

JESUS CHRIST: THE GOD OF HOLY LOVE REVEALED

*Hail, God the Son, with glory crown'd
When time shall cease to be
Throned with the Father through the round
Of whole eternity.*

—Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley. The Sermons*
(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 2:360.

The holiness and love of God radiate throughout all eternity. The prevenient action of the Most High, based upon the life and work of Jesus Christ, is not limited by time, culture, or space, but its benefits have *already* been richly enjoyed by those who have lived centuries before the advent of the Messiah or by those even today who have never heard the name of Christ. In a real sense, Jesus of Nazareth, the Jew from Galilee, is at the very center of salvation history. That is, not only have many peoples and nations looked forward to his coming, but also many have grown in wisdom and grace as a consequence of his appearance.

John Wesley's theology of holy love naturally displays the centrality of Christ in its reflections, counsels, and ministry. Indeed, there is hardly an aspect of Wesley's practical theology that is not christologically based: whether one considers the created order, the first glimmers of redemption itself, or the coming reign of God, all are important windows on the grace and excellence of Christ. Precisely because this christological material is so extensive, it will be presented along the lines of the person and work of Christ for the sake of both clarity and order. Along the way we will consider the two natures of Christ (divine and human), the significance of his

coming (the incarnation), the cruciality of his death (atonement), as well as his ministry as a prophet, priest, and king.¹ In the end it should be apparent just why Wesley's theology is so deeply rooted in Christology at every step along the way, for his thought underscores not only the seriousness of sin and human need but also the sufficiency of God's grace and provision.

The Person of Christ

The very language of the "person" of Christ grew out of the deliberations of the early church, especially as reflected in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, and Gregory Nazianzus). What the ancient community of faith intended by the term "person" (hypostasis), as it articulated a biblical understanding of the relation of Christ (the Word or Logos made flesh) to God/Father, in contrast to the construal of Arius, can also be distinguished from some lingering modern conceptions that have placed a premium on autonomy and individualism.

To illustrate, for the Cappadocian Fathers, the meaning of the term "person" was infused by the theological task before them, whereby they placed a premium on the whole matter of "relation," that is, on the relation of the Word to the Father, the begotten to the unbegotten. So understood, a person is not an "individual," separate or self-contained, but represents in a salient and defining way a relation to the "other." Therefore, to understand the person of Christ aright, he must be conceived in terms of his relation to both God/Father and humanity: as the Logos, the Son of God, Christ is not alone but has his being eternally as the only begotten One from the Father. As the Son of Humanity (the Logos made flesh), Christ is related to the human community of which he is its redemptive expression. Again, the one person of Christ, as the Logos made flesh, is related both to God/Father and to humanity. And it is precisely this double relation of Christ that Wesley most often explored under the heading of one person and two natures.

The Divine Nature

In accordance with the early tradition of the church, Wesley affirmed that the one person of Jesus Christ exists in two natures: the divine and

the human. Elaborating on the former in several places in his writings, Wesley echoes the language of the ancient ecumenical councils, Nicea and Constantinople, in particular. In his sermon "Spiritual Worship," for instance, which was drafted late in his career, he points out that the inspired writers of the New Testament gave Christ all the titles and attributes of the most high God, eternity among them.² Wesley also explored the eternity of the Son in terms of the important distinction of *a parte ante* and *a parte post*, which was described in considerable detail in chapter 1. Recall also from this previous discussion that it is God alone, not any created being or thing, who is eternal *a parte ante*. This, then, is a unique characteristic, a divine trait. And since the Son, according to Wesley, is eternal in precisely this way, Jesus Christ is therefore truly and fully God. We, therefore, "need not scruple," he declares, to pronounce Christ, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God: in glory equal with the Father, in majesty coeternal."³

Moreover, when Wesley considered with what authority Jesus proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount, he made it clear that such authority must be distinguished from that of Moses, Abraham, the Prophets, or any other created being for that matter. So understood, this authority "is something more than human; more than can agree to any created being. It speaks the Creator of all!" Wesley exclaims, "a God, a God appears! Yea, *ô ô*, the being of beings, Jehovah, the self-existent, the supreme, the God who is over all, blessed for ever!"⁴ By employing such language, especially in its emphasis on being, Wesley celebrated the essential equality of Jesus Christ with the Father. "If our Lord were God only by office or investiture, and not in the unity of the Divine essence, and in all respects equal in Godhead with the Father," Wesley reasons, "he could not be honoured *even as*, that is, with the same honour that they honoured the Father."⁵ Beyond this, Wesley concurred with the teaching of his own Anglican Church, which in its Second Article of the historic *Thirty-nine Articles* stated that "the Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, [is] of one substance with the Father."⁶ In all this material, then, in affirming that the Son is consubstantial (of the same substance) with the Father, Wesley rejects even the slightest hint of subordinationism (that the Son is not equal to the Father), and in his "On Knowing Christ after the Flesh," produced in 1789, he repudiates Arianism and other low Christologies, Socinianism in particular.⁷

Two of Wesley's favorite ways of affirming the essential equality of Christ with God/Father were through the titles "the (only-begotten) Son of

God," and "the Word of God." In terms of the first, Wesley explores such language in one of his more prominent christological "treatises," *A Letter to a Roman Catholic*, and once again his words reverberate with the tones of Nicea and Constantinople: "I believe he is the proper, natural Son of God, . . . very God of very God; and that he is the Lord of all, having absolute, supreme, universal dominion over all things."⁸ Elsewhere in his *NT Notes*, as he comments on Luke 22:70, Wesley views the ascription "the Son of God" not simply as a messianic one but as one that also underscores the divinity of Christ in a forthright way. "Both these, the Son of God, and the Son of Man, were known titles of the Messiah"; he observes, "the one taken from his Divine, and the other from his human nature."⁹

In terms of the second designation, "the Word of God," Wesley discerned a dynamic relation between God/Father and the Son. That is, the evocative, calling, speaking power of the Most High is evident in Wesley's observation that the Son is "the Word whom the Father begot or spoke from eternity."¹⁰ This speaking, so conceived, is not temporal but eternal and is indicative of both *being* and *relation*. Put another way, the Word of God has been *eternally* spoken by the Father; never was a time when the Word was not. Commenting on the Johannine prologue (John 1:1), a key passage on this topic, Wesley observes that the Word is "the only begotten Son of the Father, who is in the bosom of the Father, and *hath declared him*."¹¹ Moreover, being *with* the Father as the spoken Word of the Most High, this declared Word, according to Wesley, "denotes a perpetual tendency as it were of the Son to the Father, in unity of essence."¹² Simply put, "He was *with* God alone; because nothing beside God had then any being."¹³

Though God/Father begets the Son and declares the Word, it was the Son who was intimately involved in the creation of the world as well. He is "the true God," the only Cause, the sole *Creator* of all things¹⁴ and the "true 'Author of all' the motion that is in the universe."¹⁵ Furthermore, Wesley notes, "When all things began to be made by the Word: in the beginning of heaven and earth, and this whole frame of created beings, the Word existed, without any beginning."¹⁶ Observe in this context that the Son's role in creation is not simply an instrumental one in which God/Father creates *through* the Son. On the contrary, Wesley maintained that "we cannot doubt but when the Son of God had finished all the work which he *created and made*, he said 'These be thy bounds! This be thy just circumference, O world!'"¹⁷ More to the point, Wesley concluded that it was the only-begotten Son of God who pronounced the very words of Genesis, "Let there be light."¹⁸

Not only is the Son intimately involved in the creation, bringing forth the world and its many creatures, but also as "the true God" he is also the *Supporter* of all things that he hath made.¹⁹ That is, the Son sustains all things by the word of his power, "by the same powerful word which brought them out of nothing."²⁰ In a similar fashion, the Son of God is "the *Preserver* of all things."²¹ He is not only the Author of all motion in the universe,²² but also "the life of everything that lives . . . [as well as] the fountain of all the life which man possesses." In his sermon "Spiritual Worship," Wesley elaborates:

He not only keeps them in being, but preserves them in that degree of well-being which is suitable to their several natures. He preserves them in their several relations, connections, and dependences, so as to compose one system of beings, to form one entire universe, according to the counsel of his will.²³

The four preceding roles of Creator, Author, Supporter, and Preserver highlight the active care as well as the superintendence that is required to bring the world into being and to maintain its established order. Here the Son is, to use Wesley's own words, "the Lord and Disposer of the whole creation, and every part of it."²⁴ So significant is this rule that Wesley refers to the Son as nothing less than the "Governor of all things"²⁵ that are or ever were created, a role that includes, like the Father's, a "providential government over the children of men."²⁶ In fact, the same three circles of providence that are evident in the sermon "On Divine Providence," with respect to the work of God/Father, are also present in this earlier "christological" sermon, "Spiritual Worship."²⁷ Providential intent and care, then, is very much a part of the Son's work as well.

Beyond this, Wesley ascribes a divine title to the Son that is indicative of the teleological thrust, the goal orientation, of much of his own theology as well. Accordingly, he maintains that the Son as the true God is "the End of all things, according to that solemn declaration of the Apostle: 'Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things'—of him as the Creator, through him as the Sustainer and Preserver; and to him as the ultimate End of all."²⁸ Simply put, from the origins of creation to the consummation of all things, the Son of God is the goal, the perfection in love and being, to which human beings are directed.

And finally, the Son of God is "the Redeemer of all the children of men."²⁹ Jesus Christ as the very Word of God saves humanity from the guilt and power and ultimately from the being of sin and thereby ushers

in a freedom unexcelled and unequalled: the freedom to love God and neighbor. This role of the Redeemer whereby both forgiveness and new life are mediated to the faithful is perhaps the best known and, in some people's minds at least, the only principal role for the Son of God. In fact, according to some current theological trends, the division of labor, so to speak, among persons of the Christian Godhead is sometimes divided along these lines: the Father is the *Creator*, the Son is the *Redeemer*, and the Holy Spirit is the *Sanctifier*. However, it should be evident by now that such views do not adequately represent Wesley's own Christology (or his doctrines of God and the Holy Spirit for that matter). That is, according to Wesley, the Son of God is suitably and accurately described in all the following ways: as the Redeemer, of course, but also as the Creator, Author, Sustainer, Preserver, Governor, and End. No single function, in other words, is exclusive to the Father—or to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. Instead, what one finds in Wesley's theology is an interpenetration of roles. For its part, the early church employed the language of *perichoresis* to express the idea that the three persons of Father, Son, and Spirit mutually inhere in one another and indeed are what they are precisely in *relation* to one another. With this being-in-one-another, a genuine permeation without confusion, it is not surprising to learn of an interpenetration of roles as well. Wesley understood and valued such ancient wisdom.

The Human Nature

Because a God of holy love is other directed, expressive in outward orientation, and purposive in making communion, the Word of God comes forth to enter into human existence and thereby bring about the very conditions necessary for redemption, properly speaking. For Wesley, the Word becoming flesh—this descending movement from the form of God to a more humble human form (that of a servant)—bespeaks of the divine love in a remarkable way: "What manner of love is this wherewith the only-begotten Son of God hath loved us! So as to 'empty himself,' as far as possible, of his eternal Godhead! As to divest himself of that glory which he had with the Father before the world began! As to 'take upon him the form of a servant.'"³⁰

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Viewed from another perspective, this kenotic descending of the Word from a glorious form to a humble one, becoming incarnate as a genuine

human being, bridging the distance, at least in some sense, between God and humanity, all of this demonstrates a basic tension in Christian theology, as Wesley understood it, between transcendence on the one hand and immanence on the other. In other words, the incarnation of the Word in human form not only brings an accompanying *illumination* ("This was the true light, who lighteth every man that cometh into the world"³¹ [John 1:9]) but also ably demonstrates that in the distinct Christian understanding of revelation the Most High does not simply remain in the starry heavens, so to speak, apart, transcendently removed and coldly distant. On the contrary, God comes. The Holy One as a result of this gracious movement must now be known as *Immanuel*, God with us. For Wesley, then, the evoking, calling God is also the coming God—each attribute directed toward fellowship and communion.

The descent of the Word of God was manifested in lowly circumstances and was tied in *particular* to the story of an obscure young Jewish woman and her husband in first-century Israel. The poor and humble Mary conceived, Wesley taught, not by Joseph but by "the power of the Highest overshadowing her."³²

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:26-28)

Observe in this context, the virgin birth and divine agency are strongly associated, the one informing the other. In other words, precisely because Mary conceived, as Wesley put it, in a unique way "by the singular operation of the Holy Ghost,"³³ this begetting, therefore, excluded the role normally filled by a human father. For Wesley, then, the doctrine of the virgin birth does not represent a later addition, suggested by the sexual ethic of the emerging church, informed as it was by Hellenistic elements. Rather, it illuminates the divine agency in this birth; in other words, it is no one less than the Holy Spirit who brings about this distinct conception.

Traditional in many respects, Wesley followed his own Anglican Church (and in a way similar to Rome) by maintaining the perpetual virginity of Mary. Thus, even after the birth of Christ, Mary, in Wesley's estimation, "continued a pure and unspotted virgin."³⁴ Such an assertion resulted in some odd exegesis by Wesley, especially when he grappled with passages from the *New Testament* that suggested otherwise. One difficulty, in particular, concerned the proper interpretation of Matthew

13:55-56: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?" However, in order to extricate himself from this exegetical quandary, Wesley resuscitated a teaching that went back as far as Jerome and that had worked its way into some of the corridors of the Church of England itself. Concerning this verse, Wesley wrote: "*His brethren*—Our kinsmen. They were the sons of Mary, sister to the virgin, and wife of Cleophas or Alphaeus."³⁵ In other words, this Mary was not his mother, but his aunt; James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas were not his brothers, but his cousins! This interpretive move, which some scholars even today consider evasive, is reiterated in Wesley's commentary on Matthew 12:46 and John 7:03 and stands as an oddity in his otherwise very Protestant theology.³⁶

Though Wesley affirmed that Christ was born of a virgin, he nevertheless apparently balked at too close an identification with Mary and "her substance." Observe the language of Article II of the *Thirty-nine Articles* that Wesley had read so many times during his career:

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of *her substance*: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided.³⁷

The problem, however, is that when Wesley reproduced this article in his own *Methodist Articles* that appeared in the *Sunday Service* for American Methodist consumption, he omitted the phrase "of her substance," with respect to Mary, though he kept similar language in terms of the Father. Thus, Wesley affirmed that Christ was consubstantial with God, "of one substance with the Father," but he omitted the parallel affirmation with respect to humanity. Apparently he was unwilling to affirm, for whatever reason, that Christ was of one substance with Mary, though he did maintain, in reproducing this article, "that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man."³⁸

Other troubling evidence emerges as Wesley reproduced the epistles of Ignatius for his *Christian Library*, for in doing so he left out any passages that referred to Jesus as being born "of the race of David according to the flesh."³⁹ A similar tendency can be found in Wesley's reluctance to

employ what he called "fondling expressions" with respect to Christ, though he admitted that this language was often found in the writings of such gifted spiritual writers as Thomas à Kempis.⁴⁰ More to the point, Wesley especially took exception to the phrases "Dear Lord" and "Dear Savior," though he noted that even his brother Charles had succumbed to this level of familiarity and "used the same in many of his hymns."⁴¹

Interesting enough, Wesley's reasoned objections to the use of fondling expressions may also provide some insight into his apparent reluctance to stress the human nature of Christ too strongly. For one thing, he believed that the employment of such common, sentimental language constitutes "knowing Christ after the flesh."⁴² Not only does it abate "that tender reverence due to the Lord their Governor,"⁴³ but it also "insensibly damps 'that speechless awe, which dares not move.'"⁴⁴ In other words, this language fails to be mindful of the *divinity* of Christ in a way that Wesley thought proper. "The sum of all," Wesley exclaims, "is, We are to honour the Son even as we honour the Father."⁴⁵ In this reckoning, "the great Lord of heaven and earth"⁴⁶ deserves nothing less.

So then, despite some of the material that appears to downplay the human nature of Christ in Wesley's writings, and thereby moves in a direction of *monophysitism*, we nevertheless must conclude that Wesley's Christology is in line with orthodoxy, with the council of Chalcedon in particular⁴⁷ (which offered the formula two natures in one person), even if there was admittedly some hesitancy on Wesley's part in his *genuine* affirmation of the human nature of Christ. Though Wesley ever took the divine nature seriously (as well as its implications for Christian life and worship), "It is too much to say," Deschner wrote, "that Wesley's is a docetic Christology."⁴⁸ For Wesley, Christ is truly both God and human, though he tended, out of respect and honor, to emphasize the former.

Monophysitism: The view that Christ had only one nature (*monos*, "single," *physis*, "nature"). This teaching, which invariably diminishes the human nature of Christ, can be found in the polemic of Cyril of Alexandria against Nestorius.

The Work of Christ

Despite the care that Wesley took in his Christology, the possibility remained that some of those to whom he preached would know Christ simply after the flesh, that is, as one judged in an all-too-human way.

Who is Jesus of Nazareth, this poor ancient Jew, that we should take note of him? What sets him apart from all others? And how can Jesus be the revelation of the eternal God, the Holy One of Israel, in love, mercy, and holiness, such that he is, after all, the Christ? Answers to these pointed questions can be found in Wesley's teaching with respect to the work of Jesus of Nazareth, specifically in terms of his roles as a prophet, priest, and king. That is, the person of Jesus is revealed through thought-provoking actions; his identity is unveiled through gracious and powerful deeds.

Prophet

In his commentary on Matthew 1:16, Wesley points out that the word "Christ" in Greek, and "Messiah" in Hebrew—ascriptions that the church applied to Jesus in light of his life and ministry—signify an anointed one and "imply the prophetic, priestly and royal characters."⁴⁹ In terms of this first role, that of prophet, Wesley repeatedly stressed that the Word became incarnate in Christ in order to "enlighten our minds"⁵⁰ and to reveal "the whole will of God."⁵¹ As such, Christ is "the great Lawgiver"⁵² and "has not introduced a new religion into the world, but the same which was from the beginning,"⁵³ when the morning stars sang for the glory of God.

This affirmation of Christ as a lawgiver likely came as a surprise to some of the Protestants of Wesley's own age simply because several had grown accustomed to a law and gospel dialectic in which the seriousness and prescriptive power of the law was often muted in the name of grace or what some termed gospel "liberty." Wesley always considered such theological judgments ill informed and broadly mistaken since they entailed putting aside the *express will of God* in the name of grace. For Wesley, a law and grace tension does *not* inform the distinction between the old covenant and the new, such that the gospel is then set in tension, or in the worst instances, actually against the Decalogue of Moses. On the contrary, both the old and the new covenants are gracious according to Wesley. Therefore, the designation "a covenant

The Three Offices of Christ:

Prophet
Priest
King

of works," so often wrongly applied to the Old Testament itself by zealous Protestants, only characterized Adam and Eve in their innocence. To illustrate, Wesley writes "But it is the covenant of *grace* which God through Christ hath established with men in all ages (as well before, and under the Jewish dispensation, as since God was manifest in the flesh), which St. Paul here opposes to the covenant of *works*, made with Adam while in paradise."⁵⁴

In a real sense, Christ as the Messiah of Israel is the nexus, the continuity between the covenants, in particular the moral law of the Old Testament, on the one hand, and that of the New Testament, on the other. Again for Wesley the Son of God is the great Author of the law⁵⁵ as well as the "giver of the Decalogue to Moses." In his NT Notes on Acts 7:35, for example, he elaborates: "It was therefore the Son of God who delivered the law to Moses, under the character of Jehovah, and who is here spoken of as the angel of the covenant, in respect of his mediatorial office."⁵⁷ In fact, so strongly does Wesley associate the moral law with Christ that the same christological predicates that mark the relation of the Son to the Father are, interestingly enough, applied to the moral law as well. In his sermon "The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," for example, Wesley observes: "It is the heart of God disclosed to man. Yea, in some sense, we may apply to this law what the Apostle says of his Son—it is [*leptagasma tes doxes, kai charakter tes upostaseos autos*], 'the streaming forth' or outbeaming 'of his glory, the express image of his person.'"⁵⁸ Elsewhere in this same sermon, Wesley describes the moral law as "the fairest offspring of the everlasting Father, the brightest efflux of his essential wisdom, the visible beauty of the Most High."⁵⁹

The preceding descriptions of the moral law that reverberate with the christological language of Colossians, as Albert Outler correctly pointed out,⁶⁰ caused Deschner in his own age to query: "Is Christ the only-begotten of the Father?"⁶¹ Though the characteristics of Christ and the moral law in these and similar contexts are indeed remarkably alike, making explicit Wesley's high valuation of the moral law, nevertheless he made a significant distinction between the being of Christ as the eternally begotten Son of God and the *form* of the moral law that had its rise at the beginning of time since it was rooted in a created order.⁶² Again, the moral law is divine virtue and wisdom assuming a visible *form*. To be sure, Wesley did not deny that such virtue and wisdom are the "original ideas of truth and good, which were lodged in the uncreated mind from eternity."⁶³ Rather, he maintained that *as law*, a complete model of truth

intelligible both to angelic and human beings, these eternal elements took a particular *form* in time such that the moral law, which contained them, suitably expressed "the everlasting fitness of all things that are or ever were created."⁶⁴

Moreover, as Deschner noted, since there is no point in the elaborate history of the law "where Wesley has not attempted to provide an explicit Christological foundation,"⁶⁵ then when Christ reveals the original nature and relations of things, as in the Sermon on the Mount, "He is only revealing what He Himself has created."⁶⁶ The role of Christ as a prophet, then, is not only to declare the moral law as the explicit will of the Creator, especially in terms of the fitness of relations, but also to illuminate that same law, in its various relations, as an equal expression of the will of the Governor who has ordered things so that through faith and obedience believers will be led to the highest ends of that eternal goodwill, namely, to the love and holiness of God. Again, Christ as a prophet is a teacher of both the law and the gospel, a conjunction that not only describes so much of Western Protestant theology, but, in Wesley's case, also represents a wonderful particularization of his even larger conjunction of holiness and love.

Priest

Because Wesley took human sin so seriously, as the preceding chapter has already argued, he taught that the unbelief, alienation, and pride left in the wake of sin could not be overcome simply by human effort or design. Sinful human beings, in other words, cannot heal the problem caused by sin simply because they themselves are the problem. This means, of course, that for Wesley, as for other orthodox believers, the first elements of redemption do not entail any direct access to God. Due to the effects of sin in their perverting, deceiving, and stupefying powers, a proper relationship with the Most High can only be reestablished through the work of a Mediator. To be sure, so vital is the work of the One who bridges the relationship between God and humanity that Wesley claimed "they who have not him, through the one Mediator, have no God."⁶⁷ Again, "we could not rejoice that there is a God," Wesley observed, "were there not a mediator also; one who stands between God and men, to reconcile man to God, and to transact the whole affair of our salvation."⁶⁸

This priestly role of Christ that mediates the divine/human relationship is unique since it is a reflection of his distinct person and nature. No being, in other words, who falls short of the divine essence can accomplish this priestly work. "This excludes all other mediators, as saints and angels," Wesley exclaimed, "whom the Papists set up and idolatrously worship as such; just as the heathens of old set up many mediators."⁶⁹ Christ in his person as truly divine and really human is the second Adam, the representative of humanity, and for Wesley the Anglican Arminian, "the Mediator of all."⁷⁰

Atonement

To atone for sin is part of what the priestly Mediator does through his own sacrifice. This work, according to Wesley, is flush with the images of the suffering servant of Isaiah that find their fulfillment, their highest expression, at Calvary. Indeed, from the vantage point of the New Testament authors, the sacrificial death of Christ is so crucial that much of the material of the Gospels is taken up with the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life.

The cross, the emblem of the Christian faith, was bloody, dirty, and filled with shame, an offense and stumbling block for both Jew and Greek alike. In Wesley's own eighteenth-century context, Lord Huntingdon, on the one hand, saw little need for the atonement or for a cross for that matter. In its place, he reckoned that "the scriptural scheme of morality"⁷¹ was quite enough. For Wesley, on the other hand, the atonement, as with his doctrine of original sin, was "properly the distinguishing point between Deism and Christianity."⁷² He could see, as Outler noted, "that the 'philosophers' were, in fact, recasting the historic *ordo salutis* and proclaiming a gospel of salvation attainable by human effort."⁷³ And late in his career, no doubt frustrated with this ongoing misunderstanding, Wesley declared, "Nothing in the Christian system is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement."⁷⁴ In fact, in 1782, he cautioned his preachers that their "main and constant business [was] to preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified."⁷⁵

A number of theories of the atonement have surfaced throughout the rich history of the church, some of which undoubtedly helped inform Wesley's own teaching. Several early church fathers—for example, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria among them—developed metaphors

that suggested Christ died as a ransom in order to free humanity from the grasp of the devil. Adding to this metaphor, Origen specifically maintained that the ransom offered by Christ was paid not to God but to the devil, a notion that proved troubling for later theologians who argued quite simply that the devil had no rights and therefore was owed nothing.

Though Wesley did not take matters so far as Origen, he nevertheless clearly taught that Christ offered a ransom by his death. Developing the biblical teaching of the term (with respect to λύτρον and its cognates), Wesley focused not on the issue of to whom a ransom was paid; rather, he underscored the universality of this distinct work as evident in his comments on 1 Timothy 2:6 in which he once again noted the sufficiency of Christ's death, "Even for as many souls as needed such a ransom."⁷⁶ Not surprising, then, as Wesley contended with George Whitefield early on in his career, he declared in his sermon "Free Grace," produced in 1739, that Christ "gave himself a ransom for all"; "He tasted death for every man."⁷⁷ Moreover, when Wesley appealed to Old Testament materials to articulate his view, he drew upon the imagery of Abraham about to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and thereby affirmed that God took the initiative and provided the great sacrifice of atonement, "when none in heaven or earth could have found a lamb for that burnt-offering."⁷⁸

A theory of the atonement that illuminates Wesley's many reflections on the work of Christ—perhaps even more than a ransom view—devolves upon the basic notion of satisfaction in which the ideas not only of compensation but also of rendering some form of recompense specifically to the justice of God are also developed. Appealing to the doctrinal formulations of his own church, especially as reflected in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Wesley writes in his sermon "God's Love to Fallen Man," "But we could not have loved him as 'bearing our sins in his own body on the tree,' and 'by that one oblation of himself once offered making a full oblation, sacrifice, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.'"⁷⁹ Compare this with the language of Wesley's *Sunday Service*, which followed *The Book of Common Prayer* in considerable detail:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who, of thy tender mercy, didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.⁸⁰

It should be evident by now that Wesley's thought in this context, as he cites the Anglican material, is reminiscent of that of Anselm in his eleventh-century classic *Cur Deus Homo*.⁸¹ The heart of the Archbishop of Canterbury's medieval satisfaction theory can be summarized as follows:

1. Humanity ought to make satisfaction for sin but cannot. (Obligation, but inability.)
2. God can make satisfaction for sin, but ought not. (Ability, but no obligation.)
3. Only the God/Human both can and ought to make satisfaction for sin. (Ability and obligation.)⁸²

Therefore

The first premise above was explored in considerable detail in Wesley's writings. Indeed, he affirmed, in a way similar to Anselm, that sinful human beings are powerless to atone for the least of their sins; they are utterly incapable of "appeasing the wrath of God."⁸³ Moreover, Wesley explained in his writings why even perfect obedience henceforth, if that were even a possibility, would not undo or make satisfaction for any past sins in the least—since all obedience is "owed" to a God of holy love anyway. In his sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First," Wesley reasons as follows:

How shall he pay him that he oweth? Were he from this moment to perform the most perfect obedience to every command of God, this would make no amends for a single sin, for any one act of past disobedience: seeing he owes God all the service he is able to perform from this moment to all eternity.⁸⁴

Wesley continued in this Anselmic vein in a letter to William Law in 1756 in which he queried: "Is not man here represented as having contracted a debt with God which he cannot pay? and God as having, nevertheless, a right to insist upon the payment of it?"⁸⁵ This and other kinds of language have led Lindstrom to the conclusion that "orthodox satisfaction would seem to be the dominant conception in [Wesley's] view of atonement. . . . [T]he legal order and the judicial system emerge as the governing principle."⁸⁶ Likewise, Deschner maintains that "satisfaction, not victory, is emphasized when Wesley thinks of the atonement."⁸⁷

While it is clear that the notion of satisfaction is integral to Wesley's understanding of the atoning work of Christ, it is less clear, at least at this

point, just how that satisfaction is to be understood. In other words, in what way does Christ make compensation and satisfy the justice of God? Is it by illuminating sinful humanity through his teaching, by displaying a love that could only be divine, by offering his life in sacrifice, or by being a substitute for humanity, standing in its place or perhaps even by suffering a penalty that sinful humanity should have rightly borne? All of these are possibilities. However, we can come closer to Wesley's actual seasoned judgment in this area by drawing an important distinction between the satisfaction view of Anselm and that of Wesley, for the former held that the sacrifice of Christ secured merit that was then imputed to the guilty, while the latter by and large followed the Protestant Reformers and maintained that satisfaction is best considered in terms of penal substitution.⁸⁸ In other words, for Wesley, Christ makes compensation and satisfies the justice of God precisely by standing in the place of sinful humanity, by being reckoned among its numbers, and in the end by bearing the penalty, the very wages of sin. In his treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Wesley elaborates:

Our sins were the procuring cause of all his sufferings. His sufferings were the *penal effects* of our sins. "The chastisement of our peace," the punishment necessary to procure it, "was" laid "on him," freely submitting thereto: "And by his stripes" (a part of his sufferings again put for the whole) "we are healed"; pardon, sanctification, and final salvation, are all purchased and bestowed upon us. Every chastisement is for some fault. That laid on Christ was not for his own, but ours; and was needful to reconcile an offended Lawgiver, and offending guilty creatures, to each other. So "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all"; that is, the punishment due to our iniquity.⁸⁹

In light of this teaching, it is not surprising to learn that a broad agreement exists in the secondary literature that Wesley's satisfaction view of the atonement is best comprehended in terms of penal substitution. Langford, for example, noted that "from John Wesley to Richard Watson, the theme of Jesus' substitutionary death as a means of satisfying the justice of God was central in Methodist theology, as it was in the Reformation theology of that period."⁹⁰ In addition, Deschner reminded the broader community that "in the Wesleyan atonement Christ performs a penal substitution."⁹¹ And Williams, for his part, pointed out that "the central point of penal substitutionary theory was of great importance for Wesley,"⁹² and Lindstrom argued much the same.⁹³ And though

Dunning agrees with these descriptive judgments of Wesley's view of the atonement, he nevertheless takes issue with the suitability of a penal substitutionary view in Wesley's overall theology in a way that Lindstrom did not. "The idea that Jesus bears the punishment for man's sins is totally foreign to the New Testament, Dunning expostulates; 'the language it uses is 'suffering,' not 'punishment.'"⁹⁴ And to underscore the point, this Nazarene scholar adds: "It is truly unfortunate that Wesley failed to recognize this and thus introduced an element incongruous with his otherwise largely biblically sound views."⁹⁵

We, however, will make the case that Wesley's promulgation of a penal substitutionary interpretation of the atonement is not only appropriate but also is actually indexical to his overall theology. That is, it brings together the various themes, even tensions, of a conjunctive theology that celebrates both the holiness *and* the love of God in its ongoing themes of justice, mercy, and love. To make this explicit, we will explore Wesley's sophisticated and well-nuanced understanding of the atonement in terms of objective elements (the God-ward relation) and subjective ones (the human-ward relation) that were both factored into his overall conception. Furthermore, we will develop these elements against the backdrop of a differentiation of graces (initiating, receiving, and the responding) that offer important clues as to how Wesley's estimate of the atonement is best understood.

Objective Elements

The objective aspects of Wesley's penal substitutionary view are concerned with the work that God does *for us* in the face of human inability to make atonement that both Anselm and Wesley rightly recognized. As such, the atoning work of God in Christ represents the sovereign action of the Most High with the result that beyond the roles of Creator and Governor, the Holy One is now known as a *Redeemer* as well. This initiating grace and labor, in the face of human impotence, is concerned with bringing about a proper *relation* to God once more, with what from the divine point of view (that takes holiness, justice, and the moral law seriously) is necessary in order to effectuate reconciliation, literally at-one-ment. Indeed, since Christ alone due to his unique person and being *mediates* the divine/human relationship, then both participants are addressed, so to speak. From God's side, "the just wrath of God puts

alienated man under the sentence of death."⁹⁶ And Emil Brunner, whose view on this score is remarkably similar to that of Wesley, contended that "owing to Sin, man's situation in relation to God is dangerous, sinister, and disastrous."⁹⁷ Furthermore, Williams linked the objective elements of the atonement specifically to the wrath of God and argued: "Wesley insisted that in the Atonement something 'objective' took place. . . . The satisfaction of God's wrath by Christ's death is the only basis for the pardon of our sins."⁹⁸

Though some modern assessments of Wesley's theology may have difficulty acknowledging penal substitution in general or the wrath of God in particular, clearly Wesley did not have this problem. In terms of the first issue of penalty, Wesley consistently viewed the death of Christ as bearing the punishment rightly due the rebellious sinner. Drawing the relation between the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and Christ, Wesley reveals that at Calvary, the lamb of God bore "those punishments by which our peace, our reconciliation to God, was to be purchased."⁹⁹ And elsewhere in his treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Wesley declares that "His sufferings were the penal effects of our sins. 'The chastisement of our peace.'"¹⁰⁰ And though Wesley contends in his commentary on Isaiah that human sins were the "deserving cause" of Christ's burden, he nevertheless argues, in a way often rejected by his contemporaries, that "God was the 'principal cause' of all his sufferings."¹⁰¹ As the apostle Paul put it, "He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

In terms of the second issue of wrath, the term itself occurred, remarkably enough, over three hundred times in Wesley's writings. Even more surprising for those who have been schooled on the notion that the love of God excludes all mention of wrath, Wesley actually chronicled the rise, identity, and very purpose of Methodism in terms of it. Thus, in 1743, for example, he wrote:

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to me in London who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer and advise them how to *flee from the wrath to come*, which they saw continually hanging over their heads.¹⁰²

Again, for Wesley, "nothing is more frequently or more expressly declared in Scripture than God's anger at sin and His punishing it both temporally and eternally."¹⁰³

Deschner summarized these relational elements that bespeak of the integrity of the divine/human correlation in his pithy observation that wrath, for Wesley, is "the legal, just, holy and good answer of God to willful sin."¹⁰⁴ It is *legal* in the sense that it takes God's will, as expressed in the moral law; that copy of the divine mind, fully into account. It is *just* in that it represents an ongoing, determined opposition to evil, not countenancing it in the least. Indeed, Wesley pointed out that "Whoever . . . denies God to be capable of wrath or anger acts consistently in denying His justice also."¹⁰⁵ As Lindstrom observed: "[God's] wrath bears the same relation to His justice as His love to His mercy."¹⁰⁶ In other words, wrath must be understood in terms of the holiness of God. Indeed, it is the very purity and beauty of that holiness, its awe-evoking integrity and power, that creates a fiery distance, even dread, in the sinner. Thus, a holy God is present to sinful human beings precisely as resistance, and as Brunner observed, "The Bible calls this 'resistance' the Wrath of God."¹⁰⁷ And finally, it is good in that wrath marks the response of God to the stubborn ongoing power of evil. This truth, however, is turned on its head when the love of God is separated from the holiness of God. When this is done (and it can happen for all sorts of reasons), then wrath will inevitably be seen as something utterly "evil," as actually alien to the divine purpose and love. But as noted earlier, such a "love," divorced from holiness, will emerge as sentimental, imaginary (a species of wishful thinking), and cheap, for it oddly enough *tolerates* evil, by making ongoing allowances for it, precisely in the name of love! Mincing no words, Wesley called those ministers who brought such views into the classroom and pulpit "promise-mongers."¹⁰⁸ In his "Thoughts Concerning Gospel Ministers," for example, he cautions:

Not every one who deals in the promises only, without ever showing the terrors of the law; that slides over "the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness," and endeavours to heal those that never were wounded. These promise-mongers are no Gospel Ministers.¹⁰⁹

The first difficulty, then as now, in comprehending the wrath of God aright and in seeing it as none other than an appropriate expression of holy love, concerns the whole matter of anger. Wesley, however, did not mistake divine anger for human wrath, as is so often done in some gross anthropomorphic moves. The anger of humanity, for instance, is often wild, animated, and vengeful—consumed in hateful, vindictive passions

that are anything but holy. God's anger, however, is not like this. Consequently, Wesley warned his readers that the wrath of the Most High must never be confused with human anger or, more important, conceived apart from God's love—a love that yet remains "his darling, his reigning attribute."¹¹⁰ In a letter to Mary Bishop in 1778, Wesley offers a number of cautions while at the same time he affirms the divine anger. He explains:

But it is certain, had God never been angry, He could never have been reconciled. So that, in affirming this, Mr. Law strikes at the very root of the Atonement, and finds a very short method of converting Deists. Although, therefore, I do not term God, as Mr. Law supposes, "a wrathful Being," which conveys a wrong idea; yet I firmly believe He was angry with all mankind, and that He was reconciled to them by the death of His Son. And I know He was angry with me till I believed in the Son of His love; and yet this is no impeachment to His mercy, that He is just as well as merciful.¹¹¹

For Wesley, then, divine wrath (when compared to that of humans) must be conceived "only in an analogical sense."¹¹²

The second difficulty with divine wrath, which perhaps is far more indicative of a twenty-first-century Western setting than Wesley's own setting, has to do with some of the consequences of reigning therapeutic models of salvation that view sinners principally as *victims*. So understood, sinners have caught the disease of sin, albeit with some appreciation of responsibility for having done so, and they languish in a sickbed as the Great Physician *nurtures* them on to increasing *degrees* of health and wholeness. And though Wesley's doctrine of salvation can indeed be explained, in *part*, by appeal to therapeutic models, he never viewed sinners merely or even largely as victims but also as *perpetrators*—as those who not only actively fed their own inbred sinful inclination to depart from the living God, but also were quite energetic in their opposition, even rebellion, against a God of holy love. And as the previous chapter has already pointed out, not even children are excused. "Children themselves," Wesley contends, "are not innocent before God. They suffer; therefore, they deserve to suffer."¹¹³

Since Wesley himself had little difficulty in acknowledging the wrath of God, but understood it in light of divine holy love in its unswerving and resolute opposition to evil, he naturally did not balk at the translation of *ἡλιασμός* (*hliasmos*, 1 John 2:2) as propitiation rather than as

expiation, a preference that highlighted viewing the work of Christ, to use Wesley's own words, as "the atoning sacrifice by which the wrath of God is appeased."¹¹⁴ Developing the language of the Anglican *Thirty-nine Articles* ("The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world . . ."; Article XXXI), Wesley reaches back, once again, to Old Testament images and makes the connection between Christ, on the one hand, and the mercy-seat of the ark of the covenant, on the other, which, as a propitiatory covering, was "a type of Christ the great propitiation."¹¹⁵ Again, by Jesus Christ, as "the great propitiation there is reconciliation made. . . he interposeth between us and God's displeasure, and through him we become entitled to God's favor."¹¹⁶ Indeed, so crucial was the notion of propitiation to Wesley's overall view of the atonement that he observed: "But if, as some teach, God never was offended, there was no need of this propitiation. And, if so, Christ died in vain."¹¹⁷

A further objection to Wesley's penal substitutionary view is expressed in the claim that the logic of this interpretation necessarily demands either universalism, on the one hand, or unconditional election, on the other hand.¹¹⁸ However, since only the God/human can atone for sins, and since he has also made a "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world,"¹¹⁹ as noted earlier, then the notion of universality, properly understood, is indeed a part of Wesley's view when the objective aspects are considered. But observe that the atoning work of Christ is not the *formal cause* of justification (the forgiveness of those sins that are past) but the *meritorious cause*; that is, the atonement is the basis upon which the offer of forgiveness is made to all. Drawing an important distinction that illuminates Wesley's teaching in contradistinction to a Calvinist view, Outler described the formal cause in terms of a "correlated view of predestination and irresistible grace," and he depicted the meritorious cause as one that "allowed for prevention, free will, and 'universal redemption.'"¹²⁰ In other words, the atoning work of Christ for Wesley represents the universal basis upon which the forgiveness of sins is offered to all. This is universalism in the sense that not all are necessarily redeemed but that all may be redeemed. That is, full provision has already been made for the forgiveness of sins of all people. In this sense, universality marks Wesley's penal substitutionary view.

This ample provision for the need of all human beings through the atoning work of the Mediator highlights initiating or preventient grace

broadly understood. Faced with the powerlessness of sinful humanity to atone for even the least of sins, God acts in freedom and sovereignty and reconciles the world through the sacrifice of the Mediator, the God/human, in lavish and free grace. From the God-ward side of the relation, what we have called the objective elements, atonement has already been accomplished. As Jesus uttered from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Christ's sacrifice, to use the words of the Anglican Articles once more, is "that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual."¹²¹ Wesley the Arminian understood that kind of perfection as well. Therefore, "any theory of atonement," as Taylor notes, "falls short that fails to see it as extensive (to all . . .) and as intensive (for all sin)."¹²²

Subjective Elements

Though God has already acted in Jesus Christ even before sinners are aware of it, the atonement, the reconciliation of God and humanity from the human-ward side in its subjective heart-changing effects, would not take place until such benefits are received. That is, initiating grace must be accompanied by receiving grace. And the distinction between these two gifts from God can be illustrated by Wesley's dialog with August Spangenberg in Georgia. In February 1736, for example, the Moravian leader asked quite pointedly: "Do you know Jesus Christ?" To which Wesley replied, "I know he is the Saviour of the world." Undererred, Spangenberg pressed his case: "True . . . but do you know he has saved you?"¹²³

It is this transition from knowing Christ as the Savior of the world to knowing that he has saved you in particular (Luther's *pro me*) that illuminates the difference, at least in some sense, between initiating grace (which is the work of God and the Mediator alone) and receiving grace (which is, of course, a divine work but also one that involves human freedom [graciously restored] and acceptance in that such grace must be embraced). Again, this transition from the objective to subjective elements in Wesley's view of the atonement ultimately issues in the justification (and assurance) of sinners, who having no righteousness of their own, must receive this boon, almost in a passive way, as the sheer utter gift that it actually is. So then, even here the priority is, once again, on divine action, though the integrity of the human personality is respected, and its freedom to receive grace affirmed, aspects that would be

repudiated or lost in deterministic understandings of redemption that played out among some of Wesley's Calvinist friends. Wesley explored the ideas behind initiating and receiving graces, divine and human action, by drawing a distinction between freedom and conditions as they pertained to the gifts of God. He observes:

"Can then God give that freely, which he does not give but upon certain terms and conditions?" Doubtless he can; as one may freely give you a sum of money, on condition *you stretch out your hand to receive it*. It is therefore no "contradiction to say, We are justified freely by grace, and yet upon certain terms or conditions."¹²⁴

Consequently, for Wesley, the first movements of salvation, properly understood, are marked by initiating and receiving graces, which then out of gratitude and thankfulness issue in responding grace. But note that there is no responding without first *receiving*, whether that receiving is understood in a sovereign fashion, as in terms of the irresistibly restored faculties of preventive grace, or in a fashion that admits of human action, at least in some sense, even if it only entails extending the hand to receive the gift of forgiveness and justification.

But God, according to Wesley, is even more gracious than this, for behind the subjective aspects of the atonement is the divine love that earnestly seeks to bless. The kenotic movement of Christ's incarnational descent to take on the form of a servant finds its fulfillment, its completion, on a blood-spattered cross. In Christ's embrace of rejection and shame, what Wesley describes as "the greatest instance both of humiliation and obedience,"¹²⁵ Christ not only radically identified with the righteous judgment of a holy God upon all sinners, but also displayed a love that was enduring, triumphant, and, in the end, nothing less than divine. "After this demonstration of his love," Wesley asked, "is it possible to doubt any longer of God's tender regard for man, even though he was 'dead in trespasses and sins'?"¹²⁶

Wesley once again underscored the love of God called forth in believers by drawing a relation between Adam and Christ. Had not Adam sinned, Wesley reasons, we could not have loved God the same as if he delivered the Son up for us all.¹²⁷ "We might have loved the Son of God as being 'the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person . . .,' he declares; 'But we could not have loved him as 'bearing our sins in his own body on the tree.'"¹²⁸ This "happy fault" of Adam and Eve, what some refer to by the Latin phrase *Felix Culpa*, necessitates the

coming of Christ and his atoning death, such that a far greater good comes out of this original evil than is otherwise possible. In other words, without the fall, "that amazing instance of the love of God to man [would have] never existed which has in all ages excited the highest joy, and love, and gratitude from his children."¹²⁹ Believers might have loved God as Creator, Preserver, and Governor, but there would have been no place for loving God as the Redeemer. As a consequence of this, believers may attain "more holiness and happiness on earth than it would have been possible for them to attain if Adam had not fallen."¹³⁰

Though Wesley did indeed view the atonement of Christ as having "excited the highest joy and love, and gratitude from his children" as just noted, and though he also stressed some of the subjective aspects of Christ's work, its human-ward direction so to speak, by illuminating the importance of *receiving* grace efficaciously, nevertheless his view can be distinguished, in some measure, from the moral influence theory of Abelard. For one thing, though this medieval scholar in his *Commentary on Romans* does develop the subjective aspects of the atonement, nevertheless, in this view the love that is engendered is not necessarily rooted in a kenotic descent to the cross in the way that it is for Wesley. Indeed, for Abelard, judging from his appendix to Romans 3:19-26,¹³¹ the love of God might have been revealed in other ways, apart from Calvary. In Wesley's reckoning, however, it is precisely at the lowest depths, and in the least likely of places, that the humble, sacrificial love of God paradoxically shines forth. What manner of love is it that takes the place of sinners, bears their judgment, and despises the shame! So understood, love and the cross are not incidentally related but are necessarily so. Together they are a reflection of God's humble, sacrificial holy love.

King

The crucified one, despised and rejected, is revealed by the power of his resurrection as the Son of the living God. In this glorious work, the Most High attests to the sufficiency of atonement "by raising our great Surety from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:17)."¹³² What's more, the resurrection is the seal and proclamation of the second coming unto judgment for "God 'raising Jesus demonstrated hereby, that He was to be the glorious Judge of all (Acts 17:31).'"¹³³

Having been obedient unto death, even death on the cross, Christ has

inherited a dominion and is more than fit to judge the nations and to rule as king, the last of the three offices. Thus, when Wesley explores the first principal role of the kingly office, that is, "as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood,"¹³⁴ he not only demonstrates that the Savior will rule and have lasting authority, but also reveals that Christ's working with the law is not exhausted in the prophetic office. As a king, the risen One gives laws (the substance of which is none other than his Word) to the redeemed, to those who have been transformed by the gracious presence of the divine life.

The second role of the kingly office, "as restoring those to the image of God whom he had first reinstated in his favour,"¹³⁵ suggests the first salvific grace of regeneration, properly speaking, and thereby displays the link between the juridical theme of forgiveness and the participatory one of renewal. Consequently, these two themes are not as divorced, certainly not from the atoning work of Christ as their basis, as some interpretations would seem to suggest. To be sure, though Wesley did underscore the juridical aspects of the atonement, as noted earlier, he nevertheless had already learned from both the Salzburgers in Georgia and the Moravians in England—who each in their own way represented the rich tradition of German pietism—that death leads not only to forgiveness but also to life, that the juridical and the participatory are both rooted at Golgotha.¹³⁶ Thus, in his commentary on 1 Peter 2:24, Wesley discloses that in terms of sin, believers are "wholly delivered both from the guilt and power of it; indeed, without an atonement first made for the guilt, we could never have been delivered from the power."¹³⁷ Simply put, there is no resurrection without crucifixion; no regeneration without a cross; no kingly role without a prior priestly one.

In light of this, Deschner's claim (and others like it) that "Wesley insists we are forgiven in Christ, but not holy in Christ" in one sense is not quite accurate, for it not only sharply divides the juridical from the participatory, but also does not fully see the atoning work of Christ as the gracious basis for holiness and renewal, a renewal that, like forgiveness, is and remains a sheer, utter gift. For one thing, Wesley realized that sinners on the threshold of the new birth become holy, at least initially so, only in Christ, having no holiness (as yet) in themselves. Granted, it will be a holiness that is *imparted*, and here we agree with Deschner; but at its very inception, it marks a *qualitative* change in believers who heretofore have had no holiness in themselves. That is, genuine imparted holiness must never be understood apart from being in Christ by means of the

Holy Spirit who is the fount of all holiness. Accordingly, just as sinners must receive the forgiveness of sins (justification), having no forgiveness of their own apart from the atoning work of Christ, so, too, must they receive the gracious presence of the Spirit of Christ in regeneration and life, having no holiness in themselves, properly speaking, apart from this initially sanctifying grace.

Continuing this line of thought, we note that the apostle Paul expressed the connection between regeneration and the cross in Galatians 2:20b, in which he declared: "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And Wesley himself drew the link between justification and regeneration, the juridical and the participatory, in his pungent observation, "When does inward sanctification begin? In the moment we are justified. The seed of every virtue is then sown in the soul."¹³⁸ Put another way, these virtues, which mark the beginning of holiness, constitute nothing less than a gift to be received, one that is predicated upon the atoning work of Christ, issues in resurrected life, and is strengthened from the kingly role as well. To be sure, the beginning of holiness, as with forgiveness, are best understood not in the context of co-operant grace or of an overarching synergistic model, but in terms of free grace in which not only are divine action and initiative underscored, and rightly appreciated, but also the powerlessness of sinners either to forgive themselves or to make themselves holy is ever in view. Simply put, for sinners, the source of both forgiveness and renewal is beyond themselves. In both instances, they must come with empty hands.

The third role of Christ as king is "reigning in all believing hearts until he has 'subdued all things to himself'; until he hath utterly cast out all sin, and 'brought in everlasting righteousness.'"¹³⁹ Now if we make a distinction between the *beginning* of holiness in terms of *receiving* grace and the ongoing *process* of sanctification, in terms of both *receiving* and *responding* grace, then Deschner's earlier observation is both accurate and to the point. That is, for Wesley, though initially sanctifying grace is freely given in conjunction with justification and forgiveness, the active obedience of Christ in fulfilling the law is not imparted to the believer. "If there is a fulfillment," as this scholar pointed out, it will be "worked in him by the Spirit of Christ."¹⁴⁰ In fact, when Wesley quoted from Cranmer's "Homily on Salvation" in his sermon "The Lord Our Righteousness,"¹⁴¹ all references to Christ fulfilling the law were simply omitted, specifically the following sentence: "He for them fulfilled the

law in his life, so that now in him and by him every Christian may be called a fulfiller of the law, forasmuch as that which their infirmity lacked, Christ's [righteousness] hath supplied."¹⁴²

It is clear, then, that Wesley disassociated the fulfillment of the law from atonement and justification and, in the words of Lindström, "attached it instead to sanctification."¹⁴³ And though *responding* grace has a role to play even from the first glimmers of preventient grace, it nevertheless comes to prominence in this context of initially sanctifying grace, the proper beginning of the Christian life, simply because the response of the saints is informed for the first time by a love imparted in their hearts that is both holy and triumphant. In other words, the victory motif, for Wesley, is not so much associated with Christ's priestly work, that is, with what he does for us (justification), as it is with his kingly work, what he does in us as a Savior and Sanctifier (sanctification).¹⁴⁴ "We want Christ

in his royal character to reign in our hearts, and subdue all things to himself. . . ."¹⁴⁵ Wesley exclaims; "Hereby we are brought to 'magnify him,' indeed, to 'give him all the glory of his grace,' to 'make him a whole Christ, an entire Saviour,' and truly to 'set the crown upon his head.'"¹⁴⁶

Such a view of Christ's regal role not only affords a significant and ongoing role for the moral law in the life of believers, especially in terms of its prescriptive and illuminating power, but also sees the victory motif of conquering sin, death, hell, and Satan as playing out not simply at the cross,¹⁴⁷ but also in the ongoing transformation of human hearts in the context of the church, as Christ comes, judges, and then finally reigns without a rival. So important is this sanctifying work in believing hearts, in which grace is underscored and in which Christ holds sway, that Wesley envisions no eschatological fulfillment apart from it. In other words, it is precisely as Christ subdues all things to himself and utters casts out all sin that everlasting righteousness is brought in—a righteousness that is not only the desire of the church but also the very perfection of the kingly role.

Today and Tomorrow: The Christ of the Qur'an

Islam today not only is a major world religion with well over a billion adherents, stretching from the Middle East to Southeast Asia, but also is

second in numbers only to Christianity. Contrary to popular misconceptions, this ranking is likely to continue well into the twenty-first century, and, according to one estimate, by 2050, "there should still be about three Christians for every two Muslims worldwide."¹⁴⁸

The historic figure Muhammad as well as the revelation he received, which constitutes the Qur'an, are both integral to understanding this major faith that has proved attractive to so many. Disturbed with the confusing array of deities in seventh-century Arabia, Muhammad, later known simply as the prophet, questioned why his people did not worship the One true God and why no prophet had been sent to them. The Jews had Moses and the Torah, and the Christians had Jesus and the Gospels, but what of the Arabs?

It is difficult to assess what knowledge Muhammad and his followers had of the Gospels since they were unavailable in Arabic until the ninth century.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, when they finally did appear in translation, the Muslims simply refused to read them, having been taught for centuries that they contained distortions of the original revelation. In fact, according to Islamic belief, the religion of the prophet Muhammad is "the correction and fulfillment of the Jewish and Christian messages, contained in the Old Testament and New Testament."¹⁵⁰ However, what the prophet actually knew about Christianity probably came through oral tradition as well as from possible contacts with Monophysites, Nestorians, and Melkites (who were by no means the best representatives) since no organized church was in the area at the time.¹⁵¹

At any rate, according to Muslim tradition, Muhammad began to receive a revelation from the angel Gabriel in 610—what constitutes the first five verses of sura 96 of the Qur'an.¹⁵² After a break of two years or so, the prophet once more began to receive illumination that continued without interruption until his death in 632. Over this period of twenty-two years, the principal book of Islam emerged. Consisting of 114 surahs (chapters) and over 6,000 verses, the chapters of the Qur'an are arranged by their length, with the largest coming first, such that the last sura is simply a few verses. Lacking a kinetic line, on which cues are offered in terms of time, personality, and place, the Qur'an has been something of a puzzle, literally speaking, especially for Westerners. Pronouns, for example, arise in the work without any antecedent.¹⁵³ Indeed, the arrangement of the book entails considerable repetition and reads more like a series of unconnected aphorisms than anything else.

From the Muslim perspective, the Qur'an is the very word of God, the

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

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