

LIVING GRACE:
AN OUTLINE OF UNITED METHODIST THEOLOGY

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story of the election of Israel as the people of God in the old covenant takes place for all persons in Jesus Christ. God opens himself in his love and seeks out persons in the midst of their lost condition. God demonstrated his love for us in that Christ died for us when we were yet sinners, and while we were yet his enemies God reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son (Romans 5:8, 10). Thus, grace is in the deepest sense always "preventing," and it is always grace that precedes our response. It is God's Spirit who transforms our hardened hearts into hearts that are truly alive and are opened to God's love and the need of our neighbors (Ezekiel 11:1-19). It is the warning call of the law and the alluring power of the gospel which moves us to turn about. It is God's creative Word that creates faith out of the nothingness of human unbelief, that causes the light of the knowledge of God's love to shine into the darkness of doubt and resignation and awakens the spiritually dead to a life with God.

It is precisely through this that we humans are freed to make our own response to God's summons. We are incorporated into God's acts as willing and feeling persons and are called forth, invited, and bidden with the deepest earnestness of the saving love of God to turn around, to be reconciled to God, to let our lives be transformed, and to accept in faith everything that God has granted unto us and has brought about on our behalf. Some of the basic marks of United Methodist preaching include holding open this space for the response of faith and discipleship through the witness of God's preventing grace in word and deed, in preaching, pastoral care, congregational life, and diaconal activity. Thus, persons are encouraged to enter into this space step by step. What takes place here is solely a gift, but at the same time, it is actively lived grace.

3.2 The Renewal to Life in God

The goal of God's actions for and with humanity is their redemption and salvation.¹²⁶ That is one of the basic presuppositions of the theology and preaching of John Wesley. He shares with the entire Christian tradition the understanding that this salvation of humanity will find its fulfillment in eternal fellowship with God. However, what is distinctive in the theology of Wesley is that he understands and preaches that God's saving action for humanity is an event that is present, and it is one that also includes the whole person.¹²⁷ The goal of the working of God's grace is to enable persons now to enter into a life that is lived in harmony with God

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and with themselves, or, as Wesley liked to formulate it, it is a life that is lived in "holiness and happiness."¹²⁸

When Wesley sets out to explain what he understands by the redemption and salvation of humanity, he repeatedly points to two basic dimensions: justification and sanctification.¹²⁹ Justification "implies what God *does for us* through his Son," and sanctification is "what he *works in us* by his Spirit."¹³⁰ Or, in another basic definition, he states that "by justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God."¹³¹

Both of these affirmations are key motifs of Wesley's work between 1738 and the time of his death in 1791. In "Salvation by Faith," his first sermon after his transforming experience on May 24, 1738, Wesley summarizes the quintessence of the message of redemption in the statement "Through faith that is in him they are saved both from the guilt and from the power of it."¹³² And in one of the sermons preached in the last year of his life, he opposes the view that, when he began to preach "By grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8), he had surrendered his former motto of "Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). "But it is an entire mistake; these Scriptures well consist with each other; the meaning of the former being plainly this, 'By faith we are saved from sin, made holy.'"¹³³

However, Wesley can occasionally also place justification and regeneration beside one another as basic dimensions of redemption. The definition that is then offered is almost identical with the previous one. Justification refers to "that great work which God *does for us*, in forgiving our sins; the latter [the new birth] to the great work which God *does in us*, in renewing our fallen nature."¹³⁴

It is clear that regeneration and sanctification belong together, but they are not identical. Regeneration is "a part of sanctification, not the whole; it is the gate of it, the entrance into it."¹³⁵ Conversely, although justification and regeneration occur together in a temporal sense, they are still to be cognitively distinguished from one another. Wesley also sees that justification in the language of the New Testament can be used to comprehend the entire saving activity of God on behalf of humanity, and thus it also includes both regeneration and sanctification,¹³⁶ but overall, the two are distinguished in the sense that sanctification is "in some degree the immediate *fruit* of justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature."¹³⁷

In this chapter we will proceed to describe the saving activity of God in the life of persons in a manner that provides a modest systematizing of the order of Wesley's affirmations regarding justification, regeneration, and sanctification. However, we will need to keep in mind that this order can only be viewed as a temporal sequence in a quite hypothetical sense, since it is to be understood much more as an essential ordering of the various dimensions of redemption, viewed in its entirety.¹³⁸ The relation of those aspects of redemption which God has done for us (*pro nobis*) and are therefore valid for us and of those which God intends to do to us and in us (*in nobis*), based upon what he has done for us, seems to be foundational for Wesley.

3.2.1 The New Relationship to God—Justification

The significance of the message of justification for the present age has been questioned from several perspectives. What was valid for the churches of the Reformation as the *arculus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (that is, the articles of faith, with which the church stands or falls), and which also has occupied a central place in Methodist preaching, appears to no longer speak to persons of our time, and thus seldom appears in preaching or teaching.

Wesley's treatment of this theme was indirectly dependent upon the Protestant Reformers, through the mediation of the Thirty-nine Articles and the homilies of the Church of England, and also directly through his familiarity with the Reformation texts. On the other hand, for Luther the rediscovery of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith was the decisive impetus for a new conception of Christian proclamation and theology. The situation of the medieval church appears to have actually been a *kaivos* moment, in the sense that the message of justification could be heard as *the* pertinent Word, as it seldom had been heard in the history of the church.

In the course of the twentieth century, new insights into the presuppositions and the character of the biblical message of justification have been attained especially in the realm of exegetical study, which not only have contributed important insights to our understanding of this message but also have contributed new impetus for its actual significance. Of course, these insights were not available to the Reformers or to Wesley. They had intuitively understood some nuances of these insights correctly and rendered them in terms of their own conceptual framework. At other points we will have to set new emphases on the basis of the results of this research.

3.2.1.1 THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The biblical statements about justification have their roots in the Hebrew legal procedures. For this reason, one often speaks of the judicial or "forensic" dimension of justification. If the innocence of the defendant became evident during an Israelite lawsuit, the decision of the judge (or also of the plaintiff or accuser) was "You are righteous."¹³⁹ In contrast to the Latin or Germanic legal thinking more familiar to us, some noteworthy differences transpire:

(a.) The decision is more than the negation of a negation ("You are not guilty"; or, "You are acquitted of the accusation!"); the decision brings forth a positive statement: "You have behaved properly."

(b.) The decision is more than an immediate statement about a past matter ("You are in the right in this matter"). At the same time, it qualifies one's future membership in the fellowship of the righteous. "You are righteous" also means "you are faithful to the community," you have conducted yourself in conformity with the standards of the community and once again you fully belong among us. The decision is therefore not only one of acquittal, which "dismisses" the accused. It is also a statement of justification and explanation of honor, which admits one into community. Hence, justification is not only a decision that establishes a matter of fact, but also a decision that brings about what it declares.¹⁴⁰

In the Old Testament, the theological significance of this terminology surfaces not in the situation of the judgment of God toward humanity but within the context of God's controversy with his unfaithful people, in which God takes on the position of a defendant. Hence, in Isaiah 43, God demands that a people who have rebelled and complained against him should go to court with him in front of the nations. God declares, "Accuse me, let us go to trial; / set forth your case, so that you may be proved right" (verse 26). The result of such a lawsuit, however, can only be the confession that "no one living is righteous before you" (Psalm 143:2), or, as it is declared in the confession of one individual in Psalm 51:4, "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, / and done what is evil in your sight, / so that you are justified in your sentence / and blameless when you pass judgment." The human who is God's opponent acknowledges defeat and says, "You are right!"

Above all, this is found with respect to the judgment of God on Israel in the destruction of Jerusalem and their being led into exile: "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word" (Lamentations 1:18). Or Daniel 9:14, "the Lord our God is right in all that he has done; for we

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have disobeyed his voice" (similarly, Ezra 9:15; Nehemiah 9:8, 33). However, the hope for aid comes precisely from this recognition of the righteousness of God: "O Lord, in view of all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain" (Daniel 9:16).

Here a further important observation concerning the biblical terminology is to be made. In biblical terminology, righteousness is apparently not the formal, judicial righteousness, which acquits the innocent and punishes the guilty (the *iustitia distributiva*). Instead, it is the faithfulness of God to God's covenant and to God's people, which does not fail in spite of their faithlessness. Therefore, mercy is never a contrast to the righteousness of God in the Old Testament, but it is frequently a parallel concept (Daniel 9:16 with 9:18; and Psalm 103:17). Hence, in the Old Testament and in early Judaism it can be said that the central hope for the people of God is that God's righteousness may be made known to the people (Psalm 98:2; Isaiah 56:1).¹⁴¹

This is the linguistic and theological background against which early Christianity formulated the belief that God demonstrated his "righteousness" (faithfulness to the community) in the death and the raising of Jesus. Through his atoning death, Jesus has removed the guilt of humanity and thereby created the conditions which allow people to be accepted into his fellowship, that is, to become justified.¹⁴²

It is at this point that Paul connects his message of justification. Apparently the fundamental principles of this matter were already clear to him even at the time of his call and his theological processing of it.¹⁴³ Paul had persecuted the Christian community as a man who was zealous for the law. It appeared to him to be blasphemous to God that this community asserted that a crucified man—and for Paul that meant a person who had been cursed by the law—was the Messiah of God. Now that crucified One had appeared to him as the One who had been raised by God, and thus One who had been justified by God and who had been confirmed in the fullness of power to be God's Son. Through this, his attempt to establish his own righteousness through flawless obedience to the law was shown to be a failure. God had provided Jesus Christ to be "righteousness and sanctification and redemption" for humanity (1 Corinthians 1:30), and thus had opened the way to fellowship with God through Jesus' Person, his life, and his death. Through this, the wall that was drawn around Israel by the law was now penetrated, and the way was now open to proclaim God's saving acts even among the heathen. The eschatological revelation

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of the righteousness of God, his faithfulness to salvation, is now brought to its fulfillment for Paul in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but not only for Israel before the eyes of the people, but rather for all those who accept that righteousness in faith (Romans 1:16-17).¹⁴⁴

It is not certain exactly when Paul formulated this conceptually. He had developed his teaching on justification, which has functioned so significantly in church history, at the latest by the time of his altercation with the false teachers in Galatia. However, it is clear that this describes not only an "anti-Jewish propaganda doctrine."¹⁴⁵ It is also evident that in this situation central insights into the renewal of relationship with God through God's saving acts are grasped and communicated with particular clarity. Hence, Paul's central thesis is that, as Jews, "we have come to believe in Jesus Christ, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law" (Galatians 2:16; also, Romans 3:28).

If one follows the argument of Paul in the letter to the Galatians carefully, one realizes that the contrary position does not consist simply in the converse statement—that a person may be justified in the final judgment on the basis of the works of the law. Apparently what was stated was that, for the fulfillment of saving fellowship with God, what is needed is one's incorporation into the covenant of God with Israel through circumcision and adherence to the law. Hence, the discussion did not simply concern the question of what the forgiveness of sins accomplishes, but rather it had to do with the basic question of where persons are to find an abiding place before God.¹⁴⁶

For Paul, the example of Abraham here serves as a basic model of the promised fellowship with God. Abraham believed, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and for Paul this fundamentally excludes the principle of achievement and reward in relationship to God.¹⁴⁷ For Paul, faith is the stance of the one who expects all things from God. Abraham believed in the One who justifies the godless, those who can and will possess nothing before God. However, this is precisely the stance that is consistent with proper fellowship with God and that will thus be acknowledged by God as righteousness. This is not a kind of record-keeping on another level, but it establishes a new relationship with God. Being justified means for Paul being accepted as a child of God, and being incorporated into a living Christ-centered fellowship with other persons, a community which is no longer divided by the confinements of race, position, and religious origin. The social dimension of justification is as

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significant here as the positive description of the new community with God, which is described in Galatians 4 as the condition of children who have "come of age" and who have entered into the position of freedom in confident relationship to the heavenly Father.

Hence, justification is much more than an amnesty for the sake of Christ; it is the foundation for a new fellowship with God. At the same time, the justifying activity of God is the revelation of his righteousness and thus the revelation of the God who remains true to himself in his salvific deeds. According to Romans 3:24, redemption takes place in Jesus Christ, so that God is righteous and justifies the person who lives by faith in Jesus. By revealing his being as righteousness and love, God opens to humanity a new life in his fellowship.

This embracing of the saving activity and the self-revelation of God is particularly emphatic in Romans 4, where the faith of Abraham is described as the faith in the One who justifies the godless, and this affirmation is placed in the context of faith in God, who creates out of nothing, who raises the dead, and who has already raised Jesus from the dead. God's justifying actions are thereby placed in relationship with his sovereign creative acts and with the hope of the raising of the dead. From a soteriological perspective, justification is seen as creation from nothing, and thus it is the end of all despair and self-accusation, but also of all notions of self-competency and of all pious or secular expressions of self-justification.

This creative power of the righteousness of God also fashions the new relationship with God. It establishes a fellowship that is characterized by "peace with God" and that endures amid opposition, affliction, and temptations (Romans 5:1-5; 8:31-39). It enables the service of righteousness, which is lived in the power of the coming resurrection. It makes the activity of righteousness accessible in practical ways within all aspects of human life, and thus leads toward consistent holiness of life, which spills forth in the uninterrupted fellowship with God in eternal life (Romans 6).

Paul can express the same intention in regard to the terminology of justification with the concept of reconciliation.¹⁴⁸ In Romans 5:8-10, Paul describes in two parallel affirmations the operation of the grace of God, which preceded all of our efforts, because Christ died for us when we were yet sinners, and reconciled us when we were yet enemies of God. That gives hope to those who now wait as those who await their final redemption as persons who are justified and reconciled—who are no longer sinners and enemies, but who also have not yet reached their goal!¹⁴⁹

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The question of how we can prevail before the judgment seat of God is therefore for Paul only one aspect of the message of justification. The more far-reaching question is "How do persons who have been separated from God and who have become his enemies find entry again into redemptive fellowship with him?" Paul's answer is clear: this fellowship with God has been opened for us by Jesus' surrender of his life, which conveys God's love to a world of people ruled by sin and death and communicates the steadfast gift of God's redemptive grace to humanity. Those who accept this gift as the foundation of their lives and who also live out of that resource are the ones who stand in right relationship with God—as well with themselves. That is the New Testament message of justification.

3.2.1.2 THE UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION AMONG THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS

Of all Christian theologians, Luther has undoubtedly taken up Paul's doctrine of justification most intensively and has integrated it most thoroughly into his theology. One can ask whether it is even appropriate to speak of a "doctrine" of justification in Luther, within the context of his theology as a whole, rather than referring to Luther's theology as one which as a whole is shaped by the message of justification. Luther's theology of justification is not systematically developed; rather it is an extraordinarily dynamic, very complex, but nonetheless interrelated and coherent exposition of the event of justification. We can only highlight some of the more important features of his treatment of the doctrine in the context of this discussion.

It is well known how Luther's struggle to attain the proper meaning of the message of justification, particularly in the context of the understanding of the phrase "the righteousness of God," is concentrated in Romans 1:17. In the Preface to his Latin writings (1545), Luther, reflecting upon what his discovery of this message meant for the emerging Protestant Reformation, wrote:

For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the former or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yet, I hated the righteous God who punishes

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sinners. . . . At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, He who through faith is righteous, shall live." There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."¹⁵⁰

What is foundational for the further development of Luther's theology of justification is the inseparable connection of the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of faith.¹⁵¹ The righteousness which God grants to humanity is the righteousness of Christ, which he has lived out for them in both his death and his resurrection. Thus, the reckoning of this righteousness is not the charge of an "objective good" to their account; rather, it is "a literal, active drawing nigh of that which occurred in Christ, the actual acquittal and declaration of the righteousness of the sinner."¹⁵² The word of the gospel that is proclaimed, in which this promise is met, is for Luther "the real preacher of our salvation. *Faith* alone conforms to this Word, in which persons ignoring all results of their own lives abandon themselves as unconditionally to the promise as it is extended to them. Such a faith is not a psychic achievement but the pure willingness to allow that gift to be conferred upon one. Even faith itself is, of course, God's gift, for through the Holy Spirit God brings about faith in His Word within persons."¹⁵³

It also follows that for Luther there can be no separation between the *declaration* of righteousness and the *making* of righteousness. He did not regard the sinner's declaration of righteousness to be a merely empty declaration "as if,"

which leaves the actual empirical condition of persons unaltered. Instead, within God's declaration of righteousness he saw the efficacious Word of the Creator and Redeemer, who also will bring about that which He promises. God will also bring to victory the person to whom He declares His righteousness. Such a person will also overcome the reality of that sin, whose reign has been overcome by God's declaration of righteousness on whose behalf of humanity. This event commences at the very point that Christ becomes *actively* present through His Spirit within the believer. Though sin remains in that person, it will be completely removed only in death. However, its rule over that person is broken as the Spirit operates to bring about the beginning of new, eternal life within. Thus, faith remains, which

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with reference to one's own salvation can be only a bare receptivity, but, with reference to serving one's neighbor in the world, it is absolutely not passive. Because faith means coming into the living power of Christ, the works of love proceed from Him spontaneously. Indeed, Luther can say that true faith can in no way exist apart from such works.¹⁵⁴

The dynamic character of the Lutheran formulation of *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously just and sinner) is described in this way. The one who believes is justified with reference to the righteousness of Christ, though in light of her or his own actions, that person remains a sinner, although God's promise to set that person free of sin is now operating in that person's life, until it is fulfilled in death. Up till that point, however, confidence can be in Christ's righteousness alone, and never in one's own righteousness, however much the renewing power of the Word of God may have already done in one's life.¹⁵⁵

In this connection, a text from Luther should be cited that indicates instructive parallels and differences in view of certain questions that also revolve around Wesley—for example, questions concerning the validity of the law, the relation between faith and love, and the necessity of good works.

Therefore the law is fulfilled in a twofold manner: through faith and through love. Through faith it is fulfilled in this life, in that God has meant while through Christ gratuitously reckoned us as righteous, in fulfillment of the law. This will be fulfilled through love in the coming life, when we shall become perfect as God's new creatures. . . . Then faith itself will cease, as well as God's reckoning and the forgiveness of sins, together with the entire office of the Spirit. . . . However, meanwhile we are protected in God's bosom as a beginning of the new creation, until we are made perfect in the resurrection of the dead. However, this beginning becomes evident whenever He is really there through good works, which make our calling sure. Thus, if one may speak about this in human words, we do not become righteous through deeds [*we accomplish actu perfecti*], but through the power which draws nigh unto us [*potentia propinqua*]. For Christ is continually being formed in us, and we will continue to be formed according to His image, so long as we live. Hence, as we are justified apart from the law and the works of the law, so we live by faith, but not without works.¹⁵⁶

To Melancthon fell the difficult task of systematizing Luther's theology of justification. Through this he became the actual creator of the Lutheran "doctrine" of justification, and he thereby set in motion a series

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of difficult internal controversies within the Protestant Reformation. Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession had concisely summarized the Pauline declarations, while the *Loci Communes* of 1535 offered an explicit and comprehensive definition: "Justification signifies the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation or acceptance of a person into eternal life."¹⁵⁷ According to Melancthon, the declaration of righteousness, which means being accepted by God, and being renewed through the Spirit, which means holiness, belong closely together. However, for clarity of thought, he chooses to keep these aspects distinct. And yet, this

conceptual separation of justification and sanctification (*iustificatio* and *sanctificatio*) . . . obscured the inner relationship of both in the event of personal acceptance by Christ. One is *isolated* from the other; the one is justification, understood as a juridical act of amnesty, and the other is holiness, that becomes something subsequent which must follow, and this "must" can become a problem. Is this inward "must" the spontaneous fruit of faith? Is this the "must" of an intentionality, an obligation, which now has to be added to the gift of the declaration of righteousness? How could the "result" of holiness be so grounded in this gift that one does not fall into the path of a legal moralism?¹⁵⁸

A series of questions were thus raised which played a role not only in the development of Lutheran doctrine but also in Wesley's discussion with his Anglican dialogue partners, on the one hand, and with the Moravians, on the other.

Calvin's doctrine of justification draws out this line of questioning further but lays stronger emphasis upon the actual transformation of persons in repentance and regeneration, as well as the correct behavior of Christians in the world. He asserts, "Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness."¹⁵⁹ It becomes clear here that it was not without reason that Wesley cited Calvin over against the English "Calvinists," for instance where Calvin emphasizes that works are "better established and confirmed" through justification by faith.

For we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them. This alone is of importance: having admitted that faith and good works must cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works. We have a ready explanation for doing this, provided we turn to Christ to whom our faith is directed and from whom it receives its full strength.

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Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we grasp Christ's righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he "is given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption." Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.¹⁶⁰

This overview should not be concluded without considering the decrees on justification at the Council of Trent. Attention has repeatedly been drawn to the proximity of Wesley to some of the affirmations of this Council (either positively or negatively). An actual comparison is difficult, because the judgment of the content and the intention of the Council's declarations is variable and disputed.¹⁶¹

Above all, there are two points where the statements of the Council and the intentions of Wesley appear to coincide:

(a.) There is the conception of prevenient grace, which "awakens in the sinner faith in the truth of the proclamation of salvation . . . joined with an initial impulse of hope and love for God." According to the interpretation of the decrees of the Council, persons must cooperate in free agreement with God's grace. This is certainly not characterized as merit, but it still stands in opposition to the Reformation view of *sola fide*.¹⁶²

(b.) Justification by faith is only the beginning of justification. Faith is therefore the "basis and root of all justification," from which actual righteousness emerges in a lifelong process through the interworking of faith and works, which originates in an initial gift of righteousness.¹⁶³ Concepts of this type strike us at first glance as having a structure similar to Wesley's thought. Yet, it is also necessary to heighten our awareness of the differences between their positions. In Trent, the correlation of the three essential marks of Christian existence, faith, hope, and love, are clearly understood as supplemental graces infused into the recipient. Love and hope must be added to faith. By contrast, Wesley's position demonstrated in *sola fide* serves as a guarantee for *sola gratia*—even with all of his emphasis upon holiness and active love. Trent's rejection of the assurance of salvation, which is a basic conviction for Wesley, even where he appears to speak of a double justification, designates the clearest difference between his position and the Council of Trent.¹⁶⁴

In sum, it is noteworthy that the basic questions of the Reformation and the post-Reformation times were still being asked two hundred years later in the England of Wesley's day. The theological resolution of the question of how faith and works are to be related repeatedly surfaced as a fresh

challenge. It was no longer a question of the continuing validity of the Mosaic law, as it had been for Paul. Instead, two basic questions concerning human (or religious) existence were being asked. One had to do with the relationship of grace and one's own works in light of one's relationship to God, and the other concerned the basis for a responsible life in this world.

3.2.1.3 JUSTIFICATION IN THE THOUGHT OF WESLEY¹⁶⁵

When Wesley explains what he means by *justification*, he is close to the position espoused by Melancthon. For Wesley, "justification is another word for pardon" and thus it is "the forgiveness of all our sins, and . . . our acceptance with God."¹⁶⁶ Two aspects of this doctrine are raised up that are also important for the biblical concept of justification:

(a.) Justification is the cleaning up of the past, the forgiveness of guilt and absolution from the accusation that the law had raised against us.¹⁶⁷ For Wesley, this aspect stands in the foreground. Justification occurs on the basis of the vicarious death of Jesus, through which the righteousness of God was satisfied, in which the punishment was fulfilled by Christ but through which room was also made for the mercy of God, whereby he justifies each person who believes in Jesus.¹⁶⁸

(b.) Justification simultaneously constitutes a new relationship with God, which is characterized by the peace that God gives and the joy that rises from the hope for God's glory.¹⁶⁹ This second aspect is also quite important to Wesley. However, since its content overlaps with what Wesley has to say about regeneration and holiness, this aspect often takes a backseat in Wesley's statements about justification.

As our overview at the beginning of this chapter indicated, when Wesley gave emphasis to justification, in contrast to regeneration and sanctification, he was referring to what God has done for us in *Christus* (therefore *extra nos*). The "subjective" character of regeneration and holiness ("in us") is based upon the "objective" character of those saving events that were granted unto us in justification. Conversely, there is only a "relational"¹⁷⁰ change with reference to God that occurs in justification, whereas in regeneration and sanctification there is a "real" change that is actualized. We will need to return to this distinction at a later point.

In his preaching during the first few months and years following his discovery of *sola fide* in 1738, the following declarations stood at the forefront of Wesley's message:¹⁷¹

—Justification precedes sanctification and not the reverse, as Wesley

had formerly taught and as many of his contemporaries continued to teach.

—Justification is the justification of the ungodly: it is valid for all without any preconditions. The only "condition"—if one may call it that—is to accept it in faith.

—Justification occurs on the basis of faith without the need for preparatory or for undergirding works. The teaching of the Thirty-nine Articles (especially Article XX), and the Anglican homily "On Salvation," which bears the imprint of the Protestant Reformers was so little known in eighteenth-century England that its emphatic proclamation by Whitefield and the Wesleys called forth strong protest and opposition.¹⁷²

The discussion of the following years was soon defined by the altercation within the Methodist movement, or with closely related groups such as the Moravians.¹⁷³ Its theme had points in common with those of the post-Reformation controversies. It concerned the issues regarding "faith and works" particularly as regards two different points of contention. First it concerned the relationship of active repentance to justification by faith alone. Our discussion has already dealt with this theme. Second, there is the question of the meaning of works that are done following justification. In contrast with the assertion of the indifference (occasionally also the perniciousness) of good works for faith, Wesley represented what was to him the only possible biblical view, that for justification only faith and in no case good works can be seen as definitive, but also that the genuineness and vivacity of faith would be demonstrated by good works, which grow out of love for God and humanity as the fruit of faith, and so fulfill the command of the law.¹⁷⁴

In this discussion, Wesley was seeking to make clear that adhering to a correctly understood and lived-out "by faith alone" does not mean that faith remains alone. Instead, it is to become active through love and by bearing fruit. As Wesley once put it, "being 'justified through his grace,' we have 'not received that grace of God in vain.'"¹⁷⁵ Wesley was here using a train of thought which we saw had also been expanded upon by Luther and Calvin, and yet he could occasionally depart from it amid the harshness of the debate and come dangerously close to a form of justification based upon works.¹⁷⁶

Two additional thematic positions pertain to this discussion. One concerns the relationship of righteousness that is "imputed" to a person and righteousness that is "indwelling" or "implanted." In this matter, which had already been discussed in the time of the Reformation, Wesley was

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subjected to the sharp attacks of the Moravians and Calvinists, who were convinced that the acceptance of a righteousness that indwells the heart of a person misleads one into relying on one's own righteousness.

In his sermon "The Lord Our Righteousness," Wesley tackles these accusations. The "indwelling righteousness" is not the basis for our acceptance by God but is its fruit. It does not take the place of imputed righteousness but is its consequence. Wesley said, "I believe God *implants* righteousness in every one to whom he has *imputed* it. I believe 'Jesus Christ is made of God unto us sanctification' as well as righteousness; or that God sanctifies, as well as justifies, all them that believe in him. They to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed are made righteous by the spirit of Christ, are renewed in the image of God 'after the likeness where-in they were created, in righteousness and true holiness.'" Hence, the righteousness of Christ is "the whole and sole *foundation* of all our hope," and even faith does not take its place. "It is by faith that the Holy Ghost enables us to build upon this foundation. God gives this faith. In that moment we are accepted of God; and yet not for the sake of that faith, but of what Christ has done and suffered for us."¹⁷⁷

It is more difficult to assess Wesley's position with regard to the other thematic position, which concerns the question of the twofold view of justification, one occurring at the beginning and the other at the goal of the life of a Christian. In the year 1739, we find Wesley clearly denying the concept of a twofold justification in whatever form.¹⁷⁸ In contrast, in his exposition of James 2:21, he appeared to be operating from just such a twofold notion: one that would affirm Paul's understanding of justification, which comes through faith, at the beginning of one's life as a Christian, and another that affirms James's understanding, which is based upon works that flow out of faith. "St. James's justification by works is the fruit of St. Paul's justification by faith."¹⁷⁹

In one of his last sermons, entitled "On the Wedding Garment," published in March 1791, shortly following his death—and consciously considered by Wesley as his final testament—he clearly expresses that holiness is the "wedding garment," which will be worn on judgment day. Justification by faith alone and the statement from Hebrews 12:14 ("holiness without which no one will see the Lord") can be unified, for in Christ, only faith which is working through love is valid.¹⁸⁰ The question to which Wesley is here responding is a difficult one that is lodged deep within the biblical message. It does not only result from the conflict between the statements of Paul and of James. It is also found in the ten-

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sion that is difficult to resolve in a systematic fashion between justification by faith and the judgment of works in Paul.¹⁸¹ As much as Paul occasionally emphasized that the final salvation of those who believe is still to be expected, and that they have not yet attained their goal, he did not positulate any notions of a double justification, whereby the one is brought to its fulfillment by grace and faith alone, and the other on the basis of the confirmation of faith through the evidence of its fruit. The statements about a judgment of works must (and can) be integrated within the message of justification by grace, as an aspect of accountability, which is evoked precisely through living in faith and in the Spirit.

Hence, Wesley does not speak in these final statements about a twofold justification. For him, it is a question of the wholeness of God's saving actions for humanity. God's love produces faith in persons, and faith is operative in love through persons. It is not a matter of a supplemental achievement and preservation of those who believe. Instead, it is a matter of finding an adequate conception of God's saving acts for humans and within humans as a whole. In this line of thinking, Wesley strongly emphasizes the continuity of his proclamation of justification by grace in the more than fifty years of his evangelistic activity. He consistently maintained this position, even if he occasionally became unsteady in view of its character as *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the article of religion, by which the church either stands or falls.

If one pursues the debate over this question through the course of the Wesley's ministry, one may gain the impression that it became more of an academic controversy among theologians than anything else. A citation from Wesley's preaching will illustrate just how lively this message resounded in his preaching:

Thou ungodly one who hearest or readest these words, thou vile, helpless, miserable sinner, I charge thee before God, the judge of all, go straight unto him with all thy ungodliness. Take heed thou destroy not thy own soul by pleading thy righteousness, more or less. Go as altogether ungodly, guilty, lost, destroyed, deserving and dropping into hell, and thou shalt then find favour in his sight, and know that he justifieth the ungodly. As such thou shalt be brought unto the "blood of sprinkling" as an undone, helpless, damned sinner. Thus "look unto Jesus"! There is "the Lamb of God, who taketh away *thy* sins"! Plead thou no works, no righteousness of thine own; no humility, contrition, sincerity! In no wise. That were, in very deed, to deny the Lord that bought thee. No. Plead thou singly the blood of the covenant, the ransom paid for thy proud, stubborn, sinful soul. Who art thou that now seest and feelest both thine inward and outward ungodliness?

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Thou art the man! I want thee for my Lord. I challenge *thee* for a child of God by faith. The Lord hath need of thee. Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell art just fit to advance his glory: the glory of his free grace, justifying the ungodly and him that worketh not. O come quickly. Believe in the Lord Jesus; and *thou*, even *thou*, art reconciled to God.¹⁸²

3.2.1.4 THE MESSAGE OF JUSTIFICATION TODAY

This citation from Wesley has clearly shown us the significantly different theological context of his day and our own. The question of how persons are to stand before God is no longer the greatest concern which troubles persons of our day, whether they have been reared in a secularized environment or whether they have experienced some Christian socialization. Through definite forms of evangelistic discourse, the attempt has been made to enforce this awareness anew, but the results of these methods are more than anything counterproductive for the proclamation of justification by faith.

As an outcome of the fourth plenary discussion of the Lutheran World Alliance, together with the deliberations that preceded it, it was stated that the elementary prerequisites that are needed for proclaiming the doctrine of justification appear to be missing in the consciousness of contemporary humanity. "The person of today no longer asks, how can I have a gracious God? Persons are now asking more radical, elementary questions, that are asking for nothing less than: Where are you God? Persons today are not suffering under the wrath of God, but under an impression of God's absence. Persons are no longer suffering under a sense of their own sinfulness, but under the senselessness of their existence. They are no longer asking about a gracious God, but they are asking whether God is real."¹⁸³ This realization has unleashed a heated discussion, into which the results of recent biblical exegesis have also been partially introduced, and which has resulted in focusing new theological emphases for comprehending the message of justification for our time. It is difficult to say whether this has also led to practical consequences for the actual proclamation of the message of justification.

We may now draw our own conclusions to this discussion in three points:

(a.) If we take seriously the analysis that has been sketched in the above citation, then we may say that the doctrine of justification still yields some important emphases for contemporary Christian proclamation. For the "more radical, and also more elementary question" of contemporary per-

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sons, which is "whether or not God is real," is certainly not the same question as asking "Is there a God?"—which is how the question is occasionally stated in abbreviated fashion. It is much more a question of whether God has really entered into relationship with us, whether there is a "God for us," or whether such a God is capable of being experienced. However, this is the message of the doctrine of justification in its overall biblical form, and, by the implication of the biblical idea of grace, the reference to a "gracious" God is the message about not only a God who forgives sins but also the God who emerges from his hiddenness and turns himself toward humanity with the power and the beauty of his Being. It is the message of the God who through Jesus' death makes himself available to those who suffer due to the hatred and the absence of God within humanity. It is likewise the answer to the question about the efficacy of God in light of the suffering that obviously passes before him. The message of the revelation of the "righteousness of God" for all whose lives are threatened by the "absence of God" is that Jesus Christ brought the love of God into a world filled with hatred and death, and he stood the test unto death, so that his resurrection established in our midst the Word of God who is for us.¹⁸⁴

Perhaps the main text for our time should no longer be Romans 3:21-31 but Romans 8:31-39. However, in any case we may clarify that justification not only includes the cleaning up of one's sinful past—it certainly does that—rather it establishes a new relationship, a fellowship, which God grants to us.¹⁸⁵

(b.) We may add to this a further paradox of our current situation. It is that the question of justification by works appears to have died theologically. No one is seriously advocating it, and at the most it appears in the form of a protest against those Christian groups who appear to place undue emphasis upon their benevolent or sociopolitical agendas. And yet, our entire society is permeated with the conviction that the value and meaning of human life is determined by what a person produces or achieves or has. The *homo faber*, the human whose life is led successfully, has certainly become the model for our society—in spite of the protests which have been made by women in particular against this masculine form of self-valuation. Outwardly, this basic definition of present day existence is manifested in quite secular ways, and also occasionally with religious padding, but almost always it is without any conscious reference to the question of the justification of one's life before God. However, existentially this definition is in fact a deeply religious phenomenon, an

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ultimate search for justification, meaning, and worth which in its secular form also decisively forms us as Christians. Sensitized persons like the elderly, persons with disabilities or the ill, and not a few women and sometimes also thoughtful children, painfully perceive how the value of their life tends to be measured in terms of achievements and results, and they suffer for this, so that they are set aside in the literal sense of the word.

If our analysis has been correct, that self-justification apart from and in opposition to God is an outcome of the basic sinfulness of humanity, then it can also be said that the day in which we live needs nothing more desperately than the preaching of justification by grace alone. This imperative is underscored by the fact that the consequences of the sin of self-justification in our day are evident not only in the case of those who are languishing because they are unable to keep up the pace, but also with reference to those who intend to justify their lives by their own efforts. What certainly remains necessary is that we spell out what is meant by accepting one's life through God, whether we are among those who have not achieved or those who have, and also whether we are among the self-sufficient or those who are in doubt and despair. It means being set free to see that the worth of life does not reside in the "product" of our activity, nor does it founder in unfulfilled achievements, but it is based instead upon the love of God for us. It is being graced with a reason for life that does not distinguish between the "haves" and the "have-nots" but rather is based on the truth that our lives find their purpose only in God.

(c.) In the biblical perspective, justification is the comprehensive, creative, dynamic, and saving activity of God for humanity. Luther and Wesley have indeed presented this quite emphatically in their own ways. Forgiveness of guilt and dealing with the past is one aspect of this event, which remains foundational to the present day, but which does not include all those aspects of the doctrine that need to be recognized. Overlapping this aspect is the gift of reconciliation with God, which we are permitted to accept in faith. In place of a deep mistrust toward God, which inevitably includes fear about one's own life, and which has become the motive for a life that is lived without and against God, there enters a new, underlying trust in God, which becomes the reliable foundation for our feeling, thinking, and acting. God's presence in Christ becomes the basis for our existence and for an environment in which to live in which the past is overcome and the future is made accessible, and in which reconciliation with ourselves and with our fellow human beings begins to grow.

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As liberation from one's self and also for one's self in relationship to God, the event of justification also always contains a social and an ethical dimension, which is grounded in the surrender of one's life to Christ and then unfolds from that basis. It is here that grateful activity and patient inactivity has its place, as well as concern for our fellow human beings and joy in what God bestows upon our individual lives.

3.2.2 The New Life from God—Regeneration

The theme of regeneration, or the new birth, has a key position in the theology and preaching of Wesley. And yet it is not an all-controlling theme, although it is a litmus test of any comprehensive theological exposition of God's saving deeds toward humanity. It is closely associated with justification, on the one side, and with sanctification, on the other. Regeneration is the basis and the beginning of really living life anew under grace. That is why it is so central to Wesley's theology. In developing its meaning, Wesley typically lays hold of the declarations of the New Testament. Prior to Wesley, there was no ordered exposition of the doctrine of regeneration to which he could appeal.¹⁸⁶

*3.2.2.1 REGENERATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*¹⁸⁷

The witness of the New Testament to regeneration is not very expansive, yet some of the places where regeneration is discussed have a signal character. This is particularly true of the most significant theological reference to regeneration, namely John 3:3 and 3:5.¹⁸⁸ To Nicodemus' assumed but not stated question "What must I do to be able to enter the kingdom of God?" Jesus responds, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." In the Greek text, the words meaning "to be born anew" are a play on words with the other possible meaning of "to be begotten from above" (= from God). The condition for the saving encounter with God is a new existence, which only God himself can grant. This takes place "through water and the Spirit," in short through the outward sign of appropriating the destiny of Jesus in baptism and through the receiving of the Holy Spirit, who renews persons from within. According to John 3:9-21, this birth from above, which God produces, demands only faith on the human side.¹⁸⁹

We repeatedly find this basic conviction in the Johannine writings. Those who accept Jesus Christ as the Word of God are empowered to become the children of God. They are persons who are born of God

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(John 1:12-13). According to 1 John 2:29, 3:9, and 4:7, one knows whether one has been born of God and is now his child above all by the presence of love and by the turning away from sin.

The idea of being "reborn" also appears in some places in the letter of 1 Peter. Christians are born again unto a "living hope" (1:3), not from "perishable seed" but by the "living and enduring Word of God" (1:23) and they are called like "newborn infants" to constantly nourish themselves with spiritual food of the gospel and thus grow into salvation (2:2).

The last central place for this discussion is found in Titus 3:5, where the salvation of Christians is spoken of in terms of the bath of regeneration and the renewal in the Holy Spirit (with a pronounced opposition to justification by works). As in John 3:5, baptism and the infilling of the Holy Spirit are seen as means to the full renewal of the person who is being delivered from sin.¹⁹⁰

The picture of a new birth also undergirds the (occasionally critical) statement that Christians have remained small children (1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:12-13). In contrast to this, the motif of adoption by God is not always linked with the new birth. Galatians 4:5ff. and Romans 8:15ff. refer back to the image of adoption, in order to describe acceptance as children of God.

In a wider sense, the Pauline statements about the "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15) and being clothed with the "new self" (Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10) also belong to this context.

The inner connection between the rather meager testimony to the notion of "regeneration" with the total witness of the New Testament is also highlighted with this. It is a matter of the creative reconfiguration of human existence through God in an act of their acceptance through him. Regeneration is the description of that which takes place because of God—and solely through him—on behalf of humanity whenever persons turn to him in faith. The fellowship that is opened by God with humanity establishes a new existence, and this new existence that is created through God's Spirit is the presupposition for living in fellowship with God!

3.2.2.2 WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

As we have already seen, Wesley emphasized both aspects: not only the close connection between justification and regeneration, indeed, their temporal interpenetration, but also for the sake of conceptual clarity the necessity of maintaining the essential order of succession between justification and regeneration. For him, justification and regeneration are not

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"only different expressions denoting the same thing." It is certain that "whoever is justified is also born of God and . . . whoever is born of God is also justified" and that "both these gifts of God are given to every believer in one and the same moment." Although it is true that

justification and the new birth are in point of time inseparable from each other, yet they are easily distinguished as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us; in begetting us again he does the work *in* us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image of God. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin. So that although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures.¹⁹¹

Wesley bases the *necessity* of the new birth upon that which he also describes as its *goal*.¹⁹² Since people have fallen from fellowship with God, and thereby have lost their proper destiny to live in the image of God, it is necessary that they be reinstated in that *imago Dei*. Only through this can they begin to live in fellowship with God.

The *essence* of the new birth (regeneration) is described by Wesley in a very impressive comparison with the process of one's natural birth.¹⁹³ Although an unborn child lives in the midst of the visible world and although that child also already has ears and eyes, she or he truly knows as good as nothing about this world. The same thing is true for persons before they have experienced the new birth. God has provided them with all the prerequisites for perceiving Him and they are completely surrounded by him in whom everything that has life, "lives, moves, and has being" (Acts 17:28). Yet, such persons do not perceive God. They have no sensitivity and no awareness of his presence and they have "no true knowledge of the things of God." The "eyes" of their hearts are closed so that they see nothing of the Spirit of God.

As in the case of natural birth, this situation changes with the new birth of a person.

The "eyes of his understanding are opened" (such is the language of the great Apostle). . . . His ears being opened, he is now capable of hearing the inward voice of God, saying, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee": "Go and sin no more." . . . He feels, is inwardly sensible of, the graces which the Spirit of God works in his heart. . . . And now he may be

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properly said to *live*: God having quickened him by his Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ. . . . And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child of God grows up, till he comes to "the full measure of the stature of Christ."¹⁹⁴

Wesley summarizes this essential meaning of the new birth as follows:

"It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life: when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is 'created anew in Christ Jesus,' when it is 'renewed after the image of God,' 'in righteousness and true holiness.'"¹⁹⁵

The "*marks* of the new birth,"¹⁹⁶ which are confirmed in the life of the reborn, are first of all the essential marks of the identity of a Christian in general: faith, hope, and love. It is the event of the new birth that causes the true qualification of these marks to become clear. This faith is a living faith, which leads a person into the most intimate fellowship with God, so that the Christian is now set free from the compulsion to sin (see 1 John 3:9). The hope that fills the reborn Christian is the hope which God's Spirit places within his or her heart, which assures him or her that he or she is indeed a child of God and thereby also partaker in the heritage of eternal glory. And love is the love for God and the neighbor, which no longer needs to be incited by the external commandment but now does what God wills and what serves the neighbor, through the infilling with God's love, which leads to voluntary acts of obedience.

The *goal* of the new birth is defined practically from its necessity. The purpose of the new birth is sanctification, the life that is lived in conformity with God, for "gospel holiness is no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart. It is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus. . . . But 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord,' shall see the face of God in glory. Of consequence the new birth is absolutely necessary in order to eternal salvation."¹⁹⁷ However, as the goal of the new birth, Wesley placed "happiness in this world" in second place, but as of almost equal importance after holiness.¹⁹⁸ Whenever persons comes clean with God, they also find peace in themselves. This is true happiness and it is given to persons through new birth.

At the close of his sermons on the new birth, Wesley repeatedly makes this point to his hearers with great emphasis: "You must be born again."¹⁹⁹ Because there can be no fellowship with God apart from this basic transformation and renewal of one's existence, this challenge of the gospel

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cannot be met by a call to baptism or to the doing of works of love and mercy. The demand is clear: you must allow your life to be totally renewed by God; you must be born again. But it is precisely this which a person cannot do alone. What one can do is nothing other than place one's full trust in God and plead for the gift of the new birth. And it is to that gift that Wesley summons his hearers.

In our current United Methodist doctrinal standards, the Confession of Faith (EUB) is distinct in devoting a separate article to regeneration, as the consequence of justification. Here the understanding of Wesley is reflected, in its affirmation that "we believe regeneration is the renewal of man in righteousness through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature and experience newness of life. By this new birth the believer becomes reconciled to God and is enabled to serve him with the will and the affections."²⁰⁰

3.2.2.3 BAPTISM, THE NEW BIRTH, AND CONVERSION

To whatever extent Wesley's theological assertions can remain constant and complete in themselves over the decades, when it comes to the question of baptism and the new birth, he shows a peculiar hesitation.²⁰¹ In his sermon on "The Marks of the New Birth," which was published in 1748, he speaks about the privileges of the new birth as being "ordinarily annexed to baptism,"²⁰² and in his father's treatise on baptism, which John published under his own name, the Anglican doctrine of baptismal regeneration is likewise represented, albeit in a mild form.²⁰³ However, already in the sermon on "The Marks of the New Birth," which we have mentioned, Wesley warns his hearers to "lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye *were* born again in baptism."²⁰⁴

In a sermon which was first published in 1760, entitled "The New Birth," Wesley then once and for all established "that baptism is not the new birth," and he also maintained that it is not so according to the doctrine of the Church of England, but rather it is only the "outward and visible sign" of the "inward and spiritual grace," namely, the "death unto sin" and the "new birth unto righteousness."²⁰⁵ In his brief treatment of Article XXVII of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (Article XVII of the Methodist Articles of Religion), he then writes that baptism "is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth."

From his evangelistic work, it was clear to Wesley that the reference to baptismal regeneration was problematic and dangerous, since the spiritual condition of almost all baptized persons shows nothing of the reality of

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a regenerated Christian life, and the reference to baptism signified a dangerous inoculation against the promise and the claim of the gospel. However, he hesitated between the position that the grace of regeneration that was received in baptism could be lost and that a new act of regeneration would be required and the position that baptism is only a sign and an emblem of the new birth that is experienced in faith, which can temporarily collapse with the event of baptism, although it will not necessarily do so (not even in the case of the baptism of adults!).

Especially within Methodism in continental Europe, which operates within the context of the established Lutheran Church (or "*Volkskirche*"), the rejection of baptismal regeneration became almost a kind of confession that was shared with the adherents of Neo-Pietism.²⁰⁶ The danger of succumbing to a theological diminution of baptism was certainly at hand in this.

The fact that baptism and the new birth stand in relationship to one another is clearly shown by John 3:5 and Titus 3:5. In so doing, one ought certainly to keep in mind that the New Testament assumes missional baptism, in which conversion and baptism are closely related. However, whenever the New Testament texts mention the outward rite of washing by water, in addition to the renewal that occurs through the Holy Spirit, they also make clear that baptism is not a matter of an inward event of faith, but that it also takes place outwardly for the candidates of baptism.²⁰⁷ Conversely, the reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of Acts, in which receiving the Holy Spirit and baptism occur apart from one another in time, recalls that the spiritual precedent is not to be identified with the external rite.²⁰⁸ This applies not only to the baptism of children but also to the baptism of adults, which can (and should) be the baptism of believers, but at the moment of baptism, there can be no guarantee that the inward certainty of being a child of God that pertains to the new birth has occurred. The event of baptism actually functions as an effective sign: baptism confirms to us in quite personal terms the gift of new life in Christ, and it steadfastly guarantees God's pledge. Jesus' death and resurrection have taken place for me. Our conscious life in this reality begins at the point when I place myself before him in faith and allow God's Spirit to work within me.

This account already indicates what are the basic parameters of our answer to the question concerning the relationship of conversion of the new birth. The new birth is wholly God's gift. We must be born anew and we cannot ourselves give birth to our new existence. What can be accom-

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plished by persons who are awakened by the gospel is to turn themselves to God, to open themselves to his working in prayer, to give trusting assent to the gift of faith, and to experience the renewing of their own lives through just such an abandonment of themselves to God.²⁰⁹

Strangely enough, the question "Are you born again?" has actually become a rather uncharacteristic and almost indecent question in many United Methodist congregations. There are understandable reasons for this. In the Wesleyan tradition, the new birth has been strongly identified with emotional experiences that are not accessible to all. To be committed to this outlook exerts inappropriate psychological pressure on many persons. The misuse of the slogan "born again" as a status symbol in some segments of Christianity in North America, which assume one has once and for all taken possession of this experience rather than a basic reality of life, has brought this motif into disrepute. Yet, the matter must not be given up. The possibility and the necessity of a basic renewal of life in fellowship with God are part of the basic witness of the New Testament. However, its reality can be recognized not only by the quality of one's initial experience but also by the newly attained aspects of the quality of life with God. In accepting the image of the new birth, it could be said (although it may be doubted in our bureaucratic age) that the best evidence of my birth is not the birth certificate but the fact that I am living. The evidence for my new birth lies in the fact that I know I am God's child. It is God's gift to us that we can consciously experience the onset of our new life with God, in contrast with our physical birth, but it is never an object of spiritual proof nor a measuring instrument.²¹⁰

3.2.2.4 ADOPTION BY GOD, ASSURANCE OF FAITH, AND PRAYER

According to the New Testament and John Wesley, an essential mark of the new life of regenerated persons is that they are now permitted to live in the certainty that they are God's children.

The New Testament references to adoption by God comprise two different pictorial elements.

(a.) One stems from Jesus' preaching in parables, where he uses the example of a child to teach his disciples what it means, to accept the Kingdom of God like a child (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17; and Matthew 18:3-4). The point of comparison at which Jesus arrives in the parable is contested by biblical scholars, since the parallel Gospel texts differ. The fact that children gladly hold open their empty hands, the fact that they are small and are in need of help—all of that makes them symbolic figures for

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communicating the meaning of a right relationship with God and with his lordship. It is not by chance that the promise of the kingdom to the children (Mark 10:14) is structurally identical to the word of promise of the beatitude of the poor (Luke 6:20). God's succor is intended for those who are in need of help, the powerless, the least ones, and children.

The command to become like children is therefore the invitation to rely unconditionally upon God. Here can be seen a seamless joining of Jesus' instruction that God is to be addressed in prayer with words that would be used by children,²¹¹ together with the image of the newborn child, which is suggested in the motif of the new birth. To speak of this in contemporary terms, it is an invitation to a "therapeutic regression" to allow oneself to fall into God's love, as a child nestles into the arms of its mother, and thereby to regain that seminal trust which was lost.

(b.) The other structural element is more strongly defined by the father-child relationship, and it is not at all imprinted with the motif of the small child or a suckling infant. By contrast, we even find in Galatians 4:1-7 a sequence of images which describe how a genuine, ripened, father-child relationship can first become a living reality only when mature children find themselves in fellowship with God. It is not only due to the masculine-dominated language of the New Testament that the Greek text uses the word *sons*. From the background of ancient legal standards, they are the children who are characterized as being fully competent, as having full legal capacity (which, of course, is true for all children of God, whether they are sons or daughters). The motif of adoption (Galatians 4:5) underscores the gracious character of this relationship.²¹²

A parallel account is the taking up again of the images of the "lost son," the festive garments, and the finger ring, images signifying the father's recognition and empowerment of the son's coming of age.²¹³ Hence, the motif of adoption by God is not in the least based upon the return to the symbiotic condition of early childhood. A constitutive element of being a child of God includes responsible partnership. It is characterized by the freedom of those who have found a mature relationship with the Father, one that outgrows adolescent rebellion or childish and servile expressions of excessive zeal. These are persons who thereby truly live as mature children of God.

Both of these dimensions of adoption by God are to be distinguished from one another, but they cannot simply be attributed to different steps in one's life development. We continue to live out of both dimensions in our relationship with God: we are able both to be sheltered in God's maternal care and to be accepted by our Father as mature sons and daugh-

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ters and are thereby fully empowered through his confidence in us to be co-laborers with him. Even mature children can say, "Abba, Father!" This once again sheds important light upon the question of the "assurance of salvation." Seen in light of the New Testament, there is above all the certainty that we are children of God, a certainty granted us by God's Spirit. To this is joined the certain hope of also being an heir, a partaker in the coming glory of God and of his Christ (Romans 8:16-17). Without doubt this statement was also central for Wesley, and he repeatedly cited it and reflected upon it. However, it may prove helpful if we raise some important issues concerning his theology, such as that although this certainty had to do with the status of being a child, in fact this "status" presents nothing other than a "relationship." In this regard, it becomes evident that the sharp distinction between relationship and being, which Wesley posits in view of the new birth, turns out to be problematic. I live out being a child in the relationship to the Father and never anything else.

The tension between "assurance of salvation" in the present and the future is thus resolved, for it never consists in the certainty of a "possession," neither for the present nor the future, but consists in the certainty of a relationship which is founded upon God's faithfulness.²¹⁴ In this distinction the tension can be resolved between the necessary warning against a false security of salvation and the consolation of a certain and trustworthy hope, which is also found in Paul.²¹⁵

It is *prayer* called forth by the Spirit in confidence that is the expression of this new relationship to God. This does not mean that only those who have been born again can pray. Wesley views prayer as a means of grace that is at the disposal of all persons who desire to be in fellowship with God, right from the beginning of their faith journey. The promise that God hears prayer also applies to groping efforts to address him and to enter into relationship with him. There is deep symbolism to the fact that the simple and unadorned prayer, such as Jesus taught his disciples and which many still utilize as their first primer in prayer, begins with the same address to the Father as does the Spirit-filled call of those who are reborn as children of God. If Jesus sets this prayer over against a "heaping up empty phrases as the Gentiles do," the intent is not to provide us with a better "technique" for prayer. Instead, it is to be an exercise in a manner of discourse that trusts wholly in God.

Hence, the essence of prayer is speaking to God, and it may begin with simply emptying one's heart before God, which leads into the experience that God hears and responds, and finally it leads to the deep experience of

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the trustful fellowship of conversation with God.²¹⁶ It is unfortunate that, in our day, prayer is often restricted to petitions and requests, together with occasional thanksgiving. However, we will only experience the essence and power of prayer when it becomes an expression of a comprehensive encounter with God, in which our lives are made to belong completely with him and before him. To this is joined grateful wonder about him and about his power in nature and history that is expressed in praise and adoration, amid the many laments about suffering in this world, and amid all the questions and all the planning that we lay out before God and talk through (not just voicing our specialized wishes) and full of thanks for those experiences with God and with other humans that we encounter as his answer to our prayers.

3.2.2.5 IDENTITY AND CHANGE

A final question needs to be thought through in connection with the theme of the new birth. The image of new birth describes a wholly new beginning. Strictly speaking one could say it marks the beginning of the life of a new person.²¹⁷ In contrast to this, the basic affirmation of the message of justification is that God accepts persons as they are, so that they can now stop hiding from or denying themselves. This need not be a theological contradiction. Wesley would say that God accepts sinners as they are, and then creates them anew as is needed for fellowship with him. However, from the standpoint of psychology, the question arises concerning the identity between the old and the new person in relation to God. Is there an "I" which remains constant in both, and how is the relationship between the three aspects to be defined? Or is there a complete break between the old and the new? And if so, is there not a danger then that the existence of the old person is denied and therefore that the "redeemed" person finally refers not to him or herself, but keeps on running away from him or herself? Hence, the psychological inquiry also has a theological dimension, as does every genuine question that concerns human existence.²¹⁸

With Luther, this inquiry appears to be resolved in terms of the dialectic of *simul iustus et peccator*, whereas for Wesley it remains open and in fact seems to be addressed more squarely.

The answer to this question lies also in the fact that the new being is a being in a new relationship. Paul has expressed the fruitful tension that arises from it in two central phrases of his letter to the Galatians. First of all, he writes "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:19b-20a).²¹⁹

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The change of identity is here described in a completely abrupt and radical fashion. Paul's "ego" is crucified with Christ, and in its place Christ enters as the center of his being. However, Paul then continues, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20b). The "ego" of Christians is therefore not simply extinguished and replaced with Christ, who guides our lives with what seems like a totally new agenda. The fact that Christ lives within me takes place so that I (!) hold myself to faith in him and his love. If one pays careful attention one can see that the same thing applies to the negative side of this duality. The ego has not simply died; it has died unto the law (Galatians 2:19a) and sin (Romans 6:11) and now lives for God.

Hence, the new birth does not mean an exchange of personalities but an exchange of lords. The new person, who is born through dying and being raised with Christ, is not another person's dream through which I am always trying to flee my actual self. It is I who am the new person just as God has intended, with my own abilities, my character, my gifts and defects, and I am all of this in relation to God, under the lordship of his Spirit and thus his love, instead of being under the lordship of the "flesh," my egoism trapped within myself.²²⁰

In the New Testament witness, this condition is described by saying that the new person is newly created "according to the image" of Christ.²²¹ In the final analysis, only Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, because only he reveals God's true unfalsified being. However, God, who has created persons in his image as Creator, also renews his work in allowing persons to share in the image of his Son. By this we mean that God welcomes them into their appointed relationship as sons and daughters so they become free for a new mode of life that is appropriate for their proper destiny with God.

Thus, the "image of God," to which God intends to refashion me, bears twofold characteristics. These are the characteristics of Christ, into whose image we are transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18), for it is his "disposition" in which we represent God's nature or his love in this world. However, this picture keeps a human face as well, which is my face, which God does not take from me but gives to me in Christ.

3.2.3 *Liberation for Love—Sanctification*

In the large collection of the minutes of several conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and others, the third question that is asked is "What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the Preachers

called Methodists?" And the answer is, "Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, and particularly the church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land."²²² It is not only this doctrine of sanctification but also the preaching and the life of sanctification that is for Wesley the justification for the existence of the Methodist movement.

With this we have come to the center of United Methodist theology in so far as it wants to remain true to its original calling. However, for this very reason it is all the more valid to show that it is not sufficient for us to point out how all the lines of Wesley's theology converge at this point. We also face the task of outlining the basis for the biblical witness, as well as developing a theology of holiness that reflects the Wesleyan heritage, which can also function today in our church and beyond as the core of our evangelical preaching, Christian living, and ecumenical doctrine.

The relationship of justification and sanctification will be considered in relation to two aspects within the tradition of Christian theology:²²³

(a.) Justification and sanctification are related to one another as indicative and imperative. That is the classical solution of the Protestant tradition since Melancthon,²²⁴ as well as of A. Köberle in his book *Justification and Sanctification*, a discussion with the holiness movement, and also of Karl Barth, which brings the relationship to the following formula: "I will be your God" is the justification of man. "Ye shall be my people" is his sanctification."²²⁵

(b.) Justification and sanctification are related just as are *declaring one righteous* and *making one righteous*. That is the outlook of Orthodox and Roman Catholic theology, but it is also a basic element of Wesley's theology.²²⁶ It should be recalled that his definition of sanctification is that God "works in us by his Spirit" and we are "restored to the image of God."²²⁷

Of course, Wesley does not overlook the imperative aspect. However, what is emphasized in the comparison of justification and sanctification is not the relationship of God's work and the work of humanity as its consequence. Instead, it is the description of both of the qualitatively different dimensions of the divine activity for us and in us. Even with sanctification what takes priority is what God does.²²⁸

However, before we sketch the broader emphases of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, we first of all need to at least present the basic features of its biblical foundations. Wesley's statements will be examined in light of the biblical witness, and upon that basis we will be able to reflect upon the meaning of sanctification for our lives today.

3.2.3.1 HOLINESS AND SANCTIFICATION IN THE BIBLE²²⁹

The motif of holiness is a basic aspect of religious thought, and it is therefore also a foundational theme within the biblical tradition. Sanctification is only a partial aspect of holiness. The testimony to this concept is therefore rather brief, although the subject of sanctification certainly has much greater significance than that fact would indicate.

The meaning of the term *holy* can basically only be described indirectly. God is holy, and so is everything which belongs to God, everything that is set apart by God and has thereby been made holy. Hence, the Temple and its vessels are holy; as well as the priests and the sacrifices which they bring there. For the most part, holiness is thus a cultic concept, which is intertwined with very "concrete" concepts. There are also areas of holiness that are separated out from everyday life, which are not to be contaminated, and there are areas of the "profane" that lie "pro fano," that is, before the area of the Temple.

God's holiness shows that he is the "wholly other," who eternally surpasses humanity and therefore is unapproachable for them. For God to be seen in his glory and holiness by a human would mean death for that person, unless God has previously removed her or his sin from him or her and thereby made that person holy (Isaiah 6:1-9).

God's holiness is certainly also seen in his faithfulness. The holy God is the God who stands by his people and delivers them, upon whom they are to rely and who therefore expects trust and loyalty from them.²³⁰ However, God's holiness, God's being in contrast to the being of humanity, is evident above all in the boundlessness of God's love (Hosea 11:8-9).

The person who belongs to God is holy. This ought also to apply to the people of God, not only to the cultic regulations for the time when they were abiding in the Temple, but to all areas of their common life. "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2) is the guiding principle of the so-called law of holiness, a collection of laws which is collated in Leviticus 18-26.²³¹ All areas are claimed through the call of God: the religious-cultic area, the area of sexual taboos, but also the area of inter-human common life within society, which is ordered by a series of noteworthy regulations of social welfare legislation that culminate in the command to love one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:18, 34).

The call to be holy, which means to live by God's will, is directed toward human actions, but it is founded on God's saving and freeing actions, through which God has accepted his people into his fellowship before they could do anything at all about it. "I am the LORD; I sanctify

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you, I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God" (Leviticus 22:32b-33).²³²

For the exposition of the New Testament, it is not unimportant that, at the beginning of early Judaism, in short, somewhat before the time of the New Testament, two explicit holiness movements arose within Judaism, which set themselves apart by the fact that, drawing on Exodus 19:6 ("You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation") they applied the Levitical purity commands to those who were not priests. These two movements were the Qumran community and the party of the Pharisees. From the perspective of the New Testament, their endeavors at some points appeared to be very external and legalistic, but those efforts were sustained by the consciousness that God had set apart the entire people as his own possession and had called them to holiness.²³³

From this background, Jesus' remarkable freedom with reference to these regulations and prescriptions is striking. According to Mark 7:15, he said, "There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." Jesus was rejecting the concept of a concrete distinction between the holy and the profane, the pure and the impure, which characterized the entire ancient world. Paul and his school also followed his path (see Romans 14:14; 1 Timothy 4:4-5; Titus 1:15).²³⁴ There is no rational critique of magical notions underlying this, but rather a new view of the meaning of God's creative acts. Everything belongs to the Creator, and it is for this reason that all things are holy, in that they are perceived to be gifts of God through his Word, and are to be enjoyed with thankful prayer (1 Timothy 4:4-5; 1 Corinthians 8:3-6). Through this, there is a basic liberation from the religious taboos of the Old Testament and of the religions of antiquity, which bequeaths the whole earth to humanity for reasonable use. However, wherever the knowledge that everything belongs to the Creator is lost sight of, the danger of an unlimited exploitation of these resources threatens.

Jesus lived in God's holy Presence in a wholly new way. Wherever he performs his wonders, heals the sick and forgives sins, persons fall down before him, because they sense the presence of God in him (see Luke 5:8; Mark 5:33). That is characteristic of Jesus' sanctifying deeds and of the manner in which he led persons into fellowship with God. He did not suppress their wholesome alarm over their mortal distance from God. Through his words and deeds, he made clear that God's reconciling love was overcoming the cleft between God and humanity.

Jesus lived in this comprehensive love of God without diminution, and

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he expressed it in what he said and in what he required. He consistently lived out this reality, whether he was with the poor, the sick, the weak and sinners, or with the rich and the healthy, the strong and the godly. However, he came into conflict with those who apparently had erected more formidable reserves based upon their own strength and piety. He is not the one who confirms people's holiness; rather, he is the embodiment of the sanctifying and saving love of God. However, that was not acceptable. He was pushed aside, handed over to the pagan occupying forces, who left him to be put to death "outside the city gate" (Hebrews 13:12), in the most disgraceful fashion, on Golgotha's cross. And it is precisely by this that God's love arrives at its goal—in a peculiar combination of divine will and human resistance against God. The holy God becomes accursed (Galatians 3:13), in order to reach people who stand under the curse of their separation from God with God's saving Presence. God reveals himself as the "wholly Other," as the Holy One, in that he bursts open the stereotypes of the human image of God, in that he goes the way of weakness and folly in the cross, in order to reach persons in their weakness, their error, their sin, and their death. This sanctifying activity probes into the depth of our existence, it penetrates the most hidden roots of our needs, it lifts us out of the realm of enmity toward God and into life-giving fellowship with him. Christ is the new arena of life for us; he alone is our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

That is the basis upon which the New Testament speaks of the holiness of Christians, who are members of the new people of God. They are the temple of God, which is holy (1 Corinthians 3:16; see also 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). The "holy ones," the old title of honor for the eschatological people of God, is the title now given to them because they are sanctified through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2).²³⁵ The basis for holiness is therefore the saving act of God in the death of Jesus, through whose blood everything that separates and is unholy, all that is impure and unjust, is washed from persons, and through him humanity has been purchased for God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).²³⁶

Therefore, holiness is not only the result or consequence of justification. Justification and sanctification both describe the basic redemptive activity of God on behalf of humanity, whereby he accepts the sinner into his fellowship for Christ's sake. The concept of holiness expresses in cultic language what is otherwise expressed in the language of justification in terms of justice and social relationships. However, on both levels, persons are granted acceptance by God and acceptance into his fellowship.

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Living in this fellowship, then, also has consequences for the practical aspects of living. Paul indicates this in Romans 6, in relation to his discussion of the doctrine of justification. Belonging to God means being freed from sin and making oneself available to God as an instrument of his righteousness, with regard to all things that pertain to life. This is precisely how the sanctification of life occurs (Romans 6:19, 22). Sanctification is "lived justification," and it is the "demonstration of the reality of justification."²³⁷ First Thessalonians 4 also shows the interrelationship of God's deeds and human responsibility. "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (verse 3), and "God did not call us to impurity but in holiness" (verse 7).

In this sense, 1 Peter 1:15-16 refers back to Leviticus 19:2: "Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."

What God has fundamentally done to humanity by taking them into his fellowship and sanctifying them should become a reality that is lived out day by day in their lives in all of its aspects. In this "process of holiness," God and humanity are joined as one.²³⁸ Therefore, God, who sanctifies persons thoroughly through his Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23), is joined with humans, who are wholly placed at God's disposal with all of their members, together with all their concrete possibilities for living (see Romans 6:19, and above all Romans 12:1ff., a small compendium of practical "holiness" without this idea being explicitly stated!).

The special importance of the motif of holiness in the New Testament lies in the fact that this penetration of daily living with God's presence and character, through the actualization of his will, is given special emphasis in this definition. When sanctification is spoken of as the condition for full fellowship with God in eternity (Hebrews 12:14; cf. Romans 6:22), this is not done in the sense of an achievement and a reward. To remain in fellowship with God in this life is the inner condition for the fulfillment of this fellowship in God's eternity.

3.2.3.2 SANCTIFICATION IN WESLEY²³⁹

Within the context of this volume, it is not possible to present the individual steps of the development of sanctification in the work of Wesley, from his days at Oxford onward. We will need to limit our presentation to some of its basic highlights.

Of central importance to Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, and for its understanding in our day, is the strict equation of sanctification and love. Wesley speaks of how sanctification is to consist of the recovery of the

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image of God. However, since Wesley equates the image of God with the mind of Christ, and this in turn with love, we see that the circle is thereby once again closed.²⁴⁰

The equation of sanctification and love provides Wesley's doctrine of sanctification with its unmistakable characteristics, which can be set forth in a fourfold manner.

1. Sanctification is God's gift, just as love is God's gift. It "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5), which Wesley repeatedly highlights as the culmination of the new birth and the beginning of sanctification, and which is the particular mark of a "Methodist." For Wesley, the interaction of the indicative and the imperative is based upon holiness. Where God's love becomes so central to our lives, we ourselves are enabled to love God and our neighbors. Wesley never tires of expounding this decisive grounding of the possibility of living in sanctification.²⁴¹ For him, this event is to be likened to a "transmission belt," which transmits the power of God's love into the life of a Christian and enables him or her to live a life with God and his or her fellow human beings. Hence, Wesley maintains, with great emphasis, that we are sanctified by faith, for only faith lays hold of the love which God grants to us.²⁴² That is the message of "scriptural" holiness, which is to be spread abroad by the Methodist movement. It also indicates the characteristic difference from Wesley's doctrine of sanctification before 1738, when he was still convinced that sanctification was to precede justification.

2. Sanctification and holiness receive a positive meaning through love. They are not only defined by the delineation of what is not holy, although this point of view is certainly not overlooked by Wesley. They are primarily delineated in terms of conformity with God's being, as God is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, which is God's love. The "otherness" of their being, an important structural feature of those who are sanctified, is oriented not only toward what a Christian is not to do but above all toward that which defines this being and doing. Hence, Jesus' description of his disciples as being the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" is taken up (Matthew 5:13-16). Salt and light are distinguished from their environment; otherwise they could not function in them. However, they are not altogether distinguished by what demarcates them from their surroundings, since this would hinder their operation according to their nature. The "otherness" of their being consists in the power of saltiness and lightness, and likewise the "otherness" of Jesus' disciples is grounded

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in the power of love, which does not conform to the nature of this world, although it operates within it.

3. Because sanctification is love, it is also always of necessity social holiness.²⁴³ As much as Wesley sometimes appears to concentrate upon the experience of individuals in the witness to their own sanctification, the arena of the event of sanctification is always the community. The fight for perfect fellowship with God is inseparable from a right relationship to one's fellow human beings.

4. Wesley's emphasis upon holiness as an aspect of redemption is strongly connected with his identification of present salvation and sanctification.²⁴⁴ Sanctification is the recovery of the fellowship with God that had existed in paradise. It is the recovery of the image of God, and thereby a person becomes not only holy but happy as well.

This idea would smack of enthusiasm, if it did not maintain its solid content through the equation of sanctification and love. That person is happy who loves God and one's neighbor as one's self, and lives in the fellowship with God and is holy. That person is happy who is freed from egotism and contempt through the love of God has gotten things straight with one's self and has become free to love others and is happy. Adapting the words of John, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life," Wesley was able to connect this aspect of his doctrine of sanctification with the declaration that whoever *loves* lives life eternal.²⁴⁵

John Wesley, and even more, his brother Charles, speaks impressively about the perfection of this love in the heavenly fellowship with God. However, that the first installment of the Spirit is not only a note of security in a legal sense, but rather through the peace which God bestows and the love which he grants is already a portion of the reality of heaven upon earth, belongs to the basic convictions of the Methodist movement.²⁴⁶ This is the point when Zinzendorf and the Moravians separated. For Zinzendorf, in Christ and through faith Christians are wholly sanctified and perfected in love. But this is only "in Christ," and not in themselves ("in se"), and whether they now in fact do love more or less is of no consequence as regards sanctification. For them, everything depends upon faith.²⁴⁷

Wesley shares Zinzendorf's assumptions. Christians are sanctified only by faith through Jesus Christ.²⁴⁸ However, Wesley remains convinced that the sanctifying power of God's Spirit invades human life and enables persons to have perfect love for God and for their fellow human beings. Grace that is believed and grace that is lived are different, but they are not

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to be separated from one another or played off against one another. Sanctification in Christ and the sanctification of life form a basic unity, and they also cannot be seen as fully separated in practice, even if they are not fully identical with one another.

The relationship between "holiness in Christ" and "indwelling holiness" conforms to the relationship between justification and the new birth. In the new birth, everything necessary for fellowship with God is given to the believer: love in the Holy Spirit, retrieval of the image of God. Yet new birth is only the beginning of sanctification. For Wesley, new birth is related to sanctification like the newborn child is related to the adult.²⁴⁹ At birth, a human being has all of the human organs, but nourishment and exercise are necessary for growth, so that all the functions of the body can develop properly. Another picture could also be used, one that did not suggest itself to Wesley, which emphasizes more strongly the relational character of sanctification. If two persons affirm their love for one another before God and their fellow human beings, then everything needed has been said. There is nothing "more" that can be said beyond this foundation. Yet, it remains a lifelong task for love to penetrate all aspects and dimensions of a relationship, and to protect and deepen it amid difficulties. A love that is not lived, and which does not repeatedly press toward fulfillment, dies. Thus also does the holiness in which we are placed by Christ want to be lived out day after day as sanctification.

The difficulty that is raised for Wesley in this connection, and the danger to which Zinzendorf rightly alerted him, is the question of whether Wesley's effort to confirm the reality of this doctrine in real life does not lead him to succumb to the temptation to make something that lies within humans become the basis for trust and hope, and hence the norm by which holiness is to be measured. Then, one comes to depend too much upon external phenomena to confirm the reality of sanctification.

Above all, we will have to clarify this question with reference to Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, which he viewed as the heart of his doctrine of sanctification, and which emerged in the holiness movement of the nineteenth century as one of the driving forces of evangelical Christianity. However, there were frequent misunderstandings and divisions because of this doctrine both within and far beyond the scope of the Methodist movement.²⁵⁰

These issues are investigated in an addendum at the end of this chapter. In anticipation of that discussion, it may be noted that we will not seek to investigate and represent Wesley's basic concerns for sanctification with-

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out adopting his conception of Christian perfection, but our primary concern will be to investigate the consequences of his doctrine of sanctification from the standpoint of the biblical witness.

3.2.3.3 SANCTIFICATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD²⁵¹

There are pros and cons for the use of the terms *holiness* and *sanctification* for our present day.

We begin with the latter: *holiness* and *sanctification* are terms drawn from the language of the cult and are therefore even less accessible to present-day Europeans and Americans than are those terms that are drawn from the realm of human relations, such as *reconciliation*, *justification*, or *forgiveness*. On the other hand, these concepts are, even in their unfamiliarity, especially suitable to make clear that what is at stake is our relationship to God as well as the need for us to make room for him and his will in our lives and in this world. The theological aspect of soteriology comes to the surface at this point, and its religious and historical background may signal the concreteness of the claims of God within the temporal realm to our day. "God in the midst of humanity" is what is at stake in sanctification.

The ambivalence of the terms is also particularly indicated by the term *saints*. In the understanding of the Roman Catholic vernacular, which generally prevails within contemporary Western society, this idea certainly designates the difference and probably also the exemplary nature of that kind of human life, but it also points to its distance from the world, and it appears to refer to a special kind of religious achievement. By contrast, a doctrine of sanctification that is oriented toward the New Testament must express the proximity of God's saving activity to our daily lives, by which God embraces all areas of life. It is there that God and his love come into play. At the same time, the basic character of grace of this event needs to be emphasized. The life and death of Jesus demonstrate the affirmation that "Christ is made to be sanctification for us." It is the presence of the love of God among humans!²⁵²

Within this context, Wesley's doctrine of sanctification could facilitate the apprehension of the imminence of God's redemptive work, in which a person does not remain reliant upon him or herself but comes to experience the transcendence of the love of God in everyday life. There are three very much interrelated areas in which the activity of the sanctifying grace of God comes to expression:

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(a.) Personal Sanctification

It is difficult to determine whether the sanctification of the individual or of this community of believers should be placed first. Within the New Testament, both aspects of sanctification are inseparably intertwined with one another, and it is difficult to establish a clear order of priority. With Wesley, the aspect of personal sanctification is clearly dominant, and even today it will probably grant the most direct access to the whole issue. For that reason, we will begin our discussion with this aspect, but certainly not without noting at the outset that it can only be seen together with the other aspect, that of the sanctification of the community of faith.²⁵³

Even within this aspect, there are three levels of relationship, which Wesley explains:

- the relationship to God
- the relationship to the neighbor
- the relationship to oneself

1. *One's relationship to God is essentially renewed through God's grace.* Justification places persons in fellowship with God. As it is expressed in the language of the priestly cult, Christ has granted human beings access to the Holy of Holies. He has opened the heart of God, and now people can experience God's presence within their lives in an unmediated fashion.

This life before and with God not only lives out of the kairos of the actual moment. It also requires certain structures for fellowship with God if this life is to be extended and maintained. Here, *sanctification* signifies finding ways and means by which, out of the immediacy of access to God, God himself will lead us again and again into a new encounter with himself, ways which deepen and sustain that relationship in the midst of difficulties. At this point, the means of grace should be mentioned again. They are instrumental in the promotion of personal holiness, but that means not confusing the "form" of godliness with its true power. Genuine sanctification does not distort the need for finding practical aids in the life of faith through the imposition of legalistic requirements, but it also does not forget that without external form, even the strongest power is dissipated and rendered ineffectual.

2. *Links to our neighbors are forged.* Our fellow human beings are sisters and brothers for whom Christ has died. Hence, our relationships to them have been "sanctified," they have been taken into the loving fellowship of God. This applies not only to persons whom we encounter within

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a Christian community but also (and primarily) to our encounter with persons in general.

In the process of sanctification, it is now important that this new disposition is not paralyzed by a great exuberance of all or nothing, but rather that it is lived out in concrete encounters and amid practical deeds, in which the possible and the attainable are distinguished very carefully from the desirable in a sober fashion. At the same time, we should not lose sight of the horizon of God's all-encompassing love.

In principle, the love commandment provides considerable freedom and flexibility of activity. It is certainly the case that neither the New Testament nor Wesley reduces its content to a general directive: Love—and do what you will!²⁴ Even love can be interpreted and is in danger of being manipulated under the pressure of self-interest. Hence, we repeatedly discover within the New Testament enumerations of concrete commands, which to some extent are the signposts on the path of love.

A final comment in the discussion: the way of sanctification, as it brings us into relationship with others, is also not limited to what I do on behalf of others. Even the humility of allowing others to help me can be a way in which we conform to the sanctifying activity of God's love in our conduct.

3. Also, *the new relationship to ourselves is established by God*. God has accepted us into his grace and has thereby also given us a new relationship with himself. This frees us for a sober, yet not loveless, self-esteem, in which we remain aware of our weaknesses but are also thankful for our gifts and our strengths.

The command "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" refers to the standard for the love of neighbor that is based on the sound perception of what we would need and desire for ourselves. There are not a few persons in whom this sensitivity for what they truly need is deformed. They will not be capable of actual love for the neighbor until they find a new, unrigid relationship to themselves. Yet, it is not appropriate to develop a commandment for self-love from that and to speak of a "threefold" love commandment. Love of self does not need a commandment; it needs to be incorporated into God's love so that a relationship to the self can develop which is amiable toward oneself without becoming egotistical.

Within this context, Jesus' call for self-denial has brought numerous Christians into difficulties (Mark 8:34-35 and par.). Totally ignoring oneself and looking only toward God and one's neighbor appears to be the royal way to sanctification, but Jesus' words need to be seen within their

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context and from the standpoint of their internal epigrammatic meaning. Self-denial is not self-disdain or self-annihilation but the readiness to place oneself at the disposal of God's love and to wholly rely upon him. Within the security of God's love, we are enabled to desist from keeping a tight grasp on our lives and seeking to live for ourselves. By contrast, we are now enabled to let loose of our lives and to surrender them wholly into the hands of God. This leads precisely to Jesus' declaration that those who are prepared to surrender themselves are the ones who receive their real selves back from God as a gift.

Wherever this occurs, there will be space free for a development and a maturing of one's life in fellowship with God, which no longer needs to take place in competition with the life space of others. Self-surrender and the attainment of life, the realization of one's own destiny and being there for others, are no longer opposites. They are now objectives that truly belong together. This process of maturing in holiness thrives on openness to change in the encounter with God's Word, on the richness of life with others, and also on the challenges that come from positions of responsibility in the world in which we live.²⁵

To place into God's hands everything that constitutes our lives and to allow everything to be given form by him is part of this process of the sanctification of our personal lives. This applies equally to artistic and scientific gifts as it does to deficiencies, obstacles, or burdens with which we must live. The path to sanctification can consist in the fact that some of our burdens are removed for us by the passage of time, but also by learning to live with many of them, even as Paul reported concerning himself in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.

It is part and parcel of the New Testament witness to sanctification that the delineation of false conduct or the avoidance of areas of danger is also seen as an important task of sanctification. This was in the foreground of German Pietism as well as in the Methodist tradition for a long time. It has led to the situation in which many preachers and practitioners of pastoral care are rather inclined to reject entirely those kinds of prescriptive codes. This would be a false and a dangerous reaction. It will be an important task for the future to develop practical provisions for assistance in this direction that, on the one hand, are not legalistic, but that also do not simply burden the individual with every decision. Instead, there need to be normative precedents to assist persons in working through their problems. We see modern forms of asceticism emerging, which are appropriate within the context of certain challenges, such as encountering persons who are

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in danger of addiction, and developing means of intervention that will assist them in overcoming this behavior.

In the biblical tradition, the warnings concerning sexual aberrations assume considerable importance among the prescriptions against false social behavior in general. This concern diminishes greatly in importance for Wesley. Amid the search for responsibly developed lines of demarcation, it would be important to develop a positive response for our day, so that sexuality and sanctification are not viewed as being mutually exclusive. Instead, even this basic area of our lives can be lived gratefully in fellowship with God and can be integrated into the maturation process of our lives.²⁵⁶

(b.) The Sanctification of the Community

As we have already indicated at the beginning of the last section, we find in the New Testament a series of parallel statements about the sanctification of the community and the sanctification of individual lives. It is said of both the community of faith and the Christians' body that they are God's temple and are therefore holy. The strongest emphasis regarding the sanctification of the community is in Ephesians 5:25-27. Here the discussion of sanctification applies both to the individual and to the church, who have been cleansed of sin and sanctified by Christ. Here the church almost appears to be a kind of corporate personality in whom God's saving work takes place—detached from God's act on behalf of individual Christians.

Wesley repeatedly emphasized that there is no sanctification other than social sanctification.²⁵⁷ The common life of human beings constitutively belongs within the realm of fellowship with God. If we follow how Wesley brought this basic assertion to life, we realize that the sum and the coordination of the relationships of individuals with one another are what leads to what he calls social holiness. Yet, in one respect, there is also for Wesley a holiness of the church that transcends persons. This stands in relationship to the catholic tradition, in which the *communio sanctorum* is not seen first of all as the community of *sancti*—that is, of holy persons—but as a community of *sancta*—that is, of the holy sacraments.²⁵⁸ Aside from the question of whether this is the exposition that is historically correct, it is quite obvious that in the history of theology, it has been proved as not lacking in danger. The claim of the church to administer the real "holy things" within an "institution of salvation" has not been free of hazards, and it can lead to a strange split between an ideal church, identified with the structures of the official church, and the actual congregation of persons who are themselves filled with life.²⁵⁹ Yet we mustn't overlook

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that this tradition possesses a kernel of truth by taking up that line of thought from the New Testament that makes clear that the holiness of the Christian congregation consists of more than the sum of what its members have realized. Since the New Testament community is not only a federation of believers but also a body established by Christ, it is also valid to infer that the community as a whole has been sanctified by Christ. This sanctified nature of the community has to be actualized through practical living as a community.

The essence of holiness within the community of the New Testament can perhaps be most succinctly characterized by stating that Christ has made it to be the living environment for grace. How the church lives in this mode will be described in detail in the following chapter. Here we will simply sketch the three principal aspects of this area of concern:

—*The Dimension of the Encounter with God.* This is the realm of the congregation, in which persons can encounter God through fellowship, through their speech and action, their prayers and singing, their preaching, and their common silence before God. United Methodist church structures have no "holy" rooms, although the term *sanctuary* is often used for the worship space. However, they must be conscious within the life of the community of the need for space and time for encountering the presence of God, in which persons can experience that the "place" on which they stand is holy.

—*The Encounter with One Another.* What takes place in the community's space is more than the individual contacts of particular Christians, although togetherness in the community is not conceivable without these living relationships of individuals and groups to one another. However, it is only in the wide mesh of relationships with an entire congregation that the organism of the body of Christ can actually be lived and experienced in all its diversity. At this point, a reciprocal assistance takes place, as well as allowing self-help, where persons are encouraged but also (and this is an essential aspect of communal sanctification) called to task if their behavior gives cause for concern.

—*The Relationship to Persons Outside the Church.* The church is only conceivable as the realm of grace if the dimension of openness to the outside is present. In the New Testament understanding of the concept of sanctification, the church is in need of "places of contact" with the world in which it lives, so that something of the nature of God's love, for which the church is a sign, becomes clear. "Holy places" are signs of the presence of God. The call of the Christian community is nothing other than this.

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(c.) Sanctification and Society

Sacred places have the character of signs. They are not reservations for the pious, "residual biotopes" of the religious life, but rather they are supports for the promulgation of life out of God's love in a world which threatens to become a life-destroying wilderness. This is certainly the proper understanding of the idea of holiness and sanctification, as we know it above all in the Old Testament, so that on the one hand it aims for what is extraordinary, what is set apart for God, and which thereby refers to what belongs wholly to God.

It is within this context that the New Testament refers to the relationship of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer. This is how Luther formulates it in his exposition contained within his larger catechism: "When we say, 'Hallowed be Thy name,' we are thereby petitioning that His name, which is otherwise holy in heaven, will be and also will remain holy upon earth with us and all the world."²⁶⁰ It is precisely the relationship with the next two petitions which indicates that the hallowing of the name is not limited to the circle of the disciples, but that it is also true of the holiness of God's name throughout the entire world. The fact that God is given the honor that his will is done and his kingdom comes characterizes three different but closely related aspects of God's deity being effective throughout the entire world for its salvation.²⁶¹

Wesley had this dimension of God's saving acts in view, as well as the discipleship of Christians, whenever he referred to the task of the Methodist movement in terms of spreading scriptural holiness across the land.²⁶² At that point, he did not explicitly indicate how this spreading of sanctification throughout the land occurred. However, it is clear that he had two particular ways in mind. One is evangelistic preaching, which announces to persons both the need for and the possibility of sanctification, which occurs by faith alone through God's grace. The other is the example of the fellowship of Christians and the witness of their lives of love toward enemies—which urges on the matter of holiness.

Wesley was of the view that, with these means, something of the order of the "sanctification of the world" would be attained. He "was firmly convinced of the fact that the time will come when Christianity will have the upper hand and will cover the entire earth. Then wars will cease, hatred and suspicions that divide us will be overcome, unrighteousness and poverty will be removed, and love and justice will prevail upon the earth. This goal must always lie at the heart of our efforts, and must be the measure for our expectation in view of the gifts which God wants to grant us."²⁶³

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This hope has proved illusory, and hence, Wesley's assessment appears to us today to be too narrow to bring the transforming power of the gospel to bear upon the needs of this world. Yet, we should not allow ourselves to be led astray to undervalue the significance of preaching and of encouraging the personal modeling of the transformed life in Christ. Evangelization is not only the invitation to personal salvation but also always a declaration of the claims of God over the world and over humanity, which indwells it. Whenever this voice is missing, social and political modes of behavior are ambiguous and ineffective. The personal example of engaged Christians who get involved in the needs of the world remains the soul of all social efforts conducted by the church. What is attained through these efforts often appears to be less than a drop that falls upon a hot stone, and yet, without them, political demands or measures are strangely ineffectual because the Spirit of love is missing from them. On the other hand, the example of the inconspicuous and even basically ineffective though devoted work of a Mother Teresa has a value that can hardly be overestimated for the continued effectiveness of the power of sanctifying love in this world.

Yet, we need steps which lead us beyond the limits of the engagement of individual Christians. They are enumerated here only in a brief fashion and will be described more explicitly in the following chapter.

1. *Holiness and society* is an area which must not be lost from our sight. Despite all of his social engagement, Wesley had no perception of the deeper corporate causes of social misery. For the most part, later Methodism developed in a rather conservative way and did not emphasize the vision of the connection between Christian perfection and a new, comprehensive social ethic to which it occasionally aspired.²⁶⁴ Perhaps beginnings of a responsible theology of liberation can lead onward.²⁶⁵

2. *Sanctification and Nature.* As it has previously been indicated, the overcoming of the taboos of antiquity that were bound to nature are not only shown to be beneficial, but they are also seen as extraordinarily dangerous at particular points. The question that emerges is, can we recover the truth of holiness from the earth, water, trees, and so forth without at the same time falling back into magical thinking, which only brings us into a new dependency and slavery? It is worth considering that not only rooms for worship, but also nature reserves can be called a "sanctuary." These areas cannot and may not be for us sanctuaries in the sense that we are to worship God in nature. However, they could probably be places that could instruct us in developing the deep respect for all life which is created by God and thereby assist us to safeguard this life.

In this connection, we may note the discussion of the new appreciation for fallow seasons for land, for a Sabbath intended for humanity and its time, and for a year of jubilee for the economic indebtedness under which persons are burdened. Not to be forgotten is the history of these arrangements, which in particular contexts could develop from a blessing to a plague, and yet we need to attempt to understand them as signs of the sanctification of that which God has entrusted unto us. We must urgently discover anew the function of sacred places and times, which clarify for people that this world is not our own, but that it rightly belongs to God, and therefore to all of God's creatures.

It is probably no accident that the New Testament nowhere says that the world is sanctified in Christ, as is said of the community of faith and the Christian. The sanctification of the world is an eschatological event which is accomplished whenever God becomes "all in all." However, this also summons Christians and the Christian churches to the task of being signs of the coming kingdom and the coming holiness in a world which has basically already been redeemed by God.

3.2.4 *Excursus: The Perfection of Love* —*Christian Perfection*²⁶⁶

Wesley ascribed a very high value to the doctrine of Christian perfection for his theology and his preaching. He saw within it the special task that God had entrusted to Methodists within the framework of Christian theology. He viewed rejection of it as being incompatible with the task of working together within the movement.²⁶⁷ The fact that Wesley made some statements that conceded this position for sanctification is no contradiction. Hence, his doctrine of Christian perfection and the doctrine of sanctification, as he represented them, were for him essentially identical. This is not the place to even provide a sketch of the history of the development of this doctrine and the controversy surrounding it during the time of Wesley's work and thereafter. Here we can only sketch a basic outline and then attempt to achieve some theological insight concerning its significance.

For Wesley, it was always important to make clear what the doctrine of Christian perfection is *not*.²⁶⁸ Christian perfection does not mean inerrancy, nor freedom from errors or from weaknesses, and it is never absolute, for only God is perfect in every sense and every respect. When Wesley used the term *perfect* he meant someone having

"the mind which was in Christ," and who so "walketh as Christ also walked"; a man "that hath clean hands and a pure heart," or that is "cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit"; one in whom is "no occasion of stumbling," and who, accordingly, "does not commit sin." . . . We understand hereby, one whom God hath "sanctified throughout in body, soul, and spirit"; one who "walketh in the light as He is in the light, in whom is no darkness at all; the blood of Jesus Christ his Son having cleansed him from all sin."

This man can now testify to all mankind, "I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." . . . He "loveth the Lord his God with all his heart," and serveth him "with all his strength." He "loveth his neighbor," every man, "as himself"; yea, "as Christ loveth us." . . . Indeed his soul is all love, filled with "bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering." And his life agreeth thereto, full of "the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labour of love." . . .

Thus it is to be a perfect man, to be "sanctified throughout"; even "to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God . . . as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ."²⁶⁹

Why did Wesley say anything at all about Christian perfection? The first answer that he provided in response to such a question was that the Bible bears witness to the doctrine of Christian perfection. This is certainly correct, at least to a degree, especially with reference to 1 John, which Wesley used as a basic source in the development of the doctrine, as well as a basis for its defense. At another point, Wesley was admittedly satisfied with locating passages that made reference to the point "perfect," from which he proceeded to explicate the doctrine.²⁷⁰

As a second motive, Wesley cited the norm of experience, which is to say that, in the course of the history of the Methodist movement, he personally encountered a series of persons who could offer explicit testimony that God had gifted them with total perfection. He also located sources from within the wider stream of Christian tradition that bore witness to the doctrine, beginning with the Greek church fathers through to the mystics of the medieval and early modern eras. What presses them to struggle for Christian perfection may be the same thing which is presumed to have been behind Wesley's interest in the theme: the longing for a "realized eschatology," for eternity, which can be experienced now within the life of the Christian upon earth, and which completely fulfills and defines them and their actions. Admittedly, Wesley declined to make a personal profession of this experience. The fact that he acknowledged the doctrine