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4 What Are Human Beings?

A Wesleyan Faith

John Wesley's first university sermon, preached in the church at Oxford University in 1730, is titled "The Image of God."¹ It is a sermon that discusses what it means to think about human nature from a specifically Christian perspective. Much of this sermon has to do with the issue of human sin, but from the very beginning Wesley asserts one crucial point: human beings are created in the image of God. In light of the fact that all people share this characteristic as part of their nature, he finds it odd that this truth is not universally acknowledged. Quite objectionable, he says, is the idea that we are more like beasts than like God.

The idea that human beings are created in the image of God has its origin in the first chapter of the Bible. We read in Genesis 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them,
male and female he created them.

Sometimes people are curious about why the text says, "Let *us* make humankind in *our* image." Why "us" and "our" rather than "me" and "my"? In this passage, God is presented as a divine king surrounded by a court of other divine beings. Think of God surrounded by angels, speaking to them about the creation of human beings. The humans are not going to be created in the image of beasts, but in the divine image. Humans are not simply one more species of the animal kingdom. Rather, they have authority over the animals, over all the earth, in fact. Humans represent a different kind of creation than all that has been created before. Like God, we have will, reason, and morality.

Psalm 8 expresses basically the same idea, affirming that God has made human beings "a little lower than God, / and crowned them with glory and honor" (Ps 8:5). The Hebrew word that the NRSV translates as "God" in this passage is *elohim*, and it could be translated in a number of ways. In fact, the NIV translates this passage, "You have made [human beings] a little lower than the angels." Nevertheless, the point is clear: human beings hold a very special place within creation.

It is, in fact, as one of these beings who are "a little lower" than those who dwell in heaven, that God came to us in Jesus Christ. This is exactly how the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews reads Psalm 8 as a prophecy about Jesus. This writer (and we do not know who wrote it) holds that Jesus, who became "a little lower than the angels," is now "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" (Heb 2:9). In other words, having become human, Jesus died for all people, and for that reason is honored more highly than any other of the divine beings.

The problem with the claim that human beings are created in the image of God is that we often act so contrary to God's will. In other words, human beings sin. Wesley understood that those who disagreed with his understanding of human beings would emphasize our wrongdoing: "A fine picture—this ignorant, wretched, guilty creature—of a wise, happy, and holy Creator!"² He did of course recognize that humans sin, but this did not undercut for him the notion that we are *created* in the divine image. Rather, he believed, that through sin we actually *lose* the image of God. Traits such as understanding, the desire and freedom to act in keeping with God's wishes, a loving disposition, and happiness—these are all traits of the divine image. Nevertheless, when we look at the world, again and again we see people *not* exemplifying these kinds of traits. Therefore, even though we are created in the image of God, we lose that image through sin.

The Bible teaches again and again that, while human beings are created in the divine image, we do not always live like it. The story of Adam, Eve, and the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3) is a story about how humans defied God. In fact, they tried to be *like* God. The serpent enticed Eve into disobeying God by telling her that when she eats the forbidden fruit, "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). Adam apparently needs no such enticement. He simply eats what is given to him. Then we read that the snake was in fact right: once Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, "the eyes of both were opened" (3:7). They were created in the image of God, but that was not enough. They wanted to be *more* like God, and they reached too far. This sin has repeated itself again and again through history: humans confuse their role with God's role, and the results are catastrophic.

This, of course, is not the end of the story. Through Jesus Christ, we have the ability to recover the image of God. Greater

understanding, a will that is like God's will, love toward others, and true happiness are ours through Jesus Christ. These are ours after what Wesley called "new birth," a topic that we will learn more about in chapter 6. But for now it suffices to say that when our will is at odds with God's will, when we seek to go our own way instead of God's way, we who are *created* in God's image fail to *reflect* that image. Wesley believed that human sin causes us to be like untuned instruments: "The instrument being now quite untuned, she could no longer make the same harmony."³ We are no longer in harmony with God's will.

Not everyone who hears the message about Jesus Christ will accept it and return to God, from whom they are estranged. People, after all, have free will when it comes to doing good or evil. It is important to realize that not all Christians believe that human beings have free will. Some believe that human beings are so corrupt through sin that we cannot even recognize our own sinfulness, and we are therefore incapable of turning back to God. How is it that some people accept Christ, then? God overrides their sinful nature through a powerful and irresistible act of divine grace (a word that in this context refers to a gift that we have not earned), and once they realize their sin and God's goodness, their lives are never the same. These people never give up their salvation; such is the nature of God's powerful work on the human will. Wesleyans, however, have a different perspective. We believe that God's Holy Spirit is at work on all people all of the time, enabling anyone who wishes to accept God's gift of salvation to do so. Nevertheless, we do not *have* to do so. We can in fact say no to God. God's grace is not irresistible. Further, once we've said yes to God, we can still, at a later time, turn around and say "no." We human beings have free will, and God does not force our hand to make us do what is right for us and best for the world.

It is important to realize, though, that when human beings defy God and act in ways that are contrary to God's will, these kinds of actions do not nullify God's love for us nor the importance of human life. In fact, one of the most basic truths of Christian faith is that God loves us *while we are sinners*, and the salvation that God offers us is a proof of that love. The apostle Paul states this explicitly in his Letter to the Romans: "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Human beings matter. Whether Christian or non-Christian, righteous, sinful, or somewhere in between, human beings matter. We matter so much, in fact, that the Son of God died on a cross for us. Paul says in the same letter, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38).

A Lived Faith

What does it mean to take seriously the fact that we are created by God in the image of God? What does it mean that God loves us enough, even in the midst of our sin, to come to us in Jesus Christ and die for us upon the cross? Sometimes Christianity is presented as a list of "don'ts": don't smoke, don't drink, don't have extramarital sex, and so on. These "don'ts," however, are really only the negative side of saying something much more positive: *Do* live like you are a being of sacred worth, and like other people are too. When we use tobacco we hurt our bodies and endanger our lives, which are gifts to us from God. Too much alcohol can lead to out-of-control behavior, addiction, abuse of other people, and even death. When we engage in illicit or casual sexual behavior, we degrade ourselves, acting as if our bodies were mere instruments of pleasure, rather than gifts from God that allow us to live in and interact with God's good creation.

The same could be said for our habits around diet and exercise. While in some Christian traditions gluttony is often mentioned as a sin, in many traditions it goes unmentioned. Nevertheless, if we are of sacred worth as human beings, if we are created in the image of God, then what we put into our bodies and how we take care of our bodies really does matter. Imagine that each week when you went to church, the altar at the front leaned to one side, the chairs or pews were stained and needed a thorough cleaning, and half of the light bulbs had burned out. Imagine that there were stains on the floor and walls, and broken windows. A newcomer to the church would likely ask, “*Who’s taking care of this place?*” The answer, of course, would be that nobody is taking care of it. Despite that it is a sacred place where people come together to worship God, no one is caring for it and therefore it has fallen into disrepair. Good things may continue to happen there, of course, but the ways in which the congregants have cared for the building does say something about the value that they assign to their place of worship. In the same way, our bodies are sacred places. We did not build them. Rather, God gave them to us, and like a church building, they are given to us to honor and serve God. If we are properly to honor God, then, we should take care of the bodies that God has given to us. This is no less the case for people with disabilities than the able-bodied. The value of a human being comes from his or her God-given nature, rather than from some notion of functionality. So whether able-bodied or disabled, we matter, our bodies matter, and we should care for ourselves as people of sacred worth.

Self-care, however, is only a part of what’s at stake in realizing the value of human beings. Being a Christian is not just about the care of the self, or even only about loving God, but the care of others. As we read in 1 John 4:21, “those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” Again, human beings really do matter. They matter enough for Christ to die for us. If this is the case, this must affect the way in which we live each and every day, and this can complicate life

considerably and raise a host of questions for us. For example, how are we going to treat the person in the office whom no one likes? How are we going to regard those people with whom we disagree politically? How does our understanding of human beings come to bear, for example, on issues such as illegal immigration? Under what circumstances, if any, is it permissible for Christians to use violence against other people? How should we react to issues of poverty, both locally and globally? Do we treat our spouses and children as created in the image of God, as creatures of sacred worth? Some of these questions are easier to answer than others, but in answering any of them we need to keep in mind what we say about human beings not simply from scientific, political, or economic perspectives, but from a specifically *Christian* perspective.

We could discuss many other examples of how Wesleyans should or should not live. We could create another list of “don’ts.” The important thing, however, is not some list of particular things we should and should not do, but the basic principle involved: our lives as human beings really do matter. How we treat ourselves and other people really does matter. Human beings are creatures of sacred worth, and if we believe this, then we need to live like it.

A Deeper Faith

It is crucial for Christians to keep in mind that a person’s humanity is determined entirely by his or her being created by God in the image of God. Nevertheless, we commonly see people dehumanized for a variety of reasons. For example, it is commonplace in times of war for people to dehumanize their enemies, casting them within a kind of group identity and labeling them with terms such as *infidels*, *commies*, or other such terms, some of which are actually much more degrading than these. To regard other people in this way—to assign them an identity that categorizes them within a larger group

but does not account for their individual humanity—is profoundly unchristian.

Wesley faced a huge crisis of dehumanization in his day: the crisis of slavery. When he addressed this crisis, he did so in part by emphasizing the common human characteristics of these captive people. He castigates the slavers, saying,

You have seen them torn away,—children from their parents, parents from their children; husbands from their wives, wives from their beloved husbands, brethren and sisters from each other. You have dragged them who had never done you any wrong, perhaps in chains, from their native shore. You have forced them into your ships like an herd of swine,—them who had souls immortal as your own.⁴

He asks, “Did the Creator intend that the noblest creatures in the visible world should live such a life as this?”⁵ Wesley would not accept the dehumanization of slaves by those who would exploit them for economic advantage.

Today we face complex ethical debates around such issues as severe disability, healthcare, abortion, and end-of-life care. These issues are difficult, and there is not room here to offer them the considered attention that such serious matters deserve. Nevertheless, what we must not allow is the equating of humanity with functionality. In other words, we are human because God has created us as human, not because of what we are able to do, think, or say. If we are confined to bed, or even apparently unable to respond to stimuli (which we often designate with the dehumanizing term *vegetative state*), we are still human. For that reason, all people, whether born or unborn, entirely able-bodied or disabled, responsive or unresponsive, young or old, are equally human. Our humanity is not dependent on what we can *do*. Like our salvation, it is a gift from God.

The Catechism

Human Beings

Q. What are we by nature?

A. We are part of God’s creation, made in the image of God.⁶

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them” (Gen 1:26-27).

“Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7).

“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6).

Q. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

A. It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.⁷

Q. Why then do we live apart from God and out of harmony with creation?

A. Human beings have free will, and from the beginning we have misused our freedom and made wrong choices.⁸

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?”’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.”’ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves” (Gen 3:1-7).

Q. What is this misuse of our freedom and making of wrong choices called?

A. It is called sin.

“For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt 15:19).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23).

“For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom 7:18-19).

“For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot” (Rom 8:7).

Q. Why do we not use our freedom as we should?

A. Apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, humankind is destitute of holiness and inclined to evil.⁹

Q. What help is there for us?

A. Our help is in God.¹⁰

“No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (John 3:3).

Q. How has God helped us?

A. By acting in history through prophets, seers, and saints; by Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to the Father; and by the Holy Spirit, who abides with us and helps us to know the Son and the Father.

In Your Own Words

1. We are created in the image of God. Share how seeing others as created in God’s image might make you see them differently. How can you cultivate seeing the image of God in other people, your family, your friends, your rivals, your enemies?

2. We all make mistakes; we all tend to confuse our role with God's; we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. How can we stop confusing our role with God's role? What is our role in relation to God?
3. What is God's will for us as humans? For you as a person? Do you believe that God is happy with your current choices?
4. As God's children, we are free to reflect God's image and we are free to choose to reflect something else. What does your life reflect? What values? What goals? What achievements?
5. How well do you take care of your body, your soul, your significant relationships, your church? How much time do you devote to each? How can God help you take care of the things you need to do? How can God help you prioritize?
6. How might understanding all human beings as being created in the image of God change the debates about disability, and beginning-of-life and end-of-life care?

5 What Is Sin?

A Wesleyan Faith

Wesley was irked by people who thought too well of themselves, or thought too highly of human nature in general. Indeed, Wesley did believe that all people are created in the image of God, but he certainly did not believe that people were generally, in their present state, "innocent and wise and virtuous."¹ He scoffed at the idea that a person has "all virtue and happiness in his composition, or at least entirely in his power, without being beholden to any other being."² There were of course champions of this kind of position in Wesley's day, just as there are today. Nevertheless, in response to this view of human nature he asks, "What must we do with our Bibles? For they will never agree with this."³ In other words, a Wesleyan view of human beings must reckon with the fact that all people sin.

What is sin? It is the violation of God's will. Often we hear talk of "original sin." Wesley certainly believed in the power of original sin. The topic comes up frequently in his sermons. Basically, original sin is the idea that human beings cannot help but think, act, and speak in ways that violate God's will—until, that is, God goes to work on them, changing them from the inside out. This is an old idea with its roots in the writings of the Apostle Paul. If Paul provided the raw material for it, however, the fourth- and fifth-century Christian thinker Augustine of Hippo sent it into mass production.

Augustine, taking his cues from Paul (see Rom 5:12-21), goes all the way back to the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. He says that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, fruit that was forbidden to them, they committed the very first sin, the “original” sin (see Genesis 3). The perfect and sinless state in which they had lived was therefore corrupted. Both sin and death came into the world through this act. Furthermore, all human beings after Adam and Eve inherited two unfortunate legacies. First, because the perfection of humankind was broken, all human beings thereafter have no choice but to sin, unless they are saved through Jesus Christ. In our normal state, we no longer desire God. Rather, we love and desire everything but God, as if these other things *were* God. Second, all human beings inherit the guilt of sin through Adam and Eve. They are born with that guilt, and it must be removed through baptism and faith in Jesus Christ.

This account of sin has done a lot of heavy lifting over the years. Many, many Christians have found it compelling. Whether or not we find Augustine’s account of the origins of sin satisfactory, we can approach the idea of original sin this way: if we look around at the world, we see violations of God’s will everywhere. On a small scale, we might see this in gossip at work, in kids becoming targets of bullies on the playground, in lies between husbands and wives, in petty theft, or in sexual promiscuity. On a grand scale, we see such problems as global poverty, genocide, and racial hatred. There are, moreover, both sins of *commission* and sins of *omission*. When we actively engage in sinful behavior or social structures, our sin is one of commission. But simply standing by while injustice happens, doing nothing in the face of evil when we have the capacity to challenge it, is a sin of omission. We may not have done anything wrong, but we failed to do anything right. As we read in James 4:17, “Anyone . . . who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.” Sin is all around us all the time. Regardless of how things

got this way, the problem remains that sin runs deep, is pervasive in this world, and has serious consequences.

Sometimes the Apostle Paul talks about sin the way in which some Christians talk about the devil, or Satan. Sin, for Paul, is a cosmic force that acts upon human beings, pushing them into wrong choices, keeping them from being in right relationship with God. Paul says that all people are “under the power of sin” (Rom 3:9), and when he sins, “it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Rom 7:17). Sin is not simply something that people do—it has a *spiritual* component as well. Many Christians have believed that, just as God gave free will to humans, God gave free will to angels, and that some of them turned against God. The chief among these is known as Satan, a name that comes from the Hebrew word for *accuser* or *adversary*. Sometimes in the Bible, Satan acts like God’s district attorney, attempting to show the guilt, or at least the evil tendencies, of human beings (see Job 1:6-12; Zech 3:1). At other times, Satan is characterized as a tempter who opposes God’s purposes. We even see Satan trying to tempt Jesus at times (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). In 1 Peter, Satan is characterized as a prowling, roaring lion that wishes to devour human beings (1 Pet 5:8). John Wesley certainly believed in demons and the effects that they had on people. While this kind of belief has diminished considerably in the United States and Western Europe, most Christians worldwide believe strongly in evil spiritual forces. It is also worth noting that within the ritual of baptism in The United Methodist Church, people are still asked if they denounce the spiritual forces of wickedness.

A Lived Faith

It is helpful for us as people of faith to be aware of the human propensity to sin. The Letter of James talks about the ways in which

we might find ourselves struggling with conflicting desires. On the one hand, we may know the right thing to do. We may wish to do the right thing as well. At the same time, however, we may wish to do something that we should not, something that is at cross purposes with God's will. James calls this being "double-minded" (1:8). This term refers to competing impulses within us, rather like Paul discusses in Romans 7:15 when he says, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Christians have long talked about the temptation to sin, the desire that is in us to think, act, and speak in ways that God does not will for us. James talks about it in this way: "One is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death" (1:14-15). It is simply a part of the human condition that at times we *will* want to think, speak, and do things that God does not wish. We should expect this to happen, and when it does, God allows us to choose the right way or the wrong way to live. When we choose the wrong way, however, we should not expect to find lasting happiness. Only in God can we find lasting happiness and true fulfillment.

We do well to recognize that we, as people, are not complete on our own, and that we need God to help us live well and find true happiness. In his famous book, *Confessions*, Augustine writes in prayer to God, "you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."⁴ Only in God can we truly find fulfillment, and when we try to find it in other things, such as money, clothing, sex, food, alcohol, drugs, shopping, sports, or any other of the many, many things we use to distract ourselves, we will fail. We are setting up idols where God should be. This way of doing things is bound to lead to a continued sense of emptiness and sorrow, and the more we continue on this path, the more likely we are to commit sin after sin, never properly honoring God as we should.

Think about the sensation of buying a new car, of driving it for the first time. It has that new-car smell. The engine runs perfectly (one hopes). The wheels are balanced, the sound system is clear, and the wipers leave not a droplet of moisture behind them. You look forward to driving it—for a while. But eventually, the new-car smell goes away, a coffee stain may appear here or there, the engine may knock, the sound system may stop working. Any number of things may happen. More significant than any of this, however, the car simply becomes part of your routine, part of the everyday fabric of your life. When you get in your car to drive to work every day for a year, two years, or longer, you probably will not even think much about the car itself. Inevitably, you will eventually want a new car, which will in time be replaced by yet another new car. The same could be said about a favorite restaurant, a new television, or a new outfit. No matter how much we pay for them, how hard we work to get them, or how nice they look in the store, the pleasure of such things fades away. Jesus warned us about this, saying, "one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions" (Luke 12:15).

The prophet Isaiah writes, "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever" (40:8). Only God can give us true happiness. Yes, things can give us pleasure, and there is nothing wrong with this, but things cannot bring us lasting and true happiness. Everything in our lives—our cars, our homes, our money, our clothes, are God's, and should be used in ways that serve God. The same could be said for people. Superficial and shallow relationships cannot bring us happiness. But a friendship, marriage, or other meaningful relationship that is rooted in the love of God and in a desire to serve God can bring great happiness and fulfillment. As Christians, we believe God is the source of all good gifts. God is the source of all true happiness. All that we own belongs to God. Our relationships belong to God. Therefore, we must be mindful at all times that our lives, and everything in them, are God's. God loves us,

and we belong to God. When we begin to use the things or people in our lives selfishly, we are misusing the freedom that God has given us, and we commit sin. As Augustine put it, "The good things which you love are all from God, but they are good and sweet only as long as they are used to do his will. They will rightly turn bitter if God is spurned and the things that come from him are wrongly loved."⁵

A Deeper Faith

In Mark 2:27, Jesus says, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath." This saying might sound a bit odd to us today, but it has far-reaching implications. The sabbath is a day set aside for rest and for honor of God. In Judaism there are strict rules around sabbath observance. In fact, this is stipulated within the Ten Commandments: "Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy" (Deut 5:12). Jesus, however, is saying that God did not make people simply to follow rules. Rather, the rules are there for the benefit of people. God's way of doing things leads us into ways of life, rather than ways of death. God's way of doing things leads us to flourish as people.

It seems sometimes that among Christians the rules become their own end. Our faith becomes rule-centered, rather than grace-centered. Rules are certainly important, but they are important because they lead us into a proper relationship with God. Take a commonplace example like smoking. Christians are right to say that smoking is not consistent with the Christian life, but why? Because cigarette smoke offends God? Of course not. Rather, the reason is that God wishes us to care for our bodies and to use our bodies in ways that honor the fact that they are gifts from God. Smoking, however, hurts our bodies. It can even kill us. God's will is for our well-being, so habits that diminish our well-being are not in keeping with God's will. We humans are not made simply to obey rules.

Rather, God leads us to establish particular rules and guidelines for living within our communities so that we can flourish as God wishes.

The Catechism

Sin

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is the violation of God's will.

Q. By whom was sin brought into the world?

A. Sin was brought into the world by Satan, and by human beings who have yielded to Satan's temptations.⁶

Q. Who is Satan?

A. Satan was once a holy angel, but fell away from God.⁷

"God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment" (2 Pet 2:4).

Q. Do all people sin?

A. Yes, all people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

Q. What is original sin?

A. Original sin is the corruption of the image of God within human beings.

"Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me" (Ps 51:5).

Q. What is the result of original sin?

A. We do not truly love and serve God as we should, and we cannot help but commit actual sin.

"For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom 7:18-19).

Q. What is actual sin?

A. Actual sin is every thought, word, and deed by which we violate God's will.

Q. What is personal sin?

A. Personal sin is an actual sin that results from an individual's thought, word, or deed.

Q. What is social sin?

A. Social sin is the participation in sinful social structures.

Q. Where is our salvation from sin?

A. Our salvation from sin is in Jesus Christ.

"The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29).

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7).

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

In Your Own Words

1. For many, original sin is a difficult idea to grasp. How do you understand sin? Is there a difference between sins and original sin? What are the consequences of believing and not believing in sin?
2. Give some examples of the sins of commission and the sins of omission.
3. We are all tempted. What are some strategies to beat temptation?
4. Some people say, "the devil made me do it." What do you believe about Satan, evil, and the spiritual forces of wickedness?
5. What kinds of rules and guidelines are helpful (or are they?) in helping people overcome sin and temptation? What kinds of guidelines does your church have in place to help prevent fraud, sexual abuse, theft, and so forth? What happens if one of the church leaders or members falls?

Notes to Pages 47–66

8. We leave out “experience” here because it relates to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and to say that we understand the Spirit by the Spirit is circular.

4. What Are Human Beings?

1. See “The Image of God” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 13.

2. Ibid., 14.

3. Ibid., 17.

4. John Wesley, “Thoughts Upon Slavery,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 11, ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1978), 76.

5. Ibid., 68.

6. This Q & A is taken from the *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 845. The “Articles and Confession” say nothing directly about human nature.

7. BCP, 845.

8. Adapted from the “Articles of Religion,” Article VIII, in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), and BCP, 845.

9. Adapted from the “Confession of Faith,” Article VII.

10. BCP, 845.

5. What Is Sin?

1. “Original Sin,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 326.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.1.1.

5. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 4.12.

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7. Ibid.

6. What Is Salvation?

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2. "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 372.

3. Ibid., 373.

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5. Edwin Hatch, "Breathe on Me, Breath of God," in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 420.

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7. Eleonore Stump, "Atonement According to Aquinas," in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 66.

7. What Is the Church?

1. Samuel J. Stone, "The Church's One Foundation," in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 545.

2. John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 13, ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1978), 258.

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4. Q and A
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