On the Love of God

by

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William C. Turner, Jr.

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation queries the ongoing significance and fruitfulness of Augustine of Hippo’s insight that the Holy Spirit is the Love of God. Rather than turning to the standard text, his *De Trinitate*, this project examines closely the earlier *Tractatus in Epistolam Joannis ad Pathos*, a set of sermons on 1 John delivered mostly during the Octave of Easter.

The study of the *Tractatus* is offered in conjunction with a much later interlocutor, John Wesley. A close reading of Augustine’s sermons of the *Tractatus* is synthesized with a close reading of Wesley’s five extant sermons on texts from 1 John. The principal argument in this dissertation is that a synthesis of Augustine and John Wesley on the Holy Spirit produces a nuanced understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God that enriches contemporary systematic theology. Furthermore, instead of either a purely archeological retrieval or genealogical study of these two theologians, this dissertation demonstrates the potential for enrichment by offering constructive proposals concerning the systematic coherence between a theology of divine desire and a theology of Christian initiation made possible by this Augustinian-Wesleyan approach to the Spirit.

The opening chapters, one through three, form an exegetical and synthesizing foundation, establishing the basic building blocks of the constructive proposals of chapter four, a theology of divine desire, and chapter five, a theology of Christian initiation. In the early chapters, the dissertation draws on the recent insights into systematic theology of Sarah Coakley and A.N. Williams in order to approach systematics in a way that
brings coherence to a disparate set of homiletical texts. The conclusion of the dissertation is that Augustine’s naming of the Holy Spirit, far from being an ancient relic best abandoned, resonates strongly with Wesley’s own insights into the Spirit’s person and work and that an Augustinian-Wesleyan pneumatology suggests possibilities for further cross-centuries examination of these two significant Christian preachers.
Dedication

To Libby
## Contents

- Acknowledgments .......................................................... xii
- Introduction ................................................................. 1
  - Augustine and John Wesley ........................................... 3
  - Method and Structure .................................................. 7

### Chapter One ................................................................. 10
- Introduction ............................................................... 10
- Secondary Literature ..................................................... 12
  - Larger works incorporating the Homilies .......................... 13
  - Introductory essays .................................................... 16
- The Homilies: Initial Comments ....................................... 19

### The Ten Homilies in Detail .............................................. 23
  - Homily I ................................................................. 24
  - Homily II ............................................................. 25
  - Homily III ............................................................ 27
  - Homily IV ............................................................. 29
  - Homily V ............................................................. 31
  - Homily VI ............................................................ 33
  - Homily VII ........................................................... 35
  - Homily VIII .......................................................... 37
  - Homily IX ............................................................. 39
  - Homily X ............................................................. 41
Divine Desire in Scripture ................................................................. 168
Desire and divine aseity ................................................................. 169
Desire and worship ................................................................. 170
Desire and Israel ................................................................. 173
Desire and the divine missions ................................................................. 175

Contemporary Pneumatology ......................................................... 177
José Comblin ........................................................................... 180
Michael Welker ........................................................................... 182
Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. ........................................................................... 184
Immanence and transcendence ................................................................. 186

Divine Desire and the Love of God .................................................. 187
Preliminary matters ................................................................. 187
Searching the Scriptures for the Love of God .................................................. 190
The Love of God and contemporary pneumatology .................................................. 193
Sounding the depths of the Trinity for the Love of God .................................................. 195

Conclusion: The Bond of Love ................................................................. 199

Chapter Five .............................................................................. 201
Introduction .............................................................................. 201

Liturgical Studies and Christian Initiation .................................................. 204
Christian Initiation and the Love of God .................................................. 206

Christian initiation, human desire, and the Love of God .................................................. 210
Baptism, chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist .................................................. 216
Christian initiation, postbaptismal sin, and the Love of God............223

The Challenge of Christian Practice..............................................230

Initial remarks..............................................................................230

Rethinking “open table” Eucharist.............................................235

Rites, Loci, and System.................................................................240

Conclusion..................................................................................242

Appendix......................................................................................246

Bibliography................................................................................251

Biography....................................................................................263
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xii
All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New Revised
Standard Version of the Bible.
Introduction

How might Augustine’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God enrich contemporary systematic theology? This is the initial and framing question of the present dissertation. Already it betrays two key aspects concerning what is to follow: first, that Augustine’s understanding of the Holy Spirit will be a central concern; second, that in this dissertation I will approach Augustine’s understanding positively, as something of enduring value and significance. The first aspect is hardly noteworthy. Augustine is a major figure in (Western) Christianity, and his argument that the Holy Spirit is the Love of God has influenced theological developments for centuries. Another study of this figure or one of his key contributions is but a blip on the theological map. The second aspect, however, is less expected given the current theological terrain. Pointed criticisms of Augustine on love, of Augustine on the Holy Spirit, and of Augustine on the Holy Spirit as Love have been fashionable for at least the last fifty years. Some of these have come from genuine interlocutors who see both insights and potential problems with Augustine’s arguments; others seem intent on perpetuating inadequate or even almost willful misreadings of his work.1

1 As an example of the former I offer Louis Bouyer, Le Consolateur: Esprit-Saint et Vie de Grâce (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1980), 425, who asks, "[S]i l'Esprit-Saint se définit comme l'amour commun du Père et du Fils, faudra-t-il conclure paradoxalement qu'il est, des trois personnes, la seule à ne pas aimer?" For the latter, see Thomas Jay Oord, The Nature of Love: A Theology (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2010), 57-84, who offers an oversimplified reading of Augustine's uti-frui distinction completely lacking in subtlety and based on the flawed premise, 58, that Augustine's "most thorough description of Christian love comes in a book he calls Teaching Christianity (De doctrina christiana)." Oord depicts an Augustinian approach to love that is hopelessly devoid of any recognition of the breadth and complexity of Augustine’s thought or of the significant amount of secondary literature that offers compelling alternative readings to his own.
Though Augustine’s understanding of the Holy Spirit frames my work here, the approach I take is significantly broader. Naming the Holy Spirit the Love of God is one of Augustine’s enduring contributions to Christian theology. This contribution, I suggest, complements and is complemented by the work of a much later theologian, Methodist founder John Wesley. Indeed, my principal argument in this dissertation is that a synthesis of Augustine and John Wesley on the Holy Spirit produces a nuanced understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God that enriches contemporary systematic theology. Furthermore, instead of either a purely archeological retrieval or genealogical study of these two theologians, I demonstrate this potential for enrichment by investigating the systematic coherence between a theology of divine desire and a theology of Christian initiation made possible by this Augustinian-Wesleyan approach to the Spirit.

Thus at various points this dissertation addresses a range of topics, including, in no particular order, theological method, Trinitarian theology, liturgical theology, contemporary pneumatology, moral theology, and holistic soteriology, as well as the nature of both Augustine’s and Wesley’s approach to the Holy Spirit. This web of theological relationships adds layers of complexity to the dissertation. Hopefully the reader may also find interesting, and maybe even compelling, my own constructive proposals concerning divine desire and Christian initiation, developed in the later chapters. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this project, however, is that it brings together two theologians not often associated with each other.
Augustine and John Wesley

At first glance, Augustine and Wesley do not appear to have much in common. Augustine was a North African bishop; Wesley was an Anglican priest. Wesley lived during the Enlightenment; Augustine lived in Late Antiquity. Augustine produced a number of lengthy and influential works, including the *Confessions* and *The City of God*; Wesley did not. More importantly, Wesley does not appear to have had much affinity for Augustine’s theological legacy. According to Ted Campbell, Wesley knew of and referred to several of Augustine’s writings, but Campbell seems to speak for a general scholarly consensus on Wesley’s relationship to Augustine when he notes that “[Wesley’s] references to Augustine were often critical.”

Wesley, Campbell argues, was ambivalent about Augustine, put off by Augustine’s account of predestination and his polemics against Pelagius.

Nonetheless, I believe that there are ample grounds for bringing the works of these two into dialogue. I reserve for the chapters below extensive supporting evidence for this claim. Here I limit myself to one key similarity: both men were preachers. In fact, sermons make up a substantial part of the extant corpus of John Wesley and Augustine. For this reason, the primary source material for this dissertation will be selections of their sermons. Specifically, I focus on Augustine’s *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* and

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3 Ibid., 63-64.

4 That this is so for Wesley is common knowledge, but only recently have scholars begun to recognize the importance of sermons to understanding Augustine. See chapter one below. For a basic introduction to Augustine’s preaching, see Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 344-398.
Wesley’s five extant sermons on texts from 1 John. These will take center stage in chapters one through three. For the moment, we consider what kind of preachers Augustine and Wesley were. There are some noteworthy differences in Augustine and Wesley’s respective approaches to preaching.

The first of these differences is in the sources themselves. Augustine’s *Homilies* are, more or less, transcriptions of the actual sermons he preached. While we cannot be certain that they underwent no later editing, we do get a sense from the sermons themselves that they were not previously scripted but delivered more or less extemporaneously. There are clear instances of Augustine responding to his congregation’s reaction to something he has said, and there is the fact that he appears to have run out of time during the Octave of Easter, when most of the *Homilies* were originally preached, because he dwelt longer on sections of the epistle than he had anticipated.

Wesley’s sermons, on the other hand, are first written documents. While we can be fairly certain that they formed the basis for his actual preaching, we do not have more than a few transcriptions of Wesley’s sermons from across his entire lifetime. Considering the frequency with which he preached, this is perhaps somewhat astonishing. The sermons on 1 John are model sermons. They are clearly structured, well-organized (certainly in comparison with Augustine’s *Homilies*), and free of any direct evidence of having been delivered as we now have them.5

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5 On this point see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1989), 162-173, esp. 172-173: “[I]t appears that Wesley’s oral preaching does not seem to be radically different from the form and content of his published sermons…”
Another noteworthy difference between the two preachers is in the actual structure of the sermons. I have more to say on the breadth of Scripture in Augustine and Wesley’s preaching in the Appendix, but it is worth pointing out now that the structure of Augustine’s sermons matches much more the structure of 1 John than the structure of Wesley’s sermons. This is doubtless due to the extemporaneous nature of Augustine’s preaching, but the difference is rather stark. Augustine follows the epistle’s author verse by verse; he covers nearly every verse—even if these sermons are not a modern commentary—while staying very close to the text; his is expository preaching. As Paul Griffiths says, the *Homilies*’ “order and structure are given by John’s letter; without this letter [they are], as a whole, incomprehensible… In the first tractate [alone], twenty-one verses are quoted complete, verbatim, and in the proper order.” Augustine relies on Scripture as a continuo player on a figured bass line; it provides the firm ground for his homiletic creativity.

Somewhat ironically, the same cannot be said, or at least cannot be said in the same way, for John Wesley. Wesley lays out clear outlines at the beginning of his sermons. The basic difference in the records we have of the two homiletical forms, preached and printed, is an expected one of occasional omissions of published material in the former, but also the inclusion of more anecdotes and informal timely comments. It is not surprising, then, that the reports of Wesley’s oral preaching in these cases, though perhaps not dramatic or eloquent in themselves, point toward homiletic presentations that have more spirit and life than their published counterparts. According to Dany Dideberg in his notes on Augustine, *Homélies sur la première épître de saint Jean*, volume 76 of *Œuvres de saint Augustin*. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), 515. Augustine mentions every verse of 1 John 1:1-5:3b: “[i]l laisse tomber [seulement] les 18 derniers verset de l’épître johannique.”


I say ironic because Wesley is often called a “man of one book,” the one book being Scripture. For recent insights into this characterization of Wesley, see Ian J. Maddock, *Men of One Book: A Comparison of Two Methodist Preachers, John Wesley and George Whitefield* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2011).
sermons, but these outlines are sometimes more, and sometimes less, related to the text. In each of the sermons discussed above, a single verse from 1 John serves as the Scripture text; this single verse is more of a prompt for sermonic reflection than the subject of commentary-like scrutiny. While Wesley is not unaware of the context of each of these verses, he does not concern himself overly with accounting for the surrounding verses. His sermons are as topical as they are exegetical.

One thing the two preachers, separated by over thirteen hundred years, do share in common is length. Following Paul Griffiths’ standard, set forth in his *Religious Reading*, of one hundred sixty words per minute preaching speed, Wesley’s “On the Trinity” would take roughly eighteen minutes to preach; his “Spiritual Idolatry” would take twenty-four minutes; and his “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” “Spiritual Worship,” and “The End of Christ’s Coming” all would take about twenty-seven minutes. Griffiths estimates that the *Homilies* took, on average, about thirty minutes to preach.

The point, then, is not that Wesley and Augustine are identical figures but, rather, that their shared interest in and vocation of preaching supplies fertile grounds for comparing and drawing from their work. If this does not exactly put the two on equal footing, it at least ensures that the basis of comparison does not greatly favor one author over the other. It also underscores a major aim of this dissertation, which is to reclaim sermons as material of use to the work of Christian systematic theology.
Method and Structure

A straightforward comparison of these two preachers would be insufficient for both the framing question and the thesis I have given this dissertation. Nor does this dissertation attempt to demonstrate a genealogical relationship between Wesley and Augustine. Instead, I rely on close readings of a very limited selection of texts from each; secondary literature certainly has a role to play in ensuring a careful reading, but the initial emphasis is on the primary texts. From this close reading I then synthesize an Augustinian-Wesleyan theology of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God. The work of close reading and synthesis occupies chapters one through three. In chapter one I examine Augustine’s *Homilies*; in chapter two I turn to Wesley’s sermons on 1 John. Chapter three is the synthesis of the close readings of chapters one and two.

My thesis, however, is that a synthesis of Augustine and John Wesley on the Holy Spirit produces a nuanced understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God that enriches contemporary systematic theology. The remaining chapters, four and five, are dedicated to showing how this synthesis might benefit contemporary systematics. Instead of rehashing topics central to the sermons studied in the first two chapters, I consider two new topics, bringing the synthesis of chapter three to bear in order to offer some fresh proposals. In chapter four I turn to the subject of divine desire. Here the matter is Trinitarian theology proper, and the direction pursued is: does God desire? If the Holy Spirit is the Love of God, and if love is associated in human beings with desire, does this furnish grounds for speaking of desire in the divine life? In this fourth chapter we enter
speculative territory that neither Augustine nor Wesley ever really explores. The synthesis of their work, however, does give us a way into this territory.

In chapter five, the final chapter, I consider a second topic: a theology of Christian initiation. Having developed in chapter four some ideas concerning the place of the Spirit as Love in the life of the Trinity, I turn to the Spirit’s work in salvation through the rites of Christian initiation. Augustine, of course, shapes much of Christian thought about baptism, and his *Homilies* were preached to a congregation that would have included recently baptized members. But even though Wesley does not have as much to say about Christian rites of initiation, he is also concerned about a vivified Christianity; Wesley also values the work of the Spirit in redeeming human passions and desires. The theology of chapter five draws heavily on the preceding chapter and points to the implications of this dissertation for a systematic theology that is sensitive to *loci* normally considered under the purview of practical theology.

Thus the dissertation unfolds in two major sections: the exegetical and synthesizing work of chapters one, two, and three, and the constructive proposals of chapters four and five. But there is also a more subtle structure in play. The dissertation reflects the sonata-allegro form developed in the classic period of Western music, the era of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. In sonata-allegro form, normally, the major themes are presented in the exposition; chapters one and two are this dissertation’s parallel.

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9 See chapter one below.
10 The classical sonata is a multi-movement work. The first movement is often in sonata-allegro form. The popularity and influence of the sonata genre, however, meant that the sonata-allegro form became one of the most common in Western art music, a structuring device employed in everything from operas to symphonies.
Following the exposition, there is a cadence (chapter three) that leads into the
development (chapters four and five), in which the composer creatively employs the
themes from the exposition. Finally comes the recapitulation (here, the conclusion),
which, far from being a literal restatement of the exposition, re-presents the original
themes following the new perspective on them given by the development.

Charles Wesley, whose voice is otherwise absent from this dissertation, captures
the themes of this dissertation in one of his *Whitsunday Hymns*:\(^\text{11}\)

> Spirit of pure and holy LOVE,
> We feel thee streaming from above,
> In calm unutterable peace,
> The LOVE by thee diffus’d abroad
> Unites our happy hearts to God,
> And seals our everlasting bliss.

A dissertation, even one influenced by sonata-allegro form, is not a hymn, nor should it
try to stand in the place of one like this. But it can aspire to do justice to the vision and

Small caps original. For the published texts of Wesley’s hymns, see the Duke University Divinity School’s
Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition website, http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-
centers/cswt/wesley-texts/charles-wesley.
Chapter One

Introduction

In the Tractatus in Epistolam Joannis ad Pathos Augustine presents some of his most important teachings both on the Holy Spirit and on the love of God. Preached more or less during the Octave of Easter, likely in AD 407, the Homilies on the First Epistle of John (henceforth Homilies) are aimed at least partially, if not primarily, at the recently baptized.¹ The Homilies, however, are not mystagogical exercises unveiling the secrets of the holy sacraments to the newly initiated Christians, nor are they a collection of leftover tidbits from previously-conducted catechetical exercises that prepared such new initiates for baptism. Rather, the Homilies are theological hortations to love. In these sermons, Augustine counsels his congregation in the art of Christian love.

I use the term “theological hortations” deliberately to indicate the difficulty of classifying the Homilies. They are a mixture of various genres, including encomia on Christian love, theological instruction on Christian doctrine, moral exhortation on right Christian behavior, and careful exegesis of the text of First John. None of these genres can be isolated from the others, neither for the sermons as a whole nor for individual sermons. No sermon is only a piece of theological instruction; theological instruction is always connected to practices and patterns of Christian behavior. No sermon is merely an example of Augustinian ethics; demands for right behavior are never divorced from theological reasoning. Surely this is due in no small part to Augustine’s broader approach

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to preaching, which Stanley P. Rosenberg calls “a vital indicator both of [Augustine’s] own theological concerns and of public thought” in Augustine’s congregations.² It is also due to the fact that Augustine hews so closely to the text of the Johannine epistle. His Homilies are not a commentary on the letter, but they do approach it studiously, often one verse at a time.

In this first chapter I scrutinize Augustine’s Homilies for their content concerning love and the Holy Spirit.³ It is my contention that in these sermons Augustine provides an approach to the Holy Spirit and the love of God that is as fruitful for contemporary theology as his work in such better-known treatises as De Trinitate. This contention, however, can only be maintained following a close reading of the text of the Homilies.⁴ Following a brief survey of some recent secondary literature, I offer my own close reading of this text along three lines of inquiry: first, the general themes of the Homilies, second, Augustine’s teaching on love, and, third, Augustine’s work on the Holy Spirit.

³ In his recent dissertation, Travis E. Ables characterized Augustine’s thought on the Holy Spirit as “‘caritological’ pneumatology.” See Travis E. Ables, “A Pneumatology of Christian Knowledge: The Holy Spirit and the Performance of the Mystery of God in Augustine and Barth” (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, 2010), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/pqdtft/docview/854983257/abstract/142CEB2776F2EF0D5731?accountid=10598, 107. Ables has since published his dissertation as Travis E. Ables, Incarnational Realism: Trinity and the Spirit in Augustine and Barth (London; New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013). It is telling and perhaps unfortunate that theologians have ready words for the study of demons (demonology) and sin (hamartiology) but must invent a barbarism like “caritological” to discuss the study of love.
⁴ And, in fact, this claim will only be demonstrated fully in later chapters.
Secondary Literature

The secondary literature on the *Homilies* is sparse.\(^5\) There exists, as far as I know, only one monograph that deals explicitly with them, and even that monograph is not exclusively concerned with the *Homilies*.\(^6\) There have also been some recent larger works, including dissertations and monographs, that have incorporated readings of Augustine’s sermons on First John. Much of what has been written is in the form of introductory essays. I will touch briefly on each of these three general categories of secondary literature, mostly in order to note the various interests and general characterizations of the *Homilies*, leaving to later in the chapter comments on specific passages.

\(^5\) There are two surprises here. First, there is very little in the literature that deals either primarily or exclusively with the *Homilies*. Given their accessibility and the wealth of material they contain, this is rather curious. What is perhaps less expected and therefore even more surprising is the general absence of the sermons in works that deal with subjects at the heart of the *Homilies*. So, for example, there is no mention of the *Homilies* in the index of Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Even Lewis Ayres only gives two footnotes to the *Homilies* in his *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), despite the fact that the *Homilies* provide early evidence and a clear-cut example of what Ayres identifies as the second rule of Augustine’s Trinitarian grammar (viz., that a characteristic identified as both God and from God should apply specifically to a Divine Person other than the Father). I do not intend my surprise at these omissions as criticisms of either of these fine works. Rather, Gioia and Ayres stand in for what could be considered the general neglect of the *Homilies* in many approaches to Augustine. I believe the kinds of cases they are trying to build for new and, arguably, better readings of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology could only be strengthened by closer examination of the *Homilies*.

Larger works incorporating the Homilies

A number of larger works take account of the Homilies as part of wider projects on some aspect or another of Augustine’s thought. I offer an overview here of two that are particularly relevant to the present dissertation.

To the best of my knowledge, the sole single published monograph on the Homilies is Dany Dideberg’s Saint Augustin et La Première Épître de Saint Jean : Une Théologie de l’Agapè.7 Strictly speaking, however, even Dideberg’s work is not on the Homilies; it is on Augustine’s approach to 1 John more generally. For Dideberg, “il ne suffit pas de considérer les dix Tractatus in epistolam Ioannis qui, à un moment donné, constituent un commentaire à peu près integral de l’épître. Il faut encore explorer le reste de l’œuvre augustinienne.”8 Thus Dideberg is interested in general themes of Augustine’s broader corpus as well as the development of Augustine’s thought, issues that do not concern us in the present work.

Dideberg structures his work in six chapters according to six important themes, which are:9 the precept of brotherly charity, perfection and belief of brotherly charity, brotherly charity—distinguishing mark of the Christian, brotherly love and union with

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7 Dideberg also has an introductory essay in Homélies sur la première épître de saint Jean, volume 76 of Œuvres de saint Augustin. ([Paris]: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), but to avoid redundancy I will not discuss that essay in my overview of the secondary literature on the Homilies.
8 Dideberg, Saint Augustin, 34. The fact that Dideberg assigns the Homilies to the category of “commentary” should not pass unremarked. The Homilies are not commentaries; they are sermons. Misidentifying them as commentaries places them unnecessarily in a more rarified stratum and risks isolating Augustine the preacher from his audience (congregation). Augustine’s work in these sermons is the on-the-ground work of theological hortation, the work of refusing either to separate theology from ethics or force one into an unnatural submission to the other. “Commentary” does not do justice to such work.
9 I have translated the chapter themes from the French.
God by love, perfection of the love of God, and the God-Love—mystery of the love of believers.\textsuperscript{10} Clearly, then, for Dideberg the essential aspects of Augustine’s exegesis of 1 John, including his work in the Homilies, are brotherly charity, the love of God, and the connection between the two, and, indeed, Dideberg says that his goal is to demonstrate “comment Augustin explique l’Épître de saint Jean et en recueille une théologie de l’agapè et, plus profondément, comment le disciple bien-aimé et l’évêque africain sont dans la tradition de l’Église, l’un et l’autre, témoins de Dieu qui est Amour.”\textsuperscript{11} Agape (brotherly charity) and God who is Love are the two main points of Augustine’s exegesis of 1 John.

Before leaving Dideberg and turning to other authors, I would comment on a section of his monograph that is especially pertinent. The last section of his final chapter is on the Holy Spirit who, as “Amour du Père et du Fils, communique à l’homme l’amour de Dieu (et des frères).”\textsuperscript{12} Two interesting elements of this section deserve notice. The first is Dideberg’s claim that Augustine’s reading of “God is love” constitutes “l’apport le plus original d’Augustin au commentaire de la Prima Ioannis et à l’élaboration d’une théologie de la caritas: Dieu communique son amour à l’homme par l’Esprit Saint qui, au sein de la Trinité, est amour du Père et du Fils.”\textsuperscript{13} This understanding of Augustine’s work is also at the heart of the present dissertation. Second, however, Dideberg is able to substantiate this claim, at least in this final section, with hardly any reference to the

\textsuperscript{10} Dideberg, Saint Augustin, 8. Interestingly, the order of these six themes follows roughly (but not exclusively) the outline of the book of 1 John.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 222.
Homilies. Indeed, his principal Augustinian sources in these pages are the early De fide et symbol and the later De Trinitate. While I acknowledge without reservation the importance of both these treatises, I think a similar conclusion can be reached via a more intensive focus on the Homilies themselves.

Dideberg’s final section on the Holy Spirit forms a nice bridge to the second larger work, Raymond Canning’s The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine.14 At more than four hundred pages, Canning’s work is magisterial, and his index indicates dozens of references to various pages from the Homilies. I focus here on a short section from the end of chapter six, on “The Holy Spirit, gift of God, as love of the Father and the Son.”15 Like Dideberg, Canning does not build his work on the Holy Spirit in Augustine on the Homilies alone, but unlike Dideberg he does devote more explicit space to them. Canning begins with the immanent Trinity, discussing first Augustine’s view of the Holy Spirit in the divine life. Most of this discussion is drawn, naturally enough, from De Trinitate, especially books VI and XV. Canning argues that, especially in De Trinitate, Augustine essentially collapses “gift of God” and “love of God” so that the two are nearly identical: “All love is gift, the gift which is the Holy Spirit who makes the whole Trinity present.”16 When he wants to claim that for Augustine this divine Holy Spirit-love is the same love that is found in the love for the neighbor, Canning turns to the Homilies. In Homily 7, 6, Augustine “reasons… from the Holy Spirit… to the conclusion

14 Raymond Canning, The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine (Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993).
15 Ibid., 303ff.
16 Ibid., 309.
that, because the Holy Spirit is necessarily present in love, love is itself therefore God.”

Curiously, however, in these pages Canning shows relatively little interest either in why the Holy Spirit (and not the Son) is love for Augustine and even less interest in how the Holy Spirit’s work brings about not only neighborly love but also love for God.

Introductory essays

I review here in chronological order three fairly recent essays that are either introductory in nature or that concentrate on only a few of the sermons or themes of the *Homilies*. The first of these is Eoin G. Cassidy’s “Augustine’s Exegesis of the First Epistle of John.” Cassidy’s “paper takes a narrower focus and [limits] itself to an examination of two issues: the influence on Augustine’s exegesis of 1 John of the Donatist conflict, and Augustine’s theology of *caritas*.” After cursory remarks on Augustinian exegesis and Augustine’s broader interest in 1 John, Cassidy begins with the Donatist influence on the *Homilies*. Rather than offering a grand thesis, he simply notes various aspects of the sermons, such as Augustine’s emphasis on love and unity, that clearly have the Donatists in mind. Cassidy does not argue that the Donatist controversy was the impetus for the sermons, instead preferring the more modest—and more likely—claim that while “[t]he Donatist schism was an important influence on the way Augustine interpreted 1 John, it is not less true that the spirituality of Augustine which was centered

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17 Ibid, 305.
19 Ibid, 201.
on the motif of caritas provided the lens through which he interpreted this Epistle.” In his section on caritas, Cassidy discusses the importance of brotherly love but reserves any discussion of “God is love” for the conclusion, which includes the important insight that “it is the Christological focus of [the theme of unity in love] which offers the only appropriate context which can explain the central place which the motif of unity in love has in Augustine’s spirituality” and, therefore, his approach to 1 John in the Homilies.

Our second essay is Margaret Miles’s “Love’s Body, Intentions, and Effects: Augustine’s Homilies on the Epistle of First John,” the first of three DuBose Lectures she delivered in 1996. The subject of her Dubose Lectures is not Augustine but reading; in particular, she is interested in this first lecture in the possibility of reading sources both critically and receptively. She asks: “In our zeal to deconstruct, are we in danger of losing our ability to be powerfully attracted, excited by ideas?” Augustine’s Homilies form a sort of case study for Miles. She is not afraid to deconstruct, criticizing Augustine’s “preoccupation with the Donatists”; his “dangerous principle” of “Love and do what you will”; and his inability to “imagine a kind of love that could accept and respect religious difference.” On the other hand, Miles also identifies two “detachable

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20 Ibid., 210.
21 Ibid., 220.
23 Ibid., 21.
24 Ibid., 24.
25 Ibid., 27. I will return to this important passage later in the present chapter.
26 Ibid., 32. Whether the broad and vague category “religious difference” applies well or sufficiently to the Augustine-Donatist controversy is unclear. It does not seem to do justice to the intensity of Augustine’s disagreement with the Donatist party, especially when that intensity is compared with others, such as righteous pagans, who, at least on the surface, are far more “religiously different” from Augustine than the Donatists and about whom Augustine is also frequently far more sanguine.
conclusions” drawn from Augustine’s *Homilies* that attract and excite her: “to see accurately is to see lovingly” (based on “Augustine’s emphasis on love as method and goal”) and “loving those least lovable” (based on Augustine’s interest in loving the brother and the enemy). She views these two conclusions as a strong basis for “twentieth-century readers… to build respectful love for those with whom we differ religiously,” that is, to succeed where, in Miles’s view, Augustine failed.

In our third essay, “Augustine, Christology, and God as Love: An Introduction to the Homilies on 1 John,” Lewis Ayres attempts “to show that Augustine shaped his theology of God as love in a clearly Christological and Trinitarian context… so interwoven that an introduction to Augustine’s theology of God as love may serve also as an introduction to some aspects of Augustine’s Christology.” About half of Ayres’s essay is devoted to a tightly focused reading of the first of the Homilies, which, he argues, “can be read as a microcosm of the whole series” and which “links a theology of the incarnation to an understanding of the role and function of the church in witnessing to that event.” In this first section Ayres is careful to highlight both the theological density of Augustine’s first sermon and the close relationship of the sermon to the text of 1 John; so, for example, Ayres “preface[s] each section with the biblical text on which Augustine is commenting.”

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27 Ibid., 31.
28 Ibid., 33.
29 Ayres, “Augustine, Christology, and God as Love,” 69.
30 Ibid., 69, 70.
31 Ibid., 70.
Ayres sees in Augustine’s *Homilies* an incarnational, participatory logic. Knowing that God is love depends on being in a community of witnesses to God’s love in Jesus Christ. The community witnesses to God’s love in Jesus Christ primarily through acts of love. These acts of love are made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in the Christian practice of charity enabled by the Holy Spirit we see, however dimly, the Triune God: “Calling God love is for Augustine an issue that makes sense only within the slow process of coming to realize that the one who is love has revealed himself and that he has inaugurated a practice of formed love and confession through which we may share in the Triune life of love itself.”  

Thus Ayres is interested not only in a reading of Augustine that makes Augustine clearer; he argues further that Augustine’s “two moves [of discussing God as love with reference to the Trinity and of grounding knowledge of the Trinity in the incarnation] are fundamental to any Christian theology of God as love.” Augustine’s *Homilies*, then, are useful not only for the historical theologian but also for the systematician.

**The Homilies: Initial Comments**

Having reviewed some of the most significant examples of the secondary literature on the *Homilies*, we are now prepared to take a more in-depth look at the sermons themselves. One noticeable absence from any of the secondary literature surveyed is an examination of each of the *Homilies*. The *Homilies* may be sermons, but

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32 Ibid., 92, emphasis original.
33 Ibid., 93.
34 There is, so far as I know, only one work that tackles all of Augustine’s *Homilies* in order. This is Francis De Beer, *L’amour est Dieu: la première épître de Saint Jean selon Saint Augustin en 10 sermons* (Cambrai: 
they are not particularly short. As William Harmless observes, “Augustine routinely preached for an hour… [and] his hearers were liable to think themselves cheated if he shortened his remarks unduly.” Augustine does not cheat his congregation with the Homilies. Therefore it will be helpful to give some introductory remarks about each of the sermons. After that initial foray into the Homilies I will turn to two specific themes, namely, love and the person of the Holy Spirit. As the overview of secondary literature has shown, these themes are common among commentators on Augustine’s text, but I hope to explore both in much more detail than previous studies. Doing so will allow us to see more clearly the crucial link Augustine forges between love and the Holy Spirit in the Homilies.

Before turning to a close reading of this text, however, I want to offer some comments about the nature of the Homilies as a whole. In the introduction to this chapter I called the Homilies “theological hortations.” I employ this slightly archaic phrase in order to capture simultaneously both the theological wealth contained in the Homilies and the fact that the Homilies are best understood as sermons. In fact, I believe the homiletic aspect of this collection is not irrelevant to its theological wealth and actually is a source

Soeurs Augustines de Cambrai, 1979). De Beer’s work, though not without its insights, is not intended for an academic audience.

William Harmless, Augustine and the Catechumenate (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), 361. Paul J. Griffiths, Religious Reading, 178, however, disputes this number and estimates that Augustine’s Homilies likely only lasted twenty to thirty minutes. The difference in estimates is mostly a result of varying assumptions about how fast Augustine spoke.

The fact that these are sermons is mentioned by and plays at least a minor role in the interpretations of each of the three essays discussed above. See, specifically, Cassidy, “Augustine’s exegesis,” 203; Miles, “Love’s body,” 23; and Ayres, “Augustine, Christology, and God as Love,” 69. It is more thoroughly engaged by Ployd, “Trinity and Church in Augustine’s Anti-Donatist Sermons (406-407).”
of the riches contained therein. Augustine’s audience, his congregation,\(^{37}\) shapes the content he delivers, and not just in the obvious moments when he is clearly responding to their reaction to something he has preached.\(^{38}\) Augustine tailors his sermons for his congregation, expecting that they will come to know something (theology) and to connect that knowledge with doing (hortation).

This raises the important question of whom Augustine expected to hear his sermons. This question, of course, can never be totally settled, but I believe Augustine’s Homilies are read most fruitfully, both for understanding Augustine’s own thought and for working out contemporary theologies that take advantage of Augustine’s insights, if they are read as addressed to the baptized. That is, we will benefit most by reading these Homilies with the understanding that Augustine preaches them to people he self-consciously sees (and whom, through his preaching, he hopes will self-consciously see themselves) as baptized members of the body of Christ.

Having this understanding does not mean we need to think of these sermons as essentially catechetical or mystagogical. They certainly have characteristics in common with such sermons, but they are not reducible to such easy categories.\(^{39}\) Truly “catechetical” sermons would have been preached to those about to be baptized, but we know that these sermons were delivered in the week following Easter, likely just after

\(^{37}\) See Rosenberg, “Beside Books,” for the importance of bearing in mind that the audience for Augustine’s sermons is a congregation.

\(^{38}\) One such moment, especially prominent, occurs Homilies VII, 10, when Augustine responds to his congregation’s enthusiasm for his preceding encomium on love.

\(^{39}\) See Harmless, Catechumenate, 326, 327, 341, and 361-362 for some of the characteristics the Homilies share with catechetical and mystagogical sermons.
baptisms would have been celebrated. As for the mystagogical category, in the introduction to his translation of the homilies, Boniface Ramsey asks whether the sermons could be considered mystagogies and rejects the possibility. Ramsey concludes that the Homilies “are merely sermons on a particular book of the New Testament that are by and large unrelated to the liturgical season [and, therefore, the baptismal events within or just prior to that liturgical season] in which they were preached.”40 While conceding that, as Ramsey argues, “[t]here are simply too few mentions of the sacrament” and that “the homilies seem to presuppose listeners who are already experienced in the faith, whose most recent exposure to baptism was as onlookers rather than as recipients,”41 I would not want to lose sight of the importance of post-baptismal formation to the Homilies. Whether or not Augustine had in mind recent baptizands as his primary audience, some were almost doubtless present to “overhear” words directed at more mature members of his congregation, if, indeed, the more mature members were Augustine’s target.42 Moreover, the repeated theme in the Homilies of the importance of fidelity through acts and not merely words would have special relevance in the week following the celebration of a sacramental act whose validity depends, at least in part, on

41 Ibid. Ramsey mentions in support of his position the absence of any mention of baptism in Homilies VIII-X, a piece of evidence supported by corresponding data of Harmless, Catechumenate, 341, that show explicit mentions of the neophytes disappear after the sixth of the Homilies. Since, however, each of the first seven Homilies contains at least one reference to baptism, it is still the case that Augustine spent the entire Octave of Easter mentioning baptism at least once per day. Surely this counts for something when we consider what relationship the Homilies might have to the liturgical season.
42 As Harmless, Catechumenate, 361, argues, “Augustine and his contemporaries both recognized and exploited” the fact that “preachers inevitably address mixed audiences.”
an oral confession of faith.\textsuperscript{43} This theme does not disappear in the later sermons and actually headlines both \textit{Homilies} VIII (“Love is a sweet word but a sweeter deed”)\textsuperscript{44} and X (“This is what it means to believe that Jesus is the Christ, as Christians believe, who are Christians not only in name but also in deeds and life. That isn’t how the demons believe.”).\textsuperscript{45}

Bearing in mind, then, the significance of baptism for Augustine in these theological hortations, we may now proceed to a close examination of the \textit{Homilies}.

\textbf{The Ten \textit{Homilies} in Detail}

Here I sketch each of the ten \textit{Homilies} from Augustine on 1 John. I hope that this brief sketch will both fill a hole in the secondary literature (noted above) and give some context for the closer reading along thematic lines that follows upon it. It may also be helpful to bear in mind what seems to be the theme of the entire homiletic collection. In the penultimate sentence of the prologue, Augustine, addressing his readers as “Your Holiness,”\textsuperscript{46} declares that “where there is charity there is peace, and where there is humility there is charity.”\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} We may also consider the anti-Donatist rhetoric Augustine deploys repeatedly as further evidence of the importance of his audience as baptized members of Christ’s body, especially since baptism is a synecdoche for the dispute between Donatists and Catholics. I will not, however, dwell on the Donatist controversy as a major theme in the present work.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Homilies}, VIII.1.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Homilies} X.1.

\textsuperscript{46} Latin: \textit{Sanctitas uestra}. Boniface Ramsey suggests that this was a common address for preachers in Augustine’s time. Fair enough, but it still is interesting—and even more that, in these sermons, the more common address is “Your Charity” (Latin: \textit{Caritas uestra}; Ramsey notes that \textit{Caritas uestra} occurs in I,3; III,7; IV,5.12; V,6.8; VI,6; VIII,10.11; and IX,1.5 and that \textit{Sanctitas uestra} appears again only in IX,1). Are the two forms of address synonyms for Augustine? Rather suggestively the French edition from the Institut d'Études Augustiniennes translates both \textit{Sanctitas uestra} and \textit{Caritas uestra} as “mes frères.”

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Homilies}, Prologue. Latin: \textit{Vbi autem caritas ibi pax, et ubi humilitas ibi caritas}.
Homily I

As Lewis Ayres suggests, the first homily establishes the incarnational context for the entire series. Jesus Christ, though fully human, manifests the true God, and Christians, particularly the martyrs, are witnesses to the marriage of the two natures. The analogy of marriage allows him, then, to draw a connection between the Incarnation and the church: “The Church is joined to that flesh [of Christ], and Christ becomes the whole, head and body.” Augustine and his audience are witnesses only by what they have heard, not by what they have seen, but this is no obstacle. The bonds of faith make possible the fellowship of the church. For Augustine, the Church is a bond of joy in love and unity. Looking to the Incarnation is like looking into the brightest of lights (“truth itself is light”). What does the light show? Human sinfulness—not in order to humiliate us but instead to drive us into closer fellowship with God through confession. When our sins are shown to us God’s beauty should become all the more desirable. Confession makes the sinner humble, so there is an intimate connection between confession and love. Confession produces humility, and humility “strengthens charity; charity extinguishes offenses.” The word “perfect” hangs in the background of much of the sermon, but eventually Augustine foregrounds it: “What is perfection in love? To love even one’s enemies, and to love them to the degree that they may be brothers. For our love must not

48 Ayres, “Augustine, Christology, and God as Love,” 70ff.
49 Augustine seems to have in mind both the theological and the technical/legal sense of the word “witnesses.”
50 Homilies I.2.
51 Homilies, I.6.
52 Cp. Ayres, “Augustine, Christology, and God as Love,” 82-83: “the purpose or goal of this revelation as described in 1 John 1:13 is fellowship (societas) with the Father and the Son.”
53 Homilies I.6.
be fleshly.” Loving the enemy is the measure of Christian love, but it is not the only measure. There is also the love of those in the fellowship, those Augustine (following John) calls “brothers” (fratres). Loving the brothers is not enough for perfection in love, “[b]ut if you hate your brothers, what are you? Where are you?” Augustine offers a case study of a pagan who becomes a Christian yet who, despite the rejoicing at his conversion, is the object of significant concern. The concern is due to his hatred of his brother, a hatred demonstrated by being scandalized by the Church. Augustine identifies such a person even more precisely as a schismatic who fails to recognize that “he who loves his brother tolerates everything for the sake of unity, because brotherly love exists in the unity of charity.” Augustine concludes that the hatred of those in Christ’s fellowship is a form of blinding darkness that will destroy those consumed and distracted by such hatred.

_Homily II_

The second homily begins with the Emmaus Road story from Luke, a reading from an earlier service in the day, rather than 1 John. Augustine also comments on the Acts 2 Pentecost narrative. Here we find his first mention of the Holy Spirit in the sermons. Accusing the Donatists of feigning cultural and linguistic superiority, Augustine says that we should “look to the gift of the Spirit of God,” which incorporates people

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54 _Homilies _I.9.
55 _Homilies _I.11.
56 This cautionary tale could be further evidence of the intentionally post-baptismal context of these sermons. Notably, the conversion is marked by a shift in whom the new Christian adores: “He used to adore idols… [but] now he is an adorer of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” See _Homilies _I.11.
57 _Homilies _I.12. Augustine clearly has in mind the Donatists at this point, but whether he is simply issuing a general condemnation of the Donatists or is somehow contrasting the recently baptized in his own congregation with those in the Donatist party is less certain.
from all nations and tongues, to see why the Donatists’ exclusivism does not pass muster. Augustine’s explication of Luke and Acts in II.1-3 eventually leads to the first mention of anything out of 1 John (2:11), which is about where Augustine had left off the day before. Don’t be in darkness; love the brothers of the church, Augustine exhorts his congregation. He follows up on this exhortation with an especially poignant, and perhaps unexpected, identification of charity with motherhood, reflecting on “the childbearing mother charity… [who] rends her womb with her words, beseeches the children whom she sees being carried away, recalls to the one name those desirous of making many names for themselves, turns them away from loving her so that they may love Christ.” Soon love returns to the center as the main theme, and remains there for the rest of the sermon. Augustine begins with identifying two loves: of God and of the world. Loves do not merely direct us; they inhabit us. Therefore love of the world should be emptied from the heart so that the love of God can take its place, and baptism must lead to charity being rooted in the baptizand if salvation is to be effective. Throughout the ensuing discussion Augustine also makes use of his uti/frui distinction, developed more fully in Book I of De doctrina christiana. There is also substantial discourse here about desires:

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58 *Homilies* II.3. “Gift” here likely refers not to the Spirit himself but to the gift of preaching in tongues at Pentecost. Still, the gift-Spirit connection is noteworthy, and we will return to it in the section on the Holy Spirit below.

59 *Homilies* II.4. See also I.11, where Augustine makes a similar association between charity and maternity. This is an unexpected element of Augustine’s discourse on love, and we will explore below, at least briefly, its implications for his pneumatology in these epistles.

60 *Homilies* II.8: “Let the love of the world withdraw and that of God dwell in us” and “[John] prepares us, therefore, to be inhabited by charity.”

61 *Homilies* II.9: “To be sure, our brothers have now been reborn from water and the Holy Spirit, and we were reborn some years ago from water and the Spirit. It is good for us not to love the world, lest the sacraments remain in us to our condemnation, not as supports to our salvation. It is a support to our salvation to have the root of charity, to have the strength of piety, not only its appearance… How are you rooted so that you may not be uprooted? By holding onto charity.”
the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the ambition of the world. Together, the three comprise all that might “tempt human cupidity” (nota bene) because they also map onto the temptations of Christ in the wilderness.62 The end of this sermon is bracing: “Do you love the earth? You will be earth. Do you love God? What shall I say? That you will be God? I don’t dare to say this on my own.”63 Instead Augustine cites Psalm 82:6. How should we be “gods and sons of the Most High”? By no longer loving the world but loving God alone. The logic of deification, then, appears to lie at the heart of Augustine’s soteriology in these homilies.

Homily III

The third homily is shorter than the previous two but is packed tightly with important details. Augustine begins with a discussion of will: “No one is born of water and the Spirit unless he wills it. If he wills it, then, he grows; if he wills it, he diminishes.”64 This suggests that for Augustine baptismal rebirth is an ongoing process and not merely a one-time change, but he does not develop the point here. Instead he discusses the church as mother.65 Presently, Augustine returns to the theme of progress in the faith, now by way of the term “antichrist.” Augustine readily identifies as antichrists heretics and schismatics. The Donatists may appear to be Christians and do not require rebaptism, but because (as Augustine sees it) they intentionally remain apart from the body of Christ they are antichrists. At the same time, however, Augustine also enjoins his

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62 Homilies II.14.
63 Ibid.
64 Homilies III.1.
65 Further below in the present chapter this, of course, will make an interesting point of comparison with II.4 and I.11, where charity has motherly characteristics.
congregation: “Each one ought to examine his own conscience as to whether he is the antichrist.” Further on, Augustine insists that lying, speaking contrary to the truth (which is Christ), also marks the antichrists. Not only words but also deeds should be put to the test. This is not merely because the deeds are bad in themselves or that they are speech-acts that do not praise God. It is because those who commit them frequently perjure God: “Perverted by a wicked will, they accuse their maker,” accusing God of being the source of their propensity to sin instead of praising God for the goodness of his creation. Truth, love, and doxology are all bound together for Augustine in this homily. What is called for is learning to long for and love Christ, but if this is too difficult, Augustine offers a suitable preliminary desire: the promised reward of eternal life. To long for this reward is to “love what the Almighty promises” (III.12).

In III.12-13, Augustine discloses that all of this longing, all of this loving, and all of this truth hinge on “the sacrament of anointing… the invisible anointing that is the Holy Spirit.” The sacrament of anointing allows charity to take root. Augustine draws on this insight to explain why the Johannine declaration that “you do not need anyone to

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66 Homilies III.4; cp. III.7: “Certainly all who leave the Church and are cut off from the unity of the Church are antichrists.” Following this, in III.5, Augustine introduces some fascinating imagery drawn from the language of health. The “harmony of the members doesn’t allow for an antichrist,” whom the church “vomits” out as one would an evil humor. Augustine insists, however, that “it is of his own will that a person is either an antichrist or in Christ”; there is no sheer determinism present in these passages. He concludes III.5 with a reference to baptismal anointing, saying that “the spiritual anointing is the Holy Spirit himself, whose sacrament is in the visible anointing.” One cannot help but wonder, however, if there is also in view the anointing of the sick and dying, so that the baptismal anointing here discussed continues the metaphor of the body and health begun in III.4.

67 Homilies III.9: “The works of the Lord praise the Lord… The Lord didn’t make whatever you don’t hear of as praising the Lord there.”

68 Homilies III.9.

69 Homilies III.12.
teach you, because his anointing teaches you about everything.” It is not that external teaching disappears (or why would Augustine preach?). Rather, Augustine’s work, and the work of all teachers, depends completely on the Holy Spirit and on Christ: “But those to whom that unction doesn’t speak within, whom the Holy Spirit doesn’t teach within, depart untaught… [for] Christ teaches; his inbreathing teaches.” When Christ and the Holy Spirit are present, “your heart may not be thirsting in solitude, because it doesn’t have the springs by which it may be refreshed.” Lack is replaced by plenitude; absence (of teaching) yields to presence (of the teacher).

**Homily IV**

Augustine begins the fourth homily with the paradox of preaching: There are some who hear preaching and respond and others who hear and do not respond. The external speech of the homiletician is not sufficient; what is necessary is the dwelling of God in the heart of the believer “through faith and [God’s] Spirit.” This requires the believer to “make room for God” instead of the devil. The devil, presumably after baptism, does not have immediate access to the believer but “now assails from without… by introducing various temptations. But the one to whom God speaks within and who possesses the anointing of which you have heard doesn’t consent.” Here we must be careful to bear in mind all that Augustine has said to this point about the will. While it

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70 1 John 2:27, in *Homilies III.13.*
72 Ibid.
73 See chapter five below for my own development of this theme.
74 *Homilies* IV.1.
75 Ibid.
appears that Augustine is suggesting some “strength of will” to overcome the devil’s intentions, the more integrated solution is that love is the determining factor. It is not some abstract concept of will but rather one that is rightly formed (or “rooted” to use a recurring image for charity in these sermons): a will that loves God and not the world. Augustine returns to the theme of anointing and the indwelling God in IV.5. It is perhaps worth observing that in this sermon and the previous one, Augustine repeatedly connects anointing (presumably the post-baptismal anointing of oil), the Holy Spirit, charity, and desire. The connections between all four points are not always made in the same breath, but when anointing is mentioned, one or more of the other three is always in close context. Thus, for example, near the end of this fourth homily Augustine depicts desire as the fundamental exercise of the Christian life. Desire here is a workout: it stretches us so that we can be filled even more: “The entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire… This is our life—to be exercised through desire. But, to the degree that a holy desire exercises us, we have cut off our desires from the love of the world.” In desiring God, we empty ourselves of vinegar and are filled with honey. The metaphors mix, but in profound ways: “Let us stretch out to him so that, when he comes, he may fill us.” Augustine seems to hint that, at least in this life, we can never be stretched out so far as not to be filled nor ever be so full as not to need to stretch.

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76 *Homilies* IV.6.
77 Ibid.
Homily V

In my copy of the Homilies I have one word written above the fifth sermon, charity. For a sermon on charity, however, the fifth homily begins from a difficult place: post-baptismal sin. Augustine notices the predicament created by two different verses in 1 John: “He who has been born from God does not sin” (3:9) and “If we say we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1:8). The issue here is brought to its fullest tension by the act of confession. What are we to confess? How is our speech to be truthful if we are, seemingly, in a catch-22? Augustine reminds his audience that to be in sin is no minor thing; sin and wickedness are the same thing.78 So his solution to this conundrum is that the sin not committed by those born of God is the violation of Christ’s commandment to love: “By this love [of one another] sins are absolved. If this isn’t maintained, it is both a grave sin and the root of all sins.”79 Augustine continues to “commend charity.”80 He meditates on the Petrine recovery at the end of John’s gospel, concluding that the confession of love is all we have to offer God—and that this is no mean thing, for “[t]o receive the saving cup, however, and to invoke the name of the Lord is to be filled with charity, and to be filled with charity in such a ways that you not only don’t hate your brother but are prepared to die for your brother.”81

79 Homilies V.2. A few lines later, in V.3, Augustine develops this thought further: “He who acts against charity and against brotherly love shouldn’t dare to boast and to say that he has been born of God. But, as for him who is established in brotherly love, there are certain sins that he cannot commit, and in particular this one—that he hate his brother.”
80 Homilies V.4.
81 Ibid. Augustine identifies this as “perfect charity,” which may be in some tension with I.9, where perfect charity is the love of enemies. Regardless, this charity is not assumed all at once but “is born in order to be perfected.” The ground for discussing baptism has been laid and will not prove fruitless (see V.6).
We are to love others with the love of Christ, a love that seeks out and fills, a love that itself has been received and is the love of God.  

Augustine next makes a crucial return to the language of baptism and birth. Baptism “makes a person new by the forgiveness of all his sins.” It marks a person, but without charity the baptizand “is a deserter on the run. Let him have charity; otherwise let him not say that he has been born from God”; baptism is “a great, divine, holy and ineffable sacrament,” but the birth of God is found in charity. Liturgical acts need charity, for “[l]ove alone… distinguishes between the children of God and the children of the devil.” Love of the brothers who are seen is practice for loving God who is unseen. It is sufficient for fulfilling the law, and having firmly established that love distinguishes Christians, Augustine now returns to the theme of the different kinds of love.

“Those who love the world cannot love their brother.” This is essential for comprehending Augustine’s point. The love of the world is not some trivial issue, nor is it what we might think of as caring for creation. It is a love that takes us away from

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82 As an aside, but for the sake of highlighting the importance of recalling that these Homilies are sermons, I call attention to Augustine’s great rhetorical strategy in Homilies V.5. Augustine observes that Peter does not hear from the Lord to “be kind to me” after his confession of love but instead… Augustine does not complete the thought, not yet. First, he enters into a reflection on Christ’s invitation and reception by Zacchaeus. Christ became weak so that he could cure disease. Zacchaeus is cured of avarice by inviting Christ into his home. Following Christ’s ascension, however, we cannot extend that invitation, that act of kindness, (directly) to Christ. Augustine now completes the thought. Jesus does not say to Peter “be kind to me”; he says “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15). As a gesture of welcome to Christ, we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ by “[doing] for the brothers what I have done for you. I have redeemed all with my own blood. Don’t hesitate to die for confessing the truth, so that others may imitate you” (V.5).

83 Homilies V.6.

84 Ibid. Augustine identifies charity as the great pearl the merchant finds (Matthew 13:46).

85 Homilies V.7.

86 Homilies V.9.
loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, the love in which we are to be perfected. But this is not the beginning. The beginning of charity is sharing earthly goods. (V.12). Thus “the great and indispensable mystery and sacrament has been manifested to you,” says Augustine. Arguably, what “has been manifested” is the route to Christian perfection in love opened by both the rebirth of baptism and the anointing that grants the enduring presence of the Holy Spirit and deep-rooted charity.

_Homily VI_

Augustine continues the theme of charity with a lengthy exposition at the beginning of the sixth homily. The specific question addressed here is of how an act can be judged as an act of love for the sake of God. This, Augustine acknowledges, is a difficult question, for outward appearances can deceive. Augustine’s answer to this question is rigorous examination and confession. Augustine insists that we examine our motives and actions, that “[t]he right hand must accomplish them [acts of charity] unbeknownst to the left hand, so that the world’s desire may not intrude when we are accomplishing some good out of love.” Augustine applies similar equivocation to the fulfillment of prayer. We can make no judgment about the person whose specific prayer request is granted or rejected because God sometimes answers the wishes of even the

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87 Cp. 1 John 3:16: “he has laid down his life for us, and we must lay down our lives for our brothers.” See also VI.1: “This is the perfection of charity, and greater can never be found.”  
88 Homilies V.12.  
89 Homilies V.13.  
90 The rhetorical turn of judging the self (and not the other) is perhaps as important here as the answer itself.  
91 Homilies VI.3. This self-examination, however, is not done in isolation or in some vain attempt to flee God and God’s judgment: “If you want to flee from him, flee to him. Flee to him by confessing, not from him by hiding, for you cannot hide, but you can confess.”
demons and not always those of his holy ones. While charity and prayer may seem like unrelated topics, Augustine recognizes that the Holy Spirit connects them. In our deepest prayers, the Spirit prays with us (Romans 8:26-27). The prayer of the Spirit is the prayer of charity: “Charity itself groans, charity itself prays.” We do not have a direct identification of the Holy Spirit as Love. The link is close and tantalizing, but the direct identification between our love and the Holy Spirit is not attained in this sermon. The Spirit gives love, and, upon examination, the Spirit gives the understanding that one has love.

The homily returns, perhaps inevitably, to the sacrament of baptism. The sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence is no longer speaking in tongues, a gift that Augustine believes is now absent. Instead, peace, unity, and love of the whole Church are markers of the Spirit’s presence: “If a person loves his brother, the Spirit of God is abiding in him. Let him look, let him probe himself before God’s eyes. Let him see if there is in him a love of peace and unity, a love of the Church spread throughout the earth.” Crucially, Augustine goes on to distinguish between “the sacrament” and “the sacrament’s power.” The sacrament is the visible water of the font. The sacrament’s power is the invisible water of the Spirit. Water connects the two; Augustine traces this connection

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92 Homilies VI.8.
93 The link, however, grows stronger as the homily progresses. Whatever he means in VI.8, Augustine says, in close association with the first citation of Romans 5:5 in these Homilies, that “the Holy Spirit produces this in a person—that love and charity should be in him” (VI.9).
94 Here we have an interesting appearance of something like a doctrine of assurance: “If you have found that you have charity, you have the Spirit of God in order to understand, for this is something that is absolutely necessary” (VI.9).
95 Homilies VI.10.
96 Ibid.
through biblical themes of testing every spirit (1 John 4:1), the Spirit’s outpouring (John 7:37-39), and the association between water and the spirits (Proverbs 9:18 LXX). It is not that one is important and the other insignificant; both are needed, for “[t]he former [the sacrament] washes the body and signifies what takes place in the soul; by the latter [the sacrament’s power], the Spirit, the soul itself is cleansed and nourished.”

Homily VII

The seventh of the Homilies is probably the best-known and most familiar; each of the secondary authors surveyed above cites this sermon at some point. Because of this, my own overview of this sermon will be shorter than the overviews of the others. Augustine begins this homily with one of his favorite tropes: exile and the homeland. For Christians, this world is exile, the desert, and a place of wilderness. Among the many dangers along the route home is thirst, so “if you don’t want to die of thirst in this desert, drink charity,” a nice, if implicit, recasting of the theme of the life-giving water of charity and the Holy Spirit from the previous sermon. Hewing close to the text of 1 John, Augustine ratchets up the intensity of his praise of love. Charity is what holds us close to God, because charity is from God, and God is love: “to act against love is to act against God.” In this homily we find Augustine’s most explicit link between the Holy Spirit and love. Addressing an exegetical quandary in 1 John, Augustine asks, “How, then, could it be a short while ago, Love is from God, and now, Love is God?” The answer

97 Homilies VI.11.
98 Homilies VII.1.
99 Homilies VII.7.
100 Homilies VII.6.
he gives here is that “in love there is the Holy Spirit” (VII.6).\textsuperscript{101} A crucial connection with baptism follows shortly after this. Charity distinguishes between the wicked and the righteous, even when they both receive the same sacrament.\textsuperscript{102} The Spirit calls us to the waters of baptism, a sacrament, as all sacraments have, with visible and invisible aspects. Baptism is not merely a washing; it is a quenching. Our thirst is satiated when we are filled by the waters of the Holy Spirit, when we drink from the font of charity.

The remainder of this homily alternates between some of Augustine’s most frustrating and some of his most eloquent expositions on love. Augustine reflects on how the same act can be both an act of charity and an act of betrayal in the next section of the sermon by considering how both Judas and the Father and the Son hand the Son over for crucifixion.\textsuperscript{103} The insight that love, as an intention, can change the character of an act leads him down a difficult path: “Love, and do what you want.”\textsuperscript{104} Charity can correct, even harshly, as long as it is the true motivator. Following not long after this troubling epigram, however, is this beautiful passage: “Charity is being praised to you. If it is pleasing, have it, possess it. There is no need to steal it from anyone else. There is no need for you to think of buying it: it is free. Take it, embrace it: nothing is sweeter than it.”\textsuperscript{105} Having charity does not come at the expense of another, nor does it come from

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. I will have much more to say about this passage in this chapter’s section on the Holy Spirit; see below.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.: “A wicked person can also have baptism. A wicked person can also have prophecy,” but what is lacking in the wicked person is charity: “A wicked person, therefore, can also have all these sacraments, but a person cannot be wicked and also have charity. This, then, is a particular gift; it is the unique font. The Spirit of God exhorts you to drink from it; the Spirit of God exhorts you to drink from himself.”

\textsuperscript{103} See Homilies VII.7.

\textsuperscript{104} Homilies VII.8. I will have more to say about this verse in this chapter’s section on love; see below.

\textsuperscript{105} Homilies VII.10. This becomes the basis for Augustine’s rejection of rebaptism. Schismatics are “plunderers” and “usurpers of Christ’s possession” (VII.11). They have taken what belongs to Christ (love)
anything we do. We must simply admit it into our loves and allow its beauty to penetrate. We do not possess the gifts we are given, but Christ does—and he possesses us, too.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Homily VIII}

The eighth homily reprises several by-now familiar themes: the importance of intentions in deciding whether an act is of love or not; the necessity of being filled by God and not using love to seek fulfillment in the world; and the vital connection between charity and the Holy Spirit. When we love we do not give of our own. We only hand over what we have received. There are times when some works are appropriate and times when others are necessary, but charity knows no interruptions. There is wisdom in knowing how to act in love, but not in curtailing love’s actions.

In addition to these familiar refrains, Augustine also returns to a theme that has dogged his sermons on 1 John: why there is an emphasis on brotherly love but not on love of the enemy in the epistle. Augustine begins by suggesting that love of the enemy does not come at the cost of love of the brother: “He who goes as far as his enemies doesn’t pass over his brothers.”\textsuperscript{107} Augustine then makes an important distinction between loving in order to consume and loving as Christians.\textsuperscript{108} The problem is that this

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\textsuperscript{106} Augustine’s line of thought here, therefore, is very similar to his way of thinking about lying, on which see Paul Griffiths, \textit{Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity} (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Homilies} VIII.4.

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Homilies} VIII.5: “Are human beings to be loved as though they are to be consumed?”

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consuming love is precisely the kind of love that benevolence can enable: a love that seeks to take advantage of others who are in need, evincing a “[d]esire to extol yourself over against him [an unfortunate], and [showing that] you want him—who is the author of your good deed—to be subject to you.” 109 In other words, the neighbor’s need creates the potential for an act of charity (the neighbor is “the author” of the good deed), but it would be better if that need did not exist in the first place. Works of charity can easily also masquerade as works of pride: “Charity feeds the hungry man; pride also feeds him.” 110 Augustine is particularly sensitive to the possibility that love’s intentions can have devastating results. What we love a person for is as important as whether or not we love that person. Augustine finally answers the question of John’s supposed silence on the love of the enemy. His answer is remarkable and simple. Loving our enemy is a proleptic brotherly love. It is brotherly love in hope. We love the enemy “that he may be your [our] brother. If this is what you wish… you are loving your brother when you love him [your enemy].” 111

For Augustine, this kind of love is made possible because God is love. 112 To love the enemy requires being filled with love. To be filled with love is to dwell in God and to have God abide in us. To have God abide in us is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Why? Because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans

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109 Ibid.
110 Homilies VIII.9. This leads Augustine to more uncomfortable language about the discipline of charity, whose blows “are more acceptable than the alms of pride.”
111 Homilies VIII.10.
112 Augustine explicitly links God’s love with the love of enemies in IX.3: “For, just as he loves his enemies by making his sun rise on the good and the bad and by raining on the righteous and the unrighteous, so also we, inasmuch as we cannot provide sun and rain for our enemies, offer them our tears when we pray for them.”
This leads to Augustine’s most insistent exegetical insight: God is love, and love is God: “Love could be commended to you no more fully than by referring to it as God. Perhaps you had disdained God’s gift. And do you disdain God?” Furthermore, God does not love us in any way that might suggest God is trying to fill a lack on his part. Thus God loves as we ought to love, with no possible benefit to ourselves, with no advantage to our own being, with no sense of filling our own need. Only God has no need, and only God can heal us and fill us as we need. No other can do so. The Lord seeks nothing from us, and so only seeks our good. We should love in the same way.

Homily IX

The ninth homily, which was likely delivered some period of time after the first eight, begins with Augustine’s thought on progress in love. Charity is something in which Christians are to progress, but an honest self-assessment would lead most Christians to confess a failure to progress sufficiently. This means Christians require a

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113 This is the logic of Homilies VIII.12. This being filled, according to the Johannine epistle, is conditional, depending on our confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, a fact Augustine well recognizes. In other words, there is no playing off of the Holy Spirit against the Son. And in VIII.13 Augustine adds, harking back to the starting point of this sermon, that the confession in speech is not as important as confession in life.
114 Homilies VIII.14.
115 Ibid.: “See that you don’t think that anything is being given to God when you come to him, not even your own servitude… You are no true lord, then, when you are in need of an inferior. He is the true Lord who seeks nothing from us. And woe to us if we don’t seek him.”
116 Augustine’s persistent use of Romans 5:5 is essential to understanding his logic. God’s love does not receive needed love from us; it fills our hearts, where we need God’s love most. When we examine our hearts for this love, we seek nothing short of the Holy Spirit who communicates it to us and is this love. Therefore, when we seek to love in our actions as God has loved us, we cannot love so as to fill our own need for love, which only God can fill. Nor can we assume possession of God’s love for us (the Holy Spirit) and wield it as power over another who also needs God’s love. All we can do, if we wish to respond faithfully, is offer that which has been given to us.
117 Apparently Augustine ran out of time during the Octave of Easter to complete his sermon series and was unable to return to 1 John for several months.
certain eschatological confidence regarding the day of judgment.\textsuperscript{118} It further means a passionate desire for the coming of the Lord now. There is the person who “desires this life” and “endures death patiently.” This person “inclinestoward what God chooses,” so there is no judgment from Augustine upon such a person. But there is another person who desires God passionately and so “lives patiently and dies in delight.”\textsuperscript{119} For both Christians, the real issue, according to Augustine, is fear. To attain either the patient endurance of death or the patient endurance of life requires living without fear. Or at least without a certain kind of fear. There are two fears, the fear of punishment and the fear of God’s departure. The first “isn’t yet chaste” because desire has not been properly oriented toward God.\textsuperscript{120} It drives the one who fears away from sins, but that is all. The fear of losing God’s presence, on the other hand, drives the one who fears away from sins because that one is “embracing [God], … [is] desiring to enjoy” God.\textsuperscript{121} Love fills the place where the first fear has taken hold. Fear is needed for charity to come in: fear of our sins, of judgment, etc. But it “doesn’t remain there, because it has entered in order to introduce charity.”\textsuperscript{122} Fear wounds us, reminding us of our sins and guilt, but love “heals what fear wounds”;\textsuperscript{123} God the Physician is our healer. On the other hand, Augustine apparently believes that the second fear is necessary in this life and is never fully driven out until death, if even then.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{118} Homilies IX.2.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Homilies IX.5.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} Homilies IX.4.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} In IX.6 Augustine compares these fears to two different wives who do not commit adultery because they fear their husbands, the one fearing that her husband may discover her adultery, the other fearing that her
Two shorter notes on this homily remain. First, in IX.9 Augustine ties love to beauty: “God is always beautiful, never ugly, never changeable. He who is always beautiful has loved us first... How shall we be beautiful? By loving him who is always beautiful. Beauty grows in you to the extent that love grows, because charity itself is the soul’s beauty.”

Second, there is a recurring image in this sermon of the two pipes through which the Spirit breathes. This is used to explain apparently diverging passages of Scripture, but the point may be taken more broadly: “By the one Spirit both pipes are filled, and they aren’t discordant.” Unity, beauty, and love and are held together by the Spirit. And when we have charity, we have “the pledge of [sight]... as the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Homily X

What we have of the final homily in this collection is likely incomplete. Nevertheless, it does not seem that we are missing a huge chunk of the sermon, and there is plenty for discussion in what we do have. Augustine resumes his theme of the centrality of good works to faith and love at the beginning of this sermon: Here the

husband might leave. This may seem to be two different ways of fearing judgment, but Augustine is trying to press the difference between fearing out of love and fearing out of fear. The distinction may sometimes be murky. Augustine calls this second fear “the [one] which remains chaste forever.”

125 Carol Harrison, Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine (Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1992), 241-242, notes that “[i]t is love which is most closely related to beauty in Augustine’s thought, but (as his frequent use of the triad [of faith, hope, and love] witnesses) for love to fulfil its desire and longing for vision of supreme beauty, faith and hope are indispensable and inseparable from it in this life.”

126 Homilies IX.9. I find in this passage a sentiment very similar to Sergius Bulgakov’s ascription of divine glory to the Holy Spirit. See his The Comforter (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), among other works.

127 Homilies IX.5 and IX.9.

128 Homilies IX.10.

129 The end of Homily X as we have it is awkward in both Latin and English translations, so the assumption has been that we are missing some concluding part of the sermon.
connection between faith and love hinges on Christ, where in earlier sermons the emphasis has been more on the Holy Spirit. The love of faith confesses Christ “in order to embrace Christ.” 130 Faith and love are what make a Christian. Love of whom? First, of the Father, then, love of the Son, and lastly the sons and daughters of God: “For when the members love each other, the body loves itself.” 131 The author of 1 John does not use body language in the relevant verses, preferring instead sonship language, but Augustine combines the two: “When you love Christ’s members, then, you love Christ; when you love Christ, you love the Son of God; when you love the Son of God, you love also his Father.” 132

There follows an interesting comparison between love and avarice: “What you love is loved with exertion. God is loved without exertion. Avarice will summon up exertion, dangers, exhaustion, troubles, and you are going to submit to this! To what end?” 133 The pursuit of material goods, political connections, and other lesser desires is ultimately self-emptying. Tragically, while trying to fulfill our desires we create their very basis, but “[l]ove is the fulfillment of all our works. That is where the end is; on its account; when we arrive at it we rest.” 134 Augustine explains further what he means by “end”: “Do not think of consumption but of finishing,” or, more literally, “Do not think of consumption but of consummation.” 135 Christ is both the mountain, the vantage point

130 Homilies X.1.
131 Homilies X.3.
132 Ibid.
133 Homilies X.4.
134 Ibid.
135 Homilies X.5. Latin: “Nolite putare consumptionem sed consummationem.”
from which we see the end (of consummation), and the end itself: “And what does ‘Christ the end’ mean? That Christ is God, and the end of the commandment is charity, and God is charity; that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one.”136 Two points are worth drawing from these packed sentences. First, the end is clearly union with the Triune God through Christ. Second, Augustine seems to have in mind that God is love precisely because God is one. Love unifies what otherwise must be held apart; there is a deep foundation for his insistence on the unity of charity in the body of Christ. The answer to “How is God one” might well be “God is love.” The end is sought for its own sake; there are both things to seek for the end and temptations along the way. The end is full of joy, for “there is perpetual praise; there always the unceasing Alleluia.”137 For those worried that referring everything to love represents a reduction, either of God or of Christian faithfulness, Augustine argues that love is actually the broadest end possible and thus the broadest way. Because God’s love endures, because it cannot be stolen or destroyed, it encompasses and fulfills all other means of enjoyment.

Augustine now turns his full attention to the Donatists. Having urged his audience to embrace the breadth of love, to recognize the importance of loving the brother and the enemy to be a brother, and to keep in mind the importance of action as well as speech in faith and love, Augustine argues that the Donatists fail on all these points.

The sermon seems to end on an odd note, and Ramsey says “it is obviously incomplete.”138 I’m not so sure. There is a certain rhetorical power to the end that we do

136 Ibid.
137 Homilies X.6.
138 Ramsey, 158.
have: “Where there is the remission of sins, there is the Church. How is the Church there? [Matthew 16:19 follows]… See: believe Christ. But because you understand, if you believe in Christ, that there is nothing for you to say regarding betrayers, you want me to believe you when you slander my forebears rather than that you should believe Christ when he preaches…”

139 The snare has been laid. The true Church is not where there are no sinners, not even where there are none who have betrayed the Church. Rather, the true Church is where there is forgiveness of sins. The final condemnation of the Donatists is in hand. They have betrayed/persecuted the true Church by violating the charity/unity of the Church. Now, they have no basis to claim they are the true Church because the very foundation of the Church—the forgiveness of sins—is also the one thing they deny to those who need it most—the betrayers of the Church. Forgiveness, with the love of the enemy in hopes that he becomes the brother, is also what Augustine offers the Donatists.

**Thematic considerations**

Having considered carefully each of Augustine’s sermons, we are now positioned to reflect on the significance of the two major themes that are at the heart of the *Homilies* and of this dissertation: love and the Holy Spirit. These two themes, as well as some concluding remarks, will be the concern of the remainder of this chapter. Though they are intertwined, subjecting these themes to separate study will allow us to see better how they are related and, therefore, their riches for the work of contemporary systematic theology.

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139 *Homilies* X.10. Emphasis added.
140 Augustine’s use of Paul’s persecution of the early church in X.9 and conversion in X.5 now takes on added poignancy and importance.
Love from Three Perspectives

Augustine’s discourse on love in the *Homilies* is woven through every one of the sermons he preaches on 1 John. We will consider Augustine’s thought on love from three different perspectives: love’s inception, love’s intention, and love’s perfection.

*Love’s inception*

Perhaps one of the more surprising aspects of Augustine’s *Homilies* is his use of maternal imagery to discuss love. The image does not occur frequently (only three times: I.11, II.4, and III.1), and it disappears after the initial sermons. Still, its recurrence suggests Augustine sees something important in the image to “refer to charity as a mother.” I note three possible implicit and interdependent reasons Augustine deploys this metaphor. First, the baptismal language of birth and rebirth is ripe for maternal imagery. Second, maternal imagery reinforces the gift and givenness of love; one can no more take possession of love than one can claim credit for choosing one’s own mother. Third, motherhood makes possible brotherhood. While Christian kinship is through filiation or adoption, it seems that Christian unity still depends on a common mother. We explore these three reasons further by examining more closely the final occurrence of the maternal imagery.

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141 There are also instances of related metaphors, as when Augustine speaks in I.5 of the transformation of baptizands who “went in as old people and… came our as infants.”

142 It is perhaps noteworthy that Augustine’s use of the image of motherhood decreases as his sermons make more and more of the connection between the Holy Spirit and love. Although charity and love have motherly characteristics, for Augustine, unlike for some modern theologians, this does not seem to imply that the Holy Spirit is therefore the divine mother. Indeed, when in VII.11 Augustine discusses the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, he speaks of the dove’s defense of its nest, leading the hearer to assume, momentarily, a motherly connection. In the next breath, however, Augustine says that the dove acts like a father, and the maternal resonances fade quickly.

143 *Homilies* I.11
In the immediate vicinity of each appearance of the maternal imagery in *Homilies* I-III, there also appears a reference either to baptism or to brotherly love or to both. The “both” happens only in III.1. There, Augustine begins by discussing growth. John wants his audience, addressed as children, to “grow up quickly,” but “[b]odily age is not within the will’s capacity.” No matter how urgently a person may wish to mature in years, adding a day of life to her age is impossible. John must have another mode of growth in mind, and Augustine identifies this as the will, for “when there is a birth in the will, then there is also a growing up in the will.” The subtleties of such a pronouncement might be lost to us without the next sentence: “No one is born of water and the Spirit [note the clear baptismal language!] unless he wills it. If he wills it, then, he grows; if he wills it, he diminishes.” The baptismal language here opens the way for Augustine’s invocation of motherhood language. The maternal imagery that follows, however, also rescues Augustine from an apparent difficulty raised by his discussion of “birth in the will”: has Augustine suggested that the power and possibility of salvation rest in our own grasp, that all we need to do is assert a will for (or, perhaps, desire) birth and growth in water and the Spirit? If so, love would be an achievement, not a gift. By turning to maternal imagery, however, Augustine deflects the possibility of this line of thought. Our participation in baptismal rebirth cannot be forced, but neither can we choose the context or mode of our salvation.146

144 All quotations in this and the following paragraph come from *Homilies* III.1.
146 The recent terminology of “noncompetitive agency” seems especially relevant at this point. See especially the works of Kathryn Tanner, including, e.g., *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).
A surprise, however, is in store. In this section, where he develops the maternal image most fully, Augustine draws the link between, not love, but the church as the mother on whose breasts the infants of Christ are suckled, drinking the milk “of all the sacraments that are performed in time for the sake of our eternal salvation,” the milk that is Christ himself. As noted above, this might seem to be a departure from Augustine’s previous use, so that the church instead of love is now the mother of Christian salvation. What seems more likely, however, is that the church can be a mother precisely because Augustine has earlier identified love/charity with motherhood. Rather than displacing the earlier uses of the image, this third occurrence focuses them. It is through the church as mother that love can enter the hearts of Christians. The mother whose womb is rent by the Donatists’ schism and who calls her children to love Christ alone is the church. The fraternal love that obliges Christians to each other and that nourishes them for their salvation is found in the church. Love’s inception has a defined context; the womb of Christian love is found in the church, which is the Christian’s mother.

In the church Christian love has a clear context for its commencement and nurturing, yet the beginning of love is found not in a context but in action. Augustine already hints at this as early as his invocation of the will in III.1; active participation on the part of the one who is reborn in baptism is required. In V.6, the point is made even

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147 On the connection between church and sacrament in Augustine’s thought see, e.g., Gerald Bonner, “Augustine’s Understanding of the Church as a Eucharistic Community,” in Christopher Kleinhenz and Fannie LeMoine, eds., Saint Augustine the Bishop : A Book of Essays (New York: Garland Pub., 1994), 39-64. What Bonner seems to overlook, however, is precisely the aspect Augustine emphasizes in III.1, namely, the Church as the means of the very sacraments by which it is formed.

148 Reading together Homilies I.11 and III.1.

149 Reading together Homilies II.4 and III.1.
clearer. There, Augustine rejects any easy or automatic link between baptism and filiation or adoption. Yes, Augustine says, baptism does make an indelible mark (*character*) on the one who is baptized, a tattoo similar to that placed on a Roman soldier. Without love, however, the *character* marks not a faithful Christian but “a deserter on the run.”

Augustine’s rhetoric is quite strong on this point: “Let him have charity; otherwise let him not say that he has been born from God.” To say that simply because one has been baptized one therefore is a child of God is, evidently, and quite simply, false.

The proper commencement of charity, love’s initial foray, therefore, is found not in the sacraments but in acts of benevolence for fellow Christians, as Augustine clarifies in V.12. Indifference to the plight of one’s fellow believers betrays the absence of divine love, for “[i]f this is how your heart responds [to the plight of your fellow believer,] the Father’s love doesn’t abide in you.” This emphasis on action as the beginning of charity, and on this particular action of benevolence, is significant for at least three reasons. First, by underscoring the importance of acts of benevolence, of sharing worldly goods, Augustine binds practical charity and divine love. It is precisely “the Father’s love” that is absent from cold hearts, not just some vague or sentimental concept of human empathy or universal human love. Helping a brother or sister in Christ in need is more than an act of good will; it is an act of godly love. Second, however, Augustine’s emphasis on action as the beginning of charity does not come at the expense of human affect. The endorsement of a particular class of action as necessary for Christian love

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150 *Homilies* V.6.
151 Ibid.
152 *Homilies* V.12. Quotations in this paragraph and the following are also from this section.
concomitantly establishes the expectation of a certain affective response: the desire to help the brother or sister in need. The true son or daughter of God does not give begrudgingly, all the while mumbling “What does this have to do with me? Am I going to give away my money so that he won’t be troubled?” Augustine clearly expects a right action to follow upon a right desire. Third, Augustine emphasizes the importance of benevolent action despite his ambivalence about the relationship between action and intent. I will have much more to say about this ambivalence in the immediate next section of this chapter, but for now I note merely the strength of emphasis Augustine places on this type of action. The emphasis here, of course, does not override the concerns Augustine voices elsewhere, but it might contextualize them. Perhaps, as with baptism, there is ultimately no easy or automatic link between benevolence and Christian love, but these acts, just like the sacrament of baptism, nonetheless remain the normative standard for such love.

An unanticipated metaphor and an unexpectedly mundane action, therefore, characterize love’s inception. The beautiful and lovely image of maternal charity, birthed and nurtured in the church and its sacraments, is contrasted with the quotidian gesture of almsgiving. Yet I hesitate to use “contrast” too strongly here. Augustine’s description of motherly charity may be more poetic than his commendation of benevolence, but the poetry should not distract us from its very real, earthly, and fleshly character: the womb that is torn (II.4), the breasts that lactate (III.1). Similarly, helping a fellow believer who “is hungry [and] needy” because of “being pressed by a creditor” is deceptively simple, for such a gesture finds grave elevation in Augustine’s insistence that one finds therein
the love of the Father. Heaven and earth, God and neighbor, prosaic and profound, for Augustine, love’s inception unites them all.

Love’s intention

Charitable acts may mark the commencement of love, but Augustine is not naïve concerning them. Indeed, Augustine is frank in his recognition of the ambiguity inherent in acts of beneficence. This ambiguity, as well as Augustine’s approach for working through it, is a major focus of *Homilies* VI, VII, and VIII, but it is introduced even in the first sermon. There, discussing the importance of loving enemies, he starts with a fairly clear statement: “Do you wish life for some friend of yours? You are doing something good. Do you rejoice at your enemy’s death? You are doing something bad.” In the very next breath, however, Augustine introduces dramatic uncertainty, suggesting that “perhaps even the life that you wish for your friend is without benefit, and the death over which you are rejoicing has been beneficial for your enemy.” Augustine’s point here is, in fact, not that we should wish for the death of our enemies, but that we should only wish for what is “certainly beneficial,” namely, “the life that is with God.” Still, Augustine highlights a critical point: we cannot be certain of the results of our actions.

More important, however, is the related point that acts of beneficence may actually fail to be acts of love. We may commit those acts for our own aggrandizement, or even in order to subject another person to our domination by creating an obligation.

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154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
156 *Homilies* VIII.5. Augustine has a nice play on the trope of obligation at the beginning of IX.1, where he speaks of the sweetness and lightness of the burden of charity.
In so doing, we evince pride and avarice rather than genuine love.\textsuperscript{157} The question, then, concerning beneficence is not related directly to the temporal results: “Charity feeds the hungry man; pride also feeds him.”\textsuperscript{158} The ambiguity is rooted in another, perhaps deeper place.

Augustine’s recognition of the ambiguity of beneficence stems from his realization that a good act can be undertaken for ill reasons, and an act that seems to be horrible can be undertaken for good reasons. In an impressive and impressing example, Augustine reflects on how the same act can be both an act of charity and an act of betrayal by considering the handing over of the Son for crucifixion, an act which is the epitome of such ambiguity.\textsuperscript{159} Both “the Father handed over Christ and Judas handed him over,” and, in fact, “the Son handed over himself,” yet we call Judas a traitor, and we affirm that the Father and the Son are not.\textsuperscript{160} The difference is “the Father and the Son did this in charity, but… Judas did it in betrayal,”\textsuperscript{161} and this difference is sufficient for Augustine to say that what Judas did and what the Father and the Son did are actually two different acts.

\textsuperscript{157} Homilies VIII.6. Perhaps it goes without saying, but Augustine identifies the impure motivations for seemingly good deeds with worldly desires and loves that need to be uprooted and replaced by divine love.

\textsuperscript{158} Homilies VIII.9.

\textsuperscript{159} Homilies VII.7.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid. The Latin here is far more interesting than any English translation could be: \textit{Ecce Christum tradidit Pater et tradidit Iudas. Numquid non quasi simile factum uidetur; traditor Iudas, ergo traditor et Deus Pater? Absit, inquis. Non disco, sed Apostolus dicit: Qui Filio proprio non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit eum. Pater illum tradidit, et ipse se tradidit Ait idem Apostolus: Qui me dilexit et tradidit se ipsum pro me Si Pater tradidit Filium et tradidit semetipsum Filius, Iudas quid fecit?}

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
How are we to judge, then, whether an act is truly loving? In the case of Judas we have clear biblical testimony across all four gospels concerning his motivations, but these data are generally inaccessible for most of the population. We cannot peer into the hearts of the stranger and the enemy or even into the hearts of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Nor does Augustine offer any guide for attempting such judgments, for while questions about the genuineness of an apparent act of charity could be used to judge others, Augustine exploits the ambiguity of beneficence to underscore the importance of rigorous self-examination. We are called to examine our acts for their motivations and intentions. Are they motivated by charity or by cupidity? Do we seek the good of the other or of ourselves? Are we prideful, arrogant, and greedy in displaying our “good will”? After all, without charity “[t]here can be the appearance of good deeds, but good works cannot be [present],” and, since Augustine also strongly links charity and the Holy Spirit in the same sermons where he investigates beneficence’s ambiguity, the one who does not have true charity also does not have the Holy Spirit.

In later centuries and different contexts, such as Puritan colonial North America, this rigorous self-examination might lead to despair. Not so for Augustine. First, we may have uncertainty about our own motivations, but we still have hope in the God who is the source of love and who, for our salvation, heals us from our pride, our arrogance, and our mixed motivations. Second, Augustine seems to be reasonably confident that our self-

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163 *Homilies* VIII.9.
164 *Homilies* VI.1ff. His instruction to flee to God, rather than from God, is especially important here. See also I.6, where confession of sins is a source of hope.
examination will have fairly clear results, if it is pursued honestly. Augustine cannot be unaware of the human propensity for self-deception, so self-examination alone cannot be the source of his confidence. Rather, his confidence appears motivated by a trust in the work of the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit, as the Love of God who brings us love, is implicated in all our acts of charity, the Spirit’s witness to us about our motivations and deeds is reliable, even when we are not.

Augustine’s insistence on the importance of intentions is not without its problems. Intentions, instead of acts, become so definitive of love that they apparently have the power to redeem otherwise harmful or even reprehensible deeds.\footnote{165 The most relevant passages are Homilies VII.8, VII.11, VIII.9, and X.7.} The handing over of Christ to death, already discussed, is one example of this power, an example whose merit modern theologians may debate, but Augustine extends it into arenas even more troubling, which I will discuss under the umbrella term “love’s discipline.”

For Augustine, love works for the good of the one who is loved. If one is motivated by love, one seeks actions that will correspond to this good. Under some circumstances, this means, quite obviously, committing acts of beneficence, giving physical goods to the brother or sister in need, but Augustine also permits a far different range of acts: the father who beats his son, the love that can be “violent” through “blows of charity,” or the strong rebuke of love. In each instance there may be examples where Augustine’s logic is justifiable (e.g., the parent who swats her child’s hand away from the hot stove), but when they are offered, as they appear to be, as general rules they make the
reader understandably uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{166} Certainly Augustine has a serious point to make here about the often inscrutable difference between acts of love and acts of anger or hatred, but it is fair to wonder if some acts can be ruled out as impossible for \textit{human beings} to complete in love. Committing an act for the good of another depends on knowing not only the relevant general good (which, as Augustine rightly argues, is the knowledge and love of the Triune God) but also the relevant particular good (i.e., the act that in this moment would lead to the general good). Augustine acknowledges that such knowledge is off-limits to human beings.\textsuperscript{167} The ontological distinction between Creator and creature, however, may be blurred at certain moments when Augustine speaks of love’s discipline.

Perhaps the blurriest of these moments is the apothegm “[I]love and do what you want,”\textsuperscript{168} which, as discussed earlier, has drawn the ire of Margaret Miles. While Boniface Ramsey might be correct in arguing that the phrase’s “true meaning is utterly clear in the context,”\textsuperscript{169} Augustine seems to overlook the ease with which such a phrase might be misinterpreted. Certainly, as Eoin Cassidy argues, it “cannot be interpreted as offering a license to [Augustine’s] congregation to act in whatever way they wish” in its

\textsuperscript{166} It is worth asking whether the defense of discipline made repeatedly by Augustine is not at all generic but very specific. Could there by some kind of discipline being carried out against the Donatists by supporters (even imperial supporters) of the Catholic church? The beginning of X.10 may be the most important clue, wherein Augustine puts in the mouths of the Donatists the words, “We have endured persecution; we haven’t caused it.” If it is the case the Augustine is thinking specifically of the Donatists not only in X.10 but also in earlier passages referring to the discipline of love, then he might be trying to cast acts of discipline, presumably including some significant violence, as acts of charity intended to drive the enemy (the Donatists) back to the church, where forgiveness and true charity are found. I’m not sure this makes Augustine’s position any better.

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Homilies} I.9.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Homilies} VII.8.
\textsuperscript{169} Ramsey, 110.
immediate context, but as the images of violence add up over the remainder of the seventh sermon and the *Homilies* that follow it, the problematic implications of the phrase seem to grow in, rather than lose, their force. It is hard to reconcile love with the image of the slaveholder, let alone the image of the slaveholder who beats his slaves.\textsuperscript{171}

Still, and this is where we will end on this subject, I think Cassidy is on to something when he argues that Augustine means to say that “[i]n listening to the dictates of love, *dilige et quod vis fac*, we are doing nothing other than listening to the interior teacher who is God [the Holy Spirit] himself.”\textsuperscript{172} Augustine’s phrasing, and some of his examples, are unfortunate but not indicative of his deeper theological intent. “Love and do what you want” cannot be understood without understanding that, for Augustine, *love* and *the will* (“what you want”) are closely related terms. The sentence is, at its heart, a tautology: Love, and *do* love.

It seems, perhaps, that Augustine hasn’t considered the full weight of some of his lovelier passages in these sections. For example:

This is what you should think of if you want to see God: God is love. What sort of countenance does love have? What sort of shape does it have? What sort of height does it have? What sort of feet does it have? What sort of hands does it have? No one can say. Yet it has feet, for they lead to the Church. It has hands, for they stretch out to the poor person. It has eyes, for that is how he who is in need is understood… It has ears… These aren’t distinct members occupying space, but he who has charity sees everything all at once with his understanding. Dwell there, and you shall be indwelled. Abide there, and you shall be abided in.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{170} Cassidy, 215.
\textsuperscript{171} *Homilies* VII.11.
\textsuperscript{172} Cassidy, 216.
\textsuperscript{173} *Homilies* VII.10.
This extended quote can be considered from two angles. On the one hand, there appears to be a nice reflection on Paul’s illustration of the church as the body of Christ. This body has feet, eyes, hands, etc. To see the church is to see the love of God. To abide in the church is to abide in the love of God. On the other hand, which could have been developed further by Augustine, this is the body of Christ. The love of God which is seen in the church has a normative shape in Jesus Christ. Yes, this does not foreclose the possibility of harsh discipline, but it certainly should give more pause than Augustine has time for in this sermon and those to follow. One might better modify his phrase to “Love, and do what Christ wants.”

Love’s perfection

In Augustine’s Homilies, love has a beginning in acts of beneficence for the brother and sister in Christ. Love’s intentions are supremely important, however, as love develops and is evaluated over the course of the Christian’s life. Finally, love reaches completion, or perfection, in two particular and related forms: the love of the brother or

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174 Indeed, though this is well outside the scope of this dissertation, such a phrase would not at all need to come at the expense of Augustine’s association of Love with the Holy Spirit, since, in what appears to be an early attempt at something like what would lead to the insertion of the Filioque clause in the Latin Creed, Augustine believes the Father and the Son share a common will, which is the Holy Spirit. See De Trinitate V, VI, and XV.

175 Even before this section can get off the ground, an important caveat is necessary. Both Ramsey and Jeanne LeMouzy (who prepared the French edition) translate consistently Latin words with the perfect-stem as perfection, perfected, etc., but that is not necessarily the best translation in each case, a point Ramsey acknowledges at least once (85). By my count, Augustine uses words with this stem eighty-four times in the sermons; it occurs at least once in all but Homilies II and VII. Normally I would not be especially interested in the finer points of Latin translation, since I myself am unqualified to pass judgment in this area, but because John Wesley uses “perfection” and “Christian perfection” so insistently I feel the need to highlight early on two things. First, despite the apparent shared vocabulary, in no way am I arguing or even implying that Augustine prefigures Wesley’s theology of perfection. Second, though two major translations use “perfection” vocabulary—and, therefore, it may well be the “correct” translation, I am convinced that “completion” is a better fit for the grain of Augustine’s thought. It is the fullness of love, rather than its ultimate achievement, that concerns Augustine in these Homilies.
sister in Christ, and the love of the enemy. Given the initial importance of charity’s act, love’s perfection, in either the case of the brother/sister or of the enemy, cannot be divorced from real-world gestures of love, including both acts of beneficence and, for Augustine, acts of discipline. At the same time, however, Augustine’s emphasis on love’s intentions suggests that love for the brother and the enemy is not merely a matter of materialistic concern. What is at stake in love’s perfection is also the kind of desire one has with respect to these others.

In part, I have already established the nature of this loving version of desire in the previous section. In I.9, Augustine insists that to love another person is to desire something for them that is unquestionably good for her or him; this is, necessarily, to wish for the person to know and love the Triune God. From the beginning, the love of the brother in Christ and the love of the enemy have a distinctive unity.

Still, Augustine dwells much more on the issue of brotherly love than on the love of the enemy in the Homilies—and this despite the fact that he introduces the love of the enemy as love’s perfection as early as I.9. There are several factors in this clear emphasis. First, and most explicitly in Augustine’s own words, the epistle of 1 John is full of instructions on the love of one’s brothers and sisters in Christ but has very little to say on the subject of enemies. As I have said, Augustine follows the text of the epistle very closely in his sermons. Second, Augustine clearly has in mind the Donatists and the threat

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176 Thus there is a great deal of resonance between Augustine’s approach in the Homilies and his depiction of God as the ultimate good to be enjoyed in the first book of De doctrina christiana.
177 See Homilies VIII.10 for Augustine’s simultaneous acknowledgment of this point and rejection of the possibly subsequent implication that the author of 1 John has nothing to say about the love of the enemy.
he believes them to be against the integrity of the Catholic Church. Preaching on the love of the brother in Christ allows Augustine to point out numerous flaws in the Donatist party, from its baptismal theology to its daily practices. Third, if I am right that the post-baptismal context is essential for understanding these sermons, Augustine is teaching (and perhaps also re-teaching) his congregation the essentials to a Christian unity that is exemplified in the love for one’s fellow believers in Christ.

It is this unity which is essential to Augustine’s preaching on love’s perfection in the context of fraternal love. It participates in the unity of God, a unity also predicated on Love (in the Holy Spirit). When one loves a brother or sister in Christ, however, one is not loving him or her in order that she or he may come to know and love God; that state of affairs is presumed by the phrase “brother or sister in Christ.” Presumably, one loves a fellow Christian so that she or he may come to love God more but also in order to love the love (i.e., the Holy Spirit) that is present in the brother or sister. This, in its own right, represents love’s completion.

But it is not enough. Augustine says as much at least twice, in I.9 (“What is perfection in love? To love one’s enemies”) and in VIII.4 (“Extend your love to those who are closest [i.e., to your brothers], but you shouldn’t call that an extension.”). The love of the enemy is different from the love of the brother or sister. This love does not presume the presence of love or the Holy Spirit in the other, nor the other’s knowledge and love of God. Augustine instructs his congregation to love the enemy in order that the

178 I will have more to say on this in the section below.
enemy might become a brother. This is a proleptic love, a love that hopes, insistently, for a future that is not yet certain, but acts according to that hope nonetheless.

This is love’s greatest completion, its fullest perfection, for to love the enemy for what she or he will become (a brother or sister in Christ) is to love as God loves. It is the love of the craftsman and of the physician: “You don’t love what is in him but what you want him to be… Hence perfect love is love of one’s enemy, and this perfect love consists in brotherly love.”179 Our desire for our enemy also changes when we are filled with love: we “desire that he be healed.”180 Is it a stretch to suggest that this healing includes being filled with the very Holy Spirit that prompts our love for the enemy? The Spirit of adoption that would make us brothers and sisters? These are possibilities to be explored later in this dissertation.

The Holy Spirit

In this section we consider three aspects of the Holy Spirit in Augustine’s Homilies: general associations of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit and Love, and the Holy Spirit as Love. The point of these divisions is to show, first, that Augustine’s theological imagination with respect to the Holy Spirit is not limited by the image of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God; second, to demonstrate that the connection between the Holy Spirit and love does not lead inevitably to the identification of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God; and third, to understand better the nature of Augustine’s identification of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God.

179 Homilies VIII.10.
General associations

Although the association between the Holy Spirit and love is Augustine’s most lasting one, it is hardly the only significant association Augustine makes with respect to the Spirit. There are, I suggest, three broad classes of associations Augustine makes in addition to love.

The first of these is between the Holy Spirit and baptism, hardly surprising given the general content and direction of the *Homilies*. There are two strands within this association. The first is between the Holy Spirit and water; this has already been discussed. By connecting the Holy Spirit and water Augustine highlights the interior washing that is integral to a complete baptism. The second strand is with anointing, and this association occurs frequently, though it is never as worked out as the Holy Spirit-water motif. Just as he does with water, Augustine identifies the Holy Spirit as the divine reality visualized in the sacrament of anointing associated with baptism.\(^\text{181}\) Thus the active empowering force behind two sacraments of initiation, baptism and anointing with oil, is, for Augustine, the Holy Spirit, even if it is Christ (and not the priest) who acts in the performance of the sacrament. Further, this anointing, and the Holy Spirit alongside it, is identified with truth.\(^\text{182}\) In fact, the anointing is true because “the Spirit of the Lord himself, who teaches human beings, is incapable of lying.”\(^\text{183}\)

\(^{181}\) *Homilies* III.5. See also III.12: “This is the sacrament of anointing, its invisible power itself being the invisible anointing that is the Holy Spirit.”

\(^{182}\) *Homilies* IV.2.

\(^{183}\) Ibid. Is this also an oblique reference to something like the *Filioque*?
The second class of associations is with the Holy Spirit and inspiration. This is, admittedly, a more nebulous class of associations, and arguments could be made for what actually belongs here. There are, however, two fairly clear examples that seem to fit. The first is prayer. Turning to Paul’s words in Romans 8:26-27, Augustine remarks that the Holy Spirit is the fount of our deepest prayers, not “answering your prayer in accord with your wish, but… answering it with a view to your wellbeing.” Prayer, however, is not the only thing the Holy Spirit inspires. More directly, the Holy Spirit inspires Scripture and its writers. Augustine develops this point through the extended metaphor, introduced in IX.5 and filled out in IX.9, of the two pipes. Noticing an apparent conflict across Scripture between the command in 1 John to have no fear and the psalmist’s words that “[t]he fear of the Lord is chaste, abiding forever” (Ps 19:9), Augustine argues that these two voices of Scripture are like the two pipes of a musical instrument. It is the same breath that moves through both pipes, but the pipes produce different pitches. Different pitches, however, can be discordant or harmonious, and in each case Augustine argues that the Scriptures are harmonious. The implication is that the Spirit, who here quite literally inspires the words of Scripture’s writers (the pipes), cannot play discordantly.

The third class of associations captures aspects of the previous two as well as the variety of brief associations scattered throughout the Homilies: that between the Holy Spirit and gift. The most direct reference occurs early in the sermon series, when

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184 Homilies VI.8. The reader should hear echoes of the discussion above on the discipline of love.
185 This is the initial set of Scriptures in apparent conflict that gives rise to the metaphor in IX.5; in IX.9 the conflict is between Ps 45 and Is 53.
Augustine encourages his congregation to “look to the gift of the Spirit of God.”\textsuperscript{186} The genitive is subjective, not objective here: it is the gift that belongs to (or comes from) the Spirit, which in this case is the gift of tongues.\textsuperscript{187} Augustine returns to this same gift of the Spirit in VI.10. There he acknowledges that the particular gift of tongues has, in his day, disappeared, but he argues that this does not mean the Spirit has actually disappeared.

Tongues are not the only readily identifiable gifts of the Spirit in the \textit{Homilies}. Prayer itself, already discussed, could be counted as another such gift. So could the sight that allows us to see God’s world as good;\textsuperscript{188} the faith and hearing that are needed to trust in the dwelling presence of God;\textsuperscript{189} and the righteousness that belongs to both the departed saints and the church on earth.\textsuperscript{190} Though Augustine does not explicitly identify these as gifts, his discourse around each makes clear that none is earned or achieved, leaving “gift” as the only apt descriptor for how a Christian comes to have any of them.

For Augustine, discussions of baptism, inspiration, and gifts become opportunities for discussion of the Holy Spirit, too. Augustine’s theology in his sermons on 1 John does not narrow or confine the Holy Spirit to an ill-fitting box called “Love” but has room for other images that are also important.

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Homilies} II.3.
\textsuperscript{187} Augustine introduces the gift of tongues in Acts 2 as part of his argument that the Donatists construe the church too narrowly and cannot account for the universality of the church implicit in the Pentecost narrative.
\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Homilies} II.11.
\textsuperscript{189} \textit{Homilies} IV.1.
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Homilies} IV.3.
The Holy Spirit and love

Before our final examination of Augustine’s theology of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God, we need to consider the various points of association between the Holy Spirit and love more broadly. To do so, we begin with the three broad classes of general associations just discussed. In a way, my presentation of each of them was incomplete. It is certainly true that each class has examples that stand on their own, but that is not Augustine’s general procedure. For the most part what we find is that each of these classes, baptism, inspiration, and gift, finds its completion, or at least a strong parallel, in the associations Augustine makes between the Holy Spirit and love. Thus in baptism, the waters of baptism are also the waters of the Holy Spirit and of charity.\textsuperscript{191} The anointing of oil and the Holy Spirit parallels the charity Christians are to have that is more important to Augustine than baptism. Similarly, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit creates a harmony or unity that is very much like the unity Christians are to have because of their love; Augustine even says that the Holy Spirit inspires charity.\textsuperscript{192} Likewise, the sight, faith, and righteousness that are gifts of the Spirit are also gifts instrumental to love, or to loving rightly.

We can expand our scope a little further to see more aspects of this Holy Spirit-love connection. For instance, there appears to be no difference-making in the kind of love the Holy Spirit inspires. The love which Christians are to have for their brothers and sisters in Christ is not another love from the love they are to have for God. And the Holy

\textsuperscript{191} See the discussion above.
\textsuperscript{192} Homilies VIII.1.
Spirit, in Augustine’s thought, empowers a love for the other that works similarly to the way God’s love works in us: not seeking its own benefit, working for the good of the other, and seeking to fill that which is absent in the other.

All of this is to say that for Augustine the *association* between the Holy Spirit and love is frequent and perhaps even inevitable—but the *identification* of the Holy Spirit *as* Love is not. Except in one case, none of the general classes of baptism, inspiration, and gift, nor any of the many other passages in which Augustine mentions love and the Holy Spirit together, necessarily would lead to the identification Augustine makes. Moreover, as we will see, the logic of why the Holy Spirit is the Love of God is not built by presenting the many associations of the Spirit and love as an overwhelming case for their identification.

The one exception, however, is worth our attention. This special case is baptism. In the middle of trying to distinguish between a valid and an effective baptism, Augustine argues that charity “is the unique font.”\(^{193}\) The font of charity satiates our thirst, and “[t]he Spirit of God exhorts you to drink from it; the Spirit of God exhorts you to drink from himself.”\(^{194}\) That baptism, love (as charity), and the Holy Spirit all come together speaks volumes about the importance of each to Augustine and gives the systematic theologian an opening for deeply-rooted theological exploration and creativity. It also allows us, finally, to tackle Augustine’s identification of the Holy Spirit as Love.

\(^{193}\) *Homilies* VII.6.
\(^{194}\) Ibid.
Augustine’s identification of the Holy Spirit is not an associative logic; rather, it is a *theo*-logic. The basic frame of that logic has already been worked out by Lewis Ayres; here we have a clear-cut example of Ayres’s second rule of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology: when something is identified in Scripture as both God and from God, then it should be attributed to either the Son or the Holy Spirit, and not to the Father.\(^{195}\) What is perhaps unique about the “love” instance of this rule is that both the “from” and the “is” God occur in such close proximity (1 John 4:7-8).

This, however, is only the logic of how *either* the Son or the Holy Spirit could be identified with love; it does not give us quite enough precision. Further, it does not account for the key transposition Augustine makes of 1 John 4:8, from “God is love” to “Love is God.”\(^{196}\) Each of these points may have some resolution in Augustine’s use of Latin, but investigating his etymology and syntax will only yield linguistic reasons with theological implications. A more straightforward way is possible.

First, the transposition to “Love is God” from “God is love” enables Augustine to approach his subject soteriologically rather than metaphysically. “God is love” may yield splendid speculations about the nature of the divine life (and, in some theologians, has done exactly that), but other than providing some reassurance against fears of an angry or unloving God it has relatively little value soteriologically; the statement is far too broad.

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\(^{195}\) See Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 178ff. This is because the Father sends and is not sent; therefore, the Father is never “from” God. The rule has obviously Christological roots in the “God from God” clause of the Nicene Creed.

\(^{196}\) *Homilies* VII.6.
“Love is God,” however, opens paths for exploiting the sentence’s breadth and possibility. Which love is God? Any love (though Augustine has been describing love very carefully throughout his Homilies so that it is hardly a null term here). To the extent that I am loving, then, am I God? Not, according to Augustine, in the strictest interpretation possible of such a claim, but he does say this: “Do you love the earth? You will be the earth. Do you love God? What shall I say? That you will be God? I don’t dare to say this on my own.” Augustine goes on to quote Ps 82:6, invoking a classic text for divinization soteriology.

If there seems to be a soteriologically-driven context for the essential transposition in VII.6, there is a related Scriptural basis for identifying the Holy Spirit with this love, but it does not come from 1 John. The basis is Romans 5:5, one of Augustine’s favorite passages in the New Testament. Romans 5:5 provides Augustine with the foundation for believing that the Holy Spirit specifically is the Divine Person who dwells in our hearts: “If the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and he loves him in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, then love is God, but it is God because it is from God.” The unspoken reasoning here is similar to what Augustine invokes in De Trinitate: when we love, we not only love the object of our love, we also love the love by which we love that object. When God loves us, God also loves the love by which he

197 Homilies II.14.
198 This is an excellent moment to recall that these are sermons. The notion that love itself is divine is, potentially, both extremely empowering and very reassuring for a congregation to hear. It relieves the burden of having to work hard in order to achieve some state of love while simultaneously providing a basis for trusting that one may actually still love.
199 Homilies VII.6.
200 See De Trinitate VIII.
loves us. Augustine immediately appends Romans 5:5, “The charity of God has been poured out in our hearts,” and argues that “we should understand that in love there is the Holy Spirit.” The fact that Scripture identifies the Holy Spirit as the vehicle for God’s love, in Augustine’s mind, also makes the Spirit eligible to be that very love.

Soteriology provides the context for Augustine’s “Love is God.” Scripture, combined with what Ayres identifies as the second rule of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology, offers the justification for focusing this transposition on the Holy Spirit. Baptism seals the position, “[f]or the Holy Spirit is he whom the wicked cannot receive. He is that font of which Scripture says, Let the font of your water be your own, and let no stranger have a part in you.” If the wicked cannot receive the Holy Spirit, then the Spirit is the guarantor of effective (and not just valid) baptism. Elsewhere, as described above, Augustine also indicates that love is what distinguishes Christians after baptism. The baptismal logic, then, could not be clearer: if both the Holy Spirit and charity uniquely and exclusively identify a person as a member of the body of Christ, then they must be equivalent terms. The Holy Spirit must be love.

The Love of God

In this first chapter, we have surveyed the body of secondary literature on Augustine’s Homilies. We have investigated in detail each of his ten sermons. And we have drawn out two major themes that are essential to this dissertation’s present work. I offer, then, just a few words by way of conclusion.

201 Homilies VII.6.
202 Ibid., quoting Proverbs 5:16-17.
First, Augustine draws a sharp distinction between consuming and consummating love. The love of the Holy Spirit by which we love as Christians results in consummation. All other loves, all other desires, are destructive: they result in the annihilation of the other.

Second, this distinction makes most sense by understanding that in these sermons we are called to love what God loves. This is the love of the physician, who does not love sick patients but loves people who are going to be well. In theological terms, however, such a love demands that we rightly understand and order our loves. The love by which we love others, both enemies and friends in Christ, is the Holy Spirit. It is not a love we can possess or claim for ourselves but is a gift. Further, when we love, it is this very Love itself, the Love of God, that also our ultimate Love. We love the other that he or she may be filled with Love (the Holy Spirit), and when he or she is thus filled, we love the Love (the Holy Spirit) with which he or she is filled.

Hannah Arendt has suggested that this ultimately destroys notions of both the self and the other, who disappear in irrelevance in light of the overwhelming love, and good that is the love, of God. Augustine establishes, however, that quite the opposite is true. It is only by loving and loving with the Love of God that our loves do not revert to the selfish, avaricious, and ultimately destructive loves indicative of our sinful lives. We

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203 Friendship is not discussed much in these sermons, but Augustine mentions it briefly near the end of the collection: “Wherever you love a brother, you love a friend” (X.7). He reminds us that we are to love the enemy in order that the enemy may become a brother, for “the discipline, the strength, the blooms, the fruits, the beauty, the delight, the sustenance, the food, the drink, the embrace of charity is beyond satiety” (X.7).

must choose between love of the world and Love of God, not merely for God’s sake, or for our own salvation, but for the sake of the cosmos.
Chapter Two

Introduction

John Wesley makes many Methodist theologians nervous. No one disputes that, like Martin Luther and John Calvin, Wesley had a profound influence on the shape of post-Reformation Christianity, nor does anyone doubt that his work has shaped the lives of generations of Wesleyan followers.¹ The problem lies in the nature of Wesley’s corpus. Unlike the magisterial reformers and their successors, Wesley never wrote a large-scale comprehensive work of his distinctive theology. His treatises are relatively short and almost entirely occasional or controversial. His Notes on the Old Testament and Notes on the New Testament are not developed commentaries with a unifying theme or thesis. Many of the works that bear his name are actually “editions” of the writings of predecessors and of other authors of his day. Worst of all, John Wesley’s richest and most original theological work comes to us in the form of sermons.

The fact, however, that sermons form a substantial part of Wesley’s theological heritage makes Wesley a natural, if sometimes overlooked, dialogue partner with Augustine. As I noted in the previous chapter, scholars are beginning to reevaluate the

relative importance of sermons in Augustine’s own corpus. In that same chapter, I have also demonstrated the theological riches of one set of Augustine’s sermons, the *Homilies*. Wesley, however, does not have a *De Trinitate*, the Augustinian treatise doubtless lurking in the minds of many readers of the previous chapter, or even a *De doctrina christiana*. Without such hefty volumes as backup, do Wesley’s sermons have enough weight to hold their own?

Sermons, after all, are (usually) not intended for specialists. They are for congregations, mixed audiences whose criteria for a good sermon are likely quite different than the criteria for a piece of serious (i.e., academic) theological literature.\(^2\) Furthermore, in the two hundred twenty three years since Wesley’s death, sermons have been under the purview of practical theology in academia’s “theological encyclopedia.”\(^3\) What does Wesley the sermonizer have to offer systematic theologians?\(^4\) Such questions can only be answered fully over the length of this dissertation. In this chapter, however, I lay the foundation for a positive response. First, I survey some recent attempts among Wesleyan scholars to give John Wesley a toehold in the world of systematic (or at least academic) theology. In this opening section I also consider the

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\(^2\) Albert Outler famously concluded that Wesley was a “folk theologian.” It was intended as a compliment.

\(^3\) On the notion of a theological encyclopedia, see Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). His work tracing the development of the fourfold distinction in theology (biblical, historical, dogmatic/systematic, and practical) still taken for granted by many institutions of theological education is a worthwhile read, even if his prescriptive proposals are less than satisfying.

\(^4\) Obviously I believe Wesley has something significant to contribute, but there are those who are skeptical. See William J. Abraham, “The End of Wesleyan Theology,” in *Continuing Relevance of Wesleyan Theology* (Eugene, Or: Pickwick, 2011), 97–110. Questions about Wesley’s sermons and the nature of systematic theology are not the primary line of inquiry of this dissertation, but neither can they be totally avoided.
recent work of two Cambridge theologians, not Wesleyans, who offer new ways to think about systematic theology that may be helpful for those who believe Wesley still has something to contribute. Second, I turn to five of Wesley’s sermons, all on texts from 1 John, and I give a close reading of each of these sermons. Third, drawing on these close readings, I synthesize from the sermons noteworthy elements of Wesley’s theology both of love and of the Holy Spirit. Finally, therefore, I argue that John Wesley provides certain rich possibilities for our theological exploration of the love of God.

5 The use of sermons based on 1 John makes for a natural comparison with Augustine’s *Homilies*, but it also reflects a significant aspect of John Wesley’s preaching. Though never collected in a single unifying volume, John Wesley’s preaching on 1 John was extensive. We can see from the registry of sermons, collated by modern scholars, that Wesley likely preached on texts from 1 John hundreds of times over the course of his life. (The document “John Wesley’s Sermon Register” can be found at Duke University Divinity School’s Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition’s website: http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/research-resources/wesley-studies-resources.) This is merely an estimate of the number of times Wesley used a text from 1 John as his main preaching text; it does not include the far more numerous references to 1 John in his extant sermons, let alone in the many sermons that do not survive in written form. Wesley’s intense interest in a relatively short and often overlooked text from the New Testament may surprise some who are unfamiliar with his work, and even a few who know it well. What is perhaps still more surprising is that Wesley’s interest in 1 John did not come at the expense of his preaching on a wide variety of passages of Scripture. For a taste of the diversity of texts Wesley used for his preaching, we can examine all of Wesley’s preaching on a single day of the calendar, for example, January 31. From Wesley’s sermon register, it appears that he preached on January 31 twenty-seven times in his life. In those twenty-seven times, Wesley preached on twenty-seven different texts (In biblical order, those texts are: Genesis 28:20, Psalm 34:8, Psalm 62:1, Psalm 146:4, Isaiah 51:16, Isaiah 58, Isaiah 63:4, Luke 16:9, Luke 21:36, John 3:7, John 8:12, Acts 16:31, Romans 12:1, Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 7:37, 1 Corinthians 12:3, 1 Corinthians 12:31, 1 Corinthians 13:8 (etc.), 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 3:7, Galatians 5:1, Philippians 4:4, Hebrews 2:1, 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 4:7, 2 Peter 2:9, and 1 John 5:1). Only once was the text from 1 John. Robert W. Wall, then, may be correct to say that for Wesley “1 John is that touchstone that makes plain the Bible’s gospel message,” but such a statement must always be held together with the breadth of Wesley’s preaching. See Robert W. Wall, “John’s John: A Wesleyan Theological Reading of 1 John,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 105–41. I also have reservations about Wall’s characterization in that article of Wesley’s interest in 1 John as Wesley’s “canon within the Canon.” The term itself suggests a rigidity of interpretation far greater than a hermeneutical stance of allowing certain Scripture passages to interpret others. There is, certainly in the Christian theological lexicon, a difference between the recognition of the need to interpret Scripture with at least some consistency and the act of canon-making. Whereas Martin Luther’s attempt to bracket out the epistle of James represents a genuine, barely implicit, and perhaps extreme example of such a “canon,” we would not, I think, want to say that Augustine makes Matthew 22:37–39 his “canon within the Canon” on the basis of his instruction to read all Scripture so as to be instructed in loving God and neighbor. I suspect Wesley’s embrace of 1 John is far closer to Augustine than to Luther in this respect.
Wesley and Systematic Theology

Part of the Wesleyan recovery, or rediscovery, of the past half-century has been an attempt among scholars to demonstrate John Wesley’s amenability to systematic theology. This is not, as William Abraham would have us believe, some attempt to turn Wesley into “a folk theologian waiting to be organized into a systematic theologian.” In fact, this scholarship has often used Wesley to challenge assumptions about what is and is not systematic theology and about what does and does not count as appropriate source material for systematics. In the next few pages I survey one prominent approach that has attracted the interest and debate of a number of scholars: the quest for a unifying theme in Wesley’s work. This quest does not necessarily assert that such a theme was in Wesley’s mind when he was writing. Rather, the approach surveys the breadth of Wesley’s production in order to discern consistent or repeated patterns of thought. While I am appreciative of this line of inquiry and indebted to its practitioners, I wonder if it is still too tied to narrow definitions of systematic theology. Sarah Coakley and A.N. Williams have argued recently for broader approaches to systematics that can be helpful for readers of John Wesley.

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7 In many ways, Geoffrey Wainwright, Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), represents the apogee of this challenge. Doxology asks the world of academic theology to recognize as significant for systematic theology sets of texts and practices (sermons, hymns, and liturgical acts) that have traditionally been important for Methodists as well as for Wesley himself.
The unifying theme approach

Among the many theologians who have proposed various concepts or words as John Wesley’s unifying theme, I single out three for consideration: David L. Cubie, Randy L. Maddox, and Kenneth J. Collins. Cubie represents the previous generation of scholars; his article allows us a brief introduction to this approach. Maddox and Collins are major figures in the present generation of scholars and have each contributed a major work that employs this approach. As we will see, all three writers have different takes on the unifying theme approach.

David Cubie contends that “[t]he principle which gives coherence to Wesley’s thought is love. Love is the controlling principle in all his theological activity.”

Finding such a principle is important to Cubie because “[i]f it can be demonstrated that Wesley is a consistent thinker with a coherent principle, then he must be reconsidered as a serious theologian.” A “serious theologian” (Cubie does not say a systematic theologian, but the implication is there) is characterized by consistency and coherence around a single unifying principle. Without such a principle, Cubie concedes, Wesley is of no good to “serious” theologians, but having one is his membership card to that elite group.

Cubie’s approach is essentially an expansion and sharpening of the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral. Love, therefore, is first a methodological principle. According to

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8 David L. Cubie, “Wesley’s Theology of Love,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (March 1, 1985): 122–54. Even though he recognizes six different uses of love vocabulary in Wesley (love as familial and national loyalty; as concern for others; as happiness; as fellowship; and as impassioned or zealous), Cubie does not single out one as the most important or as the normative or regulating use. There remains a significant lack of conceptual clarity: if love is the central principle of Wesley’s theology, which love is really central?


10 At one point (145ff) Cubie even says that “Wesley has a metaphysic of love.”
Cubie, it regulates the four points of the quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience must all conform to the principle of love for Wesley to adopt or accept them. Love is also an epistemological principle: knowing that one is loved by God or that one loves one’s neighbor is a source of assurance that one has been adopted as a child of God. Finally, love is a hermeneutical principle, indeed, a hermeneutics of suspicion that accepts or rejects traditions, activities, and even passages of Scripture based on their conformity to the principle.

Although Cubie’s “Wesley’s Theology of Love” precedes Randy Maddox’s Responsible Grace by a decade, Maddox’s work remains the most influential of the “unifying theme” scholarship. His approach is more sophisticated than Cubie’s (in fairness to Cubie, it is also substantially longer), demonstrating a better grasp of the field of systematic theology and challenging that field more directly. Maddox identifies John Wesley as a practical theologian, but he does not mean that Wesley was a forerunner of the post-Schleiermacher fourfold encyclopedia of theology. Rather, Maddox classifies Wesley as a practical theologian because, first, Wesley primarily wrote first-order

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11 Cubie, “Wesley’s Theology of Love,”
12 My intention in this section is not to engage extensively the normative or exegetical claims of the various authors surveyed, but certain things cannot pass without comment. In this case, the deployment of a single concept (love) that is seemingly independent of the material it is supposedly unifying strikes me as having dubious value. Especially since the Christian tradition and Scripture itself have so much to say about love, it is hard to understand how love could be a standalone or regulating principle without also being receptive to the ways the tradition and Scripture have spoken of love. If we are faced with voices of the tradition that seem unloving, it may be that we need to leave them behind. More often, however, it may be that our idea of love is what needs to be discarded.
13 Maddox’s influence can be seen by noting two interesting facts. First, Cubie’s essay is, at least in part, a response to an American Academy of Religion Paper (“Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology”) given by Randy Maddox the previous fall. Second, the structure of Kenneth Collins’s The Theology of John Wesley, which I will discuss below, is, despite Collins’s disagreements with Maddox, clearly indebted (and nearly identical) to the structure of Maddox’s Responsible Grace.
theological materials and, second, Wesley was a “pastor/theologian who was actively shepherding Christian disciples in the world.”

Maddox resists the notion that a work must have “a theoretical Idea from which all truth is deduced or given order in a System,” and he proposes instead that consistency can best be found in “a basic orienting perspective or metaphor that guides [one’s] various particular theological activities.” According to Maddox, Wesley’s “basic orienting perspective” is responsible grace, the synergistic work of God in the creation and redemption of the cosmos. Thus, even if Wesley was not a systematic theologian, Wesley’s work has lasting, and not just occasional, significance for Christian theology.

Maddox, however, does more than challenge the notion that a serious theologian requires a thoroughly worked out system. He organizes Responsible Grace systematically, the order “reflecting the Christian experience of salvation as the recovery of holiness.” More than just a case for taking Wesley seriously as a theologian, Maddox’s book is a de facto argument for Wesley’s importance to systematic theology.

In his own approach to Wesley, Kenneth Collins adopts Maddox’s structure but argues for a different unifying force. Collins “would like to offer that the conjunctive

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15 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 18.
16 Maddox Responsible Grace, 25. The organization of Responsible Grace along soteriological lines does not mean Maddox reduces Wesley to purely existentialist concerns. For example, in a section on Wesley’s “Doctrine of the Trinity as a Grammar of Responsible Grace,” Maddox demonstrates through his discussion of, among other things, Wesley on the Filioque and Wesley’s refusal of functional unitarianism that Wesley’s interest in Trinitarian theology, while soterologically centered, has a broader scope. See Responsible Grace, 136-140. This broader scope is also apparent in the early order of Maddox’s chapters. One has only to look at the table of contents to recognize the imprint of the Trinity. Each of the three Persons of the Trinity receives the attention of a separate chapter: the Father, who is “The God of Responsible Grace” (chapter two), the Son, known in “Christ—The Initiative of Responsible Grace” (chapter four), and the Holy Spirit, who is “The Presence of Responsible Grace” (chapter five).
flavor of Wesley’s theology is actually embedded in his preferred axial theme or orienting concern, which is not simply grace but holiness and grace.” Like Maddox, Collins calls Wesley a practical theologian, setting Wesley’s “style” of doing theology against the contrasting styles of systematic and speculative theologians. Though less of a direct challenge to systematic theology, Collins does believe “that Wesley’s practical divinity is clearly a viable way of doing theology in its orientation to the mission of the church, in its attentiveness to the realization of scriptural truth, and in its service to the poor.” Wesley may not be a systematician, but he is a comprehensive theologian.

Collins is more careful than Cubie to give a clear (and theological) definition of what he argues is Wesley’s “axial theme.” He holds together both holiness and love as a single theme, worrying that “if the… power of the term ‘holiness’ is not brought to bear on love, illuminating it in a distinctive way, setting it apart from other uses of the word ‘love,’ then it is not very likely that the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ… is under consideration.”

In a review of Kenneth Collins’s *The Theology of John Wesley*, Jason Vickers writes:

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18 The difference for Collins between systematic and speculative theologians, however, is not entirely clear.


20 Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, 8. It is still not entirely clear what Collins means by love; he seems to accept as a default that love (without the accompanying modifier “holy”) is primarily an emotion. That, however, cannot be representative of John Wesley’s own position, as has been shown persuasively by Thomas M. Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Dixon’s work does not appear in Collins’s bibliography.
Works on John Wesley’s theology that are inspired by Albert Cook Outler, including this one, follow a common strategy. Initially, they begin with a candid admission that John Wesley was not a systematic theologian. By extension, they acknowledge that Wesley himself did not have an organizing principle or theme around which he sought coherently to organize and to relate the various loci of Christian theology. Next, they suggest that Wesley was a practical theologian who produced a range of catechetical and liturgical materials designed to orient readers’ affections to God. They then proceed to identify an “orienting concern”… or “axial theme”… running through Wesley’s writings. Finally, they organize material from Wesley according to the traditional loci of systematic theology in a manner that reflects the previously identified concern or theme, thereby transforming Wesley into the very thing they acknowledged at the outset that he was not—namely, a systematic theologian.21

This knowing criticism, tongue-in-cheek though it may be, ignores how those who take such an approach, including their representatives discussed here, are not mere systematic conformists but also challengers of certain dominant strains in systematic theology. Still, Vickers’s remark contains a more valuable implicit insight. Cubie, Maddox, and Collins all approach Wesley’s corpus macroscopically, identifying a unifying theme that renders a comprehensive picture of Wesley the theologian.

To my mind, the idea that one of the major aspects of a systematic or serious theologian is the macroscopic application of a single unifying theme or perspective (if not a true “system”) in order to render Christian theology coherent is another as-yet unquestioned assumption about the nature of “serious” or systematic theology that needs to be challenged.22 I intend to offer such a challenge, first by commending the work of

22 This does not mean that such macroscopic approaches have no value or insight to offer; in fact, I believe they may have extraordinary worth. What I am challenging is the notion that a theologian must have such a discernible unifying theme at the macroscopic level before systematic theology can engage him or her. Consider, for example, the place of the Trinity in Wesley’s theology. That Wesley held a doctrine of the Trinity in high regard is beyond all doubt, reasonable or otherwise. That Wesley had particular emphases concerning the Trinity is likewise unquestionable. Whether his regard for the Trinity and his particular
Sarah Coakley and A.N. Williams. After that I will be on firm ground for a more indirect but also more substantive challenge, which will be offered through a close reading of a selection of Wesley’s sermons.

*Sarah Coakley and A.N. Williams*

Two Cambridge theologians, Sarah Coakley and A.N. Williams, have published recent works that question certain long-held assumptions about the nature of systematic theology. Coakley’s work is the first volume of her systematic theology; Williams’s is a comprehensive study of systematics. Both are Anglican scholars, not part of a tradition that traces itself back to John Wesley.


emphases amount to a coherent doctrine of the Trinity easily identifiable as Wesleyan, in perhaps the same way that we may speak of an Augustinian, Thomist, or Barthian doctrine of the Trinity, is far less certain. In fact, we might even want to question whether it is appropriate or useful to speak of a doctrine, certainly one as important as the Trinity, as belonging to a particular individual or sub-tradition within the church. The doctrine of the Trinity is the church’s catechetical and creedal response to the gift of divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, most properly neither claimed by nor attributed to anyone other than the God who makes himself known in Christ as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.


attempt to provide a coherent, and alluring, vision of the Christian faith.”

Her definition notwithstanding, Coakley is open to a variety of systematic approaches in the history of Christianity, noting, for example, “that systematic theology cannot necessarily be undertaken simply in one genre of writing,” while also answering charges of ontology, hegemony, and phallocentrism from various postmodern quarters. Coakley commends her “théologie totale” as a “contemplative method” that embraces apophatic theology, admits destabilizing possibilities, and is concerned for theology that has “real-world” consequences.

We can see from Coakley’s approach some advantages for John Wesley. True, Wesley still sits uncomfortably with her definition; it is not clear whether his individual works or their collection would pass muster. On the other hand, however, Wesley certainly had real-world concerns in mind when writing and speaking of his theological convictions. Coakley’s embrace of such concerns and her openness to the variety of genres available to systematicians is welcome to Wesleyan theologians and scholars who lament that Wesley’s this-worldly concerns and non-specialist publications have been held against him.

Much more significant for Wesleyan theologians, and, indeed, for systematic theologians generally, is a recent volume from Coakley’s former Cambridge colleague A.N. Williams. Known best for her work on Thomas Aquinas, Williams expands her scope considerably in her 2011 *The Architecture of Theology*, a thorough investigation of

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the nature, warrants, and forms of systematic theology. Williams argues that too many theologians have assumed a “genre-based understanding of systematicity” and that this infatuation with genre “has arguably obscured a deeper sense in which theology may be systematic: by exhibiting an impetus towards coherence and comprehensiveness.”

This “impetus” means that some works may indeed conform to the traditional genre of systematics (what Williams calls Type 1 theology, “a body of prose intended to give a reasonably comprehensive account of Christian doctrine, ordered locus by locus”), but it also incorporates a much larger group of writings, which Williams calls Type 2 theology.

Essential to Williams’s argument are two connected and foundational positions: first, that theology is that which is concerned with God and all things in relation to God, and, second, that all things in relation to God are themselves also gifts from God. Theology, therefore, does not create its own rationality but is mimetic, attempting to reflect the God who has revealed himself in Scripture. Theology’s coherence depends,

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31 Williams, *Architecture*, 1. A few pages later (4-5), she explains that “[e]xplicit systematic theologies are not distinguished from implicit systematic Type 2 theology by their achievement of comprehensiveness— for none of them, not even the longest, does treat every possible theological locus—nor by their impetus towards connectedness, for as we shall see, all Christian theology exhibits the bent for connection to some degree. The difference between the two turns, first, on the actual scope of vision in a Type 1 theology, which although limited to some degree, remains broader than that of other theologies, and second, on the explicit connections it is able to make between doctrines, in virtue of this scope.”
32 This mimesis places necessary limits on the claims theology can make: theology cannot claim to know its subject comprehensively, for the Triune Lord is beyond all human comprehension; theology cannot claim to know with ultimate certainty because it awaits eschatological fulfillment; and theology is dependent both on authority (viz., the authority of Scripture) and reason (because of the divine reason in God’s self-revelation that makes theology possible in the first place).
first, not on a more or less worked-out system (Thomas Aquinas’s Aristotelianism, for example, or even Wesley’s orienting concern or axial theme) but on the *ratio* (here, in Williams’s account, as the relational knowability) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christian theology is systematic to the extent that it depends on and seeks understanding in light of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. According to Williams, the goal of Christian systematic theology lies in contemplation, a “sabbath from restless questioning, when there is nothing left but to repose in the enjoyment of truth and its triune source.”

Williams’s bracing reevaluation of systematic theology has resonances with and consequences for theologians interested in John Wesley. First, her insistence that the authority of Scripture is central to Christian theology surely strikes a chord with all who would impress on us that John Wesley was “a man of one book.”

Second, Williams grounds theology in worship, “the pattern of versicle-and-response, call-and-answer, yes-and-amem,” which accords well not only with the sermons that are central to Wesley’s theological bequeathal but also to the doxological turn instigated in recent Wesleyan theology by Geoffrey Wainwright. Third, Williams’s theology as a response to the self-revelation of the Triune God is in considerable harmony with the recent emphasis on Wesley’s own essential Trinitarianism.

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34 See Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1995) for the centrality of Scripture to Wesley’s theological and ecclesiological project.
Fourth, consequently, Williams’s work requires us to reconsider the role of reason in Wesley’s writings. It strengthens Maddox’s claim that, for Wesley, reason “is a faculty to be used (either well or poorly) to understand and respond to the claims of revelation” found especially in Scripture.37 Williams, however, also recontextualizes the “limited [and responsive] role for reason in [Wesley’s] theology” as characteristic not only of “contemporary nonfoundationalism and the attempt to recover theology as a practical discipline”38 but, in fact, of the inherent mimetic systematicity of all Christian theology. Wesley’s ambivalent attitude toward reason should be seen as a particular iteration of the recognizable limits of all Christian reasoning and not merely as a rejection of reason-based claims in favor of a greater emphasis on experience.39

Fifth, Williams’s distinction between Type 1 and Type 2 theology gives Wesleyan theologians room to be systematic and to make systematic claims from Wesley’s own writing, without resorting to genre-based warrants. Whether or not Wesley had a single unifying theme, or, alternatively, whether or not a single unifying theme can be discerned in Wesley at the macroscopic level, Wesley was a systematic theologian to the extent that he was a Christian theologian.40 This, in turn, means that we can investigate Wesley for

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38 Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 42.
39 In a later chapter on warrants, Williams notes the surprise Wesley likely would evince at the claims made in his name on the basis of experience by more recent Wesleyan theologians. See Williams, *Architecture*, 89ff.
40 And while I have come across objections that Wesley was not a systematic thinker or was not a very good theologian, I have yet to read a single claim that Wesley was not a theologian at all.
systematic theological purposes at the microscopic and mesoscopic levels without prejudice from or to macroscopic claims.

Thus I offer the following close reading of a selection of Wesley’s sermons as a microscopic and mesoscopic alternative to the current macroscopic approaches.\(^{41}\) The close reading and synthesis that follow are proposed as a way into systematic theology, and not to be seen as coming at the expense of systematicity. This does not mean, of course, that my approach requires no sacrifices. I do not, and cannot, make wider claims on the basis of my close reading about Wesley or his orienting concerns or his corpus as a whole.\(^{42}\) I simply seek Wesley’s response to the Triune Lord in these sermons and the implications, in conjunction with Augustine’s *Homilies*, for my own response in the later chapters of this dissertation.\(^{43}\)

**Five Wesley Sermons on 1 John**

I have already noted the frequency with which John Wesley preached on the New Testament epistle of 1 John.\(^ {44}\) We should not, however, think of the five extant sermons on texts from 1 John as a unified collection. Three of them (Sermons 77, 78, and 62) were written within a few weeks of each other (December 1780-January 1781), and another

\(^{41}\) The microscopic level comes in the close reading of each sermon. The mesoscopic level is the resultant synthesis of ideas and themes across the five sermons placed under the microscope.\(^ {42}\) Nonetheless, I believe the following study will provide insight into Wesley himself, an up-close picture of his reasoning, his rhetoric, and his theology in these sermons on certain parts of 1 John.\(^ {43}\) The scientifically objective perspective that may be implied by the use of the terms micro-, meso-, and macroscopic is to be resisted. My interest in Wesley (and Augustine, for that matter) is necessarily and unapologetically self-involving. Whether in agreement or disagreement with Wesley (or Augustine) on various specific points, my own systematic work in the later chapters is bound to their earlier work, in no small part because I, like Wesley (and Augustine), am bound by the Holy Spirit in baptism to the Triune Lord revealed in Jesus Christ.\(^ {44}\) See “John Wesley’s Sermon Register,” http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/research-resources/wesley-studies-resources. The five sermons are only those in which Wesley used a text from 1 John as his main preaching text.
(Sermon 55) was written just a few years earlier (1775), but more than three decades separate the earliest (1748, Sermon 19) and the latest of this group (1781, Sermon 62). Furthermore, unlike Augustine’s *Homilies*, the five sermons cover only a few verses from two chapters of 1 John (1 John 3 and 1 John 5). The easiest approach, then, will be to examine the sermons in chronological order: Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God”; Sermon 55, “On the Trinity”; Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship”; Sermon 78, “Spiritual Idolatry”; and Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming.”

**Sermon 19 “The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God”**

The first sermon we examine, then, is “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” based on 1 John 3:9 (“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin”). This is first and foremost a sermon on the new life in Christ. Wesley begins by distinguishing between regeneration or rebirth and justification, which “are in point of time inseparable from each other, yet… [are] things of a widely different nature.” Wesley says that “[t]he one [i.e., justification] restores us to the favour, the other to the image of God.” This is an important setup for the sermon as a whole, because Wesley is planning to make an argument concerning sinlessness. He does not want to say, however, that every person who is justified before God is to be considered sinless or even moving onto perfection. To be “born of God” is to undergo “a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the

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Holy Ghost.”\(^{49}\) Being born anew is about an inward change and a work of the Holy Spirit; it is a gift, even a gift (of new birth) upon a gift (of justification).

Wesley now begins to explore what it means to be born. He considers the natural birth of a child. The unborn child, he argues, does not sense the world around him or her. This is not because the child lives in some other world, but because the child does not yet sense the world through hearing or sight. Or, if the child does sense the world, those sensations “are not yet opened in his soul.”\(^{50}\) The instant the child is born, however, sensory experience becomes part of her life. Thus it is with those spiritually born. They have not had spiritual senses, but consequent to their new birth, wrought by the Holy Spirit, their spiritual senses awaken to the world that has always existed and surrounded them.\(^{51}\)

The first “sense” to be born is that of breath. This is not, properly speaking, really a sense in the way that we (or even Wesley) might understand sight or hearing. But it might be thought of as a “sense of well-being” or a “sense of being alive,” even a “sense” of being given a tremendous gift.\(^{52}\) This breath is “inspired, breathed into the new-born soul, and the same breath which comes from, returns to God.” Wesley calls it a “spiritual respiration” that not only sustains but actually vivifies, increasing life in the one who


\(^{52}\) On the importance of breath, etc., in Wesley’s theology, see two recent dissertations: Mark T. Mealey, “Taste and See That the Lord is Good: John Wesley in the Christian Tradition of Spiritual Sensation” (PhD diss., Wycliffe College/Toronto School of Theology/University of St. Michael’s College, 2006); and Joseph William Cunningham, “Perceptible Inspiration: A Model for John Wesley’s Pneumatology” (PhD diss., Manchester, Nazarene Theological College, 2010).
breathes. The breath “is continually received by faith… [and] rendered back by love, by prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving… [which are] the breath of every soul which is truly born of God.” Most importantly, the air that is now breathed is “The Spirit or breath of God.”

On the heels of the restoration of breath, sight and hearing are restored. Restored sight means seeing the love and mercy of God in Jesus Christ; restored hearing means heeding the voice of God. These restorations also bring with them new knowledge and “a clear intercourse with the invisible world.” Essential to this knowledge are peace, joy, and love in God, all grounded in belief in Jesus Christ and new life in the Holy Spirit.

Wesley now begins to tackle his more difficult task, which is to discuss what it means that the one reborn “doth not commit sin.” Wesley depicts the newly born soul as caught up in a cycle of receiving breath as a gift, by faith, and “by a kind of spiritual reaction [returning] the grace [received] in unceasing love, and praise, and prayer.” This cycle is not merely repetitive but restorative, just as the breath in I.8 does not merely sustain but vivifies. Indeed, the breath restores and vivifies to the point that the newly born soul cannot commit “an actual, voluntary ‘transgression of the law’; of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God acknowledged to be such at the time that it is transgressed.”

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55 Of the two, at this point in the sermon, the Holy Spirit receives the greater emphasis. The Holy Spirit is the one in whom joy is found and in whom one is born in love. There is also a reference to Romans 5:5.
57 Ibid.
sin is possible, only that no sin of a certain kind is possible. Further, Wesley emphasizes the word “abides,” which serves as an active verb in this sermon. Sinlessness is not a state in which one lives by inertia. It requires abiding, training one’s senses to remain attune to and receptive of God and his Holy Spirit.

What, according to Wesley, are we to make of those who, having had their senses thus restored, do sin voluntarily? In such a case, the sinner has regressed, having sinned first by neglecting the gifts given and then by actively pursuing the manifested sin.

Wesley gives a compelling via damnatis (or at least a via peccatoribus) based on David’s adultery with Bathsheba: David goes out on the roof, and allows his gaze to shift to Bathsheba; this prompts a sensed temptation; the Holy Spirit alerts him and warns him, but the thought receives more and more of his attention; this has an effect on the degree to which David sees and, therefore, loves God; God calls him back, but his ears are now closed to God’s word, and his gaze shifts fully to the object of his sinful desire: “The eye of his mind was now closed again, and God vanished out of his sight. Faith, the divine, supernatural intercourse with God, and the love of God ceased together. He then rushed on as a horse into the battle, and knowingly committed the outward sin.”

59 Wesley, “The Great Privilege,” II.8, Works 1:439. Wesley summarizes this via peccatoribus in nine steps in the subsequent subsection (II.9):

“(1). The divine seed of loving, conquering faith remains in him that is ‘born of God’… (2). A temptation arises, whether from the world, the flesh, or the devil, it matters not; (3). The Spirit of God gives him warning that sin is near, and bids him more abundantly watch unto prayer; (4). He gives way in some degree to the temptation, which now begins to grow pleasing to him; (5). The Holy Spirit is grieved; his faith is weakened, and his love of God grows cold; (6). The Spirit reproves him more sharply, and saith, ‘This is the way; walk thou in it.’ (7). He turns away from the painful voice of God and listens to the pleasing voice of the tempter; (8). Evil desire begins and spreads in his soul, till faith and love vanish away; (9). He is then capable of committing outward sin, the power of the Lord being departed from him.”
Wesley’s conclusion from all this is that “sin, of omission at least, must necessarily precede the loss of faith—some inward sin. But the loss of faith must precede the committing of outward sin.” Wesley’s conclusion from all this is that “sin, of omission at least, must necessarily precede the loss of faith—some inward sin. But the loss of faith must precede the committing of outward sin.” The sin of omission—neglecting to love God fully—allows desire that is otherwise healed and working toward its proper end in God to draw the restored soul out of God and lose faith. Wesley concludes that the restored soul must return the breath of life God has breathed. He depicts the Christian life according to these terms:

It immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit; God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be an holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus.

In this sermon, then, desire, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit are all intimately connected in the economy of the Triune Lord’s salvation.

Sermon 55 “On the Trinity”

This sermon dates from Wesley’s later years (1775) and is based on 1 John 5:7, “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one,” a text now considered by most scholars to be a late corruption of the original text (the NRSV omits everything from “the Father” on). Wesley alerts his

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63 In “On the Trinity,” 5, Works 2:378, Wesley makes it clear that he himself is aware of potential problems with the text.
readers that he was in a hurry and without resources when he wrote the sermon out, and it
does have an air of having been dashed off quickly.

Wesley begins, a little unexpectedly, with a discussion of religious opinion, to the
effect that it is possible to be “real Christians, loving God and all mankind,” all while
holding “wrong opinions” about various matters.\(^6^4\) The setup of essential beliefs and
adiaphora creates a little dramatic tension for the reader: to which group does Wesley
believe the doctrine of the Trinity belongs? The tension, however, is resolved quickly, for
“there are some truths more important than others…[,] some which it nearly concerns us
to know, as having a close connection with vital religion. And doubtless we may rank
among these… the word above cited,” that is, 1 John 5:7.\(^6^5\) In the next breath, however,
Wesley does place explanations of the Trinity in the category of adiaphora. In fact,
Wesley “would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text.”\(^6^6\)

The distinction between what Wesley rather unfortunately ends up calling the
“fact” of the Trinity and the manner, or the how, of the Trinity dominates the remainder
of the sermon. Here we must pay careful attention to what Wesley does and does not say.
First of all, Wesley compares, unfavorably, the investigation of the “how” of the Trinity
to the diversity of scientific opinions on the solar system, gravity, and the movement of
light.\(^6^7\) Wesley’s explicit point in invoking the scientific confusion of his age is to

à Kempis, Gregory Lopez, and the Marquis de Renty) and Calvinists among those who hold such wrong
opinions yet are still “real Christians.”


\(^{6^7}\) He specifically mentions Ptolemy, Tycho Brahe, and Copernicus.
demonstrate that his audience believes things (facts) for which there is either no clear explanation or a diversity of explanations (the manner). Not just cosmic science but also anthropology, with the question of the relationship of the soul to the body, is introduced as an area characterized by co-existing certainty (viz., that human beings are body-soul composites) and uncertainty (viz., how exactly the soul and body relate to each other).

Still, we cannot help but wonder if Wesley is just as wary of the scientific mindset as he is of the diversity of competing scientific opinions. The nature of the cosmos, human nature, and the divine nature are for Wesley (and, indeed, for any thoughtful Christian) intertwined conceptual fields. In sections 14-15 of the sermon, Wesley reprises the order of the scientific opinions he has discussed by referring them back to God. The first scientific opinion set he discusses concerns the solar system and the movement of light; he reorients the topic theologically by writing that “‘God said, Let there be light; and there was light.’ I believe it: I believe the plain fact; there is no mystery at all in this. The mystery lies in the manner of it. But of this I believe nothing at all; nor does God require it of me.”

The second scientific opinion set is anthropological; here, Wesley redirects the topic’s significance by appealing to the Incarnation, writing, “Again. ‘The word was made flesh.’ I believe this fact also. There is no mystery in it; but as to the manner, how he was made flesh, wherein the mystery lies, I know nothing about it; I believe nothing about it. It is no more the object of my faith than it is of my understanding.” In both these cases, Wesley subtly reduces the significance of the

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scientific topics (and the over-inquisitiveness of the scientific mindset that demands to know “how”) by underscoring their theological significance.

Immediately following this is his characterization of the Trinity along the same lines: the fact “that God is Three and One” versus the manner. In so doing, Wesley has very clearly, if implicitly, turned the question of the Trinity into a question of revelation and divine nature. What we need to know most about the nature of the cosmos is what has been revealed: that God is its Creator. What we need to know most about human nature has also been revealed: that the Word became flesh. And what we need to know most about the Trinity is what has been revealed: that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that these three are one. To try to peer beyond this, whether into the cosmic nature or human nature or, especially, the divine nature, to claim a “belief” about such depths (and we should notice how close belief in this sermon is to certainty) is either arrogance (believing one could attain knowledge that can only be given through revelation) or foolishness (believing one has knowledge that is in fact impossible to have). Wesley is no anticipator of modern Trinitarian minimalism. He is simply restating the classic Christian position that human beings can have no knowledge of God apart from what God reveals of himself.

If my reading of Wesley’s sermon is convincing, then this should also force us to rethink Wesley’s supposed disinterest in speculative matters. It is true that he concludes the sermon with a nod to the soteriological significance of the Trinity in terms of a witness by the Spirit that the Father, through the Son, has accepted the Christian as “a
child of God.” But we over-read Wesley if we insist that his preference to allow to remain a mystery that which is unrevealed as a rejection of systematic investigation of what has been revealed. In fact, it is precisely such systematic investigation that Wesley employs in order to demonstrate the rationality of belief in the revealed fact of the Three-One God without revelation of the how of this fact:

But would it not be absurd in me to deny the fact because I do not understand the manner? That is, to reject what God has revealed because I do not comprehend what he has not revealed?

This is a point much to be observed. There are many things which ‘eye hath not seen…’ Part of these God hath ‘revealed to us by his Spirit’—revealed, that is, unveiled, uncovered. That part he requires us to believe. Part of them he has not revealed. That we need not, and indeed cannot, believe; it is far above, out of our sight.

The sight that we have been given is paralleled by the witness of the Spirit that we are children of God Wesley uses to close the sermon.

With this more speculative (dare we say, systematic?) and more traditional approach in mind, we can now turn to two points earlier in the sermon that make for difficult reading: (1) Wesley’s refusal to “insist upon… even the best [explication of the Trinity] I ever saw… the creed commonly ascribed to Athanasius” and (2) his refusal to “insist upon anyone’s using the word ‘Trinity’ or ‘Person’.” The two, of course, are related, and what we should observe first about these statements is what Wesley is refusing: neither the Athanasian Creed nor the words “Trinity” and “Person,” but only the insistence of their use. Furthermore, Wesley accords the superlative to both the

Athanasian Creed ("the best") and the words "Trinity" and "Person" ("none better"). This appears to be a stance that is open to the silence of conscience (Wesley uses the word "scruple") but not as open to alternatives. It is, therefore, not entirely clear how Wesley’s statements here relate to his earlier discussion of the essentials and the *adiaphora*, but my inclination is to see Wesley’s stance on the Creed and the terminology as occupying a middle ground: cataphatically necessary but receptive to the cautious silence of apophaticism.

Finally, we must take note of the relatively small role of the Holy Spirit in this sermon. It is through the Spirit that God makes his revelation known to us, and the Spirit is the one who bears witness to our adoption in Christ. Beyond that, however, the Spirit is not mentioned apart from the repetition of 1 John 5:7.

Thus, in “On the Trinity,” John Wesley adopts a fairly traditional, if perhaps slightly more permissive, approach to the general doctrine of the Trinity. His willingness to explore the systematic implications of divine revelation with respect to knowledge of the divine nature may be unexpected for many readers, but it is a welcome surprise and perhaps an invitation to explore systematically other doctrinal nodes that stand in close proximity to the doctrine of the Trinity, such as the Holy Spirit and the love of God.

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73 Although we should note Wesley’s fondness for “the Three-One God” as an apparent alternative to “the Trinity.”
74 Of course, using the language of cataphatic and apophatic has its own baggage, but I think it helps emphasize that Wesley is not proposing an alternative to traditional Christian language for God or to the witness of Scripture to the revelation of God as Triune.
76 I shall explore this invitation more fully in chapter four below.
Sermon 77 “Spiritual Worship” 77

As Albert Outler notes, Wesley’s sermon on “Spiritual Worship” has characteristics of an incipient Christological treatise. 78 There is an introduction that provides the Trinitarian context for understanding Christ, followed by three sections of the sermon proper: one on Christ as God, one on Christ as life, and a final section on Christ and human happiness. The Scriptural text for the sermon is the last sentence of 1 John 5:20 (“This is the true God, and eternal life.”). 79

Wesley begins the sermon with some remarks about the content of 1 John, which he pointedly insists has to do with “the foundation of all [things of the Christian faith], the happy and holy communion which the faithful have with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” 80 This Triune foundation Wesley finds in the structure of 1 John itself, which, he argues, can be divided according to communion with the Father (1 John 1:5-10), the Son (1 John 2-3), and the Holy Spirit (1 John 4), with the present chapter (1 John 5) comprising some verses on the Triune “testimony” that is faith’s foundation and some additional verses that are a “recapitulation” of the epistle. 81

79 The immediately preceding material in 1 John 5 makes clear that the “this” of 1 John 5:20 is Christ. Wesley assumes the point but does not make it explicit until II.1, so that I.1-10 could be misread as referring to God generally and not to Christ specifically.
81 Wesley, “Spiritual Worship,” 3-5, Works 3:90. Several diverse observations are worth mentioning. First, Wesley uses the names Father, Son, and Holy Ghost repeatedly in this sermon but never actually employs the word Trinity or its derivatives, despite his inclusion of a fragment of the Nicene Creed in I.1. Second, Wesley notes that “tract” rather than “letter” best fits 1 John, although his reasoning (viz., John was too old to preach, so he wrote his sermon for someone else to read in his place) is quite different from modern commentators who have reached a similar conclusion. See, e.g., Raymond Edward Brown, The Epistles of John, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982). Third, Wesley seems to assume a familiarity with the text of 1 John among his readers, which may reinforce the centrality of 1 John in his preaching and teaching.
In this recapitulation, having the Spirit is key for knowing that one is of God, but the focus is on the importance of Christ, and Wesley likewise makes this the focus of his sermon. In the first major section of the treatise, he turns his attention to Christ’s divinity. This is not a miniature treatise on the two natures of Christ. Rather, this section involves, first, an affirmation of the full divinity of Jesus Christ as confessed in the Nicene Creed and, second, a series of epexegetical titles that affirm the role of the Son in the full range of the divine economy. The titles are Creator, Supporter, Preserver, Author, Redeemer, Governor, and End.

These titles, which confirm that “we need not scruple to pronounce [Christ] God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God: in glory equal with the Father, in majesty coeternal,” are generally self-explicating, but a few of Wesley’s comments on them deserve special notice. First, Wesley has a clear doctrine of creatio ex nihilo in mind with the titles Creator and Supporter, for “were [God] to withdraw his hand for a moment the creation would fall into nothing.” Second, Wesley presents a picture of a God who is continually active in creation; the Preserver holds together in a system the whole universe, for which, as Author, God is also the first mover. Third, this same God, as

82 Perhaps because he is not explicating or referring to the Chalcedonian definition, Wesley’s terminology in this somewhat heady sermon lacks precision; the full humanity of Jesus Christ, therefore, disappears almost entirely. At the same time, however, this ambiguity in terminology and the accompanying high Christology reflect the full text of 1 John 5:20 (KJV): “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”

83 Although Wesley makes no point of it, we should not miss that there are seven titles for Christ here.


Redeemer and Governor, is also particularly concerned with the state of fallen humanity and even of individual groups and persons. Wesley endorses the views on providence of a seventeenth century divine, Thomas Crane, who admitted three circles of divine providence: an outer circle for the Abrahamic faiths, a middle circle for the visible church, and an inner circle for “the invisible church”;

each circle represents a concomitant degree of God’s care for those found therein.

The final title, End, which Wesley applies to Christ, also captures nicely the thrust of the entire sermon. Jesus Christ is the End, or telos, of creaturely existence. As he turns from considering Christ’s divinity to a discussion of Christ as eternal life, however, Wesley de-eschatologizes this title. That Christ is eternal life does not mean Christ is life for us in some distant future nor even that “he is the resurrection.” First and foremost Christ is life now, in this present age. There is, to be sure, an eschatological reserve, but that does not come at the expense of appreciating the significance of Christ as life for us in the present.

Christ is first life as the Supporter and Preserver, but, more importantly, Christ is the one who lives in us as we are redeemed: “[t]his eternal life then commences when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts; when we first know Christ, being enabled to ‘call him Lord by the Holy Ghost’; when we can testify, our conscience bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost ‘the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Lest we read past this too quickly, I

highlight two aspects of what, on the surface, may seem like boilerplate evangelical preaching. There is, first of all, the Triune involvement in salvation. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all active; moreover, the act of testifying, which, at the beginning of the sermon, was explicitly identified as an act of the Trinity, now involves the one who is being saved. There is a participatory element that should not be overlooked. Just as importantly, the work of the Holy Spirit is especially prominent in this Triune activity, thanks to two Pauline citations. Wesley does not otherwise give the Holy Spirit much mention in this sermon, so the Spirit’s presence here stands out.

Christ is the End and also the life because Christ is the one in whom happiness is found; to be completely happy is to be filled completely with Christ. Happiness, therefore, is pursued by knowing (where knowledge seems to be a kind of intimacy) and loving the true God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ. In a rather interesting circle, then, true happiness is inseparable from true love in Jesus Christ, which is communicated to us by the Holy Spirit. This final point of the second section is also the pivot to the sermon’s final section, on happiness.

For Wesley, happiness in earthly existence is illusory and fleeting. There is the unsatisfying happiness of youth; the busy happiness of merriment; and the vain happiness of amusement. Each of these has its own passing allure, but ultimately none

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89 1 Corinthians 12:3 and Galatians 2:20.
90 Wesley, “Spiritual Worship,” III.1-3, Works 3:97-99. The notion of happiness as satisfaction suggests that the pursuit of happiness is akin to a hunger, a deep desire for something that is essential and not merely an optional part of life.
provides true happiness. Why? First, because the created was not intended to provide happiness: you may “seek happiness in your fellow-creatures instead of your Creator. But these can no more make you happy than they can make you immortal.”

Second, as the word immortal implies, whatever happiness might be found in the created order is necessarily ephemeral.

Perhaps most importantly, however, true happiness cannot be found in creatures because Wesley has contentment in mind as his definition of happiness. He mentions the restlessness of hearts from Augustine’s Confessions, and this becomes something of a theme in this final section. Inseparable from Wesley’s notion of happiness is the idea of rest: rest from the pursuit of happiness, from the flurry of endless activities that are required to sustain the illusory happiness we mistakenly seek in others or ourselves, and even rest from the wearying burden of our unfulfilled desires for happiness. Good words and good works flow out from this happiness that streams into our hearts as the life of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, however, the rest or contentedness Wesley describes as happiness does not stand in opposition to the possibility of growth and pursuit. Christians, almost without exception, are those who are happy, yet they should “expect a continual growth in grace, in the loving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ… that all sin may be destroyed and nothing may remain in your heart but holiness unto the Lord.”

95 In III.6 Wesley exempts those Christians undergoing strenuous temptations as well as the mentally ill.
area where we might hope for more from Wesley, for some indication of how we may contentedly pursue greater happiness and love.

By the end of the sermon, however, the inescapable conclusion is that true happiness is bound completely with an intimate knowledge and love of Jesus Christ made possible by the work of the Holy Trinity, and especially of the Holy Spirit. This knowledge and love of Jesus Christ is necessary because Christ is whom he reveals: the one God in whom our hearts are made to rest.

*Sermon 78 “Spiritual Idolatry”* ⁹⁷

The companion sermon to “Spiritual Worship,” “Spiritual Idolatry” picks up in 1 John where its predecessor had left off: 1 John 5:21 (“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”). The sermon is less explicit in its Christology than “Spiritual Worship,” but it otherwise deals with very similar themes. True happiness in God, false happiness in the created order, and the desires and loves by which we pursue happiness are again front and center. The Johannine text, especially the instruction in the main clause, functions topically only in the second half of the sermon; in the first half Wesley defines idols. Even in the introduction, however, Wesley discloses the arc of his argument. Keeping ourselves from idols is, he suggests, just the other side of “Beloved children, love one another”: “one cannot subsist without the other. As there is no firm foundation for the love of our brethren except the love of God, so there is no possibility of loving God except we ‘keep ourselves from idols.’” ⁹⁸ It is the foundational love of God, itself

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enabled or disabled by our relationship to idols, that preoccupies Wesley in “Spiritual Idolatry.” The resulting love of our brothers and sisters, or failure thereof, is only subject to brief discussion.

Wesley begins by showing a marked disinterest in “heathen” idolatry and its supposed modern, “Romish” descendant. In this we see both his failure to connect the variety of idolatry that does interest him with these more obvious practices of idolatry, as well as an unfortunate flare-up of anti-Catholic sentiment ill-founded on actual Roman Catholic practice or belief. The result of this disinterest, however, is a broad understanding of idolatry. Rather than the fairly narrow Lutheran definition of an idol as that which we esteem above all else, Wesley argues that an idol is “whatever we seek happiness in, independent of God.”

This more functional definition of an idol affords Wesley a degree of subtlety that might otherwise be impossible. He presents the case of a retired man who enjoys the ease of his retirement, delights in the food and drink he can enjoy, and readily turns his house into a stately home. The idolatrous sin is not in some deliberate act, as if the man intentionally committed himself to these objects or their pursuit. Rather, the sin is one of omission: “He no more thought of the king of heaven than of the King of France. God is not in his plan. The knowledge and love of God are entirely out of the question. Therefore this whole scheme of happiness in retirement is idolatry from beginning to end.” It strikes me that this is a chillingly accurate portrayal of much idolatry.

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Wesley grounds his definition of idolatry in the *triplex concupiscentia* of 1 John 2:16. There is the “desire of the flesh,” which Wesley insists “means seeking happiness in the gratification of any or all of the external senses”; the “desire of the eye,” which Wesley identifies as “the seeking happiness in gratifying the imagination”; and “the pride of life,” which he believes should “mean the seeking happiness in the praise of men, which above all things engenders pride.” Of these three, Wesley dwells longest on the desire of the eye. For him, imagination is not the mode of creative thinking that it is in our day. Rather, it is the faculty for aesthetic appreciation (in contrast with the faculty for understanding) that “is gratified by such objects as are either grand or beautiful or uncommon.” Wesley lists activities such as sightseeing in Egypt or at the seashore, appreciating apparel and furniture, owning a pet, listening to music, and studying mathematics, philosophy or science.

Again, the awareness of how complicated our idolatries may be makes Wesley’s approach particularly effective. The fault is not inherent in either the objects themselves or even, to some degree, in human pleasure in seeking them. The goodness, or lack of goodness, of some element of the created world is only incidental to its propensity to becoming an idol. Wesley recognizes we may well idolize even those people we are commanded by God to love: our brothers and sisters in Christ and our families. The rash

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words of passionate love, “I desire nothing more but thee!,” may also betray our “flat idolatry.”

Having established the diverse and complicated nature of idolatry, Wesley now considers the avoidance of idols. His exhortation to eschew idolatry hinges on two words: conviction and resolution. Conviction is the recognition that the created world is not meant for our happiness. This recognition does not depend on divine action and is available to anyone, a gesture, perhaps, to a limited natural theology. Nearly anyone can see that pleasure is short-lived and that “no man upon the earth is contented.” As in “Spiritual Worship,” contentment—which Wesley here equates also with “be[ing] at peace”—serves as the test for true happiness, [s]o that universal experience…clearly proves that as God made our hearts for himself, so they cannot rest till they rest in him.

While the conviction that happiness can be found only in God is universally available, the same is not true for the resolve necessary to flee idolatry. We may see our need to find happiness in God alone, but we should not “execute [our] resolution trusting in [our] own strength.” Grace is needed for our resolve not to falter. Considering Wesley’s definition of an idol, the dependence on God at this point is inescapable. After all, seeking happiness in God without also turning to God would, according to Wesley.

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104 Wesley, “Spiritual Idolatry,” I.18, Works 111. Another example of Wesley’s subtle analysis is in his discussion of money in I.17. Wesley sees that money can be both a means to another idol or an end in itself, so it does not fit easily into one of the three categories.
105 On Wesley’s natural theology, see Maddox, Responsible Grace, 34-35.
107 Wesley, “Spiritual Idolatry,” II.2, Works 113, 112. The last phrase is another reference to Augustine’s Confessions.
itself be just another form of idolatry. The appropriate response to the conviction that happiness is found only in God is not first resolution but repentance, “a full consciousness of your own impotence, [as well as] a piercing sense of the exceeding guilt, baseness, and madness of the idolatry that has long swallowed you up.” Repentance is a turning to God to receive genuine self-knowledge and to await the vision of God that, paradoxically, comes by his word: “Speak, that I may see thee!”

Sermon 62 “The End of Christ’s Coming”

This sermon, from later in 1781, begins with 1 John 3:8 (“For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil”). The two clauses of 1 John 3:8 are also the two main strands of thought John Wesley weaves together in his text. After a brief discourse on the short-lived changes wrought by virtue achieved through philosophy (instead of “true religion”), Wesley first discusses what “the works of the devil” are and then how the manifestations of the Son of God destroy such works of the devil.

Almost immediately, however, Wesley takes what at first seems to be a puzzling detour onto the topic of the image of God in human beings; ultimately, this detour will actually lead to the original questions of the works of the devil and the Son’s

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112 In some ways the opening of the sermon is reminiscent of Book XIV of Augustine’s De Trinitate. Although Wesley is far more dismissive than Augustine of philosophy, he confronts a similar problem: how is it that people can know the good but not pursue it? Wesley begins his answer by turning to the phrase “works of the devil” in 1 John 3:8, while contrasting the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in Scripture with the curiosity of philosophers about these things (I.2, Works 2:474).
manifestations and, at the same time, allow him to present his holistic soteriology.113

Wesley begins by distinguishing between the “natural” and the “moral” image of God. The image of God is found in human beings in that they are a spirit comprising understanding, will, and liberty, which “three are inseparably united in every intelligent creature.”114 This is what Wesley calls the natural image. Understanding is that part of the human spirit given to knowledge. Will is the affective possibility of “love, desire, and delight in that which is good” and gives purpose to understanding; liberty is “a power of choosing what was good, and refusing what was not so.”115 Liberty is Wesley’s word for agency: “Indeed, without liberty man had been so far from being a free agent that he could have been no agent at all.”

For Wesley, however, the “natural” image is complemented in humanity by the “moral” image. He does not give nearly the same length to discussing this other image of

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113 One of the distinctive words of Wesleyan scholarship of the past few decades is “holistic.” The word itself does not, of course, originate with John Wesley, and its more common usage is in the context of medicine. As a matter of fact, the definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary, lists 1926 as the year of the first known usage of “holistic,” for the medicinal term (“viz., “a form of medical treatment that attempts to deal with the whole person and not merely with his or her physical condition”) can be adapted rather easily for theological purposes. We can define holistic in this context as “a theological concern for the whole creature (indeed, the whole creation) and not merely for the state of the soul.” This definition will help us not only to understand what scholars who use “holistic” explicitly mean but also to see how the word is implied by others in the field and by Wesley himself. It must be said that most Christian theologians have had precisely this broader field of view in mind; John Wesley was hardly the first (or last) holistic theologian of the church. See especially Gregory Scott Clapper, John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989); idem, The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church: Wesley’s Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2010); Deborah Madden, A Cheap, Safe and Natural Medicine: Religion, Medicine and Culture in John Wesley’s Primitive Physic (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007); Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing,” Methodist History 46, no. 1 (October 1, 2007): 4–33 (as well as Responsible Grace); and the essays contained in Deborah Madden, ed., “Inward and Outward Health”: John Wesley’s Holistic Concept of Medical Science, the Environment and Holy Living (London: Epworth, 2008).

114 Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” I.5, Works 2:475. The fact that Wesley speaks of “every intelligent creature” here is probably a subtle reference to other beings in God’s image, namely, the angels.

God, but what he does say is interesting. According to Wesley, “God created [humanity] not only in knowledge, but also in righteousness and true holiness. As [Adam’s] understanding was without blemish, perfect in its kind, so were all his affections. They were all set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects.” The full image of God for Wesley, then, concerns both what humanity is and how humanity is to be.

What makes this Wesleyan understanding of the image of God so fascinating is that, in the first place, the first sin was not due to some weakness in the moral image but in the natural image; and, in the second place, the effect of the first sin is not primarily on the natural image but on the moral image. Wesley says that “as a free agent [Adam] steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding”; the problem, however, as Wesley understands it, is that our first ancestors’ understanding “was not infallible; therefore not impeccable.” Lucifer, or Satan, demonstrated this by having an inflated opinion of himself (i.e., his self-understanding was flawed), which introduced temptation, pride, a self-will that is contrary to God’s will, and, finally, outright rebellion against God. The works of the devil, therefore, are Lucifer’s taking advantage of the same incomplete understanding in our first parents, deceiving them and thereby, leading them into the same progression of failed understanding, self-will, foolish desires, and outward sin.

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119 This progression is noteworthy for its contrast with the opening material of the sermon. There, Wesley seems quite confident that there is no easy line from the sharpened understanding of the philosophers to a sustained life of virtue. The implication here, however, is that if Satan and humanity had had a sufficient level of understanding, or a sufficiently complete understanding neither would have fallen. What would have been automatic before the fall is now accomplishable only by the manifestation of the Son of God.
The weakness, then, is in the natural image, at the level of human (or angelic) understanding. The consequences of the fall, on the other hand, are discerned in the moral image. Wesley says that humanity “lost the whole moral image of God, righteousness and true holiness. [Adam] was unholy; he was unhappy; he was full of sin, full of guilt and tormenting fears.” Wesley’s strongest language of the consequences of sin is reserved for the moral image, which human beings simply no longer have after the fall. That does not mean there are no consequences elsewhere. Human “understanding darkened,” but since it was already not impeccable, this is only a change in degree. The natural image is not destroyed or wholly lost, even if, presumably, it is now imperceptible—either because the moral image has disappeared and, with it, the transparency of human life as in the image of God, or because human understanding is too frail to recognize the image in ourselves and others. There are also consequences for the body, which “became obnoxious to weakness, sickness, pain—all preparatory to the death of the body, which naturally led to eternal death.” Ultimately the disruption of sin affects the whole of creaturely existence.

In the sermon’s next section, Wesley discusses the various manifestations of the Son of God, considering both the possibility of such manifestations “before and at the founding of the world” as well as to various Old Testament figures. Wesley is more interested in the various manifestations of the Son following the Incarnation, from the

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121 Ibid.
birth to the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and he is still more interested in the
“inward manifestation of himself” to those who are being saved.\textsuperscript{123}

This inward manifestation, dependent and inseparable as it is from the manifestations of the Son in Jesus Christ in the New Testament, is the site of the destruction of the “works of the devil.” First, by the logic of “the cure fits the illness,” the Son manifests himself in order to inspire belief, “not by a chain of \textit{reasoning}, but by a kind of \textit{intuition}, by a direct view that ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their former trespasses,’ not imputing them to \textit{me}.”\textsuperscript{124} Read skeptically, this could be the empiricist Wesley suggesting the importance of senses and experience over reason. More charitably, however, but still allowing for the skeptics’ truth, this is a claim about the limits of reason and the necessity of revelation, which is available to spiritual sight. Belief does not mean the rolling back of the fall’s effects on human understanding but, in effect, works around the limitations of that understanding.

Following belief, the will is healed by the destruction of pride through the requirement of humility in response to the gospel, “enabling the humbled sinner to say in all things, ‘Not as I will, but as thou wilt’… [destroying] the love of the world… [and saving the sinner] from seeking or expecting to find happiness in any creature.”\textsuperscript{125} God leaves certain human weaknesses and frailties in place, however, in order to allow human

\textsuperscript{124} Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” III.1, \textit{Works} 2:481.
liberty (the third part of Wesley’s natural image) to avoid “all thought of independency.”\footnote{126 Wesely, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” III.3, \textit{Works} 2:482.}

All of this is indicative of Wesley’s holistic soteriology. The whole natural image is implicated in humanity’s fall; salvation is therefore applied to the whole image. Wesley, however, takes one more, perhaps rather daring, step. Not only is there restoration in the natural image; there is also restoration in the moral image. This is what Wesley calls “true religion” and claims as the unifying theme of Scripture. In the manifestations of Jesus Christ, who himself reveals the unseen Father and sends the Holy Spirit, humanity encounters the real possibility of a resurrected moral image \textit{in this present life}: “We know weakness of understanding and thousand infirmities, will remain while this corruptible body remains. But sin need not remain… [The Son of God] is able, he is willing, to destroy it now in all that believe in him.”\footnote{127 Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” III.6, \textit{Works} 2:483.} This is true religion, “the ‘faith that worketh by love’ all inward and outward holiness.”\footnote{128 Ibid. Wesley clarifies in the preceding subsection that neither “orthodoxy” nor “morality” forms the sufficient basis of true religion. Wesley does not mean that true religion has no content that could be called orthodox, any more than he intends that true religion has no set of practices that could be called moral. Rather, he is arguing that the salvation of true religion (holistic salvation) is shaped by the revelation of Jesus Christ, in whom there is no separation between right belief and right practice.} Above all, the moral image and its salvation demonstrates the holistic nature of Wesley’s soteriology. It is in the manifestation of holiness in the lives of those who follow Jesus Christ that the image of God becomes visible in a way otherwise impossible since the fall. As we conclude our close readings of Wesley’s sermons, I note again the (surprising) relative unimportance
of the Holy Spirit in his “The End of Christ’s Coming.” The Spirit is only mentioned twice, and both cases are only passing references.129

**Wesley on Love and the Holy Spirit**

Before drawing together Wesley’s various comments on love and the Holy Spirit in the five sermons surveyed, I review the compatibility of his work with the suggestions of Coakley and Williams concerning systematic theology. Rather obviously, none of these sermons is an example of Williams’s Type 1 theology, nor do the five taken together comprise such an example, but they do have characteristics of the systematicity of Williams’s Type 2 theology. Each one is a response to God’s revelation and dependent on the authentic witness to that revelation contained in Scripture. In “On the Trinity,” Wesley confronts the importance of theology as a response to God’s revelation head-on, but the theme is hinted at throughout the five sermons, as is the corresponding notion that what we have and do in theology (or in any faithful Christian practice) is indebted to the gifts God has given. Further, Wesley concerns himself in these sermons with God and all things in relation to God: science and anthropology, as well as more traditional topics of theology like the doctrine of God and soteriology. Coakley would doubtless be pleased at the prominence of discussions of desire and love in each of Wesley’s sermons. Finally, Wesley’s association of happiness with contentment and peace resonates with Williams’s

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129 The first reference is in I.2. Wesley, discussing the kind of knowledge Scripture provides, writes that “the design of the Holy Spirit was to assist out faith, not gratify our curiosity.” The second mention is in II.6, where Jesus’ “pouring out the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost” is one of the New Testament manifestations of the Son of God.
suggestion that the Sabbath rest of contemplation is the true telos of Christian systematic theology.

This coherence with Coakley and Williams’s approaches to systematic theology is promising. Whether or not we want to bother calling Wesley a systematic theologian, Wesley does succeed routinely and coherently (even if not with universal consistency) in recognizing, arguing for, and even embodying connections between Christian belief and Christian practice. In the present context, I find the words of Jason Vickers especially encouraging and offer them as a prelude to my synthesis of Wesley’s comments on love and the Holy Spirit:

Wesley is a theologian who thinks systematically, especially when he is reflecting on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. This may or may not get Wesley into the canon of great systematic theologians, but it does highlight the more intriguing aspects of Wesley’s work from the standpoint of systematic theology. Otherwise put, it makes Wesley more interesting to contemporary Wesleyan systematic theologians than he otherwise would be. Most importantly, it does not diminish the practical nature of Wesley’s theology. Rather, it infuses practical divinity with theological content that is at once fundamental and imminently practical, namely, a pneumatologically-oriented doctrine of the economic Trinity.130

130 Vickers, “Albert Outler,” 64. Though I appreciate greatly Vickers’s position here, I do want to sound a note of caution on his use of “economic Trinity.” Great care is needed in the use of this phrase, both because of the risk of exporting to the 18th century debates and concepts that were not articulated until the 20th century and because of what I believe to be a fair amount of confusion regarding the heuristic distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity in the 21st century. What we must not say is that, because he hewed closely to the Scriptural account of God, John Wesley was only, or primarily, interested in the economic Trinity, nor should we think of the “economic Trinity” as the “practical Trinity.” First, as I believe the sermon “On the Trinity” shows, Wesley had at least a passing, if limited, interest in speculative theology. Second, and more fundamentally, to be interested in the God of Scripture is necessarily to be interested simultaneously in the economic and the immanent Trinity, for the self-disclosure of God in Scripture is the revelation of the immanent Trinity working in the economy of creation and redemption. The church’s confessional, creedal, and doctrinal lenses enable us to see that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus is the Triune Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and vice versa.
With the exception of “On the Trinity,” love and desire are prominent themes in each of the sermons discussed above. Even in “On the Trinity,” a case could be made that Wesley is trying to curb curiosity, which is one form desire takes. Despite the prominence of both these themes, however, the sermons are short on precise definitions. Desire is closely tied to lack and insufficiency, especially in “Spiritual Worship” and “Spiritual Idolatry”; love, on the other hand, does not have anything so definitive. In recent Wesleyan scholarship, theologians have tried to sort through Wesley’s variegated terminology on affections, passions, and tempers in order to discern how Wesley views love, as well as to develop a more complete picture of his moral psychology.\footnote{See, e.g., Clapper, \textit{John Wesley on Religious Affections: The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church}; Henry H. Knight III, “The Relation of Love to Gratitude in the Theologies of Edwards and Wesley,” \textit{Evangelical Journal} 6 (March 1, 1988): 3–12; and Maddox, “John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing.”} We do not have the breadth of material available to comment on this debate, so we look instead to a recurring middle term as the starting point for our discussion: happiness.

According to Wesley, love is the means to happiness. This does not mean that all pursuits of happiness are also automatically pursuits of love; he gives no indication, for example, that the retired man in “Spiritual Idolatry” loves either his food or his home. For Wesley, idolatry is the pursuit of happiness without God and not, at least explicitly, just the misdirected use of our love. In that same sermon, however, Wesley does recognize the danger of loves that are commended to us precisely because we may mistake our love for our family or for our brother or sister in Christ as the ultimate source of our
happiness. This approach to happiness is consistent with Wesley’s position in “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” that the root of the fall lies in incomplete human understanding that precedes the disordering of the will. We may, on Wesley’s account, wrongly seek happiness in the created order because we fail to understand that true happiness is found in God alone, not just because we actively rebel against God through force of will.

Whether Wesley’s position is entirely coherent even in these sermons, however, is something of an open question. The appeal in “Spiritual Idolatry” to a universal or natural knowledge of the inability of creaturely goods to satisfy seems to work against the notion that understanding alone is the source of our problems. What this appeal shows, rather, is that the primary, but not the exclusive, problem lies with our understanding. First, the possession of a universal knowledge does not necessarily particularize that knowledge to our own situations; Wesley calls repentance a kind of self-knowing. We may see that it is wrong generally to pursue happiness in other creatures yet fail to see that by our actions we ourselves are engaged in such a wrongheaded quest. Second, only by divine aid, by grace, can we have the resolve to eschew the idolatry that inevitably follows when we try to find happiness in other creatures.

Thus we depend on the love that God gives us to restore the moral image. Thus we need that sure testimony of the Triune Lord not only of the truth about our fallen state but, more significantly, of the certainty of God’s love for us. Thus we need healing for our capacity to love as much as for our capacity to understand.
Indeed, one of the most coherent structures across these five sermons is the Trinitarian economy of salvation. Wesley’s claim in “On the Trinity” that belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is an essential component of the Christian faith is reinforced by his recognition in other sermons of both the unity of divine activity ad extra and the twin missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The testimony of God’s love is offered by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The re-creation and restoration of our own love is enabled by the graced and gracing breath of the Holy Spirit. The life of love we are enabled to live is the life of the Son, of Jesus Christ, living in us. When, because of God’s grace, we love as we ought, we find true happiness in the divine source of our love.

Moreover, this happiness is also the pacification of our desires. Wesley has a firm grasp of the restlessness and unease that troubles the human desire for happiness. We find temporary solace in the things of this world, whether they please our flesh, our imagination, or our pride, but we soon find ourselves dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction in turn compels us to the busy search for new and different sources of happiness, which themselves only continue the cycle of ephemeral satisfaction and unquenched desire.

Desire here is not just another word for love, not even for disordered love. Instead, after the fall and apart from God, desire has the effect of disordering our loves. Desire itself is

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an appetite—and it is irrational. In granting exceptions from happiness to those Christians under the duress of strong temptation or mental illness, Wesley implicitly links human desire with the demonic and the disordered, with forces of chaos that are contrary to the good and peaceful order God intends.

True happiness is lasting contentment, satisfaction, and sufficiency. Love, the God-given means to human happiness, must find its motivation and root in Jesus Christ, who is even now eternal life for us. Because Christ is true God—Creator, Supporter, Preserver, Author, Redeemer, Governor, and End—he can supply the fullness that we need for undisturbed, dispassionate contentment. Love is peaceful pursuit, and it is peaceful because of the confidence (faith) we have in the testimony that God loves us, and that God’s love is sufficient for us. Having all we need, we no longer seek happiness as desirous beings consistently confronted by lack. Instead, Wesley says that Christians have continual growth in happiness as the love of God penetrates our being more and more thoroughly.

The divine ratio, to import A.N. Williams’s framework, that brings coherence to Wesley’s thought on love and desire across these five sermons is best summed up in a paraphrase of Augustine’s *Confessions*: God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has made us to be happy, and we will not be happy until and unless we find happiness in him. This

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134 Thus happiness is related to Wesley’s concept of Christian perfection, which, as Loyer, “Spirit,” 156, argues, “is not a static, completed state (perfected perfection) but an ongoing journey (perfecting perfection)… dynamic and always… open to the possibility of greater growth in love through the continuous activity of the Holy Spirit leading disciples of Jesus Christ toward the goal that is God himself.” Happiness, ultimately, is inseparable from holiness.
happiness is sought by love, and in our fallen state we cannot know of this love except by the self-revelation of the Triune God. Indeed, this happy knowledge is in fact identical with God’s presence in our lives, the saving presence of Jesus Christ in the restoring power of the Holy Spirit.

Wesley on the Holy Spirit

There is a surprising absence of extended discourse on the Holy Spirit in Wesley’s sermons on 1 John, especially in the four later sermons. This does not mean, of course, that Wesley has nothing to say concerning the Spirit, nor that, despite their brevity, the occurrences are insignificant.

We can gain some insight by comparing the more robust discussion of the Holy Spirit in the earlier sermon on “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” with the Christology of the much later “Spiritual Worship.” In a sense, the two sermons are complementary. In “The Great Privilege,” Wesley employs an explicit pneumatology of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the very breath, love, joy, and peace that the new believer experiences and that transforms the believer in a never-ending cycle of receiving and returning God’s gift of love. The Trinity, while implicit in the way Wesley describes the Spirit’s work, is not at center stage, and Christ, while present, is also left somewhat to the side. There is no extended discussion of the Spirit’s divinity or personhood, but the Spirit’s activity is essential. On the other hand, Wesley’s Trinitarian foundation is very much explicit in “Spiritual Worship”; Christ’s full divinity is the subject of the first major section of the sermon; and the Spirit’s role in the sermon is minimal.
In neither sermon does Wesley give the impression that the Holy Spirit *in se* is to be sought by Christians or non-Christians. Christ, rather than the Holy Spirit, is the End, and our happiness is found in him. In fact, this appears to be true across all the sermons on 1 John. The Holy Spirit conveys the saving knowledge of God’s love and, in some sense, also may *be* that love, but the personal content of God’s love remains relentlessly Christocentric. Wesley’s sermons, therefore, suggest that a strong Christology may shape but need not come at the expense of a developed pneumatology. We may consider three aspects of the admittedly sparse pneumatology in these sermons.

First, the Holy Spirit communicates the saving knowledge that makes faith possible. The failure of human understanding, the originating cause of original sin, finds its corrective in the work of the Holy Spirit. That this knowledge is salvific means that the Holy Spirit is also somehow identifiable with the knowledge itself. This helps us understand, I think, part of why in “The Great Privilege” Wesley speaks of faith as a kind of intuitive knowledge. The Spirit does not give an intellectual knowledge; for Wesley, the limits of human understanding in that direction are not overcome in this life. Rather, by his very presence, the Spirit alerts us to the fact that God loves us. It might be a little like the amnesiac who reasons that the person she sees day in and day out at the hospital may love her, may even be her spouse. This reasoning from presence to love is, according to Wesley, even stronger in the case of the Spirit, in whose presence we discover that in addition to being loved we also become more loving.

The saving knowledge communicated by the Holy Spirit is necessarily Trinitarian. In one of his strongest statements on the importance of the Trinity to the life
of faith, Wesley says that no one “can be a Christian believer... till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son—and having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit ‘even as he honours the Father.’”

Wesley allows that most Christians only have such knowledge implicitly, but they nonetheless have it—and must have it. Furthermore, although in the sermons on 1 John Wesley never expounds systematically on the divinity of the Spirit, he does here call the Spirit God and insists on full doxological tribute to the Spirit as well as to the Father and the Son.

Second, the Holy Spirit personalizes the knowledge of God’s love: God loves me. Here we must ask: does Wesley by this emphasis individualize the Christian faith? There is scant mention of corporate activity, of the church, or of the body of Christ in these sermons. Nonetheless, I think that particularize is more faithful to Wesley’s intent than individualize. To individualize the faith suggests a rupture with the corporate nature of Christianity, implying an isolation of the addressee from those around her or him. This, however, would be inconsistent with Wesley’s holistic soteriology, which, at its heart, is integrative. The Holy Spirit does not renew our love of God so that we no longer need love our neighbor or our brother or sister in Christ; the Holy Spirit makes possible the

136 As Edgardo Colón-Emeric once wrote to me, “Particularization is our way into participation.”
137 Thus Thomas Lessmann, Rolle Und Bedeutung Des Heiligen Geistes in Der Theologie John Wesleys: Eine Darstellung (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, n.d.), 130, argues, “So sehr sie auch aug den einzelnen zielt, ist sie in keiner Weise individualistisch.” For Lessmann, this is because “[o]hne die Aspekte ‘Kirche’ und ‘Welt’ ist seine Pneumatologie nicht denkbar.” A more precise view has been argued recently by Andrew C. Thompson, “From Societies to Society: The Shift from Holiness to Justice in the Wesleyan Tradition,” Methodist Review (Online) 3 (January 1, 2011). Thompson, 144-145, contends that “social holiness should be properly understood as the key Wesleyan concept that names the environmental context in which sanctification is manifest among a community of believers.”
due love of those around us without the frenetic and destructive patterns of behavior entailed in the cycle of desire from which we are saved. On the other hand, Wesley insists that we must know that God loves us particularly. This particularity is important in part because Wesley believes a response to God’s love is fundamental to salvation, and there must be, therefore, a particular someone to respond. It is, however, also because we all have our own patterns of desire and idolatry from which we need saving. Still, the particularizing work of the Spirit is the work of reassurance and healing, not the fragmentation of a more modern individualism.

Third, the Holy Spirit catches us up in his divine motion. When, in “The Great Privilege,” the newborn Christian begins to live by the power of God, the new life is not spun off as a separate or somehow independent activity. The implication is that the believer is caught up in an ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit from God into creation and back to God; the language of participation and response leads Wesley’s description of the new life in God, with images of theosis and deification not far behind, if still implicit. The contrast between the Spirit’s work and the life that is Christ in “Spiritual Worship” sharpens the point. In the later sermon, Wesley depicts Christ taking up residence in us. Although we expect growth, there is something static about his

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138 This dynamic movement of the Spirit forces us to question the strong dissociative streak in Wesleyan studies between John Wesley’s theology and speculative theology such as we find in Lessmann, Bedeutung, 130: “John Wesleys Pneumatologie ist nicht ein leeres, abgehobenes Gedankengebäude, sondern eine in seinem Leben verankerte Lehre. Sie ist griffig und nicht spekulativ; sie ist ausserdem eng an den Aussagen der Schrift orientiert.” Such a statement betrays an either-or approach that is distinctly unhelpful: either a structured system of thought (Gedankengebäude) or a lived doctrine; either a speculative theology, or one grounded in Scripture. Ideas concerning the movement of the Spirit in which those who are being saved participate are, however, heady stuff, not at all easy to grasp, fairly speculative, and grounded in Scripture—at the same time that they are soteriologically, if not also practically, oriented.
description of Christ within us: we recall how in this sermon happiness is a kind of rest. In the earlier sermon, however, we abide in the Spirit who is dynamic; our abiding is likewise dynamic, active, and brought to life. We need not view these as competing views of the happiness found in God. After all, in the later sermon, it is life-giving, peaceful love that is the basis of our growth in happiness, rather than wearying desire. And it is the Spirit in the earlier sermon who enables this love while communicating it to us; there is no sense that the activity to which we are thereby awakened is anything other than life-giving and fulfilling.

Finally, while the connection between the Holy Spirit and divine love is not always clear or inevitable in these sermons, the work of the Holy Spirit does have a certain impact on human love and desire. Wesley consistently emphasizes that among the many benefits of God’s saving work is the reform of our love for God and neighbor as well as the reshaping of human passions, desires, and tempers. I have already argued that Wesley’s depiction of happiness as contentment implies a dispassionate existence, but I now need to add some subtlety to that argument. There is certainly a disinterested peace that is inherent to Wesley’s approach to happiness, but, at the same time, Wesley never argues that the Holy Spirit destroys or rids us of our passions and tempers; the Spirit reforms them, sanctifies them, and redirects them. We may surmise, therefore, that Wesley fully expects our experience of these renewed passions and tempers to be quite different from what happens in the agitated state of postlapsarian, pre-sanctified desire. In our being saved, the divine movement that is and that we join by the Holy Spirit continues to have a parallel in the motions and dispositions of the soul.
For Wesley, the Holy Spirit is the one who communicates God’s presence, power, and love to creation.\textsuperscript{139} This communication of God’s very self to the world is not due to some need in God. Instead, it is a function of how God created the world. It is in the Trinity that we find our true end and our true happiness, and only when our love is what has been received from the Triune Lord can we love those around us properly and without descent into idolatry.

\textbf{John Wesley and the Love of God}

I have already noted that Wesley never names the Holy Spirit as Love or identifies the Spirit directly as the love of God, but the importance of love as the means to happiness and of the Spirit as the mediator and communicator of the saving knowledge of God’s loving presence suggest that such a naming or identifying would not be at odds with Wesley’s theology in these sermons. I reserve for the next chapter further discussion of this matter, which I will develop in conversation with the explicit naming of the Holy Spirit as Love in Augustine’s \textit{Homilies}. At present my concern is to characterize Wesley on the love of God in these sermons more broadly, noting four important summary points.

First, for John Wesley the love of God is foundational, but in a limited way. In the order of salvation, the love of God comes first in at least two senses. The love of God, as God’s love for creation, is prior and superior to all other loves.\textsuperscript{140} God, not human beings,

\textsuperscript{139} Collins, \textit{Theology of John Wesley}, 21, writes that the “distinct holiness of God, informed by love, and 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,” a point which he expands considerably on 121ff.

\textsuperscript{140} By using the language of “prior,” I open myself to questions of the kind of priority the love of God has. It seems to me that for Wesley the love of God is both logically and actually prior both as the love that
loves first. God’s love initiates; human love responds. Human happiness finds its unique end in God’s love; that end is also the End, Jesus Christ, the true God. No other love, whether worthy, commendable, or even commanded by God, can substitute for the love of God. God’s love is the basis for all other loves. This is the first sense. The second sense is a corollary of the first: our love for God, in response to God’s love for us, is the basis for all other loves we may have. The love of our neighbor or our spouse, in Wesley’s view, cannot come before we begin to love God. To attempt to love another without first loving God is to court idolatry and to continue the cycle of destructive desire.  

I said, however, that the love of God is foundational in a limited way. The limit is found in “On the Trinity” and in the opening section of “Spiritual Worship,” and it is the metaphysical identification (or lack thereof) of God with love. In both places there is an absence of language about love. Wesley is silent about this absence, so any reason for it can only be speculative. Is it an oversight? Is it symptomatic of Wesley’s general caution regarding metaphysical speculation? Whatever the case, the effect of such silence is to

precedes creaturely love and as the love that is required of us before we can truly love others. In these sermons, at least, there is no impression that I may discover that I am really loving God while I love another creature. What must come first for that love of the other creature even to be true love is for me to come to know God’s love for me and for me to reciprocate that love, empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit.  

141 This same point is made by W. Stanley Johnson, “Christian Perfection as Love for God,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 18, no. 1 (March 1, 1983): 50–60. Johnson, 57, writes: “The substitution of love for neighbor as the ground of ethics or religion is not properly Wesleyan. If such humanism is perpetuated, it must not be done in the name of John Wesley.” The strong implication of this claim, which goes against the grain of much contemporary theology and ethics (even beyond Wesleyanism) is that what Wesley called works of piety are prior to works of mercy.  

142 But if it is, it is so oddly. In “On the Trinity” there is a definite principle of allowing the revelatory language of Scripture to guide our speech about God, and Scripture (1 John 4:8, 16, no less) does affirm that God is love.
limit us from equating love with divine Being to the exclusion of other divine attributes. Nor should we attempt yet another artificial insertion of economic-immanent Trinity distinctions. For Wesley, for God to be is for God to be one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and for Jesus Christ to be the true God is for him to be Creator, Supporter, Preserver, Author, Redeemer, Governor, and End. God’s self-communication to us in the Holy Spirit is disclosed in love, and the path to our happiness in God is love. This does not mean love is God.

The second point, which follows directly from the first, is that for Wesley the love of God has a content, and that content is Trinitarian. There is no easy separation of knowledge from love. The love of the Father is made known to the world through the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit; this technical language is not used by Wesley, but it is strongly implied across the sermons discussed above. Thus God’s love, as the love of God for the cosmos, cannot be known apart from knowing Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, in whom and by whom that love is revealed. Human experience of the love of God, which Wesley does discuss extensively, is not a vague notion but the experience of the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.\(^{143}\) Strictly speaking, therefore, our love for God follows a similar Triune pattern: in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, to the Father.

Third, the love of God is transformational. Wesley fully expects that this saving knowledge of God will change lives. Happiness in God is contentment with growth, not stale maintenance in our old sinful patterns. Rejuvenation is made possible by the

\(^{143}\) As observed above, Wesley allows that not every Christian would say as much in exactly these words, but he does believe that under examination this content would be at the center of what Christians believe and experience.
ongoing work of the Holy Spirit as our selves become more and more attune to God; love precipitates holiness. In fact, Wesley is so sure of this transformation that in both the earlier and later sermons he appears to assume that it happens automatically, even if the change does not happen completely or all at once. To come to know God’s love is to enter into a cyclical and ongoing movement of receiving and returning the gifts of God. Backsliding is possible but means a return to the alternative cycle of sin and devastating desire.

Fourth, and finally for this chapter, in its ambiguity the phrase “love of God” captures the essential relationship in Wesley’s sermons between God’s love for us and our love for God.144 We do not love truly or fully apart from God’s love for us; God’s love for us transforms us into beings capable, willing, and even zealous to love God. This suggests excellent potential for developing the phrase more fully in ways and in contexts not addressed explicitly by John Wesley, but to do so we need to bring Wesley and his sermons into a more direct conversation with Augustine and his *Homilies*.

144 *Pace* Johnson, “Christian Perfection,” 58 n.1, who is uncomfortable with the ambiguity: “Love for God is not to be confused with love from God. Love of God is somewhat ambiguous, so the phrase love for God is used in this paper to make the issue clear.” While I agree that we should not confuse love for and from God, I am not sure a neat distinction is possible. When we offer our love to God, what have we to offer but what we have received? The love of God is, in Maddox’s great phrase, a responsible grace.
Chapter Three

Introduction

In the first two chapters I resisted comparing Augustine and John Wesley, though at many points the potential for comparison was obvious. Treating the two separately, I hope, allowed for a careful investigation of what each has to say without concern for the other’s words. This separation was, frankly, somewhat artificial, at the very least because John Wesley makes repeated references to Augustine in the sermons discussed in chapter two and because Wesley, as a theologian in early modern Western Europe, inherited a way of doing and thinking about theology profoundly shaped by and indebted to Augustine.

Given the theological wealth discerned previously in Wesley’s sermons and Augustine’s *Homilies*, however, a chapter that only summarizes what has already been said, or one that only restates comparatively what has been said, would be a disappointment. Instead, the present chapter is a pivot point, a hinge between the first two and the final chapters. It is, to draw on the language of music, a cadence. Properly understood, a cadence, at least in the middle of a piece of music, is not really an end. A cadence is a transition, holding two sections of music together yet distinct from either one. Indeed, as I suggested in the introduction, not just this chapter but the whole of the dissertation has formal characteristics similar to what one might find in music, specifically in a sonata-allegro form of a classical music sonata.

There is, on the other hand, a major difference between the approach of this dissertation and the sonata-allegro form. In sonata-allegro form, the two themes usually
retain a degree of independence throughout the work. Sometimes they are woven together; sometimes they are heard consecutively. Following such a pattern in the ensuing chapters would likely result in a dizzying incoherence. It might show with high precision the degree to which Augustine and Wesley agree or disagree on the finer points of systematics, but that is not my purpose at all. Rather, my purpose in this dissertation is to commend a way of thinking about the Holy Spirit (as Love) that originates in the work of Augustine and whose appeal is broadened and enriched by the work of John Wesley. To commend this way of thinking successfully requires a coherent approach.

In this chapter, therefore, I distill what is best—best, that is, for commending thinking theologically about the Holy Spirit as Love—about the sermons of Augustine and Wesley discussed, respectively, in chapters one and two. The judgment about what is best is, of course, my own and is therefore subject to some level of idiosyncrasy, if not arbitrariness. It is not, however, without standards: compatibility (both Augustine and Wesley agree on something), correction (one offers a way of thinking that shores up some shortcoming, real or perceived, in the other), and complementarity (one discourses on a theme that is underdeveloped or unmentioned in the other). What emerges from this distillation is an approach to the Holy Spirit as Love that is conditioned by the sermons of Augustine and John Wesley but is my own rendition.¹

¹ As in the previous chapter, I underscore the theologically dubious enterprise of taking or assigning possession of a particular doctrine or theological approach. There is certainly an issue of academic clarity in speaking of “Augustine’s (or Wesley’s) theology of the Holy Spirit” and, more to the point, an issue of academic integrity in acknowledging, as best I can, which ideas are my own way of construing things and which are someone else’s. If, however, the activity of truth-giving that is Christian theology is both participatory in and mimetic of God who is Truth (and it is, or else it is not an activity worth pursuing—either a frivolous thought experiment, an absurd [self-]deception, or a dangerous idolatry), then all claims of ownership can at best be limited, conditional, and in no way ultimate.
In rough form, the argumentative force of this chapter is (1) that the Augustinian “Love” names explicitly what Wesley hints at in his own understanding of the Holy Spirit; (2) that Augustine has in mind a post-baptismal context for preaching on the Holy Spirit that is not explicit in Wesley; (3) that Wesley helps firm up Augustinian tendencies toward a holistic soteriology that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in shaping human loves and desires. These three major points emphasize the compatibility and complementarity of the two preachers; the standard of correction plays out mostly at a level of finer detail within each point.

This distillation of the Augustinian-Wesleyan material is only the first task of the present chapter. The second, shorter task is to introduce the two areas of theological engagement that will occupy, successively, chapters four and five: first, the relationship between divine love and divine desire, and, second, the work of the Holy Spirit in Christian initiation. It is in these final chapters that the true vitality of thinking of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God will emerge.

As with previous chapters, the outline here will begin with a discussion of love in Augustine and Wesley, continue with the Holy Spirit, and lead to the love of God. After this I will lay the groundwork for taking the Augustinian-Wesleyan material distilled in these three parts and drawing from it in the succeeding chapters.

**Augustine and Wesley on Love**

The starting point for the critical place love has in the sermons and theology of Augustine and John Wesley is also the end, or goal, of that love: the Triune Lord. The proper telos of love for both Augustine and Wesley is the knowledge of God, even if,
arguably, the two have different understandings of what it means to know God.\(^2\) As discussed above, for both theologians love is the means for pursuing this end, but it is also a motivation for pursuit.

The topic of love’s end(s) arises for both in the context of loving the other (neither Augustine nor Wesley seems especially interested in the topic of self-love).\(^3\) Augustine draws our attention to the ambiguity of acts of beneficence. His concern is with the potentially destructive consequences of seemingly-charitable acts that are actually demonstrations of pride, greed, or self-aggrandizement. We can commit loving acts toward another person in order to make her or him a hostage, obligated to us because of our generosity. Or, we can commit these acts with indifference to the person’s knowledge of God.\(^4\) Loving in these ways, according to Augustine, would be similar to a doctor loving a patient because the patient has cancer, which in effect means the doctor loves the cancer and not the patient at all.

Wesley, in the sermons we examined, shows less concern for the purposes with which we love the other and their potential effect on the other. The corruption of love that worries Wesley is the corruption of idolatry. Love, as a means for pursuing the end of happiness, can direct us to find happiness in other creatures. Wesley suggests that

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\(^2\) Augustine’s understanding perhaps is more intellectual and Wesley’s more intuitive. The epistemological question, however, is fraught. Augustine and Wesley share some language of spiritual senses, especially sight, but they are so far removed from each other (and from us) that mapping the relative position of each would be a difficult, if not futile, endeavor.

\(^3\) The topic simply does not come up in any of the sermons discussed in chapters one and two. For an analysis of Augustine on the point of self-love, see Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

\(^4\) John Wesley makes a similar point in *idem.*, Sermon 65, “The Duty of Reproving Our Neighbour,” in *Works* 2:511-520.
pursuing happiness in other creatures is not completely bad; we are commanded in Scripture, after all, to love many people, including parents, spouses, children, brothers and sisters (familial as well as in Christ), neighbors, and even enemies. The danger of idolatry is that even these loves we are commanded to pursue—and, far more, those which are forbidden to us—can lure us into pursuing a happiness in these creatures that is independent from God.

These different emphases in Augustine and Wesley are hardly mutually exclusive. Both would readily agree that the good of knowing the Triune Lord is the universal good and the telos of all creatures. Augustine particularizes this goal with the other in mind. If I love another person for some more local or less ultimate goal, I cannot be sure of the effects my love will have on that other person. This is the agony of love in a fallen world. If, however, I love that person with the one sure good in mind, I can be certain of the outcome, which depends on God’s faithfulness and not on the uncertainty of life in a fallen world. Wesley particularizes this goal with the self in mind. If I love another person without the ultimate good of creaturely life in mind, I may end up subjugating myself to that person, who may or may not desire my fealty.

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5 Thus Wesley’s approach to idolatry matches very closely the util/frui distinction in Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*. The util/frui distinction is not between use, crassly understood, and enjoyment but between proximate and ultimate enjoyment. The proper “use” of another creature is to enjoy the creature for the sake of the Triune Lord; the improper enjoyment of another creature is enjoyment apart from the Lord.

6 Wesley’s approach, I think, while sharing Augustine’s premise concerning the universal good, may assuage the concerns of contemporary theologians who worry that the language of sin as pride or greed contributes to the oppression of women and minorities by opening the possibility of dismissing attempts to escape such oppression as prideful or arrogant. In situations of oppression, both Wesley’s and Augustine’s theological imagination are required. Augustine helps us diagnose the oppressor who in her or his actions does not consider the oppressed’s true end; Wesley helps us narrate the search of the oppressed for a way out of oppression as a search for happiness that can only be found in God—and not, as the oppressor surely desires, in the oppressor.
From this it follows that love, for both Wesley and Augustine, is a self-offering. It is more than just a movement of the soul toward a particular good or a set of dispositions that inclines one to a set of beneficent or virtuous acts. Love is a giving of oneself to another. We may offer ourselves to another in true service of the other (i.e., that he or she may know the Triune Lord) or for our selfish reasons, and we may offer ourselves to another in true service of God or apart from God (i.e., idolatry). In all cases, what we offer, in love, is ourselves. As an act of self-giving, therefore, love also unites us to those whom we give ourselves.

One of the implications of understanding love as a self-offering is that the whole self is involved in love. For both Augustine and Wesley, this means in particular that our understanding of love is inseparably bound up with our understanding of desire. Love and desire are not the same thing. Human desire, at least in our sinful state, is an appetite predicated on lack. The self-offering that is love may be precipitated by such a lack, but lack is not inherent to self-giving—and therefore is not inherent to love. What, then, is the relationship of love to desire?

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7 I prefer the liturgical echoes of “self-offering” as the starting point, but I will use self-offering and self-giving more or less interchangeably to avoid monotonous repetition.
8 Thus the first point in Augustine’s defense of the full divinity of the Holy Spirit in De Trinitate has to do with worship: douleuein is the mode of self-offering to other creatures, but latreuein is the mode of self-offering to God (and is how we are to offer ourselves to the Spirit). See Augustine, The Trinity trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991), I.13.
9 Already in Scripture we have ample confirmation of the importance of the whole self to true love. See Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and parallels in the Gospels.
10 Rather tantalizingly, Wesley’s suggestion in “Spiritual Worship” that we can continue to desire more of God even after we have received God’s love implies the possibility of a different mode of desire that is not dependent on lack. This implication receives further development in the next chapter.
Love is a means to the satiation of our desires.\textsuperscript{11} Wesley in particular does not shy away from the idea that in love we may still seek our own benefit, even as we are offering ourselves to another. The same is true by implication for Augustine, since for both writers love is a means also to the universal end that is knowing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we offer ourselves to the other, be it another creature or to God himself, we may do so with the expectation of having our desires, or at least our deepest desire, fulfilled. There is nothing inherently harmful or selfish about such an expectation. The problem, according to Wesley, is that only God can meet that expectation permanently. When we seek to satiate our desire apart from God, we enter into a fatiguing cycle of temporary satisfaction and returning lack.\textsuperscript{12} Or, as Augustine would remind us, our love becomes a consuming love, achieving a destructive union with the other that takes whatever is necessary for our own ephemeral pleasure and leaves behind whatever is not useful to us. Not only that, but the further Augustinian insight here is that we may also offer ourselves to fill the lack we perceive in someone else. Instead of offering the poor food, we may offer the hungry food and ourselves, as we establish a relationship of obligation and subservience.

\textsuperscript{11} Neither Augustine nor Wesley discusses openly whether love is the only means to satiating our desires, but I think their work resists such a reduction. As Augustine argues, our self-giving can have unintended destructive consequences, but this does not foreclose the possibility of intended destructive acts that also satiate our desire. It is hard to see how “self-offering” fits a drone bombing of a family halfway across the globe or the abortion of a child, both acts intended to satiate desires for independence, security, and control that depend on uninvolving the self. For God, anger, grace, love, justice, judgment, and mercy are inseparable because of divine simplicity, but human beings are complex, and our pursuit of desired objects may actually be something other than love.

\textsuperscript{12} Thus our own lack is not the only stimulant of desire. We also discover, in our misguided search for happiness in the creature instead of the Creator, that the other is lacking in a fundamental characteristic: the other is also not God.
In order for our love to function properly, therefore, our fundamental desire needs to be met. Our own love is dependent on God’s love. When in God our fundamental desire for happiness is met, we are released from the hectic worrying of fulfilling that desire into the more peaceful existence of divine adoption. This allows us not only to be at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ, as Augustine admonishes the Donatists to be, but it also allows us again to risk offering ourselves to other creatures. Love is, very certainly, a risk. Our love might be rejected, or our old desires might return, along with doubt about God’s certainty to fulfill them. The real risk of love, as Augustine recognizes, lies not in the possibility but in the near certainty of the rejection of our love, when we offer ourselves to our enemies.

Love, therefore, is as much about peace as it is about self-offering. It is peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ, with our neighbors, and with our enemies. Love is also the peace we find from abandoning the wearying pursuit of unsatisfying happiness in other creatures. Perverted love, love that seeks to consume the other, is distorted because it is unpeaceable. Idolatrous love can only avail us of brief détentes and can never establish a lasting peace.

The risk of love is not something we can overcome ourselves. On our own, our self-offering inevitably becomes a vehicle for consumption and idolatry; we fail miserably at peaceable love. With God, however, a new possibility emerges: the possibility of love’s consummation. The consummation of divine adoption and the love

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of God. The consummation of friendship and kinship in Christ. And for Augustine and Wesley, of course, this possibility of consummation centers on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

**Augustine and Wesley on the Holy Spirit**

Neither Wesley nor Augustine attempts to defend or explain the divinity of the Holy Spirit in his sermons. The absence of such a defense or explanation is more striking in Wesley’s case because we do have something of the sort with respect to Christ in “Spiritual Worship.” Augustine gives us something close to an explanation in the seventh of his Homilies when he discusses how love can both be God and from God, but even this is more a specific examination of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and love than an exposition on the Spirit’s divinity, such as we find in *De Trinitate*.

Nevertheless, to say that the divinity of the Holy Spirit is simply assumed in these sermons would be a mischaracterization and a profound understatement. As with their work on love, Augustine’s and Wesley’s preaching depends at its core on the truth of Trinitarian doctrine. For both of them God is understood and identified explicitly as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each has a discussion of the two missions of, respectively, the Holy Spirit and the Son, with the concomitant understanding, explicit in Augustine and implicit in Wesley, that the Father is not sent but sends.

Similarly, their sermons give no grounds for accusations of a subordination of the Holy Spirit. In the *Homilies*, the Holy Spirit takes center stage. Christ is not absent from

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14 This sermon, along with his “On the Trinity,” is also a reminder that the reason Wesley does not discuss explicitly the Holy Spirit’s divinity in his sermons is not because he considered dogmatic/doctrinal topics inappropriate for a sermon.
these sermons, but Augustine’s attention is on the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{15} This is less true in Wesley’s sermons, but even there the Spirit plays a unique, active role, particularly in the sermon “The Great Privilege of those that have been Born of God.” The Spirit is inextricable from the logic of salvation for Wesley, just as the Spirit is inherent to the unity and love Augustine preaches repeatedly in his \textit{Homilies}.

Bearing in mind the Spirit’s divinity can enrich our understanding of a central role of the Spirit for both theologians: the Spirit as witness. In Wesley’s sermons, the Holy Spirit witnesses to the very fact of our salvation. The Spirit discloses that we are loved by God, prompts us to respond to that love, and then assures us that we are adopted children of God. If we start to backslide, the Spirit offers testimony that our ways are becoming unsure and warns us of the truth of our imminent demise should we not turn back. On the other hand, for Augustine, the presence or absence of the Holy Spirit is the test by which we know whether or not we love. It is the witness of the Spirit that allows us to see our motivations and actions for what they truly are. In both cases, love is at the heart of the Spirit’s witness. The Spirit reveals the truth about God’s love for us and about our love for God and for our neighbor.

The Spirit’s witness, however, is unlike the testimony given in a courtroom; it is not a piece of evidence to be presented, considered, and acted upon. Rather, the Spirit’s witness is transformative. Wesley expects this transformation as a sure sign that we are

\textsuperscript{15} The fact that Augustine likely composed key sections of \textit{De Trinitate} around the same time as when he preached his \textit{Homilies} should give anyone pause who would read into the former work a subordination of the Spirit to the Son or the Father. Augustine’s work in the \textit{Homilies} is congruent with his explorations in pneumatology in \textit{De Trinitate}, and so his sermons stand as testimony that the pneumatology in \textit{De Trinitate} does not automatically accord the Holy Spirit a back seat or a lesser role.
among “those that have been born of God.” The transformation for him is a redirection, renewal, and fundamental alteration of our desires. No longer seeking happiness in the creature, we are liberated to love our neighbor without turning her into an idol. Similarly, Augustine expects those who are in the Spirit to share in and exhibit the unity the Spirit enables, the harmonious unity of the body of Christ. The Spirit’s witness is like a speech-act: in the very revelation that God loves us and that we draw from this font of love to love our neighbor and even our enemy the reality of that love is enacted.\(^\text{16}\) The Spirit of Truth is also the Spirit who communicates transformative love to those who are in Christ Jesus.\(^\text{17}\)

Furthermore, there is no suggestion that the Spirit’s transformative presence comes at the expense of human agency. The introspection and reflection that are inherent to the practice of love for both Augustine and Wesley are themselves practices of \textit{examen} and not routine inspections of some spiritual mechanism. Thus, in the case of the Donatists, the issue is not whether or not the Donatists had received a valid baptism and were, therefore, in some sense part of the body of Christ. In fact, Augustine’s reproach of the Donatists depends on the validity of their baptism; he addresses them as schismatics,

\(^{16}\) Because of this, the bilateral soteriological language of subjective and objective, so prevalent in the post-Barthian world of Protestant (and some Catholic) theology, simply does not have purchase in this Augustinian-Wesleyan context. The Spirit does not transform without also witnessing; the Spirit does not witness without transformation. A speech-act has simultaneous and inseparable qualities of subjectivity and objectivity. To say “I do” at a wedding or a swearing-in is to commit oneself to a state of affairs that comes into existence through that same committal. In perhaps a similar way, when the Spirit gives witness that God loves us or that we love our neighbors, that witness transforms the state of affairs so that we are at the same time caught up in that new existence.

not as pagans or even as heretics. In their schism, however, the Donatists’ violation of the peace of Christ is a barrier to the efficacy of the sacrament. In context, this failure of sacramental efficacy is not eschatological; the question is not whether the Donatists are going to hell. Rather, the Donatists cannot love as Christ loves—i.e., with the Holy Spirit—so long as they remain separate from the Catholic Church. The possibility remains that, though we have available to us the Spirit’s transformative presence, we may continue to act as if the Spirit were absent, or—for Wesley—we may even enter a regressive cycle of desire and neglect that effectively shuts out the Spirit’s transformation.

Wesley, on the other hand, goes too far when he argues that a re-descent into sinful existence can result in a genuine absence of the Spirit. In fact, this position is not entirely consistent with Wesley’s own depiction of life in the Spirit as a matter of our response and not our initiative. The failure to respond is not the same thing as the failure of a possibility to respond, which would be the case were God truly to withdraw the Holy Spirit. Again, Augustine’s position counter to the Donatists is useful here. The Donatists...
do not lack the Spirit; they lack the will (love) to seek the Spirit. The love communicated by the Holy Spirit is peaceable love, and it does not violate human agency.¹⁹ Neither, however, is the presence of the Spirit dependent on human agency. Rather, what Wesley misleadingly suggests is that the absence of the Spirit is, in fact, an absence of knowledge concerning the Spirit’s particularizing work. What is lost is not the Holy Spirit but the knowledge that God’s love is for me, or for us. I have already discussed this particularizing work of the Spirit in the previous chapter with respect to Wesley, but it is also true for Augustine. The inward turn for Augustine, the introspection he demands in order to ascertain our deepest motives, is not an isolating individualism but a search for the Spirit’s effective particularization of the love of God. When we do not seek this particularizing love, or when we seek it in other creatures, we lose our sense of it—but not the actual presence of the Spirit, which is ubiquitous.

There remains still the issue of giving the Spirit the name Love. The logic for so doing is fetching, if not inexorable. If the Spirit communicates God’s love to God’s creation, and if the communication of God’s love is itself eventful and not just conceptual, and if that communication is identifiable with the Spirit’s presence, then calling the Holy Spirit Love has significant merit. The Spirit is what the Spirit instantiates: Love. As I have already demonstrated, however, this is not the procedural logic Augustine employs to identify the Holy Spirit as the Love of God in his *Homilies.*

¹⁹ The peaceable character of this love does not limit the disruptive character of the Spirit testified by Scripture (“the Spirit blows where it wills”) and the tradition. See Michael Welker, *God the Spirit,* 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). Peace is catastrophic to those who know only violence and war.
Augustine’s identification is due to his threefold commitment to soteriology, Scripture, and baptism. Of these, the reader will recall, it is the logic of baptism that is decisive for Augustine; because the Spirit and love both uniquely and exclusively mark the identity of a Christian after baptism, the Spirit must in some sense also be love.

John Wesley never names the Holy Spirit the love of God, yet I believe the Augustinian approach to the Holy Spirit, with its threefold commitment, is directly relevant to Wesley’s own work. On two of the three points of commitment, this seems fairly obvious. Wesley scholars revel in the soteriologically-oriented thinking of the co-founder of Methodism. Wesley is also the “man of one book,” for whom Scripture is indispensable to Christianity and “searching the Scriptures” is a means of God’s grace. In fact, we might suppose that one reason Wesley did not identify the Spirit as Love is that he found no explicit biblical justification for so doing, just as he allowed that some Christians might refrain from using the word “Trinity” and still be Trinitarian.

But what of baptism? There is no discussion of baptism in the sermons from chapter two, and, more broadly, it is not a topic on which Wesley discourses with any frequency or great depth. Still, what holds true for Augustine’s Homilies (that they were

20 In the Homilies there is, in other words, no easy separation of theology, Scripture, and practice.
21 This is true for John Wesley, so far as I can tell, universally and not just for the sermons covered in the preceding chapter. For example, his controversial sermon on “Scriptural Christianity,” on Acts 4:31 (“they were filled with the Holy Spirit”), concerns what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Over and over again, Wesley returns to the idea that to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with love. He repeatedly considers the double love command. For all the connections, however, no direct reference is made. There is even a frustrating point near the beginning where he discusses faith in the Father who is love, and in the Son who is love, and… stops. But there is also a direct connection made between Acts 4:31 and Romans 5:5, the point seemingly being that to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the love of God—yet the identity of the Spirit is never given as Love. See John Wesley, Sermon 4 “Scriptural Christianity,” in Works 1:159-180.
22 For more on Wesley’s views of baptism, see, e.g., Chong-nam Cho, “A Study in John Wesley’s Doctrine of Baptism in the Light of Current Interpretations” (Emory University Ph.D. Diss., 1966).
addressed to the baptized) is also true for Wesley’s sermons. Wesley’s sermons are not aimed at encouraging his audiences to receive the sacrament of baptism; he seems to assume that they already have been baptized. In eighteenth-century England this would not be an unfair assumption. Nor does Wesley imply that his audiences need rebaptism, as if the validity of their baptism might be questionable. Rather, the implicit baptismal point behind each of the sermons in chapter two is that Wesley is preaching to those for whom the efficacy of baptism may not be certain, either because they have not lived in accordance with that baptism or because they are at risk of backsliding. Indeed, Wesley’s English “sinners” are very similar to Augustine’s Donatists—not in that they are schismatics but insofar as their lives do not embody the love of God (and, therefore, also the love of neighbor) communicated by the Holy Spirit.

Wesley’s theology of the Holy Spirit, therefore, resonates not only with the associative and procedural logic described above but also with Augustine’s more specific theo-logic of salvation, Scripture, and baptism. The name of Love to identify Wesley’s understanding of the Holy Spirit, then, is more than possible; it is fitting. The work of the Holy Spirit Wesley describes in his sermons gives the strong associative context, but the threefold commitment provides a deep connection to the wellspring of the Augustinian position. In the Homilies Augustine is able, ultimately, to name the Holy Spirit as Love because he foregrounds the post-baptismal context of his congregation. Augustine names

From Font to Faith: John Wesley on Infant Baptism and the Nurture of Children, American University Studies, 7. Theology and Religion (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), has an extensive and slightly more recent bibliography, but that is the extent of the usefulness of his study, as Richard P. Heitzenrater, “From Font to Faith: John Wesley on Infant Baptism and the Nurture of Children,” Church History 57, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 546–47, argues with strident clarity.
what Wesley only hints at, but for both preachers, the Holy Spirit really can be the Love of God.

**The Love of God**

In the preceding discussions on love and the Holy Spirit, many of the important aspects of Augustinian-Wesleyan thought on the love of God have already been discussed—or at least foreshadowed. This includes the central claim that naming the Holy Spirit as the Love of God has significance for the way that Wesley treats the Spirit and love in his sermons on 1 John. In focusing specifically on the love of God now, I do not intend to rehash points already developed. Instead, I commend an Augustinian-Wesleyan approach to the love of God by inquiring about three relationships: between love from and love to God; between love of God and love of neighbor; and between love of God and the Trinity. I then consider how “the love of God” can focus theological attention on a holistic soteriology nascent in Augustine’s *Homilies* and richly developed in Wesley’s sermons.

**Love from and to God**

There is no doubt that for both Augustine and Wesley love from God is a gift, neither earned nor purchased by the recipient, communicated by the Holy Spirit. The language of gift is explicit in Augustine’s *Homilies*,

[^23] and it is certainly implied by Wesley in his description in “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” of receiving and returning the breath of life and love given by God’s Spirit. As that same sermon shows, when we love God, we are returning, even relinquishing, what has been

[^23]: Even if it is not as developed there as in his *De Trinitate.*
given to us. This return of love—our love to God—has, therefore, some curious and perhaps provocative implications.

There is, first of all, the implicit assertion that we never come into real possession of God’s love, either love from or love to God. It is never “ours,” any more than the air we breathe could ever really be ours. Any attempt to hold on to love would quench it, just as holding on to air would either be silly and futile or deadly. Because love is a given, it is in its nature not to belong to the person who receives it. Love is in motion; it is *actus purus*. We can only be said to have truly received God’s love when we have learned to relinquish it.

In the beauty of divine paradox, however, this relinquishing of love does not mean that God’s love is ever truly absent from us. The cycle of receiving and giving up never means that God’s love is removed from us, for God’s means for incorporating us into the body of Christ has both dynamic and static aspects. The Holy Spirit is the breath by which we live and love, *and* the Spirit is he who witnesses to us that we *are* beloved daughters and sons of God. We might say, in something of a departure from Augustinian or Wesleyan language, that our participation in God’s love shares characteristics of the divine *perichoresis*, in which being is so purely act that *circumcessio* and *circumsessio* are simultaneously and eternally true in non-contradictory ways of the life of the Trinity. Our act of relinquishing God’s love, however, is no less required of us for this fact.

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24 At least under normal circumstances. There are circumstances in which air belongs exclusively to one person, such as the astronaut on a spacewalk or the deep-sea diver, but these exceptions, first, require complete exclusion from other human beings and, second, are necessarily temporary.
The implication that immediately follows from this is that love requires faith, in all its dimensions: as knowledge of God’s particular love for us, as trust in God, and as certainty about God’s faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ. To relinquish love, to refuse to possess it, to resist making it ours, requires faith that we are not yielding something that will never be given to us again. It requires assurance that our return of love is not suicidal. Otherwise, how can we know that giving up something essential to our very life will not kill us? Furthermore, so that we are not seized by paralyzing anxiety, we must become habituated to a life of such faith and dependency. Again, Wesley’s comparison of love to air is helpful. When we first learn of God’s love for us by returning that love, we may be more sensitive to the possibility of its permanent disappearance. This is the timidity of early faith. Over time, however, we may grow accustomed to the rituals and rhythms of receiving and relinquishing, sensitive to our own participation in God’s life, in such a way that our anxiety is pacified or disappears altogether (what Wesley might call perfect love), just as we do not worry that every breath might be our last gasp.

A third implication has to do with love as a self-offering. In fact, this is really a two-sided implication. On the one hand, if love is a self-offering and the Holy Spirit is Love, then when we receive God’s love we also are the recipients of God’s self-offering to us in a manner far more profound or true than any self-offering we may make, either to

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25 Notice that faith is required for love among human beings at least as much as it is for love between human beings and God. Augustine’s descriptions of perverted love that seeks only its own benefit at the expense of others are also descriptions of love without faith; Wesley’s warnings about idolatrous love are likewise also warnings about putting our faith, wrongly, in creaturely love.

26 Wesley, especially, makes a strong connection between the life of faith and the life of love in Christ, though it is strong in Augustine in many places outside the Homilies.
God or to other people. What we return to God, in doxology and thanksgiving, is what we have been given: God’s love for us. There can, for Augustine and Wesley, never be an ultimate distinction between our love to God and God’s love to us. On the other hand, however, there is thereby introduced the worry that we never really love God. If love is a self-offering, yet what we return to God is what we have received (an other self, the Holy Spirit), then do we every truly love God?

Neither Augustine nor Wesley ever answers such a question head-on, but each obviously believes that such love is possible. As discussed earlier, the peaceable love of God in the Holy Spirit does not replace or destroy human agency; love enables us to respond. The Spirit’s presence is generative, not substitutive. God’s self-offering to us involves also an offering of (our) self to us. With the Spirit’s presence, with the transforming knowledge that God loves us, we come to know, as Jean-Luc Marion suggests we all desire to know, that we matter, that we are loved, and this knowledge (whether intellectual or intuitive) is fructifying. It produces in us a self that is able to take the risk to love in return and even, in the case of our neighbors and our enemies, to take the risk to love first. This is the beauty of God’s love for us, and it ensures that our love for...
to God is our self-offering, even if it is never independent from the Love that enables our response.

**Love of God and love of neighbor**

If the barrier between love from and to God has been lowered, what of any possible divide between love of God and love of neighbor? Is loving the neighbor the same thing as loving God? Do we love our neighbor with “the love of God”? Wesley, uncharacteristically, has relatively little to say about the love of the neighbor in the sermons discussed in chapter two, save for his concern about idolatry; Augustine, on the other hand, makes the love of neighbor a central plank of his *Homilies*. What we learn from both preachers, however, is that love for the neighbor is fraught. When we come to questions about the relationship of love for God and love for neighbor, then, we should not expect simple answers.

Love for the neighbor is not any more separable from love for God than love for God is separable from love from God. When we love the neighbor, we offer ourselves to the neighbor—this act, therefore, is similar (if not identical) to our love for God. If we do this apart from God, clearly, the results are potentially devastating: idolatry or consumption of the other. If, however, we love with the love we have received from God, our self-offering is also an offering of divine love—because the self that is offered has a participatory existence, a sharing, in the divine life. This does not, of course, mean that

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salvation are enacted liturgically, is the entry to the church, the new life in the Spirit is not at the expense of a life in relationship to other human beings. Rather, it is simultaneously a life in God and with each other. See the broader discussion on love above.
our love for the neighbor is not also a genuine self-offering, any more than (and for the same reasons) our love for God is not a true self-offering.

Herein lies the danger, especially, I think, for Wesley. Wesley says that we are to love those God commands us to love, but he does not give us much instruction on how to love them without turning them into idols. If we are offering ourselves to others, is that not an act of idolatry? Even more important, if love for the neighbor is not separable from love for God, are we not simply deceiving ourselves when we love other creatures? Augustine is of great assistance here. By insisting that love involves three (not two) factors—the lover, love itself, and the beloved—Augustine introduces the possibility of loving God and neighbor without idolatry or consumerism. We can see this by again considering love for neighbor apart from, versus with, the love of God.

In either case, all three factors pertain: lover, love, and beloved. What changes from one case to the other is the character of the middle term. Without the love of God, the love that is shared is either the whole-hearted self-offering that leads to idolatry or the half-hearted self-offering that seduces the other and allows our consumption of his or her love. With the love of God, the middle term becomes entangled with the Holy Spirit, foreclosing possibilities of idolatry and consumption. When we love, we relinquish possession of the Spirit-Love in favor of the other without (idolatrously) depending on the neighbor’s reception of our love or needing the other’s self-offering to fill our own lack. Augustine reminds us that to love the beloved necessarily involves loving love itself—and if this “love itself” is the Holy Spirit, then when we love our neighbor, we love God.
More than that, our own participatory existence in the Spirit as children of God gives us an awareness that our beloved, too, participates in the divine life. To love the other, then, is also to love the beloved as partaker in the divine nature, which brings our love for neighbor even closer to our love for God. From this, we can see why Augustine and so many others have underscored the importance of love among the faithful, for in the love of brother and sister in Christ there is a realized mutuality of loving God through loving the neighbor that is present only proleptically in our love for the enemy. Our love for the neighbor is therefore doubly mimetic of God’s love for us. When we love the brother or sister, we love as God loves us in Christ, sure of the testimony of the Holy Spirit that we share in God’s gracious gift of adoption. When we love our enemies, we love as God loved us “while we were enemies” (Romans 5:10), prior to our reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ.

Love of God and the Trinity

John Wesley and Augustine embrace a language of participation that indicates an understanding of God as the ground and prior necessary condition for our love and not merely its prototype. As the close of the preceding section suggests, however, we do not need to contrast too strongly participation and imitation. Our participation in the life and love of God through the Holy Spirit has a mimetic quality. Not only does our transformed love take on certain characteristics of God’s love for creation; we may also, rightly, seek

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31 This way of phrasing things may also enrich our understanding of Jesus’ command to love our neighbor “as our self.” Rather than a hidden command to love yourself, even to love yourself first, as has become a commonplace interpretation of the command in some circles of recent popular Christian theology, the command is to love in the same mode as loving oneself: as a child of God whose love is made possible by the engaging love of the Holy Spirit.
to imitate God’s love for us as part of the response God’s generative love initiates and demands.

Because of its place within the preaching of both Augustine and Wesley, the doctrine of the Trinity has importance for both the mimetic and the participatory aspects of the love of God. Nor should we allow Wesley’s denunciation of curiosity regarding the eternal life of God to deter attempts to consider the implications of what has been revealed concerning God’s love for the doctrine of the Trinity; this, after all, is what Augustine does with the concept of the Holy Spirit as Love in his De Trinitate.

The most important point of relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity concerns the creature-Creator distinction. The temptation of some approaches to theosis or divinization, which depend on participation language, is to downplay the difference between God and creation; some may worry that a similar undercurrent hides in the discussion of the similarity of love from and to God, or of love of God and love of neighbor. For Augustine and Wesley, however, this will not do. For them, the language of participation heightens the Creator-creature distinction. Our participation places us in a fundamentally different position from God. First, there is never any language in either preacher of us sending the Holy Spirit. The Father sends the Spirit and the Son; we share in their ongoing missions. When we relinquish the gift of Love to God, we participate in the movement of the Spirit that would happen with or without our participation. When we love our neighbor, we do not add in, as of our own power or authority, the Spirit to our acts of love, but our acts of love are made true and holy in their dependence on God’s
love for our neighbors. Second, however, our mimesis is never as of an image dimly seen at a distance. The Trinity particularizes God’s love for us by both the witness of the Spirit and the life of Christ in us; we witness God’s love for us even as we participate in and respond to it in our love for God and the neighbor. We actually have a more certain glimpse of God’s love than we do of our neighbor’s love for us, for we can be certain that God’s love is for our own good (happiness), but our neighbor’s acts of benevolence are as ambivalent as our own.

Participation, therefore, is participation in the whole life of God, ad intra as well as ad extra, but imitation of the Triune life is limited to the love of God ad extra. Our love depends on the eternal Love of God, but we love as God loves us, and not as God loves God. If, however, our participation includes more than just the “economic” Trinity, then we have some permission to think more about how what we learn of God through the love of God may shape how (and not just who) we understand God to be in God’s eternal love as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*Love of God and holistic soteriology*

The peaceable love of God that is the Holy Spirit is also incorporating, bringing together what would otherwise be separate and irreconcilable. The Holy Spirit’s affirmation of divine adoption is paradigmatic, and both Wesley and Augustine’s theology reflects the holistic work of the love of God. Augustine offers a nascent holistic soteriology. The implication of his work on the love of God in the *Homilies* is that our desires must be fundamentally altered, reoriented, and renewed in order for us to dwell in

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32 We will consider this point in the liturgical context of laying on of hands in chapter five.
the unity of Christ he exhorts, for “[t]he entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire.”

If love is the means to pursue our desires, we cannot go on desiring the same old things in the same old ways if we expect our love to be anything more than what it is in our fallen state. Augustine, however, is not specific about how this change in desire occurs, nor does he dwell on it at length.

In this regard, we might call Wesley a psychological realist. Wesley does connect the work of the Holy Spirit to the changing nature of our desires, and his account of the changes wrought by the Holy Spirit includes the expectation that the experience of desire by the one who is being saved is different than that of the one who is not. This experiential difference is a matter of peace of soul, to be sure, but it is also more than that. Wesley is optimistic that our corporeal experiences will also be different, at least barring mental illness or times of extreme trial. The quotidian existence of the one who knows and participates in the love of God is an existence in happiness.

Wesley’s position is not without its problems. It has the potential to make anxious those who do not experience the peace of divine happiness. It may fail to account for systems of evil that can taint even well-intentioned acts. And Wesley is not nearly as subtle as Augustine in considering how our love cannot only enslave us to idols but can also enslave others to us. Wesley’s expectation, however, is not grounded in anthropological optimism. Its foundation is the grace and love of the Triune Lord—the same foundation as Augustine’s hope that the Donatists might return to the Catholic

33 Augustine, *Homilies IV.6.*
Church, itself another example of Augustine’s holistic soteriology. Wesley expands the hope to include a transformation of all aspects of life that anticipates the full transformation at the resurrection.

Taken together, Augustine and Wesley remind us that a holistic soteriology cannot insist on the healing of individual bodies without also insisting on unity in love of the body of Christ, and *vice versa*. Likewise, they help us bear in mind that the love of God experienced in salvation is also the Love of God who was, and is, and is to come. Finally, they show us that the future hope for consummation and the present hope for transformation have a common *ratio* in the love of God that is the Holy Spirit. Church and individual, body and soul, God and creature are brought together by the love of God that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

**An Authentic Cadence**

In this third chapter, I have brought together the various sermons of Augustine and Wesley, arguing for their mutual complementarity and suggesting places where one or the other offers stronger material for enriching a theology of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God. What has emerged in this chapter is the groundwork for such a theology, including not only a fundamental content but also methodological considerations. In this final section of the chapter, I highlight the major aspects of this content and these considerations. I conclude by introducing the topics of the final two chapters; the

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34 Augustine’s hope for the Donatists is not eschatologically delayed; he expects visible unity in Christ now as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, the Love of God.

35 Romans 5:5, a favorite text of Augustine and Wesley.
introduction of these new topics allows this chapter to be an authentic cadence, a bridge between older and newer matters.

In naming the Spirit the Love of God, Augustine furnishes theology with a potent locus for systematic investigation. Once the Spirit is named as Love, artificial divisions between Christian practice and theology, between soul and body, between loving God and loving the neighbor, between the Son and the Spirit, become moot. Wesley never names the Spirit Love, but his theology has the same impetus toward overcoming these artificial divisions. For this reason as well as the more specific reasons discussed at length above, Augustine’s naming fits Wesley’s theology well. Wesley, however, is not merely a passive recipient of an Augustinian correction. His holistic soteriology extends Augustine’s insight, especially with respect to the full range of desires and sinful possibilities for love in need of the Spirit’s healing.

By his very presence, the Holy Spirit, as Love, generates in us the love of God on which all our love depends. Human love, which is always a self-offering, is made peaceable, free from the frenetic desires that otherwise characterize fallen creaturely existence. If we do not offer ourselves as masters to obligate others to ourselves and if we

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36 After Augustine’s insight, to seek the Holy Spirit is to seek love, and vice versa—properly, of course, not necessarily. Intellectual and spiritual pursuits of the Spirit become bound up with pursuits of love; benevolent and spiritual pursuits of love are similarly bound to the pursuit of the Holy Spirit. And, for Augustine, unity is a primary sign of Love’s work; using either the Spirit or love to justify divisiveness betrays a misunderstanding of each. This is not to say, of course, that such divisions simply disappeared following Augustine. Why they did not is more a historical question than a theological one, so I cannot answer it here (and answering it would require a fairly significant historical inquiry of lengthy proportions). My suspicion, however, is that when such divisions recur they are the result of insufficient theological commitment to Augustine’s fundamental insight concerning the Spirit.
do not give ourselves to others apart from God, we can trust that our love is the fruit of
the Spirit of Love in us and not a prolongation of our own fallen love.

For the Spirit to be as well as to communicate the Love of God for us in our
salvation requires strong Trinitarian commitments in order for the position not to collapse
into a post-Hegelian unitarianism or a trivial post-Joseph Fletcher Feuerbachian
projection. In other words, calling the Spirit “Love” cannot entail the equation of the
Godhead either with a single principle that resolves all dialectics or with the elevation of
vague notions about human feelings if it is to remain a Christian confession of faith and
truth. Augustine and Wesley both insist on the Spirit’s place within the Trinity and not as
a resolution of the Trinity or a replacement for either the sending work of the Father or
the complementary saving work of the Son.

The Wesleyan-Augustinian approach to the Holy Spirit commended in this
chapter has methodological as well as content-driven commitments. First and most
obviously, Wesley and Augustine are readers of Scripture. They have pledged themselves
to the disciplined reading of a communal text; their speech about God depends upon, and
is rife with, the words of Scripture that testify to God’s self-revelation. Second, however,
this respect for Scripture is not fundamentalist or anti-intellectual; Scripture spurs their
theological creativity, even as it guides and disciplines it. Third, Scripture does not

37 Augustine, for example, reverses “God is love” into “Love is God,” a transposition that would scare
many Christians after Barth, but he is able to do so successfully and persuasively because “love” is already
a Scripture-rich word for Augustine and not an empty human concept projected onto God. Wesley, in a
different example, endorses the phrase “Three-One God” in order to shore up the Trinitarian faith of those
suspicious of creeds—and he does this precisely because he believes the God revealed in Scripture is the
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
stand alone but is integrated with theology and practice. In Augustine’s case, the practice is explicitly baptism, but we have also seen how that is relevant for Wesley’s own situation.

The success of this chapter and, indeed, of this dissertation does not lie in simply showing that two Christian theologians, separated by time, have areas of significant agreement about the Holy Spirit. That may be more or less interesting, but it would be fundamentally a project concerning the past. I have said, however, that my purpose is to commend these areas of significant agreement for systematic theology, and, in the previous chapter, I suggested how recent work by Sarah Coakley and A.N. Williams could help us appropriate Wesley’s work in contemporary systematic theology. In the next two chapters, therefore, I do not further examine Wesleyan-Augustinian agreements and disagreements. Rather, I take the close readings of the first two chapters and the synthesis of the present chapter as the basis for two related forays into contemporary systematics.

The first of these forays is into the question of divine desire. It is commonplace to say that God wants this or that, even that God desires a particular good; such language is even Scriptural and not just colloquial. What does it mean to say that God desires? For both Wesley and Augustine, desire is predicated on lack; for neither Augustine nor Wesley does God ever lack anything. In fact, divine desire per se is an area not addressed at all by either one, and it is also not a theme of current pneumatology, which has become obsessed with economic questions at the expense of interest in topics concerning the
immanent Trinity. If, however, the Holy Spirit is the Love of God, and, therefore, is closely associated with the healing and reorientation of human desires, the Spirit as the Love of God offers an inroad for exploring a Trinitarian approach to divine desire.

The second foray is into an approach to Christian initiation based on understanding the Spirit as Love. Augustine, of course, discusses baptism, and I have argued that his Homilies are aimed intentionally at a postbaptismal audience. Wesley does not discuss baptism in the sermons from chapter two, but he does talk about the new birth. In this second foray, I draw upon the decades-long work of liturgical theologians who have stressed a broad approach to Christian initiation that accounts not only for baptism but also chrismation/anointing, confirmation, and even Eucharist. This work has not always found its way into systematic theology, despite the interest of some systematic theologians in Christian worship practices. On the other hand, the Spirit as the Love of God has not influenced the discussion among liturgical theologians. The holistic soteriology of Augustine and Wesley can help us develop a rich theology of Christian initiation that centers on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

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38 There is, however, a field in philosophy called “divine desire theory” that attempts to ground moral obligation in the desire (rather than the command or the very being) of God, on which see Christian B. Miller, “Divine Desire Theory and Obligation,” in New Waves in Philosophy of Religion (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 105–24. I am sympathetic with some of Miller’s ideas, but I worry that voluntarism lurks too close to the surface. Certainly any grounding of moral behavior in divine desire would require good reasons for believing that God’s desires were good, reliable and not capricious, and radically different from human desires and their potential for unintended destruction in even the best of circumstances.
Chapter Four

Introduction

In the preceding chapters our focus was on understanding the main theme of this dissertation, the love of God, in the context of two Christian theologians, Augustine and John Wesley. We saw how for Augustine the relationship between God’s love, whether our love for God or God’s love for us, pertains so closely to the Holy Spirit that Augustine affirms Love as a proper name for the Spirit. In Wesley, the naming does not occur, but the same intimate connection between the Spirit and the love of God does exist, so that Augustine’s name is appropriate and fitting in the Wesleyan context.

The present chapter represents the first of two forays into contemporary theological issues. The focus here no longer concerns what Augustine or Wesley thought about this or that theological detail. Instead, the emphasis is on how the Augustinian-Wesleyan synthesis developed in chapter three might guide systematic thought concerning divine desire. Specifically, the question addressed here is, “What do we mean when we say that God desires?” Language of divine desire is commonplace, perhaps especially in the context of sermons but also in other circumstances in which exhortation is appropriate and expected: “God wants us to…; God does not desire our… but our…; God wants you to…”

1 A recent Google search yielded 618,000,000 hits for the terms “God wants,” including a popular Facebook application called “God Wants You to Know.” A search for “God desires” yielded 20,500,000 results. The usage is, of course, commonplace and not limited to the internet. For example, Stanley Hauerwas, Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian (Eugene, Or. Cascade Books, 2011), 81, writes that “[t]he burning bush that is not consumed wonderfully displays God's unrelenting desire to have us know him.”
I have already noted that this question does not arise in either Augustine’s
*Homilies* or Wesley’s various sermons. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the question is
also not a topic of much concern in contemporary theology either, nor even in
pneumatology, despite the surge in recent publications on the Holy Spirit.\(^2\) In this
chapter, therefore, I suggest a possible reason for this oversight by engaging selected
works on the Holy Spirit from the past two decades. The tendency in recent
pneumatology has been to grapple with the work of the Spirit in the created order in the
place of, and at the expense of, considerations of the Spirit in the eternal life of the
Godhead. Yet as Karl Rahner established in his ill-fated essay on the Trinity, our
understanding of the economic Trinity is grounded in the immanent Trinity—and not *vice
versa*.\(^3\) Following the section of engagement with contemporary pneumatology, I will
consider the significance of naming in the context of Trinitarian theology. Does naming
the Spirit Love limit our understanding of the Spirit (and of the Triune Lord), or does it
introduce new possibilities? Finally, I will apply the synthesis of chapter three to the
question of divine desire by arguing that understanding the Spirit as the Love of God
gives clarity to and renders coherent our language of divine desire.

\(^2\) My own interest in this question was sparked by a brainstorming session early in the semester of a course
on desire under Paul Griffiths. We were naming as many questions about desire and Christian theology as
we could, and I asked whether or not God desires. The question came quite naturally to me, I suppose,
because I had grown up both in an evangelical context where statements like “God wants us…” were not
uncommon and with a healthy knowledge of the Bible and its various expressions of divine desire. I was
surprised to discover that what was, to me, fairly commonplace speech marked such a lacuna in theological
discourse.

\(^3\) See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1997), 101-103. A helpful explication of
Rahner’s *Grundaxiom* is found in Dennis W. Jowers, *The Trinitarian Axiom of Karl Rahner: The Economic
Trinity Is the Immanent Trinity and Vice Versa* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006). See especially
87-97.
Before considering more modern works, however, I allow this chapter to be shaped by Augustine and Wesley in yet one more important way: by beginning with Scripture. As was amply demonstrated in the previous chapter, both preachers rely heavily on a breadth of Scripture in their sermons, even if they also refer to non-Scriptural events, circumstances, and (in Wesley’s case) writers. They are, in Paul Griffiths’ terms, religious readers.5

Scripture also uses the language of divine desire, although in ways more circumspect and limited than the colloquial usage of such language on millions of internet websites might lead us to believe. Scriptural language will be the starting point for our discussion of divine desire. There is, however, one important preliminary matter to attend to before we can turn to this chapter’s main topic. Does naming the Spirit the Love of God really open us out to new possibilities—or does it limit our potential for greater reverence for the Third Person of the Trinity? We must first consider the significance of naming God.

**Naming and the Love of God**

If the question is simply, does calling the Holy Spirit the love of God limit our understanding of the Spirit’s person and work, then the answer must be a resounding “Yes!” Of course any naming of God imposes certain limitations. But so does saying nothing—radical apophaticism is no less creaturely than overconfident cataphatism. The problem (if it really is a problem) is not in our speech but in our creaturely existence, of

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4 For more on this, see also the Appendix.
5 Griffiths, *Religious Reading.*
which speech is only one extension. In this section, I consider various aspects to the problem of naming God: the problem of limitation; the recognition that naming also has an “excessive” quality; specific concerns that have been voiced about naming the Holy Spirit as Love; and the importance of catechized naming. Finally, I discuss the significance of naming as invocation in Christian theology.

*Limits and naming*

The question of limited speech remains valid, for the ways in which we name God are susceptible to various frailties that are not necessarily inherent to creaturely existence. That is to say, our naming of God is subject to human sin, just as any other act we might perform. Thus D. Stephen Long asks,

> How shall we speak of God so that we avoid the modern errors of fideism and rationalism? How shall we do this so that we do not assume God is an ineffable sublime about whom nothing or everything can be said, or a mythological creature about whom we must use a univocal account of language if we are to speak truthfully?... How can we recognize the truth in Feuerbach’s contextualization of our speech about God and at the same time refuse to limit language to its context, which the so-called ‘end of metaphysics’ tempts us to do?

*Creaturely limitation is not in and of itself a bad thing; even in Genesis 1-2 creaturely existence is not depicted as completely boundless.*

Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 66-83, takes this issue up with respect to gendered language for God in her chapter four on “Calling God ‘Father.’” Her work there, as well as in her earlier *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), is helpful beyond the issue of gender, but I have questions about her assertion that names, even names for God, are fundamentally metaphorical. Connecting names and metaphor is helpful insofar as it suggests that names participate meaningfully in something beyond themselves. But a name overflows even the broad channels of metaphor (see the next section below).

*Connecting names and metaphor is helpful insofar as it suggests that names participate meaningfully in something beyond themselves. But a name overflows even the broad channels of metaphor (see the next section below).*

Long presses upon us questions related specifically to systematic theology; his are the academician’s concerns. Stanley Hauerwas, on the other hand, addresses a more fundamental issue: “We, like the people of Israel, would like to think we get to name God. By naming God we think we can get the kind of God we need.” In naming God, we risk fooling ourselves into believing that we have power over God. Hauerwas continues: “Only God can name God. That, moreover, is what God does.” The possibility that we might name God is completely dependent on God giving his name to us.

In fact, human naming of any kind is properly a response to divine giving. Consider Genesis 2:19-20a: “So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field.” Naming the created world is not at the man’s initiative; it is his response to the generosity of a loving God who offers these creatures to the man in order to have them named.

The same is true, as I have demonstrated in chapters one through three, for Augustine and Wesley with respect to the Holy Spirit. The naming, implicit or explicit, of the Spirit as Love is their response to the Spirit’s self-offering and to Scripture’s identification of that self-offering with love. Is the name as clear as God’s name in Exodus 3, or as the various references in the New Testament to the Father and to the Son?

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9 Hauerwas, Working with Words, 81.
10 Hauerwas, Working with Words, 81.
11 In the same way, with help from A.N. Williams, I have already argued in chapter two that the nature of Christian systematic theology is as a mimetic response to and participation in the inherent systematicity of the created order that is itself a gift from God.
No, but naming thusly is nonetheless a responsive act. To name the Spirit as love does involve human experience, broadly understood: the experience of knowing God through Scripture and the experience of the saving work of the Triune God, but for neither Wesley nor Augustine does this amount to a Feuerbachian projection.

Excess and naming

Naming is a curious business. On the one hand, to name something or someone is to impose certain limitations: this name, not that name; this referent (especially if the name is symbolically freighted), not that; and so on. On the other hand, however, to call something or someone by name is also to acknowledge the inability of language to contain all that that thing or person is. Indeed, it is often the case that the more a name is used, the less adequate the name becomes—and, therefore, the richer the symbol. When my wife and I decided to name our firstborn Nathaniel James, the name reflected our gratitude to God for the gift of this child (Nathaniel), the long line of “Jameses” on my side of the family, and our hope for a life we did not yet know. Six years later, saying his name now invokes the many memories I associate with him. It also names a person who is shaped by many events of which I have no memory and could have no memory. There is already much more to Nathaniel than could ever be known. The name still limits, of course, but this could hardly be called problematic.

In *The Silence of St. Thomas*, Josef Pieper argues that part of calling the world “creation” and its inhabitants “creatures” is to recognize their provenance from a Creator; there is inherently more to other creatures than their named existence.12 Similarly,
drawing on French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Sarah Coakley argues “that there is a revelatory irreducibility about visual symbolism that will not simply translate without remainder into the verbal.” To name in response to seeing is to commit an allusive, not univocal, speech act. Might not the same be true for that which we see by faith? After all, for both Augustine and Wesley faith is a kind of seeing. Rather than delimiting our understanding of the Holy Spirit, could calling the Spirit the Love of God actually help us recognize that our naming participates in a divine existence that far exceeds the capabilities of our language? If we are to proceed with this possibility in mind, we would do well to heed the warning of David Bentley Hart:

It is a phenomenological (and, for Heidegger, ontological) maxim that, for anything to appear, there must indeed be a more general hiddenness: the unseen sides of an object that, in being hidden, allow a distinct form to emerge from the “total” presence; the obscuration of everything the object shields from view; the hiddenness of past and future that allows the object to disclose itself in the exteriority of its temporal “ecstasies”; and indeed the invisibility of being itself, the deferral of its absoluteness in its gracious giving way to the finite. However, it makes all the difference whether one sees this movement of hiddenness within manifestation in terms of an original negation or in terms of a self-outpouring that flows from the plenitude of full Trinitarian manifestation.

If Love is to open us out to further understanding the Holy Spirit, it must do so because of the exceeding wealth of the Triune God.

Love and naming

So far our discussion has been broad, concerning the implications and potential pitfalls of the general practice of naming God. In the last half-century, theologians have

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13 Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self, 191.
also raised specific objections to naming the Holy Spirit Love. I discuss here two sets of objections: the first, to the word “love” itself; the second, to the actual naming.

One major set of objections to naming the Holy Spirit “Love” is that the word “love” is itself problematic. Benedict XVI notes “the vast semantic range of the word ‘love’… So we need to ask: are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to designate totally different realities?”

Some fifty years earlier, Anders Nygren insisted that agape, not eros, was the exclusive and definitive form of Christian love. Benedict’s encyclical, itself a kind of response to Nygren, takes a different line. There are real differences between eros and agape, he argues, but all loves are meaningfully insofar as they are ordered by and directed to God who is Love, for “God loves, and his love may certainly be called eros, yet it is also totally agape.”

I have not addressed this question in earlier chapters because it is simply not an issue either for Augustine or Wesley. For them, the test of love—any love—is to refer it back to love’s Source. As Benedict XVI rightly argues, all human loves find their fulfillment and source in God’s love. The Spirit, as Love, therefore, is not uniquely identifiable with one form of human-experienced love.

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18 Equating the Spirit exclusively with one or another particular human love would be a genuine limitation on our understanding of the Spirit; it would also tend toward the univocal speech against which Stephen Long warns.
The second objection has to do with identifying the Spirit’s place in the Trinity with love—what is known, variously, as the vinculum trinitatis, the vinculum caritatis, or the vinculum amoris. In his *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Jürgen Moltmann offers a restrained judgment of the vinculum amoris, suggesting it might be a problem “that the inner-trinitarian efficacy of the Holy Spirit is [thereby] only presented by and in the mutual relationship of the Father and the Son.”¹⁹ A few pages later Moltmann seeks to reorient the Spirit’s relationship in the Trinity primarily toward the Father in an attempt to overcome East-West divisiveness over the *Filioque*. More pressing are the concerns voiced by James Purves, who argues that Augustine’s understanding of the Spirit as love “invited a view of the Spirit expressed in analogical terms, thereby reinforcing a separation between our perception of the Spirit and our experience of Him… [as well as] an affirmation of the Spirit’s Being which was expressed in terms of the substantial relationship of the Father and Son, rather than an identification of the Spirit in His own ontic actuality.”²⁰ The technical jargon builds up rather quickly here, but these two criticisms effectively amount, first, to a charge of separating the immanent and economic Trinity and, second, to an accusation of reducing the Spirit’s personhood.

Both charges are, I would suggest, spurious. As I demonstrate in the final section of this chapter, understanding the Spirit as the Love of God actually reinforces our

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²⁰ James Purves, *The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement: A Critical Appraisal of Trinitarian Theology and Charismatic Experience from a Scottish Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004). I have found many similar critiques, often expressed more polemically, often aimed at Karl Barth, who also works with the notion of a vinculum in his *Church Dogmatics*. 

163
understanding of the economic/immanent Trinity. Indeed, the Holy Spirit as, immanently, the Love of God renders coherent and comprehensible our language about divine love and desire in the economy of creation and redemption. As for questions about the Spirit’s personhood, Augustine and Wesley both have a dynamic, rich understanding of who the Spirit is and what the Spirit does that does not in the least suggest that the Spirit has a reduced agency or a deficient personhood in comparison with either the Father or the Son. As Love, the Spirit is active, moving, transforming, and engaging humanity in anticipation of humanity’s responsive participation. That cyclical, generative, and unifying work makes sense best—and perhaps only—if it is grounded in a similar pattern in the immanent life of the Trinity.

_Catechesis and naming_

Genesis 2 notwithstanding, naming is, in our creaturely existence, a kind of reasoning. We do not simply name on a whim, or in _ad hoc_ fashion. Naming, whether of a child or of a subspecies of frogs, is done according to a way of reasoning that must be taught and learned. The reasoning may be fairly straightforward (as in the case of the frog) or quite complicated (as in the case of the child), but naming in each case happens according to a way of thinking about relationships between things—that is, according to reason. Even in a society, such as twenty-first century North America, that endorses an emotive approach to naming in at least some cases, that emotive approach still must be taught and learned. Simply put, naming requires catechesis.

What is true of human beings with respect to other creatures is even more the case with respect to God; naming God is especially fraught business. Through religious
catechesis we learn to name God according to a tradition-bound way of reasoning. This catechesis can be formal, through confirmation classes or other forms of Christian education and formation, as well as less formal, through creeds, hymns, conversations, and, naturally, reading Scripture. Indeed, Christians have consistently affirmed throughout the centuries that whatever names are to be used for God must be directed by reasoning informed by Scripture, even if, as in the case of “Trinity” or (for the Holy Spirit) “Love,” they are not explicitly employed therein. We recall here Wesley’s sermon “On the Trinity,” in which he allows for scruples with respect to the name “Trinity” because of its absence in Scripture yet simultaneously affirms that the God revealed in Scripture is the Three-One God whom Christians have named Trinity.

Naming the Holy Spirit Love of necessity participates in Christian catechesis. First, as has been amply demonstrated in earlier chapters, the name itself is tied to Scriptural reasoning. Second, however, this Scriptural reasoning is done neither in isolation from the Christian tradition nor naively, as in the case of those who assert the Bible’s perspicacity. The creedal confessions of faith, particularly the Trinitarian aspects of those confessions, provide focal lenses for reading Scripture in a way that allows for naming the Spirit as Love. For both Wesley and Augustine, the nature of the work of the

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21 I find especially helpful Paul Griffiths, “How Reasoning Goes Wrong,” in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, 150: “[T]he act of catechizing may and should also be understood to include the transmitting of skills, among them skills of reading and responding to Scripture (skills not derivable from Scripture alone), and skills of worship. Catechesis... transmits not only knowing that (information), but also know-how, the capacity to engage in a form of activity... It is a species of apprenticeship as well as a course of instruction, and one of the ways in which the church recognizes this is to include mystagogy as an element intrinsic and proper to catechesis... Inadequate or improper catechesis is among the principal causes of inability to recognize a true judgment as true, a false judgment as false, a valid argument as valid, and an invalid argument as invalid.”
Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity gives shape and content to the idea, however explicit or implicit, that naming the Spirit as Love is consistent with the confessions of the Christian tradition.

Love is a catechized name for the Holy Spirit; it is also a catechizing name. It not only derives substance from Christian reasoning; love contributes substantially to Christian reasoning. The name Love offers itself as a key to our theological reasoning, to our attempt to understand and speak faithfully of God and all things in relation to God. In fact, Love is perfectly situated as a complement to reason, for Love, like reason (or Logos) itself, establishes and maintains coherent relationships between things that might otherwise fall apart. This is, of course, because Love and Logos are both “God from God, light from light.” Calling the Spirit the Love of God is more than an issue of naming; it is a case of invocation.

Invocation and naming

Christian naming of God is, properly, never a matter of mere classification or pure speculation. Rather, naming is primarily a matter of invocation—of calling upon and praying for the One who is named. In the previous section I mentioned in passing that naming God is fraught. Like names for creatures, names for God are insufficient for their object (there is always more both to creatures and to God), and they risk getting something wrong factually about the One who is named. Naming God also involves the added risk of improper invocation—and, therefore, of doxological collapse.

Nowhere in Scripture is this risk better illustrated than in Mark 3:19b-30. In this pericope, Jesus faces the accusation that his acts of healing, especially his casting out
demons, are themselves demonic: “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of demons he casts out demons” (Mark 3:22b). Jesus responds by pointing out how counterproductive it would be for an agent of Satan to be working against other Satanic forces; why would he be \textit{casting out} demons if he was allied with them? Jesus then extends his response by turning the charge back against his accusers, suggesting that with it they themselves are committing a blasphemy “against the Holy Spirit” (Mark 3:29).

I find three fascinating aspects of this passage relevant to our discussion of naming. First, the accusation against Jesus is, effectively, that he is invoking the wrong name: Beelzebul instead of YHWH. No one disputes the results of Jesus’ work. They are concerned with the name, and the power of the name, that stands behind Jesus’ healings. Second, Jesus does not question the possibility of invoking the name of Beelzebul nor of that name having effective power. If you call on Satan, however, you had better be prepared for demonic activity; Satan will not work against Satan. Third, in charging his accusers with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, Jesus diagnoses a malaise of doxological collapse. His accusers have ascribed to the name of Beelzebul what could only properly belong to the name of God. They, not Jesus, are the ones using the wrong name, and persistence in \textit{this} sin, alone, is unforgivable.

Naming the Spirit Love can help stave off this doxological collapse, for God alone is love. When we employ this name in our theology, when we use it as a focal lens for reasoning about God and all things in relation to God, we also invoke the Love of God, calling upon the Holy Spirit to answer the prayer implicit in all theology: Help us to speak rightly of that which is beyond all capacity for comprehension. Neither Wesley nor
Augustine proposes “Love” as an exclusive name for the Spirit, either to replace “Holy Spirit” or at the expense of the Father and the Son also being love. As a name that is also an invocation, love, however, is systematically the name most fitting for the Spirit. Love is our best entry point for ascribing rightly the work of God the Holy Spirit to God the Holy Spirit.

**Divine Desire in Scripture**

The language of divine desire is an important but infrequent aspect of Christian Scripture. By “language of divine desire,” I mean texts in which God is said to desire, want, or wish for something. As far as I can tell, there are a little more than two dozen verses in which we can find this language. Most often, these verses actually use a form of the verb “desire”; less frequently, they use the verb “wish.” “Want” and “need” hardly occur. In general, God desires but does not want; God wishes but does not need.

In the Scriptural language of divine desire, there are three recurring themes: God’s desire as a demonstration of the divine character; God’s desire for worship to be practiced along certain lines; and God’s desire for Israel. There are also passages that do

22 For ease of purpose, I rely here on the NRSV and English-language searches. My aim in this chapter is not to uncover what the various authors of Scripture might have meant or understood themselves to be saying, which is what I take to be the primary purpose of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek word studies. I am less interested in the shades of meaning of various words in the ancient languages than I am in how to understand and receive the broader picture of biblical speech about a desiring God. While the NRSV may occasionally miss some of the subtleties of an ancient language, its use of the English-language lexicon of desire is sufficient for provoking and considering the questions, “Does God desire? If so, how or in what manner or mode?” Furthermore, the study of Scripture that follows is thorough but not comprehensive, emphasizing especially moments, words, and phrases in Scripture that are explicit sufficiently to provoke those particular questions.

23 Exceptions are Matthew 27:43, “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to”; the synoptic Gospels’ versions of the triumphal entry (Matthew 21:3, Mark 11:3, Luke 19:31, 34), which speak of the Lord (Jesus) having need of a donkey/colt; and 2 Maccabees 14:35, where the author affirms that God has “need of nothing.”
not fit easily into any single category; I have grouped them under the heading of “the Divine Missions,” because each has something to do with God’s personally-involved saving work in the world.

_Desire and divine aseity_

In many of the passages of Scripture, God’s desire is a sign of God’s aseity, of the idea that all things depend on God and not the other way around. In Job 23:13, Job is in the midst of a reply to one of his “comforters,” Eliphaz. Eliphaz has advised Job to capitulate to his divine tormentor, for, Eliphaz argues, Job must be guilty of some great offense. Job’s response, at first, is defiant, confident in the justice of his case, and demanding of a fair hearing in God’s presence in order that he “should be acquitted forever by [his] judge” (Job 23:7b). Quickly, however, the bluster fades; Job recognizes that even the presentation of his case before the Lord might not be sufficient to end his suffering. God’s ways are inscrutable and not subject to change: “he stands alone and who can dissuade him? What he desires, that he does” (Job 23:13). For God, to desire is to act definitively, to accomplish.

A similar line of thought is found twice in the New Testament, in Hebrews 6:17 and in James 4:15. James is actually close in spirit on this point to Job. Deriding the wealthy in his audience who make audacious plans as if the universe centered on them, James tells them, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.’” Human plans and desires are subject to divine wishes, which themselves are constant and sure to be accomplished. In the case of Hebrews, the author writes of God’s promise of blessing to Abraham, referring to Genesis 22:16. Explaining the promise, the
author argues that it was made “when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character his purpose” (Hebrews 6:17). The “desire” here (to communicate the certainty of God’s purpose) is made known by a state of fulfillment (“an oath,” Hebrews 6:17c) and is itself indicative of who God is. God is so reliable, even God’s desires are revealed through accomplishment rather than uncertainty or lack.

We find a final example of God’s accomplishing desire in John’s gospel. In John 5:21, Jesus reveals the intimate relationship between his authority as the Son and the Father’s authority: “Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes.” Just as the Father accomplishes his desire, so the Son also accomplishes his—by giving life. For John, the Incarnation reveals the Son who, like the Father, is fully divine in the aseity of his will.

Desire and worship

God’s desire does not just illustrate the divine character in Scripture; it is also the condition for the appropriate human response to that character, i.e., worship. Throughout Scripture, whether in the Pentateuch or in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, worship is a prescribed and structured human activity. Not every human response to God is an acceptable act of worship; that much is established in Genesis 4:4b-5a: “And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” In Genesis 4, no reason is given for the Lord’s preference, but in other places reasons are offered. Among those offered is that the Lord desires a particular worship practice.
In the Old Testament, the two instances of God’s desire for a particular act of worship are nearly identical. The author of Psalm 40 celebrates the Lord’s attentiveness to her request for help. In her celebration of God’s affirmation of her patient faithfulness, she underscores that God does not act in exchange for a sacrificial offering but requires something different: “delight” in the will of God and God’s “law…within [her] heart” (Psalm 40:8). Two verses earlier she establishes why this matters: “Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required” (Psalm 40:6). “Desire” here is synonymous with “require”; it is the condition for the psalmist’s proper worship: adherence to the divine law and delight in the divine will, rather than sacrificial offerings. In this case, God’s desire does betray the potential for lack—on the part of the worshiper who may not respond with appropriate worship. Indeed, such a situation of lack is precisely what is addressed in another Old Testament instance of God’s desire for a particular worship practice, Hosea 6:6. Hosea is about Israel’s infidelity, which the prophet Hosea is commanded to reenact by marrying a prostitute (Hosea 1) and loving an adulteress (Hosea 3). In Hosea 6, divine desire finds expression in the first person: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). God’s judgment against Israel, as the preceding verses make clear, is due to a failure to offer worship characterized by faithfulness (“steadfast love”) and intimacy

24 The heading of Psalm 40 identifies it as “Of David,” but whether that means authorship to David is attributed is debatable.
(“the knowledge of God”). In Hosea, God has loved and remained intimate with Israel while awaiting the return of this love God requires and desires.  

In the New Testament, the theme of divine desire for worship characterized by faithfulness and intimacy takes on a Christological hue. In Matthew 12:7, Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 both to justify his disciples’ plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath and to establish that “the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath” (Matthew 12:8). Similarly, in Hebrews 10:5-10, Psalm 40 is reconfigured around Christ, so that he becomes the one who offers right worship to God. Jesus, however, is not only the one who responds to the divine desire; he also communicates that desire at the institution of the Lord’s Supper. In Luke’s account, the first preface to the first Eucharistic prayer of great thanksgiving is “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15b-16). Jesus longs for an intimate celebration of Israel’s most sacred feast with his disciples at the moment he transforms that feast into the commemoration and reenactment of his own paschal sacrifice. God in Christ desires communion with his disciples.

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25 In the context of Hosea, the desire for Israel’s steadfast love is not a case of God needing something that would be to his benefit. Rather, the prophet demonstrates again and again that Israel’s malaise is due to this failure to worship rightly.

26 Interestingly, the author of Hebrews follows the Septuagint version of Psalm 40, in which God gives a body, and not just ears, to the psalmist. This body, the author argues, is the body of Christ which is offered to God as the acceptable sacrifice—a body marked by faithfulness and delight in the will of God.

27 A similar desire might be present in John 17, where Jesus prays that the Father will show Jesus’ glory to the disciples (John 17:25-26). The Johannine passage also has potential to be read pneumatologically: the Spirit is the glory of God, and of Christ, sent to the disciples because the Spirit is the Love of God.
Desire and Israel

The desire for requited love leads us directly to the most frequent use of divine desire language in Scripture, which is the desire of God for Israel. This is an ever-present theme in Scripture; God chooses Israel, God provides for Israel, God establishes a covenant with Israel, and God desires Israel. God’s desire for Israel, for example, has been part of the rationale for including Song of Songs, read allegorically by Jews and Christians for centuries, in Scripture. Song of Songs makes no mention of God, but there are many passages elsewhere that do speak explicitly of God’s desire for Israel. Of these, a few refer divine desire to Israel as a whole, but many more focus the language specifically on Jerusalem or Zion. Jerusalem/Zion is both metonymous for Israel as a whole and a due object of God’s desire in its own right as the city of God’s temple and habitation.

Again the psalms introduce us to God’s desire for Israel. Psalm 68, a litany of rejoicing in anticipation of God’s triumph over Israel’s foes, suggests that Israel is the envy of other nations because Israel is the object of divine desire. The jealousy of others is, at first glance, confusing because of the grandeur of their own features: “O mighty mountain, mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan!” (Ps 68:15). What is the insignificant temple mount in comparison to the splendor of other nations? Clearly the same question could be asked of Israel itself; why would other, seemingly greater nations be envious of so small a people? Or, “[w]hy do you look with envy, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for his abode, where the Lord will reside forever?” (Ps 68:16). For the psalmist, the question holds the answer.
God’s desire for the mount transforms it from a place of irrelevance to a holy site because God’s desire attains perfectly (“where the Lord will reside forever”) and makes beautiful its object.

In Psalm 68 the reference of “the mount” is clear but unnamed; Psalm 132 expresses the same ideas as Psalm 68, but names the mount: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for has habitation” (Ps 132:13). The desire for Zion reflects the Lord’s desire for intimacy with a particular people that was also true, as we saw above, for God’s desire for right practices of worship.

Not only does God’s desire mean an everlasting abiding of God’s presence in Zion; it also means enduring concern for Israel’s survival. When the queen of Sheba lauds Solomon’s wisdom, she says that God placed Solomon on Israel’s throne “[b]ecause your God loved Israel and wished to establish them forever” (2 Chronicles 9:8 NRSV Anglicized Edition). An interesting development in the deuterocanonical tradition, however, suggests that even in Israel’s case, God does not always get what he wishes. In the reign of Zedekiah, God “sent his messenger to call them back [from their “many acts of sacrilege and lawlessness beyond all the unclean deeds of all of the nations,” 1 Esdras 1:49], because he wished to spare them and his dwelling place” (1 Esdras 1:50 NRSV Anglicized Edition), yet God’s people continue brazenly in their unholy ways. God’s desire does not, apparently, disrupt human agency.

28 The American Version of the NRSV has “…and would establish them forever.”
29 The American Version of the NRSV has “…because he would have spared them and his dwelling place.”
In the New Testament this theme becomes almost unbearably poignant when Jesus laments Jerusalem’s impending doom; he cries out, “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate” (Matthew 23:37b-38).30 Jesus’ lament should put to rest any doubt concerning the earnestness and deep reality of divine desire for Jerusalem/Israel. The image of the brooding hen with her wings outspread over her clutch foreshadows the crucified Christ with his arms embracing the city and people that reject him.

Desire and the divine missions

In addition to the texts that communicate one of these three themes of divine desire language, there are assorted verses that do not fall easily into one category, yet as a group they have particular resonance for the present chapter. Remaining with Matthew for another moment, our entry into these verses is Matthew 27, in which Israel’s leaders mock Jesus: “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son’” (Matthew 27:43). The dramatic irony, of course, is that the reader knows full well that God will deliver Jesus, but the leaders believe that Jesus’ crucifixion is a sure sign that God does not want to do so. Throughout Matthew’s gospel Jesus has recapitulated Israel’s story, so this is, in a way, an extension of the third theme I

30 The parallel with Luke 13:34b-35 is nearly identical, except Luke omits “desolate.” Luke, however, places the lament over Jerusalem long before the triumphal entry and Jesus’ prediction of the temple’s destruction; Matthew places the pericope well after the triumphal entry and immediately before the prediction of the temple’s destruction. In Matthew, Jesus is in Jerusalem when he offers this lament, increasing the lament’s tension: when God, in Christ, takes up his fullest dwelling in Jerusalem, it is a moment of sorrow, not joy, even before the events of the Triduum.
identified (desire of God for Israel). At the same time, however, both the gospel’s audience and the leaders believe in the certainty of God accomplishing what God desires, though for very different reasons. For the gospel’s audience, Jesus is the surest sign of God’s accomplishing desire, as Paul affirms in Acts 13. There, Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s selection of David to be the king “who will carry out all my wishes” (Acts 13:22). Divine desire is necessarily Christological.

Other verses suggest that God’s desire has a transforming effect on human desires, even outside the practices of worship. In Malachi 2, God’s desire is for children from a faithful marriage, as opposed to the divorce that the unfaithful husband seeks; in Revelation 3, Christ wishes that the congregation at Laodicea was either hot or cold and not lukewarm. The psalmist in Ps 51 requests that, since God “desire[s] truth in the inward being; therefore [God should] teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (Ps 51:6). The psalm has pneumatological implications when read in concert with Paul telling the Galatians that “what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh” (Galatians 5:17); with this verse, not only is the expectation of human transformation made clear but also, in coordination with other verses we have discussed, the fully Trinitarian scope of divine desire. The Spirit is the “truth in the inward being” by which God will “[c]reate in me a clean heart” (Ps 51:10), but, also, both the Son and the Spirit desire in Scripture.

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31 The pneumatological resonances are only enhanced by the language of spirit later in the psalm and by the Johannine association of the Spirit with truth and wisdom.
Scriptural language for divine desire is remarkably un-self-reflexive. The language of divine desire, though more consistent than the casual usage of colloquially religious God-talk, is used without explanation or preface. Scripture also affirms, however, that God’s desire is different from human desire, both in its rootedness in something other than lack (though that something is never explicitly identified) and in its certainty of being fulfilled (though not at the expense of creaturely agency). In other words, the Scriptural language of divine desire is ripe for sophisticated theological exploration. Given the Trinitarian expressions of divine desire in Scripture, the approach to divine desire could be from any number of starting points. A pneumatological approach seems especially promising, not least because the Spirit has, in the West, often been associated with the will of God, even in theologians who do not pursue the Augustinian identification of the Spirit as the Love of God with any zeal. The present state of pneumatology, unfortunately, tends to preclude looking to the Holy Spirit for theological reflection on divine desire. An examination of some major works in the field from the past few decades can help us understand why.

**Contemporary Pneumatology**

Many contemporary theologians have celebrated the recent flourish of publications on the Holy Spirit. In the last two or three decades, a number of books have been published on a wide range of topics with respect to the person and work of the Spirit. Finnish theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has even identified a “necessary

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32 Scripture as whole is notable for this same quality.
33 The following chronological list of titles provides a representative sample of areas of interest in contemporary pneumatology: José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll,
pluralism of pneumatology” in the field.\textsuperscript{34} That is, for Kärkkäinen the work of the Holy Spirit includes the work of diversifying, and therefore the present diversity in pneumatology is a sign of pneumatology’s flourishing. Frequently the literature attempts to overcome perceived shortcomings in (especially Western) Christian theology, and one sometimes gets the sense that what unifies the field is less a common interest in the Holy Spirit and more a shared disdain for the received tradition. In his essay on the Holy Spirit in \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology}, Michael Welker argues that the present reinvigoration of pneumatology… [is displayed] in the doctrine of the Trinity, where the doctrine of the Spirit is often appealed to as a corrective against apparently monistic doctrines of God which lack a sense of the differentiation of the divine persons; in Christology, where the pneumatological dimensions of the person and work of Christ have complemented incarnational teaching; or in ecclesiology and the theology of mission, where pneumatology expands and corrects theologies of the church structured around office and institution.\textsuperscript{35}

Welker’s thesis, however, is misleading to the extent that it suggests that contemporary pneumatology is still interested in speaking of a transcendent God with respect to these


traditional theological loci. In fact, for all the benefits of the current interest in the Holy Spirit, transcendence has given way to immanence, and most writers (there are exceptions, of course\textsuperscript{36}) do not evince any interest in pursuing their theological inquiries beyond the bounds of human experience.\textsuperscript{37} If anything, contemporary pneumatology is characterized by a trend toward a materialist reduction of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, a tendency assumed or developed by enough theologians as to belie Kärkkäinen’s supposed diversity in the field.\textsuperscript{38} This materialism has opened the door to certain connections in theology that otherwise might not have been made—it has, in other words, increased Christian theology’s systematicity. But this has come at the unnecessary cost of interest in questions that push our theological imagination beyond the bounds of a fallen cosmos toward contemplation of the eternal Triune God.

For the following survey I have selected three works representative of contemporary pneumatology: José Comblin’s \textit{The Holy Spirit and Liberation}; Michael Welker’s \textit{God the Spirit}; and Eugene Rogers’s \textit{After the Spirit}. Roughly a decade

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\textsuperscript{36} Coakley, \textit{God, Sexuality, and the Self}, 142, in her quest “to illuminate… an ‘alternative’ approach to the Trinity which gives strong priority to the Spirit in prayer,” stands out as one such exception. Coakley cannot but be interested in material/bodily matters, grounded as her systematics is in sexual desire, but her interest here does not come at the expense of divine transcendence. There is also David Coffey, \textit{Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), who uses the Augustinian notion of the Holy Spirit as Love to shape his account of the doctrine of the Trinity.


\textsuperscript{38} We must recognize the linguistic difficulties this chapter introduces and try to keep certain concepts straight. Theologians often distinguish between the economic and immanent Trinity; here “immanent” refers to God’s own immanence with respect to Godself. The problem I am identifying here uses immanence in a different way to describe God’s nearness to the created order. I use immanence in this way as a near synonym with materialism, because, as will be seen, the Holy Spirit becomes so reductively identified with the Spirit’s nearness to creation as to create the impression that there is little more to the Spirit than our own material experiences.
separates each of these works; Comblin’s is from the early 1980s, Welker’s is from the 1990s, and Rogers’s is from the 2000s. Each depends on a different and significant theological enterprise: liberation theology; continental European theology; and North American narrative/post-foundational theology. Finally, all three writers offer broad accounts of the Holy Spirit that incorporate contemporary trends without reducing to summaries the current state of affairs.

*José Comblin*

The first representative work we examine is José Comblin’s *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*. Writing his pneumatology from a liberationist’s perspective, Comblin argues powerfully for the transformative work of the Spirit in Christian discipleship. “The holiness of the Spirit is found in the renunciation of the powers of this world,” he writes;39 later he says that “[t]he Spirit creates the liberating praxis that follows the lines laid down by Christ.”40 Rather beautifully, *ascesis* is redefined in terms of solidarity with the poor, for “sharing the lives of the poor will implacably [mortify the passions]… Sharing the lives of the poor is a mortification of the body… [that] requires patience and perseverance equal to the exercises set by the anchorites of old.”41 Comblin identifies this *ascesis* as a work of the Spirit.

Comblin is not completely silent regarding the place of the Spirit in the Triune life, but most of his chapter on this topic is a review of historical theology, including a brief summary of two names for the Spirit, love and gift. His comments on the Spirit’s

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39 Comblin, 101.
40 Comblin, 156.
41 Comblin, 135.
person in other places are concerned with knowledge of the Spirit’s person in this world and not with the Spirit’s place in the Triune life per se. Even his brief section on the *Filioque* is more concerned with overcoming ecumenical divisions than with any real resolution of the theological problem.

The advantage of this approach is that Comblin unites the work of the Spirit with human agency and community life. He celebrates the “practical” pneumatologies of various movements that he describes as being “of the poor” and against the strictures of hierarchy, particularly such movements of the middle ages. His account of the Spirit recognizes that the Spirit does not remain indifferent to human encounters with the principalities and powers of this world, no matter what form they take.

Unfortunately, however, in Comblin’s picture of the Holy Spirit the horizon has all but disappeared. There is a materialism at play in Comblin’s theology, and he does not shy away from it. He writes that “there is no separation between the experience of acting and the experience of the Spirit who acts, between experiencing the Spirit and experiencing ‘me’ and ‘us.’” In other words, “[e]xperiences of the Spirit cannot be separated from positive action.” Eventually, Comblin argues that “[s]piritualizing does

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42 Comblin’s brief insight, 86, on the Spirit as gift is work quoting: “The capitalist mentality sees everything in terms of property; so, if one talks of the ‘gift’ of the Spirit, we tend to see this as acquiring something… But in the Bible, ‘gift’ means a capacity to do something handed over: those who receive the Spirit are not acquiring a new property, but a new capacity for action.”
43 E.g., Comblin, 37-38, notes the appeal of Joachim of Fiore “touched the aspiration of many Christians, unconvinced by the apparatus of power adopted by the Church of Rome… in order to rule over Christendom.”
44 Comblin, 31.
45 Comblin, 20. Action is defined as “the full expression of the agents who perform it, the self-projection through which agents not only become conscious of themselves but actually constitute themselves as agents” (21). Faith becomes “dynamized life, overflowing with energy… that gives strength to the body itself, since people have faith with their bodies” (74).
not mean separating from matter, but transforming matter. A freer church is a more spiritual church; a more communitarian church is more spiritual; a church in which everyone speaks is more spiritual; a church that fights for life is more spiritual.” The problem is that Comblin’s spirituality is so grounded that it is never clear that there is anything more, or even anything else, to the Spirit’s work than liberating human praxis.

Michael Welker

We can trace a similar trajectory in Michael Welker’s *God the Spirit*. Welker is not a Latin American liberation theologian; his diatribes against Aristotelian anthropology and Hegelian spirituality are indicative of his German academic setting. Welker, however, is also concerned with human experience of the Spirit. A central theme of the book is Welker’s claim that biblically sound experiences of the Spirit “work against a cult of the indeterminate and numinous.”

Welker’s biblical exegesis is without a doubt the strongest element of his work. He is a keen reader of the Old Testament, especially, and ably enlists modern biblical scholarship to discuss developing perspectives on the Holy Spirit from the earliest writings on. Drawing on his exegetical work, he emphasizes the Spirit’s association with “people who find themselves in distress”; the ambiguity of the Spirit’s involvement with anti-hero types like Samson; the Spirit’s public activity, including the Messianic

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46 Comblin, 91.
48 Welker’s work with the Bible, however, demonstrates, unintentionally, the difference between biblical exegesis and Scriptural exegesis. There is very little sense in Welker’s *God the Spirit* that he is reading a shared communal text that has a tradition of interpretation and that requires the lens of the *regula fidei* in order to be understood rightly.
49 Welker, *God the Spirit*, 57.
hope for the extra-religious nature of human experience of the Spirit in terms of “justice and real righteousness for Israel and for the nations.” Turning to the New Testament, where his insights are less remarkable, Welker notes the liberating work of Jesus as the Spirit-filled man with respect and argues that Pentecost is an example of xenolalia, not glossolalia, an argument that allows him later to valorize faith and minimize the importance of ecstatic gifts. In all of this is threaded perhaps Welker’s greatest insight, namely that the work of the Spirit occurs in non-repeating patterns; there is almost a fractal nature to the work of the Spirit, according to his reading of the Bible.

Welker’s Biblicism parallels Comblin’s liberationism as the grounding force in his theology. Left untouched for most of the volume is the question “Who is the Spirit?” In the final chapter, Welker lays out some answers to this question. Here he recognizes “the specific selflessness of the Spirit of God… [as a] public personality.” Ultimately this means that “[i]f we are seeking for a clearly definable individual center of action of the Holy Spirit, if we are searching for personhood in this sense, we are referred to Jesus Christ in response to the question about the personhood of the Spirit.” The trouble with Welker’s position is that the Spirit never seems to be anything more than God’s invisible, heuristic public persona, a persona always in danger of collapsing into full identification with the Son.

50 Welker, God the Spirit, 116.
51 Fractal is my word, not Welker’s.
52 Welker, God the Spirit, 295-296. Emphasis original.
53 Welker, God the Spirit, 312.
Eugene F. Rogers, Jr.

Given Eugene F. Rogers’s fondness for the language of excess, including him as a representative of pneumatology’s recent materialist reduction might seem unfair. In fact, however, it is the presence of the language of superabundance in Rogers’s work that highlights the strange way in which even excess can be compatible with materialist approaches to the Holy Spirit.

Rogers begins his work with the standard trope about the lack of recognition “'accorded the Holy Spirit in modern Christian thought.”54 What makes Rogers stand out among others who share this trope, however, is that he attributes the problem specifically to the modern guild; he is far more sanguine about the place of the Spirit in the church’s (especially the Eastern church’s) historic teaching and practice. Rogers locates the problem specifically in Karl Barth, whom he accuses of rendering the Spirit “superfluous.”55 But Rogers does not reject Barth. In charging Barth with making the Spirit superfluous, Rogers introduces linguistic tension. For him, superfluous can have positive and negative connotations. In Barth’s case, the word is negative because, as Rogers understands him, Barth has so closely identified the Spirit with Christ as to reduce the Spirit to Christ completely. Having criticized Barth for making the Spirit superfluous with respect to the Son, Rogers argues that the Spirit in fact is superfluous—if only in the strict philosophical language of necessity.56 The Spirit demonstrates the superabundance

54 Rogers, After the Spirit, 1.
55 Rogers, After the Spirit, 20.
56 The problem, of course, is the word “superfluous.” Rogers’s approach is skimpy, involving facile readings of economics in Piers Plowman, Boethius, and Bulgakov. Perhaps the biggest issue is his linking “gift” with superfluity. If, for example, he had read Bulgakov more thoroughly, he might have noticed that
of God’s grace. Further still, Rogers grounds this superabundance, albeit briefly, in the life of the Triune God. He suggests the “Spirit rests on and illuminates the Son” as a way to “[narrate] an inner-trinitarian movement that can accommodate or explain… [why some] put the Spirit last… [and] why the Son gets talked about rather than the Spirit” in theology from the past hundred years.57

Rogers’s insight that the “Spirit rests on and illuminates the Son” is a thought-provoking phrase, teeming with possibility for an understanding of the Spirit’s distinct yet cooperative mission. It seems, however, that one could have the phrase “Spirit rests on and illuminates the Son” without a strong commitment to superfluity, and that is more or less true for Rogers. What is far more essential to him than superfluity is the materiality of the Spirit. Rogers takes a narrative approach, which relies, happily, on events in the life of Christ (although, rather frustratingly, not in their proper narrative order): resurrection, annunciation, baptism, transfiguration, ascension and Pentecost.58

Rogers argues that “to think about the Spirit you have to think materially,” which for him means closely allying theology with cultural anthropology.59 He writes about the

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Bulgakov consistently holds that in God there is no difference between freedom and necessity because God is love; therefore, nothing in God, including God’s gifts and God’s Gift, can be superfluous because, strictly speaking, it is completely necessary even as it is completely free. Rogers cites Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter,* but he should also have looked to *idem.,* *The Bride of the Lamb* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001).


58 Perhaps oddest here is the relatively little attention Rogers gives to the Ascension and Pentecost. He attributes this to a fear that with Pentecost “the Spirit seems to float free of the New Testament narratives about Jesus” (200). Pentecost, however, is not what happens after the Spirit has completed his work in the earthly ministry of Christ; Pentecost is the completion of the Spirit’s work in the earthly life of the Son. If we want to speak of “after the Spirit,” we must speak of “after Pentecost.” This, in turn, leads to a larger problem with Rogers’s narrative approach. If the Spirit is the kind of Person who can be known narratively, about whom a history can be written, then where is the Old Testament? Where is the life of the Spirit in Acts? In the church’s tradition?

59 Rogers, *After the Spirit,* 56; on cultural anthropology, see 55, 58.

185
Spirit “befriending” matter, an activity of the Spirit eminently on display in the Spirit’s resting, or alighting, on the Son. The difficulty is not with these pregnant phrases, nor with Rogers’s idiosyncratic approach, nor even with his sometimes less-than-satisfying exegesis of the New Testament texts. The problem is that, even with his sensitivity to “the inner life of the Trinity,” a sensitivity that certainly exceeds that of either Comblin or Welker, Rogers still offers a portrait of the Spirit that is almost exhaustively immanent to the created order.

Immanence and transcendence

I have neither the need nor the inclination to quibble with the judgment, represented in the works of Comblin, Welker, and Rogers, that the study of the Holy Spirit requires this-worldly considerations. As Rogers says, the Spirit befriends matter. The Holy Spirit is not an enemy of the body, nor does Christian spirituality (let alone Christian hope, for which the Spirit, according to Paul, is a down payment) mean an escape from our bodies. When theologians underscore the importance of embodied existence to pneumatology, they do Christian theology a service.

But we must ask, “Is there nothing more?” For Comblin, if liberating praxis is characteristic of the Spirit’s work, is the Spirit’s work, even the Spirit’s existence, dependent on human need? For Welker, might we somehow connect the Spirit’s disempowering work in the Old Testament with the kenosis of the Son in Philippians 2? For Rogers, can we not also contemplate bodies iconically, seeing through them to the eternal Spirit of Truth? In sum, need an emphasis on embodiment come at the expense of

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60 Rogers, After the Spirit, 61.
consideration of and awe for divine transcendence? That seems too high a price to me, for it suggests that creaturely bodies not only form a key *locus* of Christian theology but also theology’s *telos*.

Just as importantly, the work I have done with Augustine and Wesley in previous chapters suggests that it is a completely unnecessary price. Calling the Spirit the Love of God concerns more than just human experience of the divine presence; that is as true for Wesley as it is for Augustine. Rather, the Spirit is the one who beckons us to contemplate our true end, to find happiness in the Triune Lord whom, by the power of the Spirit, we see now by faith. At the same time, of course, because Wesley and Augustine realize that we can only offer to others what we ourselves have been given, the Spirit is also the necessary condition for our true love of neighbor. The Spirit as the Love of God invites us simultaneously to consider divine immanence and divine transcendence.

In the closing section of this chapter, I lay out how understanding the Spirit as the Love of God can help us overcome the deficit of concern for divine transcendence *without* requiring us to give up immanent concerns. I do so by returning to the Scriptural language of divine desire discussed above in order to show how the Love of God can render this speech clearer and more coherent.

**Divine Desire and the Love of God**

*Preliminary matters*

Human desire is not identical with human love. For both Augustine and Wesley, desire and love are related concepts, but they are not directly equivalent. Human desire is stimulated by lack: the lack of some object provokes in human beings the desire for that
object, be it another person, an item of great value, or even some meaningless tchotchke. Human desire is frequently unreasonable; frequently, the more we try to give an account for why we want something, the hollower our desires sound. Love has this in common with desire: even the purest poetry falls short of communicating why we love our beloved. Love, however, is a movement toward another; desire is a motivation. We can desire something without any action; the same cannot be said of love. And desire can compel us to commit acts that are genuinely unloving: hoarding, theft, and, all too often, even violence; desire has the potential to motivate more than just love. Love, on the other hand, is, in our fallen state, also has the destructive potential as the love of consumption and idolatry instead of the properly ordered love of consummation.

Human love is grounded in and a response to the love of God. “We love because he first loved us,” says John in his first epistle (1 John 4:19). We love responsively, not proactively. God’s love for us is the basis for our love for each other as well as for our love for God. Moreover, the response is not to some vague concept that God is loving or to some human projection of concepts of love onto the divine being. Our response is to the Love of God himself, the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in creation is the work of the Love of God, and it is to this Love, supremely and definitively found in the face of the incarnate Son of God, that we respond.

If human love is different from human desire, however, must this difference also be grounded in God? If we say yes, then we appear to be in conflict with classic Christian teachings on the doctrine of God. God is simple and cannot be divided into parts; God is actus purus. Both of these affirmations are ways of saying as strongly as possible, God is
love. A no answer, on the other hand, requires nuance if it is not to imply that divine desire is stimulated by lack, just as human desire is.

To return to the Scripture passages from earlier in this chapter, another way of framing this question is to ask of such passages, “Is the language of divine desire and human desire univocal, equivocal, or analogical?” Does the language of divine desire imply that God desires in the same way that human beings desire (i.e., either in that love is not the same thing as desire or that desire is stimulated by lack)? Does it instead imply that God desires in such a very different way that we must judge all such language purely heuristic? Or can we find a middle path?

Scripture itself does not provide answers to these questions; answering them requires submission to Christian catechesis in order to make and to recognize right judgments. I have already argued that calling the Holy Spirit the Love of God has a catechizing effect, and I have placed this dissertation under the tutelage of those who would so teach us. Naming the Holy Spirit Love, and being conditioned in our understanding of that name by Augustine and Wesley, allows us to affirm a middle path.

Divine desire is a work of the Love of God. The Scriptural language of divine desire, and our colloquial usage of the same, is language that is proper to the Holy Spirit’s prevenient work as the Love of God in the created order. Like human desire, therefore, divine desire is a condition for divine Love in the fullest sense; God’s desiring anticipates the consummation of God’s love in the created order. Unlike human desire, however, divine desire is initiating, not responsive; because divine desire is Love at work
preveniently, Love (not lack) is also the necessary and sufficient condition for God’s desire.

The claim that the Holy Spirit as the Love of God gives meaning to our language of divine desire requires, as I have said, catechesis. I also believe, however, that this claim allows us to make coherent, systematic connections that themselves may be appealing even to those who have not been so catechized or who are still skeptical of the claims made here, either my own or those of Augustine or Wesley. I offer three sets of connections that are given beauty by introducing to them the Holy Spirit as Love. The first set is among the various Scriptural passages on God’s desire that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The second set, responding to the works of Comblin, Welker, and Rogers, is between the Holy Spirit and the material created world. The third set is between the economic and immanent Trinity.

*Searching the Scriptures for the Love of God*

One of the means of grace John Wesley identified for his Methodists was “searching the Scriptures,” suggesting that the reading of Scripture God blesses is hardly disinterested—we are, after all, to be looking for something. As Augustine suggests in *De doctrina christiana*, what we are to seek in Scripture is love, for God and for neighbor. Neither Wesley nor Augustine intended the particular application of this advice to the Holy Spirit, but it seems fitting to suggest that when we search the Scriptures for love we are also searching for the Holy Spirit. Here I apply that suggestion to the texts discussed above. Rather than tediously reevaluating each of those passages individually, however, I will approach them according to the major themes identified in common among them.
The first of these themes grouped together Scripture passages that speak of God’s desire in terms of divine aseity. These passages affirm that God will accomplish whatever it is that God desires; in some cases, they actually equate God’s desire with divine accomplishment. God’s will is not some weaker aspect of divinity. This way of speaking of divine desire is perhaps the most congruent with the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit as Love. There is a clear sense in these passages that God’s desire anticipates, and is not responsive to, human desire. As both Job and James recognize, God’s desire is humbling for human beings convinced that the universe should orbit our wants. In Augustine’s analysis, making our desires more important than God’s is destructive to ourselves and our neighbors; for Wesley, doing so sends us down the path of idolatry. When the Love of God is central, however, our own desires are reoriented according to the divine desire. Furthermore, as the Love of God, the Spirit is vivifying and fructifying. Both Augustine and Wesley share the Scriptural expectation that God’s very presence in itself accomplishes God’s purposes.

Similarly, the Love of God helps us understand why, despite God’s aseity even in his desires, God should desire certain forms of worship. Although God’s desire is Love’s prevenient work, Love expects a human response. The Holy Spirit is not sent into the world for God’s own benefit but for the benefit of God’s creation. To say that God desires certain worship practices is to say that God’s Love is already at work in practices of justice, care for the poor, and purity of heart. Human beings do not need to develop these practices of their own accord; we need to participate in the life of God that makes such practices comprehensible as worship in the first place. We see this especially in
Jesus’ desire “to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15b), a moment of deep Trinitarian significance. Although the Spirit is unmentioned in this passage, Jesus’ expression is clearly also one of love for his disciples. This love leads him to “this Passover,” which refers not only to the meal celebrating God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt but also to the coming Passover of Christ’s suffering. The love with which Christ desires to eat with his disciples is prevenient: it transforms the meal into something new (Holy Communion) even before the event of Christ’s passion truly begins. More than that, it is offered to all his disciples equally, from those who will abandon Christ to the one who will betray him. Christ gives the meal to his disciples as if they were his friends, but his offering is proleptic—just as the Spirit’s Love transforms relationships with our enemies into proleptic friendships. Christ’s desire for this meal is Love’s moving ahead in anticipation of the disciples’ responsive participation.

In Scripture, God’s desire above all else is for Israel. The particularity of this desire is scandalous, even in Scripture, which recognizes that other nations, at face value, are lovelier and more desirable. In his relationship with Israel God is often a jilted lover, abandoned in favor of lesser gods and sinful ways. Israel’s rejection neither exhausts nor stimulates God’s desire, which patiently awaits Israel’s fidelity even in the darkest of circumstances. Even in human beings such a desire could only survive if it were also love. For God, Love precedes the return of love from the beloved. As Augustine and Wesley argue, Love particularizes, calling to those with ears to hear to respond faithfully. Love’s particularization, even of Israel, is not a private affair, is not an isolating
individualization. God’s desire for Israel makes Israel lovely beyond all others; Israel’s face shines with the glory of God, and that glory is God’s Love.

In all these Scripture passages, God’s desire is integral to the *missio Dei*, the sending of the Holy Spirit and of the Son into the world for the sake of the world. God’s desire is prevenient Love, which is not to say that Love is restricted to God’s desire, any more than God’s grace is only prevenient. In many other places in Scripture, Love finds fulfillment and return, even if the completion of this participatory cycle is found only at the eschaton.

*The Love of God and contemporary pneumatology*

God’s desire is never divorced from God’s concern for the material creation: God’s desire is for social justice, for fruitfulness of barren wombs, for the particular people of Israel, and even for the craggy rocks of Mount Zion. God’s Love is wrapped up in the material existence of this world. So we can affirm with Comblin, Welker, Rogers, and the many other writers of recent decades that thinking about the Holy Spirit requires us to consider the material, and not just the spiritual, aspects of creation.

Not only that, we can insist that God’s desire for creation includes a desire for our transformation through the participation offered by God’s Love. As Rogers says, the Spirit befriends matter. Integral to the notion of friendship, however, is the expectation that friends will become more and more like each other over time.61 This expectation is

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grounded in the Spirit’s prevenient work, which we encounter as God’s desire. From the moment of creation, when the Spirit hovered over the waters (Gen 1:1), the Spirit has been befriending creation, wooing us into God’s likeness. Even before the fall, the conditions for the Incarnation were already established because the Spirit as the Love of God was preveniently expressing God’s desire for creation, a desire to be consummated in God’s Incarnation and humanity’s divinization.⁶²

In this initial befriending of creation, the Spirit also prefigures the disempowerment Welker identifies as part of the Spirit’s work in the Old Testament. God, who created time, works in, through, and with time.⁶³ The consummation is neither spontaneous nor automatic. The Spirit further yields to human agency, emptying himself of the fullness of his power that would otherwise overrun and destroy any creaturely will.⁶⁴ The transformation enabled by the Spirit’s loving friendship with creation happens over time. In the face of sin, God’s desire does not change, any more than the Spirit could cease to be Love, but the creaturely reception of this desire—Love is dramatically altered. As Comblin rightly points out, sin (not God) limits human agency. Above all, we find ourselves constrained to respond adequately to the Love God offers us. Systems and structures that contribute to this baleful situation are therefore contrary to the desires of

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⁶² Clearly the Spirit’s work as the Love of God, both prevenient and otherwise, includes but also extends beyond the traditional concept of sanctification.
⁶⁴ A helpful discussion (so long as one can get through the various references to Sophia) of the Spirit’s self-emptying, and of its necessity, is found in Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 219-227.
God; their elimination is justly understood as activity consistent with and attributable to the Love of God.

And yet. Divine desire is but one aspect of the Love of God. The Spirit is not reduced, even in creation, to our encounters with God’s desire, or to the Spirit’s prevenient work of Love. Every revelation of God’s love is also a manifestation of the Love of God. God’s Love challenges us to redirect our loves toward God. God’s Love insists that we can find no real happiness in loving creatures apart from God. God’s Love transforms our consuming love into consummating love. The Holy Spirit transforms all of creation, not just the glaringly obvious fallen bits. Even—and perhaps especially—in the Spirit’s most material involvement in creation, the Spirit also reveals to us the essential Triune truth: there is still more. There is more to what binds us to our neighbors than our shared concerns for well-being and justice. There is more that binds us to God than the physical elements of the sacraments themselves. The Spirit’s ever-present presence does not mean that all there is to know or say about God can be said with reference to the created order. There is still more, for the Love of God flows out from the eternal Source as surely as blood and water flowed from Christ’s pierced side. The Love of God beckons us to discover still more; the Holy Spirit summons us to drink from the plenty of God’s desire, to contemplate the Love of God in the life of the Trinity.

_Sounding the depths of the Trinity for the Love of God_

Recognizing that God’s desire, whether for right worship or for Israel, is God’s Love at work preveniently leads us to acknowledge that there is still more to God’s Love; after all, even in our human encounters with Love are hardly limited to the class of desire.
The Spirit is also identifiable as Love in our love for God and neighbor, in the assurance that we are adopted children of God through Christ, and in the healing of our loves and desires. Every time our own loves fall short is a reminder that the Spirit could still be Love for us more fully.

At the beginning of this chapter I noted that according to Rahner’s axiom (the economic Trinity is the immanent and vice versa) all economic activity of the Triune God is grounded in the immanent life of God. This does not mean that we can simply read the immanent Trinity off accounts of the economic activity, even off the pages of Scripture itself. Rather, we must probe the economic activity in order to consider carefully how God’s creating and saving work in creation might signal some truth about who God is in Godself. Only then can we begin to sound the depths of the Trinity.

In the case of divine desire, there are some elements that hold for God’s Love in this world that do not hold beyond it. To speak of God loving preveniently is to say that God submits, kenotically, to created time; there is no prevenient Love where there is no time. In this sense, and in this sense alone, God’s desire for creatures will come to an end. Along the same lines, the eschatological expectation of fulfillment and the possibility of Love’s rejection by human agents cannot be true of God’s immanent life. This does not mean, however, that we need to abandon all language of divine desire.

As desire, the movement of the Spirit into the world, sent by the Father, is the basis and realization of a complicated relationship between God and creation. That relationship is difficult to categorize, for it has characteristics of intra-human

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65 I am grateful to Paul Griffiths for helping me see the importance of making this point explicit.
relationships that we often do not mix together. God’s Love befriends us but also requires the service we might offer a ruler or patron. God’s Love seeks to adopt us but also to cohabitate with us as lovers do. God’s Love makes other nations jealous of Israel in order that they may also participate in God’s Love for Israel. God’s Love is a gift that seeks to be returned in order that it might make fruitful its recipient. No single human relationship comprehends God’s Love.

Calling the Holy Spirit Love allows us to affirm that this complexity is also characteristic of the Godhead. The Father’s Love for the Son embraces the Son as a parent’s love ought, but that same Love also woos the Son into the Father’s bosom. The Son returns the Father’s Love by offering to the Father his church, whom the Father returns to the Son as the Son’s bridegroom who is also, through adoption, kin to the Son. The Father’s Love for the Son comprehends and exceeds all possible loving human relationships.

As divine desire, God’s Love is also properly the object of our desires and love. God’s desire of Israel makes Israel desirable; all nations should yearn to be desired by God in the transforming way God desires Israel. In other words, human longing should be for God’s Love as desire as well as for God’s Love in beatific joy of consummation. Calling the Spirit Love allows to affirm that this, too, is grounded in the life of God. The Son pursues the Father’s Love; he desires it with the ardent zeal of an impassioned lover yet also with the peaceful rest of a child at home. The Father guards jealously the Love of the Son by sending Love into the world to the delight of all creation. The Son’s Love for the Father is lovely to the Son, as the Father’s Love for the Son is lovely to the Father.
Finally, as God’s desire in the world, the Spirit seeks out creation’s doxological love for the Father through and with the Son. Loving in the Spirit means loving the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit is Love, by our love for the Trinity in the Spirit we can sound the depths of the Spirit’s Love for the Father and the Son. The Spirit loves the Father and the Son neither as Source, though the Spirit is the Love by which the Father loves the Son, nor as Recipient, though the Spirit is loved by the Father and the Son. In loving the Father and the Son the Spirit offers what the Spirit is: the very gift of Love.

We encounter the Holy Spirit in God’s desires as the Love of God working preveniently. While some aspects of the Spirit’s desiring activity are ephemeral, others are grounded in the very life of God. Naming the Holy Spirit as Love allows us to speak of God’s desire with greater coherence and in systematic continuity with Christian theology more broadly. Love connects our understanding of what the Spirit does in creation with who the Spirit is in the Trinity, sacrificing neither concerns for the material order nor appropriate reserve for the ways God transcends our every understanding. The Spirit is not reducible to human experience, to the work of creation and salvation in the world, or to a materialism that makes embodied existence the telos of theological engagement and reflection. The Spirit is the Love of God who befriends matter in order to transform it, to bring it closer to God even while bringing God closer to us. The archetypal work of the Spirit, then, is the Incarnation of the Son (Luke 1:35). It should not surprise us that the manifestation of the Son of God in human form, God’s most intimate relationship with material existence, would also include the revelation of the
Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity. In the Son’s Incarnation Love’s immanence and transcendence to us are made known at once, for just there is always still more to Jesus Christ, God with us, there is always still more to Christ’s Love. The economic Trinity is but a foretaste of the eternal mystery of the Triune Lord.

**Conclusion: The Bond of Love**

In this chapter I have drawn on the exegesis and synthesis of Augustine and John Wesley’s sermons on the 1 John, sermons that make vital the connection between the Holy Spirit and the Love of God, in order to address systematically a question that preoccupied neither theologian. Not only have I used the name Love, which I owe to Augustine and Wesley. I have also followed them in certain aspects of their method and assumptions: that Christian theology depends on Scripture; that reading Scripture well requires catechesis; that God is who God is revealed to be in Scripture—and yet is also so much more; and that Christian systematic theology should be, as A.N. Williams argues explicitly, a prelude to contemplation.

The work here demonstrates the ongoing significance of Augustine and Wesley’s insights for contemporary systematic theology. Christian systematic theology functions by examining the various nodes (*loci*) of Christian theology and their interwoven connections, believing that whatever coherence might be found in them reflects and participates in, sometimes feebly, sometimes fetchingly, the God-given ordering of the cosmos. As the Love of God, the Holy Spirit is one such node but also binds other nodes, including embodied creaturely existence, divine desire, and the economic/immanent
Trinity. These connections give us ways to understand and speak of these nodes and their connections that are both fresh and resonant with the deep Christian tradition.

If, however, we are to be faithful to the homiletical context in which Augustine and Wesley’s insights arise, we cannot leave matters here. As I have eagerly sought to demonstrate, the fact that Augustine and Wesley offer keen theological perspectives in the form of sermons should be to their credit, not held against them. Their aim in the sermons, however, was always also to spur their congregations and audiences to respond faithfully to the work of the Spirit they extolled. In keeping with this goal, I employ an exitus-reditus pattern in these final chapters. From the depths of the divine Being the Spirit flows forth into our world as the Love of God, enabling our participatory return. Befriending and transforming the material order, the Spirit invites us in the initiatory rites of baptism, anointing/chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist to begin the transforming process of having our loves and desires reoriented according to the Love of God. The work of the present chapter provides the systematic underpinnings for our second foray into contemporary theology, a consideration of how the Love of God might shape our comprehension and practice of these initiatory sacraments, as well as the possibility for Christian renewal following postbaptismal sin. This theological approach to Christian practices of initiation is the subject of the following, final chapter.
Chapter Five

Introduction

One of the major themes of this dissertation is that the insights of Augustine and Wesley concerning the Holy Spirit are not just matters of historical theology. They offer vibrant and potentially fruitful material for contemporary systematic theology. In the previous chapter I demonstrated how their insights could enrich our theology of divine desire. In this final chapter, I consider their significance for a theology of Christian initiation. As in chapter four, I do this not by rehashing Augustine and Wesley’s finer points but by building my own constructive proposals, based upon the synthesis of Augustine and Wesley’s approach completed in chapter three.

At first blush a theology of Christian initiation might appear as a digression, but Christian practices have never been far from the heart of the present dissertation. Indeed, one particular Christian practice has dominated so far: preaching. I began the first chapter by suggesting that the genre (sermons) and context (a post-Easter congregation that would have included newly baptized among the faithful) of Augustine’s Homilies are essential aspects of the Homilies, rather than negative elements to be ignored or downplayed. Similarly, in chapter two I argued that John Wesley’s sermons are relevant to contemporary systematic theology, and I commended the recent work of Sarah Coakley and A.N. Williams in order to cultivate a different approach to drawing on those sermons. Throughout the dissertation I have contended that their sermonic output makes Wesley and Augustine compatible Christian theologians, even if their compatibility has
been overlooked. Not only that, the contexts of their sermons are not as different as they might seem, and it is common elements of their contexts that provide the launch pad for this chapter’s theology of Christian initiation.

On the surface, Augustine and Wesley preach to very different audiences. Augustine’s audience in the *Homilies* is his congregation in Hippo; many (though certainly not all) would have been regular attenders, accustomed to his preaching. More to the point, as I have discussed at length in chapter one, Augustine’s congregation would have included recent baptizands who had gone through Lenten catechesis and been baptized perhaps just a day or two before Augustine preached the first of the *Homilies*. Wesley, on the other hand, did not have a regular congregation, and, even if he did, the sermons we examined in chapter were spread over enough time that few would have heard them all. Wesley also does not make baptism a central component of his preaching anywhere, yet that is essential to Augustine’s *Homilies*. Still, I believe the two preachers share a common concern—not for baptism, *per se*, but for Christian initiation. Also, with both theologians there is a complex understanding of Christian initiation that depends on the work of the Holy Spirit and is not reducible to one specific rite. For Augustine, this means both exhorting his congregation to complete their baptisms through a life of love and calling duly baptized Donatists to enter into the Spirit-filled life of the church so that their lives might participate in the loving unity the Spirit gives. For John Wesley, it means preaching to audiences filled with people who would have been baptized while highlighting the significance of disruptive postbaptismal encounters with the Holy Spirit.
that characterize the new birth—without ever rejecting the baptismal foundation of
followers of Jesus. For both Augustine and Wesley, a complex understanding of Christian
initiation also means grappling with the reality of postbaptismal sin in even the most
faithful of Christians.

My approach in the rest of this chapter is as a systematic theologian for whom
liturgical practices are a key node, not as a liturgical scholar. Drawing on the work of the
previous chapters, especially the constructive theological work of chapter four, this
second foray into contemporary theology mines the Augustinian-Wesleyan idea of the
Holy Spirit as God’s Love for a coherent theology of Christian initiation that emphasizes
the work of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God in a series of liturgical practices and also
in profound encounters with the Holy Spirit outside regular ritual practices, as well as in
the ongoing need for healing and transformation from the reality of postbaptismal sin. My
thesis is that in the rites of Christian initiation God in the Holy Spirit heals and redirects
human desires; in these rites the Spirit habituates initiates to a pattern of Christian living
that extends far beyond initiation in which excitation stimulated by the inexhaustible
Love of God gradually replaces lack as the source of their desire for God and as the
foundation of their love for their neighbor.\footnote{As an aside, I do wish to note a similar pursuit in Christology, Jan-Olav Henriksen, \textit{Desire, Gift, and Recognition: Christology and Postmodern Philosophy} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub.
Co., 2009). Henriksen, 28, discussing faith in God with respect to desire, argues that

\textit{W}hen you believe in God, you desire to be in relationship with God… However, I think that…
we cannot and should not talk about this desire as resulting from either \textit{lack} or \textit{need}… To define
God’s importance to us in terms of how God fulfills our needs is to make God a smaller god…
That does not mean that God does not give us something. He gives us what we need, and also

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In what follows I first note briefly certain trends in liturgical studies. I then continue with a theology of Christian initiation, considering baptism, anointing/chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist, as well as the problem of postbaptismal sin. In light of this proposed theology I then address contemporary Christian practices that dissociate baptism and Eucharist and thereby challenge the proposed theology.

**Liturgical Studies and Christian Initiation**

Contemporary liturgical studies have been marked by a longstanding interest in Christian initiation. Among many recent scholars, Maxwell E. Johnson has been especially diligent in his exploration of Christian rites of initiation. His textbook on *The Rites of Christian Initiation* covers a broad swath of Christian liturgical history, from the pre-Nicene setting through the Reformation and into the present day. Johnson has also co-edited *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, an important collection of essays from various

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something of what we lack, long before we believe in God. But God’s function as gifting is never restricted to our lack—he transcends it in principle.

Hence, a desire based solely on our conception of needs and lack is a desire not fitting for understanding what kind of desire is involved in true faith.

Where I differ from Henriksen, at least on this point, is in the implication that for him this desire not based on lack seems to be intrinsic to human existence even in our fallen state; whereas I am arguing that the replacement of lack as the source of desire for God is itself also a gift—the gift of the Holy Spirit, who seems to go unmentioned by Henriksen. Henriksen has also co-edited a more recent volume, Jan-Olav Henriksen and F. LeRon Shults, *Saving Desire: The Seduction of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011).

2 Despite the work of Geoffrey Wainwright and those who followed him, systematic theology often is ignorant of developments in liturgical scholarship. I cannot do justice to all the debates and developments in the field in this short section, but I do hope at least to acknowledge its contours.

In both books, what stands out, in Johnson’s writing and in the writings of the other scholars of Living Water, Sealing Spirit, is the plural: the Christian rites, not rite, of initiation. These rites include baptism, of course, but also anointing with oil or chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist. Another key emphasis in these works is on catechesis before initiation is complete and mystagogy upon the completion of the rites.

Johnson’s work, along with the efforts of liturgical scholars including Paul Bradshaw, Aidan Kavanagh, and Gabriele Winkler, has contributed substantially to our understanding of early Christian practices. Moreover, the scholarly interest in the Christian past has fueled debates about contemporary issues, especially concerning confirmation, prompting questions about when to do it, what it means, whether it is a sacrament, and even whether to do it at all. Still, the necessary focus in liturgical studies on the ordo of Christian worship practices and on the content of the rites themselves has come, sometimes, at the expense of broader theological awareness and context. The implications of the wealth of systematic theology for understanding liturgical practices have often gone unexamined. Furthermore, in some cases, liturgical scholars have tended

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to depict the importance of liturgical practices for Christian theology in overly deterministic ways.\(^8\)

Nonetheless, in this chapter I do endorse the kind of liturgically progressive nature of Christian initiation suggested by the work of scholars like Maxwell Johnson. A more complex understanding of Christian initiation remains needed, for despite the efforts of these scholars and of various persons interested in liturgical reform for the last century or more, there is still a functional tendency in current Christian practices (and theology) to associate Christian initiation primarily, if not exclusively, with baptism.\(^9\) These practices also seem to undermine notions of the Eucharist as the culminating moment of Christian initiation.

**Christian Initiation and the Love of God**

In this section, I propose a theology of Christian initiation that draws on the insights of Augustine and John Wesley with respect to the Holy Spirit. Relying on the insight that the Holy Spirit is the Love of God, this proposed theology seeks to illumine two aspects of Christian initiation: first, the progressive Christian rites of initiation, including baptism, anointing/chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist;\(^10\) and second, the...

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\(^8\) This is, of course, the question of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Maxwell Johnson’s position on this question is moderate; see his “Can We Avoid Relativism in Worship? Liturgical Norms in the Light of Contemporary Liturgical Scholarship.” *Worship* 74 (2000): 135-155. By “some cases” I have in mind Schmemann, Kavanagh, and Lathrop.

\(^9\) This is true, I would suggest, even for those Christians who reject water baptism as a sufficient or even necessary rite of Christian initiation; the implication of such (admittedly extreme) positions is that one isolated event of initiation (whether a transformational personal encounter with God or speaking in tongues, etc.) supplants an isolated rite of initiation (baptism).

\(^10\) I recognize that this progressive sequence both is somewhat artificial and would have been foreign to John Wesley. It is not my intention to prejudice the chapter in favor of a possible ancient series of initiatory rites or to create an ideal that will never be realized in ecclesial life. Rather, I believe that considering the
problem of postbaptismal sin. What follows below is not intended to be a comprehensive theology of all aspects of Christian initiation, nor is it an exhaustive approach to any one of the rites to be discussed. Pneumatology is a complementary field of systematic theology; in particular, when attention paid to the Holy Spirit comes as a means of replacing or escaping central Christological emphases, something has gone wrong in the approach.

In the rites of Christian initiation God in the Holy Spirit heals and redirects our human desires; in these rites the Spirit habituates us to a pattern of Christian living that extends far beyond initiation in which excitation stimulated by the inexhaustible Love of God gradually replaces lack as the source of our desire for God. The Holy Spirit, whom we encounter in God’s prevenient grace as God’s desire for us, invites us into God’s participatory salvation, a spiraling cycle described so well by John Wesley in “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” in which we receive the Holy Spirit as God’s Love for us and respond by returning that Love in doxology for God and charity for our neighbors. The peace, joy, and unity that characterize this salvation are the marks of real happiness. The intimacy with God and neighbor enabled by this Love of God is the intimacy of reconciled friendship.

rites in this sequence best underscores the work of the Holy Spirit as Love in habituating the Christian initiate to a mode of desiring God based on the fullness of Love given at baptism and consummated at Eucharist. I also am convinced that considering a broader set of rites between baptism and Eucharist keeps the focus on what the Holy Spirit is doing and mitigates against a tendency in some approaches to the Holy Spirit in Christian initiation to become preoccupied with pinpointing the moment of reception of the Spirit.
I elucidate this basic argument in two stages. First, I consider the healing and redirecting work of the Holy Spirit in the rites of Christian initiation, examining baptism, anointing/chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist through the lens of the Love of God. Second, I grapple with the problem of postbaptismal sin and suggest ordinary and extraordinary means of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin that follows Christian initiation.

In addition to the work of the four preceding chapters, especially the synthetic work of chapter three and the first foray into contemporary theology of chapter four, I also allow three axioms to shape the theology I present below. The first of these axioms is that the Triune God is at work in the church’s rites of initiation. There has been a welcome renewal of emphasis on God as the primary actor in, particularly, the church’s sacraments.\footnote{One of the gifts of the East-West Christian rapprochement of the past century, a thawing of relationships still (one hopes) in the early stages, has been a renewed emphasis on the understanding that it is God, not human beings, who is the primary actor in the liturgy. This renewed emphasis has shaped diverse works from writers of Western origins, notably including William T. Cavanaugh, \textit{Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ} (Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) and Edward Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God} (London: Sheed and Ward, 1977).}

This emphasis has tended to fall, quite naturally, on Christ as the one who invites, consecrates, and administers the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, and so on. By stressing that all Persons of the Trinity operate in the rites of initiation, I do not want to downplay the importance of Christ’s actions (Trinitarian theology, of course, is of necessity Christological). Rather, I simply intend to bear in mind another fairly recent development in liturgical theology and practice, the recovery of the \textit{epiclesis} as a crucial element in the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as the Augustinian position that the works of the Trinity \textit{ad extra} are undivided.
The second, perhaps more controversial axiom I bring to bear here is that the purpose of the rites of initiation is *theosis*, or divinization. Once a concept that seemed confined to the Orthodox Church, divinization theology recently has become a locus of discussion and debate in much wider circles, from biblical studies to discussion among Reformed theologians. I have already mentioned that becoming like God is part of both Augustine and Wesley’s approach to the Holy Spirit as the Love of God.\(^\text{12}\) Since *theosis* is, for them and for me, inherent to God’s work of salvation, I operate under the principle that the rites of Christian initiation, which are for our salvation, likewise include divinization as an essential component.

Third, the rites of Christian initiation are for the healing of the whole human person. Scripture’s witness is that sin affects the whole of human existence, from the disordering of our loves to the death of our bodies. Similarly, I have discussed at length the importance of John Wesley’s “holistic” soteriology in chapters two and three. Fully Christian rites of initiation, therefore, address the complete spectrum of sin’s effects. These rites include words of instruction and interrogation that guide the human intellect; prayers of confession that dispose the human soul properly toward God; water and oil that cleanse the body; human touch that binds strangers together; and even food and drink to nourish the faithful. These elements signify, among other things, both the divine

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\(^{12}\) One of the central claims of David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine’s Theology of Deification* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), is that deification is extremely important to Augustine’s theology and is not merely delayed to the eschaton: “For Augustine, the movement from sinner to saint is made real always through the visible Christian faith and always in communion with others” (xx).
concern for the whole of human existence and the human expectation that our salvation will mean the end of sin’s power wherever it has reigned.

With these three axioms in mind we may now turn to a pneumatologically-informed theology of the rites of Christian initiation.

*Christian initiation, human desire, and the Love of God*

The stories of Christian initiation in the New Testament are sufficiently numerous and diverse that it is difficult to know which, if any, are meant to be normative for the practices of the church.\(^{13}\) Is Jesus’ own baptism the form our baptisms are to take? What of the multitude baptized at Pentecost, or the Ethiopian Philip encounters, or the disciples Jesus calls but never baptizes? Perhaps the one person who comes closest to having a normative experience of Christian initiation is the one who actually presents his own life as a model for churches to follow: the Apostle Paul. The difficulty with Paul, however, is that his own telling of his coming to Christ contains, at best, only hints of the details contained in the dramatic conversion narrative of Acts 9.\(^{14}\) Despite this difficulty, Paul reveals his own understanding of his conversion with precise clarity in Philippians 3. Several aspects stand out as relevant for the present chapter: first, Paul, at the time of his

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\(^{13}\) I reiterate what I said in the preceding chapter: my placement of this Scriptural investigation, however brief, prior to my discussion of the theological matters is an intentional decision to be methodologically faithful to Augustine and John Wesley.

writing Philippians, calls himself one of those “who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:3); second, Paul, in hindsight, regards his past as “rubbish,” even though on the surface it seemed admirable (Philippians 3:8); third, among those parts of his past that Paul gives up is his “zeal” as “a persecutor of the church” (Philippians 3:6; cp. Galatians 1:14); and, fourth, Paul considers his initiation to be an introduction to a lifelong quest to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus... [who] will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself” (Philippians 3:14, 21). From Paul, then, we learn that Christian initiation has a doxological trajectory; that it marks the beginning of a new life that involves the abandonment of previous accomplishments; that desirous passion (“zeal”) must be redirected; and that Christian initiation is, to some degree, a lifelong process.

Of these, I want to draw our attention especially to the question of “zeal.” The implication of Philippians 3:6 seems to be that Paul abandons all zeal upon his reception into Christ’s body, but Paul’s other writings reveal otherwise. In fact, Paul uses the word “zeal” more than any other New Testament writer and is the only New Testament writer outside the gospels and Acts to use it. In some cases, as with Philippians 3:6, Paul employs the word negatively to describe a part of his past that has been abandoned. Other times, though, Paul endorses zeal as part of the Christian life.\(^\text{15}\) Read in the context of

\[^{15}\text{Romans 12:11: “Do not lag in \underline{zeal}, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord”; 2 Corinthians 7:6-7, 11-12: “But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also...}^{\text{211}}\]
these other claims, then, Philippians 3:6 is less about Paul no longer being zealous and more about Paul’s zeal being redirected—just as his boasting, which had been according to the flesh, has been reoriented according to Christ.16

This redirecting of zeal, along with the full range of human desires, is one work of the Holy Spirit in incorporating a person into the body of Christ. In this respect, Paul’s conversion experience is hardly unique in the New Testament. Jesus calls the twelve, and they respond by giving up their former lives—their jobs, their family, their homes—in order to find salvation by following Christ; their desire for worldly goods gives way to a desire for heavenly things.17 Later, their fear for their own safety is transformed into bold proclamation of the gospel by the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). And

16 After recognizing the many problems with zeal, John Wesley reaches similar conclusions in his sermon “On Zeal.” See John Wesley, Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” Works 3:308-321. Wesley, “On Zeal,” III.12, Works 3:320-321, concludes: “Be calmly zealous therefore, first, for the church… and in particular for the branch thereof with which you are more immediately connected. Be more zealous for all those ordinances which our blessed Lord hath appointed to continue therein to the end of the world. Be more zealous for those works of mercy… those marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know his sheep at the last day. Be more zealous for holy temper… but be more zealous of all for love, the queen of all graces, the highest perfection in earth or heaven, the very image of the invisible God, as in men below, so in angels above. For ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him.’”

17 See the conclusions of the synoptic gospels’ accounts of the rich young man/ruler (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; and Luke 18:18-30.
one of the characteristics of those who fall away from Jesus and his followers is the strength of their desires for wealth and possessions.\textsuperscript{18}

At this point, we should not be surprised at the association of the Holy Spirit with the reformation of human desire in the New Testament. As I argued in the previous chapter, one way to understand Scriptural as well as colloquial language about God’s desire is to relate that desire to the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit in the created order. Since divine desire is the work of the Holy Spirit, however, it is not simply a passive state; God’s desire accomplishes what God desires.

In the state of sinfulness that dominates human existence, therefore, encounters with the Holy Spirit are engaging and not merely informative. Such encounters disclose true human identity as the beloved of God, the ones whom God desires by loving us in the Holy Spirit. The event of such encounters is in its very nature liturgical: divine initiation anticipates human response, and there is, as both Augustine and Wesley recognize, an \textit{ordo} that must characterize that response.\textsuperscript{19} Not every response to the Spirit’s prevenient work is in order; violence, greed, domination, and the desire to

\textsuperscript{18} So Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty silver coins; and Ananias and Sapphira “sold a piece of property… [and] kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 5:1-2; interestingly, in the following verse Peter accuses Ananias of “[lying] to the Holy Spirit”). Another similar case is of Simon (Magi), the magician who in Acts 8 was baptized but then tried to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit, believing that he “could obtain God’s gift with money” (Act 8:20); Acts does not disclose his ultimate fate, but Simon’s repentance in 8:24 seems to have saved him from Peter’s condemnation.

\textsuperscript{19} I use the term \textit{ordo}, a popular term among liturgical scholars with structuralist tendencies, loosely here, not in order to suggest yet another rigid approach to the liturgy but to recognize that some ordering of human response is necessary if the human response to God’s love (here as God’s desire) is not to collapse back into the chaos of the fallen world. It may be helpful to consider how the \textit{ordo} of Christian initiation I examine below might be mimetic of Christ’s own life, but I do not explore the connection here. One possibility would be to connect baptism and Christ’s birth; chrismation and the descent of the Holy Spirit at after his baptism; confirmation and the transfiguration; and Eucharist and the crucifixion.
consume our neighbors are all responses that do not accord with the *ordo* of Christian initiation in the Spirit. Those acts of response that resonate with the Love of God, including disinterested beneficence, holy friendships, and the yearning for a consummated love with God and the neighbor, are inherently in order, because their *ordo* is rooted in the very Person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s communication of God’s desire for us, a desire that precedes anything we do or could do to attract it to ourselves, opens up a new horizon of possibilities and invites a key risk: to respond by offering our own desires and our very loves in order that they might be transformed, redirected, and reoriented.

Even though the New Testament does not provide a single normative example of Christian initiation, the church, in faithful response to Jesus’ commandments to baptize and to celebrate the Eucharist, developed initiatory rites over the first few centuries. These rites are hardly straightjackets; the Spirit blows where he will, and the beginnings of Christian initiation, the first encounters with God’s desire for us, can happen in many contexts. The purpose of these rites, then, is not to confine definitively the ways a person joins the body of Christ; instead, they initiate a person into a pattern of properly-oriented desire and love that is a model for the habitual life of Christian discipleship. The rites reinforce the proper *ordo* of human response to God’s love. Baptism, chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist are both the model for and an instantiation of a graced mode of desire that is founded on and motivated by the Love of God rather than human lack.²⁰

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²⁰Throughout this chapter I discuss these rites primarily with the person who undergoes them in mind, but it is important not to forget that there is also a person, often a pastor or bishop, who participates in these
In these rites of initiation we practice and become habituated to desiring God and our neighbor rightly out of the fullness of the gift of God’s Love that we have received and to which we respond in doxology and works of charity.

In introducing the language of practice and habituation, I do not for even a moment intend either to supplant the Holy Spirit as the one who accomplishes this healing of human desire or to suggest that rote adherence to the rites necessarily obligates the Holy Spirit to us. Rather, as we have seen from Augustine and Wesley, this is the way the Spirit works—not replacing human action but enabling human response. Or, as Eugene Rogers eloquently suggests, the Spirit befriends us in our full creaturely existence, body and soul, with the expectation that in our friendship with the Spirit we will become more like God and that God, in his friendship with us, will make use of the created order to provide us with the means of grace, which is, of course, the very Love of God.

same rites in a very different way. The significance of being one who works with the Holy Spirit to welcome a person into the body of Christ is immense and may be one of the most compelling examples of proper Christian desire available to us: the pastor or bishop gives over to the neophyte the love she or he has received from God in order to participate in the consummation of the union of the neophyte with God and, as a member of the body, with the pastor or bishop. I explore this briefly below when we turn to the rite of confirmation.

21 Although I do not think that rote practice is in itself a bad thing. Doing something good, such as praising God or turning to God in order to be healed and saved from sin, without significant forethought or self-awareness is, as far as I can tell, completely unproblematic. What is a problem is any arrogant assumption that rote practice makes a claim upon God’s grace.
Christian initiation is a participatory response to God’s desire and Love. It is first and foremost a corporate initiation, the welcoming by God of people through covenant (Israel) and through grafting onto the covenant people (Gentiles). Nonetheless, God’s love is never merely generic; the work of the Spirit includes particularizing God’s love. Christian initiation, though corporate in scope, is always also the initiation of particular persons who are called by God to respond to God’s love. We can see both the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and the importance of the human response by examining each of four traditional rites of initiation: baptism, anointing/chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist. In examining these rites, we do not consider all possible aspects but limit ourselves to relevant systematic connections with the Augustinian-Wesleyan understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God.

Even before baptism, the Love of God is at work in the cosmos and in particular lives of various people. Love operates preveniently as God’s desire for us, as God’s

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22 The stress on participation here might indicate a negative opinion of infant or childhood baptism. Because the fundamental obstacle to participation in the life of God is human sin and not biological or intellectual development, however, I raise no objections to infant or childhood baptism. Young people do participate in exactly the same way that adults participate in these rites: by the grace of God and, especially, the gift of the Holy Spirit. That being said, I have significant reservations about incomplete rites of initiation for younger people, and for those churches unwilling, for whatever reason, to allow children to complete the rites of initiation all at once, as adults do, I think it would be better to postpone the first of these rites (baptism) than to continue the temporal separation between some of the rites that remains standard practice among many Christians. See below when I return to the problems raised with the disassociation of baptism and Eucharist as bookend rites of Christian initiation.

23 I have already hinted at the complicated history of Christian initiation in the chapter’s introduction. While many traditions within the church only practice three of these rites, omitting either chrismation or confirmation, I believe that all four have important factors to consider here, and I concur with Maxwell Johnson’s opinion that contemporary Christian initiation in all cases would benefit from including all four rites (and in the order I present them).
wooning us to himself to redeem us from the devastated life of sinful existence.

Prebaptismal rituals, many of which have fallen away, included a symbolic turning from west to east as the baptizand renounces the work of the devil and an exorcism (sometimes with multiple anointings) by the presiding clergy member. Already these prebaptismal rituals establish that life in Christ involves the renunciation of our sinful yearning for the world in God’s place. Baptism itself, whether an emergency baptism with no extensive liturgy or a planned baptism with a full service, does more than enhance the renunciations of the prebaptismal steps. Christian baptism is properly water baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The significance of water to the rite is profound, invoking not only water’s essential place in human life, which cannot survive without water, but also the waters of creation over which the Spirit hovers in Genesis 1:1-2, the waters of the flood by which God judged and renewed the earth, the waters of the Red Sea through which Israel passed, and the waters of the Jordan Israel crossed to enter the promised land and in which Jesus was baptized in the first epiphany of the Holy Trinity.24 In situations where a planned service is possible, liturgies that include a thanksgiving over the waters of baptism often allude to several or even all of these Scriptural moments.

One aspect of water, however, that seems to have been overlooked, at least liturgically, is water’s quenching power.25 While human beings have managed to develop

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24 Not to mention the association of the Holy Spirit and water in John 7:37-39: “[Jesus] cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

25 Of the many rites collected in E. C. (Edward Charles) Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson, Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy, Rev. and expanded ed., 3rd ed., (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), I could find only one, the medieval Liber Ordinum, that incorporates this aspect of baptism. The relevant
many ways of satisfying physical thirst over the years, we have not escaped our fundamental need for water; no waterless drink slakes our thirst. Thirst is one of our most basic, powerful, and formative desires: “Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus,” in Palestrina’s poetic adaptation of the Clementine Vulgate text of Psalm 41:1 (=Ps 42:1). At baptism, in the Holy Spirit, the sign of water not only signifies new life, washing, and deliverance; it also signifies the quenching of our thirst for God—and especially our thirst for God’s Love. This satiation of our thirst for God can, of course, only occur because of the Love of God; it is the cure for the lack that stimulates human desires.

That baptism ritually slakes our thirst for God by filling us with the Love of God in whose name and by whose power we are baptized highlights the importance of the remaining rites of initiation. By itself, this aspect of baptism might suggest that the goal of Christian baptism is mere fullness and that there is nothing more to discipleship or membership in the body of Christ other than being filled, quite passively, with God’s Love. This may be an adequate understanding of Christian initiation performed at death’s door (though even in such cases I have my doubts), but it is insufficient for a baptism that marks the beginning of a new life in Christ expected to have some length in this world. Having been filled with God’s Love at the waters of baptism, the neophyte continues through the remaining rites of Christian initiation. These rites introduce the neophyte to

portion of the blessing of the font in the Liber Ordinum, as found in Documents, 169, reads: "Give a healthful draught to mean who are upset by the bitterness of the apple; purge the disorders of mortals and with a divine antidote cure their agelong distemper."
the divine mode of desiring, in which desire is no longer stimulated by lack but by fullness, a fullness that, for creatures, is so profound that it overflows. The new Christian, now a member of the body of Christ, is instructed ritually in loving as God loves.

Chrismation, or anointing following baptism, seals the neophyte in Christ’s royal priesthood, a priesthood whose power is found in the Holy Spirit. If water is the material means of grace in baptism, oil takes center stage in chrismation. From the earliest days of the church, the oil of anointing has been associated with the Spirit; in chapter one we saw how Augustine draws on this association to commend that necessity of Christian love in the Holy Spirit for the completion of baptism. Not only does God’s Love satisfy a fundamental human need; God’s Love indulges the beloved in Christ with fragrant, rich oil that heightens the beloved’s sensual awareness of God’s ardent Love for her or him. The oil of chrismation is God’s gift of comeliness to the beloved neophyte, who in being anointed might hear the divine address, “You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you” (Song of Songs 4:7), and who might well respond, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out” (Song 1:1)—or even, “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be

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26 Importantly, the use of oil in Christian initiation also presages the ways oil will be used throughout a Christian’s life at times when healing is needed, leading, of course, to the performance of extreme unction that follows the anointing of Christ’s body by Mary Magdalene. I will return to this below.
wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits” (Song 4:16).

The oil, placed upon the forehead, is not yet the kiss of the mouth. Nor can the introduction of the oil be allowed to isolate the neophyte from the community of believers. The Spirit, though free to blow where he wills, also in love kenotically submits himself to Christ and Christ’s body to be handed on; the Holy Spirit is the church’s most significant tradițio. Thus the rite of confirmation, which does not merely duplicate the actions of chrismation, signifies to the neophyte (and the witnessing community) that the satiation of human thirst for God at the font does not sever the neophyte’s dependence on the community for receiving the Holy Spirit, even the Love of God. What is confirmed at confirmation is not only the work of the Holy Spirit in the neophyte but actually the work of the Holy Spirit in the neophyte in the context of the community of the beloved faithful. The physical element in confirmation are the actual human hands that are laid upon the neophyte. These hands, of course, have baptized with water and anointed with oil, but in those rites they were incidental means of grace. In confirmation, the traditioned human body itself, for which the hands are a synecdoche, is the means of grace as the Holy Spirit “traditions” the initiate through the body’s hands.

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27 In a very Augustinian moment, Bulgakov, The Comforter, observes that the subject of Song of Songs is really love itself, and not either the lover or the beloved; therefore, he argues, the Song is really about the Holy Spirit.

28 Similarly, the Eucharist itself is that which Christ submits to allowing to be handed on by human hands to human hands. The relevant Scripture passage here is 1 Corinthians 11:23: “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,” Paul writes, before giving the Corinthians the institution narrative.

The Love of God that quenches our thirst for God, that perfumes us, that knits us together with those who have come before and those who come after us, does not separate us from Christ himself but impels us toward Christ. The intimacy of Christian initiation in the Love of God is incomplete until the neophyte has been kissed with the kisses of the mouth. These kisses are the elements of bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus Christ offered to the neophyte at the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The Eucharist, the only repeatable rite of Christian initiation, forms the neophyte in the understanding that there can be no desire for God greater than the desire for Jesus Christ, even as it affirms that the fullness of Love given at baptism (and not a return to a state of lack) is sufficient to precipitate this greatest desire. A communal event, the Eucharist seals the neophyte in the fellowship of the altar of Christ’s own sacrifice, a fellowship profoundly woven together by the United Methodist double *epiclesis* that asks first for the Holy Spirit to make the elements of bread and wine “be for us the body and blood of Christ” and then for the Father to “[p]our out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.”

Though the Eucharist is repeatable, in this life there is necessarily a rhythmic, temporal spacing between first and subsequent communions. The Eucharist is the neophyte’s final preparation for the times between communion, a rite that shapes his or her understanding of how to love the neighbor without turning either him- or herself or the neighbor into an idol or an opportunity for a return to sin. At the Eucharist, the neophyte joins the eldest of

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the community in a practice that habituates all to the most intimate site of God’s Love for the world, an intimacy defined by friendship: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you… I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another” (John 15:13-14, 17).

As the final, repeatable rite of Christian initiation, the Eucharist is what makes sense of Paul’s zeal. Zeal, or arduous desire, stimulated by lack is destructive and cannot be considered a proper response to God’s Love. It is exactly the kind of intense desire that, for Augustine, leads to our consumption of others or, for Wesley, to our idolization of them. Yet, as Paul recognizes, zeal is constitutive of life as a member of the body of Christ; we are to desire the Lord as fully, as zealously, as possible. The fullness of God’s Love received at the waters of baptism heals our desires; it does not destroy them. When baptism and Eucharist are held together as rites of Christian initiation, Eucharist becomes the object of desire in a new mode, in the divine mode of desire from satiation instead of the fallen human mode of desire from lack. Ultimately, as Wesley underscores in “On Zeal,” our zeal is for Love itself, for God’s Love is inexhaustible, quenching but never quenched; there is always more for us.

In learning to become zealous for the Lord’s presence in the Eucharistic elements, we also discover how to be zealous in Love for our neighbor. Christian zeal is not a product of our own desires or loves; it is the self-gift of the Holy Spirit. When we pursue Christ’s embrace with zeal, we offer back to God what God has given us. Likewise, when we pursue our neighbor with zealous love, we do not offer our own fallen desires, which
would only enslave them and us. We offer our love of God, the love that participates in God’s love for us. We thereby offer our neighbors the Love of God that is the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Christian rites of initiation, the divine initiative of the Holy Spirit demands a human response. In all of these rites, this response is best thought of as receiving, an aspect to gift exchange as essential as the act of giving. The neophyte receives the fullness of God’s love, the oil of anointing, the gift of confirmation, and the kiss of first communion. In each rite, there are opportunities for demonstrating the neophyte’s reception; these opportunities involve the return of the Love of God in confession and doxology. Only the final initiatory rite of Eucharist, however, carries the expectation that responsive reception will continue in a defined shape beyond the rite itself, as charity is to be extended to the neighbor. Yet so often, as is painfully well known to all, Christians fail to fulfill this Eucharistic expectation. If the rites of Christian initiation concern the Love of God, if they are a pattern for participating in that Love, then the Love of God, the Holy Spirit, is implicated in this Christian failure. A theology of Christian initiation that draws on the work of the Spirit falls short if it does not also consider the Spirit and postbaptismal sin.

*Christian initiation, postbaptismal sin, and the Love of God*

I have suggested that one of the concerns that unites Augustine and John Wesley is for the ongoing potential for postbaptismal sin among their constituents. In Augustine’s case, this concern presents itself with respect to parties within Augustine’s own
congregation as well as to the Donatists whom Augustine considered to be in schism with the Catholic Church. For Wesley, the concern is with his fellow British citizens who were nominally Christian but who bore no fruit. Neither Augustine nor Wesley responds to their respective contemporary situations by suggesting that those to whom they preached should repeat the first three rites of Christian initiation, nor do they offer, at least in the works discussed above in chapters one, two, and three, a particularly detailed analysis for why postbaptismal sin remains possible, although both give compelling descriptions of how a person might fall into sin. Wesley challenges his hearers to experience a “new birth”; Augustine calls the Donatists to return to communion with the Catholic Church. In this section, I draw on their shared interest in the Holy Spirit as God’s Love in order to think through sin after Christian initiation in a way that connects systematically with my proposals concerning divine desire and the rites of Christian initiation. In so doing, I find Wesley’s description of a *via damnatis* or *via peccatoribus* in “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” especially helpful.\(^{31}\)

We begin where the rites of initiation end: Eucharist. Eucharist is the only repeatable rite of Christian initiation; baptism, chrismation, and confirmation are one-time events, even if reminders of them through various practices are possible. The Eucharist is both the goal of the first three rites and the habituating rite that sets out for the faithful a path of love for the neighbor, who is to be loved as a friend (even, as Augustine maintains, when the neighbor is an enemy). As I mentioned above, however,

there is no possibility for permanent Eucharist in the present age. John Wesley famously encouraged the first Methodists in “The Duty of Constant Communion,” but even that was rhetorical hyperbole for receiving communion as often as possible. Even if one communes daily, there is still a rhythm of presence and absence that is unavoidable. The question for all members of the body of Christ is: will you continue to be faithful in love during these periods of suspension?

Although not the only factor in an affirmative answer to this question, frequent and devout return to the Eucharistic sacrifice does make a positive contribution by training the eyes, both the eyes of physical sight and the eyes of faith, of the communicants to see the mystery of God’s presence in Christ in the things of this world. “Constant communion,” as Wesley calls it, also shapes our hearts to love as Christ loves us, by loving the neighbor as we love ourselves and loving the enemy proleptically as a friend. Moreover, since the basis of communion at Eucharist (and the basis of the desire for that communion) is the fullness of God’s Love offered in the quenching waters of baptism, a fullness that is never removed (or else baptism would be repeatable), the period of suspension is never a complete absence. For these, and many other reasons, Christians throughout the ages have answered that love, even perfect love,

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33 My debt to Jean-Luc Marion, *LePhénomène érotique*, is rather obvious at this point.
34 Liberation theologians have also called our attention to how, per Jesus’ admonishments in Matthew 25:31-46, the poor also function as a visible reminder of the mysterious presence of Christ in the world.
is possible beyond the moment of divine embrace in the reception of the Eucharistic elements.\textsuperscript{36}

The problem, then, is not one of the availability of God’s Love, which is sufficient for our own loves, for God and neighbor, to be in accord with how God loves us. The problem is in our responsive participation, for postbaptismal sin is really non-participation in the Love of God. While baptism slakes our thirst for God, it does not eliminate the temptations of the love for the world, which the author of 1 John describes as “the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of riches” (1 John 2:16); the temptations of the world can still titillate our desires, which are especially susceptible during the suspended periods between communion, when we are not faced with the most concrete, if mysteriously so, presence of God available to us.\textsuperscript{37} God does not withdraw his Love when our desires are first so titillated but patiently waits for our response, our participation in either the Love of God or the love of the world.

Unfortunately, in our fallen state, we have romanticized love to the point that we believe love must be easy, gentle, and a sentimental escape from the agony of the world. The desires of the world seduce us with promises of this false love, while the true Love that remains with us refuses to be the love of a lie. So, as both Augustine and Wesley note, God’s love can become painful to us, the more we distance ourselves from it, the less we participate in it, the more we pursue the desires of the flesh, the eyes, and of

\textsuperscript{36}See, e.g., Edgardo Antonio Colón-Emeric, \textit{Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection : An Ecumenical Dialogue} (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009); Thomas A. Noble, \textit{Holy Trinity; Holy People}.

\textsuperscript{37}Of course, the simplicity of the Eucharistic elements may also pale in comparison with the superficial grandeur of worldly desires.
wealth. In this movement away from God, human experience of God’s love becomes more and more the experience of God’s desire—in this case, divine desire as lament. If we have fallen for the world’s easy love, the pain of God’s Loving lament can itself be further motivation to seek (ephemeral) satisfaction in what the fallen world offers apart from God. The most damaging version of this fall occurs when we begin to use our love to dominate and consume others.

As bleak as this situation is, it is far from hopeless. The middle rites of Christian initiation anticipate the need for means of healing, which, like chrismation and confirmation, has been conducted by the anointing of oil and the laying-on of hands for centuries by Christians. The pain of turning from God’s Love after baptism has a salve; this, of course, is the confession of sins. Confession precedes Eucharist in the ordinary course of events, and confession, or speaking the truth to God in response to God’s revelation of love for creation, resumes participation in the divine life of Love. Through confession followers of Christ rejoin the ongoing procession of the Holy Spirit by returning the gift of Love to God; we hear God’s address of truth and love, “you are sinful, yet I love you,” and we respond in truth and love, “we are sinful, yet you love us.” This participatory response is a form of healing, and in some churches is even signified by oil or the laying-on of hands by a priest-confessor through the rite of reconciliation. It

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38 See Bruce T. Morrill, Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), for a helpful discussion of the liturgical necessity of rites for human healing through worship.

is also a prelude to doxology, “[l]es mots pour ne rien dire,” the words of the beloved to
the divine Lover.\textsuperscript{40}

Confession, along with the various postbaptismal rites of healing and
reconciliation, is the ordinary means of the Holy Spirit’s redirection of human desire in
the face of postbaptismal sin, but there are also extraordinary means. Among these
extraordinary means I would count both John Wesley’s “new birth” and the more recent
Pentecostal and Charismatic movements’ display of charisms and emphasis on Spirit
baptism.\textsuperscript{41} In these disruptive moments the Spirit overwhelms the particular person or
group with Love to such an extent that human response in the moment necessarily
involves the whole person’s, body and soul, ecstatic response. Such dramatic
experiences, whether prophesying or speaking in tongues or just the sense of having been
born again, cannot be thought of as ends in themselves. Their purpose, like the purpose of
the ordinary means of confession, is to reorient the desires and loves of the participants
(and of witnesses to their activities) toward the Love of God. It is perhaps a missed
opportunity that, among at least some Pentecostals, the practice of such ecstatic Spirit-
filled events has been coupled with a low view of the sacraments.\textsuperscript{42} It is at the Eucharist

\textsuperscript{40} Jean-Luc Marion, \textit{Le phénomène érotique}, 224ff.
\textsuperscript{41} There is much more to say concerning the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions’ approach to Christian
initiation than can be adequately discussed in the present chapter. In particular, a rich discussion of Spirit
baptism, which Frank Macchia, \textit{Baptized in the Spirit}, has identified as the distinctive doctrine of
Pentecostal systematic theology, is beyond the bounds of the present project. Treating it within the
framework of this chapter would not do justice to the topic. The survey in Yves Congar, \textit{Je crois en l’Esprit
Saint}, Édition: 3e (Paris: Cerf, 1995), tome II, 241ff (471ff in the edition cited, which combines all three
parts in a single volume), is dated but still useful.
\textsuperscript{42} Likewise, it is unfortunate that churches with a high view of the sacraments often shut the door to
charismatic experiences. Macchia, 252, asks of the Eucharistic \textit{epiclesis}, “do we typically highlight this as
an occasion for genuine Pentecostal experience.” He concludes, 253, that “[t]here is little opportunity for
that such experiences cease being discrete instances of the Spirit’s insistent Love for the baptized and take on habituating significance for the ongoing life of those touched by the Spirit’s Love.\footnote{The ultimate test, however, for having overcome postbaptismal sin is love, for God and of neighbor. Love for God is evinced in Eucharist, or Eucharistic activities, as love is returned in to God in Christ-centered thanksgiving. This is Christian happiness, resting in the Love of God that unites us to God. Love of neighbor is the handing on of that which is given to us: the Love of God that is the Holy Spirit. This is Christian friendship, the most fundamental relationship we have with our neighbor, because we are also friends with God (cf. James 2:23).\footnote{Especially in the case of neighborly love, we interaction or genuine experience of renewal” in most practices of Eucharist. Those who believe in the real presence of Christ might object to this conclusion, but Macchia is right to suggest there is usually little room for Pentecostal or charismatic experiences in most celebrations of the Eucharist.\footnote{In an interesting book on how important the healing of human emotions, passions, and desires is to Pentecostalism, Steven J. Land, \textit{Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom} (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 178-181, notes the waxing and waning of enthusiasm among Pentecostals for sharing the Love of God through charity and beneficence. Land, 181, argues, among other things, that “[t]he passion for the kingdom of God with the attendant attention to affective transformation and integration could offer one way to move forward.” Similarly, Paul Alexander, \textit{Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances in the Assemblies of God} (Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Pub. House ; Herald Press, 2009), traces the abandonment of Christian pacifism that characterized the early days of the Assemblies of God and, 342, insists that Pentecostals “can believe in and follow Jesus as cross-bearing, Holy Spirit-filled, tongue-talking, enemy-loving, nonviolent witnesses to the Way, Truth, and Life.” Neither Land nor Alexander, however, discusses Eucharist, nor, naturally, does either seem aware that a Eucharistic teleology to their Pentecostal practices could be a significant blessing to the entire church while also providing a means for supporting the passionate love of God and neighbor they hope their fellow Pentecostals will pursue. Macchia, \textit{Baptized in the Spirit}, does take some steps in this direction, but he is constrained by an almost Zwinglian reduction of Eucharist to a memorial commemoration.\footnote{For this reason, although there is much I admire about Coakley’s \textit{God, Sexuality, and the Self}, I cannot accept the fundamental position she gives human sexual desire. While human sexuality has played an important role in the mystic side of the Christian tradition, other metaphors of human relationship are more significant, especially adoption (which is completely unsexual) and friendship. Friendship, moreover, is the foundation for sexual relations; Christian marriage is the sacramental intensification of holy friendships. Nor must we understand this preference for friendship as a removal of the possibility of erotic, and not just agapic, love, as Sergius Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, 321ff, amply makes clear.}}
cannot presume to have returned to a state of reconciliation and love without the concomitant practice of *examen*, the careful, reflective study of our actions and motivations. It may well be that the potential for sin is strongest when things appear to be going well.

**The Challenge of Christian Practice**

*Initial remarks*

The present state of liturgical practice poses a distinct challenge to the theology of Christian initiation I have offered in the foregoing section. One aspect of this challenge presents itself almost immediately from the traditions influenced by Augustine and Wesley. On the Augustinian side, specifically in the Roman Catholic Church, confirmation usually follows First Communion for any infant baptizands.\(^45\) Many liturgical scholars have also accused the Roman Catholic Church of conflating chrismation and confirmation.\(^46\) Similar things can be said of churches in the Wesleyan

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\(^45\) Adults, because of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), normally follow the sequence described earlier in the chapter.

\(^46\) Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 446ff. Johnson cites in particular Aidan Kavanagh, Dominic Serra, and Frank Quinn as opponents of the current Roman Catholic practice of confirmation. Johnson, though a Lutheran himself, 447-448, also argues that “[b]y focusing so exclusively on the chrismation, by defining that as the essence of confirmation, and especially by adopting the Byzantine formula for its administration, however, the Roman rite of confirmation is subject to losing the richness and evocative power of the biblical gesture of hand-laying in Christian initiation” and that “it would have been preferable… [to have restored] the imposition of hands and the prayer for the seven-fold gift of the Spirit… as constituting confirmation’s ‘matter’ and ‘form’… [and to have restored confirmation] to its ancient Western location immediately following baptism and anointing in all cases, as, indeed, the final pneumatic blessing and ecclesial ratification of Christian initiation and public welcome to the eucharistic [sic.] communion of the church.” The alleged Roman Catholic Church conflation of chrismation and confirmation may be reflected in the Roman Catholic Church’s response to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*: “We do, however, believe that the emergence of a distinctive sacramental rite called chrismation or confirmation is a normative development in the faith of the church”; see “Roman Catholic Church” in Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM*, Volume VI, Faith and Order Paper 144 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 15, emphasis added.
tradition. Confirmation almost inevitably occurs after the first time someone communes. Additionally, some in the Wesleyan tradition may omit the rite of chrismation and may also find my description of confession foreign. The challenge is: how strong a claim do I intend to make with this approach to Christian initiation?

My answer is that the Augustinian-Wesleyan theology of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God developed in this dissertation commends a rich sequence of initiatory rites from baptism through Eucharist, a sequence that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit to radically alter the nature and end of once-fallen human desire. Placing confirmation after the first reception of Eucharist is, in the logic of this theology, strange, for it disrupts the line of progress from baptism to Eucharist, and it may even suggest that the consummation of Christian initiation is found in confirmation rather than in Holy Communion.

This is a precise reply to a specific challenge of contemporary Christian practice. More broadly, on the other hand, the claim of this chapter is that a strong link between baptism and Eucharist, regardless of the number of intervening rites, is vital in order for a practice of Christian initiation to acknowledge sufficiently the work of the Holy Spirit in making people members of the body of Christ. Thus John Wesley’s intense Eucharistic piety more than makes up for the fact that Wesley omitted confirmation in the Sunday

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47 The possibility of anointing with oil after baptism is allowed in my own United Methodist Church, but it is not required.
48 This, naturally, does not mean that other rites that mark growth in years and in the Christian faith are unimaginable. Instead, it simply means that as long as confirmation remains a rite of Christian initiation, it should be nested between baptism and Eucharist.
Service he gave to the budding North American Methodist movement after the Revolutionary War.⁴⁹

Even here, however, we encounter problems within contemporary practice, and not only within Augustinian or Wesleyan contexts. For example, many worshiping communities are Eucharistic communities that do not baptize. Goodson Chapel at Duke Divinity School, for reasons related to United Methodist polity, is one such community.⁵⁰

More famous is the French ecumenical community of Taizé, which on its own offers neither baptism nor Eucharist. Taizé provides “Eucharistic hospitality,” meaning that Christians of various traditions are allowed to celebrate Eucharist at Taizé, but “there are no baptisms celebrated in Taizé.”⁵¹ What should we think about such communities that celebrate Eucharist without baptizing?

Another example is the ongoing exclusion for denominational reasons of Christians whose baptism is recognized as valid and efficacious. As the authors of Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM) wrote over thirty years ago, “[i]nsofar as Christians cannot unite in full fellowship around the same table to eat the same loaf and

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⁴⁹ Wesley clearly sees the importance of Eucharist, which we find in the context of Wesley’s passion for calling baptized persons back to a more vital practice of their faith, what we might call Christian re-initiation. Wesley’s omission of any intervening rites between baptism and Eucharist in the American context, however, may have risked opening the door for exactly the passive, non-habituating reception of God’s love that Wesley combatted his entire life by preaching “responsible grace.” On early American Methodist practices, see Gayle Carlton Felton, This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism among Methodists in America (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1992), 49ff.

⁵⁰ In United Methodist polity, when a person is baptized into Christ’s church, she or he also at the same time becomes a baptized (or, in the case of adult baptizands, a professing) member of a particular local United Methodist congregation. Even though Duke Divinity School is a United Methodist seminary, it is not a congregation of the United Methodist church, so the local congregation membership of anyone who might be baptized in Goodson Chapel would be in question.

⁵¹ Brother John, Email Correspondence, 11/21/12. Brother John is one of the brothers of the Taizé community.
drink from the same cup, their missionary witness is weakened at both the individual and the corporate levels. As both the baptism and ministry sections of BEM argue, Christian ministry (lay and ordained) is grounded in baptism and fully realized (at least as is possible in this age) at Eucharist. Divisions among the churches disrupt those connections. How should churches confront these visible disruptions to Christian unity?

The Augustinian-Wesleyan theology of the Holy Spirit and Christian initiation proposed in this chapter proves satisfactory to the extent that it both confronts these and other contemporary challenges and invites systematic consideration of questions they raise. Rather than attempting to diagnose and reflect on the variety of current liturgical practices that could benefit from such systematic consideration, I here concentrate on a single but significant (especially among those in the Wesleyan tradition) topic: the practice of “open table” Eucharist.

Before proceeding, however, I offer a brief aside on the relationship between systematic theology and Christian practices. In this chapter I have developed an approach to Christian initiation based on the synthesis of the Augustinian-Wesleyan approach to the Holy Spirit as the Love of God and on the initial foray into contemporary theological issues of chapter four. In so doing, I have demonstrated how the possibility of a theologically unified, systematic approach to baptism, chrismation, confirmation, and Eucharist, as well as postbaptismal sin, that emphasizes the person and work of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God. What follows, in my view, is the optimal way to comprehend

Christian practices: not as their own branch of Christian theology, nor for merely pragmatic purposes, but as a locus (or set of loci) of systematic theology connected to and dependent on the whole. I have further attempted to model what I consider to be a helpful approach to this understanding of theology and practice by, in chapter four, beginning with theological investigations into the divine Subject and Object of Christian theology. Rigorous, systematic, and even speculative theology makes reflection on Christian practices possible without being reduced to functionalism. A more integrative approach to Christian theology such as the one pursued here might allow systematicians and liturgical scholars, for example, to foster partnerships and understandings that transcend their respective specializations and feed the hunger in the church of today for truth, wisdom, and practices whose source is in the Triune Lord.

Understanding in Christian theology, therefore, is about something more than an intellectual gazing. It is, by the gift of God, a participation in the structures and ordering of the cosmos God created, among which must be counted the means of grace, whether sacraments, rites, or works of mercy and piety, that God has ordained for human flourishing and happiness. Christian practitioners cannot afford to dismiss the understanding sought and shared by systematic theologians lest it miss the real participation that theological understanding affords; systematic theology cannot avoid the ordained means of grace without isolating itself from full understanding. The Spirit of Love is also the Spirit of Truth—and vice versa.

 234
Rethinking “open table” Eucharist

For a long time, and actually until quite recently, “open table” named an antidote to one of the challenges just discussed. In response to the practice of many churches denying Eucharist to baptized persons of other denominations, voices of various backgrounds and theological commitments called for an open table—a communion practice that would allow Christians from diverse backgrounds to share in the Eucharist. For example, Anne Primavesi and Jennifer Henderson, employing liberation theology, argue that the Eucharist “must again become the place where our witness to unity in the Spirit is most powerful… Lib erative inter-church practices become possible when we deepen our understanding of [the epicletic] invocation of the Spirit.”

Although Primavesi and Henderson do not say so, the implication is that the Spirit who sanctifies the waters of baptism and draws us together as members of the body of Christ also leads us to share the Eucharistic sacrifice.

The phrase “open table,” however, has also been expanded to mean that all persons, regardless of baptized status, should be invited. One of the most public proponents of this position is liturgical scholar Mark W. Stamm, who says that an “open

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53 Anne Primavesi and Jennifer Henderson, Our God Has No Favourites: A Liberation Theology of the Eucharist (Tunbridge Wells, England: Burns & Oates; Resource Publications, 1989), 66. Earlier examples of this position (although sans the reasoning of liberation theology), both from the Church of England, can be found in John Mark Meredith Dalby, Open Communion in the Church of England (London, Church Book Room Press, 1959) and James Peter Hickinbotham, The Open Table: Christian Hospitality at the Lord’s Supper (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1966).

54 There is something sleight of hand in the phrase, a backdoor introduction of a normative understanding of Eucharist as primarily a meal or banquet, instead of a sacrifice. It is fair to wonder whether there would be the same enthusiasm for an “open altar.”
table means an invitation without restrictions, as in ‘all are welcome.’” Stamm argues that such an invitation is consistent with the Wesleyan heritage of his United Methodist Church, which includes allusions to the Eucharist as a “converting” sacrament. Stamm’s position is complicated and not entirely coherent, but he claims to speak for many United Methodists in expressing revulsion at the idea of an invitation that links inviolably communion with baptism. Rather than making the open table a normative practice for all Christians, Stamm suggests that a United Methodist policy of open table be viewed as an exception, much like the use of grape juice instead of wine.

55 Mark Wesley Stamm, *Let Every Soul Be Jesus’ Guest: A Theology of the Open Table* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), x. It is perhaps important to note and emphasize the word “invitation.” The issue is not whether or not a pastor should interrogate each potential communicant at the altar before allowing her or him to proceed; the issue is whether the invitation to communion should be explicitly extended to those who are not baptized.

56 The issue of the Wesleyan heritage is especially knotty. Both John Wesley, in his admonishment to “constant communion,” and Charles Wesley, in hymns like “Come Sinners to the Gospel Feast,” appear to advocate for a less severe regimen of examination practices than was prescribed in devotional manuals for preparing for communion of their day.

57 United Methodist practices are themselves difficult to describe. Officially, however, the denomination’s policy is to receive unbaptized persons at the table and counsel them afterwards to be baptized. See the document “This Holy Mystery” and various related studies at http://www.gbd.org/lead-your-church/this-holy-mystery-communion-study.

58 In fact, Stamm himself describes the anger of members of his first congregation when he, as a pastor, attempted to make such a link in the Sunday bulletin.

59 There are many methodological and conceptual inconsistencies within Stamm’s work. He relies completely on anecdotal evidence when discussing United Methodist opposition to anything other than a fully open table but seems to discount anecdotal evidence of his Perkins School of Theology colleague’s resistance to open table practices. Despite the appeal to talk of the “converting” sacrament, Stamm does not offer a single example of an unbaptized person receiving communion and immediately afterward becoming a Christian and seeking baptism. He wants United Methodist practices to be counted as an exception, but that exception is to have normative status among United Methodists and is expected to endure. In the end, it is hard to see how anything other than sentiment (especially the negative sentiment of those Stamm interviews) determines his position, and it is even harder to comprehend how such a sentimental and emotive position can be possible from one who writes compellingly, 139, that “[p]articipation in the Eucharist takes Christians into the same deep waters that one enters in baptism, into the depths of covenant responsibility for and with one another.”
Interestingly, however, Stamm believes that an open table policy is workable only if other practices are developed that deepen the connection between font and table.\(^{60}\)

Stamm’s work, though it does not deal much with pneumatological issues, insists upon an understanding of love, in the form of hospitality, that is directly relevant to the core of this dissertation. Surely one could reason that if we are to love those who are not part of our church with the Love God has given us, we should offer that Love in its most intimate form, the Eucharist, to anyone who seeks it. Further, we are to love even our enemies as though they might one day be our friends; offering those known to be outside our worshiping communities could be one way of so loving. Of course, others could reply that in the long run doing so might result in less loving churches because what is offered ends up being cheap love.

Both of these replies have merit, but both stand in need of a significant corollary to the theology of Christian initiation I have developed: that the Holy Spirit may sometimes work in unpredictable means but always leads us toward the same goal, consummation of our love with the Triune God. If the Spirit does work in extraordinary means to compel an unbaptized worshiper to receive Eucharist, we should believe that person genuinely to have received God’s Love—as God’s desire for her or him—in the

\(^{60}\) This is tantamount to an admission that his open table approach otherwise thoroughly severs that connection. For a brief and helpful discussion of “open table” issues, including an account of the decision of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to maintain baptism as requirement for admission to Holy Communion, see Ronald P. Byars, *The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 225-229. Byars reaches no firm conclusions but, 228, does note that “[t]he one-time visitor who communes so as not to stand out is surely a different case from the seeker who presents for Communion more than once,” a position that resonates with some aspects of Stamm’s work.
sacrament. Thus the person’s reception of the Eucharist would be comparable to other extraordinary means of the work of the Spirit discussed above; reception would not be a substitute for the full range of rites of initiation. We should therefore expect that person to evince a desire to be baptized, if indeed he or she has received God’s Love, and then to pursue the ordinary means of Christian initiation. The person who thus receives, however, may have no knowledge or language with which to name the need or desire to be baptized. It would be incumbent under those circumstances for the church to advert all worshipers to the normal means of Christian initiation.

Furthermore, the church that intentionally invites unbaptized worshipers to the table has done them a great disservice, essentially denying them the habituating rites of Christian initiation by which the Holy Spirit, ordinarily, may reform their desires and reorient their love toward Christ in the Eucharist. Regardless of whether this might lead to a church that is less loving, the systematic consequences of such ecclesiastical behavior are rather grave. They risk severing the link between Christian practices of

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61 Of course, we may not predict how the unbaptized worshiper will experience that Love: as the prevenient love of God’s lament or even anger for her or his sins or as the heartwarming love of God’s gentle guidance.

62 As a historic example of this recommendation, we may consider the insights of Henry H. Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 183-184, who notes two categories of unbaptized adults among early Methodists whom Wesley either baptized or instructed to receive baptism: "unbaptized adults... who were not born again... [and for whom] both new birth and the witness of the Spirit normally accompanied the baptism... [as well as] those already born again but not baptized." Even though Knight, 184, contends that “[b]aptism was not for Wesley absolutely necessary to salvation,” Knight also demonstrates that Wesley consistently directed those who had encounters with the Spirit (marked here by language of “new birth” and being “born again”) to be baptized.
initiation and the work of the Holy Spirit, jeopardizing a rich systematic understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God.

Churches, however, that make a strong connection between baptism and the Eucharist, that direct unbaptized worshipers toward the font instead of the table, and that recognize the Eucharist as the consummation of Christian initiation must nonetheless seek ways of remaining open to the Spirit’s extraordinary work. Perhaps this is one point where the historic context and trajectory of Wesley’s emphases can instruct rather well. The openness of Wesleyan Christianity to such extraordinary means as the heart strangely warmed, for Wesley himself, or speaking in tongues and other gifts of the Spirit, for Wesley’s Pentecostal and Charismatic descendants, allows for the possibility that the Spirit may indeed compel an unbaptized worshiper to receive Holy Communion. At the same time that John Wesley preached in favor of extraordinary experiences of the Spirit, however, he also developed rigorous accountability structures for early Methodists: societies, classes, and bands, all small groups for Christian formation. Among the many practices of mercy and piety Wesley instituted for these groups were regular confession and instruction in the Christian faith. These groups, in other words, provided a context of ordinary means of grace for interpreting, directing, and growing from extraordinary works of the Spirit.

This does not mean that an open table, as Stamm advocates, need be adopted; rather, it places those in the Wesleyan tradition in a good position to name extraordinary experiences as works of the Holy Spirit and to direct those who have such experiences to
Christian initiation through baptism leading to Eucharist. It does mean that a theology of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God, such as the one I have developed in this dissertation, need not succumb to the temptation to choose between a strong commitment to the Spirit’s ordinary means of grace and an awareness that there is always more to the Love of God than can ever be sufficiently captured in any system or liturgy.

Rites, Loci, and System

In this chapter I have argued that a full range of Christian initiatory rites, from baptism to Eucharist, resonates strongly with the theology of divine desire developed in chapter four, a theology itself based on a synthesizing approach to the Holy Spirit as the Love of God in Augustine’s Homilies and John Wesley’s extant sermons on 1 John. The Spirit meets the initiate, whose desire for God stems from a fundamental lack, quenches that desire in the waters of baptism, and leads the initiate to desire God through the fullness of God’s Love, which is consummated at the Eucharist. This basic pattern supplies a blueprint for growth in Christian discipleship, or sanctification, habituating the neophyte to a new way of living.

There are, of course, other compelling reasons for adopting this chapter’s sequence of initiation, just as there are churches that, for good reasons, do not follow it precisely. What this chapter supplies is a non-exclusionary systematic coherence that incorporates a longstanding worship ordo with a significant understanding in the Christian tradition of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. This fruitful systematicity

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240
opens out into possibilities for reexamining older modes of coherence and developing new coherence with Christian practices and theological *loci* that extend beyond the scope of this chapter and, indeed, of this dissertation.
Conclusion

God is always beautiful, never ugly, never changeable. He who is always beautiful has loved us first... How shall we be beautiful? By loving him who is always beautiful. Beauty grows in you to the extent that love grows, because charity itself is the soul’s beauty.¹

It [the life of God in the soul of the believer] immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit; God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be an holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus.²

For both Augustine and John Wesley, the way to grow in the likeness of God is to participate responsively in what God has given for this very purpose. Becoming beautiful is not seeking to meet human standards of physical attraction; it is to grow in love, which is given by God through the Holy Spirit. Offering worship is not creating means of expressing inner selves; it is to give back over to God the very thing that makes life possible in the first place.

The Spirit, the Love of God, is God’s beauty; the Spirit is God’s breath of love that enables us to grow in love. Wesley and Augustine are not far apart here, just as we have seen that they approach each other, theologically, in many places regarding the Holy Spirit. Their compatibility in pneumatology suggests that further study and further comparison of these distant theologians may yield benefits in other subdisciplines and for other loci of systematic theology. And while genealogical research has been eschewed

¹ Augustine, Homilies IX.9.
here, at least one of the implications of this study is that the relationship of one theologian to a predecessor is more than just a matter of whether, where, how, and how often the theologian cites or quotes the predecessor. Strong claims, such as “Wesley borrowed or developed *this particular idea* from Augustine,” may, in the end, be less interesting for theology than more modest attempts that produce claims like, “Wesley shares *this set* of common concerns and interests with Augustine and so voices positions that resonate deeply with Augustine’s.” Claims of this more modest sort allow appreciation for historical claims while also leaving room for further development through systematically connecting layers of past and present concerns and positions.

Augustine’s insight into the Holy Spirit as the Love of God concerns much more than the Trinitarian *vinculum caritatis*. Even in the *Homilies* on their own, this should be clear. Augustine there is more interested in the work of the Spirit in healing and transforming the lives—by redirecting the desires and loves—of his congregation than in the speculative matters he engages in *De Trinitate*. In collaboration with Wesley’s contributions on the Holy Spirit, the breadth of Augustine’s work becomes all the more apparent. The Love of God heals sinful humanity and renews possibilities for sanctified relationships with the Triune Lord and with the neighbor.

The possibilities for further exploring the Augustinian-Wesleyan synthesis of the present dissertation are wide and diverse. Opportunities for engagement with Christology, especially what is sometimes called Spirit-Christology, eschatology, and theological anthropology are especially promising. These press beyond the limits of this dissertation,
of course, but in ways that help us bear in mind happily that sonata-allegro form is normally given to the first movement of a much larger project.

Rather than turn to these prominent nodes of Christian theology, I conclude with a brief word on social holiness.³ When the Spirit quenches the thirst and reorients the loves and desires of the Christian initiate, the Love of God establishes a friendship between God and the new disciple. When the disciple in turn loves the others in the church from the fullness of love given by God, the disciple participates in new bonds of friendship with them. When the fullness of this love is tested by encounters with the enemy, the community of disciples draws on the strength of God’s Love to regard the enemy as a friend in waiting and to live out prophetically the unconsummated friendship. This is the vision of social holiness enabled by the Love of God who is the Holy Spirit, a community of friends that includes the Triune Lord, brothers and sisters, and even enemies.

If this is an appropriate vision of social holiness, then perhaps we may say that systematic theology also has elements of social holiness. Perhaps the work of the systematician is to make friends among the theological loci and to pay attention to the bonds of friendship others have seen. Perhaps that is the way Christian systematics is not only mimetic of but also participates in the ratio of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If so, then the work of this dissertation has been to make friends of Augustine and John Wesley, of speculative and practical theology, of past theology and contemporary

³ It may be helpful to recall that I endorse Thompson’s argument (noted in chapter three) that Wesleyan social holiness is first and foremost about the necessity of holiness to develop within a community.
concerns. These are the riches of Augustine’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Love of God for contemporary systematic theology.
Appendix

The Breadth of Scripture in Augustine and Wesley’s Sermons

In chapters one and two I examine sermons of Augustine and John Wesley on texts from 1 John. Of course, both preachers incorporate a range of biblical texts that extends beyond 1 John. To say that each preacher’s work is replete with Scriptural references would be an impoverished understatement. Here I give a picture of just how central the whole of Scripture is to Augustine and Wesley by comparing their use of various books of the Bible and the frequency of that usage in the sermons discussed in chapters one and two. I then offer some comments about the overall character of Scripture reliance in each theologian.¹

In order to get a sense of the breadth of Scriptural appeals in Augustine and Wesley we may first consider which books they draw from in their sermons. There is a high degree of similarity here. In short, Wesley and Augustine refer to most books of the Bible. From the Old Testament, their references are generally from the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the wisdom literature, and the prophets; only Wesley cites anything from the

¹ In this appendix I rely on numerical data drawn from the index of Scripture in Boniface Ramsey’s translation of the Homilies and the footnotes (both Wesley’s and the editors’) of the Bicentennial Edition of the Works. I thus need to add several caveats. First, there is no clear distinction in either case between a direct quotation, a clear paraphrase, or a close parallel. What to one person may be an obvious reference to a particular verse may to another only be a hint—or even a reference to another verse altogether. Second, the index and footnotes on which I rely only provide the Scriptural references; the numbers are my own work and, therefore, subject to human error. Third, I have of necessity made some judgments about what counts as a significant reference, allowing the frequency of references to be my guide. This quantitative approach may obscure the qualitative or rhetorical significance of a verse or chapter that is used less frequently but employed in a particularly powerful or noteworthy way. All of this is to say that, while I believe what I discuss in this appendix is generally accurate, the numbers are not indisputable, and the question of the particular significance of any one passage of Scripture is not settled here.
histories (2 Samuel, in one instance). With the New Testament, however, there is a reference from every book except Philemon and 3 John at some point in either Augustine or Wesley’s sermons. Moreover, only seven references in Augustine come from books not mentioned by Wesley, and only twenty-two passages in Wesley are drawn from books not used by Augustine.

That Augustine and Wesley mostly draw on the same books does not mean they use them with the same frequency. Wesley’s most cited books are, in descending order, John, Psalms, Romans, Genesis, and 1 Corinthians; Augustine’s are Psalms, Matthew, John, 1 Corinthians, and Romans. Just as importantly, only about a third of Wesley’s total citations come from his most-cited books, but more than half of Augustine’s quotations come from his most-cited books. A similar trend is also noticeable at the level of specific chapters from various books of the Bible. Augustine returns to Matthew 5 twelve times, John 1 eleven times, and Matthew 4, Luke 24, John 21, and Romans 5 six times each. Wesley, on the other hand, cites Genesis 3 nine times and Galatians 2 six times; there are numerous chapters he cites between two and four times, but the same is also true for Augustine.

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3 Augustine employs only four books of the Bible (Sirach, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Titus) not used by Wesley, but Wesley draws on nine books (Numbers, 2 Samuel, Hosea, 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 2 John, Jude, and Revelation) not found in Augustine.
4 For Wesley, eighty-four out of two hundred forty-one quotations come from his five most-cited books; for Augustine, one hundred thirty-six of two hundred fifty references come from his five most-cited books. The numbers do not include citations of 1 John. Ramsey’s edition does not index references to 1 John, but the editors of Wesley’s *Works* volumes do: there are thirty such references across Wesley’s five sermons.
What do such figures suggest about the character of Augustine and Wesley’s Scripture usage? For Augustine, it seems fairly clear that his Scripture usage, like his Homilies more generally, is extemporaneous and dependent more on his memory than on a developed plan. Augustine’s Scripture passages cluster around certain books and certain chapters, but he usually returns to these books and chapters in many of his sermons. All six of his references to Matthew 4, for example, occur in Homily II.14, but the six references he makes to Matthew 6 are spread over four different Homilies. Matthew 4 is unusual in this regard, and Matthew 6 is more representative. This does not mean, however, that Augustine is haphazard in his Scripture usage. His five most-cited verses, John 1:1, John 13:34, Romans 5:5, John 15:13, and Luke 23:34, give a very good indication of several of the most prominent themes of the Homilies.  

For Wesley, a similar reinforcement of the careful planning of his sermons is true. The sermon “On the Trinity,” which Wesley warns was completed in haste, has, by far, the fewest references to Scripture, with only seventeen. As a whole, however, his five sermons have nearly the same number of references as Augustine’s ten Homilies. Wesley relies less heavily on a handful of books than Augustine, but his distribution of individual Scripture references is uneven. All nine of his references to Genesis 3 are in “On the End of Christ’s Coming,” and four of his six quotations from Galatians 2 are in the second

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5 In the modern English NRSV translation, those verses read as follows: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1); “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34); “and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5); “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13); and “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots to divide his clothing” (Luke 23:34).
major section of “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God.” Perhaps most interestingly, Wesley’s use of Scripture increases in the later parts of his sermons. It is not uncommon for the introduction or first major section to have few or no Scriptural references, but at the end, the references pile up very quickly. The last paragraph, often a fairly short paragraph, can have as many as nine or ten Scripture references.

Finally, it is worth comparing the use of non-Scriptural authors by the two preachers. Neither the New City Press nor the French edition of the *Homilies* footnotes or indexes any references in Augustine’s text to non-Scriptural authors. As far as I can tell, Augustine cites no Roman orators, no ancient philosophers, and no fellow Christian theologians, bishops, or preachers. In the *Homilies* he truly is a “man of one book.” This is not so for John Wesley, who even in “On the Trinity,” the rushed sermon with the fewest Scripture references, mentions by name a diverse array of writers, including: Ptolemy, Athanasius, John Calvin, Tycho Brahe, Copernicus, Thomas à Kempis, John Albert Bengel, Gregory Lopez, the Marquis de Renty, Peter Browne, and Jonathan Swift, with additional direct quotations from or strong allusions to the work of Cicero, John Milton, and Matthew Prior. In other words, Wesley’s non-Scriptural references nearly equal his references to passages of Scripture in number. Still, Wesley’s use of these writers is in service of the discussion sparked by the passage from 1 John; they are used in the service of Scripture, not the other way around.

Wesley and Augustine read and preach 1 John in the context of the whole of Scripture and not as an isolated text. The breadth of their Scriptural appeals indicates a
commitment to the twin ideas that Scripture is a seamless garment, whose parts are only comprehensible in relation to the whole, and that Scripture interprets Scripture. The whole of Scripture is the foundation for their mutual interest and their separate inquiries into the theological and homiletical potential of 1 John.
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260


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