

THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY
HOLY LOVE AND THE SHAPE OF GRACE

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For Colin

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In light of these observations, the first two worlds, with emphasis on the first—that is, Wesley's own primary source writings—will make up much of the content of the chapters ahead. Cognizant of Wesley's own preferred theological vocabulary, we will point out important themes and motifs and demonstrate that, on this level, a remarkable continuity emerges over time. Beyond this, special care will be taken in terms of the third world, showing the relevance of Wesley's eighteenth-century theology to recent concerns, especially in the sections "Today and Tomorrow." In the end, what should emerge is a careful articulation of John Wesley's theology that is appreciative of the old and mindful of the new, faithful to the past and attentive to the present. Our sincere hope is that this work may become a suitable means whereby all those traditions that look to John Wesley as a theological mentor may appropriate in new and fresh ways the rich theological legacy that he has left to us all. Through this labor may the people called Methodist, young and old, rich and poor, near and far alike, once again become earnest, empowered, and emboldened in spreading nothing less than "scriptural holiness over the land."⁷³

CHAPTER ONE

THE GOD OF HOLY LOVE

*Thy darling attribute I praise
Which all alike may prove,
The glory of thy boundless grace,
Thy universal love.*

—Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley. The Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 3:560, "Universal Redemption."

In exploring the doctrine of God, we must first of all point out that Wesley often used the term "God" in an ambiguous way.¹ On the one hand, at times he refers in his writings to the entire Godhead, especially when he describes the nature and attributes of the divine being. On the other hand, he sometimes adverts to the language of God the Father, especially when he considers the work of the Most High. Accordingly, this distinction between Godhead and God the Father will inform the major sections of this chapter and will help bring increasing clarity to Wesley's *Christian* understanding of the deity.

The Personal and Essential Attributes of God

Wesley's doctrine of God evidences a distinction between the person and work of the Most High, in which the personal and essential attributes of the divine, such as love, holiness, eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, are explored separately from those that emerge from a consideration of the roles in creation and governance, such as goodness, wisdom, and justice. But before these traits are considered, it is important to point out that for Wesley—and here he follows the

Anglican *Articles of Religion*—God is spirit without body or parts.² Elsewhere, in his observations on John 2:24, Wesley once again underscores that “God is a Spirit—Not only remote from the body, and all the properties of it, but likewise full of all spiritual perfections.”³ In this context, then, not only is the divine simplicity affirmed (without body or parts) but also transcendence, that is, the lack of spatial limitation with respect to God understood precisely as spirit.

Holy Love

When Mildred Bangs Wynkoop published her major work on theology, entitled *A Theology of Love*, she rightly understood that the love of God must be at the heart of this enterprise—if it is to be Wesleyan.⁴ Indeed, not only did John Wesley in his own setting point out that “love existed from eternity, in God, the great ocean of love,”⁵ but he also referred to love as God’s “darling, his reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections.”⁶ And late in his career Wesley counseled his friend Elizabeth Ritchie in a way that underscored divine love as both the highest human aspiration and glory: “But, blessed be God . . . we know there is nothing deeper, there is nothing better in heaven or earth, than love! There cannot be, unless there were something higher than the God of love!”⁷

Beyond this, Wesley reminded his enlightened detractors throughout the British Isles in his *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, produced in 1743, that the Methodist religion was after all about love, “the very thing you want.”⁸ The problem, however, then as now, was that so many people misunderstood what is meant by the love of God since they often supplied the content of this “darling attribute” with their own ideas, desires, and likings. And once this course is taken, one may be left with a very sentimental and unrealistic view of the divine being in which God emerges as a kindly old grandparent who indulges and tolerates the self-will of the grandchildren to make them “happy.” To prevent such a misconception in his own day, Wesley took great pains to link the love of God with another reigning attribute, namely, holiness. “[God] is infinitely distant from every touch of evil,” Wesley cautions; “He ‘is light, and in him is no darkness at all.’”⁹ Even more pointedly, Wesley appeals to the created order and its majesty—the contemplation of which should

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suggest something of the beauty, transcendence, and holiness of God. He writes:

The height of the heavens should mind us of God's supremacy, and the infinite distance that is between us and him; the brightness of the heavens, and their purity, should mind us of his majesty, and perfect holiness; the vastness of the heavens, and their encompassing the earth, and influence upon it, should mind us of his immensity and universal providence.¹⁰

For Wesley, then, God is not love in a indulgent way, nor is God holy in an abstract sense; rather, holiness is that divine attribute that informs every one of the divine perfections, but especially love. Put another way, because of its pervasiveness and extent, holiness belongs to "the essential nature of God in a deeper and more profound sense than merely as one attribute among others,"¹¹ as H. Orton Wiley, reflecting on Wesley's work, noted in his own age. As such, holiness is the "moral quality of all God's attributes."¹² It is that distinguishing characteristic peculiar to the Most High alone, and it "sets the Being of God apart from all other forms of being."¹³

What is distinctive about Wesley's contribution here is that he sees the love and holiness of God in relation to—and at times even "in tension with"—each other. That is, on the one hand, Wesley considers "the infinite distance between us and him" in terms of the divine holiness—a holiness that separates and distinguishes. On the other hand, he underscores the communicability and the other-directedness of love, its outreach embracing. As noted in the Introduction, holiness creates distance; love seeks communion. These same two predicates of the divine being, that is, holiness and love, describe—indeed epitomize—what is the will of the Most High for the church, for those who are not only "called out" and "set apart" from the world in holiness, but also invited to enter that same world in love and mission.

Moreover, if the holiness of God were stressed to the neglect of the divine love, then the Eternal One would remain forever apart from all creatures, and fellowship, much less communion, would hardly be in the offing. For Wesley, then, holiness must ever be understood in terms of the divine love, a love that is energized in a freely chosen outward movement, and that stoops down, as it were, and draws the relation, makes contact, and establishes fellowship. This distinct holiness of God, informed by love, is not to be confused with the variety of human loves and desires, is communicated, according to Wesley, by no one less than the Holy Spirit.

This means, of course, that not only is holiness a unique mark of God, indicative of the divine glory and being, but also it is, once again, not a human attribute or possibility at all—*unless it is communicated by grace*. Wesley brings these two movements of holiness and love together throughout his writings, such that one of his preferred ways of attesting to divine grace—the fingerprint of God on the world—is to discourse on the inculcation of *holy love* among the saints. To illustrate, Wesley weaves these two elements together as he comments on Exodus 26:1:

Thus the churches of Christ, though they are many, yet are one, being *fitly joined together* in holy love and by the *unity of the Spirit*, so growing into one *holy temple in the Lord*. This tabernacle was very strait and narrow, but at the preaching of the gospel, the church is bid to *enlarge the place of her tent*, and to *stretch forth her curtains*.¹⁴

Elsewhere, as Wesley explores the consequence of knowing a God of holy love, he observes in what manner the offering of a heart should be made to the Almighty: "Other sacrifices from us he would not, but the living sacrifice of the heart hath he chosen. Let it be continually offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy love."¹⁵ Again, since the mark of "holy love" is so expressive of the divine character, Wesley quite naturally highlights this as he reckons with what is necessary to enter into the richest communion with the Holy One: "God would first, by this inspiration of his Spirit, have wrought in our hearts that *holy love* without which none can enter into glory."¹⁶ In Wesley's doctrine of God, then, in its most basic sense, it is neither love without holiness, nor holiness without love, but both resplendently together.

Eternity

That God is eternal—the One who was, is, and is to come—is a mark that, for Wesley, is intimately associated with the divine name of Jehovah, "I am that I am," the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end.¹⁷ That is, God is the One whose very essence is to exist and is, therefore, not dependent on any other being or substance for this qualitatively distinct kind of being. Wesley considers this unique existence of God, a truth by the way he never attempts to prove,¹⁸ by making a distinction between two different kinds of eternities: *a parte ante* (eternity

that is past) and a *parte post* (eternity that is to come).¹⁹ "It is God alone," Wesley notes, "who ' . . . inhabiteth eternity' in both these senses. The great Creator alone (not any of his creatures) is 'from everlasting to everlasting.'" ²⁰ Holy love had no beginning; it will have no end.

That only God embraces both senses of eternity just described is a basic truth that does not exclude the notion that angels and human beings may also be eternal, properly understood. To illustrate, Wesley appeals to and uses the distinction between "duration without beginning" and "duration without end" and maintains that while the former does indeed pertain to God alone, the latter characterizes creatures as well. He reasons:

This [duration without end] is not an incommunicable attribute of the great Creator; but he has been graciously pleased to make innumerable multitudes of his creatures partakers of it. He has imparted this not only to angels, and archangels, and all the companies of heaven, . . . but also to the inhabitants of the earth who dwell in houses of clay.²¹

In light of Wesley's reflections, it appears that eternity conceived as "duration without beginning" is especially descriptive of God, a divine-making attribute if you will, since it is a characteristic shared by no other being. In fact, Wesley uses this unique trait as a standard or norm to judge other philosophical questions such as, *Is matter eternal?* "Not indeed a *parte ante*," he reasons, "as some senseless philosophers, both ancient and modern, have dreamed. Not that anything had existed from eternity; seeing if so it must be God."²² In other words, for Wesley, the past eternity of any being or thing, other than the Holy One of Israel, would necessarily result in a plurality of gods and therefore in the elimination of monotheism. Simply put, there cannot be "two Gods, or two Eternals."²³

Omnipresence

As Wesley reflected on the omnipresence of God, another key attribute, he reasoned that just as God is not limited by time, so, too, is the Holy One not limited by space. "As he exists through infinite duration," Wesley notes, "so he cannot but exist through infinite space."²⁴ Unpacking the salient text of Jeremiah 23:24 ("Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD" [KJV]), Wesley again affirms "there is no point of

space, whether within or without the bounds of creation, where God is not."²⁵ That is, since "God acts everywhere,"²⁶ God is everywhere; the one implies the other.

Though Wesley clearly taught that God is *immanent* in the creation and therefore everywhere, he nevertheless avoided the teaching of pantheism by contending that the Holy One yet *transcends* the universe in some important ways. Accordingly, though Wesley was willing to agree with Isaac Newton (1642–1727) that infinite space is the "sensorium of the Deity,"²⁷ he nevertheless balked at the notion that space circumscribes the being of God or that the universe is the "body" of the Most High. In this context, Wesley aptly holds together both the immanence and the transcendence of God, never one affirmation without the other. That is, to stress immanence to the neglect of transcendence would result in pantheism; to stress transcendence to the neglect of immanence would result in separation in which God would be and would remain unknown.

As in many of his theological deliberations, whether in sermons, treatises, or letters, Wesley was not content to leave such an important matter as the omnipresence of God on a speculative, abstract, or merely notional level. Instead, he ever sought to win an insight and to develop practical spiritual and moral applications that would assist others in their walk with a God of holy love. Thus, for example, in his sermon "On the Omnipresence of God," Wesley observes:

Yea, suppose one of your mortal fellow-servants, suppose only a holy man stood by you, would not you be extremely cautious how you conducted yourself, both in word and action? How much more cautious ought you to be when you know that not a holy man, not an angel of God, but God himself, the Holy One "that inhabiteth eternity," is inspecting your heart, your tongue, your hand every moment! And that he himself will surely bring you into judgment for all you think, and speak, and act under the sun!²⁸

And in an even more personal and familiar way, Wesley queries: "If you believe that God is about your bed and about your path, and spieth out all your ways, then take care not to do the least thing, not to speak the least word, not to indulge the least thought, which you have reason to think would offend him."²⁹

Omniscience

For Wesley, many of the essential attributes of God imply one another. To illustrate, he considered the next chief characteristic, namely, the omniscience (literally all-knowing) of God as a "clear and necessary consequence of his omnipresence."³⁰ Put another way, "If he [God] is present in every part of the universe," Wesley reasons, "he cannot but know whatever is, or is done there."³¹ Moreover, in a sermon composed late in his career, "On Divine Providence," Wesley again draws the same relation between omnipresence and omniscience: "The omnipresent God sees and knows all the properties of all the beings that he hath made. He knows all the connections, dependencies, and relations, and all the ways wherein one of them can affect another."³² In short, the infinity (and transcendence) of God in terms of space issues in and supports the idea of divine omniscience. Because God is everywhere, this Eternal One knows all that occurs anywhere.

Wesley's doctrine of the omniscience of God, however, is not only sustained by a consideration of space (omnipresence) but also supported by a consideration of time (eternity). Since "all time, or rather all eternity (for time is only that small fragment of eternity . . .) [is] present to him at once,"³³ then the Lord God knows all things, nothing is beyond such a grasp. On a more philosophical level, and in a way similar to Augustine, Wesley maintains that all time, whether past or future, is present to God as "one eternal now."³⁴ And quite naturally, the same implications apply: the God who perceives all in a moment, in an eternal now, also knows all.

Being the good pastoral leader that he was, Wesley pondered the moral and spiritual consequences of divine omniscience for human life, even referring to what discomfort such knowledge can bring, just as he had done in terms of the attribute of omnipresence, especially when he wrote: "How are ye affected to the omniscience and omnipresence of God? Men naturally would rather have a blind idol, than an all-seeing God; and therefore do what they can, as Adam did, to 'hide themselves from the presence of the Lord.'"³⁵ These last two attributes, then, highlight not only the truth of divine knowledge but also the importance of human responsibility in the face of God who is holy and glorious.

Omnipotence

And finally, Wesley explores the omnipotence (all powerfulness) of God, the last essential attribute, in terms of the divine omnipresence itself and contends that "to deny the omnipresence of God implies likewise the denial of his omnipotence. To set bounds to the one is undoubtedly to set bounds to the other also."³⁶ Elsewhere in his writings, Wesley declares that God is "omnipotent as well as omnipresent: there can be no more bounds to his power than to his presence. He 'hath a mighty arm; strong is his hand, and high is his right hand.'"³⁷ But just what does this mean to state that there are no bounds to the power of the Eternal One? How is such a truth to be interpreted properly with respect to both the natural and the spiritual realms?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary at the outset to call to mind the way the eighteenth century viewed the relation between body (matter), on the one hand, and mind (spirit), on the other. Earlier, in the seventeenth century, Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) had used the notion of matter in motion as his basic paradigm to explain all reality. René Descartes (1596–1650), aware of this shift in worldview, sought to appreciate Galileo's latest findings, while at the same time he attempted to preserve the many insights of religion. In other words, Descartes' distinction of body/mind can be interpreted, at least on one level, as an apologetical attempt to maintain the *values* of religion in a world of burgeoning *facts*. If minds and bodies are different things (*res cogitans*, *res extensa*), the Frenchman reasoned, then the findings of one cannot contradict those of the other.

One of the results of this Cartesian division is that matter is deemed utterly inert, lacking self-power. Again, according to Descartes, God created the material world, put a quantity of motion in it, but then quietly withdrew. Although Wesley rejected this last idea of divine withdrawal—which, by the way, basically results in Deism—he, for the most part, followed the French philosopher's earlier premises as they were mediated to him by his own eighteenth century. Reflecting this influence concerning God's omnipotence, Wesley writes:

The name of God is God himself . . . it means, therefore, together with his existence, all his attributes or perfections—his eternity . . . his omnipotence; . . . who is indeed the only agent in the material world, all matter being essentially dull and inactive, and moving only as it is moved by

the finger of God. And he is the spring of action in every creature, visible and invisible, which could neither act nor exist without the continued influx and agency of his almighty power.³⁸

Wesley's last line just cited—"the continued influx and agency of his almighty power"—is revealing and distinguishes his position with respect to the natural order from that of Descartes in one very important respect. For Wesley at least, the omnipotence of the Creator is conceived in such a manner that the creation is dependent on God's power not only at the very beginning, but also continually so. God is transcendent, to be sure, but the Almighty is also deeply involved with the world. Here, therefore, a wind-it-up-and-watch-it-run Deism is rejected in favor of the continuous and potent activity of God. Moreover, without this sustaining motion of the Supreme Being, the world itself, and all therein, would collapse into sheer nothing. Descartes had placed God in the heavens; Wesley brought the Holy One back to earth.

That Wesley did not retreat from the implications of the omnipotence of God in nature is revealed in a letter drafted to William Law in 1756. In his observations, Wesley is especially critical of certain aspects of *The Spirit of Prayer*, a work that Law had produced earlier. Wesley questions his erstwhile mentor in the following fashion:

Is it not possible for him [God] to change an ox or a stone into a rational philosopher, or a child of Abraham? to change a man or a worm into an angel of heaven? Poor omnipotence which cannot do this! Whether he will or no, is another question. But if he cannot do it, how can he be said to do "whatsoever pleaseth him in heaven, and in earth, and in the sea, and in all deep places?"

Thus does your attachment to a miserable philosophy, lead you to deny the almighty power of God.³⁹

Subsequently, in 1774, Wesley entered into debate with a certain Dr. Hartley who, caught up in the latest scientific developments of the day, claimed that all human sensations were caused, in a deterministic way, by vibrations of the brain. Wesley quite naturally chafed under such determinism, rejected this reductionistic view, and appealed, interestingly enough, to divine omnipotence itself to ensure human freedom. In his "Thoughts Upon Necessity," for example, he declares:

Now, if there be a God, he cannot but have all power over every creature that he has made. He must have equal power over matter and spirits, over

our souls and bodies. What are then all the vibrations of the brain to him? or all the natural consequences of them? Suppose there be naturally the strongest concatenation of vibrations, sensations, reflections, judgments, passions, actions; cannot He, in a moment, whenever and however He pleases, destroy that concatenation? Cannot he cut off, or suspend, in any degree, the connexion between vibrations and sensations, between sensations and reflections, between reflections and judgments, and between judgments and passions or actions? We cannot have any idea of God's omnipotence, without seeing He can do this if he will.⁴⁰

This same "generous" understanding of divine omnipotence is also evident in Wesley's observations on the spiritual realm, especially when he considers the miracle, the supernatural grace, of saving faith, conversion, and the new creation. In a letter to John Smith, for example, he points out:

That "the conversion of sinners to this holiness is no miracle at all," is new doctrine indeed! So new to me, that I never heard it before, either among Protestants or Papists. I think a miracle is a work of omnipotence, wrought by the supernatural power of God. Now, if the conversion of sinners to holiness is not such a work, I cannot tell what it is.⁴¹

And elsewhere, in his *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Wesley again highlights divine free grace and omnipotence in terms of redemption and in a way that may come as a surprise to some Methodists:

If you ask, "Why then have not all men this faith, all, at least, who conceive it to be so happy a thing? Why do they not believe immediately?"—we answer (on the Scripture hypothesis), "It is the gift of God." No man is able to work it in himself. It is a work of *omnipotence*. It requires no less power thus to quicken a dead soul than to raise a body that lies in the grave. It is a new creation; and none can create a soul anew, but he who at first created the heavens and the earth.⁴²

Though Wesley did indeed have a rich understanding of divine omnipotence, he nevertheless revealed in his writings that God exercises such power in a way that allows for freedom and agency that together categorize all human beings as those who have been created for nothing less than holy love. Put another way, Wesley rejected the notion of omnipotence in the sense that "God exercises all power and thus . . . creatures exercise none,"⁴³ a point that will be developed in greater detail below in terms of God's role as the Governor of all creation.

The Essential Attributes and Predestination

The essential attributes of God, especially omniscience, also help inform Wesley's understanding of predestination and election as distinct actions of the divine being. Expounding upon Romans 8:29-30 ("Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate . . ." [KJV]⁴⁴), Wesley first of all pointed out that this series of actions must not be described as a chain of causes and effects, but simply as "the order in which the several branches of salvation constantly follow each other."⁴⁵ Put another way, this is "the method in which God works."⁴⁶

In this order of salvation detailed by the apostle Paul, Wesley gives great weight to the omniscience of God in that "God *foreknew* those in every nation who would believe."⁴⁷ Such foreknowledge, which constitutes the first step, is not determinative or coercive but investigative: "we must not think they *are* because he *knows* them. No; he knows them because they *are*."⁴⁸ Actually, Wesley recognized that such a manner of speaking is largely anthropomorphic: "For if we speak properly there is no such thing as either *foreknowledge* or *after-knowledge* in God. All time, or rather all eternity . . . being present to him at once."⁴⁹ In other words, all events are open to the immediacy of divine omniscience.

One of the more important corollaries of the biblical truth that the foreknowledge of God is not determinative is the grace-infused freedom of humanity. Such a freedom not only underscores the integrity of what it means to be a *person* in the sight of a holy God, but also must be carefully understood, lest there be misunderstanding. In Wesley's estimation such freedom, restored by grace after the debilitating effects of original sin, renders men and women both "address-able" and "account-able" with the consequence that they are capable of both reward and punishment. Again, apart from this measure of freedom restored by grace, humanity would be like the sun or the moon, incapable of either virtue or vice.⁵⁰ Moreover, as the next chapter will demonstrate, since this restoring grace goes before salvation, properly speaking, then it is "prevenient" in the best sense of the term. Such grace, however, does not issue in libertarian freedom (the freedom to do otherwise), for all *subsequent* choices as has sometimes been claimed in the name of Wesley, but only for present realities suggesting ongoing dependence. That is, prevenient grace in this initial context puts in place a more limited freedom of response-ability, that is, a freedom to receive the further grace of God (deeper levels of prevenient grace) by which one can then indeed do

otherwise. In other words, the emphasis here as elsewhere is not on humanity and its "capacities" (which can quickly lead to moralism), but on the efficacious grace of God; not on human powers, but on the divine benefit that can be received by persons as they become increasingly open to grace upon grace.

The second step in this Pauline order is that those whom God foreknew, the Holy One did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Wesley interprets this biblical truth not in a deterministic way, running roughshod over human freedom restored in some measure by grace, but in a way that is consonant with the understanding that "God decrees from everlasting to everlasting that all who believe in the Son of his love shall be conformed to his image."⁵¹ Put another way, the omniscience and foreknowledge of God, once again, inform predestination, giving it a proper sense. Therefore, the "unchangeable, irreversible, irresistible decree of God"⁵² is not that the Most High will give saving grace only to the elect and withhold it from the reprobate, but none other than "he that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned."⁵³ Election, then, is not unconditional but conditional; it requires having faith in Jesus Christ.

Calling those whom God did predestinate as well as justifying those who have been so called are the third and fourth steps. But Wesley makes it clear in this context that the term "justification" is used more broadly than elsewhere in the apostle Paul's writings, and as a consequence it embraces not simply the forensic theme of forgiveness but also the *different* work of regeneration, of making holy, which is ever associated with it. In other words, the term "justification" is employed in a peculiar sense in this setting, whereby it means "he made them just or righteous . . . or (as we usually speak) 'sanctified them.'"⁵⁴ However, Wesley does not contend that the apostle conflated the matters of justification and initial sanctification, such that the latter became or could become the basis of the former. On the contrary, the single term "justification," in this somewhat abbreviated order of salvation, is simply a shorthand form, a summary and general term, for the two *distinct* works of justification and regeneration, a usage that is not often duplicated elsewhere. At any rate, the last step in this order is "whom he justified, those he glorified."⁵⁵ In other words, "having made them 'meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints,'"⁵⁶ God gives them "the kingdom which was prepared for them before the world began."⁵⁷

Naturally, some Calvinists even in Wesley's own day tried to soften their teaching on predestination by claiming that God only chose the elect and did not actively reprobate the damned. Wesley, however, always considered this line of argument evasive and replied that "election cannot stand without reprobation."⁵⁸ That is, "whom God passes by, those he reprobates. It is one and the same thing."⁵⁹ Several Calvinists responded to this criticism, taking the argument further, by observing that the Almighty, in their estimation, rightly passes over some sinners (the reprobate) and allows them, therefore, to become examples of divine justice. Wesley, nevertheless, rejected this defense as well by pointing out that he could find "no such teaching in the word of God."⁶⁰

The key difference, then, between Wesley, the Arminian, and a Calvinist such as Augustus Toplady, author of the hymn "Rock of Ages," was that the former repeatedly maintained that election was not unconditional but conditional as noted earlier. That is, those and only those who believe in Jesus Christ will be saved. Toplady, for his part, could see little difference between a conditional election, in which some measure of human involvement was required, however small, and salvation by works. In time Wesley became so frustrated with Toplady's views, especially when the latter accused him of teaching salvation by works, that he crudely summarized the Calvinist leader's teaching in the following maxim: "The sum of all is this: One in twenty, suppose, of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will. The reprobate shall be damned, do what they can."⁶¹ Why is it then, according to Wesley, that some are lost? It is because of neither divine foreknowledge nor any unconditional decree of God nor even the failure of a divine inscrutable will to give sinners what graces they need. Rather, some sinners will be lost simply because, as Wesley puts it, "they will not be saved."⁶² In other words, they stubbornly refuse what grace is offered. They will not come to the Savior so that they may have life.⁶³

Wesley's ongoing debate with the Calvinists that went through an early phase with the publication of the sermon "Free Grace" in 1739 and a very contentious later phase during the 1770s was viewed by Wesley himself as unfortunate though necessary. What was at stake in Wesley's reckoning of the matter, accurate or not, was nothing less than the integrity of the gospel, the reality of holy love, and the character of God. Indeed, Wesley believed that the doctrine of predestination, as held by some of his contemporaries, "directly tends to destroy that holiness which is the end of all the ordinances of God."⁶⁴ Again, this teaching not only

"tends to destroy our zeal for good works"⁶⁵ but also "cuts off one of the strongest motives to all acts of bodily mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and the like."⁶⁶

In a similar fashion, the doctrine of predestination, if not properly understood, can easily undermine the love of God and humanity. For one thing, it strikes at the love of God in the sense that it makes the glorious One the agent of *all* that happens, both good and evil. Implicating God in sin, the Westminster Assembly of Divines, as Wesley understood them, contended that "whatever happens in time, was unchangeably determined from all eternity."⁶⁷ And Susanna Wesley herself cautioned her son early on against such a deterministic philosophy that was superimposed upon the sacred Scriptures:

The doctrine of predestination, as maintained by the rigid Calvinists, is very shocking, and ought utterly to be abhorred; because it directly charges the most holy God with being the author of sin. And I think you reason very well and justly against it. For 'tis certainly inconsistent with the justice and goodness of God to lay any man under either a physical or moral necessity of committing sin, and then punish him for doing it.⁶⁸

Wesley evidently agreed with Susanna's trenchant remarks, for in his sermon "Free Grace," he refers to the doctrine of predestination, as held by some of the Calvinists, as blasphemy in that "it represents the most Holy God as worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust."⁶⁹ Again, how is God good or loving to the reprobate, especially when the Holy One refuses to give her or him precisely those graces she or he needs in order to be saved?⁷⁰ "Is not this such love," Wesley asks, "as makes your blood run cold?"⁷¹ And in terms of Christ, Wesley observes:

This doctrine represents our blessed Lord—"Jesus Christ the righteous"—... as an hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity. For it cannot be denied that he everywhere speaks as if he was willing that all men should be saved. Therefore, to say he was not willing that all men should be saved is to represent him as a mere hypocrite and dissembler.⁷²

A more careful and sensitive examination of Scripture reveals that out of tender mercy and with the graciousness of love that expresses the divine nature, God desires that all will come to the knowledge of the

truth and be saved. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). As a God of holy love, God can neither will otherwise nor go against the divine character, though that goodwill can unfortunately be spurned by human beings who have freedom enough to resist what grace is genuinely offered.

The Work of God/Father

For Wesley, the work of God, in terms of creation, preservation, and governance, is intimately connected with the divine attributes just discussed. Indeed, it was out of love, overflowing and rich, that the world was created. And it was out of this same effulgent love that humanity was brought forth to be in relationship with the One whose eyes are too pure to behold evil. Considering the origins of faith and love, Wesley elaborates:

There was therefore no place before the foundation of the world for faith either in the general or particular sense. But there was for love. Love existed from eternity, in God, the great ocean of love. Love had a place in all the children of God, from the moment of their creation. They received at once from their gracious Creator to exist, and to love.⁷³

Beyond this, not only did Wesley consider love to be the source and very reason for creation, but also he demonstrated that love was not subsequent to the creation of humanity, needing time to come into being as a process or development, but it was there at the outset. Wesley states:

And as light and heat were not subsequent to the creation of the sun, but began to exist with it, so that the moment it existed it shone; so spiritual light and heat, knowledge and love, were not subsequent to the creation of man, but they began to exist together with him. The moment he existed, he knew and loved.⁷⁴

In light of this, the following sections, which display the work of God as Creator and Governor, will intimate how such work must also be understood in terms of the divine being and character.

Creator

In terms of creation, sometimes Wesley simply referred to the work of the Godhead; nevertheless, at other times he underscored the role of the Father in particular. Thus in his *Notes on Matthew 6:9* (the opening lines of the Lord's Prayer), Wesley points to the Father as the One who is "good and gracious to all, our Creator, our Preserver, the Father of our Lord, and of us in him . . . the Father of the universe, of angels and men."⁷⁵ The unbegotten One, however, creates not as a monad, apart from relationship, but *through* the Son by proclaiming the Word. So understood, the Logos, according to Wesley, is "the Word whom the Father begat or spoke from eternity; by whom the Father speaking, maketh all things."⁷⁶ So then the power of the spoken Word is manifest in the created order itself; creation is nothing less than an oral act, and it brings all things into existence. Again, the evocative power of the Word brings forth life and being in abundance. It is this same power, interestingly enough, clothed in the promises of the gospel, that will also lead to redemption.

In a way similar to many of his eighteenth-century colleagues, Wesley affirmed that God created *ex nihilo*, that is, out of nothing. The Lord God "called out of nothing by his all-powerful word the whole universe, all that is."⁷⁷ Wesley understood that the idea of eternity was an essential characteristic of the divine, such that to deny that God created out of nothing was likewise to affirm not only that something *other* than God always was but also that it was independent, not contingent, upon anything for its existence. In Wesley's reckoning, such notions are clearly impossible simply because, as noted earlier, there cannot be "two eternals." For the English leader, the characteristic of eternity (especially in the sense of a *parte ante*) is a divine-making one. Nothing other than the Lord God, therefore, can have such a mark or trait. And that God creates at all, bringing out of nothing what once was not, is a clear demonstration of the divine goodness and wisdom. Simply put, work bespeaks of being.

Wesley not only affirmed God as Creator but also took personal comfort in believing that what exists did not come about simply by chance or by an "inextorable necessity,"⁷⁸ but that the Almighty is purposive, the "intelligent Cause and Lord of all."⁷⁹ Put another way, the Most High is "the producer of every man, every animal, every vegetable in the world; as he is the true *primum mobile*, the spring of all motion throughout the

universe."⁸⁰ And this orderly, purposive creation is of two sorts: the invisible and the visible. Wesley explains:

By sight we take knowledge of the visible world, from the surface of the earth to the region of the fixed stars. But what is the world visible to us but "a speck of creation," compared to the whole universe? To the invisible world, that part of the creation which we cannot see at all by reason of its distance, in the place of which, through the imperfection of our senses, we are presented with an universal blank.⁸¹

In this context, Wesley apparently has in mind the physical universe that, due to its size and distance, is incapable of being perceived in its entirety by human senses. But he also employed the term "invisible creation" in yet another way—to highlight the truth that not all created beings have a physical body. Here, Wesley, of course, was thinking of the angels, that class of beings who are intelligent spirits and who serve both the Creator and humanity alike. "They are all spirits: not material . . . beings; not clogged with flesh and blood like us," Wesley remarks, "but having bodies, if any, not gross and earthly like ours, but of a finer substance, resembling fire or flame."⁸² And the service to humanity of such angelic beings includes, among other things, removing doubts and difficulties, casting light on what was earlier dark and obscure, confirming the truth that is after godliness, warning of evil in disguise, and placing what is both noble and good in a clear, strong light.⁸³ "Thus do they secretly minister in numberless instances to the heirs of salvation," Wesley observes; "while we hear only the voices of men, and see none but men round about us."⁸⁴

The creation of angels who are endued with understanding, affections, and liberty⁸⁵ once again displays the goodness of the Creator, while at the same time it suggests a certain order, what Wesley referred to on occasion as a chain of being. There is "one chain of beings," he asserts, "from the lowest to the highest point, from an unorganized particle of earth or water to Michael the archangel."⁸⁶ Again, borrowing terminology from Plato and the later Cambridge Platonists, Wesley contended there was "a golden chain . . . 'let down from the throne of God'—an exactly connected series of beings, from the highest to the lowest."⁸⁷ Such a progression fulfills the many and different designs of the Creator. "The work of creation not only proceeded gradually from one thing to another," Wesley affirms, "but advanced from that which was less excellent, to that which was more so."⁸⁸ Reflecting on the manner of this progressive order, this

slow advance of increasing complexity and excellence, especially as it offers a clue to the divine being, Wesley observes in his notes on Genesis:

So that in six *days* God made the world. We are not to think but that God could have made the world in an instant: but he did it in six days, that he might shew himself a free agent, doing his own work, both in his own way, and in his own time; that his wisdom, power and goodness, might appear to us, and be meditated upon by us, the more distinctly.⁸⁹

This gradual, slow ascent of creation is not to be understood in a rigid, hierarchical way, especially if it is to the detriment of the animal realm. Indeed, Wesley's high estimate of animals, as creatures who have come from the hand of the living God, is evident in his comment that "the Father of all has a tender regard for even his lowest creatures."⁹⁰ Nevertheless, such regard does not mean a basic equality, in every respect, exists among the species. Wesley explains:

[Y]et I dare not affirm that he [God] has an *equal regard* for them and for the children of men. I do not believe that

He sees with *equal eyes*, as Lord of all,
A hero perish or a sparrow fall!

By no means. This is exceeding pretty; but it is absolutely false. For though

Mercy, with truth and endless grace,
O'er all his works doth reign,
Yet chiefly he delights to bless
His favourite creature, man.⁹¹

Concerning the time of creation, there are several places in Wesley's writings in which he reckons that the world is merely six thousand years old. Thus, for example, in his sermon "On the Fall of Man," as he considers the consequences of the fall for the entirety of human history, Wesley states: "Who has been able in the course of near six thousand years to evade the execution of this sentence passed on Adam and all his posterity?"⁹² Elsewhere, in another piece, Wesley takes into account the amount of experience that evil angels have acquired since the beginning of time and opines: "How great is their subtlety! Matured by the experience of above six thousand years."⁹³ In many respects a man of his age, Wesley was likely dependent on the reckoning of James Usher

(1581–1656), the Archbishop of Armagh, who in his *Annals of the Old and New Testament* fixed creation as having occurred in 4004 B.C. Wesley, no doubt, would have altered his views in light of subsequent evidence. Part of the problem here is that Wesley, in his eighteenth-century setting, failed to understand just how large the universe actually was, where distance readily translates into time. But even Sir William Herschel (1738–1822), noted German astronomer who moved to England as a young man, in his work *On the Construction of the Heavens*, underestimated the size of the Milky Way galaxy (which many believed to be the entire universe) by three orders of magnitude.

Moreover, just as the Lord God has created all things, so, too, does the Holy One sustain them as well. "He is the preserver as well as the creator of everything that exists," Wesley notes, "He upholdeth all things by the word of his power, that is, by his powerful word."⁹⁴ So understood, preserving and sustaining what has been made is an ongoing activity of nurture marked by both *goodness* and *wisdom*. Wesley elaborates: "Our Father—our Preserver . . . day by day sustains the life he has given; of whose continuing love we now and every moment receive life and breath and all things."⁹⁵ God is good in that all creatures are preserved "in that degree of well-being which is suitable to their several natures."⁹⁶ God is wise in that all creatures are cared for in terms of "their several relations, connections, and dependences, so as to compose one system of beings, to form one entire universe."⁹⁷

Sovereign

Wesley taught that God's role as Creator must be distinguished from the role as Governor because the attributes that correspond to each work must not be intermixed or confused. As Creator, the Almighty is sovereign and free. As Governor, the Most High must act without "impeaching . . . inviolable justice."⁹⁸ Again, as Creator, God brought forth all things according to the divine, sovereign will. No one or thing constrained such choices and judgments. Clearly, "justice has not, cannot have, any place here," Wesley maintains; "for nothing is due to what has no being."⁹⁹ In this context, then, sovereignty is understood principally as the freedom of God in terms of creation and nature. However, sovereignty can also be conceived in a second, soteriological sense as divine liberty in terms of redemption, a vital topic that will be explored

in greater detail in a subsequent chapter. For now, however, what is in view is simply divine sovereignty with respect to creation; and Wesley outlined such liberty in his "Thoughts Upon God's Sovereignty" in the following way: God began creation at what time seemed good; determined the duration of the universe; appointed the place of the universe in the immensity of space; fixed the number of stars as well as the components of the cosmos; created the earth with its creatures; made human beings as embodied spirits with understanding liberty, and will; set the times for every nation to come into being; allotted the time, the place and the circumstances for the birth of each individual; gave to each a body, whether weak or strong; and finally provided humanity various degrees of understanding and knowledge.¹⁰⁰

The liberty accorded to human beings, who have been created for relationship with a holy God, means that Wesley could not affirm, nor take divine sovereignty to such an extent, that he would maintain, as did the Westminster Confession, "God from eternity ordained whatsoever should come to pass."¹⁰¹ As noted earlier, the freedom and sovereignty with respect to creation must not, once again, be confused with what pertains to redemption. A distinction, in other words, must be made, to use more technical language, between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*, the absolute freedom and power of God in terms of creation, and the ordered and, in some sense, restricted freedom and power that makes room for the human beings (reflective of the divine image) that God has actually created.

Governor

In several places in his writings, Wesley refers to the work of God/Father as that of both Creator and Governor. The first role, as we have just seen, underscores the divine freedom and sovereignty to create all things in accordance with God's good pleasure. The second role as Governor, however, highlights neither freedom nor sovereignty, but justice and mercy. "Whenever, therefore, God acts as a Governor, as a rewarder, or punisher," Wesley states, "he no longer acts as a mere Sovereign, by his own sole will and pleasure; but as an impartial Judge, guided in all things by inviolable justice."¹⁰² As Governor, God will invariably act in accordance with the holiness that expresses the divine nature itself. And it was in that same holiness that humanity

was created as free, responsible moral beings. To bring the divine freedom into the role of Governor as it informs that of Creator would issue in injustice, inconsistency, as well as in the failure to render to each his or her due in accordance with God's being, character, and purpose. In short, holy love would not be fully appreciated, nor would evil be rightly recognized.

The Moral Law

One way, however, in which Wesley did relate the roles of Creator and Governor was in terms of the moral law, that "incorruptible picture of the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity."¹⁰³ As Creator, not only did God bring forth a physical world, but also, in fashioning humanity, the Almighty brought into being a moral and spiritual order in accordance with the moral law, which "is a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature."¹⁰⁴ In other words, God freely chose to create a world that would evidence the personal attributes of the divine being in terms of holiness and love. The moral law, which is holy, just, and good, is therefore imbedded in the very nature of the created moral and spiritual order. Wesley explains: "If we survey the law of God in another point of view, it is supreme, unchangeable reason; it is unalterable rectitude; it is the everlasting fitness of all things that are or ever were created."¹⁰⁵ Again, Wesley points out that the moral law, the immutable rule of right and wrong, is an expression of "the nature and fitnesses of things, and on their essential relations to each other,"¹⁰⁶ so evident in a created order. Moreover, this moral realm or dimension is capable of being discerned by those beings created in the image and likeness of God.

The ancient Greeks (see Plato's Dialogue *Euthyphro*) had pondered the same question that Wesley took up in his own day, namely: "Is a thing therefore right because God wills it? Or does he will it because it is right?"¹⁰⁷ In a certain sense, Wesley thought this statement to be misleading since the two questions that comprise it appear to suggest a polarity, a distinction between God and the will of God. "It seems, then, that the whole difficulty arises from considering God's will as distinct from God," Wesley exclaims; "Otherwise it vanishes away."¹⁰⁸ In other words, not only is God the cause of the moral law, but also this same law is an apt expression of the will of God, a will that must be identified with, and not separated from, the divine being. This means then that the moral law,

the holy law of love, as an expression of the will of God, is unshakable and enduring. Since this law is a copy of the eternal mind and has been mediated through the things that have been made, especially in terms of the fitness of relations established therein, then the contemplation of this law gives a clue to the constancy of the divine nature, in terms of personal and essential characteristics, as well as to the content of justice and mercy, elements that are always informed and illuminated by the will of God. With such views in place, Wesley was in harmony with many theologians of his day in his insistence on "the inextinguishability of the moral law and on the unchangeableness of God's nature."¹⁰⁹

Providential Provider

As the Governor of the world, the Lord God manages the affairs of creation. When this sustaining care is understood especially in terms of creatures, rather than in terms of inanimate objects (such as the sun or the moon), Wesley employed the word "providence" to explain the full range of his meaning. Accordingly, Wesley declared that such care is not the wishful thinking of Christians but is a teaching clearly affirmed in the Scriptures.¹¹⁰ Moreover, he drew on occasion a relationship between some of the attributes already discussed and God's care for the world. "The omnipresent God sees and knows all the properties of all the beings that he hath made," Wesley observes, "and all the ways wherein one of them can affect another."¹¹¹ Beyond this, God knows "how the stars, comets, or planets above influence the inhabitants of the earth beneath . . . He knows all the animals of the lower world, whether beasts, birds, fishes, reptiles, or insects. . . [and] He knows all the hearts of the sons of men, and understands all their thoughts."¹¹²

Even some of Wesley's theological detractors, however, were willing to admit that God is concerned in a general way with the creation and is therefore good, but they were loathe to admit the notion of a particular providence, that the Supreme Being, the Maker of all, would dare to be troubled as a Governor with the small, private, and commonplace troubles of individuals and societies. Indeed, several leading thinkers during the eighteenth century—John Hawkesworth among them—argued only for a general providence rather than a particular one. Supported by their reading of such Deist classics as John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) and Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730), many

cultural leaders put forth the view that God created the world to run according to basic laws and principles, the appeal to which often resulted in the rejection of any notion of a particular providence, that is, that God expresses providential care and concern toward *individuals* in the details of their lives.

Wesley reflected upon such a judgment during the latter part of his career when he had already witnessed numerous instances of a particular care in his own life during the great evangelical revival, having been attacked by mobs on more than one occasion. In his sermon "On Divine Providence," produced in 1786, Wesley points out, first of all, that the denial of a particular providence, the assumption that "the little affairs of men are far beneath the regard of the great Creator and Governor,"¹¹³ contradicts the Scriptures. Second, such a view apparently makes no allowance for exceptions to the general laws of nature in the form of miracles by repudiating divine freedom and agency.¹¹⁴ To be sure, in establishing such general laws, Wesley counters that God "never precluded himself from making exceptions to them whenever he pleases, either by suspending that law in favour of those that love him, or by employing his mighty angels."¹¹⁵ And third, Wesley maintains that the idea of a general providence exclusive of a particular one is a confused and an ultimately contradictory idea. He reasons:

You say, "You allow a general providence, but deny a *particular* one." And what is a general (of whatever kind it be) that includes no particulars? Is not every general necessarily made up of its several particulars? Can you instance in any general that is not? . . .

What becomes then of your general providence, exclusive of a particular? Let it be for ever rejected by all rational men as absurd, self-contradictory nonsense.¹¹⁶

Having read Thomas Crane's *A Prospect of Divine Providence*,¹¹⁷ Wesley viewed the particular providence of God in a threefold circle of increasing intensity and care. Thus, the outer circle includes all of humanity, which is composed of "not only the Christian world . . . but the Mahometans . . . and the heathens likewise."¹¹⁸ The second, smaller circle, contains all who are Christians, all who are called such, and all who "profess to believe in Christ."¹¹⁹ And finally, the third circle, the innermost one, embraces only *real Christians*, those "that worship God, not in form only, but in spirit and in truth."¹²⁰ Providential care, then, is graded in accordance with a deepening of faith and trust in Christ.

Many spiritual and even a few psychological benefits result from knowing the providential care, indeed the affection and grace, of a loving God. Strengthened by a fund of assurance, the children of God can weather their misfortunes and setbacks, knowing that a holy and powerful Governor cares for them deeply. Despite misfortunes, the world is not a chaotic place of disorder and happenstance, nor will God's gracious will to bless be ultimately frustrated in the lives of those who love the Most High as the center of their being. "What is there either in heaven or in earth that can harm you while you are under the care of the Creator and Governor of heaven and earth?" Wesley exclaims. And again, "Let all earth and all hell combine against you—yea, the whole animate and inanimate creation—they cannot harm while God is on your side: his favourable kindness covers you 'as a shield!'"¹²¹

Summary of the Attributes

In understanding the Almighty to be a God of holy love, whereas neither holiness nor love is conceived apart from the other, Wesley quite naturally brought this tension or conjunction into much of his writing about the divine being. In other words, this is his most basic theological orientation, and many of the other conjunctions of his practical theology (such as law and grace, faith and holy living, for example) must be seen as faithful reflections of the preeminent, and in some sense normative, divine character and being. Indeed, it is nothing less than holy love that informs Wesley's understanding of the Godhead in terms of the distinction between transcendence (separation) and immanence (communion). And it is this same tension that illuminates the roles of God/Father as both Governor (in accordance with justice and the holy moral law) and Creator (in terms of goodness, wisdom, and grace). So understood, even the vital conjunction of law and grace, which will play out in Wesley's doctrine of salvation, must be conceived as caught up in an even larger conjunction that is an important window on the divine being and purpose. Therefore, attentiveness to this basic theological orientation of holy love and grace as

The Two Principal Conjunctions in Wesley's Theology:

- (1) Holiness (Holy Love) and Grace
- (2) Law and Grace

it was carefully developed in Wesley's practical theology will provide a suitable vantage point to view not only the divine beauty and goodness, but also the wonder and possibility of those beings who have been created in such love, grace, and holiness. And finally, this same orientation keeps Wesley's theology free from the shoals of needless philosophical abstraction and speculation, for it is none other than the Holy One, that is, a God of holy love, who is wise, good, just, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.

Today and Tomorrow: Recent Trends in Cosmology

Wesley had a keen interest in the physical sciences, especially in the findings of astronomy, as revealed in his publication *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation: Or a Compendium of Natural Philosophy*. Informed by the work of Ray, Derham, Nieuentyt, and Mather,¹²² Wesley appropriated the text of Johann Franz Buddes (1667-1729), which was translated from its original Latin. Having held professorships at such places as Coburg, Halle, and Jena, Buddes was a gifted German Lutheran divine known for his striking and rich style. Wesley did not, however, slavishly appropriate the work of this German scholar, and he "found occasion to retrench, enlarge, or alter every chapter, and almost every section,"¹²³ thereby, in a real sense, making *A Survey* a work very much his own. Wesley's overarching purpose in this publication was to glorify God, the Creator. It was not, in other words, penned to "entertain an idle, barren curiosity; but to display the invisible things of God, his power, wisdom, and goodness."¹²⁴

In rightly dividing truth, Wesley makes an important distinction in *A Survey* between the proper interpretation of scripture and the findings of science. For example, as he considers the apparent discrepancy that some biblical passages contradict what is known of the earth's motion, Wesley points out that "the scriptures were never intended to instruct us in philosophy, or astronomy; and therefore, on those subjects, expressions are not always to be taken in the literal sense."¹²⁵ With such views in place, Wesley no doubt felt free to use the confirmed findings of the science of his age as he reflected upon the wonder and glory of the things that have been made.

Wesley most likely approached this field of natural philosophy (what today we call science) with excitement, perhaps even with a sense of childlike wonder. This was the time of Isaac Newton (1642-1727), who was elected president of the Royal Society in 1703. Earlier, in 1687, Newton had published his *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy), which helped revolutionize the physics of the period. Building upon the work of Galileo, Newton essentially rewrote the science of moving bodies and understood for the first time that what keeps the planets in their orbits is the very same force (gravity) that operates on the earth. This was also the time of Edmund Halley, who applied some of the insights of Newton, especially his three laws of motion, and correctly predicted in 1705 that the comet that had appeared in 1682 (eventually named after him) would complete its cycle of seventy-six years and, therefore, return in 1758, though Halley himself did not live to see it. Moreover, William Herschel, who had been appointed a royal astronomer by King George III, determined that the motion of the sun is directed toward the constellation Hercules; he published a list of double stars; and in 1781, he discovered the planet Uranus. Wesley likely read Herschel's *On the Construction of the Heavens* that considered the shape of the Milky Way galaxy. Beyond this, William Derham published his *Astro-theology* in 1714, while Wesley was at Charterhouse, a work that moved from the field of astronomy to the contemplation of God, a method that Wesley appreciated most of all.

Among other things, the careful editing of *A Survey* reveals that Wesley had kept up with this latest scientific knowledge. Indeed, one way in which Wesley was progressive, though some of his co-religionists were not, was in terms of his growing estimate of the size of the universe itself (though still small by current standards), and in his speculation that this vast expanse suggests the possibility of other worlds beyond the earth. He reasons:

It now appears a more probable and rational conjecture, that our solar system is but one of innumerable systems; that the universe is of infinite extension, and occupied by an infinite multitude of worlds; that the sovereignty of the Creator is not limited to a comparatively insignificant and solitary world, or system, but that it is infinite as his wisdom, and extensive as his power.¹²⁶

Moreover, Wesley maintains in this same work that the Holy One is Lord of the universe and "not merely of this little, straggling world of

ours; which is but a little planet, attached to a single star."¹²⁷ Indeed, Wesley fully accepted the findings of Copernicus who, in his *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, argued that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the solar system.¹²⁸ He had not linked, in other words, a particular view on these matters (that of Aristotle and Ptolemy, for instance) with the integrity and truthfulness of the Christian faith as the Italian inquisition had already done.¹²⁹ Wesley's vision of the cosmos was great; his view of the Christian faith and its Author, even greater.

Though the intellectually curious Wesley was well aware of the first great cosmological revolution in affirming the theory of Copernicus (as well as the earlier work of Galileo), two more were beyond his reach since they did not occur until the twentieth century. In 1924, for example, Edwin Hubble, a lawyer turned astronomer, discovered other galaxies beyond the Milky Way. Indeed, some of what William Herschel had considered in Wesley's own day simply to be nebulae actually turned out to be entire galaxies. Five years later, in 1929, while working at the Mount Wilson Observatory, Hubble came to an even more stunning conclusion: the universe was not static, as even Einstein had once thought, but was actually expanding. Hubble's painstaking measurements indicated that the light from distant galaxies was redshifted, which meant that they were moving away from the earth, the point of observation. What's more, the farther away the galaxies were, the faster they were moving. And all the galaxies were moving away.

Building on the work of Hubble, astronomers realized that if the universe was actually expanding over time, and if the clock were run backwards, so to speak, then the earlier universe had to be much smaller in size and far more dense. Already in the 1920s, Alexander Friedman and Abbe Georges Lemaitre put forth what was later called the big bang theory of the universe that was improved upon during the 1940s by George Gamow to reach its modern formulation. The expansion of the universe from a point of singularity (taking the clock all the way back) blew away "the idea of a cozy little universe."¹³⁰ Indeed, not only did the universe have a precise beginning, where fractions of a second (the instantaneous) made crucial, lasting differences, but also it proved to be a challenge to comprehend just what caused the expansion of the universe in the first place.¹³¹ Simply put, why did space/time begin at all?

Scientists are not yet clear what took place before the smallest measurement of time, that is, Planck time, or an interval before 10^{-43} seconds. Here the classical physics that has helped scientists understand the large-

scale universe of stars and galaxies (Einstein's general theory of relativity, for example) is not able to explain this very tiny world, close to a singularity, in which quantum mechanics as a theory holds sway. Though three of the four major physical forces of electromagnetism, the weak force (that underlies some forms of radioactivity and interactions between subatomic particles) and the strong force (that holds elementary particles such as quarks together) have been brought under the theory of quantum mechanics, gravity remains an outsider and something of a puzzle. However, until all of these forces can be explained in terms of quantum realities, in a unified theory, the precise beginning of the universe will remain a mystery. This has not stopped Stephen Hawking, however—well-known professor of mathematics at Cambridge University—from pointing out that many of the elements of the early universe appear to have been precisely set, such as its rate of expansion, to allow for the rise of the universe in the first place. He states:

If the rate of expansion one second after the big bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, the universe would have recollapsed before it ever reached its present size. On the other hand, if the expansion rate at one second had been larger by the same amount, the universe would have expanded so much that it would be effectively empty now.¹³²

In light of this observation, Hawking speculates, "If the universe is expanding, there may be physical reasons why there had to be a beginning. One could still believe that God created the universe at the instant of the big bang."¹³³

The next major revolution in physics and cosmology, of which Wesley was not aware, has to do with the rate of the expansion of the universe (this factor is known as the Hubble constant) and its implications along so many lines of thought. Until fairly recently, scientists thought that the rate of increase of the size of the universe was slowing down due to the braking effect of gravity. In 1998, however, as some astronomers were studying supernova explosions, they realized that the expansion of the universe was actually speeding up. With the Hubble constant now fixed at 1, the universe is "flat" and should expand forever. Scientists surmise that a force known as "dark energy" is causing this acceleration. The fate of the universe, therefore, is neither a big crunch (the reversal of the big bang) nor a fiery consumption. Rather the *increasingly* expanding universe will grow old, settle into a much cooler state, and eventually die.

In light of these three revolutions, modern scientists and cosmologists have put forth a couple of basic models to explain the origin of the universe. The first comes from Stephen Hawking, who, in a departure from the big bang model, speculates that there may be no point of singularity, no beginning of time/space at all. Rather the space/time dimensions of the universe are finite but without an edge, much like a globe is limited in size, though it has no beginning or ending point. Hawking explains:

It is possible for space-time to be finite in extent and yet to have no singularities that formed a boundary or edge. Space-time would be like the surface of the earth, only with two more dimensions. The surface of the earth is finite in extent but it doesn't have a boundary or edge.¹³⁴

In this model, there is no moment of creation and little for a Creator to do since the universe is self-contained. As some of the ancient Greeks had already argued centuries ago, the universe, quite simply, always was. Other scientists, however, are not so convinced. For in order for Hawking's model to work, he must appeal to the notion of imaginary time.

A second model, dependent on many of the insights of the big bang theory, speculates that the universe arose either out of a quantum fluctuation or out of a black hole from another universe. The Heisenberg principle of uncertainty, which governs quantum fluctuations, indicates that empty space is alive with packets of energy that appear and then disappear "within the time limit set by quantum rules."¹³⁵ For some reason not yet fully understood, a packet of energy took off, was rapidly inflated, and became our present universe. And in terms of the other possibility, "Every black hole in our Universe may be the gateway to another universe," John Gribbin writes, "and our Universe may have been formed by the collapse of a black hole in another universe, making an infinite sea of bubble universes in the vastness of space and time."¹³⁶ Such an understanding has led Fred Adams and others to speak not of a "universe" but of the "multiverse" in which any number of universes can exist like so many bubbles on a lake. Adams explains:

But if the laws of physics can enforce the production of our universe, these same laws could create a whole series of universes through the same mechanism. These other universes, the offspring of other small patches of space-time being launched into existence, would evolve and never come into contact with our own.¹³⁷

In terms of this recent science, just when we think we have come to at least some appreciation of the dizzying size of the universe—moving from solar system to galaxy, to local groups of galaxies, to clusters, to clouds, to superclusters and on to supercluster complexes or walls—the framework changes. Is the multiverse, with its image of a universe as but one bubble on a lake, the final frame of reference, or is that lake simply a part of an even larger structure?

If Wesley were alive today, what would he make of these most recent models, given his interest in the field? Since he was a theist, an Anglican priest who affirmed that the world comes into being out of the Word of the Creator, Wesley obviously could not accept one line of Hawking's speculation that the universe (time/space) lacks a point of singularity and therefore has neither a beginning nor need of a Creator. But it is by no means a stretch to contend that Wesley's thought, especially as reflected in *A Survey*, could indeed embrace not only the big bang theory but also some of its most recent expressions in terms of quantum fluctuations or black holes. That is, such developments could be viewed as the way, the very processes, through which the Creator has brought all things into existence. And if the universe is that much greater, more wonderful, than we have hitherto imagined, then so, too, is the One who has created it—elements congenial to Wesley's own thinking.

What Wesley's thought cannot embrace, however, given his presuppositions and assumptions, is any sort of naturalistic explanation that would remove the reality of God from consideration. For behind the quarks, leptons, gluons, photons, and bosons, there is the Creator, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God who, out of holy love, brought forth all things into existence to communicate, through the things that have been made, nothing less than the beauty and wonder of the divine life.