

Respected Founder / Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology

Randy L. Maddox

Methodists in North America struggled from nearly the beginning with the question of how they should understand their relationship to John Wesley. There was always a deep appreciation for him as the founder of the movement in which they stood. However there was also a clear hesitance to grant Wesley unquestioned authority on a span of practical and theological issues such as the legitimacy of the American Revolution, the structure for the newly independent Methodist church, and the preferred form for regular Sunday worship. One of the surprising areas where such hesitance about the role of Wesley's precedent for American Methodist developments emerged was in theology. While Wesley clearly understood himself to be a theologian for his movement, American Methodists increasingly concluded that—whatever his other attributes—Wesley was not a theologian! The purpose of this paper is to investigate the dynamics that led to this revised estimate of Wesley's status as a theologian and to note the implications that it has had for American Methodist theology. In particular I will consider progressive changes in assumptions about what characterized a theological position or work as "Wesleyan," when American Methodists acquiesced to the judgment that Wesley himself was not a theologian.

I

As background to the North American story it is helpful to make clear the sense in which Wesley considered himself a theologian (or a "divine" as eighteenth-century Anglicans were prone to call them). At the most basic level he would have meant by this designation a central role of all clergy, who are educated in the rich Christian theological heritage in order to shepherd the formation of those in their pastoral care. Wesley maintained high expectations of even his self-trained preachers to prepare for this basic role as a "divine."¹ By contrast he enjoined his preachers from taking upon themselves, without his case-by-case oversight and approval, the typical tasks of an Anglican "divine" in the specialized or professional sense of this term—namely, preparing and

¹See his "Address to the Clergy," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 10:480–500, esp. 482.

publishing liturgies, hymns, sermons, catechisms, and the like.² Because of its unique historical dynamics (including its appeal to the precedent of the early church), the production of such practical-theological materials for pastors to use had come to define the specialized task of the theologian in Anglicanism. The seriousness with which Wesley took upon himself this task is evidenced by the numerous practical-theological materials he left behind; besides his well-known sermons these include conference minutes, letters, controversial essays and tracts, disciplinary guides for Christian life, spiritual biographies, his own journal, and a range of edited creeds, liturgies, prayerbooks, bible study aids, hymnals, catechisms, and devotional guides.³

The point to be emphasized is that Wesley bequeathed to his movement not only the core of the Christian theological heritage (with certain characteristic doctrinal emphases) but a multi-level model of the “practical theologian” consistent with his Anglican setting. The history of American Methodist theology has been one of progressive neglect (and occasional rejection of portions) of this inheritance.⁴

The story can begin with Francis Asbury. Asbury was without question the most immediate mentor of the first generation of American preachers, from his appointment by Wesley as the first superintendent of the American work in 1772 until his death in 1816. His influence in this capacity, in specific regard to Wesley’s model of theological activity, must be judged ambivalent. On the one hand Asbury praised Wesley’s works for the spirituality they conveyed, and even called him the “most respectable divine since the primitive ages.”⁵ On the other hand Asbury shared the alienation of most American Methodists from Wesley and his Anglican context following the Revolutionary War, and showed a progressive independence of mind on theological matters.⁶ On balance, Wesley’s major theological writings remained for Asbury the “standards” provided by an esteemed founder. However, separation from the context in which Wesley’s theological activity fit combined with Asbury’s lack of formal theological education left him disinclined to follow Wesley’s model of

²See the injunctions against publishing in 1765 *Minutes*, Q. 24 (p. 51); 1781 *Minutes*, Q. 25 (p. 151); 1782 *Minutes*, Q. 34 (p. 158); and 1788 *Minutes*, Q. 22 (p. 224) in *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, from the First, held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., in the Year 1744*, Vol. 1 (London: John Mason, 1862).

³For more on this, see Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley – Practical Theologian,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 122–47.

⁴For a detailed analysis of the neglect of Wesley’s model of “practical theology,” on which parts of the following summary are based, see Randy L. Maddox, “An Untapped Inheritance: American Methodism and Wesley’s Practical Theology,” in *Doctrines and Disciplines: Methodist Theology and Practice*, edited by Dennis Campbell, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 19–52, 292–309.

⁵See respectively, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958) 1:263; and *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. With Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798; reprint: Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1979), 7.

⁶Cf. *Albert Outler: the Churchman*, ed. Bob W. Parrott (Anderson, IN: Bristol House, 1995), 235, 242.

preparing and publishing various first-order theological materials for the new American church.⁷ Asbury's negative precedent helps explain how appreciation for the practical-theological importance of tasks such as preparing liturgies, collecting catechetical sermons, and revising articles of religion declined so rapidly among American Methodists.⁸

At the same time that central aspects of Wesley's model of a "divine" in the specialized sense were disappearing the published journals of the early generations of American Methodist circuit riders reveal that most of them were also truncating his assumptions about the more basic level of this office assigned to all clergy. They gladly took upon themselves the task of shaping the theological convictions of their hearers but they showed little sense of the need for the careful grounding in classic theological texts that Wesley had prescribed to prepare for this task. The only reading evident in many of these journals was in Wesley himself, especially the doctrinal tracts in the *Discipline*, his *Sermons*, and his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*.⁹ And these cases are outnumbered by those in which there is no mention of reading theological works at all.¹⁰ While more reading was likely taking place than is recorded, the general impression fits the minimal educational expectations placed upon circuit riders in the early decades of American Methodism.

⁷The main examples of Asbury participating in producing practical-theological materials are the notes to the 1798 *Discipline*; his support of John Dickin's production of *A Short Scriptural Catechism Intended for the Use of the Methodist Societies* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1795) and a later revision of the same (see his Letter to Ezekiel Cooper [7 Jan. 1801], *Journal and Letters* 3:194–95); and *A Selection of Hymns from various authors designed as a supplement to the Methodist Pocket Hymn Book, compiled under the direction of Bishop Asbury* (New York: Daniel Hitt, 1808).

⁸This decline is documented in Maddox, "Untapped Inheritance."

⁹E.g., William Watters, *A Short Account of the Christian Experience and Ministerial Labours of William Watters* (Alexandria, VA: S. Snowden, 1806), 81; William Swayze, *Narrative of William Swayze* (Cincinnati: R. P. Thompson, 1839), 59; F. C. Holliday, *Life and Times of Rev. Allen Wiley, A.M.; ... including his original letters, entitled "A Help to the Performance of Ministerial Duties"* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Poe, 1853), 172; Joseph Travis, *Autobiography of the Rev. Joseph Travis* (Nashville: E. Stevenson, 1856), 235; and George Brown, *Recollections of Itinerant Life: Including Early Reminiscences*, 4th ed. (Cincinnati: Carrol & Co., 1868), 67.

¹⁰E.g., Seth Crowell, *The Journal of Seth Crowell; Containing an Account of His Travels as a Methodist Preacher for Twelve Years* (New York: J. C. Totten, 1813); Rueben Peaslee, *The Experience, Christian and Ministerial, of Mr. Reuben Peaslee* (Haverhill, MA: Burrill & Tileston, 1816); James P. Horton, *A Narrative of the Early Life, Remarkable Conversion, and Spiritual Labours of James P. Horton* (printed for author, 1839); Charles Giles, *Pioneer: A Narrative of the Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labours of Rev. Charles Giles* (New York: Lane & Tippett, 1844); George Coles, *The Supernumerary; or Lights and Shadows of Itinerancy compiled from the papers of Rev. Elijah Woolsey* (New York: Lane & Tippett, 1845); Joseph Snelling, *Life of Rev. Joseph Snelling, being a sketch of his Christian Experience and Labors in the Ministry* (Boston: John M'Leish, 1847); Tobias Spicer, *Autobiography of Rev. Tobias Spicer* (New York: Land & Scott, 1852); John Adams, *The Life of "Reformation" John Adams, an Elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. 1 (Boston: George C. Rand, 1853); John M'Lean, *Sketch of Rev. Philip Gatch* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Poe, 1854); and Alfred Lorrain, *The Helm, the Sword, and the Cross* (Cincinnati: Poe & Hitchcock, 1862).

Such minimal expectations of studying theological classics were partly practical in nature, reflecting the urgency of getting Methodist preachers out on the circuit. But close consideration suggests that they also reveal the impact of a characteristic element of the early American setting upon Methodism. One of the most diffuse tendencies among Christian groups in the antebellum period was “restorationism.” This involved a radicalizing of the Protestant notion of “scripture alone” into the optimistic assumption that pilgrims to the New World had finally been freed from the tyranny of all past tradition (including the Reformers!) and could now reinstitute the simple belief and practice of the New Testament church. This assumption comes through in several of the journals where circuit riders go to great pains to emphasize that Methodist doctrine is nothing by “bible doctrine,” and self-consciously appeal only to scripture in doctrinal disputes.¹¹ Their implied methodology is starkly affirmed by Asa Shinn in *An Essay on the Plan of Salvation*, one of the first theological monographs by an American Methodist:

Each one is bound under a sacred obligation, to go to the Bible for [one's] system of divinity, and so far as any is governed by a regard to any human creed, in the formation of [one's] religious opinions, so far [one] is deficient in the very principle of Christian faith; and pays that homage to human authority that is due only to the Divine.¹²

On such terms little direct reliance on Wesley would be expected in Shinn’s monograph, and little is found. At the same time the naivete of his proposed methodology will escape few who are familiar with the history of restorationist movements (or claims to presuppositionless interpretation in other fields). An actual examination of Shinn’s essay reveals less an exposition of scripture than an apologetic for a particular interpretation of scripture (a Methodist interpretation versus the Calvinist). And in this apologetic Shinn is not totally adverse to invoking arguments of other Methodist theologians that he has found helpful. But significantly, he invokes Wesley less frequently than he does John Fletcher.¹³

Shinn’s attraction to the work of Fletcher is not unique. The most consistent theological attack faced by early Methodist circuit riders, from New

¹¹Cf. William R. Phinney, *et al.*, *Thomas Ware, a spectator at the Christmas Conference* (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1984), 81, 107–8; John Ffirth, *Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott: to which is annexed a Narrative of his Life and Death* (New York: Waugh & Mason, 1832), 25, 43; Ebenezer F. Newell, *Life and Observations of Rev. E. F. Newell, Who has been more than Forty Years an Itinerant Minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church: New England Conference* (Worcester, MA: C. W. Ainsworth, 1847), 30–32, 60, 137, 203; and David Lewis, *Recollections of a Superannuate: or, Sketches of Life, Labor, and Experience in the Methodist Itinerancy* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1857), 36, 164–65.

¹²Asa Shinn, *An Essay on the Plan of Salvation* (Baltimore: Neal, Wills & Cole, 1813), 230. For a more extended argument to this effect, see George Peck, *Appeal from Tradition to Scripture and Common Sense; or, an Answer to the Question, What Constitutes the Divine Rule of Faith and Practice* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1844).

¹³Cf. Shinn, *Plan of Salvation*, 109–10, 318–19. See also Shinn, *On the Benevolence and Rectitude of the Supreme Being* (Baltimore: Book Committee of the MPC, 1840), where he quotes Fletcher repeatedly and Wesley only twice.

England to the Carolinas, came from their Calvinist competitors. Fletcher's extended apologetic defenses of distinctive Methodist doctrines proved particularly useful in this context.¹⁴ As such it became common from the first generation for American preachers to equate Methodist theology with Wesley's *Sermons and Notes* and Fletcher's *Checks*.¹⁵ A purposeful supplementing of Wesley with Fletcher is also evident in most other early theological monographs by Shinn's colleagues.¹⁶ And the earliest suggested course of study for American Methodist elders gave equal place to the works of Wesley and Fletcher.¹⁷

Many of the endorsements of Fletcher made clear that what they valued was not just specific arguments or claims he made but the form of his work. Fletcher had taken theological training in Geneva before immigrating from France to England and taking ordination as an

¹⁴Note the praise of Fletcher in E. Farley Sharp, ed., *Laban Clark: Autobiography about his early life from 1778–1804: Circuit Rider for the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1987), 3; Lewis, *Recollections*, 166; and James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (printed for the author, 1842), 91.

¹⁵Cf. Freeborn Garrettson's 1786 letter in Robert Drew Simpson, ed. *American Methodist Pioneer: The Life and Journals of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson* (Rutland, VT: Academy Press, 1984), 247; Ezekial Cooper, *The Substance of a Funeral Discourse on the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia: Jonathan Ponder, 1819), 40–41 (on Asbury's reading); J. B. Wakeley, *The Heros of Methodism* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 318 (on Smith Arnold in the 1790s); Worth Marion Tippy, *Frontier Bishop: The Life and Times of Robert Richford Roberts* (New York: Abingdon, 1958), 31–32 (on typical recommendations of reading in 1792); Billy Hibbard, *Memoirs of the Life and Travels of B. Hibbard* (New York: Totten, 1825), 81, 357; Charles Elliott, *The Life of the Rev. Robert R. Roberts: One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Lane & Tippet, 1844), 141; Elbert Osborn, *Passages in the Life and Ministry of Elbert Osborn, an Itinerant Minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: for the author, 1847), 22, 38–39, 98–99; John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 191–92, 261; John Ellis Edwards, *Life of Rev. John Wesley Childs: for Twenty-Three Years an Itinerant Methodist Preacher* (Richmond, VA: John Early, 1852), 78–79; Henry Smith, *Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1854), 30, 52–53; Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Curts, 1857), 51; W. P. Strickland, ed. *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1858), 196, 288; Abel Stevens, *The Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D.* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1863), 51, 57; and George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874), 73–74.

¹⁶Note the use of Fletcher to round out Wesley in Timothy Merritt, *An Essay on the Perseverance of the Saints* (Portland, MA: J. M'Kown, 1807); Nathan Bangs, *The Errors of Hopkinsinianism* (New York: Totten, 1815), 71; and Freeborn Garrettson, *Substance of the Semi-Centennial Sermon* (New York: Bangs & Emory, 1827), 10–11.

¹⁷See the list adopted at the 1817 Baltimore Conference, in *Those Incredible Methodists*, ed. G.P. Baker (Baltimore: Commission on Archives and History, Baltimore Conference, 1972), 133. This basic course carried on through the 1820s, as evidenced by Freeborn Garrettson's list (cf. Kenneth E. Rowe, "New Light on Early Methodist Theological Education," *Methodist History* 10.1 [1971]: 58–62) and that of the 1827 Illinois conference (cited in Warren Sweet, *The Methodists* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1946], 303–4).

Anglican priest.¹⁸ Reflecting a strand of the continental model of his training, Fletcher's theological writings were devoted almost entirely to rigorous extended apologetics for the Wesleyan Methodist positions on cooperant grace and entire sanctification. Wesley valued such apologetics as a *supplement* to first-order forms of practical-theological activity. By contrast, early American Methodists gravitated to Fletcher's rigorous apologetics as the *standard model* for their theological publications.¹⁹ With apologetics defining the standard of "serious" theological activity, Wesley's more formative works slid to supplementary (i.e., optional!) status. This helps explain why American Methodists chose never to reprint Wesley's *Sunday Service* but repeatedly reprinted his own scattered apologetic treatises, binding these treatises for some time with their official *Discipline*.²⁰

This publication contrast symbolizes Wesley's transition from being a model "divine" to being a scholastic source. What qualified a theological position or work as "Wesleyan" now had virtually nothing to do with it utilizing one of the practical-theological forms that Wesley had favored. Neither did it require grounding one's theology in a broadly balanced reading of the Christian tradition, as Wesley had done. What mattered was that one could cite Wesley in support of disputed Methodist positions. But this was not always an easy task. The qualities that made hymns, prayers, and sermons effective as formative materials rendered them problematic for providing handy reference. As such the clearest symbol of the solidifying scholastic nature of Methodist theology was the British publication of *Wesleyana: A Selection of the Most Important Passages in the Writings of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Arranged to form a Complete Body of Divinity* in 1825. This compendium, providing ready access to Wesley's (decontextualized) authoritative dictums on a range of theological issues, was reprinted by American Methodists through most of the nineteenth century.²¹

¹⁸For discussion of the question of how much theological training Fletcher actually received in Geneva, see Patrick Philip Streiff, *Jean Guillaume de la Flechere* (Frankfort am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), 44–45.

¹⁹Early American Methodist apologetics against Calvinism include Merritt, *Perseverance of Saints* (1807); Shinn, *Plan of Salvation* (1813); Bangs, *Hopkinsinianism* (1815); Nathan Bangs, *The Reformer Reformed* (New York: Totten, 1818); Willbur Fisk, *Calvinistic Controversy* (New York: Mason & Lane, 1837); Francis Hodgson, *An Examination of the System of New Divinity* (New York: Lane, 1840); Shinn, *Rectitude of Supreme Being* (1840); Albert Bledsoe, *A Theodicy: or, Vindication of the Divine Glory* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856); and Daniel Denison Whedon, *The Freedom of the Will* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1864). Significantly, there is little or no direct reference to Wesley in any of these.

²⁰For more on this see Frank Baker, "The Doctrines in the *Discipline*: A Study of the Forgotten Theological Presuppositions of American Methodism," in *From Wesley to Asbury* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1976), 162–82. See also Jacob Gruber's comment that "Next to the Bible, the Discipline, and Wesley's tracts which were bound up with it furnished the armory from whence the itinerants ... drew the weapons of their spiritual warfare," in W. P. Strickland, *The Life of Jacob Gruber* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 30.

²¹Original edition: (London: W. Booth, 1825). The compiler of this compendium is not listed and remains uncertain. The British Museum attributes it to William Carpenter, but this is improbable since Carpenter had few known Methodist connections. On the other hand, the dispassionate editorial statement of the purpose for publication (iii–iv), as simply informative, might support the attribution. When the first

II

Whatever contribution it made this simple collection of scattered quotes from Wesley could not satisfy the expectations of “serious” theology that American Methodists confronted in the models of their chief competitors. A good indication of these expectations can be gained by considering a Calvinist critique of initial American Methodist theological publications. In an address to the 1852 Presbyterian General Assembly E. P. Humphrey argued that Methodist theology was unworthy of serious consideration because it:

. . . has yet to be reduced to a systematic and logical form. . . . We have its brief and informal creed in some five and twenty articles; but where is its complete confession of faith, in thirty or forty chapters? . . . Where is its whole body of divinity, from under the hand of a master, sharply defining its terms, accurately stating its belief, laying down the conclusions logically involved therein, trying these conclusions, no less than their premises, by the Word of God, refuting objections, and adjusting all its parts into a consistent and systematical whole?²²

What Humphrey was here assuming as the standard against which Methodist theology came up short is a scholastic theology—i.e., a textbook that provides a comprehensive and carefully organized survey of a tradition’s truth claims, defending any controverted claims polemically, and providing rational grounding for the whole. Wesley had not provided such a work for his Methodist people. His American descendants could have taken this as warrant to question the preeminence being given this specific form of theological activity by their critics. Instead, they began to concede that—compared to Calvin, with his *Institutes*—Wesley was simply not a “theologian.”²³

Some were already at work to fill this perceived deficiency in Wesley’s bequest. The trailblazer was Richard Watson, who published his multi-volume *Theological Institutes* in 1825–28.²⁴ While Watson was a British Methodist he is relevant to our topic because his *Institutes* was the most common theology text on the course of study for elders across the breadth of American Methodism from its introduction in 1830 through most the remainder of the nineteenth

American edition was released (New York: Mason & Lane, 1840), it included a new preface (3–8) stressing the value of the compendium as a resource for young preachers and to help refute opposers of Methodism. *Wesleyana* is listed as still available for purchase in Francis A. Archibald, *Methodism and Literature* (Cincinnati: Walden & Stowe, 1883), 398.

²²E. P. Humphrey, *Our Theology and Its Development* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1857), 68–69.

²³For one of the first examples, see Samuel W. Fisher, *John Calvin and John Wesley: An Address Delivered August 7, 1856, on the Nineteenth Anniversary of the Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., 1856), 23–31.

²⁴The first American edition was Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes: or, A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity* (New York: Emory & Waugh, 1830).

century.²⁵ The scholastic character of his theology is evident in his subtitle: “A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity.” The drive for comprehensiveness is obvious. Also striking is the leading role for “evidences.” The work opens with a rational apologetic for belief in God and acceptance of Christian revelation, clearly assuming that these foundations must be established before consideration of the Christian worldview itself can begin. Finally, the work is punctuated throughout with polemic defenses of disputed Methodist claims.

While American Methodists welcomed Watson’s *Institutes*, some complained that the work’s length and labored argumentation made it inaccessible to laypersons and beginning candidates for ministerial orders. This sparked the first American ventures in survey compends of Methodist theology: in 1840 Amos Binney published a brief *Theological Compend*, which was aimed at use by families and Sunday-schools; and Thomas Ralston contributed a somewhat longer survey of the *Elements of Divinity* in 1847, geared specifically to beginning candidates for ministry.²⁶

Though he showed no awareness of them these two “popular” surveys would have been ridiculed in Humphrey’s estimation of Methodist theology even more sharply than he had dismissed Watson for being insufficiently comprehensive and lacking systematic organization.²⁷ Most American Methodist writers after 1852 focussed their energies on providing a more rigorously “scholastic” text than Watson, to meet critiques like that of Humphrey. The prime example is Samuel Wakefield’s *Complete System of Christian Theology*, published in 1862.²⁸

²⁵Watson was on the AME course of study 1844–92; AMEZ, 1872–1900; CME, 1872–1918; FMC, 1860–95; MEC, 1833–92; MECS, 1878–1906; MPC, 1830–1920; UBC, 1841–93; WMC, 1883–92; and is reported as used in the EA from 1843 (no official course until much later).

²⁶See Amos Binney, *Theological Compend: Containing a System of Divinity or a Brief View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity, Designed for the Benefit of Families, Bible Classes, and Sunday-Schools* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walton, 1840); and Thomas Neely Ralston, *Elements of Divinity: or a Course of Lectures, comprising a clear and concise view of the System of Theology, as taught in the Holy Scriptures* (Louisville: E. Stevensen, 1854). The only prior work that approached a full survey text by an American Methodist was Ara Williams, *The Inquirer’s Guide to Gospel Truth; or Doctrinal Methodism Defended Against the Assaults of its Enemies, by Scriptural Proofs and Rational Arguments* (Buffalo, NY: Steele & Faxon, 1832); Williams drew heavily on Watson in his attempt to defend those specific Methodist doctrines currently under attack by Deists, Calvinists, and Universalists.

²⁷For Humphrey’s rejection of Watson see the footnote in *Our Theology*, 69.

²⁸Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology: Or, A Concise, Comprehensive and Systematic View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity* (Pittsburgh: J. L. Read and Son, 1862). Luther Lee produced an earlier revision of Watson for the Wesleyan Methodists (giving particular attention to arguments against episcopacy, etc.): *Elements of Theology: or, An Exposition of the Divine Origin, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity* (Syracuse: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1856). Though somewhat later, the first texts prepared in the AME were essentially digests of Watson and Wakefield: James Crawford Embry, *Digest of Christian Theology, designed for the use of Beginners in the Study of Theological Science* (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1890); and James Meyer Conner, *Outlines of Christian Theology, or Theological Hints* (Little Rock, AR: Brown Printing, 1896).

This text was explicitly a reworking of Watson, partly to provide a less labored style. But its main agenda is evident in its subtitle; Wakefield's version claimed to provide "A *Concise, Comprehensive and Systematic* View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity." American Methodist Scholasticism had reached its stride!

What was the impact on the role of Wesley in American Methodist theology of this further shift from focussing "serious" theological activity on apologetic treatises to equating it with producing scholastic compends? One would expect that there was little movement toward reclaiming the primacy that Wesley placed on classical first-order forms of theological expression. What is less expected is the way that his adequacy as a scholastic "source" was increasingly called into question.

One dimension of the issue of adequacy was comprehensiveness. Since their primary interest in Wesley was his articulation and defense of contested Methodist distinctives, most of which fell in the classic locus of soteriology, Methodist scholastic theologians ended up developing large sections of their theology with little dependence on Wesley. Watson set the precedent for the later American scholastic compendiums in referring to Wesley only about a dozen times in his two-volume work, with almost all of these citations confined to the section on soteriology.²⁹ Thus emerged the common (mis)impression that Wesley's theological concern was limited to a few matters of soteriology.

The second dimension of the issue of Wesley's adequacy as a scholastic source concerned consistency. This dimension came into play precisely in those areas where Wesley was typically cited as an authority in scholastic texts. The best example is the argument over Wesley's teachings on entire sanctification that erupted in nineteenth-century American Methodism. On one side of this debate was a "holiness" camp that consolidated at mid-century, who gathered every instance that they could find where Wesley suggested that entire sanctification was an instantaneous gift available *now* to even the most recent convert.³⁰ In response a series of authors demonstrated that there were apparent inconsistencies or temporal transitions in the comments on entire

²⁹Watson's precedent is noted by Thomas Langford in *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 13. The only reference to Wesley in Williams, *Inquirer's Guide* is on the imputation of Adam's sin to later humanity (147); Binney, *Compend*, makes only a passing mention in an appendix (123); Ralston, *Elements*, extracts Wesley on the topics of Original Sin and Perseverance of the Saints, and cites him concerning justification (293–94, 303–4), the new birth (337), and witness of the Spirit (366); Lee, *Elements*, cites Wesley only concerning sanctification (207), the salvation of infants and heathen (219ff), and the episcopacy—to dispute him! (492); Wakefield, *System*, cites Wesley on the authority of Scripture (107), imputed righteousness (413), justification by faith (420), regeneration (427), the connection of baptism to regeneration (431–32), witness of the Spirit (437, 441), and sanctification (446–54); Embry, *Digest*, refers to Wesley on Original Sin (96–97) and sanctification (207–8); and Connor, *Outlines*, mentions him only in connection to sanctification (230).

³⁰See esp. John Allen Wood, *Perfect Love* (Philadelphia: Samuel Burlock, 1861).

sanctification that Wesley made over the long course of his ministry and contended that the most balanced reading of Wesley's mature thought would put the emphasis on a slow process of growth toward entire sanctification.³¹ These proposals sparked blistering rebuttals that touted Wesley's consistency and intellect over that of the "revisionists."³² The eventual response of the latter party to such rebuttals was to affirm a general commitment to Wesley while insisting that he was not inerrant. As James Mudge put it, "It is more important to be well-reasoned, self-consistent, and wholly scriptural than to accord in every smallest phrase with Wesley."³³

The question which Mudge's response begged, of course, was whether there were parts of Wesley's work with which it was *required* to accord, if one was to be a Methodist. The most obvious candidate was the Articles of Religion, which were specifically framed as doctrinal standards. But these did not address the issue of entire sanctification so holiness advocates focused attention on Wesley's *Sermons* and *Notes*.³⁴ While there is some reason to question whether the *Sermons* and *Notes* were actually intended to be included under the "existing established standards" endorsed at the 1808 MEC General Conference the general assumption in the latter-nineteenth century was that they were.³⁵ But this assumption did not stop several from questioning how sermons and a popular commentary on the New Testament could function as doctrinal standards. They hardly seemed rigorous or concise enough. Did Methodists really have to agree with every notion that Wesley mentioned in them (such as animal salvation for example)?³⁶

In the context of similar questions surrounding the unification to form the Methodist Church of Canada Nathanael Burwash came to the defense of Wesley's use of sermons as standards, arguing that sermons fit a movement that was evangelistic in origin rather than intellectual. Burwash suggested that Wesley had actually reclaimed an apostolic form that had been obscured by

³¹Cf. DeWitt Clinton Huntington, *What is it to be Holy?; or, The Theory of Entire Sanctification* (Rochester, NY: Benton & Andrews, 1869), 35ff; Jonathan Townley Crane, *Holiness the Birthright of All God's Children* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874), 43; Jeremiah M. Boland, *The Problem of Methodism* (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1888), 26–27; and James Mudge, *Growth in Holiness Toward Perfection* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1895), 9ff.

³²The most vigorous examples are: Asbury Lowrey, "Dr Mudge and His Book," *Methodist Review* 77 (1895): 954–59; and William McDonald, *John Wesley and His Doctrine* (Chicago: Christian Witness, 1904), 107ff.

³³James Mudge, "A Friendly Word with my Critics," *Methodist Review* 78 (1896): 125–30, here, 129; see also Mudge, *The Perfect Life in Experience and Doctrine* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1911), 300.

³⁴See especially W. J. Snively, "Our Standards," in *Entire Sanctification from 1739–1900*, ed. S. L. C. Coward (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Herald Press, 1900), 81–102.

³⁵The issues surrounding the 1808 General Conference are debated by Richard Heitzenrater and Tom Oden in Langford, *Doctrine and Theology*, 109–42.

³⁶Cf. the exchange between Joseph Pullman, "Methodism and Heresy," *Methodist Review* 61 (1879): 334–57, esp. 337; and Richard Wheatley, "Methodist Doctrinal Standards," *Methodist Review* 65 (1883): 26–51, esp. 45.

later scholasticism and that present-day Methodists ought to honor this move. They could do so by affirming Wesley's *Sermons* as a standard of preaching, his *Notes* as a standard of interpretation, and the Articles of Religion as a standard of unity with other Protestant traditions.³⁷

Other than a little interest in the MECS, Burwash's suggestion was dismissed or ignored by U.S. Methodists.³⁸ Albert Bledsoe spoke for the majority when he described the *Sermons* and *Notes* in 1876 as the "strangest creed of Christendom," sorely in need of a more systematic alternative. Bledsoe attributed this strangeness to Wesley having neither the calling to produce a closely articulated system of doctrine nor a great respect for theology as a science, and lamented how making Wesley's works a creed had retarded the progress of scientific theology among Methodists.³⁹ With an attitude such as this it is no surprise that Wesley's *Notes* and *Sermons* were beginning to drop from Methodist courses of study.⁴⁰

How did Methodist scholastic theologians compensate for such growing questions about the adequacy of Wesley as the major source for defining Methodist theology? The strategy that had lasting influence was to recast Methodist theology within the larger Arminian tradition and present Wesley as one who championed authentic "evangelical" Arminianism against the more deistic and Socinian forms reigning in England in his day.⁴¹ While this move might be welcomed for asking Methodists to read more than just Wesley, it had the impact of focusing that reading mainly in the Western church, which made it hard to recognize and appreciate Wesley's distinctive blend of Eastern and Western Christian theological emphases. It also tended

³⁷Nathanael Burwash, "Preface," *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards; Part I, The Sermons* (Toronto: Methodist Book and Publishing House, 1881), i–xi. For the context of Burwash's proposal see James Roy, *Catholicity and Methodism* (Montreal: Burland-Desbarats, 1877).

³⁸See W. P. Harrison, "Introduction," in *The Wesleyan Standards: Sermons* (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1886–87) 1:5–13; and John James Tigert, "The Doctrinal Standards of Methodism," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 29 (1889): 330–40. But contrast Thomas Summers, "Review of Burwash's *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards*," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 18 (1881): 717.

³⁹Albert Bledsoe, "Review of Pope's *Compendium of Christian Theology*," *Southern Review* 20 (1876): 253–301, quote on 257.

⁴⁰*Notes* was dropped from the course of study in the AMEZ in 1852, FMC in 1864, MEC in 1864, AME in 1873, MPC in 1878, and MECS in 1906. The MPC also dropped *Sermons* in 1878. The AMEZ dropped *Sermons* in 1900. The MEC initially dropped *Sermons* in 1916, but protest led to their restoration 1920–36. The AME also dropped *Sermons* in 1936. The MECS brought *Sermons* into the 1939 merger, at which time the MC opted to list only *Selections of Writings of John Wesley*, edited by Herbert Welch (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1901), and this only as collateral reading. The CME would carry *Sermons* until 1946, the FMC to 1951, and the WMC to 1968.

⁴¹Two programmatic essays were Daniel Denison Whedon, "Arminianism and Arminius," *Methodist Review* 61 (1879): 405–26; and Wilbur Fisk Tillett, "Wesleyan Arminianism," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 20 (1883): 401–26. Note how it already appears in the subtitle of Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity*, 2 vols. (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1888).

to reduce Wesley's role in defining "Wesleyan-Arminian" theology to that of adding a few qualifications to an Arminian superstructure.⁴²

III

Wesley's role in defining either the style or the content of Methodist theology was marginalized even further with the emergence of seminaries for training Methodist preachers in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁴³ The reason for this impact is that the emerging seminaries adopted with little question the fourfold curriculum being championed in the continental European discussion of "theological encyclopedia" (i.e., Biblical Theology, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology, and Practical Theology). The concern of this model to establish clear borders between each of these disciplines had a tendency to fragment theological activity. The theological nature of three of the disciplines was also called into question because theology "proper" was usually equated with Systematics.

One rapid impact of this model on American Methodist theology was a shift from producing scholastic compendiums (which could include biblical and historical sections) to observing the disciplinary restrictions of Systematic Theology. Major texts published after 1875 almost uniformly adopted this narrower focus.⁴⁴ Indeed the limitation went further yet. The fourfold model technically included the areas of dogmatics, polemics, apologetics, and ethics in Systematic Theology. But with professionalization came the pressure for each of these to become a separate specialty. Thus these Methodist systematic theologies typically restricted themselves to dogmatics or doctrinal theology. Apologetics was left to other specialists. Even ethics began to spin off into a distinct theological discipline.⁴⁵ This latter development was particularly significant (in comparison to Wesley) because theologians were now theoretically trying to separate consideration of what Christians believe from consideration of how they should act!

⁴²Note in this regard a set of papers produced by the 1895 senior class in the Biblical Department of Vanderbilt University on the theme "The Theologians of Methodism." The introductory paper is "James Arminius: The Arminian System Defined." Next come papers on Simon Episcopus and the Remonstrants and Hugo Grotius. When John Wesley is discussed in the fourth paper, it is under the subtitle "Evangelical Arminianism." Cf. *Theologians of Methodism*, ed. W. F. Tillett (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1895; reprint, Salem, OH: Schmul, 1992).

⁴³For a more detailed analysis of this transition, and its impact, see Maddox, "Untapped Inheritance."

⁴⁴See esp. Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1877–79); Summers, *Systematic Theology* (1888); John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892–94); Henry Clay Sheldon, *System of Christian Doctrine* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1900); and Olin Alfred Curtis, *The Christian Faith Personally Given in a System of Doctrine* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1905). The prototype for this transition was William F. Warren, *Systematische Theologie, einheitliche behandelt, Erste Lieferung: Allgemeine Einleitung* (Bremen: Verlag der Tractathaus H. Neulsen, 1865), 87fn1 (Warren was an American teaching briefly in Germany; he returned in 1867 to a lengthy presidency of the school of theology at Boston).

⁴⁵Cf. the article on ethics in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, edited by John McClintock & James Strong (New York: Harper, 1867–87) 3:319–25; and John J. Tigert, "Ethics: The Science of Duty," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 47 (1898): 582–90, 49 (1900): 97–101.

In light of these developments it is small wonder that by the last quarter of the century Methodist academic theologians hardly knew what to make of Wesley as a theologian. On the fourfold model most of Wesley's theological productions would fall within the "application" discipline of Practical Theology, which is precisely the realm to which a few restricted his interest and abilities.⁴⁶ Others rejected this narrow classification, allowing that Wesley combined aspects of a professional theologian with those of a practical Christian teacher.⁴⁷ But this concession only heightened the problem. What serious theologian would overlook these boundaries? And why did Wesley never undertake the central theological task of a Systematic Theology? Some of his academic descendants were inclined to excuse Wesley on the basis of his "misfortune" of training in the methodological backwaters of Anglican theology.⁴⁸ Others appealed to a supposed principle of historical development—that revivals of Christian life inevitably focus on immediate ministry while creative epochs of theological science necessarily follow and consolidate these revivals.⁴⁹ In either case the departure of later Methodist theologians from Wesley's model of theological activity was neatly justified; after all, he had not been a *real* theologian!⁵⁰

Given their questions about Wesley's theological aptitude, in what sense did these Methodist systematic theologians understand themselves to be "Wesleyan" theologians? They rarely addressed the question, creating the cynical suspicion that it was increasingly only in the incidental sense that they carried out their theological work in contexts descended from the Wesleyan revival. There is little evidence that Wesley's writings had been central to their theological formation. Indeed Olin Curtis conceded in 1909—after teaching Systematic Theology in Methodist seminaries for twenty years—that he had only recently examined the fourteen volumes of Wesley's *Works* and had been astonished by the level of Wesley's doctrinal concern.⁵¹ Neither does Wesley figure prominently in the exposition of their system. John Miley can be considered representative with less than ten citations outside of his discussion of sanctification, and many of these simply to note his disagreement with

⁴⁶See the extended argument that Wesley should be valued as a preacher but not as a model theologian in Wilbur Fisk Tillett, *Personal Salvation* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1902), 510–14.

⁴⁷The best example is George Richard Crooks & John F. Hurst, *Theological Encyclopedia and Methodology* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), 47.

⁴⁸Note how Anglican theological activity is specifically dismissed in Warren, *Systematische Theologie*, 87fn1. Importantly, Warren never directly discusses Wesley in this book!

⁴⁹The suggestion of John McClintock in "Warren's Introduction to Systematic Theology," *Methodist Review* 48 (1866): 100–24, pp. 102–4.

⁵⁰For some examples of how standard this concession had become, see T. R. Pierce, *The Intellectual Side of John Wesley* (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1897); James W. Bashford, *Wesley and Goethe* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1903), 85–86; and Harris Franklin Rall, "Do We Need a Methodist Creed?" *Methodist Review* 89 (1907): 221–30, pp. 222–23.

⁵¹Olin Curtis, "Professor Denney's Irenic Attempt," *Methodist Review* 91 (1909): 694–707; p. 703.

Wesley.⁵² No wonder that comparative analysis shows Miley and his colleagues losing touch in their theological systems with Wesley's defining emphasis on the primacy of divine gracious initiative to all human response!⁵³

IV

By the turn of the century it was clear that a growing number of American Methodist theologians considered such distancing from the earlier tradition of their movement to be a positive thing! They lamented the way that their predecessors had avoided the challenges being raised for traditional doctrinal claims by modern intellectual developments. As they entered the twentieth century these adventuresome souls resolved that it was time to embrace these new perspectives and develop a corresponding reformulation of their theology. With this resolve Methodists assumed major leadership roles in the range of innovative programs and reactions that would characterize twentieth-century American theology as a whole.⁵⁴ They were particularly prominent in the translation of Ritschlian liberalism to the American setting, the formulation of the unique philosophical idealism of Boston Personalism, the articulation of American reverberations of Neo-Orthodox theology, the recent development of Process theology, and current interest in contextual theologies.⁵⁵

One of the striking results of this engagement with current issues is that Methodist theologians finally began to gain the attention and respect of their peers in the broader theological academy.⁵⁶ Of course, they also drew the

⁵²Cf. Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 1:403–4, 438, 524, 528; 2:244–45, 343, 367, 370ff. There are very few references to Wesley in Curtis, Raymond, or Sheldon. While there are several in Summers, this is misleading because he builds his work around the Articles of Religion and each article is listed as a Wesley quote since Wesley abridged them. Thus Miley is most representative.

⁵³See the discussion of Miley in Robert Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790–1935* (New York: Abingdon, 1965).

⁵⁴Demonstrating this point is a special interest of William McCutcheon. Cf. "Praxis: 'America Must Listen'," *Church History* 32 (1963): 452–72; and "American Methodism and the Theological Challenge of the Twentieth Century," in *Forever Beginning, 1766–1966*, edited by Albea Godbold (Lake Junaluska, NC: Methodist Historical Society, 1967), 156–65.

⁵⁵For more details and bibliography on these various movements, see Maddox, "Untapped Inheritance."

⁵⁶Standard histories of American theology mention Methodists only starting with Borden Parker Bowne and Boston Personalism (if at all!); cf. Sydney Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," in *The Shaping of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 232–321; Ahlstrom, ed., *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972–85); and "American Religious Thought and Literature," in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience* 2:997–1268, edited by Charles Lippy & Peter Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988). This makes the Methodist representatives included in surveys of twentieth-century American theology all the more striking: e.g., David Soper, *Major Voices in American Theology*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953–55), who includes Edwin Lewis, Harris Franklin Rall and Edgar S. Brightman; and William Robert Miller, *Contemporary American Protestant Thought, 1900–1970* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973) who notes Woodrow Wilson, Edgar Brightman, John B. Cobb Jr., and Carl Michalson.

attention of Methodist traditionalists who charged them with betraying their Methodist/Wesleyan heritage.⁵⁷ The response of many participants in the new engagement was to dismiss the need for considering issues of consistency with their Methodist heritage. Randolph Sinks Foster, one of the pioneers, set the tone when he began a multi-volume series of *Studies in Theology* in 1891 with the vigorous insistence that “We know more today than our fathers a hundred years ago [the year of Wesley's death!]. We have truer beliefs than they had.” Predictably, Foster almost never interacts with Wesley in his series!⁵⁸ His precedent would be widely emulated in twentieth-century Methodist liberalism.

This backdrop makes the cases where Methodist participants in the various theological agendas of the twentieth century do appeal to Wesley all the more striking. Investigation shows that their appeal was typically limited to claiming Wesleyan warrant for their particular revisionist theological agenda. As Frank Collier once summarized the strategy: “Back to Wesley is forward into the spirit of what is best in the twentieth century!”⁵⁹

In Collier’s case, Wesley was invoked as the champion of the modern scientific insistence that the test of truth was verifiability in general human experience. Collier argued that Wesley rejected all merely traditional dogma, opting for Scripture, reason, and love (*sic*) as the only standards of truth; and that Wesley viewed Scripture as speaking solely on religious topics, not scientific ones. In this way he hoped to justify the legitimacy of rethinking traditional doctrines in light of the findings of the modern natural sciences.⁶⁰ While this is not a complete misreading of Wesley, it is surely a partial and partisan one!

Equally partisan were those in the first half of the century who viewed Wesley as a “proto-Schleiermacher.”⁶¹ In this case, they saw connections between the emphasis on religious experience in Wesley (and early American Methodists) and Schleiermacher’s focus on feelings or affections (*gefühle*) as the essence of religion. More importantly, they argued that Wesley shared Schleiermacher’s agenda of defining Christian doctrine in terms of what can be grounded in or derived from such experience. They touted as the distinctive character of Methodism that, unlike other confessional movements who

⁵⁷One of the earliest and sharpest such attacks was George W. Wilson, *Methodist Theology vs. Methodist Theologians* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1904).

⁵⁸The quote is from Foster, *Studies in Theology*, Vol. 1: *Prolegomena: Philosophic Basis of Theology; or, Rational Principles of Religious Faith* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1891), vi–vii. The only passing reference to Wesley I have found is in Vol. 6: *Sin* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1899), 179–81.

⁵⁹Frank Wilbur Collier, *Back to Wesley* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1924), 5.

⁶⁰Cf. Frank Wilbur Collier, *John Wesley Among the Scientists*, (New York: Abingdon, 1928), 49, 61.

⁶¹Note suggested correlations between Schleiermacher and Wesley in John C. Granbery, “Method in Methodist Theology,” *Methodist Quarterly Review* 58 (1909): 230–43, p. 235; and George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), 46–51.

forced ill-fitting traditional dogmas *upon* experience, Methodists allowed their theology to flow naturally *out of* experience.⁶²

Of course, such appeals to the self-evident nature of experience began to be called into question themselves as neo-Orthodoxy gained influence between the World Wars. This movement emphatically rejected the experientialism of liberal theology and called for a return to the biblical and doctrinal foundations of the Christian Church. It particularly sought a reappropriation of the Reformation insights of Luther and Calvin. It was not long before a parallel “neo-Wesleyanism” could be detected, which laid claim to Wesley in its criticism of the subjectivism and overemphasis on experience in liberal Methodist theology.⁶³

Neo-Wesleyans demonstrated convincingly the limitations of many of the liberal appropriations of Wesley. However they had their own issues of imbalance. In particular, neo-Orthodoxy tended towards a one-sided emphasis on human incapacities and forensic justification—emphases that could not do justice to the catholic (East and West) side of Wesley’s Anglican theology.⁶⁴ Likewise, an underlying concern to convince their neo-Orthodox friends that Wesley deserved their respect prevented those pressing the neo-Wesleyan agenda from reconsidering Wesley’s model of theological activity. They typically conceded at the outset that Wesley was not a “real” theologian—like, say, Calvin!⁶⁵ Their desire to recover Wesley’s *doctrine* to proclaim distracted them from the suggestion of Wesley’s theological *practice* that awakening and nurturing Christian life requires much more than proclamation.

It bears adding however that the neo-orthodox interest in Protestant roots was part of a larger concern with confessional identity and connections stirred by the emerging ecumenical dialogue. It was out of this broader dialogue that some theologians, most notably Albert Outler, began after mid-century to encourage their fellow Methodists to recover their Wesleyan tradition in its own right, not filtered through a standardized Protestant screen.⁶⁶

⁶²A classic example is the response to fundamentalism by (MECS bishop) Edwin D. Mouzon, *Fundamentals of Methodism* (Nashville: MECS Publishing House, 1923), 8. See also Harris Franklin Rall, “Making a Methodist Theology,” *Methodist Quarterly Review* 74 (1925): 579–86.

⁶³Note the entire issue of *Religion in Life* 29.4 (1960), which is devoted to the topic of “Neo-Wesleyanism.”

⁶⁴This point was made by Lycurgus Starkey, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 162; and Claude Thompson, “Aldersgate and the New Reformers,” *Christian Advocate* 6.10 (1962): 7–8.

⁶⁵The most relevant examples are Robert Burtner & Robert Chiles, *John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 7; and John Alfred Faulkner, “Shall We Leave Wesley for Ritschl?” *Methodist Review* 98 (1916): 447–59, pp. 448–49.

⁶⁶See esp. Albert Outler, “The Current Theological Scene: A View from the Beach at Ebb Tide,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Methodist Conference*, edited by Lee Tuttle & Max Woodward (New York: Abingdon, 1967), 157–67. The most helpful available study of Wesley for facilitating this recovery was Colin William, *John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1960).

V

The last four decades deserve special attention because they have witnessed a dramatic growth and professionalization in the field of Wesley Studies. One expression of this has been the undertaking of the first truly critical edition of Wesley's works: *The Bicentennial Edition*.⁶⁷ Equally emblematic is the proliferation of detailed secondary studies which bring to their investigation a broad knowledge of Wesley's context and an historical-critical realism about his unique stance or contribution.⁶⁸ These resources have provided the basis for a renewed engagement with Wesley by Methodist theologians that can move beyond partisanship or triumphalism.

The last four decades have also witnessed growing interest in such an engagement. While a study of Wesley published in 1960 was greeted by surprise at the assumption that Wesley's theology should merit any continuing authority within the traditions descended from his ministry, there is a burgeoning call for a "recovery of Wesley" among his current heirs.⁶⁹ Of course, this call embodies differing concerns for the various elements of the Wesleyan tradition. Among United Methodists for example the call to return to Wesley is usually connected to a search for some unifying identity within their acknowledged pluralism.⁷⁰ Within the holiness traditions by contrast the "back-to-Wesley movement" is more often an attempt to overcome the perceived distortion of the Wesleyan understanding of holiness by nineteenth-century American revivalism.⁷¹

One clear fruit emerging from these recent developments is the growing number of contemporary Methodist theologians who are reengaging Wesley's works in their critical reflection on the issues confronting Christian faith and practice in their communities.⁷² Even more significant is the way that Wesley's

⁶⁷For a description, see Frank Baker, "The Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works and Its Text," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Kenneth A. Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), 117–33.

⁶⁸For a brief survey of trends in both historical and theological studies, see Richard Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 205–18. A more complete bibliography and orientation to the theological studies can be gained from Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994).

⁶⁹For the earlier response see Harold Bosley, "Review of Colin Williams' *John Wesley's Theology Today*," *Religion in Life* 29 (1960): 615–17.

⁷⁰This call is sometimes closely wedded to a conservative theological agenda: e.g., Paul Mickey, *Essentials of Wesleyan Theology: A Contemporary Affirmation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980). However there are more moderate expressions: e.g., James W. Holsinger, Jr. & Evelyn Laycock, *Awaken the Giant: 28 Prescriptions for Reviving the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 142.

⁷¹See the programmatic call in Mildred Wynkoop, "Theological Roots of the Wesleyan Understanding of the Holy Spirit," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 14.1 (1979): 77–98, p. 80.

⁷²For a sampling among the conservative and holiness branches of Methodism, see the last decade or so of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*; and Kenneth Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997). A few of the recent United Methodist examples would be John B. Cobb Jr., *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998); and Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998).

model of theological activity is receiving renewed interest. One strand of this interest has focussed on the issue of the sources of theological authority, framed in the (somewhat debatable) terms of the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral.”⁷³ The strand that is perhaps more surprising has focussed on the *form* of Wesley’s theological activity. No one can represent better, or has contributed more to, this reengagement of Wesley than Albert Outler. In 1961, moving very much against the stream, he began to argue that Wesley should be valued as a major theologian. At first this meant only defending Wesley’s “folk theology” as a legitimate supplement to academic theology.⁷⁴ Eventually Outler was insisting that Wesley’s theological model was an authentic and creative form in its own right, that need not be compared negatively to academic theology.⁷⁵ Some others have gone further yet, suggesting that Wesley’s model should be valued (and recovered!) as a more primary expression of theology than what characterizes reigning academic models.⁷⁶

In short, there is a more intentional and far-ranging discussion among Wesley’s current North American heirs about what it is to do “Wesleyan” theology than there has ever been in the past. In the process Wesley is potentially being embraced as a theological *mentor* and no longer just a respected founding father.

⁷³For a good introduction to this topic and the debates surrounding it, see Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); William Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 56–65; and W. Stephen Gunter, *et al.*, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

⁷⁴See Albert C. Outler, “Towards a Re-appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian,” *Perkins School of Theology Journal* 14 (1961): 5–14.

⁷⁵See Albert C. Outler, “A New Future for ‘Wesley Studies’: An Agenda for ‘Phase III’,” in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 34–52, see p. 48.

⁷⁶E.g., Neal F. Fischer, *Context for Discovery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); M. Douglas Meeks, “John Wesley’s Heritage and the Future of Systematic Theology,” in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 38–46; D. Stephen Long, *Living the Discipline: United Methodist Theological Reflections on War, Civilization, and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 11; and Randy L. Maddox, “Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of the Poor,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 49.1 (1994): 35–47.