

HOLINESS VOLUME 5 (2019) ISSUE 1

CONTENTS

<i>Andrew Stobart</i>	Editorial	1
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Articles

<i>Carla Works</i>	'Finish Then Thy New Creation': God's Promise to Inherit the World	7
<i>Roger Walton</i>	Social Holiness and Social Justice	25
<i>Daniel Pratt</i> <i>Morris-Chapman</i>	John Wesley and Methodist Responses to Slavery in America	37
<i>James Garnett</i>	Assimilation, Accommodation and Appropriation: Three attitudes to truth in science and religion	59

Devotional Article

<i>Kim Cape</i>	Covenant and Kin	79
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What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us?

<i>Mike Wilson</i>	'On the Trinity'	85
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Reviews

David Clark, <i>The Gift of a Renewed Diaconate and the Contribution of British Methodism</i>	95
Martin Clark, <i>British Methodist Hymnody: Theology, Heritage and Experience</i>	97

Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones (eds), <i>George Whitefield: Life, Context and Legacy</i>	99
Clive Marsh, <i>A Cultural Theology of Salvation</i>	101
Clive Norris, <i>The Financing of John Wesley's Methodism c1740–1800</i>	103
Stephen Poxon (ed), <i>Through the Year with John Wesley</i>	105
Kenneth Stewart, <i>In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis</i>	107
Rasiah Sugirtharajahn, <i>Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World</i>	109
Mark Thompson, Colin Bale and Edward Loane (eds), <i>Celebrating the Reformation: Its Legacy and Continuing Relevance</i>	111
David Young, <i>The Great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868, and Change and Decay: Primitive Methodism from Late Victorian Times till World War I</i>	113



Editorial

Andrew Stobart

I

In a world where seemingly intractable differences polarise and poison national, international and even ecclesial discourse, the relevance of Wesleyan theological commitments is hard to underestimate. Such commitments, of course, have their origin in the mission and ministry of the Wesley brothers, who wrestled with the thorny issues of their age, no less divisive than those that face the contemporary church: the politics of human trafficking and slavery, the theology of antinomianism and human agency, and the question of uniformity in the incipient Methodist movement. In the earliest years of Methodism, the Wesley brothers and others expended considerable effort to address the issues of doctrine, discipline and public engagement that the fledgling movement was raising. Indeed, many of Methodism's characteristic theological commitments were forged in the process.

In August 1749, gathered in conference in Bristol, the first item on the agenda for John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and Howell Harris was the inquiry: 'How far can we unite with each other? Either in affection? In judgment? Or in jointly carrying on the work of our common Master?' The men, who agreed about justification but not about predestination, nevertheless concluded the conference with an expression of resolve to 'facilitate an union in carrying on the work of God'. This resolve included general undertakings to speak kindly and carefully about each other, and even a specific intention 'to use each other's expressions, mixing them with our own, as far as we can honestly'. Importantly, the success of this 'union' would not only rely on the willing attitudes of these four men; the conference ended with an agreement

that copies of the Conference Minutes would be taken by each of them and read, as each found occasion, to preachers and other 'prudent persons of our flock'. The reading of Conference proceedings thus became an instrument of what became known as Methodist connexionalism.¹

Connexionalism soon became a striking feature of the Methodist Church, and it was understood as *conversational* in character. The conferring of Mr Wesley and others was offered as an example for practice across the connexion. The 'Large' Minutes, which dealt with doctrine and discipline, and went through several editions within Wesley's lifetime, codified this in 1763, when Wesley itemised *five* instituted means of grace: prayer, searching the Scripture, the Lord's Supper, fasting and, finally, 'Christian Conference'. The following questions, among others, were to be asked: 'Are we convinced how important and how difficult it is to order our conversation right? Is it always *in grace*? Seasoned with salt? Meet to minister grace to the hearers?'²

This elevation of Christian conference as a means of grace alongside the more typical disciplines of prayer, Scripture study, fasting and Eucharistic worship acknowledges an important trend in the Methodist movement. Undoubtedly the travails of contemporary Methodist churches were not in the mind of Mr Wesley and his colleagues when these minutes were recorded; however, they recognised that one of the pressing tasks that defined their movement was *conversational*: both articulating how and why the Methodist movement existed, and inviting others to move within its transformative circumference. Despite the classic picture of Wesleyan field-preaching, small gatherings around kitchen tables or at firesides to discuss, debate, even disagree – in short, to confer – were in fact the means by which the Methodist movement grew and strengthened.

The Minutes of Conference became one among other instruments of conferral: Wesley expected his preachers to keep a journal (we might call it conferring with themselves), to read from his library publications (we might call it conferring with the tradition of scholarship), and to meet with others to pray, search the Scriptures, examine their preaching practice, and to hear and give testimony (we might call it conferring within the community). Nor was conference reserved for the Methodist family; from visiting the sick and imprisoned to giving a public account of faith, Wesley expected that his people would be engaged in conferring beyond the boundaries, with those who might be uninterested, unwilling, or unfavourable to the Christian gospel or the Methodist message.

The first supplementary question in the 'Large' Minutes thus makes eminent sense: 'Are we convinced how important and how difficult it is to order our conversation right?' Here is recognition of an inherent difficulty in the conversational task; a quite modern-sounding awareness of the complexities of the speech-act. Even for such a prolific communicator (and one might add, conversationalist) as John Wesley, ordering conversation rightly required careful and deliberate preparation and, as is made clear in later questions, prayer – both before and after.

Against this background, the task of theology in the Wesleyan tradition becomes clearer: to *foster* rather than foreclose such transformative conversation; to *resource* rather than reduce the exchange of perspectives and insight; to promote theological *engagement* rather than exclusion – all, in the words of the Conference Minutes of 1749, to 'facilitate an union in carrying on the work of God'. Wesleyan commitments unashamedly relegate theological dispute to second order discourse. First order is the work of God, the spreading of Scriptural holiness, the transformation of the world by the unmerited graciousness of God, the perfecting of the character of Christ in us, and the knowledge of the love of God shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. Theological reflection is merely – and yet also profoundly – the thinking necessary for us to engage in this work of God, as *God's* work not ours. Characterised by connexionalism, Christian conference, and conversation, the Wesleyan approach provides a salutary signal in today's world that for *us* to follow God's transformative path, we *need* to attend carefully, deliberately and graciously to each other. Wesleyan theological commitments thus possess a healthy dose of perspective that we so urgently need today.

II

While this issue of *Holiness* is the first of our non-themed issues, there is nevertheless a common thread that holds the contents together. The articles are animated by the kind of Wesleyan commitment described above – intentional engagement with the complex issues of ministry and mission today. Like any living tradition, Wesley's heritage is never static, and these articles are examples of the theological work that is being done at that interface of past and future. How, now, are we to unite around God's work, and serve our 'common Master'?

Take, for example, Carla Works' article exploring God's promise that his people would 'inherit the world'. While salvation in the Wesleyan tradition is often equated with personal transformation, Works skilfully traces another strand of thought, evident even in Wesley's hymnody, that insists on cosmic renewal. This broader vision is deeply Scriptural, drawing on Paul's renewed understanding of the Old Testament promise of land in the light of his encounter with Jesus. Methodism today 'needs to be reminded of just how big this good news really is', and Works provides 'theological reasons for caring for strangers and for caring for our planet' (p. 21).

This extended vision of renewal is often described as 'social justice', or even 'social holiness', which we happily – and often uncritically – associate with the Wesleyan tradition. In Roger Walton's article, the two terms are carefully separated, as Walton traces the differences and connections between the two terms. Both are evident in Wesley's own life and ministry, and both are carried down the tradition to today; but we must avoid eliding the two as if they were one and the same thing. As Walton puts it, 'Social holiness and social justice are, thus, part of a divine ecology where one follows the other in the rhythm of discipleship' (p. 34).

Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman provides a worked example of the complex interplay of theological commitment and practical engagement by exploring the manoeuvring of American Methodists on the issue of slavery in the antebellum (pre-civil war) period. Issues of slavery and racism are, of course, still not relegated to history, and so understanding past Methodist engagement on the issue can be salutary for today's Church. Morris-Chapman's conclusion is timely and challenging:

'Although the institutional church regularly compromised the integrity of Wesley's social vision of Christianity, the idea that Methodism could only flourish by engaging in struggles against societal evils like slavery was regurgitated by African Methodists and others, who recognised themselves as agents of God's transforming power in this world' (p. 50).

The interaction between belief and experience that is crucial for such transformative engagement with the world is explored in James Garnett's article, 'Assimilation, Accommodation and Appropriation'. Why, he asks, do we sometimes ignore experiences that contradict our beliefs (leading to social inaction), while at other times we let experience prompt us to apply our beliefs

in new, even daring ways (for example, Wilberforce's work for the abolition of slavery)? With skill, Garnett leads us through various ways of understanding the interplay between belief and experience, promoting a nuanced understanding of the often-stylised relationship between science and faith, humanism and Christianity. Such careful understanding helps us to 'negotiate more adroitly the pathway from a shared understanding of the world as it is to a shared vision of the future' (p. 74).

Mike Wilson's contribution to our series, 'What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us?' introduces another kind of theological conversation – how contemporary faith can interact with the philosophical formulations of the fourth- and fifth-century controversies that led to the various creeds of the Church. Wilson finds in Wesley an unexpected partner to wrestle with trinitarian language, and to find a way to hold biblical testimony and Christian experience together.

Finally, in Kim Cape's covenant sermon, reflecting on Norman Adams' painting *The Golden Crucifixion*, we encounter the sharp implications of committing to a Wesleyan heritage. In connexionalism, God may indeed, as Cape puts it, 'call us to claim as kin' (p. 83) the most unexpected people. But such is the meaning of our own 'being kin' with Christ.

III

This issue concludes with a healthy selection of reviews, to help readers direct their own theological reading. It remains the intention of this journal to resource the global Wesleyan community with cutting-edge scholarship and research-led content, at times through the articles we publish, and at other times by signposting relevant work published elsewhere.

As with the previous two issues of *Holiness*, we are indebted to the trust fund named by and for John Newton Davies and Sarah Davies, which is currently helping to finance this open-access journal. The availability of *Holiness* as a free-to-readers and free-to-contributors journal is only possible because of the generosity of this and other funding sources. Such partners share the ambition of Wesley House, that the transformation of Church and world is promoted by well-resourced, thoughtful and articulate Wesleyan scholarship. If you also feel able to partner with us by helping to fund *Holiness*, you can contact me at Wesley House.

Wesleyan scholarship has found a quinquennial home at the Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies since 1958. We are delighted that two of the articles in this issue have arisen from that forum, and further articles will follow in forthcoming issues. Conferences like that one, and like the Methodist Studies Seminar and the Global Scholars Retreat to be held shortly in Cambridge, are opportunities for fostering, resourcing and engaging theological conferral that is a characteristic Wesleyan commitment. By reading this journal, we hope that you will not simply 'consume', but 'confer' too, with us, with others and with the world; and through such Christian conference, may we carry on the work of our common Master.

Andrew Stobart, Editor
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Notes

1. Rack, HD. (ed.) 2011. *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 10 The Methodist Societies, The Minutes of Conference*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, pp. 229–30.
2. Rack, pp. 855–7.



‘Finish Then Thy New Creation’: God’s Promise to Inherit the World

Carla Swafford Works

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In Romans 4:13, Paul characterizes God’s promise to Abraham as the inheritance of the world. This promise, Paul argues, extends to Abraham’s descendants, not according to the flesh, but to all who believe in the one who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 4:25). What does it mean for believers to be heirs of God’s promise to ‘inherit the world’? This article considers God’s promise in light of the apostle’s confidence in the reconciliation of the whole world and the renewal of creation, and also in the context of the hymns and sermons of Charles and John Wesley. The promise to inherit the world indicates that God has not abandoned God’s creation, but is actively engaged in redeeming it. This article was originally presented as a paper at the 2018 Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies.

NEW CREATION • WESLEY • PAUL • ROMANS • COSMIC RENEWAL

In the classic hymn, 'Love Divine All Loves Excelling',¹ Charles Wesley speaks of the joy of heaven coming down to earth, indwelling believers, liberating our spirits, transforming us to be 'pure and spotless' until in 'heav'n we take our place, till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love and praise'. In this hymn that celebrates God's power and the Spirit's presence, the scope of 'new creation' is limited to people, more specifically, people in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells. Salvation is equated with individual, spiritual transformation. Moreover, this theme courses throughout Methodist hymnody. It is fair to say that John and Charles Wesley took transformation seriously, believing that God had the power to sanctify believers and urging the church to manifest this transformation in outward signs of holiness. Wesleyan theology developed from individual holiness to social responsibility, and, although all Methodist hymns may not reflect it, John Wesley's expectation for God's transformative power even grew to the hope of cosmic renewal.

This hope of new creation that includes the cosmos demonstrates Wesley's close reading of Paul's letters. Rather than sweeping up the believers to heaven to escape the evils of this world, Paul's vision of new creation in Romans 4:13 encompasses the rectification of the whole earth. This article reads Romans 4:13 in concert with other Jewish interpretations of the promise to Abraham and with Paul's belief in new creation. It is argued that Paul's gospel assumes and expands the promise of land as it hopes for God's renewal of the cosmos. In other words, God's refusal to abandon creation is at the heart of Paul's good news. How might the renewal of the whole world – a belief shared by Wesley – help revive and revolutionize Methodism today?

Interpretations of Romans 4:13: 'Inherit the World'

In Romans 4, Paul is making the case that God's granting of promises to Abraham was solely based on God's grace. The promises were not contingent upon following the law. Rather, Abraham trusted God. According to Paul, all who share in that Abraham-like faith are descendants of the promise. In Romans, the first time that Paul explicitly mentions the promise to Abraham is in 4:13. He writes, 'The promise to Abraham and to his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith'. The bulk of the argument answers the question of who those descendants are who should receive such an inheritance. The promise itself – to inherit the world – is never in question. Yet interpretations of this text rarely take the promise at face value.

There is a temptation to spiritualize the promise. For example, in his commentary on Romans, Leon Morris writes,

Heir of the world is not a particularly easy expression. It could be understood as an enthusiastic description of great material prosperity, but we expect something in the way of spiritual blessing here. Perhaps material blessing is used as a symbol of spiritual blessing. It is possible to see the prosperity in terms of the family of faith that Abraham would beget, a worldwide family.²

This interpretation is common. In fact, early in his ministry, it seems that John Wesley might have been in full agreement with Morris. Randy Maddox writes of Wesley's early ministry,

Wesley was raised in a setting that broadly assumed our final state is 'heaven above', where human spirits dwelling in ethereal bodies join with other spiritual beings (no animals!) in continuous worship of the Ultimate Spiritual Being. He imbibed this model in his upbringing, and through the middle of his ministry it was presented as obvious and unproblematic.³

It is little wonder then that many of our Methodist hymns preserve this theology – a world to come that is an escape from this earth as the spirits of believers dwell in heaven.

Paul's language of inheriting the world should cause us to question this theology. In considering the language of inheritance in Romans 4:13, many commentators mention the parallels with scripture, particularly with Genesis 22:18, which indicates a possession of 'all nations',⁴ but most do not spend much time on this promise. James Dunn notes that the promise of inheritance is almost exclusively in connection with land in scripture, but that the promise of land had been expanded before Paul is writing.⁵ Leander Keck acknowledges that Paul has expanded the promise from the land to the world, but quickly shifts the focus to the promise being granted apart from the law.⁶ After all, the point of the argument in Romans 4 is not explaining the promise – knowledge of the promise is assumed. Nevertheless, the promise itself is what is dangling in front of the Romans. What is that promise? Is the promise to inherit the world a ticket to heaven – Morris's 'spiritual blessing', – or is it an expectation of the earth's renewal?

‘Come, O My God, the Promise Seal’⁷

The highest concentration of promise language in Paul’s letters occurs in Romans and Galatians where he develops his argument in reference to Abraham (Rom 4:1–25; Gal 3:6 – 4:7; 4:21 – 5:2). In both letters, Paul emphasizes the faith of Abraham and the faithfulness of God. In Romans 4, Abraham takes center stage in Paul’s argument. This ancestor is reckoned as righteous based on faith rather than performing any works of the law. The blessing of God was given before he was circumcised (Rom 4:9–12). The timing is crucial to Paul’s argument. Since the divine blessing pre-dated circumcision, which Paul equates to the ‘sign or seal’ of his righteousness (Rom 4:11), the blessing was not contingent upon circumcision, or any human deed. Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’ (Gal 3:6; cf. Rom. 4:3). So too, in Galatians, the timing of Abraham’s trust is highlighted. The promise of God to Abraham predated the law by 430 years according to Galatians 3:17. It is important to note, as Paul does, that the law is incapable of nullifying the promise (Gal 3:18) and is not opposed to the promises of God (Gal 3:21). In other words, the promise still stands.

God’s promise to Abraham included many descendants (eg Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 17:7). As stated above, Morris highlights the importance of Abraham’s progeny – ‘a worldwide family.’ Certainly, in both Romans and Galatians, all who share in Abraham’s faith are considered children of Abraham and heirs to the promises. Both letters cite Scripture to demonstrate that Abraham is both the father of the circumcised and the uncircumcised (Rom 4:11–12, 16–17), indeed, the father of many nations (Rom 4:17; Gal 3:8).

What is the benefit of being Abraham’s descendants? There is more to the Abrahamic promise than progeny. *Land is the inheritance* of Abraham’s descendants (eg Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:7; 17:8). The promise of land rests entirely on grace and is guaranteed to all Abraham’s descendants – including all who share in the faith of Abraham, ‘for he is the father of us all’ (Rom 4:16). This guarantee stems from God’s faithfulness, not from human effort. Abraham may be lifted up as an example of human faithfulness, but it is God who is the main actor in this drama. God gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist, such as granting heirs to a barren couple (Rom 4:17). The blessing to Abraham is a promise of God that reveals God’s glory and power to bring life in the midst of death and barrenness (4:13–25). God is the one who reckons Abraham as righteous. God is the one who makes an old man who is ‘as good as dead’ a father of many nations (4:19). God is the one who brought

life to Sarah’s infertile womb (4:19) and who raised Jesus from the dead (4:24). God is capable of producing heirs and reckoning heirs of the promise (4:25). And God is capable of providing *land*.

And herein lies the problem: Paul makes no explicit reference to the land. If both progeny and land are integral to God’s promises to Abraham, how is Paul appropriating the promise of land for the Gentile mission? As noted above, it is common to interpret Romans 4:13 in a spiritual sense – a world to come that is divorced from this present experience. Yet, how can the Gentiles possibly be, as Paul claims, ‘children of the promise, like Isaac’ (Gal 4:28) if land is *not* part of the inheritance? How can Paul claim that the Roman believers will inherit the promises to Abraham, that is, ‘the whole world’ (Rom 4:13)? In short, *what on earth has happened to the promise of land in Paul’s theology?*

The land promises to Abraham, though reinterpreted by Paul, have by no means disappeared from Pauline theology. Rather, the promise of land finds its fulfillment in the hope of *new creation* – a creation that is not simply spiritualized, but is nothing short of the consummation of God’s created order, the entire cosmos. This new creation is not only marked by resurrection, but includes land and all the blessings of life in God’s redeemed cosmos.

The Absence of ‘Land’ in Paul’s Language

First, it must be acknowledged that Paul avoids talking about the ‘land’ explicitly. If land is part of God’s promise to Abraham, why does Paul not mention land as part of the inheritance? In his meticulous study of land in the New Testament, W. D. Davies highlights the lack of land language in Paul’s letters.⁸ In Romans, Davies argues, Paul would have good reason to avoid the mention of land as part of the Abrahamic promises.⁹ The apostle’s cautionary words in Romans 13:1–7 demonstrate sensitivity to the political environment. Perhaps Paul did not desire to stir up trouble in a letter written to believers in the heart of the Empire. But, as Davies notes, the letter to the region of Galatia would not necessarily share the same political cautiousness. Davies writes:

In Galatians we can be fairly certain that Paul did not merely ignore the territorial aspect of the promise for political reasons: his silence points not merely to the absence of a conscious concern with it, but to *his deliberate rejection of it*. His interpretation of the promise is a-territorial.¹⁰ (*Italics added*)

The promise, in essence, becomes a blessing to all nations and, therefore, unboundaried. Furthermore, Davies argues, Christ is the key to Paul's argument.

For Paul, Christ had gathered up the promise into the singularity of his own person. In this way, 'the territory' promised was transformed into and fulfilled by the life 'in Christ'. All this is not made explicit, because Paul did not directly apply himself to the question of the land, but it is implied.¹¹

Thus, Davies concludes, 'the land, like the Law, particular and provisional, had become *irrelevant*'.¹²

There is much to commend in Davies' observations. First, Davies acknowledges that land is a concept that gets redefined apart from a particular nation or territory not only in Paul's letters but also in the Hebrew Bible. Calling the non-Jewish audience 'heirs' of the promise, therefore, emphasizes the multi-national blessings that the promises to Abraham were meant to facilitate. In Galatians 3:8 Paul cites Genesis 12:3:¹³ 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' This citation highlights the Abrahamic promise as inclusive of all nations and not limited to one nationality or, as Davies has pointed out, one territory or land.

Second, Davies argues that Paul avoids explicit language of land due to his own thought transformation about the land via Christ. For Davies, being 'in Christ' personalizes and universalizes the promise, thereby dislocating the promise from one people and one place and relocating it 'in Christ'.¹⁴ Without a doubt, Paul's argument in Galatians 3 and 4 hinges on the Galatians being 'in Christ' and, therefore, part of Abraham's seed. Furthermore, it is Abraham's faith that takes center stage in Romans 4, and Paul is drawing parallels with the Romans' faith that God's power for salvation has been made manifest in Christ.

There are problems, nonetheless, with Davies's claim that the promise of land is now irrelevant – a dated promise that falls away now that Christ is on the scene. Land, after all, is a promise of God. According to Galatians 3:17–18 not even the law – which is holy and good (Rom 7: 12, 16) – can nullify a covenant ratified by God or void a promise. And Paul, according to Romans 11:29, sees the promises of God as *irrevocable*. Rather than interpreting Paul's lack of land language as a dismissal of the land promise, what happens if we *assume* the land promise in Paul's argument? After all, in Romans 4 both the world and the nations are mentioned as part of the promise to Abraham (Romans 4:13–25). In Gal 3:16 it is interesting that Paul does not refer to a *single* promise made to

Abraham, such as progeny, but refers to the promises (plural) that were made to Abraham and to his offspring. What if the promise of land is intrinsic to being 'children of the promise?'

'To Spread Through All the Earth Abroad':¹⁵ The Blessing of Land

When God made the promise to Abraham, the promise included all the land that he could see. The territory is not neatly demarcated with borders. In fact, even as the story progresses, the physical territory is not consistently defined. There are at least two 'maps' in the Old Testament:¹⁶ (1) the land of Canaan¹⁷ and (2) an extension of that land, during the united monarchy, to include both sides of the Jordan (minus Moab and Ammon) as well as north to the Euphrates River (Deut 11:24).¹⁸ It is telling that the text does not consistently speak of the same boundaries. Rather, the *idea* of land takes on a significance that is bigger than either of these maps.

The biblical text speaks of the land both *literally* and *symbolically* – both the fertile soil which sustains life *and* the symbolic notion of prosperity, security, and abundance.¹⁹ The literal and symbolic concepts are not easily disentangled since land as territoried space finds its meaning and purpose in land as symbol. Brueggemann defines land as a place with the Lord.

A place well filled with memories of life with him and promise from him and vows to him. It is land that provides the central assurance to Israel of its historicity, that it will be and always must be concerned with actual rootage in a place which is a repository for commitment and therefore identity.²⁰

As for promise, Brueggemann claims, God's promise to God's people is always God's land.²¹ Plus, that physical territory, the longing for it or the loss of it, consumes much of the plot line from the Abrahamic promises onward. It is little wonder that Brueggemann would see in the land a central – if not *the* central – theme of the text.

Life on the land depended completely on the Lord. The Lord provided rain. The Lord provided security. The Lord sustained life. The land was always so deeply connected to the Lord that in a profound way the land always belonged to God. Israel never 'owned' the promised land.²² Even the year of Jubilee was meant

to ensure that the land returned to the users God had elected as its tenders from the beginning.²³ In short, the Lord is sovereign over the land. That sovereignty is not confined to borders. The bordered space was always intended to be a witness, and thus a blessing, to the nations.

What might it look like to fulfill the promise of land? Fulfillment requires more than just the granting of land. The land as territory is always meant to be the land as a space where people can prosper. The land is even characterized as a place flowing with milk and honey – an area that produces more than enough to support life (Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27). Fulfillment of the land promise must look like people living and thriving on a land of plenty – a land that can support a growing population. For the land to serve this function, its inhabitants must be good stewards of the land and its resources – hence the land's connection to the covenant (Gen 17:8–9).²⁴

The intertwining of covenant and promise reflects God's good intentions for the created order. In his book, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, R. Kendall Soulen highlights the importance of God's blessings for God's creation. Rather than seeing the great plot line of the biblical story as the redemption of humanity, Soulen argues persuasively that God longs for the consummation of creation. Through land God blesses Israel with life and the fullness of life.²⁵ The gift of land embodies the kind of blessed life that God wants not just for Israel, but for all nations.²⁶ Soulen writes: 'By electing Israel and blessing it "in the land", God elects Israel together with the whole human family in all its time-, place-, and season-bound earthiness as the object of God's consummating work.'²⁷ Thus, the land is both a means and a symbol for God's blessing. As such, life on the land serves as a microcosm of God's desire for all creation.

How does land then factor into Paul's gospel? Paul is ministering during a time of Roman occupation both of the promised land and of the known world. Could the land promise not seem like a distant wish, a pie-in-the-sky hope, with no grounding in reality? Would it not be easier on God if the land promise could just be spiritualized so that God does not have to be invested in the actual created order? Based on many interpretations of the land in Christian theology it seems that interpreters have wanted to protect God's reputation. The land, like the law, has fallen to the wayside. What happens, though, if we take seriously the land as a tangible vehicle of God's blessing for creation? Paul's promise of new creation is not a promise divorced from the created order. Rather, new creation for Paul is just as tangible as circumcision.

‘Let Us All in Thee Inherit:’²⁸ Expanding the Promise

Paul’s view of salvation involves the renewal of creation. In Romans 4:13 – within the discussion of Abraham’s faith, Paul introduces God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants by saying that they should inherit the *world*. Paul avoids saying ‘land’, as though ‘land’ is simply not big enough to encompass the extent of God’s power and grace. Instead, the inheritance of Abraham is nothing short of the cosmos. Though promise language courses throughout Romans 4:13–25, the promised inheritance is only mentioned in Romans 4:13, where Paul expands the promise to include the whole world.

Paul’s expansion of the promise is not unique. In Genesis, the promise is for the land that Abraham can see. By the time of Paul, though, the boundaries of that land have broadened to incorporate the whole world (cf. Sir 44:21; *Jub.* 19:21; *Mos.* 1.155; *Bib. Ant.* 32:3 “inherit the world”; cf. 1 En. 5:7b).²⁹ For example, Sirach 44:21 reflects this extension of the land promise.

Therefore the Lord assured him [Abraham] with an oath that the nations would be blessed through his offspring; that he would make him as numerous as the dust of the earth, and exalt his offspring like the stars, and give them *an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth*. (Sir 44:21 NRS, italics for emphasis)

Similarly, Jubilees 22:14 expresses Abraham’s blessing for Jacob in terms of inheritance of ‘all the earth’. This promise is reiterated in Jubilees 32:19:

And I shall give to your seed all of the land under heaven and they will rule in all nations as they have desired. And after this all of the earth will be gathered together and they will inherit it forever.

In 1 Enoch 5:7, the chosen will receive this great inheritance: ‘But to the elect there shall be light, joy, and peace, and they shall inherit the earth.’ These elect will ‘not return again to sin’, but live long peaceable lives according to wisdom (1 Enoch 5:7–10). Wisdom will create peace and happiness on the earth (1 Enoch 5:7–10).

The hope of inheriting this peace is related to eschatological blessing. In 2 Baruch 14:7, the anticipated inheritance is the world to come. ‘Therefore, they [the righteous] leave this world without fear and are confident of the world which you have promised to them with an expectation full of joy.’ Baruch laments that the wicked seem to prosper while the righteous suffer (2 Bar 14:1–

19; cf. 4 Ezra 6:55–59), yet it is for the righteous that God created the world (2 Bar 14:19; cf. 4 Ezra 6:55). In his pleading with the Lord, Baruch bemoans, ‘For if only this life exists which everyone possess here, nothing could be more bitter than this’ (2 Bar 22:13). The text is written during a time of foreign occupation of the land,³⁰ and there is fear that ‘the Mighty One does not anymore remember the earth’ (2 Bar 25:4; cf. 32:9). Baruch’s hope is placed in an Anointed One who will resurrect all who sleep in hope of him (2 Bar 30:1). Ultimately, ‘the Mighty One will renew his creation’ (2 Bar 32:7), and the righteous will inherit this renewed earth (2 Bar 44:12–14; 51:3; cf. 4 Ezra 7:9). In 2 Baruch 57:1–3, the renewal of the earth is equated with the promise of life for the righteous.

Likewise, in *Sib. Or.* 3, the world to come is a renewal of the created order. The Sybil longs for the transformation of the earth with a land of plenty (3:619–623), a renewed Temple (3:701–730), and a just kingdom on earth (3:767–795). The transformation is equated with God’s promise of the earth and the world and the ‘gates of the blessed and all joys and immortal intellect and eternal cheer’ (3:669–771). This coming kingdom is marked by peace (3:780), ‘just wealth’ (3:784), and the judgment and dominion of God (3:784). In language reminiscent of Isaiah, the oracle imagines a time when wolves and lambs will feed together, bears will sleep with calves, lions will feast on husks, like an ox, and ‘mere infant children will lead them with ropes. For he will make the beast on earth harmless. Serpents and asps will sleep with babies and will not harm them, for the hand of God will be upon them’ (3:787–795; cf. Isa 11:6–8; 65:17–25). This coming kingdom will exhibit God’s justice on earth and abundant life in a world of peace.

In sum, Paul’s language of inheriting the world, though bigger than land as territoried space, is congruent with other Hellenistic Jewish literature. Far from spiritualizing the promise of the land, this literature expands the physical space of inheritance to incorporate the whole earth. Far from abandoning the created order, there is an expectation that God will renew it. This expectation lives on in the early church. Severian, Bishop of Gabala in Syria in the late fourth century into the early fifth century, describes the world to come as a world that has been renewed.

Paul says that the righteous will inherit the world because the ungodly will be thrown out and handed over to punishment on the day of judgment, but the righteous will possess the universe which remains, and will have been renewed, and the good things of heaven and earth will be theirs.³¹

Paul and New Creation

Ultimately, in Galatians, Paul links the promise to 'new creation'. He concludes the body of his argument by reiterating that the fruit of the Spirit rather than the marks of circumcision are the outward signs of God's work. God is renewing and rectifying the whole cosmos, not just the physical descendants of Abraham. In Galatians 6:15 Paul exclaims: 'For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.' This 'new creation' stands in contrast to the 'present evil age' of Galatians 1:4, that has been subjugated under sin's power (Rom 5:12–21). New creation is the reign of God's grace that is marked by abundant life in a redeemed world. This redemption has already begun. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, those who are 'in Christ' are already a new creation. Yet God's rectification does not stop with humanity. In Romans 8, Paul writes that all creation is suffering under the power of sin. As Beverly Roberts Gaventa has argued, the longing of creation must include more than the plight of human creatures.³² Rather, the longing of creation must indeed be all God's creation – both human and nonhuman. All have suffered under the reign of sin.

To recall Soulen's argument, God has not abandoned any of God's creation, but works toward its consummation. The God of Israel invests and reveals Godself in creation – by electing a human family – the family of Abraham, by granting that family children, and by giving those children land. These specific gifts were intended to be a blessing to all nations. For Paul, the land promise has been magnified. The borders are bigger than one territory. The whole cosmos is in view because the whole cosmos stands in need of rectification. In short, to claim that the land promise is now irrelevant misses the reality that the gift of land is a divine investment in the created order. The problem with hope in a non-spatial, spiritual kingdom is that God never consummates creation. Only humanity finds redemption while the rest of creation suffers.

This anthropocentric reading runs counter to the vision of new creation in Isaiah 65 (cf. *Sib. Or.* 3:767–795). There, the new world imagined by the prophet includes peaceful and abundant existence on the land – where people live long lives, build houses, plant vineyards, and reap the benefits of their own harvest, where even the predators live at peace with their former prey (Isa 65:17–25; cf. Isa 2:4; 11:6–8; Ezek 34:25; Hos 2:18; Job 5:23). The new heavens and new earth are characterized by God's abundant blessings (Isa 65:23).

What on earth has happened to the land in Paul's theology? It is now nothing short of abundant life in a redeemed world. Dunn rightly notes that the promise is the restoration of God's created order.³³ The gift of land embodies blessing – God's commitment to the blessing of abundant life that God desires for God's creation. Paul's appeals to the promises of Abraham do not dismiss God's promise of land. Rather, Paul *assumes* the blessing of land as testimony of God's faithfulness and as witness to God's intention to rectify creation. Through faith, the Galatians are indeed heirs and children of the promise, and what they are inheriting is life – the kind of abundant life that rectifies and reclaims human and nonhuman creation alike.

Wesley and New Creation

It was noted at the beginning that Wesley took seriously the spiritual transformation of humanity. It was also noted that initially Wesley's eschatology was a product of his environment. Maddox argues that Wesley's interpretation developed as he began to contemplate the renewal of the whole world.³⁴ Holiness for Wesley progressed from individual transformation to include social holiness and finally hope in a finished creation. Later in his life, in the 1770s and particularly the 1780s, John Wesley's theology emphasized cosmic hope.³⁵

The hope of finished creation became the lens through which Wesley viewed individual transformation. All creation has been marred by sin, and all creation longs for redemption (Rom 8:19–22).³⁶ In his sermon entitled 'New Creation,' Wesley moves from discussing inanimate creation to animals to human transformation.³⁷ In his vision of new creation, Paradise will be restored, and everything will be transformed into a more beautiful Paradise than Adam ever saw.³⁸ There will be no more rain because the earth will naturally produce pure water (64.11–12). There will be no more hurricanes or furious storms and no more terrifying meteors (64.9, 11) or earthquakes (64.15). There will be no more extreme temperatures – hot and cold (64.14). All will be serene. Though the landscape of the earth would remain beautifully diverse, there will be no wild deserts or barren sands or bogs (64.15). The rolling hills will be ornaments (64.15). He imagined humans transformed to be like angels in swiftness and strength, able to transport themselves across the globe from one side to the other (64.12).

Wesley preached that every living part of creation was affected by Adam's sin. All were subject 'to that fell monster, Death, the conqueror of all that breathe'

(*Sermon* 64.17). Wesley imagined that in the new creation, predators would no longer have to kill and devour one another to survive (64.17). In words that echo Isaiah, Wesley proclaims, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb," (the words may be literally as well as figuratively understood) "and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: They shall not hurt or destroy," from the rising up of the sun, to the going down of the same' (64.17; see Isaiah 11:6; cf. Isaiah 65:25). There will be no more death. No more sin. Believers will enjoy union with God and a state of holiness and happiness far superior to that that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise (64.18).

This belief in the earth's renewal made Wesley distinctive from some of the most popular theologians of his day.³⁹ The Cartesian dichotomy between spirit and matter had infiltrated the church so that there was hope of the soul's salvation, but little need for a resurrection of the flesh.⁴⁰ As Theodore Runyon writes, 'Wesley rejects the notion that evil is due to the material nature of the world.'⁴¹ Of the theologians that did believe in the earth's renewal, there was still a distinction between cosmic renewal and the resurrection of believers. Calvin, for instance, proposed that the earth would be renewed but did not believe that people would live on it.⁴² Rather, the redeemed would just look down upon it from heaven, as though the rest of the created order had little to do with God's intentions for the abundant life of humanity. Perhaps it is on this element of finished creation where Methodism might refocus its efforts and again be a distinctive voice of hope in our broken world.

What is at Stake?

If we place our hope in an escape from this world, we negate God's investment in the created order. Theology that limits God's rectification to people limits the power of God. John Wesley became convinced that 'new creation' encompassed the whole cosmos, all of physical creation, including animals.⁴³ Wesley interpreted Romans 8 – all creation's longing – as an indicator that all creation was indeed suffering from sin.

In Romans, Paul devotes the first eight chapters detailing sin's death-hold on creation. It is as though he does not think that the Romans can see the mightiness of the gospel until they grasp the direness of the situation. Paul's definition of sin is not limited to human transgressions. Sure, people make mistakes. Paul is clear that even those who have the law and who know what should be done fail to do it. By the end of Romans 3, Paul has well established

his case that every single person – every single mouth – is guilty. But just as death's power is not limited to humanity, neither is the power of sin. Gaventa has noted well the cosmic scope of sin's power.⁴⁴ She even talks about 'Sin' with an upper case 's' to distinguish this power from the more common definition of sin as human transgression. Sin has dominion. Sin reigns. People can be enslaved to Sin. Sin ensnares and manipulates every facet of our world. The problem is direr than the reality that humans transgress. Humans transgress because this evil power has dominated our culture, our political systems, our sense of what is just, even the goodness of God's creation. The effects of Sin are everywhere. And only God has the power to break Sin's stronghold.

When Paul claims that believers inherit the world, he is not stating that they gain heaven, as though heaven were somehow an escape from this world. No, he is standing firm in his tradition – a tradition rooted to the land. What are the theological implications of an inheritance that encompasses the earth? Inheriting the world is intricately related to the blessing of abundant life that God desires for all creation.

Revival, Reform, and Revolution in Global Methodism

What does the hope of finished creation have to do with revival, reform, and revolution in Methodism? Everything. Wesley had a tension in his theology that paralleled Paul's theology – already God's new creation is visible in this present evil age, but that new creation has not yet come to fruition.⁴⁵ All creation longs for rectification, and God has left no part of creation behind. God is actively redeeming what Sin has corrupted. The finished creation not only impinges upon the present, it also equips and enables believers to embody God's new creation here in the 'present evil age' (to borrow a phrase from Paul, Gal 1:4).

The gospel of the Methodists has implications for every facet of life as we know it. It is not merely individual reflections of faith. Nor is it only social holiness. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore makes this point well.

When people within Methodist theological traditions debate whether Wesley's central concern was to evangelize or to reshape social systems, we miss a central point. Wesley was concerned to restore broken relationships and revitalize Christian life with God and the world.⁴⁶

Methodism is not limited to interactions between humanity and God because Sin is not limited to those interactions. Just as Sin has affected all of God's creation, Methodism affirms that all the created order longs for God's redemption.

What are the implications of such a cosmic gospel? Methodists have theological reasons for bearing witness to justice. We cannot place our hope in our governments to create justice. Our political systems are corrupted by the power of Sin. Perhaps Scott Kisker is right, that Methodists, especially in the United States, have become too closely aligned with the establishment. In his book, *Mainline or Methodist?*, Kisker argues that Methodism began as a movement that was distinctive. It did not enjoy political power. It was a religious movement that attracted those from humble life circumstances. By the mid-nineteenth century, though, Methodism in the US had become the religion of the establishment. As evidence of this, Kisker cites the fact that President Abraham Lincoln's funeral was performed by a Methodist bishop.⁴⁷ US political figures such as Hilary Clinton and George W. Bush – from opposing ideologies – both claim the Methodist Church as their spiritual home. In 1887, when the Pope decided to establish a Catholic school in the US capitol, the Catholic Church created The Catholic University of America. Not to be outdone by the Catholics, Methodists also established a school in Washington, DC. They called it American University (AU).⁴⁸ The seminary where I work has a close-knit relationship with this school. We share some buildings and services since our seminary is housed at the corner of AU's campus. Not many people know, however, that AU began as a Methodist school.

Bearing witness to a God who remains invested in the whole created order means that we must be distinctive not only in our love for one another, but in our love for everyone and every facet of God's creation. We are neighbors and stewards. We have theological reasons for caring for strangers and for caring for our planet. Perhaps Methodism needs to be reminded of just how big this good news really is. In our baptismal vows, we covenant to avoid evil, but most Methodist churches rarely talk about the cosmic power of Sin. In reality, Sin's power is everywhere. It is evidenced by immigrants at our borders who are risking everything for the hope of abundant life, by refugees who are homeless due to war, greed, and the thirst for power, by the unhoused in our streets, by the reality that we have to be reminded that 'Black Lives Matter', and by the abundance of food that rots in our refrigerators while others go hungry. The effects of Sin's power are not hard to find, but they are hard to digest. Though God created the diverse world to be a place of mutual blessing, Sin thwarted those blessings. In his insightful study of the importance of new creation to

Wesley's theology, Theodore Runyon writes, 'The cosmic drama of the renewing of creation begins, therefore, with the renewal of the *imago Dei* in human-kind'.⁴⁹ Humans are called to live as the image of God in the world.⁵⁰ Wesley saw in the transformation of humanity God's work to provide channels of blessing to the rest of the created order.⁵¹ He imagines a world of harmony,⁵² and we are all actors in that cosmic drama.

Notes

1. Charles Wesley, 1747.
2. Morris, p. 206.
3. Maddox, p. 45. Maddox cites as an example the preface to Wesley's first volume of sermons (*Sermons* [1746], Preface §5, Works 1:105).
4. See, for example, Barrett, p. 89; Dunn, p. 213. Brendan Byrne's commentary on inheritance and promise serves as a refreshing exception, Byrne, p. 157.
5. Dunn, p. 213.
6. Keck, pp. 126–127.
7. A hymn by Charles Wesley.
8. Davies, p. 167.
9. Davies, p. 178.
10. Davies, pp. 178–179.
11. Davies, p. 179.
12. Davies, p. 179.
13. Also Gen 18:18.
14. Davies, p. 179.
15. A line from Charles Wesley's 'O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing'.
16. Burge, p. 571. See also Davies, p. 17, n. 3.
17. The land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea and from the Wadi of Egypt to Hamath (Numbers 34:1–12).
18. Burge, p. 571.
19. Brueggemann, p. 2.
20. Brueggemann, p. 6.
21. Brueggemann, p. 6.
22. Burge, p. 572.
23. Burge, p. 571.
24. The first fruits and first crops were sacrificed to the Lord (Lev 27:30–33; Deut 14:22; 26:9–15), and the Sabbath was even observed by the land (Lev 25:2).
25. Soulen, p. 123.
26. Soulen, p. 124.
27. Soulen, p. 123.
28. From Charles Wesley, 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling'.
29. Even during the second temple period, the language of inheritance is tied to the land (see 2 Macc 2:17–18; Wis 12:21; 18:6; cf. the inheritance language of Pss. Sol. 12:6 and the earth's actions on behalf of the righteous in Pss. Sol. 11:1–9).

30. It seems that the author lives after the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70, if 2 Baruch 32:2–4 is interpreted to presuppose two destructions. This work also has many parallels with 4 Ezra. If a common source or literary dependence is possible, then 2 Baruch may date to the beginning of the second century. For a discussion, see Klijn.
31. Cited in Bray, p. 118.
32. Gaventa, pp. 53–55.
33. Dunn, p. 213.
34. Maddox, pp. 43–52.
35. Maddox, p. 43.
36. Míguez, pp. 62–66.
37. Outler and Heitzenrater, pp. 494–500.
38. Wesley, Sermon 64.11, 16. On the beauty of creation before the arrival of sin, see Wesley, Sermon 56: 'God's Approbation of His Works', in Outler and Heitzenrater.
39. Maddox, p. 43.
40. Maddox, p. 43.
41. Runyon, p. 11.
42. Maddox, p. 44.
43. Maddox, p. 44.
44. Gaventa, pp. 125–136.
45. Wesley, Sermon 8: 'The First Fruits of the Spirit' on Romans 8:1, in Outler and Heitzenrater.
46. Mullino Moore, p. 107.
47. Kisker, p. 16.
48. Kisker, p. 17.
49. Runyon, p. 12.
50. Runyon, p. 12.
51. Wesley, Sermon 60: 'The General Deliverance', in Outler and Heitzenrater.
52. Runyon, p. 10.

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Social Holiness and Social Justice

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This article explores the connection between social holiness and social justice. It accepts the view of Andrew C Thompson that 'social holiness' in Methodist history has a distinctive meaning which was not linked to, and quite different from, the notion of social justice. However, it argues that encountering grace was not restricted to the gathering of Christians in Wesley's theology or practice and that missional engagement opens another channel or means of grace. Acts of mercy are themselves expressions of and encounters with holiness, so that holiness will lead us to justice and justice to holiness. Social holiness and social justice are, thus, part of a divine ecology where one follows the other in the rhythm of discipleship.

SOCIAL HOLINESS • SOCIAL JUSTICE • DISCIPLESHIP • WESLEYAN THEOLOGY
• PRAXIS

There is a beautiful image in Psalm 85:10:

Steadfast love and truth will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.¹

The verse speaks of the coming together of the great attributes of God. Steadfast love (*chesed*) and truth (*emet*) will meet or encounter or, perhaps even, embrace each other; righteousness or justice (*tzedeq*) and peace (*shalom*) will kiss. In this extraordinarily intimate picture, these giant concepts don't clash and crash into each other like tectonic plates but rather they touch, they embrace, they kiss. They meet in tenderness and mutual delight.

This evocative imagery is suggestive of a God in whom essential character traits are not only held together in perfect harmony and balance, but also act together in a bonded unity to achieve God's purposes.

In 2016, Rachel Lampard and I were elected to the Presidency of the British Methodist Conference. We chose as our theme for the year of office 'Holiness and Justice'. These two mighty theological pillars are deeply embedded in Scripture and have been very dear to our denomination, particularly as exemplified in our founders, John and Charles Wesley. We were convinced that these were not separate themes conjoined by an 'and' but that they were deeply interwoven concepts. Like the Psalmist, we believed that they must be intimately connected. If we were going to speak about Holiness and Justice to our church (and beyond, where we could) we needed some sense of how these great planks of our faith relate to each other. So we spent much of the preparation year exploring their relationship.

Because Methodists are mindful of John Wesley's dictum that the gospel knows 'no holiness but social holiness' we knew that we would need to attend to the meaning of social holiness. At the same time, we noted the popularity of the term 'social justice' among Methodists, recognising that major thinkers in contemporary discourse on justice equate it with social and political fairness.² As Keith Hebden has put it, '[t]o work for justice is to work for right relationships'.³

How does social holiness relate to social justice? This article represents some of our thinking on the subject.

Social Holiness is not Social Justice

The tendency to equate social holiness with social justice is widespread. Some people use the terms interchangeably, others as closely related concepts central to a Methodist understanding of church and mission. Andrew C Thompson has, however, challenged this sloppy and inaccurate Methodist vocabulary.⁴ According to Thompson the original context of John Wesley's only use of the term 'social holiness' is not in any way connected with social justice. Rather, appearing in the preface to one of the Wesleys' early hymn books, it refers to the environmental contexts 'in which holiness of heart and life is manifest in the Christian life'.

Thompson is undoubtable right that the key to understanding John Wesley's notion of social holiness is to be found in his preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* published in 1739. The intention of this preface is to orient the reader for the content and use of the hymn book. Given that congregational singing is the purpose of the hymn book, social holiness in this context relates to people coming together to praise God and to build one another up through fellowship. Wesley uses the preface to recant his earlier mystical interests. Once he pursued mystical spirituality, he confesses, but now he has renounced this way, as being built on the wrong foundation and contrary to the New Testament. He is dismissing a notion of holiness which was achieved by solitary activity such as retreating to the desert. Instead,

Directly opposite to this is the gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found there. 'Holy solitaires' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. 'This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loveth God love his brother also;' and that we manifest our love by doing good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith.⁵

As Thompson argues, 'social holiness' here is not connected with social justice. Rather, it refers to the environments or activities that are conducive to growth in holiness because they bring together those seeking holiness into a place of grace. This is what Andrew Roberts calls 'holy habitats'.⁶ For the Wesleys, these were locations where Christians gathered to engage in practices – the

instituted and prudential means of grace – through which they would meet with God and would build up one another.

The phrase ‘social justice’, on the other hand, has a very different origin and history. According to Thompson, it is a notion developed by the nineteenth-century Jesuit philosopher, Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio.

When the idea of ‘social justice’ first appeared in the 1840s, it was a formal concept rather than a material one. That is, the term was taken to signify a branch of the ordinary concept of justice, analogous to ‘commutative justice’ or ‘criminal justice’, and did not imply any particular content, philosophy, or view of the world.⁷ Taparelli’s writing gave it the distinctive form that we associate with the term today, though this was not entirely what he intended.

Taparelli was particularly concerned with the problems arising from the industrial revolution and sought to apply the methods of Thomism to these social problems. His view of social justice was primarily about the ordering of society. In effect, he accepted the status quo as divinely decreed and defended the hierarchical order of the aristocracy and the papacy. He used the concept of social justice in a very conservative way to underpin the social order as it had emerged through history, developing a theory of social equality and social inequality. Politically, social justice is, for Taparelli, the way things are in society, a balance that should be maintained.

However, he also wrote on economics and in particular opposed the emerging free market economics developing from the ideas of Adam Smith and John Locke. He understood the underlying notion of this approach to (what he deemed to be Protestant) economics to be competition. Instead, he advocated a system built on co-operation rather than competition and saw the role of government as protecting the weak against market forces. Justice is called on to protect the order of society both against the cruelty of the powerful who crush the poor and also against the communism of the poor who rise up against the powerful.

Taparelli’s idea of social justice was, thus, primarily about retaining the present structure of the social order but allied with this was a need to intervene when the poorest were threatened by external economic forces. It is his view of interventionist economics that has become more strongly attached to the meaning of social justice. This aspect of his writings was taken up and advocated by various popes, resulting in Taparelli being reckoned among the fathers of Catholic Social Teaching.

Thus the two concepts – social holiness and social justice – are neither identical nor are they easily associated from their origins. One term referred to corporate contexts in which Christians find the means of grace, the other to a social and economic philosophy for a more just society. Thompson suggests that later Wesleyan emphasis on social justice as expressing the ethical orientation of Methodism is derived, in fact, not from Wesley, but (imperfectly) from Taparelli.

Thompson does not rule out a theologically informed understanding of the relationship between social holiness and social justice in contemporary Methodism. Indeed he suggests, in his conclusion, that ‘a fuller evaluation of social holiness could inform present discourse about engaged Christian activity “in the world”’;⁸ but he is concerned that a sloppy approach wherein social holiness is equated with social justice risks losing significant Wesleyan insights into the nature of sanctification.

Thompson helps us to see that a simple connection between social holiness and social justice cannot be made from history. He sets out clearly the origins and development of these phrases but does not resolve the issue. A conceptual connection may be present, even if the words were not used in the way some have supposed Wesley to have employed them. In any case, etymological origins do not necessarily have the final word on meaning and use. Language is a fluid, evolving and dynamic process, as is theology, and new connections are often as important as ancestry.

In order to find a meaningful theology of the relationship between these two notions, we must look elsewhere.

Wesley’s Praxis

One reason why Methodists find the concept of social justice so attractive is John Wesley’s practice of engagement with social justice issues in his own context. Wesley went to preach in the open air to reach those outside the congregational gatherings of the church. He visited prisoners condemned to death; he went out among, and listened to, the poor; he got involved in campaigns against the distillers (not primarily because they fermented alcohol but because they exploited the poor); he opposed slavery and enabled work opportunities by means of loans for those who would otherwise be destitute or in prostitution. These actions still inspire Methodists and many other Christians and remind us that the Evangelical Awakening often uniquely

combined a passionate evangelism with practical action against poverty and injustice. If the preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* does not make a connection between holiness and justice, Wesley's own life and ministry does. Engagement with the social evils of the day and the people affected by them was not an additional activity to be undertaken as a result of the gospel, it was the gospel. Being saved from sin through grace, repentance and new birth and acting in care, mercy and for justice is part of the holy life to which all are called.

One of the insights regained through the discipline of practical theology has been to notice and examine theology embedded in practices. Swinton and Mowatt make it central to their definition of the discipline.

Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world.⁹

This is not the place to undertake a thorough examination of all Wesley's practices (and those of the communities that he founded) but even a surface reading of the above allows us to note that an engagement with social justice issuing from his faith was central to Wesley's way of being Christian.

Such engagement often involved his objection to societal practices or political policy and led to open discourse on creating a better world. R George Eli argues that the tracts Wesley produced in the latter part of his life, such as *Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions*, carry within them what has since become an acceptable method in political theory and analysis.¹⁰ It is a powerful precedent for the work of the British Churches' Joint Public Issues Team on, for instance, benefit sanctions, based on real engagement and careful analysis.¹¹

In Wesley's practice, holiness and justice were interlocked. However, this does not, of itself, tell us how they are integrated nor whether the connections are theologically strong, for as Swinton and Mowatt remind us:

the efficacy of the practice (the good to which it is aimed), is not defined pragmatically by its ability to fulfil particular human needs (although it will include that) but by whether or not it participates faithfully in the divine redemptive mission.¹²

Fortunately, there is also a wealth of Wesley's theological writing within which deeper connections are made between the concepts of social holiness and social justice.

Wesley's Theology: Justice as an expression and a means of holiness

David N Field has already made a strong case for a dynamic linking of holiness and justice in Wesley's writing. Beginning with the notion of holiness as love, Field sees in Wesley's theology a unity of inward and outward holiness. Inward holiness is the experience of God's Spirit enabling faith and new birth and witnessing that we are loved by God as God's children. Outward holiness is the expression of love through a life characterised by 'justice, mercy and truth'.

Indeed nothing can be more sure than that Christianity cannot exist without both inward experience and outward practice of justice, mercy and truth.¹³

Acts of piety and acts of mercy are twin practices, which point to inward and outward holiness. Both are expressions of love but while acts of piety are strongly associated with the means of grace and thus point to social holiness as the places where grace may be found, acts of mercy have been less so linked. However, Wesley makes the point very clearly that acts of mercy may also be means of grace in his sermon *On Visiting the Sick*. Having spoken about acts of piety as ordinary channels of grace he goes on.

Are there no other means than these whereby God is pleased, frequently, yea, ordinarily to convey his grace to them that either love or fear him? Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace... And those that neglect them do not receive the grace which otherwise they might. Yea, and they lose, by a continuing neglect, the grace which they have received.¹⁴

In other words, Wesley sees the face-to-face encounter with those in need as a location of grace for the believer, the neglect of which may mean the loss of grace, which ultimately would leave those who were once strong in faith 'weak and feeble-minded'. Conversely, to engage in acts of mercy is to open up another channel of grace that issues in holiness. For Wesley the inward experience of God's love is the starting point of the journey but once the Christian has begun on the road, acts of mercy as well as acts of piety both become part of the transforming process.

Field writes

Works of mercy are a means through which God encounters and transforms people's characters; they manifest a transformed character and through this manifestation they lead to further transformation. They are an expression of holiness and a means to become more holy.¹⁵

'Justice, mercy and truth', mentioned above, is, according to Field, Wesley's broader way of speaking of outward holiness. What is more, this triad does not simply mean personal virtues exercised by individual disciples but it is 'characteristic of a Christian engagement with society'.¹⁶

What Field means is spelt out by reference to Wesley's critique of the slave trade and in relation to his exhortation to visit the poor. The former involves a radical empathy with victims of slavery, seeing justice from the side of the marginalised rather than from the perspective of property rights and slave ownership. Visiting the poor requires going to 'uncomfortable, dangerous and disagreeable places'.¹⁷ In both cases, costly positioning is necessary in order to treat all people as made in the image of God, a fundamental truth made known in Christ – for Christ died for all – and experienced in the Christian community. This means that costly discipleship and becoming 'troublesome' communities, which speak truth to power and live out the alternative way of the kingdom, are all part of the same whole.

We express holiness and become holy not only in our personal interactions with others but also as we respond to structural injustice, cruelty and untruth.¹⁸

Social Justice as Encounter with the 'Other'

Field's argument can be strengthened by examining Wesley's treatment of the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). This text appears in many of his sermons.¹⁹ Moreover, he read it literally, seeing these works precisely as works that express holiness of life flowing from a grace-enabled faith. For Wesley, this meant Christians would visit the prisoners, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger and give food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, and in these endeavours they would be met by grace.

The parable lends itself to a further extension of this thought. When both groups ask the king when it was that they saw him without recognizing him, he tells them that it was in their action or lack of action to the least which was when they had in fact met him:

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (*emoi*).” (Mt 25:40)

“Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me (*emoi*).” (Mt 25:45)

The Greek *emoi* is a simple dative. It could equally be translated ‘for me’ rather than ‘to me’ but the narrative of the parable favours the second because it flows from the statement ‘when I was hungry’. The king locates himself in the place of the one in need, with whom all those gathered in front of him had met. Some had acted to meet the need, others had not, but none recognized that it had been the king in disguise. One interpretation of this is that doers of these good works meet Christ in the needy. They encounter him in ‘the other’ where they least expect him and grace comes to them in this encounter of exchange. The faithful bring food, drink, clothes and friendship but they receive Christ himself.

Wesley does not make this point. Indeed, in one place he points out the absurdity of giving bread, drink and clothes to the maker of all things. He suggests that the encounter with Christ is figurative.²⁰ However, there are other ways in which Wesley was very close to much recent theological understanding of encountering ‘the other’.²¹ He clearly believed that we are recipients of grace and blessing when we engage in works of mercy. To say that the reception of grace is always in some way an encounter with God’s holiness is only to affirm that our salvation is contained within God’s self-revelation and on each occasion of encountered grace, Christ is being formed within us.

All dimensions of mission – service, caring, being good neighbours, challenging injustice and evangelism – take us to places of encounter, some of which are demanding and difficult but turn out to be holy habitats, where grace flows with the power to transform us.

There is a theology of missional grace here, not so much the grace to empower Christians to do the works required but a grace that is encountered in the very act of performing the works, a grace that comes through and from encounter – encounter with ‘the other’ which is simultaneously an encounter with God.

Conclusion

These reflections have not comprehensively defined the way in which social holiness and social justice relate, nor is this the last word on the subject. There is much more to be explored; however, the insights here may help us make sense of our calling to both social holiness and social justice.

Social holiness and social justice are not the same, but engagement in social justice, as a key component of mission, flows from social holiness; and growth in holiness depends upon a continuing openness to and experience of grace. Grace is to be found in acts of piety and also in acts of mercy and we have no option to neglect the latter. Rather we are compelled to participate in such merciful acts for the good of all and for our own growth. These are deep Wesleyan convictions.

One way of describing this is as a kind of holy dance in which our feet follow patterns to one place and then another and then repeat the same sequence all over again in another part of the dancefloor. We attend to our needs for prayer, communion and the scriptures and to the needs of individuals and wider society in a recurring rhythm of grace. Acts of mercy are themselves expressions of and encounters with holiness, so that holiness will lead us to justice and justice to holiness. Social holiness and social justice are, thus, part of a divine ecology where one follows the other in the rhythm of discipleship.

A further conclusion is that we ought to extend the range of contexts, or sites, that we include in the concept of social holiness. If social holiness is defined as 'environmental contexts in which holiness of heart and life is manifest in the Christian life' then what we have argued here is for the inclusion in this definition of sites of missional engagement – whether they be the food bank, or the street protest against injustice. These too can be means of grace. Participating in the *missio Dei*, including the struggle for a just society, takes us to many and varied sites of social holiness where grace is readily available. It is in our participation in all these sites – whether gathering for praise or campaigning against injustice – that we are formed by grace. As sites of grace and blessing, these are all sites of God's self-giving; and through God's self-giving presence, they are thus holy places. In all these places, holiness and justice meet, even as righteousness and peace kiss.

Notes

1. The NRSV is used throughout, unless stated.
2. See, for instance, Rawls.
3. Hebden, p. 66.
4. Thompson, pp. 142–3.
5. Wesley 1739, Preface ¶15.
6. Chapter 6, Roberts.
7. For a fuller account of Taparelli's work see Burke, pp. 98–106 and Behr, p. 7.
8. Thompson, p. 171.
9. Swinton and Mowat, p. 6.
10. Eli, p. 94.
11. See, for example, 'The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty', a 2013 report from the Joint Public Issues Team 2013, available online from <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Truth-And-Lies-Report-smaller.pdf> [accessed March 2019].
12. Swinton and Mowat, p. 21.
13. Wesley 1987, p. 174.
14. Wesley 1986, p. 385.
15. Field, p. 185.
16. Field, p. 181.
17. Field, p. 184.
18. Field, p. 188.
19. For instance, Sermon on the Mount 2, 5 and 8; The Good Steward; The Great Assize; The Reward of Righteousness; On visiting the Sick; Scriptural Christianity; God's love to Fallen man; Public Diversions Denounced; and others.
20. Wesley 1986, p. 401.
21. For example, the writings of Martin Buber; Emmanuel Levinas; and Miroslav Volf.

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John Wesley and Methodist Responses to Slavery in America

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John Wesley considered the slave trade to be a national disgrace. However, while the American Methodist Church had initially made bold declarations concerning the evils of slavery, the practical application of this principled opposition was seriously compromised, obstructed by the leviathan of the plantation economy prominent in this period of American history. This paper surveys a variety of Methodist responses to slavery and race, exploring the dialectical germination of ideas like holiness, liberty and equality within the realities of the Antebellum context.

WESLEY • SLAVERY • RACE • ANTEBELLUM • AMERICA

Introduction

In Wesley's time a form of hyper-Calvinism had been mis-used to justify the class system and maintain socio-economic inequality. Thus, one's place in the world, and the problems within society at large, were often accepted passively as being part of the sovereign will of God¹. Wesley's message that 'all ... may be saved,' his rejection of theological forms of fatalism, and his embrace of the egalitarianism implicit within Arminianism, injected hope and industry into the Methodist people, encouraging them to take responsibility for their fate. No longer seeing themselves as reprobates, helpless victims of a divinely inspired plot to keep them poor, they were empowered with a confidence to address their own circumstances and, moreover, to engage in wider social reform.²

To a large extent, the principles of equality and social holiness,³ manifest in Wesley's theology and ministry, animated Methodist responses to slavery and racial inequality.⁴ Instead of accepting societal evils as a part of the sovereign will of God, or an inevitable consequence of the fall, many began to realise their potential agency for change and recognised the need to challenge social problems like slavery.⁵ However, within the American context, Wesley's idea of a social religion would have to compete with the notion that Church and State should be kept apart.⁶ This entrenched political tradition, combined with the racist conception of slavery endemic at this time, complicated the digestion of Wesley's theological principles within the American psyche.

This article will explore the interplay between these different ideas as we survey Wesley's and American Methodist responses to slavery. While the article will deal extensively with the reality of slavery and racism in the United States during the Antebellum period (before the American Civil War), it is important to discuss John and Charles' perspective on these issues. This is necessary because it helps illustrate the extent to which American Methodism departed from the views held by the Wesleys and facilitates a discussion of some of the reasons for this divergence.

Wesley's Response to Slavery and Race

During their time in America the Wesleys were first-hand witnesses of the evils of slavery. In his journal Charles Wesley recounts the barbaric treatment slave owners 'daily practise upon their fellow-creatures' including whipping, hammering nails through their ears, drawing their teeth, pouring hot wax and

scalding water upon their flesh, and even 'giving a [White] child a slave of its own age to tyrannise'. While surrounded⁸ by these 'shocking instances of diabolical cruelty' the Wesleys practised kindness towards the African Americans they encountered and John preached to slaves whenever he had opportunity, even on the boat back to England.⁹

On his return to Britain, John continued to support evangelistic work among slaves in Virginia¹⁰ and repeatedly declared his belief that God's 'saving health' should 'be made known to all'.¹¹ In his journal he even states that an African Christian woman in one of his societies is 'fuller' with the 'pure love of God' than any other (White) Christian in her area.¹² In his *Notes on the New Testament* he called slave traders 'man stealers', believing it to be the worst of crimes.¹³ He considered England's participation in the slave trade to be a national disgrace.¹⁴

Wesley and Racism

Wesley believed slavery (in all its forms) to be irreconcilable with any 'degree of either justice or mercy'.¹⁵ However, although Wesley's opposition to slavery and his treatment of African people were exemplary, it is perhaps unsurprising that his writings occasionally betray some of the ethnocentric assumptions of this period.¹⁶ Hence, while Wesley does not appear to view Europeans as superior, his journals often record his being amazed by both the virtue of Africans and by their aptitude for instruction.¹⁷ Moreover, in his *Essay on Original Sin* (1757) Wesley uses the racial term 'Hottentot' to illustrate what he considers to be the barbarity of humankind without God; the implication being that Wesley views the culture of this Southern African people as being somehow inferior to that of European nations.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in his *Thoughts upon Slavery* (1774) he acknowledges that the African societies, from which the slaves are taken, have developed political and judicial systems.¹⁹ He concludes that, if such accounts are true, they are superior in virtue than slave-trading nations like 'England and France' and that those who seek 'genuine honesty' ought to go to 'Benin, Congo, or Angola'.²⁰ Moreover, there are points in his writings where Wesley challenges stereotypes about Black people²¹ and suggests that the only reason 'why one part of mankind have Black skins, and the other White' is 'climate'. He thus appears to reject the idea, common in his day, that White people are superior for he emphasises that, whether White or Black, we all 'have the same flesh and blood'.²²

Slavery and American Independence

The theme of slavery arises most often in Wesley's controversy with the

advocates for the independence of America from Britain. The colonies had been paying taxes without obtaining political representation. Thus, some advocates of independence argued that 'all Americans are slaves' because they have no voice in the British parliament.²³ In response to this argument Wesley pointed out that:

Slavery is a state wherein neither a man's goods, nor liberty, nor life, are at his own disposal. Such is the state of a thousand, of ten thousand, Negroes in the American colonies. And are their masters in the same state with them? in just the same slavery with the Negroes? Have they no more disposal of their own goods, or liberty, or lives? Does any one beat or imprison them at pleasure; or take away their wives, or children, or lives; or sell them like cows or horses? This is slavery; and will you face us down that the Americans are in such slavery as this?²⁴

While Wesley was correct to criticise this hypocrisy, his opposition to American independence was highly misjudged if not outright foolish.²⁵ Wesley had sent a number of preachers to America (1769) who had upheld his views upon slavery.²⁶ However, his opposition to American calls for independence resulted in them being viewed as puppets of the British government.²⁷

In a series of tracts and essays Wesley allowed his arguments against slavery to become intertwined with his critique of Republicanism, which he described as the most 'despotic' form of government 'under heaven'.²⁸ It would be anachronistic to judge Wesley's political views here.²⁹ Nevertheless, in the words of Francis Asbury, Wesley's opposition to American independence made him the most 'obnoxious' man 'in the [new] world' and cast a colonial shadow over the American Methodist movement.³⁰ As a result, many of Wesley's preachers were recalled home – diluting the strength of his anti-slavery perspective within this Church's hierarchy.³¹ In time, this would render the newly formed Church unable to meet the leviathan of institutional slavery.³² Had these ministers stayed, maybe the story would have been different.³³

Methodist Responses to Slavery in America

When America finally gained its independence from Britain, Wesley recognised the separation of American Methodism and consecrated Thomas Coke (1747–1814) as its superintendent. However, the Americans wanted Asbury (who had

remained during the war) as their bishop and the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) was formally created (1784).³⁴ Initially Wesley's position on slavery was reflected in the discipline of the American Methodist conference.³⁵ However, while Asbury and Coke expected preachers to emancipate their slaves,³⁶ the fierce opposition they encountered, particularly in the south, led them to modify the Church's position.³⁷ In little over a decade,³⁸ the persecution of Methodist preachers and the refusal of slave owners to allow access to their slaves led the church to soften its approach.³⁹ By the turn of the eighteenth century instructions concerning emancipation were diluted further, with the clause 'if it be practicable' being added to the direction to free slaves.⁴⁰ In 1808, all references to slaveholding in relation to private members were removed, and by 1812 each annual conference was allowed 'to form their own regulations relative to buying and selling' slaves.⁴¹ Finally in 1824 the church, instead of publicly forbidding the ownership of slaves, encouraged slave owners to provide Christian education for them.⁴²

Having illustrated how quickly Wesley's opposition to slavery became diluted within American Methodism it is necessary to survey some of the different responses to slavery by the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church during the Antebellum period. Essentially, at least three responses to slavery can be identified within this period: (1) Racist pro-slavery response, (2) Racist anti-slavery response and (3) Immediate Abolition.

(1) Racist pro-slavery response

The degree to which leaders like Asbury, who were opposed to slavery, could influence Methodists to release their slaves was seriously impeded by the lucrative nature of the plantation economy and the doctrine of the separation of church and state.⁴³ For example William Capers (1790–1855), a prominent clergyman in the South, considered that 'the question of the abolition of slavery' was not a religious but a civil question. Capers had no objections to what he considered to be humane forms of slavery and, like many, considered slavery biblical. Incredibly Capers, like a number of Methodists in the South, considered that slavery actually 'tended to the salvation of the Negroes'.⁴⁴ In this vein, in 1824, the South Carolina Conference created a special department that would be focused upon the spiritual wellbeing of slaves.⁴⁵ Similar missions also took place in Georgia.⁴⁶ However, because plantation owners feared that spreading the gospel among the slaves would lead to insurrections, such missions to the slaves soon ran into difficulties.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, an *Address delivered in Charleston before the Agricultural Society of South Carolina* provided

Capers, who firmly believed in evangelising slaves, with powerful arguments that would enable him to convince plantation owners that evangelising slaves could work in their favour.⁴⁸ In this address, the Right Honourable Charles Cotesworth Pinckney (a plantation owner) argued that ‘nothing is better calculated to render man satisfied with his destiny in this world’ than religion.⁴⁹ Using these ideas, Capers appealed to slave owners with the same argument and maintained that Christianity, with its offer of eternal life, could substitute the slaves’ dreams of emancipation in this world. Moreover, he argued that Christianity, instead of encouraging insurrections, could make slaves more obedient to their masters.⁵⁰ To this effect, Capers redacted the gospel in order to create a catechism that would imprint upon the slaves that, if they were dutiful and obedient workers in this life, God (the supreme master) would reward them with eternal life. In order to receive this reward it was essential for them to perform their duties wholeheartedly and maintain good relationships with their earthly masters.⁵¹ The nature of this gospel is captured in the autobiography of former slave and abolitionist Henry Bibb (1815–1854).

They say, ‘Servants be obedient to your masters;—and he that knoweth his masters will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes—means that God will send them to hell, if they disobey their masters.’⁵²

In offering this form of Christianity to the slaves, Capers was offering the plantation owners a more effective workforce.⁵³ It was this that convinced the slave holders to accept such missions. By offering a perverted gospel of obedience to God and faithfulness to the interests of one’s earthly master, Capers packaged the mission as something that would reinforce, rather than undo, the institution of slavery.⁵⁴

The results of the spreading of this gospel, which encouraged slaves to remain servile, were very much appreciated by plantation owners across the South. In 1837, the South Carolina Conference reported how slaves were now ‘pointed from earliest infancy to a Master in heaven, whose eye sees in darkness as in light’⁵⁵. Thus, because slaves responded in the way intended by overseers like Capers it was reported that slaves were now less likely to rebel and that they were more honest workers than they had been previously. Tragically, the notion that in the next life their situation would be better quenched their thirst for emancipation in the present. The missions applauded themselves for this and for having ‘humanised’ slavery, improving the conditions in which these people

were kept and, moreover, for having provided slaves with a sense of purpose. Southern Missionaries claimed that their efforts had made American slaves more superior to any Africans, whether they be in the North or in Africa. Moreover, they believed Northern abolitionists, by offending the plantation owners, were jeopardising the growth of the Church among the slaves. In sum, these missions tried to humanise the institution of slavery. Rather than rejecting it they wanted to perfect it.⁵⁶

It is difficult to see how Wesley's name could ever have become attached to Methodists like Capers. We can scarce imagine what John Wesley might have said to him if the two had met. Undoubtedly there is a vast chasm between the empowering transforming theology of John Wesley and the willful misrepresentation of Caper's false gospel of white supremacy. Unfortunately, while Wesley was right about slavery, he was wrong about American independence and his opposition to it hampered the transmission of Wesley's views on this matter in the United States. As Methodism spread into the South, official church legislation against slavery was viewed as an expression of a 'British Conscience' imposed by a 'British leadership'.⁵⁷

(2) Racist anti-slavery response

In the North the situation was even more puzzling; a peculiar combination of both anti-slavery sentiments and White supremacy. Though many Northern states had legislated against slavery, their conception of liberty and equality did not entail racial equality.⁵⁸ The mentality of people at this time is captured in the writing of Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) – third President of the United States (1801–1809) and principal author of the declaration of Independence – who considered Africans to be inferior to Europeans.⁵⁹ In his published work he states that, differences of 'colour' and 'faculty' are a 'powerful obstacle to the emancipation of [Black] people'.⁶⁰ Thus, while he wished to affirm 'the liberty of human nature' he was also 'anxious to preserve its dignity and beauty'. He believed Whites were 'of superior beauty' to Blacks and warned that the 'slave, when made free, might mix [sexually]' with Whites, 'staining the blood of his master'. Jefferson considered that, once freed, slaves should 'be removed beyond the reach of mixture' and proposed that freed slaves be relocated elsewhere.⁶¹

Colonisation

Jefferson supported the *Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour in Africa* (1816), an organisation created to return free slaves back to Africa (Liberia). At

their first meeting they summarised their position concerning the problem of integrating free Blacks in a White dominated racist society as follows.

We say, in the declaration of independence, 'that all men are created equal' ... Yet it is considered impossible ... with the present feelings towards [Black] people, that they can ever be placed upon this equality, or admitted to the enjoyment of these 'inalienable rights,' whilst they remain mixed with [Whites]. Some persons may declaim, and call it prejudice. No matter—prejudice is as powerful a motive, and will as certainly exclude them as the soundest reason.⁶²

The profound aversion that many Whites had to the presence of free Blacks in society, fearing that it could lead to interracial marriage and the right to vote, led many (including Methodists) to conclude that the best thing to do was to send the free slaves back to Africa.⁶³ Ironically, those slaves who were willing to go to Liberia needed a pastor and thus, paradoxically, the colonization movement led to the ordination of African American Methodists such as David Payne to provide pastoral care and to facilitate the evangelisation of Africans.⁶⁴

Segregation in the Church

White American Methodists were extremely supportive of the colonization movement. Here the degree to which racism was entrenched within American culture, even within states where slavery was illegal, should not be underestimated.⁶⁵ In practice, the American Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) engaged in racial segregation from its beginnings.⁶⁶ From 1787 to 1829, Methodist preachers attempted to integrate Africans into the Church. However, while Black members were permitted to engage in lower levels of church leadership, ecclesiastical power remained concentrated in White hands.⁶⁷ As early as 1780, immediately following a bold declaration against slavery, the conference promoted the idea of White supremacy: stating that the meetings of 'coloured people' must be supervised by 'White persons'.⁶⁸ Thus, while the Conference had declared its opposition to slavery, ordinary Methodists had 'difficulty in welcoming Blacks fully into the household of faith and left them to listen through the window. Or... sent [them] to the barn'.⁶⁹ The strange way in which the Church's antislavery stance was 'laced' with racism is manifest in the writings of Freeborn Garrettson. Upon his conversion he immediately freed all of his slaves.⁷⁰ However, while Garrettson was an ardent evangelist, who suffered for his opposition to slavery, he still supported the idea of racial

segregation and suggested Africans were inferior to Europeans.⁷¹ Garrettson was not alone in holding these prejudices.

African Preachers

Earlier it was noted that Wesley, who generally seems to have affirmed the equality of Africans and Europeans, occasionally betrayed his surprise when encountering intelligent and virtuous Black people. At one point in his journal (June 1780) Wesley's retelling of a racist joke might be interpreted, at an unconscious level, as a collusion with the idea of White supremacy.

On Sunday, 11, preached at Kirton about eight, to a very large and very serious congregation 5 only before me stood one, something like a gentleman, with his hat on, even at prayer. I could scarce help telling him a story: In Jamaica, a negro passing by the Governor pulled off his hat; so did the Governor; at which one expressing his surprise, he said, 'Sir, I should be ashamed if a negro had more good manners than the Governor of Jamaica.'⁷²

The same dynamic, though often implicit, is found in the preachers he sent to America, who were astounded by the preaching abilities of (Black) Harry Hosier (1750–1806), who they considered to be 'one of the best preachers in the world.'⁷³ Despite his great ability, Hosier was never ordained and although he regularly accompanied Asbury, Coke and Garrettson on their preaching tours, he was lodged in segregated accommodation.⁷⁴ Moreover, although it is suggested that he was essential to the growth of Methodism – a Billy Graham of his time – 'Black Harry' was regarded as an anomaly, an 'African wonder.'⁷⁵ Many Methodists refused to accept that an African could be so gifted and assumed he was a White man in disguise.⁷⁶

Richard Allen (1760–1831), founding Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), represents a similar case. Like Hosier he was well connected with figures like Asbury and Garrettson.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, although his preaching encouraged many Africans to become Methodists,⁷⁸ his attempts to nurture these converts within the existing church structures proved impossible.⁷⁹ He recounts how, one particular Sunday, as they were praying they were forcefully removed from their seats.

We felt ourselves much cramped [and] were considered as a nuisance... [We] usually attended St. George's Church in Fourth

street; [but] when the coloured people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall.... we bore much persecution from many of the Methodist connexion.⁸⁰

It is not at all surprising that this 'racial discrimination led to separate houses of worship for congregants of African descent.'⁸¹ According to Hempton, 'the layers of paternalism, social segregation, and liturgical discrimination ... proved impossible to bear for many African Americans'. While they had initially believed that they belonged to a 'movement of spiritual and social egalitarianism' they soon discovered that myriad restrictions dictated 'the kinds of role they could perform in predominantly White congregations'.⁸² Although African Americans were gradually permitted to participate in lower levels of church leadership – becoming class leaders, exhorters and preachers – few were ordained deacons and none were ordained as elders.⁸³ Thus while individual Black congregations had a degree of autonomy, their affairs ultimately remained in the hands of a White leadership, both ministers and lay leaders, who monitored the activities of the Black members.⁸⁴ For this reason, the pull towards separation became inevitable as 'interracial fellowship around the dinner table did not become interracial fellowship around the conference table'.⁸⁵ All this serves to illustrate that although Northern states opposed slavery, the majority of Whites believed Blacks to be inferior and maintained restrictive laws designed to segregate Blacks so as to prevent them from taking leadership positions and integrating fully into society.⁸⁶

Black Methodist Denominationalism

Under these racist conditions it was perhaps inevitable that a Black and Methodist denominationalism would arise out of Wesley's theological principles. First Peter Spencer founded the African Union Church in Wilmington, Delaware in 1814. In Philadelphia, 1816, Richard Allen's Bethel Church seceded along with Daniel Coker's Baltimore congregation to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1822 in New York, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was formed.⁸⁷ While it is clear that these Christians would no longer tolerate the institutional racism they had experienced, their continued use of the name 'Methodist' indicates a strong affinity with their Wesleyan heritage. It is possible that the ongoing appeal of Methodism to slaves and free Blacks was that it connected Christianity to physical and spiritual deliverance.⁸⁸ Methodist hymns in particular, with their metaphors of imprisonment and freedom, resonated with the African American community

and these hymns were cited by prominent African American Methodists.⁸⁹ Moreover, the emphasis on personal transformation and social responsibility within Methodist teaching encouraged former slaves to view themselves as agents capable of participating in the transformation of society.⁹⁰

(3) Immediate Abolition

The vanguard of Abolition (immediate emancipation) came not from the White community but from African Americans, including Methodists who connected their freedom in Christ, about which they sang in Charles Wesley's hymns, to liberty on earth and who, moreover, believed themselves capable of realising it.⁹¹ A good example of this is the former slave and abolitionist David Walker (1796–1830) who was inspired by the Wesleys, and particularly by Charles' hymns, to denounce White supremacy.⁹² Like many African Americans Walker found John and Charles Wesley's emphasis on personal transformation and social responsibility empowering and through his publication, *Appeal to Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), Walker became a key agent in calling for the transformation of society.⁹³ His *Appeal* criticised both racist pro-slavery Christianity and racist anti-slavery Christianity.⁹⁴ His work was a call to arms, to 'awaken ... my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren', and to galvanise abolitionists into action.⁹⁵ Like many African Americans Walker viewed colonisation as racism⁹⁶ and called for immediate freedom (as opposed to the gradualism supported by many within the Methodist church).⁹⁷ Copies of his book were smuggled into ports across the South, striking fear into slave owners who put a large bounty upon his head. Walker was found dead two years later in suspicious circumstances.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, his martyrdom motivated a number of important Black and White Abolitionists into action.⁹⁹

Underground Railway

Hezekiel Grice (c.1801–1873), upon whom Walker's *Appeal* had a profound impact, was a freed slave who settled in the North. Weary of the discrimination faced by his brothers and sisters he called for a National Negro Convention to discuss the merits of whole scale emigration to Canada where they could truly be free.¹⁰⁰ As a result the *American Society of Free People of Colour* was founded (1830) and had its first meeting in the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. The aim of this organisation was to promote emigration to Canada for African Americans.¹⁰¹ Following the American Revolution, Africans who had sided with the British had been relocated to Nova Scotia. By the turn of the century slavery had already begun to decline in Canada and by 1833 it was

completely abolished. As a result it became a true safe haven for slaves who found their way there using the stars to guide them north.¹⁰² Laws such as the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), which gave slave holders the right to recapture escaped slaves in any part of the country, forced even more African Americans to emigrate to Canada and a coordinated humanitarian effort known as the underground railway developed to facilitate the passage of slaves to their freedom.¹⁰³

A leading Methodist figure in the underground railway was Josiah Henson (1789–1883) who, after escaping to Canada, became an elder in the AME church. He regularly challenged his congregations to help free their brothers and sisters who remained in captivity.¹⁰⁴ Harriet Tubman (1822–1913), a member of the AME Zion church, also played a pivotal role in the underground railway. Like Henson, she had escaped from slavery with little information of where to go but had, providentially, encountered a series of White families who abetted her escape. Once she reached safety, she returned every year to rescue other slaves. While Tubman and Henson had escaped with the barest of information and with meagre support, future escapees would inherit the knowledge that they, and others, had acquired of the various safe houses along the way.¹⁰⁵

Frederick Douglass, a friend of Tubman who had also been a slave in Maryland, was also a member of the AME Zion church.¹⁰⁶ Douglass founded the North Star abolitionist newspaper (1847–) and publicly backed the work of the Underground Railroad.¹⁰⁷ Douglass' keen mind and penetrating critiques of slavery led him to become a national leader in the abolitionist movement as well as a powerful advocate for Women's rights.¹⁰⁸ Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), also fought for the equality of men and women. A former slave, she became a member of the AME Zion church on her release and, against the odds, became an itinerant lecturer. Though she was unable to read, she travelled 'up and down the land, convicting people of the "sin" of slavery and calling for its immediate abolition at every opportunity'.¹⁰⁹

Schism

At around this time, Orange Scott (1800–1847), a Methodist Episcopal presiding elder, became convinced of the anti-slavery cause. Inspired by John Wesley, and convinced that the American Methodist tradition had abandoned his values, he wrote:

Spirit of Wesley, where hast thou fled? Who now, in the M. E. Church,
except the persecuted abolitionists, cry out for 'instant' emancipation?

Who now puts 'all slave holders, of whatever rank and degree,' 'EXACTLY ON A LEVEL WITH MEN STEALERS' Who makes slave holders 'partakers with a thief?' Who now charges them with 'blood guiltiness?' ('Thy hands, thy bed, thy furniture, thy house, thy lands, are at present stained with blood I') Certainly not Bishop H., not President F. No, not even the abolitionists. We believe with Mr. Wesley; but alas! we have spoken in whisper tones and in soft language compared with his.¹¹⁰

Here Scott identifies the case for immediate abolition with John Wesley, even suggesting that Wesley was stronger in his criticism of slavery than Scott's contemporary abolitionists. Scott's writing is saturated with citations from Wesley's *Thoughts upon Slavery* and repeatedly compares Wesley's views with the decisions and language of the General Conferences of Georgia and Baltimore. In doing so Scott used Wesley's writing to hold the American Methodist Episcopal Church to account by demonstrating the profound divergence between John Wesley's position and the way in which the American Methodist tradition had developed.

Scott was a powerful critic of slavery and, using Wesley's writings, wrote a series of articles on the subject of immediate abolition in the Conference Newspaper (1835) and gave a powerful public statement against slavery in an address at the General Conference of 1836.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, as the idea of immediate abolition began to influence more and more Methodists, the General Conference refused to change its official position of gradual emancipation – developed in order to appease Methodists in states where slave holding was legal.¹¹² In 1836, in response to calls for the instantaneous abolition of slavery, the 'delegates of the annual conference' in Cincinnati stated themselves to be 'decidedly opposed to modern Abolitionism, and wholly disclaim any right, wish, or intention to interfere in the civil and political relation between master and slave as it exists in the slave states of the union.'¹¹³ The same argument was made again four years later in 1840 at the conference in Baltimore where Charles Elliot stated that 'No Church can assume the power of making laws,' for the 'Church cannot interfere with the political relations of her members',¹¹⁴ Scott rejected this artificial distinction between politics and religion¹¹⁵ and in response to these arguments declared that it is 'always right' for the Church to 'oppose all sin'.¹¹⁶ He maintained that 'immediate emancipation,' is the 'duty of the master, and the right of the slave' and that 'holding the human species as property, is a most flagrant sin, and that no circumstances, political or not, 'can

make it otherwise'.¹¹⁷ However, he was unable to affect the official position of the MEC and Scott left the church. His departure, though, only served to increase calls for the immediate abolition of slavery. By 1844 the Methodist Church split into Northern and Southern branches – the former supporting the abolition of slavery and the latter continuing to support slavery.

Conclusion

In surveying pro- and anti-slavery responses, it is clear that American Methodists struggled to uphold Wesley's position on this matter. While an anti-slavery position was initially published in the Methodist Episcopal Church's discipline, Wesley's theological principles proved difficult to apply in practice as his successors struggled to surmount the concrete reality of slavery within a totally different socio-political context, and the position was modified, even abandoned. Although the institutional church regularly compromised the integrity of Wesley's social vision of Christianity, the idea that Methodism could only flourish by engaging in struggles against societal evils like slavery was regurgitated by African Methodists and others, who recognised themselves as agents of God's transforming power in this world. Wesley observed that the 'beauty of holiness' is that it 'cannot' be hidden;¹¹⁸ and this persisting Wesleyan conviction is inherited by Methodist engagement with the continuing issues of racism and slavery today.¹¹⁹

Notes

1. At this time the concept of predestination and election were exploited in such a way as to convince members of the lower strata of English society that their position was pre-ordained by God. Wesley's declaration that 'all ... may be saved,' Brendlinger, p. 160.
2. Wesley 1782, p. 16; Brendlinger, p. 161.
3. While I concur with Thompson's thesis that Wesley's conception of holiness should not be confused with the *giustizia sociale* of the Jesuit political commentator Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio I believe it is pertinent here to explore the way in which Wesley's understanding of the public manifestation of a holy life challenged the notion that religion and politics should be separate. For further discussion see: Thompson, p. 153.
4. Wesley maintains that to ignore the 'sorrow' and 'miseries' of others, and yet claim that one's 'earnest desire' is for 'universal holiness' is absurd. Wesley 1872, vol. 5, pp. 308–309.
5. Brendlinger, pp. 160–161.

6. Wesley believed it to be 'impossible' for a real Methodist to keep their Christianity private. He rejected the idea that holiness flourishes in separation from the world. Wesley 1872, vol. 5, pp. 294–295, 302.
7. Jackson vol.1, pp. 71–72.
8. While Georgia officially forbade slavery at this time one did not have to go far to witness these atrocities.
9. Wesley 1872, vol. 1, pp. 40, 49, 70, 72.
10. Wesley 1872, vol. 2, pp. 337–338, 354–355, 392.
11. Wesley 1872, vol.2, pp. 433, 464
12. Wesley 1872, vol.4, p. 180.
13. He writes: 'Man stealers—The worst of all thieves, in comparison of whom highwaymen and house breakers are innocent! What then are most traders in negroes, procurers of servants for America, and all who list soldiers by lies, tricks, or enticements.' Wesley 1853, p. 539.
14. Wesley 1872, vol.11, p. 145.
15. Wesley 1872, vol.11, pp. 70–72.
16. Wesley's position was contrary to Whitefield who owned slaves and even petitioned for the State of Georgia to legalise it. Brendlinger, p. 57.
17. For further discussion see: Wesley 1872, vol. 4, p. 184; Brendlinger, pp. 64–71.
18. Wesley 1872, vol.9, pp. 209–210.
19. Wesley 1872, vol.11, p. 62.
20. Wesley 1872, vol.11, p. 65.
21. Wesley 1872, vol.4, pp. 15–16.
22. Wesley 1872, vol.13, p. 497.
23. Wesley 1872, vol.11, p. 117. For example, Richard Price went as far as to argue that: 'A country that is subject to the legislature of another country, in which it has no voice, and over which it has no control, is in slavery. The [United] kingdom has power to make statutes to bind the colonies in all cases whatever! Dreadful power indeed! I defy any one to express slavery in stronger terms.' Price, pp. 19–20.
24. Wesley 1872, vol.11, p. 109.
25. Wesley's fears were rooted in the fact that during the 1770s he had become increasingly aware of the revolutionary spirit spreading across Europe and culminating in France, 1789. For further discussion see: Clark, J, pp. 236–240.
26. These included Richard Boardman, Joseph Pilmore, Thomas Rankin, George Shadford and others.
27. Melton, pp.110–111.
28. Wesley 1872, vol.11, p.87. For further discussion see: Raymond, pp.316–328.
29. Equally embarrassing is Wesley's suggestion that press freedom should be curbed in order to stop the circulation of these ideas. Wesley 1872, vol.11, p.43–44.
30. Clark, E., vol.3, p.62; Lawrence, p.157.
31. Lee, J., pp. 54–60.
32. Matthews 1965, pp. 56–57.
33. Wesley's unswerving obedience to the British crown is unsurprising. During this time these ideas were taught to all students at Oxford University. Wesley himself

- states that he was 'bred' from 'childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance.' Telford, vol.6, p. 156; Gibson, pp. 29, 35–36.
34. Melton, pp. 44–45.
 35. 'Quest. 17. *Does this Conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours? Do we pass our disapprobation on all our friends who keep slaves, and advise their freedom?* Answ. Yes.' Unknown 1840, p. 12.
 36. Initially Asbury considered that 'if the Methodists [did] not ... emancipate their slaves, God [would] depart from them.' Baker, pp. 121–122.
 37. Melton, p. 31; Coke writes that: 'We thought it prudent to suspend the minute concerning slavery, on account of the great opposition that had been given it, our work being in too infantile a state to push things to extremity.' Person, p. 195.
 38. In 1796 individual conferences were authorised to 'make whatever regulations they judge proper' regarding slavery. Unknown 1798, p. 170.
 39. Brendlinger, p. 58; Matthews 1963, p. 615.
 40. A report to the 1804 general conference states that 'When any travelling preacher becomes the owner of a slave, or slaves, by any means, he shall forfeit his ministerial character in our Church, unless he execute, if it be practicable, a legal emancipation of such slaves, conformably to the laws of the state in which he lives.' Unknown 1804, p. 215.
 41. Emory, p. 331.
 42. 'All our preachers shall prudently enforce upon our members the necessity of teaching their slaves to read the word of God; and to allow them time to attend upon the public worship of God.' Emory, p. 332. For further discussion on this shameful transition see: Matlack, p. 36; Matthews 1965, p. 24.
 43. Matthews 1963, p. 627.
 44. Matthews 1963, p. 621.
 45. Matthews 1963, p. 617.
 46. Wightman, pp. 290–293.
 47. Matthews 1965, p. 71.
 48. Pinckney, pp. 4–5, 10–14, 16–18.
 49. Matthews 1965, p. 71.
 50. Matthews 1965, p. 72.
 51. Matthews 1965, pp. 77–78.
 52. Bibb, p. 23.
 53. Coke also engaged in preaching this deplorable gospel: 'I bore a public testimony against slavery, and have found out a method of delivering it without much offence, or at least without causing a tumult: and that is, by first addressing the negroes in a very pathetic manner on the duty of servants to masters; and then the Whites will receive quietly what I have to say to them.' Person, p. 185.
 54. Matthews 1965, pp. 77–78. The powerful effect of this gospel, of obedience to ones master, can be seen in Josiah Henson's, abolitionist and minister (1789–1883), autobiography, in which he narrates how he resisted the chance to free both himself and his master's slaves (who he had been charged to transport to

- Kentucky), because of a promise he had made to his master. The Abolitionist Frederick Douglass (c.1818–1895) also gives us an insight into the psychological effects of this counterfeit gospel. For further discussion see: Henson, pp. 23–24; Douglass 1849, p. 103.
55. Matthews 1965, pp. 79–80.
 56. Matthews 1965, pp. 83–85.
 57. Richey, p. 58.
 58. Thus, even as slavery became illegal in many Northern states, people still believed Blacks to be inferior and maintained restrictive laws designed to segregate Blacks and keep them from integrating into society by preventing them from taking certain jobs and restricting their right to vote. Matthews 1965, pp. 62–63; Melton, pp. 102, 240; Holm, p. 34.
 59. He writes: 'Never yet could I find that a Black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture.' Jefferson, p. 148.
 60. Jefferson, p. 154.
 61. Jefferson, p. 154.
 62. Unknown 1817, p. 6.
 63. Melton, pp. 31–32, 240; Holm, pp. 34, 69.
 64. Melton, pp. 259–260. Daniel Coker (1780–1846), an abolitionist who had been born into slavery in Maryland, also decided to go to Liberia and became an important figure in the church in Sierra Leone. For further discussion see: Gravely 1993, p. 109; Maclin, p. 143.
 65. Holm, p. 19.
 66. Melton, p. 28; Garrettson himself recounts how he preached to 'five hundred Whites, and almost as many Blacks *who stood without*.' Simpson, p. 63.
 67. Matthews 1963, p. 616.
 68. 'Quest. 25. Ought not the assistant to meet the coloured people himself, and appoint as helpers in his absence proper White persons, and not suffer them to stay and meet by themselves? Answ. Yes.' Unknown 1840, vol. 1, p. 12.
 69. Richey, pp. 58–59.
 70. Richey, p. 54; Simpson, p. 243; Garrettson, pp. 21–22.
 71. Garrettson, p. 54; Richey, pp. 58–59.
 72. Wesley 1872, vol.4, p. 184.
 73. Person, p. 152.
 74. Straker, p. 23; Simpson, p. 268.
 75. Coke uses the title 'Mr' for Asbury and brother for a certain (White) Harry Fry. However, he refers to Harry Hosier without any title at all – using the adjectives 'Black' or 'poor Harry.' Person, pp. 191, 255.
 76. Melton, pp. 49–51.
 77. Allen 1833, p. 7; Melton, p. 98.
 78. Gravely 1993, p. 110; Allen 1833, p. 12.
 79. Allen 1833, p. 13.
 80. Allen 1833, pp. 13–15. A similar situation is recounted by Frederick Douglass in his work entitled *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Douglass 1855, pp. 351–354.

81. Straker, p. 18.
82. Hempton, pp. 105–106.
83. In 1800 the conference permitted the ordination of some Black preachers as deacons. However, this rule encountered so much opposition that it was never published and only a handful of Blacks were ordained deacons – none were ordained as elders. In 1812, the historian Jesse Lee recounts how the ordination of a man purported to be a slave provoked scandal in the Church. For further discussion see: Melton, p. 30, 44–45; Lee, L., p. 471.
84. Melton, p. 68.
85. Straker p. 21.
86. Melton, p. 240.
87. Gravely 2009, p. 124.
88. Sanneh, p. 190.
89. Macquiban, pp. 3–4. Wesley's father had been jailed on two separate occasions (for debt) and the families' comprehension of the brutal realities of incarceration during this period are graphically illustrated throughout the Wesley brothers' writings. For example: 'In prison within prison staked he lies, And keepers under keepers tyrannize: With weighty fetters gall'd, the sufferers groan, Or close-screw'd rivets crack the solid bone; Their only bed dank earth, unpaved and bare, Their only covering is the chains they wear: Debarr'd from cheerful morn, and human sight, In lonely, restless, and enduring night; The strongest health unsinew'd by disease, And Famine wasting life by slow degrees.' Wesley, S., p. 1.
90. Sanneh, p. 198.
91. Sanneh, p. 190.
92. Walker, p. 80; Melton, p. 224.
93. Walker, p. 1.
94. Gravely 2009, p. 129.
95. Walker, pp. 14–5.
96. Walker, pp. 58, 64–65. For other prominent critics of Colonisation see: Allen 1831, pp. 103–104; Adams, pp. 93–94.
97. Melton, p. 224
98. Melton, pp. 224–225.
99. William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), who was particularly inspired by Walker's appeal to the Declaration of Independence, founded the *Liberator*; which became an important periodical for the abolitionist movement. Garrison highlighting the racist motivation, the 'master spirit' behind the Colonization scheme, declared the United States to be the 'legitimate home' of 'free people of color.' Melton, p. 226; Garrison, pp. 14–15.
100. Bell, p. xi.
101. Melton, p. 226.
102. Melton, pp. 236–238, 245.
103. Melton, pp. 238, 245.
104. Henson had taught himself to become a Methodist preacher when he was a slave. Henson, pp. 13, 26–27; 35–38, 48; Melton, pp. 212–213.
105. Melton, pp. 239–242.

106. Lowry, p. 6.
107. Douglass 1849, p. 107.
108. Douglass was an active supporter of the suffragist movement, concluding that there was no basis 'in reason or justice' for denying women the vote. Douglass 1881, p. 480.
109. Salley, pp. 60–61; Melton, pp. 204–205.
110. Scott, p. 7.
111. Melton, pp. 227–228.
112. Holm, pp. 41–43.
113. Curtis, p. 115.
114. Elliot, p. 229.
115. The strength of this view is captured in the following citation from Stephen Douglas, who lost to Abraham Lincoln in the 1860 presidential election: 'Abolitionism proposes to destroy the right and extinguish the principle of self-government for which our forefathers waged a seven years' bloody war, and upon which our whole system of free government is founded.' Sheahan, pp. 258–259.
116. He wrote: 'Is the M. E. Church such a "mother of harlots," that to oppose theft [man stealing], robbery and adultery, will endanger her peace and safety? ... No abolitionist wishes the Methodist [Episcopal] Church divided — and if it is not held together by slavery, there is no danger that abolitionism will divide it — and if it is held together by the wages of unrighteousness, no matter how soon it is divided — the sooner the better.' Scott, p. 145.
117. Scott, p. 145.
118. Wesley 1872, vol.5, pp. 294–295.
119. I dedicate this article to Stephen Skuce and Tim Macquiban – agents of God's redemption in my life.

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Assimilation, Accommodation and Appropriation: Three attitudes to truth in science and religion

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This article addresses the relationship between experience and belief, focusing on the role of science in the debate between secular Humanism and Christianity. It suggests that the possibility of appropriating experience to belief – taking action to bring experience into line with belief – distinguishes spiritual belief from systematic belief (in which the object is independent of beliefs about it); but that the boundary between these two forms of belief is itself a matter of (metaphysical) belief. Understanding science and religion, Humanism and Christianity in relationship to systematic and spiritual belief-structures helps to bring clarity to the debate.

SCIENCE • RELIGION • HUMANISM • EXPERIENCE • BELIEF

Introduction

What should we do when our experience contradicts our beliefs? For John Wesley it was attentiveness to his experience that led him to change beliefs he had inherited about cherished Christian practices – for example, beliefs about instantaneous justification, field preaching and lay preachers.¹ For this reason, experience has become for Methodists a fundamental source of theology alongside Scripture, reason and tradition.² Yet Wesley's experiences of working for the spiritual and material benefit of the poor did not change his political beliefs concerning the status of the working classes.³ Neither did the accumulated evidence of conflict with the Established Church alter his belief that his Societies should remain within its fold.⁴

Like Wesley we are constantly faced with questions about when we should adapt our beliefs to our experiences, when we are justified in ignoring experiences that contradict our beliefs, and when we feel called to change the world as we experience it in order to shape it to our beliefs. These issues are central to human existence, and central to an understanding of faith. Yet they have become obscured by acrimonious debate between Christians and secular Humanists, which often focuses on the role played by the discipline of science. In this article I will look behind the debate about science and religion, and focus on the relationship between our understanding of the world as we experience it, the world as we interpret it to be and the world as we dream that it could be.

Science and Religion

In the ongoing debate between Christianity and secular Humanism, the role played by science remains central.⁵ For many commentators the willingness of scientists to change what they believe in response to evidence is what distinguishes science from religion as a form of knowledge. The philosopher Stephen Law, for example, highlights the way in which scientists seek confirmation for the theory of evolution by making predictions that might be proved wrong.⁶ He contrasts this willingness to accommodate belief to the evidence of experience with the way in which Young Earth Creationists seek evidence to fit their beliefs about the creation of the world. Law argues that by avoiding contradictory evidence, religion protects its beliefs from rational scrutiny.⁷ Jacqueline Watson makes a similar distinction between scientific and religious beliefs, but suggests that the two disciplines have different roles. She considers the legitimacy of religious truths to reside in our unwillingness to

accommodate them to experience. It is this certainty that distinguishes them from scientific truths 'precisely because it [science] does not (or should not) admit such certainty'.⁸

Elaine Ecklund and Elizabeth Long interviewed 275 American natural and social scientists, and found that many distinguished between religion and science as ways of knowing on the basis of how evidence related to belief. They also found a distinction between attitudes towards religion and towards spirituality. Among the 26% of the scientists who professed some form of spirituality, there was a congruence between their understanding of spirituality and that of science. Like science, spirituality was regarded as a search for truth 'that can never be final', suggesting that spiritual beliefs are subject to change in the light of experience in the same way that scientific beliefs are.⁹ Indeed, Martin Walton, wrestling with the vexed question of how to define spirituality, characterises it as 'a receptivity in which the experience of otherness and a transformation of the self play a significant role'.¹⁰ This reflects a long history of Christian spirituality in which openness to experiencing the otherness of God, through prayer and through the reading of the Bible, challenges and changes established belief.¹¹

It is apparent that both science and religion encounter situations where belief is contradicted by experience. That both science and religion are capable of responding, at least in some circumstances, by changing the belief suggests that a willingness to accommodate belief to experience is not the criterion that distinguishes these two disciplines.¹² In an attempt to clarify this distinction, and thus to refine this aspect of the debate between Christianity and secular Humanism, I will first consider the role of accommodation within the natural and the human sciences in more detail. I will go on to examine two further attitudes towards the truth of belief – assimilation and appropriation – and suggest that it is the possibility of appropriating experience to belief that distinguishes the human sciences (including religion) from the natural sciences. This analysis leads to a distinction between systematic belief (the object of which is independent of the belief) and spiritual belief (where the object itself is partially constructed by the belief). I will conclude that both Christianity and Humanism are examples of spiritual belief, and that the debate between them can be clarified by focusing on structures of thought rather than on the disciplines and institutions of science and religion.

Three possible objections to this enterprise are worth considering at the outset. First, some would argue that religion and science should not be compared as

forms of knowledge,¹³ and others would contest that any comparison should certainly not be reduced to a question of belief.¹⁴ Second, it might be objected that to talk of 'science' and (especially) 'religion' is to overgeneralise what is essentially a localised debate between some scientists and some Christians.¹⁵ Both of these objections offer a valid challenge to the terms of debate between Humanism and Christianity, and my conclusion will go some way towards addressing them. Nevertheless, having located this discussion within the Humanist-Christian debate, I will continue to use (albeit on sufferance) the terms in which that debate has been expressed by prominent Humanist and Christian writers.

A third initial objection might be that to talk of science in terms of belief is unduly pejorative, and skews the argument in favour of religion from the outset. Science is about knowledge, the argument might go; religion is about belief. However, the question at hand is precisely what it is about science that underwrites its ability to produce knowledge. If a belief is regarded simply as a mental attitude which 'takes a stance' that a proposition correctly represents 'how things stand in the world',¹⁶ then the same challenge can be put to both science and religion: what do you do when the stance you have taken comes into conflict with the evidence of experience? This is the challenge that I shall attempt to address.

Accommodating Beliefs to Experience

Karl Popper argued that if a belief was to be considered to be a statement about empirical reality, it must be capable of being shown to be false by experiential evidence.¹⁷ In this view, if a belief is not rejected in the face of contradictory experience, the belief ceases to be empirically based. Moreover, Popper claimed the possibility of falsifying a belief as a demarcation criterion for science.¹⁸ Whereas scientific observations could refute a belief if they provided contrary evidence, if such evidence did not result in a change of belief it amounted to no more than an 'interpretation' of the observations in light of the belief.¹⁹ Popper regarded some disciplines to be inherently unscientific because of the nature of their object. In particular, the historical sciences were of necessity interpretative because 'history is characterized by interest in actual, singular, or specific events, rather than in laws or generalization'.²⁰

Hans Georg Gadamer recognised that the human sciences lie outside the methodology of natural science and that their task is one of interpretation.

Nevertheless, his approach to interpretation²¹ incorporated Popper's logic of falsification (albeit not by that name. I will use Piaget's term, *accommodation* to avoid confusion).²² Gadamer recognised that unless the singular 'texts' of art and history could speak independently of our beliefs about them, the interpretation of human artefacts would do no more than reflect back our presuppositions.²³ He introduced accommodation to the study of singular historical or artistic artefacts by means of the 'logic of the question'.

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers.²⁴

In empirical science, according to Popper, the possibility of accommodation (falsification) arises from the possibility that experience will reveal the world to be different from how it is believed to be. In the human sciences, according to Gadamer, the possibility of accommodation arises from understanding how a unique artefact might have been other than it is. Only by re-imagining other possible answers to a question – answers that the artefact excludes – does it become possible for the inquirer to see past the horizon of their own presuppositions. 'To encounter another person's horizon through dialogue is to allow our own horizon to be potentially changed.'²⁵ For the human sciences, according to Gadamer, accommodation is thus made possible by the attitude of the inquirer towards the text.

Philosophers subsequent to Popper have come to the conclusion that for science, too, accommodation has more to do with the attitude of the scientist than the nature of the discipline. This is because even hypotheses that are expressed in such a way that they can be falsified still rely upon auxiliary hypotheses to test them. For example, the hypothesis 'all swans are white' is falsifiable, but relies upon the auxiliary hypothesis 'this bird is a swan' in order to test it. The apparent discovery of a black swan might signal an error in either of the two hypotheses, making it impossible to know whether it is the belief about swans or the belief about the particular bird that is wrong.²⁶ This leads Alex Rosenberg to conclude:

Popper's claim about falsifiability may be best treated as a description of the attitudes of scientists towards their hypotheses,

and/or a prescriptive claim about what the attitudes of good scientists should be, instead of a claim about statements or propositions independent of attitudes towards testing.²⁷

It would seem that in both the natural and the human sciences, the possibility of showing a belief to be inconsistent with experience relies upon the attitude of the person holding the belief rather than any characteristic of the belief itself. A belief that is held with an attitude that is open to accommodation can be described as *experiential* because it holds open the possibility of changing the belief in response to the evidence of experience. Its claim to truth rests in the possibility of representing how things stand in the world independently of the presuppositions of the observer. Thus, spiritual beliefs that are open to otherness, historical beliefs that respond to Gadamer's logic of the question and scientific beliefs that admit the possibility of refutation, can all be described as experiential and all claim to be true representations of their object.

Assimilating Experiences to Belief

What if an inquirer's attitude leads them to retain a belief despite apparently contradictory evidence and thus protect the belief from the possibility of change? Popper would describe this as an *interpretation* of experience, but given Gadamer's use of this word, I will again borrow from Piaget and refer to the *assimilation* of an experience to the belief.²⁸ Is there a legitimate role for beliefs that lead us to assimilate our experience rather than to challenge our beliefs? Or do these beliefs simply sidestep critique in the manner described by Stephen Law as forming an 'intellectual black hole'?²⁹ To answer this question, I will first consider whether there is a legitimate role for assimilation within the natural sciences, and then consider it in relation to the human sciences.

That assimilation does have a role to play in the natural sciences is most simply illustrated by the way scientists use a 'line of best fit'. Data plotted on a graph is construed to lie on a straight line or a curve with a standard mathematical formula, allowing the data to be described and manipulated even though they represent no more than an approximation to an assumed theoretical model. Thomas Kuhn argued that such approximations and anomalies are part of what he describes as 'normal science'. Unlike Popper, he maintained that, historically, most scientific activity has not sought to falsify hypotheses, but rather to

extend the range of facts that could be interpreted by means of a prevailing paradigm.³⁰ Among these facts 'there are always some discrepancies. Even the most stubborn ones usually respond at last to normal practice.'³¹ These contradictory experiences are *assimilated* to the beliefs of normal practice. In Stephen Law's terms, science protects these beliefs from rational scrutiny.

The benefit to scientists of assimilating unexpected data as anomalies within a stable body of belief, rather than as refutations of a belief is, precisely, stability. It means that scientists know what they are looking for and what equipment they need in order to find appropriate data. It enables them to distinguish relevant data from other readings due to observational error, equipment malfunction or imperfect experimental design. It provides continuity in a programme of work that supports investment in institutions and equipment.³² The assimilation of data to accepted beliefs does not insulate scientific beliefs entirely from change. Kuhn identifies periodic shifts of paradigm in which an attitude of assimilation is replaced by one of accommodation. This involves a shift to a new paradigm, which is often adopted by one section of the scientific community to start with.³³ However, these moments of accommodation are made possible by the intervening periods of stability in which observations acquire meaning in relation to the prevailing body of belief.

For Gadamer, too, an attitude of accommodation presupposes one of assimilation. The fusion of horizons with a text (artistic or historical) which might disclose alternative answers to a question is the result of a conversation with the text in which the interpreter remains open to revising their presuppositions. However, the starting point for such a conversation could only be the concepts and assumptions brought to the text by the interpreter from their particular situation in the world. For Gadamer, we are always participants, and not observers in the world.³⁴ Therefore interpretation can only start from, and is meaningless without, the assimilation of a text by the interpreter. 'To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that a text's meaning can really be made to speak for us.'³⁵ To be sure, understanding that does not proceed beyond the initial assimilation of a text to the interpreter's beliefs will remain constrained by those beliefs; but without the initial process of construal, no meaning will arise from the encounter between a person and a text.

Assimilation involves the recognition of the familiar, in which the evidence of experience is construed to signify something that is already believed to be true.³⁶ Such a belief can be described as *symbolic* in the same way that a

metaphor is symbolic. Aspects of one thing are taken to stand for aspects of another, so that the object 'becomes semantically charged with secondary meanings'.³⁷ However, metaphors are 'typically literally false'.³⁸ They derive symbolic truth, not from the accuracy with which they represent experience, but from the truthfulness or integrity with which they are applied and from their consistency with other metaphors. Moreover, metaphorical meaning is ambiguous, both internally because it does not specify precisely how we relate our belief to our experience, and externally in that it is not always apparent what is a metaphor and what is not.³⁹

In summary, like accommodation, assimilation plays a role in both the natural and human sciences that is not only legitimate, but essential. The process of assimilation makes our experience meaningful *for us* by relating it to the familiarity of prior beliefs, but also enriches our understanding by creating metaphorical meaning. Assimilation thus gives rise to *symbolic* truth, established by consistency within a network of beliefs. Without adopting this attitude in relation to some elements of our experience for some of the time there would be no foundation from which to support an attitude of accommodation towards other aspects of experience.

The Attitude of Appropriation

That both the natural and human sciences rely on an attitude of assimilation as well as accommodation has led some theorists to regard natural science as 'a wholly social product, a mere set of *conventions* generated by social practice'.⁴⁰ This, in turn, has prompted natural scientists to reassert the objectivity of scientific belief. For example, Keith Ashman writes:

I see no way of escaping the rather fundamental observation that the Earth travels around the Sun. I am also convinced that if every sentient being on Earth believed that the Earth was stationary and at the center of the universe this would not make it so.⁴¹

Ashman is arguing that the earth orbits the sun independently of our beliefs. No amount of believing will change the facts. However, the situation would be different in the case of an object that was made by humans – an artefact. Consider music, for example. If every sentient being believed that music was tonal, that is, based on the relationship between the first and fifth notes of a diatonic scale – as they did in Western Europe from approximately the

eighteenth until the early twentieth century – then that is what music would be. However, had Arnold Schoenberg succeeded in persuading every sentient being that music was, instead, based on ‘twelve tones which are related only with one another’⁴² music would in fact consist precisely of this. Equally, had every sentient being agreed with John Cage that ‘the music I prefer, even to my own or anybody else’s, is what we are hearing if we are just quiet’⁴³ then this is what music would have become. This is not a question of what is regarded as good music or bad music, for there are good and bad examples of both tonal and twelve-tone compositions. It is a question of what music actually *is*, hence, the critical responses to Schoenberg’s twelve-tone music as ‘a kind of engineering’⁴⁴ (rather than music) and to Cage’s 4’33” as a hoax or a joke or a thought experiment, but not music.⁴⁵ As it happens, neither Schoenberg nor Cage succeeded in redefining music entirely, but they did expand its definition beyond tonal music. Unlike the reality of the earth orbiting the sun, the reality of music has changed as a result of what people believe. We could say that experience has been *appropriated* to the belief.

Isaac Levi describes appropriation as ‘choosing true’.⁴⁶ He gives the example of an individual deciding whether to go to a Woody Allen movie or a Michael Roehmer movie. In deciding between two possible propositions, and in choosing the latter, the individual makes this proposition true.⁴⁷

The same might be said in relation to an example Richard Norman uses to illustrate how failing to adapt a belief to contrary experience can result in self-deception. Norman contrasts two cases.

- a) S acts as though p were true and thereby comes to believe p, where this is a case of self-deception or unthinking habit, inducing a belief which remains ungrounded.
- b) S acts as though p were true and thereby comes to see what it is that makes p true.⁴⁸

Norman argues that if we are going to base our actions on a belief as if it were true, even though we cannot be sure at the outset that it *is* true, we need to have some reason for thinking that we are in situation b) rather than a). However, the option of appropriation, Levi’s ‘choosing true’, adds a third possibility that Norman does not consider:

- c) S acts as though p were true, and thereby comes to make p true.

This describes, for example, what happened when the slave trade was abolished in Britain in the nineteenth century. When William Wilberforce spoke, in 1789, of men who were 'converted into goods' and 'subject to ravage just as goods are',⁴⁹ he was expressing a belief that slaves from Africa were human (rather than mere goods) and should not be treated in this way. His belief was in conflict with his experience; but he did not accommodate his belief to his experience of how African slaves were treated. Neither did he assimilate the experience to his belief, to maintain (as some did) that the slaves were treated humanely 'after the manner of their country'.⁵⁰ Rather, he maintained his belief in the humanity of the slaves *despite* his experience to the contrary, and set out to change the experience so that it became consistent with his belief. Wilberforce acted as though his belief in the humanity of the slaves was true, and thereby came to make it true. He *appropriated* his experience to his belief.

The potential for human agency to change history has been manifest as a fault line in the human sciences. How can society be studied scientifically, as if it were nature, when belief cannot change the physical reality of the earth's orbit around the sun but has changed the social reality of slavery? According to Jürgen Habermas, this was the problem with Gadamer's hermeneutics: he 'failed to provide a way to interject critical-rational change into our worldviews and traditions'.⁵¹ Drawing on the critical tradition of Marx and Nietzsche, Habermas argues that our beliefs about how the world *is* are shaped by our expectations of how we want the world *to be*: 'The horizon open to the future, which is determined by expectations in the present, guides our access to the past'.⁵² With an orientation to the future, we 'appropriate past experiences',⁵³ in order to reinterpret and reshape tradition. Habermas thus identifies a normative dimension of truth alongside the objective truth of a speech-act (its correspondence with facts) and its truthfulness (relating to the integrity of meaning for the speaker).⁵⁴ A belief can thus be *normatively* true in relation to an attitude of appropriation, just as it can be *experientially* true in relation to an attitude of accommodation or *symbolically* true in relation to an attitude of assimilation.

Appropriation and Non-overlapping *Magisteria*

That the spheres of natural and cultural sciences might be demarcated, not by an attitude of accommodation (as Popper suggested) but by one of appropriation, is comparable with the argument by Stephen Gould that science

and religion are two equal but non-overlapping *magesteria* (NOMA). Gould's view was that science 'tries to document the factual character of the natural world', whereas religion is concerned with 'human purposes, meanings and values'.⁵⁵

The foregoing discussion of belief highlights two problems with NOMA. First, the two *magesteria* distinguished by Gould's criteria are not those of science and religion so much as the natural and the human sciences. Indeed, Gould observes that a concern with an 'ethical "ought", rather than a search for any factual "is"' has been the concern of disciplines 'traditionally grouped under the humanities – much of philosophy, and part of literature and history, for example'.⁵⁶ In his concern to distinguish scientific and religious beliefs, Gould reduces the humanities to religion as 'the central discourse of this *magisterium*'.⁵⁷ Focusing on the relationship between belief and experience, as we have done above, reverses this relationship: religion belongs to the wider family of the humanities because it shares with them the possibility of shaping its object by appropriating experience to belief.

The second problem is more fundamental, and raises the question of whether it is possible to distinguish neatly between objects that are shaped by human belief and action and those objects which are not. Richard Dawkins criticises NOMA on the basis that it doesn't reflect the reality of religion. He suggests that religion (specifically Christianity) does not restrict itself to values, but also makes factual claims about the world – for example about miracles and about creation.⁵⁸ Dawkins is right to observe that such claims break down the distinction between a natural world and a cultural world. If the physical world is God's creation, and if God can intervene in creation in ways that are capable of being influenced by prayer, then the agency of God extends the sphere of culture into that of nature. Belief in God offers – for at least some believers – the possibility that nature does not stand independently outside belief, but can be appropriated to it.

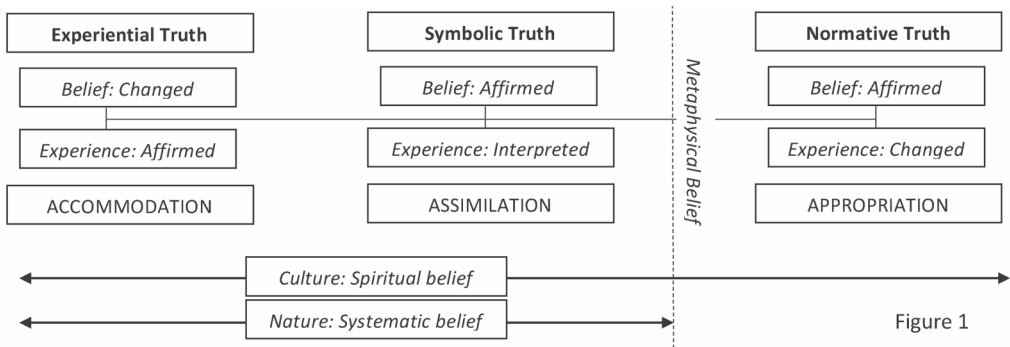
Conversely, Howard Kaye observes that, although the neat separation of *magisteria* might work well for physics and mathematics, scientific disciplines such as evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology and neurobiology 'blur the boundaries' between fact and value.⁵⁹ In these disciplines, processes which humans might fondly believe to be matters of culture and choice are revealed to be grounded in natural systems. Kaye argues that science is not confined to the implacable world of nature, but seeks to reveal to us 'who we are, why we are here, and how we are to live'.⁶⁰

Thus, whereas some religious believers seek to shrink the domain of nature that is independent of belief, some scientists seek to expand this domain. Gould acknowledges that the delineation of legitimate domains can be 'complex and difficult'.⁶¹

If we are to accept the impact of the first problem, that science is differentiated from the humanities (not religion) by the role played by belief in the formation of their object, then the second problem identifies another significant feature of these two *magisteria*. It suggests that the question of whether an object belongs to the sphere of nature, and is, therefore, separated from belief (like the earth orbiting the sun), or whether it belongs to the sphere of culture, and is, therefore, shaped by belief (like the music of John Cage), is itself a matter of belief. In other words, although there is a clearly-defined criterion as to whether an object is natural or cultural, where the demarcation line runs is a question of belief. If the beliefs we hold about an object are *physical* beliefs, then our beliefs about the extent to which the object is itself formed by our belief can appropriately be described as *metaphysical*.

There may be a high degree of consensus about metaphysical belief in relation to some objects. For example, it is likely that most people believe that they are unable to influence the orbit of the earth around the sun. It is equally likely that most people believe that music is formed through cultural choices rather than natural forces. However, for many other objects – perhaps even the majority of objects that concern most people for most of the time – the distinction between those things we can control and those we can't is far less obvious. At the centre of the debate about climate change, for example, has been the question of whether observable changes in our environment are the result of human action or of long-term, natural climactic processes.⁶² If we believe – with the scientific consensus – that climate is an object capable of influence by human action, then we can take action to appropriate it to our beliefs about how it should be.⁶³ If we believe climate to be a natural phenomenon that is independent of our actions, then we will not think it possible to influence the future of the climate in accordance with what we might believe (and hope) it should be. Our physical beliefs about how to act towards the environment are shaped by our metaphysical beliefs about what constitutes the environment as an object.

Systematic and Spiritual Beliefs



experience. These tensions are mediated by the practices of a discipline and the structure of doxastic commitments to which a belief belongs.⁶⁴ Thomas Kühn has argued that it takes an accumulation of circumstances to overcome a prevailing attitude of assimilation, so that a body of beliefs is adjusted to accommodate divergent experience.⁶⁵

There is greater tension within spiritual beliefs because, in addition to questions about whether to retain a belief or accommodate it to experience, it may not be at all apparent when an attitude of appropriation should prevail in order to change a given set of circumstances. Again, beliefs do not occur in isolation; and attitudes towards the affirmation or change of experience and belief will depend in part on the stability of a network of beliefs and experiences. Practices have also developed in order to mediate between attitudes. In politics, for example, democratic elections perform this function by allowing the majority to influence which beliefs will become normative for society. In religion, prayer can be understood as a practice that mediates between the appropriation of the future to what is longed-for, and the transformation of the self to accommodate the reality of the present. This practice of mediation is expressed most succinctly in the words, 'thy will be done.'⁶⁶

Conclusion

Distinguishing between systematic and spiritual beliefs rather than between science and religion has several important consequences. I shall conclude by drawing attention to these consequences in light of the debate between Stephen Law and the Young Earth Creationists with which I began.

First, focusing on the structures of belief rather than the respective disciplines and institutions of science and religion helps to clarify the issues by disentangling them from the politics of the debate. Ken Ham, in defending Young Earth Creationism, acknowledges that it is not scientific; indeed, it is anti-scientific. Ham rejects criticisms such as Law's – that his beliefs about creation are insulated from empirical falsification – because he rejects empirical grounds of belief in favour of biblical revelation.⁶⁷ This constitutes a metaphysical belief that all of creation is controlled by an omnipotent, supernatural God, with the effect of making all belief spiritual and non-systematic. If God controls everything in creation, then God can appropriate all experience to his will. In turn, humanity can petition God to exercise his will in a particular way, so that, through prayer, the sphere of culture is expanded

to encompass all of nature, subject to the will of God. This is not the occasion to argue the merits or otherwise of this position. What is relevant here is that Ham's position does not constitute a dividing line between religion and science, but rather is symptomatic of the metaphysical distinction between nature and culture, which has been a longstanding feature in both scientific and religious debate. For example, the debate in early Methodism between Calvinists such as George Whitefield and John Wesley's Arminianism was precisely to do with the agency of humanity and where its boundary lies, albeit expressed in the language of salvation.⁶⁸ This is a metaphysical debate that is shared by science and religion; not one that divides them.

Second, focusing on structures of belief helps to clarify the role that the discipline of science plays within both Humanist and Christian thinking. Responding to accusations of 'scientism' by religious writers attempting to limit the scope of science, Law cautiously acknowledges the logical gap identified by Hume between what empirically *is* the case, and what *ought* to be the case: 'science alone is incapable of justifying any moral position.'⁶⁹ Humanism may draw on science to provide evidence to support a course of action, and so does Christianity – in the theology of climate change, for example.⁷⁰ Yet, in doing so, both are engaging with spiritual structures of thought that balance claims to normative truth with claims to experiential and symbolic truth. Humanists and Christians should not be distinguished by their respective allegiance to science or religion, nor even to systematic and spiritual structures of thought. Rather, their differences (and similarities) need to be understood as two different forms of spiritual thinking.

Finally, by grounding the debate between science and religion in the structures of thought that they share and in the practices that inform the formation of attitudes towards belief, it becomes possible to focus more clearly on what is at stake in the contemporary debate between secular Humanism and Christianity. This is not primarily a debate about academic disciplines, but about how life is to be lived. Insofar as it is concerned with belief, this is a debate about the metaphysics of human agency; and it is a debate about when experience or belief should prevail over the other. However, it is also a debate about the practices involved in the formation of the attitudes which regulate belief; and it is a debate about the language in which these beliefs, attitudes and practices are expressed. Living involves (amongst other things) knowing when to interpret the world in the light of our existing beliefs and when to change those beliefs to reflect our experience. It involves knowing when to adapt our beliefs to a situation over which we have no control and when to take action to change

the situation so that it conforms more closely to what we believe is true. We do not form this knowledge in isolation, but alongside others, aligning ourselves with groups of people and established forms of thinking – some of which we call ‘Christian’ or ‘Humanist’.

Yet this discussion has also made clear the extent to which it is inescapably ambiguous to speak of what ‘is’ a Humanist or a Christian. These creatures are human constructs – objects of spiritual belief – and, therefore, combine experiential, symbolic and normative truths. Any discussion of Humanism and Christianity will, therefore, be animated by negotiation about what these terms mean, about how they are in fact manifest as phenomena, and about what they should become. We can, however, bring some clarity to the debate by disentangling these approaches to living from the institutions of science and religion with which they have been historically enmeshed. And in bringing clarity, we can negotiate more adroitly the pathway from a shared understanding of the world as it is to a shared vision of the future.

Notes

1. For discussions of Wesley’s empiricism, see Heizenrater, p. 81; Tomkins, p. 61; Wellings, p.58.
2. For a discussion of the role of experience in Methodism, see Marsh.
3. See Marquardt.
4. See English.
5. See, for example, Williams and Tallis.
6. Law 2011a, Chapter 2.
7. Law 2011b, p. 1.
8. Watson, J., p. 315.
9. Ecklund and Long.
10. Watson, M., p. 8.
11. For example, see Thompson and Williams, Chapter1.
12. *pace* Law and Watson.
13. For example, Armstrong, p. xv.
14. For example, Smith.
15. See for example, Asad, p. 47.
16. Sayre, p. 35.
17. Popper 2005, p. 21.
18. Popper 2005, p. 17.
19. Popper 1989, p. 38, fn. 3.
20. Popper 1986, p. 143.
21. Gadamer, p. xx.

22. Piaget, p. 6.
23. Porter and Robinson, pp. 78–79.
24. Gadamer, p. 363.
25. Porter and Robinson, p. 94.
26. This argument is drawn from Rosenberg, pp. 202–204.
27. Rosenberg, p. 208.
28. Piaget, p. 6.
29. Law 2011a, p. 10.
30. Kuhn, p. 24.
31. Kuhn, p. 81.
32. Kuhn, Chapter VI.
33. Kuhn, p. 78.
34. Porter and Robinson, p. 78.
35. Gadamer, p. 389.
36. Piaget, p. 187.
37. Piaget, p. 187.
38. Grey.
39. Aaron, p. 1.
40. Gross and Levitt, p. 11.
41. Ashman, p. 114.
42. Schoenberg 1975a, p. 218.
43. Kostelanetz, p. 12.
44. Schoenberg 1975b, p. 139.
45. Gann, p. 11.
46. Levi, p. 115.
47. Levi, p. 115.
48. Norman, p. 108.
49. Wilberforce, ¶1.
50. Wilberforce, ¶6.
51. Porter and Robinson, p. 151.
52. Habermas, p. 13.
53. Habermas, p. 13.
54. See Niemi.
55. Gould 1999, p. 4.
56. Gould 1999, p. 56.
57. Gould 1999, p. 57.
58. Dawkins, p. 85.
59. Kaye 2008, p. 153.
60. Kaye 2017, p. 2.
61. See Gould 1997.
62. See Berliner.
63. See IPCC 2013.
64. Levi, p. 8.
65. Kuhn, p. 145.

66. Phillips, p. 122.
67. See Ham.
68. So, 'The main threat of the Calvinist view, as the Wesleyans saw it, was antinomianism,' Heitzenrater, p. 247.
69. Law 2017, p. 123.
70. See Pope Francis, ¶141.

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Covenant and Kin

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The text of this article was preached on 15 August, 2018 at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, as the sermon for the Covenant Service at the fourteenth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. Dr Cape invites reflection on the painting The Golden Crucifixion by Norman Adams, a couplet from W. H. Auden's poem As I walked out one evening, and the biblical text John 15:5. The text of the sermon is published here as delivered.

COVENANT • SERMON • JOHN 15:5 • KIN • NORMAN ADAMS

O stand, stand at the window, as the tears scald and start.
You shall love your crooked neighbour with your crooked heart.

W. H. Auden¹



(*The Golden Crucifixion*, Norman Adams (1993), reproduced with permission)

Friends, take a moment and sit with the painting *The Golden Crucifixion* by Norman Adams. I like it because I have to work at it. It takes a while to see. Christ is centre: fully becoming, being resurrected by God, metamorphosed. On either side, incomplete, still becoming, are we thieves. We grieving women, with outstretched hands, mourning our loss, will not understand what we are seeing for three days. We who nailed him to the cross, not knowing what we do, are in the right-hand corner. We see nothing and are oblivious to the miracle.

When you put yourself in this picture, there are things that follow. While it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, it is also a fearful thing not so to do. We are here to remind ourselves and each other that we have chosen this picture as our defining story because we have said 'yes'; 'yes' to God in Christ, 'yes' to being metamorphosed. God has set our feet on a path of crucifixion and resurrection, sacrifice and blessing, a path of reordering everything, reordering us and our relationships with each other. We forget this, which is why we need to renew our covenant first with God and then with each other.

My father-in-law, John, was born and reared in Seguin, a small town in South Texas. His mother died in childbirth – giving birth to him. His father worked in Austin and spent most of his time there, which meant that John was reared by his two maiden aunts. John recalled that when he was a teenager and on his way out of the house to go on a date, he would walk by his aunts who were sitting at the kitchen table – shelling pecans or black-eyed peas – and before the screen door shut behind him, Aunt Bess would say: ‘John, remember who you are kin to’.

This painting reminds us that one of the things we are doing in this Covenant Service is remembering to whom we are kin – past and present. We remember we are kin to John and Charles Wesley, who came here to Christ College, Oxford. They were poor preacher’s kids, on scholarship, and had to walk to school. Their father managed what little money they had so poorly that he was thrown into debtors’ prison. So it was not surprising that the Holy Club – John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield – not only met to read Scripture but also visited the prisons and the poor.

John and Charles were ordained here in Christ Church Cathedral. The marker commemorating their ordination is here. As we remember we are kin to the Wesleys, we renew our covenant together, rededicating ourselves to God and to the service of God’s people. I will spare us a complete review of covenant history but will simply remind us that God is the only one who ever kept covenant perfectly. We celebrate today the New Covenant in Christ, which embraces all that went before and now stands as God’s final offer of a fully mutual relationship with his human family: ‘I am the vine; you are the branches’. All covenants come from God’s initiative, from God’s stubborn insistence on bringing us into faithful, obedient relationship, so that we can be happy and so that God can delight in our happiness:

I am your God, and I will be your provident, gracious Lord, Sustainer, and Deliverer *if* you will cast your dependence upon my Providence and live up to my rightful expectations of you (which do not exceed your created powers and potential). I will lay no demands upon you that are beyond your capacities to respond – and in your responding, you will find your self-fulfillment as a gift.

It is not our part of covenant-making to bargain with God, but rather to acknowledge God as God, to trust God’s grace as we see it revealed and made human in Jesus Christ, to confess our inability to free ourselves from our human

bondage to appetites and selfishness, and to dedicate ourselves to that rule of righteousness that God expects of us.

What brings us together in this covenant-making service? We come together to remember, to renew, and to make a fresh beginning, claiming freedom from the fear of death, freedom from the guilt of sin, and freedom from the prison of our self-centredness. 'I am the vine, you are the branches.'

One of my favourite images of the ways our covenant with God changes our relationship with one another is from Abba Dorotheus of Gaza, who lived in the 6th century AD. He wrote:

Imagine that the world is a circle, that God is the centre, and that the radii are the different ways human beings live. When those who wish to come closer to God walk towards the centre of the circle, they come closer to one another at the same time as to God. The closer they come to God, the closer they come to one another. And the closer they come to one another, the closer they come to God.²

What we are doing here today is drawing closer to God and drawing closer to one another.

Remembering Norman Adams' painting and remembering to whom we are kin holds us accountable to Christ and to each other: 'You shall love your crooked neighbour with your crooked heart'. Remembering to whom we are kin not only involves the past, but also includes the present.

Let me tell you about a meal I remember every time I celebrate the Eucharist. In 2001, the October after 9/11, I went to South Africa and Mozambique as staff for The Upper Room, a daily devotional guide. We went to start the African Portuguese version of the magazine. We travelled north from Maputo up the Mozambican coast on the one paved road, visiting churches and asking people to share their stories of God. As we rode for several hours, I noticed what I thought was orange construction tape that kept going and going, for miles and miles. After hours of this, I realised there was no construction, so I asked the driver, 'What's going on with the orange tape?' And he said, 'Oh, that orange tape is there to show that there are still land mines out in the fields from our civil war'. Many of those land mines are still there. And due to a recent devastating flood, most of the cattle and wildlife had drowned. Between the war and the flood, survivors either had to fly, climb trees, or run pretty fast.

When we arrived at the church, we were met by forty people, singing and clapping as they welcomed us. Their singing sounded like God's own choir. In our meeting we told the people that we were there to hear their stories of God, and that we wanted to share their stories with others as a witness to their faith. They were delighted, and one man said,

We are so happy to share our stories of God; we have many stories to tell. We have had war, we have had flood and sickness and famine, and we have many stories to tell of how good God has been to us.

Then they prepared lunch for the four of us plus the District Superintendent and his wife, the pastor and his wife, and the lay leader. There were nine of us. They brought out platters of roast chicken cut in half and fried potatoes. I counted the pieces of chicken; there were five whole chickens, cut in half – ten pieces of chicken in all. The pastor reached out and grabbed a half chicken. He tore it apart and said, 'We eat Mozambican style'. So I grabbed my chicken and started eating. I noticed as I looked around at the congregation that the men were sitting on benches, while the women sat on the dirt floor, and other women were serving the people from wooden bowls, spooning out rice over which they poured a little chicken juice. It got harder to chew. There was one half chicken left, and the pastor took it and passed it down for the people to share. I realised, as I ate my chicken, that this was no store bought chicken. The chicken's leg was long, and this chicken had run for its life a long time. I pictured the United Methodist women gathering that morning to decide whose chicken would be lunch. This five-chicken dinner was a sacramental act; this five-chicken dinner was a sacrifice. It was clear, at that moment, that Christ was the host. Christ was the honoured one. It was for Christ they gave their best, their all. It is at table with Christ as host that God is pleased.

Albert Outler once asked: 'What does your learning contribute to the sum of human wisdom, human joy, human happiness, dignity and fulfillment?' What is your offering? What would be your equivalent offering to the five-chicken dinner? What are we, who have much, willing to offer Christ?

'O stand, stand at the window as the tears scald and start. You shall love your crooked neighbour with your crooked heart.' Will we love our crooked neighbour with our crooked heart? Would that be our equivalent sacrifice?

As we remember to whom we are kin, past and present, may we be renewed. God only knows whom God might call us to claim as kin in the future.

Notes

1. W.H. Auden, *As I walked out one evening*, 1937.
2. Dorotheus of Gaza, Instructions VI.



What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us?

On the Trinity

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John Wesley's sermon, 'On the Trinity' was first preached in Cork on 8th May 1775, on the text 1 John 5:7, 'For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one' (KJV). As part of the series entitled 'What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us?', this article explores how John Wesley's sermon gives some 'wriggle-room' in understanding the intricacies of the classic fourth- and fifth-century trinitarian formulation today. The sermon – and this article – claims Christian experience as the necessary 'proof' of the biblical claim that God is 'Father, Son and Spirit', rather than relying (or insisting) upon philosophical argumentation.

TRINITY • WESLEY'S SERMONS • METHODIST CATECHISM • TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Why this Sermon?

I delight in this sermon because it sets me free to relax into my biblical faith, to belong to the Methodist Church and to be a preacher and presbyter in the Methodist Church with a clear conscience. This claim may *sound* a little wild and excessive, but I think it true. Moreover, I once put this little-known sermon in the hands of a fine preacher who was being given a hard time by his local zealots and, to my delight, it did for him what it has done for me: it rescued his ministry.

I suspect that I am not the only one to have accepted ordination and set out on the itinerant journey with paradoxical feelings of utter certainty and theological disquiet. There are things we say because they are required of us; especially, we Methodist presbyters and preachers promise to preach ‘our doctrines’. According to the Deed of Union of the British Methodist Church, the Church ‘loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation’. It was raised up to proclaim ‘the doctrines of the evangelical faith’ which are ‘based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures.’¹ This is easily stated: but the problem is to know what it means.

There are many who are clear that part of what is thereby insisted upon is a belief in a particular doctrine of trinity that formulates the Godhead to be of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; each of those three being utterly and completely God. The three being completely distinct, and the Godhead being understood to be a unity of three persons in one substance. What they are proposing is that, in effect, by ‘the historic creeds’ is meant not only the Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed, but also the Athanasian Creed (the *Quicunque Vult*²) in which classic trinitarian belief is spelt out in mind-numbing detail. The same formula is also summarised in the first of the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England: ‘In unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.’³

The British Methodist Catechism notes that although the Methodist Church ‘uses’ only two creeds (the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed), the Western Church also ‘used’ the Athanasian Creed, which is described by the Catechism as ‘more a sermon or instructional hymn than a creed, expounding the doctrine of the Trinity and opposing contemporary [ie fifth century] heresies.’⁴ The reversion to the past tense – ‘used’ – in the Catechism is strange, but perhaps instructive.

My problem with the Athanasian Creed is not that I do not understand it, but that I think I *do*. At least, I understand it in the sense that I believe it maps out the philosophical and theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries. It is an extremely subtle intellectual sleight-of-hand that proved adequate for its own time. But philosophy moves on; we are no longer Christian neo-Platonists. Theology moves on. Most wonderfully, God's own revelation to us of divine truth moves on.⁵ And we move on.

In his sermon *On the Trinity*, John Wesley, to my utter delight, makes it clear that though he does not agree with me, in his view I am perfectly at liberty to come to this conclusion about the trinity and to call myself a Christian and, by implication, a Methodist.

This article began as a presentation in Cambridge to the Wesley House *Theology and Spirituality* Seminar. I think I may summarise the response of some of my fellow seminarians as (i) that I have been cavalier in my interpretation of Wesley's sermon and that (ii) notwithstanding what the sermon and the Deed of Union may say, when one looks at the liturgies and statements of the contemporary Methodist Church, one finds a full-blown trinitarian faith therein expressed.

My response to these comments is threefold: (i) although I grant that I have taken all the wriggle-room John Wesley offers me, I do not think I have misrepresented him or taken more than he offers; (ii) I note that the current Methodist Catechism provides, in its answer to Question 65 'What do we mean by the Holy Trinity?', a careful account of God as Father, Son and Spirit that is completely compatible with the position I here describe; and (iii) provided I can reconcile what I believe to be the case with my Bible and my experience of the living Lord, I am content to carry John Wesley's wriggle-room into the liturgies of the church with a clear conscience.

The Argument of the Sermon

Wesley's sermon was preached in Cork on 8th May 1775. According to Albert Outler, it represents a favourite preaching theme of John Wesley. The sermon was published repeatedly in his lifetime, but after his death it was ignored. For example, it never appeared in the Armenian magazine.⁶ My guess is that then, as now, it was something of an embarrassment to Georgian/Victorian Methodists anxious to affirm their full orthodoxy and to cement their place within the Church catholic.

Wesley begins with his oft-repeated distinction between opinions and truths (religious truths especially). Then, having declined to speak of there being 'fundamental truths' in relation to Christianity, he supposes that some religious truths are surely more vital to true religion than others. One of the most vital truths, he suggests, is 'contained in the words' to be found in the King James Bible at 1 John 5:7:

For there are three that bear record in heaven,
the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost:
and these three are one.⁷

Immediately, Wesley distances himself from any particular explanation couched in terms of doctrinal formulae. 'I do not mean, that it is of importance, to believe this or that *explication* of these words.' He includes among such explications those 'given us in the Creed commonly ascribed to Athanasius'. He also declines to interpret the dread warning at the end of that creed, namely that 'This is the Catholick Faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved', as meaning that those who fail to assent to the creed are damned. Indeed, he concedes that for some time he hesitated to subscribe to the creed himself, until he came to the view that the warning related only to 'the *substance* of the doctrine there delivered; not the philosophical *illustrations* of it'. By 'the substance', it would seem that he means that God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost/Spirit, and that these three are one.

Wesley declares, 'I dare not insist upon any one's using the word *Trinity*, or *Person*'. (Here, I rejoice.) He uses them himself for he believes he knows 'none better'. He is content that some people may say 'Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet I scruple using the words *Trinity* and *Persons*, because I do not find those terms in the Bible.'⁸ Rather, Wesley says, 'I would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text'.

This last insistence raises the (to-our-ears modern) question, 'What *does* lie in the text?' Certainly, not the word 'trinity'. That notwithstanding, do we find in our New Testament that which is sufficient to insist on us affirming God as trinity in the sense of the Athanasian creed? Wesley has chosen this sermon text (1 John 5:7) because, of all the verses to be found in the King James Bible (the version that the vast majority of his hearers accepted as the one and only Word of God), this verse comes nearest to such an affirmation.

Wesley now turns to the question, 'Should we find this verse in our Bible?' 1 John 5:7–8 reads as follows in the King James Version:

⁷For there are three that bear record in heaven,
the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost:
and these three are one.

⁸And there are three that bear witness in earth,
the Spirit, and the water, and the blood:
and these three agree in one.

Wesley was a great admirer of Johann Bengel (1687–1752), the originator of the method of biblical textual criticism in which so much modern textual critical scholarship is rooted. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* of 1754 Wesley remarks that Bengel discusses both what might be the correct order of these two verses and 'the authority of the controverted verse' – the verse shown as verse [7] above, and verse [8] below. In his Notes, Wesley follows Bengel, translating as:

[7]For there are three that testify on earth,
the Spirit, and the water, and the blood:
and these three agree in one.

[8]And there are three that testify in heaven,
the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost:
and these three are one.⁹

In other words, Wesley, like Bengel, reverses the two verses, and favours 'testify' over 'witness'. He comments at length upon the supposedly-trinitarian verse [8] (as it now becomes) without further discussion of its validity. He does not employ the word 'trinity' at all in his description of the relationships there described.

Twenty years later, when composing the sermon under consideration here, Wesley saw fit to remark further that though Bengel seriously questioned verse [8] because of the ancient texts known to him from which it was absent,¹⁰ Bengel (and subsequently, Wesley) eventually accepted it on the conjecture that the verse was only absent from texts allegedly produced by Arian sources hostile to the Athanasian formulation.¹¹ Nevertheless, Wesley still declined to suggest that this verse added up to a trinitarian formula, or to attach the word 'trinity' to it. And, as if to signal his continuing uncertainty concerning validity, his next remark begins, 'Whatever becomes of the text'.

Wesley comes next to what he supposes for many to be the meat of the problem: is it reasonable to expect people to accept what they cannot comprehend? To this Wesley has two answers.

- (a) A general answer: we already, as a necessity of life, accept many things that we do not comprehend. Wesley produces many eighteenth-century examples. My own example might be that though I have absolutely no idea how the ignition system of my current car works (as opposed to my long-disposed-of Morris Traveller, which I understood very well), it does not cross my mind that this is a reason for my not driving my car.
- (b) A specific answer: no-one is requiring of us that we believe what we cannot comprehend *in this case*. For, Wesley supposes, it isn't the *facts* of the case that are incomprehensible to us. We understand what it means to say that God is Father, that God is Son, and that God is Holy Spirit. We understand what it means to say that there is but one God.

The issue, Wesley supposes, is the '*manner*' in which these facts are presumed to be related to each other. Though many presume that the Athanasian Creed spells out the manner of the relation, Wesley suggests that this is not a necessary conclusion for Christian belief. What *is* necessary for Christian belief is that 'these three are one'.

Wesley believes that 'these three are one' amounts to saying that 'God is Three and One'. The sermon ends with his admission that he does not see how anyone can affirm this yet not affirm trinity, for to his mind, 'trinity' sums it up perfectly. Yet he knows they can and they do, and, to his great credit, he does not condemn them on the grounds of his own failure to understand them.

Comment on the Sermon

I happen to think Wesley wrong about his conclusion that 'these three are one' amounts to saying that 'God is Three and One'. He is doing what he accuses others of doing – imposing his theological conviction upon the text (as he believes it to be). Without the imposition of further theological conditions not found in the text, does the text's use of the words 'Father', 'Son', 'Spirit' and 'One' make God a three-and-one God. From the point of view of my own faith, I am, of course, greatly aided by the fact that modern scholarship has removed this troublesome verse from the text.¹² The biblical oneness that I must address is now that of John's gospel which sets very different challenges.¹³

However, Wesley's instinct, in this sermon as elsewhere, is to submit to the text, neither adding to it nor taking from it. He invites us to receive the four facts as best we can, as grace is given to us. This is the instinct also at work in Wesley's theology of Holy Communion, where he once again privileges experience over explanation. Wesley's sacramental theology is set out in lines from the cleric Daniel Brevint which Wesley borrowed to form an explanatory preface to the original (1745) publication of his and his brother's *A Selection of Hymns on The Lord's Supper*. The key passage for present purposes lies in Section IV, where Brevint ponders how there could be such blessing in the mere eating of bread and drinking of wine.

Indeed in what *manner* this is done, I know not; it is enough for
me to admire.
'One thing I know', (as said the blind man of our Lord,) 'he laid clay
upon
mine eyes, and behold I see'. He hath blessed, and given me this
bread,
and my soul receiveth comfort. I know, that clay hath nothing in
itself,
which could have wrought such a miracle. And I know that this
bread
hath nothing in itself, which can impart grace, holiness, and
salvation.
But I know also, that it is the ordinary way of God to produce his
greatest
works at the presence (though not by the power) of the most
useless instruments.

But yet, since it pleaseth Christ to work thereby, O my God,
whensoever
thou shalt bid me, 'Go, and wash in Jordan', I will go; and will no
more doubt
of being made clean from my sins, than if I had bathed in thy
blood. And
when thou sayest, 'Go, take and eat this bread, which I have
blessed', I will
doubt no more of being fed with the bread of Life, than if I were
eating
thy very flesh.¹⁴

In other words, if you obey in humble obedience, and your experience bears out that it is so, does that not suffice?

I (in company, I believe, with John Wesley) approach the nature of the Godhead in a similar manner. In common with all who seek faithfully to follow their risen Lord, I encounter God as Father, Son and Spirit. Yet I encounter but one God. In Wesleyan vocabulary, my experience 'proves' the biblical witness. What need I more?

If it is our convention to describe a life so lived as one lived in trinitarian faith then so be it. But if the anachronisms of fourth- and fifth-century philosophical theology are necessarily to be added as essential to the package before that word is used, then I bless John Wesley and claim all the wriggle-room he offers me.

Some final observations

The ancient pressure to clarify precisely what Christians believe (that is, to define orthodoxy) arose in some measure from the Constantinian adoption of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. If Christianity were to become officially acceptable, it was necessary to know precisely *what* was becoming acceptable. All beyond the agreed definition might then be rejected as not true Christianity (ie heresy). In recent decades, though, the notion that there ever was a 'true' proto-Christianity from which all deviations were heretical perversions has been radically and convincingly questioned.¹⁵

At the heart of the myth lay institutional lust for centralised power and control (both secular and spiritual). The same is broadly true, surely, of the role of the Athanasian Creed in the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* subsequent to the Act of Uniformity of 1584 and its liturgical successors? The rubric requires that it replace the Apostles' Creed at Morning Prayer on thirteen occasions in the year, including Christmas Day, Easter Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, complete with its closing anathemas. Such is an imposed uniformity of both belief and practice.

The wriggle-room that I believe John Wesley's sermon warrants is, therefore, precious in mainstream Christianity. It is afforded to neither Anglican nor Roman Catholic. Technically, for the Anglican Church, the *Book of Common Prayer* still rules. The Roman Catholic Catechism still teaches Gregory of Nazianzus.¹⁶ Wesley's sermon (and Methodist doctrine) is willing to sit much

closer to the Bible, where, I suggest, trinitarianism in the manner of the Athanasian Creed – as opposed to the Nicene or Apostles' Creed – is not found. For this, we can be thankful to John Wesley.

Notes

1. Deed of Union of the Methodist Church, 1932, Section 2 Clause 4.
2. www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/creed-s-athanasius [accessed March 2019].
3. www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion [accessed March 2019].
4. 2013. *A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists*. London: Methodist Publishing. ¶53 and associated note 53.
5. John 16:13.
6. Outler tells us it was published seven times in Wesley's lifetime. Wesley is recorded as having preached on the theme twenty-three times. Outler also reports its subsequent non-appearance. Outler, Albert C. 1985. *The Works of John Wesley Vol 2*. Nashville: Abingdon. p. 373.
7. These words do not appear in modern translations, see below.
8. As Michael Sevetus, who was burned for blasphemy in Geneva in 1553, was notoriously reputed to have said.
9. Wesley, John. 1977. *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*. London: Epworth. pp. 917–8.
10. Outler (1985) tells us that Bengel's discussion of this verse runs to sixteen pages, p. 379 fn 12.
11. In our day, the direction of this argument is reversed. In modern Greek and English texts, the King James additional verse is relegated to a footnote. In other words, it is understood probably to be a later marginal theological comment on verse seven that has been copied, in some manuscripts, into the body of the epistle. It is not that a verse has been wilfully removed from some texts, but that another has been accidentally added to others.
12. As Outler (1985) observes, using the King James order of verses, 'The words between "bear record" (ver.7) and "the spirit" (ver. 8) are included in no modern critical edn.' P. 379 fn 12.
13. See John 10:30 and John 17:20–24.
14. www.archive.org/details/hymnsonlordssupp00wesl/page/16 [accessed March 2019], Preface pp. 3–4.
15. See, for one example from many, Brakke, David. 2010. *The Gnostics – Myth, Ritual and Diversity in Early Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
16. 1994. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman. Section 2, Chapter 1, ¶iii.



Reviews

The Gift of a Renewed Diaconate and the Contribution of British Methodism,
David Clark (Peterborough: Fast Print Publishing, 2018), 159 pp,
£6.95 pbk

The Methodist Conference asked for a report to its 2019 Conference on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the Methodist Diaconal Order, which re-opened in 1986 as a different but equal order of ministry in the British Methodist Church for both men and women. David Clark's book (largely a collation of his recent papers) is prompted by his fear that the opportunity for pre-Conference public debate will be minimal, a course he sees as markedly at variance with the founding principles of the Order, declaring that 'dialogue is fundamental to the means by which the diaconal church communicates its message' (p. 150). This is a polemical (yet courteous) work from an author so passionate about diaconal ministry and the theological principles on which he believes it rests that he resigned his presbyteral Methodist ministry in order to enter the diaconate.

Clark believes that the church to come will be diaconal in character. The current Order, and its distinctive character, is but a foretaste. He declares 'I believe that the emergence of the church to come, the diaconal church, is both an ecumenical and divine imperative not only for the whole Christian community, but for a world and planet increasingly in danger of self-destruction' (p. 127), this because 'our world faces a choice between chaos and community' (p. 150). Further, 'the social collectives that make up the diaconal church – hearings, groups, networks, the institution as an entity and partnerships – are all communal collectives' (p. 150).

Clark quotes J. McMaster, 'The Wesleyan movement was a commitment to a holiness project' (p. 141) adding, as the World Council of Churches reminded us in 1990, that 'communal holiness is also about the cosmos being made whole'. He elaborates, 'Communal holiness is that divine gift which, embodying the Kingdom communities' gifts of life, liberation, love and learning, transforms humankind into whole persons, whole families, whole institutions, whole cities, whole societies and one world, and points toward the integrity of creation' (p. 145).

Whilst Clark's compilation of writings presents a coherent argument, his use of sources indicates that this falls short of being a carefully reflective academic monograph. For instance, he sources John Wesley's dictum on social holiness from *Called to Love and Praise*, a Methodist Conference report of 1999, rather than the 1739 preface to the Wesleys' *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. He might usefully have drawn from John Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* of 1766 (Epworth 1950 & 2007). He fails to say the obvious, that the communal, diaconal holiness church he advocates is also a eucharistic community. He cites the research of Orton and Stockdale (2014) in his bibliography, but makes little, if any, use of their exhaustive, attentive listening to all manner of groups and individuals within the current diaconal order. The 2004 Methodist Conference produced *What is a deacon?* Clark might have referenced the subsequent critique in the report of the Anglican/Methodist consultation presented to the Joint Implementation Commission.

In short, this does not have the coherence of a balanced survey. It is a passionate defence of a radical understanding of 'diaconal', not just for the Diaconal Order, nor just for Methodism, but for the future of the Church of Christ. It is inevitably patchy, but provocative, and timely.

Cedric May is an ecumenist. He taught French and Quebec Literature at Birmingham University (UK) for nearly thirty years. He was ordained deacon in the British Methodist Church in 1991 and served in three appointments. He is now retired.

British Methodist Hymnody: Theology, Heritage and Experience, Martin V. Clarke (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 220 pp, £110.00 hbk

Clarke's book is very welcome. He identifies the place of hymnody and music in the worship and spirituality of British Methodism, and the theology and practice underpinning them. He charts the tensions within Methodism throughout its historical development and in its contemporary practice. There is plenty to reflect upon. *Lex orandi* and *lex credendi* (how texts are shaped by theology and spirituality, and how worshippers are shaped by texts), is given prominence in this detailed account. There are interesting local case studies.

British Methodism always has veered between recommended connexional hymnals and the recognition that preachers and congregations should be free to determine the content, shape and style of their worship within certain parameters. Clarke's book examines the associated societal and denominational tensions over the (nearly) three Methodist centuries.

The 1780 collection of hymns selected by John and Charles served both to assist the educational work of the classes and small groups and as a basis for Methodist liturgical worship. It sought to help converts and believers to grow in grace as well as to worship God. The explicitly Arminian tone reinforced Methodist identity. Clarke's first chapter explores whether hymns 'have largely served a doxological function rather than a pedagogical function' (p. 37). The answer (now, as then) is a 'both/and' rather than a 'either/or'.

Clarke explores the decline in the proportion of hymns by the Wesleys themselves from 1780 collection to the present day, and the introduction of hymns from other traditions, notably through Anglican hymn books of the 19th century (both evangelical and catholic) and more popular songs in the modern idiom. Importation is nothing new. The Wesleys borrowed hymns (i.e. words) from Anglican, Reformed and Moravian traditions, and music from secular culture. British Methodism has always been hybrid, drawing from an overtly evangelical heritage but with an eye to ecumenical resources to enrich its practice. Thus 'faith is learned, developed and shared' (p. 63).

Clarke explores language and idiom, taking a detailed look at issues of gender and theology in the editing process, recognising that you cannot please

everyone. The chapter on Musical Repertoire is especially helpful for musicologists and historians. The succeeding chapter brings out the tensions between congregational singing and the development of more formal choir-led worship, with organs and anthems.

The concluding chapters tell how modern Methodism has adopted worship songs of a more Calvinistic flavour from the vibrant, less formal worship of other evangelical and charismatic traditions. Has it thus become a victim of its habit of using hymns as tools for both conversion and doxology? Has Methodism's commitment to inclusiveness led to a diminution of Methodist heritage and identity? Hymns are useful yardsticks. They are, Clarke concludes, 'most commonly encountered as carriers of doctrinal and theological values and concepts in Methodism' (p. 185). They need to be treasured by theological educators and worship leaders to enable the people called Methodists to own their place in the 'order of salvation', that they may 'feel (y)our sins forgiven ... and own that love is heaven'.

Tim Macquiban has been a Mission Partner in Rome and Director of The Methodist Ecumenical Office since 2014. For 17 years he taught in Bristol, Oxford, Salisbury and Cambridge in higher education.

George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy, Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones (eds) (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 329 pp, £65.00 hbk

There was a time when George Whitefield seemed to be the forgotten leader of the Evangelical Revival; for Methodists, in particular, he appeared mainly as the man with whom Wesley argued about predestination whilst even those histories which acknowledged his role more fairly often highlighted little more than his abilities in preaching and possibly his travels on both sides of the Atlantic.

One can only welcome, therefore, more recent scholarly attention to this gifted but complex individual. This volume is the result of a conference held on the tercentenary of Whitefield's birth in 2014 and clearly it was a fruitful event. This is a collection of 16 essays by a mixture of scholars, some well known and established in the field and some whose names were new to me. Together, they present a well rounded picture of Whitefield, demonstrating both his considerable gifts and his significant weaknesses with good attention to the areas promised by the title – his life, his context and his legacy.

It is noticeable that the different chapters are of a uniformly high standard, making it difficult to select some for particular attention. Any scholar of the Evangelical Revival will wish to have a copy of this volume, each article in different ways introduces new material and perspectives which contribute to a fuller picture of Whitefield. It is a pleasure to also be able to recommend it to the non-specialist. The first chapter by Boyd Stanley Schletter gives a very good overview; here we meet the preacher, sometimes carried away by his own gifts and the man who defended slavery and whose involvement with the orphanage at Bethesda "distracted Whitefield to a staggering degree (p. 27)". If anything the picture here drawn of Whitefield, while based on solid research, seems a little overly negative. Mark Olsen contributes a detailed analysis of Whitefield's theological development, showing the influence of Oxford Methodism but also Whitefield's movement to his mature Calvinist position. William Gibson and Geordan Hammond explore Whitefield's at times strained relationships with the Church of England and John Wesley respectively. I particularly appreciated the way in which Hammond was able to show the development of the tensions between Whitefield and Wesley and his

persuasive argument that predestination was not the only theological issue between them. Wesley's habit of casting lots also caused Whitefield some concern.

No volume on the Revival would be complete without a thorough exploration of those who criticised what was happening and the way in which the key players responded. Brett McInelly demonstrates the way in which Whitefield not only thrived under attack but recognised that even adverse criticism was a form of publicity. Keith Edward Beebe and David Ceri Jones provide a detailed and helpful account of Whitefield's involvement not only in Wales but also in the lesser known events in Scotland and Ireland.

In summary this volume is a highly recommended introduction to the current state of play in Whitefield scholarship for specialist and student alike.

Judith Rossall is a Tutor in Church History and Preaching, Queen's Foundation Birmingham. She is a Methodist Presbyterian who served in the Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted Circuit and the Guildford Circuit. She taught at the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme in Salisbury before moving to Queen's in 2013.

A Cultural Theology of Salvation, Clive Marsh (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 253 pp, £60.00 hbk

In this work the author seeks to wrestle with what a contemporary doctrine of salvation might look like and in particular to discern how such a doctrine might be rendered understandable and accessible in the prevailing cultural context. He does this through a lively and lucid interaction with the Christian theological tradition but also with a forensic discernment of contemporary culture. Readers who are familiar with the author's previous work will recognise his obvious passion to read culture and to discern where theological work is taking place so that the theological enterprise is not confined to the esoteric space of the academy.¹

The book is structured around three discrete parts with part one setting the scene by outlining the cultural context and in particular offering a fascinating examination of the cultural references to both *happiness* and *redemption* and an engagement with the theology of Paul Tillich. Part two sets out various cultural case studies in which the author discerns the theological resonances of such diverse works as the Isenheim Altarpiece, Handel's *Messiah*, the film *Crazy Heart*, the TV drama *Breaking Bad* and the TV comedy *The Big Bang Theory*. In part three, arguably the most helpful part of the work, the author distils the reflection from the first two parts and sets out his thinking in terms of the shaping of a contemporary doctrine of soteriology. In chapter seven he outlines a template of salvation and emphasises the need for any doctrine to set out what salvation is 'from', 'for', 'by' and 'into' as necessary parts of any cogent doctrine of salvation. He also suggests seven key considerations that have to be wrestled with if we are to make any headway in terms of articulating the doctrine in a form that is intelligible and credible for the contemporary context.

There is no doubt that the author has made a very significant contribution to soteriology but crucially a contribution that makes sense in the present cultural context. At this level the book poses some fascinating questions to the contemporary church as it seeks to serve the present age. For example, how does the church give appropriate voice to the positive benefits of salvation and what we are saved 'for'? The author is surely right when he argues that in the

Western tradition of Christianity we have laboured too much upon what we are saved 'from'. Does the articulation of the positive benefits of salvation include such notions as *well-being, happiness, health, acceptance and contentment*? If there is a necessary 'affective' and 'felt' dimension to salvation then how is that articulated and experienced in the particular tradition that we inhabit? These are just a few of the tantalising questions that the author provokes and they are questions that we clearly need to ponder if we are going to be faithful to our apologetic task!

The late Robert Jenson once said that part of the purpose of theology '*is the thinking internal to the task of speaking the Gospel, whether to humankind as message or to God in praise and petition...*'² Clive Marsh has made a very lucid and perceptive contribution to the very necessary thinking that the church must engage in as it seeks to both understand the good news of salvation and proclaim it afresh for a new age.

Julian Pursehouse is Chair of the East Anglia District of the Methodist Church and is currently engaged in doctoral research on the theological theme of happiness in the Wesleyan tradition. He is a trustee of Wesley House and also the Chair of the Academic Committee.

Notes

1. Christ in Practice – *A Christology of Everyday Life*, Clive Marsh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006) & *Christ in Focus*, Clive Marsh (London: SCM Press, 2005).
2. *Systematic Theology Volume 1 – The Triune God*, Robert W. Jenson (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

The Financing of John Wesley's Methodism c.1740–1800, Clive Murray Norris. (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 334 pp, £65.00 hbk

The dust-cover promises 'a *business history* of John Wesley's Methodist *Connexion*, which began small-scale in the late 1730s but by 1800 was a substantial operation' (958 chapels; 109,961 members and a total debt of over £180,000) [p. 117]. Researchers will revel in Norris's book though casual readers could find the copious detail intrusive to the flow of the text. Those interested in the early history of Methodism and have a head for figures or finance will gain the most from this book. There are fewer tables or graphs than might be expected.

Norris shows how growth and a desire to treat God's workers fairly resulted in funds not always being used for the purpose for which they were given or intended and the chapter on *The Preachers' Fund* is particularly clear in this matter. Money was redirected from the Fund (established for 'worn out' preachers and their widows) to support the wives of active preachers [p. 57] and Wesley often raided the Fund to pay off his debts [p. 59] which are believed to have totalled more than £6,000! More significant from our twenty-first century viewpoint, the requirements of the Conference to 'put right' the re-direction of funds were sometimes ignored. The hint is strongly given that in Wesley's view the growing movement needed such freedom if it was going to fulfil its commitments and continue to grow.

The various chapters show where money came from and how it was spent. The final chapter (Education, Welfare and Missions) shows how activities that were 'secondary to the movement's primary focus' [p. 220] were developed and how they were financed. Each of the first nine chapters has a final and helpful section titled 'Conclusions'. The tenth chapter of the same name supplies extensive supporting material.

Readers glimpse the early seeds of many of the things that we take for granted. A pension fund for ministers, local care for property, the responsibilities of membership and the costs of itinerancy (many of which were not financial). Woven throughout are the threads of generosity and growth. The contemporary church is challenged to recognise both its heritage and its responsibility, as we seek to walk the ways of our fore-parents.

This focussed and unusual view of the role played by money matters in the growth of Methodism is for both the curious and those seeking to understand many of the drivers of early Methodism. The extensive footnotes indicate the range of source material. Greater control of money was exercised after Wesley's death, and the hint is given that this reduction in pragmatism resulted in reduced growth. If modern Methodism were permitted to be as apparently free and easy with money as the early Methodists were, what difference would it make, and would this be a driver for growth in this generation?

Graham Thomson began training as a Chartered Accountant before responding to God's call to be a minister. He has since served on the Connexional Allowances Committee, the CFB Council and the Methodist Ministers' Pension Fund. He currently serves as Chair of the Plymouth & Exeter District.

Through The Year With John Wesley, Stephen J Poxon (ed) (Oxford: Monarch, 2017), 383 pp, £12.99 pbk

Through the Year with John Wesley offers devotional material for each day of the year drawn from the theological and spiritual writings of John Wesley. It is presented in a succinct pattern with an opening text of scripture, followed by an extract from John Wesley's thought and then concludes with a thematically relevant prayer.

The strength of this volume lies in the variety of sources that Poxon has drawn from – there are extracts from Journal entries, sermons, Christian biographies and even a few forays into the Primitive Physic! The reader might like to check out Wesley's remedy for asthma on July 18th and share the honest spirit of Poxon's baffled prayer:

'Lord to be honest, I don't know what to make of Wesley's advice today!'

Alternatively look at the entry for May 5th that deals with the notoriously difficult area of friendships and liaisons with the opposite sex. It is generally accepted by historians that this was a deeply complex and profoundly sad aspect of John Wesley's experience. Again Poxon's concluding prayer is refreshingly honest and candid:

'Lord, friendships and relationships can be complex!...'

It is the thematic breadth of Poxon's sources that makes this such an entertaining and thought-provoking resource for personal prayer and reflection. The patient reader who stays with the task will be rewarded with a fascinating glimpse into both the brilliance and the frailty of this remarkable saint. A man of staggering spiritual tenacity who was capable of great acts of kindness but by turns irascible, foolish and utterly belligerent. Perhaps it is a timely reminder that the most remarkable of saints have feet of clay.

I fully imagine that this devotional treasure will naturally appeal to those who have any affinity with the churches that owe their existence to the Wesleyan tradition but it will also prove fruitful for the discerning Christian who wants to learn new things from one of the spiritual giants of the past. At its best it

Reviews

enables the Wesleyan tradition to be a living tradition that speaks to the experience of modern day disciples.

Julian Pursehouse is Chair of the East Anglia District of the Methodist Church and is currently engaged in doctoral research on the theological theme of happiness in the Wesleyan tradition. He is a trustee of Wesley House and also the Chair of the Academic Committee.

In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian past and the evangelical identity crisis, Kenneth J. Stewart (London: IVP, 2017), 278 pp, £17.99 pbk

Stewart perceives the modern evangelical movement to be caught in a deeply damaging paralysis of self-doubt and introspection. In his *In search of Ancient Roots*, he suggests that the evangelical movement must do more than trace its historical roots to the late medieval religious movements of the sixteenth century as is its wont. He suggests that for it to recover from its current malaise, it must engage more fully with the entire Christian historical tradition.

He highlights three causes of self-doubt and uncertainty:

- (i) The distance in time from the rise of evangelical Christianity – the original ideals and principles are, quite simply, losing their impact.
- (ii) Unresolved fundamental questions on the reliability of scripture and the unique saviourhood of Jesus Christ which encourage a drift to other, more sure-footed traditions.
- (iii) The new, relaxed stance of Roman Catholicism that has emerged steadily ever since Vatican II that renders Catholicism a more realistic option for uneasy evangelicals.

Stewart perceives the evangelical tradition to be falling between the two stools of Catholicism and Pentecostalism. On the one hand, the liberated, non-historical stance of Pentecostalism is attractive to those who weary of the endless rehearsing of the niceties of the Reformation. On the other hand, he believes that the sure-footed, unbroken thread of theological development from apostolic times that is Catholic theology is attractive to those evangelical believers uncomfortable with contemporary developments and uncertainties within their own tradition. He wants to address the charge that evangelicalism is a freakish late-comer to Christianity, rooted in a late-mediaeval (and today, anachronistic) phenomenon that obsessively dominates its theology.

Stewart has no time for a current misconception that Pentecostalism is the new Evangelicalism. Pentecostalism tends to short-circuit historical development in favour of the simple formula of bible (then) and Holy Spirit (now). On the

other hand, Evangelicalism, he believes, needs today urgently to embrace the full story of its twenty centuries of evolution.

Evangelicalism is rooted in Christian antiquity. For Evangelicalism to have a strong future, Stewart argues, it must strengthen its past. (He argues for example the clause 'we believe in one catholic church' in the creeds is vital and that evangelicals must have a point of connection with this 'catholic' church.) He usefully reviews the old areas of disagreement and division: the Lord's Supper, biblical authority, monasticism, infant baptism, and the role of faith in salvation. Stewart argues that the current disturbance, movement and breakup being experienced in protestant tradition is due to the perceived disconnect between the Protestantism and ancient Christianity.

Intriguingly, Stewart argues that evangelicalism, rather than being a one-off event in the history of the Christian church, is a perennial and recurring feature of Christian history, a necessary component of its ongoing renewal.

As in many US course books, Stewart supplies questions for discussion after every chapter. His book is intended primarily for those in Protestant ministerial training, but his case would be of interest to anyone who places themselves in the evangelical tradition. His treatment is suitable for a general readership.

Alice Muthoni Mwila is a presbyter in the Kenyan Methodist Church, and Bishop of the Nyambene Synod. Currently, she is also a PhD Research student with Anglia Ruskin University UK through Wesley House, Cambridge.

Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World, 25th Anniversary Ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed) (New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 623 pp, £23.99 pbk

This is a latest revision of the *Voices from the Margin* of twenty-five years ago. Four of the six sections contain new material – in all thirty-eight essays from contexts as varied as South Korea, Aboriginal Australia, Malawi and Brazil. There are forgivable occasional imperial echoes, like the use of the term ‘third world’ in the title which is repeated elsewhere. Nevertheless, this is a book that can only be welcomed.

The book’s premise is that western Christianity was not always easily accommodated into the cultures of the different parts of the world in the form it was preached by western missionaries. (See, for example, John Pritchard’s *Methodists and their Missionary Societies* (2013) reviewed in *HOLINESS* Vol 1:2.) The argument is that theology must discover and deploy hermeneutical methodologies that address the contexts, cultures, traditions, languages, and even levels of literacy of those among whom it is actualised (e.g. Kalilombe, p. 545 – *Literacy and Illiteracy: Example of Malawian Catholics*). Sugirtharajah gives dire warning of the price of failure.

All these essays are insightful. Some are startling: not least Engineer’s, ‘*On Developing Liberation Theology in Islam*’ (p. 495) on the reinterpretation of the Qur’an from the perspective of Liberation Theology in Islam, this at a time when religious pluralism and respect for the other cannot be over-emphasised. However, Kalilombe’s ‘*A Nicaraguan Example: The Alabaster Bottle*’ (p. 557) disappoints if only because the dramatized style unnecessarily obscures the point.

Sugirtharajah surveys the last 25 years. Then, ‘there was the realization that theology was meaningless if it left the lives of the people untouched’ (p. 597). Then, ‘Hermeneutical activity meant keeping the powerful awake at night’ (p. 605). Not so now! In his view, young authors have dropped the baton of their predecessors. ‘Marginality was [then] essentially a space for those who struggled against authority and power, not [as now] a space for venting narrow, venomous religious and ethnic ideology’ (p. 600). ‘Once the mainstream took over liberation, it was stripped of its emancipatory potential and became a

supine concept. What happened to liberation hermeneutics might well happen to post-colonialism' (p. 603). Christianity itself, lacking theological leadership in its hermeneutics, has surrendered to such horrors as narrow regional world views, accusations of one another among African and diasporic biblical interpreters on issues of being poor or sound modern biblical interpreters (p. 604). Too much of the new marginal theology comprises 'appalling academic writing, exemplified in high-blown theorizing, spurious specialization, and the growth of jaw-breaking jargon' (p. 606). Non-western biblical scholarship, he fears, like its western counterpart, is primarily concerned with itself.

These are harsh and challenging words from a Sri Lankan scholar who has been monitoring and publishing on post-colonial Christianity for three decades. Challenging for all, but particularly for those engaged in post-colonial Christian leadership and preaching. The question must be, 'Is he right'?

Charles Lungu, of the United Church of Zambia, holds MAs in Contextual Theology, Church Ministry, and Human Resource Management. Currently, a doctoral student at Wesley House and Anglia Ruskin University, he teaches Practical Theology and Religious Studies at the United Church of Zambia University.

Celebrating the Reformation: Its Legacy and Continuing Relevance, Mark D. Thompson, Colin Bale and Edward Loane (eds) (London: IVP, 2017), 409 pp, £19.99 pbk

This new contribution has something defiantly positive to say about the Protestant legacy. Its unapologetic tone is refreshing. That said, I find the general tone with which Catholicism is treated, mainly anecdotal asides about the contemporary Roman Catholic church, uncharitable in nature.

The introduction tells the Reformation story fascinatingly but includes some very grand and unsubstantiated claims, not least about modern politics, Brexit, the protestant work ethic and secularism. Accordingly, I would be cautious to whom I gave this book for fear that they might take some of the bolder claims too much at face value. That is not to say there is no value to this section. It is particularly good on what the reformation was not and the danger of anachronistic readings – especially in relation to freedom of conscience, individuality and conformity.

There are some strong essays in this collection. Cranmer, Zwingli, Calvin and Luther all get helpful treatments. On the whole the collection demonstrates sympathies on the conservative end of the evangelical spectrum. For example, Chase Kuhn's essay on the modern legacy of the priesthood of all believers is in many ways admirable. Its review of patristic attitudes and of modern dissent to Luther are helpful. But the theologically conservative complementarianism which restricts analysis of modern ministry of word and sacraments to men and admits women only to complementary roles doesn't add much to the main argument and feels a little crowbarred in as a statement of values.

Most promising and most disappointing to me was Andrew Bain's chapter on 'Discipleship in all of life'. This is becoming a major topic in Christian ethics, mission and evangelism. Bain rightly highlights the Reformers' emphasis on the disordering effects of sin for ethics and the need for divine grace acting on us. However he under-emphasises the manner in which within the Reformed tradition Christians are genuinely participants, even double agents, in this work. Anxious to set Reformed theology against Mediaeval Catholicism, he completely ignores the intense, regulatory practices and regimes of reformed

spirituality put in place by Calvin which are no less pedagogical – whilst also being responses to grace.

The chapter by Jane Tooher (the only female contributor) on Katherine Zell justifies the entry price alone. The role of women in the reformation is frequently an under-developed and under-appreciated topic. The particular strength is that she offers an assessment of clerical marriage from the woman's side, through a figure who was clearly a well-informed and thoughtful exponent of the reformation in her own right. Clerical marriage is thus revealed as an embodiment of the priesthood of all believers, and no less controversial for it among protestants.

For all the important theological and social contributions within these pages, a bit more confession and humility would have been appropriate. As it is, the results are mixed and their usefulness vary according to context.

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The Great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868, David M Young (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2016), 234 pp, £6.50 pbk

Change and Decay: Primitive Methodism from Late Victorian Times till World War I, David M Young (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2017), 318 pp, £6.50 pbk

Primitive Methodism developed as a revival movement and a breakaway in the second decade of the nineteenth century from the movement John Wesley and others had begun in the eighteenth. *The Great River* traces its rapid spread through the villages of North Hampshire in the 1830s, drawing extensively on the standard histories and the memoirs of the leading characters in primary sources such as the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*. The title of the book derives from the meaning of the village name Micheldever, one of those at the centre of the movement, and aptly characterises its speed and breadth. After describing the movement area by area and giving brief details of the leading figures involved, Young discusses the factors which contributed to its success. Sociological factors such as the extreme poverty of the area and the tensions between landowners and clergy on the one hand and the labouring poor on the other are taken account of. Negative features, such as the movement's puritan and judgemental character, are not ignored. Overall however it is a positive picture that is offered. 1868 is chosen as the cut-off date because the original leaders had died or reached retirement age and the movement nationally was changing its character. The writer ends on a nostalgic note, 'I... had learned to my sorrow that Methodism had changed beyond recognition, abandoning much of its heritage of belief, ethos and passion' (p. 223).

Change and Decay charts the progress of those changes from the 1860s to about 1918 on a broader canvas, with particular reference to doctrine. As background, changes in later Victorian society and the early twentieth century are broadly described. The central chapters concentrate on changes in theology, from the Evangelical conservatism of the beginnings to the liberalism of the period before the first World War, generally summarised in the slogan of the time as 'the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man'. The closing chapter asks whether the original faith has now been extinguished and whether it can be reborn.

The reader will find much to appreciate in this book. It is copiously illustrated from primary sources (to the point of excess for this reader). No future scholar will need to repeat Young's research. But it is not, and does not pretend to be, a comprehensive history of Primitive Methodism in all its aspects. Little is said, for example, about wider constitutional change or overseas mission.

This reviewer however has reservations. The book is confessedly written from a conservative evangelical standpoint. The key tests applied to theological change are (i) the supremacy of 'biblical teaching' over against 'human reason' and (ii) the doctrines of the special creation of humankind (over against evolution), the fall and original sin, the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement, the bodily resurrection, the last judgement and the eternal punishment of the unredeemed. Young points out that they are to be found in the denomination's doctrinal standards and they are indeed echoed in John Wesley's sermons. From this standpoint all later developments are deemed by Young to be a 'tragedy' (p. 152).

Surely no one today after two World Wars and the impact of Barth and others, would wish to return to the simplistic slogan of 'the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man'. In a period of great social and intellectual change could any church remain untouched and still expect to maintain its earlier impact? It is surely naive to point to the Continuing Primitive Methodist Church, a diminishing number of small chapels in East Yorkshire, which did not go with the rest of the Primitive Methodist Church into the union with other branches of Methodism to form the current Methodist Church in 1932, as a hopeful sign for the future (p. 307)?

Chapter 6 in fact is devoted to illustrating the conservative resistance to the changes in the denomination as a whole. It is difficult to assess just how widely those changes in theology reached. No doubt village congregations were more conservative than those in the towns. No doubt much was disseminated from the pulpit by college-trained ministers and by articles in the magazines (although, as Young shows, the magazines contained articles expressing a variety of views). The Wesley hymns continued in use (but, as today, what gloss was being put on the words sung?).

A. S. Peake is singled out as the villain of the reformist movement, along with J. D. Thompson and Sir William Hartley. From 1892 Peake was Tutor at the Primitive Methodist Hartley College in Manchester, founded by Sir William Hartley to prepare students for the ministry, and from 1904 also Professor of Biblical Exegesis and Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Manchester University,

until his death in 1929. Peake's influence spread through the articles he wrote, his *Commentary on the Bible*, and the ministers he taught. He did not support a literalist interpretation of the Bible but did seek, fruitfully for very many, to show how the tools of contemporary biblical criticism could illuminate its message. He did not seek to reduce that message to a simplistic slogan. But, as Young shows, the changes had begun well before Peak's appointment. Peake was unanimously reappointed by the Conference year by year, but this should not be dismissed, as Young tries to do, as merely the action of 'the leadership'. It would be some years before the ministers trained by Peake would be in the ranks of the Conference in any numbers, and in any case two thirds of the Conference were lay officers elected from the circuits. Young ought not to gloss over the fact that at local level there was clearly support for (as well as opposition to) what Peake stood for.

Overall, then, these two volumes are to be welcomed as giving readers a detailed picture of the heart of Primitive Methodism in its first century and the way it changed, but they will wish to make their own judgement of those changes.

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