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No Religious Preference

Recently I read an executive summary of a major demographic study of American religious choices. The authors in their analysis noted that perhaps the fastest growing religious segment of the American population are those who checked the box in front of “no religious preference” when given a chance to choose among the historic religious traditions.

Since reading that report I have found myself conflicted by that observation. On one level, it does not surprise me. There is a change taking place in the American religious consciousness, and this may very well be evidence that growing numbers of Americans are punting on the whole concept and experience of religion and joining the ranks of the committed secular.

On another level, however, I find myself insisting that this “finding” needs a great deal of nuancing in order to be properly understood. Too many well documented social trends run contrary to what a superficial reading of this finding indicate. Consider just a couple of those trends.

For one, the religions are not shrinking in America, but growing. The secularization thesis so popular at the middle of the twentieth century, was thoroughly discredited by the end of the century. Harvey Cox, wrote *The Secular City*, for example, and then publically thought better of it. Muslims and Buddhists have gained a growing following among Americans, and the number of Hindu temples built here increases annually. It may be that some of the traditional Christian denominations are struggling, but that decline has been more than offset by the stunning growth of independent mega-churches and some of the newer Christian sects such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. And there is no shortage of new religious movements appearing regularly on our cultural scene. In the face of these numbers, a thesis of overall religious decline seems difficult to substantiate.

For another, the traditionally cited challengers to religion in our day and age—science and atheism—provide little of substance to choose when up against the proven benefits of religious belief in terms of human flourishing, communal life, and, yes, eternal rewards. Two predictions: the so-called debate between science and religion will dissolve as each side finds growing value in the other. And the challenge of missionary atheism will reveal that what

Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and others are really offering us a chance to join a secular religion called atheism—after all, a recent poll shows atheists know more about religion than any of us, and in the end simply want to replace our religion with theirs, using the oldest of proselytizing techniques known to humanity, that is, privileging their ultimate ideas while critiquing all the rest.

So what is happening when someone checks the box in front of no religious preference? Let me offer a suggestion that might be worth exploring further (since I have no large scale polling data to back me up). My suggestion is this: Perhaps the “no” in “no religious preference” should be seen as modifying not “religious” as much as “preference.” That is, perhaps people who check that box are not saying they have “no religion” (which is how we tend to read it), but that they have “no preference.” Perhaps what is at stake here is not religion *per se*, but our traditional understanding of preference, especially religious preference. Consider two observations that might support this reading.

First, people do seem to be uncomfortable with religious commitment. This has made them reluctant, for example, to endorse the commitment to Christian mission the way they might once have. When I tell many people that I am a professor of mission and world religion at Asbury Theological Seminary, they act interested in the world religion part and distinctly uncertain about the mission part. The way I understand this is to see it as a growing lack of commitment to the idea that one religion is so true and so important that it needs to be proclaimed as such.

Zygmunt Bauman, the British sociologist of religion, sees this lack of commitment to be part of a larger social trend he calls “liquid modernity.” Whereas the task of identity formation was once held to be a task of building certainty and stability into our socially constructed identities, the new task, as expressed by growing numbers, seems to be a task of valuing breadth and flexibility in one’s identity so as to be able to accommodate the lightening-fast speed of social change. Firm commitments, religious commitments, are sometimes seen as inhibitors to growth rather than facilitators. At the least, religious commitment is not valued as it once was.

Second, people are increasingly suspicious of religious institutions. Perhaps this is a continuation of a trend started in the ‘60s by young people rejecting the authoritative institutions of their parents, including religious institutions. The claim heard in those days of social upheaval that “I am spiritual but not religious,” has grown from the mantra of a few to a chorus of the many. Membership in many social institutions, once seen as a privilege and something to be sought after, is now just as likely to be seen as a social burden that we would just as soon jettison if the social consequences are not too dear.

Is it possible that the key to mission work in the 21st century, especially in the Western developed countries, goes beyond telling the compelling story of what God did through Jesus Christ in order to set us free from sin? Of making religious preference a positive value, not a suspect one? It may just be the case that we now need to include an articulation of what it means to be committed to a religious viewpoint—and to let people know that it is all right to think that their religion is the best one.

—*Terry C. Muck*
Editor, The Asbury Journal

CHAD HARRINGTON

Justification by the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ

Abstract

This essay focuses on Paul's description of *justification by faith* in Galatians 2:16. Scholars such as J.D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright have recently challenged more traditional perspectives on justification. This essay appropriates some of these challenges to Paul's letter to the Galatians. The problem for Paul is that some Christians are distorting the gospel (Gal 1:7) and excluding Gentile Christians (2:12-13). Paul's solution is gospel reorientation. Instead of being a Torah-focused church, he instructs the Galatian church to be Christ-centered. This essay examines *justification*, *works of law*, and *faith/fulness* to reveal Paul's rhetorical purposes by analyzing socio-rhetorical backgrounds and literary, grammatical, and theological issues. The thesis is that Paul's rhetoric in Galatians 2:16 is sociological, moving the church to unity. Pauline justification is not only forensic language but also ecclesial language. Paul's usage of *works of law* was not only about theology but also about church unity. His reference to the faith of Christ is not a description of how one receives final salvation but of how God justifies his people, through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. The implications of this thesis may have dramatic implications for Pauline studies and even contemporary church life.

Keywords: Justification, faith, faithfulness, Galatians, unity, new perspective, church, works of law, Paul, biblical studies

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Introduction

The doctrine of ‘justification by faith’ has been one of the most influential theological tenants in Western Christianity since the Protestant Reformation. Justification by faith has become core to the gospel in many circles. What many understand ‘justification by faith’ to mean is that salvation is not earned by merit but is a gift received by the faith of each believer. However, in recent years, scholars have challenged this Lutheran interpretation of what Paul meant by ‘justification,’ and for this they have received a lot of resistance.

Augustine has been credited as the first to initiate a doctrine of justification by faith *alone*, and from Augustine through the Reformation many influential theologians started with an Augustinian understanding.¹ Thomas Aquinas saw justification as forensic and imparted upon the believer before Luther did. The doctrine of justification by ‘faith alone’ was a tenant for over a millennium. However, Martin Luther has made the most profound impact on Western Protestantism in this respect.

Luther said that justification was by faith alone and by ‘faith’ he meant a certain type of cognitive faith. The antithesis to faith, for Luther, was works of merit for justification. Following Luther and the Reformation, Western Protestantism has tended to retroject its own individualized, guilt-ridden consciousness back onto Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith.² Luther’s theological efforts to reconcile his own intense and personal struggle to gain merit before God with the gospel set the tone for justification by faith for hundreds of years.

It was not until Ferdinand Christian Baur (b. 1792) challenged this ‘traditional’ Lutheran understanding of justification.³ He was the first notable theologian after Luther to purport more than just a forensic interpretation of justification by looking into Paul’s sociological milieu. While maintaining faith as the grounds for justification and the forensic nature of justification, Baur emphasized the relational implications of justification. In so doing, he opened the gamut for the doctrine of ‘justification by faith.’⁴ Following his writings, many theologians have challenged the long held Lutheran view of justification.

The most seismic shift after Baur in Pauline theology of justification came from E.P. Sanders in 1977 with his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.⁵ This book has precipitated and the effects have been classified as the New Perspective on Paul with all its variations. Paul, in Sander’s view, was not espousing justification by faith in a fight against legalism; instead, Paul was fighting against ‘covenantal nomism.’⁶ Whether or not theologians over the last thirty-four years have agreed with Sanders, they have been influenced by his work, no doubt.⁷ Scholars who have shown utter “dissatisfaction with the Lutheran approach to Paul” include Stendahl, Davies, Raisanen, M. Barth, G. Howard, J. Dunn, N.T. Wright and U. Wilckens.⁸

The debate over justification has largely centered on Paul's letters to the Galatian and Roman churches because 'justification' with all its cognates is integral in these letters. In the Pauline corpus the verb 'to justify' (δικαιῶ) appears twenty-seven times. Grouping Galatians and Romans together, they account for twenty-three of the twenty-seven total New Testament usages. This means that in order to understand what Paul means by 'justification,' one must go to Galatians and Romans. However, Galatians stands out from Romans in at least one respect for our present study: it is the first extant letter of Paul, having been written in A.D. 49.⁹ The focus of this paper will be Galatians 2.16 because it contains the first occurrence of the verb 'to justify' (δικαιῶ) in Galatians. My thesis is that the primary thrust of Paul's 'justification' rhetoric in Galatians 2.16 is sociological, moving the church to unity. As a means of introduction to this important passage, I will provide the socio-rhetorical background surrounding Galatians. Then, I will pursue an exegesis of Galatians 2.16 focusing on the meaning of three major concepts: justification, works of law and faithfulness.

The Problem: Exclusion

In order to not miss the forest for the trees, one must ask, "What is the book of Galatians about in general?" The answer, of course, is not unanimous among scholars; it is variegated. Richard B. Hays claims that Galatians is not a "theological treatise" on how to be saved as many might presume.¹⁰ Instead, it is written to a church in crisis. J.D.G. Dunn says that the focus of Galatians is "primarily in the context of Paul the Jew wrestling with the question of how Jews and Gentiles stand in relation within the covenant purpose of God now that it has reached its climax in Jesus Christ."¹¹ To him Galatians is about the covenantal promise. Clark H. Pinnock, writing in 1998, pins Galatians as a letter about soteriology.¹² It was written to answer the question, "Are we saved by believing or achieving?" So why *did* Paul write Galatians? In what follows, I will argue for a sociological reason, more specifically that Paul wrote the letter of Galatians to admonish the church to be unified and resist the social pressure to exclude Gentiles from fellowship.

Paul saw that the church in Galatia was under immanent threat. Paul exhorts them with strong words like "I am astonished" (1.6) and "You foolish Galatians!" (3.1). The most surprising threat, perhaps, was received from the Jewish Christians who were faced with a mixed identity. Jews and Christians were both monotheistic. On the other hand, the first-century A.D. Jewish community had very distinct social boundaries. This made conversion and then new group identity challenging. Therefore, understanding the first century Jewish *Sitz im Leben* is important. Jews were divided into different sects, each with its own way of being faithful to the covenant through obedience to the law.¹³ When Jewish converts to Christianity faced the new idea of

Gentile inclusion, they were not prepared for that kind of sociological shift.¹⁴ The problem that Paul addresses in Galatians displays this tension. The agitators made the situation in Galatia even more difficult and divisive serving as active antagonists to the formation of a new Christocentric community.

Paul makes it clear that there were some ‘agitators’ in the Galatian church distorting the gospel (cf. 1.6). These people were not ‘Judaizers,’ as traditionally believed; rather, the Judaizers were the people being forced to adopt Jewish practices.¹⁵ The opponents to the gospel were agitators trying Judaize Gentile Christians.¹⁶ The agitators were forcing the Gentile Christian converts to adopt two specific Jewish customs of which we can be sure, namely circumcision (2.3; 5.6; 6.12) and food laws (2.11-14). Paul called this “turning away to a different gospel” (1.6). Paul sets the stage for his main arguments through narrating the climactic story that dominates the first half of chapter two, his conflict with Peter in Antioch. At first, this story might seem out of place, but it serves a pivotal point in Paul’s *narratio*. He has set the stage by describing his call as an apostle, putting him on the same level as Peter, a pillar (2.9). Then, he shames Peter both historically in Antioch and rhetorically through his letter to the Galatians by calling him a hypocrite. Peter started withdrawing from table fellowship with the Gentiles when certain men came to Antioch and Paul called him out on it (2.12).¹⁷ What is so important, then, about whom Peter ate with? Furthermore, what does it have to do with the doctrine of justification by faith? A look at first-century sociology surrounding table fellowship will prove helpful in answer these questions. The goal of the following section is to explore the social context for exegesis of Galatians 2.16.

In the first century Mediterranean world, as Jerome Neyrey describes it, meals held immense cultural significance.¹⁸ Those with whom a person shared food were considered equals. Meals had a significant role for group identity and affirmation of individuals within the social sphere. The Jews had a particularly exclusivistic mindset towards table fellowship because of dietary laws and traditions. So when Jews became Christians, it was difficult for some to loosen the restrictions of the law. This was not just a problem in Galatia but throughout the Roman Empire. Neyrey claims, “Christian unity was constantly threatened by problems of table-fellowship” (cf. 1 Cor. 8; 10 and Rom 14).¹⁹ Jesus set the tone for a new type of table fellowship—eating with both prominent Jews (i.e. Pharisees, cf. Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-44; 14:1-7) and ‘Gentile sinners’ (Luke 5:29-32; 15:1-2; 19:5-7). Therefore, such a radical social change was apparently difficult for Jewish Christians to readily adopt because they had come out from a deeply embedded and culturally distinctive tradition. This was true for Jewish Christians in the early church in general and Galatian Jewish Christians in particular. This type of prejudice in Galatia created a major problem for Paul, and he confronts it with veracity in the *propositio* of his letter (i.e. Galatians 2.15-21).

The Solution: Embrace

Galatians 2.15-21 binds the three major sections of Galatians together. In the past, George Howard says, many have struggled to reconcile the middle section (chapters three and four) with the beginning (chapters one and two) and the end of the letter (chapters five and six).²⁰ He offers an oversimplified, yet helpful, outline of Galatians as follows: chapters one and two are apologetic, chapters three and four are theological and chapters five and six are hortatory.²¹ Howard notes that the middle section can seem disconnected to the rest of Galatians unless the sections are reinterpreted. The solution, he proposes, is that the letter as a whole, including the middle section, is a tightly knit unit held together by the theme of gentile inclusion. In summary, the doctrine of justification by faith and the ethical segment on table fellowship are connected which sheds light on the rest of the letter.²²

This fits the logic of Paul's argument as rhetorical criticism makes clear.²³ Two notes should be made about rhetorical criticism as it pertains to the passage at hand (i.e. Gal. 2.15, 16). First, Paul's rhetoric in Galatians is probably best categorized as deliberative and not juridical or epideictic.²⁴ This means that his language and arguments were written in such a way as to persuade the Galatians towards a specific action in the immediate future. Second, Galatians 2.15-21 is most properly categorized as the *propositio*, or proposition, of Paul's deliberative rhetorical argument.²⁵ The main concept that Paul wants to communicate to the Galatians is contained in this passage. This rhetorical background provides the necessary understanding of Paul's literary context as one seeks to understand the meaning of justification in Galatians.

Paul deals with a lot in Galatians 2.16 but there are three major ideas that dominate this verse and each one has been the subject of considerable debate. They are justification, works of law and faithfulness. Countless pages have been written on each of these ideas, so I do not attempt to cover all of the material possible within this article. My purpose is not to extract a systematic theology of justification from this small section; rather, my purpose is simply to show Paul's overall thrust and purpose behind the deliberative rhetoric of 2.16. His primary thrust behind 'justification' is to persuade the Galatian church towards an embrace ecclesiology.

It is important to keep in mind the question that Paul is asking as he begins the *propositio*. The context of this passage is right in the middle of his rebuke pertaining to Peter's exclusive table fellowship practices. Thus, this is the issue as N.T. Wright says: "Is it right for Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians to eat together? Do they belong at the same table, or not? That is the question, in this, Paul's first and perhaps sharpest statement of 'justification by faith,' to which he regards that doctrine as the answer."²⁶

It is debated whether Paul's words in the *propositio* are addressed to Peter or to the Galatian church. These words we know were spoken directly to Peter

in Antioch: “How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?” (Gal 2.15). But the words that directly follow may not have been part of Paul’s rebuke in Antioch; He offers no formal transition in the text, but it seems likely that Paul has changed from talking to Peter to addressing the church of Galatia as a whole.²⁷ He writes, “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’” The last phrase, ‘Gentile sinners’, was a catch-all phrase many Jews used in reference to Gentiles (*Jub* 23.23-24; 1 Macc 2.44; *Pss Sol* 1.1, 2.1, *Isa* 14.5; *Matt* 26.45; *Luke* 6.32, 33).²⁸ Paul is surely not using it antagonistically; instead, he is using it ironically.²⁹ This may have even been phraseology the agitators were using against the Gentile Christians in order to shame them and Judaize them, thus forcing them to adopt Jewish practices in addition to believing on Christ.³⁰ However, it may not have had the same effect to the Jewish audience and may have simply been a term to refer to those outside of the covenant of Israel (*Rom.* 2.14; *Ps.* 9.17; *Tobit* 8.6; *Jub.* 13.23-4, *Pss. Sol.* 2.1-2; *Matt.* 5.47/*Lk.* 6.33). Paul makes a clear point, whatever the nuance of ‘Gentile sinners’ may be, that racial tensions were high and he uses this phrase as a rhetorical device to draw attention to an ecclesial problem.

A. Justification

Paul continues by saying, “We who are Jews by birth know that a man is not *justified* by observing the law” (2.16). The majority of the times Paul uses the verb ‘to justify’ (δικαιόω) in the New Testament are in Galatians and Romans. The same arguments often surround this term in both Galatians and Romans (e.g. Gal. 2.16 and Rom. 3.22). However, for the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the verb ‘to justify’ in Galatians only and not in Romans.³¹

Traditionally, the concept of justification has been limited to law court language with a type of forensic soteriology in which the believer is imputed the righteousness of Christ when justified.³² This is *not entirely* mistaken, but that limited view of justification distorts one’s understanding not only of justification but also of salvation. In modern Christian dialogue, people often refer to justification with these words: “Saved by faith alone and not by works.” The word ‘justification’ is virtually indistinguishable from the word ‘salvation’ in this sense. However, as Ben Witherington III notes, justification language here is not merely about salvation at the point of entry “into the body of Christ.”³³ Justification is only part of the salvation process.³⁴

Wright argues for a three-fold understanding of justification in Paul’s general usage: covenantal, forensic and eschatological.³⁵ Justification is covenantal in that Paul uses it within the context of God’s covenant to Abraham. It is forensic in that it connotes law court language (both Jewish and Hellenistic). And it is eschatological in that it cannot be understood apart from the new eschatological era inaugurated by Christ. That is how Wright

views justification in Pauline literature as a whole. My contribution, as will be displayed in the following dissertation, will demonstrate how this works out Paul's usage of justification in Galatians specifically.

Paul's main arguments in Galatians are found within chapters three and four. His first usage of *δικαιώω* after Galatians 2.16 is in chapter three: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be bless through you'" (3.8). This gives some more context to determine what Paul means being a clear reference to the covenantal promises God made Genesis (cf. Gen 12.3, 18.18, 22.18). So then, justification is covenantal. James D.G. Dunn goes as far to say that "to be righteous was to live within the covenant and within the terms it laid down (the law); to be acquitted, recognized as righteous, was to be counted as one of God's own people who had proved faithful to the covenant."³⁶ One can also see an eschatological emphasis in Galatians.

Paul talks about Gentile inclusion in connection with justification: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith" (3.8). God made a promise to Abraham that would be fulfilled in the Jewish eschatology and it was being fulfilled in Christ.³⁷ In regard to this aspect of eschatology, Wright notes that "justification, in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter the racial differences, as together they wait for the final new creation."³⁸ This eschatological fulfillment must be understood within 'justification'; already, one can see Paul using this idea to promote a new ecclesiology.

Finally, justification is forensic in Galatians 3.10, 11: "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith.'" The language of 'cursing' also belongs to covenant faithfulness (cf. Deut 27:28); however, Paul is using law-court, forensic language here to talk about guilt and innocence. Richard N. Longenecker categorizes justification as forensic because the phrase "before God" (*παρὰ τῷ θεῷ*) is used contexts describing God's judgment.³⁹ Thus, it is evident that Paul employs a variety of uses of 'to justify' throughout Galatians: covenantal, eschatological and forensic.⁴⁰

Paul, writing his letter to Christians was not teaching them how to be saved. Instead, the church needed to be made right with each other because of division. This is what Paul is addressing when he talks about justification; he was not giving an helpful *ordu salutis*, path of salvation. But justification cannot be understood without understanding the terms 'works of law' and 'faithfulness.' They are both found in Galatians 2.16, the thesis statement of Paul's epistolary encapsulated rhetoric: "εἰδόντες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐάν μὴ Διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ."

B. Works of Law

Paul's usage of 'we' ("we who are Jews by birth") most naturally implies that the audience already knew what Paul was about to say. This can be understood through rhetorical criticism as follows. The *propositio* could be divided into two different parts of the speech: first, the agreed upon facts, then, secondly, the disputable facts.⁴¹ This is likely what Paul is doing here. The first part of the *propositio* was information that the Galatian audience and he agreed on. This established communality before he addressed issues of disputation. They agreed on the content of 2.15, 16. Paul was not saying anything new; he was simply reminding them of the gospel that was preached to them before (cf. 1.6). They are, after all, Christians to whom Paul has already preached Christ. The problem was that they were still holding onto the Jewish notion that law placed them in a right standing with God. They were struggling to make Christ the center of their lifestyle instead of works of law.

This phrase 'works of law' has caused much debate among scholars and can only be given partial attention here.⁴² These are the four of the most common interpretations of 'works of law': 1) general moral principles, 2) the Jewish badges of Sabbath, circumcision and dietary laws, 3) all the practices associated with following the Torah and 4) a general attitude associated with the Torah that manifest itself through action. Immediately, the idea that Paul meant was dealing with morality in general apart from the Torah must be rejected. This seems to be the most common Western Protestant understanding of what Paul meant by 'works of law', but that is due largely to the fact that most do not see Paul in his historical and literary contexts. The word 'law' to Paul always *always* meant "the Jewish Law, the Torah."⁴³ Thus, a better translation is 'Torah' because Paul as a Jew understood it this way. Dunn says, "Traditional interpretation of 'works of law' as self-achieved righteousness makes no sense against the background of classic Jewish theology."⁴⁴ Without this understanding the phrase preceding it, '*works*' of the law, is often skipped over. Paul does not just say 'law,' he says '*works of law*.' So even when the better translation of νόμος is understood (i.e. Torah), the entire phrase must be dealt with. Wright gives a three-fold context for approaching Pauline terminology: Old Testament usage, intertestamental usage (Jewish and Greco-Roman) and the specific context of Paul himself.⁴⁵ This poses an immediate problem: 'works of law' is not found in the Old Testament, the Septuagint or anywhere in the New Testament outside of the Pauline corpus.⁴⁶ This leaves a limited context for Paul's phrase. The question, then, is whether Paul is referring to the entire Torah, just a few identity markers or an attitude about Torah.

In regard to identity markers, some have said that when Paul says 'works of Torah,' he means only Sabbath, circumcision and dietary laws.⁴⁷ This is not

without reason—these three badges were the primary distinguishing traits of Jews in and around the first century A.D. We know this from both Greco-Roman and Jewish authors.⁴⁸ In regard to Roman Hellenism, two excerpts are helpful. Firstly, in *Saturae*, Juvenal (c. A.D. 60-130) speaks of the spread of Judaism to Rome and the generation of Jews after their fathers in which he specifically singles out three customs of the Jews as distinguishing: Sabbath, abstention from pork and the practice of circumcision (XIV 96-106). These support a reading of ‘works of law’ that pertains to social identity markers. Secondly, Epictetus (c. A.D. 50-130) lists dietary laws and circumcision as well (Arrianus, *Diss* I, 22.4). Paul explicitly refers to these two issues as connected to Gentile exclusion in Galatians which supports the same interpretation of ‘works of law’ (cf. 2.11-14; 5.2).

A similar interpretation is supported by Jewish literature as well, most notably in three writings of Philo, Josephus and the Maccabean letters (Philo, *Mos* 1.278; Josephus, *Ant* 11.34647; e.g. 1 Macc 1.60-63). The identity makers of the Jews are contrasted with the Imperial antagonism of Antiochus Epiphanies IV: “According to the decree (of Antiochus), they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers’ necks. But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die” (1 Macc 1.60-63). Circumcision and dietary laws were so important that people lost their lives on account of them.⁴⁹ This very brief survey of some Greco-Roman and Jewish texts around the Second Temple era show that certain issues stood out in Jewish exclusionary sociology.

So when Paul says ‘works of Torah’ in Galatians, we know that he means badges of separation, but can this be applied more broadly to the Torah as a whole? He uses the word law (νόμος) 114 times throughout his writings and thirty-two times in Galatians.⁵⁰ Every time, he means ‘Torah’ However, he only uses the phrase ‘works of law’ (ἔργων νόμου) six times in Galatians (2:16, 16, 16; 3:2, 5, 10). In 3.2, Paul says, “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) or by believing what you heard?” Again, in the same line of argument: “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) or because you believe what you heard?” The passage that separates them also sheds light on the meaning of ἐξ ἔργων νόμου: “After beginning by the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal *by effort* (σαρκί)” (3.3). ‘Σαρκί’ is sometimes translated ‘by effort’ (NIV), but the more natural translation is ‘in flesh’ denoting *physical origins or lineage* (e.g. Rom 1.3; 9.5). Therefore, in the context of the passage, Paul connects works of law with national heritage. So ‘works of law’ begins to be more than just a few boundary markers.

The last usage of ἔργων νόμου in Galatians can be found in 3.10. Here it connotes more than just boundary markers as well; rather, it refers to the Torah as a whole: “All who rely on observing the law (ἔργων νόμου) are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by law.” (3.10, 11a). This usage leaves room for both specific works of law (i.e. circumcision and dietary laws) and the Torah.

In the context of Galatians, therefore, it seems that Paul leaves the meaning of ἔργων νόμου broad. If he wanted to limit it to the boundary markers of circumcision and dietary laws, he would have been more explicit. Instead, Paul leaves the meaning broad in order to include at least both of the above meanings. The issues that were clearly dividing the church were dietary laws and circumcision that were part of the 613 commandments. This is evident from Paul’s rebuke of Peter in 2.11-14 and the eleven references to circumcision throughout Galatians. But there also seems to be a general attitude or mindset towards the Torah that was dominating the actions of the Jews. Ultimately this is what Paul was attacking—it was an attitude of loyalty to the Torah *that threatened their ultimate loyalty to Jesus Christ*.⁵¹ That is why he rebukes Peter for trying to ‘Judaize’ the Gentile Christians (2.14). If they adopted the customs specific only to Jews by birth, then their devotion to Christ would have been compromised. They would have been carried into the type of exclusionary attitude Tacitus observed:⁵²

Again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but *toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity*. They *sit apart at meals* and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful. *They adopt circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference*. Those who are *converted to their ways* follow the same practice, and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account (*Historiae* V, 1, 2; emphases mine).

Tacitus says that the converts to Judaism adopt their practices *and* attitudes. Along with practices come the attitudes of exclusion Paul is warning against. Four observations can be made about this passage: 1) Jews often appeared as exclusive and hateful towards other ethnicities,⁵³ 2) Jews separated themselves at meals to show this attitude, 3) circumcision was used as a distinguishing mark and 4) as already said, the proselytes to Judaism were taught to follow them in these ways of distinction. Although this was written in the early second century and not the first, it gives an example where the Jewish customs of circumcision and dietary laws were connect to a general attitude of exclusion.

Since these two issues, circumcision and dietary laws (i.e. table fellowship), were divisive in both Tacitus's context and in Galatia (as noted by Paul), it is likely that Jewish Christians in Galatia had the same *attitude* Tacitus describes. Paul's usage of 'works of law,' then is a conflation of the badges of distinction, the Torah as a whole and a general attitude of loyalty to the Torah—customs, teaching and attitude. Paul responds by saying that justification is only found *through the faithfulness of Christ* (2.16). The very heart of the Pauline gospel is not the law but Christ Jesus himself.

Faithfulness

Paul says, "A man is not justified by observing the law; but by faith in Jesus Christ (οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἕαν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). The conjunction ἕαν μὴ is best understood as adversative in the context of the rest of Galatians and should be translated "but only"⁵⁴ So Paul uses this adversative conjunction to show that the means of justification is not the law but Jesus Christ.

The phrase πίστewς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ or 'faith/fulness of Jesus Christ' or has been the intense subject of thought and debate in recent New Testament scholarship.⁵⁵ Besides Romans 4 and Hebrews 11, Galatians 3 discusses faith more intensely than any other segment of the New Testament. The subject of debate is whether πίστewς Χριστοῦ is a subjective or an objective genitive. If it is subjective, then the phrase should be translated 'faithfulness of Christ' with the faith being that of Jesus. But if it is objective, the phrase should be translated 'faith in Christ' with Jesus as the substance or person in whom faith is placed and faith being that of the believer. This has been hotly debated between scholars for the last twenty-five years or so. In North America, scholars are divided down the middle as to whether the phrase should be translated with a subjective or objective genitive, but the minority of scholars agree that it is a subjective genitive.⁵⁶ A number of scholars have rejected the subjective genitive to some degree in this context, Betz, Burton and Cranfield included.⁵⁷ However, a number of scholars recently have accepted the subjective genitive: J. Haussleiter, G. Kittel, K. Karth, E.C. Hoskyns, T.F. Torrance, P. Vallotton, R. Longenecker, H. Ljungmann, G.M. Taylor, K. Kertelge, J. Bligh, M. Barth, G.E. Howard, D.W.B. Robinson, H. Luhrmann, G.E. Howard, M.D. Hooker.⁵⁸ The debate focuses on two main issues for understanding Paul's usage of the genitive here. These are grammatical and theological issues.⁵⁹

In regard to grammar, the case is strongest towards the subjective genitive interpretation despite current the majority opinion of scholars on an international level. This is the argument: Robinson states that there is no usage of πίστις with an objective genitive next to a pronoun in the Septuagint.⁶⁰ Then, there is non-Septuagintal literature—every time a noun is followed by a genitival pronoun in Jewish literature during the Second Temple era, the

construction is subjective except once.⁶⁴ See this chart below outlining these extrabiblical Greek Jewish sources:

Source	Occurrence of πίστις	Occurrence of πίστις with the subjective personal genitive	Occurrence of πίστις with the objective personal genitive
Old Testament Apocrypha	23	2 ⁶²	0
Greek Pseudepigrapha	0	0	0
Philo	116	2 ⁶³	0
Josephus	93	4 ⁶⁴	1 ⁶⁵

In the Pauline corpus, more importantly, Paul never uses πίστις, a proper noun and an objective genitive together. The twenty-four instances where πίστις is followed by a proper noun or pronoun in the Pauline corpus: twenty refer to the faith of Christians, two the faith of Abraham (Rom 4.12, 16), one to any believer (Rom 4.5) and one to God's faithfulness (Rom. 3.3).⁶⁶ "Thus in every instance in which πίστις is followed by a proper noun or pronoun in the genitive case, the genitive is unmistakably subjective."⁶⁷ In regard to Gal. 2.16, in particular, the Latin Vulgate and Syriac translations indicate a clear and explicit subjective understanding of the genitive in the phrase.⁶⁸ The burden of proof, then, rests not on the minority of scholars who hold to a subjective interpretation here but on those who take the objective genitive.

In regard to theology, the concept that justification is through *the faithfulness of Christ* fits just as well if not better into Pauline thought. First of all, the Hebrew concept of faith differs from the Hellenistic concept of faith. The former is more holistic and the latter more dualistic. Dunn notes that the Hellenistic reader would have most naturally interpreted πίστις as 'faith' or 'trust', but he fails to bring out a Jewish understanding in Paul.⁶⁹ Secondly, Paul's theology is Christocentric. Before having gone down the Damascus road, Paul was totally devoted to the God of the Torah, and now he was totally devoted to the God who fulfilled the Torah in Jesus. Everything in Paul's life gained deeper meaning because of that experience, and this is evident in his letter to the Galatians. Just like Wrede, Schweitzer and Sanders missed the covenantal emphasis in Paul's use of 'justification', it seems that many have missed the covenantal aspect of the *faithfulness of God* in the doctrine of justification. God had been faithful to his promises and that were manifest through the faithfulness of Christ. Thus, "if [πίστις χριστοῦ] is taken as the divine faithfulness to the promise given to Abraham that in him

all the nations of the earth will be blessed, a number of Pauline passages become clear.”⁷⁰ In light of that, Paul puts Christ as central locus of identity for the Galatians, both Jew and Gentile. Pauline Christology says that nothing compares to Christ in this regard, even devotion to the Torah.

This meant that the Gentile Christians do not have to become Jews in practice—they did not have to Judaize. Christ was all that was required of them to be covenant members “because out of works of law no flesh will be justified” (2.16).⁷¹ He reminds the Galatian church that the faithfulness of Christ, not works of the Torah justify a person setting them in the “status-of-being-right” with God.⁷²

Conclusion

Paul, working to redeem a community with racial division and social conflict, uses a letter to bring unity to the church of Galatia. Paul utilizes deliberative rhetoric in an epistolary form to take on a threat of the gospel pervading the church in Galatia. The gospel was being distorted and the heart of the problem was the Jewish struggle to include Gentile Christians into their fellowship. The core of Paul’s message to the Galatians pervades the *propositio*, Galatians 2.15-21. Having dealt with the first part of this section (2.15, 16), I have shown that at the heart of Paul’s talk about justification is church unity. For too long now, this passage has been used to promote an individualistic soteriology focusing on what each person receives in his or her heart only. It is time that this passage be used in the church for that which Paul intended—an ecclesiology that moves beyond an anthropocentric individualism and embraces people from all races based on their loyalty to Jesus Christ. Paul uses these words:

We who were born into the covenant as Jews, unlike those pagan ‘sinners,’ know that people do not become covenant members by a Torah-based lifestyle but only through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, and we have leaned on Christ Jesus in order that we might be covenant members by Christ’s faithfulness and not by our Torah-based lifestyle, because no human being is a covenant member because of a Torah-based lifestyle.

- Galatians 2.15, 16

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Footnotes

¹ Those who credit Augustine with this are Cooper and Harnack (as noted by John Riches). Riches offers a comprehensive history of ‘justification by faith’ in: *Galatians Through the Centuries* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008) 114-143. What follows is a summary of his analyses.

² Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1986) 13.

³ Watson 13.

⁴ He was born towards the end of the Enlightenment era so his push towards a more historical Paul probably comes from an Enlightenment mindset. This is important for understanding why a shift from Luther might be warranted. However, even philosophical modernistic rationalism has its cautions of which to be aware.

⁵ (London: SCM Press, 1977).

⁶ Sanders 511.

⁷ This can be seen even into the present year in the recent “book debate” between N.T. Wright and John Piper. John Piper, a Reformed Calvinist pastor, wrote a book entitled *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* in regard to Wright’s analysis of the doctrine of justification. Wright wrote a book entitled *Justification* as a response to Piper’s critique of his previous work. This is a clash between the Lutheran understanding of a purely forensic view of justification with the New Perspective of a broader understanding of Paul as a Jew writing to the first century church.

⁸ Watson 8. A more in depth analysis of the influence of Sanders will be dealt with below.

⁹ Dating Galatians at A.D. 49 will be assumed throughout this paper. There is neither room nor necessity for a full discussion of the dating for the main purpose of this paper. For a full discussion see Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 8-13.

¹⁰ *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Galatians* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2000) 184, 186.

¹¹ James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993) 202.

¹² Clark H. Pinnock, *Truth of Fire: the Message of Galatians* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998) 5.

¹³ Cf. Jacob Neusner, *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Dunn, *Galatians* 136.

¹⁵ Hays makes the point that labeling the disrupters as ‘Judaizers’ is not only inaccurate but also distorts the problem in Galatia (cf. Hays, *Galatians* 185). This term has been the object of some repute in recent scholarship

because of its propensity of false connotations. These agitators were more like missionaries than anything else trying to make Gentiles become add Jewish cultural and tradition to their Christian identity (cf. Dunn, *Galatians* 11). The term 'Judaizer' is not the best understanding because it implies that the conflict was between Jews. The term 'Judaizer' refers to the Gentiles who were being forced to adopt Jewish practices. Thus, 'agitators' will refer to those in Galatia who were in opposition to the gospel of freedom in Christ.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The imperfect active form, ἀφώριζεν in 2.12 indicates that Peter's separation was a process and not a one time even. Peter was separating himself from the Gentiles during meals over a period of time.

¹⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 361-387

¹⁹ Neyrey 382.

²⁰ George Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 46-61.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Rhetorical criticism has not been dominant in New Testament scholarship until recent years, so it is understandable that these sections have seemed disconnected to interpreters in the history of theological hermeneutics, not least of whom is Martin Luther.

²⁴ Hans Dieter Betz argues that Galatians is juridical rhetoric (*Galatians* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979] 28) and George A. Kennedy argues that it is best seen as deliberative rhetoric (*New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984] 144-5). Kennedy notes that Betz seems to overemphasize the narrative portion of Galatians (chapters 1 and 2) to the neglect of the exhortative segment (chapters 5 and 6). For Kennedy, the argument that Galatians is deliberative can be sustained by at least three arguments: 1) the use of narrative does not detract from deliberative rhetoric (as some propose (Betz); instead, as Quintilian (3.8.10-11), narrative can be used in deliberative oratory when it is talking of "external matters" (i.e. "alters which have bearing on the case and contribute to an understanding of the speaker, but are not directly at issue"), 2). the strong exhortative tones and explicit instructions towards future action included in Galatians five and six show the deliberative nature of this letter. Building on that, Kennedy describes that the principle of linearity shows that Paul uses the content of chapters one through four lead to the exhortations in chapters five and six, and 3). a defining characteristic of deliberative rhetoric is that "an action is in the self-interest of the audience or that it is simply 'right'" (Quintillian 8.3.1-3). To summarize his argument: Whatever Paul does in chapters one through four only serves to emphasize what he exhorts

towards future action in chapters five and six, even though it contains narration. Thus, Galatians is best perceived as deliberative and not judicial in its rhetoric (Kennedy 144, 145).

²⁵ Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 169-72.

²⁶ N.T. Wright, *Justification* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009) 114.

²⁷ In agreement with Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson, 1990) 83.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 83.

³⁰ Dunn, *Galatians* 131.

³¹ I am focusing on the verbal form of δικαιώω because this paper focuses on Gal. 2.15, 16 and neither the noun δικαιοσύνη nor any of the other cognates are used.

³² Or just as well, *imparted* the righteousness of Christ.

³³ 174.

³⁴ Wright, *Justification* 80-108.

³⁵ N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 117

³⁶ *Galatians* 134. The covenantal usage of justification is also evident in Galatians 3.24 and 5.4, the only other two times the verb is used in this letter.

³⁷ The early church clearly views the period following Christ as the 'last days' (cf. Acts 2.17; 1 Tim 4.1; 2 Tim 3.1; Heb 1.2; 2 Pet 3:3).

³⁸ Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 122.

³⁹ 118.

⁴⁰ The covenantal aspect dominates most of his uses of dikaiōw in Galatians (cf. 3.8, 3.24, 5.4).

⁴¹ See Longenecker, *Galatians* 81. He argues that *Rhetorica ad Herennium* "tells us that a *propositio* should have two parts, a statement of facts agreed on and a laying out of what remain contested" (1.10.17; cf. Cicero, *De Inventione* 1.22.31).

⁴² See Sanders (1977). This analysis will consist of understanding 'works of law' in the context of Galatians only. There is some overlap, especially with Romans, but there is not enough room to cover everything that can be said about 'works of law' in all of Pauline and Jewish literature. The point of this excursus is to show that 'works of law' in Galatians is primarily used in the context of deliberative rhetoric for a sociological change.

⁴³ Wright, *Justification* 116.

⁴⁴ Dunn 76, 77

⁴⁵ Wright, *Justification* 87

⁴⁶ Witherington 116.

⁴⁷ James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 127

⁴⁸ For a full analysis, reference M. Stern ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Vol. 1 1974, Vol. 2 1980) – circumcision: Timagenes, Horace, Persius, Petronius, Martial, Tacitus, Juvenal, Suetonius (##81, 129, 190, 194-5, 240-1, 281, 301, 320); food laws: Erotianus, Epictetus, Plutarch, Tacitus, Juvenal, Sextus Empiricus (##196, 253, 258, 281, 298, 334).

⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Macc 1.11, 14, 15; 2 Macc 2:12-17; Josephus, *Ant* 11.346-47; *Arist* 139, 142; 1QS 5.21, 23; 6.18; The above quotation was written about the sacking of Jerusalem in 163 B.C. and not contemporaneous with Galatia in the mid-first-century A.D.; however, this type of attitude was set and pervaded thereafter throughout the Roman Empire as Dunn has shown in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 124.

⁵⁰ I assume Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles for this statistic. νόμος is used 194 times in the entire New Testament.

⁵¹ Heikki Raisanen, “Galatians 2.16 and Paul’s Break with Judaism” *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 31.4 (1985): 550.

⁵² What follows is his view of the Jews in the first decade of the second century. This is not the exact time-frame of Galatians. However, there is enough evidence throughout ancient literature that these types of perceptions were wide spread so as to still gain help for understanding first century Galatia.

⁵³ τὰ ἔθνη means ‘the nations’

⁵⁴ Longenecker 84.

⁵⁵ Richard B. Hays gives a brief history of the discussion on πίστις Χριστοῦ over the last century and half (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, Ed. William Baird [Chico: Scholars Press, 1983] 158-62). Johannes Haussleiter was the first to bring the proposal of the subjective genitive interpretation of this phrase into modern NT scholarship. However, it did not receive much attention until early in twentieth century when Kittle and Diessmann attempted to defend a similar position. Their emphasis, although not different from Haussleiter, was more negative than positive. They did not necessarily accept the subjective genitive, but rejected the objective genitive as the best interpretation. Their proposals did not receive wide acceptance. The issue fell into the background of NT scholarship until the 1950s when A.G. Hebert and Thomas Torrance questioned the long-held view of the objective genitive of the phrases related to πίστις Χριστοῦ. The emphasis of their writings, no doubt, was on the possible Hebrew connotations of behind πίστις quite possibly because of a general keen awareness of Jews in the world due to the recent Holocaust. Along with this came an emphasis on the faithfulness of God to the Abrahamic covenant. However, they were quickly met with criticism

most notably by C.F.D Moule, John Murray and James Barr. Barr's criticism in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* was the most influential in dimming the light on Hebert and Torrance. While Barr's critic was somewhat legitimate, it did not quiet the issue. From Barr to Hay's writing in 1983, there was a flurry of scholarship focused on this issue and it has been a topic of debate until the present.

⁵⁶ Witherington 179.

⁵⁷ Longenecker 87

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* passim.

⁶⁰ George Howard, "The 'Faith of Christ'" *The Expository Times*, Vol. 85.7 (1974): 212.

⁶¹ Ibid., 212-215.

⁶² Sir 46:15; 1 Macc 14:35

⁶³ *Spec* IV 30, 34.

⁶⁴ *Vita* I 84; *Contra Apionem* II 218; *Bellum* III 6, VI 330.

⁶⁵ *Ant* 19:16. Howard makes a convincing argument that the clause used here does not parallel πίστις Χριστού: "πολλὴν ἔχει πίστιν τοῦ Θεοῦ τῆς δυνάμεως" 213.

⁶⁶ Howard, "The 'Faith of Christ'" 163.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν ἐπιστεύσαμεν." Respectively: "*fidem Iesu Christi nos in Christo Iesu credimus fide Christi?*" and "*behaymanutha deyeshu meshiḥa ḥenan beh beshu meshiḥa haimenn demen haymanutheh demeshiḥa*" Howard 213.

⁶⁹ Dunn, *Galatians* 138.

⁷⁰ Howard, "The 'Faith of Christ'" 214.

⁷¹ This last phrase is an allusion to Psalm 143.2 (LXX Ps 142.2). Paul changes 'living ones' from the LXX and uses 'flesh' instead. Paul's usage here simply means the "finitude, weakness and corruptibility of all human existence" (Dunn, *Galatians* 140). Flesh and living people are used synonymously in 1 *En* 1.31.5.

⁷² Wright, *Justification* 92.

JOHN W. MOREHEAD

*From “Cults” to Cultures: Bridges as a Case Study
in a New Evangelical Paradigm on New Religions*

Abstract

The increased awareness of the new religions with the counterculture of the 1960s saw various responses, including a “counter-cult” approach by evangelicals. The counter-cult approach has tended to view new religions as “cults” and to respond to them as heretical systems of belief in need of refutation by doctrinal and apologetic arguments. Over the last decade or so a new evangelical paradigm has emerged based in missiology which, while recognizing theological disagreements that the new religions have with Christianity, approaches new religions as religious cultures rather than as cults. Various resources have been produced as a result of the new evangelical paradigm. A case study is found in the resource titled *Bridges: Helping Mormons Discover God’s Grace*, which presents a culturally-sensitive understanding of Mormons and Mormonism for evangelicals.

Key Words: Mormonism, counter-cult, new religious movements, Bridges, cult, contextualization, anti-cult

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The late 1960s saw the rise of turbulent times in America as various facets of "mainstream" culture were called into question by the country's youth. America's religious life was not exempt from process. Although novel religious ideas have been a part of American history and culture for many years, the increased presence of eastern gurus and the counterculture's fascination with mysticism and alternative forms of spirituality gave the impression to certain segments of society that a "cult explosion" posed one of many threats to the country.¹ In response to the presence of these new religions, or "cults" as referred to more popularly, two segments of American culture rose in response. The first was the secular anti-cult movement, represented by groups such as the now defunct Cult Awareness Network, and the American Family Foundation (now called the International Cultic Studies Association). From the perspective of the secular anti-cult the new religions represented exploitation and a threat to freedom of choice in religious matters as gurus and leaders of new religions were alleged to engage in various forms of brainwashing.

Another very different response to the new religions arose out of the Christian subculture which adopted a self-designation as the counter-cult movement.² While sometimes overlapping with the secular anti-cult in their concerns over the new religions, in general the counter-cult follows a different trajectory which will be explored briefly later in this paper. Whether consciously or not, both the secular anti-cult and evangelical counter-cult have contributed to the marginalization of new religions in American religious life. Quite naturally, the evangelical counter-cult has done this largely within the evangelical subculture as they have shaped its attitudes, understandings, and responses toward new religions both in neighborhood churches as well as in the public square. Although academic studies have tended to focus on the secular anti-cult, the evangelical counter-cult movement represents an interesting response to the new religions in its own right.³ In this essay I will sketch the primary counter-cult approach to new religions, and then describe the emergence of a new multidisciplinary, academically-informed paradigm among evangelicals. This shift in understanding of new religions has resulted in the production of new resources which seek to re-educate an evangelical audience about the new religions. One such resource will be examined as a case study in the form of *Bridges*, which presents Mormonism as a culture rather than as a "cult."

Counter-Cult Movement and New Religious Movements

The counter-cult movement is an influential source in the shaping of evangelical attitudes toward new religions. It is difficult to know exactly how many people are involved in this movement in the United States, but it is likely that several hundred individuals, and several organizations, ranging in size from single individuals to those having a small staff, comprise this movement.⁴

Given their evangelical perspective, the counter-cult movement approaches the new religions from a particular theological framework which differentiates it from the secular anti-cult with its emphasis on actions rather than belief systems, or “deed not creed.” Australian researcher of new religions, Philip Johnson, has analyzed the vast body of materials that the prolific counter-cult movement has produced for evangelical consumption concerning the new religions, and as a result developed a typology and nomenclature related to the categorization of the various approaches the counter-cult takes in regards to the new religions.⁵ Although six basic models are identified in Johnson’s typology, by far, the approach most prominent in counter-cult circles is that labeled the “heresy-rationalist apologetic.” In this approach, counter-cult individuals begin with theological orthodoxy as defined by Protestant evangelicalism in terms of doctrines such as the nature of God, Christology, and soteriology as the overarching concerns, and then the views of various new religions are examined and contrasted. In light of this comparison the doctrines of the new religions are construed as heresies, and a refutation is offered by way of various biblical passages.⁶ In addition to the theological analysis and refutation, many counter-cult apologetic approaches also incorporate critique of the coherency of various worldviews associated with the new religions.⁷ This emphasis on identifying and critiquing heresy, coupled with the incorporation of a rational critique of the new religions, results in the heresy-rationalist apologetic.

As awareness of the Johnson typology and critique of the heresy-rationalist apologetic has become known among the counter-cult it has not been well received.⁸ Even so, in John Saliba’s assessment of various theological approaches to new religions he characterizes Johnson’s analysis of the evangelical approach as “[p]robably the most insightful, carefully articulated, and detailed analysis”⁹ available.

Although size of the counter-cult movement is very small compared to the size of evangelicalism as a whole their influence in shaping evangelical understanding of new religions through the heresy-rationalist apologetic must not be underestimated. A trip to a Christian bookstore and a perusing of the “Cults and World Religions” section will reveal a number of volumes that approach the new religions, and many times the world religions, from the heresy-rationalist perspective. In addition, the counter-cult has an extensive presence on the Internet,¹⁰ and these print and digital sources are extremely influential in shaping evangelical attitudes to, understandings of, and forms of engagement with adherents of new religious movements.

The Emergence of a New Evangelical Paradigm

As a result of the counter-cult approach to the new religions several forms of marginalization have resulted: 1) the counter-cult has been marginalized

in the academic community, either being ignored or largely viewed in negative fashion; 2) the perception of the counter-cult among the adherents of new religions is one of marginalization as the way in which the new religions are represented by the counter-cult is viewed in strongly negative fashion; and 3) perhaps most curiously, counter-cult approaches to the new religions may have resulted in the counter-cult being marginalized and treated with fringe status themselves within evangelicalism. As I have written elsewhere, "The counter-cult response to what was perceived as the religious fringe relegated the counter-cult to the fringes of the evangelical subculture."¹¹ It is in this context that a new approach to new religions has arisen within evangelicalism.

Evangelicals in several countries, including Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States,¹² independently came to the conclusion that the counter-cult heresy rationalist approach was problematic on a number of fronts. In response a new paradigm was developed that addressed perceived shortcomings. This new paradigm exhibits at least four significant facets.

First, the new paradigm is positive and holistic. The emphasis on in the counter-cult movement is on apologetic refutation, on "countering" something as in the name "*counter-cult*"¹³ Although this posture and methodology is often construed by counter-cultists as a positive means of evangelism for adherents of new religions, it is probably better understood in the negative, as a means of refutation that functions as a form of boundary maintenance for evangelicals that speaks more to their need for doctrinal and worldview definition and protection.¹⁴ Gordon Melton has observed that

The counter-cult approach originated as an evangelism effort, but with that proving unfruitful, counter-cult spokespersons have now redefined their work as apologists and limited their public activity to boundary maintenance for the evangelical community.¹⁵

In addition, advocates of the new paradigm recognize the limited value of boundary maintenance approaches beyond serving the sometimes important but narrow function of "preaching to the choir." As Saliba has noted in this regard,

[A]ll that the heated denunciations of the new religions do is to reinforce the attitudes and beliefs of both their members and detractors. Apologetic debates rarely lead unbelievers or apostates to convert; they do not succeed in persuading renegade Christians to abandon their new beliefs to return to the faith of their birth. Harangues against the new religions do not lead their members to listen attentively to the arguments of zealous evangelizers. On the contrary, they drive them further away and elicit similar belligerent responses.¹⁶

Those evangelicals who have developed the new paradigm recognize that there is a place for doctrinal and worldview contrast between religions traditions, and even a contextualized form of apologetic engagement when appropriate, but that these must take place within a more positive, expansive, and holistic framework in regards to the new religions.

Second, the new paradigm utilizes a broader understanding of the new religions. In the counter-cult approach, theology and a branch of theology in the form of apologetics are the primary tools used to understand the new religions. Those developing a new paradigm recognize that theology remains an important discipline for those evangelicals seeking to understand the new religions in relation to the Christian faith, but a broader theological framework must be utilized, one that seeks to bring theology into dialogue with other disciplines.

Third, related to the second aspect just discussed, the new evangelical paradigm seeks broader theological understandings of the new religions through a multidisciplinary framework. Disciplines such as religious studies, the sociology of religion, and anthropology are studied so that the insights provided from these academic disciplines might inform the evangelical understanding of the new religions. Theology itself is also probed more deeply so that the history of Christian engagement with other religions across cultures, and interreligious dialogue become important tools for theological enrichment. Through this process theology is then brought into dialogue with these avenues of thought so that broader, more informed, and enriching forms of theology are developed.¹⁷

Fourth, the new paradigm involves a dramatically different framework, reframing the understanding of new religions as distinct religious or spiritual cultures rather than as heretical belief systems or cults. Those developing the new paradigm recognize that the new religions incorporate elements of doctrine and worldview that are at variance with Christianity (as well as recognizing those elements that are not in conflict), but viewing the new religions as little to nothing more than cults or heresies results in a limited understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of the new religions, and tends to engender largely negative forms of interaction. Instead, the new paradigm moves beyond conceptions of heretical cults in recognition that the new religions involve not only their own unique doctrines and worldview, but also unique vocabulary, rituals, sacred narratives, and other elements that provide a sense of religious and social identity which come together to provide the adherent with a sense of cultural identity. This idea dovetails with the thesis of Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe wherein new religions are construed as global cultures.¹⁸

Resource Case Study: Bridges

Over the last several years, the development and utilization of this new paradigm among evangelicals has moved beyond the efforts of a few isolated individuals to the formation of a small but growing international network.¹⁹

Participants in this network have been involved in the production of new resources as a means of contributing to the body of scholarship on the new religions, as well as to facilitating a new evangelical understanding of them, and informing engagement with their adherents in more promising ways.²⁰ One of these resources fits well with the location of this CESNUR conference given its focus on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the remainder of this paper I will examine the educational program called *Bridges* as a case study for the types of resources currently being developed as a result of the new paradigm.

In 2002 the Winter Olympic Games were held in Salt Lake City. As the announcement of this location was made prior to the event, many members of the evangelical Christian community in Utah were both excited about the prospects of becoming the focus of the world stage, and concerned about the possibility of negative evangelistic efforts directed at members of the LDS Church. As a result of this concern Salt Lake Theological Seminary²¹ was asked to produce a new resource that would serve as a model for a positive understanding of Mormonism and interactions between traditional Christians and Mormons. The final product was a video-based training tool called *Bridges*.

The basic premise of *Bridges* is that Mormonism should be understood as a culture rather than as a cult. The producers of *Bridges* noted that the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*,²² in an entry by Dean L. May, included Mormons. The rationale for this classification involved the existence of various characteristics which function as cultural markers and which differentiate the "us" of Mormonism vs. the "them" of non-Mormons. In addition to the obvious characteristic of religious worldview, other cultural markers include a history of conflict (particularly with Protestant Christians) and a resulting sense of persecution, a westward migration across the United States that is often equated in Mormon minds with the Jewish exodus, distinct marriage practices including the past practice of polygamy and temple marriage, special dietary regulations in the form of the "Word of Wisdom," and a sense of group distinction and at times isolation in terms of its stance in relation to non-Mormons.²³ All of these cultural markers come together to form a sense among Mormons of being a distinct and different people in terms of existing as a separate culture or subculture.

Bridges begins with this foundational premise that Mormonism is best understood as a culture. The resource includes five modules that impart core ideas as part of a basic philosophy of understanding and engagement. These include an emphasis on interactions between evangelicals and Latter-day Saints through the development of relationships rather than confrontation. This does not mean that *Bridges* does not discuss the differences between evangelicalism and Mormonism, but that such differences, when they arise,

are part of a broader landscape of discussion. It also involves recognition that complex and difficult subject matter is best discussed within the context of relationships. Another foundational principle of *Bridges* is “a commitment to understanding the unique culture of Latter-day Saints and finding of points of contact within that culture”²⁴ so that the evangelical understanding of the Christian message can be shared. The cultural perspective on Mormonism, and a commitment to relationships and common ground, come together to form a basic philosophy imparted by the *Bridges* training program.

Ken Mulholland, one of the principals involved in the creation of *Bridges*, estimates that over 25,000 Christians have been through this training series. The response by evangelicals to this approach tends to follow a general pattern. Many evangelicals have their understanding and opinions of Mormonism shaped by the counter-cult heresy-rationalist perspective as found in many books and websites that discuss Mormonism. As a result, there is often great resistance to the idea that Mormonism is best understood as a culture rather than as a cult. This was my experience in teaching *Bridges* in a church in northern California. After the five modules were completed, an attendee approached me and shared that during the first module with the discussion of the cultural aspects of Mormonism she almost left and did not complete the training because she knew Mormonism was a cult. But after sitting through the complete series and giving the cultural framework and new paradigm a try she came to the conclusion that it was a better way to understand Mormonism, and in her view it holds greater potential for dialoguing more positively with Latter-day Saints. In my experience with *Bridges* such reactions are common, and for this reason *Bridges* and other resources with a similar philosophy, hold great potential for creating fresh perspectives among evangelicals in their understanding of not only Mormonism, but new religious movements and world religions as well.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen what impact the new paradigm and resources like *Bridges* will have on evangelicals in large numbers, or whether a critical mass can be reached resulting in a paradigm shift that overthrows the dominant heresy-rationalist paradigm. New religions like Mormonism do not seem to be of major concern to many evangelical churches as they once were during the so-called “cult wars” of the previous few decades. It may be that the 1980s represented the height of influence for the counter-cult when films like *The Godmakers* (Jeremiah Films, 1982) were shown around the United States and viewed by thousands of Christians. But despite the dramatic lowering of the new religions on the agenda of issues of concern to evangelicals and their churches, the continued influence of the counter-cult movement should not

be underestimated. Those developing the new paradigm will continue to meet resistance to their approach both from the counter-cult and from popular evangelicalism which has become accustomed to thinking of new religions in terms of heresy and threat rather than culture and opportunity. Despite the uphill battle, the new paradigm on new religions among evangelicals, and the resources based upon them, hold great potential for re-educating the evangelical subculture, but it will take a great deal of time, market infusion, and financial resources to facilitate a large scale shift in thinking.

Footnotes

¹ Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 175.

² George D. Chrystides presents a summary of both the secular anti-cult and Christian counter-cult approaches in chapter 10, "The counter-cult movement," in *Exploring New Religions* (London and New York, Cassell, 1999).

³ John A. Saliba includes a helpful discussion of "The New Religions in Christian Theological Perspective" in chapter six of *Understanding New Religious Movements*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press). For a more extensive analysis and valuable critique of the counter-cult movement see Douglas E. Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?: An Introduction to the Christian Countercult* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

⁴ Statistics are not available on the current number of counter-cult individuals and organizations, but as of 1996 443 evangelical counter-cult organizations were tallied in Keith Edward Tolbert and Eric Pement, *1996 Directory of Cult Research Organizations* (Trenton, NJ: American Religions Center, 1996).

⁵ Philip Johnson, "The Aquarian Age and Apologetics," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 34, no. 2 (December 1997): 51-60.

⁶ This approach is exemplified in any number of evangelical books on the topic. Examples include the major influence in the development of this model found in Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, revised updated edition, Ravi Zacharias, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2003). Examples of other popular authors that utilize the heresy-rationalist approach include John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* (In Defense of the Faith Series, 2) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999); and Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

⁷ E.g., Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), and Francis J. Beckwith & Stephen Parrish, *See the Gods Fall: Four Rivals to Christianity* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2000).

⁸ This awareness was facilitated by Johnson's essay "Apologetics, Mission and New Religious Movements: A Holistic Approach" in *Sacred Tribes Journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 5-220 (information retrieved from http://www.sacredtribesjournal.org/images/Articles/Vol_1/Apolog_Johnson.pdf, accessed 20 May 2009), as well as my chapter "Where Do We Go From Here?: Transforming Evangelical Responses to New Religions," in Irving Hexham, Stephen

Rost, & John W. Morehead II eds., *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MO: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2004).

⁹ John A. Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press), 221.

¹⁰ See the discussion of this in chapter 8, “The Siege in Cyberspace and the Democratization of the Countercult, in Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*.”

¹¹ John W. Morehead II, “Where Do We Go From Here?,” in *Encountering New Religious Movements*, 288.

¹² The situation among evangelicals in Europe is different in that the heresy-rationalist paradigm has not been nearly as influential. Here, figures like Ole Skjerbaek Madsen in Denmark and Lars Johansson in Sweden approach the new religions from a perspective very different from that in America. See Ole Skjerbaek Madsen, “Theology in Dialogue with New Age or the Neospiritual Milieu,” in Viggo Mortensen ed., *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), and Lars Johansson, “Mystical Knowledge, New Age, and Missiology,” in J. Andrew Kirk and Kevin J. Vanhoozer eds., *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

¹³ Even former Denver Seminary professor Gordon Lewis, a figure sympathetic to the counter-cult, urged a new sense of self-identity that moved beyond confrontation. See Gordon R. Lewis, “New Religious Movements and our Mission Responsibility,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 15, no. 3 (July-September 1998), 118, (information retrieved from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/15_3_PDFs/01%20Lewis.pdf, accessed 20 May 2009).

¹⁴ This is examined in depth in Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*

¹⁵ J. Gordon Melton, “Emerging Religious Movements in North America” *Missiology* 28, no. 1 (January 2000: 93-94.

¹⁶ Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements*, 220.

¹⁷ Missiologists utilize this form of theological reflection and it has been used for centuries in regards to the world religions. This is only recently the case in regards missiologically informed approaches to the new religions. For an example of theology in dialogue with other disciplines in missiology see Gailyn Van Rhee, “From Theology to Practice: The Helix Metaphor,” *Monthly Missiology Reflection* #25, (information retrieved from <http://www.missiology.org/mmr/mmr25.htm>, accessed 20 May 2009).

¹⁸ Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

¹⁹ This network is facilitated through the Religious and Non-Religious Spirituality in the Western World issue group (www.lop45.org) as part of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

²⁰ Examples of these resources in the area of scholarship includes the revamped electronic *Sacred Tribes Journal* (www.sacredtribesjournal.org), and examples of those resources aimed at helping evangelicals conceptualize the new religions and engage their adherents in more positive fashion include Philip Johnson, Anne C. Harper and John W. Morehead, eds., *Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 45, “Religious and Non-Religious Spirituality in the Western World (‘New Age’)”*, 2004 (information retrieved from <http://www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/>

LOP45_IG16.pdf, accessed 20 May 2009); Hexham, Rost and Morehead, *Encountering New Religious Movements*; Philip Johnson and Gus diZerega, *Beyond the Burning Times: A Pagan and Christian in Dialogue* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008); and the Consultation on Post-Christendom Spiritualities held at Trinity International University in October 2008 (a summary report and videos of plenary sessions can be accessed at http://www.sacredtribesjournal.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=81&Itemid=2).

²¹ Financial challenges resulted in the recent closing of the seminary (www.slts.edu), but *Bridges* and similar resources are now the intellectual property of and promoted by the Western Institute for Intercultural Studies (www.wiics.org).

²² Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1980): 720-31.

²³ Armand L. Mauss has discussed the ongoing oscillation in Mormon history between isolation and emphasis on Mormon distinctives, and desires for acceptance and emphasis on similarities with traditional Christianity and non-Mormon culture in *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

²⁴ Kenneth Mulholland, "Bridging the Divide: Cross-Cultural Missions to Latter-day Saints" in Hexham, Rost and Morehead, *Encountering New Religious Movements*, 159.

MARK A. LAMPORT

*The Most Indispensable Habits of Effective Theological Educators: Recalibrating Educational Philosophy, Psychology, and Practice*¹

Abstract

In this article, the author provocatively claims that “theological education is neither”; it is not *theological* unless it considers the nature of its mission to be ultimately Ministerial; and it is not *education* unless it takes seriously the learner as focal point of the process.

Armed with “best practices” research on effective teaching in higher education, this rather personal, sometimes feisty, essay challenges the fundamental assumptions of theological education professors’ most strongly held beliefs regarding their educational philosophies (advocating critical thinking over accumulation of content), educational psychologies (promoting learning outcomes and the characteristics of the adult learner over teaching), and educational practices (supporting a view for the nature of theological discourse for Ministerial education over Academic in theological education).

Based on a quarter-century as a professor in theological education, the author brings both an educational theory and practical theology academic background. The objective of this essay is to describe the most effective practices for teaching and suggest correlation with the teaching task of the theological educator. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to coax professors in theological institutions to reconsider their innate and explicit conceptions of educational philosophy, psychology, and practice.

Key Words: Effective theological education, teaching and learning in theological education, theological education professors, educational philosophy in theological education, theology and education, theological education best practices

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Introduction: Conceiving the Craft of Professor in Theological Education

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative.

John Dewey²

Any reflective professor wonders about their effectiveness as an educator: “*Why do I do certain kinds of things and not others? What evidence about how people learn drives my teaching choices? How often do I do something because my professors did it?*” I certainly do.³ Teaching is a serious and important intellectual and creative work, an endeavor that benefits from careful observation and close analysis, from revision and refinement, as well as from dialogue with colleagues and the critique of peers.⁴

How is teaching excellence to be defined? Ken Bain, director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at New York University, asserts outstanding teachers are those professors that achieve remarkable success in helping most of their students learn in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how those students think, act, and feel.⁵

In *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004)⁶, Bain identifies six recurring themes that describe the most effective higher education professors. The results emerge from a fifteen-year study of nearly one hundred college professors in a wide variety of fields and universities, and offers valuable answers for all tertiary educators, including theological educators.

The short synopsis is – it is not what professors *do*, it is what they *understand*. Lesson plans and lecture notes matter less than the special way teachers comprehend the subject and value human learning. The bottom line is instructors are successful only to the extent that they enable their students to learn.

The objective of this essay is to describe the most effective practices for teaching and suggest correlation with the teaching task of the theological educator. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to coax professors in theological institutions to reconsider their innate and explicit conceptions of educational philosophy, psychology, and practice.

Six Best Practices for Teaching in Higher Education

“The teacher has not taught until the learner has learned.”

Anonymous

Try this exercise over the next few courses: ask students to name and describe the habits of the best teachers they have encountered in their higher education learning environments. As you listen to the students recall with fondness and appreciation, compare these observations with these best practices from Bain’s important study.

Best Practice Number One: *The best professors know their subject extremely well.* They use their knowledge to develop techniques for grasping fundamental principles and organizing concepts that others can use to begin building their own understanding and abilities. The best teachers are active and accomplished scholars, artists, or scientists. They read, think, and write. They follow the important intellectual developments in their field. They sometimes explore related fields outside their own. They enable learners to construct not only understanding but also meaning and application. In other words, the most effective professors can do intellectually, physically, or emotionally what they expect from their students. They think metacognitively about their discipline – analyzing its nature and evaluating its quality.

Best Practice Number Two: *The best professors create critical learning environments.* These are learning cultures where people confronting intriguing, beautiful, or important problems. The routine quest is exploring authentic tasks that challenge students to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental models of reality. While teaching methods vary, these conditions are best fostered to the degree that learners feel a sense of control over their education; work collaboratively with others; believe that their work will be considered fairly and honestly; and try, fail, and receive feedback from expert learners in advance of and separate from any summative judgment of their effort.

Best Practice Number Three: *The best professors prepare to teach as a serious intellectual endeavor.* Lectures, discussion sections, problem-based sessions, etc., are treated as intellectually demanding and important as their research and scholarship. The best teachers begin with questions about student learning objectives rather than about what the teacher will do. In short, methods are used as a means to the end: student learning.⁷

Best Practice Number Four: *The best professors have high expectations for their students.* Simply put, the best teachers expect “more.” And more often than not high expectations yield high learning results. They favor learning objectives that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life. They expect but also stimulate high achievement.

Best Practice Number Five: *The best professors value their students.* With what can only be called simple decency, the best professors display openness, reflect a strong trust in students, believe that students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can.⁸

Best Practice Number Six: *The best professors evaluate their efforts.* All the studied professors have some systematic program (some more elaborate than others do) to assess their own professional growth and to make appropriate changes.⁹ Like most practice-oriented endeavors, those who are most effective for the long haul seem to be able to flex their approaches and orientations for maximum result.¹⁰

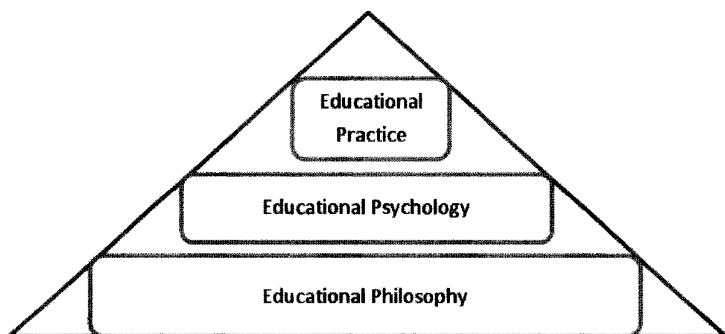
A unity of theology and education is a necessity, not a luxury. What can theological educators learn from these best practices? In addition, what obstacles may exist in theological education that prevent professors from being as effective in teaching as they might be?

Prevailing Misperceptions of Educational Philosophy, Psychology, and Practice in Theological Education

*What we need more than anything else is not textbooks but text-people.
It the personality of the teacher which is the text that the students read;
the text they will never forget.
Abraham Joshua Heschel¹*

Educational philosophy is the foundation from which one's educational psychology springs. In other words, one's most robustly held beliefs about the nature and purpose of education manifests itself in how teaching and learning is fashioned. Furthermore, one's most strongly held assertions about educational psychology invariably display themselves in educational practice. Educational practices are more observable, whereas educational psychology and educational philosophy must often be inferred. While practice is vital, it is determined by more fundamental suppositions, therefore making these even weightier. (See Graph 1.) An imperative obligation is for theological educators to plumb the depths of our most vigorously held beliefs about our inimitable brand of education.

Graph 1. Foundational elements of developing intentional educational design.



Three prevailing and fundamental misperceptions beleaguer the landscape of theological education, and theological educators may be conspicuously culpable. These obstacles, it is posited (perhaps controversially we admit), are a flawed grasp of *educational philosophy* that caters more to knowledge than thinking; a confused notion of *educational psychology* that promotes teaching

over learning; and a rickety impulse of *educational practice* that promotes the nature of theology more as academic rather than ministerial.

Educational Philosophy: The Role of Knowledge and Thinking in Theological Education

Every educational process has explicit and implicit assumptions about its purposes, methods, and intended outcomes for teaching and learning. Given the content and ultimate concerns of the theological disciplines, what are the most appropriate assumptions for those who are professors in the realm of theological education? Obviously, how a particular theological school and/or any particular professor answers this question then reveals an inherent educational philosophy, which in turn drives methods and outcomes.

Five “families” of educational philosophy inform educational practice. Whether formal or informal education, whether education with children, adolescents or adults, whether public or private education, one of these five following families is at the heart of any educational mission:¹²

1. *Academic rationalism* has as its major goals acquiring knowledge and preserving heritage. The basic concept at the heart of this educational philosophy is *knowing*. Obtaining knowledge is the highest value.
2. The *development of cognitive processes* has as its major goals processing knowledge and applying information. The basic concept at the heart of this educational philosophy is *thinking*. Critique and analysis are the highest values.
3. *Curriculum as technology* has as its major goals mastering skills and training for tasks. The basic concept is *doing*. Proficiency at physical or social or moral or technical skills is the highest value.
4. *Personal relevance* has as its major goals seeking one’s greatest interests and satisfying one’s internal motivations. The basic concept is *being*. Realizing one’s potential through the pursuit of self-selected learning is the highest value.
5. *Social reconstruction and social adaptation* has as its major goals addressing societal ills and meeting societal needs. The basic concept is *becoming*. Changing and adapting to society are the highest values.

The most pressing question is, of course, *which one of these is the most appropriate educational philosophy for professors who teach theological education?* Should it primarily be knowing theological information, or knowing how to think theologically, or developing theological skills, or developing theological interests, or changing society based on theological principles?¹³

My view is that the development of cognitive processes is the most appropriate educational philosophy for theological education.¹⁴ To be sure, there may be two or more other of these families that concurrently make a

necessary contribution; no educational philosophy exists in isolation. And admittedly, all of these have some significance in theological education, but, in our view, one's ability to think, to analyze, to critique, and then adapt to contextual practice is critical.¹⁵

Consider, for example, Jesus' educational intentions in so-called "the sermon on the mount" as a template for guiding how Christians should live as a faithful sojourner. It is important that believers would learn information how about the kingdom of God; develop life skills for living in the kingdom; pursue motivating interests in the kingdom; and to alter society toward kingdom values. Nevertheless, it is perhaps more consequential to teach the faithful to learn principles that can be applied to changing societal conditions, i.e., learning to think critically, to think theologically. The most desired educational result might be a changed society, but the most effective means to achieve that is fostered by an educational philosophy that nurtures theological thinking and application.¹⁶

As a theological education consultant, I am asked to evaluate courses, degree programs, and overall educational philosophy statements of theological schools in the United States and Europe. One of the most persistent imbalances is the degree to which learning objectives, delivery systems, teaching methods, and learning assessments promote the knowledge-content without enough emphasis on critical thinking or cultural adaptation or ministry practice of that knowledge. Granted, the evaluation of cognitive knowledge is easiest to test through written examinations and essays, but the accumulation of knowledge is not the most desired product of theological education.

Professors who teach Biblical studies know that such knowledge of academic vocabulary and textual languages is to be ultimately utilized in hermeneutical applications in preaching and teaching the principles of scripture for Christian living. Professors who teach theological studies know that they lay a foundation of historical decisions and theoretical constructs that ultimately aims at informing the practical life of the Church. Neither of these pursuits – Biblical or theological studies – is in and of itself the ultimate end, but serves as a valuable but ultimately subservient means to another end, the faithful proclamation of the orthodox faith with contextual effectiveness in our modern circumstance.

How do these sentiments coalesce with the previously identified best practices of professors? (See Table 1.) My contention that the educational philosophy of development of cognitive processes (emphasizing thinking) is to be preferred over academic rationalism (emphasizing knowing) confirms Bain's best practice number two, the idea of creating critical learning environments. While it is vitally important the best professors know their subject extremely well (best practice number one), they also understand this content-knowledge is best used as a means to an end, and not the end.

In sum, a flawed grasp of *educational philosophy* exists wherein professors of theological education cater more to the passive acquisition of content-knowledge over the more critical ability of teaching students to think theologically with an eye to applying the Christian faith and mission to the changing conditions of the world.¹⁷

Table 1. Proposed stance for theological education correlated with “best practices”

Educational category	Proposed theological educational stance	Best practices for teaching theological education
Educational philosophy	Critical thinking outlasts knowledge	Nurtures critical learning environment Knows subject well
Educational psychology	Learning trumps teaching	Values students Expects much from students
Educational practice	Theology must ultimately be practical	Prepares rigorously Conducts self-assessment

Educational Psychology: The Role of Teaching and Learning in Theological Education

What is the role of teaching and learning in theological education? How do professors best evoke learning? Barr and Tagg speak of the differing perspectives of an “instructional” model and a “learning” model.¹⁸ The former is a fairly passive lecture-discussion format where faculty talk and most students listen. This is a common scenario by many professors of theological education, but is contrary to almost all research study on optimal settings and methods for student learning. The aim in the learning model is not so much to improve the quality of instruction – although that is not irrelevant – as it is to improve continuously the quality of learning for students. The learning model ends the lecture’s privileged position, honoring in its place whatever approaches serve best to prompt learning of particular knowledge by particular students. We submit that the mission of neither theological schools nor their professors is merely instruction but rather that of producing learning with every student by whatever means work best.¹⁹

If professors of theological education acknowledge that learning must have preeminence in the educational arena, then specific knowledge of how theological education students learn is an important endeavor.²⁰ In fact, one might argue that professors’ awareness of adult learning theory ranks

alongside one's academic discipline for maximal effect.²¹ The case remains that whereas most professors of theological education are well qualified in their Biblical or theological disciplines, yet many have not undertaken any formal study in adult learning theory. Unfortunately, some highly educated academics are at a loss to communicate that knowledge effectively to their clientele.

What principles can be gleaned from adult learning theory to engender greater learning in theological education? Most adult learning theory over the last quarter-century quickly encounters the concept of *andragogy* (*andr-* meaning "man" and *agogos* meaning "leading") which is contrasted with pedagogy (*paid-* meaning "child"). In the minds of many around the adult education field, andragogy and Malcolm Knowles have become inextricably linked.²²

For Knowles, andragogy is based on five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners different from the assumptions about child learners on which traditional pedagogy is premised:²³

1. *Self-concept*: As a person matures one's self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being. (It should be noted however, this concept is culturally-bound and arises out of a particular discourse about the self which is largely Western civilization in its expression.)
2. *Experience*: As a person matures, one accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. The next step is the belief that adults learn more effectively through experiential techniques of education, such as discussion or problem solving.
3. *Readiness to learn*: As a person matures one's readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of one's social roles. The relevance of study becomes clearer as it is needed to carry out a particular task. Adults tend to learn things that are useful or interesting or because something fills us with awe, but educators should not underestimate just how much adults learn for the pleasure it brings.
4. *Orientation to learning*: As a person matures one's time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly one's orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness. However, as Brookfield acknowledges: "Much of adults' most joyful and personally meaningful learning is undertaken with no specific goal in mind. It is unrelated to life tasks and instead represents a means by which adults can define themselves"²⁴

5. *Motivation to learn:* As a person matures one's motivation to learn is internal. This assumption, as Tennent purports, views adults' readiness to learn as "the result of the need to perform (externally imposed) social roles and that adults have a problem-centered (utilitarian) approach to learning"²⁵

My contention is two-fold: the most appropriate educational psychology tenets for theological education are (1) those that advocate learning, and learning for ministry knowledge and practice as the centerpiece of why professors and theological institutions exist, which is to be contrasted to the traditional default position of the dominance of teaching²⁶; and (2) those which consider as vital to the educational process the unique needs of adult learners, which is to be preferred over the top-down, passivity-inclined, learner-dependent models.²⁷

How do these sentiments coalesce with the previously identified best practices of professors? Our contention that educational psychology stance based on learner outcomes is to be preferred over teaching outcomes confirms Bain's best practices number five, the emphasis on valuing students and their life circumstance. While it is vitally important the best professors expect much from their students (best practice number four), they also understand that theological learning is relevant for effective ministry preparation, experiential for enhancing ministry skills, and missional for creative participation in the ongoing restorative story of God.

Simply put, the most effective professors of theological education consider the motivations, life experiences, vocational urgency, and practical applications not only of the content taught, but the assignments given, and nature of the classroom environment as well.

In sum, a confused notion of *educational psychology* exists to the degree that teaching takes precedence over learning for professors of theological education. Adult learners wish to take ownership of their theological education and learn in relevant, practice-oriented, yet deeply grounded ways, ways that rhyme with the principles of adult learning theory. These forms of democratic and participatory experience are more likely to translate into both present and future meaning.²⁸

It is, therefore, no wonder – in view of my conviction some theological education professors and institutions execute ill-advised educational philosophies and educational psychologies – that likewise some educational practices are askew.

Educational Practice: The Nature of Theological Discourse in Theological Education

Many Christians today not only are uninformed about basic theology but even seem hostile to it. How has the notion of "theology" and "theologians"

gotten a reputation of being boring, irrelevant, impractical or ethereal? So, what is purpose of theology in theological education and the mission of the Church?

Christian theology is reflecting on and articulating the beliefs about God and the world that Christians share as followers of Jesus. By reflecting, Grenz and Olson claim,

“we use our minds to organize our thoughts and beliefs, bring them into coherence with one another by attempting to identify and expunge blatant contradictions, and make sure that there are good reasons for interpreting Christian faith in the way we do. Reflection, then, involves a certain amount of critical thinking – questioning the ways we *think and why we believe and behave the way we do.*”²⁹

So, theological reflection is an essential element of ministry and therefore extremely valued by laity and leaders in our church, right? Apparently not. Morgan reports a poll funded by Murdock Charitable Trust set out to discover United States churchgoers’ priorities when seeking a pastor. Both pastors and laypeople rated “theological knowledge” *last* out of five qualifications “most important for a good pastor”; whereas seminary professors rank it first.³⁰

The article further contends theological education faces a crisis of confidence by churches.³¹ It is a familiar tension between ivory-tower theory and leading-edge practicality not necessarily serving the church with the dexterity expected. While theological schools persist in graduating students conversant in Greek, Hebrew, and classical theology, they do not seem acculturated to ministry in a post-Christian world.³²

Moreover, while churches may have lost a measure of confidence in theological schools, in recent years, these same schools have whispered concern over the higher percentage than expected of their alumni who seem not to be involved in ministerial roles within a very short time of launching into the profession, and wonder why. Many reasons are possible, but what is the nature of discourse in theological education, and what should it be?, and how do our educational practices affect theological learning for ministry preparation?

Grenz and Olson (1994) describe five types of theology: (See Graph 2.)

1. *Folk theology* is unreflective believing based on blind faith. It rejects reflection because deep spiritual piety and intellectual reflection are considered antithetical to one another. Various Christian bumper stickers, choruses, clichés, and legends epitomize it. The chief characteristic of folk theology is its attachment of unquestioning belief to informal, unsubstantiated oral traditions and subjective

feelings, and refuses to measure them by any kind of grounds for believing. Folk theology is inadequate for most Christians; it encourages gullibility and simplistic answers to difficult dilemmas that arise from being followers in a secular world. This brand of thinking confuses “simple, childlike faith” with “simplistic and childish faith”³³

2. *Lay theology* appears when ordinary Christians begin to question folk theology with its childish, simplistic clichés and legends. It arises when Christians dig into the resources of their faith, putting mind and heart together in a serious attempt to examine that faith. Lay theology may lack sophisticated tools of biblical languages, logic, and historical consciousness, but it seeks to bring Christian beliefs into a coherent whole by questioning unfounded traditions and expunging blatant contradictions.

Graph 2. Grenz and Olson’s five types of theology



3. *Ministerial theology* at its best uses tools ordinarily available only through some kind of formal course work – a working knowledge of biblical languages or at least an ability to use concordances, commentaries, and other printed helps; a historical perspective on the developments in theology through the ages; and keen systematic thinking that involves recognizing inconsistencies among beliefs and bringing beliefs into coherence with one another. But the ultimate purpose is to raise up those who are called to use their spiritual gifts to nurture congregations and parachurch organizations to continue the story and mission of God.
4. *Professional theology* attempts to raise their students above Folk and Lay theology to Ministerial theology by inculcating in them a critical consciousness that questions unfounded assumptions and beliefs. Professional theologians’ main contribution lies in serving lay theologians and ministers, in teaching pastors in theological institutions, and writing books and articles to aid lay and ministerial theologians in their journeys of reflection.
5. *Academic theology* is a highly speculative, virtually philosophical theology aimed primarily at other theologians. It is often

disconnected from the church and has little to do with concrete Christian living. While it is extremely reflective, it may cut off reflection from faith and merely seek understanding for its own sake.

What, then, should be the nature of discourse, given these categories of theology, for professors in theological education? I contend Folk and Academic theology are of little consequence to the Church. These brands of God-talk do nothing to advance faith, but pervert the import of both faith and reason. Further, I vigorously protest that to the degree professors of theology intentionally or unintentionally promote shoddy or simplistic theological thinking on one hand, or purely philosophical speculation removed from the mission of God on the other hand, it makes illegitimate the *raison d'être* for theological education.

Perhaps the real question to pursue as a guiding compass for theological education is: “what is the deep need of the Church?” The answer is expertly-informed leaders who know scripture and can correctly interpret and adeptly apply it; culturally-aware leaders who understand the mission of God and entreat the Church to join in with the spirit of God in the present world; and personally-grounded leaders who handle troubled people and organizational difficulties that build communities of faith.

I, therefore, contend that the most important task of theological education is to single-mindedly advance Ministerial theology.³⁴ What the Church – and those who prepare for ministry in it – really needs is a grounded theological understanding of faith (the opposite of Folk theology), while acknowledging this is not its ultimate purpose (the goal of Academic theology).³⁵ The ultimate purpose of grounded theology promotes maturity in faith, a kingdom perspective on life in the world, and motivation for continuing the mission of God to alienated people. These are the *real* needs of the Church – to love, obey, and serve God faithfully with the mind as well as the heart.

My contention is that the most appropriate educational practice for theological education should be to inculcate people in our churches with an inquisitive faith that is not afraid to explore the world of ideas (Lay theology); to develop the knowledge, perspectives, and competencies necessary to lead churches in faith and mission (Ministerial theology); and to promote a vigorous and scholarly defense of the Christian faith to unbelievers and resources for reflection for nurturing faith of believers (Professional theology).

How do these sentiments coalesce with the previously identified best practices of professors? My contention that is the most important educational practices of theological education must be focused on the intentional and rigorous preparation of ministry students as a serious and intellectually stimulating endeavor, which corresponds with Bain’s best practice number three. Moreover, I submit the most effective theological education professors

will routinely and conscientiously conduct self-assessments of their roles as catalysts for student learning, that is to say, the preparation of ministry leaders, which attends to the proper purposes of their task.

In sum, a rickety impulse of *educational practice* exists to the degree it promotes the nature of theology more as folk or academic over ministerial theology. In cases where the former sort of theological education subsists, churches have every right to protest: “Forget formal theological education as it is practiced without regard to authentic service to the Church; we will teach candidates for ministry what they need to know.” This motivating concern then continually pushes theological education to be constantly re-engineering their practices where theology education and church practice are in sync.

Conclusion: Recalibrating Educational Philosophy, Psychology, and Practices for Teaching in Theological Education

Theology, to be Christian, is by definition practical. Either it serves the formation of the church or it is trivial and inconsequential.

Stanley Hauerwas & Will Willimon³⁶

The theological educators’ three main tools are the biblical message, the theological heritage of the Church, and contemporary culture. And a subset of contemporary culture is empirical research and the critical theory from various academic domains that inform professors of theological education in the most effective habits of their task. For sake of excellence in theological education, an educational philosophy that promotes critical thinking over acquisition of knowledge is required. For the sake of quality in theological education, an educational psychology in which student learning and ministry competency trumps teaching is indispensable. For the sake of rightly prioritized theological education, educational practices that engage in ministerial theology is urgently needed for a Church that will produce effective leaders for mission in the contemporary context.

Although its origins are dubious, Ted Ward³⁷ is famously credited with quipping the provocative aphorism: “Christian education is neither” I suppose a précis of the major argument of this essay could be similarly stated: “Theological education is neither”; it is not “theological” unless it considers the nature of its mission to be ultimately Ministerial; and it is not “education” unless it takes seriously the learner as focal point of the process.

Acknowledgements

My life has been inexorably entangled with and immensely enriched by formal education uninterrupted for five decades – since I was four. Professors, books, and colleagues have pushed me, sometimes unwillingly, in exploring the world of ideas. I owe much to them for causing to me think new thoughts, have vicarious experiences, and even feel great emotion. Thanks specifically to

John Dewey, Peter Kreeft, Larry Richards, John Stott, and Ted Ward. As a professor of theological education, these and others have shaped my educational philosophy, educational psychology, and educational practice, for which I am extremely grateful. In addition, it is a great pleasure to modestly assist in the mission of theological education in my present European adventure: Belfast Bible College (Northern Ireland), London School of Theology (England), Instituto Biblico Portuges (Portugal), and Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (Belgium). Finally, I am deeply appreciative to the wonderfully insightful, profoundly inquisitive, and multi-talented students it has been my pleasure to encounter in and out of the classroom in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia. I am well aware they have taught me much more than I have taught them. A profound debt I owe.

Appendix A: Self-Assessment Categories For Faculty Growth Plans

Following are categories from which faculty members should conduct a self-assessment as a starting place to develop a professional growth plan. These are categories which entail the work of a faculty member: (1) performance as a teacher, (2) scholarly and professional activity, and (3) institutional usefulness, with relevant subcategories of each major division.

I. Performance as a Teacher

- A. Stimulates reflective thinking, an inquisitive attitude, and motivates learning through modeling.
- B. Communicates an enthusiasm for the subject matter and teaching which encourages students.
- C. Exhibits an unusual ability to relate the Christian faith to one's discipline and the learning process, providing institutional leadership in this regard.
- D. Demonstrates unusual willingness to enhance the learning process beyond traditionally structured classes.

II. Scholarly and Professional Activity and Attainment

- A. Engages in extensive formal training in one's discipline.
- B. Publishes scholarly works.
- C. Presents papers at professional meetings.
- D. Completes professional consultations and speaking assignments.
- E. Fulfills leadership positions in professional organizations.
- F. Receives special honors or recognition in one's disciplinary areas.

III. Institutional Usefulness

- A. Serves willingly as chair of committee, department and division when called upon to do so by colleagues and the dean of faculty.
- B. Shows unusual involvement with students outside the normal advising relationship.

- C. Contributes to institutional development through the proposal of new programs and procedures.
- D. Participates significantly in other institutional activities.
- E. Sustains service in the larger community and/or church by completing special assignments.

Footnotes

¹ This essay evolves from two addresses given in October and November 2009 at the invitation of the Centre for Theological Education by Dr. Graham Cheesman, held on the campus of Belfast Bible College (Dunmurry, Northern Ireland). Thanks to the participants for their gracious feedback and vigorous engagement.

² John Dewey, *Education and Experience*, Free Press, 1997, 16.

³ I must confess (and perhaps apologize) from the outset that this is a rather personal essay. I have spent my twenty-five year career as a professor of theological education and many of the statements advanced herein come because of modest failure (and a modicum of success) in thinking and practice.

⁴ Helpful books guiding professors in reflection on educational practice: Stephen Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Jossey-Bass, 1995; and more specific to the task of theological education: Mary Hess & Stephen Brookfield, *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions*, Krieger Publishing, 2008.

⁵ The insightful and provocative writings of Neil Postman are relevant here, most notably in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Delta, 1971) and *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (Vintage, 1996).

⁶ Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

⁷ For more on developing educational methodology, see Stephen Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*, Jossey-Bass, 2006; Barbara Gross Davis, *Tools for Teaching*, Jossey-Bass, 2009; William McKeachy, *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research & Theory for College and University Teachers*, Wadsworth, 2010; Gary Morrison, Steven Ross & Jerrold Kemp, *Designing Effective Instruction*, Wiley, 2006.

⁸ The results of my doctoral dissertation research have served me well in and out of the classroom in this regard, see Mark A. Lamport, "Student-Faculty Informal Interaction and the Effect on College Student Outcomes: A Review of the Literature", *Adolescence*, Winter 1993, 971-990; and Mark A. Lamport, "Student-Faculty Informal Interaction and Its Relation to Christian College Settings: Research and Implications", *Research on Christian Higher Education*, Fall 1994, 66-78.

⁹ See Appendix A, a fine tool of self-assessment for professors, which assists in faculty growth plans. This was originally developed under the leadership of Richard F. Gross and R. Judson Carlberg, both academic deans and then presidents of Gordon College (Massachusetts), where I benefitted from this tool for nine years of my career.

¹⁰ For very helpful resources, see Thomas Angelo & Patricia Cross, *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, Jossey Bass, 1993; and Dannelle Stevens & Antonia Levi, *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback and Promote Student Learning*, Stylus, 2004.

¹¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", *Jewish Education*, Fall 1953, 15.

¹² A very good overview on the most representative typologies in educational philosophy is Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 3rd ed., Macmillan, 2002.

¹³ Some will undoubtedly want to answer this five-pronged question: "yes", that all five educational philosophies are necessary for theological education. But that response avoids an intentionally-focused educational philosophy which drives practice above all other choices.

¹⁴ Jesus asked over one hundred questions (as recorded in the Gospels) not because he did not know the answers!

¹⁵ For more on creating a classroom environment and teaching methods conducive to critical thinking, see Stephen Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

¹⁶ I would argue more fully that the most effective educational philosophy for theological education, as stated above, is the Development of Cognitive Processes; and the most effective methods to implement this philosophy are Academic Rationalism and Curriculum as Technology; and the most effective motivation for these methods is Personal Relevance"; and the most desirable educational outcome from this educational philosophy is Social Adaptation and Social Reconstruction.

¹⁷ And because of the inevitability of the changing nature of culture(s), it is continually surprising to me how the curriculum of theological education is so loaded toward biblical and theological studies in contrast to minimal or non-existent content in social and cultural analysis, especially of one's own culture. Why is cultural analysis necessary? In order to better speak, live, and conduct the mission of the gospel into the world. One (confidently) presumes those who are members of a given culture will therefore certainly know their culture. However, it is largely true those in a culture often do not objectively analyze or understand how one is influenced by one's own culture. While Christians wish to be culture changers, sociologists uniformly report that cultures ultimately make us in their compelling image, including Christian institutions. For one of the freshest insights on this topic, see Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, InterVarsity Press, 2008.

¹⁸ Robert Barr & John Tagg, "From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education, *Change*, Vol. 27, Nov/Dec 1995, 12-25.

¹⁹ See, Robert Diamond, Judith Grunert O'Brien, Barbara Millis & Margaret Cohen, *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach*, Jossey-Bass, 2008; Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*, Jossey-Bass, 2003; Maryellen Weimer, *Learning-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*, Jossey-Bass, 2002.

²⁰ It is supposed that many professors and institutions would agree with these propositions in theory, that learning is the goal, but the plain reality is that in theological education practice – as syllabi are designed, learning objectives are written, and learning activities are conceived – merely transmitting blocks of cognitively-based information composed of various theological subdisciplines is most conspicuous. There is a gap then between what we say we want in theological education and what its structures engender. Or, to use a distinction made by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön in *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974), the difference between our espoused theory and our theory-in-use is distressingly noticeable. An “espoused theory,” is the set of principles people offer to explain their desired behavior; whereas, the principles we can infer from how people or organizations actually behave is their “theory-in-use.” At this moment, and perhaps contrary to many loud protestations, the Instruction Paradigm is theological education’s theory-in-use, while the espoused theories of many more closely resemble the Learning Paradigm.

²¹ See, Mark A. Lamport & Mary Rynsbarger, “All the Rage: How Small Groups Are Really Educating Christian Adults — Part 2: Augmenting Small Group Ministry Practice: Developing Small Group Leadership Skills Through Insights from Cognate Theoretical Disciplines”, *Christian Education Journal*, Fall 2008, 391-414.

²² The works that best distill Knowles’ major principles are *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (2nd ed.), Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge, 1980; *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984; and *The Adult Learner. A Neglected Species* (4th ed.), Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1990.

²³ Knowles’ ideas are not without controversy. Some critiques of andragogy, and in particular the work of Knowles, can be found in J. Davenport, “Is There Any Way Out of the Andragogy Mess?” in M. Thorpe, R. Edwards & A. Hanson (eds.), *Culture and Processes of Adult Learning*, London: Routledge, 1987; and P. Jarvis, “Malcolm Knowles”, *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education*, London: Croom Helm, 1987

²⁴ Stephen Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning*: Milton Keynes: Open University, 1986, 99.

²⁵ Mark Tennant, *Psychology and Adult Learning* (2nd ed.), London: Routledge Publishers, 2005, 132.

²⁶ My designated title is “lecturer” at two of the theological schools I serve in Europe, a title I resist employing and sometimes, where appropriate, clarify my disinclination based on my views of teaching and learning.

²⁷ It is a remarkable phenomenon to observe the correlation of how prevailing societal customs and educational philosophies in a given region of the world mimic the same stances in theological schools in those same geographic regions. It is not surprising then, and I have observed it first-hand in Africa, Asia, and much of Eastern Europe, that a teacher-dominated, content-centered, student-dependent, pedagogical model is more common than not in theological education; much like the more rigid political environments in these regions. Conversely, in many cases, theological education, at least in theory, in North American and Western Europe

more often leans toward a more egalitarian-based, learner-focused style; much like the democratic political arenas in these regions.

²⁸ The writings of John Dewey, particularly in *Experience and Education* (Free Press, 1997); *Democracy and Education* (The Echo Library, 2007); *How We Think* (Standard Publications, 2007); and Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Harvard University Press, 1977); and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin, 2nd ed., 1996); and Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Marion Boyars Publishers, 2000) present compelling rationale for freedom and democracy in education.

²⁹ Stanley Grenz & Roger Olson, *Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation to the Study of God*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994, 25.

³⁰ Timothy Morgan, “Re-engineering the Seminary?: Crisis of Trust Forces Change”, *Christianity Today*, October 24, 1994, 75.

³¹ It is a curious anomaly that there is a continual glut of those who desire careers as professors in theological education and simultaneously a continual dearth of those who desire careers in ministry leadership.

³² Somewhat surprising is the degree to which the curriculum for ministerial preparation has not appreciably changed over the course of the last half century, especially in comparison with other professions and realms of knowledge.

³³ Yet this characterization is not intended to wantonly besmirch good-hearted but relatively uninformed people who have some degree of faith. On the other hand, this best seems to depict those more likely to be taken in by some theologically naïve or unscrupulous television evangelists.

³⁴ Lay theology is important but is most conveniently nurtured by ministry leaders through the life, nature, and mission of the Church. While Professional theologians rightly continue dialogue with their academically-inclined peers, their first-order calling is to educate and train called and gifted men and women for ministry.

³⁵ Some theological professors seem to harbor an academic recruiting agenda that seeks to convince ministry students that the more prestigious path to take is following their lead into the world of theological education. This may partially account for the “glut” and the “dearth” opined in footnote 30. On the other hand, my much more common observation is the passion and heart theological education professors have for those who are called to serve to church-based and parachurch ministries. Indeed, some of the finest, most godly men and women I have ever had the privilege to know have been my colleagues (and role models and friends!) in theological education.

³⁶ Stanley Hauerwas & Will Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 1989, 164.

³⁷ My Ph.D. advisor and mentor to a generation of theological educators, who unambiguously modeled the integration of education and theology spending his career first in the School of Education at Michigan State University and then in the department of Christian Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Illinois.)

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NATHAN CRAWFORD

*Bridging the Gap: Understanding Knowledge of God in
Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of
Songs*

Abstract:

The problem of how one knows God is central to the theological endeavor. This paper seeks to explore how Gregory of Nyssa deals with this problem. I suggest that it is by understanding the role of Christ in the incarnation that Gregory finds knowledge of God possible. The incarnation bridges the gap that exists between God and humanity. And, through bridging this gap, Christ enables a person to have mystical knowledge of God.

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This paper seeks to provide an exposition on Gregory of Nyssa's work on how one might "know" God. Specifically, this paper will focus on one work of Gregory's corpus, his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Here, one can begin to see the major themes associated with Nyssa's conception of how one may know God. Also, in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, we get an adequate picture of how Nyssa talks around and tries to conceptualize the problem of knowledge about God. Specifically, I want to argue that it is through his thinking on the nature and person of Christ that Gregory believes he is able to make a way for "knowledge" of God. I will argue this first through an exploration of Gregory's conception of the dialectic between the Uncreated (God) and the created (humanity). Second, I will look at Gregory's conception of Christ in the commentary. Third, I will look at how Gregory conceives of the participatory element of knowledge, specifically as it relates to God.

However, to begin, I feel it necessary to offer a minor detour. This detour deals with the nature of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. This commentary is a way of using the biblical text of the Song of Songs to give modes of thinking about God and humans and their relationship. The text gives a set of metaphors for interpreting the relationship between the person and God. The goal, then, of the *Commentary of the Song of Songs* is not theological insight (although this does come), but "union of the human soul with God."¹ Thus, what Gregory is doing in the commentary is a "mystical contemplation."²

This is significant because it means that we are not looking at theses that Gregory develops in a logical way in the text. We are looking at themes that come up again and again in Gregory's thinking upon the human's relationship with God. It is in Gregory's thinking upon this subject that his theological insight really comes to the fore. We must be able to tread deeply with Gregory into the mystical contemplation that he offers to see the insight that Gregory gives on how one may know God. Knowledge of God, then, comes through a "mystical pedagogy"³ instead of through a set of propositions about God.

Uncreated and Created – The Gap

The guiding theme in Gregory's thought on the human relationship with God is what I call "the gap" – which is Gregory's view of the unbridgeable distance between God, who is Uncreated, and the human, who is created. This guides Gregory's thinking because it is this "gap" that Gregory is trying to overcome in his "mystical contemplation." At its most elementary, this gap is the unbridgeable distance between God and humanity. In fact, for Gregory, to talk about an unbridgeable distance would point to the fact that humanity and God are on the same plane, which he does not believe to be accurate. For Gregory, humanity and God stand on two very different planes of existence. It is such that the created cannot cross the gap – there is no bridging of the

gap for the person.⁴ The problem that must be solved, then, is how the human has a relationship and can subsequently know that which is on another plane of existence – utterly foreign to the person.

Something else must be noted quickly. Gregory always affirms that we can know that there is a God. Gregory never questions this. What he does question is the idea that a person can know the essence of God – one cannot know what God is. However, one can know “*that* God is” – meaning that we can know that God exists.⁵

Obviously, though, Gregory does affirm something about God. Gregory affirms that God is unknowable – or at least that the *ousia* (being) of God is unknowable. Gregory finds theological justification for this in the concept of God’s infinity. In Gregory’s context, to affirm the infinity of the divine was to affirm the ultimate unknowableness of the divine. This is in contrast to Plotinus, who refused to use the word “infinity” in relation to the divine. For Plotinus, if something was infinite, it was unknowable because one could never reach the end of it for full knowledge. Gregory picks up on this and reverses it. He says that God must be infinite because God – in the Hebraic-Christian tradition – is eternal. This eternality results in God being of infinite expanse. Thus, Gregory predicates infinity of God and also, subsequently, the unknowability of God.⁶

Gregory is able to say this based upon the work of God in the world. One example of this is in “The Fifth Homily” of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Here, Gregory begins to predicate that the created must have come from an Uncreated. Gregory posits this “Being” – the Uncreated Being – as “being above beginning” and that “in which, all things are formed.” So, we have in the Uncreated a being who has no beginning (and presumably, no end) and who is the one who forms all things. This is a radically different kind of being than that of a human; so much so in fact that the human has an “impossibility of perceiving it.” This is because “it presents no marks of its inmost nature.” As that which has no beginning and is the one who does the forming/creating of the universe, this being is different.⁷

This shows that God’s work as the one who is not created but creates, while forming humanity in God’s image, is radically different than humanity. God lives on a different plane of existence, exists in a different way than humanity. God, unlike humanity, has no beginning and no end – God is infinite and eternal. Also, God is the one who forms humanity and the rest of creation. This for Gregory shows that the created does not know the Uncreated.

In his contemplation upon the texts of Song of Songs, Gregory of Nyssa continues to enforce this idea that humans cannot know the nature of God. In “The Third Homily,” Gregory talks about the idea that the revelation presented to him shows that “divine nature transcends every conception

which tries to grasp it.”⁸ Humans are not capable of this knowledge because it is “other than” or “beyond” them. This causes Gregory to say that we cannot place any limits upon the divine nature. Specifically, we cannot put a limit upon the greatness of God’s nature. As that which is Uncreated, God is infinitely greater than the created. In this recognition of God’s infinite greatness, the human begins to realize the utter transcendence that is God’s nature and realizes that it is only in the “desire for more lofty things” that any sort of knowledge is possible or attainable.⁹

For Gregory, this infinite greatness of God’s nature means that God is ineffable. The nature of God cannot be “accurately contained in a name; rather every capacity for concepts and every form of words and names, even if they seem to contain something great and befitting God’s glory, are unable to grasp his reality.”¹⁰ God’s reality is not the human reality, although the human reality is a part of God’s reality. God’s reality far exceeds the reality of humanity. Based upon God’s action in their reality, then, people make conjectures at the ungraspable.¹¹

What we have shown in the above is that Gregory emphasizes the incomprehensible, great, infinite, ineffable nature of God. This places God in another reality and on another plane of existence from that of humanity. There is a radical difference between God and the human, the Uncreated and created. However, for Gregory, the created still struggles to talk about and know God. The question then, posed to the created, is “how?”

Daley points out that for Gregory, how we know God is a cognitive process. However, the cognition is the realization of the above – that God is infinite, ineffable, eternal, etc. – that one begins to cognitively realize that one does not know God and one cannot know God. So, in the knowing of the not-being-able-to-know, the person knows. The person realizes that any thoughts of God are not able to contain God because God is bigger than the thoughts that the person could possibly have of God.¹²

This leads the person into a contemplation in unknowing to know. “The Sixth Homily” exemplifies this through Gregory’s use of the bride and bridegroom imagery derived from Ephesians 5, where he symbolizes Christ as the bridegroom and the believer (and Church) as the bride. He says, “She realizes that her sought-after love is known only in her impossibility to comprehend his essence, and that every sign becomes a hindrance to those who seek him.”¹³ What is happening to the bride is that she realizes that the signs that point to the bridegroom are inadequate. The knowledge she used to draw from these signs does not comprehend God. In fact, she must realize that she has not comprehended God and that God is ultimately incomprehensible. She must begin to seek the love of God only, knowing that knowing God is an impossibility.

However, the person remembers that the Uncreated has created her in the Uncreated’s own image (Gen 1:27). This means that when the person begins

to realize that God's essence is completely unknowable and that one could never grasp this, one can turn to an examination of one's soul. The soul provides a reflection of that which is sought – God – because it bears a certain likeness to God.¹⁴

In contemplating the image of the divine that our soul bears, though, the soul does not know God's essence. At most, what the soul can see is the beauty of God's creation and the splendor of what the Uncreated has done. One can see the beauty of God in the world. Of course, this still does not result in a knowing of God. It results in realizing that God's beauty exists in the existence of the created, but that one could never exhaust this beauty. The only thing to do in light of God's beauty is to respond and for Gregory this response must be in awe and worship.¹⁵

All of the above discussion enforces Gregory's realization of the complete ineffability of God. In "The Third Homily," he uses an analogy to talk about the ineffability of God. He talks about how when someone talks of gold, one is not actually giving the essence of gold but only the likeness of gold. One can talk about its beauty or how it shines or its worth but this is not to talk of gold as gold is in itself; it is to talk of the likeness of gold. Similarly, when someone talks of God, one can talk of the likenesses of God in the world – God's beauty, Uncreated nature, infinity, etc. However, one cannot talk about God as God exists in the Godself. One cannot give God, but only the likeness of God.¹⁶

The above discussion shows the disparity that Gregory posits between the Uncreated and the created. However, as one will remember from above, the real issue at stake in Gregory's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is the human's relationship with God. The relationship just described is not a very good one. It is a relationship on two different planes of existence, with an infinite "gap" between the two. The goal, then, for Gregory is to bridge the gap.

The Uncreated Created - Bridging the Gap

If the goal is to bridge the gap, the question becomes, "how does one bridge the gap?" For Gregory, what is entailed is positing a figure that exists on both planes of existence – both the Uncreated and the Created. Gregory believes the person who accomplishes this is Jesus the Christ. Due to this, Gregory's theology has a definite incarnational foundation. Gregory believes in Christ we have the Second Person of the Trinity uniting Godself to humanity in such a way as to "restore the divine friendship we had" in the Garden of Eden.¹⁷ For Gregory, this comes out of the human's longing for contact with the divine. In "The Fifth Homily," we see Gregory talking of how the bride desires above all else to see her bridegroom – the person seeking God seeks to see the Word of God in the flesh. This is so that "God may be seen in the flesh and speak about the divine promises of eternal

happiness for those who are worthy.”¹⁸ This comes out of the love that God has for us. So, Gregory uses Christ to bridge the gap, as the Second Person of the Trinity appearing in the flesh, bringing God to humanity and humanity to God. It becomes necessary then to see how Gregory goes about using Christ to bridge this gap.

“The Fifth Homily” is the point where Gregory goes through the movement of Uncreated, to created, to the one who is the Uncreated/created. First, Gregory talks of how the Uncreated/God is completely infinite and ineffable. God, in God’s nature, possesses all that God possesses in “infinite and unbounded measure.” This nature also does not change because this nature is always good in superabundance. He then moves to talk about the created nature. The created nature allows evil and good to exist simultaneously, meaning that the soul always has the capacity to do evil and not participate in the good. Thus, for the created, even in participation with God, there is still infinite distance between the two because the human soul always has the capacity to do evil. This moves Gregory to talk about that which is the Uncreated/created – the Word, Jesus Christ. The Word brings the person (Gregory uses the image of the bride), through virtue, into participation with God. This comes through the fact that the Word gives light, beginning with the prophets and then fully through the incarnation. In the light of the prophets, the person can begin to participate in the goodness of God, which cultivates inner beauty. The Word, then, in the incarnation gives more virtue and invites the person to participate in a higher beauty. There is infinite progression. Thus, what the Word has done is to bridge the gap so that the person can begin to contemplate God and participate in God’s inner beauty such that the person never exhausts God, but always remains the created – just the created that is infinitely participating in the Uncreated.¹⁹

“The Thirteenth Homily” continues the theme of the Uncreated and the created united in Christ. Gregory affirms the Uncreated nature of Christ in saying that Christ is “before all the ages, eternally incomprehensible, and totally ineffable.” However, in spite of this, Christ makes God known and appear in the flesh to the people. In this appearing, the Uncreated takes on the flesh and being of the created in that “it has been formed according to the lowliness of our body [Phil. 3:21].” Thus, in Christ, we have the simultaneity of the Uncreated and created and in this simultaneity, Christ allows something of the Uncreated to be known to the created.²⁰ It is in the person of Christ in the incarnation that knowledge of God becomes possible. This is specifically because in Christ, the “invisible” – that which is of God’s nature – is made “visible” – that which is of human nature.²¹ In the work of Christ, then, in the incarnation, God is available for knowledge by humanity.

However, we now ask: What is the work of the Incarnation? What is that Jesus the Christ does? And, I think most important, how does the person

of Christ function in theology? It is these questions that Gregory now gives attention to.²²

For Gregory, the person of Christ is central to his theology. Gregory believes that in the incarnation one finds the archetype of what it means to participate in God. Gregory sees in Jesus the Christ what the complete transformation of a person should look like. This is because in the incarnation, a human person is “taken up” into the Word who makes the person’s humanity God’s own. It is this “taking up” of humanity into the divinity of the Word that becomes the “model and explanation of the ‘mystical’ union of totally unequal realities.”²³ We see this also in Gregory’s thought on the Nicene Creed. For Gregory, the Nicene Creed is not a strictly dogmatic proposition about God or about Jesus being of one substance with the Father. This only begins Gregory’s thought. This is because Gregory also sees the Nicene Creed affirming the fact that Jesus took on the flesh of humanity. In doing this, the Christological hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 becomes central. This hymn allows Gregory to assert that the God who has no form loves humanity enough to take on the form of humanity in a historical place and time. This form of the Word in the flesh then does not change God, but it changes humanity in that it allows humanity participation into the divine.²⁴

In Gregory’s view, for God the Word to be able to take up the humanity of the person, it is essential that the human that God takes up be fully human. “So, it is essential for him to conceive of Christ the Saviour as possessing all that is vulnerable and variable in our nature, including our mind.”²⁵ This allows Gregory to see the Word as taking up all of humanity, not just what is easily brought into participation with God. Gregory sees the Word as bringing all that is “rebellious” and “inferior” into subjection to Godself. In his view, all those things in human nature that are in the way of the Word, all that could keep the human away from God, is taken up into the Word and made able to participate in God.²⁶ This means that eventually, through the taking up of the human nature into the Word, that we should lose the “distinguishing characteristics of our fallen race.”²⁷

The work of Christ in taking up the nature of the humanity into the divine is given its strongest form in the resurrection and the ascension. For Gregory, these two acts are not primarily about determining the divinity of Jesus. They are the salvation of humanity and the possibility for the participation of humanity into the divine. This is because in the ascension and resurrection of Christ, the divine is united permanently to the human. Here, the humanity of Christ was brought into the divinity of Christ, the transformation of humanity becomes complete. However, the humanity of Jesus never changes, but is only brought into the divine. Thus, the theological promise of the resurrection and ascension for Gregory is that the humanity of Jesus is still the same humanity as that which he lived with on earth – the

one very similar/the same as ours. For Gregory, then, the resurrection and ascension of Christ glorifies humanity and brings humanity into the divine while still leaving the humanity of Christ the same as ours. In this, the person is allowed to become divine in a participatory way through Christ's humanity.²⁸

The above discussion shows that for Gregory it is through participation in Christ that allows us to participate in divinity that is the key to knowledge of God. This participation is the key to knowledge of God. However, what has been made implicit is that this knowledge is not a full cognitive knowledge. Cognitive knowledge of God is not possible. But we can know God through "mystical knowledge" which is a knowledge predicated upon the participation that we have in God. Christ is the one that makes this participation possible through the incarnation. In the incarnation, the Uncreated takes on the life of the created, meaning Christ brings the life of the infinite God to earth to allow humanity to share in it by being drawn into this life. This knowledge is a knowledge of participation – a mystical knowledge.²⁹ Thus, it is through Christ's "bridging of the gap" that knowledge of God becomes possible.

Mystical Knowledge – The Bridged Gap

At first, we talked about the gap that existed between the Uncreated and the created. We talked about how God and humanity are on two different planes of existence. We talked about the need to bridge this gap. And then we posited that this gap is bridged by Christ. Christ does this through his simultaneous taking on of the divine nature and human nature. Christ bridges the gap by bringing the divine nature into human nature and by bringing human nature into the divine nature. This allows Gregory of Nyssa to say that Christ's bridging of the gap brings knowledge of the divine to the human. This knowledge is a mystical knowledge known through participation. Now, we must begin to look at how humanity participates in the divine nature.

For Gregory, knowledge of God is only possible through the transformation that takes place by becoming a disciple of Christ – through participation in Christ.³⁰ In "The Third Homily" he describes this transformation that must take place through the imagery of the Exodus and leaving Egypt. He says that the disciple must have no thought of Egypt and must leave every part of the old Egyptian life behind in the water. The disciple must be cleansed by God, leaving behind all of "the Egyptian plagues," thus allowing transformation to begin.³¹

This cleansing of the soul leads to a greater desire for the Word. The Word responds to this desire. In this response, the Word "exhorts her to greater perfection by receiving what is already present, for praise of deeds rightly done instills a keener desire for the Good."³² What the Word does is to

exhort the person to continue participating in the Good by doing good so that one can come to greater knowledge of God. For Gregory, it is only in the advancement of the person in virtue that one can rightly come to perfection that gives greater knowledge of God. It is in this advancement in virtue through the work of the Word that the person “is transformed from glory to glory [2 Cor. 3:18].” This advancement “from glory to glory” leads to perfection being established in different people which then leads to a “different character” shining through in life of the person due to the person’s “increase in the good.”³³ Gregory believes that as the person advances in perfection toward God the person gains knowledge of the Good and in doing so continues to do the good. In so doing, the person becomes more virtuous, which eventually, will cause the person to become a “different character” – a transformed person.

For Gregory, then, the virtue that is present in the transformed person’s life “is the outward manifestation of divinization, manifesting outwardly the divine presence in which it participates.”³⁴ Gregory makes this quite explicit in saying “the end of the virtuous life is likeness to God.” For Gregory, the virtues are what give us “purity of soul and freedom from the disturbance of passion.” This leads to a greater way of life in which “the transcendent nature might become present.”³⁵ Here, Gregory shows that the virtuous life leads to likeness with God because it is a life where the person is cleansed from sin and from the disruption that might take away from the one real joy that Gregory seeks – God. The virtuous life opens up the person to being like God in that it seeks God over the evil that could also be present in a person’s life. The person chooses the good which in turn is a choice for God.

This participation in God, through the virtues, leads Gregory to the conclusion that it is through the virtuous life that one can have knowledge of God. He says, “Whichever expression we take, one idea is common to all, namely, that from the virtues we obtain knowledge of the good which transcends all understanding just as the beauty of an archetype can be inferred from its image.”³⁶ As is evident here, the virtuous life that is lived through the power of the Word gives one the ability to know God who passes all understanding. However, this knowledge is not cognitive or cerebral. It is a knowledge predicated on one’s participation with God in the good of the virtuous life.

The virtuous life then is only possible through the Word. It is possible because it is through the Word’s power of taking humanity into divinity that this life is possible. However, it is also possible because of the person’s participation in the divine life through the imitation of the Word as the Word was on earth. In this, the person imitates the way the Word brings God into the world. In this imitation, we drink from the well that is God. In this drinking from the well that is God, we become partakers of God by drinking

God's water. And this is possible only in Jesus Christ, the Lord.³⁷ In this, the person only experiences God and the greatness of God through the imitation of Christ in the virtuous life.

So far we have seen that with the unknowability of God comes the fact that we grow in God through participation in Christ. Our participation in God leads to greater participation in God which leads to greater knowledge of our non-knowledge of God. However, we do still have knowledge of God but only knowledge of God through the transformed Christian life whereby we participate in God. Thus, it is a knowledge that comes strictly from living life in God through Christ. It is a mystical knowledge in that it is a knowledge that comes from our participation in the divine.

What becomes key for Gregory in the midst of this is that this knowledge is never a "full knowledge" or "static knowledge." We have already seen that Gregory posits God as infinite. In this declaring of God as infinite Gregory sees that for the person to come to full participation in God would take away the infinity of God. If the human could exhaust God in his or her participation in God this would do away with the infinity of God which is central to God for Gregory. Thus, for Gregory, the participation must be a boundless participation which is always dynamic, never static. It is a constantly moving participation in the life of God through Christ.

We see Gregory talk about this in "The Eleventh Homily" in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Gregory talks of how the person is on a path that is "boundless" as it rises up to God. This boundlessness of the path comes from the person's knowledge. The knowledge the person receives of God is always a knowledge that is not adequate. Thus, the person constantly starts over again in trying to gain knowledge of God. The person is always at the beginning of her participation in God because there is always an infinite distance to traverse to get to God.³⁸ Brian Daley sums Gregory best here when he states, "the perfection of our knowledge of God is precisely a process of restless, endless growth beyond the knowledge we already possess."³⁹

Gregory also brings the role of the Word to play here. He sees the person as always understanding that what s/he understood is infinitely less than what is to be known about God. The Word sees this and thus, appears to the person. He comes to the person and gives the person the ability to participate. Often the Word is not seen, but the Word is promised. This promise brings with it the fact that the divine has brought the human into the economy of the divine. And so, the Word helps the person to bridge the infinite distance that is the gap between human and divine.⁴⁰

This bridging of the distance by the Word can result in a union between the Uncreated and the created, as the union is present in the Word. However, even in this union there is infinite distance between the Uncreated and the

created. So, for Gregory the person never has her fill of God; one is never satisfied with her knowledge of God but always looks for more God. Thus, the person always longs for God, looking to participate in God more and more.⁴¹

In discussing how Gregory views participation with God, I have tried to examine how this participation gives knowledge of God in Gregory's view. The reality is that participation does not give knowledge, but that living a virtuous life does. Thus, it becomes imperative for Gregory to live the virtuous life. The way to the virtuous life is only through the Word and so it becomes necessary to participate in the life of the Word so as to live the virtuous life. Thus, the Word is necessary to live the virtuous life which gives knowledge of God. And this knowledge of God that comes through the virtuous life, which is based upon our participation in the Word, is always a beginning knowledge. We always realize that the knowledge we have is infinitely distant from the reality which is God. Our knowledge never grasps anything of God's nature. And thus, even in union with God, we always long for God, looking to participate more and more in God.

Conclusion – Bringing it All Together

In this paper, I have made an effort to work out the notion of the incomprehensibility of God in Gregory of Nyssa. In doing this, I have found Christ to be the hermeneutical turning point. This is because what Gregory is searching for is a way to bridge the infinite gap between God and humanity, the Uncreated and the created. Gregory wants to bridge this gap because his soteriology is based upon participation in God. This gap is then bridged by the work of the Word where the divine “swallows up” the human into the divine where the human never loses its humanity; and, also, the divine is brought into the realm of the human. Thus, the gap is bridged. However, in bridging the gap, Christ never allows for a full, cognitive knowledge of God, but only a knowledge of God based on our participation in God which teaches us that we do not know God but that we must continue to participate in God to know our unknowing better. For Gregory, then, there is never knowledge of God, but only participation in God and the knowledge that our knowledge is never cognitive, but based upon the way that we participate in God through our living with the Word. This participatory knowledge is a mystical knowledge, and so, only mystical knowledge based upon our participation in God gives adequate knowledge of God.

Footnotes

¹ All citations to Gregory of Nyssa's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* refer to the edition by J.P. Migne, PG 44. All English quotations are taken from Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Casimir McCambley (Brookline, MA: Hellenic Scholars Press, 1987). The reference here is to page 772.

² *Ibid.*, 765.

³ For a modern example of mystical pedagogy, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Oxford and Malden: 2008).

⁴ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 81.

⁵ Brian E. Daley, S.J., " 'Bright Darkness' and Christian Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa on the Dynamics of Mystical Union," in *Finding God in All Things: Essays in Honor of Michael J. Buckley, S.J.*, ed. Michael J. Hines and Stephen J. Pope (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 219. See also Deidre Carabine, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Incomprehensibility of God," in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), 87

⁶ This is a terse statement on what Carabine is doing in her article. Specifically see Carabine, 86.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 873.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 821.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 892.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 892.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 781.

¹² Daley, " 'Bright Darkness' and Christian Transformation. .," 216.

¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 893.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 820.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1009.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 820.

¹⁷ Charles Kannengiesser, "The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 72.

¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 880.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 873-76.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1045.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1049.

²² Here I will be reliant upon the work of Brian J. Daley, S.J. This is because Daley has done an excellent job at constructing Gregory of Nyssa's Christology in various articles. Also, Daley is drawing upon multiple sources that enrich the work of Gregory's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and upon which Gregory's Christology in the work is based. Thus, I will rely on much of Daley's research to guide my thinking on Gregory's Christology. See his articles, " 'Heavenly Man' and 'Eternal Christ': Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2002); " 'Bright Darkness'

and Christian Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa on the Dynamics of Mystical Union”; “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa’s Anti-Apollonarian Christology,” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (October 2002)

²³ Daley, “ ‘Bright Darkness’ and Christian Transformation...,” 222.

²⁴ Brian E. Daley, S.J., “ ‘Heavenly Man’ and ‘Eternal Christ’: Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior,” 480. The work that Daley is drawing upon (and for which I am dependent upon him) is from Gregory of Nyssa’s work *Antirrhetikos adv. Apollinarium*.

²⁵ Brian E. Daley, S.J., “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation. . .” 501.

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 861. See also Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation...,” 501.

²⁷ Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation...,” 499. See also, Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 1045.

²⁸ Daley, “ ‘Heavenly Man’ and ‘Earthly Christ’...,” 482-3.

²⁹ Daley, “ ‘Bright Darkness’ and Christian Transformation...,” 224.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 224.

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 813. I think it is significant here that Gregory uses Exodus language of “leaving every evil and sin in the water.” This also evokes the scene of baptism, where the person would be cleansed of sin and be brought into the believing life of the community, participating in the mystical body of Christ.

³² *Ibid.*, 809.

³³ *Ibid.*, 896.

³⁴ Martin Laird, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Religion* 79 (1999), 592-619.

³⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 961.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 824.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 977. See also the eleventh homily, 996.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1000.

³⁹ Daley, “ ‘Bright Darkness’ and Christian Transformation...,” 221. The term that is often associated with Gregory’s notion of infinite progress in the divine is *epektasis* which was coined by Jean Danielou. However, as Louth notes, this term is only used once in Gregory when referring to mystical growth in the divine. So, I have chosen not use it here, but to struggle through the language with Gregory. For an adequate, yet terse discussion of this see Louth, *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 89ff.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

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John Wesley's Question: "How is Your Doing?"

When Christians gather in small groups together, we usually greet one another with the colloquial "How are you doing?" This question can also be used to describe what happens thereafter. Many small groups that focus on personal sharing tend to focus on how the participants are doing inwardly, namely, by the sharing of their feelings, attitudes, struggles, insights, and—if real transparency exists—temptations and failings. Although these "soul-discussions" can be rich and productive, they don't necessarily propel their participants towards Christian maturity and growth.

John Wesley, keenly interested in such maturity and growth, seems to have had a fuller expectation for small group sharing. Not only did he want the Methodists under his care to be asking each other how they were doing (meaning their inner feelings, attitudes, struggles, etc.), he also wanted them to be asking each other another question, which perhaps we can phrase as, "How is your doing?" or, "How is it going with what you are doing?" Wesley believed that sharing how well you were living out your faith in actions pushed you to live a changed life.

Indeed for Wesley, *how* one was doing internally (in one's soul) was directly connected to *what* one did, or how one lived out the Christian life externally (in one's actions). "A tree," as the saying goes, "is known by its fruit." Wesley uses this analogy to explain that true religion "is, properly and strictly, a principle within, seated in the inmost soul, and thence manifesting itself by these outward fruits, on all suitable occasions."¹ In fact, it must. "But, wherever [true religion] is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation"²

Wesley saw this connection going both ways. Not only is the external life (the "doings") the best indication of the inner spiritual health (the "doing"), but carefully managing the outward Christian practices is also one of the best ways to grow spiritually. In his sermon "On Zeal," Wesley explains that by

outward works of mercy “we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace”³ A key Wesley’s insight was that spiritual growth is fostered not only by the disciplining of one’s personal piety, but also by the equally important disciplining of one’s behavior. The Methodist was to train what he or she *did*, in order to train what he or she *believed*.

It was this key insight that caused Wesley to structure Methodism the way he did. Inward faith could be affected and nurtured through outward action. Wesley, it seems, built his Methodist structure to manage not belief or even inward faith, but outward actions. The heart was quickened through hearing the word of God and experiencing God’s grace directly, but it was in the disciplined management of the outward actions that this fledgling faith grew and matured.

Yet holy living did not just serve the purpose of promoting inward faith. It was a proper end in itself. Wesley adamantly believed that spiritual growth is a growth both in inward and outward holiness,⁴ both “of heart and life.”⁵

A Prudential Means of Grace

It was the small group setting termed by Wesley as the “class meeting” (or “meeting in class”) that provided the primary context for the Methodists to grow in their inward and outward holiness. The class meeting, by Wesley’s design, was the main unit of Methodism; it was the work horse of the Methodist structure. Preaching and teaching were vital for describing the vision, but it was the class meeting that carried the Methodist there.

Class meetings did this by providing accountability: accountability to Wesley, to each other, and to Wesley’s standard of both works of piety and works of mercy. Thus the class meeting became Wesley’s method for behavioral change. Early on Wesley published *The General Rules* as specific guidelines for what this change in behavior looked like and how it was to be measured within the classes. This ensured that the class meetings were to focus not just on the members’ inner growth, but also on the outward life. So, the core unit of the Methodist structure, it can be argued, specifically included an outward accountability for outward practice.

Wesley called the class meeting a prudential means of grace.⁶ He understood that living out one’s faith in daily behavior is a means of grace. The way a person acts and lives is a way that person experiences God. It is also a measure of faith. It is a promoter of that faith. It is even part of the overall goal of holiness.

A New View of Class Meetings

Although Wesley is known for applying small groups effectively within Methodism, he by no means was the first to use them. Wesley himself acknowledges that the small group format was most likely the structure of

the early Church.⁷ What is Wesley's innovation for the classes, it can be argued, is that he designed them to have a balanced focus on both works of piety and works of mercy.

It is generally assumed, however, that Methodist class meetings had always been small groups of people coming together for piety; i.e. mutual support, accountability and spiritual encouragement. The earliest extant descriptions of Methodist class meetings, after all, do show a singular emphasis on works of piety.⁸

This fails to take into account, however, that the first Methodist class meetings were started well over sixty years before the appearances of these earliest surviving transcriptions. There is good reason to believe that the content of class meeting discussions changed over this length of time, especially considering the radical changes within Methodism, including Wesley's waning control and eventual death.⁹ It seems that it was not until the growth spurt of the early nineteenth century that class meeting transcriptions were finally published, perhaps to answer growing interest.¹⁰ By then, it can be argued, Wesley's original intention of a dual emphasis was reduced to an almost singular emphasis on works of piety.¹¹

A closer look at how class meetings arose, Wesley's description in *The General Rules*, and Wesley's theology itself all suggest that his original intention for the class meeting was in fact a dual emphasis on works of piety and mercy.

The Class Meeting

Methodist classes were about 12 people grouped according to where the members lived, with one of them being appointed as the leader.¹² Class membership therefore was very diverse, including a mixture of different sexes, marital statuses, ages, social standing and spiritual maturity. The leaders could be either men or women, although by the turn of the nineteenth century Joseph Nightingale indicates that leaders were usually men, except in classes of all women.¹³ The classes met together once per week, usually for about an hour, and usually in the homes of the leaders (although later classes also met in the local Methodist preaching houses). Class meetings were usually closed meetings since the members shared such personal information. Those who showed a desire to join a class, however, were usually allowed to observe two meetings before being granted a trial membership at the next quarterly meeting. Then, if they participated faithfully during the three month trial period, they were granted full membership status at the following quarterly meeting, officially becoming a "Methodist."

The format of the meeting was an individual recounting of personal religious experience. There was no preaching, Scripture reading, or teaching of doctrine. The class leader specifically inquired after the state of each member's

soul, and each member, in turn, gave an account of his or her religious experience since the last meeting. The leader was one of the members, a co-traveler in the Christian life, the first among equals. Thus the leader's inquiries were not interrogations, but rather expressions of concern by a caring friend. The atmosphere was intended to be one of trust, acceptance and commitment.

The Rise of the Class Meeting

Wesley claimed that the beginning of the class meeting was virtually by accident.¹⁴ It arose amid the chaos of trying to keep organized all the new members: "But when a large number of people was joined, the great difficulty was, to keep them together. For they were continually scattering hither and thither, and we knew no way to help it. But God provided for this also, when we thought not of it."¹⁵ "At length, while we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method for which we have cause to bless God ever since."¹⁶

Originally the idea of grouping Methodists into classes was for the pragmatic purpose of collecting pennies to pay off the debt on the New Room in Bristol.¹⁷ Wesley's organizational eye quickly discerned the greater application of accountability. As the leaders collected the pennies, they had weekly, personal contact with each of their members. They afforded Wesley and his preachers knowledge into the personal lives of the Methodists. As the movement grew this became increasingly important, as it became difficult for Wesley and his traveling preachers to provide direct accountability for each member under their care. The class meeting provided Wesley with "sub-pastors" in the class leaders.

Wesley also saw in the class meetings the critical role of providing a support network to keep those newly awakened from slipping back into their former way of life. Thousands of people were "awakened" under the preaching of the Wesleys and their traveling preachers. Wesley intentionally sought out a means to keep those who were stirred from slipping back into their former ways once he had moved on.

I am more and more convinced, that the devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half-awakened, and then left to themselves to fall asleep again. Therefore I determine, by the grace of God, not to strike one stroke in any place where I cannot follow the blow.¹⁸

The class meeting was the way Wesley followed the blow. He was "providentially led," he claimed, "to divide all the people into little companies, or classes"¹⁹ So effective was the class meeting that early on (by the mid-1740s) Wesley mandated that all Methodists had to be a member of a class—in fact, one became a Methodist by joining a class meeting.²⁰

The class structure was a great help to Wesley as he managed the Methodist movement. Yet its greatest benefit came to those who showed up for the class meeting, week after week. The class meeting provided a way for Methodists to “watch over one another in love,” as Wesley put it. The Methodists gathered together in classes to find support and comfort, to be encouraged in their spiritual journeys, to receive counsel and perspective, and to receive accountability for their Christian witness in the world. In the classes, the Methodists were able to bare their souls, share their recent spiritual experiences, and tell of their struggles and victories.

The benefit for the class members came from the class meeting’s mutual accountability not to their feelings but to their experience. As David Lowes Watson points out, the sharing at a class meeting was within a context of confidence and trust, in which each person gave an account of his or her “inward discernment and practical discipleship.”²¹

Ultimately it was because of this benefit to the individual class members that Wesley continued to insist on its use throughout Methodism.

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to “bear one another’s burdens,” and naturally to “care for each other.” As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ ²²

The General Rules

To explain why he excluded certain Methodists in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Wesley published *The Nature, Design, and General Rules Of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, &c.* on May 1, 1743. He explained that since people joined his societies by request, it was his authority to lay out the requirements. Wesley only had one requirement for admission: that the person desired “to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.”²³ Nevertheless, as Wesley quickly added, “But, wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits.”²⁴ A Methodist’s life, then, should evidence discernable outward “fruits” that determine if they were continuing their pursuit of holiness in earnest. Wesley continued, “It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation” and then outlined the three General Rules by which all Methodists are to live, getting very specific when explaining how the three rules apply to daily living.²⁵

The General Rules were Wesley's prescribed foundation for the class meeting. In fact, he mandated in the Annual Conference Minutes that each new person in a class be given a copy of *The General Rules*, instructing, "Give them the Rules the first time they meet. See that this be never neglected."²⁶

The three rules are all outward, observable behaviors. Since holiness for Wesley was inward and outward—was of heart and life—an individual's spiritual progress could be observed in that person's practical living. Thus the test Wesley would hold before the Methodists was a test of behavior, a test of outward living. Early on, it seems, as he was first adapting their role and function, Wesley intended the class meetings specifically to assist Methodists to live out *The General Rules*.

It was up to the class leaders to discern if the members of their classes were faithfully pursuing *The General Rules*. Wesley mandated that the class leader was to meet with the class members weekly "in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor" as well as meet with the minister and stewards of the society weekly in order to report "any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved..."²⁷

Wesley's criteria for inspection among the Methodists, notice, was not their earnestness of belief or solidness of faith, but rather their observable, outward lives. Henderson has discovered an article written by Wesley for the *Arminian Magazine*. He found it as reprinted in the November 30, 1825 edition of *Zion's Herald*, Boston. It is not included in any compilation of Wesley's works. In it Wesley expressly lays out his expectation that "the particular design of the classes is: to know who continue as members of the Society; to inspect their outward walking; to inquire into their inward state; to learn what are their trials; and how they fall by or conquer them; to instruct the ignorant in the principles of religion; if need be, to repeat, to explain, or enforce, what has been said in public preaching..."²⁸

It was critical, of course, that the leaders were intimately invested in each class member and were well regarded by them. The entire Methodist system, it could be argued, hung on the effectiveness of the class leaders. Leslie F. Church comments that the class meetings succeeded "because of the common sense and spiritual insight of the leader."²⁹

Every three months Wesley and his assistants also personally interviewed each Methodist, issuing class tickets to those that "grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."³⁰ His criteria, he explained, was "not concerning the heart, but the life."³¹

I visit, for instance, the class in the Close, of which Robert Peacock is Leader. I ask, "Does this and this person in your class live in drunkenness or any outward sin? Does he go to church, and use the other means of grace? Does he meet you as often as he has

opportunity?” And the general tenor of this, I do not say cannot be known, but cannot be hid without a miracle.³²

Wesley understood accountability in terms of how each Methodist lived. That is why *The General Rules* became the foundation of the class meeting; the *General Rules* are about behavior. It was in the class meetings guided by *The General Rules* that the Methodists were held accountable for both inward and outward holiness.

Wesley’s answer to the question of how to foster spiritual growth among a body of believers was mutual accountability to obedience to the will of God. The main form of this accountability for early Methodism was the class meeting with its dual emphasis on both works of piety and works of mercy. When *The General Rules* appeared from Wesley’s hand a year and a half after the Bristol meeting, the dual emphasis was codified into the very heart of the class meeting.

“A Heart and Life All Devoted to God.”³³

Wesley’s theological distinction between justification and sanctification also required a dual emphasis for the class meeting. Wesley believed that Methodism was nothing more or less than Christianity.³⁴ Yet Wesley was adamant that Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs or even an experience of conversion, although they are significant. He understood Christianity as a daily following of Christ, a continual relationship with God, a way of living. Wesley’s practical theology of holiness required that the class meeting—the main unit of Methodist corporate life—pulse with an accountability to both works of piety and works of mercy.

“The Scripture Way of Salvation”³⁵

Just as the Christian faith is a journey, so too, for Wesley, is salvation. Salvation begins in God’s love for the world and for each individual sinner. Grace is when God breaks into human lives with God’s love. It is by God’s grace that human lives are touched and changed. Faith is the human response to God’s grace that invites and welcomes God’s transforming presence. Yet, as Wesley understood it, salvation is not merely a one time event. It is a continual, ongoing relationship. It is a journey from selfish misery toward living fully. It is a process.

It is a process because God has a plan for those whom God touches: to transform them into whom God wants them to be. God’s plan for all people is holiness: to become holy as God is holy.³⁶ Yet people do not become holy the moment they give their lives to Christ. Holiness comes through sanctification, the process of grace whereby God transforms believers and makes them holy. This sanctifying process is what God does during the course of normal, daily Christian living.

Sanctification is not a human work, but a work that originates in God's love and is driven by the power of the Holy Spirit. God acts through grace. The believer responds by receiving God's transforming power in his or her life. God continues to act, and the believer must continue to respond: "God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again." ³⁷

Salvation is the continual journey whereby God makes people holy. It is a process that includes both justification and sanctification. It was Wesley's clarification of the distinction between justification and sanctification that gave rise to the significance of the class meeting.

"Are works necessary to the continuance of faith? Without doubt."³⁸

Early in his life, Wesley understood the centrality of holiness. This was instilled within him by his parents, and at Oxford he strove to fulfill it to the best of his ability. Yet it was not until the Moravians demonstrated the assurance of knowing Christ personally and Wesley's own Aldersgate experience that he was able to get a clearer understanding of the right order of faith, works and holiness.

Justification is a forgiveness of sins and being restored to a right relationship with God. It is a gift of God's grace whereby the merit of what Christ achieved on the cross is applied to the believer, who receives it by faith. Yet justification, as Wesley came to understand it, is real and actual. During the experience of justification, God also works in the life of the believer the grace of regeneration. Through regeneration the believer is changed and made able to become holy. Therefore by regeneration the Christian begins a process through which God works *in* the person (namely sanctification, or being made just) what God has already done *for* the person (namely justification, or forgiveness). Justification is not only *declared* by God; it also is *implanted* by God. Therefore, actual righteousness is not possible until after God justifies and regenerates. As Wesley clarifies:

"But do not [I] believe *inherit* righteousness?" Yes, in its proper place; not as the *ground* of our acceptance with God, but as the *fruit* of it; not in the place of *imputed* righteousness, but as consequent of it. That is, I believe God *implants* righteousness in every one to whom he has *imputed* it.³⁹

Sanctification is the journey started by regeneration. It is the process whereby God actually makes people righteous, just and holy. In the course of every day living, God works sanctifying grace in the lives of believers. They, in turn, respond through faithful obedience to God's will in every good work. Works, then, are a response to God's working. Thus they are not a part of justification, but a part of sanctification. Wesley was therefore able to affirm that works are

necessary for salvation, but only *contingently* so: “ for these fruits are only necessary *conditionally*, if there be time and opportunity for them; otherwise a man may be sanctified without them.”⁴⁰

Wesley continues to use the image of a tree and branches to explain the relationship between faith and works, saying that “every branch of gospel obedience is both asserted and proved to be indispensably necessary to eternal salvation.”⁴¹ This obedience gives rise to the fruit, namely works:

The doctrines [Methodists] constantly teach are these: That religion does not consist in externals only, in attending the church and sacrament, (although all these things they approve and recommend,) in using all the means of grace, or in works of charity, (commonly so called,) superadded to works of piety; but that it is, properly and strictly, a principle within, seated in the inmost soul, and thence manifesting itself by these outward fruits, on all suitable occasions.⁴²

True Christian faith, for Wesley, must produce good works. Around the time of the formation of the class meetings, Wesley published that “Neither does faith shut out good works, necessarily to be done afterwards . . . But it should also be observed, what that faith is whereby we are justified. Now, that faith which brings not forth good works, is not a living faith, but a dead and devilish one.”⁴³ In fact, He even goes so far as to say, “O warn them that if they remain unrighteous, the righteousness of Christ will profit them nothing!”⁴⁴ His response was even stronger to some Methodists who were reluctant to help “feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to instruct the ignorant, to visit the sick and such as are in prison, bound in misery and iron. . .,” writing, “I tell them it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them. I tell them, the Methodists that do not fulfill all righteousness will have the hottest place in the lake of fire!”⁴⁵

It is only by God’s grace and power, then, that the good works required are able to be done: “We shall then see there is no opposition between these, ‘God works; therefore, do ye work;’ but, on the contrary, the closest connexion; and that in two respects. For, First, God works; therefore you can work: Secondly, God works, therefore you must work.”⁴⁶

Good works are a response to God’s grace received. This is the journey of sanctification. It is through the process of receiving God’s grace and responding in good works, throughout the course of normal daily living, that God makes Christians holy.

Salvation, for Wesley, encompassed both the experience of justification and process of sanctification. As he asserted, Methodists “maintain, with equal zeal and diligence, the doctrine of free, full, present justification, on the one hand, and of entire sanctification both of heart and life, on the other;

being as tenacious of inward holiness as any Mystic, and of outward, as any Pharisee."⁴⁷

Sanctification became the hallmark of the Methodist movement. Those that were quickened through preaching found peace and assurance through a personal experience of Christ. Yet following this justification, the Christian needed a context in which to grow in that new faith and grow in the holiness that God desires. Methodism, particularly through the class meeting, provided the context for sanctification. It served as the soil from which the branches of obedience could bring forth the fruit of every good work.

“The essence of it is holiness of heart and life.”⁴⁸

Salvation, as the process that Wesley saw it to be, is intensely practical. It is the journey toward holiness, lived out in everyday life. The test of faith, then, is not what you know but how you live (“doings”). Wesley described what a Methodist looks like and what a Methodist does in “The Character of a Methodist.” He concludes by saying,

And whosoever is what I preach, (let him be called what he will, for names change not the nature of things,) he is a Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word. He thinks, speaks, and lives, according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ. His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.⁴⁹

Wesley was fond of calling Christianity “practical divinity”⁵⁰ and “experimental religion.”⁵¹ As practical divinity, the Christian faith in the heart produces in the life of the believer actual and true holiness. This holiness is not just in the inward life of the believer, but in the outward life as well.⁵² True Christianity is “the religion of the heart, faith working by love, producing all inward as well as outward holiness.”⁵³ Wesley says holiness is to imitate Christ in all things:

By Methodists I mean, a people who profess to pursue (in whatsoever measure they have attained) holiness of heart and life, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God; who place religion in an uniform resemblance of the great Object of it; in a steady imitation of Him they worship, in all his imitable perfections; more particularly, in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart, and governing the life.⁵⁴

Wesley is careful to articulate that holiness is universal love both filling the heart (“doing”) and governing the life (“doings”). Again returning to the

image of branches that bear fruit, he comments how the mustard seed of faith produces both inward tempers and outward words and works: it is that “which is first sown in the heart as a grain of mustard seed, but afterwards putteth forth great branches, on which grow all the fruits of righteousness, every good temper, and word, and work.”⁵⁵ Holiness is in heart, mind and actions. Methodists insist, that nothing deserves the name of religion, but a virtuous heart, producing a virtuous life: A complication of justice, mercy, and truth, of every right and amiable temper, beaming forth from the deepest recesses of the mind, in a series of wise and generous actions.⁵⁶

Wesley understood holiness as the purpose of salvation: “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”⁵⁷ It was for the purpose of promoting holiness of both heart and life that Wesley implemented the class meeting. The members utilized ongoing mutual accountability as the context for sharing their experience of how they lived out their faith in their daily lives.

“I exhort you that fear God to abound in works both of piety and mercy.”⁵⁸

The core method of how the class meeting fostered a growth in holiness was by inviting each member to share from their personal religious experience regarding their pursuit of holiness. The class offered the context of mutual accountability to progress in holiness around two emphases: works of piety and works of mercy.

The distinction of good works into works of piety and works of mercy is not unique to Wesley. Indeed, it was an Anglican commonplace. Wesley even argued Christ differentiated between the two. While preaching on Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, Wesley explains good works:

Some of these are commonly termed works of piety; the rest, works of charity or mercy. Of the latter sort, [Jesus] particularly names almsgiving; of the former, prayer and fasting. But the directions given for these are equally to be applied to every work, whether of charity or mercy.⁵⁹

Wesley offers a fuller explanation:

“But what good works are those, the practice of which you affirm to be necessary to sanctification?” First, all works of piety; such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows. Secondly, all works of mercy; whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to

awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these the “fruits meet for repentance,” which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation.⁶⁰

In his sermon, “On Zeal,” Wesley draws upon James Garden’s imagery of concentric circles to describe the Christian.⁶¹ At the very center of the soul is “love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival.”⁶² This love radiates out as holy “tempers” (such as “longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, fidelity, temperance,” etc.), which, in turn, give rise first to works of mercy and then to works of piety.⁶³

Interestingly, Garden did not include an emphasis on helping one’s neighbor and did not even mention works of mercy in his description. Wesley, however, not only added them to Garden’s model, but, by placing them closer to the central love than works of piety, gave them a preferred status:

Thus should he show his zeal for works of piety; but much more for works of mercy; seeing “God will have mercy and not sacrifice;” that is, rather than sacrifice. Whenever, therefore, one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred. Even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed, “at charity’s almighty call”; when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbour, whether in body or soul.⁶⁴

In fact, not only is it by works of mercy that “we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them”⁶⁵ Thus Wesley asks the Methodists:

But are you more zealous for works of mercy, than even for works of piety? Do you follow the example of your Lord, and prefer mercy even before sacrifice? Do you use all diligence in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting them that are sick and in prison? And, above all, do you use every means in your power to save souls from death? If, as you have time, “you do good unto all men”⁶⁶

It is important to note that Wesley does not separate works of piety and works of mercy into inward or outward holiness. Works of piety, for example, that foster inward holiness (such as prayer, Bible reading, and controlling one’s anger), are placed in the same category as those that foster outward holiness (such as going to church, receiving the sacraments and not swearing). Likewise, works of mercy that foster inward holiness (such as praying for those in need), are categorized with those that foster outward holiness (such as providing food and clothing).⁶⁷ Wesley held that the love of God manifests itself in the life of the believer in holiness—both inward and outward, both in the heart and life.

Nevertheless, Wesley was always careful to reiterate that works of piety and mercy are totally impotent without the inward faith. In one of his earliest sermons Wesley established that works of piety and mercy gain no merit.⁶⁸ They are necessary for salvation, but only *after* true repentance: “Both repentance, rightly understood, and the practice of all good works, works of piety as well as works of mercy (now properly so called, since they spring from faith,) are, in some sense, necessary to sanctification.”⁶⁹

“As faith increases, holiness increases.”⁷⁰

Wesley’s key insight for the class meeting was that holy living is not only the desired result of faith, it is also a means whereby that faith grows. Works of piety and mercy, then, are not only ways that Christians live out their faith (being necessary fruits), they are also ways in which God works in their lives to bring about holiness. Both are means of grace: “But are [works of piety] the only means of grace? Are there no other means than these, whereby God is pleased, frequently, yea, ordinarily, to convey his grace to them that either love or fear him? Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace.”⁷¹

In a letter to a certain Miss Furley, Wesley expresses approval that she is “waiting upon God” to bring about the fullness of holiness by engaging in works of piety and mercy, saying, “By resolutely persisting, according to your little strength, in all works of piety and mercy, you are waiting on God in the old scriptural way.”⁷² Then, to those who desire to recover their Christian passion, Wesley prescribes the path is through works of piety and mercy:

Beware of sins of omission; lose no opportunity of doing good in any kind. Be zealous of good works; willingly omit no work, either of piety or mercy. Do all the good you possibly can to the bodies and souls of men. Particularly, ‘thou shalt in anywise reprove thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.’ Be active. Give no place to indolence or sloth; give no occasion to say, ‘Ye are idle, ye are idle.’⁷³

Works of piety and mercy are not only the evidence of holiness, they also cultivate it.

Thus, “For Wesley, the locus of activity relevant to the gospel of Christ was the experience or behavior of a person.”⁷⁴ It was not knowledge: “In Wesley’s system, doing the will of God, even on the most rudimentary level, always precedes cognitive ‘knowing.’ True knowledge, for a Methodist, was the natural outgrowth of proper practice; not vice versa.”⁷⁵ Therefore Wesley structured the class meeting to focus on experience and behavior. This, in turn, was to foster holiness. Wesley often quoted the proverb from the early church, that “The soul and body make a man; the Spirit and discipline make a Christian.”⁷⁶

True and real change comes from practice. Practice comes from discipline. This is where the class meeting focused. As John Lawson says, "The Methodist is to start here, with the means of grace and moral discipline, in trust that the Spirit will bestow upon him a change of heart."⁷⁷ The class members encouraged each other in discipline by sharing how they were living:

Wesley believed that learning comes through experience. Methodism was an experiential system....The difference between the meetings of the Methodists and other religious groups of their day was that many church leaders were telling people what they *ought* to do, but the Methodists were telling each other what they *were* doing.⁷⁸

The love of God in the heart of the believer necessarily brought forth the fruit of holiness. The class meeting was the ordinary, ongoing way that Methodism fostered that holiness of heart and life. Thus the original focus of the class meeting was to bring about change in the behavior of each member. Mutual accountability to works of piety and mercy was the way early Methodists encouraged each other to engage in the means of grace that brought about the change in behavior.

***"The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness."*⁷⁹**

Wesley stated that the very purpose of Methodism was to "spread scriptural holiness throughout the land."⁸⁰ He urged all Methodists to make this their single objective.⁸¹ They could not keep their faith private and inward. It had to be seen. Inward and outward holiness could be not only personal but also had to be social. The class meetings compelled Methodists to make their faith seen in tangible ways.

The social application of holiness was driven by the Methodists' pursuit of personal holiness. Wesley firmly believed that true Christian faith is lived out in the context of interacting with other people: "Christianity is essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary religion, is indeed to destroy it."⁸² So for Wesley, the pursuit of holiness drives Christians to intersect the lives of others around them.

Yet social holiness was also driven by Wesley's understanding of God's love for all people. For Wesley and the Methodists, God's free grace was universal for all; each person was precious to God.⁸³ It was God's love for all people that compels those who already know of God's love to reach out to others who do not.

To ensure every Methodist understood this, Wesley published in the front of each hymn book that "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection."⁸⁴

Holiness is a matter of love. It is out of this love for others that Methodists were compelled to engage in works of mercy for their neighbors. Wesley explained,

It must also be allowed, that as the love of God naturally leads to works of piety, so the love of our neighbour naturally leads all that feel it to works of mercy. It inclines us to feed the hungry; to clothe the naked; to visit them that are sick or in prison; to be as eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; an husband to the widow, a father to the fatherless.⁸⁵

The concern for the neighbor, therefore, was both physical and spiritual. In defining a Methodist, Wesley specifically drew attention to both concerns:

As he has time, he “does good unto all men;” unto neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies: And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by ‘feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison,’ but much more does he labour to do good to their souls, as of the ability which God giveth and to provoke those who have peace with God to abound more in love and in good works⁸⁶

Wesley made a point to steer the Methodists away from the tendency to only focus on the spiritual needs of others. For example, he preached that a peacemaker “doeth good, to the uttermost of his power, even to the bodies of all men.”⁸⁷ Or again:

[Jesus] warns us, that the performing our duty to God will not excuse us from our duty to our neighbour; that works of piety, as they are called, will be so far from commending us to God, if we are wanting in charity, that, on the contrary, that want of charity will make all those works an abomination to the Lord.⁸⁸

The Methodist, says Cameron, “was concerned to save not only souls, but bodies also; that is, to save men, not only for the next world, but for this one as well.”⁸⁹ This social focus on the spiritual and physical needs of others was therefore an essential part of the class meeting experience. Lyddon identifies that the

value to the class meeting was the apparent successful blending of social witness and personal piety. In the class, the members were concerned with their own spiritual progress, but this concern soon manifested itself in concern for others as the class member sought to work out the norm of love of God and love for fellow human beings.⁹⁰

Hymns sung at the class meetings often expressed the values of the class. One of Charles Wesley’s hymns often sung at class meetings shows this importance of helping others:

Help us to help each other,
 Lord, Each other's cross to bear.
 Let each his friendly aid afford,
 And feel his brother's care.⁹¹

Or again:

O let us stir each other up,
 Our faith by works to approve,
 By holy, purifying hope,
 And the sweet task of love.⁹²

Wesley's social emphasis, both in terms of maintaining God's love for all people as well as Christians' love for their neighbors, kept Methodists concerned about other people. In class meetings, the Methodists spoke about how they had helped other people, both in word and deed. Lyddon argues:

The Methodist Revival which manifested itself in such structural forms as the class meeting was not only a vehicle for personal piety but also of social concern. The Revival clearly combined these two widely divergent contemporary expressions of religious life under a single religious experience.⁹³

This fostered in Methodism a unique emphasis on both the spiritual and physical well-being of other people.

“Do all the good you can....”⁹⁴

It happened. Methodists, by the thousands, left their class meetings and went out doing good to their neighbors, both to their souls and to their bodies. Wesley led them, not only by his words, but also by his own “doings.”

Stories abound of Wesley's personal philanthropy. Wesley also got directly and personally involved. His mode of bringing relief as a response to a discerned need was adopted throughout Methodism. The benevolent works of the early Methodists are practically numberless.

The class meetings, however, is where much of this relief was fostered. After the loan on the Bristol New Room was paid off, the classes continued to collect a penny from each person each week. This “class money” was then designated for the poor of the area.⁹⁵ Class leaders were to ask the class “if they save any thing for the needy? If they do any thing for the poor? If they visit the sick when it is proper to do it? and so on.”⁹⁶

It was through the class meetings that the Methodists also helped the many poor among the Methodists themselves. Collins explains “class meetings, for example, raised money, gathered foodstuffs, fuel, clothing, and medicine, and distributed them among the Methodist indigent.”⁹⁷ The members were to care for one another, in class and out. The class leader was also to visit any who were sick and provide whatever relief was needed.

By implementing his method of mobilizing thousands of individual Methodists to reach out to those around them in need, Wesley was able to orchestrate a system that did bring tremendous aid to countless people. To the Methodists, the poor and needy were not a mass, or merely each a number. Each was a neighbor. Further, through the constant invitation to the poor and needy to join “in class,” the Methodist structure offered the context for individuals to change the behaviors that limited their ability to progress. The class meeting, for example, taught basic success skills, such as faithfulness; seriousness; industriousness; cleanliness; abstinence of snuff, tobacco, liquid drams; avoiding familiarity with women; mending of clothing; and the like.⁹⁸ It provided accountability to change those habits that can lead to poverty, such as drinking, gambling and careless living.⁹⁹ The class meeting also gave the poor a voice and opportunities for leadership. Wesley changed social evil by changing the individuals within it.¹⁰⁰

Methodism worked almost too well! During Wesley’s lifetime, Methodism, which drew mainly from the lower classes, raised thousands from the lower classes into what became the new middle class. In fact, later in his life Wesley found himself preaching to Methodists on the new topics of money, luxury and wealth!

Although the class meeting’s primary goal was faithful discipleship, Watson reflects, it carried the effect of social change.¹⁰¹ It was the class meeting, with its dual emphasis not only on works of piety but also on works of mercy, that enabled such changes. Class meetings were the “place where the dual concerns of personal spirituality and social welfare were practiced.”¹⁰²

“Let the light which is in your heart shine in all good works, both works of piety and works of mercy.”¹⁰³

In his sermon “Self-Denial,” Wesley describes that neglecting works of piety and mercy can cause a Christian to stall spiritually:

He is not “going on to perfection”; he is not, as once, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, panting after the whole image and full enjoyment of God, as the heart after the water-brook. Rather he is weary and faint in his mind, and, as it were, hovering between life and death. And why is he thus, but because he hath forgotten the word of God, “By works is faith made perfect”? He does not use all diligence in working the works of God. He omits one or more, if not all, works of mercy and piety. Therefore, his faith is not made perfect, neither can he grow in grace ¹⁰⁴

Wesley held that works of piety and mercy are a means toward the goal of holiness that God desires of each person. Works are the natural and necessary result of experiencing God’s justifying and regenerating grace in the believer’s

own life. The journey of sanctification is an ongoing process whereby the Christian experiences God's sanctifying grace and continues to respond through good works. Wesley also knew from personal experience that the best encouragement for faithfulness in doing works comes from mutual accountability. Thus early on Wesley organized the Methodists into small groups. The class meeting was the solution Wesley was seeking. It offered mutual accountability and pastoral oversight. It enabled the Methodists to encourage each other to pursue holiness. As Wesley observed regarding the beginning of Methodism, "Thus, without any previous plan or design, began the Methodist society in England, a company of people associating together, to help each other to work out their own salvation."¹⁰⁵

Wesley drafted the "General Rules" as the foundation for the class meeting, expressing his desire that the class meeting be the context for holding the Methodists accountable to both works of piety and works of mercy. The only requirement to become a Methodist was a desire to save one's soul. Yet that salvation, stipulated Wesley, must be evidenced by the fruit of good works. Wesley was very specific in listing out examples of the different kinds of works in *The General Rules*. Some were works of piety, others were works of mercy. Both were included; both were crucial.

Wesley's intention for the class meeting, it seems, was a context for the evaluation of Christian conduct and life.¹⁰⁶ The standard for evaluation was *The General Rules*, with their expressed dual emphasis on both works of piety and works of mercy. The desired outcome of all this evaluating was a nurturing of each of the individual members in holiness.

Wesley's theological differentiation between justification and sanctification, and that salvation is a process, requires a growth of holiness in both works of piety and mercy. Salvation is a journey toward holiness in which the person continually experiences God's forgiving and transforming grace and then necessarily responds in the form of good works. The holiness that God desires in each person is both holiness of heart and life as well as personal and social. Thus good works are necessary for continuing on this journey to holiness, both as a response to God's grace as well as a means toward holiness. The class meeting was the regular way the Methodists were held accountable in their pursuit of holiness.

Wesley held that this growth and change came through the experience of God's grace, honed and tested through a mutual accountability to obedience through works. It was through a dual emphasis on both works of piety and works of mercy that the class meetings served as the place where this testing occurred on a regular, ongoing basis. The class meeting was where the Methodists were held accountable to pursue holiness through both works of piety and mercy.

It can be argued, then, that Wesley did indeed originally intended the class meeting to have a dual emphasis on works of piety and works of mercy. The dual emphasis was the catalysts for the members to pursue inward and outward holiness, holiness of heart and life.

***“The continuance in works of mercy is necessary to salvation.”*¹⁰⁷**

The proper dual emphasis on both works of piety and works of mercy, however, is difficult to maintain. It is a place of great tension. The tendency is to slip toward one side or the other. In small groups talking about the members’ personal religious experience, the natural tendency is to slip to a greater focus on works of piety.

The class meeting of Methodism is no different. Despite Wesley’s original intention, as well as his mandates that the leaders make continual inspection into the behavior of each member, the class meeting did not maintain the dual emphasis. By the turn of the nineteenth century, most class meetings focused on works of piety alone. Certainly this was unfaithful to Wesley’s desire for the class meeting, as it was contrary to his whole understanding of salvation and Christian living.

It is interesting to note that the focusing on piety coincided with the class meetings’ loss of vitality and popularity. It is not unrealistic to surmise that as the class meeting lost the potency that came from its dual emphasis, its usefulness also diminished. Another reason may be that the class meeting was replaced by the more appealing prayer meeting¹⁰⁸ and, on the American frontier, the camp meeting. The true death of the class meeting, however, may have come when Methodism was codified into a church. Wesley had no problem denying tickets to those whom he felt were not pursuing holiness in earnest. Such purging is not possible within a church.

***“For Such a Time as This”*¹⁰⁹**

Ironically, the decline of the class meeting seems to coincide with a massive growth of Methodism. Perhaps this suggests that the class meeting was useful only for a certain time.

Perhaps, too, it might be that this “certain time” is not so unlike now. The established church has been in a long state of decline. It struggles to reach great masses of people. Within churches Christians struggle to grow spiritually and struggle for spiritual transformation.

Perhaps it is time again to take a closer at the original class meeting as Wesley intended. It could be that its unique combination of emphasis on both works of piety and mercy may speak to our time.

Perhaps it is time to ask in our small group settings not only “You are you doing?” but also, “How is your doing?”

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Footnotes

¹ John Wesley, “A Short Address to the Inhabitants of Ireland Occasioned by some late Occurances,” in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976–) 283. Hereafter, *Works*.

² *Ibid.*, 9:69.

³ Wesley, Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” in *Sermons III*, vol. 3 in *Works*, 313-314.

⁴ A favorite idea of Wesley’s. For examples, see *Works*, 1:568, 2:493, 9:129, 9:370, 9:437, etc.

⁵ A favorite saying of Wesley’s. For example, see *Works*, 3:506, 8:529, etc.

⁶ John Wesley, “Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others; from the year 1744, to the Year 1789,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3d ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991; original edition London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 8:323. Hereafter *Works* (Jackson).

⁷ Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” in *Works* 9:258.

⁸This is certainly the case in Joseph Nightingale, *A Portraiture of Methodism: Being an Impartial View of the Rise, Progress, Doctrines, Discipline, and Manners of the Wesleyan Methodists. In a Series of Letters, Addressed to a Lady* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807); Jonathan Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism: or, The History of the Wesleyan Methodists; including Their rise, progress, and present state* (London: Richard Edwards, 1811); and Thomas Jackson, *The Centenary of Methodism. A Brief Sketch of the Rise, Progress, & Present State of the Wesleyan-Methodist Societies Throughout the World* (London: John Mason, 1839).

⁹John Wesley died in 1791. The earliest transcription of a class meeting, to my knowledge, is in Nightingale, published in 1807

¹⁰This is the case with Nightingale; Crowther; Thomas Martin, *Thoughts on the Nature and Advantages of Class-Meeting, (As adopted in the Methodist Societies:) Including an Account of the Origin, Authority, and General Oeconomy of that Institution: Intended to Explain and Recommend It, to Whomsoever It May Concern* (London: Conference Office 1813); and *A Description of Class Meetings in an Epistle from A Young Lady of the Methodist Connexion, to a Female Acquaintance* (Whitby: Clark and Medd, 1818), reprinted as Appendix L in Watson, David Lowes. *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985) 230-239.

¹¹Watson, for example, indicates that by the turn of the nineteenth century, the emphasis on inward piety eclipsed any emphasis on outward works of mercy. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 145-146.

¹²Wesley, "Nature, Design, and General Rules," in *Works* 9:69-70.

¹³Nightingale, *Portraiture*, 181.

¹⁴Wesley, "On God's Vineyard," in *Works* 3:509.

¹⁵Wesley, "Thoughts upon Methodism," in *Works* 9:528.

¹⁶Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist," in *Works* 9:259.

¹⁷For a detailed description, see "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist" in *Works* 9:259 and "Thoughts upon Methodism" in *Works* 9:528.

¹⁸Wesley, March 13, 1743, *Journals and Diaries II (1738-1743)*, vol. 19 in *Works*, 318.

¹⁹Wesley, Sermon 107 "On God's Vineyard," in *Works*, 3:509.

²⁰Richard E. Lyddon, Jr., "The Relevance for the Contemporary Church of the Eighteenth-Century British Methodist Class Meeting" (D.Min. diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1978) 13.

²¹Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 116.

²²Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," in *Works* 9:262.

²³Wesley, "Nature, Design, and General Rules," in *Works* 9:69.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 9:69.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 9:69-73.

²⁶Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations," in *Works* (Jackson) 8:307

²⁷Wesley, "Nature, Design, and General Rules," in *Works* 9:70.

²⁸Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 109-111. [Article in *Zion's Herald*

(Boston: Nov. 30, 1825), III, page 1. It was designated as a reprint from an earlier issue of the *Arminian Magazine*.]

²⁹ Church, Leslie F. *The Early Methodist People* London: The Epworth Press. 1948. 159.

³⁰ Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," in *Works* 9:265-266.

³¹ Wesley, March 9-12, 1747, *Journals and Diaries III (1743-1754)*, vol. 20 in *Works*, 162-163.

³² *Ibid.*, 20:163.

³³ Wesley, June 27, 1769, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-1775)*, vol. 22 in *Works*, 191.

³⁴ Wesley, July 2, 1786, *Journals and Diaries VI (1776-1786)*, vol. 23 in *Works*, 404.

³⁵ Wesley, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *Sermons II*, vol. 2 in *Works*, 155.

³⁶ This is, for example, a main theme of Wesley's 13 sermons on is called Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." A good example can be found in Wesley, Sermon 23, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Third," in *Sermons I*, vol. 1 in *Works*, 530.

³⁷ Wesley, Sermon 19, "The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God," in *Works*, 1:442.

³⁸ Wesley, "Minutes of Some Late Conversations Between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others," in *Works (Jackson)* 8:277-278.

³⁹ Wesley, Sermon 20, "The Lord Our Righteousness," in *Works*, 1:458.

⁴⁰ Wesley, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *Works* 2:167.

⁴¹ Wesley, "A Letter to The Reverend Mr. Downes, Rector of St. Michael's, Wood-street: Occasioned by His Late Tract, Entitled, 'Methodism Examined and Exposed,'" in *Works (Jackson)* 9:102.

⁴² Wesley, "A Short Address to the Inhabitants of Ireland Occasioned by some late Occurances," in *Works* 9:283.

⁴³ Wesley. "The Principles of a Methodist," in *Works* 9:51-2.

⁴⁴ Wesley, "The Lord Our Righteousness," in *Works* 1:458.

⁴⁵ Wesley, "Journal entry for Nov. 20, 1767," in *Wesley (Jackson)* 3:304-5.

⁴⁶ Wesley, Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in *Works* 3:206.

⁴⁷ Wesley, "On God's Vineyard," in *Works* 3:507

⁴⁸ Wesley, "Thoughts upon Methodism," in *Works* 9:529.

⁴⁹ Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," in *Works* 9:41.

⁵⁰ Wesley, November 19, 1751, in *Works* 20:407, for example.

⁵¹ Wesley, September 2, 1767, in *Works* 22:101, for example.

⁵² Wesley, "A Short History of Methodism," in *Works* 9:369

⁵³ Wesley, "A Short History of the People Called Methodists," in Works 9:438.

⁵⁴ Wesley, "Advice to the People Called Methodists," in Works 9:123-124.

⁵⁵ Wesley, Sermon 33, "Sermon Mount, Discourse XIII," in Works 1:690.

⁵⁶ Wesley, "A Short Address to the Inhabitants of Ireland," in Works 9:283.

⁵⁷ Wesley, Sermon 63, "The General Spread of the Gospel," in Works 2:489.

⁵⁸ Wesley, Sermon 106, "On Faith, Hebrews 11:6," in Works 3:500.

⁵⁹ Wesley, Sermon 26, "Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VI," in Works 1:573.

⁶⁰ Wesley, "Scripture Way of Salvation," in Works 2:166.

⁶¹ Wesley first read James Garden's *Discurs academicus de Theologia Comparativa* (London, 1699) in 1733 while a fellow at Lincoln College

⁶² Wesley, Sermon 92, "On Zeal," in Works 3:313-314.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3:313.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:314.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:313.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:319.

⁶⁷ In order to take into consideration the modern perspective of social justice, Watson suggests in his *Covenant Discipleship* curriculum to add a further dimension to Wesley's General Rules, categorizing works of piety and works of mercy each into both social and private. Christopher P. Momany, "Wesley's Class Meeting as a Model for Contemporary Integration of Christian Nurture and Christian Action" (D.Min. diss., Drew University Theological School, 1992) 61.

⁶⁸ Wesley, Sermon 17, "Circumcision of the Heart," in Works 1:406.

⁶⁹ Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in Works 2:164.

⁷⁰ Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations," in Works (Jackson) 8:279.

⁷¹ Wesley, Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," in Works 3:385.

⁷² Wesley, "Letter To Miss Furlly, afterwards Mrs. Downes, December 22, 1756," in Works (Jackson) 12:196.

⁷³ Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," in Works (Jackson) 11:432.

⁷⁴ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 104.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁶ For example, see Sermon 122 "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" *Sermons IV*, vol. 4 in Works, 90; August 17, 1750, in Works 20:357; etc.

⁷⁷ John Lawson, "Our Discipline," in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*. ed. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1965) 1:192.

⁷⁸ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 131.

⁷⁹ Wesley, "Hymns and Sacred Poems. Published by John Wesley, M.A., Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford; and Charles Wesley, M.A., Student of Christ Church, Oxford," in Works (Jackson) 14:321.

⁸⁰ Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations," in Works (Jackson) 8:299.

⁸¹ Rupert E. Davies, "Introduction," in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) 24.

⁸² Wesley, Sermon 24, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV," *Works* 1:533.

⁸³ Leslie F. Church, *The Early Methodist People* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948) 1.

⁸⁴ Wesley, "Hymns and Sacred Poems. Published by John Wesley, M.A., Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford; and Charles Wesley, M.A., Student of Christ Church, Oxford," in *Works* (Jackson) 14:321.

⁸⁵ Wesley, Sermon 84, "The Important Question," in *Works* 3:191.

⁸⁶ Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," in *Works* 9:41.

⁸⁷ Wesley, Sermon 23, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse III," in *Works* 1:518.

⁸⁸ Wesley, Sermon 22, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse II," in *Works* 1:493.

⁸⁹ Richard M. Cameron, *The Rise of Methodism: A Source Book* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954) 26.

⁹⁰ Lyddon, *Relevance*, 71.

⁹¹ Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Epworth Press, 1945) 229.

⁹² Church, *The Early Methodist People*, 169

⁹³ Lyddon, *Relevance*, 66.

⁹⁴ Attributed to Wesley. Source unknown.

⁹⁵ Wesley, May 7, 1741, in *Works* 19:193.

⁹⁶ L. Rosser, *Class Meetings: Embracing Their Origin, Nature, Obligation, and Benefits. Also, the Duties of Preachers and Leaders, and an Appeal to Private Members: And Their Temporal Advantages*, 3d ed. (Richmond: L. Rosser, 1855), 266.

⁹⁷ Kenneth J. Collins, *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999) 121.

⁹⁸ Thompson, *John Wesley*, 28-30.

⁹⁹ North, *Philanthropy*, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 136.

¹⁰¹ Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 143.

¹⁰² Lyddon, *Relevance*, v.

¹⁰³ Wesley, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV," in *Works* 1:548.

¹⁰⁴ Wesley, Sermon 48, "Self-Denial" in *Works* 2:247-248.

¹⁰⁵ Wesley, "On Laying the foundation of the New Chapel," in *Works* 3:584.

¹⁰⁶ Wesley, March 25, 1742, in *Works* 19:258.

¹⁰⁷ Wesley, "On Visiting the Sick," in *Works* 3:385.

¹⁰⁸ Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 137

¹⁰⁹ *Esther* 4:14. NIV.

Book Notes

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Catholic Spirit: Wesley, Whitefield, and the Quest for Evangelical Unity in Eighteenth-Century British Methodism

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The theological differences between John Wesley and George Whitefield have been exaggerated by both Wesleyan Arminians and Calvinists. Therefore, James L. Schwenk, professor of church history and dean of the chapel at Evangelical Theological Seminary, wants to set the record straight in a book that reminds its readers of the many similarities between the two eighteenth-century evangelicals: both were members of the holy club, both were ordained Anglican priests, both were committed to the spread of the gospel, both played an active role in the evangelical revival, both were steeped in the heritage of Pietism, both emphasized “warm-hearted” religion, both called the Church back to important social ministries, and both believed that God was “the author, initiator, means and director of the entire redemption process. It’s quite a list.

Beyond this, two of the more significant areas in which substantial theological agreement existed between Wesley and Whitefield, areas that have been neglected by some current Wesley scholars, concerned the matters of free grace and the necessity of the new birth. In terms of the former some of the more popular treatments of Wesley’s theology today hardly mention the key ingredient of free grace at all in Wesley’s theology. Instead, they plod along in an utterly synergistic “catholic” or “eastern fathers” paradigm and thereby neglect the significant contribution of the Reformation to Wesley’s theology. This unbalanced and un-conjunctive reading of Wesley’s theology is always a mistake and Schwenk’s work provides a suitable corrective. In terms of the latter issue, that of the new birth, both Wesley and Whitefield underscored the cruciality of the new birth, that is, the qualitative difference that regeneration makes in the lives of believers. This was a subject on which Whitefield “delighted to dwell,” and on which Wesley himself often taught and preached. Indeed, for Wesley the new birth, along with justification and a measure of assurance, were the principal elements of his broader theme of real, true, proper, Scriptural Christianity which he stressed throughout the great eighteenth-century revival.

The reminder of this broad similarity between the life and thought of two of the eighteenth-century's greatest evangelical leaders is not offered by Schwenk to suggest that important differences did not yet remain—for they clearly did. Whitefield, for example, held a view of predestination and election that could only make Wesley wince especially when the former argued that the Church of England gave credence to the Calvinist view in its Seventeenth Article of Religion. Albert Outler, by the way, demonstrated that the “predestinarian interpretation” of the Anglican articles had in fact “been declined by the majority of Anglican divines in the seven decades following the collapse of the Puritan Commonwealth.” At any rate, when Whitefield went on to contend that the imputation of Christ's obedient life was the basis of the believer's sanctification, Wesley likewise expressed disagreement since such a view could easily lead to lawlessness or antinomianism. And this same antinomian concern on the part of Wesley was expressed yet again as Whitefield articulated what he meant by the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. If believers cannot fall from saving grace will they actually be motivated for ongoing holy living?

Sensing the importance of experimental, warm-hearted Christianity, Wesley and Whitefield overcame some of their disagreements in order to continue to foster the revival. In this co-operation Schwenk sees a “paradigm of evangelical ecumenicity.” Others, however, will see a complicated and at times difficult relationship that endured despite the unresolved differences.

Scott Kisker

Mainline or Methodist: Discovering Our Evangelistic Mission

2008. Nashville: *Discipleship Resources*

The United Methodist Church recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary and a new, genuinely prophetic book argues that this church is sick, very sick. Influenced by theological and political trends that date back to the 1960s, the Methodist church has made a shift from qualitatively distinct life-changing evangelism to plodding along, culturally-accommodating nurture, that is, from evangelical experience to general religious experience. Put another way, the structure of the newly formed church (1968) marginalized evangelism and took on a mainline identity with disastrous results.

Selling out to the establishment and broader American culture, the United Methodist church saw little difference between cultivating good citizens and cultivating Christians. When the church became mainline it stopped being Methodist in all but name. Here a leftist political idiom, once again hailing from the 1960s with its divisive identity politics, ruled the day. Scott Kiser,

the author of this jeremiad and professor of evangelism and Wesley studies at Wesley Theological Seminary (and we hope he has tenure!), points out that many of the practices of the Methodist church today are “little more than thinly veiled attempts to manipulate others through marketing techniques.” Indeed, the only thing that mainline churches currently stand for is diversity and inclusion except, of course, when it comes to including articulate conservative evangelicals who are programmatically excluded from many avenues of power in the United Methodist church. Given this easily demonstrated fact, the call of the Methodist church for political and social justice rings hollow. For all practice purposes, the narrative of the gospel, the universal love of God and neighbor, has been displaced by a script of winners and losers, oppressors and oppressed, and we wonder why we are so divided.

Developing a theme that I had explored in my book *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley*, Kisker considers what “real Methodism” might look like if it captured a vision once more of salvation from the tyranny of sin whereby genuine liberty is proclaimed to the captives. Put another way, the missional task of the United Methodist church, from which it has greatly departed, should be to labor to save sinners from the power of sin, bringing “every part of their lives into the love of Christ the king.”

Kisker rightly understands that so great a salvation is a sheer gift from God and therefore can be received *now*, though there is admittedly process both before and after. Again he argues that “sanctification [is] a gift, an experience that one could and should expect to receive in an instant.” This view, then, has all the elements of a careful and balanced judgment that embraces both process and the instantaneous in a way that highlights the gracious activity of God. It is therefore something of a surprise to learn that towards the end of the book Kisker reverts to an utterly synergistic understanding of redemption (apparently neglecting the import of free grace) and maintains that “the very nature of God’s salvation implies that God’s people cooperate with God’s grace every step of the way of salvation.” Such synergism, a part of the “catholic” paradigm, can explain the process of redemption, to be sure, but not its life-changing moments. For that the protestant paradigm of free grace, not co-operant grace, is needed in which the emphasis is not on responding but on *receiving*. More disturbingly Kisker apparently does not realize that understanding redemption utterly in a synergistic way (one half of Wesley’s conjunction of both free and co-operant grace), issues in the kind of accommodating, incremental nurture so typical of the mainline decline from vibrant evangelical experience that he had so rightly inveighed against in the early stages of the book. However, if Kisker in his own account can find ample room for the free grace which was very much a part of John Wesley’s theology, it will not only bring much needed consistency to his argument but also greater force. The call after all to the

United Methodist church today must be to reclaim its evangelical roots and to underscore what the wonderful, potent, and efficacious grace of God can do.

L. Faye Short and Kathryn D. Kiser

Reclaiming the Wesleyan Social Witness: Offering Christ.

2008. Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House Publishers

Much evidence exists to demonstrate that the mission of the church as conceived by mainline denominations focuses largely on humanitarian concerns rather than making serious disciples of Jesus Christ. In order to draw attention to this missional disconnect L. Faye Short and Kathryn D. Kiser have written an engaging and prophetic work that is certain to provoke a lively conversation. Laying part of the blame on the social gospel that emphasized the material over the spiritual, these authors affirm both the personal and social dimensions of redemption but then rightly indicate that for John Wesley the salvation of souls was the highest priority of all—a truth that contemporary leaders of the United Methodist church have clearly forgotten.

Part of the problem here, no doubt, is that elements of liberation theology warped theological understanding by failing to grapple seriously with the very need of salvation by the poor themselves. Instead, the poor were invested with a privileged soteriological status directly in relation to their economic condition. And while Wesley recognized that the poor were “victims of some conditions over which they had no control,” as the authors aptly point out, he did not “excuse them from dealing with sin and growing in righteousness.” Instead, Wesley stressed accountability and would therefore likely take issue with the burgeoning “victim mentality” that plays out among mainline leaders today who allow preferential groups to unswervingly blame circumstances, family or the state for their unenviable condition.

Remarkably perceptive in their social and political analysis of the North American context, Short and Kiser lay much of the blame for the current confusion over the mission of the church at the doorstep of the radicals of the 1960s who advocated socialism as a prescription for all human malaise. Indeed, the emphasis by the New Left on the “sinful structures” of society has undermined the witness of the church for it moved whole populations “from a place of personal responsibility to victimization and from need to entitlement.” For example, not only did many Christian leaders take up the socialist cause in the name of the faith during this period, whereby the vocabulary of the church was redefined, but they also called for a redistribution of wealth and power through coercion, that is, through the unchecked power of the state. And with this new “structural” mentality in place people were

often asked to undertake political and social action without first being invited to the transformation of being that occurs as a consequence of faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the dirty little secrets revealed by Short and Kiser is that though the radical left is often very energetic in *talking* about the poor, evidently their *actions* do not match their words. Thus, not only do evangelicals have more programs that actually help the poor to a better way of life than do mainline leaders, but also conservative families repeatedly give more to charity than do liberal families *within every income class*. This remarkable phenomenon is becoming known as the Joe Biden effect, named after the current Vice-President who though he made around \$800,000 during the three year period from 2004-2006, gave only a little more than a thousand dollars to charity.

In the wake of this ongoing confusion with respect to social, political and theological reasoning, whereby some of the leaders of mainline denominations are very much a part of the problem, having forsaken the narrative of the gospel for a re-worked Marxist one, these two prophetic women call for the sending forth of evangelists who will proclaim nothing less than the good news of the gospel, that grace can liberate all people from the bondage of sin, and that ministry properly understood embraces spirit, soul and body, a balance that is so needed in the days ahead.

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KENNETH M. LOYER

A Review Essay: "Coming to Terms with Perfection"

Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human

Michael J. Hyde

2010. Waco: Baylor University Press

Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue

Edgardo A. Colln-Emeric

2009. Waco: Baylor University Press

Upon becoming a full member of an annual conference, every Methodist preacher from the beginning has been required to answer a list of questions formulated by John Wesley. Those questions include the following:

1. Have you faith in Christ?
2. Are you going on to perfection?
3. Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?
4. Are you earnestly striving after it?
5. Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and his work?¹

During a recent conversation about these questions, a professor at a United Methodist seminary (someone, it should be noted, who is not United Methodist) responded with a query of her own. Is any such notion of going on to perfection even "a serious question for the twenty-first century, when the world is burning left and right?" she asked.

The professor's response deserves careful consideration. Is Christian perfection in fact "a serious question" for us today? Does the doctrine even matter any more? Should it? In other words, rather than concern ourselves with the pursuit of perfection, should we not just get directly to the critical task of aiding a world that is, so to speak, up in flames?

Two recent books, *Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue* by Edgardo A. Colln-Emeric and *Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human* by Michael J. Hyde, demonstrate that perfection remains very much a relevant topic for consideration, both within Wesley and Methodist studies and in a broader context. Beginning with the latter, Hyde's survey of the history of the idea of human perfection covers in considerable detail an impressively wide-ranging scope.

Hyde moves easily across various disciplines to account for how the human understanding of the phenomenon of perfection has developed, as he says, “with the help of Western religion, philosophy, science, and art and how this development entails an appreciation of rhetorical theory” (xv). Along the way he provides lucid and penetrating accounts of such notions as otherness, divine and otherwise; the workings of daily existence; the relationship between reason and perfection; and the nature of beauty. He concludes by exploring the implications of the ever-deepening drive for perfection in medical science and technology, including the recent rhetoric of “our posthuman future,” and thus illustrates the continuing influence of the human quest for fulfillment in which perfection consists.

Religion plays a key role in Hyde’s study. Although Hyde does not mention Wesley, his work has certain resonances with Wesley’s thought. One point of contact has to do with the idea of “coming to terms with perfection.” In the words of Hyde,

Coming to terms with perfection defines a rhetorical process that calls on our ability to find the right and fitting words and other symbolic devices for communicating to others in the most enlightening, truthful, and effective ways possible whatever it is that we understand and hold to be “right,” “good,” and “true” something that is especially worthy of consideration and respect and inspires us to better our lives and the lives of others, to achieve our full potential. (11-12)

Although Wesley did not use this exact language of “rhetorical process,” it is not too much of a stretch to say that this explanation reflects Wesley’s basic intention in developing and promulgating his doctrine of Christian perfection, namely, to convey to others in the most compelling fashion nothing less than the full potential of human beings under grace. As Wesley tirelessly taught, holiness in love—leading up to and including entire sanctification—is a genuine possibility for us here and now. From Wesley’s perspective, this is a truth with which it is crucial to come to terms.

Hyde also sounds a note familiar to Wesley in the way in which Hyde comments on Christ’s command that we be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48):

Following Christ, we must engage in paradoxical behavior; that is, we must go beyond (*para*) the received opinion (*doxa*) of the common folk (publicans [cf. Matt. 5:47]) and expand our understanding of the limits of love by employing the emotion to bind ourselves with our enemies. Perfection entails love, no matter the cost. It also entails things like mercy: “Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). Mercy draws on our capacity to be as charitable as possible.

Perfection requires a lot; it is beauty in the making—so much so, in fact, that acts of compassion can sometimes bring us to shed tears of joy as we witness their results. (116)

Given its clear ethic of love, along with its scriptural basis, this description mirrors Wesley's understanding of perfection.

Despite these resonances, however, some of the theological claims that Hyde makes and questions that he raises about traditional doctrines, both Jewish and Christian, are themselves questionable from the perspective of Wesley's theology and that of classical Christian theology as a whole. For example, figuring prominently in Hyde's account is the work of the sixteenth-century rabbi Isaac Luria, who devised a cosmological myth as an attempt to make sense of the Jewish experience of exile. While this myth might have had the positive effect, in Hyde's words, of "granting hope and guidance to a suffering people" by bringing "God to these souls and these souls to God" (61), the means to this end should also be duly evaluated. Redefining the traditional understanding of God's perfection, Luria's thought calls into question the longstanding belief (in traditional rabbinic theology as well as Christian theology) that God's own well-being is not contingent on human action.

Acknowledging his indebtedness to Luria, Hyde expresses the point in this way: "We have a responsibility to hear and answer the call, 'Where art thou?' 'Here I am!' This exchange defines an ongoing process. We need God and God needs us, creatures who can perform necessary hermeneutical and rhetorical tasks, raise holy sparks, spread the truth to and for One and all" (52). Certainly, the themes of God's call and human responsibility occupy an important place in Wesley's theology and in both Jewish and Christian thought broadly conceived. More specifically, Hyde's reference to God "needing" us parallels the work of Methodist theologians who are sympathetic to process philosophy and theology. What tends to be overlooked, though, in the association (however implicit) between Wesley and process thought is the deep problem posed by Wesley's consistent adherence to standard orthodoxy about the attributes of God, including omnipotence, as reflected, for example, in his late sermon "The Unity of the Divine Being" and in his interpretation of Acts 17:25: "Neither is [God] served as though he needed any thing – or person" since "[t]he Greek word equally takes in both" (*Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*). Wesley's own writings provide ample evidence that the themes of call and responsibility can be constructively addressed without radically altering classical understandings of God.

Yet even those who have reservations about certain theological statements that Hyde makes will not fail to be impressed by the depth and integrative vision of his work. Indeed, the great value of the book lies in Hyde's ability to narrate in clear and compelling fashion a dauntingly complex topic—the human quest for perfection. As Hyde deftly shows, this never-ending quest

has helped shape the entire scope of intellectual history, particularly in the West, by inspiring some of the most influential philosophers, scientists, theologians, rhetoricians, artists, mathematicians, and musicians that the world has ever known; and it exerts a profound influence upon human life still today.

While Hyde's study illustrates the remarkable breadth and consistency of interest in perfection throughout history and including the present era, Collin-Emeric employs a fresh reading of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection and places it in conversation with the understanding set forth by Thomas Aquinas. Collin-Emeric's work is significant for at least two reasons. First of all, he provides a careful, expository account of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. Focusing on the theological and anthropological aspects of the doctrine, Collin-Emeric first considers what perfection does not mean for Wesley—divine, angelic, or Adamic perfection—and then explains what it does mean for him—freedom from sin, perfection in love of God and neighbor, and the renewal of the divine image, and especially its moral aspect, in faithful Christians. In a discussion of the soteriological dimension of the doctrine, Collin-Emeric addresses, in turn, the way to perfection, which is by grace mediated through means of grace; the purpose of perfection as a sign of fitness for heaven, a sign of God's presence and power for the church, and a sign for the world; and the recognition of perfection in the context of communally accountable discipleship. A particular strength of Collin-Emeric's elucidation of the doctrine of Christian perfection in Wesley is his attention to the foundational themes of the image of God and the way of salvation. Collin-Emeric's project would be worth reading even if he stopped there, but he does not.

A second outstanding feature involves his creative juxtaposition of Wesley and Aquinas. After identifying the centrality of perfection in each theologian's work, Collin-Emeric puts Wesley and Aquinas in dialogue with one another through an honest and constructive assessment of points of convergence as well as divergence. The result is far more than a facile comparison, however. From the start, Collin-Emeric readily acknowledges the differences between Aquinas and Wesley, both stylistic and conceptual, and then offers a wonderfully insightful metaphor to guide the conversation that he facilitates between the two: Wesley's theology is like a "house" that fits within Aquinas' "cathedral." Wesley uses the metaphor of a house to describe his understanding of the three essential Methodist doctrines: repentance, faith, and holiness. In Wesley's own words, "The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself" (*The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*, VI.4).

Through an examination of the nature and role of perfection in the theologies of these two figures, Collin-Emeric finds them to be largely

complementary. For example, both Wesley and Aquinas spoke of the importance of beatitude, the centrality of love, the universality of the call to perfection, the significance of the life of the virtues, and the social character of holiness. In keeping with the guiding metaphor of the Methodist preaching house and the Thomist cathedral, respectively, Colln-Emeric calls these elements "common building blocks." He also examines, however, elements that were in one doctrine but were absent from or even rejected by the other, such as the topics of assurance and merit. Refusing to gloss over differences, Colln-Emeric finds that these elements "are not merely decorative" but actually "play a significant structural role in their respective places." In fact, as he points out, one reason that the Methodist house and Thomist cathedral complement one another is precisely because they are different. "By Methodist theology being house-like and Thomist theology cathedral-like the church as a whole is built up and renewed." Each has distinctive features that can serve to enhance the life and witness of the church catholic (179).

More specific to Catholic-Methodist dialogue, Colln-Emeric sees the potential for mutual enrichment among the respective theological heirs of Aquinas and Wesley. With his speculative theology, which can never be disconnected from practice, Aquinas offers Methodists "the speculative theological principles that Wesley considered to fall outside 'practical divinity' and therefore never developed" (8). In Aquinas, Colln-Emeric example of what it means for someone "whose intellect strengthened by faith seeks to bring greater conceptual clarity to the truths of revelation." Indeed, there is room in the Methodist meeting house for this sort of a "Thomistic Wesleyanism" as represented by someone like John Fletcher, whose introduction of scholastic distinctions into Wesley's theology, "far from being a departure from the spirit of Methodism, clarified Methodism's catholic spirit" (180).

Meanwhile, given his practical orientation Wesley offers Catholics an example of the pursuit of perfection, a practitioner "next to St. John of the Cross, who applies the speculatively practical theology of Thomas Aquinas in a practically practical way, a way leading not up Mount Carmel to a life of contemplation but down the plain to a life of action" (8-9). Colln-Emeric sees room in the scholastic cathedral for such a "Wesleyan Thomism," whose audience is not just theologians-in-training but the common people, and whose message is conveyed by "a simplifier, a practitioner who does not only define perfection but leads others to perfection, someone like John Paul II who took the cathedral into the world and reiterated the call to holiness not just with words but with exemplars" (180-81). It is on the basis of this expansive theological and ecumenical vision that Colln-Emeric convincingly argues that Catholics can benefit from knowledge of Wesley and Methodists can benefit from knowledge of Aquinas.

In his constructive closing argument, Collin-Emeric utilizes another image as part of a practical account of how ecumenical dialogue can move forward. What he calls “kneeling ecumenism” represents a way of shifting the focus “from holy doctrine to holy ones” (198). Interestingly, to illustrate this call for a renewed appreciation of the ecumenical significance of sanctity, he considers the Catholic Gregorio L pez’s holy life from the vantage point of John Wesley and the Methodist Jane Cooper’s claim to perfection from the perspective of Thomas Aquinas. He singles out these two people for ecumenical recognition not because they are the only saints but because their lives display in striking fashion an ecclesially based pattern of sanctity that manifests for the world the presence and power of God. Collin-Emeric’s concluding claim about Wesley and Aquinas contributing to a communal grammar of holiness for the church as a whole logically follows: “through their teaching of perfection Aquinas and Wesley offer us a grammar of holiness that can form the basis for writing ecumenical hagiographies, recognizing perfection outside our church and going on to perfection in communion with our ‘separated’ brethren” (204). In all, Collin-Emeric’s first book—based on his Duke University dissertation—represents a noteworthy contribution to Wesley and Methodist studies and to ecumenism.

So what about those opening questions pertaining to Christian perfection? How important, if at all, is this doctrine given our contemporary context? Do that particular seminary professor’s concerns about, and possible underlying charges of, theological and social irrelevance themselves hold any water for a world that is “burning left and right”?

These two fine studies suggest that the topic of perfection is well worth serious scrutiny today, and that, while central to historic Methodism, this subject continues to carry an even broader cultural, philosophical, and social appeal. More precisely, from the perspective of John Wesley, as restated by Collin-Emeric in particular, it would seem that for any who wish to work for the genuine transformation of the world in Christ, there can be no better starting point than a joyful acknowledgment of perfection as the overarching goal of life—the grace-enabled journey toward which is both the privilege and duty of every earnest Christian. Of that much we would all do well to take note.

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¹ As printed in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church: 2008* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 246.

Book Reviews

BibleWorks. DVD-ROM and CD-ROM, version 8

2009. BibleWorks, LLC. \$349

Reviewed by Michael D. Matlock and Bradley T. Johnson

BibleWorks 8 (BW8) is a software program for Bible study containing a plethora of heuristic functions, tools, and resources that assist in the hermeneutical tasks of observation, interpretation, and evaluation of biblical texts and texts related to biblical texts. But, unlike most Bible study software programs, BW8 enables the student to engage in a close reading of the original biblical and biblically related texts. The programmers have designed BW8 for the Windows operating system, but users of Macintosh and Linux operating systems can also enjoy the program by running a Windows emulator. The current retail price is \$349; however, a group of ten or more members of an organization who wish to license BW8 may be eligible for discounted pricing through an institutional promotional program. For example, a biblical languages instructor coordinates this program for the Asbury Theological Seminary students who are able to purchase the program for approximately \$250.

BW8 features 190 modern and ancient Bible translations in almost forty languages, thirty-five original language texts and morphologically tagged texts, twenty-nine lexical-grammatical reference works, and many other reference works and utilities. With a portable computer, Bible students can conveniently port what would be an otherwise massive hard copy library. Other advantages of BW8 that physical libraries do not provide include the opportunity to keep original data disks in a separate environment; the capacity to search, copy and print text; and the ability to view multiple lexical, grammatical, and other reference works (e.g., translations of the writings from the Early Church Fathers and the Babylonian Talmud) pertaining to a specific biblical passage in one central location through the resource summary, analysis, and the cross-references tabs.

Perhaps the characteristics that most distinguish BW8 from its more closely aligned competitors are 1) the collection of the most extensive electronic set of original language materials, both biblically and biblically related, accessible in a thoroughly integrated system (see <http://www.bibleworks.com/content/full.html> for complete listings) and 2) a customizable user interface that allows users to set up their work environments in ways that suit their

unique learning and working styles. Unfortunately, the customizable user interface can be a little unnerving to novice users who can easily become overburdened with attempting to navigate all of these multiple ways of accomplishing tasks (such as drop-down menu options, icon button shortcuts, shortcut keystrokes, and right-clicking for context-sensitive options). An improvement would be to offer users a selection of preset configurations based on their own navigational preferences.

Students of the Bible, pastors, and educators will appreciate the wide range of tools available in this feature-rich version. Not only are users able to conduct elementary and highly sophisticated word and phrase searches of text, but also the various resources are keyed to the text in focus as mentioned above. As a result, the various screens constantly refresh to provide data associated with the word or item indicated by the user's cursor.

BW8 utilizes an interface containing three main sectors designed to track and follow typical tasks performed in Bible study. Viewing the interface from left to right, the leftmost screen or "search" window permits users to select a Bible version and text (or texts related to a biblical passage such as the works of Philo or Josephus or the OT Pseudepigrapha) and provides options to shape the search environment by means of filtering the text for distinct verse, chapter, and book ranges as well as limiting the search to specific words—lexically and morphologically tagged—or phrases. Program users can easily accomplish many of the search and display options within the search window through the small but prominent command line; unlimited, user-defined tabs are located directly above the command line to demarcate and enable work on multiple searches and projects.

After a user search is successfully completed, the center screen or "results" window displays the highlighted result items from the criteria entered into the search window. Within the results window, users can view results from multiple versions one verse at a time or the continuous verses of one single version. The rightmost window is the "analysis" window, and it is here that users can explore resources relevant to the center results window. Such resources include parsing and lexical data for original languages, points of grammatical or textual interest, detailed search results, translation notes from publishers or user notes, and a word processor that automatically associates with any chapter in the Bible or a word processor directed solely by the user's formatting preferences. Whether preparing documents with one of the BibleWorks editors or the user's favorite word processor, users will benefit by taking advantage of exceptionally versatile copy and paste features including Unicode Hebrew and Greek fonts in all three sectors of the program.

BibleWorks is replete with tutorials and user helps that assist students and educators in the process of their Bible study work. A few examples will suffice. Study guides containing many video clips exist offering a step-by-step

methodology for writing an exegetical paper, tips for how to use BW8 in a classroom setting, courses of action for displaying multiple passages for comparison (e.g., synoptic passages or Old Testament quotations in the New Testament), steps for creating a highly specific key word search, and simple ways of creating chapter and verse notes during Bible study. The Help infrastructure provides abundant ways to support users in their tasks.

In the remainder of the review, we will highlight selected important features for seminarians and other Bible students enjoying some working knowledge of biblical languages. Users will appreciate a vocabulary flashcard module to create and print or to listen to custom vocabulary sets as well as drill on the words within the program. A sentence-diagramming module enables users either to view diagrams of the entire Greek NT or to create their own custom diagrams which can be copied into word processing documents. BW8 contains several good original language lexicons. For NT Greek, Thayer's, Gingrich-Danker's, and Louw-Nida's lexicons come standard and Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (BDAG, 3rd ed.) is available for an additional cost. For the Septuagint, Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie's (LEH) lexicon comes in the base program. As for biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, program users can use Holladay's or the unabridged Brown, Driver, and Briggs' (BDB) lexicons; Koehler-Baumgartner's (HALOT) lexicon is obtainable as an add-on module.

As for biblical Greek reference grammars, Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* and Robertson's *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* are accessible in the base package; Blass, DeBrunner and Funk's *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* and Zerwick's *Biblical Greek* are available as add-on modules. In the realm of biblical Hebrew reference grammars, buyers can use Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley's *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Joüon-Muraoka's revised *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, and Waltke-O'Connor's *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*; for the Septuagint, Conybeare-Stock's *Grammar of Septuagint Greek* is available. Virtually all reference grammars contain the page numbers from the print editions facilitating easy correlation between the two mediums, and all biblical texts from citations in the grammars may be viewed in the original language and in translation by hovering the mouse over them.

For those studying the relationship between the Hebrew and Greek Old Testaments that form the backdrop against which the New Testament was written, the Tov-Polak Parallel-Aligned Greek-Hebrew Old Testament provides an invaluable tool for comparison. The Synopsis Window provides a thoroughly useful tool to compare and edit parallel texts in the Old Testament and New Testament including the Synoptic Gospels. For those Bible students interested in Early Judaism and Christianity, the default package contains many Early Jewish original language texts and versions with corresponding morphological versions and English translations such as the OT

Pseudepigrapha, Philo's writings, Josephus' writings, the Targums, and the Qumran sectarian manuscripts (add-on module). Greek, Latin and English versions of the Apostolic Fathers are available for those interested in the study of these Early Christian texts. Bible students with reading knowledge in Syriac or Latin can also draw upon these versions—the Peshitta, Peshitto, Old Syriac Gospels, and the Vulgate—without morphological assistance.

While BW8 remains superior in the area of providing original language resources, tools, and functions, users would greatly benefit from a stronger commitment from BibleWorks to make available secondary resources such as Bible dictionaries, theological dictionaries, and exegetical commentaries. Bible dictionaries such as *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *The New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*, or the fully revised *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* should be optional add-ons. As for modern exegetical commentaries, why not make series like *The New International Commentary on the Old/New Testament* or *Word Biblical Commentary* available? There is also one final item on our wish list. We would welcome a scaled-down version for use on small mobile devices such as iPhones and PDAs to create more opportunities for Bible study on the go.

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Paul A. Hartog, ed.

The Contemporary Church and the Early Church: Case Studies in *Ressourcement*

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010

Reviewed by Charles Meeks

The cry of “*ad fontes!*” is a recognizable one to any student of the Protestant Reformation; the problem remains, however, as to which *fontes* modern Christians should be returning! For Evangelicals, this call has primarily hearkened believers either to the Scriptures for matters of spiritual growth, theological debate, and even Scriptural interpretation itself, or to the writings of Calvin, Luther, Wesley, and other Reformers. A small group of Evangelical scholars, however, are becoming aware of the enormous gap left between the Scriptural record and the work of the Reformers within the majority of modern Evangelical scholarship and spiritual formation. In this collection of essays commissioned by the Evangelical Theological Society for their monograph series, editor Paul Hartog and other contributors seek to discover and apply the value of intentional, renewed interaction with the Early Church

for contemporary Evangelicals. This must go beyond the renewed “popular” interest in Early Church studies made most visible by authors such as Robert Webber (the *Ancient-Future* series especially) and Brian McLaren, articles in *Christianity Today*,¹ and, to a certain degree, the “Emerging Church” as a whole. The first result of these efforts is the present volume. However, in this work Hartog’s vision is a thankfully bit more narrow in scope than preceding exercises in *ressourcement*, such as *Ancient Faith for the Church’s Future*, a formidable compilation of fourteen essays from the 2007 Wheaton Theology Conference which serves as more of a wide gateway into the strengths and weaknesses of Patristic witness to contemporary evangelical Christianity.

Following Hartog’s introductory essay dealing with the true complexity of the issue of Early Church-Contemporary Church dialogue is a collection of six “case studies,” which attempt to go beyond merely questioning whether or not the Fathers have anything to offer us and seek to directly apply some aspect of Patristic thought to Evangelicalism for the sake of growth and sustainability. Topics tackled include Patristic evangelism and discipleship, community formation, use of the *regula fidei*, responses to cultural opposition, the preaching of social ethics, and Christology. Two responses to the essays round out the volume, one penned by Lutheran scholar Glen Thompson and the final by editor Hartog, a Baptist.

While overall this is a meritorious work, the strongest essays in the volume are Hartog’s introductory essay, Bryan Liftin’s chapter on “Learning from Patristic Use of the Rule of Faith,” Thompson’s Lutheran response, and Hartog’s own Baptist response; these exemplify the intended trajectory of the editor. Liftin’s tremendous scholarship is perhaps the most helpful in not only bolstering the Evangelical theological foundation, but in serving as a buttress against emerging traditions parading as good theology. Furthermore, Thompson’s response could indeed stand alone and be expanded into a full book, serving as an exercise both in self-inspection and inspiration for further research. Thompson highlights the necessity for Evangelicals to develop sound, logical methods for appropriating Patristic teachings, seeing the danger toward which several of these chapters creep by simply reading history and attempting to extract one or two “helpful” things.

On that point I found myself readily agreeing with Thompson; the main aspect of the collection as a whole that almost repeatedly dismayed me was the hesitancy of the majority of authors to suggest anything more than simply gleaning some surface-level insight into something of Patristic practice. The odd mix of solidly Reformed appointments of these scholars with their overwhelmingly Catholic pedigrees gave me hope for a strong applicatory component to these essays that would openly seek for incorporation of Patristic practices without fear of losing one’s Evangelical identity. Such a fear that too much interaction and incorporation will lead to a mass exodus across

the Tiber or over the walls of Byzantium is almost tangible, however, especially since, as Hartog delineates in his introductory essay, it seems that so many Evangelicals who have made study of the Fathers their academic lives have done just that. Yet there must be a *via media* that both takes seriously Evangelicalism's undeniable genetic link to the ancient Church and its modern developments. We are not quite at that middle road, as is evidenced by the overwhelming amount of foundational historical work that must be done in each of these chapters; Hartog reminds us that the Catholic adage is still true: "Evangelicals knew their Bibles, while Catholics know their history."

Interestingly, many of the essay authors are quite honest about their personal views on the extent to which Patristic practices should be integrated into Evangelicalism. This is both a strength and a weakness, for on the one hand transparency is an asset to understanding the context in which an author writes, and indeed supports their case as Evangelical Patristics scholars. On the other hand, however, such transparency can produce a weakening of the author's final case. For example, Rex Butler's thorough (though, because of space limitations, brief) and well-written examination of baptism, the Eucharist, and communal worship gatherings in the Early Church and how some groups have begun to appropriate similar practices is almost overshadowed by his admission of not subscribing to nor even supporting any sort of Patristic sacramental theology. His resulting application, limited as it is, is thereby weakened in my opinion.

When I return to the title, and then to Hartog's introductory and concluding essays, I am reminded that the process of dialogue and *ressourcement* is certainly no easy task. This volume indeed serves as a further step down the road toward deep conversation with the Fathers and Evangelicalism at the least, and perhaps re-integration of certain facets of the Early Church at best. More is yet to be done, but these Evangelicals are heading in the right direction.

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Footnotes

¹ See especially Chris Armstrong, "The Future Lies in the Past," *Christianity Today*. 52:2 (2008): 22-29.

Gary B. McGee

Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism

American Society of Missiology series 45

2010. Maryknoll: Orbis Books

Reviewed by Amos Yong

Gary McGee passed away in December of 2008 – at which time he was serving as distinguished professor emeritus of church history and Pentecostal studies at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (AGTS) in Springfield, Missouri – after completing all but the introduction to this book (which has been added by Annette Newberry, along with a preface by Byron Klaus, visiting professor of Church history and missions and president respectively of AGTS). Readers who are familiar with his earlier work – various authored and edited volumes published especially by the Assemblies of God’s Gospel Publishing House, plus his co-editorship of the first edition of the magisterial and landmark *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Zondervan) and co-authored *Encountering Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction* (Baker Academic) – will recognize upon picking up this book that they are holding in their hands McGee’s *magnum opus*, a volume that reflects the synthesizing fruits of a lifetime of research, mature scholarship, and prolonged and seasoned reflections working in the field of missiology. But *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism* is no mere or parochial “Pentecostal missions text”; rather, it belongs squarely in the mainstream of missiological scholarship. Why?

Most importantly, McGee’s thesis, that signs, wonders, or miraculous phenomena are central to missionary endeavor, is argued not only with regard to Pentecostalism but vis-à-vis the history of Christian mission as a whole. To be sure, those looking to understand the nature of Pentecostal missions will not be disappointed. The five chapters of part 2 recount the Pentecostal self-understanding of the source of missional power in their experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other languages (which were expected to enable evangelization abroad), and in the central role of healing in their missional success. Along the way, McGee also details the impetus toward organizational order and institutionalization and the various approaches to mission funding, the emphases on proclamation and evangelization over social concern and activity, the emergence and development of the indigenous church concept and its concomitant mission practices, and other doctrinal and theological debates particularly as these played out pragmatically in Pentecostal missionary work. But before getting to all of this material, the five chapters of first part of the book (about 100 out of the 225 pages of text) explicates the nature of “pentecostal power and missions” (the title of part 1) mostly prior to the twentieth century Pentecostal

revival. Readers will observe phenomena that some might think belong to modern Pentecostal spirituality and practice – e.g., prophecy, faith, healing, signs, tongues speaking and interpretation of tongues, discernment of spirits and exorcisms, and other miraculous activity – operative all along the history of the advance of the Gospel. In other words, McGee not only shows the continuity between Pentecostal beliefs and practices and that of the broader Christian tradition, and also unveils the incomprehensibility of the former apart from the latter. Put alternatively, Pentecostal phenomena is no aberration in mission history; instead, Pentecostal mission is understandable now precisely because it manifests and extends what has long been intrinsic to the missionary expansion of the Christian faith. So if Pentecostal mission is viewed as the result of the in-breaking of the transcendent Spirit of God, then so is Christian mission in general; or, if Pentecostal mission is seen instead as the expression of the Spirit of God immanent in history, then, again, so also is Christian mission in general. In short, this is the story not only of American Pentecostalism or, more accurately, Pentecostal missions, but it is also the story of miracles in Christian missions, period.

To be sure, Pentecostals who read this book will be given pause at various junctures as McGee honestly confronts some of the beliefs and practices that most, or many (at least), in the global renewal movement would not hold today. Yet regardless, the prose is even-handed as McGee writes not polemically (and certainly not hagiographically) but informatively, all the while maintaining the objectivity of a skilled historian, even if one located on the inside of the movement whose successes and failures he is committed to unfolding, and committed to its cause. Simultaneously, non-Pentecostal readers also will be led to seriously rethink the nature of missionary work in light of this volume. The massive documentation throughout both parts of the book (the almost 100 pages of endnotes includes over 1,700 citations and references, Newberry tells us) reflect McGee's mastery of both the primary and secondary literature in the history of Christian mission and demonstrate his point that the expansion of not only Pentecostalism but also Christianity as a whole has always been accompanied by miraculous phenomena, broadly understood. In short, miracles are the rule, not the exception in mission history, and if so, then that invites a thorough reconsideration of the theology of mission. One senses that McGee, always the minister and missionary at heart (as Klaus' preface portrays), presents in this volume his theology of mission, albeit couched in descriptive rather than prescriptive language, as befitting his scholarly vocation and training as a historian.

It is thus fitting that *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism* appears in this most prestigious of book series devoted to missiological research. The only thing slightly misleading is the title, which probably betrays professor McGee's humility in not wanting to claim too much, but which results in

actually underemphasizing how global his perspective is and how much of the story of world Pentecostal missions appears in these pages. Still, this book deserves to be read alongside David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* in all missiology programs, and to be carefully (even prayerfully, one feels the author hoping) studied. One suspects the Spirit of which McGee writes about intends to tell a story that others not only can read about, but also possibly enter and live out.

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John R. Levison

Filled with the Spirit

Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009.

Reviewed By Joseph B. O. Okello

In his book *Filled With The Spirit*, John R. Levison, a professor of New Testament at Seattle Pacific University, presents a sophisticated view of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. The book has three major sections. Beginning with Genesis 2:7 where God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils, the first section contends that God's act of breathing life into Adam entailed an endowment of the Spirit. Consequently, to be filled with the spirit in the Old Testament is a gift given at birth that was just as divine as the Spirit one receives through a subsequent charismatic endowment.

The second section of the book turns its attention to Jewish literature and the spirit in the Greco-Roman world. The contention in this section is that Judaism in the Greco-Roman world combined the conception of the Spirit endowed at birth with the conception of the Spirit as a subsequent charismatic endowment. Consequently, this understanding provided fodder for the growth of Christian pneumatology.

The third section focuses on early Christian literature on the Spirit. It observes that early Christian literature focuses more on the spirit as a charismatic endowment and seems to almost wipe out the Old Testament and Greco-Roman world contention that the spirit resides in all people from birth. Thus the book has at least three central claims.

Levison wrote *Filled with the Spirit* because he felt that the expression *to be filled with the spirit* seemed open-ended and expansive. He contends, for example, that images of inbreathing seemed to prompt wrenching reflections on the tensions of creation and the promise of new creation. Levison therefore hoped to navigate "The deep and occasionally stormy waters that circulated around conceptions of the spirit in antiquity."

For academic purposes, *Filled With the Spirit* is not only an invaluable resource to students of pneumatology; the perspective it presents cannot be ignored for several reasons: First, the author frequently uses the impersonal pronoun “it” in reference to the Spirit. Moreover, he does not capitalize the first letter in reference to the Spirit. Neither does he make mention of the Spirit as the third person of the trinity. Pneumatology students are often reminded that references to the Spirit ought to reflect the personalistic attributes of the Spirit.

Levison justifies his use of the impersonal pronoun in reference to the Spirit as follows: when the Spirit is seen more as a person, he does not tend to fill people; rather, he accompanies, guides and teaches. However, Levison addressed the personal dimension of the Spirit when he suggested that the Spirit both accompanies and fills believers, even when he believes that the personal nature of the spirit is less apparent even in places like book of Acts. Perhaps that is why, in Levison’s view, Michael Welker’s book *God the Spirit* refers to the “force field” of the Spirit in the book of Acts.

At any rate, Levison does not think that there exists a single conception of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. His purpose was to try and preserve the distinctiveness of different New Testament authors, and thereby pave the way for further theological reflection. What might be of interest here, however, is to bear in mind that Levison has in fact dealt with the personal nature of the Spirit in other publications. One such example is *The Spirit in First Century Judaism*.

Second, the question of the personal nature of the Holy Spirit would seem to have a major implication for the doctrine of the trinity. Levison’s book hardly makes reference to this doctrine, in spite of its extensive treatment of the doctrine of the Spirit. Despite this fact, Levison hopes that the book richly and passionately fills the relatively skeletal lines devoted to the Spirit in the creeds, for example. He believes that what one finds in *Filled With the Spirit* is the opportunity to rediscover the jarring, disorienting and redirecting presence of the Holy Spirit that is only hinted at in the creeds.

In spite of the two concerns raised above, Levison’s work is groundbreaking. No doubt he presents the doctrine of the Spirit in a manner that borders on controversy; for not many orthodox theologians would maintain, as Levison would seem to maintain, that animals and humans alike possess the Spirit of God from birth. Nevertheless, Levison makes this contention, not because he believes it to be the case, but because he thinks that a careful examination and exegesis of Israelite literature seemed to point to a subscription to this view.

In light of the contentions above by Levison, further questions still remain unanswered. To what extent is God’s Spirit a personal entity in light of Levison’s findings? Is it correct to equivocate God’s breath with God’s spirit

as Levison does? Should God's act of breathing into Adam's nostrils be taken literally or anthropomorphically? What implications does Levison's view of the Spirit have for the doctrine of the trinity? In light of Levison's work, these questions create the need for further research.

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Constance M. Cherry

The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services

2010. *Grand Rapids: Baker Academic*

Reviewed by Kandace Brooks

Constance M. Cherry currently serves as the Associate Professor of Worship and Christian Ministries at Indiana Wesleyan University. She is also a faculty member for the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies. Cherry has considerable experience in service to the local church as Minister of Music and Worship, and it is in this role that she offers this book; one designed to be best used by those who practice the art of worship leadership – pastors, students and worship teams. Says Cherry, 'let the learning take place in community,' and her text lives out this commitment, encouraging the reader into direct local conversation with those both leading and participating in worship. In a more subtle way, Cherry opens the potential for dialogue in the larger community of the church universal, the church historical, and perhaps more importantly (but more subtle still in the writing) in continual conversation with the Triune God, who is both center of and purpose for biblical worship.

The metaphor upon which the book is based is that of the architect, whose strategies in building mirror those of the designer of the service of worship. In keeping with this image, Cherry takes ample time to lay a biblical foundation for worship before moving on to the building of the structure. In this critical introductory section, Cherry immediately captures the heart of the matter, and the attention of the reader by placing a right emphasis on the revelation/response nature of our covenantal relationship with God and the centrality of Jesus Christ to the Christian narrative. The reader is challenged from the start to reflect this reality in worship, and to put aside the current tendency toward narcissism and consumer-driven design that places human needs at the forefront. The bulk of the book remains rooted in this central position as it moves toward establishing the four load-bearing walls of the

worship structure – gathering, Word, table, sending. It is in her loyalty to the historic four-fold pattern of worship that Cherry echoes most strongly the writings of her mentor Robert Webber. In each of these sections, Cherry discusses the purpose of the worship movement, its characteristic spirit, and its place in the overall dialogue of worship. Once the theoretical basis is established, she offers a variety of practical ideas for the specific design and authentic leading of each portion of the service.

Additional sections of the book include *Creating Doors and Windows for Encountering God* (prayer, music, time); *Adding Style to the Worship Event*, and *Nurturing Hospitality at the Worship Event*. It is here that Cherry is clearly most at home with her material, and not surprisingly, her confidence is evident in her courageous willingness to challenge what has become a twisted norm of worship design - the preoccupation with musical content and worship style, including the ‘niche service’ which is designed with the current (or hoped-for) congregation as the starting point. The organization of Cherry’s book is consistent with her rhetoric that style is NOT content, and that what worship designers (and consumers) often consider as primary should really be placed last, only after the foundational and structural supports are in proper place.

Clearly evident is the reality that Cherry is above all a practitioner of worship, and her writing invites the reader into the same role. By placing reflection questions at the start of each chapter, Cherry allows the reader to explore any pre-conceived notions on a given topic prior to reading. In providing a glossary of key terms and brief bibliography at the end of each chapter, the author invites further study. Finally, the offering of substantial practical suggestions and exercises for those engaged in the process of designing worship encourages immediate application of learnings.

The architectural metaphor is a strong one and particularly well-suited for a discussion of worship design; yet, as Cherry herself admits, it does have some limitations. The structure of worship, for example, is spoken of both in terms of constructing four load-bearing walls or rooms. From an architectural perspective, these are not the same, and the metaphor becomes convoluted, even suggesting (if taken far enough) a clear separation of each of the various movements of worship, each with a singular and discrete goal. The load bearing wall image is of sufficient vigor to stand on its own, and results in a more organic and potentially creative worship design.

While Cherry does not break new ground in her book, the engagement and organization of her material is excellent, and challenging to both the new and seasoned worship designer. What Cherry successfully does is to transcend particulars of denominational or theological practice and approach worship in a more holistic way, holding to the inherent promise contained in her metaphor – that at its foundation, worship that honors God is attached primarily to the desires of His heart. This is a practical book; approachable,

but certainly not diluted. While it does not carry the academic weight of theological or historical treatises on worship, Cherry is unapologetic in this approach, and rightfully so, given the intended audience and stated purpose of the book. Cherry deliberately remains on the practical side of the art of worship design, leaving the readers to explore historical and theological studies on their own, and according to their denominational affiliation or theological tradition. If there is a weakness with Cherry's book, it is that this more academically robust supplementary study is not strongly represented in the bibliographic suggestions.

Cherry's book will find a solid place in the hands of worship designers and students of worship, and will become an easy conversation partner with works of Robert Webber and Thomas Long, especially (Cherry's 'convergence' approach to worship design an expansion of Webber's 'blended' worship and Long's 'third way' solution).

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Michael P. Graves

Preaching the Inward Light: Early Quaker Rhetoric

2009. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press

Reviewed by J. Ellsworth Kalas

Although there are Quaker bodies whose worship gatherings are indistinguishable from any rather typical Protestant service, when most of us think of a Quaker service we think of silence rather than of preaching. It was not always so. Indeed, in the period covered by Professor Graves's book, the latter half of the seventeenth century, preaching played a prominent role. The emphasis, however, was on *impromptu* preaching, with the preacher speaking as moved by the Holy Spirit. Any prior preparation disqualified the speaker as being authentically moved by the Spirit of God.

Fortunately, several scores of sermons from 1650 - 1700 were recorded stenographically, and Graves has made good use of this primary material. These sermons include the work of George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends; Stephen Crisp, a successful businessman whose thirty-two remaining sermons outnumber anyone else from this period; Robert Barclay, whom Graves describes as "the most important early Quaker intellectual and the sect's most capable apologist," and William Penn, a revered name in American political and religious history, and a person of undoubted piety and character.

People in the holiness tradition are of course close kin to these early

Quakers. There is the same earnest emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and the same insistence on the importance of sanctification. Thus Stephen Crisp declared that “there is no Justification without Sanctification.” He saw perfection as an absolute part of true salvation; thus “who ever expects Salvation by Christ the only Savior, must be going on to Perfection” (160); and again, “the Faith that falls short of Sanctification, and Redemption from Sin, is such a Faith as God never gave his People, it came some other way into the World” (161). One could hardly say it better, nor could one accuse Crisp of being uncertain in his convictions.

This early Quaker preaching was also emphatic in its application of holiness to everyday life. Part of this application showed itself in plainness of dress and particular patterns of speech; more than that, these seventeenth Quaker sermons dared oppose war, face problems of race and of slavery, and call for gender equality, including the right of women to vote in the church and to preach. (Graves observes, “It has taken four centuries for women to be ordained in the Anglican Church” [181]).

Let me hasten to say that I feel the Quakers went too far in their emphasis on the Holy Spirit and on religious experience. Fox considered the current action of the Holy Spirit, as experienced by the devout, to be trustworthy beyond the Scriptures. I am uneasy with any doctrine that finds its base in experience rather than in Scripture; experience is simply too susceptible to human mood and transient emotion. Barclay was more conservative than Fox, arguing that true revelation will never contradict Scripture; and thus Scripture, interpreted through the Spirit, is always a possible corrective to revelatory misjudgment (120).

With the emphasis on religious experience, it probably isn’t surprising that the first Quakers were skeptical of formal theological education. Thus Robert Barclay — himself a well-educated man — insisted that “a man of good upright heart may learn more in half an hour, and be more certain of it, by waiting upon God and his Spirit in the heart, than by reading a thousand of their [divinity school] volumes; which by filling his head with many needless imaginations, may well stagger his faith, but never confirm it” (124). This language will sound very familiar to any of us who are old enough to have attended certain holiness or Pentecostal camp meetings. It is a frame of mind that still evokes laughter when someone employs an intentional slip of the tongue, making “theological seminary” into “theological cemetery.”

Yet with all of that being said, those of us in theological education ought to be the first to acknowledge that learning without the anointing of God’s Spirit is quite useless in bringing eternal purposes to pass. If Barclay overspoke in his emphasis on experience, we are humbled when we see relatively untrained preachers reaching hearts where we fail to reach either head or heart.

As I read the sermons of Fox, Barclay, Crisp, and Penn, I sensed often

that “you would have had to have been there.” On paper many of these sermons seem like a kind of holy stream of consciousness, with no particular beginning, middle, or end, and no sure point. Perhaps if I had been there, where I could have felt not only the integrity and native eloquence of the preacher, but also the spirit of a devout congregation, I would have been deeply moved. Indeed, I’m sure it would have been so. Something happens, indeed, when the Spirit of God comes upon both preacher and people, something that at least for the moment makes heaven seem very near.

In this respect, I venture that the biblical knowledge of the listeners and their own deep spirituality gave a quality to the preaching that was not necessarily there in the recorded words of the message. The worshipers were persons who knew the Scriptures; thus when the messenger made such references — and such quotes and allusions are constant in these sermons — they heard far more than a twenty-first century audience of the biblically uninformed would be likely to hear.

Personally, I had hoped as I began reading **Preaching Inward Light** that I would get further insight on a subject that fascinates and challenges me, the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I wanted to know how these seventeenth century Quakers prepared themselves to experience “the Inward Light,” and how they knew this was the Holy Spirit and not simply human enthusiasm. I fear I was expecting too much.

Michael P. Graves, who is the Professor of Communication Studies in the School of Communication at Liberty University, has served us well in this very substantial work, and in my judgment Baylor University Press continues to make a signal contribution through its rather wide-ranging publications.

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