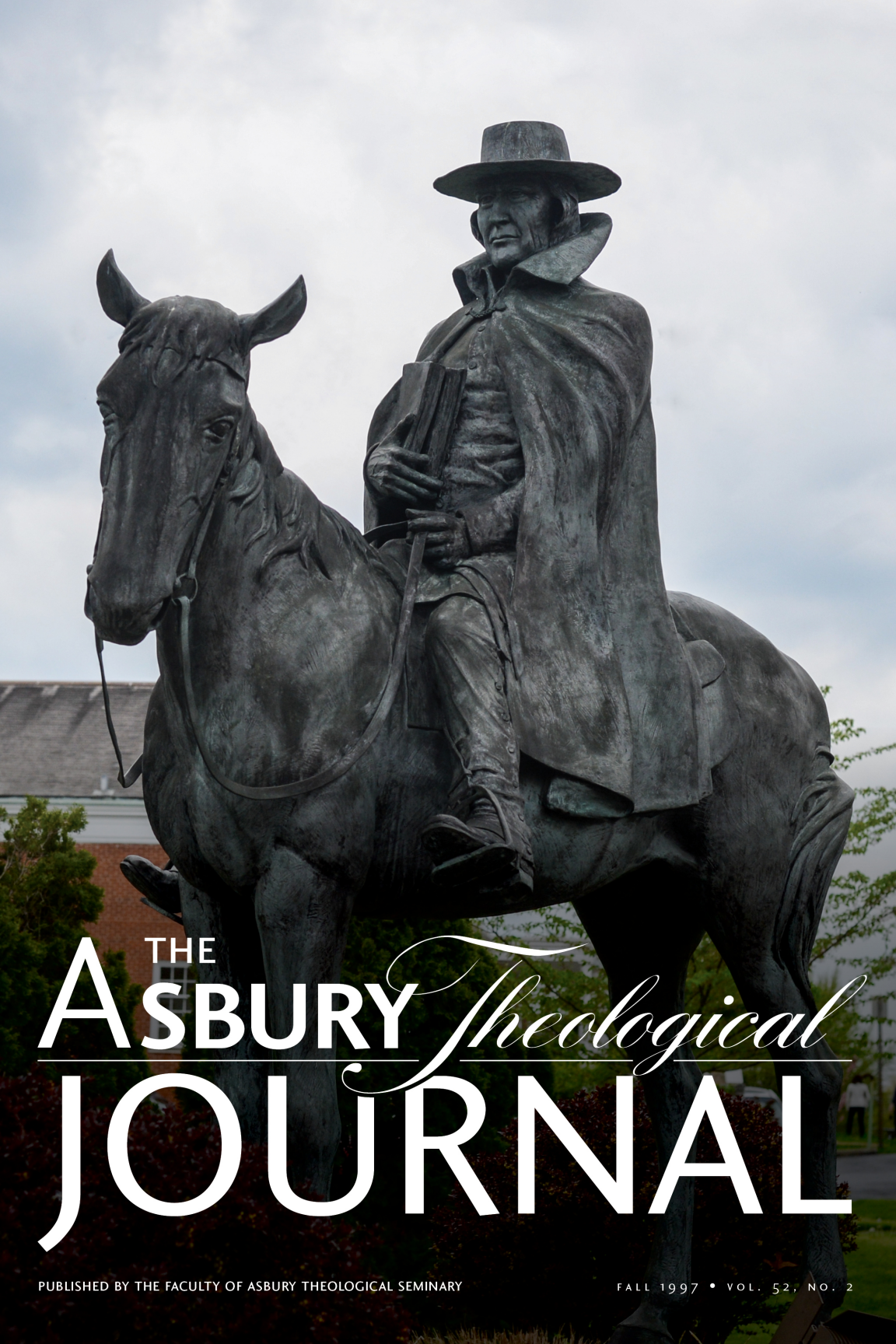




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 THE
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FALL 1997, VOL. 52, NO. 2

The Beauty of Holiness.....	5
<i>J. Prescott Johnson</i>	
Pascal's Biblical Omission Argument Against Natural Theology	17
<i>Douglas Groothuis</i>	
Martin Luther King, Jr., Personalism, and Moral Law	27
<i>Rufus Burrow, Jr.</i>	
Biblical Theological Foundations for a Response to Religious Pluralism	43
<i>Dean Flemming</i>	
Wesley on Imputation: A Truly Reckoned Reality or Antinomian Polemical Wreckage?	63
<i>Woodrow W. Whidden</i>	
Some Personal Reflections on the Jesus Seminar	71
<i>William Richard Stegner</i>	
John Wesley as Editor and Encyclopedist	81
<i>Samuel J. Rogal</i>	
Book Reviews.....	91
Alan R. Bowman, <i>The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume X, The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.-A.D. 69</i> [David A. DeSilva]	
James W. Fowler, <i>Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life</i> [Randy L. Maddox]	
John M. Haas, ed., <i>Crisis of Conscience</i> [John Culp]	
David R. Bauer and Mark Allen Powell, eds., <i>Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies</i> [B. Keith Brewer]	
Christopher R. Seitz, <i>Isaiah 1-39. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching</i> [John N. Oswalt]	
James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse, eds., <i>Here We Stand! A Call from Confessing Evangelicals</i> [David P. Whitelaw]	

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THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

J. PRESCOTT JOHNSON

"O Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." – Psalm 96:9

In the springtime of impressionable youth, I lived with my family in southwestern Oregon, where we attended a small church whose members were committed to the perfectionist persuasion that had emerged from the American Wesleyan movement. On the wall just behind the platform was a lovely banner, painted by my artistic father, which carried the words of the Psalmist, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Those words, so beautifully inscribed, remain yet in my deepest consciousness and impel me in the effort better to understand and appreciate their meaning in a day so far removed from an earlier time in my religious life.

The expression "the beauty of holiness" occurs in several places in the Psalms, as well as in the Chronicles. These latter works, drawn from the Psalms, paint a picture of the past as a way of conveying an Hebraic philosophy of history. But the original inspiration of the expression is found peculiarly in the Psalms.

Psalm 29:2 reads: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." The same thought is found in Psalm 96:8-9. After the "families of the people" are enjoined to "give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name," they are called to worship "in the beauty of holiness." Psalm 110:3 employs the plural, "the beauties of holiness": "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth."

In all of this lovely, and significant, poetry, not only are the ideas of holiness and beauty associated together; these are also associated with the idea of glory, along with other kindred ideas of strength, honor, and majesty.

Now the expression "the beauty of holiness" (*behadrath kodesh*), which is found both in Psalm 29:2 and Psalm 96:9, means literally "holy array." Thus Adam Clarke

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THE ASBURY THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

FALL 1997 • VOL. 52 • NO. 2

translates Psalm 29:2 as *holy ornaments*, and Psalm 96:9 as *the beautiful garments of holiness*. The plural form, "the beauties of holiness," as found in Psalm 110:3, is *behadrey kodesh*, which Clarke translates as *the splendid garments of holiness*.

All of these passages allude to the sacerdotal garments that the High Priest wore in carrying out his ministrations. They were given to him for beauty and glory—qualities indispensable in the high priestly function of intercession before the Divine Majesty. Now there is the question of the contemporary meaning of the ancient association of the ideas of holiness and beauty. What is the significance of "the beauty of holiness" for the Christian today? And how may that significance be ascertained?

Some progress has been made already in the direction of an answer to these questions. The terms used in these verses are, of course, Hebrew terms. "Holy array" is array that exudes beauty and glory. There is thus a certain justification for reading the original expression "holy array" as "beauty of holiness," since the holy array is, inevitably, also splendid and beautiful.

Among biblical scholars there is some disagreement as to whether or not the root-idea of the term "holiness," or *kodesh*, is negative or positive. The term may be associated with the Sumerian *kadistu*, which means "free from defect." On this interpretation the term is connected with sacrifice, and connotes separateness—the separateness of the sacrificial offering, thus its holiness. The view that the term is positive is supported by the suggestion that the term is derived from a root that is kindred to "newness," *hadhash*. What "newness" may connote is the uniqueness of essential character—the character of fresh, vital, self-contained purity. On this reading, holiness is "that which belongs to God and is devoted to God."

Regardless of the origin of the word, the Old Testament fixes the usage of the term: it means "separateness" as the basis of relation to God. And this because God's separateness is, positively, God's uniqueness. God's holiness is His divinity. God is holy because He is God. Thus God's separateness, as His uniqueness, requires of us a comparable separateness in our service before Him.

Now why is holiness beautiful? How can "holy array" be properly translated as "beauty of holiness?" What legitimizes the association of holiness, as separateness, with beauty? The fact that the term "glory" is used by the Psalmist as that which is appropriate to God's name is significant. The term "glory" is *kebob*, which means "splendor," "excellence." Coming back to the ritual meaning of the passages, then, we have this: the holiness, or the separateness and uniqueness of God, is the ground of that glory, or splendor and excellence, which is due unto His name. Or put somewhat differently, although with the same import, the glory of God is His *disdased* holiness. And it is the comparable holiness, or separateness, of the people of God that confers upon them a splendor and excellence, a glory, which shines forth with beauty. So it is, then, with justification that "holy array" is also "the beauty of holiness."

If we look at the question from a more contemporary point of view, however, what we find is this: the expression "the beauty of holiness" associates two quite distinct ideas, the *moral* idea of holiness and the *aesthetic* idea of beauty. What, now, is meant by bringing two such seemingly divergent categories, the moral and the aesthetic, into union? More precisely, what is there about the category of the aesthetic, of the idea of the beauti-

ful, that permits the qualification, or characterization, of the moral quality of holiness as possessing the aesthetic quality of beauty? We have thus far shown that the root meanings of the ancient Hebrew notions support this association, but can we look to more contemporary considerations to lend further support to this association? That is our present question.

It is helpful, first, to consider the term "holiness" with respect to its *moral* connotation. And it is instructive at this juncture to look into the writings of Wesley, whose writings contain a great deal of discussion of this particular subject.

There are, Wesley writes (Sermon CXXXIV, vii. 455-56)¹, two branches of holiness: negative and positive. Thus,

All the Liturgy of the Church is full of petitions for that holiness without which, the Scripture everywhere declares, no man shall see the Lord. And these are summed up in those comprehensive words which we are supposed to be so frequently repeating: "Cleanse the thoughts of your hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name." It is evident that in the last clause of this petition, all outward holiness is contained: Neither can it be carried to a greater height, or expressed in stronger terms. And those words, "Cleanse the thoughts of your hearts," contain the negative branch of inward holiness; the height and depth of which is purity of heart, by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. The remaining words, "that we may perfectly love thee," contain the positive part of holiness; seeing this love, which is the fulfilling of the law, implies the whole mind that was in Christ.

It may be well, at this point, to say something concerning Wesley's view as to how inward holiness is obtained. The "holiness movement" of the 19th and up into the 20th centuries, at least certain aspects of that movement, stressed the instantaneous obtainment of holiness. In placing such absolute stress upon instantaneous sanctification, a certain artificiality came to characterize the doctrine of holiness.

Wesley is clear that justification and sanctification are distinct works of grace. In the preface of his second volume of hymns, he wrote:

9. Neither, therefore, dare we affirm (as some have done) that this full salvation is at once given to true believers. There is, indeed, an instantaneous (as well as a gradual) work of God done in the souls of his children; and there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received, in one moment, either a clear sense of forgiveness of their sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person's receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart (xiv. 326).

Yet the distinctness of the two experiences, justification and sanctification, does not signify, for Wesley, that sanctification is *wholly* instantaneous. It has, to be sure, an instantaneous phase, but this along with its gradual phase. Sanctification begins with justification, proceeds in a line of development, but then, at some time, is brought to *qualitative* completion in an instantaneous bestowal of the Holy Spirit, and then, further, progresses,

quantitatively, throughout life. All this is clearly and unmistakably set forth in Sermon LXXXV (vi. 509):

1. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, "through grace," we "are saved by faith;" consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as "a grain of mustard-seed, which, at first, is the least of all seeds," but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with the pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we "grow up in all things into Him that is our Head;" till we attain "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This passage, too, points up the negative and positive aspects of inward holiness. The negative aspect is stated in the phrase, "the heart is cleansed from all sin." The positive aspect is found in the words, "filled with the pure love to God and man."

It is the positive aspect, as Wesley defined it, which is particularly important in our developing the association of holiness with beauty. Several further references to Wesley are helpful at this point. In his Journal of Thursday, September 13, 1739 (i. 225), he wrote:

"I believe it [sanctification (or holiness)] to be an inward thing, namely, the life of God in the soul of man; a participation of the divine nature; the mind that was in Christ; or the renewal of our heart, after the image of Him that created us.

Throughout his writings there are other phrases that express the same idea of inward holiness: "the image of God stamped on the heart" (iii. 341), "the renewal of the soul 'in the image of God wherein it was created'" (vii. 316). From inward holiness springs outward holiness: "perfection is another name for universal holiness: Inward and outward righteousness: Holiness of life, arising from holiness of heart" (vi. 414). "In a word, holiness is the having 'the mind that was in Christ,' and the 'walking as Christ walked'" (vii. 317).

Now there are passages in Wesley in which he characterizes the content of positive holiness. It embraces, he said, "every holy and heavenly temper—in particular, lowliness, meekness, gentleness, temperance, and longsuffering" (vii. 316). In the Extract from the *Difference between the Moravians and the Methodists*, he wrote:

Scriptural holiness is the image of God; the mind which was in Christ; the love of God and man; lowliness, gentleness, temperance, patience, chastity (x. 203).

And, referring to Paul's words to the Galatians, Wesley further listed the qualities of inward holiness: "It is the one undivided *fruit of the Spirit*, which he describes thus: 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity (so the word should be translated here), meekness, temperance'" (vi. 413).

Immediately following the reference to Galatians, Wesley went on to say:

What a glorious constellation of graces is here! Now, suppose all these to be knit together in one, to be united together in the soul of a believer, this is Christian perfection (vi. 413-14).

In Sermon XXIV (v. 294-95), Wesley used the expression, concerning which we are particularly concerned in this discussion, "the beauty of holiness." He wrote:

I. The beauty of holiness, of that inward man of the heart which is renewed after the image of God.... The ornament of a meek, humble, loving spirit.... This inward religion bears the shape of God so visibly impressed upon it.... We may say of this, in a secondary sense, even as the Son of God himself, that it is the "brightness of his glory, the express image of his person;" ... "the beaming forth of his" eternal "glory;" and yet so tempered and softened, that even the children of men may herein see God and live; ... "the character, the stamp, the living impression of his person," who is the fountain of beauty and love, the original source of all excellency and perfection.

Wesley encouraged others to testify to the obtainment of Christian perfection, and the Journal records many instances in which they professed the experience. But he was disinclined to reveal matters concerning his own religious life. Yet there are occasions when he did so. In 1725, at the age of twenty-two, Wesley read Jeremy Taylor's discussion of *purity of intention*. Forty years later he wrote in his Journal, May 14, 1765, of the profound impact Taylor's discussion made upon him:

I was struck particularly with the chapter upon *intention*, and felt a fixed intention 'to give myself up to God.' In this I was much confirmed soon after by the 'Christian Pattern,' and longed to give God all my heart. This is just what I mean by Perfection now: I sought after it from that hour.

In 1730 I began to be *homo unius libri* [a man of one book]; to study (comparatively) no book but the Bible. I then saw, in a stronger light than ever before, that only one thing is needful, even faith that worketh by the love of God and man, all inward and outer holiness; and I groaned to love God with all my heart, and to serve Him with all my strength (iii. 212-13).

The question is now raised as to whether Wesley himself reached the experience that he sought. Is there any indication in his writings that he found "the Great Salvation"?

Dr. Olin Curtis believes that he has found the passage in the Journal where Wesley records his own obtainment of Christian perfection. In the Journal entry of December 23-25, 1744, Wesley writes:

Sun. 23.—I was unusually lifeless and heavy, till the love feast in the evening.... Yet the next day [December 24] I was again as a dead man; but in the evening, while I was reading Prayers at Snowsfield, I found such light and strength as I never remember to have had before. I saw every thought, as well as action or word, just as it was rising in my heart; and whether it was right before God, or tainted with

pride and selfishness. I never knew before (I mean not as at this time) what it was "to be still before God."

Tues. 25.—I waked, by the grace of God, in the same spirit; and about eight, being with two or three that believed in Jesus, I felt such an awe and tender sense of the presence of God as greatly confirmed me therein: So that God was before me all the day long. I sought and found him in every place; and could truly say, when I lay down at night, "Now I have *lived a day*" (i. 478-79).

Dr. Curtis sums up the subject:

To anyone familiar with John Wesley's careful, realistic manner of speech, it is evident that we have here the same sort of testimony to the experience of holiness that we have in his Journal, May 24, 1738, to the experience of conversion. If the one is not quite so near a full definition as the other, it surely is just as expressive of the fact. I find it almost impossible to read Wesley's words in the light of all his later utterance about the doctrine of Christian perfection, and not consider this date, December 24, 1744, as the probable time when he began to love God supremely.²

Viewed from the side of the term "holiness," which is one of the terms in the title of this discussion, we are now in a position to grasp the import of the association of the idea of holiness with the idea of beauty. The beauty of holiness, as Wesley himself suggested, consists in the "glorious constellation of graces," their being "knit together in one, . . . united together." Christian perfection is the harmony of the graces of inward holiness. It now remains, to complete this study, to view the association of holiness and beauty from the viewpoint of beauty. What is there in the idea of beauty that serves properly to characterize holiness as beauty?

Although none is employed in the passages in the Psalms that we have considered above, the Hebrew vocabulary does contain words that are properly translated as "beauty." Thus, in Psalm 27:4:

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.

And in Psalm 50:2,

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.

The word "beauty" in Psalm 27:4 is *no'am*, which means *agreeableness*, and, by implication, *delight*, *suitableness*, *splendor*, or *grace*. It can also be translated as "pleasantness." The word has its root in *nawame*, which means *to be agreeable*. This particular form of the term "beauty" is appropriately used in the Psalm, since here beauty—the beauty of the Lord—is the object of our desire and is thus suited to that desire agreeably. Thus we find delight in the Lord.

But in Psalm 50:2 the word "beauty" is *yofee*, which is translated simply as "beauty."

The word is derived from the primitive root *yawfaw*, which means *to be bright*. And, it may be readily seen, it is the appropriate word in this Psalm, since the reference is to the shining forth of the Lord.

Thus, in terms of these two forms of the term "beauty," the Old Testament sense of beauty is agreeableness, or pleasantness, and brightness.

We are now at the place where we may approach the question of beauty from the viewpoint of aesthetic theory. And here caution is well-advised. First, care must be taken not to force a contemporary aesthetic theory, in an *ad hoc* fashion, upon the biblical expression. To do this is but to come up with something artificial and thus irrelevant to the tenor of the ancient literature. Second, there is—as is the case with most of the things that occupy philosophers—no agreement upon an aesthetic theory. That is, there are varied and even radically differing views as to the nature of beauty.

Aesthetic theories are, usually, arrived at on the basis of an already-held theory of reality. A given philosopher will develop a theory of beauty based upon his theory as to the nature of things. For example, Etienne Gilson's theory of beauty is founded upon the philosophy of Aquinas, and through Aquinas goes back to Aristotle. A philosophical naturalism, as in George Santayana, is developed as the basis for a quite different theory of beauty.

Now it seems to me that one cannot proceed in this fashion. Thus, the question is raised as to just how is it that one can come up with an aesthetic theory that does not depend upon a given metaphysical prejudice. Is an alternative possible?

There is, I think, such an alternative. The alternative comes to view when we raise the question, from the standpoint of our human experience of beauty and art, as to what that experience evidently is and involves. We know this for sure: we do experience beauty, both beauty in nature and beauty in the creation and response to art.

We will narrow our investigation to the sphere of beauty in art. This will, it is hoped, give us a platform upon which to come to some understanding of beauty, not only in art, but in nature. Since, now, the majority of us are not artists who create the art object, we will have to begin at the only point where we have the requisite acquaintance with the aesthetic sphere; and that is the *response* to beauty in art.

We respond to many stimuli. In the process of everyday living, this response is carried out, in the main, through what are called *signs*. Some datum of perceptual experience, for example, is named, taken as a sign for some further datum of experience, acted upon with either agreeable or disagreeable results. The tissue of our perceptual experiences, the connections among them in which some signify others, is the makeup of our practical living.

The same sort of sign-function is at work at the level of theory and science. A theoretical construct, or scientific concept, has meaning because it refers to some aspect of the world. The reference can be put to an appropriate test and be verified, if, that is, the reference does indeed hold.

Now this characteristic of both the perceptual and cognitive—in the sense of scientific—consciousness is what is known as *transitive*. By that term it is meant that the sign, whether a perceptual item or a conceptual item, *points to some thing beyond its own occurrence in consciousness*, refers to something else transcendent to it.

The response to beauty is wholly unlike the response to a sign, either as perceptual or conceptual sign. In the response to beauty, as in a work of art, the response is *locked into*

the beautiful object. One's attention is *fixed* upon the beauty that is beheld, and thus does not move away to something else—as an emotion or some happening in the real world—does not take the beauty as a sign for something outside of that beauty itself. In sum, the response to beauty is what is known as *intransitive*.

This brief description of the aesthetic response, the response to beauty, raises the question, it will be readily seen, as to just what there is about beauty, as in a work of art, which causes this unique kind of response, this intransitive response, that focuses its attention in an all-consuming fashion upon the object of beauty. Or, to pick up on the language of the Psalms, what is it about beauty that is responsible for that absorption of consciousness in which delight is taken in the brilliance of beauty in and for itself?

There are two, inseparable, elements of a work of art; hence, there are two inseparable elements in artistic beauty. These are *form* and *content*. An adequate theory of art must do justice to both of these elements; must not overemphasize one at the neglect of the other.

Thus art is about something. There is a material content that is contained in the art object. In music, for example, there is sensuous, and pleasing, sound. In a poem there is some reference to an element of the experienced world.

But there is also the element of form. In music, again, the sensuous sound is organized, patterned, so that, for example, a symphony is developed, in the organization of which the complex of sound moves through phases of fulfillment and completion. And in a poem the material of experience is expressed through the forms of cadence and rhythm.

What occurs, now, is that in the art object both the content and the form are changed from what they are outside of that object of beauty. The form is not now the abstract form of logic or mathematics, and the content is not now the content of actual experience. In the grip of beauty, the form is transformed and the content is transubstantiated. We can, to be sure, state what, e.g., a poem is about, or paraphrase the poem, but in so doing we miss the content that is *within* the language of the poem. Ordinary and scientific language is *transparent*, the object meant comes *through* the language. For example, a scientific statement can be made in many different languages and the same content, or meaning, is disclosed without any loss. Here the object meant is independent of the language and thus comes *through* the language. The content of the poem, what the poem, as a poem, is about, however, is *not* something that exists independently of the poetic language. On the contrary, poetic content exists, exclusively, *within* the language, with the result that something of the meaning of a poem is lost in the attempt to translate the poetic language. Poetic language is *untranslatable*. Poetic language is thus *opaque*. The meanings and values that the poem carries are disclosed in the language of the poem. This restriction of poetic content to the language of the poem is the result of the organic fusion of form and content, which, as we have observed, is characteristic of all art. Immanent meaning rules the art object in the fusion of form and content.

It may be helpful to give a couple of illustrations of the immanent meaning of a poem, resulting from the organic fusion of form and content.

Take the statement: "I love you and always shall." This statement asserts a subject matter, that of pledged love. This subject matter, as we have just done, can be asserted in a factual statement. The factual statement is the paraphrase. But now the poetry:

As fair as thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear
Till a' the seas gang dry.

What the poem is about, now, is different from what can be stated propositionally. The choice of words, their organization, yield something entirely new. In contrast to the words of the paraphrase, the logical proposition, "the words of the poem...are handled for their own sakes, and with that strangeness which enters into the proportion of beauty."³

In the book of Ruth, Ruth expresses the devotion of an alien daughter to her husband's mother. This subject matter, too, can be stated in the form of a factual proposition. But how different is the poetic content:

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee:
for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people
shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there
will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more, if aught but death part thee and
me (Ruth 1:16-17).

In these lines the emotion of love overflows into a perfection of words beyond description in other terms.

The organizing principles that are at work with subject matter, or content, are those of harmony, balance, and centrality. *Harmony*, which achieves unity by recurrence and complex unification of temporal and spatial items, is especially significant in the temporal arts, as music. *Balance* achieves unity by contrast, by a close and complex juxtaposition of similar and dissimilar items, especially spatial items. It is particularly important in painting. The combination of harmony and balance yields rhythm. *Centrality* obtains when items are so arranged in a complex that one item, or group of items, dominates the others. It is these principles, then, that work up the content of experience into beauty, the meaning of which is immanent in the object of beauty and which is beheld intransitively for the sake of beauty itself.

Beauty then, whether created or natural, obtains as the order and unification of the elements of content. Beauty is the proportionality of the material of experience. It is for this reason, when viewed from the viewpoint of the nature of beauty, that it can be said, with accuracy, that there is the "beauty of holiness." In the disposition and life of the Christian, there lie the graces of the Spirit of God, and they lie within the matrix of proper proportionality. For this reason, Christian holiness is a form of beauty. "What a glorious constellation of graces is here," Wesley said. As "knit together in one," as "united together in the soul of a believer," these graces yield Christian perfection, which is, precisely, the beauty of holiness. Inward holiness is beautiful because, within the soul of the Christian, there works the leaven of Godliness: harmony, balance, and centrality. With harmony and balance, centrality lifts the human spirit, with all of its inner resources and powers, into passionate focus upon the clarity and brightness of divine holiness and divine beauty.

Christian holiness is also, as Wesley always insisted, *outward* holiness. Not only is holiness the having the "mind that was in Christ," it is also the "walking as Christ walked."

Christian perfection is, he said, "universal holiness: Inward and outward righteousness: Holiness of life, arising from holiness of heart" (vi. 414). Just as is inward holiness, as we have tried to show, a form of beauty, so is outward holiness marked by the proportionality of beauty. I want to bring this discussion to a close by some mention of this dimension of "the beauty of holiness."

I want to begin this part of the discussion by referring, again, to Psalm 110:3, where the Psalmist sings of "the beauties of holiness."

Thy people shall be willing
in the day of thy power,
in the beauties of holiness
from the womb of the morning:
thou hast the dew of thy youth.

Here we find a marvelous example of the immanent meaning of beauty that defies translation into literal terms. Somehow, although we cannot say just how, we yet "know" what the psalmist is saying, although we have no ordinary, or usual, words into which to put the import of the passage. As we dwell upon these words, we see that there are forms and levels of meaning which are combined in a strange, mysterious manner. These forms and levels reach down into the depth of our earthly experience, yet take those primordial nuances of our intimate humanity and lift them into the idealized world of spirituality. There is talk of the morning with its dew; there is talk of the womb and of youth. But there is more, for the womb is strangely combined with the morning, and the dew is not the dew of the morning, but the dew of youth. And, further, with all this there is talk of the day of divine power and of the willingness of the people of God. What does all this mean—this gem that glitters with such a wondrous mixture of nuances of significance?

It is the power of grace that saves and brings Christian holiness. "The splendid garments of holiness" are the possessions of the children of God, their holiness of heart and life. These are the noble dispositions and the noble patterns of conduct. It is these splendid garments that become the children of the majestic Lord. The work of inward and outward holiness is the work of God. There is "the womb of the morning" suffused with freshness and purity, from which issue the godly in heart and life. There is the "the dew of thy youth," the divine nativity whose years are ageless in eternal youth and whose offspring, as the dew radiates the brilliance of the morning light, radiate in heart and life the divine splendor.

In the day of power, God's people are willing. The carrying out of that willingness in the conduct of life yields the beauty, the proportionality, of outward holiness. What this means, essentially, is that the unity that brings the inward graces into harmony serves to bring unity and harmony within the fabric of humanity. To live outwardly the "glorious constellation of graces," as these are "united together in the soul" of the Christian, is to see one another, not as many and mutually conflicting creatures, but as gathered into a unity of all human life encompassed within the enclosure of supernatural and divine embracement. The beautiful embodies, as we have seen, harmonious relations. In the harmony of all life, there is, then, beauty. In the beauty of holiness, there lies the promise that all

human life can be linked in genuine spiritual unity. The harbinger of the redemption of all peoples is the redeemed Church, the ekklesia of God. In the mystic union of the faithful in the Church, in the very beauty of that harmony, is found the hope of healing and redemption for the world. Holiness is the beauty of harmony, the harmony of the graces of the Spirit, the harmony of the people of God, and the final and decisive promise, in the unity with the Lord of all, of the harmony of the children of men.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17: 17, 21, 23).

NOTES

1. All quotations are from *The Works of John Wesley*. 14 vols. (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House).
2. Olin Alfred Curtis, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1956), p. 376.
3. Samuel Alexander, *Beauty and Other Forms of Value* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1933), p. 55.

PASCAL'S BIBLICAL OMISSION ARGUMENT AGAINST NATURAL THEOLOGY

DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS

In the hope of clarifying the nature and role of faith and reason in the justification of the Christian worldview, philosophers and theologians have pondered the Scriptures in order to find a biblically faithful and philosophically applicable epistemology regarding the existence of God. Many have found encouragement for the project of natural theology. These thinkers reckon general revelation to be a rich, although not exhaustive, resource for theistic arguments. Others have rejected natural theology by adopting either another rational program in defense of God's existence or by favoring a more fideistic orientation.

One persistent argument against natural theology appeals to special revelation itself as prohibiting such apologetic enterprises, however well-meaning their proponents may be. Although he was an innovative and cogent apologist in his own right (and not a fideist),¹ Blaise Pascal argued in *Pensées* that a faithful reading of the Bible precludes the enterprise of natural theology. One of his several arguments against natural theology can be called the biblical omission argument.² Since Pascal advances this argument forcefully, and because variations of his approach are still advocated in various theological circles, it is appropriate to probe his argument in order to discern whether or not it renders the endeavor of natural theology inconsistent with the very faith natural theologians labor to defend.

THE BIBLICAL CASE AGAINST NATURAL THEOLOGY

Pascal is impressed by the fact that no biblical writer argues from nature to Creator. No inspired writer is a natural theologian. His observation should be quoted in full:

It is a remarkable fact that no canonical author has ever used nature to

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FALL 1997 • VOL. 52 • NO. 2

prove God. They all try to make people believe in him. David, Solomon, etc., never said: 'There is no such thing as a vacuum, therefore God exists.' They must have been cleverer than the cleverest of their successors, all of whom have used proofs from nature. This is very noteworthy.³

Because the Scriptures themselves lack proofs from nature, Pascal has no need for them. He inserts the sentence, "They [the biblical writers] all try to make people believe in him," to mean that certain kinds of persuasion are appropriate, but proofs from nature are not. Pascal appears to be assuming that if the Scriptures are religiously normative with respect to theological knowledge about God, humans, ethics, and salvation, they must also be epistemically normative when it comes to theistic arguments.⁴ Pascal's reasoning seems to follow in this way:

1. The Bible is epistemically normative. It specifically and exhaustively tells us how to acquire knowledge of God.
2. No biblical writer gives a theistic proof.
3. No biblical writer recommends or permits the construction of a theistic proof as a way to acquire knowledge of God.
4. Therefore no theistic proofs are biblically sanctioned as ways to acquire knowledge of God.

In other words, if God had sanctioned theistic arguments from nature, he would have inspired a biblical writer to present one or more such arguments. We could extend Pascal's observation by adding that if theistic proofs were appropriate we would expect the Scripture at least to advocate the construction of one or more of them. But Scripture does neither, therefore, we can conclude that God does not sanction theistic arguments.

Pascal's argument is valid. Its soundness is another matter because premises 1 and 3 are questionable. We should remember that Pascal does not rest his perspective simply on a lack of overt natural theology in the Bible; he also believes that the stated scriptural teaching on sin, the fall, and redemption prohibits arguments based on natural theology, because of the inherent corruption of human reason through sin. It is first important to analyze Pascal's biblical omission argument on its own merits to discern what, if anything, it entails with respect to natural theology. Does this omission show that natural theology is opposed to the very theism it purports to defend?

Concerning premise 1, no one should expect that one book—even a large book that Christians claim as a revelation—should contain everything of epistemic significance. The fact that the Bible lacks arguments on many disputable issues in the twentieth century is no evidence that such arguments are beside the point. An omission need not be a prohibition. But Pascal might want to argue that there is nothing of greater significance to Christian *theism* than God and our epistemic deportment toward him. The concept of belief in God is pivotal to the entire Bible and thus to Christian theology, spirituality, and

ethics. It would be legitimate, then, to expect the Bible to contain everything epistemically pertinent to acquiring belief in God. We should expect the Bible—when taken as a revelation from God to all humanity—to exemplify or encourage natural theology if the practice is legitimate. But it does not. This, Pascal could say, is no incidental omission but rather a disarming silence. Natural theologians are left without any biblically sanctioned tools.

It could be argued that the biblical writers had no need of theistic arguments given the religious climate in which they wrote, and that this historical condition accounts for why there is no record of such arguments in Scripture. But this does not mean that theists in more skeptical intellectual environs might not have use for them.⁵ Atheism does not seem to have been a particular problem for the biblical writers, although the same cannot be said for polytheism or pantheism. John Baillie observes that “none of the Old Testament writers treats the existence of deity as if it were an open question or in any sense problematic,” and the same can be said of the New Testament.⁶ Henry Sloane Coffin once preached that the Ten Commandments began with “Thou shalt have no other gods beside me,” instead of “Thou shalt have at least one God.”⁷

One might counter this claim by arguing that the Bible itself admits of atheists. In Psalm 14, verse 1, the writer says that “the fool says in his heart, There is no God,” (see also Psalm 10:4 and 53:1). If the Bible cites actual atheists and refuses to engage in natural theology, this would strengthen the claim that the Bible does not sanction the practice.

This argument should not be ignored, but the use of the word “atheist” by the psalmist does not likely refer to one who denies a divine being, but rather to one who defies a divine being. This view can be established without great exegetical effort. A note in the *New International Version Study Bible* on Psalm 14:1 rightly calls the “fool’s” view a “practical atheism.”⁸ Another explanatory note in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* commenting on a parallel verse in Psalm 10:4 says “They are not atheists, but deny that God is concerned with moral retribution.”⁹ In other words, the Psalms speak of those who try to deny God in their actions while still knowing that he exists. This is explained by another verse in Psalm 10 that further describes the “atheist”: “He says to himself, ‘God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees’” (verse 11). The “atheists” are trying to deny the moral consequences of God’s existence in relation to their misdeeds. So for all intents and purposes, they live like atheists and are as such “practical atheists.” John Baillie comments that these verses do not have to do with “intellectual perplexity but with sinful evasion—with wicked man’s attempt to persuade himself that he can go through with his wickedness and yet escape divine judgment.”¹⁰

This could be likened to the cigarette addict who knows that her addiction is extremely unhealthy yet continues to smoke with abandon. When confronted with facts that prove her potentially suicidal actions, she brushes them off and refuses to take them seriously. She is thus both a nay-sayer about the perils of smoking (because she doesn’t change her actions and refuses to admit the dangers) and a believer in these dangers nonetheless. This kind of psychological situation is not rare, and many other kinds of examples could be supplied.

Given the epistemic significance of the ancient historical situation as religious, it seems illegitimate to view Scripture as definitively circumscribing the means of acquiring knowledge of God. One can still hold that the Bible is theologically authoritative and morally

normative without holding that it is epistemically normative with respect to the specific strategic employment of theistic arguments in such a way that it therefore disallows the practice of any natural theology that it does not exemplify. So premise 1 is not clearly true and is likely false in the way stipulated above.

The absence of either theistic proofs or any direct admonition to engage in such proofs need not preclude natural theology as salutary for some Christians. It is clear that the biblical writers offer no theistic proofs (Pascal's premise 2). But we must question Pascal's premise 3 that no biblical writer advocates or allows theistic proofs. Several biblical texts teach that God is manifested in the natural order. If "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1), one might infer that natural arguments are available to convince skeptics of this fact. On the other hand, it has been suggested that this text might be simply a *confession* of the believing psalmist and not an assertion that one could infer from the heavens that God made them. On this reading, the psalmist believes the heavens declare the glory of God; but the heavens give no independent evidence for the existence of God.

But verse four of Psalm 19 might challenge this view: "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." This universal reference may indicate that the heavens offer a worldwide testimony to God (through their "voice") that should be recognized by earth's inhabitants. This interpretation would mean that the evidence for God is everywhere available. Yet the critic could reply that their voice being heard simply means that all can observe the heavens, but all do not recognize the starry heavens in particular (and the universe in general) as God's work, nor can they because they lack the conviction that God exists. Pascal seems to have held this view. In speaking of the claim that "the sky and the birds prove God," he replies that his religion does not say so "for though it is true [that the sky and birds prove God] in a sense for some souls whom God has enlightened in this way, yet it is untrue for the majority."¹¹

This could be likened to me hearing a Russian speaker without having a translator available. I hear his voice, but I do not understand the message.

Both interpretations have some merit, although the universal testimony view seems most consistent with the overall context of the Psalm. Nevertheless, these verses taken alone cannot serve either to license or to prohibit natural theology.

In response to the objection that "since a cause cannot be demonstrated by an effect not proportionate to it, it seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated," Thomas Aquinas says, "On the contrary. The Apostle says: The invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (Rom. 1:20)." Thomas continues, "This could not be unless the existence of God could be demonstrated through the things that are made. For the first thing we *must know* of anything is whether it exists."¹² Thomas thinks it is required that we be able to know through argument that God exists in order for Paul's statement to make sense. Thomas is not arguing that Paul provides such an argument (Paul only gives an assertion), but that if his statement is true (as Thomas claims it is), such a theistic argument is both needful and possible—since revelation will never contradict reason. This challenges Pascal's premise 3 that proofs are not recommended in Scripture. Thomas thinks they are *required* if the Romans passage is to make sense.

Thomas' inference rests on two notions. First, he assumes that if God can be known

"by the things that are made," such knowledge must be proved by rational argument in which "the things that are made" serve as a premise or evidence for the argument. But some, such as Calvin and Alvin Plantinga, have argued that while one may know God through creation, one needs no argument to do so. God's existence can be known as an intuitive truth or a properly basic belief not inferred from anything else. Seeing a flower may occasion the belief that God made that flower, and serve as the "grounding" for that belief; but, according to Plantinga, the existence of natural objects does not provide *evidence* for the deity.¹³

Second, Thomas interprets the passage to mean that "the invisible things of Him are clearly seen" by humanity as a whole; that is, the creation reveals the Creator to every sentient person. This interpretation has a long and substantial history and seems to fit Paul's overall argument of Romans chapters 1 through 3 to establish the guilt of the entire human race. But R.T. Herbert has argued that Paul is speaking of pagan polytheists, not of humanity as a whole (which includes atheists). Therefore, God's existence is not rationally demonstrated to all humans through creation. Rather, if one is a polytheist, it would be rational to reduce one's theology to one God. But this doesn't imply that the text in Romans teaches that a rational argument from creation is available to persuade the *atheist* to become a theist.¹⁴

Paul's statements certainly indict polytheists as idolaters who should know better. Yet Paul levels his charges against the ungodliness of *all* who suppress the truth in their wickedness, against *all* who fail properly to worship the one true Creator. This reference seems universal in scope (including humanity as a whole, whatever metaphysics one holds) and not limited to the particular ungodliness of polytheists, especially given the fact that Paul bases his arguments on the universally accessible fact of the material creation. Therefore, atheists, polytheists, and any other nontheists are responsible for their comprehension of God, which is available through nature.

We cannot definitively settle this interpretive question here, but it will suffice to say that in light of this controversy the biblical evidence is not clearly against natural theology. No texts directly prohibit natural theology; neither do any passages seem to unambiguously demand natural theology; yet some seem to permit or even encourage it.

One could argue that the task of Christian philosophers in more skeptical times could include constructing arguments that alert unbelievers to the manifestations of God in nature so as to persuade them to believe in God. These arguments, if inspired by Romans chapter one, could be *a posteriori* arguments of the cosmological or teleological type since they argue from an observance of nature (or natural premises) to the existence of God. Or appeal could be made to an *a priori* ontological argument. The natural theologian might cite the Apostle Peter in favor of natural theology for a skeptical time: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). If the atheist asks for a reason why the believer believes in God, he should be given one—and this shouldn't in principle preclude theistic proofs (although other kinds of reasons might be given). The natural theologian could grant that no theistic arguments *per se* are given in Scripture but still challenge Pascal's notion that the Scriptures do not allow such theistic argumentation in any circumstance.

Thomas Morris has put the matter well in speaking of philosophical theology in gener-

al (which includes natural theology):

From the fact that the biblical documents, written as they were to deal with burning practical questions of the greatest personal significance, do not address all the possible philosophical questions which can also, in their own way, be of the greatest intellectual significance, it does not follow at all that these more theoretical questions are illegitimate, or that they are unimportant.¹⁵

He goes on to suggest that any person asking philosophical questions about religious matters should do all in his power to find answers to these questions, even if they are not directly answered by the Bible itself. To do otherwise would be to deny an important aspect of one's identity.¹⁶

Morris is speaking broadly of philosophical theology that includes much more than theistic proofs, and it might be the case—although he does not make this claim—that only matters pertaining to the coherence of theism (its conceptual integrity), rather than the existence of God, are the proper subject of his remarks. That is, the believer or unbeliever can legitimately engage in philosophical theology by reflecting on divine intelligibility and compatibility of the divine attributes, but not try to construct proofs for God's existence. But this limitation would apply only if some other reason can be given for rejecting the proofs besides the fact that the Bible omits them. Morris believes that an omission may not be a prohibition, especially if the raw materials—if not the finished arguments—for philosophical theology are available in Scripture itself.

Another of Pascal's assertions could be challenged by those who allow, encourage, or practice natural theology. Pascal remarks that none of the biblical writers gives proofs—which is true—but he also says "they must have been cleverer than the cleverest of their successors, all of whom used proofs from nature." By this he seems to mean that if the best and brightest canonical authors deemed theistic proofs unworthy or unnecessary, then we ought to imitate their philosophical omission. But even an orthodox view of the inspiration of Scripture need not affirm that the biblical writers were "the cleverest of the clever"—the most intelligent theologians of all time. All that need be affirmed is that each writer was infallibly inspired by God to write as he did for the purposes at hand.¹⁷ If God's existence did not need argumentation in the cultural milieu of the biblical writers, this doesn't imply that someone clever enough to construct theistic arguments might not come along at a later time when skepticism should render them necessary. It could be that Thomas Aquinas, philosopher *extraordinaire*, was, in fact, "more clever" than Solomon or David or any other biblical writer with respect to natural theology; but this would not imply that the biblical writers were not divinely inspired or that Aquinas was so inspired. All it would imply is that a Christian philosopher deigned to use reason in service of faith in a different way than that of the canonical writers.

THEOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE FROM BAVINCK?

An argument that fits the spirit of Pascal's rejection of natural theology was also given by Herman Bavinck, a Dutch theologian favorably cited by Plantinga partially to substantiate his claim that natural theology is not needed for an epistemically credible Christian belief.¹⁸

A distinct natural theology, obtained apart from any revelation, merely through observation and study of the universe in which man lives, does not exist....

Scripture urges us to behold heaven and earth, birds and ants, flowers and lilies, in order that we may see and recognize God in them. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these" Is. 40:26. *Scripture does not reason in the abstract. It does not make God the conclusion of a syllogism, leaving it to us whether we think the argument holds or not. But it speaks with authority.*¹⁹

Bavinck thinks that the reason Scripture lacks theistic proofs is that any syllogistic reasoning, however cogent, is incompatible with biblical authority. By this he seems to mean that if proof for God's existence were derivative of natural premises and inferential reasoning, then biblical authority would be compromised. God's existence, for Bavinck, is not established by arguments based on non-theological premises, but by biblical revelation alone. The Bible tells us to see God as Creator and nature as God's creation: it does not tell us to see nature as evidence for God.

Bavinck's argument is similar to Pascal's biblical omission argument in that it regards biblical revelation as epistemically authoritative, and rules out extra-biblical means of acquiring knowledge of God—that is, natural theology. In logical form, Bavinck's argument runs as follows:

1. Whatever speaks with the highest authority allows no external corroboration (implied).
2. The Bible speaks with the highest authority (about the existence of God).
3. Therefore, the Bible allows no external corroboration (with respect to the existence of God). There is no efficacious natural theology.

This argument is valid, but its first premise will be disputed.

Bavinck attempts to give a reason why the Scriptures lack theistic proofs, although the Scriptures themselves give no reason. So he cannot speak with the direct authority of revelation on this issue, although he believes his argument is based on the overall testimony of Scripture. We need to look more closely at the nature of authority to see if Bavinck's premise 1 is true.

Whatever speaks with authority—at whatever level—must be viewed by others as having authority, if it is to be recognized as authoritative. This almost tautological observation can be used against Bavinck. A text on biology may be the definitive statement on the subject and thus have the highest scientific authority. Yet this authority would not be damaged by those who refuse to view it as authoritative out of ignorance, perversity or disagreement. Neither would it demean the authority of the text if someone were to defend its credentials to skeptics whom the defender wishes to convince. It could still have the highest authority as a biology text even though its authority needed to be corroborated through various means. The means used to certify the authority are simply what constitutes its credentials as an authority. Credentials do not undermine authority;

they establish it.

We could imagine God making use of natural theology—by creating brilliant natural theologians such as St. Thomas or Richard Swinburne for this purpose—to accredit himself as existing for certain skeptical types. Since God would be viewed as creating the very means by which natural theology accredits him, the use of natural theology need not diminish the authority of God's Word, the Bible; it would rather complement biblical authority. The intrinsic authority of Scripture would not be dependent on the arguments of natural theology, but God's existence would be demonstrated through such arguments for those people who aren't content to rely on the biblical evidence alone. The statements of the Bible would receive their epistemic credentials through natural theology and thus be shown as having the highest authority.

Bavinck may be thinking that the authority of the Bible's pronouncements on God's existence are not simply true—that God exists, that he is the ultimate Judge and Redeemer, etc.—but that these pronouncements are self-attesting or self-authorizing and so in need of no outside corroboration. Self-attesting or self-authorizing here means not that the statements are tautologically true or must be seen as true by any attentive thinker—statements such as “the whole is greater than the parts” or “no object is bigger than it is.” What is meant is that they appeal to no other human source for their credibility. A better way to put it might be to say that the Bible's pronouncements on the existence of God are “God-attested” because God alone certifies their truth value in the Scripture without any external, evidential support.

In this sense, to speak with authority means to need no assistance or extrinsic authorization, as when a father says to a three-year-old child, “No dessert tonight because you misbehaved today.” That's the final word. To enlist a sociologist to concur would be absurd.

One may choose to view Scripture's authority in this way, but it doesn't seem forced upon us, unless—as we have denied—specific texts forbid natural theology. Further, many orthodox natural theologians have not viewed the Bible in this manner. Even if one holds, as did Bavinck and Pascal, that the Bible alone is the inspired Scripture, this need not imply that God is limited to this medium to convince skeptics of his existence.

The idea that the Bible is the ultimate and final witness to or revelation of God's existence need not necessarily eliminate the idea that there are independent reasons that could convince skeptics that God exists. Thus Bavinck's first premise seems false. If this is so, his criticism loses its force and his assist to Pascal is nullified.

To pursue this debate on natural theology in any more depth would take us beyond the scope of our inquiry. We may, however, safely conclude that for Pascal (or Bavinck) to make the case that theistic arguments are inappropriate, he needs to look further than the biblical omission argument. It may well be that theistic arguments should be deemed illegitimate by believers for a variety of other reasons, and that believers should adopt a moderate theological non-naturalism. But the mere fact that theistic proofs are not overtly stated in Scripture is an inconclusive argument against their felicity. To rely on this fact alone would appear to commit the fallacy of the argument from silence. When Pascal says that the absence of natural theology in Scripture is “very noteworthy” he means, I think, that its absence bespeaks a host of other factors about the limitations of human rea-

son, the noetic effects of sin, and the nature of God as infinite that render such proofs illegitimate. A discussion of these factors, however, would take us beyond the biblical omission argument proper.

AN INCONCLUSIVE ARGUMENT

This paper has considered the biblical omission argument against natural theology and has argued that although it raises interesting issues deserving of further attention, it is insufficient to invalidate natural theology. The fact that no biblical author offers a specimen of natural theology does not necessarily imply its illegitimacy, although it does raise the question as to why there is an omission. This could be because no arguments were needed during the time the documents were written, although such arguments might be needed at a later point. Therefore, whatever other arguments may be marshalled against natural theology, the absence of theistic arguments in the biblical text itself does not provide a sufficient argument to abandon its employment by extra-biblical apologists.²⁰

NOTES

1. For a nonfideistic understanding of Pascal's wager, see D. Groothuis, "Wagering Belief: An Examining of Two Objections to Pascal's Wager," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 479-486.
2. For an extended discussion of Pascal's rejection of natural theology see Douglas Groothuis, *To Prove or Not to Prove: Pascal's Rejection of Natural Theology* (Ph.D. dissertation, 1993).
3. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 1985) 463/243. This edition uses the Lafuma enumeration of fragments, which are listed first in the reference. The second number is the older Brunshvlg system.
4. I owe this distinction to Professor Keith Yandell.
5. The biblical writers do, though, argue against idolatry as illogical. A finite, inanimate idol cannot a universe make. See Isaiah, chapters 44-45.
6. John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), 119.
7. Ibid.
8. John H. Stek, commentator for Psalms, in Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 798.
9. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, Revised Standard Version, Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds. (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1973), 662.
10. Baillie, 120.
11. Pascal, 3/244.
12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 2, 2; emphasis added.
13. See Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16-93.
14. See R.T. Herbert, "Is Coming to Believe in God Reasonable or Unreasonable?" *Faith and Philosophy* 8, No. 1 (January 1991): 46-47.
15. Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 31.
16. Ibid.
17. The Old Testament says that Solomon was the wisest man living, but this need not mean that he had the highest intelligence, since, according to the biblical writers, more is involved in wisdom than mere intellect.
18. Bavinck goes further than Plantinga in saying that an efficacious natural theology is impossi-

ble. Plantinga's guarded defense of a modal ontological argument shows that he finds this version of natural theology to be plausible, even if not strictly needed for the believer to be within his epistemic rights in believing in God as a properly basic belief.

19. Plantinga, 64.

20. I wish to thank Professor R.T. Herbert for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., PERSONALISM, AND MORAL LAW

RUFUS BURROW, JR.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was not the first Afrikan American to study the philosophy of Personalism at Boston University. However, King is the Afrikan American most often associated with this philosophical tradition. Indeed, had he not written in his application to Boston University Graduate School that he wanted to study there both because Edgar S. Brightman (1884-1953) was teaching Personalism there, and because one of his professors at Crozer Theological Seminary (a Boston alum) encouraged him to do so?¹ King earned the Ph.D. degree in philosophical theology² at that institution in 1955. While there he was much influenced by Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf (1905-1986).

DeWolf wrote of his own influence on King. "At nearly all points his system of positive theological belief was identical with mine, and occasionally I find his language following closely the special terms of my own lectures and writings."³ King's most original and creative contribution to the Personalist tradition was his adamant persistence in translating Personalism into social action by applying it to the trilogy of social problems—racism, poverty/economic exploitation, and militarism⁴—that he believed plagued this country and the world. By focusing on social-ethical Personalism (which is grounded in the metaphysics of Personalism) King, although unknowingly, was only following the precedence set by John Wesley Edward Bowen (1855-1933), the first Afrikan American academic Personalist,⁵ and Francis J. McConnell (1871-1953).

This essay endeavors to do three things: 1) To address the impact of Personalism on Martin Luther King, Jr. because some King scholars, e.g., David Garrow, downplay the importance of Personalism on King's formal theological development.⁶ It is crucial that we remember at all times that King himself affirmed that Personalism or Personal Idealism was his fundamental philosophical point of departure.

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This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. Personalism's insistence that only personality—finite and infinite—is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.⁷

Notice that King did not say that he first came to believe in a personal God and the dignity of persons through his study of Personalism. These were beliefs that were instilled in him through his family upbringing and teachings at the Ebenezer Baptist Church pastored by his father in Atlanta, Georgia. Therefore these were beliefs that King brought to the study of Personalism, which in turn provided the metaphysical grounding he sought. Indeed, Susan Harlow brings a sharp clarity to the point in a paper she wrote on King.

The church of his parents and grandparents had imparted an understanding of God and of the purposes of Christian ministry that could not be displaced by theological sophistication. *His study of personalism reinforced his beliefs rather than supplanted them.* It gave him a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all persons.⁸ (Italics mine)

2) To consider *his* contribution to what may be cautiously referred to as "Boston Personalism." 3) To assess the meaning of his Personalism for the Afrikan American community today. I begin with a brief discussion of the meaning and development of Personalism, followed by consideration of several of its chief traits and how King interpreted them. Consideration is also given to the significance of King's belief in the existence of an objective moral order and the moral law system. These and related beliefs contributed to King's faith in the possibility of the achievement of the *beloved community*, and his insistence on nonviolence as a way of life. Finally, I discuss the meaning of the Kingian type of Personalism in relation to the phenomenon of intracommunity black violence and murder.

MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALISM

What is Personalism? It is the view that reality is personal and persons are the highest—not the only!—intrinsic values. It is a type of idealism which maintains that PERSON is the supreme philosophical principle—that principle without which no other principle can be made intelligible. The type of Personalism here considered, and which prompted King to claim it as his fundamental philosophical standpoint,⁹ maintains that the universe is a society of interacting and intercommunicating selves and persons with God at the center. Personalism provided for King a philosophical framework to support his long held belief in a personal God; the idea of the absolute dignity and worth of persons;¹⁰ and his belief in the existence of an objective moral order.

The term *personalism* was first introduced by the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1799, although he did not develop it philosophically. Both English and American scholars¹¹ used the term in their writings in the mid-nineteenth century. However, like Schleiermacher, they did not develop its philosophical meaning.

Personalism was made a growing concern in the United States by Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910), who is remembered as "the father of American personalism."

Bowne was called to Boston University in 1876. Vigorously reacting against impersonalistic and naturalistic philosophies of the likes of Herbert Spencer,¹² Bowne argued persuasively that the personal (or mind) can never be derived from an impersonal "Unknown," and that only mind or intelligence can produce intelligence. Indeed, for Bowne the most acute argument for theism is the argument from intelligibility.¹³ Much influenced by the idealism of René Descartes, Bishop George Berkeley and Immanuel Kant, Bowne gave primacy to self-certainty; the immaterialism of all phenomenal objects (which led to the view that all objects in nature are the manifestation of God's will and thought); the practical reason; a dualistic and activistic epistemology; the primacy of the good will; and the intrinsic dignity of the person.

Bowne's systematic development of Personalism as a worldview and as a way of living in the world led to the characterization of his philosophy as "systematic methodological personalism."¹⁴ This meant that Bowne, more than any of his contemporaries, with the possible exception of George Holmes Howison,¹⁵ pushed the personalistic argument to its logical conclusions in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and ethics. As a result of Bowne's leadership, Boston University was known as the great bastion of personalistic studies until (roughly) the end of the 1960s. For my purpose I date the decline of Personalism by the year of King's assassination in 1968. I do so because King was the chief social Personalist in this country who both explicitly identified himself as a Personalist and was devoted to making Personalism a reality in human relations.

KING AND PERSONALISM

There is not one, but nearly a dozen types of personalisms.¹⁶ Yet even within the most systematically developed type, viz., *theistic personalism*, which King studied, there are divergent viewpoints. For example, not all in this tradition of Personalism accept the idea of an omnipotent-omnibenevolent God. Nor do all adhere to the idea of the temporality of God. But differences notwithstanding, Personalism has a number of distinguishing features shared by all.

First, Personalism maintains that *PERSON* is prominent both metaphysically and ethically. This means that the Supreme Reality (i.e., God) is both personal and the cause and sustainer of human and non-human life forms. This idea has important implications for the treatment of persons in the world, for it implies that because the Supreme Person *chooses* or *wills* to create persons we are of infinite value to the Creator and thus should be respected and treated like beings who possess infinite dignity and worth. King often said that persons should be loved and respected precisely because God loves them. "The worth of an individual," he said, "does not lie in the measure of his intellect, his racial origin, or his social position. Human worth lies in relatedness to God. An individual has value because he has value to God."¹⁷ Persons as such possess a fundamental sacredness because they are created and loved by God. For King the biblical tradition of the Jewish-Christian faith points to the quality of innate dignity in persons, an idea he believed to be implicit in the concept of *the image of God*. This led him to conclude:

This innate worth referred to in the phrase the image of God is universally shared in equal portions by all men. There is no graded scale of essential worth; there is no divine right of one race which differs from the divine right of another. Every human

being has etched in his personality the indelible stamp of the Creator.¹⁸

King believed that every person has not only an inborn sense of worth, but is of inestimable value to the Creator. This necessarily implied for him the obligation of persons to treat self and others with respect. The idea of an inborn ideal of worth is prominent in the ethical system of Bowne,¹⁹ the Black Church tradition, and the Jewish-Christian tradition, each of which influenced King.

Second, the type of Personalism that appealed to King is *THEISTIC*. Personalists believe in a Personal God who is the creator and sustainer of the created order. In theistic Personalism we find metaphysical grounding for the biblical belief that in God we live and move and have our being. Such a God is perceived as infinitely loving, caring, responsive, active, righteous, and just. We get a sense of the thoroughgoing nature of theistic Personalism in Bowne's contention that God is the only foundation of truth, knowledge, and morals.²⁰ Although he argued that it is impossible to demonstrate the existence of God, Bowne was eager to show that the problems of the world and life cannot be solved without God as the fundamental assumption.²¹

There is no question that King believed the universe to be under guidance of a personal and loving Creator God. Nowhere did he express this more clearly and movingly than when he reflected on some of the hardships and threats made against him and his family during the civil rights movement.

I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power. To say that this God is personal is not to make him a finite object besides other objects or attribute to him the limitations of human personality; it is to take what is finest and noblest in our consciousness and affirm its perfect existence in him.²²

King believed God to be "a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love," and that "creative force" in the universe who "works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole."²³

Third, in addition to holding that reality is personal, Personalism is *FREEDOMISTIC*. In fact, the two organizing principles of Personalism are *PERSON* and *FREEDOM*. Accordingly, all being is both personal and free. To be is to be free and to act or have the potential to do so (although it is more than this!). Indeed, at bottom, to be free is what it means to be a person; to be a person is to be free, or an agent capable of acting, whether for the good or evil. This sense of self-determination is what the Creator intends, a view which has important implications for the ethical and political freedom of persons in the world and what they ought to be willing to do to assert, protect, and defend their essential freedom.

Persons are not first created, and then *given* freedom. Rather, the nature of *PERSON* is freedom. That is, it is the intention of the Creator that persons come into existence as free beings and with the capacity to be self-determined moral agents. That some persons lack moral agency because they are mentally challenged raises the theodicy question. That the extent of the existence of moral agency in some is questionable because of the denial of basic life-chances also raises fundamental difficulties that have both moral and socio-politi-

cal implications. For example, to what extent can we say that young Afrikan American males who engage in intracommunity violence and murder are *morally* responsible? There is no question that the one who pulls the trigger in a driveby shooting is legally responsible. But morally? At any rate Personalism maintains that in the most fundamental sense to be is to be free. It is because of this essential freedom that *all* persons who are moral agents²⁴ are morally obligated to resist fiercely anybody and anything that undermine or seek to crush that freedom.

King said three things about this essential freedom. First, freedom is the capacity to be self-determined and self-directed. It is "the capacity to deliberate or weigh alternatives." Secondly, freedom "expresses itself in decision." Once I choose a particular alternative I necessarily cut off other choices. And thirdly, King held that freedom implies responsibility. Once I make a choice I am responsible both for it and its most foreseeable consequences.²⁵ It may also be reasoned that any practice that threatens my freedom is a threat to my personhood and impinges on my ability to weigh alternatives, to make decisions, and to be responsible for my choices.

So important was freedom for King that he concluded with Brightman that without it there can be no persons. Freedom is a capstone of Personalism. Following Brightman and Bowne, King emphasized both the ethical and the speculative significance of freedom. Without freedom neither morality nor knowledge is possible, since each depends on the capacity to deliberate and choose. In graduate school King wrote an essay on the Personalism of the British philosopher John M.E. McTaggart (1866-1925). He argued against McTaggart's rejection of freedom. "In rejecting freedom," he said, "McTaggart was rejecting the most important characteristic of personality."²⁶ For King freedom is an abiding expression of the higher spiritual nature of persons. "Man is man," he said, "because he is free to operate within the framework of his destiny. ... He is distinguished from animals by his freedom to do evil or to do good and to walk the high road of beauty or tread the low road of ugly degeneracy."²⁷

Finally, Personalism conceives of *REALITY AS THROUGH AND THROUGH SOCIAL*, relational, or communal. Accordingly, it views the universe as a society of selves and persons who interact and are united by the will of God. The individual never experiences self in total isolation. Rather, the self always experiences something which it did not invent or create, but finds or receives from her or his "interaction and communication with other persons."²⁸ This idea is similar to the Afrikan worldview which emphasizes the importance of the relational or communal, rather than the isolated individual. The focus is on the *WE* rather than the *I*.²⁹ No person exists in isolation, but in community.

In any event, the emphasis on the communal nature of reality has been present in Personalism since the time of Bowne. The focus on the personal was never intended to point to individuals in a vacuum. Instead, in Personalism the reference has always been to "persons set in relations to one another, which relations are as much a fact as is the separate existence of the individuals."³⁰ Walter Muelder expressed this idea in his term *persons-in-community*. He writes that "man is a socius with a private center...."³¹ This description effectively holds in tension the primacy of both the person and the community, neither of which can be adequately understood apart from the other.

King's idea of the communal nature of reality and persons, and his idea of *the beloved*

community were grounded in his doctrine of God. Although he followed more closely Bowne's concept of God than Brightman's, he had deep affinity with the latter's view that while God does not need us for God's existence as we need God for ours, God is love, and love is a social category. Persons cannot love to the fullest in isolation. We are created to live together and can be fully human only in community. Brightman seemed to have this in mind when he said: "The maxim, 'Think for yourself,' is basic; but the further maxim, 'Think socially,' must be added if philosophy is to do its whole duty."³² This implies that the nature of persons is such that we need relationship with like beings and thus possess a *natural urge toward community*.

King took as his own Personalism's view that this is what is required among Christians. "The real Christian world," wrote Albert C. Knudson, "is a world of mutually dependent beings. It is a social world, a world of interacting moral beings; and in such a world love is necessarily the basic moral law."³³ For King love is the essence of the Christian faith. "I think I have discovered the highest good," he said. "It is love. This principle stands at the center of the cosmos. As John says, 'God is love.' He who loves is a participant in the being of God. He who hates does not know God."³⁴ Since love is at the center of the universe so, necessarily, is the idea of community. Indeed, this idea roots deep in the Afrikan American familial, religious, and cultural heritage. Personalism helped King to ground this idea philosophically.

King frequently expressed the idea of the interrelatedness of all life and that persons are by nature social. We see in him both a focus on the centrality of the person and of community. "All life is interrelated," he said. "All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."³⁵ This led King to reason that what affects one person directly, affects all persons indirectly. "We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality."³⁶ To treat even a single person unjustly, therefore, is an affront to *all* persons, including the Supreme Person.

MORAL LAW AND THE MORAL LAW SYSTEM

In the literature on Personalism a moral law is defined as a principle which is intended to be *universal in application*. It applies to all cases and is valid for all persons. It was Brightman who first developed a *moral law system*, which was later enhanced and/or enlarged by some of his followers.³⁷ Brightman intended that this system be relevant and meaningful in every culture. He seemed to recognize, however, that cultural differences may require certain adaptations of the respective laws.

Brightman distinguished moral law from civil, religious, natural, and logical law.³⁸ Moral law has two necessary conditions: 1) It must be a universal principle or norm. 2) It must apply to the obligation of the will in choosing.³⁹ Because it is a universal norm it is a law. Because it requires the will to choose, it is moral. Accordingly, Brightman held that no act is moral merely because it conforms to a social code. An act is moral only if it conforms to moral law.⁴⁰ Therefore, every code is subject to critique by moral law.

The moral law system is regulative, not prescriptive. That is, it does not tell us what specific moral choices to make. The laws are intended to guide us as we endeavor to make responsible moral choices. Because it is a "system" its use requires effort and intentionality on the part of those who use it. For in order to accomplish what Brightman

intended the moral law system must be seen in its totality, and one must be aware at all times of the place and role of each law, as well as their interrelationship with each other and the entire system.

Brightman's moral law system is comprised of three sets of laws: *FORMAL LAWS* (Logical Law, Law of Autonomy); *AXIOLOGICAL LAWS* (Axiological Law, Law of Consequences, Law of the Best Possible, Law of Specification, Law of the Most Inclusive End, Law of Ideal of Control); and *PERSONALISTIC LAWS* (Law of Individualism, Law of Altruism, Law of the Ideal of Personality). Each category, and the laws in them, presuppose the law which came before and anticipates or points to the law which follows in the line of progression toward the most concrete law in the system. Each law beyond the Logical Law (the first law in the system) includes more content than the one that precedes it. Brightman sums up the contribution of each set of laws to the system. "The Formal Laws deal solely with the will as a subjective fact. The Axiological Laws deal with the values which the will ought to choose. The Personalistic Laws are more comprehensive; they deal with the personality as a concrete whole."⁴¹ In the Personalistic Laws the emphasis is on the person and persons-in-relationship as the subjects of the preceding laws. The Law of the Ideal of Personality is, for Brightman, the summary law of the entire moral law system. It states: "All persons ought to judge and guide all of their acts by their ideal conception (in harmony with the other Laws) of what the whole personality ought to become both individually and socially."⁴²

KING AND MORAL LAW

King was first introduced to Brightman's personalism during his student days at Morehouse College.⁴³ It is significant that during his student days at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania (1948-51), King took a third of all courses with George Washington Davis⁴⁴ in theology and philosophy of religion. Under his careful guidance King got a more thorough exposure to the personalism of both Brightman and DeWolf.

When King matriculated at Boston University in the Ph.D. program he was a student of Brightman's for only a brief period, for he died less than two years after King began his work. King wrote of Brightman's strong influence on his character development.⁴⁵ Since King also studied under DeWolf (who became his major advisor when Brightman died) there is no question that he was familiar with Brightman's moral law system. Indeed, during his first year of graduate study he wrote a paper in DeWolf's class on personalism entitled, "The Personalism of J.M.E. McTaggart Under Criticism." At several points King contrasted McTaggart with Brightman. In the discussion on the significance of freedom King cited passages in Brightman's book, *Moral Laws*, to support his criticism of McTaggart's rejection of freedom. At one point he wrote: "As Brightman has cogently put it: 'If choice is not possible, the science of ethics is not possible. If rational, purposive choice is not effective in the [control] of life, goodness is not possible.'"⁴⁶ King believed that without freedom persons would be little more than automatons. And then in a passage reminiscent of Bowne's emphasis not only on the ethical, but the speculative significance of freedom,⁴⁷ King again cited Brightman's text, *Moral Laws*, approvingly. "Without freedom, we are not free to think, for the power to think means that the individual can impose on

himself the ideal of logic or scientific method and hold it through thick and thin.'"⁴⁸ This requires self-determination or power of will.

It may be argued that long before his formal study of Personalism, King had developed a sense that the structure of the universe itself is on the side of justice and righteousness; that there is a higher law than human law, of which persons violate at great risk. Because of this he could easily resonate to Brightman's view of the existence of an *objective moral order* in the universe which persons ought to obey. Said Brightman:

Idealists hold that moral experience points to an objective moral order in reality, as truly as sense experience points to an objective physical order, and most idealists believe that the objective existence of both orders can be understood rationally only if both are the activity or thought or experience of a supreme mind that generates the whole cosmic process and controls its ongoing.⁴⁹

For Brightman as for King, the cause of both the physical and the objective moral orders is God. King's belief in the existence of such an order can be seen in a passage in his sermon, "Our God is Able." "God walks with us," said King. "He has placed within the very structure of this universe certain absolute moral laws. We can neither defy nor break them. If we disobey them, they will break us."⁵⁰ Elsewhere King could say: "There is a law in the moral world—a silent, invisible imperative, akin to the laws in the physical world—which reminds us that life will work only in a certain way."⁵¹

When King often made the statement that "the arc of the moral universe is long, [but] it bends toward justice,"⁵² he was implying his fundamental faith that no matter how much injustice exists in the world there is something at the seat of the universe which sides with good and justice. The basis of this faith was his belief in the existence of an objective moral order created and sustained by God, and before which every knee shall bow. His many references to his belief that freedom fighters have cosmic companionship further solidified his faith that the very grain of the universe is on the side of right and justice.

One who knows the moral law system of Brightman and has read King's writings will be able to detect King's appropriation of these laws in his writings and speeches. What one should not look for in King, however, is explicit reference to or naming of the individual laws, although there is clearcut evidence that his moral reasoning was influenced by the moral law system. Furthermore, unlike Brightman and other moral law theorists King sought to apply and work out these laws in the context of his social justice work. So while he did not specifically name the laws he often cited the basic principle of a given moral law. For example, when he works through the practical application of the Logical Law he does not cite the Logical Law as such, but we do find him citing the principle involved, namely, "logical consistency."⁵³

Both Walter Muelder and John Ansbro have addressed the subject of the moral laws in the work of King. Although Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, Jr. considered the influence of the existence of an objective moral law on King's thinking, they did not examine his appropriation of the moral law system as such.⁵⁴ However, Muelder and Ansbro have done an admirable job of this.⁵⁵

Ansbro suggests that in several instances King appropriated the moral laws differently than Brightman. Consideration of two of these will suffice for our purpose. Although King

appealed to both the *Law of Individualism* and the *Law of Altruism*, Ansbro suggests that he identified more with the latter law. This implies that there was in King's ethics a stronger other-regarding sentiment than we find in Brightman. The Law of Individualism points to the idea of the individual as the basic moral unit and thus the importance of self-love. It expresses what Bowne meant when he said that no person should ever be used as fuel to warm society.⁵⁶ King accepted the validity of the Law of Individualism, but seemed to place less emphasis on it than did Brightman. Instead, King focused more on regard for the other, or the ethics of *agapé*. This ethic emphasizes the need of the other, not of the self.⁵⁷

According to King *agapé* "is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we love on the *agapé* level," said King, "we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them."⁵⁸ It is this understanding of love which led King to the controversial conclusion that "unearned suffering is redemptive."⁵⁹ But King went further. "...I pray that, *recognizing the necessity of suffering*, the Negro will make of it a virtue. To suffer in a righteous cause is to grow to our humanity's full stature."⁶⁰ (Italics mine) As for the need to abide by the philosophy of nonviolence King liked to speak of "a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back." He quoted Gandhi approvingly in this regard. "Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood."⁶¹ There was no question in King's mind that "suffering...has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities."⁶²

Ansbro contends that King "was convinced that *agapé* may at times demand even the suspension of the law of self-preservation so that through our self-sacrifice we can help create the beloved community."⁶³ King did not believe that such self-sacrifice necessarily precludes self-respect and self-love, although one surely wonders about this when it is known that he frequently placed the moral onus on those who are actually suffering oppression and injustice. That is, more often than not King expected the oppressed to make sacrifices in order to love their oppressors. In one place he said that "there will be no permanent solution to the race problem until oppressed men develop the capacity to love their enemies."⁶⁴ King believed that in the best interest of the redemption of others and the establishment of the beloved community it is sometimes necessary for individuals to sacrifice all for such an end. Ansbro rightly concludes that more than Brightman, King's application of the Law of Altruism was more open to self-sacrifice.⁶⁵

This is an interesting point, since in Personalism the self is the basic moral unit. A necessary precondition of respect and regard for others is that one respect and love self. Said Bowne:

The condition of owing anything to others is to owe something to myself. The humanity which I respect in others, I must respect in myself. I am not permitted to act irrationally toward myself any more than toward others.⁶⁶

In this regard duties to self are not of secondary, but primary importance. Bowne believed such duties "must take first rank in ethics," and that one is never more responsible for others than for self. This, he believed, is important because of the social or communal implications. "Every one must be a moral object for himself, and an object of supreme impor-

tance; for he is not simply the particular person, A or B, he is also a bearer of the ideal of humanity, and its realization depends pre-eminently upon himself"⁶⁷ (Italics mine)

Personalistic ethics condemns not self-interest, but selfishness. Since the time of Bowne this type of ethics has sought a balance between self and other-regarding interests. Just as the individual is not to disregard the needs and interests of society, society is not to unduly sacrifice the individual for its ends either. Both the individual and society have values that must be respected.⁶⁸

As the basic moral unit the individual always has rights against others and society. However, King seemed more likely to sacrifice this principle than did Brightman or Bowne. It is precisely here that I diverge from King. For one wonders how it can be expected that a person can have proper regard for others if not first and continuously for self. If I have little or no regard for myself it is inconceivable to me that I will have a healthy regard for the neighbor, let alone for those who oppress me and demean my humanity. And while it may be conceded that it is difficult to maintain a good balance between the Law of Individualism and the Altruistic Law, I would say that for a period of time it behoves groups like young Afrikan American males to place more emphasis on healthy regard for self. Because they have never been taught the importance and meaning of love of self, I understand perfectly why so many of them live only to be murdered or to murder in their community. The need for a much higher regard for self among young Afrikan American males is absolutely crucial in light of the alarmingly high incidence of black on black violence and murder. Yet I want to be careful not to suggest that King was not aware of the need for self-love among young Afrikan American males, for he most assuredly was.

CONCLUSION

The question now before us is what is the meaning of King's Personalism in the light of intracommunity violence and murder perpetrated by young Afrikan American males? Indeed, what might one under the influence of King's Personalism say to the Black community regarding this problem?

Martin Luther King, Jr. was aware that the quantity and quality of the choices available to young Black males are so limited that no matter what they choose the result tends to be self-defeating and demeaning. When King took the movement to Chicago in 1966 he lived in a slum apartment. There he met and talked with many of the angry young Black males who had no sense of hope or purpose because this society offered them nothing of substance. Many of these young men resorted to violence against each other and other members of the Chicago black ghetto. Reflecting on this experience King said:

I met these boys and heard their stories in discussion we had on some long, cold nights last winter at the slum apartment I rent in the West Side ghetto of Chicago. I was shocked at the venom they poured out against the world. At times I shared their despair and felt a hopelessness that these young Americans could ever embrace the concept of nonviolence as the effective and powerful instrument of social reform.

All their lives, boys like this have known life as a madhouse of violence and degradation.

Some have never experienced a meaningful family life. Some have police records. Some dropped out of the incredibly bad slum schools, then were deprived of honorable work, then took to the streets.

To the young victim of the slums, this society has so limited the alternatives of his life that the expression of his manhood is reduced to the ability to defend himself physically. No wonder it appears logical to him to strike out, resorting to violence against oppression. That is the only way he thinks he can get recognition.

And so, we have seen occasional rioting—and, much *more frequently and consistently, brutal acts and crimes by Negroes against Negroes.* In many a week in Chicago, as many or more Negro youngsters have been killed in gang fights as were killed in the riots here last summer.⁶⁹ (Italics mine)

Clearly King was not unfamiliar with the phenomenon of intracommunity violence and murder among young Afrikan American males.

One who takes King's Personalism seriously would emphasize at least three things that necessarily must happen if we expect realistically to put a stop to the day-to-day incidents of black-on-black violence. I know that at some point it will be necessary to take on the powerful and privileged who control the structures of this society and even benefit from intracommunity black violence and murder. But it seems to me that the first order of business is to send these three interrelated messages to the Afrikan American community.

First, because GOD IS THE CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF ALL PERSONS OR OF NO PERSONS, every person, regardless of gender or race, class or health, age or sexual orientation or preference has been imbued with the image, fragrance, and voice of God. Because God willingly creates persons every single one of us has absolute and infinite value, which means that all owe respect to each other and to self. No person or group should be easily sacrificed for the wellbeing of another.

King himself would remind Afrikan American adults (many of whom have forgotten) and inform scores of Black youth (many of whom have never known!) of their infinite worth. He would emphasize that it is not merely the spiritual aspect of the Black self that is so precious and valuable to God, but the *whole self*; that mind and body are as two sides of a single coin, and that both needs the other in order for either to exist in human form. Created persons are not disembodied selves and cannot *be* in this world without either mind or body. In addition, the best in the Jewish-Christian and Afrikan American traditions suggests (against the classical Platonic-Aristotelian view!) that mind is not superior to the body, nor is the body intrinsically evil. King would stress the infinite worth of the whole Afrikan American person—mind *and* body.

The Kingian Personalist would say, especially to young Black males today, that their bodies are sacred.⁷⁰ Indeed, it is through the body that we humans come to know and understand life; that we know about emotions; that we are able to see, hear, touch, receive, give, fuse, separate, procreate, etc. The human person has no better means, no better instrument for communicating love (or anything else for that matter!) than the body. That God created the human body and then breathed into it the breath of life, suggests its worth and sacredness. Robert Bruce McLaren rightly observes that God's action

in this regard "clarifies that a human being is not essentially a soul inhabiting a body (as if to say that it is imprisoned by the body), but a body made to live by God. This eliminates the dualism of classical philosophy."⁷¹

One influenced by the Kingian type of Personalism would drive home the point that *the bodies of Black folk have an inviolable sacredness of their own*, and therefore should be cared for and protected. She or he would plead with Afrikan American youth to love, care for, and respect not only their own bodies, but those of others. Indeed, such a one would join with Toni Morrison's character, Baby Suggs, in highlighting the importance of loving black bodies.

'Here,' she said, 'in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you!* ... This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved.'⁷²

LOVE YOUR BODY! That's the message of Kingian Personalism to young Black males today, and is the message all of us must try to convey to them.

A second point is necessarily related to the first. Black youth must learn, celebrate, and be proud of their heritage and their race. Once they are shown the way to a healthy sense of the dignity and worth of their mind-body, this will open the way to self-esteem and being proud and not ashamed of their blackness. This can only lead to a heightened sense of self-love, which means less temptation to abuse either one's self or others. No one who truly loves self, people, and heritage perpetrates their destruction. In his final presidential address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King said "...we must massively assert our dignity and worth. We must stand up amidst a system that still oppresses us and develop an unassailable and majestic sense of values. We must no longer be ashamed of being black."⁷³ This admonition implies the need to make a conscious effort to learn about black history, including both Afrikan and American contributions. For King insisted that whether we like it or not Afrikan Americans are an amalgam of Afrika and America.⁷⁴ But realistically we can be certain today that Black youth will not learn about their heritage and history in this nation's educational institutions. This means that the responsibility of so educating them falls to the Afrikan American community.

King's urging that we be proud of being black also implies that we are endowed with the capacity for developing such pride. What is needed is *the will and the effort* to do so. In addition, what is important is not what those outside the black community think about Afrikan Americans. On this point King would join with Malcolm X in saying that it is necessary that Blacks look to themselves. "We've got to change our own minds about each other," said Malcolm. "*We have to see each other with new eyes. We have to see each other as brothers and sisters.* We have to come together with warmth so we can develop unity and harmony that's necessary to get this problem solved ourselves."⁷⁵

Finally, Kingian Personalism points to the *NEED FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY TO OWN RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL THAT HAPPENS AND IS ALLOWED TO HAPPEN THEREIN*. This raises the issue of *moral agency* that has been so difficult for Afrikan Americans to discuss openly for fear that the white man will use what is said to appease his own conscience, and to diminish his sense of responsibility for creating the conditions that have made young Black males an endangered species. Yet I think the Kingian Personalist would say that there is too much at stake for us to continue to remain silent about moral agency and owning responsibility for the many specific acts of violence and murder in the Afrikan American community. So we must risk breaking silence on the question of moral agency.

Afrikan Americans can and *should* blame the powerful and privileged who manage and control racist institutions for the conditions that have created in so many Black youth a sense of hopelessness, lovelessness, and mean-spiritedness. But as for the specific acts of violence we—Afrikan Americans—must find in ourselves the courage and the wherewithal to proclaim that inasmuch as our boys pull the trigger that maims or takes the lives of others in our community, they must answer—not to *White America*!—but to the Black community. For both they and their victims belong to us. On the other hand, inasmuch as Afrikan American adults allow incidents of black-on-black violence and murder to continue unabated, we must be able to say that *WE* are responsible, and *WE* alone can put a stop to the violence. *WE* alone can and must take back from our boys the streets of our neighborhoods.

No matter how bad things get we are at bottom the “masters of our own destiny,” said Malcolm. *We may not be responsible for what has caused our condition, but we are responsible for the response we give to it.* During an interview with Kenneth Clark in 1963, Malcolm said emphatically that no one framed him when he was arrested and incarcerated prior to joining the Nation of Islam. “I went to prison,” he said, “for what I did....”⁷⁶ “FOR WHAT I DID!” Malcolm owned responsibility for what he did, even though he knew the American legal system to be unjust and racist. Indeed, the Kingian Personalist would say that until Afrikan Americans come to terms with our own responsibility for intracommunity black violence and murder among our boys, the problem will be with us for many years to come. This means that the future of the Afrikan American community will be jeopardized in a way heretofore unknown.

NOTES

1. See “Fragment of Application to Boston University,” Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), 1:390.

2. See Kenneth Clark, *King, Malcolm, Baldwin: Three Interviews* (Wesleyan University Press, 1985), p. 21.

3. L. Harold DeWolf, “Martin Luther King, Jr., As Theologian,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, vol. IV, no. II, Spring 1977, p. 10. In light of the charge of plagiarism lodged against King posthumously, one wonders whether DeWolf’s statement that “occasionally I find his language following closely the special terms of my own lectures and writings” might have been an implied concern that King bordered dangerously on plagiarism in some of the written work for DeWolf’s courses.

4. See Martin Luther King, Jr., “A New Sense of Direction,” *Worldview*, April 1972, p. 11, and King, “Where Do We Go from Here?,” in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The*

Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: Harper, 1986), p. 250.

5. See Rufus Burrow, Jr., "John Wesley Edward Bowen: First Afrikan American Personalist," *Encounter*, vol. 56 no. 3, Summer 1995, pp. 241-260. Bowen actually studied Personalism under Borden P. Bowne (1847-1910), "the father of American Personalism." Indeed, at that time Bowne was not using the term personalism, but *objective idealism* and *transcendental empiricism*. But his emphasis at each stage in the movement toward Personalism was on the centrality of the self or person.

6. See David Garrow, "The Intellectual Development of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Influences and Commentaries," Garrow, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Civil Rights Leader, Theologian, Orator* (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989), II:451, n. 23.

7. See King, *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 100.

8. Susan Harlow is a master of divinity candidate at Christian Theological Seminary. With her permission this quote is taken from a paper she submitted in a class on the Theological Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April, 1997.

9. King, *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 100.

10. *Ibid.*

11. These include the Englishman, John Grote, and the Americans, Walt Whitman and A. Bronson Alcott.

12. Borden P. Bowne, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1874).

13. See Rufus Burrow, Jr., "Borden Parker Bowne's Doctrine of God," *Encounter*, vol. 53, no. 4, Autumn 1992, pp. 381-400.

14. Albert C. Knudson, *The Philosophy of Personalism* (New York: Abingdon, 1927), pp. 85, 433.

15. However, it should be noted that there was a similar movement afoot at the University of California under the leadership of George Holmes Howison (1836-1916). Unlike Bowne, who came to consider himself "a Personalist, the first of the clan in any thoroughgoing sense," Howison named his philosophy Personal Idealism. There are several differences between their philosophies, the chief of which is that Howison was a non-creationist, believing that God is the Final, not the First cause. Bowne, on the other hand, was a creationist. He insisted that God is the fundamental cause of all things. I have discussed at length some similarities and dissimilarities between Bowne and Howison in my presently unpublished book, *Personalism: A Critical Introductory Exposition*.

16. The types of personalisms include (but may not be limited to): Atheistic Personalism, Pantheistic Personalism, Absolutistic Personalism, Relativistic Personalism, Ethical Personalism, Theistic Personalism, Realistic Personalism, Political Personalism, Panpsychistic Personalism, Anthropomorphic Personalism, and Afrikan American Personalism. See my unpublished essay: "Francis John McConnell and Personalistic Social Ethics."

17. King, "The Ethical Demands For Integration," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 122.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

19. See Bowne, *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: American Book Company, 1892), pp. 97, 203, 216-17.

20. Bowne, *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879), pp. 411-12.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

22. King, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," in King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 141.

23. King, "An Experiment in Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 20. I find it interesting that King does not characterize God's power as absolute or omnipotent, but as "matchless." This seems a subtle qualification of the classical view of divine omnipotence. Even Brightman, whose doctrine of God King both appreciated and criticized, would appreciate the idea of the "matchless" power of God. For this idea does not mean that God possesses absolute power in the classical sense, and thus has affinity with Brightman's idea of the finite-infinite God.

24. Here I follow the distinction that Paul W. Taylor makes between *moral subjects* and *moral agents*. Any conscious being is a moral subject, even if unable to make responsible moral choices. In any event they are beings to whom moral agents owe responsibilities. Moral agents, on the other hand, are moral subjects whose faculties are such that they are capable of making responsible moral choices, anticipating the consequences of those choices, willing to take responsibility for these, and able to assess the outcome and apply what is learned in new situations calling for moral choice. See Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 14-16.
25. King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," p. 120.
26. King, "The Personalism of J.M.E. McTaggart Under Criticism," in Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, II:73. This paper was presented to DeWolf on December 4, 1951 in his class on Personalism.
27. King, *Strength to Love*, p. 90.
28. Edgar S. Brightman, *Nature and Values* (New York: Abingdon, 1945), p. 117.
29. John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 49.
30. Francis J. McConnell, *Personal Christianity* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914), p. 48.
31. Walter G. Muelder, *Moral Law in Christian Social Ethics* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 124.
32. Edgar S. Brightman, *An Introduction to Philosophy* 3rd ed. rev. by Robert N. Beck (New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1963), p. 353.
33. Knudson, *The Principles of Christian Ethics* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1943), p. 118.
34. See Lotte Hoskins, ed., *"I Have a Dream": The Quotations of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), p. 71.
35. King, "The Ethical Demands For Integration," p. 122.
36. King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 254.
37. These include Peter A. Bertocci and Richard Millard, Walter G. Muelder, L. Harold DeWolf, Paul Deats, Jr., and J. Philip Wogaman.
38. Brightman, *Moral Laws* (New York: Abingdon, 1933), pp. 35-45.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
43. See Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 35.
44. John Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis), p. 15.
45. Cited in Leo Sandon, Jr., "Boston University Personalism and Southern Baptist Theology," *Foundations*, vol. 20 (April-June 1977), p. 105. King wrote about Brightman's influence in a 1957 publication in *Bostonia* (Spring 1957) 7. He also mentioned in his application to Boston University Graduate School the influence of Brightman's ideas on his thinking as a seminarian at Crozer Theological Seminary [See Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), I:390]. King noted Brightman's presence at Boston University as one of two reasons that institution appealed to him.
46. King, "The Personalism of J.M.E. McTaggart Under Criticism," in Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, II:72.
47. See Bowne, *Theory of Thought and Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1897), p. 239.
48. Cited in Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, II:72-73. It should be noted that this quote is not exact. King both omits and adds words and phrases without alerting his reader. Brightman's exact words are: "...without it we are not even free to think, to say nothing of making other moral choices. The power to think means that the individual can impose on himself the ideal

- of logic or scientific method and hold it through thick and thin" (Brightman, *Moral Laws*, p. 282).
49. Brightman, *Moral Laws*, p. 286.
50. King, "Our God is Able," in King, *Strength to Love*, p. 105.
51. Hoskins, ed., *"I Have a Dream": The Quotations of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 79.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
53. See King, "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 48.
54. See Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1974), pp. 110-13.
55. In 1983 Muellder addressed this topic in a paper read at Morehouse College on "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Moral Laws."
56. Bowne, *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: American Book Company, 1892), p. 199.
57. King, "An Experiment in Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 19.
58. King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, pp. 8-9.
59. Hoskins, ed., *"I Have a Dream": The Quotations of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 138.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
61. Cited in King, "An Experiment in Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 18.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind*, p. 85.
64. Hoskins, ed., p. 71.
65. Ansbro, p. 86.
66. See Bowne, *The Principles of Ethics*, p. 113.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 197-98.
69. King, "A Gift of Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, pp. 62-63.
70. King, *The Measure of a Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) [1959], pp. 13-14.
71. Robert Bruce McLaren, *Christian Ethics: Foundations and Practice* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), p. 109.
72. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p. 88.
73. King, "Where Do We Go From Here?," in Washington, ed., p. 245.
74. King, "A Testament of Hope," in Washington, ed., p. 318. See also King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 53.
75. George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1989) [1965], p. 40.
76. Clark, ed., *King, Malcolm, Baldwin: Three Interviews*, p. 38.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

DEAN FLEMMING

INTRODUCTION

A context of religious pluralism is nothing new to the church. The apostolic community proclaimed the finality of Jesus Christ within a Greco-Roman world of "many gods and many lords" (1 Cor. 8:5). Christians in the Two Thirds world have had to grapple with the reality of religious pluralism for centuries. In Asia, for example, where Christianity is in most cases a minority religion—and a relative latecomer at that—the issue cannot be ignored. In the West, however, it is only in the relatively recent past that Christians have come to recognize religious pluralism as a major challenge to the church.¹

At least two major developments have "forced the issue" for Western Christians. The first is the phenomenon of "globalization." Advancements in communications, international travel, and, in particular, radical demographic changes, have obliged Christians in the West to confront the reality of the world religions on a personal level.² Westerners are increasingly likely to have a Muslim or Hindu colleague, classmate or next door neighbor. At the same time, the center of gravity for Christianity has shifted dramatically from the North and West to the South and East, so that it is no longer possible to determine what constitutes the so-called "Christian world."

A second development arising from modernity in the West is that increasingly the ideology of pluralism has become virtually sacrosanct.³ In a "tolerant" age, religion becomes something private and compartmentalized, and each individual is free to choose whatever god he or she finds to be most convenient. In the marketplace of beliefs and religious claims, the customer is king. This pluralistic mentality has dominated much of the recent scholarly discussion of the relationship between Christianity and the world religions and has tended to set the agenda for approaching the issue.⁴ Any claims for Christian uniqueness are considered to be carryovers

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THE ASBURY THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

FALL 1997 • VOL. 52 • NO. 2

of "triumphalism" or "imperialism." Since all religious truth is held to be relative and culturally-conditioned, no one religion can claim to be more valid than any other.⁵

Evangelical Christians have been relatively slow to grapple with the theological issues raised by the reality of religious pluralism. Many have seemed content to follow the traditional understandings that regard other religions simply as "demonic delusions" or merely as "human efforts to find the truth," and it is automatically assumed that all of their adherents are destined for eternal perdition. Others have concentrated on developing strategies for evangelizing people of other faiths without doing the difficult thinking that provides a coherent biblical and theological framework for those efforts. Yet, can we be content simply to disagree with the answers that others give to these issues without attempting to offer a clear biblical theological analysis as an alternative?

It is encouraging that evangelical thinkers have begun to reflect more seriously on the challenge of religious pluralism, evidenced by the appearance of a number of recent studies on the subject.⁶ Much of the discussion has focused on the perennial question of the fate of the unevangelized. Evangelicals have tended to separate into the traditional "restrictivist" and more open "inclusivist" camps.⁷ Each uses Scripture to back its claims. Wesleyans have commonly—although by no means universally—been sympathetic to an "inclusivist" position that would allow for the possibility of salvation among the unevangelized and a more open attitude toward the role of other religions in God's dealings with humankind.⁸ Wesley himself (particularly the mature Wesley) is often cited, no doubt accurately, as a forerunner of this view.⁹ Yet we must ask whether the position of Wesley and the new evangelical "inclusivists" is consistent with the overall teaching of Scripture, particularly in light of recent defenses of the restrictivist position.¹⁰ In order to answer that question it is necessary to place the specific issue of the destiny of the unevangelized within the broader context of the Bible's attitude toward other religions. One of the clear needs in the current debate is a solid exegetical and biblical theological framework to guide our approach to these issues. While other factors should provide input into the task of formulating an appropriate response to religious pluralism, the perspective of Scripture is surely foundational.¹¹ This study will attempt to survey the biblical foundations for an appropriate Wesleyan response to the challenge of religious pluralism.

THE BIBLE AND RELIGIONS

A. *Old Testament*

Any attempt to find a solution to the problem posed by religious pluralism must take into account the total biblical theological witness, rather than focus simply on the teachings of isolated texts. In the Old Testament we find a clear tension between the universal and the particular in God's dealings with humankind. Genesis 1-11 begin with a universal perspective, which sees God as the Creator who desires that all people enter into a relationship of holy love with him. After the fall, he continues to deal with all people in both judgment and redemption and establishes a covenant with Noah that embraces the whole of humanity.

Then the perspective narrows. The Babel story in Genesis 11 makes it clear that the entire human family has refused to worship its Creator. In response to universal rebellion and idolatry, God chooses a single individual, Abraham, and through him initiates a

covenant relationship with his own people Israel. The so-called "scandal of particularity" has begun. Yet, in spite of the fact that this is the dominant emphasis from this point on in the Old Testament history of salvation, God uses the particular in order to accomplish his universal purposes. God chooses a people, not for their own sake, but so that through them, "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).¹²

In pre-exilic times, Israel continually struggles with the tendency toward idolatry and pluralism in the face of other religions in the surrounding cultures.¹³ The recurring failures and declines in both the period of the judges and the monarchy are due in great measure to the attraction of other deities in a pluralistic environment. In contrast, a theme of exclusivism of worship emerges which is characteristic of the Old Testament's radical monotheism. For example, Yahweh brings judgment on the gods of Egypt (Num. 33:4). The people are warned not to follow the detestable religious practices of the Canaanites which the Lord hates (Deut. 12:31). The Psalmist affirms that "all the gods of the nations are idols" (96:5). The prophets repeatedly mock the worship of false gods made with human hands (e.g., Isa. 40:19-20; 44:9ff.; Jer. 10:1-16; 51:17-18; cf. 1 Kings 18:27ff.). Idolaters are portrayed as blinded and deceived (Isa. 44:18, 20; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). In general we find a negative evaluation of human religions and worship. This is a natural corollary of the dominant emphasis in the Old Testament on God's sovereign choice of Israel and the exclusive allegiance to Yahweh demanded by the covenant relationship.

Yet, there is another side to the picture, one in which God's self-revelation is not limited to the community of Israel.¹⁴ Here and there throughout the story of God's dealings with his own special people, we find "God-fearing" Gentiles who have responded to God independently of his covenant with Israel. One notable case is the somewhat mysterious figure of the Canaanite priest Melchizedek, who is called "a priest of God Most High" (*El Elyon*) and blesses Abraham in the name of "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19-20). Walter Brueggemann points out that the title *El Elyon* is not a name for the God of Israel, but rather the high god of the Canaanite pantheon. It is only in Abraham's response in v.22 that the "God Most High" worshiped by the Canaanite Melchizedek is identified as "Yahweh, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth." Abraham reveals the true identity of the Creator God that Melchizedek has been worshiping all along (cf. Acts 17:22ff.). He is Yahweh, the God of Israel.¹⁵ This implies that Melchizedek prior to his encounter with Abraham (and perhaps others in Canaan like him who worship *El*) are worshiping the true God, albeit with a limited understanding of him.¹⁶ We should not forget that Abraham himself is called by God out of a pagan Semitic culture.¹⁷

We can mention other Gentile "God-fearers" as well. God reveals himself to outsiders like Abimelech, king of Gerar, and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the form of a dream (Gen. 20:3; Daniel 4). The Midianite priest Jethro becomes Moses' father-in-law and offers sacrifices to the God of Moses. After the Exodus, he encounters Moses at Horeb and, using God's covenant name, praises *Yahweh* for his deliverance (Ex. 18:10-11). The language of Jethro's confession ("Now I know...." cf. 1 Kings 17:24), as well as his overall portrayal in the passage, do not suggest a conversion from paganism, but rather a deepening of understanding on the part of a previous worshipper of Yahweh.¹⁸ When the people of Israel prepare to enter Canaan, the curious figure of Balaam appears on the

scene. Although he is a pagan Mesopotamian diviner, Yahweh communicates to him (Num. 22:18-20) and uses him to speak his word of blessing to Israel (23:3ff.).¹⁹ Job lives in the land of Uz, perhaps during the time of the patriarchs, yet apparently having no contact with them.²⁰ Nevertheless, Yahweh speaks to him directly and calls him "my servant" and "a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). When the Syrian officer Naaman asks Elisha for permission to worship in the temple of Rimmon, the Aramean storm god, as part of his official duties, he receives the surprising reply, "Go in peace" (2 Kings 5:18-19).

A thread of biblical "inclusiveness" can likewise be detected in the Old Testament prophets. Jonah, God's reluctant missionary, must learn the hard way that the people of Ninevah in Assyria are more obedient to Yahweh than his own people and his own prophet. Although they apparently do not know his covenant name and thus do not consciously relate to *Yahweh* in the same way as Jonah does, their repentance and faith in God (*elohim*; 3:5, 7-9) are graciously accepted by the one true Lord.²¹ Amos affirms that Yahweh holds all nations, including Israel, under his judgment (1:3-2:16). In an intriguing passage, he shatters Israel's pride in its unique status by indicating that Yahweh has been active in the history of other nations as well: "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the Lord, "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" (Amos 9:7). The eschatological promise of Isaiah finds Egypt and Assyria worshiping together along with Israel as the "people" and "handiwork" of Yahweh and as a "blessing on the earth" (Isa. 19:23-25).²² Malachi challenges the corrupt worship of Israel with the ironic statement, "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations," says the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 1:11 RSV), suggesting that the sacrifices of pagan worshippers may be more acceptable to Yahweh than those of his disobedient chosen people.²³

Finally, the Old Testament Wisdom literature is not specifically tied to God's particular revelation to the patriarchs and the prophets. It is based rather on a Creator theology that stresses the involvement of God's Wisdom in all of creation (Prov. 3:19-20; 8:22-31).²⁴ Furthermore, as Goldingay and Wright observe, the Hebrew Wisdom writings evidence "particularly clear parallels with others from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt," implying that "pagan thought has its own insight."²⁵ The Wisdom literature recognizes that the created world and the insights, culture and religion of God's human creation reflect something of God's truth, even if it must be purged of its idolatrous aspects.²⁶

The Old Testament thus reflects a tension in its attitude toward human religions. On one hand they express the rebellion and idolatry of fallen humanity. On the other they can be viewed positively as sources of insight and as preparations for faith in the true God. This latter perspective, which, although not dominant, is clearly present in the Old Testament, reflects the operation of God's prevenient grace. The Old Testament writers see God's grace at work outside of his special dealings with Israel, drawing people and nations to himself. It is noteworthy that the Old Testament never tries to directly answer the question, "Is there salvation for those outside of Israel?" However, it is apparent that there are individuals who are "outsiders," yet who have an authentic relationship with the true God. This does not mean that the Old Testament in any way allows for salvation

coming to people *through* other religions or apart from the grace of the God of Israel. The faith of the outsider is not seen merely as an unconscious worship of the true God. These are not “anonymous Israelites,” to use the current parlance. God’s activity and self-revelation in the cultural and religious context outside of Israel is intended as a preparation for his historic revelation as Yahweh. The religions may offer a starting point, but they do not provide a finishing point. Nevertheless, the operation of God’s grace in the Old Testament is clearly not limited to the community of Israel. In a similar sense, the church must recognize God’s gracious activity beyond its boundaries in the cultures and religions of all people. This does not, however, deter the evangelistic responsibility to bring the saving revelation of God in Christ to people of other faiths.

B. New Testament

In the New Testament, we find a similar tension between the particular and the universal. God’s plan of salvation narrows in its particularity until it focuses on one individual, Jesus Christ. God chose to reveal himself in a final sense at a moment in history in a particular cultural context, through the One who Christians affirm “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Yet, once again, it is through the particular that God accomplishes his universal saving purpose. The New Testament offer of salvation is universal and inclusive in its breadth. Paul describes Christ as the second Adam who represents a new humanity: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22; cf. Rom. 5:15ff.). It is God’s intention to reconcile all of creation under the headship of Christ (Eph. 1:9-10). The interplay between the “all” and the “one” is clearly evidenced in 1 Tim. 2:4-6, which declares that God “wants *all* men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for *all* men” (emphasis added). This tension between the universal and the particular must be maintained for an adequate biblical theology of religions.

1. *New Testament Exclusivism.* The first-century church functioned in a cultural milieu that was fraught with a wide choice of gods and lords—from the Roman emperor to the traditional Greek and Egyptian deities, to the worship of rocks, plants, and animals.²⁷ Furthermore, the religious climate was generally characterized by an attitude of syncretistic toleration which permitted participation in various religions and made few exclusive claims.²⁸ It is against this pluralistic backdrop that the New Testament writers stress unequivocally the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. In the oft-quoted words of Peter, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12; cf. John 14:6). Speaking to a context of religious pluralism in Corinth, Paul affirms the Old Testament perspective that the so-called gods of the pagan world are in fact non-existent beings, since “there is but one God, the Father...” and “but one Lord, Jesus Christ...” (1 Cor. 8:5-6). He goes on to warn the believers in Corinth not to participate in idol feasts, since the objects of pagan worship are in reality not the non-existent idols themselves, but rather, demons (1 Cor. 10:18ff.). This implies that there is a demonic element in non-Christian religious worship. In Colossians, he counters the competing claims of other intermediaries by stressing the exclusive supremacy of Christ, in whom *all* of God’s fullness dwells (1:19; 2:9-10). Paul reminds the Ephesians that as pagans they were formerly “dead in transgressions and sins,” they “followed the ways of

this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph. 2:1-2) and were "without hope and without God in the world" (2:12). This corresponds to Luke's record of Paul's testimony that the purpose of his Gentile mission was "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:17f.). The accommodation of the church in Pergamum (a center of religious pluralism in Asia Minor) to pagan teachings and practices is compared to Israel's being led astray by Balaam into idolatry and immorality (Rev. 2:14ff.). The New Testament nowhere contradicts the Old Testament understanding of human religions as idolatrous, distorted by sin, under satanic influence and unable to save.

To the extent that Christians in the West today share a pluralistic context in many ways analogous to that faced by the first-century Christians, the response of the New Testament writers to that environment can be applied in an increasingly direct way.²⁹ What then are the implications of such "exclusivism" for our understanding of religious pluralism? First, in response to those who want to minimize the distinctiveness of the Christian witness in relation to other religions, it must be affirmed that the "scandal of particularity" lies at the very heart of the gospel. We hear frequent attempts to reinterpret the "exclusive" texts, often through some rather suspect exegesis. We are told that such statements are not meant to be taken at face value because they belong to the language of confession.³⁰ Paul K. Knitter argues, for instance, that Peter's statement about "no other name" in Acts 4:12 is intended "not to rule out the possibility of other saviors, but to proclaim that this Lord Jesus was still alive and that it was he, not they, who was working such wonders in the community."³¹ Not only does this miss the plain meaning of Peter's statement, but the overwhelming and consistent message of the biblical witness would not seem to allow any possibility whatever that there could be "other saviors." On the contrary, the New Testament writers affirm in unison that apart from Jesus Christ there is no hope of present or future salvation (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4-5; Heb. 10:9-10). A Wesleyan soteriology would heartily affirm this understanding.

Secondly, however, having affirmed that salvation is by "no other name," we must guard against an overly restrictive understanding of biblical exclusiveness. Evangelical theology of religions and missions in the past half century has borne the stamp of the notion of radical "discontinuity" between non-Christian religions and Christian revelation, as exemplified by Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer.³² Kraemer argued that all religions, including Christianity, reflect human striving for self-justification and are thus characterized by a fundamental misdirection and error.³³ Hence the attempt to find common ground between religion and revelation is misguided, since "there are no bridges from human religious consciousness to...Christ."³⁴ Kraemer's uncompromising defense of the uniqueness of Christ still speaks to a pluralistic world. Yet, can we remain content to look at the question of the role of other religions simply in the categories of discontinuity, or is there a form of continuity between them and faith in Christ? Are *all* of man's religious instincts merely human striving, and therefore misdirected? Is the revelation of God's grace in Jesus Christ limited to those who explicitly hear the gospel? We must turn to the New Testament again to try to answer these questions.

2. *New Testament "Inclusivism" a. The Synoptic Gospels.* Since Jesus' earthly ministry entailed a particularity that focused primarily on the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24; cf.

10:5f.), we do not find much evidence of his attitude toward other religions in the Synoptic Gospels. In general the gospels give us a picture of redemption in which the historically particular revelation of God in Christ is in continuity with his self-revelation to Israel. Nevertheless, Jesus was able to commend the "great faith" of the Roman centurion (10:8) and the Syro-Phoenician woman who were outside of the stream of God's special revelation to the Jews. Jesus immediately followed his endorsement of the faith of the centurion with an allusion to the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile in the messianic banquet in the kingdom of heaven (8:11). Likewise, Matthew devotes considerable attention to the Magi who came from the East to worship the Christ child (2:1-12). It is likely that they were pagan astrologers whose religious culture prepared them in some way for a journey to Judea. They came with limited understanding, seeking to worship a king, not a savior. Yet Matthew records without embarrassment that God graciously revealed himself to pagan outsiders initially through their own religious "idols," i.e., the stars, in order to draw them to his Son.³⁵ It seems clear from the example of the magi and Jesus' willingness to commend the faith of the Gentiles and build on it that "God works out his plans for the non-Christian in fulfillment of a quest that is already there."³⁶

b. *The Prologue of John.* In the prologue to John's gospel we find reference to a general self-revelation of God in the world outside of the flow of special revelation. John speaks of Christ, the *logos*, as the one who has been the light of men from the time of creation (1:4). Further, he is "the true light that gives light to every man" (1:9), which probably means that the light which came into the world in its fullness in the incarnation also extends some measure of divine illumination to every person.³⁷ This general enlightening work of Christ in the world, including presumably that in the religions of humankind, does not bestow on their adherents some type of saving knowledge of God, as is sometimes claimed. Nor can the *logos* simply be abstracted into a "Christ principle" that is divorced from the historical Christ event.³⁸ Nevertheless it does constitute an aspect of God's gracious activity—what Wesleyans would call prevenient grace.³⁹ In commenting on this passage, Floyd Cunningham notes that "there is a radiance from the Light sufficient to account for impulses in the religions and cultures of the world which seem to be in some accord with Revelation.... Wherever there is congruity it comes by grace and is designed by God to serve as preparation for the Gospel."⁴⁰ When people of other religions come to faith in Christ they do not meet a stranger, for they have already received the illuminating work of prevenient grace. At the same time, the fact that even the incarnate light was not received by "his own" people (1:10f.), who through the Old Testament revelation had received more illumination than followers of any other religion, reminds us that devotion to religion may lead people to reject the light of Christ. Thus religions are paradoxically both the arenas of divine enlightening and of darkness and rejection.

c. *Paul's Speeches in Acts.* Luke's record of Paul's speeches in Lystra and Athens are important for any discussion of the relationship between Christ and other religions. In both cases Paul interacts with a context of religious pluralism.⁴¹ Before a rather unsophisticated Gentile crowd in Lystra, who adhered to the popular religion of the Greek pantheon (14:11f.), Paul uses their awareness of a Creator God as a point of contact. He directs them to the God who created and sustains the universe (14:15, 17). Although in the past God overlooked the Gentile errors that resulted from ignorance (v. 16), he "has

not left himself without a witness" (v. 17a). This "witness" in creation should have led the Gentiles to turn from their worthless idols and worship the living God (v. 15). Paul does not say, however, that it is potentially salvific.

To a more sophisticated Gentile audience at the Areopagus, which included Stoics and Epicureans, Paul goes even further. On one hand, he is distressed by the idolatry and religious pluralism he discovers in Athens (17:16; 29). On the other hand, Paul takes a somewhat conciliatory and respectful stance toward their pagan religious life. He calls the Athenians "very religious" (*deisidaimonesterous* v. 22), which is probably said in a neutral, not a disparaging sense.⁴² He finds a point of contact in the Athenians' worship of the "unknown god": "Now what you worship as unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (v. 23). This does not mean that this "unknown" god and the living God are one and the same, i.e., that the Athenians were "anonymous Christians."⁴³

However, Paul does recognize that there is something genuine in the religious life of the pagans, thanks to the grace of God.⁴⁴ Once again Paul takes up the theme of creation and God's universal providence as a form of self-revelation (vv. 24-26), with the purpose "that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (v. 27). In the process, he finds various points of contact with Greek philosophers that would have been familiar to his hearers, such as God's self-sufficiency, his providential care, and the notion he is the source of all life (v. 25).⁴⁵ He even quotes with approval two Stoic poets who had insight into the nature of God (v. 28). Finally, Paul places all he has said about human religious searchings and God's general revelation in the context of the decisive revelation of the Christian gospel, to which they point (vv. 30-31). The Athenians' knowledge has stopped short of enabling them to find God. Although God has "overlooked" their ignorance in the past, "now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (v. 30), for he has appointed a day of judgment for all (v. 31).

It seems clear then that this passage does not see God's final and definitive act in Jesus Christ as discontinuous with his gracious action in creation, providence and even the religious searchings of human beings. Instead, the gospel is portrayed as the fulfillment of people's genuine seeking after God prompted by his prevenient, seeking grace. Paul does not hesitate to look for points of contact in the religion of the Athenians in order to establish common ground.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, he does not allow for salvation through the Athenians' religiosity or apart from Jesus Christ, as the conclusion to the speech confirms.⁴⁷

Paul's missionary principles are instructive for our approach to people of other religions. He begins at a point of universality and commonality, i.e., creation and general revelation, and moves from there to the particular revelation of Jesus Christ. God has created all people in his image with the capacity to respond to him. While fully recognizing the destructive effect of the fall, the existence of general revelation means that religion may reflect humanity's sincere response to God and desire to know him. Prior to any particular religious belief or practice, all share a basic commonality as people made in the image of God who are, in religion as in all else, in *some* kind of relationship to the Creator.⁴⁸ This shared creaturehood might be a starting point for enabling nonbelievers to see the fulfillment of their longings in Christ.⁴⁹

d. *Paul.* Romans 1 and 2 are at the center of the debate concerning the significance of God's gracious activity outside of special revelation. The apostle Paul sees this grace oper-

ating in two arenas: creation and conscience. In Romans one, he speaks of an objective knowledge of God (*to gnoston tou theou* "what may be known" v. 19; *gnontes ton theon* "although they knew God" v. 21) which comes to man through the divine self-revelation in creation. Using the language of Hellenistic religious philosophy that would be familiar to his Gentile readers,⁵⁰ Paul affirms that God's "eternal power" and "divine nature" are clearly perceived by people apart from special revelation (v. 20). There is a genuine knowledge of God available to all humanity, without distinction.

In chapter two, in a notoriously difficult passage, Paul says that Gentiles who do not possess the law on occasion do the "things of the law," i.e., certain of the law's requirements. When they do, they evidence that what God's law requires (the "work" *ergon* of the law⁵¹) is written on their hearts. This inner knowledge of right and wrong is also evidenced by the witness of their consciences, which have the function of passing judgment on whether or not they follow God's moral law (2:14-15). The inward moral consciousness to which this passage refers is not some innate human faculty, but rather the result of prevenient grace. The Holy Spirit in his convicting presence is at work among all peoples, even adherents of other religions, even those to whom the name of Christ has not yet been proclaimed (John 16:8). In the words of John Sanders, "The unevangelized are indeed 'unreached' by human messengers with the word of Christ, but they are not unreached by the Holy Spirit's ministry of grace."⁵¹ Presumably, this happens not only directly through the individual conscience, but also in a collective sense, in cultures and religions (which are normally closely related). Where religions reflect moral truth or right action, grace is at work.⁵² The purpose of this activity of the Spirit is to lead men to Christ. In this sense, religion can function as a preparation for the gospel. This allows us "to recognize that whatever truth may be found in other religions is the result of the activity of prevenient grace in its revelatory function. The missionary can gratefully accept such truth and use it as a point of contact to demonstrate the fulfillment of those glimmers of truth by the fuller revelation in Christ."⁵³

Yet, is this knowledge of God through general revelation potentially saving knowledge? This is a question that Paul does not address. His point in Romans 1 is that this knowledge comes to humanity with the result "that they might be without excuse" (v. 20). All people are guilty of rebelling against the light that is available to them, and are thereby justly condemned: "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (1:21). As a result of the fall, they have chosen to worship creation rather than the Creator (v. 25). They have exchanged God's glory for the image of mortal beings (v. 23). In general, the world religions do not predispose people to accept Christianity when confronted with it. Religiosity often becomes a means of escape from submitting to the Creator. At one and the same time, religion reflects man's searching after God and his rebellion against him. It is both path to God and stumblingblock to finding him.⁵⁴

But what of Paul's argument in 2:14-15 that when Gentiles "do by nature things required by the law" they are "a law for themselves," because they have the "work" of the law written on their hearts? It is sometimes suggested that here Paul implies the possibility that salvation could indeed come to unbelievers apart from the gospel if they receive knowledge of the law from their consciences and obey that knowledge.⁵⁵ Admittedly, this goes beyond his present argument. What is clear is that Paul does not allow that unbelievers can be saved by

fulfilling the requirements of the law. That would go against the entire thrust of chapter 3 and numerous other statements by the apostle (e.g., Gal. 3:10ff.).⁵⁶ Nowhere in the chapter does Paul argue or even assume that individuals are capable of fulfilling the law, and *thereby* could be saved. Nor is he talking about a "hypothetical" offer of salvation for those who keep the law perfectly, since perfect obedience is not in view here.⁵⁷

Rather, the point that Paul seems to be making in chapter 2 is that the Jews cannot claim any special privilege simply because they possess the law, since *all* are accountable for their sins and come under God's judgment (v. 12)—Jews, because they disobey the Torah, and Gentiles, because they know enough of the law of God "by nature" to be held responsible when they sin.⁵⁸ Whether Paul conceived of unevangelized Gentile "doers of the law" actually being saved, we cannot answer with confidence.⁵⁹ As we have seen, Romans 2 does not speak to the issue, but neither does it rule out the possibility. When Paul acknowledges that eternal life awaits those who persevere in "good work" (2:7; cf. 2:10, 13) he is stating a universal principle whose application is not limited to Gentile *Christians*.⁶⁰ Presumably, unevangelized Gentiles come under the same criteria of judgment and hope as Jews (2:7-8), since "God does not show favoritism" (2:11). Under this criterion, those who respond to God's revelation with an "obedience of faith" (1:5; 16:26) from the heart could presumably be saved.⁶¹ However, it must be reiterated that the "work" which leads to salvation is not a "works righteousness," but rather saving obedience in response to and as an evidence of God's grace in Christ.⁶² The entire thrust of the Apostle's argument in Romans and elsewhere affirms that it is faith in Jesus Christ which is the sole basis of man's acceptance by God. If it is possible for such devout Gentiles who stand outside of the stream of special revelation to be saved, it is because they respond to the Holy Spirit's convicting work and God's grace according to the light they have received, and thus avail themselves of the merits of Christ.

It seems clear then that in the New Testament, as well as the Old, there is a tension between exclusiveness and universality. Man's religions and cultures can be the arena of both sinful opposition to God and his gracious activity that prepares people for the final and saving revelation in the Christ event.

THE STATUS OF THE UNREACHED

The previous discussion raises the perennial and unavoidable question of the fate of the unevangelized. What of those people in other religions, before and after Christ, who have not had the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel? Are they necessarily excluded from salvation? Traditionally, many evangelicals have answered the question with a firm "yes." This position, which John Sanders terms "restrictivism,"⁶³ has often been set forth as a primary motivation for missions. For example, the statement from the Congress of World Mission held in Chicago in 1960 laments that "In the years since the war, more than one billion souls have passed into eternity and more than half of these went to the torment of hell fire without even hearing of Jesus Christ, who He was, or why He died on the cross of Calvary."⁶⁴ The traditional evangelical view is often vigorously defended as the alternative to universalism.⁶⁵ Recently, however, a number of evangelical thinkers have challenged this assessment and allowed that an unreached person may be saved if that individual repents and throws himself on the mercy of God through the

atonement work of Christ, even if he is not aware of that work.⁶⁶

When we look for an answer to this problem, the difficulty we face is that the Bible never addresses the question of the fate of the unevangelized directly. Scripture does not give explicit guidance one way or the other. Although we have seen people outside of Israel whose faith was accepted by God in the Old Testament, there are no clear examples of conversion apart from the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament. The Gentile "God fearer" Cornelius is often portrayed as the leading New Testament example of a "non-Christian believer."⁶⁷ In a recent defense of this position, Sanders confidently affirms that "Cornelius was a 'saved' *believer* before Peter arrived, but he became a *Christian* and received the fuller blessings of life in Christ only after Peter came" (emphasis in original).⁶⁸ It is less than clear, however, that Luke envisions such a distinction between "saved believer" and "Christian." It is true that Cornelius is described as a pious and generous man who regularly prays to God (Acts 10:2, 22). God communicates to him through an angel and hears his prayers (10:3-7). Upon meeting him, Peter announces that God does not show favoritism, "but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right (*ergazomenos dihaio synen*) is acceptable (*dektos*) to him [RSV]" (10:34-35). Yet, Luke's point is that in spite of all this, Cornelius still needed to hear the gospel and respond in faith. The word "acceptable" cannot be taken to mean "justified" or "saved" in an evangelical sense. It was only upon hearing the message of Christ from Peter (10:36) that he received forgiveness (10:43), salvation (11:14) and life (11:18).⁶⁹ Peter later explicitly links the Gentiles' reception of the Spirit to their hearing the gospel and believing and the cleansing of their hearts by faith" (15:7-9). Luke apparently does not see Cornelius as a "saved believer" in a full sense prior to his hearing and receiving the gospel.

Nevertheless, may it not be implied that Cornelius the Jewish proselyte, and, by extension, people of other faiths who "fear God" and "do righteousness" are in a different category in God's sight than those who do not evidence such faith?⁷⁰ Precisely what that position is we cannot know for certain. What is clear is that God communicated directly to Cornelius prior to his meeting with Peter and that God heard his prayers and was pleased with his acts of charity. Surely this implies some type of special relationship with God.⁷¹ God's prevenient grace had long been at work in the heart of Cornelius, drawing him to himself, and preparing him for acceptance of the gospel when he heard it. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is working today in the hearts of people of all religions who are outside the sphere of the proclamation of the gospel. This phenomenon has been repeatedly confirmed by the experience of missionaries.⁷² The mission of the church is to take the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to those he is preparing to receive it. Whether or not there will be "Corneliuses" who have not had a "Peter encounter" and yet will find acceptance at the final judgment is in the hands of God.

Some see hope for the unreached in the analogy of the Old Testament saints, who were not saved by their works, but by God's grace made available through the atonement of Christ, yet without knowing his identity.⁷³ Appealing to Romans 3:25, which speaks of God's forbearance of the sins of the Jews, E. D. Osburn asks, "If the eternal God, who does not necessarily view time sequentially, has applied Christ's blood to people of faith in the OT who [had] no knowledge of Jesus, why can he not do likewise for the unreached person today who has no explicit knowledge of Christ but may believe in the

One who raised Jesus from the dead?⁷⁴ The analogy is of course not perfect, because the Jews of the Old Testament were recipients of special revelation and had the Messianic prophecies. However, we must guard against limiting the grace of God. Those under the old covenant had an implicit faith in Christ that was credited to them as righteousness (Rom. 4:3). Might it not be possible for people today to come to a similar kind of implicit faith in him?

God graciously reveals himself to people through his Spirit in creation, conscience, culture, and even religion. It is not inconceivable that certain individuals might, in response to that grace, honestly seek after a yet unnamed God (cf. Acts 17:23), even acting contrary to the sinful in their religion and culture. Through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, might they not cast themselves on his mercy in repentance and trust, and be saved through the merits of Christ, "who is the atoning sacrifice...for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2)?⁷⁵ Might they not through the Spirit evidence some measure of holiness and genuine spirituality in response to the gracious revelation they receive?⁷⁶ Can we exclude the possibility of salvation among those who are accepted by God on the basis of Christ's atonement, and yet have no explicit knowledge or assurance of that salvation?⁷⁷

Ultimately these are questions that God alone has the right to answer.⁷⁸ While it is my sincerest hope and most earnest prayer that multitudes of pious seekers after God from other faiths and those who have had no opportunity to hear the gospel explicitly might stand among those who are redeemed by Christ's blood, such an assurance has not been clearly revealed to us.⁷⁹ The Bible leaves us no choice but to be agnostics in some sense when it comes to these questions. Perhaps there is some encouragement in the picture of unnumbered multitudes from every nation, tribe, and people gathered before the throne of God (Rev. 7:9) and people coming from every direction of the compass to take their places at the kingdom feast (Lk. 13:29). Jesus makes the point on more than one occasion that there will be surprises as to who is in heaven and who is not (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Lk. 13:22-30). One thing the Scriptures do make clear is that if people are in heaven apart from the preaching of the gospel, it will not be on the basis of their sincerity or their own goodness or their devotion to religious observance. It will be because the grace of God was active in their lives through the Holy Spirit, drawing them to Christ.⁸⁰

To admit the possibility of salvation apart from explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ is not to flirt with universalism. Neither does it diminish the urgency of the task of world evangelization. This common objection can be answered in at least two ways. First, neither Scripture nor experience give us an assurance about the existence of large numbers of "implicit" Christians. Due to the universal presence of sin in human hearts and the blinding power of Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), people generally choose to suppress the truth and exchange it for a lie (Rom. 1:18ff.). There is no room for the optimism about the salvation of people in other religions that is characteristic of much post-Vatican II Roman Catholic thought. The religions of the world are not "ways of salvation,"⁸¹ nor are they filled with "anonymous Christians."⁸² The vast majority of people will need to hear the "word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17) and participate in a community of faith in order to be saved.⁸³ It is still urgent that the church fulfill its mandate to be a sending and proclaiming community if people are to have a reasonable opportunity to call on his name and believe (Rom. 10:14-15). The only way anyone can have assurance that he or she is

redeemed is by responding in repentance and faith to the preaching of the Word.

Second, the very objection betrays an overly-restrictive understanding of soteriology. Jesus' commission to his followers (Matt. 23:16-20) is not simply to win converts, but to "make disciples" by baptizing and instructing them, i.e., to make Christlike citizens of the kingdom. Even if people would respond positively to God's gracious revelation apart from preaching, they will remain "like the blind groping toward a dim light," without knowing the true source or nature of that light, without participating in the Christian community, without the full experience of God's grace, power and holiness.⁸⁴ In this sense, the possibility of "implicit" Christians ought to be a motivation rather than a deterrent to missions, since people who have responded to God's grace in a limited way are waiting for more light and a fuller experience of that grace. The biblical mandate is to lead people to salvation in the fullest sense, which entails a life of discipleship and holiness. This applies equally to those who have heard and those who have not.

CONCLUSION

This overview makes it apparent that the biblical attitude toward religions is not simplistic. Does the Bible view religion as the realm of demonic and idolatrous activity; or as man's futile striving to find God; or as a preparation for the gospel; or as an arena of grace leading toward the experience of salvation? To be faithful to the scriptural witness we must answer affirmatively to each of these possibilities. An authentic biblical theology of religion must be multi-faceted enough to include all of them. There is a sense in which the world religions are aligned with the powers of the present age and therefore evidence aspects of the demonic and sinful. There is a *biblical* exclusivism which must tenaciously maintain that salvation is not to be found in even the best of other religions. The dogma of religious pluralism must be lovingly but firmly confronted. There is no other path to God except the one that goes through Jesus Christ. We do not have the option or the justification simply to leave people in their own religions and trust that God will judge them justly in the end. People deserve to know the way to life, both for the present and the future. The mission of the church is clear.

At the same time, however, if we believe that God's prevenient grace is at work among peoples of other faiths, then we must be willing to recognize signs of grace wherever they are to be found: in their cultures, in their sacred writings, in their personal devotion and lifestyle, in their struggles for justice and righteousness. The biblical understanding of God's universal self-revelation and ministry of grace leads to an attitude of hopeful expectancy concerning how the Holy Spirit is working among peoples of other faiths and leading them to Jesus Christ.⁸⁵ This suggests a more open attitude toward non-Christian religions and their adherents than has sometimes been evidenced among evangelicals and upholds the historic tendency toward inclusivism among Wesleyans. At the same time, Wesleyans who accept an inclusivist stance toward the question of the unevangelized must be careful not to go beyond what careful exegesis of the Scripture will allow and turn possibilities into certainties.⁸⁶ On a practical level, a biblically informed attitude toward non-Christian religions should lead us to pursue a greater understanding of them as well as personal relationships with peoples of other faiths. We need not reject dialogue in principle simply because it has been misused at times, but rather see it as an opportuni-

ty for mutual understanding and witness to those of other faiths. In the words of Canon Max Warren, "What a wonderful opportunity that religious pluralism offers to Christians and to everyone else to make a new discovery of Jesus Christ. How gratefully we should accept God's providential challenge."⁸⁷

NOTES

1. Canon Max Warren observes that "The Accident of Europe's isolation in the Middle Ages, and then its successful expansion in the following centuries, obscured the realities of religious pluralism from most Christians of the West." *I Believe in the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 153.
2. For example, as of 1991 there were approximately six million Muslims in the United States, which makes the Islamic faith larger than most Protestant denominations. *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 85.
3. See Os Guinness, "The Impact of Modernization," in *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990), 286.
4. The literature on the subject of religious pluralism is extensive. Note especially J. Hick and P. F. Knitter, eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988); P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985); G. Richards, *Towards a Theology of Religions* (London: Routledge, 1989); D. G. Dawe and J. B. Carman, eds., *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978); G. F. Anderson and T. F. Stransky, eds., *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983); *Mission Trends No. 5: Faith Meets Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); *International Review of Mission* 77 (July, 1988); H. Cox, *Mary Mansions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); G. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
5. For a critique of this position, see esp. G. D'Costa ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990); L. Newbigen, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); "Religious Pluralism and the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13 (April, 1989), 50-54; H. Netland, "Exclusivism, Tolerance, and Truth," *Missiology* 15 (April, 1987), 77-95.
6. See e.g., W.V. Crockett and J. G. Sigourtos, *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); H. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); C. H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religious Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); A. D. Clarke and B. W. Winter, eds., *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); J. Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); *Proceedings of the Wheaton Theology Conference: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism: An Evangelical Analysis and Response* (Wheaton, Ill.: Wheaton Theology Conference, 1992); K. Gnanakan, *The Pluralistic Predicament* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1992).
7. The terms are used by J. Sanders, *No Other Name*. According to Sanders "restrictivists" hold that access to salvation is limited to those who hear the preaching of the gospel (4, 37), while "inclusivists" "affirm the particularity and finality of salvation only in Christ but deny that knowledge of this work is necessary for salvation" (215); cf. W. Gary Phillips, "Evangelicals and Pluralism: Current Options," *Evangelical Quarterly* 64:3 (1992), 229-244; C. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 14f. Among current evangelical thinkers, Sanders and Pinnock are undoubtedly the most articulate spokesmen for the "inclusivist" position. Evangelical inclusivism is to be distinguished from broader definitions of "inclusivism" which hold that Christ is "the norm that brings about salvation through all religions"; K.

Gnanakan, *Predicament*, 71.

8. E.g., H.R. Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988), 166ff.; F. T. Cunningham, "Christ, the Word, the Light and the Message: A Wesleyan Reflection on the World Mission," *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (January, 1991), 104-110.

9. For an excellent study of the development of Wesley's thought on the question, see R. L. Maddox, "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring-Fall 1992), 7-29; cf. "Clark Pinnock on World Religions: Evangelical Precedents?", in *Proceedings of the Wheaton Theology Conference*, 208-15; *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), esp. 32-34; cf. J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 249-51; C. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 158.

10. See especially the collection of essays in *Through No Fault of Their Own?*, eds. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos, the majority of which follow a more restrictivist approach to the question of the fate of the unevangelized.

11. Wesleyans would generally view human experience, a rigorous analysis of the arguments (reason) and this insights of Christian tradition as important considerations.

12. Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise indicated.

13. See esp. Richard S. Hess, "Yahweh and His Asherah? Epigraphic Evidence for Religious Pluralism in Old Testament Times," in *One God, One Lord*, 5-42.

14. See C. Chapman, "The Challenge of Other Religions," in *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes*, 180; Nicholls, "The Exclusiveness and Inclusiveness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," unpublished paper presented at the ATA Theological Consultation Sept. 1990, Seoul, Korea, 4f.; J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 218ff.

15. W. Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 135-37.

16. J. E. Goldingay and C. J. H. Wright, "Yahweh Our God Yahweh One: The Oneness of God in the Old Testament," in *One God, One Lord*, 48.

17. For a discussion of this point, see K. Runia, "The Gospel and Religious Pluralism," unpublished paper delivered at the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission Consultation, Wheaton College, June, 1990, 18ff.; reprinted in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 14 (October, 1990), 341-79. The use of the divine names in the Pentateuch is relevant here. Apparently God addressed Abraham and entered into covenant with him in terms of divine names that were a part of contemporary Semitic culture, e.g., *El*. This does not mean, however, that Abraham's religion was syncretistic or that his faith remained at the level of popular cultural understandings of deity. God "accommodates" his self-revelation to familiar religious language and symbols in preparation for his transforming acts of redemption and revelation of his true name and character. C. J. H. Wright, "The Christian and Other Religions: the Biblical Evidence," *Themelios* 9 (January 1984), 6f.

18. R. B. Widbin, "Salvation for People Outside Israel's Covenant?", in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, 81; cf. B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 329.

19. Cf. R. F. Harrison, *Numbers* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 293ff.

20. See H. H. Rowley, *Job*, NCBC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 23.

21. J. E. Goldingay and C. J. H. Wright, "Yahweh," 50.

22. C. J. H. Wright rightly cautions that it is hermeneutically invalid "to use Old Testament texts which look forward to all nations ultimately worshipping Yahweh as support for the view that all religions are in present reality the worship of the one divine Being," "The Christian and Other Religions," 10. However, it does attest to the prophet's understanding of the universal lordship of Yahweh over all people.

23. Joyce C. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 228f., renders the verb in the future ("my name will be great", so NIV), and interprets the passage eschatologically, noting that it would otherwise mean that Malachi is the only biblical writer to sanction

pagan sacrifice. However, C.D. Isbell, *Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 42, argues that the future tense is unwarranted, and takes it as a present (cf. RSV, JB) reference to what is already happening throughout the world. C. J. H. Wright comments that even if the verse is taken in a present sense, it would be "a rhetorical, ironic comparison intended rather to shame Israel than soberly to describe paganism," "The Christian and Other Religions," 10.

24. K.G. Howkins, "Non-Christian Religions: Some Biblical Guidelines," in ed. P. Sookhdeo, *Jesus Christ the Only Way* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 66; J.E. Goldingay and C.J.H. Wright, "Yahweh," 44.

25. J.E. Goldingay and C.J.H. Wright, "Yahweh," 44. The authors cite the "Thirty Sayings" in Proverbs 22-24 as an example of "direct dependence" on pagan wisdom writings.

26. J.E. Goldingay and C. J. H. Wright, "Yahweh," 44-45.

27. See e.g., "Behind the Classical Façade: Local Religions of the Roman Empire," in *One God, One Lord*, 85-100; T. Moritz, "'Summing Up All Things': Religious Pluralism and Universalism in Ephesians," in *One God, One Lord*, 101-24; B.W. Winter, "In Public and in Private: Early Christians and Religious Pluralism," in *One God, One Lord*, 125-48; D.A. Carson, "Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism," in *God and Culture*, eds. D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 43f.; C. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

28. Carson, "Christian Witness," 44.

29. D. A. Carson, "Christian Witness," 44f.

30. K. Stendahl, "Notes for Three Bible Studies," in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, 14f.; P. J. Knitter, *No Other Name*, 184ff.; S. W. Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992, 23ff.).

31. P. J. Knitter, *No Other Name*, 185. Cf. C. Pincock's much more balanced treatment of this passage ("Acts 4:12—No Other Name under Heaven" in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, 107-15, in which he acknowledges that Luke "makes a strong and definitely exclusive claim about the messianic, holistic salvation Jesus has brought into the world" (115), but that the passage addresses neither the question of the eschatological fate of the unevangelized nor the status of other religions. Pincock argues that "Peter is magnifying a mighty act of God bringing in the kingdom, not discussing comparative religions" (111). This may be true; however, it does not mean that the passage is irrelevant to the discussion.

32. *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House, 1938). Kraemer was, of course, deeply influenced by Karl Barth, who placed man's religiosity in stark contrast to God's unique revelation in Jesus Christ, and spoke, in a celebrated comment, of religion as "unbelief"; K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I 2, 299ff.

33. H. Kraemer, *Why Christianity of All the Religions?*, ET (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 94ff.; *Christian Message*, 139.

34. H. Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 132. In his later writings, Kraemer seems to show more openness to evidences of God's working in other religions, and qualifies that he does not consider other religions to be erroneous in their totality, *Why Christianity of All Religions?*, p.93.

35. F. D. Bruner, *The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary. Matthew 1-12* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 46f.

36. K. Gnanakan, *Predicament*, 131.

37. K. G. Howkins, "Non-Christian Religions," 65; J. R. W. Scott, *The Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1975), 68. Commentators are divided as to whether the "light" in this verse refers to the light of illumination (Morris; Tasker; cf. v.4), or the light of judgment (Barrett, Carson cf. 3:21). Perhaps the two understandings are not mutually exclusive, since the concept of the light is used in both senses in John. The light comes to humankind as both revelation and judgment. It seems preferable to take the phrase "coming into the world" with "the true light" (*to phos to alethinon*) rather than "every man" (*panta anthropon*). For a discussion of the grammatical difficulties

of this verse, see L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 93f.

38. The weakness of a "Logos Christology," which has roots in the Greek Fathers (cf. Justin Martyr, *Apologia* 1, 46) and to which John Sanders and Clark Pinnock have recently appealed to support the universal accessibility of salvation (*No Other Name*, 238ff.; *Wideness*, 77f., 103f.), is precisely at this point. The cosmic Logos that is "found" in other religions and philosophies is all too easily abstracted from the person of Jesus of Nazareth and thereby threatens to undercut the historical particularity of the saving event. John's whole argument in the prologue is intended to lead to the climax that the "Word became flesh" (1:14). The Word who was in the world from the beginning and who illumines all peoples is one and the same Word who became enfleshed in Jesus. See C. J. H. Wright, "The Christian and Other Religions," 12f.; cf. J. E. Bradley, "Logos Christology and Religious Pluralism: A New Evangelical Proposal" in *Proceedings of the Wheaton Theological Conference*, 190-215.

39. For a discussion of the relationship between general revelation and prevenient grace, see H. R. Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness*, 161-70.

40. F. T. Cunningham, "Christ," 107f.

41. See B. W. Winter, "In Public and in Private," 125-48.

42. W. Foerster, *TDNT* 2, 20; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 355.

43. The phrase was popularized by Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), 115-34.

44. See J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 244-47.

45. For Greek parallels see H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 141ff.; cf. B. W. Winter, "In Public and Private," 130ff.

46. C. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 365. Cf. K. G. Howkins, "Non-Christian Religions," 60ff.

47. Cf. the treatment of this passage by D. L. Bock, who concludes that it supports an exclusivist answer to the question of the fate of the unevangelized, "Athenians Who Have Never Heard," in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, 117-24.

48. C. J. H. Wright, "The Christian and Other Religions," 5.

49. K.R. Gnanakan, "Keynote address presented to the Asia Theological Association Consultation held in Seoul, Korea September, 1990," unpublished paper, 4ff.

50. See J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 58.

51. J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 237.

52. F.T. Cunningham, "Christ," 91.

53. H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness*, 166; cf. C. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 103f.

54. B. Nicholls, "Exclusiveness," 8.

55. See H.R. Dunning, 168; cf. C. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 33; J. Sanders, "Mercy to All," 220-24.

56. There are scholars, of course, who simply charge Paul with inconsistent teaching: salvation by works in Romans 2 and salvation by faith in Romans 3. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 123-33; H. Räisänen, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 101-109.

57. The occurrence of *hotan* and *ta tou nomou* instead of simply "the law" in 2:14 implies that Paul is thinking of the occasional fulfillment of certain demands of the law by certain Gentiles, not perfect obedience. Further, see K.R. Snodgrass, "Justification by Grace—to the Doers: An Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul," *NTS* 32 (1986), 79, 83. Those who support the "hypothetical" interpretation of Romans 2 include D. Moo, "Saved," 142-44; B. Demarest, "General and Special Revelation: Epistemological Foundations of Religious Pluralism," in *One God, One Lord*, 198; R.N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 121-22; H. Lietzmann, *An die Römer* (Tübingen: 1906), 13.

58. See E. Käsemann, *Romans*, ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 61ff.

59. This is in contrast to those who argue that Paul answers the question quite definitively either in a negative (e.g., D. J. Moo, "Romans 2: Saved Apart from the Gospel?" in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, 145) or a positive (e.g., J. Sanders, "Mercy," 220ff.) direction.
60. J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 86, 98; contra C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 152ff., 173ff.; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 46f., 59f.
61. For a recent articulation of this position, see J. Sanders, "Mercy," 220-24.
62. K. R. Snodgrass, "Justification," 84.
63. J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, chapter 2.
64. Quoted in K. Runia, "The Gospel and Religious Pluralism," 2.
65. Eg., H. Lindsell, "Universalism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland*, J. D. Douglas, ed. (Minneapolis: World Wide Pub., 1975), 1213; C. G. Olson, *What in the World Is God Doing?* (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Pub., 1988), 33ff.; J.R. McQuilkin, "The Narrow Way," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 127-34. This position has been defended on a popular level by Dick Dowsett, *God, That's Not Fair!* (Kent, U.K.: OMF Books, 1982). See also the bibliography in J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 73-79.
66. Eg., J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, esp. 215-305; C. Pinnoch, *Wideness*, passim, "Toward an Evangelical Theology," *JETS* 33 (September, 1990), esp. 367f.; M. Erickson, "Hope for those Who Haven't Heard? Yes, but—," *EMQ* (April, 1975), 122-26; J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), chapter 5; E. D. Osburn, "Those Who Have Never Heard: Have They No Hope?," *JETS* 32 (Sept. 1989), 367-72; K. Runia, "The Gospel and Religious Pluralism," 20ff. For additional proponents of this view, see the extensive historical bibliographies in J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 137-46, 267-80.
67. Eg., J. Sanders, 64-67, 222-24; C. Pinnoch, *Wideness*, 95f., 165f.; J. N. D. Anderson, 151. This has been the predominant interpretation of the Cornelius account within the holiness tradition, usually in support of finding a second crisis experience in Cornelius' baptism with the Holy Spirit. See, e.g., J. K. Grider, *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1980), 48-52; D. S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1971), 120f.; L. W. Wood, *Pentecostal Grace* (Wilmore, Ky.: Francis Asbury, 1980), 91. Wesley, however, considered Cornelius to be an "unbeliever," *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, repr. (Salem, Ohio: Schmuel, 1976), 302.
68. J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 66.
69. I. H. Marshall, *Acts*, 189f.; D. J. Williams, *Acts*, NIBC (Peabody, Mass.: Hendricksen, 1985), 197; C. J. H. Wright, "The Christian and Other Religions," 14.
70. C. Chapman, "Challenge," 180; cf. K. Gnanakan, *Predicament*, 142.
71. S. W. Anarajah, *Other Faiths*, 17f.
72. Eg. the reflection of Norman Anderson, "I have never met a Muslim convert who regards the God he previously sought to worship as a wholly false God. Instead, he is filled with wonder and gratitude that he has now been brought to know that God as he really is, in Jesus Christ our Lord." *Christianity*, 173.
73. J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity*, 148f., 152f.; M. Erickson, "Hope," 125; J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 225ff.
74. E. D. Osburn, "Those Who Have Never Heard," 368.
75. See F. T. Cunningham, "Christ," 109.
76. Wesley's understanding of the integral relationship between present salvation (some measure of holiness) and future salvation led him, especially in his later period, to maintain that God will judge the "heathen" according to their response to the gracious "light" they have received, assuming

at least a minimal degree of spirituality or holiness in their present lives. Cf. the sermons "On Faith," *Works*, bicentennial ed., 3:494, "On Charity," *Works*, 3:295f.; "On Living without God," *Works*, 4:174. This point is discussed by Maddox, "Wesley," 17f, (cf. *Responsible Grace*, 33f.) and F. T. Cunningham, "Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Wesleyan Perspective," unpub. paper," 10ff.

77. See F. T. Cunningham, "Inter-Religious Dialogue," 10f.

78. See L. Newbinger, *Gospel*, 177.

79. I must admit that I lack the confidence as a predictor of eternal destiny of both those who espouse the universalist and the restrictivist positions. For more optimistic appraisals of the fate of the unevangelized among evangelicals, see C. Pincock, *Wideness*, esp. 17-35; J. R. W. Scott in *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, eds. J. R. W. Scott and D. L. Edwards (London: Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1988), 327, cited in J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 145.

80. See K. Runia, "The Gospel and Religious Pluralism," 26.

81. H. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 91, 104.

82. See above, n. 42.

83. C. Pincock goes too far in appealing to 1 Pet. 4:6 as basis for the unevangelized having "second chance" after death, based on the assumption that God will not reject sinners without knowing what their response to grace would have been. "Toward an Evangelical Theology," 368.

84. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountes, "Are the 'Heathen' Really Lost?" in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, 260.

85. John D. Ellenberger cites several concrete examples of the Holy Spirit's preparatory activity prior to any contact with the gospel message, "Is Hell a Proper Motivation for Missions," in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, 223.

86. See the valid caution of W. G. Phillips at this point, "Evangelicals and Religious Pluralism: Current Options," in *Proceedings*, 189.

87. M. Warren, *I Believe*, 170.

1

WESLEY ON IMPUTATION: A TRULY RECKONED REALITY OR ANTINOMIAN POLEMICAL WRECKAGE?

WOODROW W. WHIDDEN

THE REFORMED REACTION

Protestants have long been uncomfortable with Wesley's understanding of justification by faith. The usual suspicions surface with whispers of "pelagianism," "synergism," "Romanist moralism," and "legalism." In his own time he was under close scrutiny from the Calvinistic wing of the Evangelical Revival. Such scrutiny erupted into a storm of protest with the publication of the infamous "1770 Minutes." These "Minutes" have received most of the attention of Wesleyan scholars as they have sought to assess the genuineness of Wesley's Protestant credentials.¹

A SEEMINGLY ANOMALOUS STATEMENT

What is somewhat surprising is the almost total lack of attention given to Wesley's negative, delimiting comments on "faith alone" in the "first fully positive exposition of his 'new' soteriology"²—his sermon entitled "Justification by Faith."³ After plainly stating that justification "is not being made actually just and righteous,"⁴ Wesley gives this troubling, anomalous qualifier:

Least of all does justification imply that God is *deceived* in those whom he justifies; that he thinks them to be what in fact they are not, that he accounts them to be otherwise than they are. It does by no means imply that God judges concerning us contrary to the real nature of things, that he esteems us better than we really are, or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous. Surely no. The judgment of the all-wise God is always according to truth. Neither can it ever consist with his unerring wisdom to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am righteous or holy, because another is so. He can no more in this manner confound me with Christ than with David or Abraham.

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THE ASBURY THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

FALL 1997 • VOL. 52 • NO. 2

Let any man to whom God hath given understanding weigh this without prejudice, and he cannot but perceive that such a notion of justification is neither reconcilable to reason nor Scripture.⁵

This statement seems to imply that "justification" does make the believer "actually just and righteous." As if the point is not made forcibly enough, later in this same sermon (while dealing directly with justification as accounted or imputed righteousness) Wesley reiterates the above point:

... the very moment that God giveth faith (for 'it is the gift of God') to the 'ungodly,' 'that worketh not,' that 'faith is counted to him for righteousness.' He hath no righteousness at all antecedent to this, not so much as negative righteousness or innocence. But 'faith is imputed to him for righteousness' the very moment that he believeth. *Not that God (as was observed before) thinketh him to be what he is not* (emphasis supplied). But as 'he made Christ to be sin for us' (that is, treated him as a sinner, punished him for our sins), so he counteth us righteous from the time we believe in him (that is, he doth not punish us for our sins, yea, treats us as though we were guiltless and righteous).⁶

In other literary settings, Wesley had some similar cautions about imputation:

Do not dispute for that particular phrase "the imputed righteousness of Christ." It is not scriptural; it is not necessary.... It has done immense hurt. I have had abundant proof that the frequent use of this unnecessary phrase, instead of "furthering men's progress in vital holiness," has made them satisfied without any holiness at all.⁸

After his initial qualifiers, cited above from the Sermon "Justification by Faith," Wesley proceeds (in the next paragraph) to give a rather deceptively brief and simple definition of justification: "The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins."⁹ What then is to be made of Wesley's understanding of imputed, or reckoned righteousness in the setting of his teaching on justification?

WESLEY'S SOTERIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

First of all it needs to be understood that Wesley had not confined his thinking on salvation to the Western, or Latin "juridical" Tradition, but had drawn on the "therapeutic" themes so common to the Eastern Tradition. For Wesley, God is not only interested in legal pardon, but healing participation¹⁰ and many (especially those in the Calvinist wing of the Evangelical Revival) had a hard time dealing with what appeared to them to be justification by infused righteousness (they smelled the odious scent of Rome and Trent).

Furthermore, Wesley was not thinking of the experience of salvation so much in terms of an *ordo salutis* but much more as a *via salutis*. Maddox has succinctly summed up this perspective: "Justification is not a stage that we leave behind to enter sanctification, it is a facet of God's saving grace permeating the entire Way of Salvation."¹¹ In other words, the experience of salvation is conceived more as a continuous, related process than as an order of discrete events. This inter-dependent process certainly involves legal standing and forensic reckoning, but such standing is always the baseline that enables sanctifying participation in the righteousness of God.

A POSITIVE DEFINITION OF JUSTIFICATION

Before we begin an interpretation of Wesley's polemic against "imputation" (especially as given in the above cited passages from the sermon "Justification by Faith"), a brief review of his positive understanding of justification is needed.

As has already been mentioned, Wesley's most simple and straight-forward definition of justification is "pardon." It is pardon for penitent sinners who exercise "trusting" faith in the merits of Christ's death. Such pardon "covers,"¹² or remits not only the sins of the past, but also the sin which "remains" in believers after justification takes place concurrent with the "New Birth."¹³

Furthermore, God's justifying merit and pardoning righteousness are also needed to effectually deal with the sins "improper" of those who have been perfected in love. In other words, there is never a time on the *via salutis* that the redeemed are without the need for pardon and the "imputation" of righteousness granted in justification.¹⁴

So what drives Wesley in his polemic against "imputation"? If even those perfected in love still need justification, he certainly cannot be understood to be teaching some Tridentine version of justification—salvation by infused righteousness.¹⁵ But taken at face value, one can certainly see why the forensic, juridically oriented Calvinists would so stoutly oppose Wesley.

IMPORTANT EXPLANATORY CLUES

The major explanatory clues to Wesley's chary view of "imputed righteousness" reveal themselves in his suspicions concerning the antinomian or quietistic directions taken by many who advocated such "righteousness." Every major interpreter of Wesley has pointed this out.¹⁶ As Wesley himself noted, "the frequent use of this unnecessary phrase, instead of 'furthering men's progress in vital holiness,' has made them satisfied without any holiness at all."¹⁷

When Wesley speaks of imputation, he always seems to sense the ominous specter of quietistic Moravianism or hyper-Calvinism lurking about; the inevitable outcome was thought to be the ruination of sanctificationist aspirations.¹⁸ Such doctrinal or practical antinomianism receives far greater polemical attention from Wesley than the scholastic cadences of Trent.

Even if quietistic and antinomian threats are conceded, Wesley's troubling qualifiers in regard to "imputed righteousness" certainly make it appear that he was headed back to Rome. But if it was not a beckoning Trent that Wesley was touting, what was he attempting to convey in these anomalous qualifiers?

First of all it is obvious that Wesley was speaking of the believer's life of active participation in God's righteousness. Here he clearly wanted to distinguish justification from sanctification—in opposition to the English Moravians. Neither can he be charged with confusing these two as Trent did (in traditional Augustinian fashion).¹⁹ So when Wesley says that justification does not "imply that God is *deceived* in those whom he justifies" or that He "judges concerning us contrary to the real nature of things ... or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous," he has primary reference to those who are converted and enjoying sanctifying grace.²⁰ He is not referring to the pre-conversion sins of the

regenerate. What he is saying is that the believer does not have the option of any reality which gives *carte blanche* to presumptuous sin.

Certainly God has to reckon penitent sinners condemned by their history of past sins to be "righteous when" they were "unrighteous." The very nature of forgiveness involves a covering, a reckoning, or crediting which is "contrary to the real nature of things" and that God "believes us righteous" when we were "unrighteous." Wesley was simply too logical to deny such a view of imputation or pardon for sins that are past: the past is reckoned to be something other than sinful!

Some have objected to this understanding of Wesley on imputation by suggesting Wesley did deny that penitent sinners are "reckoned" or "accounted" to be something they in reality are not. It is claimed that such justified sinners are only seen as forgiven.

WESLEY ON ATONEMENT AND IMPUTATION

I would suggest that one key to understanding Wesley on imputation lies in his view of the Atonement.⁴¹ Among Wesleyan interpreters, there seems to be general agreement that he did see the death of Christ as providing "satisfaction" to the justice of God. There is general agreement (at least in the use of substitutionary terminology) that the death of Christ was a substitute for the sinners just deserts. Not all are agreed, however, that such "satisfaction" enables God to "substitute" the "life" (active righteousness) of Christ for the occasional or incidental failings of the penitent. The argument seems to be that "satisfaction" only suggests that Christ has sufficiently satisfied divine justice to the extent that God can forgive and pardon sinners. Such pardon, however, does not require "substitution" of Christ's "active righteousness" in order for God to be seen as "just" in justifying the ungodly.

Perhaps the issue could be clarified this way: in the substitutionary model of imputation (which includes Christ's "active righteousness"), penitent sinners who trust the merits of Christ are constantly reckoned as perfect (both in their past and present lives) and the only way for them to lose such constant reckoning is to persistently break faith with Christ. Using the "satisfaction," pardon model, imputation would look like this: forgiveness for sins (both of nature and acts) is constantly available, but must somehow be constantly applied for by penitent ones experiencing salvation. Granted, God does not immediately consign those with sin(s) to damnation, but they must consciously apply for pardon or face the loss of their salvation.

Possibly the differences can be illustrated this way: struggling believers could be likened to high wire or trapeze artists; they have the option of performing with or without a safety net underneath. For the substitutionary model, the safety net is always underneath the faithful and one has to consciously move out of faith relationship with Christ to have such a net removed; but for the "satisfaction," pardon model, the incidentally falling performers must somehow appeal for the safety net to be put in place before they crash (through sin).

I would suggest, that outside of the deterministic contexts of the Reformed views, both models could be appropriate for Wesley, even though the "satisfaction," pardon model seems to fit better in Wesley's polemical contexts.

ANOMALOUS STATEMENTS INTERPRETED

So what does he mean when he says that it can never "consist with (God's) unerring

wisdom to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am righteous or holy, because another is so?"²²

What he seemed to be getting at was that those with justifying, regenerating faith are *really* just and holy in the sense that they have an obedient attitude, a sincere intention to do the right thing (though Wesley does not imply that such attitudes are in any sense meritorious—only evidential of the pardon received). Furthermore, not only do they have good intentions, they also have a qualified "holiness"—good actions and growth in character as the normal fruit of genuine faith.²³

Such a righteous reality (including both intentions and fruitful obedience) stands in clear contrast to the attitude of the presumptuously "saved" antinomian who uses the concept of the constant imputation of Christ's righteousness as a pretext for excusing sin.²⁴ It was this view of imputation, which seemed more often than not to wear the colors of Calvinistic determinism, that Wesley usually had in his sights.

BACKGROUND OF THE WESTERN DEBATE

A brief explanation of the background of the soteriological debates in Western Christianity should help illuminate the meaning and function of imputation as it was understood by these warring Evangelicals with their differing interpretations of the role of imputed righteousness.

Briefly stated, the polemics went like this:²⁵ the Reformed Scholastic Tradition viewed the death of Christ as the "formal" cause of justification, whereas Wesley (with Trent and the Anglican Tradition) saw the death of Christ as the "meritorious" cause. If the death of Christ is the "formal" cause (understood in scholastic terms as the actual immediate, or formative cause of some desired effect), then there are only two alternatives: particular election (hence the double predestination of Calvin and the Reformed Tradition) or universalism (inimical to both Arminian and Reformed Evangelicals).

Since Wesley sought a middle way between Trent's infused righteousness (Trent's formal cause of justification) and Reformed Scholasticism's predestinarian determinism, he opted for the view that the death of Christ was the meritorious cause of justification and the formal cause was declared to be the universally offered grace of God which pardons us by virtue of the merits of Christ. Thereby (Wesley) could insist that we never "earn" or "deserve" God's pardoning favor, without calling into question our *responsibility* to respond to God's gracious acceptance.²⁶

In other words, "the real nature of things" which God sees is human responsiveness to grace, not only justifying, but also sanctifying grace. And if one is only responding with a non-participatory species of faith, God is not "deceived" by such a presumptuous species of unreality.

IMPUTATION AND THE SINS OF THE PAST

Furthermore, given Wesley's more Anglican view that the formal cause of justification is freely offered grace, it could well be that Wesley conceived of imputation (in the ongoing experience of faithful, responsive participation) as always dealing *only* with the "sins" of the *past*.²⁷ Here Wesley has in mind both the sins of the believer's pre-conversion *past* and the immediate "past" incidental sins of the participating faithful (both the justified and

the perfected). In other words, Christ's justifying merits are always seen as available to those participating in the covenant; but they are never reckoned in the sense of being a fail-proof, irremissible state of imputation. Such a fail-proof experience is simply contrary to real spiritual reality.

Although Wesley never addresses this issue directly, it does seem clear that he would not take the position that the moment a true believer sins (properly or improperly), that moment the believer is out of saving relationship with Christ. Such a "yo-yo" version of salvation seems contrary to Wesley's deeply relational vision of Christian experience. Such a behavioristic conception of the life of faith (one moment you are in and one moment you are out—depending on your latest failure or success in the battle with sin) just does not seem to resonate with Wesley's grace saturated vision of the *via salutis*.²⁸

But make no mistake about it, what Wesley wants to negatively convey by these seemingly anomalous polemics over imputation (especially in his sermon on "Justification by Faith") is that a willful, habitual indulgence in sin of any type will sooner or later cause the loss of salvation—both for the newly justified and those with fullness of faith. The positive message seems to be that Jesus' offer of forgiveness and pardon, through His priestly intercession, is constantly available—but only to those who are participating in such a way that leaves them open to the experience of on-going penitence and dynamic growth in grace. Anything else is a perversion of imputation and is not in the realm of saving reality.

CONCLUSION

For Wesley, the reality of imputation dealt mainly with the sins of the past: sinners are reckoned to be something which in reality they are not, i.e., in Christ they are counted sinless, though their records testify otherwise. Thus imputation is a reckoned reality; but imputation is not a reality that may be viewed as a cover for attitudes and dispositions that would tolerate sin in any form. Thus Wesley's polemics, far from wrecking his understanding of objectively reckoned justification, seeks to point to a truer reality: cheap grace and true justification cannot really co-exist on the *via salutis* where the nature of saving grace is always participatory, not just detached mental assent. Is pardon constantly available to believers travelling this way? Of course it is, but only to those who are truly eschewing the sin which necessitates such pardon.

NOTES

1. See Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books [An Imprint of Abingdon Press], 1994), pp. 171, 172.

2. The two best recent studies on Wesley's soteriology are found in Kenneth Collins, *John Wesley on Salvation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press [imprint of Zondervan Publishing House], 1989), pp. 41-54 and Maddox, pp. 157-91 (for special focus on justification, see pp. 162-72). Maddox gives extensive bibliographic sources for further study of Wesley's understanding of justification—both primary and secondary.

In addition to Collins and Maddox, other notable interpretations are given by William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley: With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1946), Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press [imprint of Zondervan Publishing House], 1980 (a reprinting of the original

published in 1946), pp. 55ff., 75ff., and 83ff., Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, Tenn.: Discipleship-Resources-Tidings, 1975), pp. 45-64, and W. Steven Gunter, *The Limits of Love Divine, John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books [an imprint of Abingdon Press], 1989), chaps. 4, 6, and 7; Gunter is especially helpful in fleshing out the polemical contexts of Wesley's developing explanations of justification.

For those not readily conversant with Wesley's teachings on justification, Thomas C. Oden provides a concise introduction to the primary documents (and a good, basic secondary bibliography) in his *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), pp. 188-213.

3. Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater, Editors-in-Chief successively, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* vol. 1, edited by Albert C. Outler (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1984), Sermon 5, p. 181.

The *Bicentennial Edition* is henceforth cited as *Works*. The text of the sermon is found on pp. 182-99.

4. *Ibid.*, 187.

5. *Ibid.*, 188, 189.

6. *Ibid.*, 196.

7. While Wesley is correct that the specific phrase "the imputed righteousness of Christ" is not found in Scripture, he certainly must have known that the clear intent of Romans 4 supports the basic theological intent of the phrase that believers are reckoned to be something they are not in reality; this is especially true in the way that Paul employs the Greek verb *logizomai* (sometimes translated in the KJV as to "impute" [see Romans 4: 6, 8, 11], but also given the following possible meanings in Arndt and Gingrich: to "reckon," "count," "account," "credit," "look upon as," "consider," "be regarded as," "be classed among" [William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 476, 477]): v. 4: "Abraham believed God and it was counted (*logizetai*) unto him as righteousness"; v. 5: "And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned (*logizetai*) as righteousness"; v. 6: "David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons (*logizetai*) righteousness apart from works"; v. 9: "We say that faith was reckoned (*elogisthe*) to Abraham as righteousness"; and v. 11: "who thus have righteousness reckoned (*logisthenai*) to them" (RSV).

8. Cited in Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 71.

In a similar comment, Wesley made further observations about the phrase "the imputed righteousness of Christ": "I am myself the more sparing in the use of it, because it has been so frequently and so dreadfully abused; and because the Antinomians use it at this day to justify the grossest abominations" (cited in Oden, p. 210). Oden comments: "Wesley thought the troublesome 'particular phrase, 'the imputed righteousness of Christ'' was prone to misinterpretation, and had been used as a ruse to avoid any effort actually to walk in the way of holiness, and hence had inadvertently 'done immense hurt'" (Oden, p. 210).

9. Outler, *Works*, p. 189.

10. Maddox cites Outler: "As Outler has nicely phrased it, Wesley's characteristic emphasis was that we are pardoned in order to participate," p. 168.

11. *Ibid.*, 172. Compare Maddox's more elaborated comments about this perspective on pp. 157, 158.

12. *Works*, vol. 1, p. 190.

13. See the sermons "On Sin in Believers" and "The Repentance of Believers," in Outler, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 314-52 and "The Scripture Way of Salvation," vol. 2, pp. 153-69, esp. p. 165.

14. While it is true that Wesley does studiously avoid, even censure, the use of almost any varia-

tion of the word "impute" in the sermon "Justification by Faith" (and other contexts), he does use it more comfortably in less polemical settings. See especially the landmark sermon "The Lord Our Righteousness," *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 454ff. and Maddox's comments, pp. 165, 166.

15. Wesley is clear that "the sole cause of our acceptance with God ... is the righteousness and the death of Christ, who fulfilled God's law and died in our stead" (cited in Oden, p. 209).

16. Typical are Lindstrom, pp. 74 and 75, Collins, pp. 51-53; Geoffrey Wainwright, *Geoffrey Wainwright on Wesley and Calvin: Sources for Theology, Liturgy and Spirituality* (Melbourne, Australia: Uniting Church Press, 1987), p. 22, and Maddox, pp. 166-68.

17. Cited in Colin Williams, p. 71.

18. Such antinomian suspicions are even present in his most irenic, olive branch piece—the sermon "The Lord Our Righteousness"; see *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 462, 463.

19. See Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 376-92.

20. *Works*, vol. 1, p. 188.

21. Two of the best discussions of Wesley's views on the Atonement are Maddox, pp. 96-109 and John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960, 1985), pp. 150-90. Compare Kenneth Collins, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology* (Wilmore, Ky.: Wesley Heritage Press, 1993), pp. 49-54 and Lindstrom, pp. 55-75.

22. *Works*, vol. 1, p. 187.

23. I see no evidence that such an evidential understanding of the attitudes of the "justified" should be restricted only to "second" or "final justification." Granted, Wesley was not as explicit about initial and on-going justification having similar evidential fruitage in the same way he was regarding "final justification"; but I would argue that the entire tenor of his soteriological discussions sustains the present interpretation (especially the way he relates justification and sanctification as the inseparable root and fruit of genuine Christian experience).

24. Collins has perceptively caught the gist of this faith reality: "Real faith is different from that of a devil in that 'it is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart.' Notice here that Wesley does not exclude an intellectual component to faith; he simply points out that this ingredient by itself is insufficient; it must be joined to a disposition of the heart" (*Wesley on Salvation*, p. 47). Compare Outler's comments in *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, p. 52.

25. For an excellent explanation of the scholastic categories of the "causes" of salvation, see Maddox's digest of Outler, pp. 166-68; what follows is my even briefer digest of Maddox.

26. Maddox, p. 168.

27. The discussion which follows is a further elaboration of issues discussed above in the section entitled "Wesley on Atonement and Imputation."

28. See Maddox's perceptive discussion, under the heading of "Repentance within the Christian Life," in which he explains Wesley's understanding of the believer's "awareness of God's pardoning grace," which becomes an awareness that enables a "repentance within the Christian life" which "revitalizes our continuing responsible growth in holiness" (pp. 165, 166).

SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE JESUS SEMINAR

WILLIAM RICHARD STEGNER

"Of making many books there is no end...." This saying from Ecclesiastes could also describe the publications of the Jesus Seminar. Now, Robert Funk, founder of the Seminar, adds his book to the list. The title, *Honest To Jesus: Jesus For a New Millennium*, well describes the goal of the Seminar. Since Dr. Funk is the chief inspiration and founder of the Seminar, this book offers an opportunity to do some critical thinking about the work of the Seminar. Accordingly, this article will begin with a brief review of Funk's book and then reflect upon the work and claims of the Seminar.

In some ways this is the most informative book published by these new questers. For the uninitiated it introduces the kind of information shared by most New Testament scholars. In addition to introducing the "tools" of the trade, Funk helps the reader understand the work and approach of the Seminar. He sketches his picture of the Jesus behind the Gospels and sets forth in starkest terms the program of the Seminar—the destruction of orthodox Christianity along with its Christ, its creeds, and its faith.

The book opens with a remarkably candid account of the author's personal pilgrimage through life. From a teenage evangelist studying at a Tennessee Bible college, Funk traces his "professional migrations" through thirty-five years in the classroom to his founding of the Westar Institute and its project, the Jesus Seminar. His goal is seeking "the historical truth at all costs" (p. 8).

Dr. Funk writes well. In a beautiful passage he describes the significance of Jesus for today: "In his authentic parables and aphorisms, Jesus provides a glimpse into another reality, one that lies beyond the present conceptual horizons. His words and deeds open onto that reality. His vision, in my view, is worth exploring" (pp. 18-19). Indeed, when he turns to the parables, Funk is at his best both in terms of expres-

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THE ASBURY THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

FALL 1997 • VOL. 52 • NO. 2

sive language and insight. He has written about the parables throughout his career and here he displays his mastery for scholar and layperson alike.

However, the more one reads his book, as well as other books published by members of the Seminar, the more one recalls the first quest of the historical Jesus. At the end of the last century, liberal German Protestant theologians initiated the first quest with slogans like the following: Away with the Christ of dogma! Away with the supernatural Jesus of miracles and last judgments! Back to the simple Jesus of history, our great human teacher, whose sublime ethics lead to the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God. While the modern questers want nothing of Jesus, "a moralist" (p. 163), the slogans, except for the so-called sexist terms, could be interchanged.

How does one evaluate this new quest and its claims? Let us begin by saying that mainstream New Testament scholarship has not "bought into" the findings of the Jesus Seminar. Secondly, we will show that the social models employed specifically by Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan¹ are highly controversial.

THE MAINSTREAM REMAINS UNCONVINCED

Despite all the publicity and media hype, the Jesus Seminar does not represent the mainstream of contemporary critical scholarship. By contemporary scholarship I mean those New Testament scholars who use the methodologies of source, form, redaction, and rhetorical criticism and still continue to believe that the Gospels contain substantially accurate information about Jesus. In contrast, the Jesus Seminar is a decided minority of New Testament scholars. The following discussion will illustrate the kind of historical judgments which separate Robert Funk and Dominic Crossan from two representatives of mainstream scholarship.

In order to follow the discussion, some *fine distinctions* between history and theology must be kept in mind. For example, an historical statement follows: Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate in the first half of the first century A.D. That statement is subject to verification by the "tools" of analysis employed by historians. Note the difference from the theological statement which follows: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself..." (II Corinthians 5:19a). The theological statement is not subject to verification by an historian. Only if historians could somehow prove that Jesus was not crucified or otherwise put to death by Pilate would the theological truth of that statement be called into question. While some individuals may not believe Paul's statement, it is not subject to verification by historical methodology.

In order to clarify the matter even further let us apply the above insight to a sentence quoted from Dr. Funk's book. We quoted this sentence from page 18: "In his authentic parables and aphorisms, Jesus provides a glimpse into *another reality*..." (emphasis mine). Here Funk makes a theological statement because "another reality" is not something subject to historical verification. On the other hand, Funk rejects the above statement by Paul in II Corinthians *as that statement has been interpreted by Orthodox Christianity*. Here, I mean specifically the doctrine of the sacrificial atoning death and the doctrine of the incarnation. Certainly, there is a great theological gulf between many mainstream New Testament scholars and Dr. Funk. Nevertheless, the primary disagreements between mainstream scholars and the Jesus Seminar do not so much focus on theological questions (at least, publicly) as

on the historical questions. Vigorous debates focus on the more radical *historical* judgments and reconstructions of Funk and his followers.

Of course, a vigorous debate indicates that some mainstream scholars have joined the quest for the historical Jesus along with members of the Jesus Seminar. Accordingly, both sides claim to be historians as they research what can be known about the human Jesus who lived in Palestine. For example, note how E.P. Sanders describes his methodology:

The aim of this book is to lay out, as clearly as possible, what we can know, using the standard methods of historical research, and to distinguish this from inferences, labeling them clearly as such.²

Although both sides claim to use "the standard methods of historical research," they frequently arrive at strikingly different results. And these different results spark vigorous debates. One such debate concerns the passion narrative—the story leading up to the crucifixion and burial. Let us listen to the debate between Robert Funk and Raymond Brown, one of the leading mainstream scholars in the United States.

In his massive commentary on the passion narratives found in each of the four Gospels, Raymond Brown carefully sets forth his primary and secondary goals. His primary goal is to interpret for the modern reader the *meaning* that each Evangelist seeks to convey in his version of the passion narrative (hereafter, PN). This primary goal presupposes that the Evangelists were writing a "narrative" and not a history book, such as E.P. Sanders defines history above. Further, the Evangelists were working on two levels. While telling the story of Jesus' death, each Evangelist was also addressing that story to a particular audience and its contemporary situation. Consequently, each PN contains different emphases. For example, Matthew was addressing the PN to his own Jewish-Christian community that was being hard-pressed by its Jewish neighbors. Thereby, Matthew adapted the Markan PN for his audience and their particular situation-in-life.

A secondary goal is attempting to get behind individual units of the PN to establish pre-Gospel traditions. Since Mark wrote the first PN, by "pre-Gospel tradition" Brown means a story that Mark learned and later incorporated into his account or PN. One such "pre-Gospel tradition" tells of the Galilean women who witnessed the crucifixion and the empty tomb (Mark 15:40 and 16:1). While Brown is reluctant to identify such pre-Gospel traditions with history, he does claim that history is found in the PN.

In a later paper, published after his commentary, Brown reflects on his research and distinguishes four stages in the development of the PN. Accordingly, the first stage was the memory of what happened from Gethsemane to the burial (history). In the second stage the early church associated Old Testament passages with this history. In the third stage the term "Jews" was increasingly used to describe the non-Roman opposition to Jesus. Then, in stage four, some of the later passages, found especially in Matthew and John, were added.

In this same paper Brown identifies himself squarely with the mainstream by rejecting two other approaches. The first approach reads the passion narratives "as literal history." However, Brown seems to be much more concerned with the opposite approach.

The other view I judge unacceptable discredits the Gospel passion narratives as almost totally the product of Christian imagination, with little or no foundation in

fact. Under the mantle of scholarly objectivity, advocates assert firmly but without proof that the early Christians knew little about how Jesus died and simply invented their narratives on the basis of Old Testament imagery.³

Of course, Brown is referring to the kind of scholarship practiced by members of the Jesus Seminar.

Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar sketch an entirely different picture from that of Raymond Brown. Their picture begins with "the bare facts" and some views entirely different from the PN. The bare facts are remarkably brief: "However, the bare facts that Jesus was executed in Jerusalem on the authority of Pontius Pilate have stood up under close and repeated examination."⁴ From that point on the views of the Seminar diametrically oppose the PN. Instead of burial in a well-known tomb, "the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar concede that Jesus may possibly have been buried in a common grave, but they doubt that his grave site was ever known."⁵ While Galilean women may have witnessed the crucifixion, Funk doubts that their observations had anything to do with the creation of the PN. "We do not know how their memories came to inform the creation of a passion narrative many decades later, if indeed that narrative reflects any eyewitness observations at all."⁶ Funk supports these views, not by citing any "facts," but by casting doubt upon the account in the PN. The story of the women witnesses at the empty tomb "was undoubtedly a literary creation of Mark." (Note that Brown calls it a "pre-Gospel tradition.") He also states that the traditional location of Jesus' tomb was not identified until the reign of Constantine in the early fourth century A.D. However, that fact has no bearing on the significant issue: did any followers of Jesus know where he was buried?

If, as Funk maintains, there were no memories of eyewitnesses behind the PN, how, then, did it come into being? Funk follows a recent proposal put forth by a modern scholar. According to this proposal several stories found in the Old Testament and in intertestamental literature exhibit a "common plot" featuring the following elements:

"...the hero...does something to provoke a *reaction*, a *conspiracy* develops...; an *accusation* is brought forward; there is a *trial*...a *sentence*; the...accused is *condemned*...*vindication* comes at the end."⁷

Mark, or someone prior to him, knew this "common plot" and, fitting Jesus into the role of hero, produced the PN. Funk recognizes that this proposal says nothing about the vital question of history in the PN. One might also ask whether the "common plot" was an ancient reality or a product of modern scholarly guesswork? Nevertheless, Funk concludes his discussion with this statement: "The simplest, most reliable solution remains the view that Mark *created* (emphasis mine) the first version of the story and every other version is based on Mark, directly or indirectly."⁸

According to Funk's view, Mark was exceptionally inventive in creating the PN. For example, Mark records that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council, approached Pilate, received his permission, and buried Jesus in a tomb "hewn out of the rock" (14:46). Note Funk's judgment: "Joseph of Arimathea is probably a Markan creation."⁹ If Jesus were thrown into an unknown, common grave (as the Jesus Seminar holds), the rock hewn tomb must also be a creation! And the pivotal role of the women must be Mark's doing. The Galilean women witness the crucifixion (15:40), see the tomb in which Jesus

was buried (15:47), and first visit the empty tomb on Easter morning (16:1). By means of these women three of the most important scenes in the Gospel are tied together! However, since the empty tomb is a myth, Mark invented the women witnesses. Since Jesus was buried in a common, unknown grave, again, Mark invented the women who knew its location!

How does the crucial role created for these women "play" against the cultural background of the time? Or, the issue may be stated differently: what kind of author would create such a pivotal role for women in such a culture? Women could not function as witnesses in Jewish courts. In a passage like a court brief Paul argues for the certainty of the Resurrection by citing only living, *male* witnesses! (1 Corinthians 15:5-11). In Graeco-Roman society, particularly in Roman circles, male witnesses carried far more weight than female witnesses. (Traditionally, Mark's Gospel was written in Rome.) Is it not strange that Mark could invent a male, Joseph of Arimathea, to bury Jesus, but could not invent males to tie together the crucifixion, the location of the grave, and the empty tomb?

Indeed, Funk has succeeded in portraying an extra-ordinarily inept creator for the PN. In terms of the patriarchal societies of the time, this inept creator shoots himself in the foot. Or, in leading from weakness, is Mark telling "the historical truth"? In any case, Funk's account of the writing of the PN, in addition to being highly speculative, does not play well against the cultural background of the time. Is it surprising that the mainstream remains unconvinced on this and other points?

Let us turn now to another debate concerning the historical Jesus. Was Jesus an illiterate Galilean artisan, or did he receive the kind of education available for some Jewish boys of the time? In order to answer that question some background information must be introduced.

In his biography of Jesus, Crossan portrays Jesus as an illiterate artisan from a low-class stratum of society. In order to draw such a conclusion an author must know something about ancient society and how it functioned. Therefore, biblical scholars frequently turn to social scientists or other experts on the early Roman Empire. Crossan has turned to Gerhard Lenski who has written about the social stratification of the time in an agrarian society. Lenski theorizes that only one percent of the population were rulers or members of the governing class. These in turn were served by a retainer class made up of scribes, administrators, and soldiers. In addition there were merchants and priests. The vast bulk of the people were peasants who worked the land. Beneath the peasants in order were artisans, landless agricultural workers, and slaves. Modern Americans must not posit a large and prosperous middle-class between the extremes of wealth and poverty in some ancient societies.

Note how Crossan arrives at his conclusion that Jesus was an artisan. Taking his cue from the Greek word for "carpenter," Crossan assigns him to the category of artisan. Of course, the words "carpenter" and "son of the carpenter" occur in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. According to Lenski's stratification, artisans are just below peasants, the great majority of the population, and just above the desperately poor landless agricultural workers and slaves.

However, other scholars, especially some American archaeologists, disagree with Lenski's model. Since Lenski wrote in 1966, several significant archaeological "digs" have

been conducted in Galilee both in villages and in Sepphoris, the capital. Some American archaeologists who worked in these digs have maintained that the *extremes* of wealth and poverty, such as were found in Italy and other provinces of the Empire, were not typical of the Jewish state.

Again, Crossan seems to arrive at the conclusion that Jesus was illiterate from Lenski's model. Having located Jesus in the lowly artisan class, Crossan makes this surprising statement about the extent of illiteracy in "the Jewish state" of the time: "Furthermore, since 95 and 97 percent of the Jewish state was illiterate at the time of Jesus, it must be presumed that Jesus also was illiterate...."¹⁰

Again, others disagree. They argue that the level of literacy among Jewish males was higher than among other ethnic groups because of the centrality of Torah in the life of the people. This is the approach that John P. Meier pursues in trying to prove that Jesus was literate. However, before we turn to Meier's mainstream approach, a small group of Jewish scholars should be heard.

A small group of Jewish scholars have argued that Jesus was a learned man on the basis of the same word for carpenter or craftsman. For example, Geza Vermes, instead of beginning with the Greek word for carpenter that is found in the Gospels, examined the Aramaic word that lies behind the Greek. The Aramaic word (*naggar*) can be used metaphorically. The metaphoric usage is found in both the Jerusalem Talmud (dated about 400 A.D.) and in the Babylonian Talmud (dated about 500 A.D.). There the word "stands for a 'scholar' or 'learned man.'"¹¹ While the Talmuds were written several hundred years after the Gospels, the term is found in proverbial sayings, which, in those days, could survive over centuries. If the term "carpenter" were used metaphorically by those ancient bystanders, Jesus was learned!

Note that in this debate Crossan focuses on the Gentile world for his social model and places Jesus within that model by the use of a Greek word. In contrast, Jewish scholars emphasize the Jewish background of Jesus. Further, much recent mainline scholarship has been rediscovering and emphasizing the Jewishness of Jesus. Similarly, John P. Meier also examines Jesus' Jewish roots in assessing the question of literacy.

While Crossan argues on the basis of a social model, Meier pursues "an indirect argument from converging lines of probability...that Jesus was in fact literate."¹² The first line of probability is generally acknowledged: Judaism prized literacy more than other peoples due to the centrality of Torah in its life. Secondly, the criterion of multiple attestation comes into play. All sources in the Gospels—Mark, Q, the special sources behind Matthew and Luke, and John—show that Jesus engaged in dialogues and disputes with Scribes and Pharisees concerning legal, theological, and scriptural questions. Scribes and Pharisees were the leading religious thinkers of the day. Thirdly, apart from his father, the synagogue in Nazareth would be the source of his education. Would that synagogue have supported a school? Indeed, archaeology points to "a thoroughly Jewish settlement" at Nazareth with 1,600 to 2,000 inhabitants!¹³ The literary evidence suggests it was devout.

The archaeological and literary evidence together is impressive, and, if post-biblical definitions of carpenter/woodworker (*naggar*) are accurate, Joseph may have been much more prosperous than Lenski's stratification would allow.

While certainty in answering the question of literacy is not possible, again it is apparent

why mainstream scholarship remains unconvinced by arguments like Crossan's. Crossan argues on the basis of a social model drawn up in the sixties to describe the Roman Empire as a whole. Mainstream scholarship tends to approach Jesus through the Judaism of the time and relies heavily upon recent archaeological data.

NEW SOCIAL ROLES FOR JESUS

In addition to the vigorous debates between the Jesus Seminar and mainstream scholars, Funk and Crossan have been assigning new social roles to Jesus. If one rejects the biblical roles associated with orthodox Christianity as "theological accretions," one must create new roles to describe what the historical Jesus was really about. What social role enabled Jesus to provide "a glimpse into another reality..." (page 18).

Dr. Funk uses the word "sage" and the expression "itinerant sage" over and over again in his book. He even defines what he means by sage: "...Jesus may well have been a wisdom teacher—a sage."¹⁴ Perhaps the favorite role that Funk and the Seminar have reserved for Jesus is sage.

However, what do *they* mean by sage? Of course, the Old Testament speaks of wisdom teachers and Jesus did teach words of practical wisdom as did the sages of old. However, by sage, Funk and others in the Seminar identify Jesus with a particular kind of Hellenistic philosopher called a Cynic.

Now we know that many things Jesus said had parallels in the lore taught by Cynic philosophers he may have heard as a youngster in *Hellenized* Galilee. A whole new paradigm for understanding Jesus suddenly presents itself. (emphasis mine)

The Cynics were teachers of popular philosophy. They did not focus on how to succeed or "get ahead" in life so much as how to live well. They emphasized moderation and restraint. They may be compared with the existentialists of a generation ago who taught authentic existence based on conscious decisions. Their advice was mostly this-worldly and in many points their teaching was similar to that of the Stoics. Finally, Cynics were not a homogeneous group.

Further, the Jesus Seminar is not the first to make comparisons between Jesus and the Cynics. Such comparisons were made in the ancient world. Perhaps the most famous person to identify Jesus with a Cynic philosopher was Friedrich Nietzsche. However, the cogent question is not how many people have drawn this comparison, but how valid is it?

Is it a valid comparison and is there any basis for Funk's statement that perhaps Jesus listened to Cynic philosophers as a youth? While a detailed study comparing the *teachings* of Jesus with those of the Cynics has not yet been made, Hans Dieter Betz has written the most complete study of the methodological problems involved in this popular comparison. He writes:

The presumed presence of Cynics in the Galilean society in which Jesus lived is mostly fanciful conjecture. The evidence for Cynicism is limited to Gadara and Tyre, Hellenistic cities outside of Galilee... It is, therefore, wrong to make up for our lack of evidence by projecting a sophisticated urban culture replete with Cynics into every part of Galilee.¹⁵

On methodological grounds it is incorrect to speak of a homogeneous "Hellenized Galilee." Recent excavations show Galilee in Jesus' time to have been much more diverse than Funk supposed. Some towns and villages were "thoroughly Jewish." Sepphoris, the capital, and Tiberias contained a mixed population and were much more open to Hellenistic influences. Still, there is no ancient literary reference to Cynic activity there. Further, the Gospels may speak by their silence. They do not record that Jesus ever taught or preached in Sepphoris or Tiberias. Rather, he spent most of his ministry in predominantly Jewish areas.

Similarly, on methodological grounds, one should not speak of a homogeneous kind of Cynic philosopher. There were at least two kinds of Cynics and the boundary lines between Cynics and Stoics were fluid. So, once again, mainstream scholars are not persuaded that Jesus was influenced by Cynic philosophers! Nevertheless, if Jesus were *only* a wandering *teacher of wisdom* (as Funk pictures him), there is a rough analogy. Still, for someone whose goal is seeking "the historical truth at all costs" (p. 8), there is remarkably little "historical truth" to commend this new social role.

Like Funk, Crossan would also clothe Jesus in the *pallium* of a Cynic philosopher. However, there are even fewer analogies between the picture of Jesus that Crossan draws and any homogeneous Cynic philosopher. Even Crossan points out significant differences:

But he is rural, they are urban; he is organizing a communal movement, they are following an individual philosophy....¹⁶

The analogy is stretched to the breaking point as Crossan pictures Jesus as the kind of social "revolutionary" who would be totally at home in the late twentieth-century world of political correctness. Jesus organizes counter-cultural communities that are "the symbol and embodiment of radical egalitarianism, of an absolute equality of people that denies...any discrimination...and negates...any hierarchy...."¹⁷ This, of course, includes gender.

How does he derive this picture from the Gospels? For example, did not Jesus choose twelve and do they not represent some kind of hierarchical structure? Well, no: the Evangelist is reading back a later group into the ministry of the historical Jesus! Other stories also seem to lose their literal meaning and support Crossan's thesis. For example, the healing of the leper in Mark 1:40-44 isn't really talking about physical healing, but social healing and accepting a social outcast into the new community. And, as for Jesus' command to the leper to show himself to the priest so that the priest may declare him clean—that did not happen either. Such an egalitarian community would never defer to such a representative of hierarchy and patriarchy! Indeed, Crossan seems to have gone beyond historical criticism into skepticism.

How does one evaluate this new quest? First, we have seen that contemporary mainstream biblical scholarship does not accept the more radical conclusions of the Jesus Seminar.

Secondly, the phrase "the historical truth" becomes quite wobbly in actual practice. Note what historical research is not, and what historical research is trying to do in the case of Jesus. It is not a scientific experiment or a sociological survey of live participants. It is seeking to delineate the historical Jesus and *must* use the Gospels as well as other ancient literature. Note the decisions the Jesus Seminar has made in using the Gospels and in

approaching other ancient literature. In using the Gospels they have removed the so-called theological accretions and reduced the database of authentic Jesuanic sayings and parables drastically. In approaching other ancient literature they look beyond Judaism to the contemporary Hellenistic world. They certainly reject the hierarchical Jewish society of the time and the end-of-the-age speculation of the Apostle Paul and John the Baptist: this is what Jesus-as-sage really indicates.

Given all of the above, they must create a "model" to explain how a first-century Eastern Mediterranean culture functioned and how Jesus functioned within that culture. With a small database of authentic sayings, controversial models, and the biases of the interpreters, "the historical truth" turns out to be composed of a large dose of clever guesswork. In construing Jesus on the model of a Cynic philosopher, this guesswork becomes almost wish-fulfillment.

A final observation is relevant. Critics of the first quest said that the nineteenth-century liberal German theologians looked into the "well" of criticism and beheld their own face. Thus, the historical Jesus turned out to be very much like a liberal, nineteenth-century German gentleman! Is it strange that the Jesus served up by this latest search turns out to be like modern, disaffected academic types? In one case Jesus is surprisingly like a wandering wisdom teacher and in the other a politically correct social revolutionary. Like disaffected, modern academic types, this poor Jesus can only provide "a glimpse into another reality." Amidst the boring flatlands of postmodernist times such a Jesus is not much help.

NOTES

1. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) and Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus For a New Millennium* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).
2. E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 5. Even St. Paul seems to point to this dimension of the Son "who was descended from David according to the flesh..." (Romans 1:3—emphasis mine).
3. Raymond Brown, "Narratives of Jesus' Passion and Anti-Judaism," *Explorations* (Philadelphia: American Interfaith Institute, 1996), 6. Brown outlines his four stages on pages 6-8. See also Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, in *The Anchor Bible Reference Library* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).
4. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 220.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.* The following quotation is found on page 221.
7. *Ibid.*, 240. Funk is following George Nickelsburg, "Passion Narratives," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 5, 172-77.
8. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 240.
9. *Ibid.*, 234.
10. Crossan, *Jesus*, 25. See also Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 189-296.
11. Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 21. Vermes follows David Flusser, *Jesus* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 20.
12. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, *The Anchor Bible Reference Library* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 277-78.
13. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 277. See esp. notes 135-37. See also Meyers & Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 56-57. Meier is following the archaeologi-

cal and literary research of Meyers and Strange.

14. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 70. See Index p. 341 for references to sage. The quotation below, identifying Jesus with the Cynics, is also found on p. 70.

15. Hans Dieter Betz, "Jesus and the Cynics: Survey and Analysis of a Hypothesis," *JR* 74 (1994), 471. See also 453-75.

16. Crossan, *Jesus*, 122.

17. Crossan, *Jesus*, 71.

JOHN WESLEY AS EDITOR AND ENCYCLOPEDIST

SAMUEL J. ROGAL

Although John Wesley's literary reputation appears to arise principally from his sermons, journal narratives, theological tracts, original hymns, and revisions of his brother's hymnodic efforts, he deserves closer critical consideration for his contributions as an editor of others' works and the dissemination of those pieces to his Methodist followers, particularly those without formal education. Wesley had developed, during almost six years as a resident tutor of Lincoln College, Oxford (November 1729 to September 1735), the ability to compile and to catalogue, to extract, to simplify, and to rearrange large and complex texts for his students. As he began to organize the religious institution known as Methodism, he even added varying degrees of censorship to his list of editorial modes, taking care to assure that his followers' journeys to spiritual and social salvation would not be unduly burdened by anti-biblical or anti-Christian influences. At the same time, however, despite his editorial heavy-handedness, Wesley dedicated his priorities to the codification of knowledge in an attempt to expand the educational and intellectual capacities of those who had determined to accept his invitation to participate in the eighteenth-century evangelical revival.

Following receipt of the Master of Arts degree in 1727, the twenty-four-year-old Wesley embarked, as had the twenty-four-year-old John Milton almost a century earlier, upon a rigid program of self-study that served as a preface to his editorial and encyclopaedic efforts and to his life-long evangelical labors. His plan of study dictated that Mondays and Tuesdays be devoted to classical Greek and Roman history and poetry; Wednesdays to logic and ethics; Thursdays to Hebrew and Arabic; Fridays to metaphysics and natural philosophy; Saturdays to oratory and the composition of verse; Sundays to divinity. For leisure, he continued to study French, which he had begun three years previously; for amusement, he took to experiments in

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optics; for exercises in mathematics, he read Euclid, John Keil, and Isaac Newton. Most importantly, after having digested the content of a text, Wesley would then transcribe, in a commonplace book, those passages he believed important or even artistic enough to preserve for later reference.¹

After having served as his father's curate in Epworth and Wroote, Wesley returned to Oxford to fulfill the responsibilities of his fellowship. There we observe him, as the junior fellow, presiding six times per week over the public disputations, from which he honed a number of skills that would serve him well as editor and encyclopaedist. First, he noted that "I could not avoid acquiring hereby some degree of expertness in arguing; and especially in discerning and pointing out well-covered and plausible fallacies. I have since found abundant reason to praise God for giving me this honest art. By this, when men have hedged me in by what they called demonstrations, I have been many times able to dash them in pieces; in spite of all its covers, to touch the very point where the fallacy lay; and it flew open in a moment."² Second, he approached books principally for the purpose of familiarity rather than for mastery. According to common practice, university pupils prepared for examinations through the process known as *collections*, in which they wrote a synopsis of the text, a set of analytical notes, and extracts of important passages. Wesley, himself, had acquired the habit at Christ Church, and he insisted that his own students at Lincoln pursue the same practice. With possible exception of Wesley's early reading at Christ Church, where he attacked with vigor those works that would have lasting influence upon him—Thomas à Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi* and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*—and later, at Lincoln, where he discovered William Law's *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, Wesley never engaged in what could be termed serious and specialized literary scholarship. One can easily accept the observation that "the severe concentration on selected subjects and the rigid self-denial in the matter of current literature necessary to expert scholarship never characterized Wesley either at Christ Church or Lincoln. He knew more in the wider field than most of his contemporaries, and his knowledge was exact and fairly comprehensive; yet, the width of his learning impeded his flight upwards to the heights of professorial distinction. It is important to remember all this, because this very limitation, coupled with habits of economy in the rescue of spare moments for reading, made him...a leader of popular education—the best gatherer and scatterer of useful knowledge that Georgian England knew."³ Add to that observation the fact that most of those who received and digested the information belonged to the middle and lower classes of society in eighteenth-century Britain.

The extent to which Wesley applied his editorial and encyclopaedic craft to benefit his religious institution, Methodism, may be viewed—should one be willing to take the time for the screenings—through no less than 130 individual and serialized works published between 1735 and 1790. At the beginning of what can only be, in this discussion, but a small sampling of those productions stands *The Christian's Pattern; or, a Treatise of the Imitation of Christ. Written Originally in Latin by Thomas à Kempis*, published in 1735, prior to the departure for Georgia and issued again in 1741. Wesley translated the piece and, supposedly, prepared a preface "containing an account of the usefulness of this Treatise, directions for reading it with advantage, and likewise an account of this edition"; thus, the five-part preface focused on the writer, the treatise, "the temper requisite in order to read

it with improvement, the manner of reading it, and a commentary on "this edition."⁴ However, four of the five parts of that preface represent a mosaic of additional extracts from earlier versions of the *Imitation*: the 1634 Antwerp edition, the 1667 London English edition, and the 1682 Cologne edition. One would have to search long and hard to uncover the mind and the pen of John Wesley.

In 1746, 1747, and 1748, Wesley issued, for the pupils at his school for Methodist preachers at Kingswood, outside Bristol, the separate parts of *Lessons for Children*, each volume being fifty to fifty-five extracts from the Old Testament, with explanatory notes. "I have endeavored in the following Lessons," he wrote in his preface to Part I, "to select the plainest and the most useful portions of Scripture; such as children may the most easily understand, and such as it most concerns them to know. These are set down in the same order, and (generally) the same words, wherein they are delivered by the Spirit of God. Where an expression is less easy to be understood, I have subjoined a word or two by way of explication; but taking care not to detain you from your great work with comments longer than the text."⁵ Concerns for the spiritual state of Methodists led, naturally enough, to those for the body, and in 1747, a year after the establishment of his Bristol dispensary for the poor, Wesley published *Primitive Physick; or, an Easy and Most Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases*. His most popular work—twenty-three editions by the year of his death—the original and subsequent revisions consisted of a catalogue of heresy descriptions and cures gathered mostly from contemporary surgeons and apothecaries (even several from Wesley, himself) and from notes, letters, and tracts from a range of such scientific and medical theorists as Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Priestley, Hermann Boerhaave. Essentially, Wesley sought to silence the quacks and the charlatans among the medical practitioners of the day, believing that common sense and standard cures would allow most persons, at considerable savings to themselves, to function as agents of their own healing. Further, taking his editorial practices almost to an extreme, Wesley also published a two-penny pamphlet, *Primitive Remedies*, which proved nothing more than an extract of the second part of *Primitive Physick*.

Wesley's most ambitious encyclopaedic venture appeared between 1749 and 1755, the fifty-volume *A Christian Library: consisting of Extracts from, and Abridgements of, the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity which have been published in the English Tongue*. In his preface of 25 March 1749, from Kingswood School, Wesley announced that

I have endeavored to extract such a collection of English divinity as (I believe) is all true, all agreeable to the oracles of God; as is all practical, unmixed with controversy of any kind, and all intelligible to plain men; such as is not superficial, but going down to the depth, and describing the height, of Christianity; and yet not mystical, not obscure to any of those who are experienced in the ways of God. I have also endeavored to preserve a consistency, throughout, that no part might contradict any other; but all conspire together to make 'the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work.' But in order to do this, I have been obliged, not only to omit the far greatest part of several eminent authors, but also to add what was needful, either to clear their sense, or to correct their mistakes. And, in a design of this nature, I apprehend myself to be at full liberty to do so.⁶

Who and what contributed to the substance of that herculean editorial effort? The initial volume included the epistles of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp, whose authority Wesley held only below that of Scriptures; the martyrdoms of Ignatius and Polycarp; the homilies on Genesis of Macarius Magnus, and an extract of Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* (*Vier Bücher vom wahren Christentum*, 1606). The seven volumes published in 1752 offered extracts from the likes of Thomas Manton, Isaac Ambrose, Jeremy Taylor, Ralph Cudworth, and John Owens, while the more than three thousand pages of the final ten volumes offered the reader samplings from such Anglican and Nonconformist churchmen as Edward Reynolds, Robert South, John Flavel, Samuel Annesley (the editor's maternal grandfather), Robert Nelson, William Beveridge, and John Howe.

Indeed, little escaped Wesley's encyclopaedic mind and editorial hand. While nearing the end of the *Christian Library*, he discovered that the less sophisticated among his readers could not understand all of the words; to solve that problem he offered them definitions in *The Complete English Dictionary* (1753). Between 1748 and 1751 he produced Latin, English, French, Greek, and Hebrew grammars for the Kingswood scholars; six volumes of Law's tracts and letters saw print in 1772; Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise on Religious Affections* in 1773; "concise" histories of Rome (1773) and England (1776). He even went so far as to issue a collection of his own compositions (both original and extracted) under the title *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. As Believed and Taught by John Wesley from 1725 to 1765* (1770). Then, of course, there stands Wesley's contribution to the periodical literature of the eighteenth century, *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*; fourteen volumes bore his heavy editorial imprint between 1778 and 1791, and the journal existed, under various titles, until well into the twentieth century. Essentially, Wesley hoped to cool the heated theological-political controversies generating against him from the Anglican periodicals of the day (principally Augustus M. Toplady's *Gospel Magazine*) with more moderate modes of pacific propaganda. Thus, the initial volume houses biographies of Arminius, Luther, Bernard Gilpin, Bishop William Bedell, Peter Jaco, John Atlay; six essays on the Calvinian controversy; fifty-nine letters and over fifty pieces of verse; three portraits (Wesley, Jaco, Atlay); and various responses by Wesley to readers' criticisms of the substance of the magazine.

One would certainly be remiss to neglect, in a survey of Wesley as editor and encyclopaedist, the Methodist leader's venture into fiction—a genre of literature from which he usually turned his eye. However, as long as a particular work evidenced even remote ties to his evangelical institution, the editorial effort held potential for spiritual profit. Thus, in Dublin between 1765 and 1770 (and in London: Printed for William Johnson, 1766–1770) appeared, in five volumes, *The Fool of Quality; or, the History of Henry Earl of Moreland*, by Henry Brooke (1703?–1783). Born in Dublin and educated at Trinity College, Brooke came to London, studied law at the Temple, and remained in the English capital to apply his legal mind to verse and drama. Returning to Dublin in 1740, he spent the remainder of his life composing fiction, verse, drama, and tracts advocating the relaxation of the penal laws against Irish Catholics.⁷

To compress Brooke's five volumes into a reasonable and workable summary looms as an arduous exercise, for Brooke—as though reeling from the effects of the recently published *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767)—virtually buries his reader beneath a complex and

often confusing mosaic of character delineation, narration, scenic and historical description, and religious, social, and economic declamation. Henry (or Harry) Clinton, the "Fool of Quality" and the second son of the Earl of Moreland, provides some semblance of order to the piece as he proceeds through his education, maturation, and manhood. The second principal character, the Earl's brother, also carries the name Harry Clinton, but conveniently becomes Mr. Fenton; more, important, however, Brooke assigns to the latter the task of guiding young Harry toward eventual development into a responsible adult who employs both his fortune and position to help others. Simply, young Harry stands shrouded in his innocence, flanked on one side by the values of his father's decadent, polite society and on the other by the principles of his uncle's enlightened mercantile class. The uncle's influence predominates, and the student of eighteenth-century intellectual and cultural history willing to commit to the entire five volumes needs not read very far before realizing that Fenton's (and Brooke's) notions on the education of the complete and productive adult come directly from a combination of Locke's *Thoughts concerning Education* (1693) and Rousseau's *Emile* (1762). For Brooke, on the one hand, meaningful relations between parent and child emerge as especially important to the latter's maturation process; on the other, one's material resources in combination with spiritual (or Christian) strength become necessary for survival in a hostile world.

For at least two persons of historical and literary note, Brooke's *Fool of Quality* conveyed more than a slight degree of significance. The anti-Tractarian churchman, social reformer, and writer of fiction, Charles Kingsley, ever ready to encourage both economic and spiritual virtue within the English working classes, imagined the piece on the same influential level with Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and thus he issued a two-volume edition in 1859. John Wesley, on the other hand, enjoyed the advantage of a direct association with at least one relative of Henry Brooke; that, in turn, led the Methodist patriarch to an initial reading of *The Fool of Quality* and then to the determination that the multi-volume novel offered varying degrees of intellectual as well as spiritual merit for those who would follow the social and moral dictates of British Methodism. In fact, he reacted with equal enthusiasm to another of Brooke's novels, *Juliet Grenville; or, the History of the Human Heart: A Novel*—this one in three volumes and published at Dublin in 1774.

The relative alluded to above, Henry Brooke (1738-1806), the novelist's nephew, resided in Stafford Street, Dublin, and eked out a living as a painter and drawing master. Wesley had met him during one of his visits to Dublin—perhaps as early as 1760—and their sporadic correspondence began in March 1762. Young Brooke joined the Dublin Methodist Society in April 1765; Wesley's diary indicates that he lodged and dined at his house during his visits of 1785 and 1789. In fact, the Methodist patriarch's last will and testament names Brooke as one of three persons each to receive an annuity of five pounds "left to Kingswood School by the late Roger Sheil, Esq."⁸

From Hull, on 8 July 1774, Wesley wrote to the younger Henry Brooke, declaring that "When I read over in Ireland *The Fool of Quality*, I could not but deserve the design of it, to promote the religion of the heart, and that it was well calculated to answer that design; the same thing I observed a week or two ago concerning *Juliet Grenville*. Yet there seemed to me to be a few passages both in the one and the other which might be altered to the better; I do not mean so much with regard to the sentiments, which are generally very

just, as with regard to the structure of the story, which seemed here and there to be not quite clear."⁹ Hesitant to contact directly the elder Brooke about his desire to edit both novels, Wesley sought out the nephew as negotiator. A month later (6 August), the latter replied, announcing his uncle's feeble physical condition, but at the same time declaring, "He is deeply sensible of your very kind offer, and most cordially embraces it. He has desired me to express the warmth of his gratitude in the strongest terms, and says he most cheerfully yields the volumes you mention, to your superior judgment, to prune, erase, and alter as you please. He only wishes they could have had your eye before they appeared in public."¹⁰

Shortly after the London publication of *The Fool of Quality*, a critic for *The Monthly Review* had posted this reaction to Brooke's novel, particularly interesting in light of Wesley's attraction to it: "A performance enriched by genius, enlivened by fancy, bewildered with enthusiasm, and overrun with the visionary jargon of fanaticism. We wish the author would give us an abridgement, cleared from the sanctimonious rubbish by which its beauties are so much obscured. In its present state, it will be a favorite only with Behmenites, Herrnhutters, Methodists, Hutchinsonians, and some of the Roman Catholics."¹¹ One cannot easily determine if Wesley had read that notice; most certainly, however, his offer to edit the two novels proved to have been a sincere one, not simply a reaction to sharp criticism.

Almost seven years passed before Wesley presented to the world his two-volume abridgement of *The Fool of Quality*. It appeared, in 1781, under its subtitle, *The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland. Abridged by the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, published at London by John Paramore, one of the most consistent of his London publishers and booksellers. In his introductory "Remarks to the Reader," written from Bristol and dated 4 March 1780, Wesley reveals his editorial reasoning.

The whimsical title prefixed to this book gave me such a prejudice against it, that I expected to find nothing in it worth reading. So I just opened it and threw it aside. But some time after, having read one page, I was clearly convinced it would be worth while to read the whole. I was indeed a little disgusted with the spinning out of the story, so as to fill five volumes; and wished some of the digressions had been pared off, that it might have come within a reasonable compass.¹²

Thus, Wesley hacked away at what he termed "uninteresting dialogues," "trifling and ludicrous incidents," "remarks upon the feudal government," and a "great part of the mystic divinity, as it is more philosophical than scriptural."¹³ Refusing all references to the terms "fiction" or "novel," Wesley instead catalogued Brooke's effort as a *treatise* "that sets forth in full view most of the important truths which are revealed in the oracles of God. And these are not only well illustrated, but also proved in an easy, natural manner; so that the thinking reader is taught, without any trouble, the most essential doctrines of religion."¹⁴

Recalling, for a moment, Wesley's offer to abridge both *The Fool of Quality* and *Juliet Grenville*, one can uncover no evidence that the Methodist patriarch further considered or even attempted the latter project. Obviously, the rigors of his regular and tightly scheduled travel commitments, the demands upon his brief moments of leisure time (spent,

mostly, maintaining correspondence and his journal), and his advancing years, kept abridgements of fiction low on his list of literary priorities. The exact ranking of fiction upon that list may be best observed in a portion of a letter from Wesley (18 August 1784) to Mary Bishop, who conducted a school at Keynsham, Somersetshire:

I would recommend very few novels to young persons, for fear they would be too desirous of more. Mr. Brooke wrote one more (besides the *Earl of Moreland*), *The History of the Human Heart* I think it is well worth reading: though it is not equal to his former production. The want of novels may be supplied by well chosen histories; such as this own, *The Concise History of England*, *The Concise History of the Church*, Rollin's *Ancient History*, Hooke's *Roman History* (the only impartial one extant), and a few more. For the elder and more sensible children, Malebranche's *Search after Truth* is an excellent French book. Perhaps you might add Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, with the Remarks [by Wesley] in the *Arminian Magazine*. I had forgotten that beautiful book *The Travels of Cyrus*, whether in French or English.¹⁵

The specifics of Wesley's encyclopaedic method—his role as extractor, arranger, and assembler—may easily be viewed through one of his several so-called biographies, *A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Reverend John Fletcher* (1786). Fletcher (1729-1785), born and educated in Switzerland, came to England in 1752, received orders as deacon and priest in 1757, accepted the living of Madeley, Shropshire, in 1760, supervised the Countess of Huntingdon's college for ministers at Trevecca (1768-1771), but really made his mark in the exercise of his pastoral duties among the colliers of Shropshire. "...you may easily observe," admitted Wesley in his preface, "that, in doing this, I am little more than a compiler; for I owe a great, if not the greatest, part of the ensuing Tract to a few friends, who have been at no small pains in furnishing me with materials..."¹⁶

A survey of the piece reveals the truth of Wesley's word. Of the approximately 45,000 words in the volume, less than ten percent came from Wesley's own invention; what remains consists of fifty-two separate narratives transcribed verbatim or paraphrased from seventeen sources—including twenty of Fletcher's letters to various persons, six personal accounts by Mrs. Mary Fletcher, and five accounts by a Mrs. Vaughan, a servant of Tern Hill, Shropshire. Wesley provided a broad introduction to each of the ten chapters and then turned the narratives over to the sources. For instance, in the sixth chapter—relative to Fletcher's ill-health at Newington and Bath, his stay in Switzerland, and his return to Madeley—the biographer invented only seven of the sixty-one paragraphs and included eleven of Fletcher's letters. Thus, the substance of the subject's tour from Switzerland to Shropshire comes from the eye and the mind of Fletcher, himself, rather than from the view of the biographer-editor. In the ninth chapter, focusing on Fletcher's character, Wesley stands ready to defend his method. Although he had known Fletcher for thirty years, the Methodist patriarch contended that "I am thoroughly sensible of my own inability to draw such a portrait as Mr. Fletcher deserves. I have no turn at all for panegyric: I have never accustomed myself to it. It gives me therefore no small satisfaction to find, that this is in a great measure done to my hands. The picture is already drawn; and that by no mean pencil. All then which I shall attempt is, to retouch Mrs. Fletcher's observations, and now and then add a few articles, either from my own knowledge, or from the information of others."¹⁷

However, from another point of view, that of the late twentieth-century student of Wesley's daily projects and activities, the founder and leader of British Methodism had little choice but to function as editor and encyclopedist, as opposed to laboring as an inventive writer. Essentially, he had neither the time nor the desire to attempt serious artistic achievement. None of his contemporaries doubted (as no one doubts today) the superficialities and the prejudices governing his knowledge of a broad range of disciplines, both humanistic and scientific. Admitting readily to his reputation as a compiler of others' literary efforts, Wesley viewed his own literary projects as another of his numerous responsibilities to the eighteenth century evangelical revival; he realized the necessity for scattering the proper ideological and intellectual seeds, as quickly as possible, among the membership of Methodist societies. "...you are a Christian minister," he wrote to Samuel Furley in July 1764, "speaking and writing to save souls. Have this end always in your eye.... Use all the sense, learning, and fire you have; forgetting yourself, and remembering only these are the souls for whom Christ died; heirs of an happy or miserable eternity."¹⁸ Nonetheless, in the capacity of editor and encyclopaedist, Wesley managed to contribute at least as much to the non-fictional general literature of the eighteenth century as did the more recognized *literati* among his contemporaries throughout the British Isles.

NOTES

1. Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1872), 1:55-56.
2. John Wesley, "Some Remarks on 'A Defense of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of *Aspasio Vindicated*,'" in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 10:353.
3. Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909-1916), 1:20-21.
4. *Works* 14:199.
5. *Works* 14:216-217.
6. *Works* 14:222.
7. S. Austin Allibone, *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1872-1877), 1:251; Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 135; John Butt and Geoffrey Carnall, *The Oxford History of English Literature: The Mid-Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1979), 470.
8. *Journal* 8:343.
9. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 6:96.
10. Tyerman, 3:173.
11. Tyerman, 3:172-73.
12. *Works* 14:295.
13. *Works* 14:295.
14. *Works* 14:296.
15. *Letters* 7:228.
16. *Works* 11:276.
17. *Works* 11:341.
18. *Letters* 4:258.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Alan K. Bowman, et. al., eds. *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume X, The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.-A.D. 69* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996). xxii + 1193 pp. \$150.00.

The *Cambridge Ancient History* has remained a benchmark in classical scholarship and a starting point for serious investigation of the ancient world. The state of scholarly investigation of the Augustan Age has, however, progressed considerably in the more-than-sixty years since the first edition of volume ten appeared in 1934, and an entirely new volume has been prepared to provide a thorough introduction to the current state of scholarship. Parts of the first edition will continue to be invaluable, as in A. D. Nock's contribution on Roman religion, but the second edition, written by acknowledged experts in each area (such as A. Wallace-Hadrill, S. R. F. Price, and B. M. Levick), should be greeted with enthusiasm as the new reference volume of choice on the Augustan Empire.

The organization of the second edition is much different from, and in many ways better than, its predecessor. The original volume dedicated the first eighteen chapters to the rise of Augustus, the state of each of the provinces (in turn) under Augustus, and broader issues such as Augustus' social reforms and the literature and art produced during his reign. The history of the rest of the Julio-Claudian line was then introduced, followed by another run of chapters on each of the provinces, concluding with chapters on the civil wars of A.D. 68-69 and the revolts of Gaul and Judea. The second edition presents the whole history of the period from the second triumvirate through the accession of Vespasian (together with a discussion of Augustus' political achievement) in Part One, allowing the contributors in the remaining chapters to follow the developments of their subjects through the period entire. The second part treats the administration of the empire: a chapter each on the imperial court (with an excellent discussion of patronage and brokerage in the early empire), the imperial finances, the Senate, provincial administration, the military, and jurisprudence. Part Three surveys each of the provinces from the period before the inclusion of the particular province in the empire through A.D. 69. Part Four treats topics related to "Roman Society and Culture." Here one finds chapters on changes within the structure and architecture of Rome, religion, the origin and diffusion of Christianity, social status and social legislation, literature and society, Roman art, and private law.

There are bound to be omissions and disappointments with any such massive undertaking. I would register only a few. First, while S. R. F. Price has offered a very

careful and detailed analysis of emperor-centered religion in Rome, I would have found it useful if this volume had extended its treatment of this important phenomenon to include a synthesis of imperial cult in the provinces as well. One must hunt through the chapters on individual provinces to find any details about the shape of ruler cult in each, but the volume as a whole lacks a synthetic discussion of the religious articulations of the emperor, and of the provincials' relationship to the emperor. Furthermore, while there is a fair assessment of forms of Jewish religion during the period, the chapter on the origin and spread of Christianity lacks any significant discussion of the contours of early Christian theology and ethics. While there are ample reference works which provide details about Christian religion, the *Cambridge Ancient History* would have been a fine place to discuss the resonances of that message with the Roman order (e.g., Luke's alternative to the *pax Augusti* and John's reinterpretation of Roman imperial ideology). This reviewer recognizes, of course, that a single volume cannot achieve everything, and the understanding of the imperial cult articulated throughout the volume, and the inclusion of a chapter on the spread of and resistance to Christianity (which has no counterpart in the first edition), are both still to be taken as improvements.

The volume concludes with a 125-page bibliography, arranged topically, certain to be a valuable resource for further investigation. Unfortunately, the work was dated before it came to press, as most of the contributions were written before 1987. The bibliography appears to have been updated to include works written by 1990. Nevertheless, so much erudition and insight into the early empire—a period of special importance for the student of early Judaism and early Christianity—has rarely been brought together into a single volume.

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Fowler, James W. *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996.

James Fowler has been at the forefront of the interchange between psychology and religion for nearly two decades. His *Stages of Faith* (1981) was the groundbreaking adaptation of Kohlberg's stages of moral development to the religious life in terms of a proposed model of "faith development." Most of his subsequent work has been devoted to refinements and extensions of this model. These refinements have often been in response to critical questions raised about his model—particularly questions whether his account of faith and faith development are too rationalistic, too individualistic, or too generic (i.e., not specifically correlated to the content of Christian faith). The present book gathers together Fowler's most recent elaborations of his continuing project. The first and third parts of the book are rather diverse, with five of the nine chapters having been previously published in specialized contexts. I will sketch them briefly before turning to the middle part of the book.

Part I contains three chapters that nuance Fowler's model of faith development through

dialogue with recent psychological studies. Chapter 1 draws on Daniel Stern's revisionist work in infant development and Ana-Maria Rizzuto's research on how children construct God-images to argue that early childhood experiences and development shape our adult stances of faith profoundly. Chapter 2 turns attention to the emotional dynamics of faith development. This is an area that critics have charged was underdeveloped in Fowler's earlier work. He insists that he has tried from the beginning to counterbalance the one-sided emphasis on cognition over emotion in Piaget and Kohlberg. At the same time, he draws upon ego and self-psychology in this chapter to highlight even more clearly the role of emotions in all stages of his model. In Chapter 3 Fowler engages William James' classic study of the psychology of religious conversion. James had highlighted a distinction between those who grow into religious maturity in a gradual and undramatic manner (the "once-born") and those who experience instead a very dramatic transformation of religious faith and life (the "twice-born"). Fowler notes that many read his work as focusing only on "once-born" faith development, and argues that this is not appropriate. He contends that his analysis can apply as well to dramatic conversion events, by highlighting the different forms these will take in different developmental stages. As such, he concludes that his work and that of James are complimentary. Whether readers share this conclusion or not, these three chapters do help nuance some of his earlier presentations of his model.

Part III gathers six essays that reflect on the challenges of life in our "postmodern" setting. In Chapter 9 Fowler applies his model of individual development to the recent course of Western culture as a whole. He casts the emergence of the Enlightenment as a cultural corollary of the individual transition from the Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith to the Individuative-Reflective stage, and proposes that the emerging "postmodern" culture is analogous to the transition from the Individuative-Reflective stage to the Conjunctive stage. This proposal is given a specific spin in Chapter 10, where Fowler argues that the "two parties" James Davison Hunter finds involved in our current culture wars are exemplars of different stages of development—the "Orthodox" party reflecting the Synthetic-Conventional stage, and the "Progressive" party the Individuative-Reflective. The solution to our culture war, then, is for churches to claim their "public" role of nurturing political and cultural leadership that can model the move toward the Conjunctive stage. Such public ministry should be grounded in an adequate postmodern theology. In Chapter 11 Fowler evaluates four theological strategies that he believes hold promise in this regard—liberation and political theologies, cosmological approaches, hermeneutical approaches, and narrative linguistic approaches. Chapter 12 then offers his own outline of a constructive practical theological approach, which focuses on providing a credible depiction of God's creating, governing, and liberating/redeeming patterns of practice in our world. The goal of such depiction is to facilitate Christians "joining" in God's praxis. As two specific examples, Chapters 13 and 14 advocate the need for the church to address the problem of violence affecting our children and the dangers of the eclipse of childhood (i.e., the demand to "grow up" too soon) in our culture. Most readers will share Fowler's concern about such specific cultural challenges, though some will question his assumption that the best hope for addressing these lies in "public churches" rather than in countercultural Christian witness and ministry. Likewise, his description of the theological task will strike at least postmodern nonfoundationalists as still fundamentally "modern," remaining preoccupied with the public defensibility of

Christian claims. Then there is his analogous application of the faith development model to cultural developments: while this application generates some intriguing insights, it also seems prone to a Hegelian *hubris* about the superiority of the emerging culture that undervalues the radical contingency of all human cultures.

Part II is the most significant section of this book for those interested in the dynamics of Christian life and in Fowler's ongoing analysis of these dynamics. It distills his last four years of research and reflection on the role of the emotion of shame in personal and faith development. Fowler argues that we must learn to recognize and address this ubiquitous emotion in both our theoretical accounts of, and our practical shepherding of, individual and corporate Christian life. In making this case he is joining several others in the theological academy who are challenging the nearly exclusive focus on guilt in modern Western Christian models of spirituality. What makes his contribution distinctive is that he draws his conception of the nature and implications of shame almost entirely from neurophysiological studies, particularly the work of Silvan Tomkins. In line with these studies, Fowler construes shame as a natural neurophysiological affect. He assumes that it has a necessary and positive role to play in life, though in distorted forms it can misshape or break the heart. This leads him to sketch a spectrum running from healthy forms of shame to toxic forms, and to the most distorted form of all—shamelessness.

To appreciate this spectrum it is important to see how Fowler draws the distinction between the emotions of shame and guilt. Both are subjective negative judgments. But while guilt is about something one *does*, shame is about something one *is*, namely that I am exposed to others as defective or inadequate. In guilt, Fowler contends, my action can be separated from my character or my worth as a self. I can do wrong things and still think of myself as a good or worthy person. With shame, however, the negative self-evaluation is more holistic. Likewise, guilt can be addressed by a simple act of repentance. With shame, by contrast, Fowler believes that I must come to terms with a defect or lack in my very self. This requires acknowledgment and exposure of the lack to a trusted other or others and the undertaking of substantial change in my way of being a self. Finally, the gracious response to guilt is forgiveness of the offending act. The effective gracious antidote for shame, meanwhile, is the experience of being fully accepted and valued as a self per se.

Defined in this way, shame would certainly be vital to human life. In fact, Fowler contends that shame should be viewed as evolving in our species as an innately given and culturally formed mechanism that functions to preserve a sense of the worthiness of the self and to avoid the severing of relations with others in which the self would be disvalued and experience itself as unworthy. Developing this point biblically, he argues that Genesis 3 should be read as an account of our "fall" into shame or painful self-consciousness (ala Tillich), not the source of original guilt (133-39). It is a mythic depiction of that time of misty memory in each of our lives when we began to stand on our own feet for the first time, and encounter parental limits and directives, their prohibitions, and their expressions of disapproval and discipline. As historical warrant for this reading Fowler turns to Irenaeus, and laments that Western history was so unilaterally influenced by the alternative reading of Augustine.

This should give enough of a sense of the growing edge of Fowler's analysis of the life of faith to convey its provocative insights and potential implications. It remains only to

suggest the most serious limitation of Fowler's account of shame—namely, his near total focus upon a psychological perspective. Most other work on shame in biblical and theological studies draws heavily on cultural anthropology (see for example the work of Bruce Malina). Fowler barely touches on such anthropological accounts. The result is that he ends up defining shame in an individualistic manner and as even more subjective than guilt, while most other theological accounts focus on the corporate and socially constructed nature of shame (with gender differences, etc.). Nowhere does Fowler engage this difference and articulate the reasons for preferring his focus. Such an engagement would have enriched both this book and the current debate over the relation of shame and guilt. We can only hope that his new position as Director of the Center for Ethics in Public Policy and the Professions at Emory University will not preempt Fowler from taking an active part in the dialogue that is sure to continue over how Western Christianity should take shame into account in rethinking our model of spiritual life.

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John M. Haas, ed., *Crisis of Conscience*, New York: Crossroad Herder, 1996.

Modern moral relativism often results from the attempt to make moral decisions rather than from a desire to avoid moral behavior. In both Catholic and Protestant circles, the individual's conscience supplies the basis for moral decisions. In keeping with contemporary understandings of conscience, what is right depends upon the individual's own conscience which may differ radically from traditional moral standards. This book confronts the dilemma of appeals to individual conscience by carefully examining the Catholic understanding of conscience in moral decision-making rather than by attempting to substitute externally imposed law or being satisfied with satisfactory outcomes in situations.

The authors of these essays met in 1994 in response to a call to discuss the problem of the crisis of conscience in the Roman Catholic Church. The appeal to conscience by three German bishops in allowing divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Holy Communion despite living in what Catholic doctrine and discipline had held to be an objective state of sin illustrated this crisis of conscience. These essays developed from papers presented by Catholic theologians and philosophers from Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Poland, and the United States at the 1994 meeting.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's initial essay, which was previously published, asserts the objective nature of conscience in contrast to contemporary understandings of conscience based on self-consciousness. He does this by holding that conscience functions at two levels, the level of the memory of truth within the individual and the level of judgement of the present situation based upon that memory. Haas then identifies cultural forces such as Kant, Protestantism, totalitarianism, and modern religion that have resulted in misunder-

standing conscience as individual and subjective. The next two essays explain how the Catholic concept of conscience can respond to contemporary questions and issues. The objective nature of conscience does not rule out human freedom by imposing standards, but works through grace to free the individual to serve God in creative ways according to Giertych. Pinkaers concludes that conscience and prudence are both necessary and both must develop through experience in applying law. This development leads to the truth being expressed in the individual's response to the external law. McInerney deals with the problem of how conscience can be mistaken, can come to conclusions that differ from the Church with regard to moral actions. His solution is that conscience is right, but its application to a specific situation may fail due to ignorance or the choice to go against moral truth. Spaemann acknowledges the responsibility that the person has because of the possibility of choosing to go against the law, but this responsibility is not identical with conscience. Instead responsibility is limited by the nature of human existence. Carasco De Paula recognizes the need for pastoral responses to the imperfections that are part of human existence but affirms that the objective truth of the moral laws and a proper understanding of the role of conscience precludes exceptions to the moral law. This again raises the issue of the individual's autonomy. Caffarra concludes by stating that conscience requires rational truth in order to fulfill the goal of human existence to make the universal particular.

The book as a whole demonstrates a consistency and development in its focus and positions that is rare in a collection of essays. This is no doubt due to the focus of the conference and the opportunity for discussion among the authors of the essays. While the authors clearly assume that the reader will be familiar with Catholic theology, technical Thomistic categories and terminology, and Latin, a theologically educated Protestant will be able to understand their arguments and conclusions. Protestants concerned with moral relativism will find that these authors address a *modern* problem from within a Catholic context while fully aware of contemporary culture, moral theories, and philosophical discussions. This awareness enables them to avoid being limited to a Catholic context and will assist a Protestant in responding to moral relativism. Although a Protestant response to moral relativism will need to express its insights in language appropriate to a Protestant context, these essays do provide a comprehensive conceptual structure for such a response. Any attempt to challenge moral relativism will need to recognize that the appeal to conscience plays a major role in popular relativism. This book provides a way to understand conscience without ending up in subjectivism limited to the individual's conscience or in an absolutism that rejects any place for conscience.

At the same time, the conceptual structure that is presented is clearly a conservative Catholic structure. While it seeks to address contemporary concerns about autonomy and the self, it does so from the perspective that objective truth exists and is known by each individual. This book does not argue for the existence of objective moral truth, but rather asserts its existence. Those who will not grant this assumption, or who seek responses to those who do not grant this assumption, will not find this book helpful. It never answers the challenge that this is just the "Catholic answer." Many will question the claims to reason and revelation and may finally conclude that they are nothing more than assertions of power by a certain group. While the authors did not intend to answer these questions, they do not directly confront the issue of the subjectivity of knowledge nor do they

explain how to establish standards that recognizes the presence of subjectivity in truth.

This book provides a valuable alternative to people searching for moral standards. It does not give a justification for that alternative as much as an explanation of it. However, proposing a carefully nuanced response to the issue is constructive. Further, even those who do not accept the authors' assumptions can benefit from the careful reasoning that is demonstrated throughout the essays.

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Bauer, David R., and Mark Allen Powell, editors. *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*. Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series: Number 1. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996. 454 pp.

This volume represents a collection of twelve essays reflecting the major trends and issues in the contemporary study of Matthew's Gospel. Most of the essays contained in it were originally presented as papers to the Matthew Group of the Society of Biblical Literature. However, all of these essays have been subsequently reworked and updated for publication in this volume. Two of the essays (those by Schnackenburg and Luz) appear for the first time in English translation.

The work is divided into three main parts based upon the dominant hermeneutical methodology employed by the authors: composition (redaction criticism), narration (literary criticism), and reception (reader-response criticism). The helpful Introduction (pp. 1-25) by the editors discusses the three major hermeneutical approaches and presents an overview of each essay contained in the volume.

The first main part contains three essays representing an author-centered approach under the rubric "composition" which employs the method of redaction-criticism. The first essay by Donald A. Hagner is entitled "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of Matthew" (pp. 27-68). Hagner focuses on the tension of particularism and universalism in the Gospel of Matthew, together with the closely related polarity of Israel and the church, and concludes that the evangelist's community partook of both the Jewish and Christian worlds.

The second essay by David E. Garland is entitled "The Temple Tax in Matthew 17:24-25 and the Principle of not Causing Offense" (pp. 69-98). Garland proposes that Matthew has adopted a story that came to him in order to make a general theological point, namely, that Christians should surrender any claim to their own rights in order to live peacefully with others and not to harm others by causing unnecessary offense.

The third essay by Kline Snodgrass is entitled "Matthew and the Law" (pp. 99-127). Snodgrass proposes that the law was interpreted by Matthew with a specific hermeneutical key so as to reveal its divine intention, namely, a proper reading of the law is a prophetic reading of the law in which the love command and the call for mercy demonstrate the true requirements of the law.

The second major part of the volume contains three articles representing a text-centered approach under the rubric of "narrative" which employs the method of literary criticism. The fourth essay by David R. Bauer is entitled "The Literary and Theological Function of the Genealogy in Matthew's Gospel" (pp. 129-159). Bauer's literary analysis of the genealogy in Matthew 1: 1-17 provides insights into its theological function which is to introduce Matthew's implied readers to the narrative and facilitate the implied readers' entry into the narrative world of Matthew's Gospel.

The fifth essay by Mark Allen Powell is entitled "Characterization on the Phraseological Plane in the Gospel of Matthew" (pp. 161-177). Powell investigates the speech of Jesus, the disciples, and the religious leaders which is presented by the implied author of Matthew's Gospel to reveal information about these three main characters to the implied readers.

The sixth essay by Dorothy Jean Weaver is entitled "Power and Powerlessness: Matthew's Use of Irony in the Portrayal of Political Leaders" (pp. 179-196). Weaver contrasts the seeming power of Herod the Great, Herod the Tetrarch, and Pilate with Jesus and John the Baptist to reveal the irony that power is actually powerlessness and powerlessness is actually power.

The third and final part of the book contains six essays representing a reader-centered approach under the rubric "reception" which employs the method of reader-response criticism. The seventh essay by Russell Pregeant is entitled "The Wisdom Passages in Matthew's Story" (pp. 197-232). Pregeant questions the interpretation of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate and the preexistence of Jesus in Matthew on the basis of a reader-response analysis.

The eighth essay by Janice Capel Anderson is entitled "Matthew: Sermon and Story" (pp. 233-250). Anderson demonstrates that the Sermon on the Mount plays an integral role in the Gospel as narrative and raises the question of the criteria modern biblical scholars use to measure the adequacy of various readings of the Gospel and the set of values and interests those criteria embody.

The ninth essay by Rudolf Schnackenburg (translated by Ronald D. Witherup) is entitled "Matthew's Gospel as a Test Case for Hermeneutical Reflections" (pp. 251-269). Schnackenburg presents a theoretical introduction to the history of influence approach (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) using Matthew's Gospel as a hermeneutical test case.

The tenth essay by Ulrich Luz (translated by Dorothy Jean Weaver) is entitled "The Final Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46): An Exercise in 'History of Influence' Exegesis" (pp. 271-310). Luz discusses the history of the interpretation of Matthew 25:31-41 and argues that "the least of these" refers to Christians, specifically wandering charismatic teachers.

The eleventh essay by Bernard Brandon Scott and Margaret E. Dean is entitled "A Sound Map of the Sermon on the Mount" (pp. 311-378). Scott and Dean offer a close analysis of the Greek text as signifier and show the possibility of a more empirical approach to issues of textual organization and division.

The twelfth and final essay by Amy-Jill Levine is entitled "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman" (pp. 379-397). Levine understands the conjoined stories of bleeding and death followed by healing and resurrection in Matthew 9:18-26 as proleptic indicators of Jesus' own fate.

The Bibliography (pp. 399-425) contains a total of 397 works in English, German, French, and Latin. An Index of Modern Authors (pp. 427-435) and an Index of the Bible

(pp. 437-454) bring the volume to a close.

The Society of Biblical Literature and the editors of this volume are to be commended for making these studies more accessible as a collection in published form. These representative essays give the reader access into a typical working group of the Society of Biblical Literature. The volume is not only an entrée into the issues of contemporary Matthean studies, it also serves as a hermeneutical guide to the approach of various methodologies employed as strategies for reading. For the most part, these various approaches are not viewed as exclusive methods of interpretation or in competition with one another. Rather, they are considered to complement one another from different hermeneutical perspectives.

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Seitz, Christopher R. *Isaiah 1-39. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993. 271 pp. ISBN 0-8042-3131-1.

There has been a spate of books and articles on the book of Isaiah in the last 15 years. Most of this renewed interest has been directed at finding a way to read the book as a unity. It must be said that almost all participants in the discussion are quick to distance themselves from any implications of authorial unity. They all assume multiplicity of authorship, but in contrast to many earlier scholars, they recognize that the present form of the book is not accidental, and seek to find the theological and/or editorial principles which might explain that present form.

This commentary is characterized by the just-mentioned quest. Seitz attempts to understand the present form of chapters 1-39 in the light of certain unified theological concerns. In this respect he downplays hypotheses about who wrote which part when and plays up the ways in which each element functions as a part of the final whole. In chaps. 1-39 he sees three main divisions: chaps. 1-12; 13-27; 28-39. The first of these presents the prophet and points to the coming judgment, but eventual salvation of Judah/Israel. The second section shows the folly of trusting nations which are all under God's judgment. The third section, which Seitz admits is not so easy to characterize as the first two, he sees as a return to the historical setting of Isaiah with an application of the teaching about the nations to that setting. Unfortunately, the author only hints at the ways in which these themes relate to the rest of the book (pp. 6-7). This is unfortunate in the light of his overall concern. He justifies the writing of a commentary on chaps. 1-39 by arguing that the collectors of the traditions signal a significant break by looking toward the judgment prior to chap. 40 and back on it after that time. That is certainly true, but if the book is a theological unit, then at least a several page appendix helping the interpreter to see how the themes of the first part are

developed in the second part would be almost required, it seems.

The commentary begins with a brief introduction (18 pp.), which, somewhat surprisingly, almost completely bypasses the complex historical-critical questions which have been addressed to the book in the last 150 years. The author addresses five questions: The Character and Position of the Book of Isaiah; Why a commentary on First Isaiah; Literary Structure; Historical Structure; and Theological Structure. The most helpful aspect of this introduction is the admonition, repeated in a number of different forms, that the only adequate reading of the book is a wholistic one.

The discussion of each of the three main divisions which Seitz recognizes (1-12; 13-27; 28-39) is handled in the same way. There is first of all an overview in which the literary and theological structure of the division is discussed. Again it is noteworthy that almost nothing of what one has come to expect in modern Old Testament commentaries: lengthy form-critical and traditio-critical reconstructions of the text, is to be found in these. Rather, the author focuses upon the present shape of the text and what the apparent ideological structure of that shape is. From the overview, Seitz moves into a section-by-section treatment (1:1-31; 2:1-5; 2:6-4:6, etc.) of the division. These treatments focus upon attempts to understand the import of each section in the light of the present structure of the book. No explanation is given, but the amount of space given the three divisions is unequal. Chapters 1-12 receive 94 pp.; 13-27 receive 86 pp.; and 28-39 only receives 62 pp.

There is much to commend in this work. Above all, the relentless focus upon the present shape of the book and the implications of that shape for understanding the theological affirmations supposed earlier forms of the text may have looked like and in refusing to base his interpretations upon how those hypothetical precursors may have been reworked must also be praised. In view of these strengths, one is almost reluctant to point out weaknesses. However, there is one which seems inescapable in a commentary which is supposedly devoted to interpretation. Most of the time the reader looks in vain for the last step in interpretation: transferable meaning. That is, what of Isaiah's message has eternal import? Seitz does not give the preacher or teacher enough help at this point. When we turn to his book on a given passage, we will come away with a much clearer idea of how the text works. We will not have such a clear idea about what it means.

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Boice, James Montgomery & Benjamin E. Sasse (eds). *Here We Stand! A Call from Confessing Evangelicals*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996 (208 pp).

"We are calling the church, amidst our dying culture, to repent of its worldliness, to recover and confess the truth of God's Word as did the Reformers, and to see that truth

embodied in doctrine, worship, and life." This was the call of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (ACE) to an historic meeting of 120 evangelical pastors, teachers, and leaders of parachurch organizations that took place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 17-20, 1996. This book represents the products of that meeting which were the Cambridge Declaration and the eight papers which articulate its challenge. It represents an extension of the work of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy from 1978-1988, continued by ACE, but dealing with more complex issues.

In essence, the truths which evangelicals need to recover are the great Reformation doctrines summarized by the well-known *sola's* (Latin = only): *sola Scripture*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria*. The problem addressed is that the evangelical world today is losing its biblical fidelity, moral compass, and missionary zeal. This is not a single, easily defined issue (like inerrancy), but a pervasive downgrade or defection by a large majority of evangelicals. Therefore the Cambridge Declaration begins: "Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith." The eight chapters written by a senior pastor, four presidents of public institutions, and three professors of theology, embody the heart of this challenge and declaration.

David F. Wells contends that our culture is dying through a loss of moral center, through a corruption that is ubiquitous, like a dense fog everywhere. This loss is in fact a disappearance of God and our culture has never been ripe to hear a Word about God. Ervin S. Duggan affirms his hope in a living church and its cultural mission: (1) To be the church, that is to do the work of worship, education, pastoral care, and evangelism; (2) To redouble its efforts in education, especially higher education; (3) To embody a spiritual warfare by the persuasive power of superior ideas coupled with a gentle, unrelenting love.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. calls for the church to contend for truth in an age of untruth where the modern world is at war with the very notion of truth. False dichotomies such as 'spirituality vs. propositional truth' should be avoided. The basic issue for him is this fundamental question: Is the Bible the authentic, authoritative, inspired, and inerrant Word of God in written form, and thus God's faithful witness to himself? Gene Edward Veith suggests dealing with postmodernism by rediscovering the past before modernity and bringing back what was of value. With classicism in education and confessionalism in Christianity, those who believe in truth are on the cutting edge, he claims.

Michael S. Horton affirms that in confessing the *sola's* of the Reformation a two-fold response is required, first an honest admission of failure in thought, word, and action; second, a corporate and liturgical act of affirming our agreement with the hope that has preserved the church since its earliest days. The greatest challenge the church can pose to secularism is not mystical, moral, political, pragmatic, or institutional, but the announcement of God's work. Next Sinclair B. Ferguson writes on repentance, recovery, and confession. Repentance means regret and change of mind-set which are accompanied by a life-long moral and spiritual turnaround. Five features of medieval Christianity are evident in contemporary evangelicalism: (1) Repentance has increasingly been seen as a single act, severed from a life-long restoration of godliness; (2) The canon for Christian living has increasingly been sought in a 'Spirit-inspired' living voice within the church rather than in the Spirit's voice heard in Scripture; (3) The divine presence was brought to the church by indi-

viduals with sacred powers deposited within them and communicated by physical means; (4) The worship of God is increasingly presented as a spectator event of visual and sensory power, rather than a verbal event in which we engage in a deep soul dialogue with the Triune God; (5) The success of ministry is measured by crowds and cathedrals rather than by the preaching of the cross, by the quality of Christians' lives, and by faithfulness.

W. Robert Godfrey proposes five ways whereby an evaluation of worship may be attempted. Too many changes are occurring without reflection. Provocative statements are made to provoke spirited discussion of important issues. Repentance calls for careful self-examination, especially of the balance between doctrine, worship, and life. This last sentence becomes the theme of the final chapter written by James Montgomery Boice. It is a practical chapter, suggesting the items which need to be recovered in our churches towards a serious recovery of Reformation doctrines: governing *what* they teach (beginning with the sovereignty, the holiness and wisdom of God); the *manner* in which they encourage and conduct worship; and *forming* the kind of communal life they need to model before a watching world.

The book provides a stirring and sober call to repentance and renewal. It speaks to lay and clerical leaders in church and society. It appeals forthrightly for self-examination within—at the heart of evangelicalism—for a start. It should be read by current and aspiring ministers of the gospel. It would receive a wider readership were its claims articulated so as to secure a careful hearing both within and without narrowly defined 'evangelical' boundaries. For example, would persons like Stanley Grenz recognize themselves in the statements of their points of view in this debate? What about those who understand the term *evangelical* in a truly *Catholic* sense? Is it not surprising that the term *evangelical* apparently means *Protestant* (only?) and not *Catholic* (in its fullest sense)? Will a call to *return* to the stand of October 31, 1517 really provide a way forward? Is *grace* not a catholic term which calls for the *energy of love let loose in the world by faith*? So the voice of a Wesley who was reluctant to separate the word *faith from love* may be lost in this call to the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Which is not to call for a diminution of the intensity nor penetration of this call, which we *all* do well to hear and heed, but for a true recovery of the *evangel* whereby the whole gospel is preached to the whole of humanity in the whole world.

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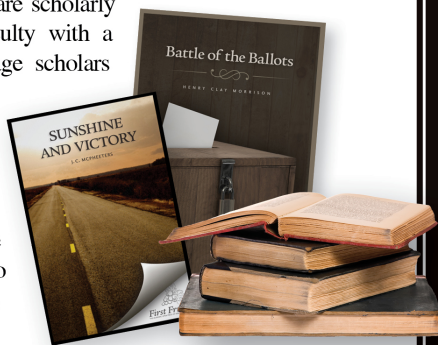
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