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A TRINITARIAN REVISIONING OF THE WESLEYAN DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

by

Glen Ashley O'Brien

Approved

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Kenneth Kinghorn

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies Asbury Theological Seminary

May 1998
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I bind unto myself the name,
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three

- St. Patrick's Breastplate

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit alike give sanctification, and life, and light, and comfort, and all similar graces. And let no one attribute the power of sanctification in an especial sense to the Spirit [alone]...

- St. Gregory of Nyssa, On the Holy Trinity.

Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
One God in Persons Three!
Bring back the heavenly blessing, lost
By all mankind, and me.

- Charles Wesley, Hymns on the Trinity.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem: Breaking the Deadlock

It is the purpose of this thesis to attempt to break the deadlock at which Wesleyan reflection on the doctrine of sanctification seems to have arrived, though a revisioning of the doctrine in trinitarian categories. Recent thought has polarized toward one or other of two positions - placing a stress either on the Christological or on the Pneumatological aspects of sanctifying grace. In part this has been a historical question. Attempts have been made to establish the position of John Wesley in regard to the use of "pentecostal" and "pneumatological" language in reference to entire sanctification.\(^1\) But it has also involved the very real task of keeping the doctrine alive among the Wesleyan people, saving it from the fate of becoming a mere historical curiosity. An attempt may be made to demonstrate the basic compatibility of these competing historical views when applied to the task of constructive theology, though this is not the task I wish to attempt here.

Statement of the Hypothesis: The Need for a Trinitarian Revisioning

Whatever may turn out to be the case regarding the appropriateness or otherwise of pneumatological language in reference to sanctification when historically considered, the current resurgence of interest in trinitarian theology may provide us with a means of

overcoming this polarization, and also of advancing the tradition in a constructive manner. The basic thesis which this research will test is that a trinitarian revisioning of the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification can provide us with a future for this doctrine, and help us to overcome tritheistic tendencies in its current formulation.

Statement of Methodology: Belonging to a Community of Discourse and Advancing the Tradition

Every theologian, consciously or unconsciously, works within the context of a particular community of discourse, and as such, is accountable to that community. Faithfulness to that community and its tradition may be variously defined. For some, it means a mere retelling of past findings, such that to depart from past convictions in the slightest manner is to be unfaithful to the tradition. For others, faithfulness is not possible without a positive critique of past gains in order, both to retain the wisdom of the past, and to go forward into new territory. Alisdair MacIntyre describes the dynamics involved in advancing a tradition, with his image of the philosopher\theologian as one who belongs to a "craft."

The authority of a master within a craft is both more and other than a matter of exemplifying the best standards so far. It is also and most importantly a matter of knowing how to go further and especially how to direct others toward going further, using what can be learned from the tradition afforded by the past to move toward the telos of fully perfected work. It is thus in knowing how to link past and future that those with authority are able to draw upon tradition, to interpret and reinterpret it, so that its directedness toward the telos of that particular craft becomes apparent in new and characteristically unexpected ways.²

Good teaching, then, will follow the order of reliving the best gains from the past history of inquiry "up to the highest point of achievement which it has reached so far, by rescrutinizing those arguments which have sustained the best supported conclusions so far." Progress in such inquiry may indeed include "more or less radical modification, and even partial demolition with a view to reconstruction."

Initiation into a theological community involves a reappropriation by individuals of the community's story of discoveries, advances, and setbacks.

[In this way] the history of the formation and transformation of belief...and practice is reenacted, the novice learns from that reenactment not only what the best theses, arguments and doctrines so far to emerge have been, but also how to rescrutinize them so that they become genuinely his or hers and how to extend them further.

The most successful of attempted revisions of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection have been those which have stressed relational rather than ontological, personal rather than impersonal, and dynamic rather than static categories. These are the very categories which have characterized contemporary trinitarian theology, beginning with Karl Barth and continuing to the present time with the work of Moltmann, LaCugna, Pannenberg, and others. It is hoped that a careful and critical evaluation of these sources and a constructive application of them to the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification may be a worthwhile contribution to the advance of the tradition. A rediscovery, on the part of Wesleyans, of the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity both in the history of salvation

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3 ibid, 129.
4 ibid, 149.
5 ibid, 201.
and in Christian experience will provide a suitable trajectory for future propulsion toward the *telos* of our tradition.

I will begin in chapter two, with an examination of two attempts at revising and restating Wesley’s theology of Christian perfection. The first will be William Sangster’s *Path to Perfection*, and the second will be Mildred Bangs Wynkoop’s *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*. The first lays down a sympathetic critique of Wesley, and a somewhat less sympathetic critique of the holiness movements derived from him, and calls for a rediscovery of the centrality of love in Wesley’s doctrine. It does not go very far, however, in providing any alternative reconstruction of the doctrine of holiness. The latter, on the other hand, with its stress on both holiness and sin as relational categories, and its creative development of the “love” motif in Wesleyanism, might be seen as representing the best that the tradition has arrived at so far.

I will then examine, in chapter three, the current debate over Christological and Pneumatological language in reference to entire sanctification. The two-decades long debate within the Wesleyan Theological Society will be followed, and the current resurgence of the discussion will be noted. The way in which this debate has uncovered a tendency toward tritheism in the Wesleyan tradition will also be discussed and evaluated, along with the manner in which an application of trinitarian theology might serve to overcome this tendency.

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Chapter four will turn to an investigation of the remarkable resurgence of interest in trinitarian theology which has been so evident in the second half of the twentieth century, and which continued to produce some of the most vigorous and creative thought in the current theological scene. Beginning with Karl Barth, and with his close identification of the ontological and economic trinity, we will see how this idea has developed among contemporary non-Wesleyan theologians.

Hoping to gain from this discussion, I will then turn, in the fifth chapter, to an examination of specifically Wesleyan resources for a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection. Such resources include Wesley’s sermon *On the Trinity*, the hymns of Charles Wesley, the sacramental theology of John and Charles Wesley, and systematic theologians, classical Methodist, mainline Methodist, and holiness movement theologians included. In a sixth and final chapter I will attempt to sketch a proposal for the way in which the findings of this research might prove helpful in that creative advance of the doctrine of Christian perfection which is its aim.

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Chapter 2

TWO ATTEMPTS AT REEVALUATING AND RESTATING THE WESLEYAN DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

Though there has been much effort expended on examining John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, relatively little effort has been made in creatively advancing it. Two approaches have been evident. Both within and outside of the Wesleyan tradition there has been a tendency to see the doctrine as unrealistic and unbiblical, and to render it an obscure and heterodox tendency within Wesley's system of thought. On the other hand there have been those, often within the holiness movement tradition, who have, somewhat triumphalistically, sought to demonstrate the essentially biblical nature of the doctrine, and who have feared any suggestion of developing or advancing Wesley's position as a betrayal of the holiness "distinctive."

Rarely has there been an effort to reverently critique and advance the doctrine. I would like in this chapter to examine two attempts along these lines, and to indicate how these efforts might be supplemented and furthered by Trinitarian theology. The first is a critique by the British Methodist, William E. Sangster, who, in his Path to Perfection, issued a challenge to his own tradition to overcome the sorry neglect of Wesley's perfectionistic views among his fellow Methodists, and provided his own sympathetic critique of Wesley. He does not, however, provide much of an alternative model. He serves something of a diagnostic purpose, rather than issuing any original proposal of his own. His criticisms of Wesley seem at points to be criticisms of holiness movement

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renditions of Wesley rather than of Wesley's own teaching. His own negative exposure to
certain holiness movement advocates seem to have colored his evaluation somewhat.²

The second attempt to advance the tradition is, I believe, a more successful one.
Mildred Bangs Wynkoop in A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism,³ begins
with a somewhat different assumption than Sangster. Where Sangster begins with the
conviction that there were errors in Wesley's own thought that needed correcting,
Wynkoop maintains that Wesley was essentially correct in his perfectionism, and places
the blame for the distortion of his teachings in unhelpful ways, at the feet of subsequent
"Wesleyanisms."⁴ I now turn to an examination of each of these approaches.

William E. Sangster's Path to Perfection.

Sangster takes note, both in the frontispiece of his book, and later in the chapter

There was one doctrine of John Wesley's - the doctrine of perfect
sanctification - which ought to have led to a great and original ethical
development; but the doctrine has not grown; it seems to remain just where John
Wesley left it. There has been a want of genius or the courage to attempt the
solution of the immense practical questions which the doctrine suggests. The
questions have not been raised - much less solved. To have raised then
effectively, indeed would have been to originate an ethical revolution which
would have had a far deeper effect on the thought and life - first of England, and
then of the rest of Christendom - than was produced by the Reformation of the
sixteenth century.⁵

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² ibid, 137-39.
³ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism. Kansas City:
⁴ Wynkoop, 48.
Sangster sets out, at least in part, to remedy this situation. He is clearly sympathetic to the broad sweep of Wesley’s teaching on the subject and has a pastoral concern throughout the book.

There is an experience of God the Holy Spirit, available for all who will seek it with importunity, which imparts spiritual power far above the level enjoyed by the average Christian: which inspires a caring God-like love different in kind and degree from the affections of normal nature: which communicates to the eager soul the penetrating power of holiness. No book can give this experience. It belongs to the secret intercourse of the soul with God. It lies at the very heart of personal religion. Its wide reception would transform the Church and shake the world.  

Sangster concedes that the stones upon which Wesley built his doctrine of entire sanctification are clearly to be found in Scripture. If Wesley was a heretic because of his perfectionistic views, by his own admission he became one through reading the Bible.

**Wesley’s Doctrine of Sin**

Sangster finds Wesley's definition of sin as "a voluntary transgression of a known law" to be inadequate, especially in light of what we now understand about the life of the unconscious mind. Dr. Cell's well known dictum that Wesley's doctrine represents "an original and unique synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness" has a fatal weakness. To say that one is justified by faith is an assertion about God. To say that one has been sanctified by faith is an assertion about ourselves, or so Sangster believes.

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6 Sangster, 8.
7 ibid, 51-2.
9 Sangster, 72-6.
10 ibid, 102-3. Sangster's contemporary, R. Newton Flew, a fellow Methodist, also took an interest in perfectionism, writing a helpful historical survey of the subject. Like Sangster he also rejected Wesley's definition of sin as inadequate. See, R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An*
He agrees with Wesley that the life of holiness must be conceived of as a "moment-by-moment" life.

[H]is teaching is deeply misunderstood if it is supposed that the faith of one high moment secures entire sanctification for a lifetime, and we see, therefore, his dislike for the phrase "a state of entire sanctification." It must be a "moment-by-moment" life because the faith of each moment is crowned with the perfect love of each moment, and life proceeds from a chain of glorious "nows."\(^\text{11}\)

Sangster rejects, as psychologically unsound, attacks upon this idea of a "moment-by-moment" life, concluding that such a life is "commended in the New Testament" and is "the open secret of the saints. Weightier testimony we do not desire."\(^\text{12}\)

He follows Edward H. Sugden's notion, probably erroneous, that Wesley conceived of sin as "a thing which has to be taken out of a man, like a cancer or a rotten tooth."\(^\text{13}\) Sin is not a thing and therefore cannot be rooted out, extinguished, or eradicated, nor, along Keswickian lines, can it be suppressed or suspended.\(^\text{14}\)

The unconscious mind cannot sin, according to Sangster. It is an amoral, rather than an immoral faculty. All of the anguish over the sinfulness of dreams among the sanctified is, therefore, misplaced. He rejects the Freudian concept of the unconscious as "a morbid underworld," a kind of "devil's cauldron, exhaling evil vapours and pouring forth evil powers" which would render human perfectibility a chimera.\(^\text{15}\) Whilst the Holy

\(^\text{11}\) Sangster, 109.
\(^\text{12}\) ibid, 112.
\(^\text{14}\) Sangster, 115.
\(^\text{15}\) ibid, 119.
Spirit does influence the unconscious mind, until the influence of the Spirit reaches the conscious mind, such influence is not the material of religion or duty.\textsuperscript{16}

**Holiness as Perfect Love**

Having critiqued elements of Wesley's position which he finds problematic, Sangster now turns to attempt a restatement of the doctrine. He wants to make it serviceable to its cultured despisers among his fellow Methodists.

The terminology of "perfect love" is to be preferred to that of "Christian perfection."

To begin with, it is positive. The common idea of perfection as sinlessness gave a picture of the ideal in terms of negation. It never grappled with the tremendous sins of omission. Even the words “sanctified” and “holy” are no better in this regard. They certainly carry the idea of being purged from impurity but no hint of being robust in active goodness. “Perfect love” reverses that: it is a spirited principle no more to be confined within the narrow limits of the individual heart than a perfume can be gathered up and returned to the bottle once it has escaped.\textsuperscript{17}

If the focus of Wesleyan perfectionism had been on "perfect love as the mainspring of holiness" rather than on the eradication of the sinful nature, "the weight of the doctrine would have rested elsewhere and 'sinlessness' would have been thrust from the forefront of thought simply as a happy consequence, if God so gave it, of something positive and more important still."\textsuperscript{18} Instead of attention being given to entire sanctification as a "sum of negatives," a focus on perfect love provides a closer cohesion between the ethic of grace and the ethic of holiness.\textsuperscript{19} The negativizing and ascetic

\textsuperscript{16} ibid, 122.  
\textsuperscript{17} ibid, 147.  
\textsuperscript{18} ibid, 155.  
\textsuperscript{19} ibid, 156.
tendency within all perfectionistic movements would be equalized by such a focus with a corresponding positive element. Rather than "purgation and more purgation" there would be a focus on "love and more love. The way forward is to let purgation be the by-product and let love crowd sin out."\(^{20}\)

Whilst we find it easy to think of grace and forgiveness as things given, it is harder to think of sanctification in such terms. It seems to speak rather of something *achieved* than given. There is a given-ness about love, however, both human and divine love, which helps us to understand sanctification as gift. To take from God perfect sinlessness is one thing. To take from God perfect love is another.\(^{21}\)

**Testimony to Perfect Love**

Should one testify to such a gift? "There is but one way" to do so, according to Sangster. The Christian must so live that others will be "forced to find the explanation of their lovely lives in Christ."\(^{22}\) This stands in contrast to the practice of the holiness movement, which, following John Fletcher's experience, has generally taught that unless one testifies openly to the experience of heart purity, one will lose the blessing obtained. This proved to be a powerful propagandic device. The more persons who testified to "the blessing," the more others sought a similar experience. Having "burned one's bridges" by such public testimony, believers could not easily admit subsequent failure, leading often to a renaming of sin with such terms as "temptation," "infirmity," or "weakness."

It belongs to the militancy of faith when seeking this experience to rise from one's knees asserting that the miracle has been wrought. All doubt is of the

\(^{20}\) ibid, 156.
\(^{21}\) ibid, 156-7
\(^{22}\) ibid, 167.
devil. It must be beaten down by the affirmations of faith. To believe and to have are synonymous. Any dubiety is guilty unbelief.

And it is just at that point that the greatest danger lurks. When uncertainty concerning the health of my soul troubles my mind, it does not normally come from the devil but from my conscience...To call the regret and repentance which this sinful awareness quickens in me "the devil," is to slander one of my best friends. To silence that admonitory voice by bawling louder that I am holy will damage me in the most sensitive part of my soul-life, and wound the most trusty mentor I have on the path of spiritual progress.23

The Church's Great Need

In conclusion, Sangster asks whether the "marrow" of Wesley's doctrine can still be preached today. He summarizes what he believes to be the heart of Wesley's position which would be valuable if restored to Methodist (and presumably all other) pulpits.

We ought to preach that the gift of supernatural love, experienced as "the expulsive power of [a] new affection," can exclude conscious sin from the believer's experience.24 None can place a limit on the efficacy of God's grace. Surely God does more with sin than simply to forgive it.25 If it were an error to believe that a Christian can be saved from all sin in this life, it would still be a lesser error than to teach that a Christian cannot be saved from sin at all. All too readily the heart fixes on "inevitability" as an excuse for sin.26

Too many Christians live on a sub-Christian level. The Church lives far below the New Testament promise, and is in great need of the experience of holiness.27 There is a lack of any sense of a spiritual goal to be achieved, and an evident lack of genuine

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23 ibid, 139.
24 ibid, 188.
25 ibid, 188.
26 ibid, 190.
27 ibid, 192-93.
Though Sangster's is a powerful, albeit sympathetic, critique, it has accomplished little in advancing an alternative proposal. It has diagnosed the situation well, pointing out some important weak spots in Wesley's doctrine, and calling for a rediscovery of the centrality of love as at the heart of the holy life. This focus will form the heart of the next attempt at revisioning the doctrine which we will examine.

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's *Theology of Love*

Unlike Sangster, who writes as a mainline British Methodist, Bangs writes from within the Wesleyan Holiness tradition in America. A Nazarene theologian, she was one of the holiness movement's most able thinkers. Her work represents, I believe, the high water mark of contemporary advances on Wesley's teaching. It does, however, interpret Wesley in contrast to certain aspects of traditional holiness movement thought.

**The Ethic of Love**

She begins with the question of whether there is a hermeneutic available to us which can "explain Christian doctrine and Christian life in the same system without either one undercutting the integrity of the other," and which can enable "theology and real human existence to meet meaningfully."29 Such a hermeneutic is available in John Wesley's ethic of "love to God and man."30 Her central thesis is that "love is the dynamic

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28 ibid, 193-96. No doubt Sangster, writing as he did in the first half of this century, would have been greatly encouraged by the renewal of interest in the work of the Holy Spirit that has been an earmark of its second half.
30 ibid, 16.
of Wesleyanism." In this, she is at one with Sangster's call for a positive focus on love over a negative focus on purgation.

**Sin as a Relational Malfunction**

Wynkoop alerts us to the existence of certain "Wesleyanisms" which diverge from Wesley at significant points. Underlying these is a tendency toward Greek rather than Hebrew concepts. Following Plato, some in the holiness movement tradition have conceived of persons as divine souls trapped in human bodies, rather than the Hebrew idea of a person as a unity. Substantival, rather than relational categories, have dominated soteriology. Sin has been thought of as a "thing" inhering in the flesh. This contrasts with the Hebrew/Christian understanding of sin as a relational malfunction, "as alienation [and] moral disorder."

**Magical vs. Moral Interpretations of Salvation**

Then there is the contrast between magical versus moral interpretations of salvation. Cleansing from sin tends to be defined as a kind of "sub-rational, psychological mutation" which leads believers "to expect a substantive alteration of the soul in salvation which occurs below the level of rational life" [and] changes the impulsive reactions of the self. Anger and pride and all other normal human emotional equipment is said to be removed, so that responsibility for discipline and proper channeling of the emotions is considered a suppression which denies what God ought to do." On the other hand, a proper "moral" interpretation of salvation would not despise

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31 ibid, 21.
32 ibid, 48-9.
33 ibid, 49.
34 ibid, 49-50.
nor reject anything human. True humanity is fully retained but made to serve a new master.\textsuperscript{35} 

\textbf{The Relationship Between Justification and Sanctification}

On the question of subsequency in reference to sanctification, Wynkoop resists any dislocation between justification and sanctification. Wesley saw that justification and sanctification were two aspects of one truth, not separated by time or experience but in relationships. Everything he saw sanctification to be by way of dynamic vitality was rooted in the work of Christ - the atonement - which justified - reconciled - all men potentially to God. The appropriation of God’s forgiveness by each individual - by faith - was the beginning of sanctification. He presupposed justification in every subsequent “stage in the way.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{The Isolation of Holiness}

Wynkoop asks the question, “What is Wesleyanism?” It should not be thought of as some kind of special Christian teaching, but rather a certain \textit{emphasis}. The Methodist claim, beginning with Wesley, has always been that Methodism makes no pretension to any novel opinions. Rather, it claims to hold nothing more, nor less, that the substance of historic Christian orthodoxy. It would be a mistake to think of holiness or sanctification as Wesley’s “specialty.” The isolation of the themes of Christian perfection and entire sanctification from the rest of his theology has led to the development of “various provincialisms” gathered around one or other such aspect of his thought.\textsuperscript{37} To do this is to overlook the profoundly catholic nature of Wesley’s approach.

\textbf{Holiness as Persons in Relationship}

\textsuperscript{35} ibid, 50.  
\textsuperscript{36} ibid, 20.  
\textsuperscript{37} ibid, 54-57.
Wesley's theology is characterized by a certain "depth" which points to "quality over against substance."\textsuperscript{38}

Its significance comes to a focus in "personness" rather than "thingness." Martin Buber reaches for something of its dimension in his "I and Thou" concept. When we speak of depth we are leaving behind the whole world of secondary values - the impersonal - and pushing back to the area of primary values - the personal - where the secondary 'worth' derives meaning.\textsuperscript{39}

To Wesley, sanctification was an ethical relationship, never a moralism, never an emotion or a deliverance from emotions, and never a magical elimination of a thing ("like a sore tooth") or the addition of something, even the "addition" of the Holy Spirit (in the superficial sense so often associated with irrational and "enthusiastic" experiences said to be religious). The direction of one's attention and "aim" was not toward the examination of one's emotional states, or the quantity of one's religious acts and obeyed rules. Religion to Wesley was in the quality and object of one's love. It was not even the attempt to measure one's religion abstractly, but to direct it concretely.\textsuperscript{40}

Since holiness has to do with "persons in relationship,"\textsuperscript{41} it must be understood and pursued in a relational context - namely in our two-fold relationship toward God and toward other persons. Wesley defined true religion as "right tempers toward God and man. It is, in two words, gratitude and benevolence; gratitude to our Creator...and benevolence to our fellow-creatures. In other words, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves."\textsuperscript{42}

Elsewhere, Wesley defines the Christian of the Primitive Church as one who loved God, and thus, could not but love his brother also; "and not in word only, but in

\textsuperscript{38} ibid, 71.
\textsuperscript{39} op. cit.
\textsuperscript{40} ibid, 73.
\textsuperscript{41} ibid, 25.
This love extended to “every soul of man,” even to those whom he had never seen, to the “evil” and “unthankful,” and even to his enemies. He loved them all because he had first been loved by Christ.  

Without busying ourselves, then, in curious, needless inquiries touching [the] extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, let us take a nearer view of these his ordinary fruits, which we are assured will remain throughout all ages; - of that great work of God among the children of men, which we are used to express by one word, Christianity; not as it implies a set of opinions, a system of doctrine, but as it refers to men’s hearts and lives.  

By emphasizing depth - “the personal, moral, and spiritual in religion” - over against “the abstract, mechanical, magical, ultra-supernatural,” Wesley was putting forward a program of radicalization, “not making religion less radical and thoroughgoing but more so.”

Various interpreters, based on their own particular orientation, have applied to Wesley a number of hermeneutical lenses through which to view his theology. This has resulted in “an Aristotelian Wesley, a Platonic Wesley, a Schleiermarchian Wesley, a Whiteheadian Wesley, a Social-Gospel Wesley, [or] a Second-Blessing Wesley.” Wynkoop, in attempting to establish her own hermeneutic, is aware of the danger of the distortions in such an approach. Nevertheless, she ventures to claim that it was “the relating of God’s grace to human experience, theology to religion, logic to life, the Church to society,” and the nature of this relation as love, that is the hermeneutical key to understanding Wesley’s theology. The Gospel appeal is grounded in “divine-human

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43 Wesley, Works, V:408.
44 ibid, 38.
45 Wynkoop, Theology of Love, 75.
46 ibid, 77.
47 ibid, 77. Emphasis mine.
interaction." Theology infused with a personal experience of God’s grace - this is Wesleyanism." The task Wynkoop sets for herself is to apply this hermeneutic of love to the doctrine of holiness, "to determine its validity and to reinterpret, if necessary, any faulty concepts which may have slipped into the understanding of it."

**Humanity as Made in the Image and Likeness of God**

Wesley’s understanding of the nature of humanity might be outlined in the following fourfold manner. First, a person is rooted in history, historicized by actual events such as the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Cross. He or she cannot stand outside of historical moments, but always inhabits a historical plane. Second, a biblical anthropology, focuses on personhood. The holiness of persons is not to be conceived of as a state, but as a relationship. Third, personhood is dynamic, so that a person is always in the process of becoming, either moving toward the fullness of his or her being, or moving away from that fullness, always becoming, but becoming either what God intended or becoming something other than the divine intention. Fourth, a person is a social being. Extreme asceticism, therefore, and particularly that of the anchorite solitary, is antithetical to holiness. Sydney Cave points out how the Gospel of Christ, according to Wesley, is "directly opposite" to mysticism. "‘Holy Solitaries’ is a phrase no more consistent with the Gospel than holy adulterers. The Gospel of Christ knows no religion,

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48 ibid, 87.
49 ibid, 100.
50 op. cit.
51 This paragraph is based partly on ideas in Wynkoop (79-87) but the development of those ideas is my own.
but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and
breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.\textsuperscript{52}

Humanity was made in the image and likeness of God.\textsuperscript{53} The likeness of God was
lost at the Fall, but the image of God remains. Through Christ, it is being restored.
Believers, in the words of St. Paul, are “predestined to be conformed to the image of
[God’s] Son.”\textsuperscript{54} It is important to maintain a distinction between the “image” and the
“likeness” of God, because “[i]f [we] have lost the image of God, practical redemption in
this life is clearly impossible without a structural, miraculous alteration in human nature
beyond which further sin would be impossible. This does not square with life as we
know it.”\textsuperscript{55} To say that a person is “made in the image of God” does not tell us what a
person is, so much as “what a person is capable of being and becoming...the biblical
concept of [humanity] is dynamic, rather than passive or static.”\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Sin as Alienation}

Just as holiness is to be defined in relational terms, so the essence of sin is to
defined in terms of \textit{alienation}. The human person is “basically a communication center.
Every nerve, organ, function, thought, act, tissue, is a transmitter and receiver. He is only
whole when another \textit{person} is listening, understanding, responding to him. Everyone
needs an audience. A person cracks up when no one listens - when aloneness closes in

\textsuperscript{52} Sydney Cave, \textit{The Christian Estimate of Man} (London: Duckworth, 1949), 9. cited in
Wynkoop, 87.
\textsuperscript{53} The distinction between “image” and “likeness” is an Irenaean one, though Wynkoop does not
explicitly refer to Irenaeus in her exposition of the idea.
\textsuperscript{54} Romans 8:29.
\textsuperscript{55} Wynkoop, \textit{Theology of Love}, 146-47.
\textsuperscript{56} ibid, 148. Emphasis mine.
Sin is the turning of a person inward, a self-curvature that is the antithesis of openness to God and to others.

Though Wesleyan theology implies this relational understanding of sin, Wesley himself never completely freed himself from the Augustinian anthropology recovered at the time of the Reformation. From the Eastern fathers he gleaned the idea of a perfection which is always being perfected, and a tendency to look *forward* to perfection, with Irenaeus and Pseudo-Macarius, rather than *backward* with Augustine and Tertullian. Yet from the Protestant reformers he seemed to have also gleaned an almost substantival view of sin. This led to significant difficulties in regard to the “rooting out” of inbred sin, and in resolving the tension inherent in the idea of a “relative perfection.”

At least one thing was clear for Wesley. No matter now radically we are held in sin, Christ came, not to condone it in us, but to free us from it. “Holiness consists of...unobstructed personal communion and deep, personal fellowship with God. God seeks our love and gives His love without measure. Sin is simply the absence of this relationship because [persons have] repudiated it.” Sin, then, is not first of all concupiscence, but “perverted love.” Concupiscence is not the *cause* of sin, but its *effect.* Sin is “a rupture of fellowship with God. Holiness is the healing of that religious malady.” Sin is “love gone astray,” love “locked into a false center, the self,” whereas holiness is “love locked into the True Center, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

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57 *ibid*, 141.
58 *ibid*, 154.
59 *ibid*, 155-56.
60 *ibid*, 156.
61 *ibid*, 157-58.
change to this orientation cannot be made by any Pelagian exertion of natural strength, but only through grace.

This sinful orientation is often thought of in a depersonalized way as some kind of “substance which is “further back” and “deeper down” than acts of committed sin - “a virtual substance with real existence in some way attached to the substance of the soul but not essential to it.”

Its “removal” is taken out of the moral responsibility of [persons] and divorced from a conscious response to the demands of grace. No way of thinking is less biblical nor more magical. (Any concept of acquiring what we want without recourse to the appropriate means is belief in magic. It is the attempt to bypass the causal means between dream and reality).

The problem, however, is not “a substructure of some alien substance clinging to [the] soul,” but alienation from God.

Purification from this orientation is at the heart of sanctification, which is not being established in a static state of sinlessness, but being initiated into a new kind of relationship. Purity, or cleansing, is not a quality of substance in the soul but a moral relationship to God, in Christ. As such, it is does not exist in the morally abstract, but in moral relatedness. 

Wesley gives answer to the objection that heart purity would exempt the fully sanctified from the need for continued reliance upon Christ, with a resounding denial.

Far from it. None feel their need of Christ like these, even the most perfect; none so entirely depend upon him. For Christ does not give life to the soul separate from, but in and with himself. Hence, his words are equally true of

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62 ibid, 164.
63 ibid, 164.
64 op. cit.
65 Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 266.
all men, in whatsoever state of grace they are; “without (or separate from) me, ye can do nothing.”

Evangelical Perfection

Wynkoop makes a helpful distinction between “Christian” or “Evangelical” perfection and various types of “perfectionisms.” The latter are based on views of perfection which circumvent the moral and personal elements of existence. She then outlines the characteristics of “Evangelical perfection” as she understands Wesley to have taught it.

1. Perfection is “teleological.” That is, it is relative to an end, and not an end in itself. That end is, presumably, the love of God and neighbor.

2. It is “an absolute requirement,” in the sense that any profession of Christianity implicates the professor in the quest for it.

3. It is maturity, in the sense that it brings a person into a “come-of-age” status in the Christian community. There is a point in the Christian’s process of growth where he or she becomes “a legal adult” with all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

4. It is both absolute and relative - absolute in terms of the quality of its integrity but relative in terms of its capacity. It involves a heart relationship with God which is in itself “wholly satisfactory” but which admits always of further growth, as Wesley makes clear.

There is no perfection of degrees, as it is termed: none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man has attained, or

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67 Wynkoop, Theology of Love, 294.
68 ibid, 295.
69 ibid, 295-96. One thinks here of the Jewish bar-mitzvah.
70 ibid, 296.
in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to “grow in grace” and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour.71

5. It does not, in the words of H. Orton Wiley, “supersede the need for the atonement.”72 The blood of Jesus continues to cleanse the heart of the one who walks in the light as he is in the light.

6. “No abnormal, absurd, impossible, or dehumanized thing is ever indicated by perfection in Scripture.”73

7. Perfection cannot be deferred to another world. Evangelical perfection has a “this-life” relevance.74

8. It is moral in nature, that is, meaningful only in relation to persons - God and our neighbor.75

9. It must be carefully distinguished from all types of perfectionism.76

10. It is positive. It is not the less-than-perfect, so much as it is the presence of love with all its dynamic outcomes.77

11. It must not be confined to the single moment of a crisis experience, nor confined only to a process with no point of completion. Wesley would surrender neither the dynamic of growth in holiness nor the decisive nature of entire sanctification. It may be helpful here to make a distinction between “Christian perfection” as a process

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72 Wynkoop, Theology of Love, 296.
73 ibid, 297.
74 op. cit.
75 ibid, 298.
76 ibid, 299.
77 op. cit.
extending through life (and perhaps beyond) and "entire sanctification" as a point in that longer journey, without strictly identifying the two.\textsuperscript{78}

The "Secondness" of Sanctification

The term "sanctification," post-Wesley, has taken on a limited meaning, and has been used in some circles almost exclusively in relation to a second work of grace. It should be kept in mind that the qualifier "entire" was added by Wesley and his preachers at the Conference of June 16th, 1747, in answer to certain objectors who reminded them that all Christians are termed in Scripture, "saints" and "holy." It was thought that Wesley, by using "sanctification" in reference to a second work of grace, was obscuring that sanctification which is inherent in the new birth.\textsuperscript{79} Wesley took this objection seriously, seeing the importance of making a distinction between the sanctification inherent in justification, and belonging at the initiatory stage of Christian life, and the fullness of sanctification to be pursued subsequently. The choice of the term "entire sanctification," then, was not based on New Testament terminology, but was chosen for the sake of expediency, in clarifying a point of doctrine. Therefore, it should not be granted ultimacy in Christian, or even Wesleyan, vocabulary.

The abstraction of sanctification from justification does violence to its biblical meaning. To those who fear a loss of "distinctives" through departure from certain terminology, it should be pointed out that relating sanctification once again to the whole of the biblical message, to the whole of the theological task, and to the whole of life, where it belongs, cannot weaken, but only strengthen holiness teaching.

\textsuperscript{78} ibid, 300-301.
According to Wynkoop, Wesley’s conclusions about the instantaneous nature of sanctification were derived from observation and experience. In effect, he was saying, “It happens this way to Methodists,” rather than elevating an experience to the status of dogmatic assertion. Some of his followers, however, have done precisely the latter. They have “standardized some of the psychological expressions and feel that the loss of them constitutes a denial of all that Wesleyan theology stands for...Experience [becomes] the pretender to the throne which should be occupied by Christ himself.” Others have been “Wesleyan in the same way Wesley was - emphasizing the deep moral obligations of believers to God and pressing toward the full commitment to God which perfect love suggests.” These will prefer biblical terms and avoid stereotyped language; whilst the former group standardize a certain experiential psychology and the terminology associated with it.

Yet Wynkoop does not want to eliminate either the “secondness” or the “crisis” aspects of sanctification. She does not want to simplify religious experience to “two trips to the altar,” of course. Yet she wants to retain the Wesleyan emphasis on that decisiveness which is at the heart of moral choice. Growth in grace is never accomplished without making ethically significant decisions. The “secondness” in Wesleyan language is used “to emphasize a point in Christian life particularly stressed in Scripture where the entire personality is united in total love to God, where the divided

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81 ibid, 309.
82 op. cit.
heart is made one under the Lordship of Christ and double motives are cleansed.\textsuperscript{83} “First” and “second” are more than numerical distinctions.

In no sense is first limited in order to make room for second. Properly, first is the entrance of the person into the whole provision of the grace of God. Provisionally everything God can do for us is done. Nothing is received arbitrarily. But a response is required of [persons] and in this human response second has definition.\textsuperscript{84}

“Crisis” should not be understood as a “clock-time” word, but as a word which stresses moral decision. A crisis in Christian experience occurs when, in the context of growth in grace, “human commitment is so intelligently complete that the Holy Spirit is not thwarted at any conscious level.”\textsuperscript{85}

For some, this will mean an identifiable spiritual “anniversary” of the new birth and/or of an experience of sanctifying grace. But for others, no such “anniversary” is possible or desirable. They have no less passed from one level of Christian experience to another, or better - from one depth of relationship with God and neighbor, to another. A variety of nomenclature is available to describe this second work of grace, none of which is free from its own strengths and weaknesses. All are “intended to carry the idea that in the progress of the Christian life a notable point was passed that is worthy of mention and which intensifies the reality of Christian faith. It was both a part of and an advance in the Christian life.”\textsuperscript{86}

It is perhaps surprising that Wynkoop does not draw on an explicitly trinitarian theology in constructing her creative appropriation of Wesley. Her stress on relationship

\textsuperscript{83} ibid, 351.
\textsuperscript{84} ibid, 352.
\textsuperscript{85} op. cit.
\textsuperscript{86} ibid, 357.
and personhood, and on the dynamic of Christian growth arising out of these, are themes that fit well into the contemporary trinitarian discussion. It is sufficient here to say that her advance to the Wesleyan tradition goes beyond the diagnosis of Sangster, and the inferences derived from his critique, to a theological development that confronts "Wesleyanisms" that diverge from Wesley, and at the same time, makes its own contribution to reappropriating Wesley in light of the essentially existential categories of "persons-in relation." This leaves open the tantalizing possibility of taking Wynkoop's program even further, through an application of both classical and contemporary Trinitarian thought to the doctrine of sanctification.

Before doing this, however, we turn to the polarization between "Pneumatological" and "Christological," between "crisis" and "process" categories in relation to sanctifying grace, which has led Wesleyan theology into something of a deadlock, and beyond which, a Trinitarian revisioning may lead us.

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87 She does deal with aspects of trinitarian thought elsewhere, and we will return to her in the fifth chapter, where Wesleyan resources for a trinitarian theology of sanctification will be examined.
Chapter 3

THE CURRENT DEADLOCK OVER THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

The Theology Hits the Fan

In the middle nineteen-seventies a discussion emerged in the Wesleyan Theological Society over the use of pneumatological and pentecostal language in reference to entire sanctification. The "first shot was fired" from Scotland when the Nazarene Herbert McGonigle pointed out that Wesley used the phrase "baptized with the Holy Spirit" in reference to justifying grace, rather than to entire sanctification. With this, "the theology hit the fan" and after much going back and forth the debate came to a head in 1977 and 1978 before "subsiding without any clear resolution."

Even earlier than McGonigle's "first shot," George Allen Turner had stated, in 1965, that "John and Charles Wesley said or wrote little about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This emphasis is relatively recent. It is not easy to find Wesleyan writers devoting much space to it or associating it with entire sanctification and evangelical perfection."
Perhaps the most sustained defense of the inappropriateness of "baptism with the Spirit" language in reference to entire sanctification, from the standpoint of biblical studies, came from Asbury Theological Seminary professor Robert W. Lyon.5

From Pentecost on, all believers receive at conversion the Holy Spirit as promised - in His fullness. No biblical basis exists for a distinction between receiving the Spirit and being baptized in, or filled with, the Spirit...Were someone to ask me where we begin in establishing the biblical roots of Wesley's doctrine of perfection in love, one of the powerful warrants I would offer would be this biblical account of conversion. The dynamic of conversion to Jesus Christ is such that perfection in love is the mandatory follow-up.6

From the perspective of historical theology, Alex R.G. Deasley entered the discussion, maintaining that "In what may be called the classical Wesleyan tradition the equation of entire sanctification with the baptism with the Holy Spirit is conspicuous by its absence. Nowhere does it appear in...Richard Watson [or] in the systematic theologies of Miley and Pope."7

William Burt Pope, perhaps the most catholic of Methodist theologians in the nineteenth century repudiated the idea that Christian perfection brings the believer into a state that it is in any way distinct from the sanctifying grace received in regeneration.

[Christian perfection is not] the entrance into a new order of life, one namely of higher consecration under the influence of the Holy Spirit. That the higher life is the secret of entire consecration there can be no doubt. But there is no warrant in Scripture for making it a new dispensation of the Spirit, or a Pentecostal visitation added to conversion. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" means "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" In other words entire consecration is the stronger energy of a spirit already in the

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6 ibid.
regenerate, not a Spirit to be sent down from on high. This kingdom of God is already within if we would let it come in its perfection. 8

The holiness movement theologian H. Orton Wiley, while he does equate the baptism of the Holy Spirit with entire sanctification, devotes only one page to "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" in his three volume systematic. Furthermore, his argument for entire sanctification does not at all hinge on this connection. 9

According to Alex Deasley, "entire sanctification is related to the baptism in the Holy Spirit in precisely the same way that it is related to baptism...[it is] the full realization in experience of that fullness of God's salvation into which one is initiated by the baptism with the Holy Spirit." 10

In a much discussed correspondence with Joseph Benson in 1770, John Wesley relegates the phrase "receiving the Holy Ghost" in reference to entire sanctification to the status of _adiaphora_ - a thing indifferent.

You allow the whole thing that I contend for; an entire deliverance from sin, a recovery of the whole image of God, the loving God with all our heart, soul and strength. And you believe God is able to give you this; yea, to give it to you in an instant...If they like to call this "receiving the Holy Ghost" they may: Only the phrase, in that sense, is not scriptural, and not quite proper; for they all "received the Holy Ghost" when they were justified. 11

For John Wesley, all change wrought in the hearts of believers at conversion must be attributed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "This teaching...may appear strange to

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10 Deasley, WTJ 14:1, 39.
some who insist that the Holy Spirit is given subsequent to regeneration at the time of a 'second blessing,' but in this concept Wesley is at one with most Reformed teaching."\(^{12}\)

The "Two Generating Movements" of Wesleyanism

The historian Paul Merrit Bassett maintains that two systematic theologies have shaped the theology of the holiness movement in the twentieth century, at least as reflected in the formal statements of holiness movement denominations. In spite of their general agreement on the doctrine of Christian perfection these are "essentially different in methodology and in certain ranges of presuppositions."\(^{13}\) The first of these is derived from A.M. Hills' "New School Congregationalism," which placed human free agency at its center, with holiness ancillary to it. The second is the more Wesleyan focus of H. Orton Wiley.

Hills' doctrine of holiness leaves the Spirit as acting almost unilaterally, divorced from solid trinitarian moorings. "For Hills, the Holy Spirit is the agent and animator of the life of holiness...no care at all is taken...to anchor the Christian life in the continuing presence of Jesus Christ, with the Spirit serving as Christ's Spirit. The Spirit is seen as an independent being with an independent work."\(^{14}\) It is easy to see how the popular holiness movement and pentecostal idea of the Holy Spirit as a gift given, not with the new birth, but at some later time, might grow from this sort of thinking.

Wiley, on the other hand, exhibits a more Christocentric approach. "[T]he Holy Spirit supernaturally extends to men, the redemptive work of Christ...Christ


\(^{14}\) Bassett, *WTJ* 16:2, 87.
communicates to the membership of [his] body, the quickening and sanctifying offices of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{15}

On its Methodistic side, then, the holiness movement has developed a deeply christocentric ethic which is utterly dependent upon Christ's historic and continuing presence and upon his example. But side by side with this ethic is a pneumatological one in which Christ's role is unclear. Rather, the emphasis is upon some sort of spiritual power.\textsuperscript{16}

Donald Dayton seems to agree with those who identify two converging (or competing?) visions within the holiness movement.

We are a movement with two generating movements...one in the Wesleyanism of the eighteenth century and one in the holiness movement of the nineteenth century. These are not entirely congruent, and our struggle with these differences may help free us to face the challenges of articulating the Wesleyan message into the twentieth and twenty first centuries. We cannot meet these challenges by repeating the clichés of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{17}

John Fletcher's Dispensational Trinitarianism

It is well known that John Fletcher popularized the use of pneumatological and pentecostal language in reference to entire sanctification. Though Fletcher's terminology is significantly different from Wesley's at certain points, the teaching of the former clearly gained the explicit imprimatur of the latter.\textsuperscript{18} Wesley, in fact equated Christian perfection with being "filled with the Holy Ghost" in a letter to Joseph Benson.\textsuperscript{19} Turner concludes that a sharp disjoining of Wesley's and Fletcher's teaching as if they were at odds with each other would be a mistake.

\textsuperscript{16} Basset, WTJ 16:2, 88-9.
\textsuperscript{17} Donald W. Dayton, WTJ 30:1 (Spring 1995), 225.
\textsuperscript{18} Cp. McGonigle, WTJ, 8 (1973), 68.
Wesley did not object to linking the baptism with the Holy Spirit with entire sanctification and sometimes he made the link himself. He only objected, on scriptural grounds, to the statement that Christians do not receive the Holy Spirit at conversion, and he heartily endorsed Fletcher's last "Check" in which the baptism of the Holy Spirit was seen as a "second work of grace."  

Fletcher divided salvation history into three distinct epochs - the age of the Father, the age of the Son, and the age of the Holy Spirit. Under the Old Covenant, God was known primarily as Father. During the period of Christ's incarnation, God was known in the person of God's Son. After Christ has ascended to heaven, "another Comforter" was sent, one who would remain with God's people until the end of the ages.

As Lawrence Wood summarises Fletcher's approach, "[e]ven as there were stages in salvation in which God was progressively known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so there may be stages in one's personal history of salvation in which one may know God successively as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet it is the one and the same God who is known."  

This "trinitarian dispensationalism" is reminiscent of the ancient heresy of modalism, leaving Fletcher open to the charge that he might be guilty of that error. In a previously unpublished, incomplete manuscript, recently uncovered in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, this tendency to modalism is also apparent. In what is intended to be a reply to the Socinian ideas of Dr. Priestly, Fletcher speaks of God having made successive "displays" of himself, "first, as creating Father, secondly as

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redeeming Son, and thirdly, as sanctifying Spirit.\textsuperscript{23} Nothing distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, says Fletcher, but "the manifestation of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, superadded to the manifestation of the Father...Moral purposes [require] a discovery of the Father's love, of the Son's grace, and of the Spirit's power."\textsuperscript{24} The problem with this is similar to that raised by the contemporary attempts at replacing the traditional baptismal formula with terms such as "Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier." All three Persons of the Godhead create, redeem, and sanctify. All three Persons bestow love, grace, and power.

In fairness to Fletcher, it should be kept in mind, that he is not seeking to develop an ontological or immanental trinitarianism, but rather to delineate the divine \textit{oikonomia} of redemption in trinitarian categories. In doing so however, he does seem to do violence to the role of the whole of the Trinity in Christian experience. Fletcher sees a clear distinction between receiving the Son and receiving the Spirit in the experience of Jesus's disciples.\textsuperscript{25} Certainly the Gospels portray the disciples as converted persons. Christ had chosen them all to be with him.\textsuperscript{26} They were "already clean" through the word which he had spoken to them,\textsuperscript{27} and they had even received a foretaste of the Spirit's power when Jesus breathed upon them after his resurrection.\textsuperscript{28} And yet, their experience of the Spirit at Pentecost turned them into bold and effective witnesses.

\textbf{The Rite of Confirmation as a Second Blessing?}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{23} Fletcher to Dr. Priestly, 80. Underlinings in original.
\item\textsuperscript{24} ibid, 81.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Wood, "The Wesleyan View," 100.
\item\textsuperscript{26} Mark 3:13.
\item\textsuperscript{27} John 15:3.
\item\textsuperscript{28} John 20:19-23.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Lawrence Wood finds in the Anglican rite of confirmation a model for understanding this two-stage experience in the Christian life. In addition to the disciples discussed above, others in the New Testament might also be seen as receiving salvation in two stages. Both the Samaritans in Acts 8:14-17 and the Ephesians in Acts 19:1-7 had already believed in some sense, but received the gift of the Spirit subsequently, in a seeming completion of their earlier experience. These two passages seemed to have served as the textual basis for the early church's "two-stage" baptismal liturgy, with two distinct movements corresponding to Easter (the believer's incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ) and Pentecost (the believer's reception of the Holy Spirit). In process of time, this second stage was separated from the first and the rite of Confirmation took its place. The renewal of liturgical studies in this century, and the openness created by the ecumenical movement, has led to the revision of the baptismal rite in almost every Christian tradition, in an attempt to bring the rite back to this earlier pattern. The distinction between these two movements within the baptismal liturgy serves for Wood as a ritualised expression of entire sanctification as two works of grace - corresponding to a personal Easter and a personal Pentecost for the believer.

"...[T]he once-and-for-all events of the past, as Easter and Pentecost, are to become contemporary events in our own personalized history of salvation."30

Of course, this analogy breaks down when one considers the fact that the two movements of washing from sin and filling with the Spirit are both part of one single initiatory rite. It is not that the believer is to receive the forgiveness of sin at an early

point in his or her pilgrimage and then sometime later receive the confirming grace of the Spirit's sanctifying work. Rather, both forgiveness and cleansing are given in the initiatory rite of baptism, a rite which belongs at the beginning of the Christian life. If anything, such an identification supports a reception of the Spirit at conversion, rather than in a second work of grace.

The "Pentecostal" Wesley

Wesley, at least in his earlier writings, does seem to take a more Christological approach to the doctrine of entire sanctification than Fletcher. He stresses, for example, the "circumcision of the heart" defined as "the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus." It is interesting to note that of the thirty texts identified as those most often quoted by Wesley in his treatment of entire sanctification, none of them has any direct reference to the Holy Spirit or to Pentecost. When Wesley does use language drawn from the day of Pentecost, he seems to do so in reference to the new birth, rather than to a second work of grace.

And yet, Wesley designated Fletcher as the one most suited to succeed him in the leadership of the Methodist societies, and approved in an unqualified manner all that he wrote. In his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Wesley does equate entire sanctification with being "full of His Spirit," and points out that "there has been a larger measure of the Spirit given under the gospel than under the Jewish dispensation."

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33 Fletcher's premature death, however, made this impossible.
35 ibid, 61
Wesley also equates perfect love with being filled with the Holy Spirit in a letter to Joseph Benson.36 And, for Wesley, it is always the "fruit of the Spirit" which characterizes the entirely sanctified believer.37

The most recent research of Larry Wood is an indication of the fact that the discussion over the agreement or otherwise between Wesley and Fletcher is far from over.38 Wood points out that the idea of a post-justification experience of the Holy Spirit was not an idea that first occurred to either Wesley or Fletcher, but was held by the English Puritans a century before their time.

Richard Baxter and John Goodwin had connected the full assurance of faith with a Pentecost-like reception of the Holy Spirit, a baptism with the Holy Spirit, subsequent in time to one's justification by faith. John Goodwin, an Arminian Puritan, in the 17th Century wrote a book called, A Being Filled with the Spirit, which was a summons for justified believers to [receive] a fullness of the Spirit [which] would grant to [them] the full assurance of...faith and...hearts...made perfect in love. John Goodwin was called a "Methodist" nearly a hundred years before Wesley because he also taught that the believer could really be made righteous through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It is thus understandable that Fletcher should call John Wesley, "the John Goodwin of the age."39

Wesley wrote to Fletcher's close associate, Joseph Benson in the midst of a controversy at the Countess of Huntingdon's Trevecca College, taking exception to their use of the term "receiving the Spirit." He maintained that the Methodists "can

37 Wesley, Plain Account, 78-9.
sufficiently prove our whole Doctrine, without laying stress on those metaphorical Expressions" such as "the baptism with the Holy Ghost" referring to this "sentiment" as being "utterly new." But Wood maintains that Wesley had misunderstood their use of these expressions. He feared that Fletcher and Benson were saying that only the fully sanctified received the "witness of the Spirit." Wesley used the phrase "receiving the Spirit" in reference to the witness of the Spirit. A letter from Wesley to Benson on December 28th, 1770 would seem to indicate that Wesley was afraid Benson and Fletcher had fallen into the "Zinzendorfian" error. He tells Benson on March 9th, 1771 that he is to reread the Minutes of the Conference "and see whether you can conform thereto...Mr. Fletcher's late discovery...would [only] create huge debate and confusion" among the Methodists. That Wesley may have been confused about the precise nature of what he termed "Mr. Fletcher's late discovery" is indicated in a letter dated March 6th, 1771 in which he himself uses the phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" as a synonym for being "perfected in love." According to Wood, this letter shows that Wesley and his associates Fletcher and Benson were in fact, in spite of Wesley's misunderstanding over their use of terms, in full agreement on equating entire sanctification with the fullness of the Spirit.

In Wood's unpublished manuscript on the subject, which is over five hundred pages in length, he documents "the extensive use of Pentecostal phrases as encoded

40 ibid, 6.
41 ibid, 7-8.
42 ibid, 9.
43 ibid, 11.
44 ibid, 11.
nomenclature for Christian perfection which were universally used by the early
Methodists, including Wesley, his leading preachers and assistants. Wood cites Albert
Outler's judgment that the latter years of Wesley's thought are those most neglected by
Wesleyan scholarship. It was this Wesley, whom Wood calls "the Pentecostal Wesley"
who was understood by the early Methodists right through to the end of the nineteenth
century. One must not simply rely on the Standard Sermons for a full understanding of
Wesley's theology of holiness.

His later sermons, The Arminian Magazine which was begun in 1778, the
writings of John Fletcher which were published in 1771, the close personal
partnership between Wesley and Fletcher in forming the ideas of their preachers
as they travelled and preached together at Methodist preaching houses and in the
annual conferences, and the preaching and writings of his key preachers and
assistants must all be brought together into a single puzzle if a true picture of
Methodism is to be seen.

In Wesley's original teaching, therefore, as expressed in John Fletcher as its
official interpreter, rather than in any later innovation of Phoebe Palmer or Charles
Finney, is to be found the identification of Pentecost with entire sanctification. Indeed,
Wood goes so far as to elevate Fletcher's writings to a kind of theological standard with
his proposal of a threefold canon consisting of "John Wesley's sermons, Charles Wesley's
hymns, and John Fletcher's theology" as having shaped "the matrix of early
Methodism." Yet, as late as 1775, Wesley writes to Fletcher, stating that their respective views
on "receiving the Spirit" differed somewhat.

45 ibid, 20.
46 ibid, 25.
47 Wood, 25.
It seems our views of Christian perfection are a little different, though not opposite. It is certain every babe in Christ has received the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God. But he has not obtained Christian perfection. Perhaps you have not considered St. John's three-fold distinction of Christian believers: little children, young men, and fathers. All of these had received the Holy Ghost, but only the fathers were perfected in love. \(^{48}\)

T. Crichton Mitchell expressed something of the weariness felt by some over the debate when he declared in 1981 that the question of John Wesley's relating (or otherwise) of Pentecost with entire sanctification seemed to him to be "merely academic, of small profit, and rather boring."\(^{49}\) Yet, if the tradition is to move forward to that creative development of its *grand depositum* that it needs, it cannot do so by sidestepping this important discussion. Unless the Holy Spirit's work is seen as an extension of Christ's atonement, and of the Father's redemptive activity, an unhealthy modalism will continue to enervate Wesleyan thought and practice. If we continue to polarize toward either a Christological or a Pneumatological pole, we will only perpetuate an imbalance that is part of our historic legacy, and which needs addressing and rectifying.

Overemphasis of one person to the exclusion of the others is in fact a virtual denial of the true God. The Father without the Son and Spirit may be treated as a first cause but not as creator; the Son without the Father and Spirit leads to a Jesusology of one who does not lead us to the Father or give the Spirit. And the Spirit without the Father and the Son may emphasize our subjective experience or the variety of gifts but is loosed from his true context in the divine life. \(^{50}\)

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\(^{49}\) T. Crichton Mitchell, "Response to Dr. Timothy Smith on the Wesley's Hymns," in *WTJ* 16:2 (Fall, 1981), 49.

If it turns out to be the case that pentecostal language in reference to entire sanctification is demonstrated to be neither fully biblical nor authentically Wesleyan, one has to ask, as Melvin Dieter does, "what other terminology can express equally well the fullness of life in the Spirit as the Pentecost motif? What motif can better represent the dynamic for genuine holy living which is at the heart of the Wesleyan tradition?" The answer to that question may well lie in a recovery of a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection.

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51 Melvin E, Dieter, "Presidential Address: Musings," in WTJ 14:1 (Spring, 1979), 10.
Chapter 4

CONTEMPORARY TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

God as Being in Communion

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan settlement, though a monumental achievement in itself, has been thought by many contemporary theologians to have left some unfinished business. It left us, according to Ted Peters, "with an eternal immanent Trinity with only a dubious tie to the economic Trinity responsible for the saving work in history."\(^1\)

Classical trinitarian Christologies, in an attempt to counter gnostic Docetism, made sharp distinctions between the human suffering and the divine \textit{apatheia} of Christ. He suffered as a human, they claimed, but not as God. In doing this they "risked sacrificing the intimate God on the altar of the beyond."\(^2\)

Trinitarian theology, particularly in the West, exhibited an increasing concern with the inner relations of the persons within the Godhead (the immanent Trinity), often to the neglect of the relations between the persons in the work of salvation (the economic Trinity). The Cappadocians understood God as one in his being, but not in the mathematical sense of Arian monotheism. They distinguished carefully been \textit{ousia} and \textit{hypostasis}, terms which had earlier been used as synonyms for "being." God is one in his being (\textit{ousia}) but consists in the inseparable relation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the three \textit{hypostases}. There is no "being" of God other than this God in relation.\(^3\)

It has often been said that the Western tradition begins with the unity of the being of God, and then attempts to understand the three persons within that framework. Augustine tended to think in this way, and Thomas Aquinas' decision to treat the unity of God first (\textit{De Deo uno}) and having established that, to then go on to deal with God as

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\(^{2}\) ibid, 21.
Trinity (*De Deo triuno*) contributed toward a certain unitarian tendency in Western scholasticism, both in its Catholic and Protestant expressions. On the other hand, the Eastern tradition begins with the community of the three divine persons and then seeks to reconcile that with the unity of God. For the former, "the oneness of God is said to have an ontological priority over the persons," while for the latter, the reverse is true.\(^5\)

But this generalization should not be overdrawn. Catherine Mowry LaCugna counsels caution in this regard.

Certainly, Augustine stated that his point of departure is the unity of the divine nature, and Latin theology as a whole exhibits a strong preference to treat the Trinity as an *intradivine* reality. This is why most Orthodox theologians regard Augustinian theology as the great reversal of Nicene faith. Yet theologians in the Greek East were every bit as concerned with divine unity...To varying degrees theologians in both traditions moved away from the pre-Nicene and biblical ordering of the divine persons according to the pattern (taxis) of the economy [and] found it more convenient to treat questions such as the equality of the divine persons in terms of the 'intradivine' structure of God's being.\(^6\)

St. Augustine's formula, *opera trinitatis ad intra sunt divisa, opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*,\(^7\) demonstrates that the Western tradition was not entirely devoid of the idea of a trinitarian involvement in God's *oikonomia*. It is the Triune God who relates savingly to the world, and not only the Father, the Son, or the Spirit.\(^8\) Nonetheless, it remains clear that the concern tilted in the direction of the immanent Trinity. The Western tradition tended to think of God's "being" as something which *underlay* relation, rather than defining being in terms of communion.\(^9\) LaCugna speaks of the preoccupation with "the structure of God's inner life" as "the theological defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity," and goes on to cite its destructive outcome in the political sphere.

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\(^7\) "The internal trinitarian operations are divided, the external trinitarian operations are undivided."

\(^8\) Peters, 21.

\(^9\) Gunton, 10.
"A unitarian, patriarchal, monarchical, hierarchical theism gradually replaced a trinitarian monotheism, with disastrous political results. Christian theologians justified every kind of hierarchy, exclusion, and pattern of domination, whether religious, sexual, political, clerical, racial, as 'natural' and divinely intended."\textsuperscript{10}

When the Trinity is considered primarily as a doctrine, there is a tendency to drive reflection on the trinitarian being of God into obscurity. Modern trinitarian theology has helped us to see that the doctrine of the Trinity begins with a focus, not on God's ontological being, but on God's saving activity. It centers on Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity, rather than being a doctrine derived from philosophical reflection on the nature of Absolute Being (a reflection which always tilts toward sheer monotheism or monarchianism), is rather the result of rational reflection on the saving activity of God in Christ. These divine occurrences confront human reason with the realization that only a triune God can account for them.\textsuperscript{11}

The proper mode of discourse, then, regarding the Trinity, is not philosophical theology, but doxology.\textsuperscript{12} The Trinity is not first a doctrine of, but the experience of believers. According to Eric Mascall, the Trinity is not properly \textit{about} God. The Trinity \textit{is} God.

The Trinity is not primarily a doctrine, any more than the Incarnation is primarily a doctrine. There is a doctrine \textit{about} the Trinity, as there are doctrines about many other facts of existence, but if Christianity is true, the Trinity is not a doctrine, the Trinity is God. And the fact that God \textit{is} Trinity - that in a profound and mysterious way, there are three divine Persons eternally united in one life of complete perfection and beatitude - is not a piece of gratuitous mystification, thrust by dictatorial clergymen, down the throats of an unwilling but helpless laity, and therefore to be accepted, if at all, with reluctance and discontent. It is

\textsuperscript{10} LaCugna, 17.
\textsuperscript{12} LaCugna, 16.
the secret of God's most intimate life and being, into which, in his infinite love and generosity, he has admitted us; and it is therefore to be accepted with amazed and exulted gratitude.\textsuperscript{13}

In the postmodern world, it is more or less a given that individuals are not lone atoms but persons in relation. There is no longer any autonomous person. Each person is who that person is because of intimate connections with other persons. The doctrine of the Trinity speaks profoundly to this realization, for it tells us that God's own being is constituted in precisely this way - God is being in communion. This communion is, moreover, a loving communion. "The doctrine of the Trinity reaches to the deepest recesses of the soul and helps us know the majesty of God's presence and the mystery of his love. Love is the most authentic mark of the Christian life, and love among humans, as within God, requires community with others and a sharing of the deepest kind."\textsuperscript{14}

Person, not substance, is the ultimate ontological category...the ultimate source of reality is not a 'by-itself' or an 'in-itself' but a person, a toward-another...God...never existed as a solitary figure. God is self-communicating, existing from all eternity in relation to another. The ultimate ground and meaning of being is therefore communion among persons: God is ecstatic, fecund, self-emptying out of love for another, a personal God who comes to self through another.\textsuperscript{15}

We now turn to the primary theological sources in the current resurgence of interest in trinitarian theology.

Karl Barth

Ted Peters alerts his readers to Claude Welch's 1952 book \textit{In His Name} and "its near prophetic insight that the work of Karl Barth would become the wave of future trinitarian discussion."\textsuperscript{16} The question of the connection between the immanent Trinity

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\textsuperscript{15} LaCugna, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{16} Peters, 9-10.
\end{flushright}
and the economic Trinity was used by Barth in his suggestion that they are in fact one. "Subsequent Trinity talk has been filling out the picture." 17

In the Preface to Barth's magnum opus, Church Dogmatics, G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance refer to Barth's work as containing "undoubtedly the greatest treatise on the Trinity since the Reformation," and likening its greatness to that of Augustine. 18

With his rejection of any kind of natural theology, Barth insisted on treating the doctrine of the Trinity, not as a hidden mystery, but in terms of God's own revelation of Godself. There is no ontological God who in God's hiddenness is somehow divorced from the saving God. Herbert Hartwell summarizes Barth's view: "We know God exclusively as one who acts upon us as the triune God...since he is the living God, it is not possible to abstract his real work and action in favor of a being of God in general. Holy Scripture does not allow 'this splitting up of the concept of God'." 19 For Barth, God is both Deus Revelatus and Deus Absconditus at the same time. 20

We have consistently followed the rule, which we regard as basic, that statements about the divine modes of being 21 antecedently in themselves cannot be different in content from those that are being made about their reality in revelation. All our statements concerning what is called the immanent trinity have been reached simply as confirmations or underlinings, or materially as the indispensable premises of the economic trinity...The reality of God which encounters us in his revelation is his reality in the depths of eternity. 22

The incarnation is not a contingency plan, or an afterthought. God wills to become human in eternity. Christ is never logos asarkos but always logos ensarkos - "the immanent has a thrust toward the economic." 23

17 op. cit.
20 Thompson, 23.
21 Barth prefers "Divine modes of being" to the traditional "persons." This should not be confused, however, with the ancient heresy of "modalism" of which Barth was not guilty.
23 Thompson, 37.
From Barth’s Reformed perspective, we turn now to the work of the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner.

Karl Rahner

According to Rahner, most Christians, though nominally professing faith in the Trinity are, in fact, practicing monotheists. The reason for this is that the doctrine of the Trinity has been separated from salvation history, and considered purely in ontological categories.²⁴ The close connection between the relations of the persons of the Trinity and the work of salvation has been so disjoined that the traditional view would seem to imply that any of the three persons could have become human, and that any of the three persons could have become the principle of divine love in humanity. In contrast to this, Rahner asserts that it is the Son alone who could have participated in the Incarnation, and the Spirit alone who could have served as the divine indwelling.

According to "Rahner's Rule,"²⁵ the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. "[N]o adequate distinction can be made between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the economy of salvation."²⁶ Rahner's great contribution is his insistence that "the Trinity is the mystery of salvation."²⁷ He provides a key to establishing a contemporary Trinitarian theology which removes the doctrine from the rarefied atmosphere of Greek metaphysics and places it in the centre of the church's life and experience.

On the one hand, Rahner is keen to ground Trinitarian theology in the actual experience of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the life of the church, and of believers. On the other hand, he is cautious about the tritheism that often emerges from this experience. The use of the traditional term "person" only exacerbates this problem. In an

²⁴ Joseph A. Bracken, What Are They Saying About the Trinity? (New York: Paulist Press, 1979)

²⁵ A term coined by Peters, God as Trinity, 22.


²⁷ Cited in Thompson, 22.
attempt to overcome this, Rahner proposes the rather clumsy-sounding phrase, "distinct manner of subsisting," as a substitution for the traditional "person."²⁸

Rahner's program is not free of problems. He seems to have failed to distinguish between the freedom of grace and the necessity of God's being. If the self-giving of the Father and the Son are ontologically grounded in the immanent Trinity, where is the "risk" in the incarnation? If the Father could do no more than give his Son for the life of the world, because this relation existed within the structure of his own being, how is this a gift? How is this a freely willed decision to save sinners? Would God still be God without the Incarnation? The "procession" of the Son from the Father (an ontological fact) needs to be distinguished more clearly from a "sending" of the Son (an economic fact) than Rahner seems to have done. Rahner seems to identify the word "God" with the Father. The Father as true God gives his divinity to Son and Spirit. This would, of course, be subordinationism.

There is also the danger that the immanent Trinity will be collapsed into the economic Trinity in such a manner that God becomes "dependent on historical manifestation."²⁹ If God only becomes Trinity in the context of a historical event such as the incarnation or the cross, then, as Helmut Thielicke puts it, "The three persons of the trinity becomes masks in a phenomenal drama."³⁰

Jurgen Moltmann

The work of Jurgen Moltmann is perhaps the most radical of modern trinitarian theologies, making concessions to process philosophy that are disconcerting to more orthodox thinkers. He openly admits that his "trinitarian theology of the cross," which seems to focus on an ontological change in God's being wrought through the cross, is "panentheistic...For in the hidden mode of humiliation to the point of the cross, all being and all that annihilates has already been taken up in God and God begins to become 'all in

²⁸ Bracken, 14.
²⁹ Thompson, 28.
³⁰ ibid, 29.
The lack of an ontological dimension in his trinitarianism opens him up to the charge of tritheism. 32

Clearly Moltmann's trinitarian theology exhibits an apologetic concern, and serves as something of a theodicy. He wishes to overcome the antagonism toward the doctrine on the part of its cultured despisers. One of the important platforms of this antagonism is the apparent responsibility of God for evil. God's perceived apathetic attitude toward human suffering is brought clearly into focus in the horrors of Auschwitz. Against the traditional view of the omnipotent God as one who is "overwhelmingly active, as doing everything, and therefore as, apparently the cause of evil," Moltmann stresses the suffering of God on the cross. 33

But this suffering is not a patipassian suffering, such that the Father is the locus of the Passion. Rather, the Father and the Son alike suffer, and out of this suffering, both experience a new quality of being in the Holy Spirit. In asserting that the Trinity is "deeply involved in the death of Jesus on the cross," 34 Moltmann rejects the classical concept of apatheia, and its corollary belief that only the human, and not the divine nature of Christ suffered on the cross. "The cross stands at the heart of the trinitarian being of God; it divides and conjoins the persons in their relationships to each other and portrays them in a specific way. From the life of these three, which has within it the death of Jesus, there then emerges who God is and what his Godhead means." 35

According to Moltmann, "The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father is just as important as the death of the Son." 36 Not only does the Son suffer the agony of being forsaken by the Father, the Father suffers at the


32 ibid. 51.

33 Gunton, 21.

34 Bracken, 27.


36 ibid, 243, cited in Bracken, 27.
separation from his Son, thus losing his identity as father. In the mutual surrender of the identities of Father and Son for the sake of humanity, the Father and Son experience "a new unity with one another in the Spirit." The Spirit is "the personification of self-giving love," and this love is set loose in the world, enabling the establishment of "a deeper and richer form of human life."\(^37\)

Our salvation depends on this complete identification of the Father and the Son with each other. The Father must share in the sufferings of the Son. "[O]nly if all disaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation and sinking into nothingness is in God himself is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible election, and divine life."\(^39\)

Theologians influenced by process philosophy, such as John Cobb, David Griffin, Charles Hartshorne and Schubert Ogden have not been explicitly trinitarian. Moltmann lies much closer to the consensual trinitarian position, yet attempts a creative advance of that position. He seems to take the pantheistic (or panentheistic) monotheism of Alfred North Whitehead and the process thinkers, and link it with a distinctly trinitarian view. He rejects the \textit{apatheia} of classical theism. "The God of theism is poor. He cannot love nor can he suffer."\(^40\) But it is not clear that Moltmann has avoided the complete identification of God with creation, often entailed in immanentist forms of theology.

In Moltmann, "God has a history with the world. He allows what happens to him in the world in time and on the cross to act back and influence him and so change him."\(^41\) The Trinity, for Moltmann, "is an evolving event between three divine subjects and the world and...the triune God is not complete until the end."\(^42\) God is still "becoming" until the consummation of all things when God will be all in all. God's own being is oriented

\(^{37}\) ibid.  
\(^{38}\) ibid, 28.  
\(^{40}\) ibid, 253, cited in Bracken, 29.  
\(^{41}\) Thompson, 33.  
\(^{42}\) ibid, 51.
toward the eschaton, along with creation. As Bauckham points out, "the economic trinity could be seen as open both behind and in front to an immanent trinity."\(^{43}\) O'Hanlon responds rather negatively to this concept. "[This] Hegelian-type identification in which the cross is seen as the fulfillment of the trinity in a Process Theology-type way...has no difficulty in directly ascribing change and suffering to God and...ends up with a mythological, tragic image of God."\(^{44}\)

**Eberhard Jungel**

The Tubingen theologian, Eberhard Jungel (b.1934), taught New Testament in Berlin from 1962-1963, systematic theology from 1963-1966, and in Zurich from 1966-1969.\(^{45}\) Writing from a Lutheran confessional standpoint, he takes up Rahner's axiom, agrees with it, but interprets it in a certain manner unique to himself. For Jungel, the difference between the immanent and the economic Trinity is only a very minor one.

It is only as God is *for us* in the Son that God is for himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. There is no essence of God hidden behind his love for us. His essential being is "loving self-renunciation."\(^{46}\)

Bracken further explains Jungel's position.

In the act of loving, the self both gives itself away to the beloved and recovers its identity on another level as a free gift from the beloved. In true love, accordingly, there is involved a death to an older self in order to attain a new selfhood with the beloved; love is a dynamic unity of life and death for the sake of a still richer and deeper life...[i]f God loves himself, this means that there is in God one who loves (the Father), one who is loved (the Son), and the exchange of love between the Father and the Son (the Spirit).\(^{47}\)

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\(^{43}\) ibid, 34.
\(^{44}\) ibid, 38.
\(^{46}\) Thompson, 31.
\(^{47}\) Bracken, 55-6.
Jungel, in asserting that God is love, is not, however, making the Feuerbachian error of claiming that love is God.

Jungel argues that divine love, which is purely self-giving and never self-seeking, is qualitatively different from human love which is invariably a mixture of the two. Hence, to affirm that God is love is to believe (a) that there is a transcendent source of human love and (b) that human love can be progressively transformed through contact with the divine. This contact with the divine is, of course, made possible in and through the life and above all, the death of Jesus. Jesus was in his own person loving proof of the identity between God and self-giving love.48

The "older-self" that dies in God is the pre-existing relationship between Father and Son for the sake of creating the new self on the human sphere through the Spirit. Jungel sees the grounds for his position as having been laid long ago in Luther's Christology and Hegel's philosophy.

That the God who is love must be able to suffer and does suffer beyond all limits in the giving up of what is most authentically his for the sake of mortal man is an indispensable insight of the newer theology schooled by Luther's Christology and Hegel's philosophy. Only the God who is identified with the Crucified One makes us certain of his love and thus of himself.49

But what of the co-eternity of the Holy Spirit? Has the Spirit no ontological existence apart from the exchange of love between the Father and the Son exhibited on the cross?

Following Barth, Jungel seems to assert that in the eternal election of God, God wills to be our saving God. There is no logos asarkos, but only a logos ensarkos. Jungel makes the incarnation, and the cross a necessity for God, so that, again, the question of

48 ibid, 56-7.
God's freedom is raised. If this self-giving love is a natural expression of the Being of God, in what sense are the incarnation and the cross gracious gifts, freely given?

**Hans Urs von Balthasar**


Balthasar, in adopting a more traditional stance, posits himself clearly against both Moltmann and Rahner.

[T]he economic trinity is to be seen as the exposition of the immanent but the latter is the basis which sustains the former and may not be identified with it... The dogma of the Trinity has profound soteriological meaning. However it is as God who is love that he is involved with it. He does not first become love because he has the world as his counterpart and partner but because, in himself, exalted over the world, he is love itself.⁵¹

Balthasar develops a "theology of Holy Saturday" in which Christ, in going down to death and Hades, experiences the fullness of God's "no" in complete abandonment to hell. Yet this "no" is placed also in the context of the "yes" spoken in the resurrection.⁵² This abandonment is experienced, not only by the human nature of Christ, but also by his divine nature. The already established idea of the *communicatio idiomatum* proves helpful at this point in overcoming the bifurcation in the idea that only Christ's humanity suffered death and abandonment. Whatever can be attributed to the human nature of Christ...
Christ can also be attributed to his divine nature and vice versa. When Christ suffered, God suffered also.\textsuperscript{53}

\textbf{Catherine Mowry La Cugna}

Contemporary Roman Catholic theologian, Catherine Mowry La Cugna, provides us with a picture of the Trinity as a "mystery of love." It is a picture which, perhaps inadvertently, reflects the characteristically Wesleyan emphasis on the centrality of love in the process of sanctification.

The mystery of God is revealed in Christ and the Spirit as the mystery of love, the mystery of persons in communion who embrace death, sin, and all forms of alienation for the sake of life. Jesus Christ, the visible icon of the invisible God, discloses what it means to be fully personal, divine as well as human. The Spirit of God, poured into our hearts as love (Rom. 5:5) gathers us together into the body of Christ, transforming us so that "we become by grace what God is by nature," namely, persons in full communion with God and with every creature.\textsuperscript{54}

La Cugna calls for a trinitarian theology "in the mode of doxology," which is "situated in the liturgical life of the church." Prayer and worship are, after all, "the inner moments of all dogmatic statements."\textsuperscript{55} Through doxology, the tension between apophatic theology, with its stress on mystery and hiddenness, and kataphatic theology, with its stress on revelation and activism, is overcome. Such a theology will be both Christological and Pneumatological, "anchored in [both] Christ and the Spirit."\textsuperscript{56}

"Understood as a way of rendering praise to God, trinitarian theology...reconnects

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{53} ibid, 54.
\footnotetext{54} Catherine Mowry La Cugna, \textit{God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life}. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991) 1. Note here some contrasts with aspects of traditional holiness movement theology. Instead of certainty there is mystery. Instead of individualism there is "persons in communion." Being made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) does not cancel out being fully human. The stress on love was central, of course, to Wesley's own theology. However, "perfection in love" came to be thought of in rather static terms, as a state achieved rather than a relationship to be developed.
\footnotetext{55} ibid, 367.
\footnotetext{56} ibid, 367.
\end{footnotes}
spirituality with theology, orthodoxy with orthopraxis, the contemplative with the speculative, apophatic with kataphatic, the pastoral with the academic.  

La Cugna conceives of the life of holiness in these trinitarian categories, drawing from the traditional Eastern Orthodox idea of ὑάτων. To be sanctified is to become Christlike, to be deified, to be "ingodded." The goal of following Christ in this way is "the sainthood of every woman, man, and child."  

The basis for a Trinitarian revisioning of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification might begin here, on familiar ground, with the recognition that sanctifying grace is expressed in the fullness of love. The advance to the tradition lies in a linking of this love to the divine community among the persons of the Trinity, thus avoiding the atomistic approach that has often led to individualism and an unhelpful pietism in Methodist circles. When an experience of sanctifying grace is understood in terms of being "crucified with Christ" or of "receiving the Spirit" it may too easily be overlooked that this crucifixion or receiving is the work and the gift not simply of a person to a person (i.e. Christ to the believer, or the Spirit to the believer) but as a communion between the Triune God and a person in relation. God in divine community is given to the church in God's sanctifying power, thus creating and sustaining, not only holy individuals, but a divine society. It is in this way that the church is made "a partaker of the divine nature."  

The idea of God's being as becoming may have its difficulties, but when applied to the believer's growth in holiness it may prove helpful. If God's being is in becoming,
then God can still be God and yet have potentiality. This seems to overthrow classical
theism's belief in God's impassibility. On the other hand, if the being of humanity is in
becoming, then a person can be fully human, and yet still in the process of becoming
more fully human, through sanctifying grace. In the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians,
Christians may quite properly be addressed as those who are "sanctified, called to be
holy."  

**Wolfhart Pannenberg**

In the eleventh chapter of the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg deals with "the Triune God as Reconciler of the World" in his treatment of the Pauline concept of reconciliation. The salvation of the world is accomplished through overcoming the opposition to God which is the result of sin and death. The world must be reconciled to God, and not God to the world. This reconciliation is accomplished through the suffering of Christ and in the ongoing present apostolic ministry that flows from it. The significance of Christ's death is not exhausted in a past event in history. A trinitarian description of the divine action in the death of Christ helps us to see the way in which God is still at work in reconciling the world to himself.  

Though human agents were at work in the crucifixion and death of Jesus, it was God the Father who was providentially directing the events leading to the cross in a salvific direction, so that "...the whole earthly path of the Son was from the outset a path
to the crucifixion of Jesus according to the providence of God."  

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60 1 Corinthians 1:2, italics mine.
62 ibid, 437.
63 ibid, 438.
is not acting monistically, however, for it is coupled with the obedience of the Son, who even now, continues, through the apostolic proclamation which continues in the church's preaching, to work reconciliation in the world.64 "Clearly the Father does not act alone in the offering up of Jesus to death. Jesus himself is not simply passive in this action, for the Son is also acting subject in this event. As such, he is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14)."65

The Spirit also is at work in this reconciliation. The truth of the content of all of the above depends on the Spirit's work, who glorifies Jesus in human hearts as the Son of God. Jesus cannot be reconciler, unless statements about his reconciling work actually correspond with a saved and reconciled humanity.66 Humanity is thus reconciled because it is "taken up into fellowship with the Father of the Son who became man in Jesus Christ...This takes place through the Spirit. Through the Spirit, reconciliation with God no longer comes upon us solely from outside. We ourselves enter into it."67

As the self-offering of the Son for the reconciliation of the world and his being offered up by the Father are one and the same event and form a single process, so we are to see the work of the exalted Christ and that of the Spirit in us as different aspects of one and the same divine action for the reconciliation of the world.68

Because the Spirit lifts us beyond our finitude and into the divine life through reconciliation, the life of believers is "ecstatic." That is, they live outside of themselves, because they live in Christ,69 and Christ in them.70 Though outside themselves, they are

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64 ibid, 438-41.
65 ibid, 441.
66 ibid, 442-3.
67 ibid, 450.
68 op. cit.
69 Romans 6:6-11
70 Romans 8:10.
not, however, estranged from themselves. Estrangement from the self is often the mark of a wrong kind of "ecstatic" behaviour. It may take place in states of extreme frenzy or fury, or in bondage and addiction. Believers escape such bondage for their *ecstasis* lifts them beyond self-centeredness into fellowship with Jesus.

For this reason, being outside the self through the Spirit and in faith in Jesus Christ means liberation, not merely in the sense of elevation above our own finitude, but also in the sense of attaining afresh by this elevation to our own existence as the Creator who has affirmed it and reconciled it to himself. It means liberation from the bondage of the world, sin, and the devil for a life in the power of the Spirit.\(^{71}\)

This does not mean a mystical union with God that would blur the distinction between God and the believer. For the Son differentiates himself from the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. As believers share in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father, so they also share in the Spirit's disposition of seeking, not their own glory, but the glory of the Father and the Son. "Hence the Spirit completes our reconciliation with God by enabling us through faith in Jesus Christ to accept our finite existence before God."\(^{72}\)

In the holiness movement ecstatic experiences have often been normative expressions of sanctifying grace. Too often, however, they have not resulted in a lifting of the self out of self-centeredness to be set free to live in God and in others. Rather, they have too often resulted in an inability to affirm our continued creatureliness, and a tendency to think of full sanctification as lifting a person beyond human fallibility.

Pannenberg's stress on a trinitarian reconciliation of humanity which enables

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\(^{71}\) Pannenberg, 452.  
\(^{72}\) ibid, 454.
believers to be caught up into the filial and others-focused dynamic of the divine family, might help us to overcome this tendency in our tradition. The fully sanctified believer would then be able both to participate in the divine nature, and also to affirm and accept the continued finiteness of his or her being.

We will now turn to the identification of resources for a trinitarian revisioning of Christian perfection drawn from the Wesleyan tradition itself, before moving on, in a final chapter, to construct a proposal for such a revision.
Chapter 5

WESLEYAN TRINITARIAN RESOURCES

John Wesley's On the Trinity

John Wesley's only sermon explicitly devoted to the subject of the Trinity was published in Ireland in 1775 under the title, "A Sermon on 1st John, v.7." Albert Outler points out that this is Wesley's only extended comment on the subject, suggesting that "for Wesley as for pietists generally, abstract doctrines are better believed devoutly than analyzed rationally."¹ This may perhaps have been a reaction to certain rationalizing tendencies in Anglican treatments of the subject, such as those of Richard Hooker, George Bull, and Thomas Sherlock.² He cites favorably the treatment of the doctrine in Dean Swift's sermon on the Trinity. Swift, who was the Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin from 1713, published his sermon on the subject in 1744. In it he contended that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, "so far above reason as precludes rational explication altogether."³

Wesley approves of the Athanasian Creed, though he rejects its damnatory clauses, and its claim that a subscription to its precise explication of the Trinity was necessary to salvation.⁴

² ibid.
³ fn. 8 in Outler, *Works II:377.*
⁴ ibid, 377. In the 1767 collection *Hymns on the Trinity,* Charles Wesley composed a paraphrase of the first half of the Athanasian Creed. In it we read of "The Father, Son and Spirit of love," and of "The Father, Son, and Spirit of grace..."

Both God and Lord, who him believe,
Each person by himself we name:
Yet not three Gods or Lords receive,
But One essentially the same.
I dare not insist upon anyone's using the word 'Trinity' or 'Person'. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better. But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot; much less would I burn a man alive - and that with moist, green wood - for saying, 'Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet I scruple using the words "Trinity" and "Person" because I do not find those terms in the Bible.' These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text: 'There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.'

The same generous "benefit-of-the-doubt" attitude that Wesley displayed toward "heretics" such as Pelagius and Montanus seems to be being extended here to Servetus also. On the other hand, it is hard to miss the biting sarcasm here in the reference to "merciful John Calvin." Wesley had uncovered an account of the Calvin-Servetus controversy in the Bodleian library, and was no doubt familiar with the events leading to Servetus death. Servetus' own words in E.M. Wilbur's translation of his Two Treatises...on the Trinity seem to reflect the sentiments Wesley represents him as holding here.

The doctrine of the Trinity can be neither established by logic nor proved from Scripture...The Scriptures and the Fathers teach one God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son; but scholastic philosophy has introduced terms which are not understood and do not accord with Scripture. Jesus taught that he himself was the Son of God...But the doctrine of the Trinity incurs the ridicule of the Mohammedans and the Jews. It arose out of Greek philosophy...whereas the church should be founded on the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

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5 ibid, 377-8.
7 The Two Treatises of Servetus on the Trinity. Translated by E.M. Wilbur, 1932. Cited in Outler, Works II:378, fn.11.
8 op. cit.
Wesley is aware that the authenticity of the text upon which his sermon is based is open to challenge. He lists Bengelius’ reasons for including it, and reminds his readers that its absence from many later manuscripts may have been the result of the Arianizing party under Constantius.9

There are many things that lie beyond human comprehension, yet we have no trouble in believing in them. Wesley lists as examples of these incomprehensible certainties, such things as the motion of the sun, of light, and air, the earth, and the existence of the body and soul.10 In just the same way, though we cannot understand the precise mode of being within the mystery of the ontological Trinity, we still intuitively know that such relations must exist, not by any process of ratiocination, but through Christian experience. The “knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion.”11

Though babes in Christ could not expect it, fathers in Christ might even share, with the Marquis de Renty, the immediate existential apprehension of the Trinity in an “experimental verity, and a plenitude of the presence of the ever blessed Trinity.”12 But even the merest babe in Christ experiences salvation in clearly trinitarian fashion. “I know not how anyone can be a Christian believer till...God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son - and having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit ‘even as he honours the Father.’”13

9 ibid, 378-9. He describes John Albert Bengel (1682-1752), whose Gnomon Novi Testamenti (1742) formed the basis of his own Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament (1755) as “the most pious, the most judicious, and the most laborious, of all the modern interpreters of the New Testament,” 378.
10 ibid, 379-84.
11 ibid, 385.
12 op. cit.
13 op. cit.
H. Ray Dunning outlines what might be a "distinctive Wesleyan approach" to the doctrine of the Trinity, based in part on Wesley's sermon, which if followed would lead to "taking a different tack from the usual evangelical approach." First, a Wesleyan approach will refuse to insist on any particular explication of the doctrine. This would not mean indifference to orthodox formulations of the Trinity, but a recognition that creedal definitions are important, not because of their positive statements, so much as for their negative rejection of errors.

There will also be a distinction between the substance of the doctrine and its philosophical or theological explication, between the fact of the Divine Being as existence in Trinity, and the manner of that existence. The Church must inevitably use both philosophical and theological language in its teaching of the doctrine as well as strictly biblical language, but this will always take place in the humility expressed in St. Augustine's approach: "When the question is asked, What three? human language labors altogether under great poverty of speech. The answer, however, is given, three 'persons,' not that it might be (completely) spoken, but that it might not be left (wholly) unspoken."15

Third - and here is the most distinctive aspect of the Wesleyan approach - there will be the recognition that the substance of the doctrine is not ontological but soteriological. In Wesleyan theology, soteriology has a central position, bringing all other doctrines into focus. "Ultimately, Wesleyan theology asks about the saving

significance of every Christian doctrine and resists bringing purely speculative questions into the area of fundamental theology." The whole of the Trinity is involved in our salvation in the sense that "thinking of the Father as Him to whom we are reconciled, it is the basis of our acceptance with God (the Son) and the basis of the witness of the Spirit." Wesley concludes, "Therefore, I do not see how it is possible for any to have vital religion who denies that the Three are One."

The Trinity in the Hymns of Charles Wesley

John Wesley described the 1780 *Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* as "a little body of experimental and practical divinity." Every Wesleyan hymn book since has approximated this description, though certainly none have surpassed the manner in which it describes this great contribution to the Church. It might be compared with the *Canon* of the Latin Mass and the *Book of Common Prayer* in terms of the sweep of its religious genius. According to Rattenbury, Charles Wesley's hymns contain "the Bible in solution" and are "needle-worked or woven-patterned fabrics" from Scripture.

T. Crichton Mitchell outlines a model of approach to the Wesley hymns:

To come to grips meaningfully and not merely enjoyably with the Wesley hymns you must...have a sense of wonder at the grace and love of God...his hymns will leave you panting for spiritual breath. And this will be whether you survey his work as to quality, quantity, variety, popularity, extent, or influence. It gives you a chin-dropping eye-popping sense of the Incredible. Incredible divine love and grace, with utterly incredible possibilities, communicated through an

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16 Dunning, 211.
17 ibid, 232.
incredible poetic celebration of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [In Charles Wesley] you have a man amazed: a man with a dancing heart: you have that all too rare specimen - a theologian who thinks and prays and sings!21

While only the Sermons and the Notes are the formal standard of Methodist doctrine,22 it is the the Sermons, Notes, and Hymns taken together which constitute the functioning standard of Wesleyan doctrine. These are the “three sets of biblical expositions” in which Methodists ground their doctrines.23 The Hymn Book is derived from the experience of a liberated soul. “[T]he veil was removed, the book opened, the bird released from the cage, and free to sing.”24

We saw that mystery was a category used by John Wesley in his approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. Mystery is a category that appears also in this other great canon of Wesleyan soteriology, the hymns of Charles Wesley. It is not only the Trinity which is a mystery. Here, the Incarnation is also an inscrutable riddle, before which angels and men stand astounded.

'Tis myst'ry all, th' Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all, Let earth adore!
Let angel minds inquire no more.25

The Trinitarian shape of this wonder may be seen in the following representative sample of Wesley’s hymnody.

Thou God that answerest by fire,
On thee in Jesu's name we call;
Fulfil our faithful hearts' desire,
And let on us thy Spirit fall.

Bound on the altar of thy cross
Our old, offending nature lies;
Now, for the honour of thy cause,
Come, and consume the sacrifice!26

Here we begin to see how resources for a Trinitarian theology of Christian perfection may be found in Wesleyan hymnody. The God who “answerest by fire” is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the name of this Jesus that we call upon our Father. As we place our “old offending nature” upon the altar, the Spirit falls upon us and consumes the sacrifice. It is the Spirit who sanctifies here, but not abstracted from the Father or the Son.

Consider also the following hymn, included by Orange Scott, the founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion of America, in an 1843 hymnal for the use of that body.

An inward baptism of pure fire,
Wherewith to be baptiz'd, I have;
‘Tis all my longing soul’s desire:
This, only this my soul can save.

Straiten’d I am till this be done;
Kindle in me the living flame;
Father, in me reveal Thy Son;
Baptize me into Jesus’ name.

Transform my nature into Thine;
Let all my powers Thine impress feel;
Let all my soul become divine,
And stamp me with thy Spirit’s seal.27

27 A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America. (Boston: Published by Orange Scott, 1843), 198. Cited in Melvin Dieter, Presidential Address: Musings,” in WTJ 14:1 (Spring, 1979), 13.
The Father is appealed to that he might baptize the longing believer into Jesus' name. This transformation, this divinization, is to be accomplished by being stamped with "thy Spirit's seal." One of the most frequently sung of Wesley's hymns, "Arise, my soul, arise" also bears a markedly trinitarian shape: "The bleeding Sacrifice" appears on the believer's behalf as "Surety," interceding on the basis of his "precious blood" before the Father, his "five bleeding wounds" pleading "Forgive!" The Father hears the prayer of "His dear Anointed One" and, unable to turn away the presence of his Son bestows the longed-for gift. But this glorious transaction is not complete until, "His Spirit answers to the blood" assuring the believer of salvation and enabling the confident cry, "Father, Abba, Father!"  

In the section on "Believers Rejoicing" in *Hymns For the Use of the People Called Methodists* there appear thirteen hymns drawn from the 1767 collection *Hymns on the Trinity.* Charles Wesley had been inspired to put together the original collection by a reading of William Jones of Nyland's *The Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity.* The following may be taken as representative.

Come Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Whom one all-perfect God we own,
Restorer of thine image lost,
Thy various offices make known;
Display, our fallen souls to raise,
Thy whole economy of grace.

Jehovah in Three Persons, come,
And draw, and sprinkle us, and seal
Poor guilty, dying worms in whom

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29 Hymns 242-255, ibid.
30 b. 1726- d. 1800.
31 Cf, note in *Works VII*:395.
Thy lost eternal, life reveal;  
The knowledge of thyself bestow,  
And all this glorious goodness show.

Soon as our pardoned hearts believe  
That thou art pure, essential love,  
The proof we in ourselves receive  
Of the Three Witnesses above;  
Sure as the saints around thy throne  
That Father, Word, and Spirit are one.

O that we may now, in love renewed,  
Might blameless in thy sight appear;  
Wake me in thy similitude,  
Stamped with the Triune character;  
Flesh, spirit, soul, to thee resign  
And live and die entirely thine!32

It is the whole Godhead, in all three Persons, who is the restorer of the *imago Dei*, in the divine *oikonomia* of grace. Jehovah is not here identified strictly and exclusively with the Father but, again, with all three Persons. It is the nature of this Triune God as Love which is stamped upon the believing heart. We "receive the proof" in ourselves, in our own experience of grace, which renews us in love after the image of our Triune God, with whose character we are stamped. We find the same teaching in Hymn no. 243.

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
One God in Persons Three!  
Bring back the heavenly blessing, lost  
By all mankind and me.33

The believer looks forward to the eschatological fulfilment hoping with joy to see "the day of God" through the washing of "the sanctifying blood / Of an expiring Deity."34

Believers may experience the antepast of that great day "when we rise in love renewed"

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32 Hymn 253, ibid, 394-5.  
33 Hymn 243, ibid, 385.  
34 Hymn 246, ibid, 387.
and our souls resemble our God - "the image of the Triune God / To all eternity." The angels never cease to worship "the Triune God of holiness, whose glory fills the sky" and this God himself imparts, and the whole Trinity descends "[i]nto our faithful hearts."  

Nowhere else in the Wesleyan theological canon is the doctrine of the Trinity linked so intricately with Christian experience as here in the hymns. Any development of a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection will need to draw generously from this resource.

**The Trinity in Wesley's Sacramental Theology**

Evangelicals have often been embarrassed by Wesley's sacramental views, and have attempted to show, either that Wesley uncritically accepted the Anglican formularies, or that his theology underwent a change after his Aldersgate experience, such that he was high church sacramentalist beforehand and a low church evangelical afterwards. This is wide of the mark. The only distinction to be made in this regard is that after Aldersgate there was greater stress on God's action in the means of grace rather than on human action.  

Others have held that Wesley's thinking on the sacraments was muddled or inconsistent, such that his evangelical theology of justification by faith and his high church theology of the sacraments could not be satisfactorily reconciled or harmonized. Ole Borgen has done us a great favor by demonstrating that such view are erroneous.

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35 Hymn 248, ibid, 390.  
36 Hymn 254, ibid, 395.  
They are, more often than not, colored by what modern Methodists wish that Wesley had said, rather than by what he did say. Borgen’s thesis is twofold:

1. John Wesley’s theology is unitive. He has one unified doctrine of the sacraments, comprising Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which forms an integrative part of the greater unitive structure.

2. The theological (and practical) importance of the sacraments for Wesley lies in their function: within the framework of the ORDO SALUTIS they function as 1) effective signs, 2) effective means of grace, and 3) effective pledges of glory to come, conjoined with the added aspect of sacrifice. 38

Whilst John Wesley maintained the importance of the formal validity of sacramental administration among the episcopally ordained priests of the Church of England, this was, for him, a question of church order. 39 He had a much deeper concern and that was the concern to demonstrate that unless God himself validates the sacraments, they are of no effect, regardless of who performs them, or how closely the rubrics are followed. Unless God adds his grace to the sacramental signs, and makes them effectual, they are nothing. In the sacraments, God works to save, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who is the executive of the Godhead. If a sacerdotal view sees the work as accomplished because of the validity of the one who presides, then Wesley sees the work done because of the grace of the one who effectuates, a kind of ex opera Deus. But it is not the Holy Spirit alone who is at work in the sacraments.

Father the Grace we claim...
Jesu, the blood apply...
Spirit of faith come down...
Pardon and grace impart... 40

38 Borgen, 47.
40 J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley, to which is appended Wesley’s Preface extracted from Brevini’s Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice together with Hymns on the Lord’s Supper (London: Epworth Press, 1948), hymn no.75.
We will discover in Wesley's sacramental theology, no less than elsewhere, that he understands the Triune God to be savingly at work in the sacramental signs, conveying preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace, "according to their several necessities."

The Trinity in Holy Baptism

When Wesley abridged The Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England for the use of the American Methodists, he defined a sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

Wesley here follows Augustine's distinction between the signum (the sign) and the res (the thing signified). There are two parts to a sacrament and they naturally belong together, though they cannot be strictly identified. This is why Wesley is able to say that baptism is not the new birth, and at the same time that it brings the new birth. The word "baptism" sometimes refers only to the outward sign - the act of dipping in, or pouring on, water. In this sense it refers only to the outward sign, and in this sense baptism is not the new birth. However, when the word is used in the sense of including the inward reality of baptism - justifying and regenerating grace - then "baptism" does bring the new birth.

In refusing to strictly identify the signum and the res, Wesley is certainly not suggesting that they should ever be separated! A soul and a body are to be separated in

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42 The fact that Wesley's baptismal theology has been, until recently, little known among modern Methodists has prompted me to include what may seem an unnecessarily lengthy section on the subject, for a thesis devoted, not to baptism, but to the Trinity. By doing so, I am hoping to lay the needed backdrop to an understanding of the way Trinitarian thought informs the Wesley hymns on baptism.  
logical distinction, but they are not meant to be separated in experience. The soul is not
the body, and the body is not the soul, but the soul and the body together make a person.
Similarly, the outward sign of water is not the inward reality of the new birth, and the
inward reality is not the sign, but both together make the sacrament of baptism.

Whilst baptism is not, for Wesley, absolutely necessary for salvation, it is God’s
ordinary means of conveying justifying grace. Christ, the Second Adam, has found a
remedy for the disease of sin, and the benefit of this is to be received through baptism,
which is the means God has appointed. “[B]aptism...is the ordinary means he hath
appointed for that purpose; and to which God hath tied us, though he may not have tied
himself. Indeed, where it cannot be had, the case is different, but extraordinary cases do
not make void a standing rule.”

There is nor doubt that Wesley holds a doctrine of baptismal regeneration
or new birth, of which baptism is a sign, and a means...Baptism is the ordinary
means through which we are born again by the grace of God and the power of the
Holy Spirit...God may or may not convey his grace through any one means, but
ordinarily he will - and does.

This does not mean that Wesley sees baptism as any sort of guarantee of heaven,
which is how evangelicals often understand baptismal regeneration-type language. It is
always possible that the seed of new life implanted in baptism might be strangled, so that
the one once washed from sin, may finally be damned. Wesley never lost sight of moral
responsibility, which is why he was able to declare to the baptized gentlemen of Oxford,
“You must be born again!” It was not that they had not been born again in baptism, but
that they had so quenched the Spirit through a lifetime of sin, they were now hell-bound

46 Borgen, 133.
unless they repented and believed. In baptism, “a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness.”

Borgen describes the “frightening ignorance” often exhibited by modern Methodists, regarding what Wesley actually teaches on the subject of baptismal grace and experience. The founder of Methodism held to both baptismal regeneration and the “necessity for a salvation experience” for those who had “fallen from grace.”

Modern Methodism stand impoverished indeed, when it takes just one aspect of Wesley’s doctrine of Baptism, and reduces it further by practically pushing God out of the picture. Wesley always stresses experience, but his emphasis is on God’s work, and not on men’s ability or “experience.”

Wesley’s theology of baptism, far from being muddled, confused, or uncritical, is a well-thought through position, consonant with the classical Christian tradition. Certainly, Wesley displays no great innovation in his theology of baptism, and some see this as less than a virtue. His most important work on the subject, *A Treatise on Baptism* (1758), is an extract from his father, Samuel’s, *Pious Communicant* (1700). Some seem to find fault with this, as if Wesley ought to have done more thinking of his own in this area and come up with a theology of baptism that fit more neatly his evangelical doctrine of the new birth. Nor should his use of an abridgment of an already extant work count against Wesley’s having given careful thought to the matter. He was, in fact, a masterful borrower, abridger, and editor, of virtually every aspect of his teaching. His theology of

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48 Borgen, 143.
49 ibid.
50 His multi-volume *Christian Library* bears witness to this ability.
baptism is an evangelical theology, no less so than his theology of justification by faith, of assurance, and of entire sanctification. Perhaps Borgen is right when he claims that Wesley's *Treatise on Baptism* was "largely ignored" by later Methodism...because it did not agree with the watered down views of [his] successors."$^{51}$

*Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* exhibits the trinitarian shape of Wesley's doctrine of baptism. The following is taken from a section entitled "At the Baptism of Adults."

1. Come Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
   Honour the means ordained by thee!  
   Make good our apostolic boast,  
   And own thy glorious ministry...

3. Father, in these reveal thy Son;  
   In these for whom we seek thy face  
   The hidden mystery make known,  
   The inward, pure baptizing grace...

5. Eternal Spirit, descend from high,  
   Baptizer of our spirits thou!  
   The sacramental seal apply,  
   And witness with the water now!$^{52}$

The sacrament of baptism is here spoken of as having been ordained by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rather than simply by Christ, as we might expect. The Father is asked to reveal his Son in those who are to receive "the hidden mystery" of "pure baptizing grace." And it is the Spirit who comes down and applies the sacramental seal.

And another:

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,

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$^{51}$ Borgen, 26.  
In solemn power come down!
Present with thy heavenly host,
Thine ordinance to crown.
See a sinful worm of earth!
Bless to him the cleansing flood!
Plunge him by a second birth,
Into the depths of God.

Let the promised inward grace
Accompany the sign;
On his new-born soul impress
The character divine!
Father, all thy love reveal!
Jesus, all thy name impart
Holy Ghost, renew and dwell
For ever in his heart! 53

The Trinity is present, along with the angels, ready to plunge the candidate into a second birth, into “the depths of God.” The divine character that is impressed is not that of any one Person alone. The Father reveals his love, Jesus imparts his name, and the Holy Ghost renews and dwells in the heart.

The Trinity in the Eucharist

Wesley’s views on Holy Communion must be distinguished from a number of other well known positions - those of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. He rejects Luther’s so-called “consubstantiation” view because it seems to localize the presence of Christ, which, in Wesley’s view obscures the unity of the Trinity. Christ is certainly present in the Lord’s Supper, but the Father is also present as is clear from the following hymn of Charles Wesley:

Father, thy feeble children meet
And make thy faithful mercies shown;
Give us through Faith the Flesh to eat.
And drink the blood of Christ thy Son,

53 Hymn 465, ibid, 647-8.
Honour thine own mysterious Ways,
Thy Sacramental Presence shew.
And all the Fulness of thy Grace,
With Jesus, on our Souls bestow.  

Wesley is closer to Calvin’s “spiritual presence” position, but whereas Calvin stresses the presence of Christ in terms of “power and strength,” mediated through the Holy Spirit, Wesley stresses the Presence of Christ in his divinity. “[I]n fact the whole Trinity is present and acting, bestowing upon men [and women] the benefits of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.” Thomas Cranmer has a two-fold Presence - figurative in the sacrament and real and spiritual in the hearts of believers, and Wesley comes close to this view.

Whatever the case, Wesley can never be accused of holding a Zwinglian “real absence” position. The sacraments are for Wesley, “true and effectual means of grace; thus all purely memorialist conceptions are excluded.” Wesly does use “memorialist” language in reference to the Supper, as was common also among the early church fathers, in spite of their “realism.” But he does not use such language in the Zwinglian sense. Nor does he use the term anamnesis (a favorite of the Anglo-Catholics), though it would have been known to him from his reading of the Greek Fathers, and of the New

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56 Borgen, 67-68.
58 Borgen indicates that the term “real absence” is not one justly applied to Zwingli, but this tantalizing reference is not elaborated upon. Borgen, 68.
59 ibid.
Testament. Certainly, for Wesley, the “memorial feast” is more than simply a mental reflection on past events.

The “memorial” Wesley presents is a dynamic drama of worship in which both the believer and the Holy Spirit are actively involved... The meaning of the sacrament is the “setting before our eyes” Christ’s death and sacrifice, and the fact that he sacrificed himself to atone for our sins; that is the Lord’s Supper shows forth Christ’s death. God appointed the sacrament, and it was his express design to revive his sufferings and expose them to all our senses as if they were present now. Not only our mind or memory is involved, but all our senses as well. Thus the sacrament as “memorial” involves a total and vital worship experience.60

The Eucharist is also a salvific mystery in the hymns of Charles Wesley.

O the depth of love Divine,  
Th' unfathomable grace!  
Who shall say how bread and wine  
God into man conveys!  
\textit{How} the bread his flesh imparts,  
\textit{How} the wine transmits his blood,  
Fills His faithful people's hearts  
With all the life of God!

Let the wisest mortal show  
How we the grace receive,  
Feeble elements bestow  
A change not theirs to give.  
Who explains the wondrous way,  
How through these the virtue came?  
These the virtue did convey,  
Yet still remain the same.

How can heavenly spirits rise,  
By earthly matter fed,  
Drink herewith Divine supplies,  
And eat immortal bread?  
Ask the Father's Wisdom how;  
Him that did the means ordain!  
Angels around our altars bow  
To search it out in vain.

Sure and real is the grace,

\textsuperscript{60} Borgen, 87.
The manner be unknown;
Only meet us in Thy ways,
And perfect us in one.
Let us taste the heavenly powers;
Lord, we ask for nothing more:
Thine to bless, 'tis only ours
To wonder and adore.  

Here in the much-neglected eucharistic hymns of the Wesleys we also see a distinctively Trinitarian stamp. As the believer approaches the Lord's Table there is the need for a supernatural quickening of the imagination that will make clear the fullness of the Father's love in giving his Son up to death for our sakes. It is the Spirit who provides this supernatural assistance.

Come, Holy Ghost, set to Thy Seal,
Thine inward Witness give,
To all our waiting Souls reveal
The Death by which we live.

Spectators of the Pangs Divine
O that we Now may be,
Discerning in the Sacred Sign
His Passion on the Tree.  

And another:

Come, Thou everlasting Spirit,
Bring to every thankful Mind
All the Saviour's dying Merit
All His Suffering for Mankind.  

And elsewhere:

Come, Holy Ghost, Thine influence shed,

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62 ibid, 27.
63 op. cit. "These prayers to the Spirit for power to realize the Passion and Death of Christ must not be confused with the epiclesis, that is to say, the prayer to the Spirit to quicken the bread and wine into means of grace, of which we find examples in later parts of the book." Rattenbury, 27.
And realize\textsuperscript{64} the sign;  
Thy life infuse into the bread,  
Thy power into the wine.  

Effectual let the tokens prove,  
And made, by heavenly art,  
Fit channels to convey Thy love  
To every faithful heart.\textsuperscript{65}

On of the most distinctively Trinitarian hymns in Wesley's collection is no. 75 in Rattenbury's edition.

\textit{Father}, the grace we claim,  
The double grace, bestow'd  
On all who trust in Him that came  
By water and by blood.  

\textit{Jesu}, the blood apply,  
Thy righteousness bring in,  
Us by Thy dying justify,  
And wash out all our sin.  

\textit{Spirit} of faith, come down,  
Thy seal with power set to,  
The banquet by Thy presence crown,  
And prove the record true.  

Pardon and grace impart;  
Come quickly from above,  
And witness now in every heart  
That God is perfect love.\textsuperscript{66}

It is the Father's grace that is claimed as the source of that "double grace" of Christ, who came by water and by blood. The dying of Jesus justifies and sanctifies us, but it is only as the Spirit descends to set his seal to the application of Christ's righteousness for the believer, that the eucharistic banquet is crowned. This coming of

\textsuperscript{64} i.e. "make real," rather than "come to understand."
\textsuperscript{65} Rattenbury, 217.
\textsuperscript{66} ibid, 218. Emphasis mine.
the Spirit "proves the record true." In other words, the objective record of revelation
given to us concerning Christ's redemptive death, and the justifying and sanctifying grace
that flow from it, are made efficacious to us - are experienced by us - only through the
application of the Spirit's presence and power.

Hymn 166 may be thought of as a poetic appendix to the eucharistic hymns. In it
Wesley recounts the "happy saints" of the early church, "true followers of the lamblike
Lord," who "joined in holy fellowship" to receive "every day" those "tokens of expiring
love" offered in the Eucharist.

From house to house they broke the bread
Impregnated with life Divine,
And drank the Spirit of their Head
Transmitted in the sacred wine.67

Keeping "the Eucharistic feast" they "supp'd in Eden with their Lord," willingly
giving themselves up to imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom, that they might take the
kingdom of heaven "with violent faith." Why has such a flame of love expired in the
church? Because "the daily sacrifice is ceased," love has grown cold, as the means of
grace are "cast away" and the "sacred signs" ordained by Christ are "laid waste."68

The cry goes up to God to restore again this daily sacrifice, and a decidedly
eschatological note is struck:

Return and with Thy servants sit
Lord of the sacramental feast;
And satiate us with heavenly meat,
And make the world Thy happy guest.69

67 ibid, 248-49.
68 op. cit.
69 ibid, 249. Emphasis in original.
I have dealt with the Trinitarian themes in Wesley's sacramental theology, in part because any revision of the doctrine of holiness along trinitarian lines, will have to provide resources also for a trinitarian spirituality, for a means of appropriating experientially, the saving work of the Triune God. A renewed understanding of sanctifying grace conveyed through sacramental life and piety, would, I believe reinvigorate our tradition in a constructive and spiritually enriching manner. This will involve moving from the individualism of the "bar of decision" type of "altar call" to the communal nature of the Eucharistic feast. Here we sit down together as sisters and brothers at our Father's table, the guests of our Host and Elder Brother Jesus, and through the Spirit anticipate the heavenly banquet.

We turn now to the theme of the Trinity as it appears in several representative theologians of the Wesleyan tradition.

Later Wesleyan Resources

Jabez Bunting

Jabez Bunting (1779-1858), became the patriarch of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, in Britain, as it emerged after John Wesley's death as an ecclesiastical organization in its own right. In a sermon on The Sanctifier and the Sanctified, Bunting refers to Christ as "the Sanctifier" and warns against attributing the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit alone.

Though this work of sanctification is often ascribed in Scripture to the special agency of the Holy Spirit, yet we are not to understand those passages as excluding either the Father or the Son. It is probable that St. Paul refers to the

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First Person of the Trinity in his prayer for the Thessalonians: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly..." And elsewhere we read that Christ is our "sanctification," and that we are sanctified by faith that is in Him.

The Holy Spirit is given to sanctify us only in consequence of the incarnation, the atonement, the ascension, and intercession of Christ. These mediatorial acts of the Son are the cornerstones of the whole covenant of grace, the whole economy of redemption. He died to procure and lives to dispense the Spirit, by whose communion His grace flows to His mystical Body.\(^{71}\)

**Luther Lee**

In 1843, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was organized as an outgrowth of abolitionist sentiment among Methodists, and within a year, Luther Lee, formerly a circuit rider in the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was serving as the new movement's Conference President. After the Civil War, he would rejoin the parent church, but not before serving eight years as the editor of the *True Wesleyan*. He also served three years as professor at the Wesleyan Methodist-related Adrian College.

His systematic theology, *Elements of Theology*,\(^{72}\) published in 1856, contains the following definition of sanctification:

Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Christ, whose blood atonement has power to cleanse from all sin; whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, which is justification, but are washed entirely from its pollution, freed from its power, and are enabled, through grace, to love God with all our hearts, and to walk in His holy commandments blameless.\(^{73}\)

Again we note the references to all three Persons of the Godhead. It is the Holy Ghost who renews our fallen nature, but not in any manner divorced from the blood of

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\(^{71}\) ibid, 57-8.


\(^{73}\) Luther Lee cited in Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, 94.
Christ's atonement, the efficacy of which provides the power to cleanse from sin. All of this enables us to love and obey God (presumably the Father) with all of our hearts.

William Burt Pope

William Burt Pope (1822-1903), Canadian by birth, but a resident of England from the age of seven, was British Methodism's most catholic theologian of the period. His *Compend of Theology* was also widely read among American Methodists, being in the Methodist course of study from 1880-89. Richard S. Taylor considers the treatment of "The Methodist Doctrine of Entire Sanctification" found in Pope's *Compendium* to be "a remarkable statement. In all Wesleyan literature there can scarcely be found a more balanced, comprehensive, or perspicuous summary of the unique genius of original Wesleyanism. It provides a plumbline for authenticity." In his *Higher Catechism of Theology*, Pope defines entire sanctification as "the work of the Holy Spirit alone, applying the virtue of the Atonement in the removal of the last trace of the indwelling or pollution of sin and consecrating the entire nature of the believer to God in perfected love." In ascribing entire sanctification to the work of the Holy Spirit "alone" it is clear that Pope is not intending to divorce that work from the other persons of the Godhead, as we shall see.

In treating the "means" or "instrumentalities" of sanctifying grace he lists "the truth" ["*Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth* (John 17:7)."] and the sacraments.

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The latter "seal the covenant of sanctification." As "the word...expressed in act [they] convey the grace of which they are signs."\(^7^9\) He goes on to assert that it is "the sacred presence of the Holy Trinity in Christ [which] is the means of sanctification, and necessarily of entire sanctification."\(^8^0\) The prayer of Ephesians 3:19 that believers might be "filled unto all the fulness of God" has for its object the indwelling of Christ.\(^8^1\) The final means of sanctification is given as "the might of divine love: His love is perfected in us (1 John 4:12)."\(^8^2\)

Pope warns against certain "tendencies to error" in the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification, including the idea that sanctification is not given with the new birth.

[T]here is danger...of forgetting the distinction between sanctification and entire sanctification: as if holiness or consecration to God were a second blessing bestowed at some interval after believing. Its entireness may be called a second blessing, but holiness itself begins the life of acceptance. The Holy Spirit as a sanctifier is given, not after an interval, but when we believe. In whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, as we are children, and, as we are sanctified, unto the redemption of God's own possession (Eph. 1:13-14).\(^8^3\)

**Daniel Steele**

Even Daniel Steele (1824-1914), who gave special attention to the work of the Holy Spirit,\(^8^4\) insists that the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer from the moment of regeneration,\(^8^5\) and seems to hold a trinitarian understanding of sanctification.

The work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity in the scheme of salvation is quite definitely stated in the Holy Scriptures. The Father originated

\(^7^9\) ibid, 152.
\(^8^0\) op. cit.
\(^8^1\) op. cit.
\(^8^2\) op. cit.
\(^8^3\) ibid, 156.
the plan, the Son by His atoning death provided the means, the blood of sprinkling, and the Holy Spirit conditionally applies it for the soul's purification. But sometimes the work of the Spirit is ascribed to the Son...[W]hen the Son is spoken of as sanctifying, it is always in a different sense from the Spirit's work of purification.

When Christ is spoken of as our sanctification, it is meant, not that he enters into the hearts of believers and cleanses them but that He provides the purifying medium, His own shed blood, and the sanctifying agent, the Holy Spirit. The Son's work is external, the Spirit's is internal...the work of the one is objective that of the other is subjective; the one sanctifies provisionally and the other effectually.86

H. Orton Wiley

The Nazarene theologian, H. Orton Wiley (1877-1961), deals with the doctrine of the Trinity in the first volume of his *Christian Theology*. His treatment of the subject is thoroughly Wesleyan.

The doctrine of the Trinity is in the Bible as humid air. The cool wave of reflection through which the Church passed, condensed its thought and precipitated what all along had been in solution. While there are philosophical views of the Trinity, yet philosophical analysis probably never could have produced, and certainly did not produce it. It arose as an expression of experience, and that too, of an experience which was complex and rich...It was religion before it was theology, and in order to be effective must again become in each of us, religion as well as theology.87

In his treatment of the "offices" of the Holy Spirit, Wiley speaks of the Paraclete as "the Executive of the Godhead on earth" serving as the agent both of the Father and the Son. This does not mean that the Spirit is absent from the ontological being of God. He still enjoys "eternal communion with the Father and the Son in heaven."88 In dealing with "the divinely appointed means and agencies" of entire sanctification, Wiley speaks

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86 Steele, "Christ Our Sanctification," in Taylor, 271.
of the role played by each person of the Godhead. The originating cause of sanctification is the love of God, the meritorious or procuring cause is the blood of Jesus Christ, and the efficient cause or agency is the Holy Spirit. He goes on to list "truth" as the efficient cause, and "faith" as the conditional cause. "When, therefore, we speak of sanctification as being wrought by the Father, or by the Son, or by the Holy Spirit; whether we speak of it as by blood, or through the truth, or by faith, we are referring merely to the different causes that enter in to this great experience." 89

**Mildred Bangs Wynkoop**

We have already seen, in chapter two, that Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, one of the most gifted and insightful of the holiness movement theologians, somewhat surprisingly, did not draw heavily on trinitarian categories in her major work, *A Theology of Love*. She does, however, briefly deal with the subject there, in a passage quite characteristically Wesleyan in its approach.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a clue to the vastly complex and intriguing social nature of the one God. [D]octrines [such as the virgin birth, the two-natures christology, and the Trinity] are not themselves revelation but attempts to rationalize revelation. There is no better source of information about God and Christ than the Scriptures themselves, which are windows open toward, not shutters against, light. The doctrines of the Virgin Birth and the Trinity are intellectually incomprehensible, but the person of Christ is knowable and God is real in total experience. 90

In an article on the theological roots of Wesleyanism’s understanding of the Holy Spirit, Wynkoop maintains that the difference between Wesley and the holiness movement which bears his name lies along ontological lines. Wynkoop points out that

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Wesley taught the essential oneness of God, accepting the biblical distinctions between the persons of the Trinity without trying to explain them. He also seemed to accept what is now understood as the Hebrew anthropology, that is, that the human person is a unity of personality, rather than a trichotomous or dichotomous conglomerate of ontological centers. 91

None of us can divorce ourselves from our context to be a “holy” person... “Souls” have no reality apart from the whole person. Grace pervades all that a person is, never merely a part of him. Theology, to Wesley, should reach all that God is in His redemptive relationship to humanity and all that humanity is in its relationships.

Wesley understood God’s grace as operating in the context of human experience - in history...To him...crisis experiences were only valid and meaningful in the context of the on-going process of human development. He was very concerned about those who trusted in “experiences” as such, which were not an integral part of the rational, moral life.

Forgiveness is not merely a personal event but the entrance into a community in which forgiveness is the prevailing atmosphere. It is a social connection as well as a personal event. Perfection of love is only “individual” as it becomes the expression of new relationship under the Lordship of Christ. 92

Wynkoop contrasts this communitarian vision of Wesleyan holiness with what she calls “the apocalyptic interpretation of Christian experience.”93

In this view, crisis experience “happens” but cannot be made to mesh with life prior to the experience....What God does to us, or in us, is thought to be a divine invasion cutting across our existence as rational beings, unrelated to our understanding and responsibility, resulting either in a new status in God’s sight, or in some mutation of human nature below the level of consciousness. The Keswick terms, surrender and possessed by are favored over the very active terms, “present your bodies,” “yield your members,” and “put off” and “put on.” In the apocalyptic view the human nature is not considered a real asset to the life of Christian grace, in stark contrast to the biblical and Wesleyan understanding of the full need of the whole human person to be the bearer of grace to the world.

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91 Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, “Theological Roots of Wesleyanism’s Understanding of the Holy Spirit,” in *WTJ* 14:1 (Spring, 1979), 78.
92 ibid, 82-4.
93 ibid, 84.
In holiness circles (wherever this view prevails) these invasions result in subterranean personality mutations which should produce, automatically, holy character, the graces of the Spirit and the removal of distracting emotional disturbances. The call to holiness, in this context, is to begin the search for a specific kind of experience. It is not the pilgrimage toward love which engages the whole of a person's moral relations... but a disattachment from these relations a moving inward toward oneself - the kind of separation discouraged by Jesus and Paul, at least.  

Wynkoop maintains that the holiness movement has committed two ontological errors - tritheism in theology and trichotomy in anthropology. "[T]he extreme ontological distinction between the Persons of the Godhead [issues] in a practical tritheism...[which] makes it possible to say that Christ is our Savior and the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier." To this ontological differentiation is added a trichotomist anthropology which "makes it necessary to suppose that the multiple entities in human persons account for the need for multiple works of grace to achieve entire sanctification. This is probably behind the idea of discontinuity of grace in relation to the 'works' of grace." It seems apparent that only a re-examination of the doctrine of the Trinity, both in its classical and contemporary forms, can help us to overcome such ideas.

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94 op. cit.
95 ibid, 80.
96 op. cit.
Chapter 6

A PROPOSAL FOR A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

In this final chapter I would like to offer a brief proposal for a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection from the standpoint of one who belongs to the Wesleyan tradition and who seeks to advance that tradition through a reverent critique of its strengths and weaknesses. The movement of the proposal will proceed from tritheistic to trinitarian categories in soteriology, from a stress on individualism to a stress on community in ecclesiology, and from an apocalypticist to a sacramentalist vision of spirituality. I will then indicate the way in which presently held Wesleyan categories of sanctification may be reevaluated, and either rejected, or retained with modifications.

From Tritheism to Trinitarianism in Soteriology

A tendency toward tritheism continues to haunt preaching and devotional writing in Wesleyan holiness circles, and in popular evangelicalism broadly. The debate among Wesleyan thinkers over whether or not pneumatological and pentecostal terminology ought to be used in a Wesleyan theology of sanctification is one indicator of the failure to resolve the tension in the holiness movement between the two driving forces of its history - its rootedness in the classical Christian trinitarianism of the Anglican tradition, and the tritheistic tendencies always present in “second blessing” revivalism. To polarize toward the first of these tendencies could lead to a focus on the ontological being of God which would throw into shadow the salvific economy of God appropriated in Christian experience. To polarize toward the latter tendency would be to perpetuate that tritheism which thinks of the Father primarily as “God,” the Son as our “Savior,” and the Spirit as
our “Sanctifier,” thus failing to see that salvation is the work of the Holy Trinity. The Wesleyan-holiness tradition must continue to call persons to the fullness of life in God, but it must leave behind any concept of a something or a someone “added on” to the divine life.

**From an Individualist to a Communitarian Ecclesiology**

In the development of a trinitarian theology of Wesleyan perfectionism, it will be the dynamic relation between the persons of the Trinity which provides the model for human relations in the Church and in the world. A focus on these relations in the oikonomia of salvation will help us to develop models of sanctifying grace which bear the marks of the kind of outgoing, others-focused love, the antithesis of which has often marred the witness of “holiness” Christians.

Sin and holiness are both relational terms. Sin is a relational malfunction, rather than a substance clinging to the soul. Its “removal,” therefore, is not an ontological, but a relational question. To be cleansed from sin is not to be ushered into some kind of new order of being, but rather, to become fully human, completely open to God and to others in outgoing, self-forgetting, love. The trinitarian relations within the Godhead whereby the Father gives his Son for the life of the world, the Son gives glory to his Father through unstinting, though costly obedience, and the Holy Spirit is given to glorify, not himself, but both the Father and the Son, provide the model for our relationships to others. Believers, in their relationships with one another, and with the world, are caught up into the “ecstatic” fellowship of the Divine Family. The fully sanctified believer is
one who shares with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in an “others-focused” orientation.

From Apocalypticism to Sacramentalism in Spirituality

The “apocalyptic” model of sanctification tends to divorce sin from its relational components and to conceive of persons as being acted upon unilaterally by God, in the context of essentially individual experiences. Calls to move on from salvation in Christ to the higher ground of the Spirit-filled life abound. Behind such calls is a desire for the kind of “subterranean personality mutations” which constitute the appeal of the apocalyptic model of spirituality.¹

An alternative to this model is the recovery of sacramental piety in the Wesleyan tradition. The place of the means of grace in the appropriation of Christian experience has been given too little attention in Wesleyan-holiness circles. If the desired blessing of full sanctification may be received by simple faith, in a moment of divine inbreaking at an altar of prayer, what need is there for a sacramental piety? Yet for John and Charles Wesley, the trinitarian nature of baptismal grace provided a foundation for all subsequent religious experiences, and the work of the Trinity at the eucharistic feast provided the context for the development of the experience of justifying and sanctifying grace throughout the believer’s life. The altar has been variously conceived of as a bar of decision, as a mourner’s bench, or as a Bethel of promise-making. Such motifs are essentially individualist in orientation. However useful the “altar-call” as a means of grace may have been in the recent history of the church, it must be remembered that it is

¹ Wynkoop, Theology of Love, 84.
of very recent origin, and lacks any divine institution. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, on the other hand, have been coextensive with the life of the Christian Church since its inception. The communal acts of being received into the household of God through the waters of baptism, and of sitting at Table to break bread together in that same household, provide a better locus of sanctifying grace in a trinitarian spirituality, than does the present apocalyptic model of the altar call.

The Distinction between Subsequence and Secondness

Wesleyan theology must maintain that salvation is the work of God the Holy Trinity. To conceive of the Spirit as acting unilaterally in a second work of grace conceived of as an “add-on” to salvation is to blunder into tritheism. The experience of the fullness of sanctifying grace should not be divorced from the context of the ordo salutis as a whole. However, entire sanctification may continue to be thought of as a subsequent experience to the new birth. This is so, because the initiatory stages of Christian life, by definition, form a beginning point, rather than a culminating point in the believer’s journey. But such subsequence must be seen as the result of an increasing openness to God, a restoration of the image and likeness of God, conceived of in relational terms, rather than as a superhuman change which elevates one to some higher order of being.

While the retention of “subsequence” in a Wesleyan theology of sanctification makes sense, it might be best to leave behind the idea of a “second” work of grace. To speak of “first” and “second,” is to be overly optimistic about the fullness of human

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2 Understood broadly as including prevenient, justifying, sanctifying, and perfecting grace.
capacity to appropriate divine grace in two saving “moments.” It also tends to place limits on God who is thought of as dealing with his children in two works of grace only, when a relational soteriology would make way for perhaps many more than two experiences of sanctifying grace. In this way, the immediacy of the call to decisive acts of consecration is retained, without the self-defeating triumphalism that leads to the spiritual complacency involved in the reception of a “first” and “second” blessing, upon the foundation of which believers may mistakenly think they may now rest.

The Distinction between Sanctifying Grace as a Subsequent Work of Grace, and Christian Perfection as the Telos of Being.

It might also be best to make a distinction between the reception of sanctifying grace in subsequent experience, and Christian perfection. There may be many experiences of sanctifying grace, each an aspect of Christian perfection, and complete in its own way, and yet propelling the believer forward to the full telos of her or his being in the fullness of the Divine life of the Trinity.

The Distinction Between Holiness as Freedom from Depravity and Holiness as Perfect Love

The focus on holiness as the perfection of love, a familiar idea for Wesleyans, is fully retained in a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection. The relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, provide the model for this love. Sanctification is not the removal of any sub-stratum of depravity adhering to the soul, but the restoration of the human person to the divine intention - full and unhindered love to God and to other persons. Since sin is not a “thing” with an independent ontological existence of its own,
it cannot be “removed.” On the other hand, if sin is a relational malfunction, the healing of that malfunction lies in a restoration of the person to unhindered relationships of love.

A trinitarian theology of Christian perfection will stress the whole human personality as the dwelling place of the entire Godhead. A “Spirit-filled” person is a “God-indwelt” person, and as such is a “partaker of the divine nature.”\(^3\) There are not “classes” of elites within the family of God, such as “Spirit-filled,” and “not Spirit-filled,” but only “children,” “young men,” and “fathers.”\(^4\) All have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, residing within, though not all have been as fully transformed by that indwelling as others. The whole of the life of God is given to the whole of the Church - one family in the household of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\(^3\) 2 Peter 1:4.
\(^4\) 1 John 2:12-14.
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