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Taking Aldersgate Seriously

Kenneth J. Collins

The Samuel J. and Norma C. Womack Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Methodist College, Fayetteville, North Carolina

Among contemporary Methodist historians, the marking of the 250th anniversary of John Wesley's Aldersgate experience will perhaps best be remembered not for its joyful or devout commemorations, but for the lively controversy which it has engendered. Theodore Jennings, for instance, not only observed in 1988 that "Aldersgate [was] largely a non-event,"[1] but he also argued that as Methodism celebrated this anniversary it was only celebrating "its own willful distortion of its own history, its own apostasy from Wesleyan theology."[2] Likewise and more recently, Randy Maddox, editor of Aldersgate Reconsidered, decried the continuing celebration of Aldersgate and suggested commemorating the formation of the first Methodist society (1739) or even Wesley's death (1791) as suitable, and more theologically appropriate, replacements.[3]

In a real sense, what lies behind such calls for replacement is the assumption that an interpretive revolution is now under way in Wesley Studies—a revolution, so it is claimed, which will eventually issue not only in the rejection of the reigning conversionist paradigm, but which will also lead to the establishment of a more accurate and sophisticated model. However, the thesis of this present essay is that it is precisely the methodology used by contemporary historians like Jennings and Maddox, who together seek to deconstruct a rich interpretative tradition, which is itself seriously flawed in that it is unable to adjudicate the current hermeneutical dilemma before the Methodist community: namely, how are the texts of Aldersgate to be interpreted: a) in light of Wesley's entire spiritual journey and b) in terms of the socio-ecclesial context of the interpreters? Indeed, as this present piece will demonstrate, the works of both Jennings and Maddox falter chiefly on the first of these counts.

I. Methodological Failure

A. Definitional Imprecision

One of the more obvious difficulties of the work of Jennings and of a volume like Aldersgate Reconsidered is the lack of definitional precision in each. Jennings, for instance, quickly moves from a discussion of a conversionist reading of Wesley's Journal to what he calls "Aldersgateism" and contends that the latter entails the ability "to date one's conversion and that nothing after this is really important."[4] Even more troubling than this apparent creation of a stereotype is Jennings confusion of a twentieth-century ecclesiastical context with a hermeneutical problem which arises from eighteenth-century texts. In particular, he critiques "Aldersgateism" for its reluctance to be fully apprised and appreciative of the vocabulary of contemporary liberation theology. "It [Aldersgateism] knows, and can know," Jennings complains, "nothing of a preferential option for the poor for it thinks of interior consciousness instead of doing the will of the Father."[5]

In light of this lack of clarity, and also for the sake of hermeneutical responsibility, the conversionist or "standard interpretation" should be defined with greater precision and in terms of those authors who are the best representatives of this interpretive school — such authors as Henry Moore, Luke Tyerman, Nehemiah Curnock, George Croft Cell, William Cannon, J. Ernest Rattenbury, Martin Schmidt, V.H.H. Green, and Kenneth J. Collins.[6] When this is done, the conversionist model emerges with all of its many nuances intact, and the Aldersgate experience appears as the time when John Wesley encountered a gracious God, exercised justifying faith, was born anew, and when he received a measure of assurance. It is, therefore, in this restricted sense that the phrase will be used throughout this essay.

B. The Hermeneutical Problem: Unexamined Texts and Overrated Communities

For their part, both Theodore Runyon and Richard Heitzenrater, two of the leading scholars in Wesley studies, realize that the current controversy in Methodism involves not only the interpretation of equivocal texts, but also an interpretation in terms of Wesley's entire spiritual biography. The "fit," so to speak, is preeminently, though not exclusively, between an assessment of a text and John Wesley's spiritual trajectory.[7]

Unfortunately, the careful hermeneutical work of Heitzenrater and Runyon is not duplicated by many of the other participants in the Aldersgate debate. Jennings, for instance, although he initially attempts to undertake an extensive theological examination of Wesley's texts (the Journal notes in particular which supposedly "rob the conversionist interpretation of much of its force"),[8] he quickly abandons this task in order to criticize those groups within Methodism, especially American Evangelicals, which attach some significance to Aldersgate. Such criticism, exaggerated as it is, not only casts doubt on Jennings' scholarly judgment, but it also reveals a highly partisan reading of Aldersgate. In fact, claiming to know even the motives of moderate and conservative scholars, Jennings declares: "Aldersgate was not Wesley's conversion. The attempt to maintain that it was rests upon a willful distortion of Wesley's own words and reflections."[9] And elsewhere, even more forcefully, Jennings decries:

What this means is that the conversionist myth of Aldersgate is a lie. It is unsupported by Wesley's own writings and depends upon a systematic distortion of these texts. To celebrate Aldersgate as ... the conversion of Wesley is to perpetrate an historical fraud....But [Wesley] was not taken in by [this] phony evangelicalism that for all its talk of Christ, faith, and being born again, had no relation to that biblical faith that works by love to produce the holiness without which none shall see God.[10]

Obviously, something has gone very wrong here. Jennings, apparently unable or at least unwilling to argue in a deliberate and reasoned fashion, has ultimately resorted to hyperbole and name-calling to carry the day. In short, his "theological" argument—what there is of it—has collapsed under the strain of his (in group/out group) polemics.

In a similar fashion, Randy Maddox neither explores the theological significance of the Journal disclaimers, nor does he offer nuanced arguments which employ the literary fruit of the later Wesley.[11] Indeed, his scholarly interest lies elsewhere. Observe, for example, the subtle but no less significant hermeneutical shift which takes place in Maddox's approach where the interpretive task involves not so much Wesley's later spiritual development, but the contemporary community of interpreters. He explains:

The best way to determine if a legitimate 'fit' has been found is to forward a proposed interpretation into the community of interpretation and see how it survives the questions of those with differing perspectives."[12]

To underscore his point, Maddox affirms that the ambiguities of the texts of Aldersgate are such that "this debate cannot be settled on textual grounds alone,"[13] and he, therefore, calls for an increased role for "the shifting theological concerns within the later Wesleyan traditions."[14] In other words, the socio-ecclesial origins of differing interpretations of Aldersgate are not only underscored by this interpreter, but such material, in the absence of any other kind of argumentation in his writings, actually forms the basis for his rejection of the conversionist paradigm.[15] However, it is one thing to be sensitive to the socio-ecclesial environment of interpretation—a requirement for any critical study—but it is quite another thing to label unfavored assessments of Aldersgate as "partisan" and at the same time to designate one's own preference as an "obvious result of ... professionalization."[16] And though Maddox claims to be informed by the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who insisted that a proper interpretation must fuse the horizons of both text and community,[17] his essays in Aldersgate Reconsidered suggest more the influence of Stanley Fish's reader-response criticism where the meaning of a literary work is found not in the text, but in the interpretive acts of its readers.[18] In short, Maddox's conclusions read more like favored political statements, the celebration of his own interpretive community, than like the results of careful hermeneutical labor.

But perhaps the most flawed element in Maddox's methodology is his attempt to employ the typology of Thomas Kuhn as an organizing vehicle for Aldersgate Reconsidered. Seemingly unaware of many of the characteristics which inform some of the key distinctions which Kuhn has made in his typology, Maddox incorrectly discerns that an "interpretive revolution" is already taking place concerning Aldersgate.[19] But for Kuhn, at least, reigning paradigms, precisely because they often express first principles, are much more difficult to displace than Maddox has imagined.[20] To be sure, a truly scientific revolution, in contrast to normal science, emerges only when the list of anomalies becomes so great and the arguments against the reigning paradigm so cogent that a crisis erupts.[21] But, by analogy, is this the state of affairs in Wesley Studies today? Apparently not, for though Maddox, as noted earlier, has called for the deemphasis of all Aldersgate celebrations,[22] he has done so virtually in the absence of any sustained, critical, and theological evaluation of Wesley's writings on this crucial issue. But the mere mention of "the ambiguities of Wesley's references to Aldersgate" and a simple appeal to "the later Wesley" are not enough.[23] In short, Maddox, like so many others in Wesley Studies today, has mistaken the claim that the conversionist paradigm is faulty, for an argument.[24] The field of modern science, however, proceeds much more cautiously (and judiciously) than this.

Not surprisingly, then, many of the remaining selections which constitute Aldersgate Reconsidered likewise neglect the hermeneutical task by failing to take into account, in any significant way, the writings of the later Wesley. Instead, these approaches much prefer to explore the perspectives of assorted contemporary Methodist communities—an endeavor which constitutes the heart of their argumentation. Unfortunately, what emerges from such labor is more akin to sociological (and political) analysis than it is to the challenge and promise of hermeneutics. However, for the sake of space only two such examples will be cited.

First of all, David Lowes Watson, aware of "the polarization of our church today,"[25] calls for an appropriation of the form of religion—not just religious experience—in terms of Wesley's General Rules and other methods of discipleship in his piece "Aldersgate Street and the General Rules: The Form and the Power of Methodist Discipleship." But in his attempt to correct a supposed imbalance of the power and form of religion in Methodism today (due to assigning Wesley's Aldersgate experience a disproportionate significance) Watson essentially overstates his case and thereby forfeits many of the well-crafted nuances which are characteristic of Wesley's mature theology. Preoccupation with the contemporary ecclesiastical setting, so it seems, has colored Watson's interpretive lens. In one place, for example, he writes: "For the form and power of early Methodist discipleship lay in its methods ..."[26] However, it is much more accurate to state that, for Wesley at least, the form indeed lay in the methods, but the power in the Holy Spirit.[27]

The second contribution to Aldersgate Reconsidered which warrants attention in terms of the development of its argument is that of Jean Miller Schmidt which is entitled: "'Strangely Warmed': The Place of Aldersgate in the Methodist Canon." And though this piece obviously has its strengths, one of them being its apparent repudiation of Jennings' debunking of Aldersgate as a "non event,"[28] it too is not without its faults. Thus, for example, the assessment of the value of Aldersgate in the life of John Wesley, offered in the brief introduction of this essay, is heavily dependent on the insights and conclusions of Albert Outler.[29] This appeal to authority, problematic as it is, becomes even more troubling when Schmidt attributes a claim to Outler which he, in fact, never made. Schmidt writes:

Rather, as Albert Outler has shown, the Aldersgate story as such drops out of sight in Wesley's writings after 1740, and the experience itself was followed by 'further crises of equal, or nearly equal moment.[30]

However, compare this quotation with Outler's comments in his book John Wesley: "But the fact remains that the Aldersgate story as such drops abruptly out of sight after its publication in the second Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal (1740)."[31] Notice that this late Methodist scholar wrote that the story as such drops out of Wesley's Journal in 1740, which is accurate, but that Schmidt contends the account drops out of Wesley's writings, which is not. Surely Albert Outler was well aware of the reference to Aldersgate in Wesley's writings years after 1740. In a letter to

"John Smith," for example, on December 30, 1745 Wesley affirmed:

> For it is true that from May 24, 1738, 'wherever I was desired to preach, salvation by faith was my only theme'...And it is equally true that 'it was for preaching the love of God and man that several of the clergy forbade me their pulpits' before that time, before May 24, before I either preached or knew salvation by faith.[32]

Beyond her initial observations and her exploration of the secondary literature, Schmidt tracks the practice of British and American churches in commemorating John Wesley's Aldersgate experience and concludes that "celebrations of the anniversary of Aldersgate are a product of this century!"[33]—an observation, judging from its punctuation, which she holds forth in apparent triumph. This same claim, by the way, is reiterated by Maddox with equal vigor when he notes that "Aldersgate as the crucial event in Wesley's life is a relatively recent phenomenon, not evident before the twentieth century!"[34] However, an exploration of the liturgical activities of Methodism, again though interesting, has little to offer scholars as they grapple with some very difficult writings. Therefore, whether or not the American Methodist church in the nineteenth century constructed banners or composed hymns to mark the significance of 24 May 1738 is virtually irrelevant. The heart of the debate lies elsewhere. And that this has not been clearly seen by many scholars is, no doubt, part of the problem.

II. Future Prospects for the Debate

In light of this brief survey of recent scholarship, it should be evident by now that the historical and theological work which remains to be done in order to displace the conversionist paradigm and to establish a new one is considerable. On the one hand, one must disprove that Aldersgate was the time when John Wesley encountered a gracious God, was justified, born anew, and when he received a measure of assurance—the ingredients of the conversionist interpretation—and prove, on the other hand, through argument and reason, that a new model is better able to make sense of Wesley's own early and later spiritual development, especially in terms of his celebrated motif of real Christianity which he developed from 1725 until his death.[35]

Accordingly, whether an interpretive revolution concerning Aldersgate will emerge in the future remains to be seen. At present, however, no such revolution is evident. Arguments based on silence (Wesley almost never referred to Aldersgate again), on exaggerations (Aldersgate is a "non-event"), on authority (misquoting Outler), on ethnocentricity or favored interpretive communities, as well as arguments which principally appeal to secondary sources or church practice to sustain their conclusions are all inadequate: they can neither displace the "reigning" conversionist paradigm nor can they establish a new one. And though some have proclaimed, with much fanfare, that an interpretive revolution is already underway, the real work has hardly begun.

Endnotes

1. Theodore Jennings, "John Wesley Against Aldersgate," Quarterly Review Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall 1988): 7. Bracketed material is mine; I have changed the present tense to the past.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

3. Randy L. Maddox, "Celebrating Wesley—When?" Methodist History Vol. 24, No. 2 (January 1991): 75. Though Maddox justifies the commemoration of Wesley's death as reinforcing the perspective of the mature Wesley, he hardly demonstrates what theological characteristics of the mature Wesley must be brought into play and, more importantly, what precise difference they would make.

4. Jennings, "Against Aldersgate," p. 11, 20.

5. Ibid., p. 21. Bracketed material is mine.

6. To be sure, these authors maintain slightly different emphases on this topic; nevertheless, their general position clearly resonates with what is defined here as a conversionist view. Cf. Henry Moore, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, Vol. 1. (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1826), 198ff; Luke Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, 3 vols.(New York: Burt Franklin), 1:179ff; Nehemiah Curnock, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., 8 vols.(London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 1:33ff; George Croft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1935), 28, 73, 185, and 361; William Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946), 66-80; J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Conversion of the Wesleys (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 25, 42, and 82; Martin Schmidt, John Wesley: A Theological Biography, 2 vols.(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:213-311; and V.H.H. Green, John Wesley (London: Thomas Nelson Ltd., 1964), 60-63.

7. Cf. Richard Heitzenrater, "Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity," in Aldersgate Reconsidered, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), p. 50., and Theodore H. Runyon, "The Importance of Experience for Faith," in Aldersgate Reconsidered, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), p. 105.

8. Jennings, "Against Aldersgate," p. 8.

9. Ibid., p. 4.

10. Ibid., p. 20, 22. Bracketed material is mine.

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Wesley Studies Society
c/o Christ United Methodist Church
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Greensboro, NC 27410
(910)299-1571

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11. Randy Maddox, for example, argues that the standard interpretation of Aldersgate assumes that May 24, 1738 was the time when Wesley was converted from a pre-Christian moralist into a true Christian believer. However, Maddox seems to be unaware of two essential points which clearly emerge from a reading of the whole Wesley: first, the theme of true Christianity was one which Wesley developed throughout his life; second, and more importantly, Wesley strongly associated true, proper Christianity, in almost all instances, with regeneration and with a measure of assurance during the last decade of his life. Cf. Maddox, Reconsidered, p. 13.

12. Randy Maddox, "Aldersgate: A Tradition History," in Aldersgate Reconsidered, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), p. 146.

13. Ibid., p. 134.

14. Ibid.

15. Though Maddox affirms that differing interpretations of Aldersgate should be analyzed in light of textual ambiguities and the shifting theological concerns within the later Wesleyan traditions, he virtually neglects the former task. Cf. Maddox, "Tradition History," p. 133 ff.

16. Ibid., p. 144. Observe, for example, that Maddox lists the conversionist view under the heading "Aldersgate as Partisan Theological Warrant," and the assurance-only view under "Questioning Partisan Readings of Aldersgate." In addition, although Maddox associates the conversionist view with revivalism, itself a questionable judgment, he fails to locate, sociologically speaking, anti-conversionist views — perhaps because he thinks that they are the correct ones and have therefore transcended such bias. Cf. Maddox, "Tradition History," p. 137-144.

17. Ibid., p. 145.

18. Cf. Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

19. Maddox, Reconsidered, p. 11.

20. As in the case of the inability of Einstein's general theory of relativity to incorporate the insights of quantum mechanics, anomalies are often set aside by scientists or accommodated by various modifications. Cf. Alan Lightman and Roberta Brawer, eds., Origins: The Lives and Worlds of Modern Cosmologists (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 38.

21. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 74-76.

22. Maddox, "Celebrating," p. 75.

23. Though Maddox alludes to "Wesley's relative lack of later references to Aldersgate," arguments based on silence are extremely weak and convince only those predisposed towards such a view. Moreover, Maddox's assumption that Wesley's later qualifying footnotes overturn the "standard interpretation" is not sustained by his consideration of any texts. Cf. Maddox, "Celebrating," p. 71., and Reconsidered, p. 145.

24. Observe that Maddox's description of the "standard" interpretation in Aldersgate Reconsidered contains a number of inaccuracies. My own work, for example, is misquoted ("dangerous new wave in Wesley studies"); moreover, Maddox contends, on my behalf, that the standard interpretation has been the position of Methodist scholars ever since Wesley! However, see my piece "Twentieth-century Interpretations of John Wesley's Aldersgate Experience: Coherence and Confusion?," Wesleyan Theological Journal 24 (1989): 18-31, where I clearly state that Frank Baker and Umphrey Lee questioned the accuracy of the conversionist view.

25. David Lowes Watson, "Aldersgate Street and The General Rules: The Form and The Power of Methodist Discipleship" in Aldersgate Reconsidered, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), p. 34.

26. Watson, "General Rules," p. 45. Emphasis is mine.

27. Outler, Sermons, 1:396.

28. In contrast to Jennings, Schmidt affirms that "... Wesley was a new man after Aldersgate." But she quickly adds clarifying her point, "as are all those who have experienced the forgiving, accepting, and reconciling love of God in their lives." Cf. Jean Miller Schmidt, "'Strangely Warmed': The Place of Aldersgate in the Methodist Canon" in Aldersgate Reconsidered, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), p. 119.

29. Schmidt's estimation of Aldersgate as "one in a series" of significant spiritual experiences is expressed in language borrowed directly from Outler. Compare Jean Miller Schmidt, "'Strangely Warmed': The Place of Aldersgate in the Methodist Canon" in Aldersgate Reconsidered, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), p. 109. with Albert C. Outler, ed., John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 52.

30. Schmidt, "Strangely Warmed," p. 109.

31. Outler, John Wesley, p. 14.

32. Frank Baker, ed., The Works of John Wesley, Vols. 25, 26. The Letters (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 26:183.

33. Ibid., p. 115-16.

34. Maddox, Reconsidered, p. 19.

35. Cf. my piece, "The Motif of Real Christianity in the Writings of John Wesley," The Asbury Theological Journal 49, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 49-62, for a thorough exploration of this motif and its significance for Aldersgate.

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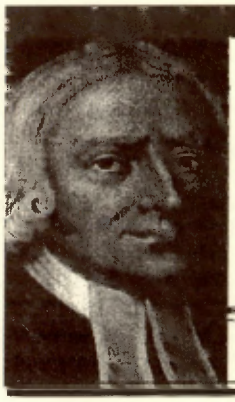

THE ALDERSGATE

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IS "A NEW CONNECTION" WESLEYAN?

By Andy Langford

At our 1995 Western North Carolina Annual Conference, members will be asked to support four petitions to reform our United Methodist connection. These petitions are detailed plans to reform local church structure, reform church finances, reform consultation prior to appointments, and reform the general church. They bring to our Conference proposals that are essential to reposition our denomination for the next millennium. This paper explains what these proposals are, why they are needed, and whether they are Wesleyan. Finally, this paper invites you to support these proposals. Over the past years, many have analyzed and complained about our connection. Now is the time for action.

To be faithful to our living God — "I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19) --

> our church must experience a profound transformation in its perspectives, behaviors, and systems.

For the community of God's people who call themselves United Methodists to "sing to the Lord a new song" (Isaiah 42:10), we must craft new structures for our church. Like Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Mary and Paul,

> we must have new eyes and hearts to seize the possibilities our God has placed before us.

> Our United Methodist connection must undergo profound transformation.

Once we were the largest and most powerful church in the United States. But today, theological and political controversies divide us. Financial crises dominate church life. Many of our pastors and laity question the authority and value of the connection. The sources of this disarray are many. Our American culture is self-centered, individualistic, and cynical. Persons in authority are distrusted. Members of local congregations care little about denominational history or tradition. All mainline denominations have been disestablished. But most importantly, the 1968-1972 restructuring of our church created a system doomed to failure. In 1968, the Wesleyan theologian Albert Outler urged the newly created United Methodist Church not to adopt the proposed new structure.

> Outler argued that it would create a system of bureaucratic despotism that would disenfranchise local congregations.

Unfortunately, Outler was correct.

At the same time as the current system collapses, many local United Methodist congregations are alive and thriving. Through decentralization, local United Methodist congregations are replacing the general church as the center of power. Congregations ascertain their own needs and then use resources and programs outside the denomination. The critics of decentralization cringe and call this "congregationalism," while its supporters celebrate local churches being "empowered." Decentralization is not a sign of decline. Rather, decentralization is a clear movement of the denomination's power away from the general church to local congregations.

Let's be clear: in the Wesleyan tradition, our connection has never been linked with one particular church structure. We have been united as people of faith who share common interests and concerns. Since 1972, however, people have equated our current structure with our connection. But let us remember our history.

> For our first one hundred and fifty years, our bishops were the visible sign of our unity.

Asbury riding the trail from one society to another was the model. Local congregations had only class leaders or lay preachers. The only general agency was the publishing house. Apportionments began only in 1918, and then were voluntary.

> The massive bureaucracy we now have was created in 1972.

This proposal for a new connection is not anti-Wesleyan.

This proposal is pro-congregational.

> Local United Methodist congregations are the primary ministry units, the builders of community, places of mission, and the embodiment of Christ on earth.

This proposal trusts local congregations to be the center of our church. **In general, The United Methodist Church may either fight decentralization, hoping to return to the centralized denominational structure of our past thirty years, yet thus becoming even more irrelevant. Or, our denomination may affirm decentralization, affirm the centrality of local United Methodist congregations, and become a church for the 21st century.**

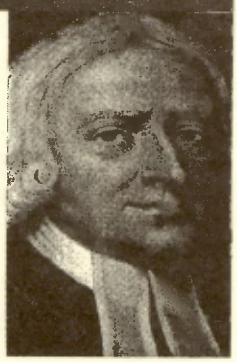
Four proposals will create a new Wesleyan connection:

1. Reform local church structure.

Each local church shall determine its own administrative and programmatic structure to achieve its own ministry and mission. Beyond the necessary congregational structures - a Church Council (a major reworking of our current administrative structure), Charge Conference, Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, Board of Trustees, Committee on Finance, Committee on Nominations and Personnel, and persons responsible for nurture, witness, and outreach - each congregation shall have freedom to design the organizational structure that best fits that particular congregation.

Local congregations will become the central organizational focus of our new connection. Congregations will claim and own their own ministry of making disciples. In our early days, local societies defined their own ministry, and were led in worship by visiting preachers. Wesley never defined how a local community of believers must be organized. Local congregations shall not be structured, directed, or coerced by a benevolent system of overseers.

We propose to delete the current requirement that every local church have organizations that relate to appropriate district and Annual Conference structures and programs. Why should every church have any particular office unless it serves the direct needs of a local congregation? What began as several paragraphs in 1968 has become a nightmare for local congregations.



2. Reform local church finances.

To fulfill its own mission, each local church shall set its own budget, including how much of each apportionment for each agency, benevolence, and fund it will accept. Each local church shall be responsible for the total costs of pastoral leadership, including salary, pension, and insurance, except for significant missional needs.

> Decisions about money must shift from the general church and Annual Conferences to local congregations.

First, each general program agency, commission, council, and fund shall have a set budget, determined by General Conference. Next, each agency and fund becomes a separate line item. Then, each Annual Conference shall have the right to revise most general apportionments. Finally, each Charge Conference shall have the right to revise the apportionments requested from each general agency, council, commission, or fund, as well as most apportionments from the jurisdiction, the Annual Conference, and the district. This new model allows each local congregation to revise apportioned funds as those funds fit into each congregation's defined ministry and mission.

In addition, no United Methodist congregation shall receive subsidies from the connection except in specific missional situations. Today, too many of our congregations are subsidized by the connection, especially in the area of pastoral expenses. These subsidies weaken the larger connection and inhibit local congregations from claiming ownership for their own ministries. Exceptional missional situations may be funded through a Conference benevolence fund.

3. Reform consultation prior to pastoral appointments.

Pastor-Parish Relations Committees shall be allowed to interview candidates prior to the appointment of pastors to their congregation. District Superintendents shall have as their primary responsibility resourcing local congregations. Bishops shall have as their primary responsibility, in consultation with local congregations, the appointment of pastors to local congregations based on the needs of local congregations.

Today, appointments are most often made based on the needs of the clergy, not the needs of local congregations.

> The needs of congregations must be considered first and foremost in any discussion of appointments.

Prior to pastoral appointments, district superintendents shall provide the names of up to three potential pastors as selected by the bishop and cabinet. Pastors will be given the names of three congregations. The Pastor-Parish Relations Committee shall be given a reasonable amount of time to submit additional names to the district superin-

tendent and bishop. The Committee must interview all the potential pastors named by the bishop and may interview any of its own suggested candidates, provided that the bishop gives approval. After this process, the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and pastors shall express their preference(s) to the district superintendent and bishop. The bishop shall not be obligated to follow the wishes of the Committee, in keeping with our church's constitution. This model, already in place in a number of Annual Conferences, and in many large membership congregations,

allows every local congregation more ownership of the appointment process.

The bishop still retains ultimate responsibility for each appointment.

Such a model requires that district superintendents must spend at least 80% of their time within their own district and be removed from mandatory service on conference committees. The resident bishop in each area must assume again her or his primary role of setting appointments, spending 80% of his or her time within their Annual Conference.

4. Reform the general church.

Annual Conference and General Council on Ministries shall be abolished as mandatory organizations within the connection. Each level of the church may determine the structure that best meets its own administrative and programmatic needs. The number of elected members of the general program agencies, councils, and commissions of the church shall be significantly reduced. The Council of Bishops shall assume greater leadership throughout the connection, including electing a full-time President, electing general agency general secretaries, coordinating the ministries of the church, and setting of the Conference agendas and calendars.

Our system today is much closer to that of the Roman Catholic Church than that of John Wesley or Francis Asbury. Today, Annual Conferences act toward local churches like parents of little children, doing for the children what the parents think is best.

Annual Conferences should eliminate all structures and staff (and their budgets) that are not directly supportive of ongoing congregational-based programs.

For example, eliminate requirements that mandate an Annual Conference Council on Ministries and the responsibilities of a district Council on Ministries.

The Council of Bishops must become the leader of our new connection, a system that may be called "episcopal congregationalism."

Like Asbury of old, let our bishops, elected by the church, lead the church.

Today, our bishops are isolated, protected, and limited managers of a dysfunctional system. The Council of Bishops itself should be limited to active bishops, its votes binding on every member, and its oversight of its members strong. In addition, the

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Our special thanks to the people of Weddington United Methodist Church for their financial assistance with our inaugural Issue.

Council should elect the church's general secretaries, coordinate the ministries of the church, and set the agendas and calendars of the Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conferences.

We must restructure our general church agencies. Our proposal is that the Council ofBishops should replace the General Council of Ministries and coordinate the work of the general church. This new connection does not eliminate any general agency, but they will exist only if they can raise money from local congregations.

> Finally, this new connection shall reduce the number of elected board members in half.

Conclusion

And what is our United Methodist future? A major question this new connection raises is what still holds us together as The United Methodist Church? Will we still be Wesleyans? There will be much to keep us together: our name, our cross and flame symbol, our Wesleyan and evangelical history, our hymnal and book of worship, our publishing house, our sharing of property, essential committees at every level, a strong episcopacy, episcopal appointment of clergy, credentialing of clergy and diaconals, and the list continues. We will be different. But yes, we will still be The United Methodist Church.

Like Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Mary and Paul, we must step forward in faith. Clearly the current connection must change. Our United Methodist future without fundamental transformation is problematic at best.

> God is doing a radical, new thing among us. We must listen carefully if we are to continue to occupy a place in God's ever expanding reign.

We need a new connection. We need it now. Let's make it happen.

Andy Langford, author, is a member in the Western North Carolina Annual Conference. He is currently serving as co-pastor of First United Methodist Church of China Grove with his wife Sally. He gratefully acknowledges the input of a number of colleagues from throughout the connection and especially the 100 pastors and laity in our Conference who have assisted in this work. All of the above proposals will be presented to the Western North Carolina Annual Conference for referral to the 1996 General Conference.

Comments are warmly welcomed and encouraged. You may write Andy at P.O. Box 625, China Grove, NC 28023.

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THE ALDERSGATE

Vol. 2 November 1996 No. 3

Introduction

This issue of The Aldersgate offers the reader a rare glimpse into the world of early Methodism and an introduction to the problems associated with studying Wesley's letters, while providing some vivid reminders of the importance of our contemporary faith communities to our ministry and our lives. The source for this insight is a "lost" Wesley letter to Thomas Cooper, a minister under his employ. The author of this issue's article needs no introduction. Frank Baker, Professor Emeritus of English Church History at Duke University and a minister in the British Methodist Church, is one of the leading Wesley scholars of our time. Dr. Baker served as the original Editor-in-Chief of the Wesley Works Project, and is the author of many books and articles too numerous to list in our limited format. We thank God for his ministry and for gracing our pages with his scholarship.

This "lost" letter confirms that the trials and tribulations of ministry never prevented Wesley from reaching out in a spirit of love to his fellow clergy, encouraging the faithful to remember they were a part of a larger community of Christians, even if temporally separated from other pastors by geography and work. Moreover, Wesley evidenced a remarkable willingness to reconcile himself with those pastors who had fallen away from the ministerial fold, while urging a return to the work of Christ. Professor Baker's essay provides us with remarkable insight into the challenges of ministry and the importance of our connective relationship, issues that continue to be of importance to Methodists today.

The Publishers

PROBING A WESLEY LETTER

By Dr. Frank Baker

Before leaving for a research tour in England my colleague Richard Heitzenrater sent me a letter passed on to him by a lady in Arkansas which she believed to be a letter by John Wesley, dated Bristol, September 22, 1788. He had informed her that this was not a John Wesley holograph; it was neither in his handwriting not written on contemporary paper. Yet some stylistic similarities suggest that it might indeed prove to be a later copy of one of Wesley's letters, with some personal references. It seemed important to carry out some further tests. The date, opening, and signature matched other contemporary originals. John Wesley was in Bristol on September 22, 1788, and did indeed (as the letter states) take a "place in the mail coach for next Sunday night" to London. Wesley's hope to visit Plymouth "next Autumn" was fulfilled in August 1789. Clearly there was some problem in that city which called for a letter from the unknown writer to Wesley. Some research was desirable to discover the recipient, especially as such a comparable letter thus dated is otherwise unknown.

The next step was to check the preachers stationed at Plymouth by the Methodist Conference in July 1788. Lawrence Kane had come there as the supervising "assistant" in 1787 and remained there in 1788; he published a sermon on Wesley's death in 1791, disappeared for a time, and reappeared in 1818 as a seceder to the Primitive Wesleyans in Ireland. The second man was George Wadsworth, whom Atmore's Methodist Memorial described as "an honest, pious, good man", but afflicted with "the palsy", so that he had to retire as "not able to keep a circuit", and died in 1797.

We are extremely fortunate in investigating the third man, however. First, because he is one whose autobiography was published, albeit late in life; secondly because it parallels some peculiar points in this particular letter, and introduces further otherwise unknown letters. Thomas Cooper (1760-1833) was born at Staincross, near Wakefield, to Methodist parents, was converted in 1779, began to preach for nine months, including the conversion of one of Wesley's future preachers, Thomas Tattershall (1754?-

1822), and pondered himself becoming an itinerant preacher. To this end he wrote in 1780: "I received a most affectionate letter from Mr. Wesley, and therefore hastened to Kingswood [School], where I arrived in the beginning of May, and continued there upwards of fifteen months." (Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, 1835:11). [He adds an interesting point: "In Bath I was received with the greatest kindness by Lieutenant Webb, whose house I made my home during my stay there." (ibid, 12). Thomas Webb (1724-96), British soldier in America, and Methodist pioneer, eventually settled in Portland Chapel, Bristol.] In 1781 Thomas Cooper, as a preacher on trial, travelled in the extensive Sevenoaks or Sussex Circuit, where he rejoiced in the "most animating and highly profitable" conversation of Revd. Vincent Perronet (1693-1785), then "about ninety years of age", who warned Cooper to expect the end of the world (as did Wesley's favourite biblical commentator, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) in the year 1836. (ibid, pp. 12-13) James Hindmarsh, Cooper's succeeding "assistant" at Norwich in 1782, "never went through the circuit but once", being embroiled with Baron Swedenborg's "strange views", of which his son Robert became the English Church founder.

It is wise and kind at this stage to inform the reader that Cooper inherited from his mother "a constitutional nervous disease", that his memory intermittently betrayed him, that he suffered from serious fits and what appeared to be a stroke; and that his physician and his widow had urged the preparation of this autobiography as a valuable therapy during his closing decade of physical deterioration, 1821-33. Even from 1785-1787 his recollections were very unreliable, and his record needs amending from Wesley's Minutes.

In 1783 Wesley appointed him to Colchester, where, after a shaky start in Essex, not normally congenial to Methodists, he then found himself the leader of a revival in Manningtree, at the head of the Stour estuary. His "assistant" during the first year was John Booth, a steady but nondescript young preacher. On February 28, 1784, Wesley nominated the two of them for inclusion among the one hundred representative preachers to form his official Conference in the pivotal Deed of Declaration. At the following Conference that year Cooper's new "assistant", William Boothby, was also named a member of the "Hundred".

The two normal years of stationing in Colchester (for the more acceptable preachers--for others it would be one) expired for Cooper in 1785. Wesley routinely stationed him in Cornwall, 300 miles from Essex, assuming that this would cause no problem. Cooper wrote otherwise to Wesley, however: "As I was engaged to be married, and so long a removal would have prevented it, I begged very hard to be continued a third year, or at least to be sent to a Circuit near at hand. My honoured father...did not see fit to indulge my request; and I would it hard to submit. I therefore married Miss Ann Pawninton, of Mistley, who with her mother built a new chapel for my sole use in Manningtree. Here I had a large congregation, and I laboured with all my power to win souls to Christ....I commenced preaching at Harwich, and the Lord have me souls for my hire....I therefore formed them into a society." (UMM, 1835:81-2) This meant that for 1785 and 1786 he had officially "desisted", and was therefore not included in the Minutes. His narrative continues: "After I had laboured alone in this manner somewhat more than a year, Mr. Wesley came to visit Colchester, where I hastened to see him; and he received me most affectionately."

Thus Wesley accepted Thomas Cooper back into the Methodist fold, and Cooper's faulty memory thought that he has received into Full Connexion and into the "Hundred". In fact in 1787 he was among many "admitted on trial", was not accepted into full connexion until 1788, and was no longer listed among the "Hundred". But he was safely back, and doubtless Wesley did write somewhat along the lines noted by Cooper: "In February, after I had seen Mr. Wesley in Colchester, he wrote to me that with all speed I must go into the Birmingham Circuit, Mr. Murlin being left."

It is extremely difficult to discover the exact dates or sequence of events at this stage, nor is Wesley's Journal, or even his diary, as helpful as usual. After the Bristol Conference of 1786 Wesley and some others, including Robert Carr Brackenbury, took a coach for Harwick for him to accept an invitation to preach in Holland. On September 4, 1786, his vessel returned him to Harwich, whence he took the chaise to the Inn in Colchester, arriving at 1p.m., and staying overnight at the inn. This seems the most likely occasion for Cooper to present himself and his apologies to Wesley, who did not travel on to London until the following day, for lengthy discussions with Dr. Thomas Coke and Thomas Rankin, Cooper being the least mentioned. His summons to

Birmingham did not follow immediately, however.

The wife of hardy old John Murlin, "the Weeping Prophet", had been failing for two years, and died Jan. 18, 1786, Murlin himself writing her obituary for the Arminian Magazine (1786, pp. 422-8). Murlin himself was crippled with rheumatism, and he clearly felt that if it were at all possible he should retire to an opening in High Wycombe. Hence arose, apparently, the urgent call from Wesley to Thomas Cooper in February 1787 for him to go with all speed to Birmingham, to complete the remainder of the connexional year for Murlin, as well as the connexional year of 1787, when Murlin was officially listed as a supernumerary. It was a great trial for Cooper and his wife to leave his Essex flock, who were happily taken over by the Methodists. Mrs. Cooper died after their arrival in Birmingham, having lived with him only "three years and a few days. (W.M.M., pp. 82-3).

Thomas Cooper, traumatized much later as he recollected these pressurized years, omits completely any mention of Plymouth, but the Minutes duly show this was indeed his allotted station for 1788, and therefore supposedly also for 1789. It seems likely that at the time in August 1788 he had voiced some disquiet to Wesley about the circuit, possibly because on account of one of his expected colleagues, either Kane or Wadsworth, or indeed doubting his own fitness. It does seem clear, however, that the following letter was indeed written by Wesley, and was indeed intended for Cooper, during the year later blocked out of his memory:

Bristol / Sept. 22, 1788
My dear brother

I have much business to do in London, and as I do not depend upon seeing another year I must be there as soon as possible, & to that end, have taken place in the mail coach for next Sunday night. If I should live to see the next Autumn, I shall endeavour to see you at Plymouth.

As it was evidently the Providence of God which placed you in your present situation, He will doubtless give you grace sufficient for it. Only take care to improve ye Sabbath, & you will some day stand at the right hand! I am

Your affectionate Brother
J. Wesley

By the time Wesley reached Plymouth again in August 1789, Cooper had left (after one year only), for a new Circuit, Wolverhampton, where he rejoiced in the fellowship of widowed Mrs. John Fletcher, whose husband had maintained that after his death he would stay with her as a guardian angel; she did indeed assure Cooper of John Fletcher's continued spiritual presence with her.

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On Feb. 25, 1790, Thomas Cooper was remarried, to the daughter of a Ludlow attorney named Lewis, and rejoiced in a large family, steadily enlarging during the ensuing years of his ministry. In 1805 he and John Gaulter (in Leeds) occupied adjoining houses, and having seven children each, and claimed, "we had nothing but harmony and love."

(ibid., p.88) In this context Cooper recollected approvingly one of John Wesley's memorable sayings: "as our Father in the Gospel, Mr. Wesley, used to say, 'Yorkshire is the garden of Methodism.'" In the postscript to Cooper's autobiography (added by his widow) she noted that her husband "would often repeat the words of our venerable Father, Mr. Wesley, 'The best of all is, God is with us.'"

Even though no holograph letter from Wesley to Thomas Cooper appears to have survived, this recent discovery surely does echo one of them; it might have been a confused memory for him, though within it is Wesley's own assurance that whether as a pupil in Kingswood School, as a preacher in Plymouth or Birmingham, or with his growing family in other Methodist circuits, Thomas Cooper, was always governed by the Providence of God.

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THE ALDERSGATE

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The Sanctified Body: Why Perfection Does Not Require A "Self"

By Stanley Hauerwas, Ph.D.
Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics
Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

I. The Problem With Holiness

I am an evangelical Catholic. Which is but a way to say that I am a Methodist. Methodism is a movement that by accident became a church, or at least claims to be a church, in America. Wesley charged his followers to cover the world. We have done that, but as a friend observes, like Sherwin-Williams paint we are only a fourth of an inch deep. A strange result for a holiness movement meant to renew an established church. Yet at least on some readings Wesley represented a peculiar combination of Catholic and perfectionist theological convictions.[1] As one wag once put it, "If Wesley had not been Wesley he would have been Ignatius Loyola" or, more seriously, there is Albert Outler's often made claim that the true character of Methodism is to be an "evangelical order" with "a catholic Church."[2]

I have always found this peculiar combination, even though it may not represent the "historical Wesley," theologically attractive and promising. Yet one must also acknowledge the position is inherently unstable, particularly in modernity. It will be the burden of my argument that recent developments, which some call post-modernism, offer some extremely helpful ways for a display of holiness without a loss of the Catholic character of the church. The loss of the "self" and the increasing appreciation of the significance of the body, and in particular the body's permeability, can help us rediscover holiness not as an individual achievement but as the work of the Holy Spirit building up the body of Christ.

Yet I first need to suggest why an evangelical Catholicism has been so hard to sustain theologically as well as in the actual practice of the church in modernity.[3] To do so I am going to make generalizations about Catholicism as well as Protestant practice that would require much qualification if they were to reflect the complexity of each. I think it worthwhile to risk being accused of over-generalization in the interest of making clear the challenge I see before us. By "us" I mean those who think any intelligible account of Christianity requires those that would be Christian to lead lives of holiness in a manner that the church does not become but a means to that end.

Part of the great genius of Catholicism was its ability to sustain Christianity as a way of life for peasants. To so put the matter will seem to many, both Catholic and Protestant, to put Catholicism in a negative light. Yet I mean such a characterization to be nothing but positive. First of all I do not think there is anything wrong with being a "peasant," that is, someone who works everyday at those crafts necessary for us to eat, have shelter, sustain the having of children, and allow us to carry on the basic practices necessary to sustain communi-

[1]I do not mean to suggest that sanctification and holiness are not equally central to Catholic practice and theology. The crucial issue is where such holiness is to be found. Geoffrey Wainwright helpfully notes that Catholic teaching serves to give the believer an assurance concerning the Church's proclamation of the gospel, while the Methodist tends to point to the assurance of the Spirit manifest in the individual believer. Methodists in Dialogue (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), p. 20. Wainwright quotes from the 1986 Nairobi Report of the Methodist-Roman Catholic Joint Commission that rightly suggests that Methodists "might ask whether the Church, like individuals, might by the working of the Holy Spirit receive as a gift from God in its living, preaching and mission, an assurance concerning its grasp of the fundamental doctrines of the faith such as to exclude all doubt, and whether the teaching ministry of the Church has a special and divinely guided part to play in this." p. 21. That question asks Methodist to develop an adequate ecclesiology that given our beginnings has always been absent.

[2]Wainwright uses Outler's quote in a sympathetic way throughout his book. As Wainwright observes "if one were to reflect more fully than John Wesley did on the theological implications for ecclesiology of (his) view of the appropriation of salvation, it would put Wesley rather on the 'Catholic' side in the debates concerning the instrumentality of the Church, in which some contemporary ecumenists have located 'the basic difference' between Roman Catholics and Protestants." p. 104. That seems exactly right.

[3]Pietism and holiness while often connected historically are not only distinguishable, but can be antithetical. That is particularly the case when the emphasis of pietism on the individual's experience undercuts any account of the importance of discipline as a form of discipleship. One of the ironies of American Methodism is how the revivalistic enthusiasm of the nineteenth century served to render impotent Wesley's understanding of these matters.

ties. Peasants may not be "intellectuals," but they have knowledge habituated in their bodies that must be passed on from one generation to another. Peasants are often suspicious of intellectuals because they rightly worry about "ideas" that come from people who do not work with their hands.

Christian peasants usually do not think they are called to be holy. It is enough that they pray, obey, and pay. Peasants, however, are usually more than willing to acknowledge the importance of holiness—venerating people, sacraments, and relics that are clearly "different."[4] Peasants also know that those with authority over them, particularly those with ecclesiastical authority, may be anything but holy. Yet they understand the salvation offered by the church is not dependent on her ecclesial representatives, but rather is to be found in sacrament and saints.

No doubt "peasant Catholicism" was and is open to great perversions. Yet it is equally the case that one of the great virtues of such a Christianity is its capacity to be practiced by people who are poor. Such a Christianity is not a set of beliefs or doctrines you believe in order to be a Christian, but rather Christianity is to have one's body shaped, one's habits determined, in a manner that the worship of God is unavoidable. Of course beliefs and doctrines matter, but it is not the peasant's task to insure they are rightly maintained. That is the task of the church located in the office of the Bishop assisted by the theologian.

Whatever the limits and virtues this kind of Catholicism represented, it no longer seems to be an alternative for Protestant or Catholics who live in the so called "developed societies." For in such societies no one any longer believes, in spite of evidence to the contrary, they are peasants.[5] We believe our lives are the outcome of choices we have made. Such a world seems, moreover, to be the kind of context which the pietist longed for. No longer is anyone made to be a Christian, but one only becomes a Christian through experience and voluntary commitment.

This view of the importance of individual commitment is often thought to be the great achievement of the Protestant Reformation. After all is this not what the priesthood of believers is supposed to mean? The answer is, of course, "no" if by the priesthood of believers you mean, as many American Christians seem to assume, that you can have an unmediated relation to God in which you are your own priest. Luther and Calvin would have been stunned by the suggestion that the church is a collection of individuals in which each person gets to determine their relation to God. Yet such individualistic presumptions have become the hallmark of Protestantism particularly in America. Even more surprising, such individualism is underwritten by holiness traditions on the assumption that sanctification names our effort to lead a Christian life.

In such a context the emphasis on sanctification is not only Pelagian, but also often confuses middle-class moralism with "being Christian." Whatever the possibility Methodism may have represented for there to be a church that was at once evangelical and Catholic, it's been lost in the interest of being a church in which "anyone is welcome." Honesty compels me to acknowledge, of course, that there was never any great effort by American Methodists to embody Wesley's peculiar understanding of the church as a disciplined community. But whatever sense might have existed of that option is now submerged in debates about what techniques might provide for "church growth."

If we have any hope of reclaiming the church as a disciplined body of disciples I believe some analogue to peasant Catholicism will be required. In other words we need to recover the discipline of the body that at least offers an alternative to the endemic individualism and rationalism of modernity—an individualism and rationalism that has too often been thought necessary or at least confused with a concern with holiness. As a way to recover what holiness might look as a discipline of the body I am going to discuss two quite different texts—Dale Martin's The Corinthian Body and Arthur Frank's, The Wounded Story Teller: Body, Illness, and

[4]One of the remarkable themes of Caroline Walker Bynum's remarkable book, The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) is how the "common piety" of "common Christians" acted as a check on the theological temptation toward a "spiritualization of the body." As she puts it, "something very deep in third- and fourth-century assumptions was unwilling to jettison material continuity in return for philosophical consistency." (p. 68) At least part of that "something" was the veneration of relics of the saints whose bodies had already become relics through martyrdom and holiness while they were alive and so continue to be such after death. The Protestant rejection of such veneration as idolatry as well as the Enlightenment's characterization of such practices as superstition or magic most charitably can be described as superficial.

[5]Bankers, lawyers, university professors, and other "professionals" have difficulty thinking of themselves as peasants. They certainly do not work with their hands. Yet in many ways they are much more at the mercy of those that rule than the traditional peasant. Perhaps their perilous state is the reason they are so convinced they are in control of their destinies, that is, that they are not peasants. Of course that is why professionals are less free than peasants. Peasants know there are masters and accordingly develop modes of resistance. Professionals think they are the masters which, of course, makes them completely incapable of defending themselves. Professionals present a peculiar challenge to the church because they assume the church has no right to tell them what to believe or do. They assume what they know as a banker or lawyer or university professor gives them a critical perspective on Christianity. Too often they think they get to make up the kind of Christianity they like. It would be a step in the right direction if such people could see that at least in terms of their ability to control their lives they are not distinguishable from peasants. If such a recognition of their situation were possible, they might be able to develop peasant skills of resistance and survival—skills of hope that hopefully are drawn from practices provided by the church.

[6]Dale Martin, The Corinthian Body (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Arthur Frank, The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) References to Martin and Frank will appear in the text.

Ethics.[6] Though these books treat quite different subject matters, I hope to show they exhibit quite similar views of the body made possible by recent challenges to modernist notions of the self and, accordingly, can help us think better what a recovery by Christians of the sanctification of the body might look like.

2. The Permeable Body in Paul

Martin takes as his task nothing less than freeing Paul from our modernist reading habits exemplified by Cartesian soul/body dualism. Note the way I put the matter, that is, Martin does not claim he is telling us what Paul "really" meant by the "body," but rather he is trying to prepare us for being better readers of Paul by providing us with conceptual skills to make us better readers. Of course he also thinks in the process we will better understand what Paul "meant," for example in I Corinthians 12, but by that he means he expects us after having read his book to be able to make better sense of the many things Paul says about the body. In other words Martin refuses to acknowledge a "text" which must be interpreted by an autonomous agent in the hope of discovering "what the text really meant."

The dualism between "text" and "interpreter" is but one form the body/soul dualism takes that his books is meant to challenge. Descartes gave the definitive expression to this dualism by associating body with matter, nature, in an attempt to show the body can be explained in mechanistic terms. The soul in contrast to the body was identified as "mind," non-matter, the supernatural, and the spiritual. (6) Martin does not attribute the power and ubiquity of the body/soul dualism in modernity to Descartes, but rather Descartes provides for him one of the most compelling intellectual justifications of this dualism—a dualism Martin thinks disastrous for our understanding of Paul.

Drawing on ancient philosophical and, in particular, medical sources Martin challenges our presumption that the ancients shared a Cartesian view of body/soul. Prior to modernity the soul, while certainly different from the body, was not conceived in the Cartesian sense as "non-matter." Of course there was a wide variety of ways the soul and the body were understood in the ancient world, but Martin convincingly argues that however the soul was distinguished from body the former was assumed to take up space, to consist in stuff. Accordingly our common distinctions between the inner and outer, the individual from the social body were unknown or understood quite differently. For example it was assumed by many in the ancient world that the individual human body was but an instant of the social body. (37) Martin does not provide this background in order to convince us that Paul was influenced by this or that ancient thinker, but rather to help us understand what Paul says about the body which may seem quite odd or, at least unconnected, are not only inter-connected but also make a great deal of sense. For example Martin suggests in I Corinthians 15: 12-24 Paul meant that the resurrection of Christ necessarily entails the future resurrection of Christians. Paul assumes that Christian bodies have no integral individuality to them; so due to their existence "in

[7]Martin rightly points out this is why Paul sees no difficulty with the practice of baptism for the dead in I Corinthians 15: 24-25. Such a suggestion makes particularly embarrassing reading given more orthodox Christian polemics against the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

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Christ" through baptism they must experience the resurrection. "To deny the resurrection of their bodies is to deny the resurrection of Christ; to deny the resurrection of Christ is to render any future hope void. The Christian body has no meaning apart from its participation in the body of Christ." (131)[7]

This perspective provides the background of Martin's main theses that Paul, as well as most Corinthian Christians, saw the body as a dangerously permeable entity threatened by pollution. Against Paul there were at Corinth those who were better off as well as being of a higher status who stressed the hierarchial arrangement of the body without being overly concerned about the body's boundaries or pollution. (XV) What is crucial for Martin's case is the recognition that the battle over hierarchy is a battle over the body. That some have become sick and even died as the result of their behavior at the Lord's supper is what should be expected. Martin observes Paul's advice to the better off at Corinth "flew in the face of the accepted practice and common sense of the upper class of Greco-Roman society. Paul's instructions represent a direct challenge to upper-class ideology and required that the higher-status Corinthians adjust both their expectations and their behavior to accommodate the needs of those of lower status." (74-75) This is not a surprising conclusion, but what Martin has helped us see is that Paul assumes those upper class bodies are suffering because their bodies are not in fact "theirs."[8]

What this means is our normal reading of I Corinthians 12: 12-25 as a "metaphor" is a mistake. It is not as if the church is, like the body, interconnected needing all its parts even the inferior one. The church is the body from which we learn to understand our particular bodies. That is why Paul can argue that those who occupy positions of lower status are actually more essential and should be accorded more honor than those of higher status. As Martin observes, "This is not a compensatory move on Paul's part, by means of which those of lower status are to be compensated for their low position by a benefaction of honor. Rather, his rhetoric pushes for an actual reversal of the normal, 'this worldly' attribution of honor and status. The lower is made higher, and the higher lower." (96)

When we read Paul we best leave behind distinctions between the physiological and psychological we have come to think as obvious. Put colloquially, you have to get physical to read Paul. That is particularly true if we are to understand Paul's "ethics" and why his ethics cannot be distinguished from his theology. Paul's presumes the church is Christ's body so all immorality is not like the body becoming ill or polluted, it is to make the body ill and polluted. So questions of a man having sexual relations with his stepmother, (I Cor. 5); for Christian men to use prostitutes (6: 12-20); to eat meat sacrificed to idols (chapters 8-10); and the proper eating of the Lord's supper (11: 17-34) are all connected. For Paul each of these matters is a question of the purity of the body and avoidance of pollution. For a Christian man to visit a prostitute is equivalent to the body being invaded by a disease that threatens everyone since everyone is the body.

Crucial for Paul is the maintenance of boundaries of the body. Martin observes that just as Christian healers cured diseases by casting out demons, so Paul demands the Corinthians cleanse the body by expelling those who pollute the church. Thus in I Corinthians 5: 9-12 Paul tells the Corinthians they must not associate with the brother who is "sexually immoral or greedy or an idolater or a slanderer or a drunkard or rapacious," and in particular they are not to eat with such a man. Yet Paul says you may have to associate with such people who are not in the church since otherwise Christians "would have to leave the cosmos entirely." Paul does not fear the pollution of the church by contact between a Christian and non-Christian, but "he does think that the disguised presence within the church of a representative from the outside, from the cosmos that <u>should</u> be 'out there,' threatens the whole body. The body of Christ is not polluted by mere contact with the cosmos or by the body's presence in the midst of the corrupt cosmos, but it may be polluted if its boundaries are permeated and

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[8]Martin provides an illuminating account of the relation between class and the aesthetics of the body in the ancient world. People in the lower classes were assumed to be ugly which of course meant that people in the upper classes policed their lives through medical practices meant to insure that they be beautiful. Particularly important was how the infant body way treated requiring quite detailed forms of swaddling. (pp. 26-37.) Against such a background one begins to appreciate how socially disruptive Paul's holding up the "weakest" member must have been.

[9]Martin rightly criticizes modern Protestant attempts to make Paul an advocate of marriage, family, and heterosexual intercourse—e.g. why Paul really was not against marriage. According to Martin even more misleading are attempts to make Paul a supporter of a "healthy view of human sexuality. As recent theorists of the history of sexuality have argued, the category itself—whether one is speaking of homosexuality, heterosexuality, or human sexuality in general—is a modern one, heavily indebted to psychology, psychotherapy, and the medicalization of the self so important to modern culture, especially since the nineteenth century. Paul does not speak of sexuality but of sexual actions and desires. And whenever the subject arises, Paul treats sex as potentially dangerous. If it cannot be completely avoided, it must be carefully controlled and regulated so as to avoid pollution and cosmic invasion." (p. 211) Martin's account of desire should be required reading for all who would develop an "ethics of sex" for today. Particularly important is Martin's contention that Paul shows no concern for the 'propagation of the race' as the necessary presumption of Christian marriage. (214)

an element of the cosmos gains entry into the body." (170)

The problem with modern readings of Paul, readings often meant to underwrite a concern with holiness, is they are far too spiritual. For example they assume that the problem with allowing some one who is sexually immoral to remain in the church is that they may tempt others to such immorality. Of course that may be true, but that is not how Paul thinks about these matters. He thinks it has to do with the very constitution of the body. It is not a question of whether sexual fidelity is or is not good for us. It is a question of the kind of body we are as the body of Christ. It is not a question if we "understand" why we should marry or not marry. It is a question of how our bodies are positioned for the upbuilding of the body of Christ.[9]

Holiness is not, for Paul, a matter of individual will. Holiness is the result of our being made part of a body that makes it impossible for us to be anything other than disciples. That is why the "little things" matter. Whether one eats or does not eat meat sacrificed to idols matters because our bodies are and do matter. How those "little things" shape and are shaped by the body may well change. Indeed over-concentration on one "little thing" may well be a way to overlook or ignore what is really destructive for the holiness of the body. Yet what Martin has helped us see is our bodies, what we do and do not do, our habits, is at once the subject as well as that which makes possible sanctification.

3. The Wounded Body

The great difficulty with Martin's account of Paul's letter to Corinth is not whether he gets Paul right or wrong, but rather if we have no idea what to make of his account of the Pauline body. We can "understand" what he is saying, but we cannot imagine it in relation to our own lives. Few of us experience our bodies as he suggests the Corinthians experienced theirs. Our churches certainly do not think sinners should be expelled because they threaten the integrity of the body. After all we join the church through voluntary commitment by which we mean we have made an intellectual choice to be a member of this church. The body just comes along as part of the package.

In truth we simply lack the resources, which is just another way to say examples, to imagine what Paul is talking about or how such a view of the body might fit over our own lives. Yet I think there is one place in our lives where Paul's understanding of the body is intensely exemplified—when we are sick. Sickness makes it impossible to avoid the reality of our bodies. When I am sick I am not a mind with a suffering body, but I am the suffering body. Illness may be the first time that we have the opportunity to discover that we are part of a story that we did not make up.

Arthur Frank observes that "seriously ill people are wounded not just in body but in voice." (XII) The wound creates the need to tell stories because the diseased or injured body disrupts our old stories creating the need for new stories. Yet these stories are not something separate from our body but rather come out of our bodies. Just to the extent, however, stories give voice to our pain, make our body familiar, the body eludes language. Desperate to domesticate the alienation our hurt creates between our stories and our body, we are driven to reduce the body to a thing, the topic of the story, the not me. (2-3) But in that reduction we lose our bodies as the source of who we are.

Another name for this reduction, according to Frank, is called modern medicine. Such a medicine is so close to us, has taught us how to understand ourselves, we no longer sense its power over us. Frank calls our attention to the descriptive power of modern medicines by quoting a North African woman: "In the old days folk didn't know what illness was. They went to bed and they died. It's only nowadays that we've learned words like liver, lung, stomach, and I don't know what!"[10] What it means for this woman (and for us) to seek medical care is not only to agree to follow the regimens prescribed, but to tell her story in medical terms. To say how she feels, this North African woman, is required to narrate her feelings in terms of a secondhand medical report. "The physician becomes the spokesperson for the disease, and the ill person's stories come to depend heavily on repetition of what the physician has said." (6)

Such a medicine is the institutional form of the Cartesian soul/body dualism Martin was combating in his attempt to exemplify Paul's understanding of the body. Something like the Cartesian dualism is required if the authority by which physicians impose their specialized language on their patients is to be legitimated. Frank characterizes this modern, medicalized body as monadic since it refuses to offer its pain to others or to receive reassurance from

[10]Frank, pp. 4-5. Frank is quoting Pierre Bourdieu in his Outline For a Theory of Practice, pl 166.

[11]Frank rightly observes that postmodernity is contradictory since it is so often characterized by opposing tendencies happening simultaneously. For example "one side of postmodernity is the hyper-rationalization that subsumes the individuality extolled by modernity. Modernist medicine's general unifying view was a beneficent rationalization carried out in the interest of a science that had cure as it objective. DRGs are a less-than-beneficent rationalization carried out in the interest of cost-containment and administrative control over medicine. DRGs represent the modernist project turning against itself. A different side of post modernity is the presence of self-stories that provide models of reclaiming the self." pp. 70-71.

others that they recognize our affliction. A monadic body is the body modernist administrative systems desire since such bodies are all the more capable of being put through bureaucratic procedures. Moreover it is hard to see how modern medical practice, which has increasingly become bureaucratic, could admit any other understanding of the body since the disease model that grounds its practice presupposes just such an account. (36)[11]

The monadic body, however, is capable of permutations that Frank displays through ideal types he thinks exemplify modernist options: the disciplined and the mirroring body. The disciplined body is characterized by self-control through which it seeks predictability by employing therapeutic regimens. Such regimens organize the body in the hopes that contingency can be avoided or at least compensated. (41) The mirroring body is at once its own instrument and object of consumption, that is, the body consumes and consumption enhances the body. Medicine, for example, is consumed in the interest of cure. This body is called mirroring because it recreates itself in the images of others. Like the disciplined body the mirroring body fears contingency, but not in the form of unpredictability, but in disfigurement. Both bodies are monadic acting alone in a world that judges them, "but the judgments are made on different grounds: performance for the disciplined body and appearance for the mirroring body." (44)

Frank identifies another type, the dominating body, that is dyadic but not in a sense of being for others, but against others. For the characteristic feature of the dominating body is it defines itself by force. When this body becomes ill, it gets mad assuming the contingency of disease but never accepting it. The disciplined and mirroring bodies turn on themselves, but the dominating body turns on others. (48-49)

These types constitute modernist stories in miniature that shape and continue to shape our bodies. Frank reminds us that these are types since few of us ever exemplify any of these types completely. Rather we embody them at different times in different circumstances often several at the same time. Not to be forgotten, however, is that these are body types—that is, they remind us that just as there is no single thing called self neither is there any single thing called body. Our bodies are under constant negotiation shaped and reshaped by the stories in which we find ourselves.

Frank contends that these three stories to be sure in quite different ways legitimate and reinforce the power of modernist medicine over our lives. Yet he also thinks the stories for which illness calls and requires is an indication that we are moving beyond these modern stories and their subservience to medicine. "The postmodern experience of illness begins when ill people recognize that more is involved in their experience than the medical story can tell." (6) Correlative to this attempt to reclaim our stories of our illness according to Frank is a different body—the communicative body. It is not just an ideal type, but an idealized type Frank commends exactly because it accepts its contingency as part of the fundamental contingency of life.

The communicative body does not regard predictability as the rule but the exception. Accordingly there is no "self" desperately seeking to control the body. While there may be aspects of the body that are not the self, where one ends and the other begins is not easily determined. For the communicative body the "body communes its story with others; the story invites others to recognize themselves in it. Thus the communicative body tells itself explicitly in stories. Reciprocally, stories are the medium of bodies seeking to approximate the communicative type." (50) For the communicative body illness is not something that must be overcome, nor simply chaos, but rather an occasion for the discovery that we are on a journey, a quest, through which we learn "who I always have been" but did not know. (129)[12]

The suggestion that the communicative body is not just an ideal but an idealized type is Frank's way of saying that this is the way we ought to be. Moreover he thinks this is the way we can be "after modernity." It requires that ill people, not caregivers, need to regard themselves as the heroes of their own stories. This requires that we understand that heroism is not to be identified with those that can "do" something, but rather is to be found in those who persevere through suffering. (134) What such a body offers is not victory, but testimony. Our healing is not the overcoming of our illnesses, but rather our ability to share our going on with one another through the community stories create.

The imperative to receive testimony is, according to Frank, postmodern just to the extent that the witness must remain uncertain of what is received. Such uncertainty is required if we are not just to hear a story, but to be implicated in it. As Frank puts it, "This reciprocity of witnessing requires not one communicative body but a relationship of communicative bodies. Ordinary speech, conditioned by thinking on the model of law courts, refers to 'the witness' as if witnessing could be a

[12]I have had to telescope Frank's quite wonderful discussion of the restitution and chaos illness narratives. The plot of the former is "I was healthy, I am sick, but tomorrow I will be healthy again." The chaos story appears to have no plot seeing illness as the disruption of all stories. These stories can and are told in quite different ways, but Frank is surely right to see them as basic plot lines that shape our bodies not only when we are ill but when we are well.

solitary act. Witnessing always implies a relationship; I tell myself stories all the time, but I cannot testify to myself alone. Part of what turns stories into testimony is the call made upon another person to receive that testimony. Testimony calls on its witnesses to become what none of us are yet, communicative bodies." (143)

Frank's account of the "wounded storyteller" is not located theologically or even in any specifiable tradition. In that way he remains ambiguously modern, that is, no longer confident of the modern self but yet having no alternative. He thinks we must again reclaim the stories our bodies are trying to tell us from modern medicine, but the call for us to be the narrator of our own stories can be seen as but a new form of the modernist pretention that we can be our own creators. He quotes Paul Ricoeur's suggestion that we must become "the narrator of our own story without becoming the author of our life," noting such a statement seems to require acceptance of divine authorship. (176) Yet, at least in this book, he offers us no sign that he believes in such an authorship.

He rightly observes that the ethic of testimony requires the witness to speak "outside the language of survival. Modernity disallows any language other than survival; the modernist hero cannot imagine any other way to be, which is why physicians are often genuinely baffled by criticism. People in post-modern times need different languages of meta-survival with various messages that death is all right. Clinical ethics needs these messages." (166) But "various messages" can be but an appeal to modern presumptions to let pluralism reign—we get to choose the after life we like.

I confess I feel uneasy making these critical comments, given the testimony Frank has made through this book. I worry that my attempt to make Frank say where he stands is itself a modernist stance. Posing the question but reproduces the modernist assumption that what really matters is his "consciousness." What is important is that he is standing in stories that he cannot do without. For example consider his own reflections on Paul:

> The body's story requires a character, but who the character is is only created in the telling of the story. The character who is a communicative body must bear witness; witness requires voice as its medium, and voice finds its responsibility in witnessing. What is witnessed is memory, specifically embodied memory, a memory of experience written into the tissues. St. Paul, whose attitudes toward sexual embodiment are not popular, nevertheless expressed the embodiment of witness passionately. Paul knows he witnesses through his body: "In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings" (II Corinthians 6:5). Paul's ministry, to bring others into the body of Christ, is effected through rendering his own body available to suffering. This archetypal affinity of witness and bodily suffering cannot be evaded: Paul's unpopular message is that the responsibility of some is to find themselves called to the nexus of this affinity.(165-166)

So Paul's understanding of the body turns out to be the heart of Frank's perspective on illness. For Frank "wounded storytellers" are moral witnesses, reenchanting a disenchanted world. Through such stories we are reminded of our duties owed to the commonsense world. The last line of Frank's book reads, "illness stories provide glimpses of the perfection." Yet is such perfection the perfection of Christ?

4. The Sanctified Body

I see no reason that we should try to give an answer in general to such a question. Rather we should be grateful that people like Frank have been forced to challenge modernist presumptions about the self, renewing their and our imaginations in the process.[13] I purposefully use the language of "force" because I think that we do not develop new habits without being forced to do so. If we are to learn to think differently, we must have our bodies repositioned so that we have no other choice but to be what we were created to be.

Which is the reason I have chosen to focus on the body as the subject of sanctification. Not just the body, but the sick body. By suggesting that Frank's account might help us to imagine what it would mean for us to be in the Pauline sense the body of Christ, I am seeking to find the means to remind us that perfection is but another name for submission. The focus on illness is anything but accidental. For illness is the means we discover we are subject to the world of necessity, that we are fundamentally dependent beings, that we need stories that shape our dying. Perfection is the art of dying. To practice that art requires that we learn the art of living as embodied members of Christ's body.

The problem with the language and practice of holiness in modernity is it has been far too spiritual. To become holy has been presented as something we could will, something we could become if we just tried

[13] In an earlier book, At The Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991) Frank provides a wonderfully candid narrative of his own illnesses.

hard enough. Using Frank's typology holiness has been shaped by disciplinary, mirroring, and dominating stories more than by the communicative story. As Christians we have assumed modernist paradigms to shape our accounts of holiness because they promised to put us in control of our existence and, in particular, of our bodies. As a result our body's story, which is nothing less than the story of our desire for God, has been and is silenced.[14]

There are complex questions about the relation between the body and the body's stories that require further analysis.[15] I am sure the way to understand the way the body is storied is by looking more closely at how we are habituated. Indeed I suspect we are made perfect through our habits. So how we eat, with whom we eat, when we eat, what we eat are among the most important questions of "ethics." The monks have been right to think nothing is more important for the shaping of communities of holiness than how our days are structured. Nothing is more important for holiness than learning to speak and the use of that speech to speak the truth to one another in love.

If we are to be so habituated we will be so only by God's grace which often is but another name for necessity. Illness is one of the last sources of grace just to the extent it forces us to need one another, to be communicative bodies, to be peasants. Perhaps that is why the most intense time in many Protestant worship services is when we share prayers for our own and the illnesses of others. Such times should not be depreciated, but they are not self-sustaining. For the body that we share with one another in prayer must become the body God shares with us in eucharist. After all the eucharist is the only true sanctified body.

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[14]As part of his analysis of the various types Frank nicely shows what they imply about desire. For example he notes that the disciplined body lacks desire which but indicates its impossibility. (41) The mirroring body produces desire, but what such a body wants is itself. (44) The communicative body desires and so desiring must learn to live out of control. (50)

[15]Some may be concerned that my account of the "self" may be too physical risking some form of a reductionistic naturalism. These are complex question in philosophical psychology about which I cannot pretend competence. It is my own view, however, that modern theological accounts of the self have not been sufficiently naturalistic. Theologians until recently have always known that humans are also creatures which means we are animals. We should not be surprised, therefore, if neuroscience is capable of displaying our behavior in a predictive fashion. The mistake is to assume such a display being a sufficient reason to assume that all our behavior is "determined," whatever that would mean. For an account of these matters that nicely shows the complexity of these matters see Owen Flanagan, Self-Expressions: Mind, Morals, and the Meaning of Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

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HOLINESS AND THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

by Henry H. Knight III

The centrality of holiness to early Methodism is beyond dispute. John Wesley believed the movement was specifically called to hold before the world the great promise of Christian perfection as attainable in this life. As late as 1790 he wrote that "This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appears to have raised us up."[1] Among the four dimensions of doctrine identified by Alister McGrath is that of "social demarcation;"[2] clearly holiness served that function for Wesley's Methodists. It made them a distinctive people.

Of course holiness was not the whole of Methodist doctrine--that includes such key elements as prevenient grace, conviction of sin, justification, and sanctification as well. But holiness as perfect love was the orienting telos of all the other doctrines, giving them their purpose and direction.

It could not be otherwise for Wesley. Because he believed God's purpose in salvation is to restore the fallen imago Dei in this life, Christian perfection, which designates that restoration, must be seen as the soteriological capstone. But not only for soteriology; holiness is also the central mark of the Christian community, and hence the goal of ecclesiology as well. But not only ecclesiology; holiness is the shape of redeemed human society, and therefore also the eschatological goal. But not only eschatology, for holiness as perfect love is that which marks the trinitarian life of God itself, in whose image humanity was created.

As all this implies, "doctrine" for Wesley did not simply designate concepts to be cognitively affirmed but promised realities to be experienced and lived out. What McGrath says of Luther and Melanchthon is equally true of Wesley:

> Doctrine is not understood as naked intellectual belief, but as a means of generating an atmosphere of expectation, of removing obstacles, of orienting oneself in an appropriate manner, in order that the risen Christ may be encountered and known, and his benefits appreciated.[3]

We can see this in Wesley's own description of "genuine Christianity" when it is understood "as a scheme or system of doctrine."[4] Having pictured Christianity as a life of love for God and neighbor, along with other attendant affections and practices--that is, in terms of holiness of heart and life--Wesley then discusses the purpose of Christianity as doctrine:

> First, it describes this character in all its parts, and that in the most lively and affecting manner.... Secondly, Christianity promises this character shall be mine if I will not rest till I attain it.... Christianity tells me, in the third place, how I may attain the promise, namely, by faith.[5]

Doctrine for Wesley was "practical divinity" which served to direct persons to Christ and create in Christians an expectant faith and a hunger for holiness. Insofar as sanctification was a lived reality among the Methodist people, their message of holiness had authenticity.

But the reality of holiness as both content and goal of the Christian life not only gave integrity to the claims of Wesleyan theology, it also shaped Wesleyan practices. This is seen most clearly in the intrinsic connection between "doctrine" and "discipline." Doctrine describes the Christian life centered on holiness as a desirable and attainable reality; discipline consists of those practices which enable one to receive and grow in that life. The discipline included doing no harm, doing good, and attending the ordinances of God, as well as regular accountability for one's faithfulness to these practices at the weekly class meeting. Discipline thus encouraged active participation in means of grace within which one encountered the living God and through which the Holy Spirit transformed one's life such that it increasingly imaged the love of God. It is this doctrine and

discipline together, centered as they are upon holiness of heart and life, that gives Wesleyanism its distinctive identity.

It also gave them a distinctive mission. When the Methodist conference asked "What we may reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the Preachers called Methodist?" the response was clear: "to reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land."[6] As he argues in a number of writings such as "The General Spread of the Gospel" Wesley believed the renewal of the church in holiness to be almost a precondition for the effective evangelism of non-Christians. With that "grand stumbling block being thus happily removed out of the way, namely, the lives of the Christians"[7] Wesley expected non-Christians to be strongly attracted by the love the Christians would show to one another and to the world.

If we compare present day Wesleyanism with the original, the contrast is stark, at times to the point of reversal. Holiness and the renewal of the church is no longer our mission. Doctrine has been watered down and Christian perfection largely abandoned. Discipline and the class meetings have mostly disappeared. Is it any wonder there is a pervasive crisis of identity throughout the Wesleyan movement?

The reasons for all this are complex and probably not fully known. The roots of the decline of our passion for holiness may go back to the early nineteenth century, where Wesley's understanding of holiness in terms of Christian affections is replaced by one more focused on rational control of the will.[8] The separation of the "instantaneous" and the "gradual" by parties contending over holiness further eroded the Wesleyan vision. The decline of discipline in America may have to do with the unwieldy size of class meetings due to the exclusion of women leaders, as well as the replacing of a vibrant lay ministry with an increasingly clergy-centered church. Certainly accommodation to culture and middle-class respectability took its toll.

But whatever the causes, the effects have been seriously detrimental to the Wesleyan vision. For unless one is earnestly seeking holiness of heart and life, the discipline, classes, and practices of Wesley's Methodism make no sense. And, unless there are Christians engaged in something like that discipline and those practices, the doctrine of Christian perfection is scarcely credible. And--if all this is the case--then an evangelism centered on holiness will not be credible either, lacking as it does the existence of a people who give evidence of growth in holiness in their own lives.

This crisis of holiness identity comes at a time of massive intellectual and cultural change in the West, usually designated as a shift from Enlightenment-based modernity to postmodernity. The foundational assumptions of Western society are being shaken in a way not seen since breakdown of the medieval world. But far from being the death knell of Christianity, this new situation is a vast opportunity for a reinvigorated Christianity to spread the gospel with renewed excitement and confidence--provided that Christianity recovers holiness as its central focus.

As part of this shift, Christianity is finding itself no longer a dominant cultural force. Even in North America, Christianity is faced with competing religions and spiritualities in the private sphere, and a secular society that is increasingly hostile to any religious act or motive which dares to move beyond the personal to engage public issues. Whether this "trivialization of religion" will continue is uncertain,[9] but the loss of Christianity's privileged position in society is virtually certain.

Accompanying this loss is the gradual extinction of that species of church member so troubling to Wesley, the nominal or "formal" Christian. That Wesley was so troubled is a reminder that he never bought into the myth of Christendom even though he lived in the midst of it, a clue as to why he may prove to be helpful to a post-Christendom church. In a sermon given in 1744 at Oxford University he pointedly asked,

> Where, I pray, do the Christians live? Which is the country, the inhabitants whereof are "all (thus) filled with the Holy Ghost?... Who one and all have the love of God filling their hearts, and constraining them to love their neighbor as themselves?... Why, then, let us confess we have never yet seen a Christian country upon the earth.[10]

This remains a timely warning to those in America who seem bent upon building a Christian establishment, whether of the old mainline or the new religious right. Christianity does have societal implications (as Wesley knew) but at its heart it is about transformed lives. The demise of the European and the American versions of Christendom opens the way for a more authentic Christianity which is centered on holiness.

Persons are no longer expected to be Christians as a matter of course--now one must make a conscious choice. Hence now people need good reasons to become Christians. It is to these postmodern,

post-Christendom seekers that the promise of holiness has its appeal. People are looking for something that is real, that is authentic. Moreover, they at the same time are desperate for some good news that life does not have to be the way it is--that there is a viable alternative to broken relationships, personal hurt, distrust, and social injustice. Holiness is that alternative, and the evidence in its favor is found wherever there are communities of people who are living out a new life and are seeking to grow in the knowledge and love of God.

The presentation of the promise of holiness to postmodern people calls for creativity, for such terms as "holiness" and "sanctification"--as well as "sin" and "guilt"--carry negative connotations in contemporary society, often associated with legalism and judgmentalism. One of the most effective ways of communicating what this actually means is the telling of stories of real people, especially everyday people. The more particular and concrete the presentation, the less likely the message will be misconstrued.

But there are theological tasks as well for the recovery of holiness for a new century. First, we need to maintain Wesley's link between the "instantaneous" and the "gradual" in our theology of holiness. This means that while we hold firm to the promise of perfect love, we at the same time emphasize its inception and growth in terms of sanctification, or the new life in Christ. Put differently, we need to think of holiness as both an attainable goal and that which orients and gives meaning to the Christian life in its entirety. In this way we can--as Wesley did--make common cause with other Christians who do not hold to Christian perfection as attainable yet nonetheless understand the Christian life as growth in holiness and movement toward perfect love.

Second, we need to recover Wesley's link between doctrine and discipline, or between the Christian life and the means of grace. The means of grace are the communal, liturgical, and devotional context which makes the Christian life possible and Christian perfection credible.[11] It is through these practices that the Holy Spirit gradually transforms lives and instills in them a hunger for the instantaneous gift. There really cannot be a Christian life shaped and governed by the promise of holiness apart from the recovery of the means of grace.

Third, we need to recover Wesley's understanding of sanctification in terms of Christian affections.[12] In this Wesley was ahead of his time, at one and the same time biblically faithful and proleptically postmodern. In the remainder of this paper I want to suggest how the affections, linked with means of grace, are congruent with certain postmodern virtues while helpfully subversive of some postmodern vices. Among the virtues of postmodernism with which the affections are congruent is a holistic anthropology. This is in contrast to the mind/body dualism of the Cartesian and Kantian Enlightenment, and the moral psychology it tended to generate.

The dualism of mind and body was designed to resolve a conflict between two Enlightenment values, human freedom and objective scientific research. The problem was this: given the explanation of

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Wesley Studies Society
c/o Christ United Methodist Church
410 N. Holden Road
Greensboro, NC 27410
(910)299-1571
Fax (910)-299-7866

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material reality in terms of discoverable laws of cause and effect, and the human being as part of that material world, what becomes of human freedom? The solution was to lodge the body in the world of cause and effect, but not the mind, thereby claiming a safe haven for rational human freedom.

This created a fresh problem which modernity never did solve: how does this duality of body and mind nonetheless constitute a single, unified person? Wesley has no abiding interest in solving this philosophical conundrum. What he does do is insist on the biblical claim that persons are a unity, and that embodiment is an essential element of that personhood. He rejected any construal of humanity which would deny human responsibility for actions.[13] While certainly a person of the eighteenth century, this was at least a move by Wesley in the direction of a postmodern understanding of the self as an embodied agent.

Of more direct importance to holiness is the moral psychology which was linked to this dualism. The Enlightenment portrayed the self as an arena of conflict between reason (associated with mind) and the emotions or passions (connected to the body) for the control of the will. While most philosophers believed the will should be under rational control, lest we get carried away by irrational passions, .others advocated the reverse. But almost everyone presupposed a passion/reason conflict as the central dynamic of human moral choice.

John Wesley vigorously dissented from this kind of conflictive portrayal. The affections, while not ruling out "enthusiastic" emotions or deluded reasoning, made normative the integration of emotion, reason, and will in the whole person. The moral conflict we face is not between emotion and reason but sin and God, and each contender seeks our whole-hearted devotion. This fundamental issue is where our heart is, or, who or what is the object of our affections? Who do we love, for what do we give thanks, in what do we hope?

To speak of the object of the affections introduces a second area of congruence with postmodernity. Enlightenment modernity understood each person to be an autonomous rational individual; relationships were the result of a subsequent personal choice which had no basic effect on the personhood of the individual. In contrast postmodernity believes personhood to be fundamentally constituted by relationships; we are thereby constructs of that complex web or relationships within which we find ourselves.

Holiness understood in terms of the affections likewise depicts human character as constituted by relationships. The claim is that who we are as Christians has everything to do with our relationship to God and our neighbor; as we grow in the knowledge and love of God we are formed and shaped in God's image. This is why the means of grace are essential to the Christian life: it is as we search the scriptures, pray, give thanks, receive the bread and wine, fellowship with one another, and serve our neighbor that we come to know God more fully, experience God's renewing love in our lives, and are transformed by that love. The means of grace are therefore means through which we live out our relationship with God--they are practices through which we come into God's presence and respond to God's love.

The essential relationality of the affections may also address the issue of whether holiness should be thought of in substantive or relational terms. If you begin with the assumption that we are autonomous individuals, then relationship seems a rather weak description of holiness--if relationships are external to the self, then they would leave the self fundamentally unchanged. But if we are constituted by our relationships, then to be in a loving relationship with God and our neighbor will transform us at the very core of our being. To transform our affections is to change the self, to receive and begin to live a new life.

The affections imply a very particular way of life, distinct from other ways of living. To love God as revealed in Jesus Christ is to live a life profoundly different from one centered on the love of money or success. It is also different from a life centered on God as described other than by way of God's revelation in scripture; descriptively different gods lead to descriptively different affections and lives. While many may speak of loving God, the content of that love will vary according to who we believe that God is.

The particularity of the life of scriptural holiness has more in common with postmodern than modern assumptions. Modernity envisioned human reason and experience as essentially universal, the same in all times and places. Liberal theology, in its drive to reconfigure Christianity in light of this modern perspective, posited a primordial religious experience of which Christian doctrine and practice was an expression. Postmodernism is highly suspicious of such universal claims; reason and experience is seen more as a function of one's particular cultural and historical context.

The Christian affections are formed and shaped within the liturgical, communal and devotional context created by the means of grace. Thus unlike liberalism, Christian experience is not prior to

doctrine and discipline; rather it is the teachings and practices that make Christian experience possible.

It is this sensitivity to context that opens a fourth area of resonance with postmodernity, as well as a potential conflict. Our claim is that the gospel and the Christian life is for everyone, that is, it is universal. The postmodern suspicion is that this is imperialistic, imposing our way of life on persons in cultures quite different from our own. That has of course happened--the Christian life became identified with certain behaviors and practices in Western culture, and these behaviors and practices were then exported without regard to cultural difference.

When holiness is understood as affections that are rooted in the heart and become the motives for behavior rather than the behavior itself, both the universality and cultural distinctiveness of the Christian life becomes clear. What makes it ultimately one way of life is the one Lord who gives that life; the object of the affections is the God revealed in Jesus Christ. But what makes holiness culturally distinctive is the way those affections are lived out; what it means to love God and one's neighbor in practical terms will necessarily vary from culture to culture. The gospel can indwell every culture and remain the gospel still.

Of course, this won't satisfy those postmoderns who are wedded to absolute relativism. To them we must give an account of the hope that is in us that affirms without compromise that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Savior of all. We make this claim not triumphalistically but with the gratitude of those who have been renewed by the living presence of the risen Christ. This universality is intrinsic to the gospel we have received and invite others to consider; but the fullness of all this gospel means for our world awaits the day when people of all nations and cultures worship Jesus as Lord and work out for themselves what it means to follow Christ in their various contexts.

There are two additional issues which make a recovery of holiness of heart and life essential to a postmodern, post-Christendom Christianity. The first is that holiness as understood by Wesley takes seriously both human sin and the grace of God.

To see this as advantage may seem odd, given contemporary society's rather ambiguous response to sin. On one hand, the therapeutic perspective of popular culture views any talk of sin as demeaning if not judgmental; the goal is to affirm rather than to call into question. On the other hand, another prominent strand sees human evil in the world as almost dominant--our lives are threatened by violence, deceit, and broken relationships. One must be continually on guard and be every ready to demand one's rights in the face of this ongoing threat. It is just such demands by parties in conflict that fuel the cycles of violence and retribution around the world.

Both of these perspectives are unsatisfactory because neither offer real hope for change. The first doesn't take the problem of sin seriously enough; the second takes sin seriously but has no room for grace.

In contrast we believe that the gospel not only promises real transformation of human lives, offered as a free gift, but that is the heart and purpose of salvation. God intends through forgiveness and new birth to begin a process of restoration whose goal is nothing less than the recovery of the imago Dei in this life. What this means is that the affections of love and other fruits of the Spirit take root in human hearts and grow through the power of the Spirit as we engage in a relationship with God. The result is restored relationships, renewed purpose and meaning in life, and evangelistic and social outreach to others in the name of Christ.

If holiness is God's central purpose, then of course it is essential to Christianity in any age. Any version of the gospel which promises forgiveness without new life not only truncates God's own plan for humanity, but likely has diluted the authentic understanding of divine forgiveness as well.

But holiness is especially necessary in a time like our own, when the world is hungry for love. People are desperate for real relationships of caring and trust. At the same time, they are searching for meaning in their own lives. Materialism and consumerism leave them empty, individualism leaves them lonely, and pop psychology and shallow spiritualities do not begin to fill the void. They are seeking something with real integrity, upon which they can rely and in which they can truly hope.

To encounter a community of persons who are genuinely devoted to God, who express real care for one another, and whose lives bear some resemblance to the faith they profess is a strikingly welcome experience in a world such as this. Such a community need not exhibit perfect love to impact the lives of others, but it does need to be a people who are seeking that love and are together growing in love.

The rational apologetics typical of much of modern evangelicalism will have limited appeal in a post-Christendom society. Far more persuasive is an

apologetics of love. To encounter the reality of the new life in Christ is an invitation to receive that life for oneself. It provides the only lasting hope of restored relationships and lives of meaning and purpose, for it is an anticipation of the eschatological life which shall come and remain for all eternity.

Henry H. Knight III
Assistant Professor of Evangelism
Saint Paul School of Theology
5123 Truman Road
Kansas City, MO 64127

HALSPST@aol.com

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Freedom or Freefall in Worship: Discerning the Difference

by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr.

The current worship wars, controversy and consternation over innovation and tradition in worship, are not new. James F. White has chronicled this struggle between the frontier tradition and the liturgical tradition in numerous articles and books. His *Christian Worship in North America: A Retrospective — 1955-1995* gathers a number of articles written over the years into a refreshing collection tinged with humor and revealing perspective.[1] White's work reminds me anew that we have had, and still have, a very messy kettle of fish on our stove when it comes to mainline Protestant worship and theology.

Many recent books on the emerging styles of worship, including *Contemporary Worship for the 21st Century*, which I co-authored with Craig Miller, try to straddle the fence on the issues in hope that no one's worship style will be stepped on and all the options will be kept open. Is this great reluctance to take a stand due to an amazing charity in the church? Or is it a lack of doctrinal and liturgical standards that leave us tiptoeing through the tulips on questions of liturgical norms? Or is it that we are, on the whole, waiting to see what order emerges out of the current chaos? Does the current situation reflect responsible exercise of liturgical freedom, or are we prone to a kind of liturgical freefall due to a lack of ecclesial identity and discipline?

Terms

By freefall I mean a kind of liturgical anarchy; worship concocted and conducted without a tether to or an investment in the larger Christian tradition. It is jettisoning the liturgical heritage for pragmatic "worship." Liturgical freefall may be the result of frustration that cannot make sense of liturgical norms and patterns in the tradition as embodied in official rites. Or, it may be prompted by an idolizing of one's own creative capacities to the disregard of a shared ecclesial center. If you visit in a number of churches as I do, you will readily recognize the manifestation of both of these pathways to freefall. The results may vary, but the loss is the same: to put it bluntly, one can barely discern the franchise, except for a common thread of exaggerated subjectivism! Every menu is different! And more importantly, faith communities drift further and further from any recognizable engagement with the mainstream of Christian faith. This is the case both on the theological left and right!

My assumption here is that the Christian faith—here I am focusing on the United Methodist expression of the Christian faith—uses or speaks with a distinctive language whose grammar, syntax and vocabulary are shaped and formed by the liturgy. The result of liturgical freefall is a contemporary Tower of Babble, a kind of emergent congregationalism and a growing heterodoxy across the church. We speak more and more theological languages and have less and less accountability to one another in terms of the Christian doctrinal and liturgical tradition.

On the other hand, this article is not a quest for a liturgical "goose step" that legalistically binds every pastor and congregation into an unquestioning "do-it-by-the-book" posture. Liturgical freedom is modeled on the argument of Paul to the Galatians: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another." (Gal. 5:13) There is here a communal context for freedom and a call to a balance through discipline using the gift of love. What are the communal and doctrinal parameters for liturgical liberty? If we are in liturgical freefall, how could our sense of church and doctrinal standards recall us to a faithful freedom in worship?

Doctrinal standards

William J. Abraham, in *Waking From Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church*, makes the case that The United Methodist Church is a *confessional church* by virtue of its constitution. His argument is founded on the first restrictive rule of the Constitution, (para. 16 in *The Book of Discipline—1996*, which says that the General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith or establish any new standards of rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine. Many of us have been saying for years that The United Methodist Church is not a confessional church. We bought the 1972 Discipline's theological package hook, line and sinker: we have asserted that we have no confessional stance—only a method that invokes scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Further, many of us have been alarmed by the reputed narrowness of the Confessional Movement. Abraham's argument has led me to take a second look at my assessment. Further, it opens a door to a place for us to stand together as we wrestle at the interface of the Christian community and the post-modern world.

My purpose here is not to review or endorse Abraham's argument, nor is it to deal with doctrine as constitutive gift to the Church. Rather, I want to sketch out a working model for liturgical liberty grounded in our doctrine and propose that liturgical freefall is not an option for us. If, as Abraham argues, we have in the Articles of Religion and The Confession of Faith a theological home base to which we are constitutionally committed, what might that home base offer us as we struggle through the issues of freedom and freefall in worship? That is the point of departure for what follows.

The relevant texts

I include here the two clearly relevant texts from the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith for our consideration. In a real sense these are more "church

order" texts than they are doctrinal. In these quotes, I use inclusive language in brackets so that the texts are more in tune with our contemporary usage. I hope that I have in no instance changed the meaning of the texts and welcome any feedback if such changes cause distortion.

Article XXII—Of Rites and Ceremonies of Churches

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and [human] manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever, through [their] private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which [they] belong, which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.

Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification.

From "The Articles of Religion," *The Book of Discipline—1996*, p. 62.

Article XIII—Public Worship

We believe divine worship is the duty and privilege of [humanity which], in the presence of God, bows in adoration, humility and dedication. We believe divine worship is essential to the life of the Church, and that the assembling of the people of God for such worship is necessary to Christian fellowship and spiritual growth.

We believe the order of public worship need not be the same in all places but may be modified by the church according to circumstances and the needs of [the people]. It should be in a language and form understood by the people, consistent with the Holy Scriptures to the edification of all, and in accordance with the order and Discipline *of the Church.*

From "The Confession of Faith," *The Book of Discipline—1996*, p. 68.

Reflection on worship and our doctrinal standards[2]

What emerges from a quick read of these texts from our doctrinal canon is that we can read into these texts what we want to see! If you want a case for liturgical freefall you will find words to shore up your case. If you want a liturgical straight-jacket, you will find words to restrain those who appear to be out of control. However, when you read the texts — *really* read the texts — an amazing balance and grace emerges. These statements become a means of discipline for our connection as worship leaders in the church. What emerges is a tensive field marked by (1) tempered catholicity and (2) disciplined particularity, (3) criteria for contextualizing worship, and (4) a protective fence against legalism. With what follows, I include some questions which I hope will invite others to join the dialogue.

1. Tempered catholicity: *it is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike* . . . . (AR: XXII)[3] There is no grounds here for attempting to do what Rome did in the counter-Reformation: force a universal rite upon all people groups, even in China! The article recognizes the diversity of worship over time and across the globe. AR: XXII holds this necessary liturgical diversity in tension with the authority of *the church to which [one] belongs* . . . to ordain and approve rites and ceremonies by general ecclesial authority. In other words, liturgical innovation by leaders as individuals in any particular place is subject to the General Conference which ordains and approves the rites and ceremonies of The United Methodist Church as a church within the universal Church. CF:XIII recognizes that diversity of worship *may be modified by the church according to circumstances and the needs of [the people].* It seems clear in context that in both texts "church" is not used in a local sense but in the larger collective sense.

   Question: to what does the term *"every particular church"* refer? I understand this to refer to the various traditions of Christ's church; not, except in the most radical congregational polity, each local church.

2. Disciplined particularity: *Whosoever, through [their] private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which [they] belong, which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren* (AR: XXII). Unfortunately, this does not cover *ignorance* which accounts for so much offense "*against the common order of our church.*" It does, however, speak sharply and clearly to all of us who see worship as our private domain and to our indulgence in *private judgment*, exaggerated sense of creativity, and preferences.

   Liturgical freedom is not denied here; liturgical freefall is! The thrust is relational and communal. Perhaps, taking our doctrinal standards seriously would engage us in use of the means of grace called "Christian conference" with our bishops and superintendents, the other elders [*presbyters*], deacons, and all the faithful in the connection. Isn't that what the early Conference of Methodism did? The language of CF:XIII contextualizes the origin of liturgical diversity: the order of public worship *may be modified by the church* — not the independent operator.

   Question: What do these texts mean by "rites and ceremonies" and "public order of worship"? This could be turned into a thorny problem, but the intent would seem to point, at a minimum, to what in our hymnal and book of worship are identified as "General Services" and "The Basic Pattern of Worship." In keeping with our tradition since 1784, it would mean use of what has been lumped together as the "Ritual" of the church—both orders and texts for baptism, Holy Communion, marriage and funeral rites, and ordination services. In our church the Ritual, now called The General Services, is marked with great flexibility for pastors and other worship leaders as they seek to tailor worship to the contexts in which they plan and lead the liturgy of the church. See *The United Methodist Book of Worship* pages 13-32 for a virtual feast of options related to the Word and Table pattern.

3. Criteria for contextualizing worship: [Worship] *should be in a language and form understood by the people, consistent with the Holy Scriptures to the edification of all, and in accordance with the order and* Discipline *of the Church* (CF:XIII). This language highlights and affirms the great Protestant reforms which have now also been embraced by Rome since Vatican II: worship that is (1) in the vernacular (something we are still working at in moving from stilted and formal language to more

generous use of metaphorical daily speech), (2) grounded in Scripture as primary authority for faith and salvation, and (3) conducted within the worship order (*ordo*) of the Church. Both doctrinal articles on worship emphasize the Protestant spiritual sensitivity to *edification.*

Question: How does United Methodist tradition and its doctrinal heritage understand sanctification/holiness within the guiding norm of edification? Do the questions asked of candidates for baptism (Baptismal Covenant I, No. 4) point to the scope of what we mean by and pray for as edification? sanctification? Fritz West in *Scripture and Memory: The Ecumenical Hermeneutic of the Three Year Lectionaries* notes the distinctiveness of Protestant and Catholic sensitivities; Protestant attentiveness to edification tends to regard readings as "print" and Catholic attentiveness to sanctification tends to regard "the word," as God speaking. While I think he is generally accurate in his observations about worship, I wonder if in the Methodist tradition we are "genetically" closer to the Catholic sensitivity to sanctification in daily life and piety than we are to edification.

4. Worship as graceful duty and privilege — a protective fence against legalism: *We believe divine worship is the duty and privilege of [humanity] who, in the presence of God, bows in adoration, humility and dedication. We believe divine worship is essential to the life of the Church, and that the assembling of the people of God for such worship is necessary to Christian fellowship and spiritual growth* (CF: XIII). Perhaps this segment of the texts under consideration speaks to the last question. Clearly it points to worship as a means of grace for all people. Worship is both duty and privilege. The key is to move beyond formalism to investing the form (*ordo*) with our expectancy that the Spirit will infuse it to be for us vital encounter with the risen Lord. CF: XIII affirms that in worship the Spirit grows the body of Christ toward maturity in discipleship both communally and individually.

   Saddling bishops, elders, deacons, and the faithful with the "rites and ceremonies of the church" will not bring people into the presence of God or result in Christian growth. This is the point at which local churches, seminaries, Boards of Ordained Ministry, and Annual Conferences have such a vital role to play in calling, forming, and ordaining persons to service and word (deacons) and to service, word, sacrament, and order (elders). If the *fence* is seen as constricting and constraining, the cows will reach for greener grass and break through to "freedom" and freefall. If, however, the fence is seen as a gracious enclosure where life can be found in awesome wonder, the churchly form of word and sacraments will shape us with the realism Peter expressed in answer to Jesus' question "Do you also wish to go away?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6: 68) Rites are not about being right under burdensome constraint; they are about entering into eternal life for the life of the world! See John 20:30-31.

So what does our doctrinal canon offer us in discerning liturgical freedom? Clearly, there is here no doctrinal gateway to liturgical freefall, whatever hagiographic tales of frontier ministry we may relish. Our doctrinal standards invite prayerful reflection by all who have been or will be asked not only, "...will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church accepting its *order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline* defending it against all doctrines contrary to God's Holy Word, and accepting the authority of those who are appointed to supervise your ministry?" See "Ordination of Deacons" and "Ordination of Elders" in *The United Methodist Book of Worship, 676.* Presumably, all clergy answer that question without perjury before God or the Church! The great opportunity before us in the post modern world is to see our order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline as gifts and to use them with gratitude, confidence and competency born of the Spirit.

May we more and more treasure liturgical freedom as a gift with "good and pleasant" boundaries and a call to use of the *ordo* for the life of the world.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:
Wesley Studies Society
c/o Saint Timothy's United Methodist Church
5228 Hiltop Road
Jamestown, NC 27282
(336) 632-4581
Fax (336) 632-4582
Email: dhockett@att.net

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Daniel Benedict is the Worship Resources Director of The General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) of The United Methodist Church. He leads the Christian Initiation Project Team that focuses on an adult catechumenal process supported by five volumes including Come to the Waters, By Water and the Spirit *(a study version of the General Conference paper on baptism),* Gracious Voices, Accompanying the Journey, *and* Echoing the Word. *All are published by Discipleship Resources http://www.discipleshipresources.org*

[1] For example, see White's "Evangelism and Worship from New Lebanon to Nashville" and "Worship and Culture: Mirror or Beacon." I am once again grateful for the light and grace that White is able to bring to some of the vexing cross currents of worship in North America.

[2] While I did not quote the articles on the sacraments (Articles of Religion XVI and Confession of Faith: VI), on baptism (Articles of Religion: XVII), and on the Lord's Supper (Articles of Religion: XVIII, XIX, XX), they should also be considered as guiding texts for studying our liturgical freedom.

[3] Notations with AR stand for Articles of Religion and CF for Confession of Faith

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