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Wesleyan Resources for a Contemporary Theology of the Poor?

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Recent years have witnessed epochal and unforeseeable changes in the political situation of the Northern hemisphere—the reunification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fracturing of former Soviet satellites, and broad-scale rejection of nationalist communism. It is sometimes suggested that these changes totally discredit what has come to be called Liberation Theology. But while they do raise serious questions about some of the specific solutions proposed by certain liberation theologians, they have hardly eliminated the problems that spawned liberation theology in the first place. Indeed, there appears to be a *widening* gap at present between rich and poor in several nations, between developed (or *overdeveloped!*) nations and the developing nations, and between the culturally elite and the culturally marginalized.

For those of us in the Wesleyan theological traditions this situation sounds strangely reminiscent of the social context within which the original Methodist revival arose. Thus, there is good reason for asking whether there are resources in our tradition for relating the Good News of God's salvific love to this critical dimension of our current situation.¹ Other studies have focused attention on some of the characteristic Wesleyan convictions and practices that are very relevant to this issue.² The topic that I want to direct attention to deals not with such "content" of a Wesleyan theology but with its method.

As liberation theologies found their voices among the world's poor and marginalized, their early questions often focused on specific doctrinal claims of the dominant Christian theological traditions. It did not take long though for the

scope to enlarge and incorporate such questions as *who* does theology, *where*, and in *whose* interest. That is, they became convinced that there cannot be an adequate theological understanding of, or address to, the situation and needs of the poor or marginalized until theological reflection itself is done *with* and *by* these very folk. It is in this latter sense that I have titled this essay as the question of whether there are Wesleyan resources for a contemporary theology *of* the poor (i.e., a subjective genitive).

I. THE GROWING CRITIQUE OF CLASSIC ACADEMIC THEOLOGY

It does not take much reflection to recognize that the methodological questions being raised by those who are seeking to reformulate theology in the interests of the poor and marginalized strike at the core of the current dominant model of serious theological activity in North Atlantic Christianity. This model developed with and is defined by the setting of the Western universities.³ The self-confessed goal of these universities was determining rationally defensible and ordered knowledge, *for its own sake*. On such terms: 1) the favored forms of theological activity became Apologetics (which seeks to provide a rational defense of Christian claims) and Systematics (which seeks to provide a rational ordering of these claims); 2) Christian faith became identified with the “objective” findings of these academic disciplines; and 3) colleagues or opponents within the university (a fairly elite group!) became the primary dialogue partners and audience for theologians.

To capture the intensity of the reaction to this reigning model among those pursuing a theology *of* the poor and marginalized, let me quote from the final report adopted at the Second General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (December 1986, Oaxtepec, Mexico):

Third World theology is theology as if people mattered. Its concern is not the neatness of a system but the liberation of the people. It is not elaborated in the academy but developed by the communities of the poor. ... Professional theologians are the communities’ servants in interpreting events and in systematizing the communities’ experience. Their fidelity and responsibility to the community are essential to the concept of theology. ... (This theology) calls for a very different language than that of the academy. There is no need for it to be apologetic. ... In sum we have learned to show more respect and concern for people than for systems and scientific theory.⁴

Implicit in this comparison with standard academic theology are alternatives to the three characteristics of this reigning model of theological activity that were noted above. Most obvious (to start in reverse order), the EATWOT statement argues directly that the primary arena within which and for which theology should be done is not the academy but the Church—understood specifically as the community of all Christian disciples, with particular focus on those traditionally marginalized.⁵

The second alternative point, less obvious in this quote but clear in other liberation theology writings, is that the primary sense of Christian faith is identified as the implicit worldview that motivates Christians to faithful commitments of solidarity with the oppressed, not a set of abstract theological claims. Authentic theology grows

out of and reflects on such commitment.⁶ Involved here is a recovery of something like the early Christian distinction between the basic worldview (*habitus*) that motivates and guides individual believers' lives in the world and the pastoral activity of norming and forming this worldview in believers.⁷

This distinction relates directly to the third point, which is a shift of emphasis on what constitutes serious theological activity. We noted that the Western academic setting made systematic textbooks or sophisticated Apologetics the standard form of theological activity. If the most primary context of theology is seen instead as the Christian community, and its task is the norming and forming of ordinary Christians' lives in the world, then serious theological activity will take different expressions. It will elevate to "first-order" those activities which serve most directly to form (or *reform*) the worldviews of believers; namely, such things as popular bible commentaries, basic catechisms, hymns, liturgies, and expositions of central elements of worship.⁸ It is no accident that we are seeing increased interest in such genres among liberation theologians.⁹

This should be enough to demonstrate that liberation theologians are calling for more than a minor revision of standard academic theology; they are calling for a fundamental change to an understanding and practice of theological activity that is more integrally related to the life of the Christian community. In making this call they join a number of other currents in recent reflection on theological methodology that are coalescing around the desire for transforming the defining model into a more truly "practical" theology.

II. DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS OF A "PRACTICAL" THEOLOGY

In another context I have surveyed the various voices calling for this recovery of a more "practical" discipline of theology and sketched the major characteristics that they desire in such a theology.¹⁰ It will be helpful to rehearse these characteristics here, drawing examples from those concerned with developing an authentic theology *of* the poor and marginalized.

A. Truly Practical Theological Activity will be Unified

The first of the characteristics advocated for a recovered practical theology is that it overcome the bifurcation (and progressive isolation) of the various sciences that has come to typify the university theological curriculum. This bifurcation is a direct reflection of the separation of theological study and education from the daily life of the community of believers. As they have sought to bring theological reflection into the service of Christian life in the world, liberation theologians have found it necessary to violate such disciplinary boundaries, interweaving biblical and historical studies integrally with doctrinal reflection.¹¹

B. Truly Practical Theological Activity will be Holistic

A second characteristic desired in a contemporary practical theology is that it be holistic. No one has urged this characteristic more strongly than liberation theologians, with their demand that theologians not isolate *orthodoxy* from *orthopraxy*. In

truly human praxis there is a constant dialectical connection between what we believe and what we do. As such, the disciplinary separation of doctrinal and ethical reflection in the academic theological curriculum must be rejected as a false (ideological!) move.¹²

Yet another dimension of a holistic theology is suggested by the recent renewed appreciation for the “character ethics” of Aristotle and the early Church. If human affections are not “mere feelings” but the motive power and orienting guides of authentic human praxis, then an integral part of a truly holistic (and practical) theology would be the nurturing and patterning of appropriate human affections (*orthoaffectus*). This point has gained emphasis among liberation theologians as they have rejected the dichotomy between spirituality and justice, reclaiming the spiritual (affectional) dimension of any theology committed to justice.¹³

C. Truly Practical Theological Activity will make Praxis Primary

A third characteristic prevalent in the recent calls for a more practical theology is the affirmation of the primacy of praxis in theological activity. This is to contend, to begin with, that authentic theological activity is sparked by the needs and challenges of existing praxis, as contrasted with such factors as theoretical comprehensiveness and professional advancement.

At the same time, it is important to note that affirming the primacy of praxis does *not* imply a crude “pragmatism;” i.e., a reduction of theological decisions to the single criterion of “whatever will work.” Nor does it necessarily entail that theology derives its norms from praxis.¹⁴ In short, it does not reject careful doctrinal reflection, drawing on biblical and historical resources. Rather, it requires that all such reflection be pursued to the point of determining the anthropological, soteriological, and political dimensions of the doctrines under consideration.¹⁵

Likewise, an affirmation of the primacy of praxis would require that authentic theological reflection, however abstract, must always be related back to praxis through such “first-order” theological activities as constructing liturgies and shepherding congregations. In other words, the fundamental problem with the reigning academic model of theology is not that the latter involves abstract doctrinal reflection, but that (to use Alfred North Whitehead’s term) it commits the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” It becomes consumed with abstract issues and theoretical precision, neglecting the praxis-related tasks that authentic theory is meant to serve.

D. Truly Practical Theological Activity will be Inherently Transformative

The emphasis on the primacy of praxis leads directly to the fourth characteristic desired in a recovered practical theology: it should be inherently transformative. It should seek not merely to understand or explain Christian life, but to correct it. As Dermot Lane as put it,

The understanding of knowledge and truth operative in the primacy of praxis is one of transformation in contrast to the more traditional understanding of knowledge and truth as simply disclosure or correspondence or conformity or verification. These latter tend to maintain the status quo whereas an under-

standing of knowledge and truth as transformation challenges theology to go beyond the status quo.¹⁶

Obviously, this characteristic involves the claims of a practical theology. But it also relates to the form of theological activity. Systematics and Apologetics can all-too-easily be taken as simply “explaining” Christian life. Such “first-order” activities as liturgies and bible studies are more directly related to transforming incomplete or distorted Christian praxis.

E. Truly Practical Theological Activity will be Communal

The fifth characteristic advocated for a contemporary practical theology has been a distinctive emphasis of those concerned to overcome the isolation from the community of faith that the professionalization of theology has fostered. They stress that theological reflection needs the participation of the breadth of persons involved in Christian praxis to preserve its vitality and wholeness.¹⁷ That is, it needs to be communal in its process.

Some specific aspects of this desired communal nature should be noted. First, the point at issue is not just that every individual has a right to participate in theological activity but that this activity is best done *in community*, by persons living together in faith. Second, there should be a particular concern to involve members of the community most often excluded by academic theology; i.e., the poor, oppressed, or exploited. Third, while this emphasis specifically rejects the restriction of theological reflection to an elitist group of professional theologians, it does not exclude them. They too are a part of the community. However, as Samuel Amirtham and John Pobee have phrased it, it is crucial that “what the theologian does is *in the context of* and *with* the people, not *for* the people gathered as a community of faith.”¹⁸ Finally, while it is essential to draw on the insights and wisdom of the entire Christian community, this should not be construed as reducing theological judgments to “majority rule.”¹⁹ Criteria of authenticity for Christian life and belief would remain, and helping the community remain conscious of these may be the most important contribution of professional theologians to a communal practical theology.

F. Truly Practical Theological Activity will be Contextual

Perhaps no characteristic desired in a recovered exercise of theology as a practical discipline has found wider contemporary consensus than the demand that it be contextual. It should not be devoted to the search for universal unchanging expressions of the Christian faith. Rather, it should undertake the demanding work of wrestling with both Christian revelation and particular socio-historical situations, seeking authentic context-sensitive embodiments of the Christian gospel. As Rebecca Chopp has shown, this characteristic is central to liberation theologies.²⁰

The theme of contextuality has received significant attention in recent years. In the process some clarifications have emerged. First, it has been argued that the context relevant to theology must be defined broadly, including the social and political dimensions of Christian life, rather than being reduced to individual human experience, as has been typical of Western liberal theology.²¹ Second, it has been stressed

that in its search for contextually-relevant theological expressions an authentically Christian practical theology must constantly guard against relativism.²²

G. Truly Practical Theological Activity will be Occasional

The final characteristic desired in a contemporary practical theology is that it be occasional; i.e., concerned more to address whatever pressing issues are arising in a specific community's life than to abide by some program for formulating an abstract theological System. There are few better examples of this conviction than the EATWOT quote with which we began.

III. WESLEY'S MODEL OF THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY

Such, then, are the characteristics being championed for a desired "practical" theology—an understanding and practice of theological activity that could more adequately constitute a theology *of* the poor and marginalized. One of the questions that many advocates of this agenda are asking is where we can find instructive models of such theological activity? The most promising place to look would be outside the time period and cultural location of the dominance of university theology; e.g. the Early Church, Eastern Orthodoxy, and marginal Western traditions. I have suggested elsewhere that John Wesley might also be such a model!²³ Among the reasons for this suggestion was Wesley's heavy reliance on the Early Church—particularly many Greek theologians who were taken as authoritative for later Eastern Orthodoxy—as his prototypes for theological activity.²⁴

Wesley imbibed his interest in the Early Church from his Anglican setting. Seventeenth-century Anglicans had decided that the best way to preserve a *Via Media* between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was to take the pre-Constantinian Church as their norm. Among the implications of this was that they followed the Early Church in channeling theological activity into such expressions as a prayerbook, catechetical homilies, and brief articles of faith—rather than *summae*, encyclopediae, or Institutes. One result of this was that early Anglicanism experienced some less tension between the academy and the church than did contemporary continental Christianity. But tension there was, and when Wesley came face-to-face with this tension he decided that he could not remain in the relative security (and isolation) of the academic context while there was such pressing need for embracing and theologically shepherding the masses of ordinary Christians. Thus, like modern liberation theologians, Wesley took the primary arena of theological activity to be the community of believers, with a special focus on persons often excluded from the established church.²⁵

Wesley also shared the recognition of the distinction between the basic worldview (*habitus*) that motivates and guides individual believers' lives in the world and the pastoral activity of norming and forming this worldview. This is best seen in *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*, where Wesley distinguished between genuine Christianity as a "principle in the soul" and genuine Christianity as a "system of doctrine" which describes Christian character and tells us how to attain it.²⁶

Finally, Wesley epitomized involvement in "first-order" theological activities like

those being appropriated by modern theologies of the poor and marginalized. Among these activities were: the theological editing of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the *Book of Common Prayer*; the production of catechisms and catechetical sermons; the provision of carefully edited popular Bible study aids; the collection of guides for prayer and devotion; the publishing of spiritual biographies and autobiographies as models for imitation; the selection and editing of hymns for Methodist worship; the numerous letters of pastoral advice; the theological conferences with his preachers; and essays, open letters, and tracts addressing issues that arose within the Methodist movement.

With these general commonalities in mind, let us consider how well Wesley's theological activity may have approximated the characteristics desired in a contemporary recovered "practical" discipline of theology.

A. Wesley's Theological Activity was Unified

Wesley largely antedated the growing separation of the sciences in the theological curriculum. Accordingly, he showed little hesitance in ranging among the areas of Scripture, history of Christianity, church discipline, and doctrinal theology. While he recognized different genres of theological writing (controversial, practical, etc.) he assumed an overall unity of the theological task. This was particularly the case as he placed theological reflection in service to ministry. To be sure, Wesley's was a naive unified theology, since he never faced the challenge of the later divisions. Yet, his example might still bear consideration as post-modern theologians seek a "second naiveté" (Paul Ricoeur) that reunifies the various theological domains.

B. Wesley's Theological Activity was Holistic

It is also easy to demonstrate that Wesley shared the concern that *orthodoxy* not be separated from *orthopraxy*. This is the point at issue in his well-known claim that "right opinion" is a "slender part of religion." He was not intending to dismiss right opinion, but to insist that it was of no value *unless* it finds embodiment in Christian praxis.²⁷ The connection between orthodoxy and orthopraxy is also reflected in the typical agenda of Wesley's conferences with his preachers, which dealt not only with doctrine, but with discipline and practice as well.²⁸ Thus, it is not surprising that some liberation theologians have found Wesley's example on this point suggestive, making allowance for the fact that he shared his age's blindness to the structural aspects of sin and Christian praxis.²⁹

If we turn to the broader conception of a holistic theology, which incorporates the insights of "character ethics," there is so much warrant in Wesley that he has frequently been touted as an exemplar by advocates of this general theme.³⁰

C. Wesley's Theological Activity Reflected the Primacy of Praxis

This brings us to the affirmation of the primacy of praxis in theological method. Such primacy assumes, to begin with, that it is the needs and challenges of existing praxis that spark authentic theological activity. Even a cursory examination verifies that the stimulus of most of Wesley's theological endeavors was the struggle to meet the needs of, and address the controversies within, his revival movement.

The primacy of praxis also entails that theological reflection must always be related back to praxis through “first-order” theological activities. The earlier listing of the various forms of Wesley’s theological activity should demonstrate his appreciation for such “first-order” activities.

What the primacy of praxis does *not* imply is a crude “pragmatism” or the neglect of careful doctrinal reflection. Wesley surely did not avoid doctrinal reflection. Indeed, at one time or another, he touched on every major area of Christian doctrine. Moreover, he did not limit himself to doctrines whose implications for Christian life (or evangelism) were immediately evident. He found it necessary to take up some quite technical debates, such as the question of whether Christ’s death was the *formal* or *meritorious* cause of justifying faith.³¹ He also dealt with such speculative issues as the nature of animals in Heaven,³² the nature of the torments in Hell,³³ and how God will deal with those who have not heard of Christ.³⁴ But, what most characterized Wesley’s doctrinal reflection was that it always highlighted the anthropological and soteriological implications of the doctrine under consideration, no matter how technical or speculative it might be.³⁵ As such, it is misleading to characterize Wesley as “a practical rather than speculative thinker.”³⁶ Much more appropriate would be the valuation of him as a self-conscious practical theologian, undertaking careful doctrinal reflection in response to the stimulus of praxis and in service to primary theological activities.

D. Wesley’s Theology was Inherently Transformative

The next characteristic desired in a recovered practical theology is that it should seek not merely to understand or explicate Christian life, but to correct it. Obviously, this assumes that humans (and human societies) are *not* spiritually whole, and that theology’s goal is not to make them comfortable with their faults but to reform them. Wesley shared this conviction; as evidenced by such claims as that, while Calvinists merely aim to make Calvinists, he is trying to make Christians!³⁷ As we have seen, he also concentrated his theological activity in genres that are most likely to have character-forming and -transforming impact.

E. Was Wesley’s Theological Activity Communal?

What about the suggestion that a practical theology be communal in its process? Wesley’s precedent in this regard must be considered ambiguous. On the one hand, he valiantly sought to bridge the gap between professional theology and his minimally-educated followers by providing abridged and simplified editions of materials he judged appropriate. Likewise, he created the communal setting of the conference for discussing Methodist belief and practice with his preachers. On the other hand, despite his frequent claim that he desired to stimulate thinking rather than indoctrinating, Wesley was hardly a strong advocate of giving the “people” a voice in theological decisions. His primary goal was to provide his lay pastors and other followers with an appropriate theological formation, not to solicit from them new theological insights or perspectives.³⁸

While this role for the “people” leaves much to be desired, one must admit that

Wesley avoided a simple “majority rule” approach to theological decision-making and fulfilled the role of holding the community accountable to criteria of theological authenticity. Likewise, the truth is that Wesley did actually draw on his interactions with his people for doctrinal judgments (on issues such as the connection between conversion and assurance, or the possibility of entire sanctification), though the people themselves functioned more as test cases than as valued interpreters.

F. Wesley’s Theological Activity was Contextual

There is a growing recognition among Wesley scholars of how contextual his doctrinal reflection was, and of how this fact helps alleviate some seeming inconsistencies in his convictions. Good examples would include: Alan Coppedge’s study of the contextuality of Wesley’s responses to the Calvinist Methodists and their affirmation of predestination; Robert Fraser’s argument that Wesley nuanced his comments on sanctification relative to his audience; Mark Horst’s analysis of Wesley’s situational utilization of two differing emphases on repentance; John H. Tyson’s review of the contextual dynamics of Wesley’s interrelation of law and Gospel; and John R. Tyson’s examination of the contextual variation of Wesley’s definition of sin.³⁹ To be sure, this is a different dimension of contextuality than relating the Gospel to differing socio-historical contexts, but the general precedent remains.

The crucial point about the contextual dynamics of Wesley’s theological reflection is that it seldom degenerates into relativism. Rather, there is a reasonable consistency between the sundry contextual variations that appears to reflect a basic orienting concern which guided Wesley’s various contextual theological judgments.⁴⁰

G. Wesley’s Theological Activity was Occasional

We come finally to the “occasional” nature of a truly practical theology. Perhaps the most relevant expressions of Wesley’s theological activity in this regard are his various open letters, appeals, tracts, and essays published to explain and defend his theological positions. One might suppose that these are exceptions to the characterization of Wesley as a practical theologian. After all, it is usually to these works that Wesley scholars turn to defend him in the academy as a theologian.⁴¹ However, these works too are best accounted for under the model of theology as a practical discipline, because they are ideal examples of *occasional* praxis-related theological reflection, spawned by the controversies and needs of his Methodist people.

IV. RENEWING WESLEY’S MODEL IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

So what might twentieth-century descendants of that original Methodist movement conclude from the discussion so far? One possibility would be to rethink Wesley’s status as a theologian. It has become almost obligatory for anyone writing on Wesley’s theology to begin with an apology that he was not a “systematic theologian.” The implication usually derived from this is that Wesley’s model of theological activity was second-rate, or even third-rate!⁴² In light of the growing questions about the standard against which he was being judged and found wanting, a more positive estimation of Wesley would seem possible.

But why even undertake such a reevaluation? Several possible motives come to mind: a desire for historical accuracy, the hope of renewing appreciation for doctrinal reflection in Methodist circles, or even a partisan ambition to reverse the tables and champion Wesley (or Methodism) against those traditions in which systematic theology has been more common. However one assesses these possibilities, I would suggest that something more fundamental is at stake.

We face a dire need for reintegrating the practice of theological reflection and activity into the life of the community of believers if we are to foster authentically Christian responses to the urgent problems of our times, including the problems of poverty and economic injustice. Recovered awareness of earlier approximations to such integration would provide both traditional warrant and instructive prototypes for addressing this present need. In other words, a renewed appreciation for Wesley's model of theological activity may be one of the contributions that our tradition can make to the current quest for a theology *of* the poor and marginalized, for it might encourage contemporary analogues.

But if it is to have this effect, then it surely must begin at home! In their concern to demonstrate that their theology was truly Protestant, Methodists largely abandoned Wesley's more "practical" Anglican style and forms of theological activity in the early nineteenth century, appropriating the scholastic style typical of continental Protestant theology. A striking symbol of this move was the publication of the first "compend" of Wesley's theology in 1825—to provide an abstract, comprehensive, and systematically organized survey of his theological convictions.⁴³ This move distanced theological reflection from praxis at both ends: from the situation and needs of the community of believers which should spark authentic reflection, and from "first-order" theological activities that address this community.

Thus, if we in the Wesleyan and Methodist traditions should seriously wish to commend Wesley's model of theological activity to the broader contemporary Christian community, then we must start by taking it more seriously ourselves. We must immerse ourselves in the life of the household of believers—including particularly those usually excluded from influence—as deeply as we have been immersed in the academy. And we must devote more of our attention to the primal level of theological work, which is comprised by those activities which most directly form and *reform* Christian life in the world: i.e., constructing liturgies, designing worship, expositing the creed, preparing catechisms, and so on.⁴⁴

Notes

1. This paper was originally presented at the Ninth Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies (July–August 1992), which had the theme "Good News for the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition?"

2. See especially: *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Theodore H. Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); and Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

3. The dynamics of this development and its effects on the previous practice of theology as a practical discipline are traced in Randy L. Maddox, "The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 650–72.

4. *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences*, edited by K.C. Abraham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 200–1.

5. Cf. *Ibid.*, ix, 198.

6. Perhaps the clearest expression of this distinction is in Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976). Segundo argues that theology must be seen as the "second step," reflecting on acts of commitment (75ff). He then notes that faith or ideologies are prior to commitment (97–102). The idea of a worldview would appear to capture what he means by "faith" and "ideology" together. See also Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Liberation Theology: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 9–14.

7. The connection to the early Church is noted explicitly in Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 4; and Boff & Boff, *Liberation Theology*, 16. See also the analysis of early Christian understandings of theology in Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 31–37.

8. Cf. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 11–21. They make a distinction between three levels of liberation theology: professional, pastoral, and popular. They stress the primacy of such "first-order" activities for popular liberation theology, which deals with the broad Christian population. They do not make as clear as others would the primacy of this level of theology.

9. E.g. Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979); Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983); Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, 4 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976–82); and Juan Luis Segundo, *The Sacraments Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979). On the importance of popular biblical commentaries see also Abraham, *Third World Theologies*, 72–73.

10. Maddox, "Recovering Theology as a Practical Discipline."

11. To quote from the Asian report in *Third World Theologies*, "Theological methodologies are ways of doing theology on biblical grounds and sources, in relation to historical contexts, that is, in commitment or response to the struggles of oppressed peoples in the Third World" (19).

12. See especially Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 92–94.

13. Note particularly: Segundo Galilea, *The Way of Living Faith: A Spirituality of Liberation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984); and Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988).

14. On this often misunderstood point, see Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), esp. 190, 200. See also José Miguez Bonino, "Theology as Critical Reflection and Liberating Praxis," in *The Vocation of the Theologian*, ed. T.W. Jennings (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 37–48.

15. For some good examples of such doctrinal reflection, see Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989); and the discussion of the practical nature of the Christian idea of God in Johann-Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 51, 67.

16. Dermot Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process, and Salvation* (New York: Paulist, 1984), 67. See also Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 151.

17. See especially Samuel Amirtham and John Pobee, eds. *Theology by the People: Reflections*

on Doing Theology in Community (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986).

18. Amirtham and Pobe, "Introduction," *Theology by the People*, 7. See also Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, "Introduction," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theology from the Underside* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 1–15.

19. See the cautionary words in Rebecca Chopp, "Practical Theology and Liberation," in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis Mudge and James Poling (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 120–38; here, p. 124.

20. Chopp, *Praxis of Suffering*, 140: "(for liberation theologians) theology is known as a practical activity, characterized by its concreteness in dealing with particular events, stories, and witnesses rather than limiting its role to the analysis of general concepts of existence and tradition."

21. For stinging critiques of the Western liberal theological project see Amirtham and Pobe, *Theology by the People*; Chopp, "Practical Theology and Liberation"; and Thistlethwaite and Engel, *Lift Every Voice*.

22. For particularly helpful discussion of this aspect of contextualization, see Robert Brown, "What is Contextual Theology?" in *Changing Contexts of Our Faith*, ed. Letty Russell (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 80–94; and Robert Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985).

23. Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley – Practical Theologian?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 122–47.

24. On this point see Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences," *Asbury Theological Journal* 45 (1990): 29–53.

25. Note the argument that Wesley's decision to be a "folk theologian" was influenced by the emerging gap between upper and lower classes in the eighteenth century in Robert Wilson & Steve Harper, *Faith and Form: A Unity of Theology and Polity in the United Methodist Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 19.

26. *Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*, §II.1, *John Wesley*, 188.

27. For more on this see Randy L. Maddox, "Opinion, Religion and 'Catholic Spirit': John Wesley on Theological Integrity," *Asbury Theological Journal* 47 (1992): 63–87.

28. See *Minutes* (25 June 1744), *John Wesley*, 136.

29. Cf. *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Theodore H. Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

30. E.g. Gregory Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989); Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1975), Chapter 5; Mark Horst, "Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith in John Wesley's Thought" (Yale University Ph.D. thesis, 1985), esp. 131; Henry Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 195–96; and Richard Steele, "'Gracious Affections' and 'True Virtue' in the Experimental Theologies of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley" (Marquette University Ph.D. thesis, 1990), 307 fn54, 444ff.

31. See the summary of the issues involved in Albert Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Kenneth Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), 11–38; here, p. 25.

32. Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," §III.3–4, *Works* 2:446–47

33. Sermon 73, "Of Hell," *Works* 3:31–44.

34. Sermon 91, “On Charity,” §II.3, *Works* 3:295–96; Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §I.4, *Works* 3:494; and Sermon 130, “On Living Without God,” §14, *Works* 4:174. See also Randy L. Maddox, “Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27.1 (1992): 7–29.

35. Note the consistent style in his “doctrinal” sermons of defining and (if necessary) defending the doctrine, and then highlighting the praxis dimensions of the doctrine. E.g., Sermon 67, “On Divine Providence,” §27, *Works* 2:548; Sermon 72, “On Evil Angels,” §III, *Works* 3:27; and the whole of Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being” (*Works* 4:61ff), where his description of God’s attributes culminates in a description of true religion as “gratitude and benevolence” (§16 [p. 66]).

36. As in Frederick Maser, “The Unknown John Wesley,” *Drew Gateway* 49.2 (1978): 1–28, p. 9.

37. Letter to Mrs. Woodhouse (30 July 1773), *Letters* (Telford) 6:34.

38. For one example of his claim to want to stimulate free thought rather than providing all the answers, see the Preface of his *OT Notes*, §17, in *Works* (Jackson) 14:252. At the same time, it is clear that he expected only *motivation* from his meetings with his people, while he would provide them with *information*. As he put it in his *Journal* (16 Feb. 1760), they needed *light* while he needed *heat* (*Works* 21:240).

39. Alan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate* (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987); Robert Fraser, “Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism” (Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis, 1988), 60–61; Horst, “Christian Understanding,” 80–91; John H. Tyson, “The Interdependence of Law and Grace in John Wesley’s Teaching and Preaching” (University of Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis, 1991); and John R. Tyson, “Sin, Self, and Society: John Wesley’s Hamartiology Reconsidered,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 44.2 (1989): 77–89, esp. pp. 80–82.

40. I have tried to develop this case in some detail in *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*.

41. E.g. Robert Casto, “Exegetical Method in John Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*: A Description of His Approach, Uses of Sources, and Practice” (Duke University Ph.D. thesis, 1977), 2; and Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 104ff.

42. E.g., Rupert Davies, “The People Called Methodists: 1. Our Doctrines,” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, edited by R. Davies, *et al.* (London: Epworth, 1965), 1:147.

43. *Wesleyana: A Selection of the Most Important Passages in the Writings of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Arranged to form a Complete Body of Divinity* (London: W. Booth, 1825). This compend was apparently prepared by William Carpenter. On its purpose, see the Preface, iii–iv. It was reprinted several times in the nineteenth century. Its place has been taken more recently by Robert Burtner & Robert Chiles, *John Wesley’s Theology: A Collection from His Works* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954; reprint ed., 1982).

44. A good example of the style of work that I am suggesting is the trilogy by Theodore W. Jennings Jr.: *Life as Worship: Prayer and Praise in Jesus’ Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982); *The Liturgy of Liberation: The Confession and Forgiveness of Sins* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1988); and *Loyalty to God: The Apostle’s Creed in Life and Liturgy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992).