THE SHAPE OF WESLEYAN THOUGHT: THE QUESTION OF JOHN WESLEY'S "ESSENTIAL" CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

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It is an honor to be part of this historic conference on "The Legacy of John Wesley for the Twenty-First Century." We are celebrating John Wesley's three-hundredth birthday this year. The institution I serve, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, so this is a year of synchronous Wesleyan celebrations. The question of legacy, as I understand it, is not a question of mere history (that is, everything that happened) but is a question of valuing, that is, it is a question of what from the past we value today and in this case, what we value as relevant to the aspirations of the Christian community as the global Christian community enters its own third millennium.

In this paper I want to reflect on "The Shape of Wesleyan Thought: The Question of John Wesley's 'Essential' Christian Doctrines." In a more extended work on "The Shape of Wesleyan Thought," I shall argue that John Wesley had two somewhat different lists of "essential" doctrines: one list of essential Christian doctrines, and a related but distinct list of doctrines that characterized the Evangelical Revival (namely, repentance, faith, and holiness). That more extended argument will try to show that this pattern of asserting what is commonly Christian, on the one hand, and what is distinctive about the Evangelical message, on the other hand, continued to structure Wesleyan thought beyond the age of John Wesley. For example, this pattern appears in the outline of Methodist hymnals, where we find with great consistency an initial section of hymns in praise of the divine Trinity, reflecting the faith of the ecumenical church and then a section of hymns on "The Christian Life," singing sinners and believers through the process of repentance, faith and sanctification. In my paper today, I want to focus on one aspect of this broader argument, namely, the question of John Wesley's essential Christian doctrines, that is, what did John Wesley believe to be the core or essential doctrines that define Christian faith?

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1. **Background, Status Quaestionis**

"A man of a truly catholic spirit," John Wesley wrote, "has not now his religion to seek. He is fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine." But what were "the main branches of Christian doctrine," as John Wesley understood them? And in what sense were they "fundamental" or "essential" or "necessary"? Necessary for salvation? Fundamental to Christian unity? Because John Wesley never gave out a definitive list of essential doctrines (or so it is generally claimed), scholars have given a variety of answers to these questions. This paper responds to these questions about John Wesley's understanding of "essential" or "fundamental" doctrines by offering some criteria by which we can discern Wesley's fundamental or essential Christian doctrines. With these criteria clarified, the paper discerns seven specific essential doctrines in John Wesley's understanding of the Christian faith. Elsewhere I have tried to identify doctrines that, in John Wesley's view, were the distinct characteristics of the evangelical movement.

John Wesley's distinction of "essential" or "fundamental" doctrines reflected an ongoing discussion about necessary or fundamental doctrine inherited from the time of the Protestant Reformation. One of the options advocated by such Catholic humanists as Desiderius Erasmus and by such Protestant Reformers as Philipp Melanchthon was to suggest that Christians should agree on a relatively short list of central or "fundamental" teachings and allow a wide range of disagreements over non-essential doctrines or opinions (the term *adaphora* was used in sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century theological disputes to distinguish "non-essential" or "indifferent" doctrines or opinions). This notion was taken up late in the seventeenth century and early in the eighteenth century by Protestant Pietists, who maintained that Christian piety should be a principal ground of unity, and Christian unity did not rely on detailed agreement in doctrinal matters.

It is widely recognized that John Wesley distinguished consistently between "essential" or "fundamental" doctrines, on the one hand, and non-essential "opinions," on the other hand, most notably in his 1749 sermon on a "Catholic Spirit," but also in a wide range of writings through his career. Nevertheless, the question of what precisely were his "essential" doctrines has continued to puzzle his interpreters.

The Australian Methodist Colin Williams, whose 1960 study of *John Wesley's Theology Today* influenced generations of Wesleyans, attempted to identify Wesley's essential doctrines by collating passages where Wesley himself indicated that a particular teaching was an uncompromisable, "essential" or "fundamental," element of Christian faith. Using this method, Williams took the following six items to be essential doctrines for John Wesley:

1. original sin,
2. the deity of Christ,
3. the atonement,
4. justification by faith alone,
5. the work of the Holy Spirit, and
6. the doctrine of the Trinity.

Williams's list and his criterion of identifying doctrines explicitly stated by John Wesley to be essential or fundamental offers a useful beginning point, although as it stands it offers a
rather unorganized combination of doctrines. Item 5 is especially problematic: one can argue that it refers to the distinctive teaching of the Methodist movement that insisted on "perceptible inspiration," although my own reading of the passages that Williams quotes at this point is that Wesley did not insist in these loci on any doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit; rather, Wesley insisted that the work of the Holy Spirit itself is necessary to Christian existence. On this reading, Wesley was not making a claim about an essential doctrine. Moreover, Williams neglects at least two doctrines that, in my opinion, Wesley does claim as fundamental or essential, namely, the doctrines of biblical authority and the doctrine of regeneration.

In contrast to President Williams's list of John Wesley's essential doctrines we have a very different list that appeared two years after the publication of Williams's work in Lawrence Meredith's 1962 Harvard dissertation on "Essential Doctrine in the Theology of John Wesley with Special Attention to the Methodist Standards of Doctrine." Meredith's dissertation focused on three essential doctrines in John Wesley's thought, namely:

repentance,  
faith, and  
holiness.

This triad is grounded in a passage in John Wesley's "Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained" in which Wesley asserted that "Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three,—that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness." It is clear that Meredith had conceived of the project of "essential doctrine" in a different way than Williams, whose book he had indeed seen before the publication of his own thesis. Rather than identifying passages in which Wesley had denoted a doctrine to be "essential" or fundamental, Meredith tried to find a logical consistency or coherence to Wesley's claims about characteristically Methodist teachings. Despite the focus on "essential doctrine" in his dissertation, then, what he sought was rather different than Colin Williams's quest for the ecumenically significant core or fundamental doctrines in John Wesley's work. In fact, using my own terminology, what Meredith did was to restrict the ecclesial scope of the claims he examined to distinctive claims emphasized by the Methodist movement. This is helpful in its own way, and Meredith's work will be important in developing my argument about distinctly Methodist teachings.

This paper utilizes the following criteria to discern John Wesley's essential or fundamental doctrines.

1. As indicated above, I do follow a version of Colin Williams's criterion that takes seriously what John Wesley himself said in identifying specific doctrines as "essential" or "fundamental" or "necessary."

2. A variation on or expansion of Williams's criterion is to identify at least one passage where John Wesley indicated that a particular doctrine is uniquely constitutive of Christian faith, without utilizing the terms "essential" or "fundamental" or "necessary." In one passage in his "Character of a Methodist," Wesley identifies the doc-
trine of biblical authority as distinguishing Christian faith from other religious traditions in language parallel to his affirmation (in the same paragraph) that the doctrine of the deity of Christ distinguishes Christian faith from other religious traditions. 30 [This is omitted in oral presentation.]

3. I identify an extended passage in John Wesley’s “Letter to a Roman Catholic” (1749) in which Wesley gives a summary (though not a list) of Christian doctrines held in common by Protestants and Catholics. I shall argue that the way in which this passage is cast, bracketed by John Wesley’s clear distinction between essential doctrines and non-essential “opinions,” shows that he believed the content of the passage to express essential Christian teachings.

4. We can consider the consistency between doctrines identified by these methods and the doctrines included in the Articles of Religion that were sent to North America with Thomas Coke in the fall of 1784. 31 Although this criterion in itself might not identify a particular doctrine as essential or fundamental (since a wide variety of doctrines were affirmed in the Methodist Articles), it will serve at some points as confirming the status of some doctrines as fundamental to John Wesley’s understanding of the Christian faith.

In each case, I shall try to examine texts with attention to their contexts, and with the intent of discerning the “ecclesial scope” of John Wesley’s doctrinal claims, that is, whether he claims specific doctrines as necessary for Christianity in general, for Protestant identity, or for the identity of the Methodist movement.

2. JOHN WESLEY’S DOCTRINAL AFFIRMATIONS IN THE “LETTER TO A ROMAN CATHOLIC” [OMIT IN ORAL PRESENTATION]

Keeping these criteria and the question of ecclesial scope in mind, I now want to examine some of John Wesley’s specific claims about essential Christian doctrines that appeared in 1749, at the time when Wesley wrote his sermon on a “Catholic Spirit.” In fact, it appears that Wesley actually began a statement of essential doctrines within this sermon, when he asked about the nature of Christian unity with reference to his Scripture text, “Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?” 32 After dismissing inappropriate notions of Christian unity (such as the notion that Christian unity depends on unity in “opinions” or modes of worship), 33 Wesley then proceeded to state positively what Christian unity should imply, and the first two paragraphs in this statement begin as follows:

The first thing implied is this: Is thy heart right with God? Dost thou believe his being and his perfections? his eternity, immensity, wisdom, power? his justice, mercy, and truth? Dost thou believe that he now “upholdeth all things by the word of his power?” and that he governs even the most minute, even the most noxious, to his own glory, and the good of them that love him? hast thou a divine evidence, a supernatural conviction, of the things of God? Dost thou “walk by faith not by sight?” looking not at temporal things, but things eternal?
13. Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, “God over all, blessed for ever?” Is he revealed in thy soul? Dost thou know Jesus Christ and him crucified? Does he dwell in thee, and thou in him? Is he formed in thy heart by faith? having absolutely disclaimed all thy own works, thy own righteousness, hast thou “submitted thyself unto the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Christ Jesus?” Art thou “found in him, not having thy own righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith.” And art thou, through him, “fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life?”

From this point, the sermon focuses on signs of Christian unity in heartfelt faith and in appropriate Christian practice. But I would note that the passage begins by naming the importance of faith in God the creator and faith in Christ as God, that is, it appears to begin a Trinitarian formulation of Christian faith although it does not follow through with this scheme.

John Wesley did follow through with such a scheme in a critical, extended passage in his “Letter to a Roman Catholic,” written in Dublin on 18 July 1749, very close to the time in which he wrote his sermon on a “Catholic Spirit.” The text of this passage is given in a “codicil” at the end of this paper. In this work, Wesley urged his Catholic reader to avoid disputes about “opinions,” which here have the same meaning as in the sermon on a “Catholic Spirit,” viz., non-essential doctrines.

John Wesley then engaged a rhetorical device, namely, understatement or meiosis. The device he uses is not a simple understatement, but involves an apparently restrictive claim that is later revealed to imply a much larger claim. In this case, Wesley made a series of claims about the beliefs of “a true Protestant,” beliefs about which he might claim some expertise and in discussing which he could temporarily sidestep the issue of his authority for describing Roman Catholic beliefs. “A true Protestant may express his belief in these or the like words…” he wrote, and then in five numbered paragraphs he paraphrased the substance of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. With this summary complete, Wesley then revealed his use of meiosis by asking,

Now, is there anything wrong in this? Is there any one point which you [the Catholic reader] do not believe as well as we?

But you think we ought to believe more. We will not now enter into the dispute. Only let me ask, If a man sincerely believes thus much, and practices accordingly, can any one possibly persuade you to think that such a man shall perish everlastingly?

Bracketed as it is by reference to division over “opinions,” and acknowledging the rhetorical device used in this passage, it is clear that what Wesley identified here was in fact what he took to be the essence of Christian faith—Protestant and Catholic. That is, although the passage is literally cast as reflecting the beliefs of “a true Protestant,” Wesley’s use of meiosis tried to show his Catholic reader that what “a true Protestant” believes is in fact consistent with the essence of Christian faith that should be shared by all Christians. The ecclesial scope of the passage is thus ecumenical (“catholic,” in the sense in which Wesley affirmed
this word) and so the passage offers what I believe is as close as John Wesley came to a statement of essential or fundamental Christian teachings, even though it is not structured as a list of fundamental teachings. 28

The content of this passage begins by following the Trinitarian pattern of the Apostles’ and Nicene-Constantinopolitan creeds. At a number of points, Wesley follows the language of Anglican Bishop John Pearson’s classic Exposition of the Creed, a document well known to the Wesley family. The recently published works of Susanna Wesley include an extended commentary on the Apostles’ Creed that Susanna Wesley wrote, based on Pearson’s Exposition. 29

The first paragraph of this passage in the “Letter to a Roman Catholic” affirms belief in God the Father, affirming God’s fatherhood in relation to Christ’s divine sonship and God’s fatherhood in relation to God’s providence over all things. 30 The second paragraph affirms doctrine about Christ. Wesley affirms Christ’s offices as prophet, priest and king, he affirms the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed’s assertion that Christ is “God of God, very God of very God,” and he affirms Chalcedonian language about Christ “joining the human nature with the divine in one person.” 31 This paragraph also includes a reference to Wesley’s belief in the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin, an odd point in describing the beliefs of “a true Protestant,” but a point that heightened the meiosis employed in the passage. It also affirms the reality of Christ’s work on behalf of human salvation, including Christ’s suffering, death, burial and resurrection, echoing the words of the Apostles’ Creed.

The third paragraph of this passage affirms belief in the Holy Spirit “equal with the Father and the Son” and the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about human salvation. 32 The next paragraph affirms belief in the “catholic, that is, universal, Church” which comprises all who have fellowship with the divine Trinity, both the living and the dead. 33 The fifth and final paragraph of this creedal passage affirms that “God forgives all the sins of them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel,” concluding with the affirmation that the “unjust” will suffer eternal torment and the “just” will “enjoy inconceivable happiness in the presence of God to all eternity.” 34

Framed as it is by the Trinitarian shape of the creeds, this extended passage affirms five of the six teachings that Colin Williams identified as essential doctrines for John Wesley: the doctrine of the Trinity (Williams’s item 6), the doctrine of the deity of Christ (item 2) and the atonement (item 3) in the paragraph or article on Christ, teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit (item 5) in the paragraph or article about the Holy Spirit, and at least a glancing reference to the doctrine of justification by faith (item 4), though not couched in traditional Protestant language of justification by faith “alone.” Wesley’s statement on justification appears in the last paragraph (on the final judgment), where Wesley asserted that, “God forgives all the sins of them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel.” 35 This passage from the “Letter to a Roman Catholic” also includes a reference to the doctrine of regeneration, asserting that God the Father “is in a peculiar manner the Father of those whom he regenerates by his Spirit, whom he adopts in his Son.” 36 Oddly enough, it is the doctrine of original sin (Williams’s item 1) that is absent from Wesley’s sustained discussion of common Christian teachings here. It would appear that John Wesley’s concern with original sin as an essential doctrine did not develop until the mid to late 1750s, when he published his doctrinal treatise on “The Doctrine of Original Sin:
According to Scripture, Reason and Experience" (1757) and then his doctrinal sermon on “Original Sin" (1759), though it seems odd that it is not mentioned in an extended description of common Catholic and Protestant teachings.

This particular passage from John Wesley’s “Letter to a Roman Catholic" deserves sustained attention in a discussion of Wesley's essential doctrines. Although Williams himself did not deal with this passage in his own treatment of essential doctrines, the passage gives a kind of logical form to the group of “essential” items that Williams had identified in a more or less haphazard fashion in John Wesley's writings. Because the letter was written in 1749, it gives an indication of Wesley’s sense of the most important Christian affirmations fairly early in the development of the Methodist movement (i.e., about ten years after John Wesley’s initial open-air preaching).

Moreover, we can also observe that John Wesley crafted this passage in such a way that characteristic emphases of the Methodist movement also appear as integral aspects of the Christian faith in. Taking Meredith's list of characteristically Methodist doctrines, for example (these are repentance, faith, and holiness), we find repentance and faith asserted together (“God forgives all the sins of them that truly repent and unfeigned believe his holy gospel")37 and the need for holiness under the article on the Holy Spirit, whom Wesley describes as

the immediate cause of all holiness in us; enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions; purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies, to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.38

The reader may also discern in this last quotation reference to the distinctly Wesleyan teaching about the assurance of pardon. Even the paragraph on God the Father includes a reference to believers as “those whom he regenerates by his Spirit, whom he adopts in his Son."39 The creedal passage from the “Letter to a Roman Catholic,” then, weaves together themes of Christian doctrine inherited from the ancient church, from the Reformation, and from the Methodist movement (the subject of a subsequent project).

3. Seven Essential Christian Doctrines

We have considered above Colin Williams’s list of six fundamental or essential doctrines, although we called into question the fifth item he listed (the work of the Holy Spirit), since it does not appear to be a doctrine that Wesley considered essential in the same sense as other common Christian doctrines. Utilizing Williams’s own criterion, however, it would be fair to add another item to his list at least provisionally, namely, the doctrine of regeneration, since in one of the passages Williams cites, John Wesley stated that both the doctrines of justification and regeneration were “fundamental” for Christians.40 That is to say, the doctrine of regeneration should be an essential doctrine according to Williams’s own criteria for discerning essential doctrines, even though Williams failed to include it in his list. Moreover, I shall argue by a kind of expansion of Williams’s criteria (see criterion number 2 in the list above) that the doctrine of scriptural or biblical authority can also be seen (provisionally at this point) as essential or fundamental to Wesley. At
least, he himself claimed that it was constitutive of Christian faith. This, then (subtracting one and adding two from Colin Williams’s list), gives us a list of seven “essential” doctrines in John Wesley’s understanding, which I now propose to examine individually.

1. The Doctrine of the Trinity

With this revised list of essential doctrines in mind, we can now attempt to identify more precisely in what ways some of these doctrines were “essential” in Wesley’s understanding. On the doctrine of the Trinity, Williams cites a passage from John Wesley’s sermon on ‘The Trinity’ (1775) stating explicitly that the doctrine of the Trinity is a necessary or essential doctrine. In the passage Williams cites, Wesley made the point that the praise of the one God in three Persons is closely tied to vital Christianity. Wesley also made the point through the introduction to this sermon that there is a wide difference between fundamental beliefs and opinions, and the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed one of the fundamental beliefs of Christian faith. Moreover, it is important to note that this sermon, like the “Letter to a Roman Catholic,” was written during one of Wesley’s visits to a traditionally Catholic region of Ireland (in this case, County Cork), and it is significant that in the first paragraph of the sermon he indicates that both Catholic and Reformed authors have been mistaken in many of their “opinions,” but may nevertheless be saved by faith in Christ. The context and the text of the sermon itself make clear that its ecclesial scope is ecumenical (trans-confessional), and its claim is that the doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine essential to Christian faith as such (i.e., not to the distinct identities of Catholics or Protestants). This is consistent with the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity provided the overall framework of the creedal passage in John Wesley’s “Letter to a Roman Catholic.”

Moreover, the 1784 revision of the Anglican Articles of Religion that Wesley sent to North America with Thomas Coke included as its first articles an affirmation of belief in the Trinity utilizing the language of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed (Article 1). We have evidence, then, from 1749 and 1775 and at least confirming evidence from 1784 that John Wesley considered the doctrine of the Trinity to be an essential Christian teaching.

John Wesley understood the central meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity to lie in the claim that “these three are one, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit are one,” here quoting the so-called “Johannine comma” (I John 5:7). To deny the unity of these three would make absurd Christians’ worship of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and would make absurd the claim that believers receive assurance through the Holy Spirit that their sins have been forgiven by the Father on the basis of the atoning work of the Son. Wesley did not insist that Christians needed to know the terms “Trinity” or “Persons,” and he emphasized what contemporary theological interpreters have called the “economic Trinity,” that is, the Trinity as revealed in the out-working of salvation, not as the internal relationships of the divine Persons.

2. The Doctrine of the Deity of Christ

In asserting that the doctrine of the deity of Christ was an essential doctrine in the thought of John Wesley, Williams cited the introductory paragraph of John Wesley’s tract, “The Character of a Methodist” (1742). This warrants a bit of explanation since Wesley’s claim here is that the deity of Christ is a common Christian teaching rather than a distinc-
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tive Methodist claim (but in a tract entitled "The Character of a Methodist"). We must note again in this case, as in the "Letter to a Roman Catholic," Wesley's use of *meiosis*.

Although cast as a description of "The Character of a Methodist," it is clear from the outset that what Wesley offered in this tract was a description of a true Christian. Despite the tract's title, the tract does not deal in any way with such distinctive Methodist teachings as assurance, entire sanctification, and the like. The first paragraph of the tract asserts that "The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort..." and goes on to state grounds for unity with other Christians that amount to essential or fundamental teachings as contrasted with opinions. One of these is Wesley's claim, quoted appropriately by Williams, that

We believe Christ to be the eternal, supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.

The context, in this case, is a claim about common Christian fundamental beliefs, those beliefs that do "strike at the root of Christianity," and so Wesley claims that the doctrine of Christ's complete divinity is essential to Christianity itself. The doctrine of the deity of Christ is stated in the creedal passage in the "Letter to a Roman Catholic," in the paragraph on the work of Christ, and is also asserted in the Articles of Religion that were sent to North America in 1784, thus giving us references from 1742 and 1749, and what I have called confirming evidence from 1784, that he considered this doctrine to be an essential Christian teaching.

The doctrine of the deity of Christ simply makes explicit with respect to Christ: the claim of the doctrine of the Trinity that the second Person of the divine Trinity is equally and eternally God along with the first Person. It is the doctrine that became explicit in the early fourth-century conflict with Arianism, indeed, the doctrinal controversy that led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, and is made most explicit in the first part of the second article of that creed, which states that Christ is "God from God, light from light, very God from very God, of one substance with the Father..." Wesley argued for the complete deity of Christ based on the Christians' worship of Christ (worship of anything less than complete deity would be idolatrous) and on the need for God's own intervention and presence in the work of salvation.

3. The Doctrine of the Atonement

In asserting that the doctrine of the atonement was an essential doctrine for Wesley, Colin Williams cites a letter from John Wesley to Mary Bishop, dated 7 February 1778. Although this was a private letter, John Wesley did maintain in the letter that the doctrine of atonement distinguishes Christianity from Deism:

Indeed, nothing in the Christian system is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement. It is properly the distinguishing point between Deism and Christianity... Give up the Atonement, and the Deists are agreed with us.
Here the ecclesial scope of Wesley's claim is made clear by reference to "the Christian system" and by the contrast with Deists. The claim Wesley made here about Deism is somewhat odd: normally, one would think it was the doctrine of the deity of Christ that distinguished traditional Christianity from Deism, but Wesley also associates that doctrine of atonement, including Christ's suffering and death on our behalf, as another critical distinction between Deism and historic Christian faith. Like the doctrine of the deity of Christ, the doctrine of atonement is also stated in the creedal passage in the "Letter to a Roman Catholic," in the paragraph on the work of Christ, and it is also asserted in the second and twentieth Articles of Religion that was sent to North America in 1784.58 We have, then, references from 1749 and 1778, and confirmation from 1784, asserting that John Wesley viewed the doctrine of the atonement an essential Christian doctrine.

However, it may be important to note in this regard that John Wesley does not favor any particular understanding of atonement (that is, the substitutionary, sacrificial, moral-exemplary, or Christus Victor theories or understandings of atonement). Rather, his emphasis is on the whole work of Christ in assuming humanity (embracing Christ's life, death and resurrection), or, we might say, the content of the second part of the second article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, which asserts Christ's work "for us human beings and for our salvation." What is necessary or essential, then, is to believe that our salvation has come about through the whole event of Christ's assuming humanity on our behalf.

4. The Doctrine of Biblical Authority

The doctrine of biblical authority ought to appear among John Wesley's "essential" doctrines. As noted above, however, it does not appear in Colin Williams's list, and perhaps did not because John Wesley's statements about this teaching did not explicitly include the key terms "necessary," "fundamental," or "essential." It is nevertheless on this point that I want to make the case for an extension of Williams's criterion (see criterion 2 in the list at the end of section 1). The passage in John Wesley's works that most clearly reveals his sense of a doctrine biblical authority as constitutive of Christian faith is in the first paragraph of his tract on "The Character of a Methodist," where Wesley wrote,

> We believe, indeed, that "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God," and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church. We believe Christ to be the eternal, supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.59

I have referred earlier to the latter sentences of this passage in discussing John Wesley's understanding of the doctrine of the deity of Christ as an essential Christian doctrine (in section 3 above). John Wesley expressed this understanding of the deity of Christ in parallel to his understanding of biblical authority; just as the doctrine of biblical authority distinguishes Christians from non-Christians (and Protestants from Catholics in the form in which Wesley refines it), so the doctrine of the deity of Christ distinguishes true Christians
from Socinians and Arians. It may be that Williams took the last sentence quoted above (about "opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity") to refer only to the doctrine of the deity of Christ, but the parallelism involved here suggests to me that John Wesley took both the doctrine of biblical authority and the doctrine of the deity of Christ to be essential Christian doctrines, not indifferent opinions. In any case, he very clearly states in the passage that belief in biblical authority is constitutive of Christian faith in distinction from other religious traditions.

Although the doctrine of biblical authority does not appear in the creedal passage we have referred to in the "Letter to a Roman Catholic," we may note as corroborating our claim about the doctrine of biblical authority as an essential doctrine that the fifth and sixth Articles of Religion that was sent with Thomas Coke to the Methodists in North America in 1784 asserted the doctrine of biblical authority.60

It is critical to note in the passage from the "Character of a Methodist" cited above John Wesley's own sense of the ecclesial scope of this doctrine. Even though the passage is brief, it reveals some of the substance of his understanding of biblical authority. In the broad sense, he maintained that the doctrine of biblical authority is shared by all Christians and in this sense is constitutive of Christian faith in general. After a critical semicolon, however, Wesley went on to state that the doctrine of biblical authority involves the belief that the Bible is "the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice," and in this sense, he maintains, this doctrine distinguishes Protestants from Catholics. Putting the issue in this manner shows that Wesley reflected the apprehension, typical of Protestants in his era, that the Tridentine doctrine of ecclesial authority placed subsequent Christian traditions on an equal footing with scripture—this same apprehension is reflected in Wesley's "Roman Catechism, with a Reply Thereunto."61 Regardless of the accuracy of this apprehension (or misapprehension), this makes it clear that Wesley was committed to the Protestant notion of scriptura sola in the sense that the Bible contains all that is necessary for human salvation and for the reform of the church. Nevertheless, despite his claim that a more nuanced understanding of the doctrine was distinctive of Protestantism, we should not miss the point that Wesley maintained that the doctrine of biblical authority in the broad sense is itself constitutive of Christian faith.62

5. THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN

I have noted above how peculiar it was that John Wesley's creedal statement in the "Letter to a Roman Catholic" did not refer explicitly to the doctrine of original sin. This letter was written in 1749; it is clear that by the middle of the 1750s John Wesley had become quite concerned about the doctrine of original sin, producing both his sermon on "Original Sin" and his most lengthy theological treatise, "The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason and Experience" (1757). Both this treatise and John Wesley's sermon on "Original Sin" two years later (1759) include explicit claims that the doctrine of original sin is an essential Christian doctrine.63

It should be clear that John Wesley's version of the doctrine of original sin was modified in some ways from the Augustinian inheritance of the ancient church and the Reformation. Although he affirmed that the results of Adam and Eve's sin affects every human being, Wesley appears to have questioned the concomitant notion that every
human being deserves damnation as a result of this inheritance of sin. Wesley did, for example, include the Anglican Article of Religion on Original Sin among the Articles he sent to America with Thomas Coke in 1784, affirming that original sin denotes "the corruption of the nature of every" person. But the Methodist version of the Article omits a critically important phrase from the older Anglican Article stating that "in every person born into this world, Ioriginal sin] deriveth God's wrath and damnation." An earlier letter of John Wesley (1756, the year before he wrote his doctrinal treatise on "Original Sin") explained his doubt as to whether God would condemn anyone based on original sin alone. This left Wesley affirming that all humans stand in need of divine grace, but their liability is due to their own involvement in sin rather than their inheritance of sin from their first human parents.

It is important to see that, for John Wesley, the doctrine of original sin was very closely connected to the preaching of repentance, and specifically, the need for preaching what he called "evangelical repentance" or "the repentance of sinners," that is, the acknowledgment of our sin and our need for grace that precedes Christian faith. It is almost certainly for this reason that in one place John Wesley has original sin as the first in a list of three doctrines that characterize the Methodist movement, and in a similar list in another place he has repentance in the first place. When we examine his descriptions of original sin and repentance, we find them closely intertwined: the practical application of the doctrine of original sin is to call for repentance, and the presupposition of the call for repentance is the doctrine of original sin. In this case, then, we can see that a common Christian doctrine also has a specific nuance within the ecclesial scope of the Methodist movement (by this I mean the Evangelical revival more broadly). Wesley claimed that the teaching of original sin per se characterizes (or should characterize) all Christians; the implication of this, that we should call for heartfelt repentance on the part of sinners, is one of the marks of the Evangelical movement.

6. THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

In asserting that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was a necessary doctrine for John Wesley, Colin Williams cited two passages from John Wesley's Sermons. The first, from John Wesley's sermon on "The New Birth" (1760), bears quotation, since in fact it claims that not only justification but also regeneration are "fundamental" for Christians:

If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed 'fundamental,' they are doubtless these two—the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.  

It is genuinely puzzling that, having cited this passage (in his notes), Williams would list only justification and not the new birth or regeneration (the subject of the sermon he cites) as an essential doctrine for Wesley. It is on the basis of this passage that I have taken both justification and regeneration as necessary or fundamental for John Wesley's under-
standing of Christian faith. And yet, in both cases Wesley’s particular understandings of these doctrines differs in some significant respects from their earlier expressions of them in the Augustinian and Protestant doctrinal traditions.

On the doctrine of justification by faith, Williams also cites a phrase from John Wesley’s sermon on “The Lord our Righteousness.” This citation strikes me as a less significant reference, however, because Williams took Wesley’s reference to Luther’s articulus startis vel cadentis ecclesiae as a reference to the doctrine of justification by faith alone (as Luther had used the expression), but it seems clear to me that in this instance Wesley (although using Luther’s terms) claimed in this passage that doctrine about Christ is “the article for doctrinel on which the church stands or falls.” Nevertheless, there are other cases where Wesley asserts the essential nature of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It is also asserted among the Articles of Religion that were sent to North America in 1784.

In affirming justification by faith as an essential Christian doctrine, Wesley repeated one of the cardinal points of the Protestant Reformation, and yet there is a distinctly Evangelical nuance to his understanding of justification and especially ‘faith’ that appears in the perorations of his sermons. “Faith” cannot simply mean assent (which could be “the faith of a devil”), it must engage the heart and affections. In his list of three key Evangelical teachings, John Wesley sometimes places “justification” in the second position and sometimes “faith,” just as “original sin” and “repentance” could be swapped in the first position. A doctrine that thus has (or should have) universal ecclesial scope also has a specific nuance or emphasis within the scope of the Evangelical movement.

7. The Doctrine of Regeneration

We have justified our inclusion of the doctrine of regeneration or the new birth as an essential doctrine for John Wesley on the basis of the passage cited above from the sermon on “The New Birth” cited above, where Wesley claimed that justification and regeneration were both constitutive of Christian belief. The creedal passage in the “Letter to a Roman Catholic” refers to God as the Father of “those whom he regenerates by his Spirit, whom he adopts in his Son.” We do not have confirming evidence from the 1784 Articles of Religion confirming regeneration as an essential doctrine, since regeneration is mentioned only in the Article on baptism, and thus it is a derivative reference that does not name regeneration per se as an essential teaching. The evidence for regeneration as an essential doctrine is thus not quite as strong as the evidence for other doctrines considered above, but this may be due to the fact that John Wesley took the term “regeneration” as a term denoting the gateway to the broader teaching about sanctification and holiness, and there is of course evidence that he considered holiness to be a common Christian teaching.

John Wesley considered the teaching of regeneration (leading to holiness) as being one of the three key doctrines of the Evangelical Revival and indeed, he considered the teaching of entire sanctification to be perhaps the one clear distinguishing mark of the Wesleyan branch of the revival. At this point, however, we may note again the distinctive emphasis of Wesley’s understanding of regeneration. Although he acknowledged the traditional teaching of baptismal renewal for infants consistent with the Anglican Articles of Religion and the liturgy for baptism in the Book of Common Prayer, he took the practical implica-
tion of the doctrine for believers to be that one must be "born again" whether or not one was formerly baptized. In this respect, Wesley found himself in a position quite similar to that of Spener, Francke, and other Lutheran Pietists, namely, in affirming the grace received in baptism but insisting that believers need to experience divine grace anew. "Holiness" is consistently given as a third distinctive mark of the Evangelical movement, and it denotes the holiness born of divine grace through the present power of the Holy Spirit. In this way, again, John Wesley affirms that a common Christian teaching about the need for regeneration (and more broadly, for holiness) has a distinctive emphasis within the scope of the Evangelical movement, namely, to call those who have been baptized and justified by faith to experience anew the power of the Spirit leading to Christian holiness.

4. GROUPS OR CLUSTERS OF ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Given the evidence for these seven doctrines as standing consistently as "essential" or "fundamental" doctrines in John Wesley's thought, we may now ask if there is any discernable shape or logic to the seven doctrines identified here. It should clear based on the evidence I have given that John Wesley considered the first three doctrinal claims that we considered above (the doctrines of the Trinity, of the deity of Christ, and of the atonement) to be fundamental or essential to Christian faith as expressed in the ancient creeds. The Trinitarian form in which he gave these doctrines, following the outline of the creeds, gives a certain shape to them, with the doctrines of the deity of Christ and of the atonement as sub-points under the second article of the creed. The doctrine of the deity of Christ and the denial of this by the Arians was, after all, the beginning of the Trinitarian controversy and of the churches' definition of Trinitarian doctrine at the first (325) and second (381) ecumenical councils. The doctrine of the atonement (in the broad sense) underlay the further development of Christology as formulated in the third (431) and fourth (451) ecumenical councils.

It is consistent with the identification of these three doctrines as essential or fundamental doctrines that the 1784 revision of the Anglican Articles of Religion that Wesley sent to North America with Thomas Coke included as its first two articles an article affirming belief in the Trinity utilizing the language of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed (Article 1) and an article affirming belief in the deity of Christ and the atonement using some of the language of the Chalcedonian Definition of Faith (Article 2). This is not to say that every doctrine asserted in the revised Articles was taken to be essential or fundamental by Wesley, but it is, I think, consistent with his identification of these three doctrines as fundamental that they should appear at the very head of the doctrines defined in the Articles. It may be important to state that John Wesley affirmed these three doctrines very much as they had been affirmed, and affirmed them consistently through his career.

We may identify the next four doctrines that were also essential or fundamental for Christian faith, by Wesley's own admission (the doctrines of biblical authority, original sin, justification by faith, and regeneration) as a distinct cluster, although the doctrine of biblical authority is a more foundational doctrine and is distinct from the remaining three, which are concerned with issues of human nature and salvation. The identification of these three or four doctrines as a cluster distinct from the previous three is my own distinction, and does not reflect a distinction that John Wesley himself made. But each of
these doctrines reflected the distinct inheritance or at least the decided influence of the Western, Augustinian tradition, as contrasted with the previously identified three doctrines, which were affirmed in the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church. Moreover, John Wesley qualified in particular ways his affirmation of the doctrines of original sin, justification and regeneration, and this suggests to me that we should see them in a somewhat different light than the previous three.

We are left, then, with a cluster of at least four doctrines reflecting the inheritance of Christian doctrine from the Western, Augustinian tradition as modified in the Reformation and in some ways as modified by Wesley himself. These are the doctrines of biblical authority, of original sin, of justification, and of regeneration.

If I could lay out these seven doctrines in a kind of schematic, then, they might be arranged as follows:

- the doctrine of the Trinity
- the doctrine of the deity of Christ
- the doctrine of the atonement
- the doctrine of biblical authority
- the doctrine of original sin (calling for repentance)
- the doctrine of justification (calling for faith)
- the doctrine of regeneration (leading to holiness)

The doctrine of biblical authority stands, in a sense, by itself, with the first three doctrines representing teachings about God and Christ defined in the inheritance of ancient Christian faith, and the latter three doctrines representing teachings relating to human nature and salvation defined in the Western Augustinian tradition and Reformation. I have suggest that the latter three doctrines bear an integral relationship to the three "grand scriptural doctrines" that John Wesley claimed as the distinctive emphases of the Evangelical movement, namely, the doctrines of repentance, faith, and holiness.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to show that John Wesley identified at least seven specific doctrines as "essential" or definitive Christian doctrines. The manner in which John Wesley expressed these doctrines in the creedal passage from his "Letter to a Roman Catholic" and the patterns of doctrines I have tried to discern in the previous section suggest that there is a kind of logic or shape to Wesley's understanding of central Christian teachings. I am not, of course, denying that there was a distinctively Wesleyan understanding of the Christian faith; what I am arguing here is that at the heart of the Wesleyan message was the proclamation of the Christian faith that had been shared through the centuries and is shared today in historic Christian communities. A significant aspect of John Wesley's legacy for the twenty-first century lies in the fact that he transmitted "the faith once delivered to the saints." Put differently, John Wesley's legacy for the twenty-first century is tied up with the Christian legacy for the twenty-first century. Put in the words of his brother's hymn,
names and sects and parties fall;
    thou, O Christ, art all in all!

**CODICIL: JOHN WESLEY’S DOCTRINAL AFFIRMATIONS IN THE “LETTER TO A ROMAN CATHOLIC” (1749)**

6. As I am assured that there is an infinite and independent Being, and that it is impossible there should be more than one; so I believe, that this One God is the Father of all things, especially of angels and men; that he is in a peculiar manner the Father of those whom he regenerates by his Spirit, whom he adopts in his Son, as co-heirs with him, and crowns with an eternal inheritance; but in a still higher sense the Father of his only Son, whom he hath begotten from eternity.

I believe this Father of all, not only to be able to do what so ever pleased him, but also to have an eternal right of making what and when and how he pleased, and of possessing and disposing of all that he has made; and that he of his own goodness created heaven and earth, and all that is therein.

7. I believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Savior of the world, the Messiah so long foretold; that, being anointed with the Holy Ghost, he was a Prophet, revealing to us the whole will of God; that he was a Priest, who gave himself a sacrifice for sin, and still makes intercession for transgressors; that he is a King, who has all power in heaven and in earth, and will reign till he has subdued all things to himself.

I believe he is the proper, natural Son of God, God of God, very God of very God; and that he is the Lord of all, having absolute, supreme, universal dominion over all things, but more peculiarly our Lord, who believe in him, both by conquest, purchase, and voluntary obligation.

I believe that he was made man, joining the human nature with the divine in one person; being conceived by the singular operation of the Holy Ghost, and born of the blessed Virgin Mary, who, as well after as before she brought him forth, continued a pure and unspotted virgin.

I believe he suffered inexpressible pains both of body and soul, and at last death, even the death of the cross, at the time that Pontius Pilate governed Judea, under the Roman Emperor; that his body was then laid in the grave, and his soul went to the place of separate spirits; that the third day he rose again from the dead; that he ascended into heaven; where he remains in the midst of the throne of God, in the highest power and glory, as Mediator till the end of the world, as God to all eternity; that, in the end, he will come down from heaven, to judge every man according to his works; both those who shall be then alive, and all who have died before that day.

8. I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us; enlighten-
ing our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions; purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies, to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.

9. I believe that Christ by his Apostles gathered unto himself a Church, to which he has continually added such as shall be saved; that this catholic, that is, universal, Church, extending to all nations and all ages, is holy in all its members, who have fellowship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that they have fellowship with the holy angels, who constantly minister to these heirs of salvation; and with all the living members of Christ on earth, as well as all who are departed in his faith and fear.

10. I believe God forgives all the sins of them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel; and that, at the last day, all men shall rise again, every one with his own body.

I believe, that as the unjust shall, after their resurrection, be tormented in hell for ever, so the just shall enjoy inconceivable happiness in the presence of God to all eternity.

NOTES
2. In his sermon “On the Trinity” (1775), John Wesley acknowledged that he did not prefer the term “fundamental,” because the term was ambiguous and there were “so many warm disputes about the number of fundamentals” (¶ 2; in Outler, ed., Sermons 2:376), but at this point he offered no other term except to say that “there are some truths more important than others” (ibid.). In the sermon on “The New Birth” he did use the term “fundamental” to describe the doctrines of justification and regeneration (introduction ¶ 1; in Outler, ed., Sermons 2:187 and in Sugden, ed., Sermons 2:425-426).
3. In an essay of mine on “John Wesley and Methodist Doctrinal Emphases.”
5. The dispute over adiaphora took on a new meaning late in the seventeenth century when Pietists (including Francke) argued that worldly pleasures were strictly forbidden by the Gospel, in contrast to so-called Orthodox Lutherans, who maintained that worldly pleasures might be indifferent matters (adiaphorality) and thus perhaps allowable to Christians.
6. The distinction between essential or fundamental “doctrines” and “opinions” is drawn at length in John Wesley’s sermon on a “Catholic Spirit” (1749), where Wesley insisted that although we may not share the same opinions or ways of worship as others, our hearts should nevertheless be right with God and with all our neighbors, and our “hands” should be extended to them (¶ I:11; in Outler, ed., Sermons, 2:82-92). Wesley maintained, however, that a “catholic spirit” is not to be confused with a “speculative Latitudinarianism,” an “indifference to all opinions” nor with an “indifference to all congregations” (¶ III:1-3; in Outler, ed., Sermons, 2:92-94). Wesley’s sermon entitled
“A Caution against Bigotry” (1750) maintains that we should not forbid the efforts of persons who do not have an outward connection with us, who are not of our ‘party,’ with whose opinions we differ, with whose practices we differ, who belong to a Church we consider to be beset with error, or who hold bitter affections towards us, so long as their ministries bring forth good fruits (¶ II:III; in Outler, ed., Sermons, 2.697 76).


9. Williams cites Wesley’s doctrinal treatise on “The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason and Experience” ¶ VI:VI (in Jackson, ed., Works 9:429), although at this point, it should be noted, Wesley was apparently quoting (with approval) a treatise of Dr. Isaac Watts on the doctrine of original sin.

10. Williams cites the introductory paragraph of John Wesley’s tract “The Character of a Methodist” ¶ I (in Jackson, ed., Works 8:340); similarly, the 1765 sermon on “The Lord our Righteousness” begins with the assertion that, although Christians might disagree over many issues, they should be united in their teaching about Christ, which is fundamental (Introduction, ¶¶ 4-6; in Outler, ed., Sermons, 1:450-452; and in Sugden, ed., Sermons, 2:425-426).


12. Williams cites John Wesley’s sermon on “The New Birth,” Introduction, ¶ 1 (in Outler, ed., Sermons, 2:187; and in Sugden, ed., Sermons, 2:226-227), although it is interesting that in this passage John Wesley asserted that both the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the new birth are fundamental, and Williams lists only justification as an essential or fundamental doctrine.
based on this passage. Williams also cites John Wesley's sermon on "The Lord our Righteousness" Introduction, ¶4-6 (in Outler, ed., Sermons, 1:450-452; and in Sugden, ed., Sermons, 2:425-426), apparently taking the reference to Luther's articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae as a reference to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, although it seems likely to me that in this instance Wesley was claiming that doctrine about Christ is "the article for doctrinal on which the church stands or falls."

13. Williams cites a letter of John Wesley to his nephew Samuel Wesley dated 1784-08-19 (in Telford, ed., Letters 7:231) and "The Character of a Methodist" ¶5 (in Jackson, ed., Works 8:341); although I do not read either of these references as clearly defining a necessary doctrine; rather, they seem to say that the work of the Holy Spirit itself (not necessarily a doctrine or teaching about the Holy Spirit) is necessary for Christian existence.


15. In a letter to the anonymous and yet unidentified "John Smith," John Wesley states that "perceptible inspiration" is "the main doctrine of the Methodists" letter of 1745-12-30, ¶13, in Baker, ed., Letters 26:181-182; and in Jackson, ed., Works, 12:70; cf. a letter to Smith dated 1748-03-22, ¶7, in Baker, ed., Letters 26:289, and in Jackson 12:100, and this is consistent with his introduction to the Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, which argues that the teaching of a distinct spiritual sensation characterizes the Methodist movement that Wesley defended in this tract ¶12; in Cragg, ed., Appeals, 11:49; and in Albert C. Outler, ed., John Wesley [A Library of Protestant Thought; New York: Oxford University Press, 1964], pp. 3-4; and in Telford, ed., Letters, 2:64, 2:135).


21. So far as I know, the question remains open as to whether John Wesley himself or Thomas Coke or perhaps another assistant was actually responsible for the editing of the Articles of Religion that were sent to North America with Coke. I do presume, however, that the Articles as edited were reviewed by Wesley himself and thus received some degree of approval from him.


26. The quotation is in ¶5 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:81); the summary of creedal teachings comprises ¶¶6-10 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:81-82, and given in a "codici" at the end of this essay).

27. Ibid., ¶11 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:82).

28. This reading is supported by Outler's introduction to the sermon on a "Catholic Spirit," where Outler refers to this passage from the "Letter to a Roman Catholic" as John Wesley's "fullest summary" of his understanding of essential teachings, although Outler warns in this passage that


30. Ibid., ¶ 6 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:81).
32. Ibid., ¶ 8 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:82).
33. Ibid., ¶ 9 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:82).
34. Ibid., ¶ 10 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:82).
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., ¶ 6 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:81).
37. Ibid., ¶ 10 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:82).
38. Ibid., ¶ 8 (in Jackson, ed., Works, 10:82).

41. In the passage from ¶ 1 of "The Character of a Methodist," cited above and below.
42. John Wesley, sermon "On the Trinity" (1775) ¶ 2 (in Outler, ed., Sermons, 3:376; and in Jackson, ed., Works 6:200); cf. Williams, p. 17 and n. 15.
43. Reading for this the whole of ¶¶ 1-2 (in Outler, ed., Sermons, 3:374-376).
44. See the notice affixed to the beginning of the sermon, where Wesley indicated that he did not have his books available at Cork when he wrote the sermon. This could explain why the sermon is lacking in specific reference to historic Trinitarian texts, with the exception of his concern about the anathemas in the so-called Athanasian Creed. Surprisingly, Outler does not note the Catholic context in which the sermon was written, although he may have presupposed that readers would glean this from the affixed note (cf. Outler, ed., Sermons, 3:373-374 and the affixed note at 3:374).
49. John Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist" ¶ 1 (in Jackson, ed., Works 8:340); cf. Williams, p. 16 and n. 11.
50. "Character of a Methodist" ¶ 1 (in Jackson, ed., Works 8:340). The understatement or meiosis is revealed clearly in the last paragraphs, where Wesley stated that:

These are the principles and practices of our sect; these are the marks of a true Methodist... If any man say, "Why, these are only the common, fundamental principles of Christianity!" thou hast said; so I mean; this is the very truth; I know they are no other, and I would to God both thou and all men knew, that I, and all who follow my judgment, do vehemently refuse to be distinguished from other men, by any but the common principles of Christianity....

(¶ 17; in Jackson, ed., Works 8:346). But we should note that on other occasions, Wesley would in fact indicate beliefs or teachings that distinguish the Methodists (see the next essay).
51. Ibid.
55. See, for example, the sermon on "Salvation by Faith" Introduction ¶ 3 and ¶ 1.4 (1738; in Outler, ed., Sermons, 1:118, 120).
63. John Wesley, “The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason and Experience” ¶ VI:VI (in Jackson, ed., Works 9:429). As noted above, Wesley was quoting in this passage (with approval) a treatise of Dr. Isaac Watts on the doctrine of original sin; cf. John Wesley, sermon on “Original Sin” ¶ III:1-2 (in Butler, ed., Sermons, 2:182-184), where John Wesley made the point that the doctrine of original sin distinguishes Christianity from heathenism.
67. As distinguished from "the repentance of believers": the distinction is drawn very clearly in John Wesley's sermon on "The Repentance of Believers" Introduction ¶ 1-3 (in Butler, ed., Sermons, 1:335-336).
68. The list with original sin in the first position is given in a letter from John Wesley to George Downing, 6 April 1761 (in Telford, ed., Letters 4:161; cf. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, pp. 156, 204, 215); the list with repentance in the first place is given in "The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained" (1746) ¶ VI:4-6 (in Davies, ed., Societies, p. 195; in Jackson, ed., Works 8:472-475; and in Telford, ed. Letters 2:267-270).
69. Although some Wesleyan scholars have attempted to distinguish "regeneration" and "new birth" (cf. Randy Maddox, Responsible Grace [Nashville: Abingdon Press/Kingswood Books, 1994], pp. 159-160, 176-177), it must be noted that generatio in Latin denotes "birth," and thus regeneratio denotes "new birth" or "rebirth." That Wesley identified the terms "regeneration" and "new birth" is very clear from ¶ IV:1 of the sermon on "The New Birth," where he quotes the Westminster Catechism, which utilizes the term "regeneration" (John Wesley, sermon on "The New Birth," ¶ IV:1 (in Butler, ed., Sermons, 2:196; and in Sugden, ed., Sermons 2.2371); cf. also John Wesley's sermon "On God's Vineyard" (1787), which takes "born again," "born from above," and "born of the Spirit" to be synonyms for regeneration (¶ 1-6, in Butler, ed., Sermons 3:506).
71. John Wesley, sermon on "The Lord our Righteousness" Introduction, ¶ 4-6 (in Butler,

72. For example, the introduction to his sermon on "justification by Faith," where John Wesley asserted that the doctrine of justification by faith is "the foundation of our hope." (Introduction ¶ 1; in Outler, ed., *Sermons* 1:182).


78. For example, in the "Letter to a Roman Catholic," ¶ 8 (in Jackson, ed., *Works*, 10:82).


80. On the issue of consistency through his career, we note that these three doctrines (the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the atonement) were all affirmed in his 1749 "Letter to a Roman Catholic" (see the text above) in the 1784 revision of the Articles of Religion, and at a number of intervening points along the way: 1775 for his sermon on "The Trinity," 1742 for his tract on "The Character of a Methodist" affirming the deity of Christ, 1778 for his letter to Mary Bishop affirming the doctrine of atonement as a necessary Christian doctrine.