

Sin, Self and Society: John Wesley's Hamartiology Reconsidered

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The arrival of the "Bicentennial Edition" of John Wesley's 108 *Sermons on Several Occasions*, in Albert Outler's *Works of John Wesley*,¹ seemed reason enough to take a fresh walk down those familiar roads; but the sheer size of those three volumes led me into the temptation of procrastination. When I finally took up the task I was amazed to see how much my perception of our Methodist patriarch changed as I tried to view all 108 sermons as a doctrinal and practical whole.

This rereading of Wesley was so revolutionary for me that I urge others to undertake a similar pilgrimage. Not only did I find myself refreshed by encountering our forefather in such a sustained fashion, but I was also impressed by the theological unity and development found across his homiletical corpus. We have been too apologetic about Wesley the "unsystematic theologian." While it is certain that no one will mistake the *SOSO* for a literary offering from Calvin or Barth, it is clear that the collection does have a systematic principle at work in it. It is framed on the essential themes of practical divinity (orthodoxy wed to orthopraxis), and, like concentric circles of instruction, those foundational truths ripple into broader parameters of application all across the homiletical corpus.

*Hereafter cited in the text as *Sermons*, with the appropriate volume and page number indicated. When the *Sermons on Several Occasions* are referred to in a general fashion, as with respect to their order or context, they will be cited as *SOSO*. When a specific quotation is made, it will be cited from Outler's edition of the *Sermons*, which includes the *SOSO* and additional material.

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John Wesley's treatment of the doctrine of sin is a good example of the way he approached the formation of doctrine in his *SOSO*. An examination of his hamartiology is all the more necessary because of popular misconceptions about Wesley's doctrine of sin.

The first misconception was that he had, as Colin Williams termed it, "a defective conception of sin."² This criticism is based in Wesley's willingness to consider sin, "properly so-called," as "a voluntary transgression of the law of God;...acknowledged to be such at the time it is transgressed." (*Sermons*, I, p. 436). Wesley's recognition that willful ("voluntary") and cognitive ("acknowledged") factors lay at the heart of human sin caused him to occasionally depart from the more absolute definition, which, in the words of the Westminster Divines, described sin as "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God" (*Shorter Catechism*, Q. 14).³ In some respects Wesley's hamartiology stands closer to the *Anglican Articles of Religion* which view sin as a loss of paradisiacal perfection and distinguish between voluntary and involuntary sins.⁴ A closer reading suggested that it was precisely the "defective" (or voluntarist) element of Wesley's doctrine of sin that made it an important basis for Wesleyan soteriology, ethics and practical piety.

A second misconception about Wesley's hamartiology is that his doctrine of sin, while being connected to "social holiness" (through issues like slavery, the "scarcity of provisions" and the "reformation of manners"), was primarily concerned with personal sin and therefore it generally functioned in the context of his evangelism. This apparent difficulty seems all the more serious when Wesley is read from the perspective of theologies of liberation, since a privatized gospel has sometimes been a silent accomplice of systemic injustice. But a closer reading suggested that Wesley's doctrine of sin functioned in at least two contexts beyond the personal: it embraced and simultaneously corrected the Enlightenment's optimism about the importance of human moral agency; and it drew such a direct line of connection between "personal sins" and societal evil that it seems unwise for Wesley's descendants to distinguish sharply between personal and social sins, between personal and social holiness.

THE FOUNDATION

Few of Wesley's doctrinal constructs show the impact of his theological context more than his treatment of original sin. He built this construct through his recurring attention to biblical phrases like "in Adam all died" (which pointed to the extent "all" and the dire situation caused by it--spiritual death), "lost the life and the image of God," "dead in trespasses and sins, without hope, without God in the world, and therefore children of His wrath," and so on.⁵ Anchored in his direct affirmation of the Christian tradition (*Sermons*, I, p. 317), Wesley's hamartiology was also, as he said, "confirmed by daily experience" (*Sermons*, II, p. 176).

Wesley's *SOSO* affirmed a doctrine of human depravity at the time when enlightened folk viewed it as a "superstitious error" that had debilitating effects upon human moral agency and action. While his sermons did not mount a di-

rect attack on the Deistic or Enlightenment anthropology (there are occasional asides), his *Appeals* are another matter. They are direct assaults upon ideas like “innate moral virtue” and the essential goodness of (unspoiled) primitive human consciousness.⁶ In both cases, depravity was the presupposition of Wesley’s gospel of gracious restoration in an age that abounded with optimism regarding human nature and destiny. In a deft stroke, Wesley issued a challenge to the age’s optimism about *unaided* humanity and the appropriate bases for moral action, and yet also co-opted its interest in human dignity, moral action, and ultimate perfectibility.⁷ It seemed typical of Wesley to restore with one hand what he took away with the other.

Seeking to curtail the Enlightenment’s estimate of “natural man,” Wesley pointed to human “sickness,” or “sleepiness” which caused “the whole imaginations of the thoughts of [their] heart to be ONLY evil,...continually.”⁸ Thus, “...we may learn one grand, fundamental difference between Christianity, considered as a system of doctrines, and the most refined heathenism...they knew not that men were empty of all good, and filled with all manner of evil” (*Sermons*, II, p. 182-183). The fall of humanity, which was occasioned by an abuse of human liberty (in contradistinction to contemporary religious naturalistic determinists), made everyone (in their natural state) liable to judgment and corrupt in their dispositions.⁹ It also turned them into active atheists or practical idolaters who traded the love of God for the love of the world since they affixed to creation the loyalties they justly owed to the Creator.¹⁰ In *SOSO*, Wesley’s “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge” (#69) and “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered” (#70) assailed the epistemology of “this enlightened age, wherein it is taken for granted, the world is wiser than ever it was from the beginning of the world” (*Sermons*, II, p. 483). Sermons like “On Eternity” (#54), “On Predestination” (#58), “The Mystery of Iniquity” (#61), “On Divine Providence” (#67) and “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels” (#68) challenged and interacted with current cosmologies.

Wesley also emphasized a reconstituted human dignity that shared the aspirations of his age with regard to the nature¹¹ and destiny of humanity.¹² His sermons provide both the ideological and practical underpinnings for effective human moral actions¹³; they seem both classically traditional and strangely current with his emphasis upon the sanctifying effects of spiritual formation and religious education.¹⁴

John Wesley’s understanding of salvation as “healing of souls” (*Therapeia psuchas*) presupposes universal sin as the fatal disease that afflicts humanity (*Sermons*, II, p. 171f.). It is a leveler of all human schemes of self-salvation and the presupposition (*preparatio evangelica*) for his creation-wide conception of salvation (justification and sanctification) by faith. Taken in its therapeutic context, Wesley could even see tremendous benefits in the doctrine of original sin: “See then you, upon the whole, how little reason we have to repine at the fall of our first parent, since herefrom we may derive such unspeakable advantages both in time and in eternity” (*Sermons*, II, p. 434).

The second important connection for the doctrine, an obvious outgrowth of the first, was its structural role. The fall of the first Adam provides the pattern for redemption through the second Adam (Christ). Albert Outler described it as Wesley's "dramatic theology of history" (*Sermons*, II, p. 451); it was foundational to the soteriology of both Wesley brothers.¹⁵ Church fathers as ancient as Irenaeus (d. 198?) looked to the Pauline pairing of the first and second Adams to find a paradigm for speaking of humanity's long trek from being exiles of Eden to having the *Imago Dei* restored within them through the love of the Son of God. This pattern pervaded the *SOSO*, and gave Wesley's theology the sort of symmetry (his word was "proportion") that he described as the "analogy of faith."¹⁶ It set his soteriology against the background of the larger plight of all humanity, and made his theology of redemption less individualistic than the way we have been accustomed to reading it. It gave him a theology of history, in which the "Mystery of Iniquity" and the "Mystery of Godliness" are worked out on the broad stage of human events (*Sermons*, II, p. 452). And for all his criticism of the Enlightenment's anthropology, Wesley also embraced the substance of its optimism about the perfectibility of humanity (by grace) and thereby set his doctrine of original sin in a thoroughly constructive context.¹⁷ While coming "to the very edge of Calvinism," Wesley's soteriological optimism emphatically distinguished him from its narrow reading of the parameters of redemptive grace.¹⁸ Hence, on two separate occasions, he drew a direct line from the fall of Adam to the incarnation of Christ, setting both events in the context of divine, therapeutic grace. Wesley wrote: "If Adam had not fallen, Christ had not died" (*Sermons*, II, p. 411, 433).

VARIED CONTEXTS

The emphasis Wesley gave his doctrine of sin is especially significant as one tries to assess its adequacy. A few of his early sermons, especially those written sermons which stand on the shoulders of his popular evangelism, do not offer Wesley's famous distinction between sin "properly" and "improperly so-called." The early *SOSO* sermons link inner and outer sins, urging repentance and liberation from both bondages.¹⁹ In fact, *SOSO* #9, "Spirit of Bondage and Adoption," seems to go out of its way to argue that the issue of intentionality does not enter into the assessment of one's guilt: "If thou dost [commit sin], is it willingly or unwillingly? In either case God hath told thee whose thou art--'He that committeth sin is of the devil.'" (*Sermons*, I, p. 264). In these instances Wesley used the broadest conception of sin; his early evangelism followed the *sola fides* tradition in emphasizing a hamartiology that undercuts all human attempts at self-justification.

With that foundation soundly in place, Wesley turned his attention to the residual effects of sin which remain in believers. In "The First-fruits of the Spirit" (#8), and "On Sin in Believers" (#13), he sought to clarify the connection between residual sin in believers and his conception of sanctification. In the former (sect. III.5-6) he makes a distinction between willful transgression and "sins of infirmity"--including "involuntary failings" and "sins of surprise"--

since "they that are in Christ and walk after the Spirit are not condemned...for anything whatever which they are not able to help..." (*Sermons*, I, p. 246-247). In the latter section he sought to reconcile his soteriology with his hamartiology and other current expressions, especially criticizing the Moravian notion that a person could be pure in heart but not in their "flesh" or physical life. Wesley was willing to affirm a believer's "sinlessness" with respect to outward sin, but he could not affirm that a believer, as soon as he or she is justified, is "freed from all sin" (*Sermons*, I, p. 321f.). "Hence," Wesley concluded, "although even babes in Christ are *sanctified*, yet it is only *in part*....Accordingly, believers are continually exhorted to watch against the flesh, as well as the world and the devil" (*Sermons*, I, p. 332-333; cf. #14, "The Repentance of Believers").

This line of development reached its apex in #19, "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God." Here "sin" was understood "according to the plain, common acceptance of the word: an actual, voluntary 'transgression of the law'; of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God acknowledged to be such at the time it is transgressed" (*SOSO*, #19, p. 436). This emphasis upon *voluntary transgression* laid some of the basis for Wesley's perfectionism that both looked to a complete renovation of the human will (which was considered sinlessness in the Wesleyan, special sense of the word), and yet which was also fraught with qualifiers in order to take into account the extent of human frailty.

John Wesley's *SOSO* moved toward the doctrine of sanctification with "a singleness of eye." But the chronological dislocation of several of his most important sermons on this topic suggests that Wesley ordered this collection of sermons with a theological agenda in mind. The earliest extant sermon on sanctification, "The Circumcision of the Heart" (1733), was pushed back to position #17 in the *SOSO*, signaling, I think, the author's recognition of the difficulties associated with what he considered to be Methodism's most distinctive doctrine. More standard topics like justification, sanctification, religious affections and the nature of the new birth were treated before broaching the topic of Christian perfection. Outler is certainly correct to point out that the location of the sermon rings true "in the right order of Christian experience" (*Sermons*, I p. 400). The position of "The Circumcision of the Heart" is also didactically sound, since one must have the preceding doctrines well in hand in order to understand Wesley's distinctive views on sanctification as Christian perfection.

The next major presentation of Christian perfection was found in sermon #40, "Christian Perfection" (1741). The topic had been opened in several intervening sermons, but now it received fuller treatment. One might conclude that its position, after fourteen sermons on the Kingdom of God and eight sermons about religious affections, has something to do with Wesley's desire to ground his teaching about perfection in practical theology and Christian experience. But the immediate context of "Christian Perfection" is even more interesting since the sermon is set amidst six apologetical pieces; furthermore, an apologetic tone is registered by the sermon's insistence (like the larger tract by the same title) on clarifying exactly what this sort of perfection is *NOT*. While

the theological thrust is consonant with the earlier sermon, the apologetic tone suggests that Wesley's conception of Christian perfection had begun to cause misconceptions which needed to be put to rest.

"The Scripture Way of Salvation" (#43, 1765) maintains the standard Wesleyan themes ("sanctified, saved from sin and perfected in love"), but also indicates that two important questions had come to the forefront: whether Christian perfection was to be expected "now," "at any moment," or on the threshold between life and death; and, whether God works "this great work in the soul gradually or instantaneously" (*Sermons*, II, p. 168). Ending the sermons on a note of evangelistic urgency, John registered his preference for an instantaneous work that is to be expected "now."

In 1784 Wesley issued two significant treatments of Christian perfection. The one, "On Perfection" (#76), was a latter day attempt to explain the doctrine along the lines marked out in "The Circumcision of the Heart." Wesley's tone was, as Outler describes it, "irenical." His approach was to reduce the doctrine to its essential core: Christian perfection defined in terms of the love of God and neighbor, and sin understood from the standpoint of voluntary transgression ("sin properly so-called"). The more controversial issues which had emerged in "The Scripture Way of Salvation" were jettisoned for the moment, as Wesley chose, instead, to "expostulate a little with the opposers of this perfection."

The second sermon from 1784, "On Patience" (#83), seems to have been born in the midst of controversy. Outler suggests that the sermon's setting--amidst still another controversy with the Calvinists--explains its rejection of "final preservative" (eternal security). But this context also explains the connection which Wesley drew between patience and Christian perfection. Pointing out the immaturity of the opposition, Wesley urged the Methodists to have patience in the midst of the sort of trials which refine one's faith, since trials lead to Christian perfection (*Sermons*, III, p. 173). In the closing paragraphs of "On Patience," he returned to the more controversial issues surrounding Christian perfection; he urged "the universal change which turned holiness that was "mixed" into that which was "entire," and claimed that this change "is commonly, if not always, an instantaneous work" (*Sermons*, III, p. 176-179). Those closing paragraphs of "On Patience" offer Wesley's most unqualified statements about Christian perfection found in the *SOSO*.

Interestingly enough, in other later sermons where Wesley sought to reform the attitudes and morals of the populace at large (i.e., "Reformation of Manners" [#52], "On Riches" [#108] or "National Sins and Miseries" [#111]), he returned readily to the broader, evangelistic description of sin ("not properly so-called"). Thus, when reading Wesley on hamartiology one must ask whether he understands himself as functioning as an evangelist/reformer or as a spiritual supervisor addressing those already striving to "run the race set before them." And in his willingness to link those two sides of the theological task we find that sense of balance which makes Wesleyan hamartiology worth reconsidering.

SOCIETAL SIN

Wesley looked to the human will for the root of sin (in contradistinction to social or contextual causes).²⁰ He responded to the rhetorical question, "Why is there *pain* in the world?" by pointing to human sin (*Sermons*, II, p. 400-401). In a similar fashion, "the origin of evil" can be traced to the Edenic Fall, which "God permitted in order to a fuller manifestation [sic.] of his wisdom, justice, and mercy, by bestowing upon all who would receive it an infinitely greater happiness than they could possibly have attained, if Adam had not fallen" (*Sermons*, II, p. 434). But Wesley's emphasis upon the personal character of sin was not so pervasive that he was blind to systemic injustice and societal evil.

Wesley's sermons offer us two important test cases for looking at his approach to human sin in the collective or societal sense. The first issue is easily identified by the title of one of his later sermons, "National Sins and Miseries" (#111). It traces the impact of human sin beyond the individual into society. The "mystery of iniquity" has corrupted all facets of human history including the church (*Sermons*, II, p. 309). His sermon on "The Reformation of Manners" (#52), delivered before a reformatory society by the same name, offered a direct and admittedly simplistic solution to the problem: "So far as...righteousness in any branch is promoted, so far is the national interest advanced. So far as sin, especially open sin, is restrained, the curse and reproach are removed from us" (*Sermons*, II, p. 309). Wesley's approach to the evil in human society began with the Word of God and personal piety, and it also extended beyond what others considered his appropriate field of influence to his urging legislation for the promotion of righteousness and restraint of evil. Perhaps we will not feel the full force of the scandal Wesley felt in matters like "buying and selling on the Lord's Day." Perhaps issues like global hunger or apartheid touch us more acutely. But it is clear that a pattern emerges in these sermons that shows a deep awareness of the way in which the selfish attitudes or immoral actions of a few can abridge justice and threaten the well-being of the many.

Wesley was even willing to see some of the faults of British colonialism. As he wrote: "We have carried our laurels into Africa, into Asia, into the burning and frozen climes of America. And what have we brought thence? All the elegance of vice which either the eastern or western world could afford" (*Sermons*, II, p. 574). But such sentiments were quickly silenced when dealing with the practical dilemma of the American Revolution (cf. "The Late Work of God in America" [#113]). In Wesley's mind the conflict was the result of the colonists' spirit of arrogance, affluence and self-indulgence; it was based in a false understanding of "liberty" (*Sermons*, III, p. 607). The colonists confused "liberty" with the "spirit of independency." Quoting the poet, Alexander Pope, Wesley described this false liberty as "The glorious fault of angels and God" which is "overruled by the justice and mercy of God, first to punish those crying sins, and afterwards to heal them" (*Sermons*, III, p. 607). After they have been punished for their waywardness and they are "brought again to 'seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' there can be no doubt but 'all other things,' all

temporal blessings, ‘will be added unto them’” (*Sermons*, III, p. 607). These blessings will not include “independency (which would be no blessing, but a heavy curse...) but liberty--real liberty, which is an unspeakable blessing...” (*Sermons*, III, p. 607). While Wesley did not believe that the North American claims of political exploitation were valid, his vision for God’s restoration of the land showed the familiar interconnection of spiritual and civil liberty: God “will superadd to Christian liberty, liberty from sin, true civil liberty; a liberty from oppression of every kind; from illegal violence; a liberty to enjoy their lives, their persons and their property--in a word, a liberty to be governed in all things by the laws of their country...” (*Sermons*, III, p. 607).

In a second test case, if Wesley’s view of “national sins” seemed to become more skewed as a result of his own political identifications, his approach to riches became increasingly prophetic down through the years. His practical bent took Wesleyan evangelism from the doctrine of sin to the use of money with surprising rapidity.²¹ Wesley’s exposition of the Sermon on the Mount (pt. III), connected gospel “meekness” with both self-sufficiency and generosity (*Sermons*, I, p. 528). His most famous treatment of finances appeared in “The Use of Money” (#50). Once again Wesley sought to steer a middle course between sloth and extravagance. He sought to raise the Methodists from poverty and yet save them from the temptations of surplus accumulation; hence his threefold dictum, “Gain all you can, Save all you can, Give all you can,” marked out the way of careful stewardship. The acquisitionist portion of the program was tempered by suitable consideration for love of self and neighbor (sec. I.3-8). Saving money is a portion of one’s stewardship, and should be without self-ish orientation: “Expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life” (p. 274). The first two rules found their motivation in the third: “Having first gained all you can, and secondly saved all you can, then give all you can” (p. 277).

Where “The Use of Money” had been addressed to the populace, Wesley’s sermon “The Good Steward” (#51) considered the responsibilities of those to whom God has entrusted many talents--people of the upper class and financial substance. The tone and content of the sermon fits well its occasion, Wesley’s “somewhat unlikely appointment as ‘Chaplain to the Countess Dowager of Buchan’” (*Sermons*, II, p. 281). More typical of Wesley was his strong influence upon “Self Denial” (#48) as a central feature of gospel piety and spiritual power.

By the time he was preaching and publishing “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels” (#68), perhaps as much as forty years after “The Use of Money,” Wesley had become much more skeptical about the:

...deceitfulness of riches....A thousand melancholy proofs of which I have seen with in these last fifty years....For who will believe they do him the least harm? And yet I have not known threescore rich persons, perhaps not half that number, during the threescore years,

who, as I can judge, were not less holy than they would have been had they been poor (*Sermons*, II, p. 560).

Nor was Wesley now addressing people of substance, as he had in "The Good Steward" (#51); a "rich person" is now defined as one "who has food and raiment for himself and family without running into debt and something over" (*Sermons*, II, p. 560). The Methodists seem to be among those who are not "giving all they can": "without which they must needs grow more and more earthly minded. Their affections will cleave to the dust more and more, and they will have less communion with God...That *must* follow unless you give all you can, as well as gain and save all you can. There is no other way under heaven to prevent your money from sinking you lower than the grave..." (*Sermons*, II, p. 561).

By 1781 and the inclusion of "The Danger of Riches" in *SOSO* (as #87), Wesley had become increasingly concerned about the issue of wealth. He continued to describe "riches" in a very minimal way: "Whoever has sufficient food to eat and raiment to put on, with a place where to lay his head, and something over, is *rich*" (*Sermons*, III, p. 230). The danger of riches is that, "either desired or possessed," they lead to "foolish and hurtful desires." Wesley noted "a near connection between riches [and]...anger, bitterness, envy, malice, revengefulness, to an headstrong, unadvisable, unreprouvable spirit--indeed to every temper that is earthly, sensual or devilish..." (*Sermons*, III, p. 236). In Wesley's view, riches had become more and more the locus of sinful attitudes and behavior. The sermon ends with a familiar saying: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven," but he leaves the door open (just a crack): "...yet the things impossible with men are possible with God. Lord, speak! And even the rich men that hear these words shall enter Thy kingdom!" (*Sermons*, III, p. 246).

The third main sermon in this progression was "On Riches" (#108, 1788). Outler correctly notes striking parallels between this sermon and "The Use of Money" (*Sermons*, III, p. 518). But the tone has changed markedly, and the mood of the later sermon is easily traced to the changing status of the Methodists: "How many rich men are there among the Methodists (observe, there was not one when they were first joined together!) who actually deny themselves and take up their cross daily?...See one reason among many why so few increase in goods without decreasing in grace--because they no longer deny themselves and pick up their daily cross" (*Sermons*, III, p. 527-528).

Because of the way in which riches "lead naturally" to "devilish" affections, and turn one's attention from God, Wesley came very close to considering wealth to be idolatrous and sinful. His definition of what constitutes "riches" and his repeated insistence upon Christians having the attitude of a beggar ("meek" and "humble") provides a foundation for constructing a theology for the poor. But his "Gain, Save, Give" formula will not work for those who live their lives in abject poverty, or who are deprived of economic opportunity. Nor

will his primarily spiritual approach to problems like poverty and injustice satisfy the just claims of the oppressed.²² In a similar fashion, Wesley's sermons on "national miseries" drew a direct connection between sin, society and civil law, and thereby provided a basis for speaking about the redress of systemic injustice. Yet when it came to particulars, like the North American Revolution, Wesley believed that the grievances of the colonists were primarily problems of piety and were not politically valid.

It would seem appropriate to suggest that just as Wesley drew a direct connection between personal and national sins and the downfall of the nation, so also should virtues like "meekness" and "self-denial" have been extended from the personal to a national or international model. Some of this sort of attitude emerged in Wesley's evaluation of colonialism as a system, but in the final analysis he could not attribute the American Revolutionary War to anything other than the colonists' sinful understanding of freedom. The raw materials for a societal theology that encompasses both individual and corporate sins are present in Wesley's *SOSO*, but the final construction must be one of our own making.

CONCLUSION

In his whimsical theological word book, *Wishful Thinking*, Frederick Buechner writes that "The power of sin is centrifugal. When at work in human life, it tends to push everything out toward the periphery. Bits and pieces go flying off until only the core is left. Eventually bits and pieces of the core itself go flying off until in the end nothing is left."²³ This is certainly the way John Wesley viewed sin; it attacked the very core of what it means to be a human being (our created Godlikeness and will). In this respect Wesley's conception of sin is surprisingly current, because he drew an unabashedly direct line from personal sin to societal evil and injustice. Against a background of almost unbridled optimism about human capacity, he pointed to the graphic record of humanity's inhumanity, and yet Wesley's bedrock optimism about God's grace made his theological thrust a therapeutically restorative one. While not all of his modern heirs will agree with Wesley's penchant for starting the reformatory task with personal sin, we do see imbedded in his model the recognition that all sin has a personal quality; it is based in the will and conscience (or lack thereof) of individuals and their collectives. Nor does Wesley see sin as a private matter between the individual and God--individual sin quickly has catastrophic ramifications.

While Wesley's treatment of matters like poverty and discrimination (racial and gender) does not seem adequate by modern standards, his acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of human sin and his vision of the interrelatedness and gracious perfectibility of all human life mark out the road we must travel if we would follow Wesley. It seems possible to think of Wesley's theology as being foundational for contemporary Wesleyan ethics, while also acknowledging that John Wesley himself may not be an adequate ethical "model" for modern Wesleyans--if by that we mean that our ethical concerns and actions must

specifically imitate or be limited by his own. Rather, it is appropriate to suggest that Wesley's hamartiology is determinative for the way in which his modern heirs understand themselves and their world, while arguing that (following Wesley's own pattern) our tradition must continue to expand in ever-increasing ripples of recognition of the dimensions of human sin and attempts to remedy the pain and injustice caused by it.

Notes

1. Albert Outler, ed. *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1-3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).
2. Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), p. 203.
3. Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint 1977), Vol. 2, p. 678.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 493, 496. The *Anglican Articles of Religion* describe "Originall or birth sinne" (Art. IX) as being "very fare gone from originall ryghteousness," and as "the luste of the fleshe," or "concupiscence." Article XVI, "Of sinne after baptisme" evidences the distinction between willful and involuntary sin which became so much a part of Wesley's hamartiology: "Not euery deadly sinne willingly committed after baptisme, is sinne agaynst the holy ghost, and unpardonable."
5. Cf. *Sermons*, I, p. 185 (#5, "Justification by Faith"); II, p. 173 (#44, "Original Sin"); II, p. 190 (#45, "The New Birth"); II, p. 410 (#57, "On the Fall of Man"); II, p. 433 (#59, "God's Love to Fallen Man").
6. *Sermons*, II, p. 170 (#44, "Original Sin"); cf. Thomas Langford, "Constructive Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition," in Ted Runyon, ed., *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), p. 58-59. Also *Sermons*, I, p. 89, gives a brief aside.
7. Langford, "Constructive Theology," pp. 58-59.
8. Cf. *SOSO*, "Salvation by Faith" (#1); "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God" (#19); and "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (#43).
9. *Sermons*, II, p. 388, 399 (#56, "God's Approbation of His Works") and p. 423 (#59, "God's Love to Fallen Man").
10. *Sermons*, II, p. 178-180 (#44, "On Original Sin"); p. 367 (#54, "On Eternity"); *Sermons*, III, p. 131-132 (#80, "On Friendship With the World"); p. 78 (#76, "On Perfection"); *Sermons*, III, p. 103-115 (#78, "Spiritual Idolatry").
11. *Sermons*, III, p. 454ff. (#103, "What is Man") and *Sermons*, II, pp. 451-453 (#61, "The Mystery of Iniquity").

12. *SOSO*, “On Sin in Believers” (#13); “The Circumcision of the Heart” (#17); “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” (#19); and “On Christian Perfection” (#40).

13. *Semons*, II, p. 399 (#56, “God’s Approbation of His Works”).

14. Cf. *Semons*, III, p. 322-333 (#93, “On Redeeming the Time”); p. 333-347 (#94, “On Family Religion”); p. 347-361 (#95, “On the Education of Children”); and *Semons*, I, p. 376-398 (#16, “The Means of Grace”).

15. John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 60f.

16. See John Wesley’s *Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, Ohio: Schmul reprint, 1976), p. 397 (comment on Rom 12:6) for his fullest definition of the term:

...according to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein [Bible], touching upon original sin, justification by faith, the present, inward salvation. There is a wonderful analogy between all these; and a close and intimate connection between the chief heads of that faith which was once delivered to the saints. Every article therefore, concerning which there is any question, should be determined by this rule, every doubtful scripture interpreted, according to the grand truths which run through the whole.

Cf. John Wesley’s *Works*, Vol. 14, p. 253; and *Semons*, I, p. 182-183, 473 and 530; II, p. 483-484.

17. John Wesley’s treatise, *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757?) gave a panoramic survey of human history as a way of demonstrating, as stated by the subtitle, “The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scripture, Reason and Experience.” The treatise, certainly one of Wesley’s longest (273 pages in his works!), samples the civilization and religion of ancient Greece, Rome, Israel and Native Americans (the Chickasaws he met in Georgia) to trace what Wesley termed “the mystery of iniquity” and “of Godliness.” This treatise had the obvious purpose of answering Dr. Taylor’s *The Doctrine of Original Sin* which Wesley considered to be theologically defective.

18. Both Wesley brothers were champions of the unlimited atonement and universal offer of God’s grace. Cf. *Semons*, II, p. 342f., and my article, “God’s Everlasting Love: Charles Wesley and the Predestinarian Controversy,” *Evangelical Journal*, 3 (Fall 1985): 47-63.

19. *Semons*, I, p. 122-125 (#1, “Salvation by Faith”); p. 419-421 (#18, “The Marks of the New Birth”); and p. 269 (#9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption”).

20. Langford, “Constructive Theology,” p. 59.

21. *SOSO*, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount” (#28), pt. VIII; “The Use of Money” (#50); “The Danger of Riches” (#87); “On Riches (#108); and “The Danger

of Increasing Riches" (#131) approach this issue directly. Several other sermons touch upon it in passing.

22. Contemporary writers, like José Miguez Bonino, who read "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," find post-Wesleyan developments and experiential components powerfully influential for their ethical posture; hence, Bonino warns: "...it would be very dangerous and misleading to lapse into an 'enthusiastic' and 'triumphalist' exposition of Wesleyan doctrine as the new social ideology for a supposedly Christian transformation of society. For us in the third world at least, Methodism as a social force is part of history--and in some ways part of our domination and exploitation" (Ted Runyon, ed. *Sanctification and Liberation* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1981], p. 60).

23. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row), p. 88.

