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## CHAPTER 33

# PNEUMATOLOGY IN THE METHODIST TRADITION

D. LYLE DABNEY

'DIVINITY', John Wesley writes near the end of the preface to his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 'is nothing but a grammar of the language of the Holy Ghost' (Wesley 1950: 9). That this was anything but a casual comment is demonstrated by his subsequent remarks. For he goes on to commend a reading of the New Testament that burrows deeply beneath the surface of those texts and gets at what we might now call the 'deep logic' of the words of the 'apostles and evangelists'. He describes the substance of the 'divinity' buried in those documents as having to do with 'the holy affections expressed thereby, and the tempers shown by every writer' (ibid.)—by which he means those fundamental dispositions of the human heart transformed by the Holy Spirit and the holy behaviours or forms of life that accompany such a change. Finally, complaining that those who have gone before have paid little attention to these 'affections' and their transformation, as well as to what brings such re-creation about, Wesley intimates that his own chief concern in the *Explanatory Notes* that follow will be to read the New Testament, whose witness is the 'language of the Holy Ghost', employing just such a 'grammar of the Spirit'.

A 'grammar', according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, describes the inflectional forms of a language, or other means of indicating the relations of words in a

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sentence, as well as identifying the rules for employing these in accordance with established usage. Thus grammar deals with both the analysis and the practice of a language, demonstrating how the various parts of the language relate to one another and how they are to be used. In the following I want to suggest that Wesley's notion of 'divinity' as a 'grammar of the Spirit'—that which explicates how the elements of the 'language of the Holy Ghost' relate to one another and gain their meaning in concert together—represents not just the approach he used in commenting upon Scripture, but is rather the theological hermeneutic implicit in his 'reading' and 'enacting' of the entirety of the Christian faith. 'Divinity' became for him, I contend, the description of how the Christian community bespeaks the witness to God's transformation of human lives, individually and corporately, and the very affections that shape them through Christ and in the Spirit. Moreover, it is precisely this pneumatological orientation that constitutes his theological distinctive. To give an account of John Wesley's pneumatology, therefore, is not simply to enumerate and explain the many passages in his writings in which he mentions the Holy Spirit, whether in passing or at length; it is to render an account of the trajectory of his theologizing as a whole. Moreover, it is to begin to give an account of pneumatology in the Methodist tradition as a whole and to speak of how that might best be appropriated today.

To begin to demonstrate the distinctive character of Wesley's reading of Christian theology and the role played in it by pneumatology, Wesley's 'Methodist divinity' must be seen against the background of the Western theological tradition. The last century has been an era of theological reassessment, as Christianity has faced both the challenge of the passing of the cultural and legal privilege that the churches have long enjoyed in Western society as well as the developing crisis of modernity. Representatives of the various theological traditions of the West have struggled to recover and critically reclaim the basic insights that provided each with their own original and distinct dynamic in their contributions to the long conversation that is the Western theological tradition. Thus there has occurred a dramatic renewal and reinterpretation of the thought of—among others—Augustine and the early church fathers, of Aquinas and the Scholastics, as well as of the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, and not to mention Wesley himself. In the course of these developments we have been reminded anew that, as Peter Brown has observed, 'the quality of a religious system depends perhaps less on its specific doctrine, then on the choice of problems that it regards as important, the areas of human experience to which it directs attention' (Brown 1969: 393). For this movement of recovery of the Western traditions has made it abundantly clear once again that the Western theological tradition has been dominated by two fundamentally conflicting trajectories or tendencies of thought that have taken very different 'problems' and 'areas of human experience' as their points of departure.

The first trajectory is seen most clearly in medieval monastic and scholastic theology, forms that take God's creation, more specifically, the capacities of created

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human nature, as the starting point for their reading of the faith, and interpret salvation accordingly as the ascent of the soul to knowledge of God the creator through the assistance of grace. In its scholastic form, this type of theology can be said to begin, therefore, with a kind of syllogism: God is good in being and act; creation is an act of God; ergo, creation is essentially good and in search of its highest good. That is by no means to be understood as denying the presence and pervasiveness of sin in the world, nor as implying that the act of creation is somehow complete. Rather, according to this theology, despite the acknowledged imperfection and incompleteness in the world, it is ultimately the goodness of God's creating that defines the creation. That goodness expresses itself above all in an innate human capacity for God, a created openness for or a desire to ascend to the fulfilment of our nature in union with our creator, a yearning for that which human nature cannot of itself attain. Thus the point of departure for this tradition is expressed in the words of Augustine, monk and priest and bishop, in his *Confessions*: 'You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you' (Augustine 1998: 3). Catholic theology of this sort, therefore, came to be cast as an appeal to the created nature of human beings to find the fulfilment of their being by ascending to God through a receipt of an infusion of the grace that the Father has provided in Christ through the church. The natural virtues, both moral and intellectual, it is claimed, lead to even as they are transcended and guided to fulfilment by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Hence, while medieval scholasticism carefully differentiates between nature and grace, it does not contrast but rather orders them in an unbroken hierarchical relationship. Its clear tendency, then, is to posit a fundamental continuum between nature and grace, the creator and the created, creation and redemption; for it is a theology of nature fulfilled by grace. Thus its representative affirmation was and is that of Aquinas: 'Grace does not destroy, but rather presupposes and perfects nature' (Aquinas 1948: i. 6).

Over and against that sort of thought stands the theology of the sixteenth-century Reformation, the second dominant theological trajectory in the West. The fundamental logic of Reformation theology is protest, indeed, Reformation theology is protesting, or Protestant theology. What it protests against is above all the root affirmation of medieval monastic and scholastic theology: that human nature by virtue of being God's good creation possesses an innate capacity for God and is thus intrinsically open to and in search of its creator. Casting itself in the role of the bishop of Hippo confronting the teachings of Pelagius, this tradition declares that any teacher of such a theology of 'human nature verses the grace of God' (Augustine 1956: 116) was one who simply did not understand 'why he was a Christian', (ibid. 122) for such doctrine would 'render the cross of Christ of no effect' (ibid. 123). Thus, Luther argued in his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* of 1517 that, 'on the part of man however nothing precedes grace except ill will and even rebellion against grace' (Luther 1955: xxxi. 11). Not the goodness but the sin and consequent incapacity of the creature for the creator, not the yearning

for but the flight from God is, therefore, this theology's point of departure; and that sin and incapacity and flight is seen as the defining reality in all creaturely existence. Now that is not to say that all is interpreted as simply evil. When Calvin, for instance, spoke of the 'depravity' of nature, he did not mean that there was no good in the world, what he meant was there was no unalloyed good, no part or capacity or desire untouched by the fall. For sin has spoiled all, according to this theology, and there is no untouched part of our essential humanity or residual image of God to which one can appeal as purely good, as open to and in search of its creator. Indeed, according to this reading of the faith, the claim that there is such a possibility, such a capacity for God, is the essence of sin itself, in that it constitutes the implicit claim that one can by one's own efforts be redeemed.

Reformation theology, therefore, is cast not in the form of an appeal to the good, but in the form of a dialectic, according to which the Redeemer Jesus Christ as the Divine Word stands over and against creation, 'outside of us', *extra nos*, confronting human beings in their sin and summoning them to faith in the free grace of God made manifest in his death on the cross, 'on our behalf', *pro nobis*. We come to right relationship with God, it is claimed, not through being enabled by infused grace to fulfil nature's law and so ascend to our creator, but rather by forswearing such reliance on law and placing our trust in Christ the Redeemer who by grace freely imputes his righteousness to us. This sort of theology, therefore, finds its point of departure not in creaturely good, but in creaturely sin, and takes the form not of creation's ascent to its God and Father, but of God's descent to creation in Jesus Christ the Son. Its clear tendency, then, is to assert utter contradiction between law and gospel, God and world, creation and redemption, redeemer and those in need of redemption. Not creation *and* anything, most certainly not nature *and* grace, but rather 'Christ alone' (*solus Christus*), 'faith alone' (*sola fide*), 'Scripture alone' (*sola scriptura*), and 'grace alone' (*sola gratia*) were the Reformation watchwords. Reformation theology is a theology, therefore, not of continuum but of contradiction. As the Anglo-Catholic John Burnaby expressed the issue in the midst of a conflict with such theology earlier in this century: 'Against the "Both-And" of the Catholic, Protestantism here as everywhere sets with... insistence its "Either-Or"' (Burnaby 1991: 4).

To place John Wesley on the horizon of Western theology as it is defined by the two trajectories I have just sketched is both to illustrate the central dilemma of the Western tradition and to illuminate Wesley's own unique theological trajectory. For in the England of the eighteenth century Wesley found himself facing the dilemma of the Western theological tradition in microcosm. That dilemma consists in the interaction of the conflicting 'logics' of the two theologies that have dominated the Western tradition as described above: on the one hand, the Catholic trajectory that can be characterized for heuristic purposes as a 'theology of the first article' of the creed stressing the fulfilment of creation and of the created human capacities for God, and, on the other, the Reformation trajectory that can be characterized

for heuristic purposes as a 'theology of the sovereign act of creation'. The dilemma of the representatives of the two theologies in Christianity at large is the tension between human potentiality and the saving grace of God. In early modern England the dilemma of the possibilities of creation versus the possibilities of redemption is a thematic which then becomes a dialectic despite all its good intentions. Over and against this problem, the "Both-And" of the English Reformed tradition and the holiness. And it was a trajectory that marked

Wesley's reading of the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit. The outlines of the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit driven by his own experience at Oxford to the point of his own salvation in Scotland, Wales, and the theology of the first article of the creed in which he found a response to others to God's call. The second article of the creed preached in 1738 while listening to the sermon according to which the Holy Spirit is in the God who is

But the course of the first challenged by the Moravian Peter Bohler in the Great Awakening. He was forced to give account of his faith and without the experience of the theological tradition. He termed a 'theology of the transforming' through the Holy Spirit. Theology, therefore

for heuristic purposes as a 'theology of the second article' stressing redemption as the sovereign act of God in Christ on behalf of humanity. The struggle between the representatives of those two positions in the Anglican Church and in English Christianity at large had led them to the constant tendency to champion either human potentiality and act to the detriment of divine activity or the electing and saving grace of God to the detriment of the works of human beings. In Wesley's early modern England, as in the West in general, this took place most often in terms of the possibilities of human knowing versus divine revelation or God's grace versus the possibilities of human obedience. One side of the characteristic problematic which thereby arose was indicated by Adolph Harnack when he noted that despite all its good intentions, the Reformation in its emphasis on the act of God over and against the acts of human beings, 'neglected far too much the moral problem, the "Be ye holy, for I am holy"' (Harnack 1976: 267). It was in forms of English Reformed Orthodoxy that Wesley concretely faced that neglect of Christian holiness. And it was his response to such neglect that determined the distinctive trajectory that marked his own theological development.

Wesley's reading of the Christian faith manifests a readily identifiable tendency, and the work of the last two generations of Wesleyan scholars has made the broad outlines of the development of his trajectory of thought increasingly clear. It was driven by his own spiritual pilgrimage from the 'Holy Club' during his student days at Oxford to the missionary expedition to Georgia he undertook for the sake of his own salvation to his career as an evangelist travelling throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. His development began with what was essentially a theology of the first article—clearly discernible in his earliest sermons and correspondence in which he moralistically sought to conform his own life and that of others to God's commands. He then moved to and through a kind of theology of the second article—expressed most emphatically in the sermon 'Salvation by Faith', preached in 1738 soon after his 'heart had been strangely warmed' at Aldersgate while listening to a reading of Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans—according to which he called upon the people of the British Isles to place their faith in the God who freely bestows forgiveness (Wesley 1975- : i. 197, esp. n. 93).

But the course of Wesley's theological development did not stop there. Rather, first challenged by the question of spiritual assurance pressed upon him by the Moravian Peter Böhler and inspired by news of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Great Awakening in North America reported by Jonathan Edwards, and then forced to give account of himself in debate with Reformed Orthodoxy both within and without the evangelical revival of his day, Wesley's contribution to the Western theological tradition consists in his striving towards what can perhaps best be termed a 'theology of the third article' of the creed. This was a theology of the transforming redemption of God's human creature and all creation in and through the Holy Spirit that begins in forgiveness and ends in holiness of life. His theology, therefore, takes as its central concern neither the fulfilment of creation

nor the contradiction of sin and grace but the divine initiation of a process of 'Christian perfection' in human life that is implicit in creation, explicit in reconciliation and, eventually, fully actualized in redemption. Moreover, he understands that 'perfection' not as moral conformity to an external command, but as a living expression of God's perfect love in the lives of human beings individually and collectively—transformed 'affections' indeed! Thus the point of departure for Wesley's theology ultimately became neither created human capacity nor sinful human incapacity, but rather the faithful presence and activity of God through the Spirit in the midst of creation, striving to bring humanity to God's good and perfect ends. It is thus a theology of neither 'created continuum', as in a theology of the first article, nor of 'evangelical contradiction', as in a theology of the second article, but of the continuity of God's work of faithful grace by the Son and in the Holy Spirit through the discontinuity of the creature's faithless estrangement.

This is clearly his emphasis as early as 1742 when, in his tract *The Character of a Methodist*, he sought to provide a proper definition for Methodism and its central concern by declaring that 'a Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him"' (Wesley 1975- : ix. 35). Thus, while the primary language of grace for medieval scholasticism was that of the sacraments, and that of the Protestant Reformers the 'Word', with the Spirit embedded within and beneath those conceptualities and practices, for Wesley the primary language of grace was from beginning to end the language of the Spirit, certainly in conjunction with but by no means in subordination to the practice of Word or sacrament. Indeed, it was in making precisely this point concerning Spirit and grace that Wesley explicitly differentiated his own theological concern from that of the Reformation, and implicitly from that of scholasticism. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 1: 12, the text for his sermon essay *The Witness of Our Own Spirit* (1746), he writes: 'By "the grace of God" is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God.' But then he goes on to elucidate his understanding of grace in this text—and the central theme in his own theology:

But in this place [the grace of God] rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which 'worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure'. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein. And now we can perform, through God, what to man was impossible. Now we can order our conversation aright. We can do all things in the light and power of that love, through Christ which strengtheneth us. We now have 'the testimony of our conscience', which we could never have by fleshly wisdom, 'that in simplicity and godly sincerity . . . we have our conversation in the world'. (Wesley 1975- : i. 309)

Wesley preached grace, therefore, not simply in terms of justification as 'unmerited mercy', the 'righteousness of Christ imputed to the one who has been brought to faith' that was the central Reformation concern, any more than he proclaimed grace as the infusion of 'operative leading to habitual and then to co-operative grace'

leading to the righteous emphasis. Rather he w process of sanctification the image of God" (an other words, while on with salvation as that v more so—with salvati (contra a theology of t Wesley was centrally human individual and as the transformation theology of the first a theology was ultimate gracious presence and words: 'I believe that faith is imputed for r rightly maintained th surely, the present and

In the role played distinctive in Wesley's of the either/or of Wes redemption against c against human works way beyond that imp moments of God's ac Trinitarian work of C eschatological redemp the Holy Spirit, the t very first sermon in t *Occasions* begins with which God hath besto goes on to specify t describing the relatio the Gospel of John (1: God's creating in the redeeming of creation that he proceeded to therefore, as Albert O that has no exact equ unique for one simple to be not simply a cate Christian theology—



leading to the righteousness that is fit for the vision of God, which was the medieval emphasis. Rather he was concerned to demonstrate, as Outler comments, 'how the process of sanctification, begun with regeneration, is really aimed at "the recovery of the image of God" (an equivalent phrase for holiness)' (Wesley 1975- : i. 299). In other words, while on the one hand we must say that Wesley was concerned not just with salvation as that which delivered us from the penalty of sin, but also—and even more so—with salvation as that which delivered us to a life in God's perfect love (*contra* a theology of the second article), then on the other hand we must say that Wesley was centrally concerned with the realization of God's righteousness in human individual and corporate life, not however as the fulfilment of nature but as the transformation of nature through new creation in the Holy Spirit (*contra* a theology of the first article). For once again, the point of departure for Wesley's theology was ultimately neither human capacity nor incapacity, but rather the gracious presence and activity of God through the Son and by the Spirit. In Wesley's words: 'I believe that Christ by his Spirit works righteousness in all those to whom faith is imputed for righteousness' (Wesley 1996: x. 272). Thus Robert Cushman rightly maintained that 'The first principle of Wesley's experimental divinity is, surely, the present and immediate working of the Holy Spirit' (Cushman 1989: 35).

In the role played by pneumatology in his theology, then, we find what is distinctive in Wesley's theologizing. He refused to remain mired in the dilemma of the either/or of Western theology and so play off creation against redemption or redemption against creation, human works against divine grace or divine grace against human works. His fundamental and unique concern was, rather, to seek a way beyond that impasse and pursue a theology that encompassed both those moments of God's activity in a unified vision of divine grace, a reading of the Trinitarian work of God in creation and reconciliation from the perspective of eschatological redemption; from the perspective, that is to say, of a theology of God the Holy Spirit, the transformer and perfecter of all creation. For this reason the very first sermon in the first published collection of Wesley's *Sermons on Several Occasions* begins with the by no means incidental declaration: 'All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of his mere grace, bounty or favor'; and goes on to specify that those 'blessings' include both creation and salvation, describing the relationship of those two works of God in a phrase drawn from the Gospel of John (1: 16): 'grace upon grace' (Wesley 1975- : i. 117-18). The grace of God's creating in the Spirit is taken up and made perfect in the grace of God's redeeming of creation in the Spirit. And it was from that perspective of the Spirit that he proceeded to interpret Christian discourse accordingly. John Wesley was, therefore, as Albert Outler has remarked, 'working with a distinctive Pneumatology that has no exact equivalent... up to [his] time' (Outler 1981: pp. xv-xvi). It was unique for one simple reason: because for him, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit came to be not simply a category interpreted within other categories in the larger body of Christian theology—as it had been for medieval scholasticism and the Protestant



The first characteristic of a contemporary Methodist theology of the third article would be that it would represent an expressly ecumenical theology. From the beginning, Wesley was involved in ecumenical dialogue as a constitutive part of the Methodist mission of calling men and women of every class and nationality to discipleship to Jesus Christ. He was convinced that his concern for holiness of life and for the Holy Spirit as that which brought such 'perfection' to fruition was no new discovery or invention, but belonged rather to the Christian tradition from the very beginning. What he sought to do was to critically reclaim that heritage in the context of the rapid cultural and ecclesiastical changes of eighteenth-century England and bring it into conversation with the churches as a resource for the renewal of Christianity in his own age. For Wesley, therefore, ecumenical dialogue and recourse to the past were for the sake of the whole of the Christian mission in the present—and in the future as well.

True to that heritage, Methodists have been at the forefront of the ecumenical movement throughout the past century, from its beginnings as an optimistic expression of the Modern missionary movement down to its desultory present when it has fallen prey to forms of the 'liberal/conservative' divide that was the bane of modern theology. Many now realize that if the ecumenical movement is to make progress once again, it must do so by regaining its focus on the mission to which God has called us through Christ and in the Spirit. By reclaiming its own distinctive kind of ecumenical heritage, a renewed Methodist theology of the third article could now serve Christianity at large by helping the churches discover anew the *missio Dei* that represents what is truly common among us in all the diversity of our past and our present—and in rediscovering that, to engage anew in that mission in the midst of the profound cultural and ecclesiological changes in the age in which we now live. Stanley Hauerwas has remarked that, 'Methodist identity makes sense only as it entails a commitment to discovering the unity of God's church through our different histories' (Hauerwas 1985: 19). By taking up a renewed theology of the third article and pursuing the kind of ecumenical agenda that marked its mission in the beginning, Methodism would thus begin to 'make sense' once again—and could help other Christian communities 'make sense' as well.

Such a theology is uniquely equipped to affirm the root concerns of the dominant traditions in the West and to point them beyond their mutual differences to a common theological effort with all other Christian communities in the context of the mission to which God has called us. Thus, on the one hand, with the champions of a theology of the first article, such a theology of the third article insists that the God who is redeemer in Christ Jesus is the selfsame creator of the world; and that creation, therefore, as an expression of the gracious goodness of God, is itself good and stands in a positive relationship with redemption. Yet the goodness of creation and its positive relation to redemption, according to such a theology, is not an ontological or anthropological 'given' but rather an ongoing pneumatological 'giving', for just as creation's good is the ever-renewed gift of God's life-giving and life-sustaining 'breath', so new creation through Christ is a

new, eschatological impartation of such a divine Spirit taking up and transforming creation as an intimation of God's good purposes for all things. On the other hand, with the representatives of the theology of the second article, such a theology of the third article insists that it is God alone who brings about right relationship with humanity and God alone who makes the divine self known in and through Jesus Christ. Yet the question as to how the witness of Scripture itself attests to the way God achieves such reconciliation and self-revelation is answered by a theology of the third article in pointing to the work of the Spirit. According to that witness it is the Spirit who enables the Word to take up a broken and estranged creation in incarnation, whose anointing marks that Incarnate One as Son and Christ, whose descent is reflected in the consent of that Son to go the way of suffering and death on the cross, and who then finally takes up in resurrection that One who has fully entered into the horror of human estrangement and death. A theology of the third article, therefore, urges the dominant theologies in the West to a theological vision that begins neither with created capacity nor incapacity for God, but rather with God's capacity in and with and for all creation, the possibility of the Spirit; and in that possibility a theology of the third article seeks to encompass concerns for both creation and redemption on the horizon of God's eschatological promise of new creation, the 'perfection' or 'making holy' of all things in the Holy Spirit. And that horizon is one of God's mission into which we have been called by Jesus Christ.

Championing such an ecumenical theology would be for Methodists an act of repentance—and, just possibly, of renewal. For the truth is that for a variety of reasons the Methodist tradition has failed to achieve the promise of its own theological beginnings. In pointing to a theology of the third article, therefore, it would not be indulging in a further round of triumphalism, asserting its own superiority over all other forms of theologizing. Rather, it would serve to illustrate that the time for polemics and party-spirit in Christian theology is over. For this has indeed been a century of the rediscovery and reclamation of the various theological traditions of the West in the face of the twofold challenge of the passing of Christendom and the crisis of modernity. But in the course of that we have spent far too much time and effort trying to justify the various versions of those conflicting traditions we have reclaimed. Christendom, however, is now over, and modernity may be as well; and what that means positively is that the struggle for dominance over Western society and the self-justification of our theologizing may at last be set aside. Wesley could help teach us again to take up our theological task together today. Richard Heitzenrater has written of Wesley, that, although he held the early church in highest esteem, 'his purpose was not to replicate the first century in eighteenth-century England, but rather to live in his own day a life that was faithful to the love that God had shown for humankind in Jesus Christ' (Heitzenrater 1995: 319). We must do now what Wesley did then. And in doing that, we must in the same way do today what the monks and the scholastics as well as what Luther and the Reformers did in their day: we must give account in word

and deed of the 'loving circumstances of the very well be a way we to 'act our age' again understood not simply faith and practice, but disciples of Christ in which we find ourselves

The second character of the third article would be either/or that has classical and modern creature called to be noted above, the contradiction have tended nature at the expense to the detriment of a article is a theology assumes the continuity creation and redemption does a theology of the God's sovereign act necessity of starting of the second article Trinitarian theology decree, but as the death and yet again Christ that by the unforeseeable and of God in the world love in and for God a discourse that bespeaks the discontinuity of 'redeemed' (i.e. 'regained'). Thus talk about God

That is why, while the third article, *Christus* discourse of such a humanity through human as the image Christendom and in must learn again the

and deed of the 'love God [has] shown for humankind in Jesus Christ' in the circumstances of the age in which we now live. A theology of the third article could very well be a way we could begin to do that together, and thus could begin to learn to 'act our age' again. Ecumenical theology, in this sense, would thus be best understood not simply as the task of resolving our 'internal' disputes concerning faith and practice, but rather as the common task of faithful living and thinking as disciples of Christ in the face of the challenge of the new 'external' situation in which we find ourselves called to pursue God's redemptive mission today.

The second characteristic of such a contemporary Methodist theology of the third article would be that it would offer the possibility of moving beyond the either/or that has characterized the Western theological tradition both in its classical and modern forms, for it would hold talk about God and talk about the creature called to be the 'image and likeness' of God in the world together. As I noted above, the conflicts of the two theologies that have dominated the Western tradition have tended to result in the one emphasizing the capacities of human nature at the expense of divine grace and the other the sovereignty of divine grace to the detriment of any human capacity of will or act. But a theology of the third article is a theology of 'grace upon grace'. That is, it is a theology that neither assumes the continuity of a divinely ordained teleology through the events of creation and redemption that would allow us to start with talk of the human, as does a theology of the first article, nor in protest declares the utter discontinuity of God's sovereign act of election between those two moments resulting in the necessity of starting with talk of divine contradiction of the human, as in a theology of the second article. A theology of the third article is, rather, an expressly Trinitarian theology that speaks of God neither in terms of first cause nor final decree, but as the *creator* of a humanity that is of itself prone to sin and subject to death and yet again as the *reconciler* who enacts new creation in and through Jesus Christ that by the renewed grace of the *redeemer* Holy Spirit opens up a hitherto unforeseeable and unrealizable possibility for human life as the 'image and likeness' of God in the world, that is, as the perfect expression in word and deed of divine love in and for God and thus in and for God's world. Such a theology, therefore, is a discourse that bespeaks the continuity of God's faithful loving-kindness through the discontinuity of creation's estrangement and death that calls forth a renewed, 'redeemed' (i.e. 'regained', 'recovered') creation that is the echo of such faithfulness. Thus talk about God and talk about humanity go together in such a theology.

That is why, while *pneumatology* is the 'field of discourse' of a theology of the third article, *Christology* is its centre. Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, is in the discourse of such a theology the humanity of God in the world, that divine humanity through whom and in relation to whom we begin to become truly human as the image of God in creation by the grace of the Spirit. In an age post-Christendom and in the midst of the crisis of modernity, the Christian community must learn again that in Jesus Christ we speak not just of humanity's God, but of

God's humanity; and indeed, that it is only by speaking of God's humanity that we can rightly speak of our humanity at all. For we live in an age that no longer has any common account of human being and becoming, that can no longer speak coherently or cogently of what it means to be a human or what would constitute a good or worthy human life. A contemporary Methodist theology of the third article would be a discourse that bespeaks the discovery of God's humanity in and for God's world though and in Jesus the Christ, a humanity whose beginning, whose mission in word and deed in God's creation, and whose end and new beginning is marked by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The third element in such a contemporary Methodist theology of the third article would be that as a theology of Christian mission it would hold together what the Methodist and other traditions have in the past century too often allowed to be separated and played off against one another: evangelism and social action, the formation of disciples and the reformation of our social and material world, proclaiming the Word of God to the world and doing the Word in service to God's world. Thus we could address ourselves to the entirety of the creation that God has acted to redeem and avoid that evil that Wesley called 'practical atheism', the inability or refusal to see that 'nothing [is] separate from God' (Wesley 1975- : i. 515-16). The Methodists, just as the church in general in North America today, still bear the Modern marks of the deep division between those who, on the one hand, would stress continuity between church and society and call for the priority of social engagement in a world of suffering and injustice, and, on the other hand, those who emphasize the discontinuity between church and society and place the priority upon evangelism and discipleship in the midst of a world of sin. Addressing this divide, a renewed Methodist theology of the third article, once again, would represent a theology of continuity of God's grace through the discontinuity of creaturely sin. As a theology of 'grace upon grace' which can speak of the real and profound discontinuity of estrangement and death between creation and redemption, it is able to speak of the difference between church and society, and in doing so, would be able to help the church come to a new understanding of itself as a community of discipleship to Jesus Christ, led by the Spirit in the mission to the world to which God has called us. But precisely as a theology that can speak of such discontinuity, a theology of the third article can also speak of the continuity that the Spirit works between creation and redemption: the Spirit that led the Son—and all the daughters and sons in that Son—in his mission through the cross is the selfsame Spirit that raises the dead to new and transformed life and promises the eschatological transformation of all creation. The redemption God achieves through the Son and in the Spirit is not 'of' the creature or 'of' the world as created, but is rather 'for' the world that God is yet in the midst of creating. Thus it is precisely as a community called 'out of' the world that we are directed to and into God's world in hope and faith in the emergent Holy Spirit in whom God will yet 'make all things new'. For such a community remembers that the One who calls

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men and women to 'repent and believe the gospel of God' is the same One who breaks the loaves and the fishes to feed the multitude and who points to the 'least of these' in our midst. Therefore, a renewed Methodist theology of the third article would insist that no one can point the Christian community to the poor who does not at the same time point us to Christ, and no one can point us to Christ who does not at the same time point us to a world of suffering and death that Christ came to feed and clothe and heal and redeem. Moreover, no one in the Christian community can point us to God who does not point us to God's creation.

In a renewed Methodist theology of the third article we glimpse a way of laying claim to the Wesleyan theological tradition anew; a possibility that there might yet be a future for Methodism's past. In an age post-Christendom and struggling with the crisis of modernity, the church as a community of mission could very well find that such a theology of the 'Spirit who makes holy', in whom God creates and redeems, and in whom God's creatures can discover their full humanity in Christ, could serve to lead this broken and abandoned age in the words spoken by Jacob so long ago (Genesis 28: 16): 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' Such is the promise, I suggest, of learning to read the faith anew with John Wesley according to the grammar of the Spirit.

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JOHN WESLEY  
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