the University at Oxford April 4, 1742, was the most published and purchased tract in early Methodism. See Tyson, Charles Wesley: A Reader, 13, 212-220. According to Doughty, “Dust may lie thickly on the tombs of eighteenth-century sermons, but there are few churches in Methodism—and even beyond her borders—in which Charles Wesley does not preach on almost every Sunday of the year in those glorious hymns which are so rich a part of our Christian heritage, and dead and dying souls are quickened into newness of life” “Doughty, “Charles Wesley, Preacher,” 267). See also Albin, “Charles Wesley’s Other Prose Writings,” 91.

53 Paul Ellingworth, “I’ and ‘We’ in Charles Wesley’s Hymns,” The London Quarterly and Holborn Review (April 1963), 156. The hymns were both instruments and products of the movement. Their meaning/truth/life found in the following three main facets of early Methodism: (1) in individual experience and private devotion; (2) in the corporate life of the bands, classes and societies; and (3) in the evangelism, especially field preaching of the Wesleys and their helpers. See also Beck, “Rattenbury Revisited: The Theology of Charles Wesley’s Hymns,” 73.

54 Beck, “Rattenbury Revisited: The Theology of Charles Wesley’s Hymns,” 71, 75, 77 Charles’ hymns are not without some criticism, particularly from scholars in the contemporary context. Such criticisms include a lack of attention to the social impact of the gospel and prophetic implications for the ordering of public life or conduct of nations. See Beck, 78. See also Ellingworth, “I’ and ‘We’ in Charles Wesley’s Hymns,” 156, 159, 160. Ellingworth argues that Charles’ hymns are largely individualistic, though they reach upward and then outward. He claims they are limited to the world of nature, and the Church is portrayed as mostly invisible.


58 Langford, “Charles Wesley as Theologian,” 98.

59 Langford, “Charles Wesley as Theologian,” 104.

60 See Philip D. Kenneson, Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in the Christian Community (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), and Kallenber, Live to Tell.


63 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 21. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge has its roots in the religious societies founded by Anthony Hornbeck in the 1670s, the English counterparts to the collegia pietatis organized by Jacob Spener.


65 See also “Rules of the United Societies,” Works, 8: 269-71.

66 The General Rules were meant for mutual support, but were also enforced, serving as a guide for accountability specifically in the Newcastle societies of 1743. The General Rules are protected as formal doctrine within the UMC tradition and appear in the UMC Discipline. General Rules of United Societies, UM Book of Discipline (2004), 72-74.


69 Albin, “An Empirical Study,” 277 In relation to awakening and conviction, lay people are mentioned three times more frequently than clergy, twice as often in relation to the new birth, and four times more often in relation to sanctification. Interestingly, in many accounts there is no human catalyst identified. See Albin, 278.


75 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 197

76 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 182-84. See Letters, 26: 472-73) Charles concerns emerged particularly with regard to preachers in Ireland.


78 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 206.

79 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 206-07
81 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 207
83 “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist,” I.11, Works, 9: 258.
84 Church, “Charles Wesley — The Man,” 250-51.
85 J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns (London: Epworth Press, 1954, third edition), 228. Rattenbury argued that Charles’ loyalty to the Church of England “had little influence on his evangelical theology.” While there is not enough room here to make a sustained response, this dismissal seems too swift. See also Church, “Charles Wesley — The Man,” 250.
86 Rattenbury, The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns, 229. The loyalty of Charles to the Church of England was unbreakable and perhaps rather pathetic because he was an irregular churchman — field preaching in opposition to the Bishop and first to administer the sacraments in Methodist preaching houses, yet he never actually disobeyed Episcopal commands. See Rattenbury, 230. See also Charles’ poem, “Did we preach ourselves, or Christ the Lord?” mentioned by Rattenbury.
88 For example, See Marva J. Dawn, Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), particularly 2-16; and Bishop Ken Carder, “Market and Mission: Competing Visions for Transforming Ministry” (Hickman Lectures, Duke Divinity School, October 2001).
92 Maddox, “Visit the Poor: John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,” 62.
93 Maddox, “Visit the Poor: John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,” 62-62.
96 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 321.
97 Richard P. Heitzenrater, “The Poor and the People Called Methodists,” in

98 Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the People Called Methodists," 32.

99 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 252.

100 Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the People Called Methodists," 36.

101 "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," XIII.2, Works, 9:277


104 Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the People Called Methodists," 30. An interesting note is that when Wesley married he greatly relaxed his stance on accumulation.
A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene 1905 to 2004
Mark R. Quanstrom
Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press

On one level, Quanstrom’s book on holiness theology reads like a detective novel. He begins with the crime scene (“by the end of the [twentieth] century entire sanctification would not be taught so much as an instantaneous change. .but rather more as an unremarkable event in the process of growth, if at all”), and he then works his way back, recounting much history, to offer an explanation as to how this event occurred.

Originally the doctrine of entire sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene was taught as a second, distinct work of grace, subsequent to regeneration, that was received instantaneously by faith. In this conception, contrary to contemporary objections, revisionings and misunderstandings, the Nazarenes actually followed fairly closely the doctrine of John Wesley himself. Decension, however, set in rather quickly as holiness folk began not only to distinguish between sin properly (a willful violation of a known law of God) and improperly (any violation willful or not) speaking—in a way that even Wesley had done—but they went beyond the Father of Methodism by offering what was touted as a “more realistic” understanding of the nature and extent of sin. Here the possibility of heart cleansing was modified “in light of the subsequent ‘failures,’ of the sanctified.”

An accomplice in the death of the historic teaching on Christian perfection was the gradualist reading of Wesley’s doctrine of salvation that arose, oddly enough, in his name during the twentieth century. Salvation at its highest reaches was understood to be an incremental process, fostered through the means of grace, that ever advanced by degrees. In this newfangled view (tied in with the theological fad of reading Wesley through an Eastern Orthodox paradigm) purity was equated with maturity in a way that many holiness leaders of the nineteenth century specifically cautioned against. As Quanstrom points out, J.A. Wood, author of the holiness classic, Perfect Love, believed
“one could never mature into purity.” Such wisdom, however, has apparently been lost.

Another culprit in this cast of characters included, interestingly enough, some of the nineteenth-century holiness leaders themselves especially as they tied entire sanctification to Pentecost. Quanstrom views this development as an “American addition to Wesley’s doctrine coming primarily from outside the Wesleyan tradition via Charles G. Finney and New School Presbyterianism.” Whether one agrees with his analysis or not, the consequence of this move was to foster increasing confusion in terms of the scriptural (and Wesley’s own) teaching on the new birth and entire sanctification. That is, Pentecost does not represent the perfection of the church but its beginning. And if the disciples of Christ were entirely sanctified at Pentecost, then this can only mean that they were real, true, proper Scriptural Christians, regenerated and initially sanctified by the Spirit, prior to Pentecost—a view that Wesley specifically rejected. Give such confusion, when many holiness folk in the late twentieth century thought they were explicating John Wesley’s teaching on entire sanctification, they were actually describing his views on the new birth! And if the grace of regeneration is not properly understood, how will one ever understand entire sanctification?

As he recounts the story of holiness theology late into the twentieth century, Quanstrom painfully but accurately observes: “there was no substantial agreement in the [Nazarene] denomination over what it meant to be “entirely sanctified.” And if the recent conference on “Revisioning Holiness” sponsored by the Nazarenes is any clue, then we can only conclude that the present state of the doctrine among some holiness folk is indeed in considerable flux. Quanstrom’s perceptive, courageous and well written book helps us to understand just why this is so.

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**John Wesley’s Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness**

**D. Stephen Long**

2005. 257 pp., paper, $34.00

_Nashville: Abingdon Press_

Bringing together a strong background in both theology and philosophy, Stephen Long, associate professor of systematic theology at Garrett Theological Seminary, has produced a book in Wesley studies that will likely be discussed for years to come. His basic thesis, weaved throughout the work with numerous subtle and fresh expressions, is that a significant shift had occurred during the Age of Reason (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) in which God and the good were separated. At first the cultural elites of this
period, philosophers and educators among them, were content with having “the good” become a more general category than the term “God” with the result that the latter was virtually subsumed under the former. That is, leading moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, Locke and Kant among them, attempted to ground morality on “self-evident axioms akin to geometry.” In time this patchwork arrangement was discarded by others, and the full humanistic thrust of these subsequent thinkers became evident, as even the language of “the good” dropped out to be replaced by “the rights” that (self-referential) people enjoy. In short, an autonomous individual having rights is a far different starting point than a community responding to the evocative power of God ever calling them through the means of grace.

Long expresses this shift in yet another way by distinguishing moral theology, which resonates with a medieval, sacramental and participatory approach to reality, from ethics, which is predicated on the divorce between God and the good. Interestingly enough, the cash value of this distinction in the twentieth century issued in numerous attempts by Methodist theologians and ethicists to substantiate the ongoing relevance of theology by a vigorous (and often self-righteous) appeal to a “grand social reality.” Seminaries and colleges, for instance, quickly re-titled their course offerings in order to demonstrate the new perspective until the oddly-drawn course that was more about the twentieth century than the eighteenth finally emerged, namely, John Wesley’s Theology for Today. Indeed, some contemporary Methodist theologians actually went on record by declaring that they had virtually no interest in John Wesley’s theology until they perceived how they could relate his theological reflections to the social vision and analyses of Marxism. The problem with this move, then as now, was that it subsumed the story of the church, and the gospel (and that of Methodism as well) under some other discourse where a “politics of division” continually held sway.

In light of these developments, Long calls for a return to a “metaphysics of participation,” reflected in Wesley’s theology, in which happiness and holiness can once again become the goal of humanity, in which the moral life depends on “friendship with God” through the inculcation of the theological virtues, and in which the beatitude that arises from the vision of God enjoyed by the ecclesial community is selflessly shared with others. However, if the story of the church is indeed a more general narrative than that of “the good” as Long suggests (“the church is that social reality than which nothing more universal or more public can be conceived”), then such a view must be held with great care and in deep humility lest those “outside” the church be treated as the “other” and, in the worst instances, as “enemies.” In other words, though Long has made the case for a theologically informed ethic, what he calls moral theology, he nevertheless has not laid out a detailed, positive program as to how this can occur and what consequences it will hold for
those beyond the church. To be sure, the pages of church history (just ask the Jewish community) are filled with the results of those who intended to do the will of God (Deus vult) and serve the church, but in doing so left a record of persecution and remarkably un-Christ-like behavior. Simply put, Long needs to articulate a number of checks and balances (perhaps in a future book) that will accompany his worthy theological vision.

Methodist Theology Today
Clive Marsh, Brian Beck, Angela Shier-Jones, and Helen Wareing, eds.
2004. 256 pp., paper, $21.95
New York London: Continuum

This recent edited work which purports to be about Methodist theology today for the most part simply embraces the British Methodist scene which has not been noted for its theologians. Indeed a hesitancy, perhaps even an awkwardness, quickly emerges among the contributors with respect to serious theological inquiry lest all of this be considered, as they put it, “too high-falutin.” And in terms of the basic question, “What is so special about Methodism?” the editors glibly reply, “nothing.”

The nothingness, the unsettling emptiness, of this oddly executed book is evident in its frank recognition that the use of Wesley texts was “diluted during the twentieth century” as theological fads, many of them coming from the political left, ruled the day. In making a distinction between the interpretation of the written Word (the Bible) and the living Word (the contemporary judgment of the leaders of the British Methodist Conference), one contributor thereby feels empowered to effectively set aside the authority of Scripture (actually the authority of God, according to N.T. Wright) for the sake of new, and in her judgment, better understandings—especially in terms of the highly controversial matter of human sexuality. Indeed, the theological drift that has characterized British Methodism for much of the twentieth century (and now into the twenty-first) is so painfully evident here especially as it affirmed: “There is no single common or dominant theological understanding of the nature of scriptural authority at work in British Methodism.”

What fills the void here, what is actually authoritative or normative throughout, is the judgment of the leaders of British Methodism itself, a judgment that gives every indication that it has been culturally accommodated in significant ways. Since Scripture is “not the only place of revelation” and since revelation itself is deemed to be ongoing (“God continues to reveal”), the essays naturally invite the kind of systemic critique that emerges from a
significant reading of the writings of Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, who both cautioned against the heady narcotic of mistaking fleeting cultural forms, all-too-human products, for revelation, the very Word of God. As one contributor put it in a shaft of refreshing honesty: “Methodism’s openness to current trends of thought...may be interpreted as showing a tendency to ‘be confirmed to this world.’” Most readers will agree.

Having lost the generous balance between personal and social ethics so typical of the work of John Wesley, current British Methodist leaders, as amply demonstrated in this volume, have decided to become “less centered on evangelism, and the pilgrimage of individual Christians,” with the result that Methodist membership (Is anyone surprised by this?) continues to decline in Britain. And though this British “Great Reversal,” similar to its North American counterpart, is chalked up to ongoing tensions between the evangelical and catholic elements in the movement, the situation is actually far more complicated than this observation allows. By way of analogy, when the voting was taking place in 1969 on the possible reunion of British Methodism with Anglicanism, it was a successful coalition of Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals within the Church of England which actually defeated this measure. Neither group wanted to be a part of the doctrinal lassitude and the theological skittishness that British Methodism would likely bring to the enterprise. Indeed, the minority of evangelicals within British Methodism today (a persecuted lot to be sure) have far more in common with the Anglo-Catholics of the Church of England than they do with many of the Methodists of their own communions.

But what is particularly sad, even poignant, about the British Methodist situation is that while on the one hand its leaders do indeed acknowledge that “the Methodist Church may cease to exist as a separate Church entity during the twenty-first century (though not because the Anglican church wants to unite with it), on the other hand, these very same leaders refuse to take what steps would actually begin to address this downward spiral. Indeed, they doggedly insist on staying the course in British Methodism and on affirming “its own peculiar identity and understanding of ministry.” But this is far too much peculiarity in the face of a hurting world that needs to hear the gospel, genuine good news.

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