

Theology in the Twenty-First Century Some Wesleyan Agendas

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What would be John Wesley's likely agendas for the enterprise of Christian theology if he were poised with us at this opening of a new century and millennium? This might sound like a simple question, but as I considered the invitation to address it, I was struck by the audacious nature of the task. I accepted the assignment with a combined sense of hesitance and of deep appreciation that it was being raised at all. An explanation of these mixed feelings might provide the most appropriate introduction to the discussion that follows.

My hesitance in undertaking the task springs from at least three factors. First, what has been posed is technically a "contrary-to-fact" question. Since Wesley does not in fact stand poised with us, there is no way to determine with logical certainty what his agendas would be. The best we can do is try to determine what his convictions were in his own historical context, and then speculate about which possible agendas in our setting would be most in line with these convictions. Moreover, there is an inescapable interpretive element on both ends of this "hermeneutic bridge." Ultimately, all that I can offer is what I perceive to be intersections between my *reading* of Wesley and my *reading* of our present situation in the church and the theological academy. While I trust that my readings on both fronts are informed by broad and sympathetic dialogue with other interpreters, I make no claim to be offering self-evident or universally-accepted answers.

A second factor contributing to my hesitance about the proposed topic is closely related to the first. One of the most central emphases in theology over the last half-century has been the need to acknowledge the contextual nature of theological reflection. As a human enterprise, theological convictions and concerns are inevitably expressed in particular embodiments. While they rightly understand their claims to extend beyond the particularities of this embodiment, they have no access to some ideal universal form of expression. At the very least, they must take the form of one language or another. Characteristically, their contextual nature runs much deeper than this; the particularities of contexts can result in quite similar concerns or convictions leading to rather different agendas. This makes it unwise to hope that one could come up with a uniform set of agendas that Wesley would recommend for theology as it is understood and practiced throughout the Christian family in our day, or even a uniform set for his ecclesial descendants throughout the world. While family resemblances will surely shine through, there will also be appropriate differences reflecting the distinct cultural settings and formative histories of every context within which this question might be raised.

This point emphasizes the need to specify which context I will have most in mind as I ponder the question posed, and brings up a third factor that caused some hesitance about taking up the task. The context of which I have the most extensive and participatory knowledge is the theological academy in North America—and particularly the Wesleyan/Methodist branch of this academy. Any judgments which I offer about Wesleyan agendas for the present will be most relevant for this context. The further we move from this context, the more tentative my judgments must become. It is not just that I would know less of the specifics of that present context, but that this lack could keep me from recognizing particularly relevant resources in Wesley's response to his context. The invitation made clear the desire for me to propose recommendations that Wesley might have for his continuing Methodist descendants here in Britain. My reticence in agreeing, while slight, grew from my awareness that the situation of British Methodism differs in some ways from that of Methodism in North America. At the same time, what study I had done of your situation, and conversations I have had with many of you, assured me that there are enough broad similarities for my reflections to be of some value. I have attempted to inform them through further interaction with British Methodist scholarship, but it would be most accurate to say that the reflections which follow arise from, and speak first to, a "North Atlantic" context (i.e., I have not tried to set my North American context to the side).

All of this could suggest that I took on the task with reluctance. Quite the opposite is true. My hesitance was more than offset by my appreciation that Wesley's descendants in Britain are sincerely

interested in knowing what advice he might have to offer them—*specifically as a theologian*—as they approach the 300th anniversary of his birth. This was much less the case a century ago. Consider, for example, the special worship materials, new biography, and related sermons and addresses that were produced in Britain as part of celebrating the centennial of Wesley’s death in 1891.¹ One finds in these frequent praise of Wesley as the founder of the movement, and of his organizational skills, dramatic personality, and the like. But there is only one address among them, by Frederic McDonald, that focuses attention of Wesley’s work as a theologian per se.² And the apologetic nature of this sole entry is palpable: McDonald takes pains to define *true* theologians as preachers and teachers of the gospel, and then argues that Wesley *should* be appreciated as an influential theologian because of the impact his movement has had on culture. The relatively smaller group of materials produced for the bicentenary of Wesley’s birth in 1903 lack even such an apologetic entry.³ I hasten to add that the British situation was hardly unique, the materials produced by The Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States for these events reflect the same neglect of Wesley’s role as a theologian.⁴ Against this backdrop, the first thing that calls for some reflection is how we account for the renewed interest in Wesley *as a theologian* that is evident among his British and North American descendants today.

Factors Contributing to the Renewed Interest in Wesley’s Advice for Theology

One might suspect that the reason for minimal attention to Wesley as a theologian in the commemorative materials at the turn of the last century was that these materials were produced by church functionaries, rather than by theologians. A quick check of the contributors will show that this is not the case, some theologians are included. What the lack of attention reflects instead is the reality that few Methodists at this time considered Wesley’s characteristic activities to be exemplary of the task of a theologian. This was particularly true of Methodist theologians, who were increasingly revealing their embarrassment about this dimension of Wesley’s precedent by qualifying consideration of his theological claims with the opening concession that he was not a “real” theologian.⁵ This concession stands in sharp contrast to Wesley’s own sense of the importance of his role as the theologian (in eighteenth-century terms, the “divine”) of his movement, and to the tendency of early Methodists like Francis Asbury to praise Wesley as the “most respectable divine since the primitive ages.”⁶ The sharpness of the contrast raises two questions: What led to this reversal of valuation of Wesley as a theologian? And what tendencies are fostering a reclaiming of Wesley’s precedent today? Three factors stand out at the intersection of these two questions.

Recognizing the Distinctive Anglican Context of Wesley’s Work as Theologian

The first factor concerns how Wesley’s model of theological activity reflects his Anglican context. Due to its unique history of development the Anglican tradition understood the standard forms and practice of theology differently from its continental counterparts (both Roman Catholic and Protestant). Instead of equating serious theological activity with the production of scholastic compendiums of doctrine, Early Anglicanism followed the example of the early church in focusing this activity more on the production of such formative materials as creeds, collections of catechetical homilies, and liturgies. And in Wesley’s day prayer guides and collected sermons remained a central form of theological publication. Thus, Wesley was functioning as a typical Anglican theologian when he devoted the bulk of his theological activity to these forms.⁷ And it was natural for him to be appreciated *as a theologian* by early Methodists as long as the Anglican sensitivities of their originating setting remained strong.

But this continuity was not long-lived. Shortly after Wesley’s death British Methodists followed the earlier example of their North American counterparts in separating from the Church of England. As Methodists distanced themselves from their Anglican past their default location became in the midst of continental-based Protestant movements, particularly among the various churches within the Reformed family. In Great Britain Methodists tended to align their self-understanding and practices with the dissenting churches, over against Anglicanism; in North America, with Anglican presence minimalized, Methodists were forced to articulate their self-understanding and practices over against

the competition of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. In both settings Methodists were constantly reminded that—judged by continental standards—they lacked a *real* theology. In one of the most vivid examples, E.P. Humphrey argued that Methodist theology did not yield a serious challenge to Presbyterians in America because it:

... has yet to be reduced to a systematic and logical form. ... We have its brief and informal creed in some five and twenty articles; but where is its complete confession of faith, in thirty or forty chapters? ... Where is its whole body of divinity, from under the hand of a master, sharply defining its terms, accurately stating its belief, laying down the conclusions logically involved therein, trying these conclusions, no less than their premises, by the Word of God, refuting objections, and adjusting all its parts into a consistent and systematical whole?⁸

Humphrey was clearly assuming a scholastic compendium as the standard against which Methodist theology came up short. Rather than taking Wesley's failure to provide such a work as warrant to question the preeminence given this form of theological activity, his descendants set out to fill this perceived deficiency in Wesley's bequest. The first attempt was the 1825 British publication of *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*.⁹ This work serves well to represent the transition from Wesley being valued as a model of theological activity to him becoming a scholastic authority to be quoted on select theological claims. At the same time, an after-the-fact collection of excerpts from Wesley could not satisfy the challenge issued by critics like Humphrey, so Wesley's heirs moved on to producing full-fledged original scholastic theologies. The trailblazer was the British Methodist Richard Watson, who published his multi-volume *Theological Institutes* in 1825-28.¹⁰ Through the remainder of the century several others on both sides of the Atlantic broadened and paved the path that Watson had blazed.¹¹

As they advanced, the status of Wesley as a theologian declined yet further, because his adequacy as a scholastic source was increasingly called into question. One dimension of the issue of adequacy was comprehensiveness. Since their primary interest in Wesley was his articulation and defense of contested distinctive Methodist claims, large sections of these scholastic theologies were developed with little dependence on Wesley. Watson set the precedent in referring to Wesley less than a dozen times in his two-volume work, with most of these citations confined to the section on soteriology.¹² Thus emerged the common (mis)impression that Wesley's theological concern was limited to a few matters of soteriology. The other crucial dimension of adequacy concerned consistency. This dimension came into play precisely in those areas where Wesley was typically cited as an authority in scholastic texts. A key example is the argument over Wesley's teachings on entire sanctification that erupted in nineteenth-century American Methodism and sent echoes through the British churches.¹³ The fact that one could find quotes in Wesley's writings to warrant each of the contesting positions led many to insist, with James Mudge, that "It is more important to be well-reasoned, self-consistent, and wholly scriptural than to accord in every smallest phrase with Wesley."¹⁴ In other words, Wesley should not be treated as an unquestioned scholastic source even in those limited areas that he frequently addressed.

If Wesley's role was reduced to providing an occasional questionably-authoritative dictum within the scholastic theologies that dominated the nineteenth century, it was further marginalized by the Methodist transition to systematic theologies toward the end of the century. This transition took place more rapidly in North America and Germany than in Britain as the emerging Methodist Episcopal seminaries adopted with little question the fourfold curriculum being championed in the continental discussion of "theological encyclopedia" (i.e., Biblical Theology, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology, and Practical Theology).¹⁵ This model stressed the need to maintain clear borders between each of the disciplines, and it tended to call into question the theological nature of the first three disciplines by equating theology "proper" with Systematics. The *real* theologian was now the systematic theologian.

It is small wonder that the emerging generation of Methodist systematic theologians at the beginning of the twentieth century hardly knew what to make of Wesley as a theologian. On the fourfold model most of his theological productions fell within the "application" discipline of Practical Theology, and some restricted his interest and abilities to this realm. Others rejected this narrow

classification, allowing that Wesley combined aspects of a professional theologian with those of a practical Christian teacher.¹⁶ But this concession heightened the problem. What serious theologian would overlook these boundaries? And why did Wesley never undertake the task of a Systematic Theology? Some of his academic descendants were inclined to excuse Wesley on the basis of his misfortune of training in the methodological backwaters of Anglican theology!¹⁷ Others appealed to a supposed principle of historical development—that revivals of Christian life inevitably focus on immediate ministry, while creative epochs of theological science necessarily follow and consolidate these revivals.¹⁸ In either case, Methodist theologians at this juncture took it as obvious that Wesley had not been a *real* theologian.

If this is how we arrived by the centennial of Wesley's death at the situation of discounting his role as a theologian, what accounts for the recent renewed interest in this role? The convergence of two distinct agendas has played a large part. On the one hand, there has been a growing dissatisfaction within academic theology over the last half of the twentieth century with the compartmentalization of the four-fold model, and with overly theoretical approaches to systematic theology. This has spawned a variety of calls for recovering an understanding and practice of theology that is more integrally connected to the life and practice of Christians in the world.¹⁹ On the other hand, the field of Wesley Studies has come of age over this same time period, moving beyond earlier tendencies to hagiography and uncritical equations of Wesley with current agendas, striving instead to understand Wesley fairly within his own historical context before raising questions of relevance for our own contextual issues.²⁰ This repositioning has allowed us to recognize again the model of theological activity that Wesley imbibed from his eighteenth-century Anglican setting. More importantly, it has allowed a growing number of Methodist academic theologians to entertain the possibility that Wesley's precedent might prove helpful in seeking a renewed understanding and practice of theology as a "practical discipline."²¹

Reconsidering the Hubris of the Enlightenment

While transitions in assumptions about what constitutes "theology" may account for the tendency of Methodists at the beginning of the twentieth century to dismiss Wesley's *model* of theological activity, they do not fully explain the disregard evident among many Methodists at this time for Wesley's specific theological *convictions*. Much less do they explain the strong negative reactions that erupt on occasion to suggestions that Wesley's stance on a particular theological issue should be considered normative for Methodists today. These phenomena relate more to the cultural transition of the Enlightenment.

At the heart of the Enlightenment is a skepticism about the reliability of past authorities. Through the medieval age the standard model of inquiry (*scientia*) in all fields had been to read and master long-standing authorities. Then venturesome scholars began pointing out apparent disagreements among the authorities. The eventual response of many was to appeal to the oldest authorities as more pristine and reliable (the Renaissance/Reformation). This made even more traumatic the gradual demonstration—from Galileo through Newton—that these classic authorities were wrong about basic questions in cosmology. Thus was posed the inescapable question: Once we have been enlightened about the potential fallibility of traditional authorities, what continuing role ought we allow them to play in the enterprise of seeking truth (science)?

Obviously, there is a spectrum of possible answers to this question, running from rejection of any consideration of traditional authorities in seeking truth on one side to reactionary defense of traditional authorities as the exclusive guides to truth on the other. The most influential voices in Wesley's early-Enlightenment context pushed toward the reformist pole of this spectrum. Following Francis Bacon, they charged that what marred all past inquiry were the traditional presuppositions that scholars brought to their investigation. The corresponding prescription was that we ought to set aside all presuppositions, traditional and otherwise, testing proposed claims for truth solely by the universally-available criteria of reason and present empirical experience. It was taken for granted that results emerging from such testing would be more reliable than any traditional claims. The hubris of a few even led them to suggest that these results would be absolutely certain and universally applicable.²²

Wesley sought a mediating position between the most reformist Enlightenment voices and the conservative reaction. While he dismissed such radical voices as Voltaire and Hume, he was open to

much of the new developments in the natural sciences, the human sciences, and biblical studies.²³ Reflecting the spread of radical voices, through most of the nineteenth century major Methodist theologians were noticeably more suspicious of Enlightenment trends and less engaged with ongoing developments in science and biblical studies.²⁴ As the turn of the century approached some younger theologians became convinced that the greatest need of Methodist theology was to come to terms with the modern intellectual trends that their predecessors had avoided. A few appealed to Wesley as their warrant for this move.²⁵ More common was the tendency to adopt toward Wesley the Enlightenment devaluation of all traditional authorities. Randolph Sinks Foster set the tone when he began a multi-volume series of *Studies in Theology* in 1891 with the insistence that “We know more today than our fathers a hundred years ago [the year of Wesley’s death!]. We have truer beliefs than they had.” Predictably, Foster almost never interacts with Wesley in his series.²⁶ His precedent was widely emulated as Methodist theology moved into the twentieth century.

The agenda of these younger scholars was bound to create controversy. Representative is the debate that erupted in British Methodism in the 1910s when George Jackson embraced current higher critical views like the rejection of the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis. The most vocal opponents of openness to modern biblical criticism organized as the “Wesley Bible Union” and sought to require the conformity of Methodist clergy and teachers to the “Wesleyan Standards.” The official response was the declaration of the 1917 British Conference that Wesley’s *Sermons* and *Notes* “were not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on our preachers.”²⁷ The more general result of this and similar debates was that through much of the twentieth century Methodist theologians on both sides of the Atlantic have been prone to view appeals to the precedent of Wesley as “fundamentalist” attempts to stifle engagement with modern thought.²⁸

While there have remained Methodist voices over the last quarter of a century that echo the radical Enlightenment devaluation of all past authorities, other voices have been emerging that call for a positive reengagement of contemporary Methodist theology with Wesley and the later Methodist tradition.²⁹ These voices reflect the “Enlightenment about the Enlightenment” that lies behind the current transition in North Atlantic culture to what many are now calling our “post-modern” era. At the moment this label is claimed by a variety of competing agendas, some of which are polar opposites of others. What they share is the rejection of the claim of Enlightenment thinkers to be providing “pure” knowledge that is free from the constraints of context and interpretive filters.³⁰ Once this claim is rejected, the Enlightenment privileging of present knowledge over past understandings of truth is revealed as an unwarranted superiority complex. And, as David Ford has felicitously put it, “we are free in a new way to recognize what is of value in premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity.”³¹

What is “new” about the reengagement with tradition that Ford and others call for is that no authority or period is granted absolute status. We can reconnect to Wesley and later Methodist traditions without it becoming a type of “Wesley Fundamentalism.”³² Wesley’s valuable insights can be gleaned, without overlooking his shortcomings. Most importantly, he would be allowed to challenge us about our blindspots and distortions of the faith, as much as we have felt free in the past to challenge him. This is the kind of reengagement with Wesley as a theological mentor that Albert Outler looked forward to in “Phase III” of Wesley Studies.³³

One specific aspect of this reengagement needs to be highlighted. The concern is often expressed, particularly among British Methodists, that a preoccupation with Wesley could undermine the distinctive mission of Methodism as a renewal movement within the church universal. This might be true if one focused attention and authority only on those places where Wesley is most distinctive, but one of the key values for Methodists today of renewing dialogue with Wesley is that thereby they actually renew dialogue with much of the core of the Christian tradition. And, some of Wesley’s distinctive emphases are precisely the most important gifts our tradition has to offer to the broader church. Thus, I agree with those who are questioning the prior tendency of British Methodists strive to be “ecumenical” by specifically playing down their Methodist distinctives.³⁴

Reclaiming the Importance of Transforming the Church

A third factor influencing attention to Wesley as a theologian has been shifting Methodist perceptions of the health of their churches. Wesley’s sense of the relative lack of health of both typical Anglican

church life in his day and of the moral state of the nation is signaled by his definition of the mission of early Methodism as “not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, *particularly the Church*; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”³⁵ I have italicized the phrase “particularly the church” to draw attention to Wesley’s clear conviction that attention to the spiritual health of the church is not a distraction from impacting the nation, but foundational to such impact. The significance of his work as theologian was directly correlated to the need of church and society for transformation.

The materials produced in Great Britain and the United States for the Wesley celebrations of 1891 and 1903 reflect churches in both settings that perceived themselves to be doing well and were pausing to remember fondly their founder. There is little sense that they are anxious to discover what Wesley may have to offer that could *reform the church*. Indeed, the Americans had dropped the phrase “reform the church” from their mission statement when they made the official transition from being a renewal movement in Anglicanism to being The Methodist Episcopal Church.³⁶ Likewise, the sense from both settings at this time is of a general satisfaction with the state of their nation, and their place in the nation. This sense was particularly strong for the American Methodists, who were just climaxing what scholars now call the “Methodist Century” in North American religious history.

The self-perception of Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic is quite different a century later as we again mark these Wesley commemorations. The mainline Methodist churches in both settings have experienced significant numerical decline, particularly over the second half of the twentieth century.³⁷ Even the holiness churches, which have been the “success” story within the Methodist family through most of the century, have noticed significantly decreased rates of growth in their U.S. numbers in the last decade. For mainline American Methodists the decline in numbers has been rendered more painful because it is paralleled by loss of the significant political influence they once held. Their pronouncements on social issues, for example, are seldom even noticed by civil government today.

What has been noticed in general society, in Britain and North America alike, is the decline of such important civic virtues as patience, empathy, and compassion.³⁸ Those who note this decline often champion religious groups as one of the last hopes for cultivating these virtues in their members, for the good of our larger society. Robin Gill has provided the most detailed evidence to date, focused on the British setting, that churches have played a crucial role in the formation of individual moral character that culture requires but cannot facilitate itself.³⁹ But Gill and others have also noted that contemporary mainline churches seem to be less effective than their predecessors in instilling and strengthening such character in their members. The challenge facing these churches, they contend, is to recover an ethos and practices that more effectively awaken and nurture Christian character.⁴⁰

In other words, contemporary Methodists recognize again that our situation is not that different from the one faced by Wesley. So we are turning back to dialogue with him, seeking what wisdom he might offer us about how to *reform our churches*, and thereby more effectively spread holiness and wholeness in our world.

Implications for Prioritizing Agendas

The convergence of the three factors just described goes a long way in accounting for both the earlier neglect and the recent recovery of interest in consulting Wesley as a resource for contemporary theology. This convergence also provides a helpful backdrop for the difficult task of selecting which agendas to emphasize out of the many that Wesley’s precedent could suggest for theology in the twenty first century.

There are surely a number of emphases in current considerations of traditional theological loci that resonate with Wesley’s concern and precedent. For example, I believe Wesley would be highly interested in the current attempts to develop an understanding of God that makes clear God is truly responsive to humanity. Much of his own efforts were directed at challenging the model of God as a Sovereign King widely assumed in his day toward a model of God more as a Loving Parent. In terms of the current debates, my sense is that he would find the model of Open Theism being proposed by many evangelical Wesleyans preferable to the model of Process Theism championed by other Wesleyans across the theological spectrum.⁴¹ Turning to a very different example, the current high interest of the medical community in the apparent health benefits of religious faith and involvement

has become one more stimulus in issuing a call for a holistic theology of ministry that envisions the goal of Christian ministry as the promotion of human flourishing in all its dimensions.⁴² Wesley's frequent reminder that God desires to provides us "both inward and outward health," or "health of soul and health of body,"⁴³ along with his continual promotion of his *Primitive Physic* and his support of medical clinics, are ample evidence that he would be interested in this agenda. While some of his current heirs have begun to explore it, there is much left to be done.⁴⁴

Consideration of Wesley's resonance with such issues related to traditional loci merits at least an essay or two in its own right. But I want to suggest that the particular factors that have been central to renewing interest in Wesley's input on theology point us toward considering as well, and perhaps as of first importance, what agendas he might promote concerning how the very enterprise of theology is understood and practiced today in the North Atlantic context.

Wesleyan Agendas for Enriching the Understanding and Practice of Theology

Albert Outler has suggested that Wesley's model of theological activity is one of his most underappreciated resources for the present church.⁴⁵ And calls for recovering something like this model are emerging in British Methodism.⁴⁶ But some may question how focusing on such methodological issues is fitting for Wesley—or his descendants—given his insistence that the primary concern of the Methodist movement was always the practical task "raising up real Christians." They would do well to consider a sermon that Wesley published late in his life, titled "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity."⁴⁷ This sermon opens with Wesley's assertion that the reason Christian communities around the globe had done so little good in the world was that they were producing so few real Christians. He then identified three factors of typical church life that together account for this lamentable state: first, in too few churches did members attain any adequate understanding of Christian doctrine; second, many of those churches which provided members with doctrine lacked corresponding provision of appropriate Christian discipline; and third, of churches which provided both doctrine and discipline, there remained in most a broad absence of the specific Christian practice of self-denial.

Most observers of church life would likely agree that Wesley's description of his time is broadly applicable today.⁴⁸ But they are likely to be puzzled by his prescription for effectiveness in raising up real Christians. In particular, why does he see "doctrine" as so central to this task? The answer to this question lies in the understanding of doctrine (or theology) that Wesley had in mind, an understanding much richer and more integrally related to Christian life than that which dominates the present theological academy. I believe one of Wesley's most central concerns for theology in the twenty first century would be that we recover something more like this classical understanding of the enterprise as a whole. Once we have reminded ourselves of the various dimensions involved in the enterprise we will be able to appreciate the more specific agendas concerning the practice of theology that he would commend for our attention.

Recalling the Classical Dimensions of the Theological Enterprise

Only with the emergence of universities in the Middle Ages did we begin to have persons whose primary vocation was academic instruction in theology. The vocation of noted theologians in prior centuries was more commonly that of pastor, bishop, abbot, or spiritual director—roles devoted to shepherding Christian communities in their engagement with daily life. Broadening the consideration to include these earlier examples results in a more robust conception of theology, a conception that identifies at least four dimensions within the overall enterprise.

The primal (or embodied) dimension of this robust expression of theology is the *basic worldview* that Christians assume should orient believers' lives in the world. As Paul put it, Christians will perceive things rightly and act appropriately only when they have the "mind of Christ." That this involves holistic dispositions, not merely intellectual convictions, is evident from Paul's parallel emphasis on Christians nurturing the "fruit of the Spirit." The mind of Christ fosters—and is reciprocally strengthened by—loving service of others (Phil. 2). The "orienting" nature of this

foundational dimension deserves special emphasis. A person's worldview is not simply one set of beliefs/dispositions alongside others which they embrace; these specific beliefs/dispositions frame the perspective within which the person makes sense of, evaluates, and incorporates all other beliefs and dispositions. That is why "theology" should not be restricted to designating only knowledge of God (as the Greek roots of the word might imply). It is inadequate even to confine it to knowledge of general religious truths. It names instead the Christian practice of approaching all of life from—and placing all knowledge within—the perspective of God's revelation in Christ Jesus.

Paul's passionate appeal for Christians to emulate the "mind of Christ" reflects the reality that this orienting worldview is not unilaterally infused by God at one's conversion. Neither does it emerge effortlessly over time, or manifest itself spontaneously whenever it is needed. It must be cultivated, as part of the intentional process of growing in Christ-likeness. This need defines the second dimension of the theological enterprise evident through the history of the church—the *pastoral*⁴⁹ *task of forming/reforming a Christian worldview in believers*. Since the worldview in question is holistic, this task has proven to involve a variety of activities aimed at invoking and shaping beliefs, affections, and character dispositions. The case of the early church is particularly revealing in this regard. Their theological energies were necessarily dominated by the task of forming a Christian worldview in new believers, and they pursued this task with a clear sense that the cultures within which they lived were bent on instilling quite different worldviews. In this context they prized most highly as "theologians" those who crafted such formative practical-theological materials as hymns, liturgies, catechetical orations, and spiritual discipline manuals.

The case of the early church also makes clear that the production of such "first-order" theological materials will inevitably spawn "second-order" *normative theological reflection* (a third dimension of the overall theological enterprise). That is, it will spark debates not only over the adequacy of particular practices for forming a Christian worldview but also over alternative conceptions of this basic worldview and alternative proposed implications of the worldview for concrete action in the world. Thus, for example, a proposed liturgy addressing prayers directly to the Holy Spirit provoked a debate in the early church that led naturally into the range of issues concerning God's triune nature.⁵⁰ Challenges to the longstanding use of predominantly male imagery for God in Christian discourse and symbols provide a current example of the same dynamic interaction between these dimensions of the theological enterprise.

The concern of the three dimensions of theology considered so far focuses primarily on those who have embraced (to some degree) the Christian worldview. A fourth dimension that can be discerned throughout the span of the church is more apologetic/evangelistic in aim, *dialogical engagement with those who question or reject Christian beliefs and practices*. While this aim has its own integrity, once again we should not overlook the connections between this dimension and those already identified. Dialogue with critics has often helped to clarify aspects and implications of the Christian worldview. Likewise, the questions that outsiders articulate are typically gnawing at insiders as well, and their resolution serves to enable a deeper appropriation and integration of the Christian worldview by believers. Coming full circle, Christians living more authentically in the world are the most effective apologetic or evangel that could be desired.

Maintaining the Holistic Nature of the Primal Dimension of Theology

As we noted earlier, Wesley's Anglican setting mediated to him the pre-university model of theological activity. As such, each of the classical dimensions can be readily identified in his theological claims and practice. One of the most detailed articulations of the primal dimension is found in his description of the character of a true Christian in his letter to Conyers Middleton:

A Christian cannot think of the Author of his being, without abasing himself before [God]. ... He has a continual sense of his dependence on the Parent of good for his being, and all the blessings that attend it. ... The ruling temper of his heart is the most absolute submission, and the tenderest gratitude, to his sovereign Benefactor. ... And as he has the strongest affection for the Fountain of all good, so he has the firmest confidence in [God]; a confidence which neither pleasure nor pain, neither life nor death, can shake. But yet this, far from creating sloth or

indolence, pushes him on to the most vigorous industry. ... As he knows the most acceptable worship of God is to imitate [the One] he worships so he is continually labouring to transcribe into himself all [God's] imitable perfections; in particular, justice, mercy, and truth. ... Above all, remembering that God is love, he is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbour; of universal love; not confined to one sect or party; not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions, or in outward modes of worship; or to those who are allied to him by blood, or recommended by nearness of place. ... And this universal, disinterested love is productive of all right affections. It is fruitful of gentleness, tenderness, sweetness; of humanity, courtesy, and affability.⁵¹

Wesley's appreciation for the holistic nature of this primal—or embodied—dimension of theology is readily apparent in this description. This holism was very intentional, and hard-won, on Wesley's part. Through his Oxford years and beyond he drew upon both the great spiritual writers and works in the emerging discipline of psychology to enrich and balance the rationalist (Platonic) overtones that reigned in the moral and spiritual writings of Anglicanism in his day. He developed an "affectional" model of the spiritual life that emphasized both the primacy of being *affected* by God's grace before we can respond, and the freeing impact of these affections being *habituated* into the guiding "tempers" of our thoughts, words, and actions.⁵²

Wesley's descendants have not always maintained this holistic balance. Through the broad influence of Thomas Reid and Immanuel Kant, many in the nineteenth century adopted more rationalistic and decisionistic moral psychologies.⁵³ In reaction to theological revisionism, others have tended to equate faith with the intellectual affirmation of specific doctrinal claims. In the face of changing mores, still others have nearly reduced religion to a legalism of external behaviours. And in our age of social activism, several verge on reducing the whole of Christian life to "orthopraxis."⁵⁴ Wesley would surely commend any move we might make in this coming century to maintain and deepen, both in the Methodist arena and in the church as a whole, an appreciation for the holistic nature of this primal dimension of theology.

Reclaiming the Range of First-Order Activities for the Formative Dimension

Wesley clearly shared the classical assumption that a truly Christian orienting worldview does not emerge spontaneously with the experience of justifying grace, it must be cultivated. And he shared the appreciation of the early church for the range of first-order practical-theological materials that serve this purpose. For example, recognizing the centrality of a basic "life-narrative" in one's worldview, he exhorted his Methodists to live in the story of Christ, and the stories of exemplary Christians (a rich set of which he provided for their reading), so that their orienting narrative might be shaped in keeping with the pattern of Christ. Again, acknowledging the formative impact of those songs that embed themselves in our memories and being, he carefully edited a series of hymnbooks as guides for sustaining and shaping the Methodist people.

The pastoral wisdom of Wesley shines through in his appreciation for how the interconnections of the main branches of Christian doctrine serve to maintain balance in the Christian worldview. A good example is his emphasis on the importance of forming our Christian lives in keeping with the balance of the *whole* Christ—or "Christ in all his offices."⁵⁵ If we understand Christian life only in terms of Christ as prophet we are likely to reduce Christianity to legalism, and either despair at our failures or consume one another with judgmentalism. If we conceive Christian life only in terms of Christ as priest we will tend to reduce Christianity to an antinomian offer of forgiveness without any expectation (or promise!) of change. And if we focus only on Christ as king we could get caught up in a false perfectionism that fails to recognize the continuing role of confession and growth in the Christian life. As formative influences against such distortions John Wesley encouraged his American descendants to retain the rhythms of the church year, and Charles Wesley authored collections of hymns for each season of Christ's life.

Given his conviction about the holistic nature of the worldview being formed, Wesley was concerned to provide his Methodist people with a truly balanced set of the means of grace, a set that not only provides for the narrative *shaping* of our affections but also conveys to us the *empowering* experience of God's grace.⁵⁶ As he stressed in the sermon on the "Causes of the Inefficacy of

Christianity,” they were provide not only with “doctrine” (through creed, sermon, scripture reading, and the like), but also with “discipline” (through spiritual direction, class meetings, and the like) and “self-denial” (in a variety of forms, including the works of mercy). This careful pastoral creation of the network of means of grace that framed early Methodist life was an exemplary expression of theology in its formative dimension.

By comparison to his precedent, most of Wesley’s descendants have engaged in a more limited range of formative theological practices. Almost immediately in both the North American church and the British church (after his death) formal liturgy, observance of the church year, and the like were broadly laid aside in favor of extemporaneous or “free” worship.⁵⁷ Wesley’s request that Methodists institute a weekly celebration of Eucharist was essentially ignored. By the end of the nineteenth century the class meeting was widely abandoned on both sides of the Atlantic.

The list could go on, but it might be more helpful to ask what contributed to this narrowing of the formative dimension of theology. Part of it was simply the result of now being in a situation of defining themselves over against Anglicanism. But another major factor was the impact of living in a culture shaped by (and often imbibing) the rationalistic and decisionistic moral psychology of Reid and Kant. This psychology places primary value on activities that address the mind and call for decision—i.e., scripture reading, sermon, and prayer. In such a context, the most likely way that professional theologians would continue to address and impact the church directly would be through their preaching. Overall, it appears that British Methodist theologians have continued this dimension of Wesley’s precedent more faithfully and seriously than their North American counterparts.⁵⁸

With the move into the twentieth century a rather different dynamic served to undercut concern for the formative dimension of theology. Growing weary of the rationalistic undertones of Methodist scholasticism, early in the century a majority of theologians on both sides of the Atlantic embraced the counter emphasis on emotion or “experience” originating from Friedrich Schleiermacher. More importantly, they tended to adopt Schleiermacher’s apparent broader assumption that the role of theological doctrine is not to *form* Christian dispositions but to give compelling *expression* to the dispositions characteristically resident in Christians—and thereby to call forth these dispositions that are natively resident in others.⁵⁹ Some of them touted as a virtue of Methodism that, unlike other confessional movements who forced ill-fitting traditional dogmas *upon* present experience, Methodists allowed their theology to flow naturally *out of* religious experience.⁶⁰ While Wesley would have shared their discontent with rationalistic and heavy-handed dogmatic theology, he could never be content with an alternative where doctrine is derived unilaterally from Christian experience. This is because Wesley would not share the apparent assumption that Christian dispositions emerge “naturally” into authentic forms. As long as this assumption reigned, there was little hope of these theologians recovering the range of formative activities that characterized Wesley’s precedent.

The neo-Orthodox turn would begin raising questions about this assumption, and over the last two-thirds of the century there have been various grassroots efforts to renew appreciation and practice of the liturgical and spiritual formation of Christian life. Wesley would surely encourage us to continue and broaden these efforts, helping both Methodists and the church at large to reclaim—as central to the work of theology!—the full range of first-order activities that contribute to forming the Christian mind and heart. As just one example, given his explicit reminder that “works of mercy” are not just a duty but a “means of grace” that has formative impact on the one engaging in the work, he would clearly welcome attempts to reclaim the importance of this practice.⁶¹

Seeking True Balance within the Normative Dimension

As we turn attention to the normative dimension of theology we are moving into an arena where present academic theologians feel quite at home. The history of the theological academy is one of increasingly focusing “real” theology on the normative and apologetic tasks. The further they moved from Wesley’s original setting, the more Methodist theologians have embraced the latter focus. As such, Wesley’s central concerns about present theological practice would deal less with the need to appreciate these dimensions than with the need to reintegrate them with the other dimensions of the theological enterprise.

While this might sound simple, it plunges us into historical debates about the very nature of academic theology. Up into the Middle Ages it was generally assumed that theology was overall a “practical” discipline (*scientia practica*); that is, that theology focused primarily on addressing humans and the things humans do—in light of God. By contrast, it increasingly became standard in the university setting to defend theology as instead a “theoretical” discipline—focused first and foremost on understanding God *per se*.⁶² The crucial problem with this shifted focus is not that it champions theoretical reflection, but that it easily severs the dynamic interaction between the normative dimension of theology and the primal and formative dimensions. Theoretical considerations about the nature of God, drawing on biblical exegesis and philosophy, have been integral to normative judgment in the church from its earliest days. But an equally central set of considerations in classic Christian normative reflection has been the “practical” consequences of alternative conceptions of God and God’s relationship to humanity.⁶³ Moreover, just as it was instructed by spirituality/practice in reaching its decisions, second-order normative reflection was ultimately geared to readdressing spirituality/practice by means of first-order theological activities. It could take very formal expression in conciliar creeds, for example, but its fruitful outcomes were never intended to be restricted to such expression. They were meant to guide how Christians prayed, worked, played, procreated, and the rest. Wesley would surely side with those seeking to recover in the theological academy a sense of theology as a “practical discipline” where the balance of this dynamic interaction again reigns.

Wesley would also be concerned about the continuing challenge of the Enlightenment hubris to the balance of criteria invoked in normative dimension of theological activity itself. He clearly recognized that some Enlightenment voices cast the authority of *present* experience and reason over against past authorities in a way that emptied scripture and tradition of any normative contribution in deciding theological issues. He was also aware of the reactionary calls from some Protestants for theology to be based on scripture *alone*. Faced with this polarization, Wesley refused to join either side.

His major reason for refusing a forced option between the authority of scripture in theology and that of experience, reason, or tradition was Wesley’s commitment to the unity of God’s truth. The God speaking in and through scripture is—according to scripture itself—the God who can be known in part through our life in the universe God has created and by the intellectual powers that God has gifted to humanity. This same God promised to guide the church into truth. As such, to reject appeals to experience, reason, or tradition in normative theological debates is ultimately to reject the authority of scripture as well.

But what about the rejection of scripture in favor of present experience and reason? Here Wesley’s fundamental objection was his recognition of the fallibility of human knowing. He had repeatedly found what he thought to be certain on the basis of reason or experience called into question, particularly by dialogue with the experience and reasoning of others.⁶⁴ While this did not always lead him to surrender his view, it did convince him that experience was no self-evident or infallible guide to use in critiquing scripture. More importantly, it convinced him that all human understandings of our experience, tradition, and scripture itself are *interpretations* that are open to error and should remain open to the possibility of reconsideration.⁶⁵

Just as Wesley found that dialogue made him aware of the fallibility of his interpretations, he found in dialogue the most helpful way to test alternative interpretations—seeking those which are most adequate. For theological issues this would involve overlapping dialogues: the way to develop more adequate understanding is an ongoing dialogue between scripture, tradition, experience, and reason—all read in dialogue with other interpreters.⁶⁶ Consider the example of slavery. Wesley did not dispute the traditional assumption that there were scriptural allowances for slavery. He argued instead that what was allowed in scripture was not the debased form of slavery he witnessed in British colonialism. And he insisted that central themes of scripture (equality of creation and the command to love) call Christians to reject slavery in its present form. To be sure, American Methodists increasingly polarized over Wesley’s suggestion, and their attempt to legislate an elusive consensus led instead to a painful split. But while it has taken much struggle, most have come not only to agree with Wesley about all modern forms of slavery, but to recognize a subtle challenge in scripture (e.g., Paul in Philemon) even to the slavery of its own time.

Thus, when the church is confronted today with an apparent conflict between scripture and experience, for example, the way forward that Wesley’s precedent would commend is not to debate which of these is more authoritative but to engage in the difficult (and often lengthy) dialogical

reconsideration of our *interpretations* of each of these—and of tradition—until we build consensus around an interpretation that can “do justice” to all of them. Unfortunately, there remains a widespread tendency, even among Wesley’s heirs, to fall back quickly into the polarizing model of the Enlightenment.⁶⁷ Wesley would encourage us to continue challenging this polarization, seeking authentic balance in normative theological reflection.

There is another major concern for balance that is evident in Wesley’s own normative theological reflection. He was well aware that quite different overall theological emphases could find warrant within the dialogue of scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. His consternation with this reality is at times palpable. One of the most striking cases is his response to the claim that the doctrine of predestination (with its limited atonement and unconditional reprobation) is a biblical doctrine:

(the doctrine of predestination) destroys all [God’s] attributes at once. It overturns both his justice mercy and truth. Yea, it represents the most Holy God as worse than the devil. . . . But you say you will “prove it by Scripture.” Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never can prove this. . . . There are many Scriptures the true sense whereof neither you or I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense at all than to say it had such a sense as this. . . . No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works.⁶⁸

If pressed to defend his closing dictum, Wesley would surely argue that it is not an arbitrary conviction but reflects “the whole tenor of Scripture.” Even if one agreed, the episode still shows that we have touched Wesley’s “theological nerve.” Similar deep convictions or worries shine through in the theological reflection of every major Christian tradition, and I have proposed calling these the “orienting concern” of each tradition.⁶⁹ When we recognize these different orienting concerns it becomes much easier to anticipate the response of a tradition to particular issues—and to engage the tradition about whether particular responses are truly congruent with their concern. In Wesley’s case, the deep worry that runs consistently through his normative theological reflection is that we preserve the vital tension between two truths that he viewed as co-definitive of Christianity: without God’s grace, we cannot be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God’s grace *will not* save. I have chosen to designate this as a concern about “responsible grace.” I hope to capture thereby that Wesley’s distinctive concern is about the nature of God and God’s actions. It tries to make clear that God’s indispensable gift of gracious forgiveness and empowerment is fundamental, while capturing Wesley’s characteristic qualification of such empowerment as enabling rather than overriding human responsibility. Whatever one might decide about the adequacy of the proposed label, I think the presence of the concern is evident throughout Wesley’s work.⁷⁰ And I am convinced that he would urge his heirs to continue seeking to maintain the balance of this deep conviction in our normative reflection on debated theological issues today.

Modeling Dialogical Engagement in the Apologetic Dimension

Despite occasional protesters like Tertullian and (the early) Barth, the apologetic dimension of the theological enterprise is not only legitimate, it is inescapable. At the very least, believers seeking to “honor God with their minds” will be concerned to resolve for themselves apparent conflicts between their religious convictions and broadly-accepted human knowledge. Wesley often took it upon himself to offer guidance to his Methodist people in this regard. On occasion he took on the strong polemical tones of his age—particularly in debates with deists. But more characteristic of his preferred method of engaging this dimension is his (eventually, five-volume) *Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation*. In this work Wesley engages in an extended dialogue both with the findings of modern science, and with several different interpreters of these findings. The final product is a progressive description of the levels of creation, from the molecular to the stellar, with periodic pauses to comment on the wisdom and goodness of God as the best possible explanation for such intricacy and apparently purposeful design.

While Wesley’s glosses occasionally seem to suggest that any reasonable person who considered such evidence would be compelled to believe in God, this must be seen as rhetorical. He elsewhere explicitly denied that reason alone could ever conclusively prove this—or any other—theological claim.⁷¹ The witness of the Spirit was also necessary. As such, I would suggest that his agenda for apologetic engagement was more modest, namely

helping *strengthen* the religious convictions of his readers (and himself!) by showing how these convictions “make sense” of broadly-accepted human knowledge. Note how this purpose comes through in his conclusion to *Survey*, where he takes on the role of a steward speaking to God:

I have not looked upon thy works inconsiderately, and passed them over as ordinary things. But I have studiously and diligently searched into them. ... And this observation did not rest in the bare perusal of the works themselves, or in the searching out, so far as that could be done, their immediate natural causes. But I traced their being, dependence, and government unto thee, the First Cause of all. And by this tracing of things to their original, I was led to a demonstrative conviction, that there is a God, who is the great cause, both of their being and motions: yea, that there is but one God; that he is most powerful, most wise, knowing all things, governing all things, supporting all things. Upon these convictions, I was *strengthened* in the belief of thy holy word, which had so great a congruity with these truths. And upon these convictions, I did learn the more to honour, reverence, and admire thee; and to worship, serve and obey thee.⁷²

It should come as little surprise that the apologetic enterprise is one that Methodist academic theologians carried over in full force from Wesley. By this point, it might also be anticipated that they quickly gravitated toward the more ambitious goal of providing rational *foundations* for religious faith. This begins as early as Richard Watson, who subtitled his *Theological Institutes* “A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity,” and began the work with an extended philosophical apologetic for the reliability of Scripture.⁷³ The slide towards emphasizing the rational foundation for religious belief was particularly characteristic of Methodist theologians in North America.⁷⁴ Thus it was characteristic that the first form in which Methodist theology received significant recognition in the broader North American academy was as a form of philosophical apologetics—in Boston Personalism.⁷⁵ The second half of the twentieth century has seen strongly foundationalist and rationalist apologetics called into question. Some have seen this as requiring that we abandon the apologetic dimension of theology. Wesley would encourage us instead to return to a more modest and dialogical mode of engagement.

Conclusion

To bring these various points together, the most important dialogical engagement that Wesley would recommend to his descendants as we stand poised at the beginning of this new millennium is not that of theology with science, but that of “professional” theology with the life and leaders of our churches. He would call us to reclaim an appreciation for the embodied dimension of theological convictions, and for those engaged in the formative dimension. He would encourage those called to academic theology to pursue our vocation more intentionally in conversation with the church and our fellow Christians in the world. Correspondingly, he would encourage pastors and other church leaders to reclaim the role of intentional shepherding of the theological formation of those in the community of faith. And he would hope that we would see this not as some concern for preserving Methodist “tradition,” but rather as a call to re-engage the original Methodist *vision* of reforming the church and spreading holiness/wholeness in our broader cultural settings.

NOTES

1. Centenary Handbook (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1891); *The Centenary of the Death of John Wesley, March 2, 1791*. (Hymns for use at centenary services (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1891); Edith Kenyon, *The Centenary Life of Wesley* (London: W. Scott, 1891); *Wesley, The Man, His Teaching and His Work: Being Sermons and Addresses Delivered in City Road Chapel at the Centenary Commemoration of John Wesley's Death* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1891); and “The Wesley Centenary,” *Review of Reviews* 3 (1891): 246.

2. See Frederic McDonald, “John Wesley, the Theologian,” *Methodist Recorder* (2 April 1891):257; and reprinted in *Wesley, the Man* ...

3. See especially: *Wesley Studies, by Various Authors* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1903)—a selection of articles that appeared in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for June 1903, and those contributed to the Bi-centenary number of the *Methodist Recorder*.

4. Cf. *The Wesley Memorial Volume; or, Wesley and the Methodist Movement, judged by nearly one hundred and fifty writers living and dead*, Edited by J.O.A. Clark (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880 [published in anticipation of 1891]); *John Wesley. Born 1703–Died 1791. Centennial Commemoration of Mr. Wesley's Death March 19th, '91*, ed. by Chicago Methodist Social Union (Chicago:

W.J. Jefferson, 1891); *John Wesley Bi-centennial; People's Temple, Boston, June 29–30, '03*, edited by the John Wesley Bi-centennial Commission, Methodist Episcopal Church Conferences, New England (Boston: Taylor Press, 1903); *Wesley Bi-centennial Celebration by Charleston Methodist Churches, June 24–28, 1903*, (N.p., [1903?]); *Wesley Bi-Centennial, Wesleyan University*, (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University, 1904); and *The Wesley Bi-Centenary Celebration in Savannah, GA. Wesley's Only American Home. June 25–29, 1903*, (Savannah, GA: Savannah Morning News Print, 1903).

5. For examples of how standard this concession became on both sides of the Atlantic see T. R. Pierce, *The Intellectual Side of John Wesley* (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1897); Wilbur Fisk Tillet, *Personal Salvation* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1902), 510–14; George Eayrs, *John Wesley, Christian Philosopher and Church Founder* (London: Epworth, 1926), 72–73; and J. Ernest Rattenbury, *Wesley's Legacy to the World* (London: Epworth, 1928), 57.

6. See *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. With Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798; reprint: Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1979), 7.

7. For more on both the Anglican precedent and Wesley's practice see Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley – Practical Theologian?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 122–47.

8. E. P. Humphrey, *Our Theology and Its Development* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1857), 68–69.

9. (London: W. Booth, 1825). This collection was apparently prepared by William Carpenter.

10. Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes: or, A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity*, 3 vols. (London: John Mason, 1825–28).

11. For the transition to Methodist scholasticism in British Methodism see Thomas A. Langford, *Exploring Methodism: Methodist Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1998), 20–27. For analysis of movement away from Wesley's model in American Methodism see Randy L. Maddox, "An Untapped Inheritance: American Methodism and Wesley's Practical Theology," in *Doctrines and Disciplines: Methodist Theology and Practice*, ed. Dennis Campbell (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 19–52, 292–309.

12. Watson's precedent is noted by Thomas Langford in "John Wesley and Theological Method," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. R.L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 41. Martin Wellings provides a similar analysis of continuing British Methodism in "'Throttled by a Dead Hand'? The 'Wesleyan Standard' in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century British Methodism," *Methodist History* 37 (1999): 162–74. For related analysis of American Methodism see Randy L. Maddox, "Respected Founder / Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology," *Methodist History* 37.2 (1999): 71–88.

13. For a survey of early British precedents and the North American debates see Randy L. Maddox, "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 51.1 (1996): 151–72. A sample of later British discussion can be gleaned from Joseph Agar Beet, *Holiness, as understood by the Writers of the Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1880); Thomas Cook, *Full Salvation* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1899); Charles Eldridge, *Perfect, but not Perfected* (London: F.E. Longley, 1875); and John Hartley, *Chapters on Holiness* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Bookroom, 1883)

14. James Mudge, "A Friendly Word with my Critics," *Methodist Review* 78 (1896): 125–30, p. 129.

15. On American developments see Maddox, "Untapped Inheritance," 37–43. For Methodist theology as then emerging in Germany, see Karl Steckel, "Zur Theologie der Evangelisch-Methodistischen Kirche," in *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Methodistischen Kirche*, eds. K. Steckel & C. E. Sommer (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1982), 243–76.

16. The best example is George Richard Crooks & John F. Hurst, *Theological Encyclopedia and Methodology* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), 47.

17. Note how Anglican theological activity is specifically dismissed in William F. Warren, *Systematische Theologie, einheitliche behandelt, Erste Lieferung: Allgemeine Einleitung* (Bremen: Verlag der Tractathaus H. Neulsen, 1865), 87 fn1. Importantly, Warren never directly discusses Wesley in this book!

18. The suggestion of John McClintock in "Warren's Introduction to Systematic Theology," *Methodist Review* 48 (1866): 100–24, pp. 102–4.

19. For more on this see Randy L. Maddox, "Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline: A Contemporary Agenda," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 650–72.

20. See the classic description of this transition in Albert C. Outler, "A New Future for 'Wesley Studies': An Agenda for 'Phase III,'" in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, edited by M.D. Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 34–52.

21. Cf. Randy L. Maddox, "Reclaiming an Inheritance: Wesley as Theologian in the History of Methodist Theology," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. R. L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 213–26.

22. One of the most perceptive analyses of the early-Enlightenment dynamics is Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

23. Cf. John English, "John Wesley and the English Enlightenment: An 'Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,'" *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 263 (1989): 400–3; John W. Haas Jr., "Eighteenth Century Evangelical Responses to Science: John Wesley's Enduring Legacy," *Science and Christian Belief* 6 (1994): 83–102; and Scott Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995).

24. This point is central to E. Dale Dunlap, "Methodist Theology in Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century" (Yale University Ph.D. thesis, 1956), see esp. p. 425. See also the fine study by Mark Clement, "Sifting Science: Methodism and Natural Knowledge in Britain, 1815–70" (Oxford University Ph.D. thesis, 1996). The American church was largely dependant upon British theologians through this period.

25. The best example (though from a slightly later period) is Frank Wilbur Collier's motto: "Back to Wesley is forward into the spirit of what is best in the twentieth century!" See Collier, *Back to Wesley* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1924), 5.

26. The quote is from Foster, *Studies in Theology*, Vol. 1: *Prolegomena: Philosophic Basis of Theology; or, Rational Principles of*

Religious Faith (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1891), vi-vii. The only passing reference to Wesley I have found is in Vol. 6: *Sin* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1899), 179–81.

27. This debate is sketched in Wellings, “Throttled by a Dead Hand.” The Conference declaration is cited on p. 174.

28. Cf. John Cobb’s candid confession of this fear, only recently laid aside, in *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 8–9.

29. Langford provides a good survey of British Methodism in this period in *Methodist Theology*, 78–94.

30. The seminal work leading to this Enlightenment about the Enlightenment was Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. See esp. pp. 270–85 in the recent revised English translation (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

31. David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 21.

32. Clive Marsh has articulated well the call for such a reconnection in “The Practice of Theology in British Methodism,” *Epworth Review* 28.3 (2001): 36–44. See also Wellings, “Throttled by a Dead Hand,” 174.

33. See Outler, “A New Future for ‘Wesley Studies’,” 41–42.

34. On this characterization of prior British Methodism see Langford, *Methodist Theology*, 85. A call for more balanced appreciation of Methodist distinctives is issued in *Methodism and the Future: Facing the Challenge*, edited by Jane Craske & Clive Marsh (London: Cassell, 1999), 10; and Marsh, “Practice of Theology,” 41.

35. “Large Minutes,” Q. 3, in *The Works of John Wesley*, edited by Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 8:299, emphasis added. This collection of Wesley’s *Works* will be cited hereafter as *Works* (Jackson).

36. The new statement adopted was: “God’s purpose in raising up the preachers called Methodists in America was to reform the continent, and to spread holiness across the land.” See p. 4 of the reprint of the Minutes of the organizing conference in *Methodist Disciplines, 1785–89* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

37. This transition in the American setting is cast most graphically by the sociologists Roger Finke & Rodney Stark in *The Church of America, 1776–1990* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992). Interestingly, they point out that the decline of mainline Methodism as a percent of total population actually starts as early as 1850. And their discussion does not reflect recent reports that decline among United Methodist in the United States appears to have leveled off over the last 3–5 years. For reports and reflection on the situation in Britain, see the collection of essays in Craske & Marsh, *Methodism and the Future*.

38. Cf. Mark Abrams, et al., *Values and Social Change in Britain: Studies in the Contemporary Values of Modern Society* (London: Macmillan, 1985); Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper, 1985); Reginald W. Bibby, *Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990); and Don E. Eberly, *The Content of America’s Character: Recovering Civic Virtue* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995).

39. Robin Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

40. In addition to Gill, see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Steve Tipton’s chapter (dealing with United Methodism) “The Public Church,” in Robert Bellah, et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 179–219; and Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987). For similar evaluation of evangelical churches see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

41. For an introduction into this discussion, including the differences between Open Theism and Process Theism, see Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994); John B. Cobb Jr. & Clark Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free-Will Theists* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); and Bryan Stone & Tom Oord, eds., *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love: Process and Wesleyan Theologies in Dialogue* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

42. See the call for such a holistic theology in the “preachers’ magazine” of The United Methodist Church: Ralph Underwood, “Medicine and Ministry at the Crossroads,” *Quarterly Review* 18 (1998–99): 397–409.

43. Cf. Letter to Alexander Knox (6 Aug. 1778), in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, edited by John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 6:317–18; and Letter to Alexander Knox (26 Oct. 1778), *Letters* (Telford) 6:327. The abbreviation *Letters* (Telford) continues below.

44. See particularly: Gordon Gadsby & Francis Dewhurst, “John Wesley’s Contribution to the Evolution of Alternative and Holistic Medicine,” *Epworth Review* 26.1 (1999): 95–104; Morris Maddocks, “Health and Healing in the Ministry of John Wesley,” in *John Wesley, Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by John Stacey (London: Epworth, 1988), 138–49; Philip Wesley Ott, “John Wesley on Mind and Body: Toward an Understanding of Health as Wholeness,” *Methodist History* 27 (1989): 61–72; and Philip Wesley Ott, “John Wesley on Health as Wholeness,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 30 (1991): 43–57.

45. Outler, “New Future for ‘Wesley Studies’,” 48.

46. See particularly Richard Clutterbuck, “Our Doctrines,” *Epworth Review* 24.3 (1997): 21–33; and Kenneth Cracknell, *Our Doctrines: Methodist Theology as Classical Christianity* (Sheffield: Cliff College Publishing, 1998).

47. Sermon 122, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, edited by Frank Baker, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984ff) 4:86–96. This edition of Wesley’s *Works* will be referred to simply as *Works* in following notes.

48. Note in this regard the recent description of the ethos of British Methodism in Brian E. Beck, “The Elusive Methodist Identity: Who are We?” *Epworth Review* 27.4 (2000): 22–30.

49. I am using this term to describe the nature of the task, not to delimit who might engage in it. The tendency (particularly in the

Western church) to restrict such formative work to clergy is regrettable and unjustified.

50. Cf. Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*.

51. Letter to Conyers Middleton (24 January 1748–49), *Works* (Jackson) 10:67–69.

52. For an extended discussion of Wesley's moral psychology see Randy L. Maddox, "A Change of Affections: The Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's 'Heart Religion'," in *"Heart Religion" in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. Richard Steele (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 3–31.

53. I identify examples of this move on both sides of the Atlantic in "Holiness of Heart and Life."

54. Marsh comments perceptively on some of these tendencies in "Practice of Theology."

55. Note Wesley's insistence that his preachers "preach Christ in all his offices," in "Minutes" (9 August 1745), Q. 15, in *John Wesley*, edited by Albert Outler (New York: Oxford, 1964), 150. This dynamic is discussed in Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 109–14. His concern about the balance of the Trinity is discussed on pp. 139–40.

56. For more on this point see Henry Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992); and Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, Chapter 7.

57. Cf. Maddox, "Untapped Inheritance," 27–28; and Timothy S. Macquiban, "Changing Patterns of Worship in British Wesleyan Methodism, 1780–1828," *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 1 (1994): 47–65.

58. See Maddox, "Untapped Inheritance," 28–29, on the decline of valuing sermons as serious formative theological activity, and hence of the publication of collected sermons. This form of first-order theology carried over much longer in the British church. Indeed, a recent essay laments its demise as coming in the second half of the twentieth century. Cf. John Munsey Turner, "Preaching, Theology, and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century British Methodism," *Expository Times* 111 (2000): 112–17.

59. On the British side, see the description of this period in William Strawson, "Methodist Theology, 1850–1950," in *A History of The Methodist Church in Great Britain*, edited by Rupert Davies, et al. (London: Epworth, 1983), 3:211–15; Turner, "Preaching"; and Langford, *Methodist Theology*, 57–59. For North America, see Maddox, "Untapped Inheritance," 43–47.

60. A classic example is the response to fundamentalism by (MECS bishop) Edwin D. Mouzon, *Fundamentals of Methodism* (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1923), 8.

61. See Wesley's insistence that works of mercy are a "real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to" in Sermon 92, "On Zeal," §II.5, *Works* 3:313. For an elaboration of this point see Randy L. Maddox, "'Visit the Poor': John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers," in *The Wesleys and the Poor: The Legacy and Development of Methodist Attitudes to Poverty, 1729–1999*, edited by Richard Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002).

62. Cf. Edward Farley, *Theologia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 31–38.

63. This point has been emphasized by Ellen Charry, in "The Moral Function of Doctrine," *Theology Today* 49 (1992):31–45; and *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrines* (New York: Oxford, 1997).

64. Cf. His Letter to the Editor of the *London Magazine* (1 January 1765), *Letters* (Telford) 4:286.

65. For a discussion of Wesley's (admittedly embryonic) awareness of the mediated or interpretive nature of human knowing, see Randy L. Maddox, "The Enriching Role of Experience," in W. Stephen Gunter, et al., *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 112–16.

66. For more on these dynamics, as well as clarifications about what Wesley himself would have intended by "tradition," "experience," and "reason," see the essays in Gunter et al., *Wesley and the Quadrilateral*.

67. Compare, for example, the approaches of William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), esp. 56–65; and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), esp. 155–76.

68. Sermon 110, "Free Grace," §§25–26, *Works* 3:555–56.

69. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 255–56.

70. Making this case is the main purpose of *Responsible Grace*.

71. See Letter to Samuel Furly (21 May 1762), *Letters* (Telford) 4:181; and Sermon 70, "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," §II.1–2, *Works* 2:593–94.

72. John Wesley, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation, or A Compendium of Natural Philosophy*, 5th edition (London: Maxwell & Wilson, 1809), 5:197–99.

73. See the discussion of Watson in Langford, *Methodist Theology*, 21–22.

74. Cf. Chapter 3: "From Revelation to Reason," in Robert Chiles, *Theological Transitions in American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon, 1965).

75. Standard histories of American theology mention Methodists only starting with Borden Parker Bowne and Boston Personalism (if at all!); cf. Sydney Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," in *The Shaping of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 232–321; Ahlstrom, ed., *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972–85); and "American Religious Thought and Literature," in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience 2:997–1268*, edited by Charles Lippy & Peter Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988).