# Confronting Modernity:

## Towards A Theology of Ministry in the Wesleyan Tradition

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### I. Prolegomenon

The effort to offer a theology of ministry, namely, to understand God working in the world--is part of a persistent dialectical enterprise, grounded in a desire to participate in the ancient conversation between God and the people of God. It is faith seeking understanding, which requires an intellectual appreciation of God, namely, reflective theology. At the center of this activity is faith, which makes the enterprise possible. The foundational element in this worldview is a transcendent God, the creator of heaven and earth. The pursuit of this appreciation must involve a comprehensive view of reality. It must concern itself with life before human existence, the interaction of the creations of God and ultimate heavenly union with God.

God has given the children of God appreceptive qualities so that we might come closer to the divine reality within our lives on the earth. At the center of our gift is Jesus Christ, the insight of salvation. Christ is the determinative norm for life. Christ allows us to see the reality of self-giving or what Paul Achtemier has described this as the "self-limitation" of Christ that should be assumed by all of our Lord's disciples.

For Calvin, as well as Wesley, the created world is the theater of God's glory. Christ's life is a historic fact, making us historic people.

We understand this history via a number of means; the witness of scripture allows us to share in the insight of those assembled at the feet of Christ, as well as their spiritual patrimony. Theology enables a more thorough understanding of God in the here and now, as the attempt is made to connect *theos* and *logos*; history tells us of the provisional fulfillment of Christ in the Hebrew Bible and the history of Christ itself in the New Testament, augmented by accounts of the saints who have kept the message alive for succeeding generations. Our pedagogical enterprise is an effort to understand God's self-gift, and it possesses personal and historic dimensions. These characteristics of the divine imperative are most easily and completely accessible via the teaching of the Church. Any attempt to accurately portray the situation of the Church is exasperated when it is done only through the lens of contemporary culture, without an appreciation of the claims of classical Christianity, or what Thomas Oden describes as "postcritical orthodoxy."[1]

At the center of an awareness of God is our agreement with Gregory of Nazianzen: "When I say

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[1]Thomas Oden, After Modernity...What? Agenda for Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1990).

God, I mean Father,[2] Son, and Holy Ghost."[3] Such a formulation makes God knowable in as complete a form as possible. The Trinitarian formula allows us to fully comprehend the presence of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as coeternal and pre-existing as well as participating in creation. Our history is the history of the activity of the Trinity.

Matthew 28:19 presents the most thoroughgoing depiction of the Trinity. The Early Church understood the Trinitarian description to convey the completeness of God in the life of the Church and in history. The Trinity encompasses the narrative of salvation, allowing of a comprehensive account of the origin, redemption and culmination of the people of God. The movement can only fully be understood by this three-fold activity.

One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit functions as the Holy Trinity, but the name Trinity does not

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[2]We believe in the need for stressing the role of the feminine within the Christian community of faith, while attempting to uphold the tradition of the Church. Human language obviously cannot adequately present the fullness of God, but all available methods should be employed to allow for as undiminished a view as possible. In terms of the systematic discussion of theology and sacramental participation, the traditional prescription of scripture, as depicted by St. Gregory and the Early Church must be used.

[3]H. Wace and P. Schaff, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume 8 (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, nd.), p. 347.

constitute a replacement for the naming of the elements. This is a technical term. Within the doctrine of the Trinity there exists a unity of the Godhead with three manifestations. *Perichoresis*, a mutual in-dwelling or mutual containing within the Trinity, exists and can be understood as communication within the Godhead. As the assembled body of Christ we must emulate this sharing. The foundations of Christian ministry and our understanding of it--as well as the Christian life, must be founded upon this premise.

Our understanding becomes more complete when the explication is continued in the form of an elucidation of the defining qualities of God. The initial understanding is God as Father, the Almighty.[4] To begin with earthly fatherhood and project it on God is incorrect. We refer to God as father because Jesus called God *Abba*, father. The Father is the Father of the Son. If Jesus had not used this term, it would not have become normative. This does not suggest a paternalistic God, unsympathetic to the feminine aspects of the Godhead, but a means of incorporating the historic understanding of God. *Abba* is used on several occasions, including in the garden. Irenaeus suggested the use of Abba noted the Father as unique in the sense that it was intimate

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[4]Such an explanation does not preclude the inclusion of feminine characteristics into the Godhead; these qualities are part of our understanding of God. A prominent example of the use of feminine imagery is the depiction of God in Matthew 23:37.

speech; the closeness of speech a young child would use when speaking to a parent. And once God is understood as Father, Jesus must be perceived in correlative sense as the Son.

God looks at the earth in a commanding way. God has power over all life, God is omnipotent. God is not the heavenly force of the Platonic demiurge or Aristotle's "unmoved mover." God rules all things visible and invisible. The rule of God is not by divine fiat; on the contrary, it is premised upon a love for the children of God, God's "emptying" for our salvation. God encompasses the whole of our existence. Through the resurrection the fullness of God's complete power can be appreciated.

The awareness of God comes primarily from knowing God as and via Jesus Christ. Christians naturally look to Jesus. While one may be uncomfortable with what is sometimes described as Barth's "Christomonism," the centrality of Christ, it serves as an important reminder of the person and work of God in Christ as an active testimony to Christians today. We know about sin only because it was overcome in Christ. Christ serves as the revealer of the Father (Galatians 1:16); Christ expresses the image of the Father's Glory (Hebrews 1:3); and Christ shows the image of God with humankind (Romans 5:12-21). We are now able to see God more completely, and to comprehend the self-giving of God even more thoroughly.

When we talk about God we are also talking about the Holy Spirit. We discuss God in the order we know God, and while the third person has always been divine, the Church did not give a full account of the Holy Spirit until the Fourth Century. The Holy Spirit comes upon Christ and Christ in turn sends the Holy Spirit, as John promises. Paul clearly has the notion that in the internal life of God the Holy Spirit is distinguishable. The Spirit is distinct and has been revealed to us. The Holy Spirit is part of the God-head, the Holy Spirit is God. With the Holy Spirit, we grasp Jesus Christ, and in comprehending of Jesus, we know the Father.

**Some Spiritual Mentors Who Can Aid Our Understanding**

Such an understanding of God has persisted against our self-imposed obstacles. As students of theology, Holy Scripture, and social and political thought, we must return to God as we attempt to study the role revelation assumes in the Christian life. In a sense, these figures allow for an extraction and re-articulation of an orthodox Wesleyan account of God. The first *periagoge* or turn came with Moses, who in the midst of a transition, proved that movement in one's life was an essential part of the theological enterprise.

It is Moses, in his transition, who connects the relatively compact world of Memphite theology to Christianity. This new differentiated field of ex-

perience is the most important break with the older order, but the role of Moses is even more epochal:

> The unique position of Moses has resisted classification by type concepts, as well as articulation through the symbols of the Biblical tradition. He moves in a peculiar empty space between the old Pharonic and the new collective sons of God, between the Egyptian empire and the Israelite theopolity. On the obscurities surrounding the position of Moses now falls a flood rather than a ray of light, if we recognize in him the man who, in the order of revelation, prefigured,but did not figurate himself, the Son of God.[5]

This symbolization could be understood as an effort to "overcome" the compactness of the Egyptian order and the movement towards the more highly developed Christian period. Through Moses and the messianic symbolism attached to him, we have the beginning of the "divine order" that results in Jesus. Moses embodies the characteristics of the "Son of God," although he is reluctant to accept the challenge of the charge. The "Son of God" is more than the figure of Moses, it must include the movement from

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[5]Eric Voegelin, Israel and Revelation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), p. 398.

Egypt, which Moses leads. Moses must also organize and guide a group of people who have refrained from making the necessary sacrifices and commitments for the sojourn out of Egypt. At one juncture his followers accuse Moses of attempting to kill them on the journey and ask him to return to Egypt.[6] Moses perseveres and regains his control of a skeptical lot. So we find in Moses, the teacher and seeker of order, the basis for a transformation of a clan of Hebrews into the divinely-inspired nation. Moses can undertake such a mission precisely because he experienced the theophanic reality, and Israel as the "Son of God" could have never existed had it not been for Moses. The creation of Israel is the experience of Moses's "leap in being," his extraordinary advancement in perception that he shares with the Israelites. This presence allowed the people of Israel to understand the human condition much more thoroughly than any previous civilization had been able to understand it; in this sense, Moses presents, translates, and fulfills the requirement placed upon him by the God that remains valid for Christian ministry--present God's message accurately and as completely as one possibly can to the people of God.[7] The demand on the disciple remains intact, regardless of circumstances. David Steinmetz has described Carl

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[6]Exodus 14:11-12.

[7]We are indebted to the Russell Kirk's description of Voegelin's Moses in his Roots of American Order for much of this insight.

Michalson's translation of this idea for a Christian cleric: "preach the faith of the Church even if they could not claim the whole of that faith for themselves. The Church, he said, lives from the word of God; it cannot live from heresy."[8]

The expatriation of the Israelites marks the decline of the Pharaonic order. Egypt is no longer the most favored empire and it must surrender its status in the world. Yahweh forces the Pharaoh to relinquish his title of the "Son of God" and it is assumed by Israel; therefore, it is no longer bestowed on a single individual. Egypt can never again exert the control it possessed in the past; the Pharaoh, in an effort to save his kingdom, appeals to Moses and Aaron to depart quickly and promises not to attempt to follow the emigres.[9] The post-exodus Egypt will not be the same as before, for now a greater power than the Pharaonic will have been recognized and it is Moses as teacher who presents this community and message to the world.

The new "Son of God" is a coherent social movement, but the group is again unable to provide the necessary leadership to make the departure from Egypt. It is at this point we notice a more dif-

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[8]David Steinmetz, "The Protestant Minister and the Teaching Office of the Church," Memory and Mission (Nashville: Abington, 1988), p. 77.

[9]Exodus 12.

ferentiated symbolism making its appearance: the revelation to Moses in Exodus 2 and 3. In Exodus 2:15-25 the Pharaoh dies and people of Israel remain in bondage and continue to pray for deliverance. Moses has fled Egypt and is in the land of Midian. In Midian the God of the Fathers reveals himself and tells Moses he will serve as the leader for the removal of the people of Israel from Egypt. In verse 25 the condition of the people of Israel is acknowledged by God as a reaffirmation of the Mosaic call. Eric Voegelin argues Yahweh was already a recognized deity, thereby affirming a procession of symbols that were in the process of change.[10] Yahweh's entrusting of the fate of Israel to Moses indicates the importance of the revelation. The procession of tension through Exodus 2 marks the awakening of Moses to his competition with the Egyptian regime. He has no alternative except to assume the mantle of leadership and suffer the consequences of his decision. God expresses himself through his actions and these events are evidenced by the instances where we are told "God knew" of the situation of the Israelites. God is presented as always participating in human history and maintaining a desire to improve the lot of humanity, albeit he does not always take an active role in these activities.

Above all, a certain sense of balance prevails and the continuity advances our understanding of the figure

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[10]Eric Voegelin, Ibid.

of Moses and God. The new order is of the people of God and the revelatory act involving Moses is now shared with his people. Moses struggles are the struggles of the people of Israel. The more multifaceted the conflicts Moses has to encounter, the more multifaceted the existence of chosen people become. The *Sitz in Leben* of the leader translates into the actual setting of his people. Moses is the man who has freed Israel from the polytheism and superstition and brought it into the presence of the one God. The function of his prophetic successors is "less clear."[11]

Moses is not the historian of Deuteronomy, but he is a spiritual teacher. Most profoundly, Moses serves as the *nabi*, the man in whose heart and mind the "leap of being" occurs. With Moses the theophanic reality of God in the midst of the people of God becomes more integrated. Our appreciation of God develops even more thoroughly with St. Paul, especially his Letter to the Romans.

The letters and ministry of Paul represent one of the most accessible accounts of the Christian as re-articulator of the faith as it is related to the historical and spiritual tension in early Christianity. No where are these tensions more obvious than in the Letter to the Romans. In the letter Paul addresses his flock in Rome in the following fashion: "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you

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[11]Ibid., p. 371.

and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."[12] We understand Paul's impetus for writing at this point, at least on a superficial level, as being motivated by his love for his fellow communicants. The letter, now canonized as the sixth book of the New Testament, is the longest letter written by Paul; it contains the most elaborated discussions of the Christian "life" to be found in the Pauline letters.[13] The Letter to the Romans is, therefore, one of the most important documents of the Christian faith--it has been called "the theological epistle *par excellence*."[14] While the study of this letter is essential to an understanding of the Christian *logos*, one cannot enter into such a study in a half-hearted way. This is especially true when one is attempting to exegete Paul's view of Christian freedom, civil responsibility and divine revelation in accordance with the changing demands of early Christian society.[15] The Letter to the Romans and its more explicitly political teachings are at the center of this problem. These

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[12]"Romans 1:7," The New Oxford Annotated Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 1361.

[13]Matthew Black, Romans (Greenwood: Attic Press, 1971), p. 14.

[14]Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abington Press, 1982), p. 112.

[15]For a more complete discussion of the problems one must encounter in this regard see Clinton Morrison, The Powers That Be (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 11.

passages have been used, for example, to justify a dogmatic obedience to the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Martin Luther, for example, in his Lectures on Romans attempted to use his commentary on these texts as the basis for a criticism of the Catholic Church's "temporalness" and lack of commitment to "eternal" concerns.[16]

The harshest criticism of Paul belies a simple explanation, but we might describe the essence of his critique as an effort to detail Paul's troublesome propensity for attempting to bring the vastness of the *Kosmos* to earth. Paul shares many similarities with Plato and Aristotle, as they also strived to present the order constituted by man's response to a theophany. Paul and Plato are reacting to related events, but it is the nature of their reactions that separates the two. Paul, unlike Plato, transcends the boundaries of normal anticipation to the anticipation of a state of perfection (*teleion*).

Paul's message was to affirm the reality of life with God and to preach a message of righteousness. For Paul the "vision of the Resurrected" was more than a manifestation of the divinity, it was the reformulation of the absolute transcendent. And as a more practical concern, Paul was simply fulfilling the requirements of this by preaching and proclaiming a regime more

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[16]William Pauck, Luther: Lectures on Romans (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 358.

strict than the law of the Jews. Paul preached an austere and demanding message, while much of the old world was falling into disorder. This worldview does not have to be read as a gnostic or utopian exertion; it may have been the work of a man that was given a proclamation, the greatest ever pronounced, and he recognized it demanded articulation.

Lastly, John Wesley allows us, as Joseph Seaborn has argued, to understand the "the importance of as close a marriage as possible between faith and learning."[17] Ted Campbell has detailed the relationship between Wesley's affinity for the "manners of Ancient Christians" as a means of understanding and defending the Christian tradition.[18] For our purposes, Wesley was part of an older, almost medieval tradition in religious life, who was forced to clarify his approaches regarding the education of clergy and the authority of the Church for an age dominated by a different, more discriminating temperament. Through his rearticulation of clerical holiness, Wesley is challenging the social contractarian view of religious life; he also raises the possibility that theological atomism could prevail if such a departure from normative *ethos* was

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[17]Joseph Seaborn, "John Wesley's Use of History as a Ministerial and Educational Tool," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1985, p. 237.

[18]Ted Campbell, John Wesley and Christian Antiquity (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), p. 57. Chapter 4 of this tome is devoted to such an examination.

implanted. Human existence was defined by Wesley as a social and political participation, connected to a community, and if the connectiveness of the community was disrupted, the social order that had prevailed could falter. We are not examining an artifact, but the work of a perspicacious student of life engaged in an effort to recover the lost soul of Christian evangelism amidst the temptations of the French Revolution.

For Wesley the presentation of a thorough understanding of God was essential for the preservation of the faith. In the course of his own life, he composed numerous works aimed at fulfilling such a purpose. These "vital links" between the Church's past and its authority demanded a modern affirmation of God in the world. Our understanding and articulation of these connections are the grounding of a theology of ministry and life.

## II. Confronting the Problem: The Human Factor

At the core of a theology of ministry is a view of humanity and the human need for grace, which comes from our understanding of God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, with an appreciation of the centrality of creation as an ongoing Christian concern. God created humankind in the likeness of God; however, fallen humankind has throughout the centuries attempted to recreate God in humanity's own image; although when we are at our best as children of God, we are serving our divine purpose. When such allegiance is perpetuated as creations of God, we can be "received with blessings" (I Timothy 4:3-5), as we have attempted to return to communion with God.[19]

By examining the image of God, *Imago Dei*, and our genesis in this image, we can overcome such limitations and actually reverse such distractions, and return to a fuller knowledge and love of God and a deeper appreciation of ourselves as children of God.

Wesley suggested that if you want to know humankind in the image of God, one first had to see

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[19]The use of the Hebrew *tob* (Genesis 1) may also suggest this goodness.

the renewal of humankind in Jesus Christ. Christ becomes the last Adam. He provides for a revolutionary reversal of humankind in the image of God. We now read the Hebrew Bible with an enlightened understanding of the continued theophanic reality of God. We can know sin in all its destructiveness because of how it was overcome in Christ. The person of Christ provides the basis for this breakthrough.

Among the contributors to this appreciation are the image of God at the end of the first chapter of Genesis, the witness of the New Testament; and Christ as image of God from the side of humankind and from the side of God. Christ reveals the Father to us and serves as the mediatory cause by presenting the image of God from humankind and allowing the acknowledgment of humankind in the likeness of God (Romans 5:12-21). Christ, then, is the newer and greater Adam.

As one who was created in the image of God, we can know God. As the eminent British Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright suggests, the relationship is not "symmetrical."[20] We are connected to God, and without this connectiveness we would not exist. To understand this conjunction we must understand the characteristics of the bond; and we

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[20]Geoffrey Wainwright, Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 16.

begin such a process by understanding the three central manifestations: communion with God, the human vocation on earth, and humans as social beings.

Being created in the image of God means we are formed to be in communion with God, or friendship with God. God wants us to enjoy fellowship. One of the most important signs of this is language. God claims us and asks us to respond. This is the dialogical constitution of human existence. In Christ, we can know our role in such communion. We are weak, but God is strong and our strength comes from allowing God's plan to be our plan. Being in communion with God also means we are free in the sense our Creator is free. This gives us the freedom to be as utterly human as God is utterly God. Such a notion can be dangerous given the fact that the freedom of modern liberal democracy--the earthly freedom we experience--is actually bondage to a substantial degree. Freedom with God has special meaning. The second collect of the Book of Common Prayer declares this freedom in God:

> O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us, thy humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defense, may not fear the power of

any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.[21]

The freedom God offers makes us most free when we are most thoroughly God's! Augustine's admonition to love God and do as you will is a reminder of this in our lives. It is also a reminder of the need for complete devotion to God.

The second part of being in communion with God is our role as stewards of the earth, God's created order. We are given this control not as destroyers of the creation, but as servants who seek to represent God in such a way as to exalt God's holy name. The material elements used in the sacraments of the Church present a model for the use of the divine elements in the relation between God and humanity. We share in the fullness of God's love by participation in the care of God's creations.

Lastly, as creatures formed in the image of God we are social beings. At the creation of humankind in Genesis 1:26 a social model is proposed: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The relationship of divine love for us and our love of God has always been understood as a love for each other. The Trinity reflects this love and helps us develop the Christian social constitution that makes the life in

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[21]The Book of Common Prayer (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 57.

God possible. In the sacrament of baptism we join the community of faith and we join the family of God. To refuse to love your brothers and sisters in the faith is a refusal to love God. The Eucharist symbolizes our continuing love for God and our sharing in the Image of God. It is a meal we share together with God. Participation in the Eucharist requires the proper use of God's creations for all of God's children.

While we are created in the image of God, we remain sinful creatures. God gives us communion, but we all too often create our own idols. The human heart, as Calvin suggested, is a factory of idols. We are sinful creatures and the doctrine of sin, according to William Temple, is one doctrine for which we have empirical proof. The role of *peccatum originale originatum*, the condition we find ourselves in after Adam, helps us redefine our relationship to God. The fall of Adam is humanity's fall. We must have the grace of God if we are to be redeemed and reconciled.

Even though the characteristics of our tradition's concept of divine grace are complex, the position of grace as the genuine and essential act of God's perfect love for humankind can inform our inquiry. Humans are in a rather hopeless situation, removed from an intimate relation with God due to human sin. As we begin to acknowledge the limitations of our condition, usually at a point where we are experiencing "the sleep of death, the weights of...a burden (sin) too heavy to be borne," we can ap-

preciate the inner working of God's grace.[22] H. Orton Wiley, a Wesleyan scholar, for example, suggests humankind's inability is so complete that only God can save them;[23] this does at least allow for a response, which would prove untenable for orthodox Calvinists who place such emphasis on total depravity. The Wesleyan concept of grace requires a response that is antithetical to "indolent inactivity."[24] In God's grace we find the hope that brings order to our lives. Without such a concept of grace, "the cosmos itself would fly into disarray and chaos."[25] This grace can operate in a variety of forms, but it always assumes the sign of God's love of humanity. Charles Wesley's sudden movement within his corpus of eucharistic hymns from "pardoning grace" to the "life of grace" suggests the importance of the concept to an accurate articulation of the tenets of Wesleyan sacramental theology:

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[22]Edward Sugden, editor, John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons (Nashville: Abington, 1983), p. 170.

[23]As quoted in Charles Carter, editor, A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1983), p. 485.

[24]Sugden, Ibid., p. 170.

[25]Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, The Gospel of Grace: The Way of Salvation in the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 61.

> Thou our faithful hearts prepare, Thou Thy pardoning grace declare; Thou that hast for sinners died, Show Thyself the Crucified. (34:3)[26]

The concept quickly assumes a "double" quality and grace becomes the personification of the perfect love of the divine:

> Worthy the Lamb of endless praise, Whose double life we here shall prove, The pardoning and the hallowing grace, The dawning of and the perfect love (38:1)[27]

The elongation of a concept of grace as an extended relationship with God over the course of lifetime of devotion, connected with an eschatological element becomes part of the evolution of the notion, especially within the context of the Lord's Supper:

> Our life of grace we here shall feel, Shed in our loving hearts abroad, Till Christ our glorious life reveal, Long hidden with Himself in God (38:4).

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[26]J. Earnest Rattenbury, The Euchararistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley (Cleveland: Order of Saint Luke Publications, 1990), 11-12.

[27]Ibid., p. 11-13.

Such a full appreciation of divine grace was essential to the life of the believer. John Wesley remained a devotee of the Protestant notion of salvation by faith through God's grace alone, although he also articulated the limits of "cheap grace"[28] as it was (perhaps unfairly) associated with Luther.[29] Grace, as with the Lord's Supper, had a vibrancy associated with it that could not be excluded.

The Book of Discipline begins with an unequivocal presentation of the centrality of the importance of the theological understanding of grace to the Wesleyan tradition: "Grace pervades our understanding of the Christian faith and life."[30] Grace is at the core of our theological enterprise and our recognition of the sacraments.

The formal means of grace serve as mediums of presenting, confirming, and defining our devotion to Christ:

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[28]This is actually a term borrowed from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 1.

[29]Colin Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), p. 69.

[30]The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1992 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) p. 44, and subsequent editions.

> By 'means of grace,' I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.[31]

By naming these essential habits in such a way, the Wesleys have sided with the general trend of the Reformation to avoid describing the elements as "marks." The "means" are to serve as an external sign of an interior grace and assume either an instituted or prudential form. Among the instituted means, prayer assumes the pre-eminent position, described as the "chief" source.[32] Within the same context, the Wesleys detail the use of scripture and the Lord's supper, possibly suggesting a special status for these means as compared to fasting and Christian conference that are mentioned at a later point. The initial three are summarized as the ordinary means. The three prudential means of "doing no harm, by avoiding evil," "doing good of every possible sort," and following the rules of the societies and participating actively in the gatherings.

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[31]Sugden, Ibid., p. 171.

[32]Rattenbury, Ibid. This is a contestable point. Several of the eucharistic hymns suggest the Lord's Supper is the primary act of the spiritual life.

We must thank God for the grace of God and seek to conform to it. Prevenient grace offers us the opportunity to restore our relationship and a rememoration of our creation in the image of God.

## III. Christ as Fatum

Luther responded to the second article of the Nicene Creed, "And in one Lord Jesus Christ," by summarizing it anew: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God born of the Father in eternity, and also true man born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord."[33] Christ is given the title at the decisive event in the history of creation, the Resurrection, and we have hints of this connection throughout the New Testament. We find examples of Jesus as Lord in I Corinthians 6:14, when we are told God "raised the Lord Jesus," and in Romans 10:9: "because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." In addition to the confessions, Acts 2:36 mentions the exaltation of Jesus as Lord and God.

Throughout the centuries the Church has affirmed that Jesus Christ is *Kyrios.* The depiction of Lordship was certainly part of the earliest Christian confessions. Jesus made it clear that the Messiah was not only David's son, but David's Lord; Jesus was Lord

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[33]As quoted in Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 88.

(Mark 12:37).[34] This is a remembering of what Christ has done and what shall take place in the future.

The Creed gives us the story of the one Lord, and tells us Christ will return. We confess Christ as Lord at our Baptism, and we invoke Christ as Lord when we pray. We make this confession because Christ is our Lord, the one who lived, died and was resurrected. The one who, according to early Methodism's twenty-five Articles of Religion, was: "two whole and perfect natures--that is to say, the Godhead and manhood--were joined together in one person...one Christ, very God and very man."[35] But Jesus was with the Father before the Creation and is now at the right hand of the Father serving as our intercessor. Christ as Lord serves not as an oppressive tyrant, but as the model of Christian virtue. The royal office of Christ is the royal office of the Father.

The great Czech theologian Jan Lochman correctly affirmed there are several major functions of this Lordship.[36] The offering of *Kyrios* comes at the

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[34]Thomas Oden, The Word of Life: Systematic Theology, Volume Two (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989), p. 15.

[35]Thomas Oden, Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1988), p. 112.

[36]Jan Milic Lochman, The Faith We Confess (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

Resurrection, as we have noted, and this directs attention to a specific act. We recapitulate the Easter event with Jesus the crucified as both Lord and God. We call upon our Lord because we can bear witness to the power of the resurrection. As a second consideration, *Kyrios* refers to the children of God in the present. To share in the classic response of Thomas, we see our Lord and our God when we see Jesus (John 20:28). Christ was the Lord before creation, he remains Lord today, and shall return as Lord to redeem the people of God. The term points us to the past and the future. In the Lordship of Christ contemporary Christians are presented with hope amidst the turmoil they must encounter vis à vis the various powers and principalities of the world. Christ brings a message of liberation, while representing the whole work of God, and atoning for the sins of humankind. As a third aspect of the Lordship of Christ, we must realize it is of cosmic dimensions. With Paul, we may confess that the Lordship of Christ has power in heaven and on earth and has the authority over all earthly and heavenly power. This affirmation should comfort us in the present, while providing the incentive for our supplication in the immediate, and augmented by our labors on behalf of our Lord. With Christ as our Lord, we must follow Him.

## IV. The Living Breath: Holy Spirit as Comforter

The Holy Spirit is God, the third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit was active before and during Creation, in the revelation of God, as our Lord promised, and now serves as the Comforter. Our appreciation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit presumes some distinctiveness from the first and second Persons of the Trinity. We also acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is more than an impersonal power; on the contrary, it allows us to realign our realities of life and reorient them towards God in the present; the Holy Spirt is part of God's giving to humankind. We must also affirm, with Augustine and the tradition of the Church that "God does not give a Gift inferior to Himself,"[37] therefore, the full divinity of the Holy Spirit is assumed.

Our knowledge of the faith, our awareness of the Father and the Son, comes from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit serves as a source of inspiration and enlightenment. The Spirit constantly directs the communicant towards the truth of Christ, a revelation that allows us to see beyond the decadence of this world.

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[37]Augustine, Faith and the Creed, in William A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1970), p. 44.

The Spirit is holy because it is God. All holiness comes from God and any holiness is a derivative from God. In fact, we define holiness in relation to God. In his *Orations*, Gregory of Nazianzen appropriately summarized the Holy Spirit of God:

> always existed, and exists, and always
> will exist who neither had a beginning,
> nor will have an end...
> ever being partaken, but not partaking;
> perfecting, not being perfected;
> sanctifying, not being sanctified;
> deifying, not being deified...
> Life and Lifegiver;
> Light and Lightgiver;
> absolute Good, and Spring of Goodness
> by Whom the Father is known
> and the Son is glorified....
> Why make a long discourse of it? All that the Father has the Son has also, except the being Unbegotten; and all that the Son has the Spirit has also, except the Generation.[38]

The Holy Spirit is then part of the abundant life God offers us. It proceeds from the Father, receiving from the Son. The Holy Spirit is represented as Lord and Giver of Life. This, as we have noted, is a title ascribed to both Christ and the Holy Spirit. The

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[38]As quoted in Thomas Oden, Life in the Spirit, Systematic Theology, Volume Three (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), pp. 15-16.

Sovereignty of God is singular, but exercised by three Persons.

The Holy Spirit serves the individual, community of faith, and the Church by giving life. At Pentecost, work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church is affirmed, but the Holy Spirit is an eternal participant in the Godhead. It has been present from the beginning and continues to give life to humanity.

The Holy Spirit also makes effective the systematic ordering of God's work of salvation towards humankind. God has made the divine intentions known and they receive rearticulation in Scripture. The Holy Spirit serves the believer and the community of faith by providing reassurance; the Holy Spirit offers the administration of redemption, *Oikonomia*, of the beginning and the end, providing nurture to those in covenant with God. The writer of Hebrews notes that the Holy Spirit assesses the thinking and attitudes of the heart, suggesting the Holy Spirit is even aware of our most clandestine activities. This is the discernment that convicts us of sin. Through the Spirit's work in prevenient grace we are afforded the opportunity to confront our sin and the redemptive power of God can then act, allowing for our New Birth. This is the hallmark of the Christian life and allows for a greater understanding of God that transforms our existence.

The Holy Spirit builds upon conversion by showing the way of personal, communal and societal holiness. We are to become more like the Spirit--more like

God--as we progress towards the Holiness of God. The Spirit empowers the Church and shows it the light of God amidst the darkness of the world. The Holy Spirit follows the New Birth with the giving of spiritual gifts so that the believer might glorify God, and the Spirit controls these gifts so that the gifts can only be used for the edification of God and the uplifting of God's Church.

## V. Summing Up: A Wesleyan Notion of Ministry Revisited

The minister in the tradition of Wesley must be of a theological habit of mind and possess a theology of ministry if the Church is to survive. An affirmation of the Quadrilateral of Scripture, Reason, Tradition and Experience as the four authorities is our theological quest. The relationship of the four is more complicated than one might assume. We must reassert the primacy of scripture as the pre-eminent guide for our lives. While scripture is the dominate "piece," we also realize tradition serves as the womb of scripture and continues to provide the basis for our transmission of the essential teachings. Tradition produces scripture, but scripture then becomes normative for tradition. Scripture tells us about experience. Experience is recorded in scripture. We are presented by experience with patterns for future relationships with God and with our brothers and sisters in the faith. Reason occurs throughout scripture. Paul, for example, uses reason in the service of the Gospel. The elements affirm the anthropological constant. We continue in the same quest to know, as did our progenitors in the faith, and we must continue to use the quadrilateral as our guide.

As Donald Thorsen suggests in his tome on the Wesleyan Quadrilaterial,[39] Wesley's "theological method"[40] was a rearticulation of the tradition of the Church, augmented by a "vital understanding of the faith."[41] We then must examine the current challenges before us in such a way as to affirm our story and confront the realities of modernity. In effect, we confront the possibility of retelling our story to a new, unreflective audience.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the narrative movement in contemporary theology is that it has forced a reconsideration of how we share the story of our faith and the tradition of our church. As one can easily prove, our inability to offer an accurate recollection of our shared past, connected to the prospects for a future under the blessings of God, have left some Wesleyans (especially United Methodism) unable to respond to many difficulties the movement must currently face. When we move from the universal dilemma to the particular quagmire, an even greater appreciation for the predicament can be

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[39]Donald A. D. Thorsen, The Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 31-124.

[40]While Wesley never composed a treatise on systematic theology, there is a "system" to his understanding of the Christian life and how it should be lived.

[41]Thorsen, Ibid., p. 61.

achieved. The rising generation must hear the story before the story is forgotten. Rosemary Keller's plea for a revitalization of this narrative knowledge is essential to the preservation of Wesleyanism and the resurgence of a sense of community in a fractured world. We must begin, as Keller argues, with an effort at "synthesis."[42] The hermeneutic under which Keller is operating, grounded in an appreciation of feminism as a persistent theme within Wesleyanism since the early period of British Methodism, has much merit. Such a program could serve to preserve the story; however, much systematization and elucidation of the story should take place. For example, the reconciling of competing narratives has progressed tremendously in the last quarter century, but they must be taught both formally and informally. To undertake such an effort is to attempt a reasserting of Wesleyan theology within the constraints of the community of faith. The most prominent current example of this is Thomas Oden's work on the early Mothers and Fathers of the Church and his delineation of their insight for the modern Wesleyan. Keller envisions a similar project and anticipates the personal and denominational dimensions of such an undertaking. If we are to respond as a denomination, we have little choice except to pursue such a task.

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[42]Rosemary Keller, "The Transformed Life in Jesus Christ; Toward a Feminist Perspective in the Wesleyan Tradition," Wesleyan Theology Today (np., nd.), p. 197.

More opportunities must be offered for the telling of the Wesleyan/Methodist story and the teaching of the theological mission. The new epoch in such sharing allows all communicants to participate in telling the story without succumbing to the prevailing tenets, which have hitherto been the accounts of dominant progress and usually excluded the efforts of women, evangelicals, and other groups. Keller envisions "mutual empowerment" benefitting both men and women; she also argues such a *reapproachmont* is the normative, Wesleyan approach to solving such a dilemma. The Holy Spirit works through the Church over time as a source of comfort and enlightenment. As many of the early spiritual leaders of Wesleyanism demonstrate, the invocation and guidance of the Holy Spirit allowed for the amelioration of significant difficulties. The ministry of Phoebe Palmer serves to remind contemporary Wesleyans of the use of the immediate nature of the gifts of the Spirit and their importance to the community of faith. Keller believes this new learning will also increase the faithfulness of the denomination, and Wesley also stressed the connection the story of the faith and the life of the Church.

The question of a revitalized ministry then becomes the essential one for the preservation of the faith. In the course of his own life, Wesley composed numerous works aimed at fulfilling such a purpose. Wesley's Sermons, Sunday Service and various letters are prominent reminders of this pursuit of theological recovery that appears to be neglected by some

contemporary Wesleyans. John Wesley's program was in an essential sense, a pragmatic plan for church renewal.

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