

ABSTRACT

THE WESLEYAN DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE

by

Greg Burgner

The purpose of this research was to investigate how the theory of psychological type as articulated by Carl Jung and developed by Isabel Briggs Myers may inform the experience of Christian assurance, most particularly as interpreted through the lens of Wesleyan theology.

Participants in a United Methodist congregation completed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) along with a researcher-designed instrument intended to differentiate respondents' awareness of logical/impersonal/objective features versus relational/personal/subjective characteristics as they relate to their present experience of Christian assurance.

Findings revealed that respondents with preferred thinking on the Myers-Briggs characterized their experience of assurance in terms of logical/impersonal/objective categories, whereas those with preferred feeling favored relational/personal/subjective characterizations.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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During a recent visit to Asbury Theological Seminary, I stayed overnight at Larabee Hall, the building where my father-in-law was residing when he met my mother-in-law, then the dean of women at the college across the street. The next day I went to worship at Estes Chapel, where nearly twenty years ago I was married. The seminary buildings and grounds fill me with memories of professors and friends who mediated to me the love of Jesus.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

When I was sixteen years old, my mother died after a horrid struggle with cancer. I was deeply wounded by the loss but also extremely well defended from my pain by a legion of social and intrapsychic factors, not the least of which was my tenacious, fundamentalist-style faith.

She was with the Lord. All was well. I was unaffected. Only, a year or so later, I found myself in agonizing torment over the state of my mortal soul. Ruminations over the assurance of my salvation would become the consuming obsession of my life. I had “sin[ned] willfully” (Heb. 10:26, KJV) after coming to know the Lord, and so I was in trouble. I did not perfectly understand the atonement, and if I was failing to comprehend the heart of the gospel, I must surely be in desperate straits. At college, I made some Christian friends, but I tried to keep my anxieties largely to myself. If, in my solitude, I have said some version of the *sinner’s prayer* once, I have said it a thousand times.

While studying at Asbury Theological Seminary, I began to deal more publicly with my obsession. I took my concerns to a professor who was equipped in the language of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a personality assessment device developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katherine Briggs, and I disclosed to him what I understood to be my personality type. I have rehearsed his response many times (I trust the story of this encounter is not now too far apocryphal). “You’re never going to be *sure* [original emphasis] of *anything* [original emphasis], but you will experience God at the communion table and in fellowship with other Christians.” The professor was telling me

that, for good or for ill, the way my personality was organized held implications for how I should understand my spiritual life. It suggested certain limitations and potentialities that I should accept as part of the gift of my humanity. Furthermore, the contours of my unique personality should have implications for the patterns of spirituality that should be most meaningful for me, in addition to interpreting those places wherein I was constitutionally challenged.

While at seminary, I learned about the spiritual and theological legacy of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. Part of the Wesleyan heritage is a stress on the doctrine of Christian assurance, which avers that Christians can know, by deep and personal communication with God's Spirit, that they are accepted as the sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:16). According to Methodist teaching, this intuitive conviction is available not only for the spiritual few, but for all (Wesley 1: 287, 298).

The tensions that have marked my spiritual journey are apparent: I was baffled with regard to the nature of the assurance of which Wesley spoke, but I was also quite clear that I seemed to be missing something. Furthermore, the literature reminded me that I was not alone (Ciarrocchi; Van Ornum). I was curious to understand how the application of personality theory might help to interpret the ways assurance is variously manifest within the intricately diverse body of Christ.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how personality theory informs a phenomenology of Christian assurance as it has developed in a Wesleyan environment. The research project measured the relationship between subjects' scores on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and their scores on a researcher-designed instrument to evaluate

their language for the experience of assurance.

Research Questions

Two questions provided the framework for the research project.

Research Question #1

Among individuals from a United Methodist church, what was the relationship between thinking versus feeling preference, as measured by the MBTI, and their awareness of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective features relative to their experience of Christian assurance, as measured by a researcher-designed instrument?

Although the first research question was my primary locus of interest, the study was also the occasion for another, in some ways, more fundamental, investigation.

Research Question #2

What significance did the respondents afford to the question of Christian assurance in their own spirituality? In other words, I was asking whether the question of assurance is still a living issue. A single item added to the researcher-designed instrument provided the clues.

Definitions

This study sought to investigate spiritual experience using the lens of personality theory. Consequently, leading terms come from the fields of Jungian psychology and Christian theology.

MBTI Terminology

Isabel Myer's concepts organize psychic variability in terms of two principal operations, *perceiving* (gathering information) and *judging* (arriving at conclusions).

With regard to perception, each person is presented with two choices for receiving information, either via the five senses (*sensing*) or by an unconscious, intuitive process (*intuition*). With regard to judgment, each person is presented with two options for making decisions, either by impersonal logic (*thinking*) or by a personal and subjective assignment of value (*feeling*; Myers and Myers 1-3).

Of the four mental processes, sensing, intuition, thinking, and feeling, one process will be *dominant* for individuals. The dominant process will be their best developed, most conscious process on which they most readily rely (Myers and Myers 10-12; Quenk 4).

Against both Jung's and Wesley's somewhat fluid understandings of the important category of *feeling*, for the empirical aspect of this study, Myers' definitions provide the necessary precision. Again, *thinking* is that mental process that comes to conclusions via impersonal logic, and *feeling* decides via a personal and subjective assignment of value.

The Language of Assurance

Assurance, particularly for the purpose of the methodological section, is defined as "a sure confidence that, by the merits of Christ," one, indeed, stands presently "reconciled to the favor of God" (J. Wesley 19: 136; Wood 250; Tuttle 199).

Biblical and Theological Foundations

The eclectic nature of the study, and its blending together of biblical, theological, and psychological considerations into what purports to be an authentic empirical design, requires specification of some of the foundational theological premises that operate throughout this document.

Central to all that follows is the theological affirmation that believers can

experience, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the deep conviction of their acceptance by God. The classical scriptural substantiation for the doctrine comes from the eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans: "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs" (vv. 15b-17a, NRSV). Some of the more controversial particulars of the doctrine receive further treatment in the review of the literature, but the existence of an experience that corresponds substantially with Romans 8 is everywhere assumed.

Another New Testament concept provides a rationale for an investigation of the varieties of spiritual experience among individual Christians. Writing about the various gifts of the Holy Spirit in the church, Paul assumes a principle of diversity manifest within a deeper unity: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Quite appropriately, this scriptural text provides the title for the basic handbook on the theory of type, *Gifts Differing* (Myers and Myers).

Methodology of the Study

This was a correlational study using a researcher-designed scale along with the MBTI.

Participants

The participants for the study were members or constituents from a United Methodist congregation who volunteered to complete the MBTI along with the researcher-designed instrument. As a complement to the research protocol, the church provided a short workshop on personality type and spirituality. The sample of thirty-

seven ranged in age from 28 to 79.

Instrumentation

The MBTI is a forced-choice, self-report questionnaire with items designed to place respondents within the four preference dichotomies. The Pathways to Assurance Inventory (PAI) is a collection of ten statements designed to clarify whether, with regard to their experience of Christian assurance, respondents are more aware of logical/impersonal/objective influences or whether relational/personal/subjective influences feature more prominently in their minds.

In order to address research question two, I appended to the PAI an item inquiring into the importance of the matter of assurance in the respondent's own spirituality.

Data Collection

From the sample of thirty-seven participants, I used their scores from the thinking/feeling dichotomy on the MBTI in a continuum format and submitted them to a correlational analysis, comparing their responses on the PAI. For my secondary research question, I noted respondents' responses to an item involving the significance of the matter of assurance for them and submitted the data to the appropriate operations.

Delimitations and Generalizability

Owing to the small sample size, the sample group's homogeneity as representatives of a single United Methodist church, and the paucity of research conducted on the PAI, the study represents itself as only a suggestive and heuristic exploration into the relationship between personality type and the experience of assurance. The MBTI takes into account a multiplicity of interacting dynamics. My choice to concentrate on but one of the preference dichotomies, based on practical

concerns for simplicity, represents a serious weakness. Nevertheless, the evidence, however tentative, is encouraging for the continued use of the MBTI as an investigative tool for probing the interaction between Spirit and psyche.

A collection of particularly willing United Methodists from one congregation is an admittedly idiosyncratic sampling of the Church universal. I chose to argue that the earnestness and spiritual interest assumed to be represented by such a population should not be taken as liabilities but rather as predictors of accuracy and thoughtfulness in their responses. In this sense, the suggestion of some unique applications to the larger church population may be plausible.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 provides an introduction to the biblical, historical, theological, and psychological context of the study. I argue that Wesley's unique construal of faith and assurance is properly understood only by a consideration of the philosophical options current at his time and with a view to the way the constitution of his own personality influenced both his experience of God and his approach to truth. I use the life of Wesley, arguably Christendom's greatest champion of the experience of assurance, as a case study to demonstrate how the theory of psychological type may inform a spiritual biography.

Chapter 3 presents the details of the research design. It describes my attempt to test my reading of history and theology in the experience of "living witnesses" (J. Wesley 18: 248). Chapter 4 reports the results of a study of present-day witnesses regarding the issue of Christian assurance. Chapter 5 offers an interpretive summary and raises tentative suggestions for the church.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Biblical, theological, historical, philosophical, and psychological considerations all weigh in with varying angles of insight into the challenge of interpreting the doctrine of Christian assurance in the lived experience of an individual believer.

Biblical Background

Before entering into an exploration of the doctrine of assurance in the developing history of the Church, a preliminary exegetical inquiry into a few texts of the New Testament lays the foundation from which, by a Christian accounting, the conversation may properly begin.

Romans 8

The classic text for the doctrine of assurance comes from the magnum opus of the Apostle Paul:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:14-17)

The author sets these words within a discussion of life versus death, existence under the rule of “the flesh” (v. 12) versus mortification of “the deeds of the body” (v. 13). In view of such weighty considerations, and the endurance for which they call, Paul encourages his readers with an assurance of their adopted status and the promise of their final glorious inheritance (Barrett 152-53).

C. K. Barrett explicates the passage further. All those who submit to the control of the Spirit, says Paul, have the status of children. Paul’s use of the offspring motif for

believers is rare; in this case the language points to heirship and the promise of final salvation. In verse fifteen, “a spirit of slavery” does not represent any sort of spiritual being but is a rhetorical contrast with “a spirit of adoption.” Barrett translates the latter as “the Spirit that anticipates our adoption as sons” (153). Such language contrasts the hopelessness of the former existence with the confidence of the expectation of the future glory (152-53).

Against any modern stigma of “second class status” associated with adoption, F. F. Bruce assures the modern reader that in Roman culture a son was chosen for adoption for the sake of name and inheritance: “[H]e was in no whit inferior in status” (157).

The cry, “Abba! Father!” has stimulated considerable discussion. Against the suggestion that the words are a metonym for a lengthier prayer, perhaps the Lord’s Prayer, E. A. Obeng counters that they stand alone and complete (364-65). Joachim Jeremias stresses the uniqueness of Jesus’ use of “my Father” and, in particular, the Arabic *Abba* in address to God. As witnessed by references in the Roman and Galatian epistles, Jesus’ prayer reverberated widely in the church (*New Testament Theology* 64-65). Commenting on the Romans passage, Ben Witherington, III interprets that the cry comes at the prompting of the Spirit, audibly, intelligibly. The language of the text likely reflects Paul’s own usage, and he appears to be writing with the assumption that his readers are similarly acquainted with the phraseology (218).

The conversation continues regarding the usage of *Abba* as culled from the domain of home and family (Stott 223). Jeremias sees Jesus’ form of divine address as an instance of bold theological innovation (*Prayers of Jesus* 62). Gerhard Kittel reads in the language of Jesus an entirely novel and, most likely, offensive familiarity of children

addressing their fathers (6). N. Thomas Wright notes how the term was also employed by adults, but still maintains the affectionate, personal connotation (“Letter to the Romans” 593). Kittel connects the appearance of the term in the churches with Jesus’ own usage; it signifies an assumption of Jesus’ relationship to God (6; see also Wright, “Letter to the Romans” 593).

Witherington compares alternate readings of verse sixteen: “the Spirit bears witness *to* [original emphasis] our spirit” versus “the Spirit bears witness *with* [original emphasis] our spirit” (218). With either translation, the Spirit’s witness has priority, with the believer’s intimate response to God as a result. The witness, he notes, should not be equated with the cry, which manifests what has already taken place internally (218-19).

The New English Bible translates the text, “In that cry the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:16). Such a reading might involve an allusion to the Deuteronomic requirement of two witnesses to corroborate testimony (Deut. 19:15). Alternatively, John Stott questions whether experience allows the distinction between the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the human being, and whether the placing of the two side by side would in any case be appropriate (234).

Verse seventeen points ahead to the outcome of the believer’s adoption: the enjoyment of the heirship, shared jointly with Christ, which inheritance is conditioned on participating with Christ in suffering for his cause (Witherington 219).

Romans 5

William J. Abraham notes how the following text serves in segments of Christianity as “the charter for a doctrine of Christian assurance” (437): “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of

God” (Rom. 8:15b-16, NRSV). The passage is, however, but one among a number of readings that bear on this belief. Earlier in Romans, Paul speaks of a “hope [that] does not disappoint us” by reason of “God’s love [that] has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (5:5). James D. G. Dunn reports a consensus that *God’s love* should be interpreted as God’s love directed toward its recipients, and not the other way around (252). Contrariwise, Wright prefers the objective genitive reading (“Letter to the Romans” 517). Dunn highlights the experiential quality of the language and notes that Paul does not take pains to distinguish between the impartation of the Spirit and the manifestation of God’s love. Dissecting the differences, in experience, would be difficult. Paul is seeking to describe an experientially weighted dynamic with language intimating the dawning of the anticipated new age (253). Whether the passage signifies God’s love directed toward us or vice versa, the experiential element might serve in either case as a harbinger of hope.

1 John

If Romans 5 suggests a dramatic experience of the Holy Spirit as basis for hope, 1 John presents a number of rational evidences for assurance: “*By this we may be sure* [emphasis mine] that we are in him: whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked” (2:5b-6). “*We know that we have passed from death to life* [emphasis mine] because we love one another” (3:14a). Even in the midst of these forceful theorems, however, the experience of assurance cannot be understood apart from the agency of the Spirit: “And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us” (3:24b). I. Howard Marshall raises a number of issues regarding the manifestation of this assurance: (1) whether it goes back to the confidence of the *Abba* prayer, (2) whether it

involves an inward awareness of divine belovedness, and (3) whether John has in mind a *charismatic* encounter with the Spirit's power. Marshall suggests a providence in John's silence along these lines: By not specifying a phenomenon, he saved his readers from the temptation to exalt that experience as the measure for the spiritual life. He concludes that the better part of wisdom is to avoid dogmatic insistence on any one manifestation of the Spirit (202-03).

Historical Review

The following section reports an historical review of the doctrine of assurance as it leads up to the eighteenth century and the days of the Methodist revival when the witness of the Spirit took such a prominent position in the annals of Christian theology.

Stoeffler's Analytical Nomenclature

F. Ernest Stoeffler outlines a scheme of alternative means for reaching religious certitude and then summarizes the various ways the question has been addressed within the history of the church. *External authority* finds expression in the confidence of the children's song, "Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 191) or perhaps in an uncritical confidence in an organization. *Inference* includes the classic proofs for the probable existence of God. *Direct apprehension* involves a certainty of experience, of immediate, personal encounter with God. The confidence of direct apprehension is that which grounds the witness of the apostles. Jesus spoke with an authority that set him apart from the scribes, the same kind of authority as was later manifest in the words of Paul: "I know the one in whom I have put my trust" (2 Tim. 1:12). It is the fruit of personal acquaintance (Stoeffler 130).

Stoeffler sketches a developing history of Christian assurance: Through the time

of the early Church up to the Middle Ages, direct apprehension carried the day. Then, in the moral and intellectual morass occasioned by the barbarian invasions, immediate apprehension gave way to a naïve faith in external authority and the institution of the Church. The certainty of direct apprehension was replaced by nothing more sanguine than the limpid reach of uncertain hope. Later on, the scholastic teachers caught an occasional glimpse of the confidence of the fathers, but, by and large, they only replaced a certainty obtained via external authority with that which could be attained by means of inference. Disputes between the competing understandings of faith led to the compromise of Trent, which declared the impossibility of certain, infallible knowledge with regard to one's possession of grace. If, however, the official Roman Catholic position has left out the possibility of spiritual assurance, the mode of direct apprehension has been maintained by the mystics (130-32).

Inside the debates of Trent, the champion of the Scotists—the school that followed twelfth-century teacher Duns Scotus—argued for the certainty of grace. Martin Luther, himself situated in the Scotist heritage, had followed his own longings for certainty to the monastic life. His eventual spiritual breakthrough involved the experience of salvation by faith and, with it, a return to that mode of certainty experienced by the primitive church. A subsequent sacramentalism in his own thinking led to a cold scholasticism among his theological descendants, but later on, the Pietist movement championed a return to the robust faith that Luther had first understood and experienced (Stoeffler 132-33; Hastings 326).

Following Luther, and holding together inferential certainty with certainty via direct apprehension, John Calvin writes of faith as being “both revealed to our minds,

and confirmed to our hearts” (qtd. in Stoeffler 133). Although he generally includes both inferential and experiential elements as constitutive aspects of assurance, he seems to favor the latter (133).

Stoeffler’s survey goes on to note the undulating patterns of emphasis within developing Reformed theology, the ideas of a number of the English Puritans, the influence of Jacob Arminius, the witness of the Moravians, and the insurgence of Enlightenment rationalism. By the time of Wesley, the approach to certainty via direct apprehension was in danger of losing the day (133-34).

If Stoeffler’s approach lacks a certain nuance (Noll 162), the conceptual schema serves well as a means to speak of the alternative avenues to certainty. In particular, the category of *inference*, as distinguished from immediate or *direct apprehension*, appears regularly as the more detailed discussion ensues.

Apostolic Christianity

Arthur S. Yates offers an interpretive survey of assurance and the Apostolic Church. As portrayed in the gospels, the situation of the disciples following the crucifixion of Christ falls far short of settled assurance. Post-resurrection encounters with the Lord offered them encouragement; nonetheless, the disciples still lacked the confidence necessary for the task that would lie before them. Jesus’ final words in Luke anticipate something significant yet to come: “[S]tay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49b). Then came Pentecost: wind, fire, tongues. Yates concentrates on the spiritual reality behind the manifestations. Prominent in that experience is the assurance of salvation. The ending of Peter’s first sermon sounds the note of certitude: “Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that

God has made him both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). A watchword in Acts becomes boldness: “[T]hey were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (4:31b). Yates links *boldness* with the Greek term for “full assurance” and relates the motif of Pentecostal power to the witness of the Spirit: ““And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit”” (Acts 5:32). Then, after reviewing correspondences between Pentecost and Wesley’s experience at Aldersgate, Yates interprets the “in Christ” language of Paul and the larger New Testament corpus to suggest a mystical union with the divine, along with the assurance that such a unity necessarily entails (139-44).

The Patristic Period

In a 1755 letter to Richard Tompson, Wesley touches on assurance and the Patristics:

[W]ith regard to the assurance of faith, I apprehend that the whole Christian Church in the first centuries enjoyed it. For though we have few points of doctrine explicitly taught in the small remains of the ante-Nicene Fathers, yet I think none that carefully reads Clemens Romanus, Ignatious, Polycarp, Origen, or any other of them, can doubt whether either the writer himself possessed it or all whom he mentions as real Christians. (Telford 3: 137)

Yates continues to guide this study, beginning with two initial observations. He acknowledges a relative paucity in the Patristic writings of a certain type of language related to assurance. In addition, he notes a marked difference distinguishing the “fervent experience of spiritual certainty” in the earliest days of the Church from the more prosaic language of the fathers (149).

Nevertheless, a spiritual fervency is abundantly present in *The Epistle of St. Clement*, a letter that has been dated concurrently with the Gospel of John (Gregg v):

How gracious and admirable are the gifts of God, beloved! Life in immortality, activity in righteousness, truth in confidence, faith in assurance, temperateness in sanctification! And if all these are now within our apprehension, what must be the things that are being prepared? (49)

Later, the letter's language suggests an experience of mystical insight:

Through Him [Christ] let us gaze into the heavenly heights; through Him we behold as in a mirror His flawless and transcendent visage. Through Him the eyes of our heart were opened; through Him our mind, once foolish and hidden in darkness, shoots up unto the light. (51)

One is reminded of the words of Charles Wesley's classic, "And Can It Be That I Should Gain": "[T]hine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 363). The language suggests a breathtaking epiphany.

The Middle Ages and the Council of Trent

Along with Stoeffler, Yates names the medieval period as a time of trust in "external authority" (136). Auguste Sabatier's assessment suggests the force of authoritarianism during this period:

In the Middle Ages the method of authority, lording it over the human mind, dominated in all sciences. A proposition of Aristotle, an utterance of Scripture, a dictum of the Fathers, a decision of a council, settled officially, and for most men quite as fitly, a problem of physics, astronomy, or history as a problem of morals or philosophy. (xvi)

It was one of those councils that Wesley ardently opposed. Under the heading, "AGAINST THE VAIN CONFIDENCE OF HERETICS," the Council of Trent decreed, "[N]o one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God" (Schroeder 35). As J. G. Tasker reports, Trent pitted Ambrosius Katharinus, the Scotist, against Dominicus da Soto, who represented the victorious position of Thomas Aquinas (Hastings 326).

In his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas asks whether persons may know

they possess grace, and posits three routes to knowledge: (1) *revelation*—God sometimes favors persons with this revealed knowledge, as a “special privilege” (1143). (2) *of themselves, with certitude*, “*by its proper principle* [emphasis mine]”; except the principle, in the question of grace, is the unknowable God, and (3) *inferential indicators*—persons may know they possess grace if they are aware of their love for God, of their disdain for the accoutrements of the world, and if they are unaware of any “mortal sin” (1143). Nonetheless, the knowledge supplied by inference is limited at best.

The Roman Catholic scholar Stephen Pfürtner suggests that since the days of Trent, Catholic pundits have read Aquinas wrongly, with their Protestant counterparts following suit. While Aquinas denied the “certainty of grace,” he did not reject the “certainty of hope.” According to Pfürtner, he did indeed teach the “certainty of salvation,” interpreted in terms of a solid confidence in a God who forgives and saves (104-10). One wonders if further engagement with Aquinas’s nuanced treatment of the paradoxes of faith may promise hope for increasing dialogue between Catholics and Protestants.

With Trent, the relatively agnostic position regarding spiritual assurance won the day, at least in the arena of policy. However, Tasker reminds the reader that official pronouncements do not necessarily circumscribe the limits of lived experience (Hastings 326). Representing the mystical tradition within Catholicism, the twelfth century reformer Bernard of Clairvaux offers a poetic vision of the spiritual life. He speaks of the Son’s act of revelation via “the kiss” which is the Holy Spirit. He refers to a divine, Spirit-mediated revelation that does not illumine the intellect alone, but the affections, as well. “[I]t also fires with love” (Evans 238). In another line Bernard seems not at all timid

in expressing testimony to certainty by *direct apprehension*: ““What soul among you all but hath at some times felt the Spirit of His Son in the secret conscience, crying, Abba, Father?”” (qtd. in Yates 162). The affective component seems for Bernard a universal component of Christian experience.

The Reformation

Pförtner offers that, since the days of Augustine, the issue of Christian assurance has hovered on the theological agenda. With Martin Luther, it moved to center stage (29).

Martin Luther. Pförtner tells the tale of a young monk, in travail of soul, yearning for release from sin and for the grace of God, both fearing hell and craving the assurance of salvation. The way ahead, according to received teaching, lay in a theology of performance. He reveals his then notion of justification: “I wanted to live so devoutly and so strictly through my own works ... that I could appear before God and say: ‘Here you have holiness’” (qtd. in Pförtner 32). Sanctification by self-effort brought no peace; neither did prayer or the sacraments. Luther continues, “When I was most devout, I went doubting to the altar and doubting also I came away from it. If I had said my penance, I still doubted; and if I had not said it, then too I doubted” (qtd. in Pförtner 32). The futility of self-salvation was apparent (30-33).

Pförtner notes how at this point Luther’s notion of God’s justice significantly determined his conception of God. The divine justice had to do with reward according to merit; it implicated a punishing, condemning God. The result for Luther was a near-blasphemous anger combined with unassuageable guilt (33).

Then, after studying Paul’s letter to the Romans, Luther came upon a new richness in the phrase, “the justice of God.” For the tormented religionist, God’s justice

came to mean “the passive justice by means of which God justifies us through faith” (qtd. in Pfürtner 34).

Luther was relating with a different deity, not the condemning, vengeful God of his past imaginings, but a generous, gracious God of the Prodigal Son. Despair gave way to sublime confidence: “[I]t was as if I had been completely new-born and as if I had entered through open doors into paradise itself” (qtd. in Pfürtner 35). The merciful God, not self-effort, was the ground of his justification. Salvation was utterly certain.

Questioning the surety of one’s salvation was incompatible with genuine faith. One might just as well say one questioned the power and grace of God (33-36).

Pfürtner notes how, in the face of personal temptation, Luther set his attention on God and trusted the good news in Christ. When tempted sorely to despair, he addressed inner confusion with an appeal toward external, objective reality: “I am baptized” (qtd. in Pfürtner 150). Indeed, the later Luther has been accused of an unhelpful emphasis on the sacraments (Stoeffler 133). Aligning evidences from Luther’s writing and life with the theology of assurance, Herbert B. Workman detects a note of experiential certainty. He then goes on to bemoan a move in the elder Luther toward a reductionistic, intellectualized understanding of faith that undermines the experience of assurance (23-25). Mark A. Noll remarks that Luther seems unspecific with regard to the possibility of a direct, as opposed to inferential, apprehension of one’s relationship with Christ (163). A reading from Luther’s commentary on Galatians may demonstrate not only the importance of certainty for the reformer but also its largely (at least in this instance) inferential character:

Let everyone accustom himself ... to believe for a certainty that he is in a state of grace.... But if he senses that he is in doubt, let him exercise his

faith, struggle against the doubt, and strive for certainty, so that he can say: “I know that I have been accepted.... If I am a sinner, and if I err, He [Christ] is righteous and cannot err. Besides, I enjoy hearing, reading, singing, and writing about Him. There is nothing I want more than to make His Gospel known to the world and to convert many people.” (379)

The struggle for assurance, in this instance, is based on a reliance on the faithfulness of Christ and on the evidences of genuine piety.

John Calvin. According to Noll, Calvin, unlike Luther, clearly articulates an approach to assurance involving certainty by direct apprehension (163). Faith, for Calvin, is a “firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (20: 551). Faith, a product of the Spirit, involves both knowledge and will, a combination of cognitive and affective and volitional components (Plantinga 244, 247, 249). In a section of the *Institutes* dealing with the value of the sacraments for confirming faith, Calvin names three divine blessings: “[F]irst, the Lord teaches and instructs us by his Word. Secondly, he confirms it by the sacraments. Finally, he illumines our minds by the light of his Holy Spirit and opens our hearts for the Word and sacraments to enter in” (21: 1283-84). In the end, the divine operations of illumination and preparation enable Word and sacraments to accomplish their work.

Faith, for Calvin, involves a personal, inward appropriation of the promises of God (20: 561). Regarding the noetic aspect of faith, Calvin reckons with the uniqueness, not only of the subject matter, but also the way it is apprehended:

When we call faith “knowledge” we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man’s mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained, it does not comprehend what it feels. (559)

These comments evince the same straining after language that is later revealed in Wesley.

Calvin interprets the words “sure and firm” (20: 560) (earlier, “firm and certain” [551]) to speak of a “more solid constancy of persuasion” (560). A vacillating, confused faith will not do; it “requires full and fixed certainty, such as men are wont to have from things experienced and proved” (560). No one is a true believer who does not grasp “an undoubted expectation of salvation” (562). If this seems rigidly dogmatic, Calvin goes on to offer a sensitive, nuanced, and strikingly frank portrayal of the life of faith as an admixture of confidence with pressing ambiguity, certainty with doubt: “Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety” (562). For scriptural substantiation, he turns to the Old Testament.

Calvin uses King David and the Psalms as a case study in faith that continues to believe in the face of doubt. In the midst of all of his anguished lament, David’s faith perseveres (20: 562-64). For Calvin, the “godly heart” (564) is a divided one, a combination of sweetness and grief, settledness and tremulousness, joy and terror. Life in the present never finds cure for the “disease of unbelief” (564). Life in the present does not afford a perfect faith.

Nonetheless, for Calvin, the adjectives *certain* and *clear* may stand. Distraction does not imply a divorce. Agitation does not imply immersion. One may be “struck [but] ... not for that reason cast down” (20: 564). At the end of the day faith stands triumphant over the besieging trials.

Nicholas Wolterstorff offers a contemporary interpretation of Calvin’s understanding of faith. One may hold a belief with a limited degree of confidence and yet

maintain that belief with *tenacity*. In his reading of Calvin, the call is for tenacity, perseverance, and steadfastness of belief in the face of the unavoidable incursions of doubt. Wolterstorff reads the modern philosophical concept of tenacity, as opposed to levels of confidence, as a recurrent theme in Calvin's writing (412).

For those who are presently assailed by doubt, Calvin offers his own pastoral insight. Against the schemes of unbelief, he encourages the believer to lay hold of the Word of God and the promises of his mercy and pardon. "Thus the godly mind, however strange the ways in which it is vexed and troubled, finally surmounts all difficulties, and never allows itself to be deprived of assurance of divine mercy" (20: 566). In addition, as was noted earlier, Calvin affirms the role of the sacraments in the confirmation and development of faith. The Genevan is clear, however, that the efficacy of the sacraments is dependent upon the "inward teacher, . . . by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in" (21: 1284). Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments are without effect (1284).

Abraham notes how Calvin and his disciples (not uniquely) turned to the inner witness of the Spirit to substantiate their view of Scripture as the location of God's word (442). Wesley operates with a narrower definition. Wesleyan and Reformed understandings regarding Christian certainty will diverge, as well, with regard to their respective positions on predestination and divine election. In technical terms, Wesley taught the *assurance of faith*, the belief that one could be assured that one was presently a child of God. God vouchsafes to only a few an assurance of ultimate salvation (Telford 5: 358). Contrariwise, the Calvinist position, connected to the eternal decrees of God, emphasizes this latter confidence; though, one may alternatively argue, predestination

vitiates assurance by withholding the certainty of one's election (Yates 167).

Calvin's emphasis on assurance and on a faith "both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (20: 551) may succeed in holding in tandem aspects of Stouffler's "certainty by inference" and "certainty by direct apprehension." A developing distillation of Reformed thought, the Westminster Confession, acknowledges the rational quality of faith, even as it affirms a communication between spirits:

This certainty is not a bare conjecture and probable persuasion grounded upon fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith—founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which the promises are made, the testimony of the spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits. (Bettenson 349)

As this document makes clear, by the time Wesley was born, the biblical language of the witness of the Spirit was part of the settled theological parlance of the day. The sections that follow treat the life and teaching of the English evangelist as a rich and variform, sometimes puzzling, but always intriguing commentary on this most provocative of biblical motifs.

John Wesley. Noll remarks that Wesley's doctrine of assurance adds virtually nothing original to what has been articulated in other theologies. His contribution to the conversation has consisted in a renewed emphasis and vitality (165). Indeed, Wesley interprets a providential design in the emergence of this Methodist teaching, a doctrine well on its way to extinction (1: 285-86).

J. Wesley clarifies his teaching on assurance in two of his standard sermons published in 1746 and 1767 under the title, "The Witness of the Spirit" (1: 267-98). I review the second, revised text with a view toward Wesley's basic position.

Wesley defines the “testimony of the Spirit”:

an inward impression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that “Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me”; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God. (1: 287)

That witness does not imply an audible voice nor, necessarily, an inner vocalization, though the latter may sometimes be present. An awareness of a certain text of Scripture may or may not accompany the experience. The significant factor is the immediacy of impact, unexplainable yet effective in producing peace, confident rest, the clear persuasion that all is forgiven. It is intuitive, not the result of rational discourse, but prior to it (287-89).

This *immediate* witness J. Wesley differentiates from believers’ *indirect* witness, “the testimony of our own spirit” (1: 289), something like the voice of a good conscience, the product of analysis into the movements of the soul. It is based on inference, which reasons from the teaching of Scripture and believers’ own self-awareness to conclusions based on the evidence of spiritual fruit in their lives (287-88).

The witness of the Spirit precedes the witness of the believer’s spirit. Since Christians must know they are beloved of God before they can begin to respond in love, God’s direct witness is necessarily prior to their subsequent deductions (J. Wesley 1: 289-90).

J. Wesley takes on a number of objections to his design (1: 293-96). In his reply he recommends an attitude of circumspection toward one’s experience of the direct witness: “[L]et every man who believes he ‘hath the witness in himself’ *try* [original emphasis] whether it be of God. If the fruit follow, it is; otherwise, it is not” (295). Wesley allows for no supposed direct witness that will not admit of objective evaluation.

The potential for delusion, for believing one has the direct witness when one does not, is real. The witness of the Spirit does not stand on its own but is necessarily conjoined with the confirming inferential witness. “And while they are joined we cannot be deluded: their testimony can be depended on. They are fit to be trusted in the highest degree, and need nothing else to prove what they assert” (295). The matter is settled.

Although J. Wesley enjoins an attitude of caution when one claims the witness of the Spirit (1: 297), he is not at all tentative about the doctrine itself. The experience of thousands has confirmed it (290-91). In instances of testing, the indirect witness alone may prove insufficient to sustain the afflicted soul (296-97).

The sermon closes with two corollaries. First, one should never settle for any presumed witness of the Spirit that is not immediately accompanied by fruit. During times of trial, the fruit may become less apparent, but the fundamental part remains. Second, one should never settle for any assumptive fruit that does not spring from the prior witness of the Spirit. Under God’s prevenient grace, certain genuine evidences of Christian affections may appear prior to one having received one’s justification. To stop short of the direct witness would be dangerous. The witness of the Spirit is essential to believers’ assurance, to their abiding peace. Seekers should be in earnest prayer until they have received for themselves that which is vouchsafed to every member of God’s family (J. Wesley 1: 297-98).

A Developmental History of Wesley and Assurance

In order to inform a fuller understanding of Wesley and his doctrine of assurance, a narrative account illustrates how his teaching developed within the personal and professional contexts of his life.

The Oxford Period

In a July 1725 letter to his mother, Susanna, the young J. Wesley proffers a rationalistic definition of faith: “Faith is a species of belief, and belief is defined, an assent to a proposition upon rational grounds. Without rational grounds there is therefore no belief, and consequently no faith.” In this letter Wesley expresses an agnostic position regarding ultimate perseverance, along, already, with his conviction that assurance of present salvation is a real possibility—based, at this point, on one’s evaluation of one’s own “sincerity” (25: 175).

A letter written four months later, again to Susanna, demonstrates the malleability of his developing theology. J. Wesley agrees with his mother “that saving faith . . . is an assent to what God has revealed, because he has revealed it, and not because the truth of it may be evinced by reason” (25: 188). Science and faith are two different matters. Once again, in a letter to Susanna, now writing from Lincoln College near the end of the decade, Wesley differentiates faith from other categories of assent and, more precisely, from knowledge, as resting on different types of evidence. Hope, he suggests, is a distinct category of its own, depending on evidences different from both faith and knowledge; they are, Wesley surmises, scripture coupled with one’s evaluation of one’s own sincerity. He quotes with high praise a reading from Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Dying*, which includes these instructions: “As we hate sin, and grow in grace, and arrive at the state of holiness, which is also a state of repentance and imperfection, but yet of sincerity of heart and diligent endeavour, in the same degree we are to judge concerning the forgiveness of sins” (244-45). The question remains how to know whether one is *sufficiently* sincere. He writes to Ann Granville in October 1731, offering, “[O]ur hope is sincerity, not

perfection, not to do well, but to do our best” (317-18). Again, one wonders what are the criterion of the measure.

The early Methodist movement at Oxford was famous for its rigorous attention to the details of one’s service to God and neighbor. Richard P. Heitzenrater sees in what seems Wesley’s frantically assiduous piety the evidence of a quest for assurance. A dependence upon his own sincerity led to anxiety and compulsiveness. Colleagues interpreted Methodist practice as legalism (*Wesley and the People* 43-44).

The Georgian Reckoning

In August 1735, John Burton, a friend of J. Wesley and a trustee of the colony of Georgia, invited Wesley to join the work in America (J. Wesley 25: 434-35). In a letter dated 10 October, the soon-to-be missionary discloses his motivations for accepting the invitation. One secondary consideration is the promise of accomplishing a greater good across the Atlantic, but Wesley’s primary concern is the more telling: “My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathens” (25: 439). This provocative confession anticipates two significant features of the later Methodist revival: the primacy of soteriology and the confirming effect of the practice of ministry.

The checkered details of J. Wesley’s stint as a missionary highlight the *before* section of standard Methodist legend. Wesley had from his youth carried a passionate aversion for the sea (18: 222). His journal reports the way that rough waters on the journey to America betray his own lack of preparedness for death. Against his own shameful self-recriminations, Wesley remarked at the striking equanimity of a group of German passengers. Violent seas assaulted a worship service onboard the *Simmonds*,

covering the vessel, splitting the mainsail, but the Germans persevered undaunted.

Wesley rehearsed a conversation with one unruffled representative following the ordeal:

“‘Was you not afraid?’ He answered, ‘I thank God, no.’ I asked, ‘But were not your women and children afraid?’ He replied mildly, ‘No; our women and children are not afraid to die’” (136-43). The man’s simple response reveals a profound experience.

Shortly after arriving in America, J. Wesley encountered August Gottlieb Spangenberg, a Moravian pastor, and received a strikingly direct interrogation: “My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?” Wesley was unable to answer with commensurate directness (18: 145-46). Following a less-than-exemplary success among the colonists and Indians of Georgia, the earnest clergyman confessed his own spiritual apprehensions: “I went to America, to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me?” (18: 211). An entry from a couple weeks prior is no less self-condemning:

By the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling, I am convinced ... [o]f unbelief; having no such faith in Christ as will prevent my heart from being troubled; which it could not be, if I believed in God, and rightly believed also in him. (208)

Wesley had at this point apparently embraced an understanding of saving faith that “implies peace in life and in death” (209), an imperturbable quiescence reminiscent of the Moravians’ composure aboard the *Simmonds*.

The Road to Aldersgate

By the end of 1737, J. Wesley’s season in Georgia was complete. In a February 1738 journal entry, Wesley reflects on his experience: “But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I the least of all suspected), that I who went to America to

convert others, was never myself converted to God” (18: 214). He voices his yearning for the unassailable confidence of Moravian spirituality: “The faith I want is, ‘a sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God’” (215-16). He turns to the Scriptures as a standard of a robust confidence, saying, “I want that faith which St. Paul recommends to all the world.... I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it” (216). Such a definition of faith, he goes on, implies not only freedom from sin but also freedom from fear and doubt (215-16).

In a matter of months, both John and his brother Charles reported profound experiences of faith and assurance. In an extract from his journal, J. Wesley publishes a synopsis of his spiritual development leading up to 24 May of that year. Significantly, it reveals Wesley’s developing criterion for true Christian faith as shaped in conversation with Peter Böhler, according to whom genuine faith is accompanied by victory over sin and “constant peace from a sense of forgiveness” (qtd. in Wesley 18: 248). Initially, Wesley understands his deficiency in faith as a matter of degree. “Again, I knew not that I was *wholly void of this faith* [original emphasis], but only thought *I had not enough* [original emphasis] of it” (247). Böhler’s rather absolute insistence on “dominion over sin” and “constant peace” (qtd. in Wesley 18: 248) strike the churchman as something of “a new gospel” (248). Again, significantly, and tellingly for an understanding of his theological methodology, Wesley submits the debate to “Scripture and experience,” the latter inquiry involving conversation with three “living witnesses” of Bohler’s teaching (248).

Once again, the necessary fruits of genuine faith, according to J. Wesley’s

Moravian mentor, were freedom from sin coupled with ““constant peace from a sense of forgiveness”” (qtd. in Wesley 18: 248). This experience of forgiveness was, Wesley surmised, a phenomena seated in the affections: “I well saw, no one could (in the nature of things) have such a sense of forgiveness, and not *feel* [original emphasis] it” (248). Only, in this locus lay the problem: “But I felt it not” (248). Nonetheless, Wesley’s investigation of the Scriptures, coupled with the testimony produced by Böhler’s “living witnesses” was evidence enough. Wesley would embark on a radical renunciation of any trust in works righteousness, along with a corresponding search for a radical and personal trust in Christ (247-49).

What proceeds in the lines that follow represents the heart of Methodist lore:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* [original emphasis] sins, even *mine* [original emphasis], and saved *me* [original emphasis] from the law of sin and death. (Wesley 18: 249-50)

The language is at once theological and personal, full of conceptual meaning but centered in the heart.

The events of 24 May 1738 may be variously interpreted, but the significance of the issues involved is clear: Wesley’s developing understanding of salvation by faith, along with his teaching on personal assurance, were critical components of a movement that would soon reshape the religious landscape of England and the world. Nonetheless, against any simplistic or triumphalist interpretation of Wesley and the revival he led, an unprejudiced review must also seek to digest the several disclosures of ongoing struggles with doubt that continued to assail Wesley even into the maturity of his life and ministry.

Important, as well, are the refinement and nuance he articulates on the subject of Christian assurance in its various manifestations.

Refinement and nuance are traits that usually emerge over time. During the days immediately following Aldersgate, at least Wesley's *public* presentation of his theology and experience revealed a striking absence of these qualities. A letter to his brother Samuel from a dismayed observer reports on Wesley's recent revelation (the Sunday after Aldersgate) to people gathered in her home that, until recently, he had not been a true believer, which he followed with the challenge that they, too, should themselves all renounce any presumptions about their own spiritual standing (Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley* 261-62). However, admissions of his own continuing ambivalence in the season following Aldersgate evince much less bravura. In the aforementioned extract from his journal, after victory at Aldersgate, doubts immediately arose: "[I]t was not long before the enemy suggested, 'This cannot be faith; for where is the joy?'" (J. Wesley 18: 250). A response to this qualm came readily enough, but the psychological warfare continued. Apparently, Wesley could neither fully experience nor accept the Böhler-style Moravian teaching, with its absolute expectations of unperturbed faith, admitting of no degrees (250-54).

To the Continent and Back

By the middle of June, J. Wesley was on his way to Europe full of questions and confusion but also with the anticipation that by conferring with the German branch of the Moravian church he might reach a more settled faith. Wesley's preaching choices the Sunday before his departure seem striking: He twice preaches the sermon "Salvation by Faith," itself a clear and authoritative statement of an evangelical understanding of faith

(18: 254-55; 1: 120-21). One is reminded of Böhler's earlier encouragement to his troubled protégé in the face of assailing doubts: "Preach faith *till* [original emphasis] you have it, and then, *because* [original emphasis] you have it, you *will* [original emphasis] preach faith" (18: 228). The episode presaged what might be considered a lifelong theme—a capacity in Wesley to minister "beyond the limits of his own faith" (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People* 224; see also Rack 550).

After arriving on the continent, about a week following a brief conversation with the leader of the Moravians in Germany, Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People* 82), the question arose with regard to the necessity of assurance for salvation. Wesley listened eagerly, one may be sure, to the Count's teaching: Justification and the corresponding assurance, said the Count, are not coterminous. One may not know that one is in a state of justification until much later. J. Wesley was quick to contrast the Count's remarks with the teachings of his friend, Mr. Böhler (18: 259-61).

On Sunday, 17 September, J. Wesley returned to preaching on home soil, and in a matter of days, he was embroiled in controversy over the doctrine of assurance (19: 12). In a rejoinder to Arthur Bedford, he agreed with regard to three propositions: "(1), that an assurance of salvation is not of the essence of faith; (2), that a true believer may wait long before he hath it; and (3), that after he hath it, it may be weakened and intermitted." Only, his difference with Mr. Bedford involved definitions: Wesley understands an *assurance of salvation* to denote a confidence in the present condition of one's soul (25: 562-63). Bedford speaks of perseverance. In addition, rather than speaking of "assurance of salvation," Wesley prefers the language, "the assurance of faith" (563), which is not to be equated with faith itself but is a unique dispensation of the Spirit. Interestingly, at this

point, Wesley is not willing to countenance that an assurance of final perseverance might be available even to a limited number of souls. Later on, he will not discount that reality (563; Telford 5: 358).

In his letter to Bedford, J. Wesley explains a strikingly nuanced understanding of the doctrine of assurance. The “full assurance of faith,” taken from Hebrews 10:22, involves the conviction that one possesses a degree of genuine faith in Christ and that one presently stands in a justified status. It arrives in varying degrees to different souls according to the will of God, but it is vouchsafed to all, and so Wesley trusts that in good time all true believers will be given the assurance that they abide in the grace of God (25: 564). A mere four months after Aldersgate, Wesley was a far cry from the absolutist position of the English Moravians. One may grant that some of Wesley’s earlier pronouncements express the necessity of full assurance (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People* 85), but the sense of the Bedford response seems much in keeping with his more mature teaching.

If, in his correspondence with Bedford, J. Wesley is careful not to impose an absolute standard of assurance on others, a letter to his brother Samuel finds him rather more demanding on himself. First of all, he expresses his conviction that all Christians who do not have the witness of the Spirit should pray to receive it. For himself, he adds, it is “necessary for my salvation” (25: 594). One cannot help but be curious with regard to his reasoning.

Heitzenrater notes the coincidence, toward the end of 1738, of J. Wesley’s public message of Moravian-style salvation by faith with a season of concentrated self-assessment (*Wesley and the People* 86). In October of that year, he analyzed himself vis-

à-vis the various fruit of the Spirit. On some measures, he was hopeful, but when he considered love toward God, he was frigid. When he looked at joy, he saw nothing that lasted. When he looked for peace, he saw nothing that was not susceptible to wavering. When others judged his faith as nonexistent, he, too, was inclined to join along in the doubt (19: 18-19). All of these shortcomings, and more, notwithstanding, he reports, “I nevertheless trust that I have a measure of faith and am ‘accepted in the Beloved’” (19). These honest reports of the earnest clergyman seem reminiscent of Calvin’s ideas of a necessary ambivalence of faith in the here and now. As this study proceeds, I shall attempt to answer whether and how Wesley arrived at a place of confidence beyond this conflicted self-recrimination.

The Bristol Revolution

In March 1739, George Whitefield, Wesley’s colleague in the Methodist movement, invited his friend to come and assume the leadership of a revival in Bristol, a growing port city on the southwestern coast of England. After agreeing with his fellows at the society on Fetter Lane to refer his decision to the drawing of lots, J. Wesley was on his way to “this new period of my life” (19: 37-38). *This new period of my life*—such a pedestrian phrase would not begin to describe the revolution in which Wesley was about to be engaged. Before long, he would be preaching in the open air before thousands, organizing small groups, and attending society gatherings (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People* 99-100). Commentators variously relate this season of fruitful extroversion to the preacher’s historical struggle with assurance. Yates asserts that, after Wesley had given himself without reservation to the outward conduct of the revival, lapses were few (17). Heitzenrater interprets that Wesley found his personal faith confirmed in the way the

people responded to his message (*Wesley and the People* 102). Albert C. Outler makes the observation more poetically: Recalling Böhler's encouragement to "preach faith till you have it," he remarks how Wesley "had preached faith until *others* [original emphasis] had it, and now his own was confirmed by theirs" (17)! The triumph in Bristol, Outler remarks, resulted in an equanimity demonstrated in far fewer occasions of spiritual distress (17-18).

If Heitzenrater and Outler are right that the testimony of others helped to stabilize J. Wesley's own interiority, a conversation with his mother, recorded in his journal on 3 September 1739, could not but have been significant. She had been relatively ignorant of the witness of the Spirit and of its availability as "the common privilege of all true believers" (19: 93). Then, during the Eucharist, the words pierced her heart, and at once she experienced the forgiveness of sin in a personal way. She also recalled the report of her father, that for over forty years he had been free of doubt and fear (93-94).

The term *fanatic* has been humorously defined as "[s]omeone who strongly believes something I don't believe" (Benson and Stangroom 39). In eighteenth-century England, the accusation of choice for unconsidered, overly emotional religious presumption was *enthusiasm*. According to his own assessment, J. Wesley was, by temperament, anything but an *enthusiast* (Rack 548-49). In a self-effacing gesture toward the fictionally named "John Smith," he ascribes to himself, then questions, an earlier confession: "I want [i.e., lack] heat more than light" (26: 161). If his tendency was, indeed, toward cool rationalism, a common conception of the evangelist was quite different. Wesley's credulity toward others' testimonies, coupled with his practice of reading indications of divine direction in certain events, gave rise to the opposite

impression (Rack 549). Enthusiasm was the most frequent indictment against the Methodist movement, and the doctrine of assurance was the target more than once (Yates 180, 182). In August 1739, Bishop Butler remarked to the leader of the revival, “Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing—a very horrid thing!” (Curnock 2: 257). His statement is perhaps the most famous expression of a fairly common charge.

The entries in J. Wesley’s journal for 5 and 6 June 1742 are revealing. The controversial evangelist had returned to the town of his childhood. Not at all bashful to enter into spiritual dialogue, he asked a question of a former servant of his father’s:

“Do you know any in Epworth who are in earnest to be saved?” She answered, “I am, by the grace of God; and I know I am saved through faith.” I asked, “Have you then the peace of God? Do you know that he has forgiven your sins?” She replied, “I thank God, I know it well. And many here can say the same thing.” (19: 272-73)

Wesley does not report such a warm engagement with the curate of the parish. On Sunday, after declining his famous visitor’s offer to preach, the vicar expounded at length against “the character of an enthusiast” (19: 273). At six that evening, Wesley returned to the churchyard to preach to a record crowd. The text he mentioned, ““The kingdom of heaven is not meats and drinks, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”” (273-74), may suggest a connection with his published sermon, “The Way to the Kingdom” (1: 217). In it, Wesley writes of a “peace” that is beyond “all (barely) rational conception; being a supernatural sensation, a divine taste of ‘the powers of the world to come,’” that “banishes all doubt, all painful uncertainty, the Spirit of God ‘bearing witness with the spirit’ of a Christian that he is ‘a child of God’” (223). The weekend’s events may suggest that *enthusiasm*, at least when involving the question of Christian

assurance, was a matter of widely divergent opinion.

Defining Doctrine for the Movement

In 1744, Wesley began what would become a tradition of annual conferences, a practical vehicle for defining Methodist doctrine and organization (Outler 134-35). The minutes of all the early conferences address, one way or another, the doctrine of assurance. The first conference asks, “May not a man be justified and not know it?” (137). It answers, “[A]ll true Christians have this faith, even such a faith as implies an assurance of God’s love” (137). Furthermore, the matter is apparent by simple reckoning (“[F]aith after repentance is ease after pain, rest after toil, light after darkness” [137]) and by instantaneous and subsequent fruit (137). The conference goes on to inquire, “Does any one believe who has not the witness in himself or any longer than he sees, loves and obeys God?” (138). It answers in the negative (138).

The second annual conference, in August 1745, raised the issue again: “Is an assurance of God’s love absolutely necessary to our being in his favour, or may there possibly be some exempt cases?” (Outler 149) It answers, “We dare not positively say there are not” (149). Further questions and answers follow:

Q. 2. Is such an assurance absolutely necessary to inward and outward holiness?

A. To inward, we apprehend it is: to outward holiness, we incline to think it is not.

Q. 3. Is it indispensably necessary to final salvation? Suppose in a papist or a Quaker, or, in general, among those who never heard it preached?

A. Love hopeth all things....

Q. 5. Does a man believe any longer than he “sees” God?

A. We conceive not. But we allow there may be infinite degrees in seeing God. (149)

The language exhibits a tension between establishing a strong case for the availability of assurance and maintaining a degree of pastoral generosity and humility.

The third annual conference, 1746, continues the dialogue: “Are [the assurance of faith, the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and revelation of Christ in us] ordinarily, where the pure gospel is preached, essential to our acceptance?” (Outler 159) It answers, “Undoubtedly they are, and as such, to be insisted on in the strongest terms” (159). The conference asks, “Wherein does our doctrine now differ from that we preached when at Oxford?” (160). It answers, “Chiefly, in these two points: 1. We then knew nothing of the righteousness of faith in justification; nor 2. Of the nature of faith itself as implying consciousness of pardon” (160). The experience of Christian assurance stands as an integral aspect of Wesleyan soteriology; nonetheless, the statement avoids strictly categorical language.

The fourth annual conference offers a tentative restatement of the possibility of “exempt cases” (Outler 166-67). These sometime reservations notwithstanding, the conference resorts to the affirmation that “[if] Christ is not revealed in them, they are not yet Christian believers” (166-67). The continuing difficulty with a categorical pronouncement on the issue of assurance may once again reflect conflicting pastoral motives: once to affirm assurance as an essentially important aspect of Christian experience, once to avoid a too heavy hand with those who might yet be seeking it for themselves.

One may read these selections from the conferences as nearly—except for the tentative allowance for *exempt cases* and for the acknowledgement of *degrees* of the vision of God—identifying justifying faith with assurance in a fashion reminiscent of

Wesley's early Moravian teachers. Indeed, notes from the 1747 conference define "justifying faith" as "a divine assurance that Christ loved me and gave himself for me" (Outler 165). In any event, as Heitzenrater points out, the picture that emerges is somewhat less than clear (*Wesley and the People* 159). J. Wesley, himself, may be supremely aware of the confusion when, at the end of July 1747, he outlines for his brother Charles the initial draft of a "*genesis problematica*," a logical inquiry into the question of justifying faith (26: 254). In it he clearly distinguishes justifying faith from assurance of the forgiveness of one's sins. He acknowledges that such an assurance "is the common privilege of real Christians" and that it constitutes "the proper Christian faith" (255). Nonetheless, the voices of both Scripture and experience join to deny the conclusion that everyone who presently lacks explicit assurance must then be the object of God's wrath. In addition, he attacks the identification of assurance with faith on rational grounds: "For how can a sense of our having received pardon be the condition of our receiving it?" (255). Baker's footnotes add how the conversation was far from over (254).

The "John Smith" Correspondences

During 1745 through 1748, J. Wesley engaged in a series of six pairs of correspondences with the pseudonymous "John Smith." They address the particulars of Wesley's position with regard to faith, assurance, perfection, and the notion of "perceptible inspiration" (26: 138-39, 183; Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People* 157-58). In his first reply to the clergyman, Wesley speaks about the immediate, fulsome witness of the Spirit:

I do not deny that God imperceptibly works in some a gradually increasing assurance of his love. But I am equally certain he works in others a full

assurance thereof in one moment. And I suppose, however this godly assurance be wrought, it is easily discernible from bare reason or fancy. (157)

In response to Smith's personal disclosure that he cannot remember when he first received justifying faith, Wesley allows that his opponent may qualify as an excepted case, but he can counter with the testimonies of twelve or thirteen hundred individuals who have personally witnessed to him of their very conscious experience of "the day when the love of God was first shed abroad in their hearts" and of the witness of the Holy Spirit with their own (157-58).

J. Wesley extends his evidentiary appraisal of the distinction between *crisis* and *process* in his December letter: He is acquainted, he reports, with hundreds who in the matter of a moment were delivered from fear and suffering over into peace, joy, and love for God and neighbor. Nonetheless, a gradual growth in peace and love subsists (26: 180). Wesley goes on to affirm, and then define, the doctrine of "perceptible *inspiration* [original emphasis]" (181):

[The term means] that inspiration of God's Holy Spirit whereby he fills us with righteousness, peace, and joy, with love to him and to all mankind. And we believe it cannot be, in the nature of things, that a man should be filled with this peace and joy and love by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost without perceiving it, as clearly as he does the light of the sun. (181-82)

Wesley cannot be more emphatic about his position. Perceptible inspiration is, he affirms, "the main doctrine of the Methodists. This is the *substance* [original emphasis] of what we all preach" (182). It is integral to genuine Christian experience, "the very foundation of Christianity" (182). Wesley's polemic may be illustrative here as a pointer to, among other things, the importance of his religious epistemology for his entire theological project.

The struggle for clarity with Smith continues in June 1746. J. Wesley recalls his earlier affirmation of *perceptible inspiration*, with this interpretation: “I hold, God *inspires* [original emphasis] every Christian with peace and joy and love, which are all *perceptible* [original emphasis]” (26: 202). Only, the question arises whether this definition refers to perceptibility of fruit, rather than a direct perception of the operation itself (202). Referring back to *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, he attempts an explication: The “direct perceptible testimony of the Spirit” involves an awareness, not of “the manner in which he operates, but the *graces* [original emphasis]” themselves (202-03; 11: 140). By doggedly affirming the *direct* perceptibility of the Spirit’s witness, just “as distinguishable from the suggestion of fancy as light is distinguishable from darkness” (203), Wesley is seeking to safeguard the confidence of Christian certainty by assigning it into a category akin to vision or other sense perception.

At this point, J. Wesley refers his readers to his *Farther Appeal*. Here, again, the logician is seeking to rebut the criticisms of fellow clergymen regarding the nature of “*The Operations of the Holy Spirit* [original emphasis]” (11: 139). He roughly quotes Thomas Dockwray’s assertion: “That the Scriptures declare, the operations of the Spirit are not subject to any sensible feelings” (140). Wesley defines his terms. *Feeling* means inward consciousness. *The operations of the Spirit* means, not the *manner* of the Spirit’s workings, but the *graces*. With these definitions, Wesley rests confident to challenge his critic to prove from Scripture that such operations cannot be felt or perceived (140).

Wesley’s Mature Moderation

One must at this point begin to reckon with Noll’s suggestion that “the heavy stress on the immediate witness of the Spirit may be describing a Christian phenomenon

that is not nearly so distinct in the Scripture's portrayal of assurance as Wesley would have one believe" (177). Reflecting, perhaps, some of the inherent difficulties in J. Wesley's position, along with his habitual resort to Scripture and experiential evidence, a review of his later work reflects something of a more chastened outlook. Published in 1788, his sermon, "On Faith" (3: 491-501), reveals a wistfulness in the mature Wesley as he recalls the earlier preaching of the Methodists. In those days, they were insufficiently aware of the distinction between being God's *servant* and God's *child*, and the reality that the person "who feared God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him" (3: 497). "[T]hey were apt to make sad the hearts of those whom God had not made sad" (497) by condemning, rather than encouraging, ones who still lacked full assurance. The assurance of faith is still, for the mature Wesley, a blessed expectation. Only, now the teaching is couched in tenderness rather than the acrimony of debate. He interprets a source text for the doctrine ("And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" [Gal. 4: 6, KJV]) in terms of a "childlike confidence in him, together with a kind affection toward him" (498). The doctrine of assurance is to serve, not as a bludgeoning device, but as a gentle invitation.

Writing in 1768 from Liverpool to Ann Bolton, Wesley personifies just such a pastoral attitude. It carries, for me, such a deep impression that I will report the text at length:

Indeed, my dear sister, the conversation I had with you at London much increased my affection for you and my desire that you should not fall short of any blessing which our Lord has bought for you with His own blood. Certain it is that He loves you. And He has already given you the faith of a servant. You want only the faith of a child. And is it not nigh? What is it you feel now? That spark just kindling in your heart.... Look up, my sister, my friend! Jesus is there! He is ever now interceding for *you*! [original emphasis] Doubt not of it! Doubt not His love! Forget yourself, a

poor, vile, worthless sinner. But look unto Jesus! See the Friend of Sinners! *Your* [original emphasis] Friend; your ready and strong Savior! (qtd. in Telford 5: 86)

Judging from my own emotional response to the seasoned evangelist's impassioned invitation, I cannot help but believe that his words likely became a ready means of God's grace to Ms. Bolton, as well.

In 1767, musing to himself in the solitude of a coach, J. Wesley notes how neither a proper conception of imputed righteousness nor even justification by faith are essential for salvation—in fact, how a mystic who even contradicts the doctrine itself might still be saved. If theological precision in these things is inessential, then the time has arrived to cast off the bombastic verbiage and “return to the plain word, ‘He that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, *is* [original emphasis] accepted with him’” (22: 114-15). Apparently, for Wesley genuine piety was more fundamental to the life of faith than correct vocabulary.

In a 1768 response to Thomas Rutherford, J. Wesley, expressing his disinclination to “draw the saw of controversy” (qtd. in Telford 5: 358), offers a three-tiered design for the understanding of assurance. First, a very limited number of believers experience assurance of final salvation, or the “full assurance of hope” (358). This admission, one notes, marks a change from his earlier assumption. A larger number possesses the “full assurance of faith” (358) the confidence of presently enjoying God's favor to the exclusion of fear and doubt. The third category of believers involves those who, while possessing a real sense of acceptance, nevertheless frequently struggle with reemerging apprehensions. Wesley affirms this third, more constrained, construal of assurance as “the common privilege of Christians fearing God and working

righteousness” (358). Finally, he is careful to include room for the possible exceptional case, the un comforted Christian, thereby distinguishing assurance from justification (Telford 5: 357-59).

Some time later, Wesley offers a piece of nonjudgmental advice to a Mary Bosanquet. He reminds her that commonly one person may be guided differently from someone else. “The same Spirit worketh in every one; and yet worketh several ways, according to His own will” (Telford 5: 175). Everyone must go his or her own way.

In a letter to Joseph Benson, May 1781, the venerable churchman provides an amicable view of his mature position regarding assurance. He is not bound to defining terminology: The terms, *discovery*, *manifestation*, *deep sense*, or something altogether different may serve the meaning as well as his *impression*. He must maintain “[t]hat some consciousness of our being in favour with God is joined with Christian faith, . . . but it is not the essence of it. A consciousness of pardon cannot be the condition of pardon” (Telford 7: 60-61). The deduction recalls J. Wesley’s musings with brother Charles some thirty-four years prior (26: 255).

Four years later, Wesley’s lifelong career of investigation into the human experience of God is apparent in the spiritual direction he offers Mary Cooke.

My dear Miss Cooke leans to the right-hand error. It is safer to think too little than too much of yourself. I blame no one for not believing he is in the favour of God till he is in a manner constrained to believe it. But, laying all circumstances together, I can make no doubt of your having a measure of faith. (qtd. in Telford 7: 298)

Later, after sharing a vignette from his own personal struggle, he offers this teaching:

There is an irreconcilable variability in the operations of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men, more especially as to the manner of justification. Many find Him rushing upon them like a torrent. . . . This has been the experience of many. . . . But in others He works in a very different way. (298)

He is able to be quite directive: “Let Him take His own way: He is wiser than you; He will do all things well” (298). One cannot help but admire the patient kindness of the aged master as he guides the tentative steps of yet one more spiritual seeker.

The *Dénouement*

The question remains whether Wesley ever personally arrived at the full confidence of the assurance about which he preached. Alexander Knox suggests he did not make any such profession (Southey 357). As late as 1766, in a letter to his brother Charles, the experienced evangelist returns to the self-examination of earlier decades: “[I do not love God. I never did]. . . . [I have no] direct witness, I do not say that [I am a child of God], but of anything invisible or eternal” (qtd. in Telford 5: 15-16). Interpreters have treated the remarkable self-disclosure as coming in the context of a recent nonsuccess in Scotland along with wearisome marital troubles (Outler 81) or as an experience of a mystical “dark night of the soul” (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People* 224). Henry D. Rack submits that the confession, along with other material, suggests not a momentary lapse but a long-standing incapacity in Wesley’s personality for the kind of intuitive and affective experience of God that he sought. Aldersgate was the exception. The 1766 correspondence is a token that, despite Moravian teaching, despite the brief experience at Aldersgate, despite the apparent experiences of others, he was beginning to be reconciled with the ways God has deigned to work in his life (546-49).

Wesley offered counsel to Miss Cooke:

There is an irreconcilable variability in the operations of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men, more especially as to the manner of justification. . . . Let Him take His own way: He is wiser than you; He will do all things well. (qtd. in Telford 7: 298)

If Rack is correct, then perhaps the tender equanimity expressed in these words of pastoral counsel says something about the later movements of his own spirit.

Wesley's Epistemology

Since his death, Wesley has been interpreted variously as a communicator of “folk theology” (Outler iii), a “practical theologian” (Maddox), a Calvinist, an Arminian, a Roman Catholic, a Reformer, and an Eastern Orthodox (Collins 206) but rarely as a “major theologian” along the lines of a Thomas Aquinas or a Martin Luther (Outler iii). One might argue, however, that Wesley's thinking coheres most elegantly not in his Anglicanism, his Calvinism, or his Arminianism, actually not in any theology at all, but in the philosophical commitments that undergird all of his pastoral, theological, and polemical work. Wesley's theological method, contends Don Thorsen and others, traces back to the empiricism of John Locke (Thorsen 108; Hindley 99-108; Brantley 100-01). In this section I suggest that the philosophical environment of British empiricism, which emphasized sense perception as foundational to understanding, coupled with aspects of platonic thought having to do with the *vision* of God provides a context for understanding Wesley's construal of faith as a sensing faculty exactly parallel to natural sensation. Furthermore, I show how this concentration on empirical, sensual information can be seen to correspond with a range of features in Wesley's life and career, not least of which are his unique struggles with assurance.

The Role of Reason

In his dissertation on Wesley's epistemology, Mitsuo Shimizu notes how reason had been taken to be the foundational source of spiritual knowledge in seventeenth and eighteenth century Anglicanism (35). Although, in his day, some of Wesley's critics

might construe the Methodist emphasis on feeling as so much enthusiasm (35, 74), he considered himself an accomplished logician (Jackson 10: 353) and never eschewed the importance of reason as a source for theology (52). In J. Wesley's correspondence with "John Smith," he consents how "a rational assent to the truth of the Bible is one ingredient of Christian faith" (26: 157). More emphatically, in his *Appeal*, he affirms "a religion evidently founded on, and every way agreeable to, eternal reason" (11: 55). "So far as [one] departs from true genuine reason, so far he departs from Christianity" (55). He avers to Thomas Rutherford, "that to renounce reason is to renounce religion" (qtd. in Telford 5: 364). All of these considerations comport with an understanding of Wesley's "almost ultra-logical" inclination (Knox 496).

An "Internal Evidence"

For J. Wesley, one witness for the truth of the Christian faith involves an indirect perception of "traditional evidence" (11: 534) through the faculty of reason; it is not to be undervalued. In addition, he posits an "internal evidence" (535), which operates on another level entirely. He speculates that Providence has lately allowed the "external evidence" to be somewhat muddled so that seekers would be drawn to "look into themselves also, and attend to the light shining in their hearts" (535-36). This second, internal, psychological feature is at the heart of his religious epistemology and foundational to his definition of saving faith. It is something more than "a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head" (1: 120). It is a personal orientation, "a disposition of the heart" (120) involving personal trust and commitment (121). In his "Earnest Appeal," Wesley demonstrates how this personal and inward emphasis directs its attention to a kind of sensational evidence that has a direct analogy

with the natural senses. Faith is the soul's "eye," "ear," "palate," and "feeling" (11: 46-47). It is well-suited for apprehending the whole realm of spiritual reality and, more particularly, God's love toward the believer (46-47).

In his introduction to Wesley's sermons on the witness of the Spirit, Outler notes the "intuitionist" aspect of his religious epistemology (J. Wesley 1: 267). Whereas Wesley offers warm praise for the empiricist Peter Browne (2: 383; Shimizu 106), and uses his *Procedure* extensively (Shimizu 113-14), he cannot abide Browne's assumption that everything that can be known arrives via the natural senses (179-80). Appealing to the Platonic concept, Wesley posits as a basis for spiritual knowledge the direct operation of God on the human soul (170). Wesley reports reading the French Platonist Nicolas Malebranche, and in numerous contexts he recommends his work (Green 318; Shimizu 114-15). A follower of Descartes, Malbranche adheres to a body/mind dualism, according to which the material and mental worlds have no real involvement with one another. Objects do not impinge on the mind via the senses. Instead, perception involves a divine revelation of ideas that correspond with the material of the external world (Shimizu 146-47). Malbranche offers the epigram: "'We see all things in God'" (qtd. in Schimizu 147). Something of a related dualism can be seen in Wesley's distinction between the material and invisible with their corresponding perceptual apparatus.

A Transcendental Empiricism

The question remains whether Wesley was an *intuitionist* or if he was more deeply grounded in the empirical preference for concrete, sensory data. The very difficulty Wesley encounters with explicit terminology for the experience of the witness of the Spirit (e.g., "impression," "deep sense") expressed in a letter to Joseph Benson

(qtd. in Telford 7: 60-61) may itself say something about the slipperiness of the concept he was seeking to describe. In a most intriguing movement, something that at the least resembles an intuitive experience and is expressed largely in the language of the feelings, in the end finds its epistemological moorings in the certainties of sensation. George Croft Cell's term "transcendental empiricism" serves as a fitting moniker for Wesley's curious synthesis of intuitive and sense-oriented epistemologies (93; Thorsen 122). The label suggests that basic to Wesley's sensibilities is a preference for the certainties of sensory data, over which were stretched the mystical language of intuition and feeling.

Thorsen acknowledges Wesley's intuitionist predilections but suggests a deeper connection with the experimental approach that recalls John Locke's synthesis of rational and empirical methodologies (113-14). Philosophical empiricism locates human knowledge in the evidence available to the senses; innate ideas do not exist. One should observe that Wesley is not entirely uncritical of Locke's work. He differs markedly with his fellow Englishman on questions of faith and certainty and the role of probability (Jackson 13: 456, 460, 464; Matthews 310-12). Reservations notwithstanding, Thorsen suggests that in his larger theological outlook as well as his more particular terminology, British empiricism held sway as the primary philosophical influence (114). Wesley notes the prescription of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in the academic course of study at his Kingswood school (Jackson 13: 287-88). He excerpted from the same via successive volumes of the *Arminian Magazine* (Shimuzu 92).

An Empiricist at Heart

Over and over again, one sees in J. Wesley's writings a preference for what knowledge can be gained by the senses as over against rationalist speculation. In the 1746

preface to his collection of sermons, he styles his purpose as “plain truth for plain people” (1: 103-04). He eschews “all nice and philosophical speculations,... all perplexed and intricate reasonings” (104). He seeks to represent “the true, the scriptural, experimental religion” (106). Whether the question has to do with the doctrine of perfection, the witness of the Spirit, or original sin, he constantly returns to the corroborating testimony of “living witnesses” (Telford 5: 39, 41; J. Wesley 1: 290; 13: 411-13). Shimizu reports that for nineteen years, Wesley turned his pen to the natural sciences (82), and his journal shows he was still reading Bacon at the age of eighty-four (Curnock 7: 352). At fifty-six, he prefaces his *Desideratum* on the subject of therapeutic electricity: “I am not greatly concerned for the philosophical part, whether it stand or fall. Of the facts we are absolutely assured.... I am much more concerned for the physical part” (14: 241-42). In his sermon “The General Spread of the Gospel,” addressing the question of God’s purpose and human freedom, he proposes a “plain, simple way” forward that avoids “entangling ourselves in any subtle, metaphysical disquisitions” on matters divine (2: 488-89). At the close of his homily “On Predestination,” he offers the desire that people should be satisfied with the “plain account” he has outlined, “and not endeavour to wade into those mysteries which are too deep for men to fathom!” (2: 421). Sermonizing “On the Trinity,” Wesley avers how the Bible enjoins belief in certain “*facts* [original emphasis],” but not their “manner” (2: 383-84).

J. Wesley’s preference for seating knowledge in the experiential, sensational domain is perhaps no more clearly stated than in his distinctive conception of *faith* as “the demonstrative evidence of things unseen” (11: 46), in just such a way as physical sensation is the demonstrative evidence of things visible. “It is with regard to the spiritual

world what sense is with regard to the natural” (11: 46). In this blending of a platonic conception of spiritual “vision” with the language of philosophical empiricism Wesley offers what is arguably his most creative work. In this way, I propose, he sought to endow spiritual intuition with the certainty of sense perception.

An entry from J. Wesley’s journal, January 1739 reveals an emphasis on sense perception as it relates to his own experience of assurance. He avers he has no love for God on the basis of direct, sensory impression. “I *feel* [original emphasis] this moment I do not love God; which therefore I *know* [original emphasis], because I *feel* [original emphasis] it. There is no word more proper, more clear, or more strong” (19: 29-30). In his provocative essay, Frederick Dreyer suggests that Wesley’s empiricism is the key to understanding his religion and that in every debate, be it with the Anglican over the speculative nature of assurance or with the Calvinist or Lutheran with regard to the nature of holiness, the guiding assumption is simply this: “[N]othing is known that cannot be felt” (29-30). If Dreyer is right, and *feeling* was for Wesley the foundation of his religious epistemology, then what is left is an investigation of his repertory with both the language of feeling and (in a section that follows) his own experience with this psychic function.

Wesley’s Use of *Feeling*

In a 1768 letter to Thomas Rutherford, Wesley seems a bit annoyed that he, being “still totally misunderstood and misrepresented” (Telford 5: 363) on the topic of *inward feelings*, should after so much explanation be called upon to interpret himself again (363). Although I do not wish to belabor the complexities of what might seem a simple topic, I shall investigate a little more precisely into the different ways in which Wesley uses the term.

In this section I inquire into the role of the feelings in J. Wesley's doctrine of assurance and, more particularly, into their connection with the direct witness of the Spirit, beginning with Wesley's early debates with Böhler on the nature of faith as implying the "sense of forgiveness" (18: 247-48). Clearly for Wesley a "sense of forgiveness" necessarily involved *feeling* (248). One is constrained to wonder how being the recipient of forgiveness should feel. Charles Wesley had experienced "a strange palpitation of heart" (91). John wrote of a "heart strangely warmed." One is reminded of his 1739 confession of his own lovelessness toward God. He reveals how such a condition may be ascertained, the same way one ascertains whether one is cold or hot, by *feelings*: "There is no word more proper, more clear, or more strong" (19: 30). Curiously, such an energetic non-apology may be telling in its own right.

In a 1759 letter to John Downes, Wesley affirms that the threefold criterion of *love, joy, and peace* are by the nature of the case a matter of inward feeling. Next, he connects this feeling with assurance: "[M]en are satisfied they have grace, first by feeling these [love, joy, peace], and afterward by their outward actions" (qtd. in Telford 4: 332). This progressive paradigm might seem to cohere with J. Wesley's general distinction among the "direct" versus "indirect witness" (1: 297), "internal" versus "external evidence" (11: 535), and the "faith of a child" versus the "faith of a servant" (qtd. in Telford 5: 86). However, in his sermons on the witness, observation of fruit is clearly related not to the first but to the second order of evidence (1: 272-75; 287-88). In his correspondence with "John Smith" (26: 202-03) and in his *Farther Appeal* (11: 140), Wesley clarifies that certain fruit of the Spirit, not the manner of the Spirit's operation, are the objects of perception. However, if these perceptions are only related to that

second order of indirect evidence, one must question what is remarkable about them in the first place.

In “The Witness of the Spirit, II,” J. Wesley insinuates an element of feeling that inheres closely to the experience of an unmediated, intuitive assurance—stormy seas have abated, “and there is a sweet calm” (1: 287). An awareness of feeling, seen in the assessment of love, peace, and joy, is a large part of his indirect, second order of assurance, as well (287-88). In addition, never to be forgotten, the language of the warmed heart at Aldersgate adds to Wesley’s personal story of assurance an echo of undeniably visceral overtones.

Contrariwise, when, with his definition of faith as “divine evidence” (11:46), Wesley employs the language of feeling to describe a faculty of senses separate from, and parallel to, the natural sensorium (46-47), he is stretching those terms beyond any understanding of physically mediated emotion so that he can say to Dr. Rutherford that he thinks of feeling as nothing more than inner consciousness (Telford 5: 364). The definition could imply that the inner “impression” or “deep sense” of the witness of the Spirit is not to be confused with any corresponding physical manifestations. However, in the same paragraph, Wesley quotes himself: ““We believe that love, joy, peace, are inwardly felt, or they have no being; and that men are satisfied they have grace, first by feeling these, and afterwards by their outward actions”” (qtd. in Telford 5: 364). In the realm of normal human affairs, one is hard pressed to think of an experience of love, joy, or peace that is not associated with at least some physical phenomenon.

If Wesley may miss the mark in regard to clarity in his developing discussion of religious feeling, I might note that among three different international conferences on the

subject of *feelings and emotions* during the twentieth century, the leaders have never succeeded in distinguishing the concepts (Willeford 124). Furthermore, one must allow that in the midst of leading a massive revival, addressing controversies on numerous fronts, and working out the exigencies of his own spiritual journey, the evangelist was responsible for what amounts to a ground-breaking synthesis of empirical investigation with Christian spirituality. As Thorsen suggests, perhaps Wesley should not be faulted too much for leaving to his descendants the task of developing a better systematized nomenclature of the spiritual life (118).

The Myers-Briggs Model of Psychological Type

Psychological type is a means of understanding and categorizing differences in human personality. Articulated in the early part of the twentieth century by the Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung and simplified and refined by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katharine Briggs, it has found a significant place in the educational and, to a lesser extent, psychological literature via the popularity of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

Preliminary Definitions

According to the Myers-Briggs model, type theory is based on four sets of polar dichotomies, four categories of preference, which together encapsulate a wide range of mental activity. The first preference dichotomy, *extraversion/introversion* (EI), denotes “complementary orientations to life” (Myers and Myers 7), whether one is more interested in the outer world, involving people and objects outside the self, or the inner world, which involves ideas and experiences interior to the mind. The second dichotomy, *sensing/intuition* (SI), addresses the ways persons make perceptions, how they receive information. Sensing involves the direct concreteness of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and

taste. Intuition, contrariwise, is a more indirect means of perception, working through the unconscious, ascribing meanings and possibilities to things far beyond the data directly available to the senses. The third dichotomy, *thinking/feeling* (TF), describes the way persons arrive at judgments from the information they have received. Thinking comes to conclusions by way of impersonal logic, the objective manipulation of facts and ideas. Feeling is more sensitive to the personal implications involved; it is subjective and focused on values. The last preference dichotomy, *judgment/perception* (JP), has to do with whether one prefers to use the perceiving function (*sensing/intuition*) or the judging function (*thinking/feeling*) when engaging with the outer world. Of course, both perception and judgment are necessary to get along in the world, but most people are more at ease with one or the other. The perceiving and judging attitudes are mutually exclusive. In order to reach a judgment, one must for the moment discontinue the accumulation of data. On the other hand, in order to continue in the perceiving attitude, one must for the moment suspend judgment. One should again note that the judgment/perception dichotomy signifies the way a person prefers to engage with the *outside world*. The importance of this distinction will become clear in the following discussion of the dominant and auxiliary processes (Myers and Myers 2-9).

From childhood, according to the model, persons develop preferences in the way they receive and respond to information. In the area of perception, persons will become better equipped and more confident in the use of either sensing or intuition, and their preference will have eventual implications for their favored activities and perspectives on life. Meanwhile, the less-preferred function will remain in the background, relatively undeveloped. With regard to judging, persons will almost always put more confidence in

and derive more pleasure from either thinking or feeling. For some, logical proof will tend to trump personal concerns. For others, subjective, value-oriented motives will carry the day. Depending on their preferences, children will evince a developing expertise either in personal relationships or in the domain of facts and ideas, and they will thrive in activities that lend themselves to their area of sophistication. As with the sensing/intuition dichotomy, the less-preferred process will remain in the background; it is often ignored (Myers and Myers 1-4).

The Hierarchy of Energy

As most people have a preference to be expressed between sensing and intuition, and between thinking and feeling, all have one process that is dominant, the most highly developed function that gives direction and integration to their lives. Persons will use their dominant process more consistently than the others, with greater confidence and fuller enjoyment. According to the model, a perfect balance of processes is not the ideal; for a life to be maximally effective, one process must reign supreme, to the exclusion of the others (Myers and Myers 2-3, 10-12).

An important functional counterpart to the dominant process is its auxiliary process. Because the perceptive and judging functions are complementary to one another, the auxiliary process will be located accordingly: If, in a given person, sensing (a perceptive function) is dominant, the auxiliary will be either thinking or feeling, its functional complement. If feeling should predominate, the auxiliary would be either sensing or intuition. A person with dominant sensing, for instance, with an affinity for, and facility with, acquiring factual data, would still need either the thinking or feeling function in order to figure out what to do with all the information (Myers and Myers 12).

The auxiliary process also functions to balance extraversion and introversion. Quite naturally, with persons of every type, the dominant process engages predominately with the world that most attracts their interest. If they are extraverts, their dominant process will be oriented toward the outer domain. Without the complementary assistance of the auxiliary process, paying attention to their inner experience, they would be extraverted in the extreme. If they are introverts, their dominant process will focus inwardly in the domain of ideas. Engagement with the outer world is unavoidable, so they enlist the auxiliary process to engage with the world outside. In a sense, this necessity increases the importance of introverts' auxiliary process (Myers and Myers 13).

Extraverts demonstrate their dominant process quite transparently. Their most highly developed mental function is focused on the outer world, and so it is immediately manifest. Things are rather more complex in the case of the introvert. Their most highly developed mental function is tenaciously centered on their inner world, so that when situations require them to focus their attention outwardly, they rely on their auxiliary process. Consequently, the auxiliary process, not the dominant one, becomes the face by which they are largely known to the world. Ironically, to most others, an introvert with dominant sensing and auxiliary thinking *looks* like a thinker. Only when a situation arises that is sufficiently motivating does the introverted dominant process emerge to face the world at large (Myers and Myers 14).

In their foundational study, Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter B. Myers focus discussion on the dominant process and, over against Jung, assert the importance of the auxiliary process for a number of considerations (10-12, 17-21). In her handbook, Naomi L. Quenk offers further detail with regard to the tertiary and inferior processes.

Quenk conceptualizes the four functions (the constituent dichotomies of perceiving and judging) in terms of a “hierarchy of energy” (4). Accordingly, persons’ *dominant function* consumes the lion’s share of their psychic energy, and it is the function of which they are most aware and which is most amenable to their control. The *auxiliary function* uses somewhat less energy and is somewhat less conscious and somewhat less subject to management. Nonetheless, with the dominant and auxiliary functions in place, persons have at their sufficiently conscious disposal agreeable means for both perceiving and judging (4, 5).

The *tertiary function*, which lies on the opposite end of the pole from the auxiliary, is not so easily amenable to conscious control. If the dominant function comes with much enjoyment and ease, the tertiary function is wrought with difficulty and dissatisfaction (Quenk 4, 5).

The *inferior function*, the polar opposite of the dominant, is the least conscious of all the functions. Its unconscious energy corresponds in degree with the conscious energy that is accessible to its dominant counterpart. So long as the dominant function is at work, the inferior function’s energy rests latent. At times, in the instance of a diminution of conscious energy as a result of fatigue, sickness, stress, use of intoxicants, or major changes in life, the inferior function can emerge in a kind of psychic *coup d’état*. When it erupts, it resembles the way it would appear in its dominant form. Only, it is exaggerated, immature, and prone to extreme, poorly nuanced categorization (Quenk 5-8).

Jung’s Use of *Feeling*

If the idea of *feeling* is for Wesley a central, if not controlling, motif in his enormously prolific works, the concept has a similarly prominent place in Jung’s

understanding of psychological type, and so I examine in some detail Jung's use of the term in his own writings.

From the Glossary

In his glossary at the end of *Psychological Types*, Jung speaks of *feeling* as principally an operation involving the centralized, conscious aspect of the self (the ego) and some object, which assigns to the object an evaluation of approval or approbation. It can manifest, as well, separate from immediate consciousness, as *mood*, where, again, the evaluative process is active, now with regard to conditions at large. Feeling is a judging function that establishes the criterion for its evaluations on a subjective basis (434, 425).

With intensification, feeling becomes *affect*, a feeling condition to which is conjoined perceptible physical arousal. Jung phrases feeling, along with thinking, a "*rational* [original emphasis] ... function" (435) because the assigning of values, like the formation of concepts, has a rational basis (434-35).

Jung adds to his definition the further explanation that he has not described the essential nature of feeling. Abstract conceptualization cannot fully express it, just as no other basic function can fully apprehend any other one (435-36). This incommensurability between one function and the next may find its counterpart in Wesley's struggle to define with precision the nature of the intuition of the witness of the Spirit.

Willeford's Critical Analysis

After noting a predilection in historic German philosophy to understand differences in terms of polar opposites, William Willeford raises the issue of polarity versus nuance with regard to Jung's various articulations related to feeling. Jung was

seeking, Willeford suggests, to define dichotomy in places where distinctions are not easy to delineate. The result was a degree of conceptual overlap (116-17).

Willeford culls from Jung ten different views relating to feeling and affect, including, “[f]eeling as continuous with affect, or emotion” (117); “[f]eeling as rational and evaluative” (121); and, “[f]eeling as relationship” (124). The two prior formulations are stated clearly enough in the aforementioned glossary at the end of *Psychological Types*. Willeford notes that the last denotation of feeling, in terms of relationship, is not at all explicit in *Psychological Types* but quotes Jung as saying that in the absence of feeling in its extraverted form, ““a harmonious social life would be impossible”” (124). Accordingly, three rather discreet understandings with regard to *feeling* emerge—*affective*, *evaluative*, and *relational*. However, according to Willeford, Jung never makes explicit how these notions are related (126).

Myers’ Transposition

One may question whether I. Myers achieved any more substantial integration of these concepts than did her predecessor. Her discussions on feeling do include those same evaluative, affective, and relational elements, with *feeling as subjective evaluation* as its functional core (Myers and Myers 3-5).

An Analysis of Wesley and Assurance via Psychological Type

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how personality theory informs a phenomenology of Christian assurance as it has developed in a Wesleyan environment. In the following sections, I proffer an interpretation, framed in the language of psychological type, that gathers into one frame a number of data from J. Wesley’s inward spiritual journey, his personal style of life, his philosophical choices, and even his

avocational interests, that seeks in some measure to explain both the evangelist's passion towards, and difficulty with, the doctrine that he describes as "the *substance* [original emphasis] of what we all preach" (26: 182). After reviewing the biblical and historical moorings of the doctrine of assurance, and then narrating a developmental exploration of Wesley's own personal and public engagement with the issue, and then interpreting his language in terms of the philosophical options then available, I hope to have cleared sufficient ground for the synthetic heart of the study. The section that follows offers up a case study of Wesley with reference to the language of psychological type—with a particular view, of course, toward the question of assurance.

In the history of the church, few leaders have left behind a more voluminous assemblage of written information than Wesley. The sheer mass of the firsthand data published both by and about him offers a promise that a sense of the man might be available to anyone with sufficient curiosity and leisure to inquire. Nonetheless, any attempt to understand a historical figure the likes of a Wesley should begin with a meditation on this quote from Heitzenrater: "It seems the psychohistorians have always been better psychologists than historians, even when their psychology has not been adequate" (*Elusive Mr. Wesley* 382-83). Heitzenrater uses the very difficulty history has found in settling on a standard effigy for the churchman as a metaphor for the difficulty one encounters in trying to get at the *real Wesley* (22-24). I stand, properly chastened, even before I begin.

Wesley's Configuration on the MBTI

In any cursory study of the life of John Wesley, a number of features emerge. Firstly, one notices a fastidious concern for the details of living, as witnessed early on by

the scrupulous order of Oxford Methodism, and later through Wesley's detailed management of the societies, and also by a personal diary which he at one point developed in order to record, almost seemingly, every spiritual impulse of his waking life (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People* 52-53). Secondly, the scholar Wesley evinces a facility with, and preference for, the logical and the reasonable, as witnessed by his early career as a tutor, his self-admitted proficiency as a logician, and his readiness to enter into logical discourse in the service of his ministry. Thirdly, one also notices a corresponding difficulty with, and longing after, the deeper dimensions of feeling, as witnessed in his self-deprecating spiritual analyses, his own various self-assessments, and a certain arguable naiveté with regard to the subtleties of romantic relationships. Finally, one finds in Wesley a practically nonexistent sense of intuition, manifested significantly one evening during the stressful spring of 1738 but, by appearances, largely hidden again for the rest of his life.

The foregoing observations represent a dissection of Wesley's personality according to Jung's four mental functions: sensing, intuition, feeling, and thinking. I am proposing that Wesley's dominant function is sensing, that his auxiliary is thinking, his tertiary, feeling, and his inferior function, intuition.

One may safely surmise that Wesley, the consummate organizer of the revival, was never one to wait idly by and let things happen to him. He preferred to operate in the outside world by means of the judging mode and, more specifically, via the thinking function, as witnessed by his early and ongoing teaching, his sermons, and his myriad publications.

Unarguably, Wesley was a masterful shaper of a movement, relying heavily upon

his thinking function as a means to order the revival and to engage his detractors.

Nonetheless, the question remains whether thinking was his dominant function. In other words, despite his effective interaction with the outside world, the evangelist may not have been an extravert. The introduction to type theory has noted how introverted personalities, as displayed to observers, are relatively difficult to understand. Introverts prefer to exercise their most differentiated function in their inner world, leaving their engagement with the outside world largely in the hands of the auxiliary. Consequently, introverts with dominant sensing, for example, could appear to the world as dominant thinkers because thinking is the function they are pleased to reveal. Myers and Myers go on to note how introverts who exercise a well-developed auxiliary function make an essential contribution to the world (18).

This construal of introversion with dominant sensing and auxiliary thinking, I suggest, was the case with Wesley. Myers and Myers note that that with introverts the dominant function, usually hidden from the outside world, will become manifest in important situations (14-15). According to my reading of Wesley, at some of the most crucial points of his career, he is basically, foundationally, an empiricist. This preference for sense information appears not only in his philosophical predilection for observable fact over metaphysical theory but in his own introspective musings, as well. Wesley is an introvert with dominant sensing coupled with a masterfully developed thinking apparatus with which to engage the outer world.

In his 28 March 1739 journal entry, expounding upon his decision to take over leadership of the revival in Bristol, J. Wesley culls an extract from an earlier apologia to his father, outlining his rationale for rejecting his encouragement to follow him as curate

of Epworth. The spiritual friendships he enjoys at university are a treasured blessing—and evidence of the social aspect of Wesleyan piety. Perhaps equally tellingly, he praises, as well, the “blessing” of “retirement”: “No one takes it into his head to come within my doors unless I desire him, or he has business with me. And even then, as soon as his business is done, he immediately goes away” (19: 38-40). Wesley is an introvert, I say, with dominant sensing, and if on that fateful day at Fetter Lane the lot had spoken against the Bristol engagement (38), he might well have followed his preferences into a somewhat less public career.

These are the broad contours of the analysis. I now inquire more particularly into the various evidences for this approach.

The Case for Introversion

The stereotypical caricature of the graceless introvert, at home with the world of ideas but utterly inept in social encounters, does not fit very precisely into a developing picture of the leader of the evangelical revival. For one possible example, John Gambold, as an early Methodist, praises his mentor to a friend in terms of a charming earnestness (Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley* 233-41). Furthermore, one might argue that a person simply cannot rise to the eminence Wesley enjoyed in England without a certain facility with social parlance. Myers and Myers are clear, however, that introversion need not imply incompetence in one’s outer world; simply, introverts are at their best with reflection (7).

A number of features in the available data combine to support an understanding of Wesley as introvert. One is raised into bold relief by the very title of a recent anthology of materials by and about Wesley, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley* (Heitzenrater). For all the

reams of Wesleyanna available to the historian, Heitzenrater offers a number of reasons that the figure of Wesley has been, and remains, somewhat difficult to pin down. They include his legendary status in his own time, discrepancies between his public and private persona, controversies boiling around him on a number of fronts, and a number of paradoxical tensions in his ideology and experience (26-33). Introverts, say Myers and Myers, are hard to understand and probably unintelligible to extraverts, in other words, elusive (54). In addition, the authors stress introverts' steadiness, independence from whatever may be happening in the present external environment, and their powers of detachment and concentration (54-55). From Gambold's description of Wesley as unmoved by situational changes (Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley* 238), to his own acknowledgment of his own constitutional steadiness, the evidence bears out a picture of unflappable self-continuity. In a letter Wesley quotes one commentator as saying, "I used to wonder, said one, that you was *so little affected* [original emphasis] at things that would make *me* [original emphasis] run mad. But now I see it is God's doing. If you *felt* [original emphasis] these things as many do, you would be quite incapable of the work to which you are called" (qtd. in Telford 5: 26). The historian Outler prefers poetic description: "For the next half-century [after the confirming victory at Bristol], in failure and triumph, tumult and peace, obloquy and fame, the picture rarely varies: a man with an overmastering mission, acutely self-aware but rarely ruffled, often in stress but always secure on a rock-steady foundation" (17-18). The detached introvert, according to Myers and Myers, can manage well without encouragement (51). Wesley's management of the revival amid a sea of controversy seems a perfect case in point. Introverts, according to Myers and Myers, have a penchant for "unworldly wisdom," "eternal truths" (55). The

description requires no comment.

An introvertish persuasion, alluded to earlier with regard to Wesley's decision not to take the cure at Epworth, may also find expression in the words of Wesley's historic examination of the Methodist preachers that have found their way into the present *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*: "Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any one place than is strictly necessary" (204). Idle, extravertish chit-chat, it seems, would be far from the Wesleyan way.

The Case for Sensing

Wesley's penchant for sensual data, for concrete facts, for immediate observation, and for direct experience has been treated in the section on the churchman's empirical bent. All of these proclivities are characteristic of the sensing preference (Myers and Myers 57-62). Whether he was writing on the natural sciences, championing the simplicity of the facts of a given matter over metaphysical theoretical posturing, or evaluating the self-evident issue of whether or not he himself felt any love for God, the sensing approach consistently won the day.

According to Myers and Myers, sensing types are more concerned with actualities than with the things that might be (57). A reflection of this propensity in Wesley could be revealed in this remembrance of him by his admiring protégé: "He had neither the presumption nor the leisure to anticipate things whose season was not now, and would show some uneasiness whenever any of us, by impertinent speculations, were shifting off the appointed improvement of the present minute" (Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley* 237-38). Myers and Myers describe in the sensing type a deliberativeness, a carefulness, an enjoyment of precision suitable to an accountant (60-61). With regard to these

characteristics in J. Wesley, one may select for evidence the meticulous columnar system of accounting he devised in his diaries of 1734-35 (18: 303), the care with which he administered the arrangement of tickets for membership in his societies (19: 183-84), and the logical precision demonstrated in his writing.

Finally, the argument that in Wesley an epistemology is foundational even to his theology (Dreyer 29-30)—illustrated in his empiricist construction for faith and substantiated by his frank appraisal that, in the cases of assurance and perfection, without the testimony of a living witness he would be inclined to suspect his own understanding of the Scriptures (Jackson 11: 406)—gives further support to the conclusion that in the end, he relies chiefly on the sensing function. Sensing is dominant in his personal makeup.

The Case for Thinking

J. Wesley's auxiliary function, according to this construal, is thinking. Thinking, according to Myers and Myers, is a logical process of arriving at an objective conclusion. The impersonal is the thinker's forte. Related professions are surgery and the law bench (65, 67). On first look, one might not think of a pastor as living in the world of the impersonal and objective; the life to which Wesley aspired obviously involved a feeling and relational dimension. His letters are replete with gentle, pastoral, relationally sensitive language: "My dear friend" (26: 482), "your ever affectionate brother" (489). However, his writings are perhaps even more notable for their succinct, ultra-logical construction and their polemical bite. Furthermore, since, according to this construal, thinking is for Wesley auxiliary, the ways that it manifests should not be so extreme as if it were the dominant process (Myers and Myers 67-68).

According to Myers and Myers, thinkers have greater abilities as executives as compared with their prowess in the social arena (68). Again, one may concede that Wesley represents for the biographer no social pariah. Nonetheless, when one evaluates his relative strengths, Wesley's ability to make hard, executive decisions rates well, for instance, with regard to his treatment of membership tickets for the United Societies, noted in his journal, 1741: J. Wesley was well prepared to excise the membership roll when necessary, to engage in the unpleasant institutional surgery of personal discipline, when he judged that the occasion required. Only, one should note, the leader was not altogether heartless in withholding the ticket: "About forty were by this means separated from us; I trust, only for a season" (19: 183-84). Too much delight in the tough decisions could be problematic.

One may surmise that Wesley's executive aptitude factored into Whitefield's invitation to lead the revival in Bristol, and into Wesley's successful management of a movement that involved, toward the end of his life, some "[t]hreescore thousand persons setting their faces heavenward" (Telford 7: 206). Contrariwise, all must admit that the great organizer was somewhat less adept with the finer subtleties of romantic and other relationships. The brilliant logician was too easily befuddled in love.

J. Wesley's journal tells of a developing relationship with Sophey Hopkey, and its intentionally platonic nature, until on a certain day he takes her hand and kisses her: "And from this time, I fear there was a mixture in my intention, though I was not soon sensible of it" (18: 365-67). His diary of 9 March 1737 shows him emotionally broadsided by her decision to marry another (485-86). After a convoluted near-miss at marrying in 1749, he finally succeeded with Mary Vazeille a couple of years later. A letter to her, a few

months into the marriage, may betray a certain naiveté with regard to the expectations of a marriage, as compared with his relative acumen with running a religious movement. From Bristol, the interrogation proceeds thusly: “Do you neglect none of your temporal business? Have you wrote to Spain? And sold your jewels? And settled with Mr. Blisson?... Do not you forget the poor? Have you visited the prison?” (26: 451). In the end, the marriage was a failure (Rack 266).

Myers and Myers contrast the developing skill of the thinking child “in the organization of facts and ideas” with the feeling child who “becomes more adult in the handling of human relationships” (4). The foregoing letter seems to suggest not an adult but a paternalistic air in Wesley’s remarks toward his wife. Benjamin Kennicott’s criticism of Wesley’s last sermon before the university at Oxford may also evidence a degree of naiveté with regard to the nuance of relationships. Kennicott actually appreciated some of the preacher’s vituperation. “But considering how many shining lights are here that are the glory of the Christian cause, his sacred censure was much too flaming and strong, and his charity much too weak in not making large allowances” (qtd. in Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley* 278-79). One is hard pressed to stand in judgment of the preaching of a John the Baptist or even a lesser prophet such as Wesley. Nevertheless, one must wonder if the kind of invective noted on that day was not the work of an unchastened thinking-type preacher.

If this material from his marriage and preaching suggests in Wesley a certain tactlessness with regard to the feelings of others, it is perhaps most evident in the case of others’ deep bereavement (Rack 542-43). To his sister he interprets her children’s death as a great providence. Now she will have more time to devote to the Lord (J. Wesley 26:

90). As late as 1791, he accuses Adam Clarke of “inordinate affection” after the death of his child (Telford 8: 252-53).

If Southey is at all correct in his evaluation of Wesley’s “voracious credulity” (231), in particular with regard to the personal excesses in others he sometimes accepted, this characteristic may reflect not only Wesley’s sensing, empirical bias, but also a certain lack of sophistication in the reading of other’s nonverbal cues. His brother Charles thought of him as easy prey for unscrupulous characters (Rack 541). Again, these assessments may all be of a piece.

At various points in his writings, Wesley points to his own paucity of feeling. Characteristically, he expresses what he is lacking with the cool detachment of logic. Most illustrative of this sense may be the striking confession to his brother Charles in 1766 that he never loved God. Nonetheless, he goes on—very much the casual, impersonal observer of his own personality—to tell how this lacking contrasts with his sense of being used by God. As soon as the confessional is over, conversation turns to the standard business of the revival (Telford 5: 15-16).

In 1786 Wesley engaged in self-analysis:

Almost ever since I can remember I have been led in a peculiar way. I go in an even line, being very little raised at one time or depressed at another. . . . I see abundantly more than I feel. I want to feel more love and zeal for God. (qtd. in Telford 7: 319).

If *feeling* were at the heart of his epistemology, it was not so in his psychical constitution.

Samuel Wesley once remarked to Susanna about their son, “I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature, unless he could give a *reason* [original emphasis] for it” (qtd. in Clarke 513). The Wesley’s most famous son, by constitution, for better or for worse, was a thinking type. This feature helps to explain a

large part of both his success and his personal pain.

The Case for Judgment

According to Myers and Myers, the judgment-perception dichotomy addresses the way persons prefer to deal with the outer world, either by the “*perceptive* attitude [original emphasis],” which tends to keep options open, or the “*judging* attitude [original emphasis],” which closes off perception and moves to a decision. Judging types “order their lives,” while perceptive types “just live them” (8-9). That Wesley chose to engage with the world by his judging function is perhaps the most obviously apparent feature of his personality, as is witnessed by the very name of the movement he led—the Methodists.

One small piece of information underscores the large public stereotype about the man and his movement. It comes from John Gambold’s discussion of Wesley’s directions to his friends during the early days at Oxford. Following early devotions, they were to decide what should be the agenda for the whole day. Such a strategy would discipline a personality that had been habituated to “humour and chance” (Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley* 239) and gradually ready it for the accompanying constraints of holiness (233-34, 238-39).

More evidence for Wesley’s preference for judging may seem to belabor the point. More suggestive, particularly with reference to his treatment of assurance, is a consideration of Wesley’s judging process as a function of his introversion. According to the theory, introverts dedicate their dominant function (in Wesley’s case, a perceptive one, sensing) to their inner experience. The face they show the public is their auxiliary (Myers and Myers 13-14). Obviously, Wesley, the gifted logician, has a marvelously

developed facility with the thinking domain. To most observers, thinking would seem to be his dominant function. Indeed, in the outer world, Wesley operates as a dominant thinker. He raises questions, establishes premises, arrives at conclusions. Everything is rational, dogmatic, clear, conclusive. Inwardly, however, where the preacher truly lives, he is still very much in the perceptive mode, not nearly so *decided* about his own sense of assurance as the doctrine he preaches would suggest. Things are not so conclusive. Heitzenrater has suggested that Wesley demonstrated a capacity to venture beyond the level of his own experience in his public proclamation (*Wesley and the People* 224). Perhaps Mr. Böhler's early advice to "preach faith *till* [original emphasis] you have it" (J. Wesley 18: 228) found some resonance in Wesley because this ability fit the natural constitution of his personality.

Myers and Myers note that with some exceptions, introverts are unlikely to allow others into their interior worlds (14). Nonetheless, at times Wesley is shockingly transparent, more likely, not in his persuasive, public, judging mode but with regard to his seeking, private, perceiving attitude. Perhaps the most famous example is his June 1766 confession to brother Charles, but this moment of self-disclosure is by no means an isolated instance.

According to the theory, these four preferences, introversion (I), sensing (S), thinking (T), and judgment (J), when joined together in an individual create a describable personality type (ISTJ). ISTJs are responsible, dependable, steady in the face of tumult, not easily distractible. They stress the logical and the analytical along with the ability to make decisions. Given sufficient development of their extroversion, they are executive material (Myers and Myers 104-06). They are material for the leading of a movement.

Aldersgate as an Experience of the Inferior Function

Type theory may have something to suggest, as well, about Wesley's experience of assurance at Aldersgate and subsequent failure to experience an ongoing intuition of his acceptance. According to my construal, intuition was Wesley's least developed, least conscious function: "I am very rarely led by impressions, but generally by reason and by Scripture. I see abundantly more than I feel" (qtd. in Telford 7: 319). Again, the somewhat fluid nature of the subject matter is evident. One may ask whether, for Wesley, *impression* is the same thing as a *feeling* or, more largely, whether the grammar of intuition/feeling will ever admit of being fully parsed. Nonetheless, according to the vocabulary of type theory, at Aldersgate Wesley encountered a uniquely intuitive experience, an unexpected, unbidden, perception of his acceptance, emerging from a source to which his consciousness was not privy, bringing a sense of conviction and inspiration (Myers and Myers 57-58).

According to the theory espoused by Quenk, for someone with dominant sensing, the intuitive domain is basically unconscious. At certain times, however, the inferior intuition can emerge in a psychic *coup d'état*, assuming control over a person's personality and manifesting the characteristics of a person with dominant intuition. The experience often involves a tendency towards immaturity, exaggeration, and absolute, all-or-nothing-at-all thinking. Such out-of-character experiences often result from sickness, life change, and emotional stress (5-8). To make a connection with Aldersgate, one has only to recall the events surrounding the event: romantic catastrophe, public humiliation, spiritual disequilibrium, and, finally, the announcement that Wesley's younger brother Charles had just experienced the crisis for which the elder brother, himself, had been

longing. In the language of Quenck's construal, Aldersgate could represent an "inferior function takeover" (11) that would become for Wesley a taste of the intuitive domain for which he would long the rest of his life.

In the end, according to this paper, he would take this experience, along with the combined testimony of many others, wrap it up in the language of feeling and then place it squarely in the conceptual category of sensation. Faith, as apparatus of spiritual perception, would involve immediate, intuitive, perception of the divine, but as a new category of sensing, it would have all the certainty of the natural senses. This marvelously creative construction is made more intelligible when one understands not only John's predilection for a Lockean epistemology but the dominance of sensing in his own personality makeup.

Myers and Myers note that introverts with preferred sensing lack appreciation for the intuitions of others (104-05). This sort of sentiment may be detected in Wesley's tendency toward devaluation of metaphysics and corresponding exaltation of empirical data. Contrariwise, Wesley does not seem overly suspicious of the intuitive experiences of others. In fact, he has been in this respect accused of being credulous to a fault. Perhaps his formative experience with the Moravians, coupled with his own sense of intuitive insight at Aldersgate, gave him more of an appreciation for intuition in others.

Rack's Evaluation

Toward the end of his treatment of Wesley and the Methodist movement, Rack comes to conclusions that may bear strongly on an impartial study of the leader's personality. His suggestions largely inform my own analysis:

Wesley generally lacked the kind of direct emotional experience of the presence of God, the supernatural world and an inward assurance of

salvation of the kind that so many of the converts valued and about which he and they spoke so often as being open to all. A lack of a capacity for such experiences seems to have been a fundamental feature of his constitution. (548)

The previous pages represent my attempt to use the conceptual language of typology to make the same point. In addition, Rack reads the 1766 letter to Charles as a sign of an incipient acceptance of his limitation as the manner of God's designs for him (549). The idea is pregnant with possibilities for application.

Arguably, the depth and complexity of the subject of Christian assurance requires an examination into its various elements in a piecemeal fashion if one is to enter into a meaningful investigation at all. Surely, to comprehend Wesley, his doctrine of assurance, and his experience around it, a universe of factors demand attention, including historical, developmental, genetic, and neurological considerations. Consequently, a discussion as brief as this chapter should aim, at best, at provoking further study, rather than providing anything approaching comprehensiveness.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The historical section has demonstrated how in the ongoing conversations of the Christian Church, and especially within the writings of John Wesley, the question of Christian assurance—how believers can know they are children of God—has been very much alive.

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how personality theory informs a phenomenology of Christian assurance as it has developed in a Wesleyan environment. In the literature review, I sought to use the theory of psychological type to engage with the experience and teaching of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement and champion of the doctrine of Christian assurance, in order to provide a narrative and theoretical scaffolding from which to develop the empirical aspect of the study. Needless to say, the question of Christian assurance is wide and deep, almost overwhelmingly so. Type theory has provided a manageable way to frame some of the issues involved. Now, in order to transfer this inquiry into the experience of *living witnesses*, I narrowed the field of investigation even more to ask if the thinking/feeling dimension of the Myers-Briggs model has any relationship with a person's experience of assurance. Most precisely, I asked, among individuals from a United Methodist church, about the relationship between their preference for thinking versus feeling as measured by the MBTI and their awareness of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective features relative to their experience of Christian assurance, as measured by a researcher-designed instrument.

This question reflects my decision to select one dimension from Myers' model of

personality type and to investigate whether variation with regard to this dimension might relate in certain ways with the manner in which different individuals would articulate their experience of Christian assurance.

A number of assumptions were implicit in this research question. One involved the confidence that all participants, as regular attenders at their church, had, indeed, arrived at some level of assurance in their Christian faith. A second involved the proposal that the experience of assurance may admit of degrees, which suggests that certain experiences might strengthen individuals' sense of Christian assurance. A third affirmed that the phenomena surrounding the experience of assurance are, at least in some measure, amenable to rational evaluation.

My hypothesis, based on my own personal experience, my knowledge of personality theory, and my intuition of the mysterious interactions of Spirit, psyche, and word, predicted a positive correlation between thinking versus feeling preference and subjects' reporting of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective factors in their experience of assurance.

Of the many factors that loom significantly over a consideration of my primary research question, the matter of two centuries of cultural development between Wesley's time and today sits prominently. My own personal struggles for assurance stand in direct continuity with those of the first Methodist. However, the question remains whether the issue of personal assurance has been replaced in the larger Christian community by other pressing concerns. Consequently my second research question was important: What significance did the respondents afford to the question of Christian assurance in their own spirituality? A single item added to the researcher-designed instrument provided the

clues.

Without doubt, a multitude of factors enter into a given person's experience of assurance, not the least of which are the invisible, ineffable, immeasurable workings of the Holy Spirit. I proceeded with the assumption that the Spirit often operates within the more mundane human processes of feeling, thinking, and perception. These natural human operations do not, themselves, easily admit of clear and discrete definitions. The lines separating feeling, thinking, sensation, and intuition are not nearly so distinct as one might wish. The language that has sought to describe the various operations of the human soul is still very fluid, and subject to emendation, not only via the findings of philosophical analysis but from neurobiological research, as well (Damasio 145-46). One might argue that the language of poetry is better suited to this subject than the *zeros* and *ones* of computer-assisted research.

My choice, then, of a quantitative paradigm for the study design may have seemed counterintuitive. Ideally, a combination of phenomenological or other qualitative approaches with my survey research might provide the richest harvest of data. However, John W. Creswell notes the pragmatic argument against combining research paradigms (7-8). Lawrence F. Locke, Stephen J. Silverman, and Waneen Wyrick Spirduso affirm the descriptive, predictive, and explanatory powers of the quantitative paradigm as foundational to the modern social scientific project (132).

Participants

The study took place in 2008 among the parishioners of Antioch United Methodist Church, in the Gainesville District of the North Georgia Conference. The church is within ten miles of the center of Gainesville, a city of around 35,000. Antioch

was hosting approximately seventy in worship.

The congregation contributed forty participants to the study. One participant offered comment that left in question the veracity of that person's responses, so I discounted that person's data altogether. For the primary research question, two participants presented anomalies in completing the PAI, either leaving an item unmarked or improvising with arrows, indicating (presumably) the direction of choices on the dichotomous instrument. For that question, I discounted their data, as well, leaving the sample at thirty-seven. For the secondary research question, seven participants failed to complete the single item appended to the PAI, leaving the sample at thirty-two. Of the sample used for the primary research question, thirteen were male and twenty-four female. The average age of that sample was 52, with a range from 28 to 79. All were Caucasian.

Instrumentation

Of the various options available for investigating the relationship between personality type and the experience of assurance, I chose the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator along with a self-designed survey, the Pathways to Assurance Inventory.

The reasons for employing a survey were several. Surveys allow the researcher to draw inferences with regard to a given practice, attribute, or opinion by extending generalizations from a sample to a larger population (Creswell 118). The survey design provides convenience in terms of time and financial expense and produces easily quantifiable data. Most importantly, the potential for gathering information about a large population from a comparatively small group can be significant (Rea and Parker 7). In addition, with respect to the personal and sensitive nature of the topic being studied, the

design allowed for an optimum measure of anonymity. I matched survey scores with scores from the MBTI, with an additional Likert item for my second research question. Allowing for the personal nature of the study, the research design promised a high degree of confidentiality.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Among personality instruments in current use, the MBTI has a unique history and design. In the foreword to *Gifts Differing*, John D. Black tells the story of its development. Independently of the traditional psychological establishment, Isabel Briggs Myers sought to translate her interest in Jungian typology, inherited from her mother, Katherine Briggs, into a usable form. In order to develop the items for the instrument she would produce, she sampled her own children, their classmates, and others. She taught herself statistics and psychometrics; she found a professional mentor. Exercising a tireless entrepreneurial energy, she developed a sample size that reached into the thousands. Despite negative judgments within the psychological establishment toward personality measurement and typologies, and despite her uncredentialed status, Myers remained intrepid in her work, and the MBTI began to receive some institutional support, with the Consulting Psychologists Press assuming publication in 1975. That same year the Center for Applications of Psychological Type came into existence, formed with a view toward continuing service and research with the instrument (x-xii).

Unlike other popular personality measurements, the MBTI does not seek to address traits across a measured continuum but aims at an assessment of type as construed along four polar dichotomies. It is a forced-choice, self-report questionnaire with items designed to place respondents within the four preference dichotomies. I chose

Form G of the instrument. Sample items are located in Appendix B.

In his 1989 review, John G. Carlson reports on positive findings in recent reliability studies for the MBTI, while at the same time noting the need for further evaluation (“Affirmative” 485). As an instrument for separating individuals into one of the sixteen discreet types, it is relatively unreliable, but when used to locate them along the four basic personality continua, the instrument has proven considerably more stable (Francis 37-38). The most recent edition of the *MBTI Manual* reports consistent test-retest reliability over time, with the newer Form M showing improvement over form G. Of the different preference dichotomies, the TF scale has shown the weakest reliability (Myers et al. 165). Also related specifically to the TF dichotomy, the instrument has been criticized for employing differential gender weighting on the assumption of possible social learning factors. According to this adjustment, response items are weighed differently for males and females with regard to the TF score (Vacha-Haase and Thompson 174).

Owing to the vagaries of Jung’s own ideas, along with a somewhat unsystematic approach in translating and making operational his theory, Carlson cautions that assessment of construct validity for the MBTI is at a tentative stage (“Recent Assessments” 359). Robert S. Steele and Thomas J. Kelly note significant correlation between the EI scale and the extroversion factor on the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (690). Unfortunately, Carlson notes a relative scarcity of correlational studies regarding the remaining scales; the validity of the majority of the items has not been fully established (“Recent Assessments” 360, 364). The most recent edition of the *MBTI Manual* presents a number of correlational comparisons with a number of

instruments, including the Jungian Type Survey and the 16 Personality Factors Questionnaire (Myers et al. 173-85), and introduces confirmatory evidence of the validity of whole types, as opposed to the individual scales (196, 219). I should note that in a follow-up to his 1985 review, although Carlson calls for more systematic empirical research on the MBTI, he also admits to what he names the “psychological reality” of the four dimensions of type and the sometime remarkable connections clients make with their descriptions from the instrument (484).

A number of critics have faulted the MBTI regarding its dichotomous scoring protocol (Vacha-Haase and Thompson 174). The instrument is designed to determine a given set of preferences, not the relative strength of those preferences (Myers and McCaulley 58). Apparently, however, one’s relative score on a given scale is not altogether unimportant: Leslie Francis enjoins the exercise of particular care in making inferences with regard to given cases with low preference scores (43). In addition, Isabel Briggs Myers and Mary H. McCaulley submit, for the purpose of correlational investigation, a formula for converting preference scores to a continuous format (9).

Francis reports on the unusual posture of the MBTI with regard to its apparently unorthodox development and its discreet, rather than continuous, arrangement of types. It has until recently received relative neglect from the psychological mainstream. Nonetheless, citing the increasing depth of empirical research related to MBTI theory, he supports its usefulness as a means of practical insight into the varieties of religious experience (36, 43).

A number of factors supported the use of the MBTI for this study: (1) It is the most commonly employed instrument for measuring personality type available (Vacha-

Haase and Thompson 173); (2) it is confirmed by a growing, if not conclusive, corpus of empirical support; (3) personality type theory has a developing track record with regard to analyzing and interpreting religious experience (Francis 39-42); and, (4) the conceptual design on which the theory is based has served usefully for my preliminary analysis of Wesley and assurance.

The Pathways to Assurance Inventory

So far as I have observed, no surveys have been published that address the experience of Christian assurance; therefore, I designed my own. The purpose of the Pathways to Assurance Inventory was to ascertain, via the respondents' self-report, whether they were more aware of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective factors in their experience of their present level of assurance. For the various items, logical/impersonal/objective factors involved the language of truth, logic, vision, detachment, ideation (see Appendix B): "The objective truth of the Christian faith is essential to my sense of assurance" (Item 2a); "A well-reasoned lecture on the Bible could bring me deep assurance" (Item 7a). Items that were designed to pinpoint relational/personal/subjective factors used the language of feeling, attachment, relationship, valuation: "Assurance is a function of relationship" (Item 9b); "In the end, the facts of the Gospel have to be made real in a personal way" (Item 3b).

The PAI was designed to require no interpretation prior to administration. An introductory paragraph defines the purpose of the instrument as a means to investigate some of the ways that individuals express their experience of Christian assurance, their confidence that they are accepted by God. Below a line for the respondent's name and the

introductory paragraph followed the response items, with ten sets of paired opposites, situated according to a Likert Scale format.

Appended to the PAI was a single item also designed in the form of a Likert item. Respondents were asked to rate, along a continuum from *not important* to *very important*, the significance of the issue of Christian assurance in their own spirituality.

Data Collection

At the critical juncture of the study, proper, forty volunteers from the Antioch church received written copies of the MBTI and PAI, along with the single item on the significance of assurance. The majority of respondents dated the Form G of the MBTI between the dates 10-14 May 2008. Participants received the consent form clarifying the elective nature of the study and affirming a pledge of confidentiality (see Appendix A). During a special session at the church, a neighboring hospital chaplain spoke on personality type.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data from the MBTI and the PAI, I submitted the pertinent figures for a correlational study using the Spearman rho, which measures the relationship between two ranked variables (Comrey, Bott, and Lee 371). Per Myers and McCaulley's instructions, for persons with a preference for thinking, I used the number associated with that preference, subtracted from 100; and for those with a feeling preference, I used the number associated with that preference, added to 100 (9). I then submitted the TF scores, as well as scores for the PAI, for computation on the Spearman rho.

Ethical Procedures

I provided a consent form for project participants, specifying the elective nature

of participation, the gathering of data from the instruments, known risks or discomfort, confidentiality, reporting of project results, my offer to answer any questions about their involvement, and their understanding of the option to discontinue participation at any time.

I have either returned identified results of the study to participants or secured them in safekeeping at home.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how personality theory informs a phenomenology of Christian assurance as it has developed in a Wesleyan environment. The research project measured the relationship between subjects' scores on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and their scores on a researcher-designed instrument to evaluate their experience of assurance.

The following questions provided the framework for the research project:

1. Among individuals from a United Methodist church, what was the relationship between thinking versus feeling preference, as measured by the MBTI, and their awareness of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective features relative to their experience of Christian assurance, as measured by a researcher-designed instrument?
2. What significance did the respondents afford to the question of Christian assurance in their own spirituality? In other words, I was asking whether the question of assurance is still a living issue.

Profile of Participants

Forty persons from the Antioch United Methodist Church volunteered for the study. After one participant disclosed a comment which raised uncertainty about the truthfulness of their responses, I discounted their data entirely. Two additional participants offered irregularities with the completion of the PAI; one failed to mark an item, and the other used arrows to indicate (presumably) the direction of their choices. For the primary research question, I discounted their data, so that the sample was thirty-

seven. Seven persons did not complete the significance scale, so the sample for the secondary research question was thirty-two. The sample for the primary research question included thirteen males and twenty-four females, with an average age of 52, and a range from 28 to 79. The participants were all caucasian.

Research Question #1

Among individuals from a United Methodist church, what was the relationship between thinking versus feeling preference, as measured by the MBTI, and their awareness of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective features relative to their experience of Christian assurance, as measured by a researcher-designed instrument?

For the purposes of this study, respondents' scores on the TF dichotomy of the MBTI were converted to a continuum around an arithmetical threshold of 100. The continuous score for a thinking preference is 100 minus the preference score. The continuous score for a feeling preference is 100 plus the preference score. Construed thusly, the lowest possible score, indicating the clearest possible preference for *thinking*, is, for Form G, 35. Conversely, the highest possible score, indicating the clearest preference for *feeling* is, for Form G, 139 for males and 143 for females (Myers and McCaulley 10, 58). Table 4.1 presents a particularized listing of TF scores and indicates that only 37.8 percent of participants scored below 100. With 62 percent scoring above 100, the stronger proclivity among the sample for the feeling preference was clear. The median score was 113. Again, the sample for the primary research question was thirty-seven. The statistical analysis program used for the study was SPSS 11.5 (SPSS).

Table 4.1. MBTI Scores

Score	n	Valid %	Cumulative %
57	1	2.7	2.7
59	2	5.4	8.1
63	1	2.7	10.8
69	1	2.7	13.5
79	1	2.7	16.2
83	1	2.7	18.9
85	1	2.7	21.6
89	1	2.7	24.3
93	2	5.4	29.7
97	1	2.7	32.4
99	2	5.4	37.8
103	1	2.7	40.5
105	1	2.7	43.2
109	1	2.7	45.9
111	1	2.7	48.6
113	1	2.7	51.4
115	2	5.4	56.8
117	1	2.7	59.5
119	1	2.7	62.2
121	1	2.7	64.9
123	3	8.1	73
125	2	5.4	78.4
127	2	5.4	83.8
129	1	2.7	86.5
133	3	8.1	94.6
139	1	2.7	97.3
143	1	2.7	100
Total	37	100	

Figure 4.1 provides a pictorial display of the MBTI scores.

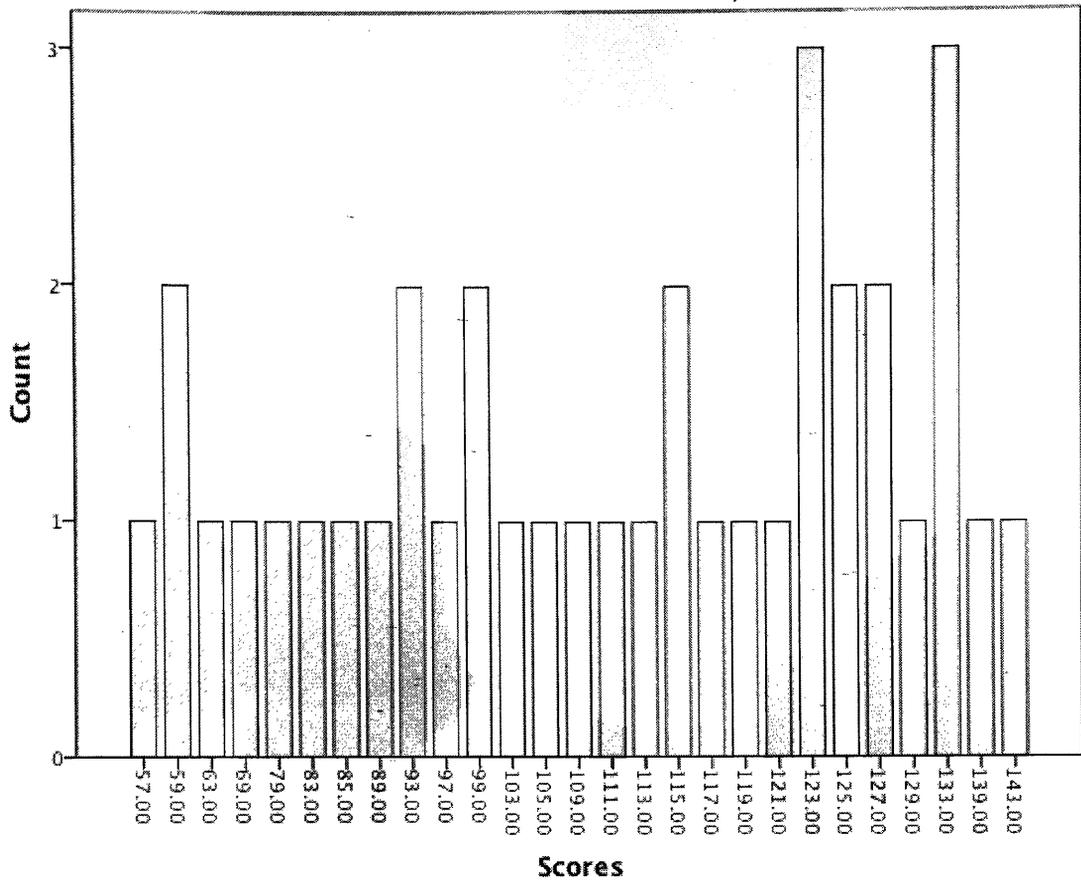


Figure 4.1. MBTI bar graph.

When separated according to gender, the percentage of females with TF scores above 100 was even higher, at 75 percent, with 62 percent of males scoring below 100. As Table 4.2 indicates, median scores for females and males, respectively, were 116 and 99.

Table 4.2. MBTI Scores according to Gender

Gender	n	Median	Mode
Male	13	99	99
Female	24	116	123

Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

The Pathways to Assurance Inventory featured ten items arranged in a Likert scale format with a midpoint cumulative score of 30. Table 4.3 illustrates the striking proclivity within the sample for those statements designed to express the relational/personal/subjective dimension of their experience.

Table 4.3. PAI Scores

Score	n	%	Cumulative %
22	1	2.7	2.7
26	1	2.7	5.4
29	1	2.7	8.1
30	3	8.1	16.2
32	4	10.8	27
33	2	5.4	32.4
34	2	5.4	37.8
35	1	2.7	40.5
37	4	10.8	51.4
38	3	8.1	59.5
39	2	5.4	64.9
40	1	2.7	67.6
41	3	8.1	75.7
43	1	2.7	78.4
44	2	5.4	83.8
46	1	2.7	86.5
48	3	8.1	94.6
50	2	5.4	100
Total	37	100	

Figure 4.2 offers a graphic representation of the data for the PAI.

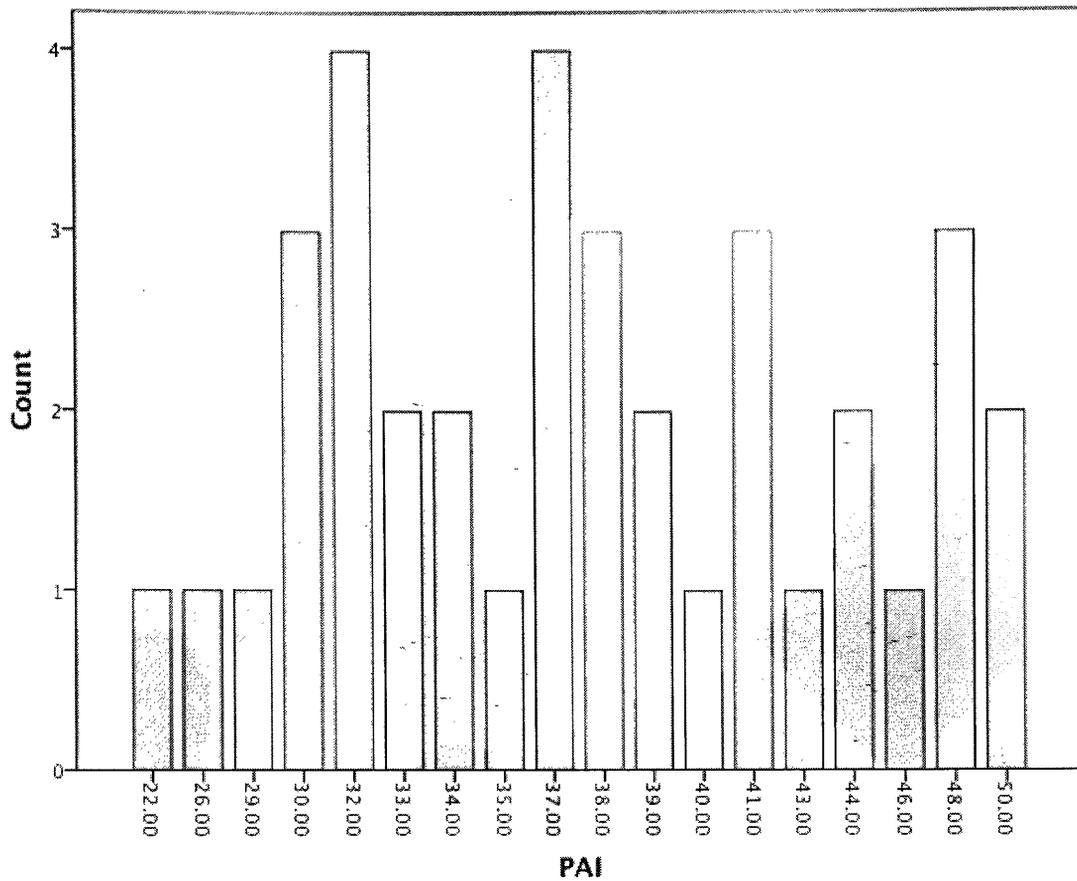


Figure 4.2. PAI bar graph.

As Table 4.4 indicates, when tabulated according to gender, the median scores were strikingly similar at 39 for males and 37 for females.

Table 4.4. Gender Differences for PAI

Gender	n	Median	Mode
Male	13	39	41
Female	24	37	32

A Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used for the MBTI and PAI scores. As Table 4.5 demonstrates, results indicated a positive relationship between the variables and a statistically significant correlation ($r = +.405$, $n = 37$, $p < .013$, two-tailed).

Table 4.5. Correlation between MBTI and PAI Scores

		PAI	MBTI
PAI	Correlation Coefficient	1	.405*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013
	N	37	37
MBTI	Correlation Coefficient	.405*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	
	N	37	37

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 4.3 graphically illustrates the moderately positive correlation between the MBTI and PAI scores.

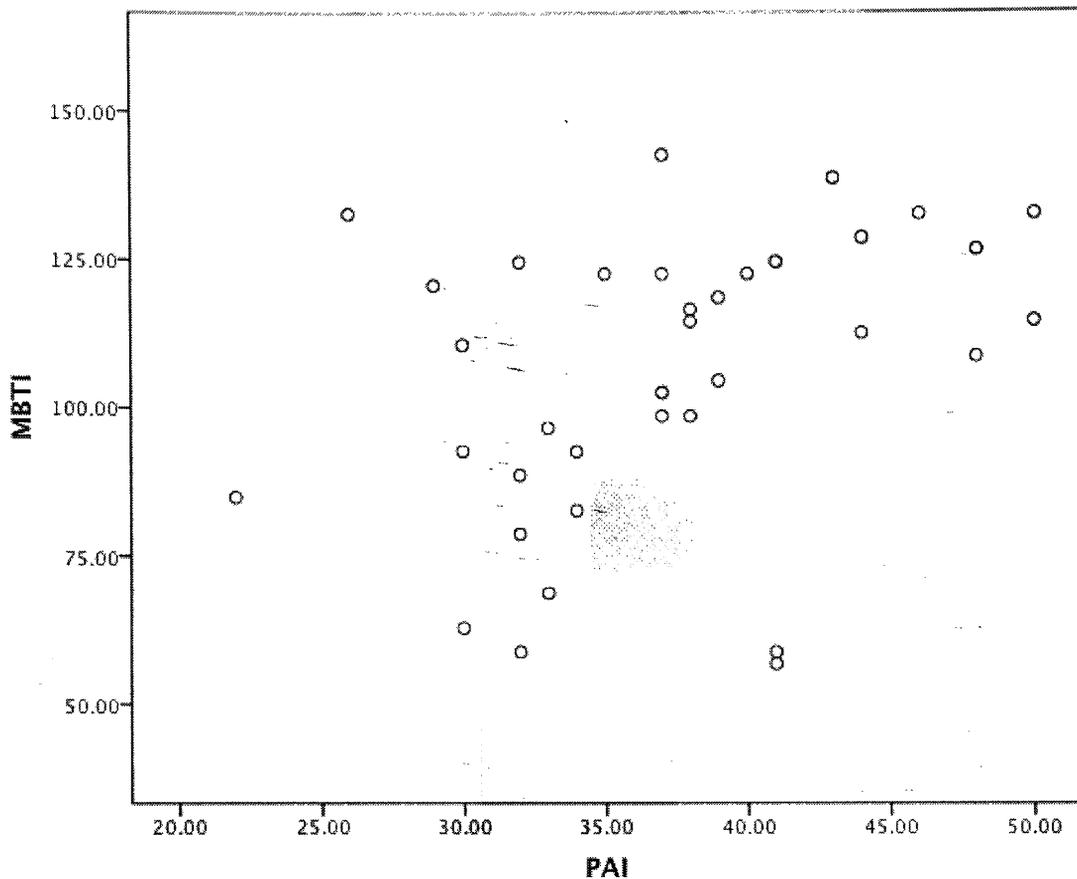


Figure 4.3. Correlation between MBTI and PAI scores.

The moderately positive correlation may suggest that those persons with the clearer preference for thinking resonate more strongly with language that highlights logical/impersonal/objective considerations in their experience of assurance, and that those with the clearer feeling preference resonate more strongly with language that highlights relational/personal/subjective considerations. It could suggest that the thinking/feeling preference has identifiable implications for the way a person experiences the witness of the Spirit.

Research Question #2

Appended to the Pathways to Assurance Inventory was a single item arranged in a Likert scale response format. Participants rated items on a scale from one to five the significance of Christian assurance in their own spirituality. A 1 stands for *not important*. A 5 stands for *very important*. Seven respondents did not complete this page, and one was discounted after offering comment that called into question the veracity of her data. As Table 4.6 demonstrates, the remaining sample of thirty-two respondents divides equally with scores of 4 and 5.

Table 4.6. Significance of Assurance Scores

	n	Valid %	Cumulative %
Score of 4	16	50	50
Score of 5	16	50	100
Total	32	100	

Summary of Major Findings

Perhaps the most telling feature of the statistical results of the study is the paucity of low scores on the Pathways to Assurance Inventory. Only 16 percent scored at or below the midpoint, leaving the remainder of 84 percent who preferred language expressing the relational/personal/subjective dimension. With regard to the MBTI, the tendency among the sample toward the feeling preference, with 62 percent scoring at or above 100, is considerably lower. Nonetheless, the connection is significant enough to warrant an assessment of moderate positive correlation between the two sets of scores and so to offer a moderately positive affirmation of the primary research question. The study affirms for participants a moderate relationship between thinking versus feeling

preference, as measured by the MBTI, and their awareness of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective features relative to their experience of Christian assurance.

Gender differences were remarkable on the MBTI, with females predominately manifesting a preference for feeling, and males for thinking. Curiously, with the PAI, the median score among both gender groups was situated clearly on the relational/personal/subjective side.

Respondents provided a positive answer to the secondary research question, whether or not Christian assurance remains a living issue, strongly affirming the importance of Christian assurance in their own spirituality.

In synopsis, the study produced the following findings:

- Results indicated a moderate positive correlation between subjects' thinking versus feeling preference, as measured by the MBTI, and their awareness of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective features relative to their experience of Christian assurance.
- MBTI results disclosed a preference among females for feeling, and among males for thinking.
- On the PAI, median scores tended toward the relational/personal/subjective dimension, regardless of gender. The vast majority of respondents preferred language expressing the relational/personal/subjective domain.
- Evidence from the sample indicated Christian assurance remains a living issue.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results of the study confirmed a moderately positive correlation between participants' thinking versus feeling preference, as measured by the MBTI, and their awareness of logical/impersonal/objective versus relational/personal/subjective features relative to their experience of assurance, as measured by the PAI. Not surprisingly, the study suggested a relationship between personality preferences and the type of language chosen for describing spiritual experience. It supports my intuition that in a discussion of assurance, a person with a strong feeling preference would resonate more quickly with personal factors that enter into a deep sense of belonging and that someone with a preference for thinking would be more aware of rational factors. In fact, one might argue that any findings suggesting a weaker correlation between personality scores and language preferences vis-à-vis assurance would have appeared entirely counterintuitive, even questionable. The Bible presents a God who is acquainted with persons' needs as a Father and who is able to provide his spiritual gifts on an individual basis (Luke 12: 30; 1 Cor. 12: 4-11). Furthermore, the notion seems fitting, from an incarnational perspective, that God should engage with his creatures in a manner suited to their psychological uniqueness.

This study confirms the importance of psychological enquiry, both as a means of understanding the individual's relationship with God and as a tool for pastoral ministry. It suggests that insight into a person's personality type could shape a pastoral counselor's approach to help a parishioner enter into an experience of deeper assurance: For one person, a library of apologetic tomes will not be as effective as a small group experience

of deep relationship centered around the Eucharist. For another, the free-flowing subjectivity of a relationship-based group might not provide the cold, rational evidence the more logical heart craves.

One cannot help but recall J. Wesley's homage toward *feeling* in his early (1739) spiritual self-assessment (19: 29-30). If Dreyer is correct to assert that for Wesley, feeling is indispensable to knowledge (29-39), and if that epistemological assumption has buttressed Wesley's teaching and the tradition that follows him, one wonders if churches within the Methodist tradition are best suited to apply a personal, relational, subjective approach to their spiritual practices.

The review of Jung's glossary in *Psychological Types* highlights the question of the incommensurability of the different psychic functions. One cannot express fully the essential nature of feeling with abstract conceptualization (435-36). I noted a possible connection with Wesley's struggle to define precisely the nature of intuition of the witness of the Spirit.

If in truth the experience of assurance is heavily dependent on feeling-related factors, and, per Jung, the feeling function is not totally assessable to rational analysis, the element of mystery this impasse creates is probably not shocking to most providers of pastoral care. In seeking to understand the interaction of the Spirit with the human soul, pastors will always be amateurs, always aware of the inability of language to express the full depths of spiritual experience. I am reminded of the story of a ballerina questioned by someone so impudent as to ask about the *meaning* of one of her performances. "If I could have said it,' she said 'I wouldn't have had to dance it'" (qtd. in Wright,

“Resurrection” 152-53). Speaking of the mystery of spiritual rebirth, Jesus uses the metaphor of the wind, unrestrained, inexplicable (John 3: 5-8).

Perhaps the findings of this study suggest, in the end, a humbling insight for pastors and other practitioners of the spiritual life. Results may suggest a strongly weighted feeling dimension in the dynamic of Christian assurance. If pastors find themselves sometimes struggling for words to express the nature of the experience and to draw others into its reality, then perhaps the best move is humbly to admit their inability to manage the wind of the Spirit as it blows in a person’s heart. The Spirit’s work in a human soul is, in the final analysis, beyond pastors’ analytical probes and manipulations.

Limitations of the Study

This project, an initial enquiry into the relationship of personality type and Christian assurance, is at best a tentative and heuristic design. It affirms, with the humility a preliminary observation must require, a correlation between scores for one psychic function (thinking/feeling) and for language chosen to describe the dynamic of assurance and suggests a possible weighting of that experience with relational, personal, subjective language.

A number of considerations raise questions regarding the strength of the study and offer an invitation for further research: The small sample, the limitations of the researcher-designed instrument, and the choice to limit the primary research question to assess a single judging function are all factors that bear upon an evaluation of my findings. Research respondents were strikingly heterogeneous in race, geographic situation, and denominational affiliation. The average age was a limiting factor as well. In addition, my close relationship with the participants could have had a coercive influence.

High scores on the item evaluating the importance of Christian assurance in individuals' spirituality could reflect the importance of the issue for their pastor.

Treating an issue as complex as the witness of the Spirit requires one to circumscribe the scope of the investigation, setting a universe of important considerations to the side. By limiting the primary research question to concentrate on a single preference dichotomy, the empirical aspect of the study left unaddressed a number of psychological, historical, experiential, genetic, neurological, and even pathological factors. Similarly, in addition to the concentration on personality type, a variety of additional factors could have been treated at length, which might bear upon Wesley's experience regarding Christian assurance and his treatment of the doctrine.

Unexpected Observations

The results have confirmed my basic assumptions about the ways of God with the human soul. Nonetheless, the study has produced a picture that is not as simple as I might have anticipated. I am not surprised that females' responses tended toward the feeling side of the personality spectrum, with males disposed more toward thinking, but I am curious that the PAI revealed a majority preference for relational/personal/subjective language, regardless of gender. This finding may suggest that the issue of assurance is so heavily dependent on feeling-related factors that a person with a strong thinking preference (such as Wesley) might have a particularly difficult struggle in this area. It may have practical implications for ministry, suggesting that churches develop more opportunities for relational engagement with the Scriptures because (even for the thinker) deep spiritual assurance often manifests within a relational medium.

Recommendations

Further research might advance a number of enquiries. This study focused on the thinking/feeling preference, a productive move with findings that suggested a preference for personal/relational/subjective language in articulating the dynamic of assurance. However, the witness of the Spirit is, arguably, an intuitive experience (J. Wesley 1: 287-89). A study centering on the perceptive function as a key component might unearth significant data.

Surely, as churches seek to help believers grow in Christian maturity, a balanced program of relational enrichment and logical engagement is an ideal milieu for spiritual development. Counsel in a recent popular commentary suggests a depreciation of the affective side of spiritual tenacity: “As so often in the Christian life, *reminding* [original emphasis] yourself of *truth* [original emphasis], not trying to conjure up feelings of this or that sort, is the way to keep going in faith and patience” (Wright, *Hebrews* 150). The findings of this study may offer of small corrective.

Although every church, like every individual, has its own idiosyncratic style, its own set of corporate personality preferences, surely a balance between relational and logical/ideational formation is the goal for all. For many churches this balance might involve the introduction of a cross-cultural mission experience so that members may, in addition to their mission tasks, experience the reality of Christian truth in a relational setting. For others it might begin with a Sunday school class that involves not only rigid lecture but experiential engagement between class members. For others, home-based small groups could provide the relational setting for effective communication of Christian

theology. Other churches may already provide opportunities for strong relationships but lack a strong theological curriculum.

Postscript

The introduction to this dissertation portrays my historic struggle with scrupulosity and the witness of the Spirit. My mind returns, as well, to an experience in my twenties, my participation in a United Methodist Sunday school class where I felt a significant sense of belonging. I have wondered if my experience of belonging in that group of brothers and sisters helped to mediate to me a sense of belonging to God.

My report of this study has been delayed by a recent personal crisis involving broken bones and traumatic brain injury. Once, after I had awakened from a coma, my wife asked me how this experience was changing me. I did not tell her about ecstatic visions or dreams during my near-death experience. I could remember none, but I wondered if I would be a little less perfectionistic, a little less worried by the obsessive-compulsive symptoms that had tormented me for years. Again, I had no visionary ecstasy to settle upon as a source of any change, but my wife's constancy and faithfulness had expressed to me a deep sense of my belovedness. She had become for me the medium of the Spirit's communication.

Resting in one's belovedness has implications for every part of the Christian life. Rational understanding of God's word is vitally important to mature spiritual development, most noticeably, perhaps, for the believer with a strong thinking preference. However, especially for the person with a strong feeling preference, perhaps a relational milieu is a perfect setting for planting God's truth deep in the personality.

I think Mr. Wesley should have the last word:

There is an irreconcilable variability in the operations of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men, more especially as to the manner of justification. Many find Him rushing upon them like a torrent.... This has been the experience of many.... But in others He works in a very different way. (qtd. in Telford 7: 298)

Wesley then offers, “Let Him take His own way: He is wiser than you; He will do all things well” (298). One cannot but give thanks for God’s mysterious, unfathomable expertise in dealing with the souls of his daughters and sons.

APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION
IN CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE STUDY

I have been asked to participate as a subject in a research project that will explore the relationship between personality type and spiritual experience. The purpose of this research is to examine how the personality theory informs an understanding of Christian assurance as it has developed in a Wesleyan context. This project is under the direction of Greg Burgner.

If I choose to participate in the project, I understand that the data will be gathered from the instruments included herein. There are no known risks or discomfort to me from participation in the project. I understand that information gathered from me through the instruments for this project will not be reported to anyone outside the research project in any manner which personally identifies me. A report of the general results of this project will be prepared for the Doctor of Ministry Office at Asbury Theological Seminary and may be submitted to a publication or conference at a later time. The project investigator, Greg Burgner, offers to answer any questions that I may have about my involvement in this project. I understand that I may end my participation at any time.

I understand that a signed statement of consent is required of all participants in this project. My signature indicates that I voluntarily agree to the conditions of participation as described above and have received a copy of this form.

Date

Signature

Print full name

APPENDIX B

THE PATHWAYS TO ASSURANCE INVENTORY

Name: _____

This instrument is designed to investigate some of the ways that individuals express their experience of Christian assurance, their confidence that they are accepted by God. You will find listed below ten paired statements which represent opposite approaches to assurance. On the continuum between them, circle the number that best describes you. The number three expresses no preference.

When it comes to my experience of assurance of God's acceptance:

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The logical evidence for the Christian faith plays the larger part. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | It is a personal awareness of God's love that is most important. |
| 2. The objective truth of the Christian faith is essential to my sense of assurance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | A sense of deep communion with the divine is what is most essential for me. |
| 3. In the end, I rely on the facts of the Gospel. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | In the end, the facts of the Gospel have to be made real in a personal way. |
| 4. It is largely about standing on the promises of the Bible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | It primarily comes out of the sense of my relationship with God. |
| 5. It is based on the truth of Scripture. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | It is based on a deep, personal communication from the Spirit of God. |
| 6. It is about logical, persuasive truth. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | It is about loving encounter. |
| 7. A well-reasoned lecture on the Bible could bring me deep assurance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I am more apt to experience assurance during holy communion. |
| 8. Feelings come and go, but I stand on the written Word of God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | The Word of God has to be written on the flesh of human hearts. |
| 9. Assurance is a function of sound theology. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Assurance is a function of relationship. |
| 10. It is about objective truth. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | It is about subjective experience. |

APPENDIX C

SIGNIFICANCE SCALE

Please rate, on a scale from one to five, the significance of Christian assurance in your own spirituality. "1" stands for "not important." "5" stands for "very important."

Circle the number that best represents you.

1

2

3

4

5

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