

Recovery of the Divine Nature:
Wesleyan Soteriology and *Theosis* Calmly Considered

by

Bobby Lynn Rackley

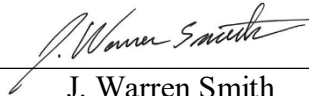
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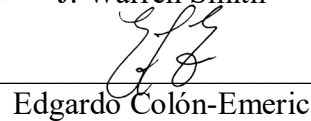
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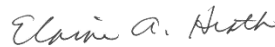
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Edgardo Colón-Emeric



Elaine Heath

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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of Theology in the Divinity School
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ABSTRACT

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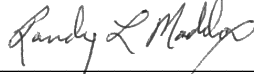
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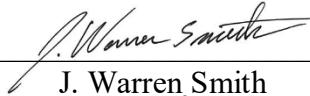
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Abstract

In the not-so-distant past, the language and theology expressed variously as *theosis*, deification, or divinization was relegated to Eastern Orthodoxy. Scholarship over the past fifty years, however, has moved deification from disgrace or quiet indifference to a place of active dialogue. Not only has *theosis* gained the attention of Protestant and Catholic theologians alike, it has also generated a host of literature exploring how figures in the West embody this once-considered Eastern concept.

This dissertation adds clarity and specificity to how John Wesley's theology reflects deification. Wesleyan theologians, in their exploration of John Wesley's interest in the "primitive church" and Eastern tradition, frequently gesture to the similarities between Wesley and *theosis*. Yet these studies, while adding rich specificity to Wesleyan-patristic studies, are often focused on parallels between Wesley and a particular figure. While tracing the lines of direct attestation and probable influence, they are not focused on *theosis* in particular, and as a result can only gesture toward possible resonances with Wesleyan theology.

Bypassing the question of Wesley's sources and influences, this project focused instead on identifying the content of *theosis* within Wesley's writings. By creating a "lens" of what constitutes the doctrine, as gleaned from recent scholarship, the way was paved to examine in detail what ways Wesley might reflect those core components of *theosis* in a large swath of his writings, including the entirety of his sermon corpus. This adds meaningfully to Wesleyan scholarship in at least two ways: 1) it is both an explicit

study of deification and John Wesley; and, 2) more than merely gesturing to parallels, it traces how those emphases are present throughout Wesley's ministry by a close reading of a large representative selection of Wesley's writings.

The close study of what constitutes deification reveals at least three theological axes which must be firmly established for the doctrine to be intelligible: 1) an understanding of God as desiring true union with humanity; 2) a theological anthropology which sees the *telos* of humanity as true Godlikeness; and 3) a soteriological thrust that points to redeemed humanity as participating in the Godhead. There is a deeply Trinitarian structure to this understanding of soteriology, which has corresponding anthropological implications. With an understanding of God and humanity in place to support the doctrine of deification, the final core idea is the means by which one is deified, an area that touches upon ecclesial context, sacramentology, and grace-enabled ascetic practices such as fasting and prayer.

When applying this lens to John Wesley's theology, the results of my study overwhelmingly support not only the presence of deification within Wesley as a theological theme, but it has structural significance for understanding Wesley's theology. The Trinitarian structure of Wesley's soteriology is a rich interplay of both an understanding of God as desiring and empowering true union with humanity on the one hand, and a theological anthropology that sees the *telos* of humanity as true Godlikeness on the other.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my loving wife Amanda, and our two sons, Josiah and Silas. I hope “Daddy’s Big Paper” makes you all proud.

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God's grace is mediated in concrete ways through God's children, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to study with the gifted and pastoral scholars on my committee. I owe a debt of gratitude most especially to my advisor Randy Maddox, without whose kindness and encouragement this project would never have come to fruition. He embodies both humility and depth of scholarship that I can only hope to emulate, and I am among the ranks of pastors and scholars who have been enriched by his ministry – may he enjoy a long and happy retirement! I am also deeply thankful for the privilege to study with J. Warren Smith and Edgardo Colón-Emeric, both of whom have deeply shaped my faith and scholarship, and who I count as close friends and mentors. Special thanks is also due to Elaine Heath, who graciously joined the committee and gave feedback on this project.

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tangible love and grace of God, and she would have rejoiced to see this day; her life and love still shape the person I am today, and the pastor and scholar I hope to become.

On a final note, an academic endeavor such as this requires considerable financial resources. I am thankful to Duke Divinity School for grants and scholarships that covered many of my expenses. Special appreciation goes out to A Foundation for Theological Education for the honor of a John Wesley Fellowship, which provided financial assistance as well as a robust community of scholars to share this journey.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Introduction

I was in my first church history course at Duke Divinity School when I was introduced to the concept of *theosis*. The famous words from St. Athanasius's *On the Incarnation* were part of the lecture: "God became man, that man might become god." Amid the waves of new theological terms and ideologies and perspectives, I remembered being enamored with the titillating newness of this way of conceiving the salvation of God wrought through Jesus Christ. This fascination was nurtured a year later, when I had the happy coincidence of taking the core Christian theology course and Wesleyan theology course in the same semester. While learning that *theosis* or deification might be a point of ecumenical promise between Eastern and Western Christianity,¹ I was also introduced to the potential parallels between John Wesley's theology and Eastern thought. The fertile soil of those early experiences gave rise to a sustained interest in both Wesley and deification. This dissertation is devoted to exploring the question of Wesleyan deification in a new and comprehensive manner.

The Conversation in Context

In the not-so-distant past, the language and theology expressed variously as *theosis*, deification, or divinization was relegated to Eastern Orthodoxy. Scholarship over the past fifty years, however, has moved deification from disgrace or quiet indifference to

¹ The course was taught by Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright, noted Methodist scholar and renowned advocate for ecumenical theology. In the final stages of this dissertation he joined the Church triumphant. May he rest in peace and rise in glory!

a place of active dialogue. Not only has *theosis* gained the attention of Protestant and Catholic theologians alike, it has also generated a host of literature exploring how figures in the West embody this once-considered Eastern concept. Deification has served as a lens to give new readings to various theologians, while such novel readings and connections have been lauded for their ecumenical potential (and sometimes challenged as misleading).

For Wesleyan theologians, this focus of scholarly attention can trace its roots to Albert Outler, who issued a clarion call for Wesleyan-patristic studies with his famous thesis proposing that John and Charles Wesley drank deeply from the well of the Eastern Fathers and therefore Wesleyan theology reflects a unique synthesis of Eastern and Western theologies. Sparked by Outler, the relationship between Wesley, his sources, and possible Eastern influence or parallels has been a major locus of Wesleyan scholarship for over half a century. Claims about direct attestation and influence upon the Wesley brothers by specific Eastern Fathers have proven hard to demonstrate, but this has not quelled scholars from pointing out shared *emphases* with Eastern Christianity.²

² Initially, comparative studies tried to trace direct connections between early Eastern fathers and Wesley. Ted Campbell and Richard Heitzenrater tempered this methodology, however, pointing out that Wesley often used patristic sources to fit his own agenda, and that direct attestation of patristic sources within John Wesley's writings is relatively scant. See Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991); and Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley's Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers," *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002). In light of this concern, recent scholarship often forgoes trying to tie direct connections between Wesley and patristic sources, pointing instead to what J. Warren Smith has referred to as "family resemblances" between Wesleyan and patristic theology.

Problems in the Current Debate

The possible resonance between Wesleyan theology and the doctrine of deification is well documented, yet there are at least two weaknesses in current Wesleyan scholarship on this topic. First, while it is not uncommon to find allusions to the connection between *theosis* and Wesleyan theology – or at times specifically sanctification/ Christian perfection – these claims have not been investigated in depth or at length. In particular, these references do not delve into the Wesleyan corpus to demonstrate the extent or strength of those affirmations or rejections of *theosis*. This creates a need for greater specificity in exactly how Wesleyan theology is like and/or *unlike* core understandings of *theosis*; and, relatedly, whether these parallels are of thematic or doctrinal importance.

The second major weakness is the typical myopic consideration of John Wesley and individual Eastern theologians. Such narrowly focused comparative studies abound – such as John Wesley and Macarius or John Wesley and Clement of Alexandria. Often, these studies sink in the quagmire of trying to ascertain direct causal influence in Wesley's theology, a Sisyphean task that more often than not proves speculative and historically inconclusive. Collectively, such studies are tied to what can be demonstrated by direct attestation and probable influence, and are thus only able to gesture toward parallels of the *theme* of *theosis* between Wesley and this or that figure. In an analogous way to how Ted Campbell gave a much-needed comprehensive study of John Wesley's

appropriation of patristic sources,³ what is needed is a serious attempt to compare Wesley's theology to the most broadly attested aspects of the overarching schema of divinization within Eastern Orthodox theology. Such a project is greatly assisted by the attention that has been devoted over the last two decades in scholarship of Orthodoxy and beyond of similarities and differences between various proponents of *theosis* or deification.

A New Approach: The Nature and Structure of This Project

Following a different trajectory, this project does not attempt to trace direct attestation between Wesley and any particular Eastern theologian. Instead, the first section of this project will develop a robust understanding of deification, a lens through which to properly assess the ways in which Wesley's theology reflects deific content (or fails to reflect it). The first chapter surveys recent scholarship on deification in general, and then Wesleyan understandings of deification in particular. Chapter Two moves to a close reading of five treatments of *theosis* written in the past two decades. These five works, penned by fourth different authors, span different fields (biblical studies, historical theology, and contemporary theology) and represent scholars with different faith perspectives (Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox). Our focus will not be on assessing their individual scholarly agendas but on distilling from these sources the ways in which they understand and define deification. Taken together, they provide a rich repository

³ Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991). Campbell's monograph is based on his dissertation. See "John Wesley's Conceptions and Uses of Christian Antiquity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Methodist University, 1984).

from which to discern the parameters for what core tenets constitute a doctrine of deification.

In the second section of this project, attention turns to John Wesley's theology and writings. Aiming to give a representative (and reasonably comprehensive) consideration of Wesley's corpus, this section consists of close readings of his sermons and selected treatises. The lens of deification developed in Chapters One and Two is applied to these materials, exploring the extent to which Wesley exemplified core convictions of *theosis* within his theology. Chapters Three through Five follow a Trinitarian pattern, looking at Wesley's understanding of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit respectively. Chapter Six turns attention to the means of grace, and how Wesley understood humanity's faithful response to the salvation of God.

Trajectory and Thesis

The close study of what constitutes deification reveals at least three theological axes which must be firmly established for the doctrine to be intelligible: 1) an **understanding of God** as desiring true union with humanity; 2) a **theological anthropology** which sees the *telos* of humanity as true Godlikeness; and 3) a **soteriological thrust** that points to redeemed humanity as participating in the Godhead. There is a **deeply Trinitarian structure** to this understanding of soteriology, which has corresponding anthropological implications. With an understanding of God and humanity in place to support the doctrine of deification, the final core idea is the **means by which one is deified**, an area that touches upon ecclesial context, sacramentology, and grace-enabled ascetic practices such as fasting and prayer.

When applying this lens to John Wesley's theology, this study will demonstrate that deification is not merely of thematic importance, but of structural significance. It gives structure to Wesley's doctrine of creation with its core conviction that humanity is created in the image of God. The *imago dei* is the theological reality that links God the Father as loving Parent to God's human creation, made with a capacity for similitude and fellowship with its Creator. Wesley's Christology can be expressed in the deific language of the Great Exchange: in the Son's incarnation, redeemed humanity has been elevated as the children of God, capable of imitating their divine parent. *Imitatio dei* reveals an ethical dimension to deification, expressed by Wesley most often in the language of scripture: having "mind that was in Christ" (Phil. 2:5) so as to "walk as Christ walked" (1 John 2:6). Closely aligned with Christ's redemption is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption that enables and empowers a dynamic divine-human synergy between God and God's human children. This robust pneumatology avoids a Pelagian works-righteousness, while giving a theological underpinning to the means of grace. The classical language of filiation and adoption are the very roots of deific exegesis of scripture, and they likewise serve as an organizing principle for a Wesleyan understanding of redeemed humanity as children of God.

Chapter 1

Deification: A Survey of Current Scholarship

A century ago, a survey of scholarship on deification within Wesleyan theology would have been unthinkable. The language and theology expressed variously as *theosis* or deification was relegated to Eastern Orthodoxy. To the ears of many in the Latin West, Christian expressions of soteriology utilizing the concept of *theosis* were at best odd and uniquely Eastern, or at worst blasphemous and potentially dangerous. Unlike so many questions in Christian theology that progress in continuity with conversations of previous generations, Wesleyan theologians did not ponder the place of deification in the theology of John and Charles Wesley, nor consider its relevance for contemporary theological discussions of their day.

The past fifty years, however, have removed deification from disgrace or quiet indifference to a place of active dialogue. Not only has *theosis* gained the attention of Protestant and Catholic theologians alike, it has generated a host of literature exploring how figures in the West embody this once-considered Eastern concept. Deification has served as a lens to give new readings to various theologians, while such novel readings and connections have been lauded for their ecumenical potential.¹ Among Wesleyan theologians, the noted scholar Albert Outler issued the clarion call for Wesleyan-patristic studies. His famous thesis proposed that John Wesley drank deeply from the well of the

¹ While this has been the overwhelming trend, the recent surge of interest has not been lauded by all. A notable critic is Protestant theologian Bruce McCormack. See Bruce McCormack, "Participation in God, Yes, Deification, No: Two Modern Answers to an Ancient Question," in *Denkwuerdiges Gehemnis: Festschrift fuer Eberhard Juengel, zum 70* (Geburtstag, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004): 347-74.

Eastern Fathers, and therefore Wesleyan theology reflects a unique synthesis of Eastern and Western theologies. One stream of this active, on-going conversation has been the possible connections between John Wesley's understanding of sanctification – including entire sanctification and Christian perfection – and the idea of *theosis* presented in the Eastern Fathers of the early Church.

This chapter traces the trajectory of modern scholarship in its consideration of deification, with special emphasis on the state of this question within Wesleyan theology. Section one provides a brief history of the renaissance of deification in Protestant dialogue, which grounds section two and its broad survey of how *theosis* and deification has been treated within Wesleyan scholarship. Section three draws upon conversation partners we have among our protestant brothers and sisters, exploring in short fashion how some scholars in those traditions have approached this question in reference to their respective traditions, with hopes that their methodologies and insights might be fruitful for Wesleyan treatments of deification. Overall, this chapter offers a big picture of this very specific topic in Wesleyan-patristic studies, with an eye to orienting an exploration of the question of deification within John Wesley's corpus.

Fostering the Question: The Renaissance of *Theosis* and Deification

Eastern Orthodoxy has retained both the language and soteriological concept of *theosis* throughout its long history, even lauding it as a distinctive element of Christian

theology that has been woefully lost to the West.² The language of renaissance, therefore, appropriately describes the re-discovery of deification by traditions that for much of their history have not explicitly incorporated this concept into their theological reflection.³ Given the strong Protestant bias *against* deification until recent decades, a brief orienting history of key figures and texts will help narrate the nexus of *theosis* conversations within which Wesleyans are now taking active part.

Deification Lost

In general, the historic tension between the Christian East and West set the stage for the overarching hostility toward deification within Protestant circles, for whom deification paints soteriology in drastically different terms than standard Protestant paradigms. If one follows the classic (and admittedly polarized) reading of Eastern and Western differences in soteriology, Protestants inherited the Western *forensic* emphasis in understanding salvation, with its corresponding hamartiological and anthropological assumptions; which in turn made the Eastern *therapeutic* emphasis of *theosis* unintelligible, if not fantastically heretical. While this East/West reading is overgeneralized, it does point to fundamentally different conceptual frameworks that often made Eastern Orthodoxy – and by extension, deification – a strange conversation partner for Protestants.

² Paul L. Gavrilyuk, “The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum,” *Modern Theology* 25:4 (Oct. 2009): 648.

³ Contemporary scholars often argue that deification is present *implicitly* within the work of various Protestant theologians, even if it is not *explicitly* incorporated in their text. Thus, classic distinctions (such as the presence of deification in the East and its absence in the West) are actively being challenged, as we will discuss below.

Besides the long-standing geographical and linguistic divide between Eastern and Western Christianity, there were also theological and philosophical underpinnings that separated Protestants from active consideration of *theosis*. In 1901, Adolf von Harnack's influential *History of Dogma* vociferously attacked deification as evidence of the corrupting effects of Hellenization on Christian truth in the early church.⁴ Deification was "a speculation" on the "fringe of religious knowledge," Harnack asserted, and when it became "the central point of the system," the "simple content of the gospel was obscured."⁵ Other prominent thinkers shared Harnack's opinion, and saw *theosis* as a troubling Christian appropriation of pagan Greek notions of *apotheosis*.⁶ Philosophically, Protestants embraced Kant's dictum, "we can only experience God's *effects* on us, which are primarily moral, and never God in himself,"⁷ and shied away from metaphysical concepts of real participation in God, in favor of moral imitation models. Together Harnack and Kant set biases that determined the tone of Protestant theology for much of the twentieth century. Karl Barth, as one notable example, describes deification as encouraging "abstract talk" about Christ's human nature that leads to a dangerous "high-pitched anthropology."⁸ Barth, like many Protestants both Reformed and Wesleyan,

⁴ Gavrilyuk, 648.

⁵ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1901), 2:318. As cited in Gavrilyuk, 647.

⁶ See Gavrilyuk, 649. *Apotheosis* is the concept much utilized in Greek mythology, whereby a hero or leader is elevated to the level of a god based upon the merit of his or her actions. Such a notion stands at stark contrast with basic Christian understandings of the Creator/creation distinction, human anthropology, and the *telos* of humanity.

⁷ Roger E. Olson, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," *Theology Today* 64 (2007): 187.

⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2. *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, edited by G. W. Gromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 64, pp.81-82. As cited in Gavrilyuk, 647.

denied “deification as a real ontological transformation of persons through participation in God.”⁹

Deification Regained

Paul Garvilyuk points to the writings of Russian philosopher, theologian, and poet Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) as the “*initial impetus*” for the retrieval of the doctrine of deification.¹⁰ According to Garvilyuk, Soloviev’s idea of deified humanity (Sophia) as an eternal aspect of God’s being “gave the first impulse” for a renewed interest in *theosis* within Orthodoxy.¹¹ For Protestant scholars, the impetus is most usually linked not with Russian sophiology but with the 1957 English translation of Vladimir Lossky’s 1944 masterpiece, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l’Église d’Orient*.¹² Lossky lauded deification as a crowning achievement of Byzantine mystical theology, and he painted a stark contrast between “dynamic theology” of the East and the “static theology” of the West.¹³ Though Lossky’s work was polemical in tone, his conclusions were supported and reinforced by Philip Sherrard’s 1959 landmark study *The Greek East and the Latin West*.¹⁴ These developments place Albert Outler’s provocative

⁹ Olson, 187. See also John Drury, “Luther and Wesley on Union and Impartation in Light of Recent Finnish Luther Research.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40.1 (Spring 2005): 60. Drury argues that Kant’s philosophy obscured a proper reading of Martin Luther, whose writing reveals realism not recognized in transcendentalist/Kantian readings.

¹⁰ Gavriilyuk, 648.

¹¹ Gavriilyuk stands alone in asserting Soloviev’s pivotal role. For more on Russian sophiology, see Boris Jakim’s article “Sergius Bulgakov: Russian *Theosis*” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, eds. Michael Christensen & Jeffery Wittung (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 250-258.

¹² See *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: J. Clarke, 1957).

¹³ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 4-5.

¹⁴ Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959). Sherrard’s scholarly work, while less polemical than Lossky, also leans favorably toward Eastern Christianity. Indeed, Sherrard personally became Orthodox later in life.

1961 presidential address to the American Theological Society firmly in context.¹⁵

Whereas George Croft Cell famously proposed a unique synthesis between Protestant and Catholic theologies within Wesley, Outler pointed instead to a synthesis between Eastern and Western theologies, a thesis no doubt informed by Lossky and Sherrard's recent scholarly work.

The time was ripe for Outler's thesis to be well received. Within Wesleyan circles there was already a renewed interest in historical study of John and Charles Wesley. The ecumenical movement had also blossomed in the latter half of the twentieth century, sparking new and robust discussion of *theosis* in the light of its ecumenical promise. Wesley-Patristic studies thereby had a two-fold justification and appeal: illuminating the theological agenda of the Wesley brothers, while at the same time revealing unique contributions that Wesleyans could bring to the ecumenical table.

Other denominations similarly considered the ecumenical potential of deification as a connecting doctrine across traditions. New research on Martin Luther began in the 1970s as a result of Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue, creating the so-called "Finnish School" led by Tuomo Mannermaa. The Finnish interpretation reads (the early) Martin Luther as expressing a robust understanding of deification as real union with God.¹⁶ Such a reading not only connects Lutherans with Eastern Orthodoxy, but also with other Protestant traditions, such as Wesleyans, whose readings of Luther on imputed righteousness had

¹⁵ See Albert Outler, "Towards a Re-Appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian," *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 39-54.

¹⁶ Drury, 59-61.

been a source of conflict.¹⁷ Such ecumenical fruit continues to be at least one major motivation behind the continued conversation of *theosis*.¹⁸

In point of fact, an ever-growing number of Western theologians are now lauded as teaching versions of deification, refuting previous assumptions that *theosis* was lost in the West.¹⁹ Even theologians not normally associated with deification, and those like Karl Barth who clearly denied deification in their theologies, have been heralded as teaching deification, as it were, in spite of themselves.²⁰ Presently, theologians from virtually every Christian tradition at least give some attention to *theosis*, even if it is not a major component of their theology. Roger Olson expresses this reality most poignantly:

When asked to identify who is talking about deification in Western theological circles, my initial response is “Who isn’t?” It seems that almost every Protestant and Catholic theologian writing creatively and constructively in the last two to three decades has found it necessary to address the subject, and many are trying to incorporate it into their emerging theological visions.²¹

This continued interest is not difficult to trace. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* added ‘deification’ as an entry in its 1997 edition.²² Comparative studies between key Western theologians and Palamas followed, with Reinard Floghause placing Palamas alongside Martin Luther to bring out patterns of deification in Reformation thought

¹⁷ Indeed, this is the very point of Drury’s article: to begin Wesleyan-Lutheran dialogue by confronting John Wesley’s denunciation of the “forensic fiction” he found in Luther’s description of imputed righteousness.

¹⁸ See Olson, 187. Olson also suggests that the New Age movement with its corresponding “cultural thirst for real spiritual experience” may be another reason deification has again regained ground in Western theology.

¹⁹ Carl Mosser, “The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55.1 (Feb. 2002): 38-39.

²⁰ David Vincent Meconi, “The Consummation of the Christian Promise: Recent Studies on Deification,” *New Blackfriars* 87.1007 (Jan. 2006): 6.

²¹ Olson, 188. For a list of specific theologians, see Gavriilyuk, 648.

²² Meconi, “The Consummation...,” 3. See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 465.

(1997), and A.N. Williams showing commonalities between Aquinas and Palamas, utilizing their understandings of deification as a common “ground of union” between these key figures in Eastern and Western Christianity (1999).²³ New translations of Greek writings have been steadily offered in English; as has Jules Gross’s 1938 masterpiece survey, *La divinization du Chrétien d’après les pères grecs: Contribution historique à la doctrine de la grâce*, in 2002.²⁴ Gross challenged Harnack’s claim that deification is a mere Hellenization of Christian kerygma by arguing persuasively that deification is in point of fact a “biblical idea in Greek dress,” the expression of the Pauline idea of mystical incorporation with Christ and the Johannine idea of “the incarnate Logos as the source of divine life.”²⁵

On the heels of Gross’s work being made available to a larger audience, Norman Russell’s ambitious survey, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (2004), exhaustively detailed the development of deification over the first few centuries of Christianity. Russell’s landmark survey is contemporaneous with several other monographs considering the historic role of deification within the Christian tradition, such as Maloney’s *The Undreamed Has Happened: God Lives Within Us* (2003)²⁶ and Karkkainen’s *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (2004).²⁷

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Jules Gross, *The Deification of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers: Historical Contribution to the Doctrine of Grace*. Trans., Paul A. Onica (Anaheim, California: A & C Press, 2002). It should be noted that Russell makes reference to the translation being complete in 2000; perhaps he was given access to the pre-published translation (5, fn. 8).

²⁵ Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 5-6.

²⁶ George A. Maloney, S.J., *The Undreamed Has Happened: God Lives Within Us* (Scranton: The U. of Scranton Press, 2003).

²⁷ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004).

Moreover, the first international conference on deification, “Partakers of the Divine Nature,” was held at Drew University in May 2004. The resulting anthology of essays, which bears the name of the conference, was published in 2007.²⁸ Various contributors to that conference also published two other anthologies, *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology* (2006)²⁹ and *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology, Volume Two* (2011).³⁰ Further anthologies, drawing upon scholars across different faith traditions and fields of expertise, continue to be published with increased regularity: *Called to Be the Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification* (2016),³¹ *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (2018),³² and *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* (2019)³³ are notable examples.

While historical theology has explored deification both within individual figures and in reference to deification’s development as a doctrine, biblical studies has explored scriptural intimations and affirmations of deification. Lewis B. Smedes’ *Union with Christ: A Biblical View of the New Life in Jesus Christ* (1983)³⁴ is an early example, providing a fascinating study of the Pauline language that undergirds notions of *theosis*.

²⁸ *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, eds. Michael Christensen & Jeffery Wittung (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

²⁹ Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2006).

³⁰ Vladimir Kharlamov, ed., *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology, Volume Two*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 156 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2011).

³¹ David Meconi, S.J., and Carl E. Olson, eds., *Called to Be the Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016).

³² John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2018).

³³ Jared Ortiz, ed., *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U. of America Press, 2019).

³⁴ Lewis B. Smedes, *Union with Christ: A Biblical View of the New Life in Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983).

Deification as a lens through which to read Pauline texts has been further developed within the past decade by Michael Gorman's *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (2009),³⁵ and Eduard Broysov's *Triadosis: Union with the Triune God. Interpretations of the Participationist Dimensions of Paul's Soteriology* (2019).³⁶ Johannine texts have drawn similar attention in studies like Andrew Byers' *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John* (2017),³⁷ and Michael Gorman's *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (2018).³⁸ Sparked by such studies, consideration of the exegetical basis for theological affirmation of deification through the breadth of the New Testament is a lively focus of current biblical studies.³⁹

A Continuing Conversation

The above overview makes clear the scholarly interest in the notion of *theosis* in recent decades. This interest has not waned, but rather has intensified in the past few years, in disciplines ranging from historical theology to biblical studies. As we turn now to Wesleyan-Methodist studies, it is clear that Wesleyan interest in deification is neither idiosyncratic nor peculiar, but merely one voice of a much larger and lively scholarly conversation.

³⁵ Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). See also Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapid. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015).

³⁶ Eduard Broysov, *Triadosis: Union with the Triune God. Interpretations of the Participationist Dimensions of Paul's Soteriology* (Eugene Oregon: Pickwick, 2019).

³⁷ Andrew J. Byers, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2017)

³⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018). This monograph is based on The Didsbury Lectures, given in 2016.

³⁹ See also John Pester, "The Promise, Authoring, and Corporate Inheritance of Salvation as Deification in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Affirmation & Critique* XV.2 (Fall 2010): 49-62.

Wesleyan Considerations of Deification: A Broad Survey of Wesleyan Literature

As an approach to the topic of deification as it now stands in Wesleyan studies, this section gives a rudimentary chronology of texts and articles that nurtured the interest of Wesleyan scholars in *theosis*. Our goal is not to provide an exhaustive survey, but to illuminate the general trajectory of the consideration of deification within Wesleyan circles. We draw not only upon Wesleyan theological works that specifically utilized deification/*theosis* terminology, but also instances of language and expressions that point toward the general understanding of *theosis*, whether it is mentioned thematically or doctrinally.

Before Outler's 1961 Address – Deification as an Unnamed Concept

As mentioned above, Albert Outler's 1961 address marks the genesis of intense Patristic-Wesleyan study. As one might expect, the terms *theosis* and deification are not generally found in Wesleyan theological works prior to Outler.⁴⁰ But even if the terminology was not utilized, that does not mean *the concept* was not present. In point of fact, if deific understandings are not thematically present in readings of John Wesley's theology prior to Outler's thesis, then it casts considerable doubt on Outler's proposal, or renders it as a radically different reading of Wesley.

Collin W. Williams's *John Wesley's Theology Today*, published in 1960,⁴¹ gives a snapshot of how sanctification was described by a Wesleyan scholar immediately prior to

⁴⁰ There are isolated early suggestions in Alexander Knox, *Remains of Alexander Knox, esq.* (London: Duncan & Malcolm 1844), 3:483; and Richard Denny Urlin, *John Wesley's Place in Church History* (London: Rivington's, 1870), 10, 59–86.

⁴¹ Collin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960).

Outler's influential thesis. *Theosis*/deification language is not utilized, but Williams does express a robust understanding of the "great transformation of life" that opens to the believer "in the believing relationship with Christ."⁴² This "promise of unbroken personal relationship with Christ" must not fall into the heresy of "angelism," Williams contends, but it does involve "unbroken moment-by-moment relation to Christ" that leads to "transformation of [the Christian's] total existence."⁴³ The relational, transformative nature of Williams' account of sanctification gives it resonances with *theosis*.⁴⁴

After Outler's 1961 Address: A New (Ecumenical) World in Deification Language

Outler's thesis deeply impacted Wesleyan studies and the ecumenical movement at large. Perhaps this is no better illustrated than in (the Anglican scholar) A.M. Allchin's 1965 anthology *We Belong to One Another: Methodist, Anglican, and Orthodox Essays*.⁴⁵ The first direct reference to the Wesley brothers and divinization is found in this work: (the Roman Catholic scholar) Brian Frost's essay asserts that Charles Wesley "see[s] the Christian life in terms of divinization."⁴⁶ In fact, Frost worries that Charles' account is described so intensely as to "border on a kind of absorptionist mysticism."⁴⁷ Thus in the same work where we find direct mention of *theosis* terminology we encounter concerns

⁴² Ibid., 168.

⁴³ Ibid., 169; 189.

⁴⁴ This raises important questions that will be addressed in chapter three of this dissertation: to what extent can one identify *theosis* as a 'concept' when such terminology is not employed; likewise, what differentiates a deification motif from a robust understanding of sanctification?

⁴⁵ A.M. Allchin, ed., *We Belong to One Another: Methodist, Anglican, and Orthodox Essays* (London: Epworth Press, 1965).

⁴⁶ Brian Frost, "The Idea of Fullness in the Hymns of Charles Wesley," in *We Belong to One Another: Methodist, Anglican, and Orthodox Essays*, A.M. Allchin, ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 51. If there are earlier references, I did not find them in my research.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

of its implications. Allchin's own essay in the work has a more ecumenical focus, pointing to similarities between Orthodoxy and Methodism, and how these connections cast light on "Christian perfection and on the way of the Christian life."⁴⁸

Allchin's anthology marked the beginning of a sustained ecumenical dialogue between Orthodoxy and Methodism. A veritable fount of publications carried on this interest, including the recent anthologies *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (2002),⁴⁹ *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (2005),⁵⁰ and *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (2007).⁵¹ While deification is often mentioned in these works, it is part of a larger conversation of ecumenism. From the side of Orthodoxy, articles with an ecumenical spirit seek to explain Eastern soteriology in a way that makes deification properly understood – a notable example of this is Kenneth Paul Wesche's "The Doctrine of Deification: A Call to Worship."⁵² Other articles point more explicitly to a positive relationship between Orthodox theology and the Wesley brothers, such as S.T. Kimbrough, Jr.'s article "Theosis in the Writings of Charles Wesley," which uses Wesleyan hymnody to argue that the concept of *theosis* is actively present within

⁴⁸ A.M. Allchin, "Our Life in Christ: In John Wesley and the Eastern Fathers," in *We Belong to One Another: Methodist, Anglican, and Orthodox Essays*, A.M. Allchin, ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 77.

⁴⁹ ST Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodoxy and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).

⁵⁰ ST Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005).

⁵¹ ST Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007).

⁵² Kenneth Paul Wesche, "The Doctrine of Deification: A Call to Worship," *Theology Today* 65 (2008): 169-179. See also Kallistos Ware, "The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition," in *For Us and For Our Salvation: Seven Perspectives on Christian Soteriology*, ed. Rienk Lanoooy, 107-131 (Utrecht: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1995), 107-131.

Wesleyan-Methodist practical theology.⁵³ Kimbrough's later monograph, *Partakers of the Life Divine: Participation in the Divine Nature in the Writings of Charles Wesley* (2016),⁵⁴ remains the major scholarly treatment of deification within Charles Wesley's corpus.⁵⁵

A host of recent Methodist scholarship points eastward, exploring John Wesley's interest in Eastern figures.⁵⁶ K. Steve McCormick's study "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: an Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love" (1991)⁵⁷ is a prime example of such work. After tracing thinkers who saw Wesley reclaiming an Eastern past rather than bridging a Catholic-Protestant divide (Wesley's friend Alexander Knox, Reformed theologian Hendrikus Berkhof, and Wesleyan scholar Albert Outler), McCormick argues

⁵³ S.T. Kimbrough Jr., "Theosis in the Writings of Charles Wesley," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52.2 (2008): 199-212.

⁵⁴ S.T. Kimbrough Jr., *Partakers of the Life Divine: Participation in the Divine Nature in the Writings of Charles Wesley* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016).

⁵⁵ While not addressing deification specifically, it is a clear background assumption in Julie Lunn's *Theology Sanctification and Resignation in Charles Wesley's Hymns* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁵⁶ In descending chronological order, see these recent dissertations: Ki Jung Nam, "John Wesley's Editing of Pseudo-Macarius's Spiritual Homilies: A Redactional Study Focusing on the Theme of the Spiritual Senses," (Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 2018); David Robert Walls, "The Influence of Greek Fathers Doctrine of Theosis on John Wesley's Doctrine of Perfection," (Ph.D. thesis, University of St. Michael's Toronto School of Theology, 2015); George Bailey, "Growing into God: A Consideration of the Relation between the Experience and Theology of Sanctification, in dialogue with John Wesley's Theology of Perfection and Gregory Palamas' Theology of Deification," (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 2011); Yong Hwa Lee, "Gregory of Nyssa and John Wesley's theological dialogue on Christian Perfection," (Master's thesis, Concordia University, 2004); Neil Douglas Anderson, "The Influence of Clement of Alexandria upon the thought of John Wesley," (Ph.D. thesis, Drew University, 1999); Seung-An Im, "John Wesley's Theological Anthropology: A Dialectic Tension Between the Latin Western Patristic Tradition (Augustine) and the Greek Eastern Patristic Tradition (Gregory of Nyssa)," (Ph.D. thesis, Drew University, 1994); Hoo-Jung Lee, "The Doctrine of New Creation in the Theology of John Wesley," Emory University (Ph.D. thesis, Emory University, 1991); Craig Alan Blaising, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Original Sin." (Th.D. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979); Robert Sheffield Brightman, "Gregory of Nyssa and John Wesley in Theological Dialogue on the Christian Life," (Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1969).

⁵⁷ K. Steve McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26.1 (1991): 38-103. This article is a distillation of his earlier dissertation on the topic: "John Wesley's Use of John Chrysostom on the Christian Life: Faith Filled with the Energy of Love," (Ph.D. thesis, Drew University, 1983).

that Wesley's "faith filled with the energy of love" was rooted in his reading of Chrysostom. As a result, McCormick asserts that the "eastern motif of *theosis* [is] the organizing principle" for Wesley's *ordo salutis*.⁵⁸ In 2002, Kenneth Carveley offered a similar comparative study of Wesley and Maximus the Confessor.⁵⁹ Carveley frames his study from the assumption that deification is central to Wesley's understanding: "Deification, with its anticipation below of the joys of heaven, is recurrently found in Wesleyan spirituality, and grounded, as with Maximus, in the Incarnation as the basis of our sharing and renewal in the life of God."⁶⁰ McCormick and Carveley are indicative of the host of comparative works that attempt to link John Wesley to various Eastern figures.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁹ Kenneth Carveley, "From Glory to Glory: The Renewal of All Things in Christ: Maximus the Confessor and John Wesley," in *Orthodoxy and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. ST Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 173-88.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁶¹ In descending chronological order, see these recent works: Coleman M. Ford, "'A Pure Dwelling Place for the Holy Spirit': John Wesley's Reception of the Homilies of Macarius," *Expository Times* 130 (2019): 157-66; Howard Albert Snyder, "John Wesley, Irenaeus, and Christian Mission: Rethinking Western Christian Theology," *Asbury Theological Journal* 73 (2018): 138-59; Glen O'Brien, "John Wesley and Athanasius on Salvation, in the Context of the Debate over Wesley's Debt to Eastern Orthodoxy," *Phronema* 28.2 (2013): 35-53; Matt Friedman, "A Macarian-Wesleyan Theology of Mission," *Asbury Journal* 67 (2012): 93-111; Stephen Plant and Marcus Plested, "Macarius, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and the Wesleys," *Epworth Review* 33.1 (2006): 22-30; Neil Douglas Anderson, *A Definitive Study of Evidence Concerning John Wesley's Appropriation of the Thought of Clement of Alexandria*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2004); J. Warren Smith, "John Wesley's Growth in Grace and Gregory of Nyssa's Epectasy: A Conversation in Dynamic Perfection," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 85.2-3 (2003): 347-57; Peter C. Bouteneff, "All Creation in United Thanksgiving: Gregory of Nyssa and the Wesleys on Salvation," in *Orthodoxy and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. ST Kimbrough, Jr., 189-201 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002); Kenneth Carveley, "From Glory to Glory: The Renewal of All Things in Christ: Maximus the Confessor and John Wesley," in *Orthodoxy and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. ST Kimbrough, Jr., 173-88 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002); John Chryssavgis, "Isaiah of Scetis and John Wesley: The Practical Way of Holiness," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35.2 (2000): 91-113; John Cammel English, "The Path to Perfection in Pseudo-Macarius and John Wesley," *Pacifica* 11 (1998): 54-62; Mark T. Kurowski, "The First Step Toward Grace: John Wesley's Use of the Spiritual Homilies of Macarius the Great," *Methodist History* 36.2 (1998): 113-24; Hoo-Jung Lee, "Experiencing the Spirit in Wesley and Macarius," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. R. L. Maddox, 197-212 (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998); David Bundy, "Christian Virtue: John Wesley

Of course, not all Wesleyan or Orthodox scholars embrace Outler's thesis. Nor are all suggestions of affinity or contrast between Wesleyan and Orthodox theology compelling – scholars attempting to compare Orthodox and Wesleyan traditions are often experts in one tradition, while amateurs (at best) in the other. David Ford's article "Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley: Variations on the Theme of Sanctification" (1988), illustrates this problem well.⁶² As one of the few Eastern Fathers we have concrete attestation that Wesley read, pseudo-Makarios is a verified shared source for Wesleyan and Orthodox traditions. Ford's interpretation of Wesley, however, ignores current and divergent readings of Wesley (e.g. how various Wesleyan scholars divergently understand Wesley's teaching on perfection), which leads to his rather pessimistic thesis that Wesley in "somewhat subtle yet vitally significant areas...departed from the spirit and the specific teachings of Makarios" – and that these points of departure came to characterize the Wesleyan movement as a whole.⁶³ In short, Ford's limited understanding of Wesley obscures for him many parallels other scholars find between pseudo-Makarios and Wesley.⁶⁴

and the Alexandrian Tradition," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26.1 (1991): 139–63; Howard Albert Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian," *Asbury Theological Journal* 45.2 (1990): 55–59.

⁶² David Ford, "Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley: Variations on the Theme of Sanctification," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 33.3 (1988) 285-312.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁶⁴ Ford himself details nine areas where Wesley and Makarios share core conceptions of *theosis*, but those points are delegated to a footnote while his "comparison" proceeds to tease out the six areas he finds the theologians at variance (288, footnote 9). There are, it should be noted, a number of positive comparisons. See Matt Friedman, "A Macarian-Wesleyan Theology of Mission," *Asbury Journal* 67 (2012):93–111; Stephen Plant and Marcus Plested, "Macarius, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and the Wesleys," *Epworth Review* 33.1 (2006): 22–30; John Cammel English, "The Path to Perfection in Pseudo-Macarius and John Wesley," *Pacifica* 11 (1998): 54–62; Mark T. Kurowski, "The First Step Toward Grace: John Wesley's Use of the Spiritual Homilies of Macarius the Great," *Methodist History* 36.2 (1998): 113–24; Hoo-Jung Lee, "Experiencing the Spirit in Wesley and Macarius," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. R. L. Maddox, 197–212 (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998); Howard Albert Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian," *Asbury Theological Journal* 45.2 (1990): 55–59.

Wesleyan Scholars in Spotlight

In addition to looking at the overall arc of Wesleyan studies in relation to deification, it is helpful to shift gears and look particularly at individual Wesleyan theologians. Outler's suggestion about an Eastern Christian influence on John Wesley's theology has been the starting point for his theological children and grandchildren in Wesleyan studies. These scholars differ widely in how they embrace or resist his assertions about Eastern influence, and by extension to what extent they see *theosis* within Wesley's theology.

Randy L. Maddox

Randy Maddox illustrates a major Wesleyan scholar who has embraced Outler's call to explore an Eastern influence on Wesley's theology. His 1990 essay "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences"⁶⁵ draws several parallels that Wesley shares with Orthodoxy, highlighting the synthesis Wesley often creates between traditionally eastern and western understandings of theology. Orthodoxy speaks of "likeness to God," Maddox points out, a likeness made possible by our being made in the "image of God" and realized by "*participation* in divine life and grace."⁶⁶ Wesley's synthesis likewise holds "an overall estimation of the human condition much like that of Eastern Orthodoxy."⁶⁷ The doctrine of *theosis* is made intelligible through distinctive understandings of Christology (Christ makes deification possible),

⁶⁵ Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences," *Asbury Theological Journal* 45.2 (1990): 29-53. It is no coincidence that Maddox dedicates this essay to Albert Outler, in honor of his eightieth birthday.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

Pneumatology (the Spirit facilitates our transformation), and sacramentology (sacraments mediate grace which transforms the believer by degrees). Maddox asserts that it is this sanctification/deification similarity that marks the “closest resemblance” between the two traditions.

Maddox’s article proved to be a foretaste of his comprehensive treatment of Wesley’s theology just a few years following – *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (1994).⁶⁸ As in his earlier article, this latter work also highlights the deep resonance Wesley has with central emphases of Eastern Orthodoxy. Maddox foregoes the earlier impulse of Wesleyan scholars to stress direct attestation between Wesley and Eastern theologians; instead, he argues that the connection need not be direct for there to be deep parallels between the theologies.⁶⁹ In this light, Maddox points out that Wesley, like Orthodoxy, focuses on the *telos* of humanity – the “gracious and gradual restoration of humanity to God-likeness.”⁷⁰ Maddox is quite explicit: Wesley’s “understanding of sanctification has significant parallels with the Eastern Orthodox theme of deification (*theosis*).”⁷¹ The doctrine therefore helps make sense of the Wesley

⁶⁸ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23. Initially, comparative studies tried to trace direct connections between early Eastern fathers and Wesley. Ted Campbell and Richard Heitzenrater tempered this methodology, however, pointing out that Wesley often used patristic sources to fit his own agenda, and that direct attestation of patristic sources within John Wesley’s writings is relatively scant. See Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991); and Richard P. Heitzenrater, “John Wesley’s Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers,” *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002). In light of this concern, Maddox is following a trend in recent scholarship that often forgoes trying to tie direct connections between Wesley and patristic sources, pointing instead to what J. Warren Smith has referred to as “family resemblances” between Wesleyan and patristic theology.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

brothers' emphases on real transformation in the believer and the prevalence of therapeutic motifs in their soteriology.

Maddox's contribution to the discussion of deification cannot be underestimated, and in some ways is a useful dividing line for future treatment of the topic, as scholars have either embraced or pushed against such a strong identification of Wesley with Eastern Orthodox soteriology. Jeremy Ayers in his essay "John Wesley's Therapeutic Understanding of Salvation" (2002),⁷² for example, embraces such Eastern parallels. However, scholars such as Thomas A. Noble have questioned whether it is an oversimplification to cast Wesley's theology as the marriage of a juridical-emphasizing West and a therapeutic-emphasizing East. Noble points instead to Wesley's Augustinian heritage, and what he terms the understated "Western therapeutic tradition" which Wesley could have likewise informed Wesley's soteriology.⁷³

Thomas C. Oden

While Thomas Oden's *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology Volume Three* (1992)⁷⁴ is not a Wesleyan theology *per se*, it represents the scholarship of a renowned United Methodist who includes *theosis* within his theological treatise. Like Maddox, Oden emphasizes the pneumatological aspect of *theosis*. He cautions against any notion of *theosis* that falls into "idolatrous or pantheistic merging of creature and Creator."⁷⁵ To

⁷² Jeremy Ayers, "John Wesley's Therapeutic Understanding of Salvation." *Encounter* 63.3 (Summer 2002): 263-297.

⁷³ Thomas A. Noble, "East and West in the Theology of John Wesley," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 85.2-3 (2003): 370; 372.

⁷⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology, Vol. 3* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

this end, one must carefully distinguish between incommunicable and communicable divine attributes, Oden explains, for *theosis* never entails the creature attaining the fullness that exists in God. Properly understood, however, the doctrine of deification allows us to speak of real friendship with God, and real union with one another, as union with Christ necessarily entails that all believers are united in life together. Participation, union, *participatio Christi*, sanctification, and *theosis* are all inter-related terms for Oden, and he points the reader to the other terms in each respective section.

Manfred Marquardt

Manfred Marquardt's article "Christian Conversion: Connecting Our Lives with God" (1998)⁷⁶ shares much of Oden's emphasis of *theosis* being deeply connected to life with God and Christian community. Conversion, according to Manfred, is "essentially 'connecting our lives' with God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the three-in-one God whose very being is love."⁷⁷ The "believer's life is being connected with God," he reasons, and as such is connected "all other persons who are converted to Christ."⁷⁸ Again, *theosis* is connected to a robust understanding of the communion of saints and the essential unity of the Body of Christ, just as it is for Oden.

⁷⁶ Manfred Marquardt, "Christian Conversion: Connecting Our Lives with God," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox, 99-112 (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 99-112.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

Theodore Runyon

Runyon's *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (1998)⁷⁹ fully embraces the notion of deification within Wesley's theology. Runyon, in agreement with Maddox, both highlights Eastern Orthodox parallels and points explicitly to Wesley's utilization of *theosis* understanding: "the Holy Spirit draws us into participation in the reality of God."⁸⁰ He goes on to highlight how to understand *theosis* as "becoming more fully human, that is, becoming what God created humanity to be, as that creature whose spiritual senses are enabled to participate in, to be a partner, and to share in (*koinonia*) the divine life."⁸¹ Later in his book he points to our participation in God making us "participants in God's redeeming of all creation"⁸² – a notion that has resonances with what other scholars have likewise articulated with implicit deific language.⁸³

Even with such strong affirmation of deification in Wesley, Runyon does not push the Wesley-Orthodox connection too strictly; he readily points out that Eastern Orthodoxy may not share Wesley's emphasis on entire sanctification.⁸⁴ Further, Wesley may not have even been aware of the term "*theosis*" at all. Yet Runyon holds that "the core idea of *theosis* – participation in, and transformation by, the creative energy of the

⁷⁹ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸³ See Brian E. Beck, "Connexion and Koinonia: Wesley's Legacy and the Ecumenical Ideal," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox, 129-142 (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 129-142. Beck speaks of the Trinitarian notion of *koinonia* and the "drawing of human beings – and ultimately of all creation – into the life of God" (137).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

Spirit – was central to Wesley’s understanding of regeneration and sanctification.”⁸⁵ In the end, Wesley may have held to deification, as it were, even in spite of himself.

Kenneth J. Collins

Not all Wesleyan scholars have readily accepted that Wesley is cut from the same cloth as the Eastern Fathers. Kenneth Collins is perhaps the most interesting case study of how deification has been received – and rejected – by scholars in the midst of this ongoing conversation.

In *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons* (1989),⁸⁶ Collins makes no references to *theosis* at all, and his description of sanctification lacks the language or thematic elements of deification. Perhaps in light of Maddox’s *Responsible Grace* and others who pointed stressed Eastern motifs, Collins’ *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (1997)⁸⁷ has a considerably more robust description of sanctification. Unlike his earlier 1989 work, Collins makes several strong appeals to the theme of participation in Wesley’s theology.⁸⁸ “The participation motif,” he contends, is that “redemption entails participation in the life of God.”⁸⁹ Such participatory descriptors, as mentioned in the section on Oden above, can be synonyms for *theosis*.⁹⁰ Collins only takes a light step toward this understanding, immediately warning against putting too

⁸⁵ Ibid., 245.

⁸⁶ Kenneth J. Collins, *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1989).

⁸⁷ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

⁸⁸ Ibid. See 20, 101, 176

⁸⁹ Ibid., 101.

⁹⁰ This connection may not be accidental; Collins was a student of Oden.

much emphasis upon Eastern Orthodoxy as a lens through which to view Wesley. It is better, he asserts, to “consider Wesley’s doctrine of salvation on its own terms.”⁹¹ This is especially true since reliance on Eastern Orthodoxy fails to account for the “instantaneous elements that pertain not only to juridical themes, like justification, but to participatory ones as well, such as the new birth and entire sanctification.”⁹² Collins’ warning bespeaks a major interpretive tension with Maddox, who speaks of the gradual nature of Wesley’s sanctification as a parallel to Orthodox understandings of gradual *theosis*. Collins reads Wesley’s views on justification and sanctification in more punctiliar terms. Thus, while utilizing participatory language, Collins remains distant from a reading of Wesley that would fit compatibly with Eastern Orthodox understanding of deification as gradual growth in godlikeness.

A decade later, Collins’ stance hardens considerably. *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (2007),⁹³ reveals a scholar who has grown weary of the discussion. He denounces the practice of tying Wesley to another tradition in order to map Wesleyan theology. These attempts, he contends, usually succeed in a myopic focus on that tradition over Wesley’s own teaching.⁹⁴ As a result, a disordered love of orthodoxy and ecumenicism – which Collins attributes to Outler – has blurred a proper reading of Wesley’s understanding of God’s instant work in the life of the believer.⁹⁵ Collins allows that Wesley may have used Eastern sources, but he points out

⁹¹ Ibid., 207.

⁹² Ibid., 207.

⁹³ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 294.

that it is equally accurate to point to the many (confirmed!) Western sources that also informed Wesley's theology.⁹⁶ Further, just because Wesley's mature theology may have resonances with certain Eastern understandings of theological anthropology and soteriology, that does not demonstrate an easy correlation: "they [Wesley and Orthodoxy] arrive at this [same] soteriological point through much different routes and at very different 'times.'"⁹⁷ Collins is perfectly clear where he now stands in the discussion – neither *theosis* nor deification is directly mentioned. Most interestingly, the language of participation is likewise stripped from his theology, perhaps because he found the participation motif he expressed in his previous work to be too fraught with misunderstandings to be helpful in reading Wesley aright.

Collins, whose first explanations of Wesley's theology ignored Eastern influence, seems to have come full circle. If Maddox represents an embracing of Eastern parallels with Wesley, then Collins may well represent those scholars who remain skeptical or have grown hostile to the idea. Both John B. Cobb, Jr.'s *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (1995)⁹⁸ and Philip R. Meadows' anthology *Windows on Wesley: Wesleyan Theology in Today's World* (1997)⁹⁹ serve as further reminders that not all the Wesleyan world has chosen to herald *theosis* as important theology for today, as neither work has any mention of *theosis* at all.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 297.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 73.

⁹⁸ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

⁹⁹ Philip R. Meadows, ed., *Windows on Wesley: Wesleyan Theology in Today's World* (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1997).

Partakers of the Divine Nature: Wesleyan Voices in Recent Dialogue

The first global conference on *theosis* was held at Drew University in 2004. Both the conference, and the anthology that followed in 2007, were made possible, in part, by the work and interest of Wesleyan scholars. The article in the anthology dedicated to Wesley is Michael J. Christensen's "John Wesley: Christian Perfection as Faith Filled with the Energy of Love."¹⁰⁰ Christensen carefully highlights the ways in which Wesley modified his patristic sources to paint a theology of sanctification that looks considerably different than *theosis* as envisioned by the Patristic Fathers. Wesley's change of terminology in patristic sources – replacing Clement's *gnosis* with 'love' and pseudo-Makarios' *theosis* with 'sanctification' – bespeak not only a change of language, but a fundamental conceptual modification. Ultimately Christensen is critical of Wesley's "distinctive and limited... understanding of both the promise and the process of what the patristic writers meant by becoming 'partakers of the divine nature.'"¹⁰¹ The article ends with a note recognizing Wesley's gifts and sources, with encouragement to use this balanced knowledge in service of future theological work.

Albeit the representative essay for Wesley in an international conference on *theosis*, Christensen's assessment is not the final word. Edgardo Colón-Emeric, for one, is skeptical of Christensen's conclusions. In *Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection* (2009),¹⁰² he acknowledges the difficulty of directly correlating Greek sources with

¹⁰⁰ Michael J. Christensen, "John Wesley: Christian Perfection as Faith Filled with the Energy of Love," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, eds. Michael Christensen & Jeffery Wittung (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 219-29.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁰² Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Wesley, Aquinas & Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009).

Wesley, as well as the possibility that Wesley's changed terminology might point to changed concepts, as Christensen assumes. However, Colón-Emeric argues that Christensen takes a wrong turn when arguing that patristic fathers held a strong contrast between *theosis* and sanctification, and between discipline and faith – those distinctions are more contemporary and Protestant than ancient, he argues.¹⁰³ Further, Colón-Emeric also questions the general categorization of theology into Eastern and Western camps. Far better, he argues, is to consider individual theologians in turn, which allows one to see the 'Eastern' theme of *deification* in the quintessential 'Western' theologian Aquinas, as scholar A.N. Williams persuasively argues.¹⁰⁴ This also allows for a more careful and precise study of theological figures and topics – to which end Colón-Emeric compares Wesley and Aquinas. Though deification is not the central thrust of his work, the similarities Colón-Emeric draws between Aquinas and Wesley on Christian Perfection gesture toward a possible shared understanding of *theosis*. Importantly, this link is not dependent upon a particular Greek influence, but rather a mutual imbibing of the entire Christian tradition by two 'Western' theologians. Wesley's utilization of *theosis* is thus quite possible; Colón-Emeric, unlike Christensen, leaves the topic open for further study.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 255, footnote 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 98, 248-49 footnote 105. Colón-Emeric appeals to Williams' *The Ground of Union* to make this argument. Though *theosis* only appears scantily in the *Summa*, Williams contends that the scarcity of such passages "belies their significance" (248, footnote 105). Indeed, Williams argues the 'ground of union' between Palamas and Aquinas – two figureheads of Eastern and Western Christianity – is the concept of deification.

Conversation Partners: Learning from Other Traditions

Wesleyan Protestants are not alone in considering deification, and there is much we can learn from the conversations that other traditions are having about their major figures regarding *theosis*. To that end, this section ‘eavesdrops’ on other conversations, listening carefully for how other traditions’ approaches might inform the contours of the question within Wesleyan circles.

Luther: A Question of Scope – How Far Can You Press Deification?

Thanks to the so-called Finnish School, Martin Luther has been readily heralded as a Western theologian for whom deification holds important focus. Yet the *scope* of deification in Luther is a matter of debate. Drury articulates this concern well: “[The Finnish School’s] substantive claims have proved helpful in reading Luther texts, but whether *theosis* captures the whole of Luther’s theology is a claim far more difficult to defend.”¹⁰⁵ Drury himself finds the *theosis* motif in Luther to be helpful “as long as we do not go so far that Luther’s other emphases are not allowed to speak.”¹⁰⁶ Deification cannot outshine the rest of Luther’s theological commitments. To this end, there are also questions that challenge how to read Luther and *theosis*. Should one privilege Luther’s latter writings as his most mature? If so, some of the most concrete examples of deification in Luther will be lost, as they come from his earlier writings. Do these earlier writings reflect Luther’s true sentiments, or are they still tainted with Catholic notions he later sheds in his more mature ‘Protestant’ theology? In the end, questions of scope cut

¹⁰⁵ Drury, 63.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

two ways in Lutheran studies: 1) What is the scope of Lutheran texts that should be considered? and relatedly, 2) What is the scope of deification in Luther's theology as evident from those texts?

Calvin: A Categorical Question – What Type of Deification?

John Calvin, unlike Luther, has not been strongly heralded as a proponent of *theosis*. Calvinist scholars remain divided on the question, as Calvin's corpus itself does not contain strong evidence or language of deification. Carl Mosser, however, has argued for thematic presence of *theosis* within Calvin. In "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification" (2002), Mosser contends that even though deification is "not a prominent theme in its own right," the "concept and imagery" are employed throughout Calvin's theology.¹⁰⁷ Yet even Mosser insists that deification must not be overstated in Calvin, as he feels the Finns have done with Luther.¹⁰⁸ A.J. Ollerton shares this restrained scope of deification in Calvin. Instead of a simple 'yes' or 'no' to *theosis*, Ollerton argues that Calvin both "*receives* and *rejects* different versions of deification in a differentiated manner."¹⁰⁹ Drawing upon Norman Russell's study of patristic notions of deification, Ollerton points to three possible trajectories of deification – Alexandrian, Cappadocian, and Latin – and emphasizes that it is not so much a question of *whether* Calvin holds to deification, but rather *what type* of deification Calvin embraces or rejects.¹¹⁰ This

¹⁰⁷ Mosser, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰⁹ A.J. Ollerton, "*Quasi Deificari*: Deification in the Theology of John Calvin." *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011): 237.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 238-39. Ollerton places Calvin in the Alexandrian trajectory, which focuses on the incarnation and sacraments as mediators of the divine life to humanity. The rest of the essay details exactly what Calvin rejects and accepts.

question of type and category has been applied in more general studies of *theosis* as well. Like many recently published anthologies, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (2006)¹¹¹ has each article trace how *theosis* functions in the theologies of individual theologians or particular centuries – not attempting to define and apply only one understanding of deification to the whole. Individual treatment of theologians in relation to *theosis* – an approach supported by Colón-Emeric as discussed above – has become a helpful (and perhaps necessary!) step for discussing *theosis* with any specificity for any particular figure or time period.

Beyond the Letter: The Complexity of the Language and Terms of Deification

How to recognize the language of *theosis*, and what constitutes this language, remains a major consideration for scholars in speaking of deification. Calvin again serves as a prime example. Mosser’s title of his article, “the greatest possible blessing,” comes from Calvin’s exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4 – “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”¹¹² – and the description Calvin gives of the gift of “partaking of the divine nature.” Instead of direct attestation, Calvin used tame language to prevent misunderstandings of deification, Mosser insists. Therefore one must look for *language* and *imagery* in Calvin that point to deification (*imago dei*, union with Christ, engraftment with God, the Lord’s supper, glorification, Trinitarian thrust, and emphasis on the Holy Spirit). Ollerton, like Mosser, returns to

¹¹¹ See footnote 25.

¹¹² Biblical references, unless otherwise noted, come from the King James Version, reflecting the language found in the Wesleyan corpus.

Calvin's exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4 for the title of his work. Calvin used the phrase *quasi deificari* to describe the kind of deification that takes place by being 'partners of the divine nature.' The two scholars take slightly different stances on Calvin's use of *theosis* based upon Calvin's word choice, thematic emphases, and imagery. This parsing of a cluster of terms and language that point to the theme of *theosis* is not idiosyncratic to Calvin studies; identifying just what language constitutes deification is an element of studies across the board.

Mark A. Garcia, as evident in his study *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (2008),¹¹³ can exemplify scholars who reject language that others have identified as *theosis*. To be clear, Garcia gives a flat-out denunciation of deification in Calvin.¹¹⁴ To undergird his rejection of a *theosis*, Garcia points to Dupuy's four-fold models of pre-Reformation understandings of union with Christ: union (*henosis*), conjunction (*synapheia*), communion (*koinonia*), and Divinization/Deification.¹¹⁵ This allows a more precise consideration of what Calvin means in talking about union with Christ and participation with God. Our *participatio* with God, Garcia argues, is not ontological even though it is intimate.¹¹⁶ Properly

¹¹³ Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2008).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹¹⁶ Interestingly, Garcia struggles to express the nature of this union in strong-yet-distinctly-separate language. De Kroon's translation of *participatio* as "communion" or "fellowship," Garcia argues, "is not sufficiently representative of the intimacy in Calvin's idea" (258). The Spirit remains the bond – and only bond – of this union: "As in his teaching on the Supper, communion with Christ is much more than mental but less than baldly physical or essential. It is real and true not by a miracle of ontological oneness but by the blessing of the Spirit's work who unites Christ and his own" (258).

defining the terms prevents one from seeing deification and participation and union with Christ as necessarily synonymous ideas.

While Garcia clearly complicates a direct correlation between language associated with *theosis* and the doctrine of *theosis* proper, other scholars attempt to tie theologians to *theosis* despite statements and language that complicate such an interpretation. Kyle Strobel, in his article “Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of *Theosis*” (2012),¹¹⁷ attempts to do just this for Jonathan Edwards:

I argue here that while Edwards does not wield this specific terminology [divinization], he invokes the grammar of *theosis*, turning to the key biblical passages and doctrines to develop a robust account of “divinization.” I focus on the specific grammar Edwards employs to talk about *theosis* within the contours of his own systematic analysis.¹¹⁸

Strobel goes on to explain how statements that appear to be specifically anti-deification – such as Edwards denying that we are “Godded with God” – are clarified when looking at Edwards’ context and the opponents he was attempting to defeat. Interestingly, Strobel does not posit any correlation between Edwards and Orthodoxy, yet he suggests that Edwards provides cohesion in deification doctrine that *is not found* in Eastern Orthodoxy! More pertinent to the topic at hand, Strobel’s discerning deification in Edwards despite 1) lack of *theotic* language, and 2) a lack of knowledge of, or direct correlation to, Orthodoxy, are both striking. They have resonances with Runyon, who posits deification as having structural importance in Wesley’s theology, even if Wesley did not recognize

¹¹⁷ Kyle Strobel, “Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of Theosis,” *Harvard Theological Review* 105.3 (2012): 259-279.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the theme. They also have striking similarities with Myk Habets' study of *theosis* in theologian Thomas Torrance (2009).¹¹⁹

From Survey to Next Steps: Elements of This Present Study

The broad survey of Wesleyan treatment shows sustained conversation, but nothing reaching exhaustion of the topic, much less a definitive treatment of the subject. The brief consideration of other traditions' reception of deification has provided helpful guiding questions to aid a more thorough treatment of Wesley and deification. Thus, in this final section I offer what I discern to be necessary moves for Wesleyan scholarship in general, and for this study in particular, moving forward.

Moving Forward: Need for a Comprehensive Study

In Meconi's survey of recent studies on deification (2006), he identifies three types of major works: 1) those which constitute a major sweep of the history of deification; 2) those which focus on one figure or question; and, 3) those which are doctrinal or scriptural, seeking to recover deification as "the capstone that structures and guides its theological speculation."¹²⁰ The majority of Wesleyan work on deification falls in the second category, with a plethora of comparative studies exploring Wesley's connection with particular Eastern fathers. The level of direct attestation and influence has been tempered in recent decades, but this has not quelled scholars from pointing out

¹¹⁹ Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009). Habets argues for the significance of *theosis* for Torrance, despite the scarcity of Torrance's own use of the term. Torrance, while aware of Eastern Orthodox theology, takes deification and changes, develops, and rejects Orthodox elements of the doctrine.

¹²⁰ Meconi, "The Consummation..." 9.

shared *emphases* with Eastern Christianity. The assumption that there is a great East and West divide in Christian tradition has also been challenged in recent studies, which lessens the drive to point to Wesleyan theology as a great synthesizer of Christian tradition. As Wesleyan-Patristic studies moves forward, I believe the comparative work of previous generations will inform our next moves, but I doubt that more comparative studies of Wesley and particular Eastern figures will be fruitful in the continued discussion of deification.

What I find to be missing from the study of Wesley and *theosis* is a comprehensive work that attempts to relate the comparative work of previous individual case studies – such as Wesley and Macarius, or Wesley and Clement of Alexandria – to the whole Wesleyan appropriation of *theosis*. In a similar way that Ted Campbell gave a much-needed comprehensive study of Wesley’s appropriation of patristic sources,¹²¹ what is most needed is a serious attempt to do a similar comprehensive treatment of Wesley and deification. While most Wesleyan works gesture toward parallels of *theosis* between Wesley and this or that figure, or between Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy more generally, no book-length study has yet focused exclusively on Wesley and *theosis*, much less a study that has sought to look for deific elements in large swaths of his corpus. This project aims to fill this niche along both trajectories, focusing particularly on *theosis* and Wesley, and looking closely at a large collection of Wesley’s writings.

¹²¹ Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991). Campbell’s monograph is based on his dissertation. See “John Wesley’s Conceptions and Uses of Christian Antiquity” (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Methodist University, 1984).

Theosis and Wesley: Theme, Doctrine, or Structural Element?

Closely related to the need for a more comprehensive study of Wesley and *theosis* is the need for clarity in what the goals for such a study would be, as the goals we seek will naturally affect the nature of scholarship. From the scholars studied in this chapter, a number of differing goals have emerged: ecumenical connections between Christian traditions,¹²² inter-religious dialogue,¹²³ a fuller picture of salvation,¹²⁴ and even as a topic that is merely “interesting to talk about.”¹²⁵ While each of these goals have merit, a critically important goal when considering deification within a particular theologian or tradition is to determine *the role* of deification and how it functions within a particular figure or theological tradition.

Andrew Louth’s article “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology” (2007)¹²⁶ clarifies this question for Eastern Orthodoxy, concluding *theosis* is a doctrine with **structural** importance for Orthodox theology, as opposed to an interesting theological emphasis that can be studied as a mere facet of Orthodox thinking.¹²⁷ Similar sentiments are brought forward by Gösta Hallonsten, whose article looks at the future of *theosis* scholarship, arguing that there is a vast difference between discussing the **theme** of *theosis*, which is present in all Christian traditions to some extent, and the **doctrine** of

¹²² Drury, 68.

¹²³ Mosser, 57.

¹²⁴ James R. Payton, Jr, “Keeping the end in view: how the strange yet familiar doctrine of *theosis* can invigorate the Christian life,” *Christianity Today* 52.10 (Oct. 2008), 66+. *General OneFile*. Web. 1 Apr. 2013.

¹²⁵ Mosser, 57.

¹²⁶ Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, eds. Michael Christensen & Jeffery Wittung (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 32-44.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

theosis, which implies a key place for the concept.¹²⁸ One of the goals of this study is to determine the role of *theosis* for John Wesley: whether it functions as a motif/theme, major doctrine, or a structural element in Wesleyan theology.

Terminology or Ideology?

There is a danger of getting lost in an endless discussion of definitions, but there is also real danger in glossing over important concepts. What exactly constitutes *theosis* language? At times this concept seems synonymous with sanctification, at others deification seems to comprise some intersection of sanctification and glorification. Do these terms articulate the same concepts? Are they terms that circle around the same ideas dressed in different language? Or should *theosis* be more narrowly defined and placed within one of these theological categories, or enlarged to encapsulate both? As Christensen points out, Wesley replaced divinization language with “sanctification” – so a necessary task is exploring the extent to which Wesley’s shifting terms reflect synonymous or divergent understandings of sanctification and *theosis*.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ See “Theosis in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, eds. Michael Christensen & Jeffery Wittung (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 281-293.

¹²⁹ Christensen is referring to Wesley’s abridgement of Macarius’ *Spiritual Homilies* which Wesley included in the first volume of the *Christian Library*. In Wesley’s abridgement, he either replaces references to “deification” with “sanctification,” or excises them altogether. Much has been made of the implications of Wesley’s editorial decisions, which carve out much of the deific content. In my own research, however, I have found the dismissal of *theosis* on the basis of Wesley’s redacted text to be overstated. First of all, Wesley’s abridgement is based on Thomas Haywood’s 1721 *English translation* of the homilies. Haywood’s translation favored sanctification over deification terminology, so the text from which Wesley worked was already translated with that leaning. Secondly, of the twenty-two Macarian sermons Wesley included in the *Christian Library*, there are only two instances where Wesley redacts Haywood’s translation of “deified.” The change in terminology begs the question of Wesley’s rationale, but it does not preclude the possibility of deific content even within Wesley’s abridgement. See Mark T. Kurowski, “The First Step Toward Grace: John Wesley’s Use of the Spiritual Homilies of Macarius the Great,” *Methodist History* 36:2 (Jan 1998): 113-124; John C. English, “The Path to Perfection in Pseudo-

In similar fashion, participation language must not naively be assumed to express deification. Garcia pushes against that notion in reading Calvin, and Gavrilyuk critiques A.N. Williams' *Ground of Union* for stretching the concept of deification to its thinnest level: "deploy[ing] the broadest definition of deification possible – participation in God."¹³⁰ Collins utilized a participation motif in one of his books on Wesley, but removed it from his most recent monograph. Thus this study will seek in the next chapter to identify the key terms and ideas that comprise deification. From that lens, this project can avoid two interrelated pitfalls: prioritizing deific language to the neglect of deific content/ideas, or the content over specific terminology.

Relation to Eastern Orthodoxy

Any discussion of *theosis* brings forth logical questions for its relation to Eastern Christianity. Can one discuss deification separate from Eastern Orthodoxy; can one define the term in ways that ignore historic understandings of the term? Must Wesleyan scholars look for *continuity* between Wesley and Eastern fathers or Wesley's *re-interpretation* of such sources?¹³¹ Would a change still constitute deification; or, as Olson argues, would changed understandings do injustice to the term while muddying ecumenical endeavors?¹³² Being aware of such issues, even if they do not dominate a particular study, will certainly strengthen the overall endeavor. Orthodoxy is too

Macarius and John Wesley," *Pacifica* 11 (Feb 1998): 54-62; Howard Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 44.2 (1990): 57.

¹³⁰ Gavrilyuk, 651. Gavrilyuk argues that this stretching of deification may work "like a time-bomb...producing a 'creative destruction' of the soteriological visions developed by the Churches of the Reformation" (657).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 655. Gavrilyuk argues these are the two directions studies of deification can go.

¹³² Olsen, 193.

connected with the doctrine of deification – historically and presently – for its role in current discussion to be altogether ignored.

At the same time, as this survey has demonstrated, the stark divide between East and West has been compellingly challenged in recent theological treatments of *theosis*. The doctrine once exclusively held as Eastern now has a host of scholarship arguing for Latin or Western adherents as well. Moreover, deification is not a static, monolithic theme or doctrine. All simple definitions, even if only looking to eastern sources, are complicated by the fact that Eastern Orthodoxy is a living tradition, and there are modern inter-Orthodox disagreements in the discussion of *theosis* between figures such as John Zizioulas and Vladimir Lossky.¹³³ As such, this current project proceeds with conviction that there are two pertinent questions at stake in regards to Wesley and deification: 1) a question of content – whether Wesleyan theology has the necessary components for a doctrine of deification to be intelligible; and, 2) a corollary question of relationship – *if* deification is intelligible in Wesley, how does the Wesleyan doctrine of deification relate to Orthodoxy. This project focuses exclusively on the first question, exploring deeply Wesley and *theosis*. The second question is fascinating, and filled with ecumenical potential, but that is a project all its own.

¹³³ See Olsen, 189.

Chapter 2

Deification Defined and Nuanced

As is evidenced by the brief survey of studies on deification and *theosis* in our first chapter, there is sustained interest in this ancient Christian doctrine that has launched it from misunderstood obscurity to popular study in a matter of decades. No longer designated (or relegated!) to doctrinal importance for Eastern Christianity alone, recent studies have arisen from Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant scholars across traditional labels of Eastern and Western Christianity, and from disciplines as diverse as historical theology, biblical studies, and systematic theology. This sustained interest has borne fruit in a number of studies that speak eloquently of deification in a wide range of contexts and historical figures. Common to all these scholarly projects is a need to define deification intelligibly first, so as to use those parameters of the doctrine to explore the particular aims of their studies.

Central to this project, too, is the identification of what constitutes the core ideas or elements of *theosis*, which might then be used as a lens for parsing out the presence – or absence – of these core tenets of deification within John Wesley’s theology. Fortunately, this task is greatly aided and informed by the chorus of secondary sources that have examined deification in detail as part of other scholarly endeavors. While any study taken individually is vulnerable to the biases and misreading of an author who intends to prove his or her particular thesis, these studies considered collectively have the potential to identify, as well as sharpen, the picture of current scholarly understandings of core themes and trajectories of *theosis* as a doctrine.

Based on the conviction that these secondary studies can provide a magnifying glass through which to critically assess *theosis* within John Wesley's theology, this chapter will proceed in three sections. The first section will explore five studies that will be utilized to create an overall picture of contemporary understandings of deification. For each study, attention will be given to the theological orientation of the scholar, the thesis and methodology of the study, and finally the overarching understanding or definition of deification which emerges from that particular work. The second section will seek to put these secondary works in conversation with one another, identifying first what they reject in a doctrine of deification, and then examining in detail what core elements are held as essential or particularly constitutive of the doctrine. Naturally, attention will be given to places where there are distinctions or nuances to how these studies present *theosis*. The third and final section, extrapolating from section two, will propose a lens for exploring the role of *theosis* within John Wesley's theology. This chapter, in total, seeks to create a definition of deification that can guide exploring the extent of this doctrine in John Wesley or other writers. As such, it is critical to the logic and integrity of the rest of this project.

Section I: Deification Considered Within Recent Scholarship

In formulating a list of contemporary scholarship from which to develop a sense of how *theosis* is understood and explained in current theological dialogue, works from

diverse religious fields have been utilized, choosing five pivotal studies of *theosis* published within the past fifteen years:¹

Michael Gorman's *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* (2009)
Daniel A. Keating's *Deification and Grace* (2007)
David Meconi's *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (2013)
Norman Russell's *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (2004)
Norman Russell's *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (2009)

Each of these works seek to identify core themes and trajectories of *theosis* as a doctrine, reflecting upon the most current understandings of the doctrine available. Before shifting to what these collected works together reveal about deification, we must first pause to look briefly at each of these sources individually: identifying the thesis, methodology, and structure of each study, followed by the definition and nature of deification that functions as normative.

Gorman: *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (2009)²

While Michael Gorman is a member of The United Methodist Church, his monograph *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* is neither self-consciously directed toward a Methodist audience nor composed with an intentional Wesleyan theological slant. Instead, writing as a New Testament scholar, Gorman is seeking to give a nuanced reading of how to understand Pauline theology that is a "logical continuation" of his

¹ These studies are presented in alphabetical order by author for unbiased presentation.

² Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

earlier work on Paul, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*.³ The central claim in this second work contends that cruciformity, properly understood and teased out in Paul's corpus, is "theoformity, or *theosis*."⁴ Indeed, the main thesis revolves around the assertion that "*theosis is the center of Paul's theology*."⁵

In terms of our search in this chapter of an overall picture of, Gorman's work stands as the only work in biblical studies. As Gorman is not interested in historical theology or patristic exegesis of Paul's writing, his work explores the biblical warrant for *theosis* within the Pauline corpus. The way in which he defines and understands *theosis* adds texture and nuance to the conversation, and his explicit treatment of Paul adds depth to Pauline passages quoted in the other studies. It is also important to note that Gorman's contribution to the conversation surrounding *theosis* is enlightening and helpful, regardless of whether one is in total agreement with all aspects of his reading of Paul.⁶ Given the parameters of our study, his understanding of *theosis* will be the main focus under consideration.

Methodology and Structure

As a work of biblical scholarship, Gorman's monograph centers around exegetical studies which tease out the central place he gives *theosis* in Paul's theology. The first

³ Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

⁴ Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 171. Italics in original.

⁶ It is outside the scope of this project to argue that Gorman's thesis – specifically that *theosis* is the center of Paul's theology – is in fact true, or that its corollary conclusions about justification and sanctification are without dispute in Pauline scholarship. This study more modestly seeks to identify how Gorman defines and treats *theosis* as a theological concept, and then to put his understanding in conversation with other recent scholarship also exploring and defining *theosis*.

chapter focuses on a close reading of Philippians 2:6-11, which Gorman argues is the centerpiece of Paul's master story.⁷ Philippians 2:6 has two levels of meaning, surface and deeper meanings, which allow for two alternate translations to stand side-by-side as two sides of the same coin: "*although* he was in the form of God" shows the counter-intuitive character of God, while "*because* he was in the form of God" shows the cruciform character of God.⁸ *Kenosis* (self-emptying) and cruciformity are constitutive of divinity, Gorman posits, not exceptions to it:

In this reading, Christ *exercised* his divinity. ... That is, although Christ was in the form of God, which leads us to certain expectations, he subverted and deconstructed those expectations when he emptied and humbled himself, which he did *because* he was the *true* form of God."⁹

This kenotic nature of God revealed in Christ Jesus has anthropological implications, "summoning us to cruciformity understood as *theosis*."¹⁰

Giving special attention to Galatians 2:15-21 and Romans 6:1-7:6, Gorman's second chapter argues that justification is best understood as co-crucifixion with Christ. In both passages justification by faith is understood by Paul "as a participatory experience of co-crucifixion and resurrection with Christ."¹¹ As justification is such an important part of Pauline scholarship, this is the longest chapter, as well as what Gorman considers to be "the soul of the book."¹² At the climax of his argument, he proposes a thick definition of justification which guides the rest of his work:

⁷ Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

Justification is the establishment or restoration of right covenantal relations – *fidelity* to God and *love* for neighbor – by means of God’s grace in Christ’s death and our Spirit-enabled co-crucifixion with him. Justification therefore means co-resurrection with Christ to new life within the people of God and the certain *hope* of acquittal/vindication, and thus resurrection to eternal life, on the day of judgment.¹³

The logic of justification as co-crucifixion points Gorman to directly link *justification to theosis*: “[Justification] is participation in the covenantal and cruciform narrative identity of Christ, which is in turn the character of God; thus justification is itself *theosis*.”¹⁴

Gorman’s understanding of justification as co-crucifixion leads him to regard as impossible “a theological rift between justification and sanctification,” as he describes that “the same Spirit effects both initial and ongoing co-crucifixion with Christ among believers, a lifelong experience of cruciformity or...theoformity – *theosis*.”¹⁵ Thus the third chapter and third movement of Gorman’s study seeks to unpack *theosis* as “a helpful alternative term (and perhaps even a more appropriate one) for what has usually been called sanctification or holiness in Paul.”¹⁶ “Holiness, or sanctification,” Gorman insists, “is not an addition to justification but its actualization, or embodiment.”¹⁷ It is grounded in Paul’s understanding of the gospel:

¹³ Ibid., 85-86. Gorman earlier argues that his definition avoids typical divisions in Pauline understanding of soteriology: “...Paul has not *two* soteriological models (juridical and participationist) but *one*, justification by co-crucifixion, meaning restoration to right covenant relations with God and others by participation in Christ’s quintessential covenantal act of faith and love on the cross...” Ibid., 45.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶ Ibid., 106.

¹⁷ Ibid., 165.

Holiness is therefore fully Trinitarian,¹⁸ reflective of the participatory and transformative understanding of justification made possible by the Son and empowered by the Spirit.¹⁹

Holiness is articulated as Christlikeness within Paul's corpus, encouraging "Christlike, cruciform love" from believers that "seeks the good of the other and the community:"

That this holiness is in fact Christlikeness is clear from the assertion that the *telos* of salvation in Romans is conformity to "the image of his [God's] Son" (8:29) rather than conformity to this age (12:1-2), from allusions to Jesus' teaching on love and non-retaliation (12:9-21), and from an explicit call to Christlike love for the weak (15:1-3).²⁰

Holiness is therefore inherently communal, a "corporate *koinonia* of transformation," embodied in Christ's church.²¹ Pauline expressions of "putting on Christ" and being "in Christ" are thus best understood in a communal context; indeed, Gorman later asserts that *theosis* is a theopolitical reality actualized within the church.²²

Gorman's final core chapter explores the question of nonviolence. Turning to Paul's view of the resurrection as the lens through which to view the cross – and by extension the paradigmatic shape of the believer's life in Christ – Gorman argues that "a life of nonviolence and reconciliation" is an "integral part of Paul's vision of justification and of participatory holiness – *theosis*."²³ This is modeled by God, who loved us while we were enemies; God did not respond to our violence and sins "with the infliction of violence, but with the absorption of violence on the cross."²⁴ The resurrection provides a

¹⁸ The fact that Paul's language around holiness is at times Christocentric does not make his claims less Trinitarian: "...Paul's famous phrase 'in Christ' is his shorthand for 'in God/in Christ/in the Spirit.' That is, his christocentricity is really an implicit Trinitarianism." See *ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112-13. See also pg. 109, where Gorman argues that holiness is "an experience of the Trinitarian God."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 113. See also pgs. 70 and 172.

²² *Ibid.*, 172.

²³ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

pivotal transformative lens for engaging with violence as a cruciform people, reconciled nonviolently in Christ and faithfully expectant that God will ultimately deal with evil and sin.

The Definition and Nature of Deification

As is evident in the above section, *theosis* is both the thesis and the common thread running throughout Gorman's reading of Paul. What one may find surprising is that, unlike the majority of other studies of *theosis*, this work barely traces the historical development of the doctrine at all.²⁵ The fact that *theosis* as a term was coined later in the development of Christian theology – centuries after Paul! – is not problematic for Gorman; nor is he concerned with parsing the patristic exegesis that spawned the cluster of terms related to *theosis*. What is key for Gorman is accurately labeling what Paul is expressing within his epistles:

It is the burden of this book to make it clear that Paul's experience of Christ was precisely an experience of God *in se*, and that we must either invent or borrow theological language to express that as fully and appropriately as possible. For Paul, to be one with Christ is to be one with God; to be like Christ is to be like God; to be in Christ is to be in God. At the very least, this means that for Paul cruciformity – conformity to the crucified Christ – is really theoformity, or *theosis*.²⁶

Gorman goes on to concede that *theosis* may not be the “only word to describe the full soteriological process in Paul,” but that it is “both appropriate and useful.”²⁷ Moreover,

²⁵ Ibid. 4-5. Gorman mentions only briefly Irenaeus and Athanasius as originators of the exchange formula. It is here that he gives his only warning about *theosis*: “becoming God/god” in a Christian context is not apotheosis.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

“*not* to use such a word,” Gorman warns, “would mean seriously misrepresenting what is perhaps at the core of Paul’s theology.”²⁸

From the outset, Gorman gives a clear definition of Paul’s understanding of *theosis*: “Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ.”²⁹ Elsewhere he describes *theosis* as “participatory Trinitarian cruciform holiness.”³⁰ These dense definitions warrant careful parsing in what they say about Jesus’ divinity, the human capacity to participate in that divinity, and what *theosis* looks like in the life of the believer.

As outlined above, Gorman’s reading of Philippians argues that Christ’s divinity is manifested in the *kenosis* of Christ’s incarnation and death. By insisting that the *kenosis* of Christ is a divine attribute inherent in Christ’s divinity – as opposed to that *kenosis* being foreign to divinity or pertaining only to the incarnation – becoming like God entails a similar *kenosis* of the believer. *Theosis* is therefore best described, Gorman explains, as “*cruciform theosis*.”³¹ That is to say, cruciformity is constitutive of the divinity of Christ, and as followers of *that* Christ, cruciformity/co-crucifixion/*theosis* is constitutive of Christian discipleship, and often how Paul describes his apostolicity.³²

²⁸ Ibid. Later, Gorman explicitly states why he finds other terms too broad or too narrow to fully describe Paul’s theology: “... ‘justification’ and ‘reconciliation’ are terms that are a bit too narrow to indicate the heartbeat of Pauline soteriology, while ‘participation’ is inevitably a bit vague. *Theosis* is a better choice.” Ibid., 171.

²⁹ Ibid., 7. Here Gorman is clear that he does not intend to provide an extended description or defense of *theosis*, but rather a clear reading of Paul.

³⁰ Ibid., 128.

³¹ Ibid., 171. Italics in the original.

³² Here Gorman points out, using 1 Thess. 2:6-28 and 1 Cor. 9:1-23, the similarity how the apostles exercise their freedom in Christ through self-denial and *kenosis* with how Jesus exercises his divinity

Theosis, however, is not the domain of the spiritually elite; rather, it is tied directly to God's intention for all humanity: "*theosis* means that humans become *like* God. ... *Theosis* is about divine intention and action, human transformation, and the *telos* of human existence – union with God."³³ As creatures made in the image of God, this cruciform *kenosis* of humanity is actually living into God's intention for God's human creation:

... human beings, including Adam, are most like God when they act kenotically. In Christ's preexistent and incarnate *kenosis* we see truly what God is truly like, and we simultaneously see truly what Adam/humanity truly should have been, truly was not, and now truly can be in Christ. *Kenosis is theosis*. To be like Christ crucified is to be both most godly and most human. Christification is divinization, and divinization is humanization.³⁴

Becoming like Christ is both deifying and humanizing; it is not a renunciation of humanity, but rather the fulfillment (and restoration!) of humanity's potential as image-bearers of God. *Theosis* is possible because of Christ's work restoring fallen humanity, restoring the human capacity to participate in Christ's divinity – what Paul refers to as "putting on Christ," and Gorman terms "Christification."

As to what *theosis* looks like in the life of the believer, it is helpful to trace Gorman's overall argument. Godlikeness/Christification/humanization is made possible through Christ and entails our *co-crucifixion with Christ*, which Gorman understands as the proper understanding of justification within Paul's corpus. Holiness/sanctification, as explained above, is properly understood as the actualization or embodiment of

through self-denial and *kenosis*. Thus, the apostles model the cruciformity and *kenosis* of Christ. See *ibid.*, 23-24.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

justification, rather than a separate theological category. Fittingly, Gorman explains sanctification in terms of cruciformity, both as “cruciform holiness” and “countercultural, cruciform (holy) love.”³⁵ Taken together, with justification as *theosis* and sanctification/holiness as *theosis*, Gorman makes *theosis* a shorthand term to describe Paul’s full soteriological vision. The cluster of terms and stages which theologians parse stages of salvation – faith, baptism, justification, and sanctification – become what Gorman terms as “theologically coterminous:”

[Romans 6 and Galatians 2 illustrate] that for Paul faith and baptism are theologically coterminous. ... While some may prefer a nice orderly *ordo salutis*, Paul sees baptism, justification, and even sanctification as theologically coterminous: ‘But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6:11). ‘And at the same time,’ Paul would say, ‘you were crucified and raised by God’s grace and power.’³⁶

Theosis is the fulfillment of God’s salvation of humanity, as well as a fitting descriptor of each step within the *via salutis*. It is both the process and the *telos* of salvation; a present and ontological reality that awaits eschatological completion.³⁷ *Theosis* is therefore a shorthand term for describing the full salvation of God.

Theosis is both transformative and participatory for the believer. Justification by co-crucifixion is inherently participatory, made possible by the salvific work of Christ, yet entailing the willing *kenosis* of the believer who is thus able to fulfill both dimensions

³⁵ Ibid., 110.

³⁶ Ibid., 79. For more explicit treatment of Galatians 2 and Romans 6, see *ibid.*, 72-73.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 92. “The appropriate eschatological reservation ... should not cause us to think that this transformation, this *theosis*, does not actually occur. Of course it is incomplete, but the claims ... that for Paul the transformation is not in any sense present and ontological but is completely future and eschatological (with a little foretaste thanks to the Spirit) ... simply do not do justice to the texts.”

of the Law through Christ – love of God (“vertical” requirements) and love of neighbor (“horizontal” requirements):

[Justification by co-crucifixion means] restoration to right covenant relations with God and others by participation in Christ’s quintessential covenantal act of faith and love on the cross; this one act fulfilled both the “vertical” and “horizontal” requirements of the Law, such that those who participate in it experience the same life-giving fulfillment of the Law and therein begin the paradoxical, christologically grounded process of resurrection through death. That is, they have been initiated into the process of conformity to the crucified Christ (cruciformity, Christification), who is the image of God – and thus the process of theoformity, or *theosis*.³⁸

This literal transformation in the life of the believer fulfills the Law and begins a restoration of the *imago dei*. And while this participation “in the reality of the life of the kenotic triune God” necessitates the cooperation of the believer, it is made possible through “Spirit-enabled theoformity.”³⁹ The justified – those who are co-crucified with Christ – “are able to fulfill the law and do the works of love because they are forgiven *and* liberated *and* restored *and* filled with the Spirit.”⁴⁰ This God-empowered transformation of the believer conveys a deeply trinitarian understanding of God within the Pauline corpus:

This work of the Spirit [holiness] is ultimately the work of the Father, who gives believers the Spirit of the Son. As in 1 Thessalonians, in Galatians Paul implies

³⁸ Ibid., 45. Importantly, Gorman denies that there are two soteriological models at work within Paul, a juridical and participationist, but rather *one*: justification by co-crucifixion.

³⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 102. This list corresponds to the benefits of participating in Christ’s crucifixion: “... by participating in Christ’s sacrificial (forgiving), apocalyptic (liberative), and covenantal (law-fulfilling) crucifixion, believers are forgiven, freed from Sin, and empowered to fulfill the vertical and horizontal requirements of the covenant instead of continuing in the various transgressions that previously characterized their existence and that manifested, inseparably for Paul, both their slavery to Sin and their covenantal dysfunctionality.”

that Spirit-enabled cruciform holiness is ultimately not only Christlikeness but also Godlikeness.⁴¹

Thus transformation and participation within believers are undergirded with a robust Christology and pneumatology that enable human cooperation with God.⁴²

One final note about *theosis* is the corporate nature of this doctrine within the Pauline corpus. As mentioned above, *theosis* for Paul is a theopolitical reality actualized within the church; it is “not primarily an individual experience, but a corporate one of *communal theosis* – we become, in Christ, the righteousness/justice of God.”⁴³ The individual and corporate aspects of *theosis* are clearly exhibited in the church in baptism, where “baptism into Christ means incorporation into the diverse community of fellow baptized, co-crucified, co-resurrected, justified inhabitants of Christ (Gal. 3:28).”⁴⁴ While Gorman does not stress a sacramental understanding of *theosis*, “the corporate *koinonia* of transformation” that creates “Christlikeness” or “putting on Christ” or “in Christ” are described with a sacramental arc:

This *koinonia* is therefore above all a participation in Christ’s cross, which is inaugurated through faith and baptism (see chapter two), remembered and re-experienced in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:16), and embodied existentially in both cruciform love for others (Phil. 2:1-4) and suffering with Christ (Phil. 3:10).⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibid., 118. He cites 1 Thessalonians and Galatians as two letters supporting this claim. In the same passage, Gorman asserts that the “work of the Spirit is ultimately the work of the Father, who gives believers the Spirit of the Son.”

⁴² See Ibid., 93. Contemplation is one form of human cooperation with God in *theosis*.

⁴³ Ibid., 91 and 93. See also 172, where the church is described as embodying and proclaiming the reality of *theosis* to the world.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 113.

Baptism, Eucharist, and the *missio dei* are constitutive activities of the church, and it is fitting that they are constitutive of holiness and *theosis*.

Keating: *Deification and Grace* (2007)⁴⁶

Daniel A. Keating is a Roman Catholic scholar, and his monograph *Deification and Grace* is the sixth published volume within the Introductions to Catholic Doctrine series. While the goal of the series is to provide “readable scholarly introductions to key themes in Catholic doctrine,”⁴⁷ Keating’s study is not self-consciously directed to *Catholic* theology alone,⁴⁸ but rather reclaiming deification as a universal *Christian* doctrine that spans expressions of Christianity in both the East and West. Keating names the goal of his work as creating “a synthetic account of deification in Christ as the full outworking of grace in the Christian life.”⁴⁹ This focus on God’s grace as central to understanding deification is reflected in the title.

Keating’s work is of special interest to this project, as it represents a study whose entire goal is to give a robust and thick description of deification that draws upon patristic sources of both the East and West without dismissing their differences. There is “striking similarity on the essentials (not necessarily on the details) of deification,” Keating contends, and while “[the Fathers’] voices may not always be on the same pitch, ... they are normally in the same key and in harmony with one another.”⁵⁰ The end result is a

⁴⁶ Daniel Keating, *Deification and Grace*. Introductions to Catholic Doctrine (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007).

⁴⁷ Ibid, unnumbered bibliographic entry page.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 2-3. Keating briefly mentions relevant sections of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, but that is the extent of explicit reference to deification within the Catholic tradition. See also footnotes 3 and 4 on page 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

work that seeks to discern the melody of deification that is common to Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic theologies.

Methodology and Structure

Three underlying convictions guide Keating's approach to deification: 1) the doctrine "arose from the Church's hard-fought efforts to interpret the Scriptures rightly in the face of alternative interpretations of those same Scriptures;"⁵¹ 2) that deification is "not the patrimony of the Eastern church alone" but rather there is a "remarkable convergence on the substance of the doctrine of deification between the Eastern and Western traditions;"⁵² and, 3) that deification "must be firmly embedded within classical Christian doctrine and the credal confession of the Church."⁵³ Attention is directed to these three convictions in each chapter of his study, giving shape to the entire work. More broadly, Keating seeks to address key questions and concerns surrounding deification as they arise.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., 5. The focus on biblical exegesis that undergirds Keating's exploration of deification is an ecumenical strength of his scholarship, particularly for applying his research and assertions to Protestant traditions and theologians.

⁵² Ibid., 5-6. While seeking to point out convergences between ideas, Keating at the same time intentionally allows the patristic witness of Eastern and Western figures to stand side-by-side: "By proposing that there is a core account of deification common to many writers in the Christian tradition, I am not seeking to flatten the differences. Each author, and each theological tradition, possesses peculiar elements. These are worthy of sustained attention, but they are not the focus of this study" (6).

⁵³ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁴ These include whether deification is more of a Greek notion than Scriptural understanding, if there is an overemphasis on Christ's incarnation over and above Christ's atoning death, whether deification crosses the ontological divide between Creator and creation, and finally whether the doctrine is useful in Christian theology today. See summary of concerns on pages 7-8.

The “formula of exchange” – described by Keating as “the Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men might become sons of God”⁵⁵ – guides the movement of the next chapters. Keating cites and agrees with Norman Russell that the graced exchange between redeemed humanity and Christ is central to understanding deification,⁵⁶ and illustrates how the formula of exchange is biblical, widely attested in both Eastern and Western Fathers, and is ultimately “the key summation of the doctrine of salvation in the Fathers and [is also used] as a shorthand statement that sums up the content of the doctrine of deification.”⁵⁷ The Son’s willing condescension as the ground of deification (and particularly our filiation), and then humanity’s reception of the divine life form a united whole in the structure of the study. The remaining chapters explore growth in deification as we are transformed into Christ’s image and become partakers of the divine nature.⁵⁸

The Definition and Nature of Deification

Key terminology is not of major concern for Keating, so much as identifying the core content of deification. On the one hand, even when direct terminology is used, as it is within the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, often it is utilized without direct

⁵⁵ See *Ibid.*, 38 and 117. For this definition, Keating draws from multiple iterations of the formula of exchange expressed in patristic sources. The “formula of exchange,” “Exchange Formula,” and *admirabile commercium* are often used interchangeably and express the same concept.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12. Russell identifies this as the “fundamental tenet” of deification. See Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 321.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁸ Keating himself describes the work as revolving around the Exchange Formula: “how Christ has redeemed and deified our nature in himself (chapter two); how we have become ‘sons’ and ‘gods’ by receiving new life through the effective indwelling of God (chapter three); and how we make progress in the divine life through transformation into the image of Christ (chapter four).” Chapter five functions as a space to explore questions that have historically risen from the implications of “partaking of the divine nature,” such as pantheism and exact meaning of ‘participation’ in the life of God. See *ibid.*, 91.

explanation.⁵⁹ On the other hand, even without deific language, “the content of deification may be present in the absence of the technical vocabulary;” thus, one “can identify [deific] content even when the vocabulary is absent.”⁶⁰ Neither Irenaeus of Lyons nor Leo the Great use the characteristic terminology of *theosis*, Keating points out as historic examples, but each are attributed with articulating clearly the content of the doctrine of deification.

In identifying the content of deification, at the beginning of his study Keating asserts that “deification is a kind of summary term that expresses all that God intends for us in Christ through the Spirit.”⁶¹ Later, he states that “deification is the transformation and glorification of our nature, so that it can be what God intended it to be: a dwelling place of God in the Spirit....[which is]...in fact our glorious destiny as creatures.”⁶² Keating goes on to clarify that this transformation is not ontological, while affirming that it is real communion with the triune God:

...deification does not mean an ontological promotion to something other than we are (that is, human beings made in God’s image and likeness). We do not become God as God is, but we come to participate in his divine life and power. Our nature is elevated and glorified, but *as deified* we remain creatures and human beings completely dependent on God as our source. Deification is the honored status that God intended for us as his sons and daughters, a status forfeited in Adam and attained in Christ, the New Adam. Through our real incorporation into Christ we experience the fruits of divine life in a way suited to our nature, and we share in the Trinitarian fellowship of love “that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3).⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

⁶² Ibid., 110.

⁶³ Ibid., 116.

In these and all others references to deification, Keating consistently holds that the doctrine is both Christocentric and Trinitarian, explaining that at its heart deification refers directly to our filiation and adoption as sons and daughters of God in the economy of God. For this reason, to avoid misunderstanding, deification “needs to be embedded within Christian truth and explained by reference to other doctrines...[for] it depends entirely on the specific confession of the Triune God, the Incarnation of the eternal Son, and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the Church.”⁶⁴

The Exchange Formula functions for Keating as the historic lens to properly understand deification. Because it functions as a shorthand summation to the “scriptural testimony concerning our redemption,” the Exchange Formula gives a framework for the doctrine of deification vis-à-vis other Christian doctrine and the witness of Scripture:

Christ, by virtue of his divine-human constitution and by means of his saving actions, is the center and locus of that redemption. He is the Second Adam who renews our nature in himself, thus inaugurating a new humanity, and breathes his Spirit into us, causing us to be adopted as sons and daughters of the Father. By means of the indwelling of God, we are set on a course in which we freely cooperate, to be confirmed to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:29). It is only in the life of the age to come that this transformation will be completed, and we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).⁶⁵

One may note in the above description distinct movements within deification – its initiation in Christ, one’s ongoing growth in deification in this life (guided and empowered by the Spirit), and its ultimate completion in the eschaton. Later, Keating

⁶⁴ Ibid., 121.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 28.

speaks of these as three stages of deification which are helpful categories in exploring the “one, integrated work of our deification.”⁶⁶

The beginning of God’s deific work in the life of believers is baptism. Citing the “ample testimony” of the Church Fathers, Keating names “baptism and the gift of the indwelling Spirit as the beginning of our divine filiation and deification.”⁶⁷ Continuing with a sacramental understanding, the Eucharist follows as “the primary means for ongoing participation in the life and power of God.”⁶⁸ This sacramental source of deification emphasizes the indwelling of God in the life of the believer in both pneumatological and Christological terms: “By the Spirit in baptism and through the life-giving body and blood of Christ through the Eucharist, we have divine life and power dwelling within us – and it is this divine indwelling that is the proper source of our deification.”⁶⁹ Through exploration of Scripture, quotations from the Fathers, and doctrinal exploration, Keating firmly establishes a sacramental – and by extension Trinitarian – foundation for the doctrine of deification.

The on-going progress in deification likewise has a “baptismal and Eucharistic shape.”⁷⁰ “Deification cannot be understood,” Keating explains, “apart from the Cross and the call to suffer for the sake of Christ.”⁷¹ Biblical images of baptism and Eucharist

⁶⁶ See. *Ibid.*, 40: “Deification – like sanctification – can be viewed as occurring in three stages: It begins in us at a particular moment, it grows and progresses throughout the entirety of our earthly life, and it is completed in the life of the age to come.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44. It should be mentioned that while Baptism and Eucharist are lifted up above other means, Keating also cites “the proclamation of the Word of God in the Scriptures” as another means mentioned by some Church Fathers “by which God comes to dwell in the soul.” See *ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 63. See also pg. 87: “Progress in the deified life will always have a baptismal and Eucharistic form.”

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

found in Romans 6 and 1 Corinthians 10 hold in tension the biblical paradox that following Christ entails dying to oneself so that one might live the divine life made possible in Christ Jesus. In fact, Keating is quick to point out, “it is striking how closely Paul links our divine filiation as ‘sons of God’ with the call to suffer with Christ.”⁷² Practices of asceticism – which vary in emphasis in varying understandings of deification – are properly understood in light of Christ’s suffering for us and our call to follow to join, sacramentally, in his death and resurrection:

Being given up to death for Jesus’ sake and having “death at work in us” [2 Cor. 4:10-12], does not immediately sound like a description of the deified life. But this is just what we should expect if we understand that deification is being transformed into the image of Christ. As his body we are called to participate in his suffering and death, just as we are in his resurrection.⁷³

Thus, the route to transformation in Christ is a necessarily cruciform journey entailing participation and cooperation of the believer, aided and empowered by the Spirit.

This sacramental form of deification is held in tension with two other core “foundational truths concerning our progress in deification” which inform and nuance a proper understanding of growth in deification: first, all progress “is grounded in divine grace and the prior indwelling of God;” and, second, the New Testament invites believers into “transformation into full maturity in the image of Christ, expressed especially by faith, hope, and love.”⁷⁴ Each of these truths mutually inform the other, giving shape to Keating’s full vision of deification. While growth in deification entails our participation,

⁷² Ibid., 85. Here Keating quotes Romans 8:16-17: “It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

⁷³ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 63.

that participation is preceded and empowered by “the divine saving initiative of the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.”⁷⁵ Only through Christ is there “true freedom to love God, to do his will, and to be in full communion with [God].”⁷⁶ That we are intended to grow in Christlikeness – and therefore Godlikeness! – is expressed throughout the New Testament in various forms. Characteristic of the entire study, Keating paints these Scriptural images in terms of our divine filiation as sons and daughters of God. Growing in image or likeness of God – descriptions of deification used variously by some but not all theologians – “both have a close affiliation with the notion of ‘sonship,’” Keating asserts, “...to say that we are created ‘in the image and likeness of God’ is to state, most simply, that we are ‘sons and daughters of God’ in a way that is not true of any other created being on earth.”⁷⁷ The notion of Christian perfection expressed in Scripture harkens to maturity as children of God:

“By the Spirit we are called to become *mature* sons and daughters of God, spiritual adults, as it were. ... We are called to leave behind spiritual adolescence and become mature sons and daughters, imitating the ways of our Father in heaven and becoming formed in the image of Christ.”⁷⁸

Expressing this growth in terms of virtue ethics, it is precisely “because we have been born anew as sons and daughters of God and are partakers of the divine nature that we can make progress in godly virtue.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid., 66. Keating goes on to say that God’s initiative “governs – and acts as the wellspring for – all that we can say about our progress in deification.” Note that Trinitarian emphasis here and elsewhere in Keating’s description of deific understandings.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 68

⁷⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 78. Keating here is not talking about a Wesleyan understanding of Christian Perfection, per se. Keating’s understanding here matches that of prominent Wesley scholar Randy Maddox. Both assert that the Greek word *teleios*, often translated as “perfect,” is better understood when translated as “mature.”

⁷⁹ Ibid., 81.

Meconi: *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (2013)⁸⁰

David Vincent Meconi is an ordained Jesuit priest, though his monograph *The One Christ* is not written primarily (or self-consciously) to a Catholic audience. As a work of patristic historical theology, *The One Christ* gives a compelling counter-reading to standard readings of Augustine that either deny or minimize any notion of deification within Augustine's theology.⁸¹

Over and against these readings, Meconi posits that "deification of the human person is central to how St. Augustine presents a Christian's new life in Christ."⁸² There are two main theses he seeks to defend: 1) Augustine "advocates a theology of deification in a manner hitherto unappreciated" in scholarly debate; and, 2) this "wider metaphor of divine union runs throughout Augustine's thought in ways indispensable to his overall theological concerns."⁸³ Becoming "one in Christ" – or "the one Christ" as phrased in the title – is a statement of deific hope and the centrality of deification in Augustine's overall theology.

Meconi's work serves an important function in this chapter and this study. As a work of historical theology focusing on one figure, it demonstrates how one scholar goes about exploring the doctrine of deification in the overall theology of a key patristic theologian. The fact that Augustine is a key figure in the Latin West is pertinent to

⁸⁰ David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2013).

⁸¹ See *Ibid.*, xiii-xv. Not only is deification or *theosis* within Augustine denied by many scholars, but some point to Augustine – by virtue of his role in Western Christianity – as a key figure whose lack of deific emphasis shaped the entire Western tradition.

⁸² *Ibid.*, xi.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

discussions of deification that argue that western sources also emphasize deification. Augustine also provides a bridge to John Wesley, as key texts of Augustine (particularly his *Confessions*) were part of Wesley's theological training as an Anglican priest in the eighteenth century. Perhaps most importantly, however, this work gives a window into how deification might be understood in the overall theological framework of one theologian.

Methodology and Structure

Meconi argues that the dominant reading of Augustine, which has traditionally dismissed the notion of deification within his theology, has done so in part by pointing out the lack of deific language within Augustine. This “purported lack of deification language in Augustine” in turn “parallels his supposed inability to bring God and creation into any kind of harmonious relationship.”⁸⁴ Those traditional readings are challenged by seeking to “situate Augustine's understanding of the concept of deification within the wider framework of [Augustine's] theology;” Meconi argues that limiting an investigation of deification within Augustine to the eighteen instances of *deificare* within his corpus reduces it to a mere “nominal reality.”⁸⁵ Taking a thematic approach, this study looks at primary texts that explore communion between God and creation within Augustine's wider theology. This makes clear the “diverse roles deification plays in Augustine's theology” rather than enumerating a catalogue of specific terminology.⁸⁶ By

⁸⁴ Ibid., xiv. Here Meconi lifts up two examples: Myrrha Lot-Borodine, who argues that the “Augustinian vision of Christianity may be motivated by a promise of beatitude, but never by deification;” and Philip Sherrard, who argues that Augustine renders divinity as “non-participable and unknowable.”

⁸⁵ Ibid., xv.

⁸⁶ Ibid., xvi.

allowing Augustine's "teaching on humanity's divine transformation in Christ" to be explored fully, deification becomes a "pivotal metaphor" among a range of metaphors for Augustine's "presentation of the Christian life."⁸⁷

The first move of the study is to explore Augustine's doctrine of creation as the "fundamental prologue to divine union."⁸⁸ Rather than being utterly removed from its Creator, creation is continually ontologically dependent upon God for its formation and being. In this regard creation is "*doxologically deiform*," in that "all creatures are iconic and derivatively divine...ontologically good and perpetually confess[ing the] triune creator."⁸⁹ Against readings of Augustine that would paint God's union with creation as impossible, Augustine "invents the term *formabilitas* in order to describe the 'ability to be formed' inhering in all creatures."⁹⁰ This formability has a distinctly trinitarian shape:

... the Father initiates existence (that something is), the Son bestows being and intelligibility (what something is), and the Spirit holds these creatures in a purposeful ordering (how each existent is interconnected within the cosmos).⁹¹

The vision is Logocentric as "each created existent must imitate the Word's eternal turn toward and presence before the Father in order to receive existence and the qualities which make it what it is."⁹² This vision is also Pneumatologically grounded, as it is the Spirit who "does not merely 'hold' creatures in existence, but in so doing arranges them beautifully and purposefully according to the Father's Logocentric plan."⁹³ By the very

⁸⁷ Ibid., xiii. Other metaphors linked with deification are explored below.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 8. Italics in original.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 16-17.

⁹¹ Ibid., 14. See also 79, where creation is said to display a "triadic ontology that is most often explained in terms of existence, essence, and a creature's proper place in the ordered cosmos."

⁹² Ibid., 2.

⁹³ Ibid., 14.

nature of creation, it is capable of “divine imitability” which lays the foundation for deification:

Logocentric and filial in nature, creation must inescapably imitate the Son’s turn *toward* and loving communion *with* the Father. . . . A creature’s conversion back to and subsequent formation by [*conuersione et formatione*] the Father is of course neither eternal nor equal as is the Son’s eternal conversion. Yet by adhering to the Father and thereby receiving their form, creatures imitate the perfect and eternal Form. The more a creature is turned toward that Word, the more that creature becomes like the Word.⁹⁴

Ultimately, the purpose of creation is this communion with God’s divine life, inviting “this ecclesial convocation of created persons to be united in constant praise and assimilation.”⁹⁵

With creation being in dialogue with its Creator, the stage is set to focus on Augustine’s theological anthropology, a task addressed in the second chapter. If creation is the prologue for deification within Augustine, then the *imago Dei* is the “precondition by which such communion is able to occur.”⁹⁶ The *imago Dei* plays an important role throughout Augustine’s theology. Paradoxically, the *imago Dei* both shows humanity’s similitude with its Creator as well as the complete otherness of God: “It simultaneously marks the ontological otherness between eternal and created persons while also highlighting the relationship between them.”⁹⁷ This is essential in delineating the ontological scope and limitations of talking about deification within human creation.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 31

⁹⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 35. See also page 51, where Meconi likewise points out that participation between Creator and creation “always implies a simultaneous connectedness *and* disparity.”

Unique to Augustine, the *imago Dei* is not a reflection only of the Son (as the perfect Image of God), but rather it is triune in nature; reflecting each person of the trinity.⁹⁸ Augustine also understood the nature of an image not only to share similarities with its model, but rather to have an innate drive to become more like its model, striving to “become the perfection upon which it is modeled.”⁹⁹ This “movement out of creation toward the creator,” Meconi asserts, “is what ultimately constitutes the *imago Dei* for Augustine.”¹⁰⁰ This natural desire for God instilled within humanity is the pure desire that is corrupted in the Fall, providing a lens through which to understand Augustine’s hamartiology. In their creation, Adam and Eve enjoyed a contingent perfection dependent upon their obedience and faithful turning toward God their creator.¹⁰¹ Ironically, sin is *also* an attempt to become like God, though through distorted means:

[Satan] sought to be like God not through reliant participation in God but through the autonomous assertion of self. It is in this way that Augustine gave the metanarrative of evil a deifying stamp. The devil is the *primus peccator*, *primus preuaricator*. He first turned away because he could not be God. This is the same prospect the devil dangled before the first humans. He enticed them to become gods in their own nature as opposed to becoming “created gods” by participating in the one and only God. This was the fallen angel’s original act of rebellion and

⁹⁸ See Ibid., 41-45. In this regard, Meconi asserts that Augustine broke with much of the Christian tradition. This led to Augustine describing the *imago Dei* in terms of triads, and ultimately settling on the image being the human person’s remembering, knowing, and loving God (*memoria Dei*, *intelligentia Dei*, and *amor Dei*).

⁹⁹ Ibid., 40. This is, of course, unilateral on the part of the image; the model is not affected or defined by the striving of the image.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 46. See also page 55 where Meconi cites Augustine scholar Olivier du Roy on his reading of *ad* in Genesis 1:26 to lay the foundation for two truths: the human soul is both an image of the divine and also naturally desiring to become *more* like God. “The human person alone, as creature, is like God, while simultaneously being an *imago* that has been implanted with a nature longing to become God” (55).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 59-61. Here Meconi differentiates between humanity’s contingent perfection at creation, and the absolute perfection which is the destiny for humanity: “... this distinction is between the *potestas perseuerantiae* which the first humans received, versus the *felicitas perseuerantiae* for which they were destined; in the first state they enjoyed the ability not to forsake goodness, but in the latter they would not have been able to forsake the good.”

this is how he led the first humans astray. He falsely promised them by right what they could have had by grace: divinity.

The “innate and good desire for deification” that is possible through participation in God, was traded for what Meconi terms a “perverse deification.”¹⁰² Human deformity, marred by the Fall, is nonetheless not completely eradicated; instead, the natural turning toward God becomes disoriented, both inwardly focused on oneself and outwardly focused on earthly things. This perverse deification is doomed to futility: “If the Trinity alone can actualize the human person, no mere earthly communion could ever fulfill that divine image.”¹⁰³ The restoration of the *imago Dei* and the rightful participation of humanity in God is ultimately the goal of salvation, and to that end the study turns to soteriology by looking at Augustine’s Christology (chapter three), pneumatology (chapter four), and ecclesiology (chapter five) in turn.

Meconi holds that “Augustine’s account of salvation can be described as an account of deification,” yet deification is but one metaphor “used always alongside other central Christian images.”¹⁰⁴ Moving from consideration of Augustine’s wider theology, the focus shifts to the eighteen uses of *deificare* within Augustine’s corpus. All eighteen appear when “describing the incarnate Son’s activity in the world,” and are never isolated; instead, they are “always found in the midst of standard biblical images, inviting his audience to embrace this stunning reality as one more way of understanding how God redeems in Christ.”¹⁰⁵ Six of the uses are literary, while the remaining eleven refer

¹⁰² Ibid., 67; 70.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 74.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 81-82. See also 103: “... Augustine can move fluidly between the metaphors of becoming ‘gods’ and of becoming ‘children of God,’ stressing the commonality of a new divine life lived in a creaturely way in and through Christ, while also distinguishing between different scriptural images of this new life.”

directly to the work of Jesus Christ and take on great theological significance to Augustine's soteriology. Deification as a doctrine is never explicitly or systematically treated within Augustine's writing, but appears alongside other ways of describing God's salvation through Christ:

... Augustine's choice to use deification language soteriologically is always contextualized by a wider metaphor: recapitulation, adoption, the "exchange" between God's humanity for our divinity, as well as the subsequent ability to now live as God lives, with hearts and minds (and eyes) renewed. As such, deification proves diversely delineated, with Augustine at times stressing the lowliness of Christ in achieving humanity's greatness, while at other times stressing the language of the participation of Christians in divinity, the role of grace, or of ecclesial incorporation.

Recapitulative deification, divine adoption through the waters of baptism, the "great exchange," and other salvific images stand side-by-side in Augustine's soteriological use of *deificare*, either explicating scripture or bolstering Christian metaphors for salvation.¹⁰⁶ Together they employ a robust incarnational and sacramental theology that is rooted in Augustine's Christology.¹⁰⁷

Augustine's trinitarian theology, evident already in his doctrines of creation and theological anthropology, makes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit indispensable in his understanding of deification. This runs counter to the majority of scholarship that has focused on Augustine's assertion that Holy Spirit is "the personal love between Father and Son" to the neglect of the Spirit's work in the overall economy of salvation.¹⁰⁸ In Christ there is a new dispensation of the Holy Spirit, whereby humanity may now freely imitate God empowered by the Spirit:

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, 133-34.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 140. In particular, Meconi cites Patricia Wilson-Kastner and Daniel Keating as two scholars who fail to give the role of the Holy Spirit in Augustine's soteriology its full due.

Such an imitation is not the necessary imitation of the Logos necessarily performed by all of creation which we examined in chapter 1, but is now a free imitation of God which can be approached and executed only through grace [*per gratiam*]. This grace, furthermore, proves to be the Holy Spirit himself, named here as the gift of God [*munus*] now given to Christ's body. The Spirit is thus presented as the one sent to unify and to gather created persons on a two-fold level. The Spirit unites men and women to God [*ad deum*] and to one another [*ad nos ipsos*] and in this, the two great commandments are fulfilled.¹⁰⁹

It is true that the Holy Spirit is the bond of unity, holiness, and love within the Trinity; it is also the work of the Holy Spirit, in an analogous way, to bind humanity to its

Trinitarian creator:

...the Holy Spirit is God's union, God's spiritual holiness, and the love between the Father and the Son; in the economy, the Spirit is the glue which unites believers with God and with one another, the person who both renders holy and spiritually transforms Christ's followers, and the love of God poured in the hearts of his people. The Spirit is the charity which binds the church together and the church to Christ.¹¹⁰

Because of Augustine's strong Trinitarian theology, what is received in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is nothing less than an enjoyment of the fullness of the Trinity in the human soul.

As the above quote also gestures, deification has a clear ecclesial focus, which Meconi explores in the final chapter of his study. Augustine's ecclesiology places the church centerstage, with the church encapsulating the primordial praise of all creation and of all graced people throughout time. The term *totus Christus* – “the whole Christ” – is a hermeneutic Augustine develops in reading scriptures such as Matthew 25 and Acts 9, where Christ identifies with the faithful. This becomes a hermeneutic through which to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 144-45.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 149, 173. See also 152: “As the bond between the Father and the Son, the Spirit makes the entire Trinity our divine guest: we dwell in God and God dwells in us.”

view the church as “nothing other than the ‘whole Christ,’ a continuation of the incarnation where union with the perfect man Jesus Christ is made possible.”¹¹¹ It is not surprising, with this focus on the church, that deification is deeply sacramental and ecclesiastically received: “The Son’s life is transmitted to his faithful by the Spirit in his church, and it is particularly through the sacraments of union the Christian sees in himself Christ.”¹¹²

The One Christ – the title of the monograph – is the penultimate expression of the centrality of deification in Augustine’s theology. While opening the dazzling door to humanity’s participation/identification/deification in Christ, it must also be carefully understood so as to avoid an ontological confusion of either Christ’s divine nature or humanity’s creaturely nature. In the end, deification is about the full realization of humanity’s created potential:

The Son of God may have become human so humans may become one with God, but that does not mean that humans will become God the same way the Son is God. As such, Christian sanctification becomes a matter of perfect and integrated humanity, a process Augustine may call deifying or “becoming godly” but one that never renders a saint equal to divinity. In this creaturely communion with the divine, we see how the *totus Christus* is always a matter of solidarity and dissimilarity: one with Christ in his will, yet other than Christ in his divinity.¹¹³

The potential for misunderstanding perhaps explains why Augustine never pushes deification too far in his writings, and always gestures to it alongside other metaphors for salvation such as divine adoption. At the same time, Meconi is clear that deification is

¹¹¹ Ibid., 176. See also 194.

¹¹² Ibid., 176. See also 216 for an extended discussion of Augustine’s understanding of Baptism and Eucharist.

¹¹³ Ibid., 213. Meconi here is using the scholarship of Augustinian scholar Pasquale Borgomeo who helpfully parses the limits of *totus Christus*.

central to his reading of Augustine: “These pages have set out to argue that Augustine of Hippo understands humanity’s deification to be the primary purpose of Christian salvation.”¹¹⁴

The Definition and Nature of Deification

As explained above, Meconi does not limit his understanding of deification to deific terminology, but rather has a more expansive approach, seeking the thematic presence of deification within Augustine’s overarching theology. The eighteen instances of *deificare* within Augustine’s corpus are but one part of Meconi’s argument that deification is a pivotal way to understand God’s salvation through Jesus Christ. Moreover, Meconi is not seeking to define deification as an overarching doctrine within Christianity (such as Keating above), but rather to apply deification specifically to how he sees it played out in Augustine’s theology. Put differently, this study seeks to explore how deification make sense within Augustine’s theology and writings, as opposed to how Augustine’s theology and writings inform a doctrine of deification within broader Christian theology. These are interrelated questions, but Meconi’s approach requires one to distill what is being said of deification proper, and what might be more appropriately said for Augustine in particular.

Meconi spends little time exploring the history or warrant for deification, instead beginning with a working definition of deification that informs the rest of the work:

Life in Christ is ultimately a creature’s participation in the divine life and the renovation of the Christian believer by the Holy Spirit in and through Christ’s church.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 234.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., xv.

A longer, more extensive definition is given at the closing of the study:

For this the Son has entered the creation that has always imitated his turn to the Father: to make possible the “great exchange” of humanity’s graced share in divinity through his humble union with humanity. For Augustine, the work of the incarnate Son is thus one of divine adoption and renewal and transformation. He who is Son by nature has come into humanity so as to make humans sons and daughters of God by grace, and the divinely adopted are not only freed from their sinfulness, they are made living temples of the Holy Spirit, enabled to live a new humanity of sanctity and charity in Jesus Christ.¹¹⁶

From these thick definitions, the nature of deification can be delineated along several important trajectories.

Of overarching significance, deification is ultimately about the salvation of humanity achieved by Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Rather than standing alone, deification stands as *one way* to describe salvation among several noncompeting metaphors:

At times Augustine will explain this transformation in terms of deification explicitly. He will also talk about becoming divinely adopted sons and daughters, while at other times he will present the goal of Christianity as “becoming gods,” or becoming a member of the whole Christ (*Christus totus*), or even as becoming Christ himself.¹¹⁷

Deification is not a radically different description for God’s salvation of humanity, but one that compliments other Christian images and metaphors for God’s saving work; Augustine neither ignores deification, nor does he allow it to “exhaust how he sees Christian salvation.”¹¹⁸ At the same time, deification stands as a pivotal and indispensable way of understanding salvation, connecting how humanity was created (capable and

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 242.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., xiii.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 236.

desirous of God), with understanding the Fall (the temptation for false deification – seeking divinity outside of God), and our ultimate destiny in Christ (to be united and transformed by God). Deification as a soteriological system requires an understanding of Christian doctrine that makes it intelligible within Augustine’s overall theology. Doctrines of creation and theological anthropology that makes deification possible as a foundational concept, are prerequisite. Understandings of Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology that show both the means by which humanity is deified as well as, and the limits to, what deification can mean in Christian theology are likewise indispensable. The way Augustine makes these connections within his theology points to the similar necessity for coherence within doctrines for a theology of deification to be intelligible.

Deeply Trinitarian in nature, deification is rooted in both Christology and pneumatology, though for Augustine his specific reference to *deificare* are most specifically about Christ and the incarnation. Following the Christian tradition, the language of the Great Exchange is used to describe this “transaction” between fallen humanity and the redeeming Christ, alongside a robust understanding of the Holy Spirit’s divinizing power:

Salvation from this false deification is achieved only through the Son’s descent into the human condition.... The Son of God becomes human so humans can conversely become sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father, to become other “gods” able to participate in and live in accordance with the divine nature...the Holy Spirit brings humans into this new life, redeeming sinners in Christ by imparting his own holiness as the result of his unifying indwelling.... Realized as indwelling grace, the Spirit effects a real transformation, raising the human person out of sinfulness and rejuvenating his very being.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 235. See also xii for more treatment of the Great Exchange.

Trinitarian theology, which undergirds the Christian distinction that God is perfectly united yet separate divine Persons, analogously grounds humanity's union with God without "obliterate[ing] personal characteristics or differences" between creation and Creator.¹²⁰ Only God is capable of divinizing humanity, and that deification does not mean a confusing of divine and human natures. Deified humanity is truly most human, living into the *image* from which it was fashioned.

Transformation in the life of the believer is a key aspect of deification. Real change is made possible through Christ's incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Meconi calls this "ethical deification," and sees three of the eleven uses of *deificare* within Augustine's writing as dealing with how deified life is lived: life lived and ordered by the Spirit, life gifted (by the Spirit) with spiritual/deified eyes able to see spiritual realities, and life lived in imitation of God that brings "our disposition in line with his."¹²¹ These three direct uses of *deificare* are not exhaustive but rather illustrative of the change of life and behavior in the moral actions of believers. Augustine's more comprehensive understanding of human transformation is found in his ecclesiology, making deification communal and ecclesial as it takes visible shape in the life of the church. His theology of the church as *totus Christus* – the One Christ – leads to discussion of Augustine's teaching on Christian holiness, prayer, and community.¹²² While these topics lead to practices of asceticism in some understandings of deification,

¹²⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹²¹ Ibid., 120-26.

¹²² Ibid., 206-10.

within Augustine's theology they are more channels of the divine life imparted to the believer in his or her incorporation within Christ's body, the church.

The ecclesial dimension of receiving the divine life makes the sacraments of central importance in understanding deification, as they "are the created media through which God imparts his grace, being the primary means of humanity's incorporation into the mystical body of Christ."¹²³ Reconciliation with God and humanity is brought about primarily through the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist: "Through [baptism] one becomes a child of God, and through Eucharistic communion, one is brought further into enfleshed godliness."¹²⁴ Baptism "initiates [the believer into] a new and graced participation in God," which is then nurtured by the Eucharist which "renders Christ's sacrificial presence available throughout history and thereby offers [the believer] the occasion to receive the divinely humble flesh."¹²⁵ Baptism is an invitation to participate in Christ's death, and the Eucharist is an invitation to receive the divine life which the Son freely offers; the Sacraments embody the substance of the Great Exchange. Deification for Augustine cannot be understood except as both deeply communal and sacramental.¹²⁶

As a final note, it is helpful to point out that Augustine's understanding of deification has an underlying doctrine of "participation" that is informed by the Platonic tradition.¹²⁷ His doctrine of the *imago dei* is undergirded by an understanding of

¹²³ Ibid., 216.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 221.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 224 and 226.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 221. On this point Meconi cites agreement with Norman Russell's assessment of Augustinian deification.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 51.

“image/likeness” informed by his teacher Ambrose (in introducing Augustine to nonliteral readings of Genesis) and his context (where an image not somehow like its model would be unthinkable).¹²⁸ This explains how Augustine was able to “break with the standard interpretations of Genesis’s language of *imago et similitudo*,” and it also notes likely distinctions between how Eastern church fathers and mothers may use image/likeness in a doctrine of deification.

Russell: *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (2004)¹²⁹

Norman Russell is a scholar of immense importance to this project. A member of the London Oratory from 1972 to 1987, Russell is a patristic scholar who converted from Roman Catholicism to Orthodoxy in 2010.¹³⁰ This study will look at two monographs written by Russell. This earlier monograph is a work of historical theology, not catering exclusively to either a Catholic or Orthodox audience; it is part of the Oxford Early Christian Studies series, which focuses on the thought and history of early Christian centuries. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (henceforth, *The Doctrine of Deification*) is the outgrowth of Russell’s Oxford doctoral dissertation completed in 1988, the culmination of almost twenty years of study and research.¹³¹ It is a seminal text whose contribution to the field of *theosis* studies cannot be overstated, both in depth of scholarship and breadth of scope.

¹²⁸ See *Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹²⁹ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹³⁰ Biographical information on Russell is difficult to find. A short biography is found on the St. Stephen’s House, Oxford website: “Honorary Fellows,” University of Oxford,

<https://www.ssho.ox.ac.uk/about/staff/honorary-research-fellows.html>, (19 June 2019).

¹³¹ Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, vii.

Russell’s in-depth scholarship of *theosis* within early patristic writers is invaluable. Focusing on actual occurrences of *theotic* language within the corpuses of early Greek theologians – terminology which Russell thoroughly explores and categorizes – this work treats deification in the broad Greek tradition both in individual writers as well as schools of Christian thought, from the birth of Christianity to Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century. Russell’s scholarship adds depth to this present discussion, not offering one definition of deification, but rather identifying various streams and nuances between different theologians and understandings of deification that are transmitted within Christian tradition, moving deification from a metaphor to a doctrine. Among its many gifts to our project, Russell’s scholarship grounds the conversation in the roots of Christianity, with an engagement with the earliest texts of deification, some of which John Wesley encountered in his reading and study at Oxford.

Methodology and Structure

Russell’s main aim in his study is to trace “Christian deification from its birth as a metaphor to its maturity as a spiritual doctrine.”¹³² This leads to an overall structure beginning with the background of early Christianity – chapters both on deification/apotheosis in the Graeco-Roman world and foundational understandings in Judaism – and moving from the earliest movements of Christianity to the eventual “schools” of the Alexandrian and Cappadocian traditions. The overarching synthesis is achieved in the monastic movement, Russell argues, and specifically with Maximus the

¹³² Ibid., 1.

Confessor, through whom “deification entered the Byzantine monastic tradition as the goal of the spiritual life.”¹³³ At that point the metaphor of deification reaches full maturity as a doctrine within its own right. Though beyond the focus on the Greek patristic tradition, the closing epilogue briefly touches on Western patristic theologians.

Not looking at specific vocabulary is a weakness of past studies, Russell contends, so he specifically tracks deific language as it appears – and is created! – through Christian tradition.¹³⁴ Covering centuries of church history, the study looks specifically at deific language that is used amongst the dozens of patristic theologians. To help categorize their usage of such language, Russell creates an organizing schema that guides the entire project. Deification in early Christianity appears in one of three ways: **nominally, analogically, or metaphorically**. These categories each describe deific language in increasingly significant ways, which are outlined succinctly in the very opening pages of the monograph. Nominal and analogical uses are straightforward:

The nominal interprets the biblical application of the word ‘gods’ to human beings simply as a title of honour. The analogical ‘stretches’ the nominal: Moses was a god to Pharaoh as a wise man is a god to a fool; or men become sons and gods ‘by grace’ in relation to Christ who is Son and God ‘by nature.’¹³⁵

Metaphorical uses are more complex, and are divided into *ethical approaches* to deification, and *realistic approaches* to deification:

The ethical approach takes deification to be the attainment of likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavor, believers reproducing some of the divine attributes in their own lives by imitation. Behind this use of the metaphor lies the model of *homoiosis*, or attaining *likeness* to God. The realistic approach

¹³³ Ibid., 296.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 6. Russell points at this is a weakness of Gross’ scholarship, who “treats deification as a concept that is embodied in different writers as it is transmitted from one generation to another, without looking closely at the terminology that was developed to express it.”

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1.

assumes that human beings are in some sense transformed by deification. Behind the latter use lies the model of *methexis*, or *participation*, in God.¹³⁶

Realistic approaches are further delineated as either *ontological* or *dynamic*:

The ontological aspect is concerned with human nature's transformation in principle by the Incarnation, the dynamic with the individual's appropriation of this deified humanity through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.¹³⁷

Thus, in total, there are four major uses that frame how deification is categorized and understood in patristic writings: 1) **nominal**; 2) **analogical**; 3) **ethical**; and 4) **realistic**, with ontological or dynamic aspects.

While the above schema differentiates deification into distinct understandings, there is overlap between metaphorical applications of deification. Both *homoiosis* and *methexis* – ‘likeness’ and ‘participation’ with God, respectively – have deep roots in platonic thought, expressing levels of being and becoming, and both overlap in their references of meaning.¹³⁸ “Analogy, imitation, and participation thus form a continuum,” Russell argues, “rather than express radically different kinds of relationship.”¹³⁹ The four broad categories of deification utilized within the study are therefore not static and impermeable, but rather ways to “analyz[e] the historical development of the doctrine.”¹⁴⁰

One final note is helpful in understanding Russell's methodology: it is not merely a list of deific uses within the span of patristic writers. By tracing its development, there is a narrative aspect tracing the way the concept develops over Christianity's first centuries. Russell argues that deification grows from biblical roots, in rich Hellenistic

¹³⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 9.

soil,¹⁴¹ developing as theologians sought answers to the “specific philosophical, theological, or exegetical problems” of their day.¹⁴² An eye to both the uses of deific language, as well as to what ends such language was used, gives the study a depth that merely listing occurrences of language would lack.

The Definition and Nature of Deification

Deification is not a monolithic concept that has been used in the same way to address the same concerns throughout Christian thought. Different theologians across the ages have used deification in vastly different contexts to address a host of different questions. Considering the development of deification across the ages provides the best analysis to the concept over time. While there is great specificity with each theologian, one can also discern in broad stripes theological trends over time and within different schools of thought.

The earliest roots of deification are found within the biblical witness itself. Rabbinic Judaism, whose version of ascent toward God grew out of meditation on Ezekiel’s vision of the throne-chariot of God, provided a notion of human ascent before God. Most specifically, the Rabbinic exegesis of Psalm 82:6 would prove to have lasting impact on later Christian exegesis of this psalm. The ‘gods’ of this verse, according to

¹⁴¹ In this, Russell is confirming Gross’s thesis that deification is an outgrowth of biblical exegesis, expressed in the Hellenistic language and culture of the early church, a fact to which he alludes in *ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴² Russell credits this approach to Eric Osborn’s treatment of deification with his book, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (1981: 111-20). Osborn lists different ways to study deification: the cultural (describing deification as a core part of Eastern Christianity of which each author contributes to the whole), the polemical (attacking deification as wrong), the doxographical (listing occurrences of each author), and the problematic (considering the problems which deification sought to solve). Russell contends that the problematic, which helpful, is not exhaustive, as deification is more than just a conceptual term. See *ibid.*, 7-8.

Rabbinic tradition, were those who “won immortality through the faithful observance of the Torah.”¹⁴³ In the New Testament, Pauline language of participatory union – ‘in Christ,’ ‘with Christ,’ ‘Christ in us,’ ‘sons of God,’ etc. – prepares the way for deification, but falls short of using the terminology of deification.¹⁴⁴ Paul’s parallels linking Christ with Adam (Christ inaugurating a renewed humanity) and Abraham (Christ restoring covenant relationship with God) in letters to Rome, Corinth, and Galatia formed the basis of his unique language of God’s “adoption” of those who participate in Christ Jesus:

Baptism into Christ is a new Exodus leading the people of God out of slavery to demonic powers and into the freedom of the heir to the promises that were made to Abraham and David. By adoption they become fellow-sons and fellow-heirs with Christ and consequently can address God as ‘Abba, Father!’ ... [in Romans 8:12-17] the agent of adoption is the Spirit, who is called the spirit of adoption in contrast with the spirit of slavery. ... Participation in Christ is shown to have successive stages: liberation from demonic powers, sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and finally sharing in his glory.¹⁴⁵

Pauline writings introduce the core concepts that would later come to define the nature of deification – Christ as the means for renewed humanity, baptism as adoption into the family of God (filiation and ‘sonship’), and the Holy Spirit as the agent through whom this renewed life is appropriated to humanity. Johannine writings, though stopping short of speaking of ‘sonship’ which refers alone to Christ in that corpus, call believers

¹⁴³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. See also *ibid.*, 79-85. Specifically, Russell argues that Christ is not unequivocally called ‘God’ until the second century, so union with Christ in Paul is not union specifically with God *until after* Paul.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 81-82. Paul is the first Jewish writer to use ‘adoption’ language, though Russell links Paul’s usage with deeper prophetic tradition. Hosea, who is the first to use this phrase, speaks of the eschatological community as “sons of the living God” (Hos. 1:10). For a detailed list of Pauline passages detailing images of participatory union with Christ, see page 84: “Believers are sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 4:5; cf. Eph. 1:5). They are ‘heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ’ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; cf. Eph. 1:14. They ‘put on’ Christ in Baptism, clothing themselves in life and incorruption (Rom. 13:14; I Cor. 15:53; Gal. 3:27; cf. Eph. 4:24 and Col. 3:10) They become one body, the body of Christ, because they share in one eucharistic bread (1 Cor. 10:17).”

‘children of God’ and posits that they possess a new humanity that shares in the life of God:

[The unity described in John 17:22-23] originated in the Father and the Son and flows down from them to believers In John all who believe in Christ possess it here and now (John 3:16). ... All who participate in him by believing in him and sharing baptism (John 3:15) and the Eucharist (John 6:54) participate in eternal life Christ imparted supernatural life to his disciples when he breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22). Through the Spirit given by the glorified Christ believers already possess an eternal life which death cannot destroy.¹⁴⁶

Core concepts that later define deification are again found here – strong association of transformation through the sacraments, shared life with the Triune God, and (at least to some extent) a realized/inaugurated eschatology. Taken together, these scriptures, along with others, lay a biblical foundation for future generations of theologians to speaking of the deification of believers.

The earliest Christian models draw especially upon Psalm 82:6 – “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High.” Contrasting the failure of Adam and Eve with the success of Christ, around 160 Justin Martyr utilized this verse to polemically identify the ‘gods’ of the psalm as Christians, the new Israel obedient to God’s Law, as opposed to Jews.¹⁴⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, in a similar exegesis, viewed Psalm 82:6 as identifying Christians as the ‘gods’ and ‘sons of the most High’ who have received the grace of adoption through Christ Jesus. Identifying this adoption as occurring at baptism, Irenaeus asserted that God comes to dwell within humanity through the waters of baptism, making believers sons and daughters of God, ‘gods’ who have

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 12; 105-10; 112.

recovered their lost likeness to God and now participate (again) in divine life.¹⁴⁸ Irenaeus was not setting up a polemic against Jews; he was defending a proper understanding of the incarnation. All of this is possible only if the incarnation is real: Jesus can only bestow divinity and ‘sonship’ if he is indeed Son and God; humanity can only be transformed and renewed through baptism if Christ became truly human. At this stage in Christian thought, deification is more nominal and analogical, with ethical or mystical approaches faint at best. The “reciprocal relationship between the incarnation and deification,” however, will be developed by later theologians, and deification and the development of Christology will remain closely linked.¹⁴⁹

The Alexandrian tradition spanned several centuries and is divided in two sections by Russell, to consider transitions between earlier and later thought. Within early Alexandrian tradition of the late second and early third century, Clement and Origen are the two major figures who most shaped discussions of deification. Accepting the earlier exegesis of Psalm 82:6, ‘gods’ were baptized believers for both Clement and Origen. Clement was the first to develop technical language for deification, language Origen in turn uses. While ecclesial aspects of deification remained primary – and notably, for Clement, the sanctifying and deifying role of Scripture – the philosophical aspect of deification was significantly developed. This no doubt reflected the many philosophical schools in Alexandria at the time, and its identity as a center for philosophical learning. Deification is the result of discipleship, which entails moral and intellectual effort. For

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 12; 112-13.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 113.

Clement, only the Christian can be a philosopher in the truest sense, empowered by the Spirit to detach from the world. Deification is accomplished by imitation of God:

... the Christian Gnostic becomes a god through reproducing within himself, by moral and intellectual effort with the help of divine grace, the divine attributes of unity, freedom from passion, and incorporeality. As a result of these he is granted immortality and admitted to the highest rank of the saved.¹⁵⁰

This imitation is made possible through divine adoption, which allows believers to move from *image* to *likeness* of God.

Origin likewise viewed the potential divinity of redeemed humanity as contingent upon “a life of prayer and the practice of the virtues.”¹⁵¹ Indeed, his exegesis of ‘gods’ in Psalm 82:6 reflected the ethical dimension of deification: “The gods are those who have put to death the deeds of the body and live by the Spirit. They have transcended their human nature through the operation of the Son and the Spirit.”¹⁵² At the same time, Origin was less interested in ethical purification than he was in the creaturely participation of the rational creature in God:

His emphasis ... [is] on the nature of the dynamic relationship which connects the contingent with the self-existent. Life, goodness, and immortality are attributes which do not originate in the contingent order but belong properly to the Father alone. The rational creature is deified as these attributes are progressively communicated to it through its responding to the active reaching out of the second and third Persons of the Trinity.¹⁵³

Taken altogether, early Alexandrian tradition emphasized a nominal, analogous, and ethical approach to deification, though with Origin it gestured toward a more dynamic understanding that will be later developed. It adopted an inaugurated eschatology,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 134.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 142.

¹⁵² Ibid., 144. Though this is not the only exegesis of that psalm Origin offers.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 12.

whereby believers may imitate Christ in this life and thereby become *like* God, but its final consummation was experienced in the eschaton.

Athanasius and Cyril were later Alexandrian figures who shaped the mature form of the Alexandrian tradition. Athanasius had a rich and complex understanding of deification, employing technical terminology more often than his predecessors. Unlike earlier writers who typically used deific language assuming a shared understanding, Athanasius often coupled his usage with explanatory synonyms:

Adoption, renewal, salvation, sanctification, grace, transcendence, illumination, and vivification are all presented as equivalents to deification. Although the concept itself is not controversial, Athanasius may well be intending to exclude any possibility of misunderstanding.¹⁵⁴

In addition to giving contextual clues for how to understand deification when using deific language, Athanasius expanded the content of deification:

... [He] moves the emphasis away from immortality and incorruption to the exaltation of human nature through participation in the life of God. Deification is certainly liberation from death and corruption, but it is also adoption as sons, the renewal of our nature by participation in the divine nature, a sharing in the bond of love of the Father and the Son, and finally entry into the kingdom of heaven in the likeness of Christ Athanasius develops the dynamic aspects of deification, the perfecting and transcending of human nature In Athanasius Irenaeus' teaching on adoption has been combined with Origen's doctrine of a dynamic participation in the Trinity to produce a concept of deification as the penetration and transformation of mortal human nature by the eternal Son which enables it to participate in the light and life of the Father.¹⁵⁵

This realistic approach to deification focuses on the flesh of the incarnate Christ, which in principle elevates all humanity, making our filiation possible (though not mechanical).

While this dynamic approach lends itself to a robust sacramentology and deeper

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 177.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 178.

exploration of participation, those elements were not developed, most likely as they did not aid in Athanasius's polemic against the Arians.

Cyril followed in Athanasius's footsteps in associating deification with soteriology, and takes the understanding of participation in God forward in several important aspects. His focus on Johannine understandings of the Trinity allowed him to create a robust pneumatological, and therefore trinitarian, foundation for deification. His focus on one divine nature tied Son, Spirit, and Father together in unity, such that when believers have the Spirit, they have the Father and Son as well. He also moved past Athanasius's focus on the 'flesh' to give focus to the impact of the incarnation on the human soul:

The recipient of salvation is not simply the 'flesh' but a unity of body and soul that images God in his or her will. Athanasius' insights into the transformation of human nature as a result of the Incarnation are thus combined with a conviction that moral progress plays a vital role in restoring our likeness to God.¹⁵⁶

The physical and spiritual dimensions of deification no doubt informed his frequent use of 2 Peter 1:4, his most preferred language for speaking of deification.¹⁵⁷ It also gives insight into his development of the dynamic role of the sacraments in the deified life. Cyril was the first to focus on the role of the Eucharist as a way to assimilate to Christ and as integral, along with the moral life, to how "human beings participate in the divine

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 192.

¹⁵⁷ 1 Peter 2:4 – "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (KJV). While recognized as *the* deific scripture by many today, Russell traces its first use applied to deification with Origen. Psalm 82:6 was *the* deific scripture for early centuries of Christian thought, so Cyril's frequent use of this Petrine passage is unique and noteworthy.

nature.”¹⁵⁸ Much of the groundwork Cyril lays will be explored by Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century.

Later Alexandrian tradition (Russell argues), as seen in Athanasius and Cyril, moves from nominal/titular, analogous, and ethical approaches to a realistic or sacramental approach, envisioning “an ontological transformation of the believer by the incarnate Christ.”¹⁵⁹ This transformation is accomplished through Baptism, the Eucharist, and the moral life. These activities are communal and ecclesial, mirroring the Alexandrian tradition itself, which came under increasing episcopal control.

Russell ends his treatment of the Alexandrian legacy with four points that came to define deification from that tradition:

First there is a strong emphasis on the convergence of transcendence and immanence in Christ and through him ... in the believer as well.

Secondly, there is a fundamental reliance on the theme of participation, which offers a way of understanding on the ontological level how Becoming can share in Being, or the created in the uncreated, without abandoning its contingent status, and on the dynamic level how the created and contingent can partake increasingly of the divine nature through the operation of the Holy Spirit, which enable it to attain eventually to the image and likeness of God. ...

Thirdly, there is a firm rejection of any approach to bridging the gulf between created and uncreated by positing an inferior level of deity which can function as a mediator. ...

Lastly, a central place is given the ecclesial context of deification. The emphasis moves away from divinizing contemplation toward the practice of the virtues and the reception of the Eucharist in the Christian *synaxis*.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 192.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 163.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 203-04.

These contributions of the Alexandrians will be most evident in the monastic traditions that returned to them as guides for understanding deification.

The Cappadocian tradition grew out of the philosophical culture of its time as well, adapting Platonism to a Christianized understanding, such that the soul's ascent was assumed as the *telos* of the Christian life. This ascent, however, is tempered by the apophatic nature of Cappadocian theology, which was ever quick to recognize the altogether *otherness* of God, who is beyond creaturely apprehension. The Cappadocians used little of the language of the Alexandrians in referring to deification; and it was from their tradition, and the pen of Gregory of Nazianzus, that the neologism *theosis* was crafted and used. Each offer significant nuances in how they spoke of deification, but collectively the Cappadocians reflected a nominal, analogical, and ethical approach to deification.

St. Basil's understanding of deification was most akin to Clement of Alexandria. In his apophatic theology he spoke more often of the ability to imitate God through moral excellence, and in that sense become 'like' God. The term 'gods' in Psalm 82:6 was not those adopted by God, like for Irenaeus and most of the Alexandrian tradition, but rather "those who have become perfect through the practice of virtue."¹⁶¹ The term 'gods' remained but a titular term, at times describing the eschatological hope of redeemed humanity, body and soul, to enjoy the vision of God. The focus remained on a nominal and ethical dimension of deification. Any realistic aspect of deification for Basil was found in his understanding of the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 212-13.

Gregory of Nazianzus utilized deific language most often among the Cappadocians, using the concept of *theosis* as a “frequent metaphor for man’s growth towards fulfillment in God.”¹⁶² His theological convictions led him, like Basil, to a major focus on the ethical dimension of deification in the soul’s ascent to God through *ascesis* and *mimesis*:

On the ethical level [*theosis*] follows the escape of the soul from its bondage to matter and its ascent to God through ascetic endeavor and true philosophy.¹⁶³

However, harkening back to Athanasius, Nazianzus also developed a realistic aspect of deification in reference to the incarnation:

[T]heosis is the change wrought in ‘man’ by the Incarnation, the fruits of which are communicated to the individual believer by the Holy Spirit in baptism ... as a human response to the Incarnation, our ascent being a *mimesis* of Christ’s descent. We have already become gods in principle in so far as we have been united with Christ by baptism, but our deification is only brought to fulfillment after a long period of *ascesis*.¹⁶⁴

Taken together, Nazianzus saw *theosis* as humanity’s “telos, brought about on the one hand by the deifying power of the Holy Spirit in baptism and on the other by the moral struggle in the ascetic life.”¹⁶⁵

Gregory of Nyssa, in stark contrast to Nazianzus, only referred to deification in guarded terms. The utter transcendence and unknowability of God allowed him to speak of realistic deification only in reference to Christology, which by extension he applied to the Eucharist. Unique to Nyssa, among the Cappadocians, was his preferred use of ‘participation’ language:

¹⁶² Ibid., 232.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 224.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 224-25.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 233.

A man becomes a god by imitating the characteristics of the divine nature, by participating in the divine attributes, by modelling himself on the properties of the Godhead. Ultimately, he transcends his own nature and becomes immune from corruption and mortality.¹⁶⁶

‘Participation’ language is a means to talk about how humanity truly experiences deepening relationship with God, while at the same time insisting that God’s “nature or essence remains totally beyond our comprehension.”¹⁶⁷

With the death of Cyril in 444, language of deification fell out of Christian theology, only to be seriously considered again by what Russell terms the “monastic synthesis.” Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century birthed the doctrine of deification that would be passed to the Byzantine monastic tradition. Drawing upon both the Alexandrian and Cappadocian traditions, Maximus “abandons the Christological use of the term” and develops it into a central teaching for “a monastic audience on the ascent of the soul.”¹⁶⁸ For Maximus, deification is the goal of the Christian life and the goal for which humanity was created; indeed, it is the *telos* of all creation. This is deeply tied to the incarnation, deepening and articulating afresh the exchange formula:

The kenosis of the Word is followed by the theosis of the believer, God’s accommodation to the constrictions of human life by man’s expansion, within the limitations of his creaturely capacity, to the infinity of the divine life.¹⁶⁹

[Christ] descended in order that we might ascend. He emptied himself in order that we might be filled with divine glory. *Katabasis* is followed by *anabasis*, kenosis by theosis. Christ brought about a situation which excelled that of the original creation. He gave humanity a new beginning: through the hypostatic union of the Word with ensouled flesh, which deified us in principle, through the mystery of the passion, which effected our return to obedience, and through the resurrection, which has inaugurated the age of the Spirit.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 234.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 232.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 237.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 262.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 294.

This elevation of humanity requires ascetic effort, and is accomplished through community and not in isolation:

The ascetic life is concerned with attaining a moral likeness to God. Through the renunciation of sensual gratification the soul strives to attain a *symbiosis* with Christ. The human and divine interpenetrate each other as we appropriate immortality, stability, and immutability.¹⁷¹

Though this language highlights the true likeness to God and closeness of relationship, Russell points out that Maximus was ever-careful to keep distance between the human and divine, leaning more into the language of imitation than participation, and speaking of God's "energies" (to which creation can relate by grace) versus God's "essence" (which is beyond creaturely apprehension).¹⁷² Within Russell's schemata, deification for Maximus was analogous and nominal, rather than realistic.¹⁷³

Russell: *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (2009)¹⁷⁴

Norman Russell's seminal scholarship outlined above was the result of some twenty years of academic study. It has no equal in scope or academic thoroughness in considering deific language as it appears within individual theologians and schools of early Christian thought. In this second monograph, Russell shifts his focus toward both modernity and the Eastern Orthodox perspective. *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* is part of the Foundations Series of St. Vladimir's Seminary Press,

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 294.

¹⁷² Later, Gregory Palamas will develop this essence/energy distinction in ways that deeply shape Eastern theologies.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 295.

¹⁷⁴ Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

which is geared toward providing survey texts “testifying to the faith and creativity of the Orthodox Christian Church” to the modern world for both classroom and personal study.¹⁷⁵ Russell’s conversion to Orthodoxy, combined with his sustained engagement with deification, rendered him uniquely qualified to pen such a work.

While we made clear above that the goal of this project is not to put John Wesley’s theology in conversation with modern Orthodoxy, consideration of this second volume by Russell, focused on current Orthodox understandings of *theosis*, is pertinent both to gaining a full picture of his contribution to the field of deific study and to identifying those core aspects of the doctrine which one might look for in Wesley’s corpus.

Methodology and Structure

Russell’s goal in this monograph is to show how *theosis* became central within Orthodox thinking in modernity – a relatively new (or rediscovered) focus that he attributes to the convergence of four factors: the rediscovery of the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, the impact of Russian religious philosophy, the recovery of the spirituality of the *Philokalia*, and the reengagement of Orthodox scholars with the early Greek Fathers.¹⁷⁶ The seven chapters are divided into two foci, with the first four chapters dedicated to the biblical and theological foundations for *theosis*. The last three chapters, which are less pertinent to this project and are ignored in our consideration below, consider more speculative theological emphases within recent Orthodox understandings

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., bibliographical page.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

of *theosis* – self-transcendence, participation in the divine energies, and union with God; emphases growing out of engagement by Orthodox thinkers with modern personalist philosophy, fourteenth-century hesychast doctrine, and the teaching of the early Greek Fathers.¹⁷⁷

Like his previous monograph, Russell includes as many voices as possible, seeking to identify patterns amongst the variety. These voices do not necessarily contradict one another – some indeed harmonize– but they show true divergences of thinking when it comes to *theosis* as well. Russell builds upon his previous work, rearticulating themes and schemata that aid us in identifying his contribution to the understanding of *theosis* as both a theme and doctrine.

The Definition and Nature of Deification

To begin, Russell stresses that for Orthodox theology *theosis* is both the goal of the Christian life and the process whereby one achieves that goal; thus, it has both anthropological and economic components:

... [Theosis] concerns our growth as human beings toward ultimate fulfilment in God, while simultaneously encompassing the whole of God’s plan of salvation. ... It is both a theological theme and a spiritual teaching, both the *goal* of the divine economy and the *process* by which the economy is worked out in the believer.¹⁷⁸

While not totally separate from one another, the patristic teachings on *theosis* presented it as both a theme and as a spiritual teaching:

As a theological theme it refers to the mystery of the Incarnation: “Because of his infinite love he became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 21.

As a spiritual teaching it refers to our appropriation in and through Christ of the transformed humanity created by him: our task is to become “like God so far as possible.”¹⁷⁹

Theosis as a theological theme is tied especially with incarnational theology and the sacramental life of the church.¹⁸⁰ Applying the schemata from his previous study, Russell characterizes this thematic treatment as a *realistic approach* to *theosis*, “expressing a real and intimate relationship with God.”¹⁸¹ Through ‘participation,’ and specifically sacramentally through baptism and Eucharist, humanity can share in the attributes of God’s divinity:

... through incorporation into Christ by baptism we share in the humanity endowed with divine life which he created. Baptism “mingles” us with the Word of God and enables us to become the dwelling-place of God. By being adopted as sons or daughters of God we are reunited with the source of life ... [and are] nourish[ed] through the Eucharist.¹⁸²

Realistic describes the actual change wrought in the believer, but *theosis* remains but a metaphor, a poetic figure of speech to describe how we might be called gods.

Similarly, *theosis* as a spiritual teaching falls under Russell’s previous definition of the *ethical approach* to *theosis*, which entails our active pursuit of godliness with the help of divine grace.

The separation of the will from the passions, the practice of ceaseless prayer, the return of the soul to its original beauty, the attainment of a final god-like perfection, may be the gift of divine grace but must be accompanied by moral effort.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁸² Ibid., 25.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 26.

Here, the language of imitation best describes how believers strive to reflect God in their daily lives.

More than his previous monograph, Russell seeks in this work to define *theosis* clearly. To aid in distilling a definition – which he asserts is hard to pinpoint, even with Orthodox theologians today! – he cites statements of four prominent Orthodox theologians:

Deification must not remain a general spiritual category but must acquire a specific anthropological content, which in the language of the Fathers means a content at once anthropological and Christological: that is to say, it must be understood again as Christification. (Panayiotis Nellas)

Deification, then, has to do with human destiny, a destiny that finds its fulfillment in a face-to-face encounter with God, an encounter in which God takes the initiative by meeting us in the Incarnation, where we behold “the glory as of the Only-Begotten from the Father” (John 1:14), “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). (Andrew Louth)

Deification is God’s perfect and full penetration of man Deification in a broad sense begins at baptism, and extends throughout the whole of man’s spiritual ascent; here his powers are also active, that is, during the purification from passions, the attaining of the virtues, and illumination. In this ascent the natural powers of man are in continual growth, and reach their apogee once they become capable of seeing the divine light – the power of vision is the working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we can say that the deification by which this revivification and growth is realized coincides with the process of the development of human powers to their limit, or with the full realization of human nature, but also with their unending eclipse by grace. Deification never stops, but continues beyond the ultimate limits of the powers of human nature, to the infinite. The latter we can call deification in the strict sense. (Dumitru Staniloae)

For the person to be restored to his or her integrity and wholeness, for the human being to become ‘all *prosopon*’ – ‘all person’ – defines our existential end. It is the conclusion of our moral journey, the attainment of theosis or deification, the goal toward which the Church strives. (Christos Yannaras).¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 19-21.

Taking key elements from each of these descriptions, Russell posits the following definition of deification:

Theosis is our restoration as persons to integrity and wholeness by participation in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in a process which is initiated in this world through our life of ecclesial communion and moral striving and finds ultimate fulfillment in our union with the Father – all within the broad context of the divine economy.¹⁸⁵

Later, Russell gives another definition of deification that reflects the title of his second monograph. In this definition, he insists that *theosis* is more than a synonym for salvation; it speaks of the very *telos* of God’s intention for humanity and creation:

Theosis, or “becoming god,” implies more than redemption or salvation. It is not simply the remedying of our defective human state. It is nothing less than our entering into partnership with God, our becoming fellow workers with him (1 Cor 3:9) for the sake of bringing the divine economy to its ultimate fulfillment.¹⁸⁶

It is telling, even within a work considering deification within the Orthodox tradition, that no standard definition or description is readily available. The term/theme/doctrine does not lend itself to easy description.

Apart from a technical definition, Russell asserts that *theosis* is of structural significance in understanding the “whole understanding of salvation and the conduct with ought to flow from it.”¹⁸⁷ Expressed most succinctly in the ‘exchange formula,’¹⁸⁸ *theosis* entails the purging (kenosis) of distortions to our humanity, such that true *theosis* is a restoration of our full humanity in Christ; *theosis* is not the destruction of the human creature, but instead the creaturely fulfillment of humanity.¹⁸⁹ This process is deeply

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 21. Russell also asserts that all of these elements – short of union with the divine – are present within Christian tradition by the fourth century.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 38-39 for a list of instances of the exchange formula in the patristic witness.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 40.

communal, and while fully realized in the eschaton, it begins in the ecclesial community now:

We cannot achieve theosis on our own. We need the ecclesial community in which we are re-created in the image of God through baptism and the Eucharist. In the Eucharist we give our symbolic gifts to God; he gives us himself in return. Deification is a state of profound communion with God and with each other. Although consummated in the kingdom of heaven, it begins in the worshipping community.¹⁹⁰

Thus we become more human as we become more godly, guided through the Triune God (Who is perfect community) into greater communion with the ecclesial community and with God.

Modern Orthodox theology utilizes a distinction between image and likeness to God to understand *theosis*. This has not been the case for all theologians in all times. In the patristic witness, for example, not all give weight to a distinction between image and likeness (as found in Genesis 1), including Cappadocian father Gregory of Nyssa, and Alexandrian bishops Athanasius, Theophilus, and Cyril.¹⁹¹ The distinction between the two, however, has been helpful to understand both humanity's capacity for *theosis* (image) and attainment of godlikeness (likeness):

The image sets out what we might call the ontological (or "structural") basis of our relationship with God, for no personal relationship can exist when absolutely nothing is shared in common. ... The *image* gives us the capacity or a conscious relationship, finite as we are, with the infinite God. The *likeness* is our dynamic realization of that capacity within the life of ecclesial communion. It is our mirroring of God's beauty, holiness and love in our mind and will. And because God has no limit, we shall continue to grow into the likeness of God for all eternity.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹¹ See *ibid.*, 78.

¹⁹² Ibid., 91.

As helpful as the image/likeness distinction is within modern conversations, it is also telling that within the patristic witness there are understandings of *theosis* that do not utilize the distinction; it is helpful, but constitutive of *theotic* understanding.

While modern Orthodox theologians see *theosis* as “the crowning point of the divine economy,” there are also distinctions that should not be glossed.¹⁹³ Some modern Orthodox theologians see *theosis* on a cosmic level as the fulfillment not only of humanity but of creation as a whole – notably, Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky, and Andrew Louth.¹⁹⁴ Others have returned to a more biblical focus, focusing more intensely on the incarnate Son, with themes of the believers’ adoption in Christ and Christification – notably, Panayiotis Nellas, John Zizioulas, and John Behr.¹⁹⁵

Section II: Deification Studies in Conversation

We have considered five different secondary sources penned by four different authors, all published within the past twenty years. Collectively they give a nod to diverse theological fields, from historical theology to biblical studies. Writing from Methodist, Catholic, and Orthodox perspectives, the authors have penned monographs that treat deification in both Eastern and Western traditions, embracing deification as a shared common theological heritage. What emerges is an amazing amount of convergence, even amid their diversity of perspectives and scholarly aims. This section puts these sources in

¹⁹³ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 47-50. They tend to focus on St. Maximus and the later fathers, Russell contends.

¹⁹⁵ See *ibid.*, 50-53. They tend to focus on Athanasius and Cyril, Russell contends.

conversation with one another, giving a unified vision of how *theosis* is currently understood in recent scholarship.

What Is Rejected?

Following a *via negativa*, the sources are united in identifying several understandings of *theosis* that they collectively reject.

Theosis as unique to Eastern Christianity. All four scholars unilaterally deny that *theosis* is the purview of only Eastern Christianity. Keating sets out to demonstrate that it is found in both Eastern and Western fathers,¹⁹⁶ and Meconi highlights *theosis* within the Western father Augustine. Even Russell's *Doctrine of Deification*, with its focus on the Greek Patristic tradition, ends with an appendix highlighting deification within Syriac and Latin fathers.¹⁹⁷ Earlier studies on *theosis* may have polemically identified the concept with Eastern sources, but recent scholarship is prone to seeing *theosis* readily throughout the entire Christian tradition.

Theosis as a Greek idea imposed upon Christianity. In the background of deific studies is the specter of Adolf Harnack, whose early criticism of *theosis* labeled it as a Hellenistic corruption of biblical Christianity.¹⁹⁸ Russell, Keating, and Gorman each place *theosis* directly within the biblical tradition of early Christianity. Russell's treatment explores the Pauline and Johannine passages that make up the biblical basis for the doctrine, as well as the Rabbinic exegesis of Psalm 82:6 as the Judaic foundation for considering the faithful gods. Gorman's monograph applies *theosis* to Paul's corpus as a

¹⁹⁶ Keating, 5.

¹⁹⁷ See Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 321-32.

¹⁹⁸ Keating, 7.

term most descriptive for reading Paul, without regard to its historical/Hellenistic background. It is also from Gorman's study that we hear a rejection of the Hellenistic idea of *apotheosis*: "becoming God/god" in a Christian context is *not* the Greek notion of *apotheosis*, whereby a noble human is elevated to god-like status.¹⁹⁹ With Russell's careful word studies of *theosis* in the Greek tradition, he is able to state with authority that Christian thinkers were using a distinct set of vocabulary and terms not shared by Hellenistic writers of their day.²⁰⁰ Christianity grew in a Hellenistic culture, where gods and sons of gods were part of the cultural milieu. But *theosis* as a concept grew as a way to explain the radical redemption and new life offered to humanity through Christ, not as social adaptation to philosophy or a Christianized version of pagan *apotheosis*.

Theosis as a violation of the Creator/Creation distinction. This is perhaps the most pressing of all theological dilemmas with deification. When speaking of the human creature's ascent to godliness, is there an ontological leap whereby the human creation becomes God in a real sense? With one voice this is unilaterally rejected. Meconi asserts that divine union with God is real for Augustine, but in a "non-literal" way.²⁰¹ Augustine uses *theosis* as a metaphor – one among several, including standard biblical images! – to describe the believer's new life in God.²⁰² The metaphoric understanding of *theosis* is reinforced by Russell's *Doctrine of Deification*. Even in its "realistic aspect," ontological deification is only true in consideration of the Incarnation and Christ's elevation of humanity. The "realistic aspect" of deification on the human side is dynamic (*not*

¹⁹⁹ Gorman, 4-5.

²⁰⁰ See Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 16-52. See also Keating, 29.

²⁰¹ Meconi, xvi.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 80-82.

ontological) allowing for transformation through participation with God through the reception of the sacraments and/or moral effort. Humanity never ceases to be creature, even though participation with God allows for a *communicatio idiomatum* of divine characteristics. Gorman explains this in terms of humanity becoming again what it was created to be, a restored humanity made possible by following the lead of Christ. Thus, becoming like Christ is both deifying and humanizing; it is not a renunciation of humanity, but rather the fulfillment (and restoration!) of humanity's potential as image-bearers of God.²⁰³

Russell highlights that for some Patristic Fathers the language of imitation is used to highlight the difference between God, who is true Being, and humanity, who is becoming. For some Fathers, the language of image and likeness helps articulate our capacity for divinity while distinguishing God as the distinct archetype and Creator. With Maximus the Confessor, and later Gregory Palamas, the distinction of God's essence (true nature inaccessible to creation) and energies (operations of God accessible to creation through participation) become language to protect the Creator/creation ontological divide. Theologians have differed in how to articulate and protect this theological distinction, but all are unified that *theosis* may only be achieved in an analogous way, such that believers are gods by grace and not by nature.

²⁰³ Gorman., 37. "To be like Christ crucified is to be both most godly and most human. Christification is divinization, and divinization is humanization."

What Is Contested?

There are also places where there are divergences between the scholars, where they are either not in agreement with one another, or where one scholar makes assertions the others either ignore or do not consider constitutive of *theosis*.

Terminology or content? Russell is adamant that terminology matters in studying deification.²⁰⁴ “Usage determines meaning,” he reasons, and “deification’s meaning cannot be established a priori or by generalizing from a few examples.”²⁰⁵ His spectacularly detailed scholarship considers the full range of deific languages and looks at each occurrence in the extant corpuses of the theologians in his study. Of our four scholars, Russell stands as unique in holding terminology as the primary means to consider *theosis*. Keating, in near polar opposition to Russell, contends that while terminology is significant, it is not required to identify *theosis* within a theologian: “we can identify its content even when the vocabular is absent.”²⁰⁶ To this end, he points to both Irenaeus of Lyons and Leo the Great, neither of whom used deific language, but both clearly have the *content* of deification in their theologies. Meconi sides with Keating, assuming that the doctrine of deification can be present in Augustine, even when the term is not. At the same time, he pays special attention to the sixteen actual occurrences of *deificare* within Augustine’s corpus, while taking a *thematic* approach to considering the content of deification within Augustine’s overall theology.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 6.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰⁶ Keating, 8-9.

²⁰⁷ Meconi, xv.

Paul and *theosis*? To what extent can one say that *theosis* is found in Paul? For Gorman, this is the premise of his entire monograph: *Theosis* is the best theological description for Paul's understanding of justification, sanctification, and salvation. Russell's *Doctrine of Deification* insists that Paul predates any talk of *theosis*, properly understood. Prior to the second century, Russell contends, Christology was not developed such that identification with Christ was assumed to be identification with God.²⁰⁸ Yet even for Russell, Pauline passages lay the foundation for later deific exegesis that makes deification a deeply biblical doctrine. For Meconi and Keating it is Paul's scriptural legacy, and the later exegesis of that scripture, that is of major concern to their projects.

Attainment in this life? This is not so much a disagreement amongst the four scholars considered here as a recognition that they each affirm both a present and future dimension to *theosis*. Clement of Alexandria famously spoke of the Christian being deified by heavenly teaching: "[s/he] becomes a god while still moving about in the flesh."²⁰⁹ Basil the Great, however, could only come to speak of Christians as gods in an eschatological state, where body and soul are in the presence of God. For many theologians deification is a partially realized or inaugurated eschatology, a *telos* that will be brought to completion only in the eschaton. Russell speaks of deification that takes an *ethical approach*, emphasizing one's moral progress in this life through *ascesis*, which assumes progress in this life, but does not assume its completion until the next. Among the studies considered here, Gorman alone applies *theosis* to a vision of pacifism in the

²⁰⁸ Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 85.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 121. Quotation is from *Strom.* 7.101.4.

Christian community, a vision of non-violence in this life that mirrors the perfect peace that is to be finally accomplished.²¹⁰ While this may apply to Paul, it does not feature in other theologians mentioned in these studies.

Importance of Historical Perspective? To what extent is *theosis* a doctrine and concept that should be considered within its historical context, and to what extent can its theological use be divorced from its patristic heritage? The above discussion of Paul espousing – or not espousing – a theology of deification is pertinent here. Gorman shows little interest, and indeed spends little time, outlining the historical roots of deification. Psalm 82, so pivotal in a historical survey of the history of the doctrine, gets barely a glance. The term is used as the best way to describe Pauline themes and is thus utilized. Russell, in polar contrast, does not even begin *Fellow Workers with God*, his treatise considering *theosis* in a modern context, without several chapters linking the concept to its development along biblical and historical lines. Keating seeks to link both biblical and historical connections in his survey of deification, whereas Meconi quietly takes a working definition of deification and begins analyzing Augustine’s theology from that starting point. Russell is able, through his approach, to speak of resonance certain ideas have with historical figures, but at times that is merely pointing out similarities, while at others it is pointing to direct attestation and inherited theological convictions.

How Is Deification Defined?

While detailed at length above, it is helpful to see how each of our four scholars under consideration define deification in their treatises. Not surprisingly, all are hard-

²¹⁰ Gorman, 129.

pressed to give just one definition, but rather gesture toward several different aspects of deification, sometimes in different parts of their works. Rather than attempting to offer one working definition that might mask nuance of each individual scholar, their definitions are most illuminative in their original wording.

Daniel Keating:

... Deification is a kind of summary term that expresses all that God intends for us in Christ through the Spirit.²¹¹

... Deification is the transformation and glorification of our nature, so that it can be what God intended it to be: a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ... [which is] ... in fact our glorious destiny as creatures.²¹²

...[D]eification does not mean an ontological promotion to something other than we are (that is, human beings made in God's image and likeness). We do not become God as God is, but we come to participate in his divine life and power. Our nature is elevated and glorified, but *as deified* we remain creatures and human beings completely dependent on God as our source. Deification is the honored status that God intended for us as his sons and daughters, a status forfeited in Adam and attained in Christ, the New Adam. Through our real incorporation into Christ we experience the fruits of divine life in a way suited to our nature, and we share in the Trinitarian fellowship of love "that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3).²¹³

Michael Gorman:

Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ."²¹⁴

... Paul's experience of Christ was precisely an experience of God *in se* For Paul, to be one with Christ is to be one with God; to be like Christ is to be like

²¹¹ Keating, 7.

²¹² Ibid., 110.

²¹³ Ibid., 116.

²¹⁴ Gorman., 7. Here Gorman is clear that he does not intend to provide an extended description or defense of *theosis*, but rather a clear reading of Paul.

God; to be in Christ is to be in God. At the very least, this means that for Paul cruciformity – conformity to the crucified Christ – is really theoformity, or *theosis*.²¹⁵

[*Theosis* is therefore best described] as “*cruciform theosis*.”²¹⁶

Theosis means that humans become *like* God. ... *Theosis* is about divine intention and action, human transformation, and the *telos* of human existence – union with God.²¹⁷

... human beings, including Adam, are most like God when they act kenotically. In Christ’s preexistent and incarnate kenosis we see truly what God is truly like, and we simultaneously see truly what Adam/humanity truly should have been, truly was not, and now truly can be in Christ. *Kenosis is theosis*. To be like Christ crucified is to be both most godly and most human. Christification is divinization, and divinization is humanization.²¹⁸

This work of the Spirit [holiness] is ultimately the work of the Father, who gives believers the Spirit of the Son. As in 1 Thessalonians, in Galatians Paul implies that Spirit-enabled cruciform holiness is ultimately not only Christlikeness but also Godlikeness.²¹⁹

[*Theosis* is] participatory Trinitarian cruciform holiness.²²⁰

David Meconi:

Life in Christ is ultimately a creature’s participation in the divine life and the renovation of the Christian believer by the Holy Spirit in and through Christ’s church.²²¹

For this the Son has entered the creation that has always imitated his turn to the Father: to make possible the “great exchange” of humanity’s graced share in divinity through his humble union with humanity. For Augustine, the work of the incarnate Son is thus one of divine adoption and renewal and transformation. He

²¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 171. Italics in the original.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 118. He cites 1 Thessalonians and Galatians as two letters supporting this claim. In the same passage, Gorman asserts that the “work of the Spirit is ultimately the work of the Father, who gives believers the Spirit of the Son.”

²²⁰ Ibid., 128.

²²¹ Meconi, xv.

who is Son by nature has come into humanity so as to make humans sons and daughters of God by grace, and the divinely adopted are not only freed from their sinfulness, they are made living temples of the Holy Spirit, enabled to live a new humanity of sanctity and charity in Jesus Christ.²²²

At times Augustine will explain this transformation in terms of deification explicitly. He will also talk about becoming divinely adopted sons and daughters, while at other times he will present the goal of Christianity as “becoming gods,” or becoming a member of the whole Christ (*Christus totus*), or even as becoming Christ himself.²²³

Norman Russell:

Theosis is our restoration as persons to integrity and wholeness by participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit, in a process which is initiated in this world through our life of ecclesial communion and moral striving and finds ultimate fulfillment in our union with the Father – all within the broad context of the divine economy.²²⁴

Theosis, or “becoming god,” implies more than redemption or salvation. It is not simply the remedying of our defective human state. It is nothing less than our entering into partnership with God, our becoming fellow workers with him (1 Cor 3:9) for the sake of bringing the divine economy to its ultimate fulfillment.²²⁵

What Are the Core Concepts?

There is significant overlap in the above definitions. The places of convergence are striking among the five works. The final task of this section will be highlighting common core elements, a lowest common denominator if you will, of what constitutes deification.

Cluster of Terms and Ideas. There is wisdom in Russell’s insistence that language is important, as well as Keating’s insistence that deification is defined by its

²²² Ibid., 242.

²²³ Ibid., xiii.

²²⁴ Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, 21. Russell also asserts that all of these elements – short of union with the divine – are present within Christian tradition by the fourth century.

²²⁵ Ibid., 36.

content. Gorman's study is built upon this foundation, identifying *theosis* by linking Paul's Christification and *kenosis* as essentially the content of *theosis*. Even theologians that use explicit deific language pair it with other metaphors such as adoption and filiation. Many of these terms center around soteriology, and are detailed below

Rooted in Scripture. Whether exegesis of Psalm 82, or reliance upon Pauline, Petrine, or Johannine texts, deification properly understood is an outgrowth of the exegesis of Scripture. Themes such as being "in Christ," "partakers of the divine nature," or adoption/identification with Christ are the foundational understandings that form foundations for deification. Particular attention to how theologians interpret Scripture is necessary to see the content of deification within their corpus and theology.

Trinitarian Basis. Deification is rooted in both a robust Christology and Pneumatology, such that it offers a robust, trinitarian understanding of God's salvific work. Christology is crucial, and often expressed in the historic "exchange formula" that highlights how the Incarnation makes our filiation and adoption possible. The appropriation of Christ's divinity is accomplished by the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the believer. The role of the Holy Spirit is central in the appropriation of the divine life in the believer and within the ecclesial community as a whole.

The Grace-Enabled Response. In the same degree that deification demands a robust trinitarian theology, it likewise demands human response. The divinizing power of the Incarnation is not mechanically applied to all humanity; it requires the grace-enabled response of persons who respond to God's salvation. Gorman speaks in the language of *kenotic theosis*, that there is an emptying of oneself to receive divinity. Russell speaks of the ethical approach to deification, which emphasizes imitation of God and the ascetic

pursuit of moral excellence. Meconi and Gorman together emphasize the ecclesial and communal nature of this response, lived out sacramentally through baptism and Eucharist. Other practices that are held as deifying are Scripture reading (Clement) and ascetic practices such as meditative prayer (Maximus the Confessor and the broader monastic tradition).

Connection to Soteriology and Other Core Doctrines. The authors considered in this chapter all make connections between deification and other core doctrines of Christian theology. Meconi's premise of deification within Augustine's wider theology is rooted in the latter's theology of creation. Without that foundation of humanity's capacity to turn to and imitate its prototype, deification would be unintelligible to Augustine's overall theology. Russell, especially in *Fellows Workers with God*, emphasizes how *theosis* is not only about sanctification, but indeed about the entire salvation of humanity, both the *goal* and the *process* of the Christian life. All have identified deification an all-encompassing doctrine that links Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology into a united whole. Deification, therefore, finds expression in a host of different themes and expressions. These cluster of terms and ideas around soteriology are often the core concepts for many theologians:

- **'Exchange Formula,'** detailing a kenotic Christology that elevates humanity to divinity.
- **Adoption or Filiation,** often linked to baptism, and pointing to renewed humanity made 'gods' by grace.
- **Christification,** linking one's growth in Christ as a growth into the life of God.

- **Growth in Godliness or Perfection**, pointing to the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work that imparts divine attributes to humanity.
- **New Adam/Humanity**, biblical imagery that harkens to a new humanity capable of participating or imitating God.

These elements present themselves in various ways in different theologians, but all point to understandings of deification.

Focus on the Ecclesial Community. As mentioned above, the praxis of the church – such as the reading scripture, baptism, eucharist, prayer – are all associated with deification. Russell, Keating, Gorman, and Meconi stand together in citing the communal nature of God’s salvation and the necessity of community for deification. The church stands as the locus of deification.

One Doctrine in Different Expressions. If this chapter proves anything, it is that there are multiple ways in which theologians have utilized deification over the centuries. Russell’s survey in *The Doctrine of Deification* illustrates this point most clearly. Nominal, analogous, and metaphorical uses differ from theologian to theologian, and from age to age. Individual usage – or lack of usage – must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Often a theologian’s use of deification is polemic, or seeking to address a problem or issue of his or her day.

Section III: A Lens for Identifying Deification

Having carefully considered deification in five major monographs, and put their four authors in conversation with one another, the way is now paved to propose a lens for this project in considering deification within John Wesley’s theology.

The Necessary Framework

In the first place, I posit that the trend of recent scholarship is correct in denying that *theosis* is the unique purview of Eastern Christianity, or that *theosis* is the Greek idea of *apotheosis* imposed upon Christianity. On both fronts, it has been demonstrated that Western figures embrace core tenants of the doctrine, and all expressions of deification, Eastern and Western, are careful in protecting the Creator/creation divide that *apotheosis* breeches. In terms of those “gray” areas where scholars differ – the importance of terminology, the role of key scriptures, and place of historical perspective – these areas serve more as helpful trail markers rather than dead ends. They are helpful reminders to pay attention to how ideas/terminology, scripture, and history are accessed and utilized, but none of these elements derail conversations about deification.

The core ideas mentioned in the above section form the backbone of what a lens for deification must consider:

- **Clusters of terms and ideas** that come to articulate deific content.
- **Rooted in scripture** – historically “deific” or not – as the exegetical foundation for the doctrine.
- **Trinitarian basis** that links a robust Christology and pneumatology together to make the doctrine or theme coherent.
- The **grace-enabled response** that highlights humanity’s ability to relate to the divine.
- **Connection to soteriology and other core doctrines** which link God’s salvation to the elevation of humanity: the formula of exchange, adoption/filiation, Christification, growth in godliness/perfection, and/or new Adam/humanity.
- **Focus on the ecclesial community** as a means of grace and deification.

These are core components that are consistently lifted up as constitutive of *theosis*, though they are not expressed in the same way by all theologians or schools of Christian thought.

In synthesizing these core ideas, I would suggest three theological axes which must be firmly established for a doctrine of *theosis* to be intelligible: 1) an **understanding of God** as desiring and enabling true union with humanity; 2) a **theological anthropology** which see the *telos* of humanity as true Godlikeness; and 3) a **soteriological thrust** that points to redeemed humanity as participating in the Godhead, both to a significant degree in this life as well as eschatologically. There is a **deeply Trinitarian structure** to this understanding of soteriology that has corresponding anthropological implications. With a theological understanding of God and humanity in place to support the doctrine of deification, the final core theme is the **means by which one is deified**, an area that touches upon ecclesial context, sacramentology, and grace-empowered ascetic practices such as fasting or prayer.

Wesleyan Deification Calmly Considered

This project will proceed by drinking deeply at the well of Wesley's sermons and selected treatises. This close reading of his works reveals that the core components of deification are present within Wesley's theology. Indeed, they are not only thematically present, but are structural frameworks by which to understand Wesley's theological agenda. Following a Trinitarian arc, this project will demonstrate that the theological, anthropological, and soteriological axes mentioned above function throughout Wesley's corpus.

God the Father: Creator and Creation. As evident in Meconi's monograph on Augustine, deification requires a doctrine of creation that allows for humanity to attain divine attributes. Deification requires God to create humanity with a *telos* of divine

communion on the one hand, and a theological anthropology that affirms humanity's capacity for real communion with God. Wesley's understanding of God as Creator is familial, lifting God up as a Loving Parent who seeks communion with God's human children. Wesley's theological anthropology is rooted in the *imago dei*, which serves as a structural way to affirm the soteriological thrust that we are both created with a capacity to be like God, and redeemed and empowered to reflect our divine parent in loving communion with God.

God the Son: Redeemer and New Adam. Christology must be seriously considered. Deification requires an understanding of Christ not only as redeemer, saving humanity from sin, but also elevating humanity to a state capable of godliness and union with God. Historically this is expressed as the Exchange Formula, and within Wesley Christ serves as the New Adam who inaugurates a new humanity capable of *imitatio dei*. Salvation entails the transfiguration/Christification of believers as they, through grace, are enabled to have the "same mind as Christ Jesus" and "walk as Christ walked." Christ, the Son and perfect Image of God, is the basis for the adoption of believers as children of God, restored in their image of their Creator and Father.

God the Holy Spirit: Sustainer and Indwelling Spirit. Since Cyril of Alexandria, affirmation of deification has been characterized by a robust pneumatology. Deification requires an understanding of the Spirit as the person of the Holy Trinity who enables believers to participate in the divine life of God. For Wesley, the Holy Spirit is the presence and grace of God, and the work of the Spirit is to call, claim, and empower believers as full children of God. Believers' status as children of God is paramount here. As children reflecting their divine Parent, believers are spurred further into the life of

God – purging unholy tempers and gaining the fruit of the Spirit – as they experience the witness of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Adoption. This is not the unilateral work of God, it also entails a Spirit-enabled divine/human synergy whereby the believer is restored to the image of God, able to imitate God and grow in grace.

Grace-Enabled Response: The Means of Deification. As Russell articulates, deification entails a response to God’s goodness; believers might imitate God with an ethical focus on deification, or they might be said to participate in God with a dynamic realistic focus on deification. Wesleyan deification emphasizes the former, with an ethic focus on the believer’s grace-empowered imitation of God. Ascetic practices are part of sanctification and the ethical progress of the soul, as are the means of grace, which include both works of piety (like the sacraments) and works of mercy. The means of grace for Wesley are “means of love,” actions and dispositions that both reflect the character of God, which is love, and also transform believers into the image of their Loving Parent.

Chapter 3

Creator and Creation

The goal of this chapter is to look at the foundations of Wesley's understanding of the relationship between God and God's creation. We noted in the previous chapter that deification emphasizes a God who created humanity with a *telos* of divine communion on the one hand, and a theological anthropology that affirms humanity's capacity for real communion with God on the other. Wesley's doctrine of creation, and in particular his understanding of the relationship between human creation and its Creator, is of foundational importance in identifying any sustained understanding of deification. Thus, following some preliminary notes about the scope and method of research, this chapter will explore Wesley's doctrine of creation and theological anthropology in four major sections: 1) the role of God the Father as loving parent; 2) how Wesley describes the original creation of humanity in relation to its Creator; 3) the current capacity of humanity for godlikeness in light of the fall; and, 4) the ultimate future *telos* of humanity in the economy of God, and the ultimate relationship of redeemed humanity to its Creator.

Scope and Method of Research

With deification defined and analyzed in the last chapter, the stage is now set in the following chapters to examine Wesley's primary material in light of those core aspects of deific understanding. The aim of this project is not to read deification back onto Wesley in an artificial way that forces the doctrine to bear a Wesleyan image, but

rather to give a comprehensive view of Wesley's theology that allows an honest assessment of where, and to what extent, Wesley's theological vision of the Christian life expresses the core understandings of *theosis*. Indeed, *theosis*-tinted lens can cast any theologian in a *theosis*-centered light; a more honest assessment can be garnered by allowing the primary source material to guide the view of Wesley's theological vision in its own right, considering organically if, and in what ways, the doctrine of deification emerges.

The size of the Wesleyan corpus is immense; not only did Wesley write prolifically, he also republished numerous redacted writings of others where his editorial decisions reveal his theological leanings. To make this project feasible, while also as comprehensive as possible, the scope of primary material has been carefully chosen to reflect a representative, but manageable, swath of his writings. The backbone of the Wesleyan material considered here is the entirety of Wesley's 151 extant sermons.¹ As a practical theologian, Wesley articulated his theology through those sermons to friends and critics alike. In total, they represent the most holistic window into Wesley's theological vision over the course of his long ministry, with sermons dating from the 1720s to the 1790s, ranging from unpublished manuscript sermons of his earliest ministry to the sermons written solely for publication in the *Arminian Magazine* just prior to his death. In addition to the sermon corpus, relevant treatises that potentially shed light on Wesley's view of humanity's ascent to godliness have been considered, namely the

¹ The 151 numbered sermons, and sermon fragments, are most comprehensibly found in *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984—). This collection provides the most up-to-date scholarly treatment of Wesley's writings available today. Note: hereafter referred to simply as *Works*.

treatises on Christian Perfection.² For this particular chapter, given its focus on theological anthropology, Wesley's *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757) has also been researched and analyzed.

The scope of Wesleyan material considered is important, but equally so is the method researching and presenting that material. Wesleyan scholars have long chosen to investigate Wesley's career in three chronological stages of Wesley's career: "early" Wesley up to his Aldersgate experience in 1739; "middle" Wesley from 1739-1765; and, "late" Wesley from 1765-1791. For this project, primary material was both read and analyzed chronologically.³ The fruit of this approach is the ability to determine themes common to Wesley's thinking throughout his life, as well as emphases that emerge or change over the course of his ministry. Where relevant, this project will point to places where the date of primary material sheds light on shifts in Wesley's theology over time.⁴

God the Father: Loving Creator and Parent

Following a Trinitarian pattern in this project is logical, as Wesley's theology is deeply Trinitarian. In point of fact, it is so tightly woven in virtually all of Wesley's works that only on occasion do we find him self-consciously addressing the triune nature of God in the salvation of humanity:

² Some of these treatises are found in Albert Outler's anthology *John Wesley* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1964). Note: hereafter referred to simply as *John Wesley*.

³ The chronological sequence is not reflected in the sermon numbers. Thus, Wesley's earliest manuscript sermon is 'Sermon 133,' while his last sermon is numbered 'Sermon 132.'

⁴ Beyond mere intellectual interest, this approach was adapted at the beginning of this project to aid in evaluating whether deific emphases are isolated to particular periods in his ministry (e.g. "early Wesley"), or indicative of a sustained theological engagement over time. While the end of study concluded that there is overall continuity across the early, middle, and late Wesley on the themes of my study, there are times when particular aspects or emphases emerge in particular periods of Wesley's ministry.

Do not direct your prayers to Christ only, without either having or seeking to have access to the Father through him. It is our great privilege, and calling, to draw nigh to both the Father and the Son. The whole Trinity are engaged in our redemption; each of the sacred Persons bear some peculiar office, and have blessings for all that draw nigh in full assurance of faith.⁵

The above quote is illuminative in two directions: first, it asserts the triune nature of Christian soteriology; and, secondly, it reveals a concern Wesley is addressing – an emphasis on the Son to the neglect of the Father. The concern potentially rises, no doubt, from the fact that Wesley’s specific treatment of God the Father is far less ubiquitous than his elaboration of the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

While the Father does not receive as much singular treatment, the role of the Father is not negligible in Wesley’s theological vision. More often than sustained treatment of any one Person of the Trinity, Wesley is wont to invoke the different operations of the triune God in seamless theological prose:

Unto God the Father, who first loved us, and made us accepted in the Beloved; unto God the Son, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; unto God the Holy Ghost, who sheddeth the love of God abroad in our hearts, be all love and all glory for time and for eternity!⁶

If we take this in its utmost extent it will include all that is wrought in the soul by what is frequently termed ‘natural conscience’, but more properly, ‘preventing grace’; all the ‘drawings’ of the ‘the Father’, the desires after God, which if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that ‘light’ wherewith the Son of God ‘enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world’, *showing* every man ‘to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God’; and the *convictions* which his Spirit from time to time works in every child of man.⁷

These passages are deeply illuminative. God the Father is the Divine Lover, who first loved God’s human creation; the One whom Wesley attributes as wooing and “drawing”

⁵ *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763), I.34, *Works*, 13:117.

⁶ Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” III.8, *Works*, 4:343.

⁷ Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” I.2, *Works*, 2:156-57.

humanity back to Godself in the prevenient grace of God. Importantly, God is not aloof from humanity, but rather desirous of intimate relationship.

Most often – without denying the united triune activity of creation – God the Father is attributed with the particular office of Creator. For some theologies, affirming God as Creator is a way primarily to assert God’s omnipotence and sovereignty, emphasizing the grandeur of God and viewing the end of creation as glorifying its Creator. While Wesley may affirm each of those theological assertions individually, the emphasis is quite different: affirming God as Creator is a way to assert God’s loving role as divine Parent. In Sermon 94, “On Family Religion,” we see this dynamic at play as Wesley guides parents in how they might teach their young children about God:

...it is God, that made the sun, and you and me, and everything. It is he that makes the grass and the flowers grow; that makes the trees green, and the fruit to come upon them! Think what he can do! HE can do whatever he pleases. He can strike me or you dead in a moment. But he loves you; he loves to do you good. He loves to make you happy. Should not you then love *him!* You love *me*, because I love you and do you good. But it is God that makes me love you. Therefore you should love him. And he will teach you how to love him.⁸

The passage is not a Pollyanna vision of God – indeed, God can “strike you dead in a moment!” – but the emphasis is not on God’s power or omnipotence, but on God’s loving intention.

Sermon 26, “Sermon on the Mount, VI,” gives one of Wesley’s most concentrated treatments of the Father’s role as Creator, and this theme of God as Loving Parent is clearly evident. Exegeting the Lord’s Prayer, Wesley waxes long on the opening address to God as *Father*:

⁸ Sermon 94, “On Family Religion, III.7 *Works*, 3:341.

‘Our Father.’ If he is a Father, then he is good, then he is loving to his children. And here is the first reason for prayer. God is willing to bless; let us ask for a blessing. ‘Our *Father*’ – our Creator, the Author of our being; he who raised us from the dust of the earth, who breathed into us the breath of life, and we became living souls. But if he made us, let us ask, and he will not withhold any good thing from the work of his own hands. ‘Our *Father*’ – our Preserver, who day by day sustains the life he has given; of whose continuing love we now and every moment receive life and breath and all things. So much the more boldly let us come to him, and ‘we shall find mercy and grace to help in time of need.’ Above all, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of all that believe in him; who justifies us ‘freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus’; who hath ‘blotted out all our sins’, ‘and healed all our infirmities’; who have received us for ‘his own children, by adoption and grace’, ‘and because we are sons, hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father;’ ‘who hath begotten us again of incorruptible seed’, and ‘created us anew in Christ Jesus’. Therefore we know that he heareth us always; therefore we ‘pray’ to him ‘without ceasing’. We pray because we love. And ‘we love him, because he first loved us.’⁹

In this passage God is not only Creator, but in a unique sense Father or Parent. “Father” is not merely a name showing intimate relationship with Christ; believers through Christ are filiated and adopted as children of God, and thus relate to God as their loving Parent. Leaning into his exegesis of Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6, Wesley will most often link the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of adoption” and believers as children of God, crying “Abba, Father” to their God who is both Creator and parent to redeemed humanity. Thus, God is the Divine Parent to believers in an intimate, familial sense. (This will be explored later in depth in chapter five’s exploration of Wesley’s pneumatology).

Further, the classic Christian understandings of God as Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer are each viewed through a lens of parental *love*. The extent of the Father’s love to humanity is demonstrated in God’s willing sacrifice of Christ, and that divine love gives birth to the faith community that can collectively speak of God as *our* Father:

⁹ Sermon 26, “Sermon on the Mount, VI,” III.4, *Works*, 1:578-79.

‘*Our* Father’ – not *mine* only who now cry unto him; but *ours*, in the most extensive sense. ... He loveth all that he hath made. He ‘is loving unto every man, and his mercy is over all his works’. And ‘the Lord’s delight is in them that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy;’ in them that trust in him through the Son of his love, knowing they are ‘accepted in the Beloved’. But ‘if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.’ Yea, all mankind; seeing ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son’, even to die the death, that they ‘might not perish, but have everlasting life’.¹⁰

This love of God is the basis for the community’s love for one another; human love is ever a response to the divine love of God poured out upon humanity. Moreover, the demonstration of the Father’s love for humanity in the willing sacrifice of Christ is central to the close relationship humanity now enjoys with God. In Sermon 59, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” Wesley speculates that if it were not for humanity’s sin that necessitated Christ’s sacrifice, we would not know the extent of the Father’s love:

[Without fall, no need for faith] And the same grand blank which was in our faith must likewise have been in our love. We might have loved the Author of our being, the Father of angels and men, as our Creator and Preserver; we might have said, ‘O Lord, our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the earth.’ But we could not have loved him under the nearest and dearest relation, as ‘delivering up his Son for us all’.¹¹

The triune salvation of God is predicated upon the Father’s love and loving intention for God’s human creation.

God’s love for humanity as Divine Parent has anthropological ramifications: humanity is created to enjoy relationship with God as the adopted children of God. This is not merely a creature fulfilling its duty, or fitting into its intended niche of creation glorifying God. Though both of these ends are in one sense true, Wesley’s understanding

¹⁰ Ibid., III.5, *Works*, 1:579.

¹¹ Sermon 59, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” I.3 *Works*, 2:426-27.

of the Father is one that envisions the Creator Parent desiring deep communion and fellowship with humanity:

He [a wise person] knows God: his Father and his friend, the parent of all good, the centre of the spirits of all flesh, the sole happiness of all intelligent beings. He sees, clearer than the light of the noonday sun, that this is the end of man: to glorify him who made him for himself, and to love and enjoy him forever. And with equal clearness he sees the means to that end, to the enjoyment of God in glory; even now to know, to love, to imitate God, and to believe in Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.¹²

O trust in him for happiness as well as for help. All the springs of happiness are in him. Trust in him ‘who giveth us all things richly to enjoy’... it is his love gives a relish to all we taste, puts life and sweetness into all, while every creature leads us up to the great Creator, and all earth is a scale to heaven. The transfuses the joys that are at his own right hand into all he bestows on his thankful children; who, having fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, enjoy him in all and above all.¹³

Father, friend, Parent of all good, spring of happiness, great Creator – these are glorious names for the God who Wesley believes is truly possible for human creatures to know, love, and have enjoy in intimate fellowship. This emphasis is the foundation of a theological framework where deification is possible, an understanding of God as desiring true union with humanity. The corollary of that assertion is a theological anthropology that understands humanity to be created with a *telos* of fellowship with God and true godlikeness. To that end, we now turn.

Created in the Image of God: Humanity as Deiform Creatures

Wesley often used a vision of pre-fallen humanity as a starting point to ground his theological assertions. At times it was merely to create a baseline of humanity’s purity on

¹² Sermon 33, “Sermon on the Mount, XIII,” II.2, *Works*, 1:692.

¹³ Sermon 28, “Sermon on the Mount, VIII,” §21, *Works*, 1:626.

a particular point of argument. In an early sermon, Wesley affirms Adam and Eve were “both created upright” with the “power to continue so,”¹⁴ an affirmation which is also expressed in treatises in the middle of his career.¹⁵ Throughout his ministry he made similar claims that further parsed his understanding of humanity’s original creation as best met the needs of his particular topic. One can easily paint a picture of humankind as understood by Wesley by piecing together these various assertions of unblemished humanity: endowed with a desire for happiness, reputation and society;¹⁶ endowed with a capacity for thinking and a conscience;¹⁷ a desire for knowledge which points to the Creator;¹⁸ and, among other virtues, an innate sense to honor one’s parents implanted in the soul.¹⁹ Other assertions gesture toward theological speculation, such as positing how the original humans were perhaps similar to angels in their movement,²⁰ or how Adam may have *not* needed to reason as present humans, as the light of his understanding was not dampened by the darkness of sin.²¹ Taken together, they paint a picture of Wesley’s understanding of prelapsarian humanity. At the same time, many of these assertions

¹⁴ Sermon 138A, “On Dissimulation,” §1.2, *Works*, 4:257.

¹⁵ See *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757), Part VII, I, *Works*, 12:448 – humanity was created “upright.” See also “Thoughts on Christian Perfection” (1760), *Works*, 13:26 where Wesley speculates that “man, in his original state, was not liable to these [involuntary] transgressions” that presently beset even those perfected in love in humanity’s fallen state.

¹⁶ See Sermon 133, “Death and Deliverance,” §§7, 8, 11, *Works*, 4:209-11.

¹⁷ See Sermon 12, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” §§4-5, *Works*, 1:301-02.

¹⁸ See Sermon 69, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” §1, *Works*, 2:568 – “The desire of knowledge is an universal principle in man, fixed in his inmost nature.”

¹⁹ See Sermon 96, “On Obedience to Parents,” §1, *Works*, 3:361. Such “principles naturally implanted in the soul” are not destroyed by the fall.

²⁰ See Sermon 56, “God’s Approbation of His Works,” I.4, *Works*, 2:390, where humanity was “equal to angels” and therefore “able to convey himself this pleasure to any given distance.” See also Sermon 99, “The Reward of Righteousness,” §2, *Works*, 3:401, where Wesley refutes the idea that God created humanity to “supply the vacant thrones of the rebel angels.”

²¹ See “Further Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection,” I.1, *Works*, 13:95 – “I say ‘if he reasoned’, for possibly he did not. Perhaps he had no need of reasoning till his corruptible body pressed down the mind, and impaired its native faculties.”

receive no prolonged treatment in the Wesleyan corpus, so one must be careful to what extent they are presented as representative of Wesley's theology.

The Image of God

The "image of God," the biblical affirmation of the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26-27, is Wesley's preferred lens for looking at theological anthropology. It appears in his manuscript sermons as early as 1730,²² in the first sermon in his first collected edition of *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1746),²³ as well as the final sermon before his death in 1791, where he contemplates the heavenly life of the redeemed advancing "in the whole image of God wherein they were created!"²⁴ Beyond these benchmark sermons, Wesley used the *imago dei* in systematic and intentional ways to organize and structure his theological agenda throughout his corpus. The *imago dei* functions as a structural organization for Wesley's understanding of moral psychology (the "natural" image of God reflected by humanity); his description of the divine qualities lost, present, or possible (the "moral" image reflected by humanity); and ultimately his understanding of soteriology (the *restoration* of the Image of God for redeemed humanity). Each deserve attention and will be explored below in turn.

²² The first occurrence I noted was Sermon 139, "On the Sabbath," *Works*, 4:267-78. The sermon, though unpublished, has notations that it was preached twelve times by John Wesley through the year 1733. This is no passing mention of the *imago dei*: humanity was "made in the image and for the imitation of God," a conviction that drives the thesis of the sermon that Sabbath observance aids in imitation of God I.2, *Works*, 4:270.

²³ Sermon 1, "Salvation by Faith," *Works*, 1:09-30. While his collection of sermons was published in 1746, this sermon was written nearly a decade beforehand on June 11, 1738.

²⁴ Sermon 132, "On Faith," §11, *Works*, 4:196.

The Natural Image of God

Created in the natural image of God, Adam and Eve were created with mature holy tempers that reflected their Creator. While these were resistible, they were naturally “inclined” toward righteousness and holiness. In fact, in his early Sermon 141, “The Image of God,” Wesley establishes that humanity’s constitution is, as much as creaturely possible, defined by its godlikeness:

... not only that man was sprung from God, but that he was his likeness from whom he sprung; the image of his divine Parent was still visible upon him, who had transfused as much of himself into this his picture as the materials on which he drew would allow.²⁵

This sermon is a helpful touchpoint for the major components of Wesley’s understanding of moral psychology. It continues by first parsing the natural capacities with which humanity reflects the *imago dei*. Adam was given *godlike knowledge* or **understanding**. While humanity was never omniscient like its Creator, Adam enjoyed clear understanding informed by a proper knowledge of reality; it was not absolute like God’s knowledge, but perfect in its kind:

[Adam] was endued, after the likeness of his Maker, with a power of distinguishing truth from falsehood ... in several properties of it, as well as in the faculty itself, man at first resembled God. His understanding was just²⁶

This swift capacity to understand was further guided by a **will** that was entirely motivated by love. The will, for Wesley, was the springhouse of action, the affections which prompted and guided decisions.²⁷ It is significant that while understanding is clearly

²⁵ Sermon 141, “The Image of God,” §2, *Works*, 4:292.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.1, *Works*, 4:292.

²⁷ This was not the typical definition of will in Wesley’s day. For more detailed discussion of different notions of the will, see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); and Randy L. Maddox, “A Change of Affections: The

delineated to have creaturely limitations in this sermon, Wesley simply aligns humanity's will with the motivating spring of its Creator, love:

Man was what God is, Love. Love filled the whole expansion of his soul; it possessed him without a rival. Every movement of his heart was love: it knew no other fervor. Love was his vital heat; it was the genial warmth that animated his whole frame.²⁸

The capacity and freedom to enact (or choose not to enact) the loving inclinations of Adam's prelapsarian will lay not in the will itself, but rather in a faculty Wesley labeled **liberty**. Like God, with clear understanding and the will filled with the springs of love, Adam enjoyed full freedom or liberty to do the good (or reject it):

What made his image yet plainer in his human offspring was, thirdly, the liberty he originally enjoyed; the perfect freedom implanted in his nature, and interwoven with all its parts. Man was made with an entire indifference, either to keep or change his first estate²⁹

The result of all these endowments working as they were intended was the **happiness** Adam enjoyed in paradise.³⁰ The sermon, which lists each of these endowments in ascending order, places happiness as the crowning jewel:

The result of all these – an unerring understanding, an uncorrupt will, and perfect freedom – gave the last stroke to the image of God in man, by crowning all these with happiness.³¹

Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's 'Heart Religion', in *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. Richard Steele (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 3-31.

²⁸ Sermon 141, "The Image of God," I.2, *Works*, 4:294.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I.3, *Works*, 4:295.

³⁰ Happiness as Wesley defines it harkens to the Aristotelian notion of *eudaemonia*. For a recent dissertation delving into the specifics of Wesley's understanding of happiness, see Min Seok Kim, "Happiness and Holiness, Joined in One" as the Christian Life Goal in John Wesley's Theology (Ph.D. dissertation, Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2018).

³¹ Sermon 141, "The Image of God," I.4, *Works*, 4:295.

Sermon 141 was penned in 1730, yet the core tenets that define Wesley's moral psychology are present in the form they would most often be expressed in his works – knowledge/understanding, will, liberty, and happiness. Some fifty years later, Wesley succinctly articulates the same endowments in a number of sermons:

“The General Deliverance” (1781): In these, in the power of self-motion, understanding, will, and liberty, the natural image of God consisted. ... [Adam's state was] paradisiacal, perfectly happy.³²

“On the Fall of Man” (1782): ... man is not mere matter, a clod of earth, a lump of clay, without sense or understanding, but a spirit like his Creator; a being endued not only with sense and understanding but also with a will exerting itself in various affections. To crown all the rest, he was endued with liberty, a power of directing his own affections and actions.³³

“The End of Christ's Coming” (1781): [God] ‘created man in his own image’ – in his own *natural* image (as to his better part) that is, a spirit, as God is a spirit: endued with *understanding* ..., a *will* ..., with *liberty* And as a free agent he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding. In so doing he was unspeakably happy³⁴

Thus Wesley's moral psychology – the natural image of God in humanity – proves a consistent and important aspect of his theology. Happiness is sometimes mentioned and sometimes ignored when Wesley articulates his moral psychology, because it is not an enduring human capacity but a well-being arising if and when humans use their capacities rightly. Happiness in God, however, is a prominent theme and *telos* of Wesley's understanding of salvation and humanity's future hope in God that will be explored below.

³² Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” I.1, *Works*, 2:438-39.

³³ Sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” §1, *Works*, 2:400. This quote also demonstrates Wesley's identification with the *imago dei* within the spiritual composition of humanity and not the body. See also Sermon 103, “What is Man?” II.5, *Works*, 3:460 – “man is not only a house of clay, but an immortal spirit made in the image of God, an incorruptible picture of the God of glory.”

³⁴ Sermon 62, “The End of Christ's Coming,” I.3-7, *Works*, 2:474-76

The Moral Image of God

In addition to the *natural* image of God, which points to humanity's spiritual constitution and the created capacities of understanding, will, and liberty, Wesley is also wont to point out that humanity was created originally in the *moral* image of God.³⁵

Sermon 45, "The New Birth," prioritizes this moral dimension of humanity's godlikeness as the chief reflection of God:

Not barely in his *natural* image, a picture of his own immortality, a spiritual being endowed with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections; nor merely in his *political image*, the governor of this lower world ...; but chiefly in his *moral image*, which according to the Apostle, is 'righteousness and true holiness.' [Ephesians 4:24]³⁶

"Righteousness and true holiness," a quotation of Ephesians 4:24, remains a favorite biblical shorthand for Wesley to articulate the moral image of God in humanity, and subsequently both the created capacity and calling to be holy and righteous.³⁷ The sermon goes on immediately to elaborate upon the nature of this righteousness and holiness:

In this image of God was man made. 'God is love,' accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth: so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. God is spotless purity: and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot.³⁸

Not only in natural constitution, but also in moral character, does the human creation mirror its Creator. What is fascinating here is that Wesley again turned to love as the ground of union between humanity and God. Love serves as the entire constitution of

³⁵ See Sermon 117, "On the Discoveries of Faith," §5, *Works*, 4:30 -- "[Humans each possess] an immortal spirit, made in the image of God, in his natural and his moral image."

³⁶ Sermon 45, "The New Birth," I.1, *Works*, 2:188.

³⁷ See, from "late" Wesley, Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," I.7, *Works*, 2:475 -- "God created man, not only in his *natural*, but likewise in his own *moral* image. He created him not only in *knowledge*, but also in righteousness and true holiness."

³⁸ Sermon 45, "The New Birth," I.1, *Works*, 2:188

humanity's originally-created will, the very nature of God reflected in humanity. And here, love serves as a Wesley's foundational understanding of righteousness and holiness, the ways in which humanity bears moral similitude to God: righteousness is love; holiness is love;³⁹ God is love. These are the building blocks for how humanity is created, and thus will come to bear in how Wesley described fallen and redeemed humanity. The important point at this juncture is see the way in which prelapsarian humanity is the perfect picture of a deiform creature reflecting the loving nature of its divine archetype.

Creatures Capable of God

Created in the natural and moral image of God, humanity was created with a capacity to know its Creator. At times the emphasis is placed on the rational nature of humanity. As rational creatures, humans "alone of all the visible creation are capable of contemplating" God's attributes.⁴⁰ Moreover, being "sensible, rational creatures, and above all, creatures capable of God," Wesley contends, marks the one and only "essential difference between men and brutes."⁴¹

More frequently, however, Wesley returns to the natural image of God reflected in humanity – of which rationality and understanding is a part – and joins those innate components of our constitution with the capacity for God they allow. Thus the capacity

³⁹ To this point, in *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Wesley defends the notion that Adam and Eve were holy in Eden, answering an object that holiness is not holiness without moral choice: "What is holiness? Is it not, essentially, love? The love of God and of all mankind? Love producing 'bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering'? ...Love is holiness wherever it exists. And God *could* create either men or angels, endued from the very first moment of their existence with whatsoever degree of love he pleased" (Part II, IV, Obj. 2, *Works*, 12:277).

⁴⁰ Sermon 142, "The Wisdom of Winning Souls," I, *Works*, 4:307.

⁴¹ Sermon 128, "The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart," I.2, *Works*, 4:153. See also Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," III.11, *Works*, 2:449

for God follows the contours of humanity's moral psychology: a rational understanding enables one to *know* God, a will created full of love enables one to *love* God; liberty to freely choose the good enables one to *obey* God; happiness, the product of living into the created capability for holiness and righteousness, finds full expression as one can fully *enjoy* God. These themes are repeated often in Wesley's sermons:

God created all things for himself; more especially all intelligent spirits. ... He made those more directly for himself, to know, love, and enjoy him⁴²

[humanity], created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and enjoy his Creator to all eternity.⁴³

[Adam] was a creature capable of God, capable of knowing, loving, and obeying his Creator. And in fact he did know God, did unfeignedly love and uniformly obey him. This was the supreme perfection of man, as it is of all intelligent beings – the continually seeing and loving and obeying the Father of the spirits of all flesh."⁴⁴

Knowing, loving, obeying, and enjoying God are activities with which created humanity is able to relate to its Creator. These demonstrate an internal consistency between Wesley's understanding of creation and the creaturely fulfillment of these capacities in humanity.

Creatures Capable of Intimate Fellowship with God

It is important to note that Wesley does not describe humanity's interaction with God as the mere fulfillment of creaturely duty, a bare proper action, or *reaction*, to the action of God. Instead, humanity's capacity for God is painted as intimate fellowship, union with God, or "dwelling in God." Wesley often links holiness and righteousness

⁴² Sermon 79, "On Dissipation," §4, *Works*, 3:117.

⁴³ Sermon 56, "God's Approbation of His Works," I.14, *Works*, 2:397.

⁴⁴ Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," I.2, *Works*, 2:439.

with creaturely happiness. Thus, in Adam we see the intimate relationship God intended for holy and happy humanity:

“[Adam], the lord of all [in Eden], was perfect in holiness. And as his holiness was, so was his happiness; knowing no sin, he knew no pain.”⁴⁵

[Adam] should continue holy, ... he should be pure in heart, even as God is pure, perfect as his Father in heaven was perfect; that he should love the Lord his God with all his heart; ... that he should love every soul which God had made; ... that by this universal benevolence he should ‘dwell in God (who is love) and God in him’ [Cf. 1 John 4:16]⁴⁶

And [Adam] as a free agent he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding. In so doing he was unspeakably happy, dwelling in God and God in him, having an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son through the eternal Spirit⁴⁷

This uninterrupted communion with God is in turn the goal (and possibility!) of humanity, even after the fall. This theme permeates Wesley’s sermons throughout his ministry:

For to this end was man created, to love God; and to this end alone. ... But Love is the very image of God: it is the brightness of his glory. By love man is not only made like God, but in some sense one with him. ‘If any man love God, God loveth him, and cometh to him, and maketh his abode with him.’ [John 14:23] He ‘dwelleth in God, and God in him’ [I John 3:24]; and ‘he that is thus joined to the Lord is one spirit.’ [1 Cor. 6:17]. Love is perfect freedom. ... Love is the health of the soul, the full exertion of all its powers, the perfection of its faculties.”⁴⁸

In the image of God was man made, holy as he that created him is holy, merciful as the author of all is merciful, perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man dwelling in love dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be ‘an image of his own eternity’ an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He was accordingly pure, as God is pure. ... He ‘loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength.’ ... Such then was the state of man in paradise. By the free, unmerited love of God he was holy and happy, he

⁴⁵ Sermon 109, “The Trouble and Rest of Good Men,” Proem., *Works*, 3:533.

⁴⁶ Sermon 6, “The Righteousness of Faith,” I.2, *Works*, 1:205.

⁴⁷ Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming, I.7, *Works*, 2:475-76

⁴⁸ Sermon 146, “The One Thing Needful,” II.2, *Works*, 4:355-56.

knew, loved, enjoyed God, which is (in substance) life everlasting. And in this life of love he was to continue forever if he continued to obey God in all things.⁴⁹

‘... follow thou after the image of God. ... Let nothing satisfy thee but the power of godliness, but a religion that is spirit and life; the dwelling in God and God in thee; the being an inhabitant of eternity; the entering in by the blood of sprinkling ‘within the veil’, and ‘sitting in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.’⁵⁰

[When seeing a beggar] I see one that has an immortal spirit, made to know and love and dwell with God to eternity ... the candidate for immortality.⁵¹

Rest not till you enjoy the privilege of humanity – the knowledge and love of God. Lift up your heads, ye creatures capable of God Lift up your hearts to the Source of your being! ... Let you continual ‘fellowship be with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ’! Let God be all in your thoughts, and ye will be men indeed.⁵²

These multiple sermons give slight nuances to the same theme of divine intimacy:

“knowledge and love of God” pointing toward intimate fellowship with God; those who embrace this personal, close theocentric existence are truly human (“men indeed”); that the “power of godliness” is nothing less than the “dwelling in God and God in thee.”

An important facet of this divine intimacy is the full enjoyment of God. Indeed, there is a direct connection between creaturely fulfillment, or true happiness, and humanity’s intimate relationship with God. Sermon 120, *The Unity of the Divine Being*,” articulates this connection well, both in God’s good intention for humanity’s happiness and its locus in God:

He made man to be happy in himself. He is the proper centre of spirits, for whom every created spirit was made. So true is that well-known saying of the ancient

⁴⁹ Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” I.1.4, *Works*, 1:184-85.

⁵⁰ Sermon 33, “Sermon on the Mount XIII,” III.9, *Works* 1:697. See Sermon 22, “Sermon on the Mount II,” II.6, *Works*, 1:498 where Wesley essentially repeats the same paragraph.

⁵¹ Sermon 100, “On Pleasing All Men,” II.5, *Works*, 3:425.

⁵² Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” III.11-12, *Works*, 2:450.

fathers, *Fecisti nos ad te; et irrequietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te* – Thou has made us for thyself; and our heart cannot rest till it resteth in thee.⁵³

The heart resting in God, an idea Wesley is quoting from St. Augustine, is especially evident in Wesley's later sermons.⁵⁴ Happiness and holiness, the pair so often joined in Wesley's writings, are both rooted in God as their beginning and their *telos*.⁵⁵ Both are equally unintelligible, or pale shadows of their intended realities, for humanity enslaved to sin and isolated from God.⁵⁶

Could Unfallen Adam Have Grown in Godliness?

Before turning from Wesley's understanding of prelapsarian humanity, it may be helpful to explore the speculative theology of what may have been, had Adam not fallen from grace. Some theologians across the ages have differentiated between 'image' and 'likeness' which are repeated in the Genesis account. To paint in broad exegetical strokes, 'image' in those interpretations is seen a created *capacity* for godliness, whereas 'likeness' denotes the *attainment* of that created potential.

Wesley's only explicit reference to the image/likeness wording is found in Sermon 75, "On the Fall of Man," where he highlights what he takes to be "the

⁵³ Sermon 120, "The Unity of the Divine Being," §§9-10, *Works*, 4:63-64. Wesley goes on to say this is what every parent should teach their child: "Now is not this the very principle that should be inculcated upon every human creature – 'You are made to be happy in God' – as soon as ever reason dawns?" [A wise parent might say] 'He made *you*; and he made you to be happy in him; and nothing else can make you happy.'"

⁵⁴ See Sermon 78, "Spiritual Idolatry," II.2, *Works*, 3:112 – "God made our hearts for himself, so they cannot rest till they rest in him"; Sermon 73, "Of Hell," I.4, *Works*, 3:35 – "a spirit made for God can have no rest out of him"; Sermon 79, "On Dissipation," §§4, 10, *Works*, 3:117, 120 – "And as long as they are united to him, created spirits are at rest. ... [God is] their proper centre".

⁵⁵ See the list of occurrences collected by Albert Outler in *Works*, 1:35, fn28.

⁵⁶ See Sermon 28, "Sermon on the Mount VIII," §13, *Works*, 1:620 – Wesley points out that "an everlasting spirit made for God" will never be satisfied with earthly "husks that may poison but not satisfy."

emphatical repetition” of humanity being made in the image of God.⁵⁷ Elsewhere he simply takes “image of God” to be self-evident as shorthand for humanity’s original creation.

There are, however, a few passages in Wesley’s early and middle writings where he addresses Adam’s obedience as a means to greater holiness and therefore greater happiness. Sermon 144 points to Adam having a law of love, needed to “perfect” his happiness:

[God] gave [Adam] a law, even to love him in whose image he was made. And love, the one thing [that] his Creator required in return for all his benefits, he therefore required, because it was the one thing needful to perfect his creature’s happiness.⁵⁸

Sermon 6, briefly addresses the differences between the Covenant of Grace, which all humanity needs in our sin-sick state, and the Covenant of Works, which only Adam in his pre-fallen perfection could obey. By doing so, Adam would continue and “increase” in the “favour and life of God:”

... the covenant of works was not given to man when he was dead in trespasses and sins, but when he was alive to God, when he knew no sin, but was holy as God is holy. ... It was never designed for the *recovery* of the favour and life of God once lost, but only for the *continuance* and increase thereof, till it should be complete in life everlasting.⁵⁹

A final passage is found in “The Doctrine of Original Sin,” where Wesley defends Adam’s original holiness, while still maintaining that “entire holiness does not exclude growth:”

‘But if Adam was originally perfect in holiness’ (say *perfectly holy*, made in the moral image of God), ‘what occasion was there for any farther trial?’ That there

⁵⁷ See also Sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” II.6, *Works*, 2:409-10 – “Mark the emphatical repetition!”

⁵⁸ Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” §1, *Works*, 4:331.

⁵⁹ Sermon 6, “The Righteousness of Faith,” §II.1, *Works*, 1:210.

might be room for farther holiness and happiness. Entire holiness does not exclude growth. Nor did the *right state* of all his faculties entitle him to that full reward which would have followed the *right use* of them.⁶⁰

Taken together, these three passages imply that while Wesley treats the image of God as a marker of pristine perfection, he does not view Adam's pre-fallen state as a static perfection. He is open to the idea that Adam could have advanced, even in Eden, in holiness, happiness, and fuller union with God, much in the same way that he allows for advancement in holiness for those who claim Christian Perfection in this life.

The Imago Dei and Wesley's Via Salutis

From a soteriological perspective, Wesley uses the *imago dei* to highlight the created potential, the present fallenness, and the future hope of humanity. This becomes a common way to describe humanity in his writings, therefore making it a helpful and central key in unlocking Wesley's theological vision of humanity's created capacity for God as we move into the next section. An early illustration of this tendency to view salvation history through the lens of the *imago dei* is found in Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful":

Now this great work, this one thing needful, is the renewal of our fallen nature. In the image of God was man made, but a little lower than the angels. His nature was perfect, angelical, divine. He was an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He bore his stamp on every part of his soul; the brightness of his Creator shone mightily upon him. But sin hath now effaced the image of God.⁶¹

Though man recklessly gives up the divine image, God is merciful to provide a means to "renew" God's image within humanity:

⁶⁰ *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part II, VI.2, Obj. 2, *Works*, 12:300.

⁶¹ Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," I.2, *Works*, 4:354.

Abusing the liberty wherewith he was endowed, [Adam] rebelled against his Creator, and willfully changed the image of the incorruptible God into sin, misery, and corruption. Yet his merciful, though rejected, Creator would not forsake even the depraved work of his own hands, provided for him, and offered to him a means of being ‘renewed after the image of him that created him.’⁶²

The story of the Image of God – freely bestowed by God, freely broken by humanity, and gracefully restored by God – became a favorite motif for Wesley, creating a baseline for his assertions about soteriology. The “one thing needful” being the restoration of the Image of God allows Wesley to at once affirm humanity’s created capacity to be godlike, while at the same time framing salvation as a recapitulation of humanity to true godlikeness.

The Image of God in Disrepair: Sin and Humanity as Fallen Creatures

There were streams of Christian and deist thought in Wesley’s day that questioned the notion of indwelling sin as affirmed in the traditional doctrine of original sin. Wesley rejected their optimistic view of human nature most notably in his (lengthy!) treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757). Tellingly, he places his objection through the lens of the *imago dei*:

“if therefore we take away this foundation, that man is by nature foolish and sinful, ‘fallen short of the glorious’ image of ‘God,’ the Christian system falls at once ... [nothing more than a] ‘cunningly devised fable’⁶³

In escalating order, Wesley proceeds to show the reality of human sinful dispositions through the witness of wicked world history,⁶⁴ the witness of individual conscience,⁶⁵ the

⁶² Sermon 141, “The Image of God,” §4, *Works*, 4:293.

⁶³ *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part I, Pref., §4, *Works*, 12:158.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Part I, I.18, *Works*, 12:175.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Part I, II.12, *Works*, 12:203.

witness of Scripture,⁶⁶ and ultimately the witness of the Church universal that affirms that humanity stands now not in the prelapsarian state of holiness, but separated from communion with God and lacking conformity of our moral capacities (the image of God) to the holiness and love of God.”⁶⁷ This treatise serves as Wesley’s primary apologetic piece on the nature of sin; elsewhere he takes for granted that humanity’s sinfulness and need of restoration is a given foundation for his theology.

An Image Distorted

Despite what the above treatise might imply, Wesley was equally resistant to those that would totally destroy the *imago dei* in the name of total depravity. Even in *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, he contends that some aspect of the *imago dei* survives the fall. In considering the prohibition against murder in Genesis 9:6, which is a prohibition based on the *imago dei*, Wesley’s exegesis preserves a postlapsarian image of God: “whereinsoever [the *imago dei*] consisted [it was] not utterly effaced in the time of Noah.”⁶⁸ In the sermon corpus, Wesley is not one to dwell on the image of God being lost without gesturing to the ways in which it remains, by grace, even faintly. Sermon 105, “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels,” demonstrates how quickly Wesley shifts – even in the same sermon! – from talking about the image of God being “totally lost ... [a result of] what man has made himself,”⁶⁹ to speaking of what “remains of the image of God.”⁷⁰ Wesley arrives at this balance through dual theological commitments: while

⁶⁶ Ibid., Part II, III.10, *Works*, 12:254.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Part II, III.11, *Works*, 12:225.

⁶⁸ *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part II.4, Obj. 2, *Works*, 12:276.

⁶⁹ Sermon 105, “Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels” §2, *Works*, 4:162.

⁷⁰ Ibid., I.1, *Works*, 4:163.

Wesley affirms total depravity in principle, he also holds a view of prevenient grace such that no person is left totally depraved; there is at least a partial restoration by grace to respond to God.⁷¹ In his more nuanced treatments of sin's effect on the *imago dei*, Wesley would argue that the moral image of God – the love, holiness, and righteousness of God – was indeed totally lost in sin, while the natural image of God remained, though damaged. Sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” gives what is Wesley’s more indicative assessment of the current human condition: “In that moment he lost the moral image of God, and in part, the natural. He commenced unholy, foolish, and unhappy.”⁷²

Lost in Part: The Damaged Natural Image of God

Wesley’s moral psychology becomes the window through which he understood our damaged human condition. The body, which had been a pristine instrument of the soul, is now a source of stumbling:

But Adam fell, and his incorruptible body became corruptive; and ever since it is a clog to the soul, and hinders its operations. . . . Therefore it is as natural for man to mistake as to breathe; and he can no more live without one than without the other.⁷³

The body, moreover, is now a source of temptation,⁷⁴ an unreliable instrument to the soul.

Human **knowledge**, or **understanding**, is likewise limited in its “present capacity,” even unable to discern the manner of God’s work in the world.⁷⁵ Indeed, “by

⁷¹ This reasoning puts Wesley, albeit through a circuitous reasoning, to a position similar to Eastern sources. Eastern Orthodoxy, by comparison, typically denies total depravity.

⁷² Sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” II.6, *Works*, 2:410. Of interest, Wesley argues that Adam was not deceived, but “knowingly and deliberately” rebelled against God.

⁷³ “Further Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection,” I.1, *Works*, 13:96.

⁷⁴ Sermon 82, “On Temptations,” I.1, *Works*, 3:159.

⁷⁵ Sermon 140, “The Promise of Understanding,” I.2, *Works*, 4:284. God’s work is now “too wonderful” for fallen humanity to perceive.

nature” every human is now “a mere atheist,” with no natural knowledge or understanding of God.⁷⁶ Without God, and with faulty and mistaken knowledge, humanity is now prone to error and mistaken judgment. At the same time that Wesley denies an innate knowledge of God in fallen humanity, he points out that desire for knowledge within the human constitution is a means God uses to bringing humanity to the source of all knowledge, their Creator.⁷⁷ Thus, in the ruins of sin-depraved understanding, the seeds to seek God are restored by grace in every human heart.

The human **will**, created a pure spring of love, is now plagued with the “heavy chains of vile affections.”⁷⁸ Indeed, love itself has “become a torment,”⁷⁹ with humanity trading pure love of God for lesser passions and affections; idolatry and self-worship takes the place of true love and worship of God.⁸⁰

Liberty, that native capacity to freely choose the good, is now likewise bound by the vile affections of the will. There is now a “natural appetite for evil,”⁸¹ a bent toward sinning, “free only to evil.”⁸² At first glance, it would appear that humanity is fully overpowered, with no real ability to choose the good. However, once again Wesley’s understanding of God’s mercy is evident to fallen humanity. While maintaining that

⁷⁶ Sermon 95, “On the Education of Children,” §5, *Works*, 3:350. For the same sentiment in another sermon, see also Sermon 79, “On Dissipation,” §7, *Works*, 3:118.

⁷⁷ See Sermon 69, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” §§1-2, *Works*, 2:568-69 -- “[Desire for knowledge] is intended to hinder our taking up our rest in anything here below ... till we ascend to the source of all knowledge, and all excellence, and the all-wise and all-gracious Creator.”

⁷⁸ Sermon 146, “The One Thing Needful,” I.2, *Works*, 4:354

⁷⁹ Sermon 141, “The Image of God,” II.3-4, *Works*, 4:298-99.

⁸⁰ Sermon 44, “Original Sin,” II.7 *Works*, 2:179 – “In his natural state every man born into the world is a rank idolater ... we ‘have set up our idols in our heart’ ... We worship ourselves.” See also Sermon 95, “On the Education of Children,” §6, *Works*, 3:350 – “... every man is by nature, as it were, his own god. He worships himself. He is, in his own conception, absolute Lord of himself.”

⁸¹ Sermon 133, “Death and Deliverance,” §7, *Works*, 4:209.

⁸² Sermon 9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” II.7, *Works*, 1:258.

because of sin one may not have “absolute power” of one’s mind, Wesley reasons that “through the grace of God” one retains the “power to choose and do good as well as evil.”⁸³ Complementing this grace-restored capacity⁸⁴ to choose good, God has also given all of humanity the supernatural gift of conscience, an ability to discern good from evil.⁸⁵

With an understanding that is flawed, a will that is chained to earthly and vile affections, and a liberty that is bent toward sinning, humans no longer bear the moral image of God. **Happiness** and **holiness**, God’s intention for created humanity, give way to misery and corruption. “Universal misery is at once a consequence and a proof of this universal corruption,” Wesley contends, “Men are unhappy (How very few are the exceptions!) because they are unholy.”⁸⁶ In the place of their created glory, humans are now “weak, miserable, helpless creatures.”⁸⁷ This desire for happiness is part of human nature,⁸⁸ however, and points humanity back to God and true holiness.⁸⁹ Again, the seeds to seek redemption are re-implanted in the human soul through the grace of God. The desire of humanity is to return to the deformity – the godlikeness of holiness – that is constitutive of lasting happiness. Put differently, persons are only happy insofar as they possess the divine qualities which they were created reflect.

⁸³ Sermon 116, “What is Man?” §11, *Works*, 4:24.

⁸⁴ This grace-restored capacity is specifically attributed by Wesley as the work of the Holy Spirit, as will be explored in chapter five.

⁸⁵ See Sermon 105, “On Conscience” I.5, *Works*, 3:482. On this point, Wesley is adamant that conscience is *not* natural to fallen man: “For though in one sense it may be termed ‘natural’, because it is found in all men, yet properly speaking it is not *natural*; but a supernatural gift of God”

⁸⁶ *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part I, II.14, *Works*, 12:208.

⁸⁷ Sermon 135, “On Guardian Angels,” §1, *Works*, 4:225. Wesley suggests that God’s angels may help God’s fragile human creatures.

⁸⁸ See Sermon 133, “Death and Deliverance,” §7, *Works*, 4:209 – “The desire of happiness is inseparably [bound] to our nature, and is the spring which sets all our faculties a-moving.”

⁸⁹ See Sermon 134, “Seek First the Kingdom,” §11, *Works*, 4:221 and Sermon 138A, “On Dissimulation,” §III.1, *Works*, 4:259.

The Image of Satan: The Anti-Deification of Humanity

A striking image Wesley chooses to employ is the comparison of fallen humanity to the devil. Composing a picture of fallen human as the anti-image of God, Wesley contrasts the Image of God of humanity's original creation to the Image of Satan to which it has descended. This is a type of anti-deification, if you will, that highlights at once both the depth of depravity of sin, and the heights to which humanity was created to attain. It is a theme Wesley returns to consistently throughout his ministry to make various points. The early Wesley uses the satanic anti-image to point to the dire human condition and the need of salvation:

“He is sunk lower than the very beasts of the field. His soul is not only earthly and sensual, but devilish⁹⁰ the one thing now needful – to re-exchange the image of Satan for the image of God, bondage for freedom, sickness for health.⁹¹

In the middle to late Wesley, the Image of Satan is used to show the dynamic nature of humanity, capable of either deformity or its tragic reversal. Humans may have God dwell and transform them, or else be possessed and malformed by the devil, walking in those ways:

as God dwells and works in the children of light, so the devil dwells and works in the children of darkness ... transforming them into his own likeness, effacing all the remains of the image of God, and preparing them for every evil word and work.⁹²

[Having lost the knowledge and love of God, Adam] became unholy as well as unhappy. In the room of this he had sunk into pride and self-will, the very image of the devil, and into sensual appetites and desires, the image of the beasts that perish.⁹³

⁹⁰ Sermon 146, “The One Thing Needful,” I.2, *Works*, 4:354.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, I.5, *Works*, 4:355.

⁹² Sermon 38, “A Caution against Bigotry,” I.1-2, *Works*, 2:64-65.

⁹³ Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” I.2, *Works*, 2:189-90.

Satan has stamped his own image on our heart in *self-will* also ... so far we bear the image of the devil, and tread in his steps.⁹⁴

... not only deprived of the favour of God, but also of his image ... [humanity is] sunk partly into the image of the devil, in pride, malice, and all other diabolical tempers; partly into the image of the brute, being fallen under the dominion of brutal passions and groveling appetites.⁹⁵

Over and against these descriptions of anti-deification, Wesley returns in his later years to an emphasis on God's salvation and the possibility again to restore the Image of God: Being "born again," Wesley points out, is an "inward change ... from the image of the brute and devil into the image of God."⁹⁶ Wesley also encourages parents to teach their children about their original creation in the Image of God, their present state in the image which is "now like the devil,"⁹⁷ and ultimately to aim to have God as their end.⁹⁸ "Press upon all your children to 'walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us'; to mind that one point, 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him' [1 John 4:16]."⁹⁹

Hope for Fallen Humanity: The Salvation of God

Wesley is a theologian who takes the reality and devastation of sin seriously, and he is a theologian who views the image of God as humanity's glorious created potential and goal. Both are equally true for Wesley in all his writings, and both convictions temper how he addresses each facet of his theology. Salvation for Wesley must entail

⁹⁴ Sermon 44, "Original Sin," II.8-9, *Works*, 2:179.

⁹⁵ Sermon 59, "God's Love to Fallen Man," §1, *Works*, 2:423.

⁹⁶ Sermon 14, "Scriptural Christianity," III.2, *Works*, 1:351. See also Sermon 107, "On God's Vineyard," §9, *Works*, 3:507.

⁹⁷ Sermon 95, "On the Education of Children," §18, *Works*, 3:356.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, §21, *Works*, 3:359.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, §25, *Works*, 3:360.

humanity's redemption from the reality of sin *as well as* its renewed capacity for God.

The lens of the *imago dei* frames the original godlikeness of humanity's creation and the hope for restored godliness in its recreation and redemption.

As we see with the image of Satan above, humanity's godlike potential is tempered by the ungodly descent of its current constitution. Humans are poised between two extremes, and what was created to be our *natural* state and aim – growth in God's moral image – has been replaced with the *unnatural* norm of ungodly humanity, the image of Satan.

One helpful sermon to illustrate how Wesley navigates this tension within his theology is Sermon 9, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,"¹⁰⁰ The "natural" man, Wesley explains, is in a state of spiritual sleep:

State of a 'natural man.' This the Scripture represents as a state of sleep. ... For his soul is in a deep sleep. His spiritual senses are not awake. ... He has no conception of that evangelical holiness without which no man shall see the Lord; nor of the happiness which they only find whose 'life is hid with Christ in God'¹⁰¹

From this state of sleep, by grace humans can "awake" to the direness of their situation: "discern the real state he is in. Horrid light breaks in upon his soul."¹⁰² Wesley calls this newly awakened stage as being "under law."¹⁰³ Awakened sinners now see the sin in their lives and are aware of God's righteous law, but are helpless to obey. Their relation to God is fear, and they find themselves free only to sin.

¹⁰⁰ Sermon 9, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," *Works*, 1:248-66.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, I.1, *Works*, 1:251

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, §II.1, *Works*, 1:255.

¹⁰³ This corresponds to what Wesley elsewhere calls the "Covenant of Works." Obeying God's righteous law was in the created potential for Adam, but is an impossibility (without Christ!) for fallen humanity.

The Law points sinners ultimately to Jesus, and the restoration of their souls. Wesley calls this stage as being “under grace.”¹⁰⁴ The sinner finds that “heavenly, healing light now breaks in upon his soul,” Wesley explains, and “here end both the guilt and power of sin.”¹⁰⁵ Through Jesus, the moral image of God is restored, the law is fulfilled, fear gives way to love, and the power of sin is destroyed. Under grace, Christians enjoy the restoration of the Image of God.

Sermon 9 is illustrative of many of the theological convictions Wesley hopes to keep in tension. Sin and grace are both taken seriously, explaining humanity’s fallen “natural” spiritual sleep on the one hand, and the salvation of God that awakens sinners to their need of God on the other. In keeping with a conviction that Wesley especially articulates in his later ministry, God redeems broken human understanding and liberty, not overwhelming those faculties or forcing conversion, but *assisting* them by grace toward *freely choosing* a response of faith.¹⁰⁶ The law, while engendering fear and despair for fallen humanity, is also a good, pointing humanity to Jesus. And through Jesus, the righteousness and holiness of God (the moral image!) is now restored to believers. Thus the current state of redeemed humanity – “Under Grace” – is a restoration to the godlikeness of its original creation.

Another helpful sermon that is illustrative of Wesley’s soteriology is Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart.”¹⁰⁷ This early sermon in Wesley’s career demonstrates

¹⁰⁴ Likewise, this corresponds to what Wesley elsewhere calls the “Covenant of Grace.”

¹⁰⁵ Sermon 9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” III.3-4, *Works*, 1:261.

¹⁰⁶ See Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §11, *Works*, 2:489 – “He did not take away your understanding, but enlightened and strengthened it. He did not destroy any of your affections. ... least of all did he take away your liberty. ... he did not force you; but being *assisted* by his grace you, like Mary, *chose* that happy choice.” See also Sermon 68, “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels,” §4, *Works*, 2:553.

¹⁰⁷ Sermon 17, “Circumcision of the Heart,” *Works*, 1:393-414.

themes and ways of articulating salvation that prove consistent, and consistently revisited, throughout his career. “Circumcision of the heart,” a phrase Wesley gleans from Romans 2:29, is a scriptural shorthand for the inward work that God does within the soul. As such, it signifies “a right state of the soul,” which Wesley articulates as “a mind and spirit renewed after the image that created it.”¹⁰⁸ The sermon goes on to further parse out this new work of God in the mind and spirit. The renewal of the image of God, this circumcision of the heart, is a lived out “habitual disposition of the soul” which the scriptures term “holiness.”¹⁰⁹ Later in the sermon, Wesley defines circumcision of the heart along another trajectory, love:

[You have “steadfast faith” and “lively hope” ...] If thou wilt be perfect, add to all these charity: add love and though hast the ‘circumcision of the heart.’ ‘Love is the fulfilling of the law,’ ‘the end of the commandment’. ... It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. ... In this is perfection and glory and happiness.¹¹⁰

This points to a eudemonistic vision of the telos of God’s salvation for humanity:

One happiness shall ye propose to your souls, even an union with him that made them, the having ‘fellowship with the Father and the Son’, the being ‘joined to the Lord in one Spirit’ ... [whatever you do] be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole end as well as source of your being.¹¹¹

Union and Fellowship with God harken back to Adam’s paradisiacal happiness and intimacy with God. Thus salvation is nothing less than a full restoration of what was lost in the fall.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., §3, *Works*, 1:402.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., I.1, *Works*, 1:402.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., I.11, *Works*, 1:407.

¹¹¹ Ibid., I.12, *Works*, 1:408.

The Image of God: A Multifaceted Concept

There is much to unpack in Sermon 17 that is helpful in reading Wesley's entire corpus. Perhaps most helpful is how it illustrates Wesley's ease in using a cluster of related terms to describe God's salvation. The restored image of God stands alongside holiness, love, and circumcision of the heart as images and concepts to describe the new life found in God. These terms are used interchangeably by Wesley, and articulate the full salvation of God.

This point is especially helpful in understanding Wesley's depiction of salvation in his writings. Like different colors within a kaleidoscope, these core concepts of humanity's salvation are interspersed and juxtaposed in varying designs throughout Wesley's corpus. References to the restored image of God are ubiquitous in Wesley's corpus,¹¹² yet they take new meaning as they receive nuanced treatment as "spotless love,"¹¹³ "the revival of pure religion,"¹¹⁴ righteousness from God,¹¹⁵ sanctification,¹¹⁶ and the "end of religion" and cure for humanity's disease.¹¹⁷ The richness of Wesley's theology of the *imago dei* is made all the more evident in the interweaving concepts that further define the fullness of his meaning. The end of all religion is the Image of God in

¹¹² See Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," II.2-4, *Works*, 4:356-57 – The Image of God is the end of our creation and redemption; see also Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," §39, *Works*, 2:60. – "the glorious image of the Most High" is the goal of human salvation.

¹¹³ Sermon 15, "The Great Assize," IV.5, *Works*, 1:374.

¹¹⁴ Sermon 112, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel," II.17, *Works*, 3:592.

¹¹⁵ Sermon 22, "Sermon on the Mount, II," II.2, *Works*, 1:495. See also Sermon 33, "Sermon on the Mount, VIII," III.12, *Works*, 1:698.

¹¹⁶ Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," II.1, *Works*, 3:204

¹¹⁷ Sermon 44, "Original Sin," III.5, *Works*, 2:185.

one sermon; in another it is righteousness;¹¹⁸ in another “the life of God in the soul”;¹¹⁹ and in yet another the “centre” of religion is “entire love.”¹²⁰

A critical reading of Wesley might consider this an inconsistency within his theology; yet a close reading of his works reveals times when Wesley, like an artist painting a bouquet, places concepts together in ways that complement their meaning and enhance his overall vision of God and salvation.

And what is righteousness but the life of God in the soul, the mind which was in Christ Jesus, the image of God stamped upon the heart, now renewed after the likeness of him that created it? What is it but the love of God because he first loved us, and the love of all mankind for his sake? [It may] well may this be termed ‘the kingdom of heaven’; seeing it is heaven already opened in the soul.¹²¹

[According to the oracles of God, religion] lies in a single point: it is neither more nor less than love – it is love which ‘is the fulfilling of the law’, ‘the end of the commandment’ Religion is the love of God and our neighbor.¹²²

[Not harmlessness, ... not morality, ... not formality....] No: religion is no less than living in eternity, and walking in eternity; and hereby walking in the love of God and man, in lowliness, meekness, and resignation. ... He alone who experiences this ‘dwells in God, and God in him’ [1 John 4:16]¹²³

Taken together, the idea that the image of God is love is helpfully nuanced by passages that assert its righteous character; this love is not a mere feeling or emotion, but an active spring of action that produces holiness. This congeals perfectly with an understanding that love is active and just actions toward God and one’s neighbor. Wesley’s understanding that the kingdom of heaven begins now, *on earth*, is complemented by an

¹¹⁸ Sermon 134, “Seek First the Kingdom,” §6-7, *Works*, 4:219-20.

¹¹⁹ Sermon 80, “On Friendship with the World,” §3, *Works*, 3:128.

¹²⁰ Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” III.6, *Works*, 4:343. See also Sermon 102, “Of Former Times,” §11, *Works*, 3:448.

¹²¹ Sermon 21, “Sermon on the Mount, I,” I.1, *Works*, 1:481.

¹²² Sermon 84, “The Important Question,” III.2, *Works*, 3:189-91.

¹²³ Sermon 119, “Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith,” §18, *Works*, 4:57-58.

understanding that this love is manifested *here* in one's relationship with fellow humanity. What results is a rich and robust vision of the full image of God as is possible in redeemed humanity, not only eschatologically but also in this present life.

Christian Perfection: The Image of God in Fallen Humanity

It may at first stroke appear that Christian perfection, or entire sanctification, should be discussed in the section below, exploring the future possibilities of the *imago dei* and the *telos* of humanity. Yet, at its core, Christian perfection is a contentious doctrine of the Methodism precisely because of its assertion of the *present* perfection of Christians in this sin-fallen world. While it will be treated again in Chapter 5 alongside Wesley's pneumatology, it is fitting to point out how the doctrine fits into Wesley's understanding of fallen humanity at this point in our study.

The first point, rather anticlimactically, is how Wesley's vision of perfection fits seamlessly with his plethora of images and descriptions of the *imago dei*. A sampling of ways Wesley defines the term could easily define the *imago dei*, 'circumcision of the heart,'¹²⁴ holiness, or righteousness:

'Faith working by love' [Gal 5:6] is the length and breadth and height of Christian Perfection. 'This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loveth God love his brother also;' and that we manifest our love 'by doing good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith.' ... he is, like his Master, 'going about doing good.'¹²⁵

Perfection is] perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ See Sermon 83, "On Patience," §10, *Works*, 3:175. Indeed, Wesley himself speaks of entire sanctification in terms of the "circumcision of the heart" prophesied in Deuteronomy 30:6. See also Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," II.29, *Works* 2:120-21.

¹²⁵ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, §9, *Works*, 13:39.

¹²⁶ Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," I.9, *Works*, 2:160.

This is the sum of Christian Perfection: it is all comprised in that one word, love. The first branch of it is the love of God...it is inseparably connected with the second, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'¹²⁷

According to this Apostle, then, perfection is another name for universal holiness – inward and outward righteousness – holiness of life arising from holiness of heart.¹²⁸

While more will be said of Christian perfection later, it is striking at this juncture to notice the continuity of Wesley's vision of God's salvation across his works, and how that fits with the image of God that features so prominently in his theological anthropology.

The second point strikes at the very root of contention, namely the claim of perfection in *this life*. This world, this "great infirmary" for "wounded and sick" humanity, is the very locus where God is able entirely sanctify and perfect broken humanity!¹²⁹ Wesley's vision of human potential in this life, "the full image of God" as he sometimes puts it, requires nuance to be intelligible. Wesley explains that none are "so perfect in this life as to be free from ignorance," mistake, nor infirmities.¹³⁰ Given the present creaturely limitations on knowledge, there is no hope in this life for the perfection Adam enjoyed in Eden, for "from wrong judgments wrong words and actions will often necessarily flow."¹³¹ These mistakes and errors to which fallen humanity is vulnerable

¹²⁷ Sermon 76, "On Perfection," I.4, *Works*, 3:74

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.8, *Works*, 3:75.

¹²⁹ Sermon 109, "The Trouble and Rest of Good Men," Proem., *Works*, 3:533.

¹³⁰ Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," I.1-7, *Works*, 2:100-104.

¹³¹ Sermon 76, "On Perfection," I.1-3, *Works*, 3:72-73.

are not sins *per se*, but “innocent infirmities.”¹³² Moreover, those perfected in love might still, unwittingly, be source of temptation for others in this life.¹³³

What is particularly noteworthy in Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection is his commitment to the idea that the restoration of the *imago dei* is so central to God’s good intention for humanity that it is a present possibility. The moral image of God, holiness and righteousness, can fill even a broken human vessel with damaged natural faculties. This points to a commitment to the true godlikeness to which humanity is capable, and an understanding that God is actively at work to achieve godliness in God’s human creation even in their brokenness. If this is truly possible in this life, it begs the question of what union and fellowship with God is possible in the eschaton. To that great end we now turn our attention.

The Renewed Image of God: A Return to Deiform Doxology

By God’s free grace humanity was created in God’s image, and by God’s free mercy that image is restored.¹³⁴ The end of that redemption, like Wesley’s description of the image of God, is a constellation of biblical phrases and affirmations. Through Jesus, God is truly “our Father,” as we are made children of God by adoption and grace.¹³⁵ Images of filiation and adoption join affirmations of recovery of the image of God, the restoration of holiness, and having “the mind that was in Christ Jesus.”¹³⁶ Wesley

¹³² Sermon 82, “On Temptations,” I.3, *Works*, 3:160. Innocent, though they may be the source of temptation.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, I.6, *Works*, 3:161-62.

¹³⁴ Sermon 1, “Salvation by Faith,” §1, *Works*, 1:117-18.

¹³⁵ See Sermon 26, “Sermon on the Mount, VI,” III.4-5, *Works*, 1:578-79.

¹³⁶ For one place where Wesley articulates many of these ideas, painting a picture of the sanctified life, see Sermon 12, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” §16, *Works*, 1:310.

develops these ideas in both what Christ has done *for us*, as well as what the Holy Spirit does *in us*. Both these articulations of the redeemed life will be considered in subsequent chapters of this project. In this present section, we turn our attention to what might be said of Wesley's hope for redeemed humanity, both in this life and in the eschaton.

A Present and Future Reality

Wesley's understanding of salvation is never merely the attainment of heaven. There is a direct line of continuity between the Christian's life on earth and the ultimate perfection in heaven: "The great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, which is begun on earth but perfected in heaven, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped upon our hearts."¹³⁷ The goal of this progressive salvation is for humanity to live whole and full lives in God. Even for those who experience Christian perfection, there remains room for growth: "[The perfected] daily 'go' on 'from strength to strength'; beholding now as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."¹³⁸

A passage from Sermon 141, "The Image of God," gives an insightful vision of the nature of this progress, exploring the intersection between humanity's created potential in the *imago dei* and its creaturely fulfillment:

[Restored understanding] directs us to reform our will by charity. To root out of our souls all unmanly passions, and to give place to them ... to collect the scattered beams of that affection which is truly human, truly divine.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Preface, §4, *Works*, 13:43.

¹³⁸ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Preface, §5, *Works*, 13:43.

¹³⁹ Sermon 141, "The Image of God," III.2, *Works*, 4:300.

God's grace restores understanding, part of humanity's original constitution, to likewise reform the will by love. The trickle-effect of this restoration is not only a restoration of humanity, but insofar as humanity was created in the image of God, a restoration to humanity's full deiform nature. To be *truly human*, for creatures made in the image of God, is to be *truly divine*. It is noteworthy that Wesley describes transformation to godliness beginning in this life. By the end of his career, Wesley will even gesture toward possible advancement in holiness after death in "paradise," as Christians await the resurrection.¹⁴⁰

Advancement in Holiness/Godliness

Wesley, especially in his earlier writings, tends to speak of a return to humanity's original creation, a restoration to "its ancient perfection."¹⁴¹ Even in these early sermons, however, he considers whether angels might advance in "godlike virtue" as they perform "acts of benevolence" toward humanity.¹⁴² In Wesley's later sermons he applies this logic to God's entire human creation. Exploring the notion of *felix culpa*, Wesley speculates how the fall might have ultimately benefited humanity with greater opportunity for holiness and happiness:

We may now attain both higher degrees of holiness and higher degrees of glory than it would have been possible for us to attain if Adam had not sinned.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ See Sermon 132, "On Faith," §§5, 11, *Works*, 4:191, 196. "Paradise," or the ante-chamber of heaven, was Wesley's understanding of where souls await the resurrection after death. Despite similarities, he would have recoiled at the notion that his understanding of "paradise" resembled purgatory.

¹⁴¹ Sermon 136, "On Mourning for the Dead," §5, *Works*, 4:239.

¹⁴² Sermon 135, "On Guardian Angels," III.2, *Works*, 4:232.

¹⁴³ Sermon 57, "On the Fall of Man," II.10, *Works*, 2:411-12.

[Humanity] in general have gained by the fall of Adam a capacity of attaining more holiness and happiness on earth than it would have been possible for them to attain if Adam had not fallen.¹⁴⁴

As the more holy we are upon earth, the more happy we must be. ... Therefore the fall of Adam, first by giving us an opportunity of being far more holy; secondly, by giving us the occasions of doing innumerable good works which otherwise could not have been done; and thirdly, by putting it in our power to suffer for God ... may be of such advantage to the children of men, even in the present life, as they will not thoroughly comprehend till they attain life everlasting.”¹⁴⁵

Wesley even applies this speculation to God’s wider creation:

The whole brute creation will then undoubtedly be restored, not only to the vigour, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they every enjoyed.¹⁴⁶

For all the earth shall then be a more beautiful paradise than Adam ever saw¹⁴⁷

The *felix culpa* tradition, at least in the way that Wesley engages it, points to a humanity created with the ability to experience greater beatitude than its original creation. Holiness is constitutive of God’s divine nature; indeed, Wesley holds that holiness is the full image of God *in se*,¹⁴⁸ and part of the moral image of God reflected in God’s human creation. Humanity’s capacity to be holy as God is holy, thereby creates a channel for greater depth of holiness, for a greater share of godliness. As Wesley tied happiness and holiness together throughout his theology, this creates a logical ability for humanity to grow in holiness, and happiness, and ultimately godliness.

¹⁴⁴ Sermon 59, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” I.1, *Works*, 2:425.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II.10, *Works*, 2:431.

¹⁴⁶ Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” III.3, *Works*, 2:446.

¹⁴⁷ Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” §16, *Works*, 2:508.

¹⁴⁸ See Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” I.1.4, *Works*, 2:142. See also Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” III.1.4, *Works*, 2:194 – “What is holiness? “Not a bare external religion, a round of outward duties. ... No; gospel holiness is not less than the image of God stamped upon the heart.”

The Telos of Humanity

What is Wesley's understanding of human nature as it is ultimately perfected by its Creator? In the eschaton, what is the ultimate *telos* for humanity? The answer to these questions, like so many for Wesley, is multifaceted. We will explore in turn key ways that Wesley goes about answering these questions.

Enjoyment of God/Happiness. In Sermon 116, "What is Man?," Wesley pointedly asserts that humanity was "born for nothing else" but that we "may know, love, and serve God on earth, and enjoy him to all eternity."¹⁴⁹ This list of verbs match, as we discussed above, the created natural image of humanity's created constitution, and Wesley returns to this list, and ones like it, with regularity.¹⁵⁰

Happiness is almost always tied to holiness for Wesley, such that "the degree of our love is the degree of our happiness."¹⁵¹ As discussed above, Wesley's appreciation for the *felix culpa* swelled later in his career. He speculated that fallen humanity has opportunity for greater holiness than Adam; ergo, eschatologically redeemed humanity would likewise experience greater happiness.

Communion // Fellowship with God. There is no Christianity without communion with God, Wesley contends.¹⁵² Redeemed humanity enjoys true fellowship with God, even on earth; Wesley spoke of this fellowship as both a present and future reality:

¹⁴⁹ Sermon 116, "What is Man?" §15, *Works*, 4:26.

¹⁵⁰ See also Sermon 28, "Sermon on the Mount, VIII," §2, *Works*, 1:613; and Sermon 79, "On Dissipation," §20, *Works*, 3:124 – To see, love, serve, and glorify God were the goals of the Holy Club in Oxford.

¹⁵¹ Sermon 90, "An Israelite Indeed," I.2, *Works*, 3:283. See also Sermon 101, "The Duty of Constant Communion," II.5, *Works*, 3:432 – To be "happy like [God]" one must be "like him in holiness."

¹⁵² See Sermon 61, "The Mystery of Iniquity," §29, *Works*, 2:465.

O trust in him for happiness as well as for help. All the springs of happiness are in him. ... It is his love give a relish to all we taste, puts life and sweetness into all, which every creature leads us up to the great Creator, and all the earth is a scale to heaven ... [God's children] having fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, enjoy him I all and above all.¹⁵³

... happy and holy communion which the faithful have with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.¹⁵⁴

... constant communion with the Father and the Son, living in eternity and walking in eternity¹⁵⁵

“Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise. ... And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!”¹⁵⁶

Union in God // Dwelling in God // Fullness of God. Most intimately, Wesley's description of humanity's ultimate relationship takes on the language of mutual indwelling, union, and being filled with the divine. One sermon, for example, ends with a stanza that harkens to a marriage-like relationship between God and humanity reminiscent of Song of Solomon: “Come eternal King of Glory, // Now descend and take thy bride!”¹⁵⁷ These images titillate the imagination, pointing to an eschatological future that aligns humanity as closely to God as creaturely possible. Perhaps for this reason, Wesley especially loves to quote 1 John 4:16 and Ephesians 3:19 – to ground these visions in Scripture:

To love God, and to be loved by him, is enough. ... His Holy Spirit shall dwell in you. ... He shall fill you with peace, and joy, and love! Love, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person! Love which never rests, never faileth, but still spreads its flame, still goeth on conquering and to conquer, till what was but

¹⁵³ Sermon 28, “Sermon on the Mount, VIII,” §21, *Works*, 1:626.

¹⁵⁴ Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” §3, *Works*, 3:89-90.

¹⁵⁵ Sermon 107, “On God's Vineyard,” V.1, *Works*, 3:514.

¹⁵⁶ Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” §18, *Works*, 2:510.

¹⁵⁷ Sermon 124, “Human Life a Dream,” §18, *Works*, 4:119.

now a weak, foolish, wavering, sinful creature, be filled with all the fullness of God! [Ephesians 3:19]¹⁵⁸

What is the very root of this religion? It is Immanuel, God with us! God in man! Heaven connected with earth! The unspeakable union of mortal with immortal. For ‘truly our fellowship’ (may all Christians say) ‘is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.’¹⁵⁹

When we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us, we are one with Christ, and Christ with us; then we are completely happy...[then] we properly experience what that word meaneth, ‘God is love; and whosoever dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.’ [I John 4:16]¹⁶⁰

... a restoration not only to the favour, but likewise to the image of God; implying not barely deliverance from sin but the being filled with the fullness of God.¹⁶¹

Taken together, they once again reveal a theologian who pulls upon various images and metaphors to express his theological vision. The telos of humanity is a canvas that Wesley paints in colors of varying intensity. “To enjoy God” lacks the intimacy and intensity of Wesley’s bolder claims, but to ignore Wesley’s use of such descriptions would paint a biased picture of his theology. Yet, with that being acknowledged, one may stand back and admire the full mural of Wesley’s vision of the *imago dei*, and rightfully see a picture of the Creator and human creation united forever in intimate, holy union for eternity.

¹⁵⁸ Sermon 148, “A Single Intention,” I.11, *Works*, 4:377.

¹⁵⁹ Sermon 124, “Human Life a Dream,” §15, *Works*, 4:118.

¹⁶⁰ Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” II.6, *Works*, 3:96-97.

¹⁶¹ Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” III.5, *Works*, 2:482. See also Sermon 89, “The More Excellent Way,” §5, *Works*, 3:266.

Chapter 4

God the Son: Redeemer and New Adam

The last chapter explored Wesley's understanding of God as Creator and Loving Parent, looking in depth at the ways in which the *imago dei* establishes a foundational understanding of both God and humanity to make deification intelligible. With Wesley's theological anthropology and doctrine of creation considered, we now turn our focus to Wesley's Christology. Like the previous chapter, the goal is to allow the primary source material to guide this analysis, looking at where, and in what ways, the necessary Christological elements for an understanding of deification emerge within Wesley's theology.

Focus of This Chapter

The focus of this present chapter is to look at Wesley's understanding of the person and work of Christ. Deification requires an understanding of Christ not only as redeemer, saving humanity from sin, but also elevating humanity to a state capable of godliness and union with God. Historically expressed as the Exchange Formula,¹ the soteriological thrust is a robust Christology that demonstrates how Christ's incarnation and willing *kenosis* paves the way for all of humanity to have access to – and the fullness of – God. Or, to put it succinctly, Christ “exchanges” his divinity for the sake of humanity, so that humanity might be elevated to divinity; the Son of God becomes

¹ Note: “formula of exchange,” “Exchange Formula,” and *admirabile commercium* are often used interchangeably and express the same concept.

human, so that humanity might become the children of God. Wesley's Christology is the next important link in identifying any sustained understanding of deification within his theology. Thus, this chapter will explore Wesley's Christology in four major sections: 1) how Wesley broadly describes the salvation wrought by Christ; 2) the ways in which the incarnate Jesus serves as the New Adam in the Exchange Formula; 3) the way in which redeemed humanity is elevated to *imitatio dei* in the Exchange Formula; and 4) how Wesley grounds his Christology in ways to answer possible objections to a robust vision of the righteousness of redeemed humanity.

God the Son: Jesus and the Salvation of God

If the goal of this project is to consider Wesleyan theology on its own terms, it is helpful to see what broad themes emerge before turning to attention to how the Exchange Formula might frame Wesley's Christology. To this end this section will explore three major themes that emerge in Wesley's description of Christ's saving work for humanity: redemption from sin, restoration of the *imago dei*, and renewed relationship with God. Pertinent as a precursor to the Exchange Formula, these classic understandings of the work of Christ point to a robust vision of redemption that undergirds the Wesleyan vision of the exchange.

Christ Redeems from Sin

What becomes quickly apparent is just how orthodox Wesley's Christology is in both his sermons and treatises, as he utilizes the creedal affirmations of Christ's saving work. There are times, like Sermon 2, "The Almost Christian," where Wesley

paraphrases or quotes a line from the creeds: "...for our sakes he suffered a most painful death, to redeem us from death everlasting; that he rose again the third day; that he ascended into heaven."² In *A Letter to a Roman Catholic*, Wesley gives an extended quotation and paraphrase of the Nicene Creed, pointing to a shared orthodox Christology – and creed! – as a point of ecumenical commonality with Catholicism.³ At other times, Wesley simply asserts Christ's saving role in his own words:

Unto God the Father, who first loved us, and made us accepted in the Beloved; unto God the Son, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; unto God the Holy Ghost, who sheddeth the love of God abroad in our hearts, be all love and all glory for time and for eternity!⁴

Justifying faith implies ... a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for *my* sins, that Christ died for *my* sins, that he loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.⁵

The price whereby this [the forgiveness of all our sins and acceptance with God] hath been procured for us (commonly termed the 'meritorious cause' of our justification) is the blood and righteousness of Christ.⁶

[Justification was] given by God to *fallen man* through the merits and mediation of his only begotten Son.⁷

... the Son of God hath loved me and given himself for me; and that I, even I, am now reconciled to God by the blood of the cross.⁸

[Jesus is the] 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,' the glorious image of God wherein they were created: and all (who attain) 'are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; ... that he might be just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus'; that without any

² Sermon 2, "The Almost Christian," III.4, *Works*, 1:138.

³ See *A Letter to a Roman Catholic*, §7, *John Wesley*, 494-95. The creedal structure of Wesley's *Letter* reflects the fact that he is digesting John Pearson's work *On the Creed*.

⁴ Sermon 144, "The Love of God," III.8, *Works*, 4:345. This is a quotation from John Chrysostom, that Wesley is likely taking from Thomas Ken.

⁵ Sermon 5, "Justification by Faith," IV.2, *Works*, 1:194.

⁶ Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," I.2, *Works*, 2:157.

⁷ Sermon 6, "The Righteousness of Faith," I.7, *Works*, 1:206.

⁸ Sermon 7, "The Way to the Kingdom," II.10, *Works*, 1:230.

impeachment to his justice he might show him mercy for the sake of that propitiation.⁹

As these passages reveal, Christ's forgiveness is seen in both universal *and* personal terms, and is grounded in an understanding of God's loving and good intention for God's human creation.

Asserting Christ as the redeemer from sin, of course, is a common affirmation of Christianity. What is perhaps more elucidating is to see the themes that emerge from how Wesley speaks of Christ's saving work in Sermon 14, "The Repentance of Believers," a sermon from later in his ministry. Rather than speaking of initial forgiveness for new converts in the faith, Wesley argues that Christ's role as savior continues for believers:

Believe that he who is 'the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person', 'is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God through him'. He is able to save you from all the sin that still remains in your heart. He is able to save you from all the sin that cleaves to all your words and actions. He is able to save you from the sins of omission, and to supply whatever is wanting in you. It is true, 'This is impossible with man; but with [the] God-man all things are possible.'¹⁰

Christ's redemptive work is an on-going activity within the lives of believers. It is not merely forgiveness from the guilt of sin, but moreover a power *over* sin – a theme Wesley develops and nuances in his career.¹¹ Also characteristic of Wesley, this freedom from sin is a present possibility in this life, not only in the eschaton:

⁹ Sermon 35, "The Law Established through Faith, Discourse I," 1, *Works*, 2:20-21.

¹⁰ Sermon 14, "The Repentance of Believers," II.2, *Works*, 1:347.

¹¹ Immediately following Aldersgate, Wesley spoke boldly of sin being completely destroyed in believers. Soon thereafter, however, he admits that the root of sin remains, though it does not have *dominion* over a believer. This sermon reflects Wesley's mature stance, where he holds that the guilt and power of sin can be destroyed in the lives of Christians, but also allows that sin is still being rooted out even in 'altogether' Christians.

...[Jesus] is not only able but *willing* to do this – to ‘cleanse you from all your filthiness of flesh and spirit’... Believe therefore that he is willing to save you *today*. He is willing to save you *now*.¹²

The present salvation from sin is not meant to be a static status for the Christian. For Wesley the freedom from sin that Christ makes possible is followed by the continued empowerment of Christ to live in holy freedom:

Leaning on our Beloved, even Christ in us the hope of glory [See Col. 1:27], who dwelleth in our hearts by faith, who likewise is ever interceding for us at the right hand of God, we receive help from him to think and speak and act what is acceptable in his sight.¹³

Thus we have in this sermon a representative trajectory in Wesley’s orthodox understanding of Christ as savior. Beginning with the basic Christian conviction that Christ saves us from our sins, Wesleyan theology nuances this as Christ’s present work in believers, a work that entails not only freedom *from sin* but also freedom *to live for God*. This is the starting point for Wesley’s holiness theology, and is important to note now, as it will have implications on how Wesley views redeemed humanity below.

Christ Restores the Imago Dei

In the previous chapter we established the *imago dei* as an organizing doctrine of Wesley’s theological anthropology and soteriological vision. It is natural that Wesley ties the restoration of the *imago dei* explicitly to Jesus, the perfect image of God. A favorite Scripture for Wesley to quote is Hebrews 1:3, which establishes Jesus as “the outbeaming of his Father’s glory, the express image of his person.”¹⁴ As the perfect image of

¹² Sermon 14, “The Repentance of Believers,” II.3, *Works*, 1:348.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II.5, *Works*, 1:349.

¹⁴ Sermon 15, “The Great Assize,” II.1, *Works*, 1:359. See also Sermon 24, “Sermon on the Mount, IV,” §1, *Works*, 1:531 – “[Jesus is] ‘the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person’ ... yet so tempered and softened that even the children of men may herein see God and live.”

the invisible God, Jesus came that humanity might have the *imago dei* restored. In fact, Wesley's early sermon, "The One Thing Needful," paints this as the sole reason for Christ's incarnation:

[Recovery of the image of God] was the one end of our redemption; of all our blessed Lord did and suffered for us; of his incarnation, his life, his death. ... All these miracles of love were wrought with no other view than to restore us to health and freedom. ... For this only he lived, that he might heal every disease, every spiritual sickness of our nature.¹⁵

Just as the restoration of the "image of God" was the one thing needful for humanity, this was the goal to which Christ gave his life:

[The one thing needful] is simply to escape out of the snare of the devil, to regain an angelical nature; to recover the image wherein we were formed; to be like the Most High. This, this alone is the one end of our abode here; for this alone are we placed on the earth; for this alone did the Son of God pour out his blood¹⁶

Like Sermon 14 above, this sermon takes an ethical turn; the restoration of the *imago dei*, enabled by Christ, pushes the Christian to pursue godliness, or the "divine nature" to the "highest measure:"

Be it our one view in all our thoughts, and words, and works, to be partakers of the divine nature, to regain the highest measure we can of that faith which works by love, and makes us become one spirit with God.¹⁷

Based upon the work of Christ, the believer can have "one view" and live intentionally in ways that lead to becoming "one spirit with God."¹⁸

¹⁵ Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," II.3, *Works*, 4:356.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, III.1, *Works*, 4:358.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, III.3, *Works*, 4:359. As discussed in Chapter Three, "partakers of the divine nature" is a quotation of 2 Peter 1:4, a Scripture that is often cited in discussions of the biblical warrant for deification.

¹⁸ Later in life, Wesley would sometimes speak of this undivided focus in the believer as having a "single eye" towards God. Most notably, see Sermon 125, "On a Single Eye," *Works*, 4:120-30. This sermon was written in September 1789 and published in the *Arminian Magazine* in November and December 1790.

This early sermon is representative of Wesley's later writings as well. Being conformed to "the image of the Son" is tied to sanctification in this life,¹⁹ for example, and in other places attributed to the eschatological hope of humanity who will reflect with "highest resemblance" God's "glorious nature" when Christ returns:

'There shall be no more curse; but [...] they shall see his face,' shall have the nearest access to, and thence the highest resemblance of him. This is the strongest expression in the language of Scripture to denote the most perfect happiness. 'And his name shall be on their foreheads.' They shall be openly acknowledged as God's own property; and his glorious nature shall most visibly shine forth in them.²⁰

Godliness is both the present pursuit as well as the future hope for believers, made possible through the work of Christ. This is strong deific language that highlights the promised similitude to God that believers can expect eschatologically. Importantly, this ultimate godlikeness is the culmination of a resemblance that begins in this life.

Christ Renews Relationship with God

Salvation from sin and the restoration of the *imago dei* enables humanity to again reflect and relate to God. Wesley sometimes points in a general way to the fact that Christ came to make God known:

[The Father] gave us [Jesus], after he had freely given us all things, that his name might be known and glorified.²¹

Hereby the great Physician of souls applies medicine to heal *this sickness*; to restore human nature, totally corrupted in all its faculties. God heals all our atheism by the knowledge of himself, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; by

¹⁹ Sermon 58, "On Predestination," §9, *Works*, 2:418 – "It is generally allowed that the word 'justified' here is taken in a peculiar sense, that it means, he made them just or righteous. He executed his decree, 'conforming them to the image of his Son', or (as we usually speak) 'sanctified them'."

²⁰ Sermon 15, "The Great Assize," III.5, *Works*, 1:371. See also Sermon 124, "Human Life a Dream," §13, *Works*, 4:117 – "[We will] 'awake up after his likeness' now 'satisfied with it'" [a quotation of Ps.17:16 (BCP)].

²¹ Sermon 142, "The Wisdom of Winning Souls," §I, *Works*, 4:308.

giving us faith, a divine evidence and conviction of God and of the things of God – in particular of this important truth: Christ loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.²²

[God] then revealed himself to the children of men. ‘The Father revealed the Son’ in their hearts: ‘and the Son revealed the Father.’ ‘He that of old time commended light to shine in their hearts, and enlightened them with the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.’²³

[The restored] capacity of attending to God ... cannot be done till we are new creatures, till we are created anew in Christ Jesus. ... It is by this faith alone that he is ‘created anew in’ or *through* ‘Christ Jesus’, the he is restored to the image of God wherein he was created, and again centred in God, or as the Apostle expresses it, ‘joined to the Lord’ in ‘one Spirit’ [1 Cor. 6:17].²⁴

These general references to renewed relationship with God give way to more specific and intimate metaphors, such as filiation, adoption, or becoming the “sons” and “daughters” of God:

So St. Paul, ‘Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus’ [Gal 3:26]. So St. John, ‘Them gave them power’ ... ‘to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born’, when they believed, (‘not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh’, not by natural generation, ‘nor of the will of man’, like those children adopted by men, in whom no inward change is thereby wrought, ‘but) of God’ [John 1:12-13].²⁵

Such a sinner thou art! God is love; and Christ hath died. Therefore the Father himself loveth thee. Thou art his child. Therefore he will withhold from thee no manner of thing that is good.²⁶

This is properly the ground of a Christian’s joy. ... I am bought with the blood of the Lamb, and that believing in him, “I am a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.”²⁷

... every believer is ‘born of God’, ‘a new creature’, ‘sanctified’, has ‘a new heart’, has ‘Christ dwelling in him’ [Eph. 3:17], and is a ‘temple of the Holy Ghost’.²⁸

²² Sermon 44, “Original Sin,” III.3, *Works*, 2:184.

²³ Sermon 119, “Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith,” §11, *Works*, 4:53.

²⁴ Sermon 79, “On Dissipation,” §§7-8, *Works*, 3:118-19.

²⁵ Sermon 18, “The Marks of the New Birth,” I.1, *Works*, 1:417.

²⁶ Sermon 8, “The First-fruits of the Spirit,” III.4, *Works*, 1:246.

²⁷ Sermon 12, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” §16, *Works*, 1:309-10.

²⁸ “Thoughts on Christian Perfection” (1760), §11, *Works* 13:64.

... the Son of God begins his work in man by enabling us to believe in Him. He both opens and enlightens the eyes of our understanding In that day 'we know that we are of God,' children of God by faith, 'having redemption through the blood' of Christ, 'even the forgiveness of sins.'²⁹

The parental/filial image of restored family – adopted through grace – will be explored more fully in the next chapter on pneumatology, but it is important at this juncture to point out that the grounding basis of humanity's adoption as children of God is the salvific work of Christ.

Another image of the renewed relationship redeemed humanity has with God is tied to its mutual indwelling with Christ. The Johannine and Pauline scriptures that speak of being "in Christ," "dwelling in Christ," being "members of the body of Christ," and the like, all point to the ways in which the believer's union with Christ is union with the Father and the Godhead:

These, who 'have redemption through his blood', are properly said to be 'in him', for *they* 'dwell in Christ and Christ in them' [cf. 1 John 4:13]. They are 'joined unto the Lord in one Spirit' [1 Cor. 6:17]. They are engrafted into him as branches into the vine. They are united as members of their head, in a manner which words cannot express, nor could it before enter into their hearts to conceive.³⁰

Let nothing satisfy thee but the power of godliness, but a religion that is spirit and life; the dwelling in God and God in thee; the being an inhabitant of eternity; the entering in by the blood of sprinkling 'within the veil', and 'sitting in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus' [cf. Eph. 2:6].³¹

What is the very root of this religion? It is Immanuel, God with us! God in man! Heaven connected with earth! The unspeakable union of mortal with immortal. For 'truly our fellowship' (may all Christians say) 'is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.' 'God hath given unto us eternal life; and this life is in his Son.'

²⁹ Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," III.1-2, *Works*, 2:481.

³⁰ Sermon 8, "The First-fruits of the Spirit," I.1, *Works*, 1:235. See also Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," I.13, *Works*, 2:87 – "Christ dwells in thee," Wesley asserts, then asks provocatively, "thou in him?"

³¹ Sermon 33, "Sermon on the Mount, XIII," III.9, *Works*, 1:697.

What follows? ‘He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.’³²

‘That the Lord God might dwell in them’. This refers to a yet farther manifestation of the Son of God, even his inward manifestation of himself For he is then inwardly manifested to us when we are enabled to say with confidence, ‘My Lord, and my God!’ Then each of us can boldly say, ‘The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*’ [cf. Gal. 2:20].³³

The intimacy of this language goes far beyond that of relationship with a distant, though appeased, deity; through Christ the believer is ushered into a deep and intimate relationship with Godself. In union with Christ believers are true children of God by grace, dwelling in fellowship with the Trinity. Through Christ, believers can call God ‘Father’ as redeemed and adopted sons and daughters of God. Forgiven from sin, humanity is restored in the *imago dei* and equipped, through grace, to live for God. The crowning achievement of Christ’s redemption of humanity, however, is renewed relationship with God, and Wesley paints that new reality in the boldest language of scripture.

The Great Exchange: Incarnate Jesus as the New Adam

Taken together, Christ’s role as savior in the economy of God is expressed in rich diversity across Wesley’s corpus. In speaking of Christ rescuing humanity from sin, restoring the *imago dei*, and renewing relationship with God, Wesley articulates the historic creedal and biblical affirmations of orthodox Christology. In each area explored

³² Sermon 124, “Human Life a Dream,” §15, *Works*, 4:118.

³³ Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” II.7, *Works*, 2:480. The opening quotation is Ps. 68:18 (BCP).

above, Wesley describes a humanity that is not only restored but also elevated by the person and work of Christ. Significantly, this elevation is to greater similitude *to* and fellowship *with* God.

In this section we turn to the Exchange Formula as an organizing principle for understanding Wesley's Christology. Like the themes discussed above, the Exchange Formula is ubiquitous in Christian theology, though its most famous articulation comes from the pen of St. Athanasius: "God became man, that man might become god." It expresses the truth of the gospel by paradox, juxtaposing the *kenosis* or humility of Christ with the elevation of humanity to the fullness of God: Christ became sin that we might become the righteousness of God; Christ died that we might live; Christ became poor that we might have the riches of heaven; Christ humbled himself that we might be exalted.³⁴ Whether expressed in a short and pithy prose or lengthy treatise, theologians have utilized the Exchange Formula to express their understanding of the mystery of Christ's salvation for redeemed humanity. Significant for this project, the Exchange Formula has been used as a shorthand for *theosis*, emphasizing on the one hand the downward movement of God to reach humanity in the incarnation, and the deifying elevation of humanity to godlikeness as a result.

The focus of this section is to examine how Wesley speaks of this divine reversal within his writings. Though these two sides are not easily separated, we will focus our

³⁴ These expressions, of course, are rooted in scripture. The Exchange Formula has as its inspiration and foundation the exegesis of Scripture and proclamation of the Christian gospel.

attention first to how Wesley parses the first half of the exchange – Christ’s incarnation and *kenosis*.³⁵

The Exchange Formula in Wesleyan Garb

What emerges from the Wesleyan corpus is not a repeated short, pithy phrase that expresses the paradox of Christ’s saving work. Rather, a number of passages in Wesley’s middle and later writings express – in lengthier prose! – the ways in which Christ’s condescension led to humanity’s ascension and salvation. Wesley steeped these descriptions in the language of scripture, often quoting multiple passages to paint a full picture of Christ’s salvific work:

‘The gospel’ (that is, good tidings, good news for guilty, helpless sinners) in the largest sense of the word means the whole revelation made to men by Jesus Christ; and sometimes the whole account of what our Lord did and suffered while he tabernacled among men. The substance of all is, ‘Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners’ [cf. 1 Tim. 1:15]; or, ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end we might not perish, but have everlasting life’ [John 3:16]; or, ‘He was bruised for our transgression, he was wounded for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed’ [cf. Isa. 53:5].³⁶

Not that God (as was observed before) thinketh him to be what he is not. But as ‘he made Christ to be sin for us’ [cf. 2 Cor. 5:21] (that is, treated him as a sinner, punished him for our sins), so he counteth us righteous from the time we believe in him (that is, he doth not punish us for our sins, yea, treats us as though we were guiltless and righteous).³⁷

³⁵ In regard to the *kenosis* of Jesus, it is relevant to note that some Wesleyan scholars have noted that John Wesley is not as quick to speak of the humanity of Christ as his brother Charles. To that end, some have even questioned Wesley’s Chalcedonian convictions. For an orienting article detailing the stances of prominent Wesleyan scholars, see David A. Graham, “The Chalcedonian Logic of John Wesley’s Christology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20.1 (January 2018): 84-103. For a defense of Wesley’s Chalcedonian Christology, see Richard M. Riss, “John Wesley’s Christology in Recent Literature,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45 (Spring 2010): 108-29. And for an example of how Charles Wesley’s strong *kenosis* Christology may have practical application in ministry, see S. T. Kimbrough, *Radical Grace: Justice for the Poor and Marginalized--Charles Wesley's Views for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013).

³⁶ Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” II.8, *Works*, 1:229.

³⁷ Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” IV.5, *Works*, 1:196.

Yet again: the covenant of works required of Adam and all his children to *pay the price* themselves But in the covenant of grace, seeing we have nothing to pay, God ‘frankly forgives us all’; provided only that we believe in him who hath *paid the price for us*; who hath given himself a ‘propitiation for our sins, for the sins of the whole world’ [1 John 2:2].³⁸

God gave his Son, ‘his only Son, to the end that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Son of God, that was God of God, Light of light, very God of very God, in glory equal with the Father, in majesty co-eternal, ‘emptied himself, took upon him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’ [Phil. 2:7-8]. And all this he suffered not for himself, but for us men and for our salvation. ‘He bore all our sins in his own body upon the tree, that by his stripes we might be healed’ [1 Pet. 2:24]. After this demonstration of his love, is it possible to doubt any longer of God’s tender regard for man, even though he was ‘dead in trespasses and sins’?³⁹

These above passages point specifically to the forgiveness of sin – Christ took on sin and sin’s punishment, thus forgiving and acquitting guilty humanity. Wesley also expresses the Exchange Formula in terms of life and death; how Christ’s suffering and death paved the way for life and flourishing for humanity:

Here end both the guilt and power of sin. [The believer] can now say, ‘I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live...[cf. Gal. 2:20]⁴⁰

Can you say, ‘The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’? [cf. Gal. 2:20]⁴¹

‘He died for all that they who live’, all who live upon the earth, ‘might not henceforth’, from the moment they know him, ‘live unto themselves’, seek their own honour, or profit, or pleasure, ‘but unto him’, in righteousness and true holiness [2 Cor. 5:15].⁴²

The sum of all is this: the God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made. This he has proclaimed to them in his Word, together with the terms of

³⁸ Sermon 6, “The Righteousness of Faith,” I.13, *Works*, 1:209.

³⁹ Sermon 103, “What is Man?” II.7, *Works*, 3:460-61.

⁴⁰ Sermon 9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” III.4, *Works*, 1:261.

⁴¹ Sermon 119, “Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith,” §15, *Works*, 4:55.

⁴² Sermon 123, “On Knowing Christ after the Flesh,” §2, *Works*, 4:99.

salvation revealed by the Son of his love, who gave his own life that they that believe in him might have everlasting life.⁴³

Among other scripture, Galatians 2:20 emerges as a favorite phrase to succinctly and scripturally frame the exchange from life to death.

The New Adam

Keeping with his penchant for leaning on the language of Scripture, Wesley also frames Christ in the biblical metaphor of the Second Adam:

In the fullness of time he was made man, another common head of mankind, a second general parent and representative of the whole human race By the sin of the first Adam ... we all became 'children of wrath'; or, as the Apostle expresses it, 'Judgment came upon all men to condemnation.' Even so by the sacrifice for sin made by the second Adam, as the representative of us all, God is so far reconciled to all the world that he hath given them a new covenant.⁴⁴

According to Scripture the Christian religion was designed 'for the healing of the nations' for the saving from sin, by means of the Second Adam, all that were *constituted sinners* by the first.⁴⁵

Christ, the second Adam, is the fountainhead for a new humanity who is freed from the power of sin to live in a new covenant with God. Wesley also uses the metaphor of Christ as the second Adam to highlight the new life inaugurated by Christ's incarnation and death. A favored scriptural expression for this reality is 1 Corinthians 15:22, and Wesley often utilizes it to ground his description of what Christ's work accomplishes:

'As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive' [cf. 1 Cor. 15:22] – all who accept of the means which he hath prepared, who walk by the rules which he hath given them. All these shall by dying conquer the first death, and shall never taste the second. The seeds of spiritual death they shall gradually expel, before the earthly tabernacle is dissolved, that this too, when it has been taken down and thoroughly purged, may be rebuilt 'eternal in the heavens'⁴⁶

⁴³ Sermon 127, "On the Wedding Garment," §19, *Works*, 4:148.

⁴⁴ Sermon 5, "Justification by Faith," I.7-9, *Works*, 1:186-87.

⁴⁵ Sermon 61, "The Mystery of Iniquity," §31, *Works*, 2:466.

⁴⁶ Sermon 141, "The Image of God," III, *Works*, 4:299.

‘In Adam ye all died;’ in the second Adam, ‘in Christ, ye all are made alive’ [cf. 1 Cor. 15:22] Now ‘go on’ [Heb. 6:1] ‘from faith to faith’ [Rom. 1:17], until your whole sickness be healed, and all that ‘mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus’ [Phil 2:5].⁴⁷

In appointing the Second Adam to die for all who had died in the first: that ‘as in Adam all died, so in Christ all might be made alive’ [cf. 1 Cor. 15:22]⁴⁸

What is significant here is not only that humanity is gifted with new life through Christ, but the *nature* of this new life. Just as Christ’s saving humanity from sin was linked to Christ’s present work in believers, Christ as the second Adam inaugurates a new life where death is “gradually expelled” and believers attain the “mind of Christ.” Again, the Wesleyan emphasis that Christ’s work entails not only freedom *from sin and death* but also freedom *to obey and live for God* emerges.

In Wesley’s later writings, he leans into the *felix culpa* tradition to express the elevated station which Christ, the second Adam, raises humanity from the first: “the evil resulting from the former [Adam] was not as the good resulting from the latter [Adam], not worthy to be compared with it.”⁴⁹ Or, as he expresses it in another sermon, “We may now attain both higher degrees of holiness and higher degrees of glory than it would have been possible for us to attain in Adam had not sinned.”⁵⁰ While the *felix culpa* tradition

⁴⁷ Sermon 44, “Original Sin,” III.5, *Works*, 2:185. For a similar passage, see Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §12, *Works*, 4:174 – “And here we have need to take great care, not, on the one hand, to despise the day of small things, nor, on the other, to mistake any of these partial changes for that entire, general change, the new birth; that total change from the image of the earthly Adam into the image of the heavenly, from an earthly, sensual, devilish mind into the mind that was in Christ.”

⁴⁸ Sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” II.9, *Works*, 2:411.

⁴⁹ Sermon 59, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” §3, *Works*, 2:424. See also *ibid.*, I.1, *Works*, 2:425-26 – “So there would have been no room for that amazing display of the Son of God’s love to mankind.”

⁵⁰ Sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” II.10, *Works*, 2:411-12. Here, Wesley’s logic is that without sin, we would have never known God’s deep love as redeemer: “We might have loved God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Governor. But there would have been no place for love to God the Redeemer: this could have had no being. The highest glory and joy of saints on earth and saints in heaven, Christ crucified, had been wanting.”

always gestures toward speculative theology, it is important to note that the notion that fallen humanity was elevated by Christ's work is an on-going theme in Wesley's work that predates his latter articulation in this theological form.

Closing Thought

The nature of the Exchange Formula is that it is nearly impossible to talk about one side of the exchange without shifting to the other. So it has been in this section – to speak of Christ as savior is to speak of the humanity who is saved by his work; to speak of a second Adam is to speak of the redeemed humanity of which he is the fountainhead. In closing this section, I end with one of the passages where Wesley extols the love of Christ in worshipful awe:

‘Beloved, what manner of love is this’, wherewith God hath loved us! So as to give his *only Son!* In glory equal with the Father; in majesty co-eternal! What manner of love is this wherewith the only-begotten Son of God hath loved us! So as to ‘empty himself’, as far as possible, of his eternal Godhead! As to divest himself of that glory which he had with the Father before the world began!⁵¹

In a nutshell, this articulates perfectly the selfless love of Jesus, whose death and resurrected life form the foundation for the second part of the Exchange Formula – the forgiven and renewed life of redeemed humanity. To that end we now turn.

The Great Exchange: *Imitatio Dei* and Redeemed Humanity

Christ's suffering and death leads to a glorious new redeemed reality for humanity. For Wesley this no mere return to an Edenic existence, but rather an ushering

⁵¹ Sermon 59, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” I.5, *Works*, 2:428. Of interest, Wesley goes on to argue this as the basis for Christians’ love of fellow humanity: “If God *so* loved us, how ought we to love one another!”

in of a new way of life in Christ Jesus. After establishing the ways in which Christ is the foundation for salvation, Wesley's Christology takes a sharp and multi-faceted turn toward how forgiven humanity is capable of imitating Christ in holiness and righteousness. Jesus, the perfect Image of God, restores the *imago dei* in humanity and invites these newly adopted children of God into discipleship. Discipleship for Wesley is at its core an invitation to become like Jesus. To inwardly have the tempers and thoughts of one's life mimic those of Christ – "to have the mind of Christ" – and as a result to live as Christ lived – "to walk as Christ walked." Redeemed humanity is not only forgiven, but given the grace-empowered ability to imitate Christ. Imitation of Christ is nothing short than imitation of God; thus the *imago dei* gives foundation – through Christ's salvific work – to *imitatio dei*. Put differently, this Christification of believers to "have the mind of Christ" and "to walk as Christ walked" describes the deification of God's redeemed human children.

This ethical move toward describing humanity's potential for Christlikeness, and hence *godlikeness*, is explored through several biblical lens by Wesley. This section will explore those themes which emerge most often in Wesley's Christology: the imitation of God made possible by Christ, being crucified with Christ, and two images Wesley uses most often – having the mind of Christ and walking as Christ walked.

A God We Can Emulate: Imitatio Dei as a Wesleyan Emphasis

Sermon 139, "On the Sabbath," is a sermon early in Wesley's career that demonstrates how strongly, and early, the idea of *imitatio dei* takes shape in his

theological vision. Sabbath observance is not a mere duty, but a means to remind humanity of its created purpose:

[Humanity], being made in the image and for the imitation of God, should imitate him in this, in bestowing six days on the world pertaining to this world, and resting from all these works on the seventh, to retire to a better world. We see here the chief reason of this command, the great end for which it was given, even that man might learn to imitate God, to fulfill the purpose of his creation⁵²

Moreover, keeping this one commandment points to a larger vision of imitating God in all things:

... that they might ever be mindful of taking him for their pattern, not only in one particular, but in the general course of their lives, which after his example should be holy, just, and good It is the business of his life to imitate him in all things; to make God's mercy, justice, and holiness the pattern of all his thoughts, words, and actions.⁵³

To make it one's "business in life" to "imitate God in all things" points to an active agency in the lives of believers who must labor and strive for godliness; it is both a gifted potential from God and an invitation to actively attain God's likeness:

[By God's abundant kindness] he restores lost man to pardon and peace, and gives him the second, better life of holiness. That this his last, noblest gift may not be in vain, we must now especially work together with him; we must labour to conform ourselves to his likeness, to be holy as he is holy. We must make it our peculiar business to perfect his image in our souls, to bind mercy and truth about our neck, to write them deep on the tablet of our heart.⁵⁴

The restoration of the *imago dei* leads to a "second, better life of holiness," the *imitatio dei*.

Sermon 139 presents core tenets of a theology of ethical engagement that is based on the ability of redeemed humanity to serve and obey God, to reflect and imitate God's

⁵² Sermon 139, "On the Sabbath," I.2, *Works*, 4:270.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I.4, *Works*, 4:271.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III.1, *Works*, 4:275.

holiness and righteousness. Passages that speak of imitation of Christ are plentiful in Wesley's corpus:

'Be ye' Christians 'perfect' (in kind though not in degree) even 'as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' [Matt. 5:48] See a picture of God, so far as he is imitable by man! A picture drawn by God's own hand! Let us not rest until every line thereof is transcribed into our own hearts. Let us watch and pray and believe and love, and 'strive for the mastery', till every part of [the law of liberty] shall appear in our soul, graven there by the finger of God; till we are 'holy as he which hath called us is holy', 'perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect'!⁵⁵

Let him therefore 'learn of' him 'who was meek' as well as lowly.⁵⁶

The Son of God 'enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world' [cf. John 1:9], *showing* every man 'to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God' [Mic. 6:8].⁵⁷

And as he knows the most acceptable worship of God is to imitate him he worship, so he is continually laboring to transcribe into himself all his imitable perfections: in particular, his justice, mercy and truth, so eminently displayed in all his creatures.⁵⁸

Let all our actions spring from this fountain; let all our words breathe this spirit; that all men may know we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him to be lowly in heart.⁵⁹

Imitating Christ is not only geared toward acts of piety that engender greater love of God.

Wesley links imitating Christ to both love of God, and, as an outgrowth of that love, to love of neighbor. Sermon 91, "On Charity," links this love to fellow humanity directly with the new life made possible by Christ's death, expressing it, as we saw is Wesley's wont, with Galatians 2:20

But it must be allowed to be such a love of our neighbor as can only spring from the love of God. And whence does this love of God flow? Only from that faith

⁵⁵ Sermon 23, "Sermon on the Mount, III," III.13-IV, *Works*, 1:530.

⁵⁶ Sermon 52, "The Reformation of Manners," §III.10, *Works*, 2:316.

⁵⁷ Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," I.2, *Works*, 2:157.

⁵⁸ "Plain Account of Genuine Christianity" (1753), I.4-5, *John Wesley*, 184.

⁵⁹ Sermon 74, "Of the Church," §§23-24, *Works*, 3:54.

which is of the operation of God; which whoever has, has a direct evidence that ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself’ [2 Cor. 5:19]. When this is particularly applied to his heart, so that he can say with humble boldness, ‘The life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ [Gal. 2:20].⁶⁰

“The lover of mankind,” Wesley goes on to elaborate, “remembers him who suffered for us, ‘leaving us an example, that we might tread in his steps’ [cf. 1 Peter 2:21].”⁶¹

Love of God and love of neighbor, the two-prong command of Jesus in the gospels, is ubiquitous in Wesley’s theological writings and central to his understanding of the Christian life.⁶² It is integrally tied to his understanding of *imitatio dei*. In Sermon 99, “The Reward of Righteousness,” Wesley points out the similitude between acts of love done toward fellow humanity and God’s loving action for humanity. Following the steps of Jesus, these acts of human love “we may liken to divine” as they are a share in the “glorious work” of God:

... your blessed Master ‘left you an example, that you might tread in his steps’ [cf. 1 Peter 2:21]. Now you know his whole life was one labour of love How many things of a nearly resembling sort, ‘If human we may liken to divine,’ have been done, and continue to be done daily by these lovers of mankind. Let everyone then be ambitious of having a share in this glorious work!⁶³

Imitating the God of love is both living into the image of God in which humanity was created (*imago dei*), and participating in the life made possible by Christ in godlike imitation (*imitatio dei*). Insofar as believers imitate Christ in love to God and love of neighbor, their actions may truly be described as ‘divine.’

⁶⁰ Sermon 91, “On Charity,” I.2, *Works*, 3:295.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, §I.8, *Works*, 3:298.

⁶² See, for but one example, Sermon 134, “Seek First the Kingdom,” §7, *Works*, 4:220 – “... our Saviour comprises the whole duty of a Christian: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,’ with the whole bias of thy understanding, thy will, and thy affections; and, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor’, that is, every man, ‘as thyself.’”

⁶³ Sermon 99, “The Reward of Righteousness,” III.2, *Works*, 3:412-13.

Crucified with Christ: Cruciformity and Discipleship

Imitation of Christ entails following the example of the God who willingly emptied himself for the benefit of humanity; imitation of Christ necessarily invokes a cruciform discipleship that is willing to deny oneself in obedience to God. Cruciform discipleship is a biblical concept we see helpfully parsed in Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection” and Sermon 48, “Self-denial.” Together these texts bring to light how the believer is crucified with Christ in order to live the resurrected life offered to redeemed humanity.

In Sermon 40, the believer’s crucifixion with Christ is an end to living in sin.

Wesley utilizes an extended exegesis of Romans 6 to ground his argument:

[Those born again, Scripture says] do not ‘continue in sin’; that they cannot ‘live any longer therein’; that they are ‘planted together in the likeness of the death of Christ’; that their ‘old man is crucified with him, the body of sin being destroyed, so that thenceforth they do not serve sin’; that ‘being dead with Christ, they are freed from sin’; that they are ‘dead unto sin’, and ‘alive unto God’; that ‘sin hath not dominion over them’, who are ‘not under the law, but under grace’; but that these, ‘being made free from sin are become the servants of righteousness’ [Romans 6].⁶⁴

An end to sinful living is only part of what Wesley hopes to convey. Using Galatians 2:20, he points to both the death of sin in the believer (the ‘negative’ sense of the verse) and the life of virtue (the ‘positive’ sense of the verse):

Every one of these can say with St. Paul, ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me’ [Gal. 2:20] – words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as outward sin. This is expressed both negatively, ‘I live not’ – my evil nature, the body of sin, is destroyed – and positively, ‘Christ liveth in me’ – and therefore all that is holy, and just, and good.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection,” II.3, *Works*, 2:106.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II.25, *Works*, 2:118.

Wesley goes on to parse out the positive life of virtue attainable to the believer.

Following Jesus, this imitation may be a path of suffering, but it will result in the purification of all “sinful tempers”:

‘The disciple is not above his master.’ Therefore if I have suffered be content to tread in my steps. And doubt ye not then but I will fulfill my word: ‘For everyone that is perfect shall be as his master.’ But his Master was free from all sinful tempers. So therefore is his disciple, even every real Christian. ... He is purified from pride; for Christ was lowly of heart. He is pure from self-will or desire; for Christ desired only to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work. And he is pure from anger, in the common sense of the word; for Christ was meek and gentle, patient and long-suffering.⁶⁶

It is important to note that the basis of the new life of virtue is not mere asceticism.

Wesley roots *imitatio dei* in his Christology. It is *Christ’s crucifixion and death* that abolishes death and brings new life; it is Christ’s salvific work that give believers status as adopted children of God who are capable in the status and freedom they *have through Christ* to eschew sin:

But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons; that they might receive that ‘grace which is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’ [2 Tim. 1:10]. Now therefore they ‘are no more servants, but sons’ [cf. Gal. 4:7]. So that, whatsoever was the case of those under the law, we may safely affirm with St. John that since the gospel was given, ‘He that is born of God sinneth not’ [1 John 5:18].⁶⁷

By rooting the believer’s call to cruciformity in their adoption as children of God, Wesley is laying a groundwork to see such ascetic activities as an outgrowth of their life of faith and not as a type of Pelagian works-righteousness.

⁶⁶ Ibid., II.24-26, *Works*, 2:118-19.

⁶⁷ Ibid., II.10, *Works*, 2:109-10.

Sermon 48, in its direct discussion of self-denial, the emphasis is that cruciform discipleship is the way of the cross:

And everyone that would follow Christ, that would be his real disciple, must not only ‘deny himself’, but ‘take up his cross’ also. A cross is anything contrary to our will, anything displeasing to our nature. So that taking up our cross goes a little farther than denying ourselves.⁶⁸

If we do not ‘take up our cross daily’, we do not ‘come after him’, but after the world, or the prince of the world, or our own ‘fleshly mind’. If we are not walking in the way of the cross, we are not following him; we are not treading in his steps, but going back from, or at least wide of, him.⁶⁹

Wesley paints the picture in the starkest of terms. Without denying oneself or taking up one’s cross, you are not “fully” a disciple of Christ:

... he omits one or more, if not all, works of mercy and piety. Therefore his faith is not made perfect, neither can he grow in grace; namely, because he will not ‘deny himself, and take up his daily cross’. It manifestly follows that it is always owing to the want either of self-denial or taking up his cross that a man does not thoroughly follow his Lord, that he is not fully a disciple of Christ.⁷⁰

While Wesley was not always so pointed in his exhortation that believers be willing to suffer and deny themselves as part of their life of discipleship, a common element of his teaching on discipleship is the renunciation of anything which interferes with wholehearted obedience to God. Suffering, acts of asceticism, and eschewing one’s “self-will” to align one’s will to God are all aspects of discipleship that mirror Christ’s suffering, Christ’s self-denial, and Christ’s total obedience to the will of God. Insofar as a disciple is doing these actions out of a genuine love of God, that disciple is imitating the example of Christ and reflecting true godlikeness.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Sermon 48, “Self-denial,” I.7, *Works*, 2:243.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, §2, *Works*, 2:238-39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, II.6-7, *Works*, 2:248.

⁷¹ As one may recall from chapter two of this project, the believer reflecting God’s kenosis in Christ is what Gorman calls Christification.

The Mind of Christ and Walking as Jesus Walked: Inward and Outward Holiness

Two of Wesley's favored scriptural images for the imitation of Christ are 1) having "the mind of Christ," a quotation from Philippians 2:5 (though he nuanced this with other scriptures as we will see below); and, 2) "walking as Christ walked," a quotation from I John 2:6.⁷² Both phrases are found throughout Wesley's writings, and at first blush it may seem artificial to divide images of having the 'mind of Christ' and 'walking as Christ walked' when they are often so united in Wesley's own writing. Indeed, in Wesley's later writings, the two are commonly linked with little commentary.⁷³ Wesley's tract *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766), however, is helpful in showing how indispensably connected the two ideas run in Wesley's theology, as well as the nuanced meaning Wesley gives them in the *imitatio dei*:

Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having 'the mind which was in Christ', and of walking as Christ also walks'; even of having, not *some part* only, but *all* the mind which as in him, and of walking as he walked, not only in *many*, or in *most* respects, but in *all* things. And this was the light wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as an *uniform* following of Christ, and *entire* inward and outward conformity to our Master.⁷⁴

Imitation of the God involves both *inward* and *outward* conformity to Christ. Outward righteousness, or 'walking as Christ,' is the outgrowth of inward righteousness, or having

⁷² Though it harkens to other scripture as well, which Wesley at times utilized. See, for example, Sermon 12, "The Witness of Our Own Spirit," §1, *Works*, 1:300 – "He that followeth me', saith our Lord, 'walketh not in darkness' [cf. John 8:12]. And while he hath the light he rejoiceth therein. 'As he hath received the Lord Jesus Christ, so he walketh in him'" [cf. Col. 2:6].

⁷³ For examples, see Sermon 61, "The Mystery of Iniquity," §32, *Works*, 2:467; Sermon 108, "On Riches," §4, *Works*, 3:520; Sermon 74, "Of the Church," §21, *Works*, 3:53; and Sermon 67, "On Divine Providence," §18, *Works*, 2:543.

⁷⁴ *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, as Believed and Taught by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, from the Year 1725 to 1765* (1766), §5, *Works*, 13:137. Wesley attributes this insight to the year 1727, when he stopped reading and began *studying* the Bible.

‘the mind of Christ.’ In both his middle and latter career there are times he nuances these distinctions more clearly:

[They were filled with the H.S. to give them] ‘the mind which was in Christ’, those holy ‘fruits of the Spirit’ which whosoever hath not ‘is none of his’; ... to fill them with ‘faith’ ... to enable them to ‘crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts’, its passion and desires; and, in consequence of that *inward change*, to fulfil all *outward* righteousness, ‘to walk as Christ also walked’ [1 John 2:6], in the ‘work of faith, the patience of hope, the labour of love’ [1 Thess. 1:3].⁷⁵

By the due use of reason we come to know what are the tempers implied in inward holiness, and what it is to be outwardly holy, holy in all manner of conversation – in other words, what is the mind that was in Christ [see Phil 2:5], and what it is to walk as Christ walked [See 1 John 2:6].⁷⁶

[Born of the Spirit, there is not only an outward] but an inward change, from all unholy to all holy tempers, from pride to humility, from passionateness to meekness, from peevishness and discontent to patience and resignation – in a word, from an earthly, sensual, devilish mind to the mind that was in Christ Jesus [cf. Phil. 2:5].⁷⁷

[The whole armor of God is] universal holiness. See that ‘the mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus’ [cf. Phil. 2:5], and that ye ‘walk as Christ also walked’ [1 John 2:6]; that ye have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.⁷⁸

[The Oxford club attended to these truths:]
That without holiness no man shall see the Lord;
That this holiness is the work of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do;
That he doth it of his own good pleasure, merely for the merits of Christ;
That this holiness is the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ also walked.⁷⁹

Taken together, these passages demonstrate that having ‘the mind of Christ’ and ‘walking as Christ walked’ form two sides of a holistic understanding of holiness of heart and life.

Imitation of Christ – which is, by extension, *imitatio dei* – is both about inward and

⁷⁵ Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” §4, *Works*, 1:160-61.

⁷⁶ Sermon 70, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” I.7, *Works*, 2:592.

⁷⁷ Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” I.6, *Works*, 3:506.

⁷⁸ Sermon 72, “Of Evil Angels,” III.1, *Works*, 3:27.

⁷⁹ Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §13, *Works*, 2:491.

outward change in the believer, a changed mind and walk that mirrors the mind and walk of Christ.

The Mind of Christ in Detail

In considering the ‘mind of Christ’ specifically in Wesley’s writings, it is important to note that he weaves together several key scriptures that refer to the mind of Christ in addition to Philippians 2:5, including Ephesians 4:23 and 2 Corinthians 10:5 –

[Circumcision of the heart consists in] that habitual disposition of the soul which in the Sacred Writings is termed ‘holiness,’ and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, ‘from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit’, and by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus, the being so ‘renewed in the image of our mind’ [cf. Eph. 4:23] as to be ‘perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect’ [cf. Matt. 5:48].⁸⁰

[Through faith] ‘and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringeth into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ’ [2 Cor. 10:5].⁸¹

O ‘let’ there be ‘in you that lowly mind which was in Christ Jesus’ [Phil. 2:5]. And ‘be ye clothed’ likewise ‘with humility’ [1 Peter 5:5].⁸²

Together these biblical passages point to an interior ‘mind’ of holiness that is a direct imitation of the interior tempers and intention of Christ. This inward change is the starting point of true imitation of Christ:

... ‘serving God’ is to resemble or imitate him
We here speak of imitating or resembling him in the spirit of our minds [See Eph. 4:23]. For here the true Christian imitation of God begins. God is a spirit; and they that imitate or resemble him must do it in spirit and in truth.
Now God is love; therefore they who resemble him in the spirit of their minds are transformed into the same image. They are merciful even as he is merciful. Their soul is all love. They are kind, benevolent, compassionate, tender-hearted

⁸⁰ Sermon 17, “Circumcision of the Heart,” I.1, *Works*, 1:402-03.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, I.6, *Works*, 1:405.

⁸² “Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies” (1762), I, *Works*, 13:84. See also Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” §4, *Works*, 3:201-02 – Wesley here gives a careful exegesis of Philippians 2 and the humility of Christ.

Yea, they are, like him loving unto every man, and their mercy extends to all his works.⁸³

The direction of this passage shows the direction of *imitatio dei* – the temper that ruled prelapsarian humanity, made in the *imago dei*, is love. Having the ‘mind of Christ’ is a restoration of both the image and love of God:

And what is righteousness but the life of God in the soul, the mind which was in Christ Jesus, the image of God stamped upon the heart, now renewed after the likeness of him that created it? What is it but the love of God because he first loved us, and love of all mankind for his sake?⁸⁴

Righteousness (as was observed before) is the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus. It is every holy and heavenly temper in one; springing from as well as terminating in the love of God as our Father and Redeemer, and the love of all men for his sake.⁸⁵

[Being born in the Spirit] there is in that hour a general change from inward sinfulness to inward holiness. The love of the creature is changed into the love of the Creator, the love of the world into the love of God. Earthly desires, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life, are in that instant changed by the mighty power of God into heavenly desires. The whirlwind of our will is stopped in its mid-career, and sinks down into the will of God. Pride and haughtiness subside in to lowliness of heart; as does anger, with all turbulent and unruly passions, into calmness, meekness, and gentleness. In a word, the earthly, sensual, devilish mind gives place to ‘the mind that was in Christ Jesus’.⁸⁶

The love of God – which Wesley equates as the ‘mind of Christ’ – does not terminate in God, but rather pours out in love and service to fellow humanity, the love of neighbor.⁸⁷

⁸³ Sermon 29, “Sermon on the Mount, IX,” §6, *Works*, 1:635-36.

⁸⁴ Sermon 21, “Sermon on the Mount, I,” §11, *Works* 1:481.

⁸⁵ Sermon 22, “Sermon on the Mount, II,” II.2, *Works*, 1:495.

⁸⁶ Sermon 83, “On Patience,” §9, *Works*, 3:174. Wesley goes on to describe entire sanctification, which is not a new *kind* of holiness, he argues, but a different *degree* of holiness.

⁸⁷ See also Sermon 114, “On the Death of John Fletcher,” I.3, *Works*, 3:613 – “And loving God, he loves his brother also; his goodwill extends to every child of man By this, as well as by the fruits of love – lowliness, meekness, and resignation – he shows that there is the same ‘mind in him which was in Christ Jesus’.”

In this we see an inward consistency in how Wesley consistently portrays the Christian life. It is both inward and outward holiness, love directed to God and humanity.

The goal of the imitation of Christ is for the believer to be fully submitted to Christ; to have Christ rule as God and King more and more in the life of the believer. This becomes a *Christus victor* theme of holiness in the life of faith, having Christ reign in the inner dispositions of the believers whom he has saved by faith. Wesley often utilizes 2 Corinthians 10:5 to express the idea of the mind where Christ “reign[s] without a rival:”

... ‘bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ’ [cf. 2 Cor. 10:5]. Let God have the sole dominion over you. Let him reign without a rival. Let him possess all your heart, and rule alone.⁸⁸

As ‘this is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent’, so it is the kingdom of God begun below, set up in the believer’s heart. The Lord God omnipotent then reigneth, when he is known through Christ Jesus. He taketh unto himself his mighty power; that he may subdue all things unto himself. He goeth on in the soul conquering and to conquer, till he hath put all things under his feet, till ‘every thought’ is ‘brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ’ [cf. 2 Cor. 10:5].⁸⁹

... no man is a partaker of Christ until he can clearly testify, ‘The life which I now live ... I live by faith in the Son of God,’ in him who is now *revealed* in my heart, ‘who loved me, and gave himself for me’ [Gal. 2:20]. It is by faith that beholding ‘the light of ... the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ we perceive, as in a glass, all that is in ourselves, yea, the inmost motions of our souls. And by this alone can that blessed love of God be ‘shed abroad in our hearts’, which enables us so to love one another as Christ loved us. By this is that gracious promise fulfilled unto all the Israel of God, ‘I will put my laws into their minds, and write (or engrave them in their hearts;’ hereby producing in their souls an entire agreement with his holy and perfect law, and ‘bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ’ [2 Cor. 10:5].⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Sermon 29, “Sermon on the Mount, IX,” §20, *Works*, 1:642.

⁸⁹ Sermon 26, “Sermon on the Mount, VI,” III.8, *Works*, 1:581-82.

⁹⁰ Sermon 12, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” §8, *Works*, 1:304-05.

Till this universal change is wrought in his soul, all his holiness was *mixed* After being filled with love, there is no more interruption of it than of the beating of his heart. And continual love bringing continual joy in the Lord, he rejoices evermore. He converses continually with the God whom he loves, unto whom in everything he gives thanks. And as he now loves God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength, so Jesus now reigns alone in his heart, the Lord of every motion there.⁹¹

It is not surprising that this total surrender to Christ, this inward holiness that is both a restoration of the *imago dei* and a filling of the heart with love, is also one of the ways Wesley articulates his understanding of Christian perfection:

Another view of [perfection] is given us in those words of the great Apostle, ‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.’ For although this immediately and directly refers to the humility of our Lord, yet it may be taken in a far more extensive sense, so as to include the whole disposition of his mind, all his affections, all his tempers, both toward God and man.⁹²

While inward holiness in but part of the holistic holiness Wesley expressed was possible – and necessary! – for believers, it is the inner springs from which outward holiness flow.

One final point that is important to note in how Wesley describes attaining the ‘mind of Christ’ is that it is not a static condition. As a believer imitates Christ, that believer is able to grow in the image and likeness of God, becoming more and more like Jesus:

While thou sleekest God in all things thou shalt find him in all, the fountain of all holiness, continually filling thee with his own likeness, with justice, mercy, and truth. While thou lookest unto Jesus and him alone thou shalt be filled with the mind that was in him [Phil. 2:5]. Thy soul shall be renewed day by day after the image of him that created it Then as though beholdest the glory of the Lord thou shalt be ‘transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord’ [2 Cor. 3:18].⁹³

⁹¹ Sermon 83, “On Patience,” §10, *Works*, 3:176.

⁹² Sermon 76, “On Perfection,” I.5, *Works*, 3:74. See also Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” §22, *Works*, 4:70 – “This is religion, even the whole mind which was also in Christ Jesus.”

⁹³ Sermon 28, “Sermon on the Mount, VIII,” §4, *Works*, 1:614.

As our knowledge and our love of him increase by the same degrees, and in the same proportion, the kingdom of an inward heaven must necessarily increase also; while we ‘grow up in all things into him who is our head’ [Eph. 4:15]. And when we are ... ‘complete in him’ as our translators render it – but more properly when we are ‘filled with him’; when ‘Christ in us, the hope of glory’ [cf. Col. 1:27], is our God and our all; when he has taken full possession of our heart; when he reigns therein, without a rival, the Lord of every motion there; when we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, we are one with Christ, and Christ with us; then we are completely happy; then we live all ‘the life that is hid with Christ in God’ [cf. Col. 3:3] Then, and not till then, we properly experience what that word meaneth, ‘God is love; and whosoever dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him’ [1 John 4:16].⁹⁴

Moreover, this growth in Christlikeness is not an imitation that is doomed for the believer to strive for as a mere shadow of Christ; a striving after the wind that is an endless pursuit of an impossible ideal. Indeed, Wesley paints this growth in godliness as potentially achieving its goal, which is in essence the thrust of his doctrine of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. When not speaking of that doctrine in particular, he will claim the attainment of godliness as a biblical promise, especially quoting Ephesians 4:13 of a believer becoming the “perfect man” and attaining the “stature of the fullness of Christ:”

...a salvation from sin and the consequences of sin, both often expressed in the word ‘justification’, which, taken in the largest sense, implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on him, and a deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ ‘formed in his heart’ [cf. Gal. 4:19]. [Born again from babe in Christ] ‘until at length he come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ [cf. Eph. 4:13].⁹⁵

[Pastors should be] “training them up in inward and outward holiness, ‘until they come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’” [cf. Eph. 4:13].⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” §6, *Works*, 3:96-97.

⁹⁵ Sermon 1, “Salvation by Faith,” II.7, *Works* 1:124-25.

⁹⁶ Sermon 97, “On Obedience to Pastors,” I.4, *Works*, 3:376.

Wesley will in his later writings paint this attainment of deeper godliness as moving from having the faith of a *servant* to having the faith of a *son*. The faith of the servant is servile and motivated by fear, but the faith of a son is free and motivated by love. To have the latter faith is to have the mind of Christ:

He will then have ‘Christ revealed in his heart’ [cf. 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 3:17], enabling him to testify, ‘The life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*’ [Gal. 2:20] --- the proper voice of a child of God. He will then be ‘born of God’ and inwardly changed by the mighty power of God from ‘an earthly, sensual, devilish’ [Jas. 3:15] mind to ‘the mind which was in Christ Jesus’⁹⁷

In yet another way of articulating his meaning, Wesley will paint the image of two types of Christians, those who are content with the form of godliness and bare essentials of the faith, and a second order of Christians who seek to walk like Christ in all ways and are “filled with the fullness of God:”

The other sort of Christians not only abstain from all appearance of evil, were zealous of good works in every kind, and attended all the ordinances of God; but likewise used all diligence to attain the whole mind that was in Christ [see 1 Cor. 2:16, and Phil 2:5], and labored to walk in every point as their beloved Master. In order to this they walked in a constant course of universal self-denial They took up their cross daily. They strove, they agonized without intermission, to enter in at the strait gate. This one thing they did; they spared no pains to arrive at the summit of Christian holiness: ‘leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, to go on to perfection’ [cf. Heb. 6:1]; ‘to know all that love of God which passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fullness of God’ [cf. Eph. 3:19].⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Sermon 117, “On the Discoveries of Faith,” §14, *Works*, 4:35-36.

⁹⁸ Sermon 89, “The More Excellent Ways,” §5, *Works*, 3:265-66. His earlier Sermon 2, “The Almost Christian,” paints a division between *altogether* Christians, who are truly Christians, and *almost* Christians, who are Christians in name only. This later sermon does not paint the picture in such stark terms – both first order and second order Christians are *Christians*, though only the second order enjoy the fullness of the Christian life. See *Works*, 1:131-41.

Together, these passages reveal a robust hope for redeemed humanity, elevated to a similitude to Christ that, without stretching Wesley's intended meaning, is both godly and divine-like as it is a full reflection of the Master whom they emulate.

Closing Thought

The second half of the exchange paints a rich picture of a redeemed humanity that is not only forgiven, but restored to rich relationship with God. Through Christ, believers are able to imitate their Master, gaining the "mind of Christ" such that they "walk as Christ walked." This renewal of inward and outward holiness is a restoration of the *imago dei*; the *imitatio dei* ultimately points humanity back to a fully restored *imago dei*. Or, to frame it in the language of exchange: Christ, the full Image of God, became truly human, that humanity, made in the image of God, might become truly divine. No such articulation is found so succinctly phrased in the Wesleyan corpus, yet consistently in his depiction of redeemed humanity Wesley paints a picture of Christians who emulate Christ and grow in their Christlikeness. Being a perfect "man," as we see above, is equated to most fully reflecting Christ; growth in the Christian life is the Christification of the believer. And while Wesley never coins that particular word in his description of sanctification, his Christology points to a humanity that is most fully human when it reflects the full humanity/divinity exhibited by Christ.

Graced Exchange: Godlikeness Rooted in Christology

Having explored Wesley's vision for the new status of redeemed humanity through the lens of the Exchange Formula, it is appropriate now to point out the ways in

which Wesley nuances the exalted status of humanity. While capable of *imitatio dei* and growth in Christlikeness and godliness, the believer is still fully dependent upon Jesus for these to become realities in the believer's life. That is to say, this ascent toward godliness remains rooted in a rich understanding of God's grace. It is a *graced* Exchange that is neither automatically applied to all of humanity, nor intelligible outside of a robust Christology that seeks to carefully differentiate the righteousness of Christ that is the foundation of Wesley's soteriology, and the righteousness of humanity that is predicated upon it. This section will briefly seek to establish how Wesley navigates these two understandings in his theology.

The Righteousness of Christ

For all the ways that Christ makes God known and assessible to humanity – the first half of the exchange formula, if you will – there are also the ways in which redeemed humanity embraces God and lives in the righteousness and image of God – the appropriation of the divine life that forms the latter half of the exchange. Wesley seeks to carefully nuance how to speak of the righteousness of Christ alongside his emphasis on personal holiness and righteousness within believers. Sermon 20, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” is particularly helpful in seeing how Wesley navigates these two understandings. Early in the sermon, affirming both the full humanity and full divinity of Christ, Wesley interestingly differentiates between Christ's divine and human righteousness:

His divine righteousness belongs to his divine nature Now this is his eternal, essential, immutable holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth: in all which

‘he and the Father are one.’ ... Whoever believes the doctrine of imputation understands it chiefly, if not solely, of his human righteousness.⁹⁹

The *human righteousness* of Christ belongs to him in his human nature This is either *internal* or *external*. His internal righteousness is the image of God stamped on every power and faculty of his soul. It is a copy of his divine righteousness, as far as it can be imparted to a human spirit. It includes love, reverence, resignation to his Father; humility, meekness, gentleness; love to lost mankind, and every other holy and heavenly temper: and all these in the highest degree, without any defect, or mixture of unholiness It was the least part of his *external righteousness* that he did nothing amiss; that he knew no outward sin of any kind. ... He never spoke one improper word, nor did one improper action [*negative* righteousness]. But even his outward righteousness was *positive* too. ‘He did all things well’ [cf. Mark 7:37].¹⁰⁰

Human righteousness, of course, is different than the totality of God, or divine righteousness. At the same time, Wesley affirms that this is not a radically different *kind* of righteousness, it only differs in that it is assessable to humanity as a creature of God: “It is a copy of his divine righteousness, as far as it can be imparted to a human spirit.” As we saw earlier in Chapter Three, one historic way to distinguish between the full divinity of God that is proper to God’s self and the divinity of God in which God’s creation can participate has been to differentiate between God’s *essence* and God’s *energies*. This passage perhaps comes the closest to expressing this idea in Wesleyan garb.

Sermon 20 also gives voice to how Wesley articulates the imputed righteousness of Christ – that righteousness that is proper only to Christ, and yet is graciously “imputed” to humanity vicariously through Christ’s life, death and resurrection.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Sermon 20, “The Lord our Righteousness,” I.1, *Works*, 1:452.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, I.2-3, *Works*, 1:452-53.

¹⁰¹ This sermon also addresses the key distinction between Christ’s passive (imputed) and active righteousness (imparted). This was a major point of conflict between Lutherans and Calvinists, who stressed Christ’s passive righteousness (and hence imputed righteousness), and Anglicans who sought to avoid separating the two (and hence also emphasized imparted righteousness, as the Spirit empowered

Wesley points out that this imputation of righteousness is the gift of God to believers, not the result of prior works:

‘But when is it imputed?’ When they believe. In that very hour the righteousness of Christ is theirs.¹⁰²

‘But in what sense is this righteousness imputed to believers?’ In this: all believers are forgiven and accepted, not for the sake of anything in them, or of anything that ever was, that is, or ever can be done by them, but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for them.¹⁰³

Imputed righteousness links righteousness within believers directly to Christ’s salvific work. It differs from imparted, or inherent righteousness, that describes the actual righteousness that believers cultivate in their own lives through God’s grace. Wesley also holds on to this teaching, which he elaborates later in the sermon:

‘But do not you believe *inherent* righteousness?’ Yes, in its proper place; not as the *ground* of our acceptance with God, but as the fruit of it; not in the place of *imputed* righteousness, but as consequent upon it. That is, I believe God *implants* righteousness in every one to whom he has *imputed* it. ... They to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed are made righteous by the spirit of Christ, are renewed in the image of God ‘after the likeness wherein they were created, in righteousness and true holiness’ [Eph. 4:24].¹⁰⁴

It should be noted here how Wesley again attributes inherent/imparted righteousness also to God’s grace. God “*implants* righteousness in every one to whom [God] has *imputed*

possible growth of the holy tempers). See *ibid.*, footnote 30, *Works*, 1:453, for a more detailed discussion. Wesley steers clear of digressing into this point of theological controversy in this sermon, but he does reflect his Anglican convictions: “But his obedience implied more than all this. It implied not only doing, but suffering: suffering the whole will of God from the time he came into the world till ‘he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree;’ yea, till having made a full atonement for them ‘he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.’ This is usually termed the *passive* righteousness of Christ, the former, his *active* righteousness. But as the active and passive righteousness of Christ were never in fact separated from each other, so we never need separate them at all, either in speaking or even in thinking. And it is with regard to both these conjointly that Jesus is called, ‘the Lord our righteousness’” (I.4, *Works*, 1:453).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, II.1, *Works*, 1:454.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, II.5, *Works*, 1:455.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 1:458-59.

it.” Personal holiness grows out of Christ’s salvific work for humanity, such that believers begin living in newness of life. Consistently across his corpus, Wesley is quick to tie personal holiness as an outgrowth of the righteousness of Christ as its fountainhead:

... the whole of our duty both towards God, ourselves, and our neighbor – are here included in the word ‘righteousness’. And although this may in one sense be said to be ours, as being in some measure owing to our own endeavours, working together with the Holy Spirit of God, yet it is very justly ascribed to [Jesus] and termed his righteousness, since he is the confirmer and perfecter, as well as the infuser of it.¹⁰⁵

‘His righteousness.’ This is all *his* righteousness still: it is his own free *gift* to us, for the sake of Jesus the righteous, through whom alone it is purchased for us. And it is his *work*: it is he alone that worketh in us by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁶

The sole cause of our acceptance with God (or, that for the sake which, on the account of which we are accepted) is the righteousness and the death of Christ, who fulfilled God’s law and died in our stead. [The only condition is faith alone:] faith, though necessarily producing both, yet not including either good works or holiness.¹⁰⁷

I do expect that he will fulfil his Word, that he will meet and bless me in this way. Yet not for the sake of any works which I have done, nor for the merit of my righteousness; but merely through the merits and sufferings and love of his Son, in whom he is always well-pleased.¹⁰⁸

Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it. Thus is his grace free in all, that is, no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on God alone, who freely gave us his own Son, and ‘with him freely giveth us all things’.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Sermon 134, “Seek First the Kingdom,” §6, *Works*, 4:219.

¹⁰⁶ Sermon 29, “Sermon on the Mount, IX,” §20, *Works*, 1:643. See also §21, *Works*, 1:644. “[Christ] put an end to that law – to the law of external rites and ceremonies – that he might ‘bring in a better righteousness’ through his blood, by that one oblation of himself once offered, even the image of God, into the inmost soul of ‘everyone that believeth’.”

¹⁰⁷ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, §1, *Works*, 13:37.

¹⁰⁸ Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” IV.2, *Works*, 1:391. Here Wesley argues that the means of grace are therefore not attempts to earn God’s love.

¹⁰⁹ Sermon 110, “Free Grace,” §3, *Works*, 3:545.

Personal Holiness in Detail – The Contours of Human Righteousness

Wesley's Christology intentionally depicts righteousness as the gift of God in Christ Jesus. At the same time, his soteriology emphasizes the role of personal holiness in ways we will now explore. More than just the acquittal of sin, the salvation and love of God inspires Christians to live for God:

For there is no motive which so powerfully inclines us to love God as the sense of the love of God in Christ. Nothing enables us like a piercing conviction of this to give our hearts to him who was given for us. And from this principle of grateful love to God arises love to our brother also [Doing no evil...but also good to neighbor] It is therefore the fulfilling of the positive, likewise, as well as of the negative law of God.¹¹⁰

'My Father', will he say, 'worketh hitherto, and I work' [John 5:17]. And at all possible opportunities he is, like his Master, 'going about doing good' [cf. Acts 10:38].¹¹¹

Following the example of Jesus, the believer goes about doing the work of God in imitation of Christ; this is a natural response of faith that is a response to the love of God shown in Christ.

In "Further Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection," we see how Wesley speaks of the law in light of Christ. While Christ fulfills the law of God, Christians are now free to live under a "law of faith:"

For Christ 'is the end of the' *Adamic* as well as of the Mosaic 'law' [Rom. 10:4]. By his death he hath put an end to both In the room of this Christ hath established another, namely, 'the law of faith'. Not everyone that *doeth*, but 'everyone that believeth', now receiveth *righteousness*, in the full sense of the word; that is, he is justified, sanctified, and glorified.¹¹²

The whole law under which we now are *is fulfilled by love*. 'Faith working' or *animated* 'by love' is all that God now requires of man.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Sermon 36, "The Law Established through Faith," III.3, *Works*, 2:42.

¹¹¹ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, §5, *Works*, 13:39.

¹¹² "Further Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection," I.1, *Works*, 13:96.

¹¹³ "Further Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection," I.4, *Works*, 13:97.

The “law of faith,” what Wesley sometimes will harken to Galatians 6:2 as the “full[ing] the law of Christ,”¹¹⁴ is a way Wesley tries to hold in tension the necessity for holiness in the Christian’s life – being holy as God is holy – while describing the new grace-filled potential of righteousness made possible in Christ – fulfilling the law of Christ. We see in Sermon 34, “Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law” how Wesley tries to balance a high esteem of the law while also keeping a Christocentric view of salvation:

Indeed each is continually sending me to the other – the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me ‘above gold or precious stones’; seeing I know every part of it is a gracious promise, which my Lord will fulfil in its season.¹¹⁵

... [the law] is the offspring of God, that it is the copy of all his imitable perfections¹¹⁶

The law of God (speaking after the manner of men) is a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature...¹¹⁷

The law of faith is the freedom to live in love of God and neighbor, not as a means to earn approval from God; the is a joyful response to Christ. Or, as the sermon eloquently puts it, the law points to Christ, and Christ points to the law.

Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment,” is a sermon penned later in Wesley’s career that illustrates how Wesley seeks to keep personal holiness as a core component of the redeemed life. In the sermon, his exegesis of the wedding garment in Christ’s parable

¹¹⁴ For one example, see Sermon 68, “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels,” §9, *Works*, 2:556. Going “on to perfection” (Hebrews 6:1) is equated to “fulfill[ing] the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Interesting here is Wesley’s defense of Pelagius, whom he asserts was arguing nothing more than for the necessity for obeying the law of Christ.

¹¹⁵ Sermon 34, “Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law,” IV.7, *Works*, 2:18.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.7, *Works*, 2:18.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §II.6 *Works*, 2:10.

is that it represents the “righteousness of the saints.” Without the wedding garment, as the parable goes, one is not able to attend the wedding; likewise, without personal righteousness, one cannot expect to enter God’s salvation and the beatific wedding feast of the Lamb. Such a bold claim requires Wesley to return again to nuance the interrelationship between Christ’s righteousness on the one hand, and the righteousness/personal holiness of believers that he asserts is necessary for salvation:

The righteousness of Christ is, doubtless, necessary for any soul that enters into glory. But so is personal holiness, too, for every child of man. But it is highly needful to be observed that they are necessary in different respects. The former is necessary to *entitle* us to heaven; the latter, to *qualify* us for it. Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no *claim* to glory; without holiness we could have no *fitness* for it. By the former we become members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. By the latter we are ‘made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light’ [Col. 1:12].¹¹⁸

Here Wesley explicitly speaks of personal holiness as necessary for salvation, if only in a secondary sense. He goes on to elaborate that holiness is not about Christian or heathen ordinances or morality, but the two-prong command of Christ to love God and one’s neighbor:

What then is that holiness which is the true wedding garment, the only qualification for glory? ‘It is neither circumcision’, the attending on all the Christian ordinances, ‘nor uncircumcision’, the fulfilling of all heathen morality, but ‘the keeping of the commandments of God’; particularly those, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.’ In a word, holiness is the having ‘the mind that was in Christ’ [cf. Phil. 2:5], and the ‘walking as Christ walked’ [1 John 2:6].¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment,” §10, *Works*, 4:144.

¹¹⁹ Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment,” §17, *Works*, 4:147.

And thus we come full circle. *Imitatio Dei* is the holiness of which Wesley speaks – following the example of Christ believers can have the “mind of Christ” and “walk as Christ walked.”

In Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” Wesley will paint this as being the possible impossibility:

It is possible for you to fulfill all righteousness. It is possible for you to ‘love God, because he hath first loved us’, and to ‘walk in love’, after the pattern of our great Master. We know indeed that word of his to be absolutely true, ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’ But on the other hand we know, every believer can say, ‘I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.’¹²⁰

Personal holiness is grounded in Christ’s righteousness and is unintelligible without it. Yet, in a real and meaningful way, Wesley pushes for a robust understanding of human righteousness that is gracefully possible. Humanity is not just a recipient of Christ’s righteousness; believers are enabled to be truly godly.

In the dance between the imputed righteousness of Christ and the inherent/imparted righteousness of humanity, Wesley always returns to an affirmation of the absolute necessity of Christ. This is especially true when speaking of the grand hope of redeemed humanity on this side of eternity: Christian perfection. Even those who are perfect in this life will never cease to need Christ’s righteousness. “The most perfect,” he will remind his Methodist flock, “have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions.”¹²¹ And the “holiest of men,” he will elsewhere extol, still

¹²⁰ Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” III.5, *Works*, 3:207-08.

¹²¹ “Thoughts on Christian Perfection” (1760), §§4-5, *Works*, 13:60.

need Christ as their prophet, priest, and king.¹²² There is no point in the believers' imitation of Christ whereby that believer rises above the need of Christ.

Concluding Thoughts: An Extravagant Promise

In Wesley's Sermon 30, "Sermon on the Mount, X," he exegetes Christ's command to not cast pearls before swine by linking it to 2 Peter 1:4 and the promise God has given humanity in Christ:

Tell not them of the 'exceeding great and precious promises' [2 Peter 1:4] which God hath given us in the Son of his love. What conception can they have of being made 'partakers of the divine nature' who do not even desire to 'escape the corruption that is in the world through lust'?¹²³

The "exceeding great and precious promises" are rooted in Jesus, through whom humanity may be "partakers of the divine nature." Wesley's Christology presents a soteriology that is based on God's loving condescension which leads to the elevation of humanity – not only forgiven and restored to the *imago dei* of its creation, but in restored relationship that is described in robust language of deep communion. Believers are enabled, through Christ, to a freedom that is at once freedom *from* sin, and freedom *to* live for God. They may imitate Christ, and in so doing attain the "mind of Christ" and

¹²² "Further Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection," I.9, *Works*, 13:98-99. For another rich passage on Wesley using the *munis triplex* to ground his Christology, see Sermon 36, "The Law Established through Faith," I.6, *Works*, 2:37-38 – "We are not ourselves clear before God unless we proclaim him in all his offices. . . . as our great 'High Priest, taken from among men, and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God' [Heb. 5:1]; as such, 'reconciling use to God by his blood' [cf. Rom. 5:9,10], and 'ever living to make intercession for us' [Heb. 7:25]; but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom' [1 Cor. 1:30], who by his word and his Spirit 'is with us always', 'guiding us into all truth'; yea, and as remaining a King forever; as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood; as restoring those to the image of God whom he had first reinstated in his favour; as reigning in all believing hearts until he has 'subdued all things to himself'; until he hath utterly cast out sin, and 'brought in everlasting righteousness.'"

¹²³ Sermon 30, "Sermon on the Mount, X," §17, *Works*, 1:658.

“walk as Christ walked.” As we have seen above, these are not mere gestures toward an impossible standard. For Wesley, this is the actual hope of our salvation, and the very reason for Christ’s coming: *imitatio dei* leads to the actual Christification of the believer in true righteousness and holiness. And while this righteousness is always rooted in Christ, it is an extravagant promise that all believers might have a share in the very nature of the God whose image they bear.

Chapter 5

God the Holy Spirit: The Spirit of Adoption

In the previous two chapters focusing on the Wesleyan corpus, we first explored Wesley's understanding of God as Creator, considering the ways in which the *imago dei* functions as an organizing principle that makes deification intelligible both on theological and anthropological grounds. Next, with Wesley's theological anthropology and doctrine of creation established, the Chapter Four explored Wesley's Christology, and in particular the ways in which Christ's work on humanity's behalf was an elevation of the believer to reflect the divine life of Christ. Created in the *imago dei*, and saved through Christ – the perfect image of God – redeemed humanity is capable of *imitatio dei*. Following a trinitarian structure, this chapter turns its attention to Wesley's understanding of the Holy Spirit. Like the previous chapters, the primary source material guides this analysis, looking at where, and in what ways, the necessary pneumatological elements for an understanding of deification emerge within Wesley's theology.

The Focus of This Chapter

The goal of this chapter is to look at Wesley's understanding of the Holy Spirit as a mediator of the divine life to humanity. Deification requires an understanding of the Spirit as the person of the Holy Trinity who enables believers to participate in the divine life of God. While there is more than one way to articulate this appropriation of the divine life in deific ways, it is most often expressed in terms of Spirit-enabled divine/human synergy, an impartation of divine attributes, the filiation of believers as

children of God, and/or the Spirit's presence as the actual indwelling of God. This chapter will explore Wesley's pneumatology in terms of the Spirit's role in rough chronological sequence in the life of the believer: 1) how Wesley describes the Spirit as enabling faithful response to the salvation offered in Christ Jesus; 2) the ways in which new birth and sanctification are understood as the adoption and filiation of believers as sons and daughters of God; and, 3) the kingdom of God within redeemed humanity as filled and led by the indwelling Holy Spirit

The Quickening Spirit: Humanity Vivified by the Spirit of God

The salvation offered through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is not automatically applied to the whole of humanity; while being universally *available* to all, salvation must be *accepted* by individuals who want to participate in the divine life freely offered by Christ. Wesley's Arminian commitments are further tempered and nuanced by commitment to the consequences of sin, which leaves sinners unable to freely choose the good,¹ and a commitment to grace, which restores humanity's capacity to turn to God. The mediation of God's grace and the starting point of salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes humanity receptive to the person and work of Christ; furthermore, the continued work of God in the believer is also grounded in the on-going guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit. So full and rich are the ways that the Spirit is involved in our

¹ Here, I am intentionally avoiding the language of humanity being "dead" in sin, a notion with both biblical and Augustinian/Western roots, and stereotypically dubbed teaching of Western Christianity in which Wesley was birthed. Scholars have long pointed out Wesley's penchant for using language more commonly attributed to Eastern Christianity: the sickness of sin, the woundedness of humanity, and the medicine of salvation. The central point here is more general – Wesley denies that humanity, without divine assistance, is able to turn to God.

salvation, that “an entertainment of heaven,” Wesley speculates, will be to explore “how the Holy Ghost, the author of the world of grace, upheld our soul in mortal life!”² Indeed, the Spirit is the fullness of God, and an integral part of Wesley’s understanding of trinitarian salvation: “In him [the Holy Spirit] are included all good things; all wisdom, peace, joy, love; the whole treasures of holiness and happiness; all that God hath prepared for them that love him.”³

While Wesley’s pneumatology is a robust feature of his theology, it also highlights the nature of his writings, which are not systemized for this ever-practical theologian. References to the Holy Spirit abound, but they are particular to the audience and topic at hand – sometimes pointing out single assertions of the Spirit’s work, and at other times pulling together a rich tapestry of what Spirit-filled life looks like for believers. This section will first give an overall picture of Wesley’s understanding of the vivifying work of the Spirit in the total life of the believer, and then focus specifically on the initial ways in which the Holy Spirit makes the human creature receptive to God.

A Mystery with Order: An Overview of the Holy Spirit’s Influence

For as much as Wesley says about the Spirit, it is first helpful to acknowledge places in his writing where he leans into the mystery of the Spirit’s work:

The precise manner how it begins and ends, rises and falls, no man can tell. ‘So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.’ Thou mayst be as absolutely assured of the fact as of the blowing of the wind; but the precise manner how it is done, how the Holy Spirit works this in the soul, neither thou nor the wisest of the children of men is able to explain.⁴

² Sermon 140, “The Promise of Understanding,” III.3 *Works*, 4:288.

³ Sermon 30, “Sermon on the Mount, X,” §20, *Works*, 1:659.

⁴ Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” II.2, *Works*, 2:191.

This great ‘mystery of godliness’ began to work from the very time of the original promise. ... his sanctifying Spirit began to renew the souls of men.⁵

Wesley was never afraid to lean into the theological category of mystery, acknowledging God is not limited to one way of working in believer’s lives, nor bound to one never-deviating system of accomplishing humanity’s salvation.

With that being said, there are places in Wesley’s corpus where the general trajectory of the Spirit’s activity is detailed. In the preface of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Wesley acknowledges the Spirit’s freedom, while detailing the “general manner” in which the Spirit works:

Indeed how God *may* work we cannot tell. But the general manner wherein he *does* work is this. Those who once trusted in themselves that they were righteous ... are, by the Spirit of God applying his word, convinced that they are ‘poor and naked’. ... In their trouble they cry unto the Lord, and he shows he hath taken away their sins, and opens ‘the kingdom of heaven’ in their hearts, even righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Fear and sorrow and pain are fled away, and sin hath no more dominion over them. Knowing they are justified freely through faith in his blood, they have peace with God, though Jesus Christ; they rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts.⁶

In one succinct paragraph, much is affirmed of the Spirit’s work as understood by Wesley. From a humanity unaware of its need for God, the Holy Spirit serves to open the understanding of individuals to recognize their need for God and to respond (in other writings, this becomes exploration of prevenient grace, personal conscience, and knowledge of God). From that convicting presence, the Spirit works in those who turn to God, opening the “kingdom of heaven in their hearts,” infusing righteousness, peace, joy,

⁵ Sermon 61, “The Mystery of Iniquity,” §3, *Works*, 2:452. Here Wesley points to the Spirit’s role from the very beginning of time, naming Abel as an example.

⁶ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Preface, §10, *Works*, 13:46-47.

hope, and love into their lives (other writings will explore these as gifts/fruit of the Spirit instilled in the “new birth”). When this new life is tested, either by trial, temptation, or indwelling sin, the Spirit continues to guide and comfort believers:

But it is seldom long before their Lord answers for himself, sending them the Holy Ghost, *to comfort* them, to bear witness continually with their spirit, that they are the children of God.⁷

The witness of the Spirit, “with their spirit” – that is, alongside the witness of the believer’s spirit – are two additional core aspect of Wesley’s understanding of the Spirit’s role in giving assurance and confidence of salvation, while dispelling doubt and fear. Not only does the believer feel this new status within themselves (a nod to Wesley’s focus on experiential religion), they also have the supernatural witness of the Spirit that gives them strength and confidence. This “witness” is almost always tied for Wesley to the new status believers have as sons and daughters of God. Adoption, filiation, and familial relationship to God are among Wesley’s most frequent assertions of the Spirit’s work.

There is great internal consistency in Wesley’s corpus along the contours of his pneumatology outlined succinctly above. Some twenty-five years later, Wesley pens Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” a text many consider to be one of the clearest articulations of his mature theological convictions. Here we see consistency with his earlier teaching, along with more detail of how he understands the work of the Holy Spirit. The sermon begins by showing the fully Trinitarian nature of salvation, and how the Spirit’s conviction of sin is enabled by the “drawings” of the Father (manifested in prevenient grace and conscience) and the light of Christ:

⁷ Ibid., §11, *Works*, 13:47.

If we take this in its utmost extent it will include all that is wrought in the soul by what is frequently termed ‘natural conscience’, but more properly, ‘preventing grace’; all the ‘drawings’ of the ‘the Father’, the desires after God, which if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that ‘light’ wherewith the Son of God ‘enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world’, *showing* every man ‘to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God’; and the *convictions* which his Spirit from time to time works in every child of man.⁸

Christ’s example and “light” is the fertile ground from which the work of the Spirit springs. Put differently, the *justification* made possible by the salvific work of Christ is continued by the *sanctification* made possible by the Spirit. Sanctification for Wesley entails the Spirit enabling believers to “mortify” those things that are not pleasing to God on the one hand, and to continue in continual growth toward godliness on the other. Wesley will often term this the “new birth” and the beginning of new spiritual life in the believer:

From the time of our being ‘born again’ the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled ‘by the Spirit’ to ‘mortify the deeds of the body’ [cf. Romans 8:13], of our evil nature. And as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We go on from grace to grace....⁹

Alongside mortifying those things that are contrary to God, the believer is infused with newfound spiritual sensitivity, a spiritual mindedness that Wesley links to an enlivened “spiritual sensorium” that was hitherto deaf, blind, and numb to the spiritual world. In Sermon 43 there is a brief mention of these spiritual senses:

By this twofold operation of the Holy Spirit – having the eyes of our soul both *opened* and *enlightened* – we see the things which the natural ‘eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard’ [cf. I Cor. 2:9]. We have a prospect of the invisible things of God. We see the *spiritual world*, which is all round about us, and yet no more discerned by our natural faculties than if it had no being.¹⁰

⁸ Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” I.2, *Works*, 2:156-57.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I.8, *Works*, 2:160.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II.1, *Works*, 2:161.

Chief among the gifts of the Spirit is the witness of the Spirit – alongside the witness of the believer’s soul – that assures a believer of his or her status as a forgiven child of God. For Wesley and his focus on experience, this is the practical *evidence* of one being a child of God:

And it is certain this faith necessarily implies an *assurance* (which is here only another word for *evidence*, it being hard to tell the difference between them) that ‘Christ loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.’ For ‘he that believeth’ with the true, living faith ‘hath the witness in himself’ [1 John 5:10]. ‘The Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God’ [Romans 8:16]. ‘Because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying, Abba Father’ [cf. Gal. 4:6]; giving him an assurance that he is so, and a childlike confidence in him. But let It be observed that, in the very nature of the thing, the assurance goes before the confidence. For a man cannot have a childlike confidence in God till he knows he is a child of God.¹¹

Assurance of salvation is the foundation for the confidence as children of God, attesting to a real, familial, and intimate relationship as adopted sons and daughters of God. In this sense, God is not only creator, but in a unique sense “Father” or Parent. Wesley, leaning into his exegesis of Romans 8:15¹² and Galatians 4:6,¹³ will most often link the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of adoption,” and believers as children of God, crying, “Abba, Father” to their God who is both Creator and Parent to redeemed humanity.

In both passages considered in this section, it is also poignant to point out how the work of the Holy Spirit is the very agent of what is commonly termed prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Wesley himself readily speaks of God’s grace with that terminology, but rather than expressing grace as if were a created reality separate from

¹¹ Ibid., II.3, *Works*, 2:161-62.

¹² Romans 8:15 – “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (KJV).

¹³ Galatians 4:6 – “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (KJV).

God, he tends to equate grace with the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ Prevenient grace, for example, is not an impersonal force or “created” impulse that works upon human beings inviting them into union with God. Prevenient grace is no less than the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, who personally convicts men and women of sin and invites them to communion with Godself. With grace being equated to God’s loving presence, salvation is most often understood by Wesley as a restored communion with God.

The Awakening of Grace: Conscience, Conviction, and The Law of God

With the general work of the Spirit established above, it is possible to consider in detail the initial movements of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of humanity. While fallen humanity may well be said to be powerless to seek God without divine assistance, Wesley is clear that fallen humanity is assisted proactively by the grace of God, which is the very presence of the Holy Spirit at work within humanity. Even the most basic stirrings of one’s conscience are evidence of, and made possible by, God’s desire to connect with humanity. “Natural conscience,” Wesley ruminates in one of his later sermons, is not a *natural* capacity of humanity, but a “supernatural gift of God, above all

¹⁴ This harkens to a greater debate within Christianity about the nature of saving grace. Uncreated grace is the presence (or energies) of God within humanity, whereas created grace is a divinely-originated “product” gifted to humanity. Eastern Christianity affirms that believers experience uncreated grace, whereas most Western theologians have affirmed that believers receive created grace. Randy Maddox argues, convincingly, that “Wesley’s overall understanding of grace resonates strongly with the Eastern notion of uncreated grace. ... For them, as for Wesley, grace is the Holy Spirit at work in our life, initiating and sustaining our recovery of Christ-likeness.” Equating grace with God’s love and the work of the Spirit gives grace a distinctly relational character. See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 85-86. For more on Wesley’s understanding of grace as uncreated, see Craig Alan Blaising, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Original Sin,” (Th.D. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979).

his natural endowments.”¹⁵ In the same sermon, Sermon 105, “On Conscience,” he ties conscience to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, which is the true source of conscience in a Christian understanding of the term:

And it is his Spirit who giveth thee an inward check, who causeth thee to feel uneasy, when thou walkest in any instance contrary to the light which he hath given thee.¹⁶

But [knowledge of oneself] is not possible for him [an unbeliever] to do without the assistance of the Spirit of God. Otherwise self-love, and indeed every other irregular passion, would disguise and wholly conceal him from himself.¹⁷

The Holy Spirit’s power to convict and convince fallen humanity of the reality of sin is tied to the Spirit as the source of enlightenment and knowledge of God. This guidance and understanding continues from conversion through the on-going growth of believers whose actions are taught and led by the Spirit:

In order to the very existence of a good conscience, as well as to the continuance of it, the continued influence of the Spirit of God is absolutely needful. Accordingly the Apostle John declares to the believers of all ages: ‘Ye have an unction from the Holy One; and ye know all things:’ all things that are needful to your having ‘a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man’. So he adds, ‘Ye have no need that anyone should teach you,’ otherwise ‘than as that anointing clearly teacheth us those three things, first, the true meaning of God’s Word; secondly, our own tempers and lives, bringing all our thoughts, words, and actions to remembrance; and thirdly, the agreement of all with the commandments of God.’¹⁸

The final point above, bringing believers into agreement “with all the commandments of God,” hits upon the Wesleyan theme that the law of God – rather than being rendered impotent and unimportant by Christ who fulfilled its requirements on humanity’s behalf –

¹⁵ Sermon 105, “On Conscience,” I.5, *Works*, 3:482.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.11, *Works*, 3:485.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.13, *Works*, 3:486.

continues to guide believer into holiness of heart and life. In Sermon 34, “Original, Nature, Properties and Use of the Law,” Wesley speaks of conscience as being the law “re-inscribed” into the hearts all of humanity:

And yet God did not despise the work of his own hands; but being reconciled to man through the Son of his love, he in some measure re-inscribed the law on the heart of his dark, sinful creature. ‘He’ again ‘showed thee, O man, what is good’ (although not as in the beginning), ‘even to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God’ [cf. Micah 6:8].¹⁹

Yet this basic knowledge of the law written in the heart of humanity must be accompanied by the Spirit of God in order for individuals to both understand and be convinced of their sinfulness before God. Conviction of sin is a “peculiar work” of the Holy Spirit:

And thus it is that the law of God is now made known to them that know not God. They hear, with the hearing of the ear, the things that were written aforetime for our instruction. But this does not suffice. They cannot by this means comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth thereof. God alone can reveal this by his Spirit.²⁰

And the first use of it [the law], without question, is to convince the world of sin. This is indeed the peculiar work of the Holy Ghost, who can work it without any means at all, or by whatever means it pleaseth him, however insufficient in themselves, or even improper to produce such an effect.²¹

The stirring of conscience, the law of God “written” within the hearts of humanity, the comprehension and conviction of sin – are all together the first steps toward conversion and salvation. Each are attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit as the active agent of prevenient grace.

¹⁹ Sermon 34, “Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law,” I.4, *Works*, 2:7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I.6, *Works*, 2:8. The passage goes on to elaborate that this fulfills the prophesy of Jeremiah 31:31, 33: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, IV.1, *Works*, 2:15.

Responding to Grace: Enlightenment and Opened Spiritual Senses

Beyond the first stirrings and conviction of sin for fallen humanity, the Holy Spirit is credited with opening the wellspring of spiritual understanding, enabling knowledge of God. Images of having one's "eyes of understanding" opened is a common expression:

He shall enlighten the eyes of thy understanding with the knowledge of the glory of God. His Spirit shall reveal unto thee the deep things of God [see 1 Cor. 2:10]. The inspiration of the Holy One shall give thee understanding, and cause thee to know wisdom secretly. Yea, the anointing which thou receives of him 'shall abide in thee and teach thee of all things' [1 John 2:27].²²

God, having 'opened the eyes of their understanding', pours divine light into their soul, whereby they are enabled to 'see him that is invisible', to see God and the things of God. What their 'eye had not seen', nor their 'ear heard', neither 'had it entered into their heart to conceive', God from time to time reveals to them, by the 'unction of the Holy One, which teacheth' them 'of all things'.²³

Wesley attributes to the Holy Spirit both the dawning of spiritual understanding and the continued teaching office of the Spirit in the believer's life.

"Opened eyes" is more than just a metaphor, however. The inbreaking of spiritual knowledge in the soul is tied to the new birth, the beginning of one's spiritual life.

Wesley describes this as the beginning of new life in God, and the awakening of spiritual senses that were hitherto dormant in unredeemed humanity. In Sermon 130, "On Living Without God," he uses the curious analogy of a frog to illustrate the spiritual dormancy of the spiritual sensorium. Fallen humanity, Wesley explains, is like a frog trapped within

²² Sermon 28, "Sermon on the Mount, VIII," §3, *Works*, 1:613.

²³ Sermon 119, "Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith," §13, *Works*, 4:54. The purpose of this divine light is that the believer might have a "single eye" toward obeying and loving God: "See that in all you think, speak, or do, 'the eye' of your soul 'be single', fixed on 'him that is invisible', and 'the glories that shall be revealed'. Then shall 'your whole body be full of light'. Your whole soul shall enjoy the light of God's countenance. And you shall continually see 'the light of the' glorious love of 'God in the face of Jesus Christ'" (§16, *Works*, 4:56).

the trunk of a tree. Though the frog has eyes and ears and other senses, they are dormant within the darkness, silence, and confines of its wooden prison. When the frog is released, however, those senses are quickened by the light, noise, and freedom of open air to see, hear, and move. So, too, Wesley reasons, is the soul who experiences the quickening power of the Holy Spirit in the new birth:

But the moment the Spirit of the Almighty strikes the heart of him that was till then without God in the world, it breaks the hardness of his heart, and creates all things new. The Sun of righteousness appears, and shines upon his soul, showing him the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He is in a new world. All things round him are become new. Such as it never before entered into his heart to conceive. He sees, so far as his newly opened eyes can bear the sight,

“The opening heavens around him shine,
With beams of sacred bliss.”

He sees that he has ‘an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous’, and that he has ‘redemption in his blood, the remission of his sins’. He sees a ‘new way’ that is ‘opened into the holiest by the blood of Jesus’; and his ‘light shineth more and more unto the perfect day’.²⁴

An excellent sustained look at Wesley’s teaching about a spiritual sensorium is found in Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God.” The sermon begins by establishing that the new birth – being “born of God” – opens the believer to a world that was beforehand hidden:

And in general, from all the passages of Holy Write wherein this expression, the being ‘born of God’, occurs, we may learn that it implies not barely the being baptized, or any outward change whatever; but a vast inward change; a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost, a change in the whole

²⁴ Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §9, *Works*, 4:172. The passage goes on to correlate spiritual senses with new ways to relate to God – *hearing*, believers can now obey; *tasting*, believers can now taste and see that the Lord is good. Though the sermon emphasizes how God opens the spiritual senses in the soul, Wesley also warns that the new birth is not about these newfound spiritual sensitivities in themselves, but rather how they point to the full restoration of the *imago dei*: “And here we have need to take great care, not, on the one hand, to despise the day of small things, nor, on the other, to mistake any of these partial changes for that entire, general change, the new birth; that total change from the image of the earthly Adam into the image of the heavenly, from an earthly, sensual, devilish mind into the mind that was in Christ” (§12, *Works*, 4:174).

manner of our existence; for from the moment we are ‘born of God’ we live in quite another manner than we did before; we are, as it were, in another world.²⁵

Only the natural man discerneth it nor; partly because he has no spiritual senses, whereby alone we can discern the things of God; partly because so thick a veil is interposed as he knows not how to penetrate.²⁶

Being “born of God,” the believer now has spiritual awareness to see, hear, feel, and experience God in real and tangible ways:

All the darkness is now passed away, and he abides in the light of God’s countenance.²⁷

His ears are now opened and the voice of God no longer calls in vain. He hears and obeys the heavenly calling; he ‘knows the voice of his shepherd’. All his spiritual sense being now awakened, he has a clear intercourse with the invisible world. And hence he knows more and more of the things which before it ‘could not enter into his heart to conceive’. He now knows what the peace of God is; what is joy in the Holy Ghost; what the love of God which is shed abroad in the hearts of them that believe through Christ Jesus. Thus the veil being removed which before interrupted the light and voice, the knowledge and love of God, he who is born of the Spirit, ‘dwelling in love, dwelleth in God and God in him’ [1 John 4:16].²⁸

More than spiritual senses of sight, hearing, and feeling, believers are sensible and cognizant of God’s peace, joy, and love – indeed, the whole gamut of gifts and fruit of the Spirit. Alive to God and participating in the characteristics of God, the believer is able to dwell fully in God. Though the notion of “dwelling in God” will be explored further below, it is poignant to recognize in passages like the one above that Wesley creates a seamless picture of the dawning of God’s grace in the soul to the soul dwelling in the fullness of God. The arc of God’s redemption is communion with God’s human children.

²⁵ Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God,” I.1, *Works*, 1:432.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.7, *Works*, 1:434.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I.9, *Works*, 1:435.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.10, *Works*, 1:435.

Responding to Grace: Empowerment and Engagement with God

There is a conscious movement from enlightenment to empowerment that runs throughout Wesley's description of the work of the Spirit. While God is the first mover in restoring and redeeming humanity, there is a grace-empowered response that is tied to Wesley's description of the new birth. With the presence of the Holy Spirit restoring and enlightening understanding, humanity is empowered to root out "unmanly passions" and live in virtuous freedom and happiness, obeying God in holiness:

[Restored understanding] directs us to reform our will by charity. To root out of our souls all unmanly passions, and to give place to them...to collect the scattered beams of that affection which is truly human, truly divine. ... Thus it is that the 'law of the Spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death' [cf. Romans 8:2]; thus it restores us, first to knowledge, and then to virtue, and freedom, and happiness. Thus we are 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God' [cf. Romans 8:21]²⁹

The strong one [the devil] can no longer keep his house. A stronger than he is come upon him, and hath cast him out, and taken possession for himself, and made it an habitation of God through his Spirit. ... The understanding of the sinner is now enlightened, and his heart sweetly drawn to God. His desires are refined, his affections purified; and being filled with the Holy Ghost he grows in grace till he is not only holy in heart, but in all manner of conversation.³⁰

For their 'eye' being 'single, their whole body is full of light'. Whatsoever is needful, they 'are taught of God'. They 'have an unction from the Holy One [1 John 2:20],' 'which abideth in them, and teacheth them' [cf. 1 John 2:27] every hour, what they shall do and what they shall speak. Nor have they therefore any need to *reason* concerning it; for they see the way straight before them. The Lamb is their light, and they simply follow him, whithersoever he goeth.³¹

Enabled by the Spirit to believe, humanity is now empowered by the Spirit to fulfill the two-fold commandments of Christ to love God and neighbor:

²⁹ Sermon 141, "The Image of God," III.2-3, *Works*, 4:300-01.

³⁰ Sermon 38, "A Caution against Bigotry," I.13, *Works*, 2:68.

³¹ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Preface, §7, *Works*, 13:45.

They now ‘walk after the Spirit’ both in their hearts and lives. They are taught of him to love God and their neighbour with a love which is ‘a well of water, springing up into everlasting life’. And by him they are led into every holy desire, into every divine and heavenly temper, till every thought which arises in their heart is holiness unto the Lord.³²

He was first called, not only with an outward call by the Word and the messengers of God, but likewise with an inward call by his Spirit applying this Word, enabling him to believe in the only-begotten Son of God, and bearing testimony with his spirit that he was a child of God. And it was by this very means they were all sanctified. It was by a sense of the love of God shed abroad in his heart that every one of them was enabled to love God. Loving God, he loved his neighbor as himself, and had power to walk in all his commandments blameless.³³

And with enlightened reason, humanity can know experientially the tempers implied in *inward* holiness, which lead to *outward* holiness. This proves to be the pneumatological underpinning for the *imitatio dei* theme described in the last chapter. The Holy Spirit enables the actualization for the Christological phrase Wesley was wont to weave into his understanding of redeemed humanity: having the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and walking as Christ walked:

It was to give them (what none can deny to be essential to all Christians in all ages) ‘the mind which was in Christ’ [Phil. 2:5], those holy ‘fruits of the Spirit’ which whosoever hath not ‘is none of his’; to fill them with ‘love joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness’; to endue them with ‘faith’ (perhaps it might be rendered ‘fidelity’), with ‘meekness and temperance’; to enable them to ‘crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts’ [Gal. 5:22-24]; its passions and desires; and in consequence of that *inward change*, to fulfil all *outward* righteousness, ‘to walk as Christ also walked’ [cf. 1 John 2:6] in the ‘work of faith, the patience of hope, the labour of love’ [1 Thess. 1:3].³⁴

They [Methodists] know the new birth implies as great a change in the soul, in him that is ‘born of the Spirit’, as was wrought in his body when he was born of a woman; not an outward change only, as from drunkenness to sobriety, from robbery or theft to honesty (this is the poor, dry, miserable conceit of those that know nothing of real religion); but an inward change, from all unholy to all holy

³² Sermon 8, “The First-fruits of the Spirit,” I.4, *Works*, 1:236.

³³ Sermon 58, “On Predestination,” §12, *Works*, 2:419-20.

³⁴ Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” §3-4, *Works*, 1:160-61.

tempers, from pride to humility, from passionateness to meekness, from peevishness and discontent to patience and resignation – in a word, from an earthly, sensual, devilish mind to the mind that was in Christ Jesus.³⁵

Is it not reason (assisted by the Holy Ghost) which enables us to understand what the Holy Scriptures declare concerning the being and attributes of God? ... It is by this we understand (his Spirit opening and enlightening the eyes of our understanding) what that repentance is, not to be repented of; what is that faith whereby we are saved; what is the nature and the condition of justification; what are the immediate and what the subsequent fruits of it. ... By the due use of reason we come to know what are the tempers implied in inward holiness, and what it is to be outwardly holy, holy in all manner of conversation – in other words, what is the mind that was in Christ, and what it is to walk as Christ walked.³⁶

Together, these passages from multiple sermons from his middle and later career weave a tapestry of salvation that is an interplay between the vibrant colors of the Spirit’s work, and the complementing colors of humanity’s faithful grace-filled response.

The interplay between the Spirit and redeemed humanity was not lost on Wesley, and he sought language to articulate the intimate interchange between Creator and creation. In Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” Wesley traces the advent of spiritual senses being awakened in believers in the new birth to their maturity in those who grow into the “full measure of Christ.” In describing the interchange, he speaks of the believer’s fellowship with God as a type of “spiritual respiration:”

And all his spiritual senses are then ‘exercised to discern’ spiritual ‘good and evil’. By the use of these he is daily increasing in the knowledge of God, of his inward kingdom. And now he may properly be said *to live*: God having quickened him by his Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ. He lives a life which the world knoweth not of, a breathing, as it were, upon his soul, and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven. And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the

³⁵ Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” I.6, *Works*, 3:506.

³⁶ Sermon 70, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” I.6, *Works*, 2:592.

life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child of God grows up, till he comes to 'the full measure of the stature of Christ' [cf. Eph. 4:13].³⁷

The Spirit “breathing” on the soul – a self-conscious harkening to the biblical references to breath and wind in scripture – is returned back to God in faithful response, a “breath” of prayer and praise. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, grace is not a static idea for Wesley, but the very presence and action of God, who is “descending into [the Christian’s] heart.” Likewise, the presence of grace in the soul is described as communion with God: “intercourse between God and man,” “fellowship with the Father and the Son,” and the “life of God in the soul.”

Returning again to Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God,” we see an extended treatment of this idea of spiritual respiration. In the continual interplay between the Spirit and the believer, Wesley coins the term “re-action” to capture facts that 1) the Spirit is the first mover in this relationship; and, 2) the believer is in a dynamic relationship with God, whereby he or she is compelled to respond or “re-act” to the action of the Spirit:

But when he is born of God, born of the Spirit, how is the manner of his existence changed! His whole soul is now sensible of God. ... The Spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returns to God. ... And by this new kind of spiritual respiration, spiritual life is not only sustained but increased day by day, together with spiritual strength and motion and sensation; all the senses of the soul being now awakes, and capable of ‘discerning’ spiritual ‘good and evil’.³⁸

Now one who is so born of God as hath been above described, who continually receives into his soul the breath of life from God, the gracious influence of his Spirit, and continually renders it back; one who thus believes and loves, who by faith perceives the continual actions of God upon his spirit, and by a kind of

³⁷ Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” II.4, *Works*, 2:193.

³⁸ Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God,” I.8, *Works*, 1:434-35.

spiritual re-action returns the grace he receives in unceasing love, and praise, and prayer...³⁹

From what has been said we may learn, secondly, what the life of God in the soul of a believer is, wherein it properly consists, and what is immediately and necessarily implied therein. 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, the 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.⁴⁰

In addition to prayer and praise mentioned in Sermon 45, here Wesley adds “unceasing love” and an offering of all one’s life to God. Additionally, the absolute necessity of this “spiritual re-action” is impressed upon Wesley’s audience. While God’s grace moves first and without condition of previous holiness (that is to say, this is an example of the Holy Spirit acts as the preventing grace of God), the *continued* action of the Holy Spirit is conditional upon faithful response:

And hence we may, thirdly, infer the absolute necessity of this re-action of the soul (whatsoever it be called) in order to the continuance of the divine life therein. For it plainly appears God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. He prevents us indeed with the blessings of his goodness. ... [But] his Spirit will not always strive; he will gradually withdraw, and leave us to the darkness of our own hearts. He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him, a sacrifice wherewith he is well pleased.⁴¹

In this way, humanity is empowered to respond to God through the work of the Spirit, but this empowerment entails humanity’s response. It is also an empowerment that Wesley is careful to make clear is always dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit, though it

³⁹ Ibid., II.1, *Works*, 1:435-36.

⁴⁰ Ibid., III.2, *Works*, 1:442.

⁴¹ Ibid., III.3, *Works*, 1:442.

entails the agency of the believer. We see this dynamic clearly delineated in his early Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart:”

At the same time we are convinced that we are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that without the Spirit of God we can do nothing but add sin to sin; that it is he alone ‘who worketh in us’ by his almighty power, either ‘to will or do’ [cf. Phil. 2:13] that which is good – it being as impossible for us event to think a good thought without the supernatural assistance of his Spirit as to create ourselves, or to renew our whole souls in righteousness and true holiness.⁴²

... his Spirit [is the] inspirer and perfecter both of our faith and works. ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his’ [Rom. 8:9]. He alone can quicken those who are dead unto God, can breathe into them the breath of Christian life, and so prevent, accompany, and follow them with his grace as to bring their good desires to good effect. And ‘as many as are thus led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God’ [Rom. 8:14].⁴³

So while the very notion of spiritual respiration or re-action implies a mutual and dynamic relationship with God, this divine/human synergy is explicitly and thoroughly Spirit-enabled.

Sanctification and The Imago Dei

The dynamic relationship between God and humanity is helpfully parsed by the theological categories of justification and sanctification. As fallen creatures in need of forgiveness and thoroughly unable to achieve that salvation in their own power, humanity is fully dependent upon Christ for redemption. Wesley is able to speak of justification as that peculiar work of Christ as what God does *for us*. On this point Wesley will hold fast to the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide* and ground righteousness, as we explored in the last chapter, in his Christology. Strictly speaking, the imputed righteousness of Christ is that

⁴² Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” I.3, *Works*, 1:403-04.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II.4, *Works*, 1:411.

righteousness that is given to humanity through the merits of Christ as pure gift. While never de-emphasizing the agency of God in salvation, Wesley allows sanctification to be the place where the Holy Spirit works *in us* – or rather to capture the full mean *alongside us* – creating anew redeemed humanity to the glory of God the Father. This at once keeps salvation as a fully trinitarian exercise, attempts to avoid a Pelagian works-righteousness by grounding salvation in Christ, and allows for a dynamic understanding of the Holy Spirit as the agent of imparted/actual righteousness that is achieved with the co-operation of humanity. This view is prevalent throughout Wesley’s ministry:

... in a word, the whole of our duty both towards God, ourselves, and our neighbors – are here included in the word ‘righteousness’. And although this may in one sense be said to be ours, as being in some measure owing to our own endeavours, working together with the Holy Spirit of God, yet is it very justly ascribed to him and termed his righteousness, since he is the confirmer and perfecter, as well as the infuser of it.⁴⁴

... the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does *for us*, in forgiving our sins; the latter to the great work which God does *in us*, in renewing our fallen nature. In order of time neither of these is before the other. In the moment we are justified by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Jesus we are also ‘born of the Spirit’; but in order of thinking, as it is termed, justification precedes the new birth.⁴⁵

‘His righteousness.’ This is all *his* righteousness still: it is his own free *gift* to us, for the sake of Jesus the righteous, through whom alone it is purchased for us. And it is his *work*: it is he alone that worketh in us by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. ...[Unbelieving Jews, besides being ignorant of imputed righteousness] were ignorant of that inward righteousness, of that holiness of heart, which is with the utmost propriety termed ‘God’s righteousness’, as being both his own free gift through Christ, and his own work by his almighty Spirit. And because they were ignorant of this they ‘went about to establish their own righteousness’. They labored to establish that outside righteousness which might very properly be termed ‘their own’; for neither was it wrought by the Spirit of God nor was it owned or accepted of him.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Sermon 134, “Seek First the Kingdom,” §6, *Works*, 4:219.

⁴⁵ Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” §1, *Works*, 2:187.

⁴⁶ Sermon 29, “Sermon on the Mount, IX,” §20-21, *Works*, 1:643.

By ‘the grace of God’ is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which ‘worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure’ [Phil. 2:13]. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes lace therein. And now we can perform, through God, what to man was impossible. Now we can order our conversation aright. We can do all things in the light and power of that love, through Christ which strengtheneth us.⁴⁷

... at the same time a man is justified sanctification properly begins. For when he is justified he is ‘born again’, ‘born from above’, ‘born of the Spirit’; which although it is not (as some suppose) the whole process of sanctification, [it] is doubtless the gate of it. Of this likewise God has given them a full view. They [Methodists] know the new birth implies as great a change in the soul, in him that is ‘born of the Spirit’, as was wrought in his body when he was born of a woman; not an outward change only, as from drunkenness to sobriety, from robbery or theft to honesty (this is the poor, dry, miserable conceit of those that know nothing of real religion); but an inward change, from all unholy to all holy tempers, from pride to humility, from passionateness to meekness, from peevishness and discontent to patience and resignation – in a word, from an earthly, sensual, devilish mind to the mind that was in Christ Jesus.⁴⁸

By the same faith we feel the power of Christ every moment resting upon us, whereby alone we are what we are, whereby we are enabled to continue in spiritual life, and without which, notwithstanding all our present holiness, we should be devils the next moment. ... We receive help from him [Christ] to think and speak and act what is acceptable in his sight. Thus does he ‘prevent them that believe in all their doings, and further them with continual help’, so that all their designs, conversations, and actions are ‘begun, continued, and ended in him’. Thus doth he ‘cleanse the thoughts of their hearts, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that they may perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name’.⁴⁹

... to the Son, giving himself to be ‘a propitiation for the sins of the world’ [cf. 1 John 2:2], and to the Spirit of God, renewing men in that image of God wherein they were created [see Col. 3:10].⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Sermon 12, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” §15, *Works*, 1:309. See also the closing of that sermon for summative benediction with the same theme: This is our rejoicing; that as our ‘Father worketh hitherto’, so (not by our own might or wisdom, but through the power of his Spirit freely given in Christ Jesus) we also work the works of God. And may he work in us whatsoever is well-pleasing in his sight, to whom be the praise for ever and ever (§20, *Works*, 1:313.)!

⁴⁸ Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” I.6, *Works*, 3:506.

⁴⁹ Sermon 14, “On Repentance of Believers,” II.5, *Works*, 1:349.

⁵⁰ Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” §2, *Works*, 3:200.

There is an internal consistency, a logical and seamless connection between Wesley's robust Christology and his pneumatology. It is no mere forgiveness of God's human creation we have in Jesus, but rather a restoration of the *imago dei* and an elevation of humanity to the *imitatio dei* that restores true godlikeness (the Christification of believers). So too, the Holy Spirit works in humanity to enable this true imitation of Christ, a real and tangible holiness that is at once both gift as well as the outgrowth of the fruit of believers' co-operation with God.

In closing this section, it is poignant to see how the Spirit's restorative work not only enables true imitation of God, linking the Spirit's work into Wesley's Christology and theme of *imitatio dei*; indeed, the Spirit's work is also tied to the fulfillment of humanity's creation, restoring the *imago dei* that was effaced by sin. Especially in his later writings, Wesley will attribute the restoration of the image of God not only to Christ's salvific work on humanity's behalf, but also to the Spirit's salvific work within humanity:

[The one thing needful] is simply to escape out of the snare of the devil, to regain an angelical nature; to recover the image wherein we were formed; to be like the Most High. This, this alone, is the one end of our abode here; for this alone are we placed on the earth; for this alone did the Son of God pour out his blood; for this alone doth his Holy Spirit watch over us. One thing we have to do, to press toward this mark of the prize of our high calling; to emerge out of chains, diseases, death, into liberty, health, and life immortal!⁵¹

By faith I know that the Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life; of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; of holiness and happiness, by the restoration of that image of God wherein we are created.⁵²

⁵¹ Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," III.1, *Works*, 4:35. Penned in 1734, this sermon shows that linking the restoration of the *imago dei* to the work of the Spirit is not only present in Wesley's later writings.

⁵² Sermon 117, "On the Discoveries of Faith," §7, *Works*, 4:32.

By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God: by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. ... But even that love [pure love to God and man] increases more and more, till we ‘grow up in all things into him that is our head’ [cf. Eph. 4:15], ‘till we attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ [Eph. 4:13].⁵³

The persons concerning whom he is here speaking are those that are born of God, ... who feel ‘the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them’ [cf. Rom. 5:5]. This then is the treasure which they have received, a faith of the operation of God, a peace which sets them above the fear of death, and enables them in everything to be content; an hope full of immortality, whereby they already ‘taste of the powers of the world to come’; the love of God shed abroad in their hearts with love to every child of man, and a renewal in the whole image of God, in all righteousness and true holiness.⁵⁴

For ‘God hath also’, through the intercession of his Son, ‘given us his Holy Spirit’ [cf. 1 Thess. 4:8], to ‘renew’ us both ‘in knowledge’ [cf. Col. 3:10], in his natural image, ‘opening the eyes of our understanding, and enlightening’ [cf. Luke 24:45; Eph. 1:18] us with all such knowledge as is requisite to our pleasing God; and also in his moral image, namely, ‘righteousness and true holiness’ [Eph. 4:24]. And supposing this is done, we know that ‘all things will work together for our good.’ We know by happy experience that all natural evils change their nature and turn to good; that sorrow, sickness, pain, will all prove medicines to heal our spiritual sickness. They will all be ‘to our profit’; will all tend to our unspeakable advantage, making us more largely ‘partakers of his holiness’ [cf. Heb. 12:10] while we remain on earth, adding so many starts to that crown which is reserved in heaven for us.⁵⁵

[Jesus] the great Physician, who by his almighty Spirit should heal the sickness of their souls, and restore them not only to the favour but to ‘the image of God wherein they were created’. ... In consequence of this [being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost] three thousand souls received ‘medicine to heal their sickness’, were restored to the favour and the image of God, under one sermon of St. Peter’s.⁵⁶

⁵³ Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” II.1, *Works*, 3:204.

⁵⁴ Sermon 129, “Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels,” I.3, *Works*, 4:164.

⁵⁵ Sermon 57, “On the Fall of Man,” II.8, *Works*, 2:410-11.

⁵⁶ Sermon 61, “The Mystery of Iniquity,” §2, 8, *Works*, 2:452, 454.

Wesley's theological anthropology is deeply trinitarian, and as we can now attest a deeply foundational way to understand both humanity's created capacity for God and humanity's ultimate achievement of true godlikeness.

Concluding Thoughts

This first section has explored how Wesley describes the Spirit as enabling faithful response to the salvation offered in Christ Jesus. From the initial sparks of conscience to the dawning of spiritual capacity to know and love God in the new birth, the Holy Spirit is the personal presence of God that enables and empowers believers to co-operate with God in intimate partnership; the Holy Spirit is the love and grace of God that leads believers into communion with their Creator. God's human creation is not merely acted upon, but enabled and empowered to respond (or, per Wesley, "re-act") to the grace of God. Tied to Wesley's other theological (and trinitarian) commitments, this is practically a restoration of the *imago dei*, allowing believers to truly follow the example of Christ in true holiness (to have the mind of Christ and to walk as Christ walked) and have renewed fellowship with God. Conversion and new birth for Wesley is a restoration to deiformity and true Christlikeness/godlikeness. It is both rooted and enabled by God, but also entails the participation of the believer.

The Spirit of Adoption: The Sons and Daughters of God

With the dawning of grace and Wesley's understanding of the new birth explored above, we now aim our focus on the ways in which new birth and sanctification are understood as the adoption and filiation of believers as sons and daughters of God. In

understandings of deification, as detailed in Chapter Two, one of the core and historic ways to understand deification is the believer's filiation and adoption as a son or daughter of God in the economy of God. Wesley's pneumatology reflects this deific emphasis in particular, as he understands believers' filiation and adoption by the Holy Spirit as central to both the work of the Holy Spirit (as the Spirit of adoption) and the identity of believers (as children of God). This section will detail the ways in which this is central to Wesley's theology.

The Spirit of Adoption and The Glorious New Status of Believers

Though Wesley is far from systematic in his writings about the Holy Spirit, the theme of adoption is one of the most ever-present ways for him to express the believer's new life in God. The filiation of the believer – the becoming a child of God – is the glorious hope of salvation, pointing to a glorious new status before God. As believers are marked by their adoption as sons and daughters of God, the Holy Spirit is known as the Spirit of adoption, enabling believers to address God as Father in intimate, familial address: “Abba, Father!” This call becomes a short-hand for Wesley to indicate the status of believers as children of God, a people who know and have access to God as their loving parent. And while the phrase “Abba, Father” has several biblical precedents – first as Jesus' cry to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36 and later as the Spirit-enabled cry of believers as “sons” to the Father in Galatians 4:6 – Wesley is most prone to quoting Romans 8:15: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The

scripture is ubiquitous within the sermons as expressing this new relationship the redeemed have with God as Father:

Blessed are they who are thus continually employed in the work of faith and the labour of love; ‘for they shall be called’ – that is ‘shall be’ (a common Hebraism) – ‘the children of God’ [Matt. 5:9]. God shall continue unto them the Spirit of adoption [Rom. 8:15], yea, shall pour it more abundantly into their hearts. He shall bless them with all the blessings of his children. He shall acknowledge them as sons before angels and men; ‘and if sons, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ’ [cf. Rom. 8:17].⁵⁷

[The Father] who hath received us for ‘his own children, by adoption and grace’, ‘and because we are sons, hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father’ [cf. Gal. 4:6]; ‘who hath begotten us again of incorruptible seed’ [cf. 1 Pet. 1:3, 23], and ‘created us anew in Christ Jesus’ [cf. Eph. 2:10].⁵⁸

This state we are thirdly to consider; the state of one who has found ‘grace’, or favour in the sight of God, even the Father, and who has the ‘grace’, or power of the Holy Ghost, reigning in his heart; who has received in the language of the Apostle, ‘the Spirit of adoption, whereby he now cries, Abba, Father’ [cf. Rom. 8:15].⁵⁹

Thou rejoicest in that thou hast ‘redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin’. Thou rejoicest in that Spirit of adoption which crieth in thy heart, Abba, Father!’ [Rom. 8:15]⁶⁰

If the new birth is the metaphor for new life in God, then “Abba, Father” is the like first cry in the delivery room. By God’s grace believers have new relationship and intimate access to God; “Abba, Father!” is a clarion call identifying a new existence as children of God for those enabled by the Spirit to join the family of God. Redeemed believers are not merely restored creatures relating to a distant-if-benevolent deity; they are rather children

⁵⁷ Sermon 23, “Sermon on the Mount, III,” II.7, *Works*, 1:520.

⁵⁸ Sermon 26, “Sermon on the Mount, VI,” III.4, *Works*, 1:579. The first quoted phrase is not from Scripture, but from the BCP (Collects, Sunday after Christmas).

⁵⁹ Sermon 9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” III.1, *Works*, 1:260.

⁶⁰ Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” II.11, *Works*, 1:231. For later sermons that also quote Romans 8:15, see Sermon 11, “The Witness of the Spirit, II,” III.3, *Works*, 1:289; and, Sermon 79, “On Dissipation,” §16, *Works*, 3:122.

who cry out to their Creator Father in love, wonder, and praise. The classic language of *theosis* is a fitting descriptor of Wesley's soteriological thrust: what Jesus the Son is by nature, the children of God have become through grace.⁶¹

Romans 8:16, The Witness of the Spirit, and Christian Assurance

Wesley's penchant for leaning on Romans 8:15 is likely tied to his reliance on Romans 8:16, which speaks of the Spirit's witness, alongside the believer's own witness, to this new status as children of God: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The Christian faith is never a matter for Wesley of doctrine alone; head meets heart, and the lofty theological doctrines of the faith are *experienced* by believers in tangible ways.⁶² Thus, Romans 8:16 becomes a key verse for Wesley to affirm both the believer's own experience and assurance of faith, bolstered and reaffirmed by the "witness of the Spirit. It is the very Spirit of God that assures one of the veracity of this brand new reality as a child of God:

By this 'faith of the operation of God', which was the very 'substance', or subsistence, 'of things hoped for', the demonstrative 'evidence of invisible things', he instantly 'received the Spirit of adoption, whereby he (now) cried Abba, Father' [Rom. 8:15]. Now first it was that he could 'call Jesus Lord, by the Holy Ghost', 'the Spirit itself bearing witness with his spirit that he was a child of God' [Rom. 8:16]. Now it was that he could truly say, 'I live not, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' [Gal. 2:20].⁶³

⁶¹ There remains, of course, the ontological distinction between God and humanity; believers become sons and daughter in an analogous way to Jesus the Son, but not in the Son's full divinity.

⁶² See Sermon 10, "The Witness of the Spirit, I," I.1, *Works*, 1:271. Wesley cites common Christian experience – alongside biblical warrant – as authoritative: "... seeing so many other [biblical] texts, with the experience of all real Christians, sufficiently evince that there is in every believer both the testimony of God's Spirit, and the testimony of his own, that he is a child of God."

⁶³ Sermon 4, "Scriptural Christianity," I.1, *Works*, 1:161. Here we also see another tendency of Wesley when speaking of the witness of the Spirit: linking Romans 8:16 with Galatians 2:20. The realization that the believer's life is now intertwined with Christ is affirmed by the witness of the Spirit. See also Sermon

Ye feel that ‘by grace ye are saved through faith’; saved from sin by Christ formed ‘in your hearts’, and from fear by ‘his Spirit bearing witness with your spirit, that ye are the sons of God’ [cf. Rom. 8:16]. ... ‘Ye have an unction from the Holy One’ [1 John 2:20] that teacheth you to renounce any other or higher perfection than ‘faith working by love, faith ‘zealous of good works’, faith ‘as it hath opportunity doing good unto all men’. ‘As ye have therefore received Jesus Christ the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and ’stablished in the faith’, and ‘abounding therein’ more and more.⁶⁴

And as to you who believe yourselves the elect of God, what is your happiness? I hope, not a notion, a speculative belief, a bare opinion of any kind; but a feeling possession of God in your heart, wrought in you by the Holy Ghost; or, ‘the witness of God’s Spirit with you spirit, that you are a child of God’ [cf. Rom. 8:16]. This, otherwise termed ‘the full assurance of faith’, is the true ground of a Christian’s happiness. And it does indeed imply a full assurance that all your past sins are forgiven, and that you are *now* a child of God.⁶⁵

This 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’ [cf. 1 Cor. 12:3]; 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’ [cf. Gal. 2:20]. And then it is that happiness begins – happiness real, solid, substantial. Then it is that heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper, heavenly state commences, while the love of God, as loving us, is shed abroad in the heart, instantly producing love to all mankind: general, pure benevolence⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly, Wesley interweaves the witness of the Spirit with other salvific terms he is wont to use. Here we see passages where both the “circumcision of the heart” and the “image of God” stand alongside the witness of the Holy Spirit:

This is the next things which the next thing which the ‘circumcision of the heart’ implies – even the testimony of their own spirit with the Spirit which witnesses in their hearts, that they are the children of God [Rom. 8:16]. Indeed it is the same Spirit who works in them that clear and cheerful confidence that their heart is

114, “On the Death of John Fletcher,” I.2, *Works*, 3:612; and, Sermon 106, “On Faith,” I.12, *Works*, 3:497-98.

⁶⁴ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, §6, *Works*, 13:39.

⁶⁵ Sermon 110, “Free Grace,” §14, *Works*, 3:549. Additionally, see Sermon 8, “The First-fruits of the Spirit,” I.2, *Works*, 1:234; Sermon 18, “The Marks of the New Birth,” II.2-3, *Works*, 1:423; Sermon 2, “The Almost Christian,” II.9, *Works*, 1:141; and, Sermon 1, “Salvation by Faith,” III.6, *Works*, 1:128.

⁶⁶ Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” II.5, *Works*, 3:96.

upright toward God; that good assurance that they now do, through his grace, the things which are acceptable in his sight; that they are now in the path which leadeth to life, and shall, by the mercy of God, endure therein to the end.⁶⁷

This great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, which is begun on earth but perfected in heaven, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped upon our hearts. It is a renewal in the spirit of our minds after the likeness of him that created us. It is a salvation from sin and doubt and fear. From fear; for ‘begin justified freely, they who believe have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. From doubt; for ‘the Spirit’ of God ‘beareth witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God’ [Rom. 8:16].⁶⁸

He rejoiced in that ‘witness of God’s Spirit with his spirit that he was a child of God’ [Rom. 8:16]; and more abundantly ‘in hope of the glory of God’; in hope of the glorious image of God, the full ‘renewal of his soul in righteousness and true holiness’; and in hope of that ‘crown of glory’, that ‘inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away’ [1 Pet. 1:4].⁶⁹

The witness of the Spirit is for Wesley both evidence of the inner presence of God and a source of assurance for believers that they are children of God and heirs of salvation.

Perhaps because Wesley endured times where he questioned his own salvation, the witness of the Spirit as an assurance of the work of God plays an important role in Wesley’s understanding of Christian life. To this end he wrote a pair of sermons, Sermon 10 and Sermon 11, entitled “The Witness of the Spirit.” Written some twenty years apart in Wesley’s middle and later career (1746 and 1767, respectively), together they give concentrated insight into the nature of how Wesley understood the witness of the Spirit over the course of his career. Both sermons detail the inward witness of believer, which can be deduced from by inwardly seeing the evidence of the Spirit’s work in one’s life:

⁶⁷ Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” I.9, *Works*, 1:406. Wesley will later affirm again in this sermon the absolute necessity of the witness of the Spirit: “From what has been said we may, thirdly, learn that none is truly ‘led by the Spirit’ unless that ‘Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God’ [Rom. 8:16]” (II.5, *Works*, 1:411).

⁶⁸ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Preface, §4, *Works*, 13:43.

⁶⁹ Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” I.3, *Works*, 1:162.

Every man applying those scriptural marks to himself may know whether he is a child of God. Thus if he know, first, ‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God’ into all holy tempers and actions, ‘they are the sons of God’ (for which he has the infallible assurance of Holy Writ) [Rom. 8:14]; secondly, I am thus ‘led by the Spirit of God’ – he will easily conclude, ‘Therefore I am a “son of God”.’⁷⁰

Strictly speaking, it is a conclusion drawn partly from the Word of God, and partly from our own experience. The Word of God says everyone who has the fruit of the Spirit is a child of God. Experience, or inward consciousness, tells me that I have the fruit of the Spirit. And hence I rationally conclude: therefore I am a child of God.⁷¹

In Sermon 10, the supernatural witness of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by the tempers and love placed within the soul by God:

It [the witness of the Spirit] is a consciousness of our having received, in and by the Spirit of adoption, the tempers mentioned in the Word of God as belonging to his adopted children; even a loving heart toward God and toward all mankind, having with childlike confidence on God our Father, desiring nothing but him, casting all our care upon him, and embracing every child of man with earnest, tender affection A consciousness that we are inwardly conformed by the Spirit of God to the image of his Son, and that we walk before him in justice, mercy, and truth; doing the things which are pleasing in his sight.⁷²

Later in Sermon 11, Wesley will attribute the fruit of the spirit as the “immediate result” of the Spirit’s adopting presence:

But what is ‘the witness of the Spirit’? ... The testimony now under consideration is given by the Spirit of God to and with our spirit. He is the person testifying. What he testifies to us is ‘that we are the children of God’. The immediate result of this testimony is ‘the fruit of the Spirit’; namely, ‘love, joy, peace; longsuffering, gentleness, goodness’. And without these the testimony itself cannot continue. For it is inevitably omission of known duty, but by giving way to any inward sin – in a word, by whatever grieves the Holy Spirit of God.⁷³

⁷⁰ Sermon 10, “The Witness of the Spirit, I,” I.2, *Works*, 1:271-72.

⁷¹ Sermon 11, “The Witness of the Spirit, II,” II.6, *Works*, 1:287-88.

⁷² Sermon 10, “The Witness of the Spirit, I,” I.6, *Works*, 1:273-74.

⁷³ Sermon 11, “The Witness of the Spirit, II,” II.1, *Works*, 1:286.

Finally, in both sermons there is a movement from the witness of the Spirit to the goal of that witness – the assurance of faith. The witness of the Spirit makes the children of God confident and steadfast in their adoption and forgiveness:

But the fact we know: namely, that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption that while it is present to the soul he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship than he can doubt of the shining of the sun while he stands in the full blaze of his beams.⁷⁴

But he so works upon the soul by his immediate influence, and by a strong though inexplicable operation, that the stormy wind and troubled waves subside, and there is a sweet calm; the heart resting as in the arms of Jesus, and his ‘iniquities are forgiven, and his sins covered’.⁷⁵

The witness of the Spirit results in a bold confidence in the lives of believers.⁷⁶ In the context of the last quote above, Wesley assures his readers that the witness of the Spirit is not necessarily an outward voice or a particular scripture applied to the hearer; instead, there are both direct and indirect means through which a clear sense of one’s status as a child of God is confirmed and celebrated.

Beloved Children: Love Shed Abroad in Our Hearts

Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” an early sermon in Wesley’s career, ends with this Trinitarian blessing:

Unto God the Father, who first loved us, and made us accepted in the Beloved;
unto God the Son, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;

⁷⁴ Sermon 10, “The Witness of the Spirit, I,” I.12, *Works*, 1:276.

⁷⁵ Sermon 11, “The Witness of the Spirit, II,” II.4, *Works*, 1:287.

⁷⁶ Though the focus here has been on Sermons 10 and 11, the clear witness of the Spirit is also found in Wesley’s earlier writings as well. See Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” I.7, *Works*, 1:405 – “He [the believer] feels what is ‘the exceeding greatness of his power’ who, as he raised up Christ from the dead, so is able to quicken us – ‘dead in sin’ [cf. Eph. 2:1,5] – ‘by his Spirit which dwelleth in us’ [Rom. 8:11] ... [revealing] Christ in our hearts: a divine evidence or conviction of his love, his free unmerited love to me a sinner; a sure confidence in his pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost – a witness, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth’ [Job 19:15]; that I ‘have an advocate with the Father’, that ‘Jesus Christ the righteous is’ *my* Lord, and ‘the propitiation for *my* sins’ [1 John 2:1-2].”

unto God the Holy Ghost, who sheddeth the love of God abroad in our hearts, be all love and all glory for time and for eternity!⁷⁷

The benediction above is a beautiful articulation of the ways in which the love of God is a core Wesleyan way of understanding the salvation of God. It also highlights another key way Wesley describes the work of the Spirit: the Holy Spirit “sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts,” a scriptural reference from Romans 5:5.⁷⁸

To be children of the God is to be like our divine parent. As God is love, so too are God’s children. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s son and daughters infuses them with a grace-empowered ability to live in love:

Dost thou now believe? Then ‘the love of God is’ now ‘shed abroad in thy heart’ [Rom. 5:5]. Thou lovest him, because he first loved us. And because thou lovest God, thou lovest thy brother also.⁷⁹

... God hath willed and commanded that ‘all our works should be done in charity’ ... in that love to God which produces love to all mankind. But none of our work can be done in this love while the love of the Father (of God as our Father) is not in us. And this love cannot be in us till we receive the ‘Spirit of adoption, crying in our hearts, Abba, Father’ [cf. Rom. 8:15].⁸⁰

‘The love of God’ was also ‘shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which was given unto him’ [Rom. 5:5] ‘Because he was a son, God had sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying Abba, Father!’ [Gal. 4:6] And that filial love of God was continually increased by the ‘witness he had in himself’ of God’s pardoning love to him, by ‘beholding what manner of love it was which the Father had bestowed upon him, that he should be called a child of God’ [1 John 3:1]. So that God was the desire of his eyes, and the joy of his heart; his portion in time and in eternity.⁸¹

We expect to be ‘made perfect in love’, in that love which ‘casts out’ all painful ‘fear’, and all desire but that of glorifying him we love, and of loving and serving

⁷⁷ Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” III.8, *Works*, 4:343.

⁷⁸ Romans 5:5: “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (KJV).

⁷⁹ Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” II.12, *Works*, 1:231.

⁸⁰ Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” III.6, *Works*, 1:193.

⁸¹ Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” I.4, *Works*, 1:162-63.

him more and more. We look for such an increase in the experimental knowledge and love of God our Saviour as will enable us always to ‘walk in the light, as he is in the light’. We believe the whole ‘mind’ will be in us ‘which was also in Christ Jesus’ that we shall love every man so as to be ready ‘to lay down our life for his sake’, so as by this love to be freed from anger and pride, and from every unkind affection.⁸²

What is significant here is the ways in which the role of the Holy Spirit in shedding the love of God into believers’ hearts is an essential prerequisite for believers to live like God. We love – and are enabled to love – because God first loves us; the love of God is the spring from which “faith working by love” is possible. Filiation, the process by which believers are made children, is none other than an infusion of divine love, the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Spirit’s vivifying presence.

Restoration to love, then, is naturally a restoration of the *imago dei*, a renewed capacity to love God and love one’s neighbor. In addition to enabling and empowering children of God to live lives of love, the love of God also is the spring from which unholy tempers and passions are expunged from the soul. The Holy Spirit is able to purify believers and instill inward holiness as the restorative power of love roots out everything that is not holy, good, or divine:

It is the Spirit which continually ‘worketh in them, both to will and to do of his good pleasure’ [cf. Phil. 2:13]. It is he that sheds the love of God abroad in their hearts, and the love of all mankind; thereby purifying their hearts from the love of the world, from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life [1 John 2:16]. It is by him they are delivered from anger and pride, from all vile and inordinate affections [see Col. 3:5].⁸³

And all inward holiness is the immediate fruit of the faith that worketh by love. By this the blessed Spirit purifies the heart from all pride, self-will, passion; from love of the world, from foolish and hurtful desires, from vile and vain affections. Besides that, sanctified afflictions have (through the grace of God) an immediate

⁸² Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” §3, *Works*, 2:140.

⁸³ Sermon 9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” III.7, *Works*, 1:262-63.

and direct tendency to holiness. Through the operation of his Spirit they humble more and more, and abase the soul before God. They calm and meeken our turbulent spirit, tame the fierceness of our nature, soften our obstinacy and self-will, crucify us to the world, and bring us to expect all our strength from, and to seek all our happiness in, God.⁸⁴

Now whosoever has this faith which ‘purifies the heart’, by the power of God who dwelleth therein, from pride, anger, desire, ‘from all unrighteousness’, ‘from all filthiness of flesh and spirit’; which fills it with love stronger than death both to God and to all mankind – love that doth the works of God, glorying to spend and to be spent for all men, and that endureth with joy, not only the reproach of Christ, the being mocked, despised, and hated of all men, but whatsoever the wisdom of God permits the malice of men or devils to inflict; whosoever has this faith, thus ‘working by love’ [Gal. 5:6], is not *almost* only, but *altogether* a Christian.⁸⁵

By the same Spirit he was enabled to be ‘temperate in all things’ [1 Cor. 9:25], ‘refraining his soul even as a weaned child’. He was ‘crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him’ [cf. Gal. 6:14] – superior to ‘the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life’ [1 John 2:16]. By the same almighty love was he saved both from passion and pride, from lust and vanity, from ambition and covetousness, and from every temper which was not in Christ.⁸⁶

[Hold fast, watch and pray...] In so doing, expect a continual growth in grace, in the loving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Expect that the power of the Highest shall suddenly overshadow you [Luke 1:35], that all sin may be destroyed, and nothing may remain in your heart but holiness unto the Lord.⁸⁷

Purged by a love stronger than death, crucified to the world, saved from passion and pride – the filiation of believers is made possible by the triune love of God. As Wesley points out in Sermon 80, “On Friendship with the World,” separation from the world makes believers God’s sons and daughters “in a peculiar sense.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Sermon 47, “Heaviness through Manifold Temptations,” IV.5, *Works*, 2:232-33.

⁸⁵ Sermon 2, “The Almost Christian,” II.6, *Works*, 1:139.

⁸⁶ Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” I.6, *Works*, 1:163-64.

⁸⁷ Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” §III.10, *Works*, 3:102.

⁸⁸ Sermon 80, “On Friendship with the World,” §28, *Works*, 3:140. Here he is harkening to 2 Cor. 6:17-18.

The Freedom of Children

The Holy Spirit as the agent of adoption produces vast changes in the lives of God's children – bearing witness to their adoption, shedding the love of God in their hearts, and purifying and sanctifying them as they reflect more deeply the God in whose image they were created. This leads Wesley to speak of the liberty enjoyed by the children of God. As forgiven and reconciled people, they are freed from the punishment and power of sin, and thus are freed from guilt of sin and fear of punishment:

And 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty' [2 Cor. 3:17]; liberty not only from guilt and fear, but from sin, from that heaviest of all yokes, that basest of all bondage. ... [Now] having power over all sin, over every evil desire and temper, and word on work, he is a living witness of the 'glorious liberty of the sons of God' [cf. Rom. 8:21]: all of whom, being partakers of 'like precious faith' [2 Pet. 1:1], bear record with one voice, 'We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!' [Rom. 8:15]⁸⁹

And being saved from guilt, they are saved from fear. Not indeed from a filial fear of offending, but from all servile fear, from that 'fear which hath torment', from fear of punishment, from fear of the wrath of God, whom they now no longer regard as a severe master, but as an indulgent Father. 'They have not received again the spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father: the Spirit itself also bearing witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God' [Rom. 8:15-16]. They are also saved from the fear, though not from the possibility, of falling away from the grace of God, and coming short of the great precious promises. They are 'sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of their inheritance' [Eph. 1:13]. Thus have they 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ They rejoice in hope of the glory of God And the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts through the Holy Ghost which is given unto them' [cf. Rom. 5:1, 2, 5].⁹⁰

It is a peace, that banishes all doubt, all painful uncertainty, the Spirit of God 'bearing witness with the spirit' of a Christian that he is 'a child of God' [cf. Rom.

⁸⁹ Sermon 9, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," III.5-6, *Works*, 1:262. Wesley goes on to summarize that "the heathen, baptized or unbaptized, hath a fancied liberty," the Jew a "heavy, grievous bondage," and the Christian a "true glorious liberty of the sons of God." This parallels his tripartite division of humanity: "To sum up all. The 'natural man' neither fears nor loves God; one 'under the law' fears, one 'under grace' loves him." See *ibid.*, III.8, *Works*, 1:263.

⁹⁰ Sermon 1, "Salvation by Faith," II.4, *Works*, 1:122-23.

8:16]. And it banishes fear, all such fear as hath torment; the fear of the wrath of God, the fear of hell, the fear of the devil, and, in particular, the fear of death.⁹¹

The “glorious liberty” of the children of God, a harkening again to Romans 8, is an appropriate bookend to the witness of the Spirit that first attests to the adoption of believers. From affirmation of adoption, believers are moved by the Spirit to lives that fully reflect the freedom God intends for the children of God.

Servants and Sons

In closing this section exploring Wesley’s understanding of believers as adopted children of God, it is pertinent to note here a development in Wesley’s thought that occurs later in his ministry. It might be well remembered that Wesley, in his zeal for holiness, at times cut a sharp dividing line between those who were living holy lives and those who maintained an outward veneer of Christianity. In his famous Sermon 2, “The Almost Christian,” for example, he divides those who call themselves “Christians” between those who are “almost Christian” (which is to say *not yet truly Christians*) and those who are “altogether Christian.” He exhorts his audience to strive to be Christians indeed, with the love of God residing within them:

May we all thus experience what it is to be not almost only, but altogether Christians! Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus, knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us.⁹²

In Wesley’s later sermons, he laments some of the polarizing definitions he accepted earlier in his ministry. In Sermon 106, “On Faith,” the now aged leader reflects that his

⁹¹ Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” I.10, *Works*, 1:223.

⁹² Sermon 2, “The Almost Christian,” II.11, *Works*, 1:141.

Methodists in the past used to call those without a sense of God's forgiveness, or the witness of the Spirit, "children of the devil."⁹³ That was an unfair accusation, Wesley contends, as even an infant in Christ is able to fear God and work righteousness. Now he employs a different way to parse development in faith – from servants to son. A young believer who obeys out of fear without the witness of the Spirit "is at present only a *servant* of God, not properly a *son*."⁹⁴ The witness of the Spirit, and the adoption as full children of God, will come with spiritual maturity:

And indeed, unless the servants of God halt by the way, they will receive the adoption of sons. They will receive the *faith* of the children of God by his *revealing* his only-begotten Son in their hearts [see Gal. 1:16]. Thus the faith of a child is properly and directly a divine conviction whereby every child of God is enabled to testify, 'The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me' [Gal. 2:20]. And whosoever hath this, 'the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God' [cf. Rom. 8:16]. So the Apostle writes to the Galatians, 'Ye are the sons of God by faith' [Gal. 3:26]. 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father' [Gal. 4:6]; that is, giving you a childlike confidence in him, together with a kind of affection toward him. This then it is that (if St. Paul was taught of God, and wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost) properly constitutes the difference between a servant of God and a child of God. 'He that believeth', as a child of God, 'hath the witness in himself.' This the servant hath not.⁹⁵

But let us covet the best gifts, and follow the most excellent way [see 1 Cor. 12:31]. ... press on till you receive the Spirit of adoption. Rest not till that Spirit clearly witnesses with your spirit that you are a child of God.⁹⁶

The ultimate identifying marker of *children* over *servants* is the witness of the Holy Spirit attesting to believers' adoption as sons and daughters of God. Servants are motivated by fear of punishment and a sense of obligation, whereas children are motivated by love and

⁹³ Sermon 106, "On Faith," I.11, *Works*, 3:497.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, I.10, *Works*, 3:497.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.12, *Works*, 3:497-98.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I.13, *Works*, 3:498.

a sense of liberty.⁹⁷ The sermon ends by pointing to an ever-growing love and maturity for even “sons,” exhorting those with the witness of adoption to press on toward God:

I exhort you, lastly, who already feel the Spirit of God witnessing with your spirit that you are the children of God, follow the advice of the Apostle, ‘Walk in all the *good works* whereunto ye are created in Christ Jesus’ [cf. Eph. 2:10]. And then, ‘leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God’, go on to perfection [cf. Heb. 6:1]. Yea, and when ye have attained a measure of perfect love, when God has ‘circumcised your hearts’, and enabled you to love him with all your heart and with all your soul, think not of resting there. That is impossible. You cannot stand still; you must either rise or fall – rise higher or fall lower. Therefore the voice of God to the children of Israel, to the children of God is, ‘Go forward’ [Exo. 14:15].⁹⁸

Another later work, Sermon 89, “The More Excellent Way,” demonstrates a similar teaching that believers are never in a static state before God. Therefore, they should choose the “more excellent way” and seek to aspire to the “entire image of God:”

From long experience and observation I am inclined to think that whoever finds redemption in the blood of Jesus, whoever is justified, has then the choice of walking in the higher or the lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time sets before him the more excellent way, and incites him to walk therein, to choose the narrowest path in the narrow way, to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness, after the entire image of God. But if he does not accept this offer, he insensibly declines into the lower order of Christians. He still goes on in what may be called a good way, serving God in his degree, and finds mercy in the close of life, through the blood of the covenant.⁹⁹

The bifurcation between Christians rising in “the more excellent way” of holiness and those who decline “into the lower order of Christians” is categorically different than the younger Wesley’s division between “almost” and “altogether” Christians, with arguably

⁹⁷ For another later sermon with the same assertion, see Sermon 117, “On the Discoveries of Faith,” §13, *Works*, 4:35 – “Nevertheless he should be exhorted not to stop there; not to rest till he attains the adoption of sons; till he obeys out of love, which is the privilege of all the *children* of God.” Wesley here compares the faith of a servant versus the faith of a son. The servant obeys out of fear, while a son obeys out of love.

⁹⁸ Sermon 106, “On Faith,” II.5, *Works*, 3:500-501.

⁹⁹ Sermon 89, “The More Excellent Way,” §6, *Works*, 3:266.

ameliorated standards for holiness and faith. While that proves an interesting topic for further exploration, what is pertinent for this discussion is Wesley's consistent teaching that believers are ever invited into full adoption as the children of God, with liberty, freedom from sin,¹⁰⁰ and ever-deepening communion with God. Servile fear may always give way to, through the power of the Spirit, familial love and peace.

Concluding Thoughts

In classic parlance of *theosis*, God makes a believer *by grace* what Christ himself is *by nature* – a child of God. This section has explored ways in which new birth and sanctification are understood as the adoption and filiation of believers as sons and daughters of God. Rather than being a facet of Wesley's pneumatology, the status of believers as children of God is a robust and central teaching. The Holy Spirit is praised and lauded as the witness to this divine adoption, filling the children of God with divine love and purifying them of unholy passions and tempers. Freed from sin, guilt, shame, and fear, redeemed humanity enjoys the "liberty of the sons of God." Looking to God as their loving parent, the believer is able (like Jesus!) to cry, "Abba, Father!" with the confidence and assurance of a child of God.

¹⁰⁰ While Wesley did not deny that Christians still struggled with sin, he maintained they could *expect* the freedom God promised and *strive* for the full promises of God. See *An Abstract of the Life and Death of The Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Tho[mas] Halyburton*, Preface, §6, *Works*, 13:30 – "But though it is possible a man may be a child of God who is not fully freed from sin, it does not follow that freedom from sin is impossible, or that it is not to be expected by all the children of God. It is to be expected by all; for it is promised. It is described by the Holy Ghost as the common privilege of all."

The Indwelling Spirit: A New Humanity Led and Filled with the Spirit

Quickened by the Spirit to new life in the new birth, and elevated to the glorious new status as children of God, redeemed humanity has yet another gift from God: the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This third section looks closely at the ways Wesley understands the Spirit's presence as the kingdom of God, and how specifically redeemed humanity is filled and led by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Interior Kingdom: Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit

In the last section we began exploring how the Holy Spirit works within believers, giving witness to their adoption, filling them with divine love, and expunging everything that contrary to the will of God from their lives. In continuity with these movements of the Spirit, God also instills within believers the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. When Wesley speaks of the Holy Spirit's presence and the impartation of these gifts, he speaks practically of this being God's kingdom *within* believers. In keeping with his penchant to choose a key verse of scripture to hinge his teaching, Romans 14:17¹⁰¹ is utilized most often:

This is that kingdom of heaven or of God which is 'within' us, even 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' [Rom. 14:17].¹⁰²

'The kingdom of God', saith our blessed Lord, 'is within you.' It is no outward, no distant thing; 'but a well of living water in the soul, springing up into everlasting life'. It is 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' [Rom. 14:17]. It is holiness and happiness.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Romans 14:17 – "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" KJV.

¹⁰² Sermon 21, "Sermon on the Mount, I," I.11, *Works*, 1:481.

¹⁰³ *An Abstract of the Life and Death of The Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Tho[mas] Halyburton*, Preface, §1, *Works*, 13:28.

The inward kingdom of heaven, which is set up in the heart of all that ‘repent and believe the gospel’, is no other than ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost’ [Rom. 14:17]. Every babe in Christ knows we are made partakers of these the very hour that we believe in Jesus. But these are only the first-fruits of his Spirit; the harvest is not yet. Although these blessings are inconceivably great, yet we trust to see greater than these.¹⁰⁴

This alone is religion, truly so called: this alone is in the sight of God of great price. The Apostle sums it all up in three particulars – ‘righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ [Rom. 14:17]. ... But true religion, or a heart right toward God and man, implies happiness as well as holiness. For it is not only righteousness, but also ‘peace and joy in the Holy Ghost’ [Rom. 14:17].¹⁰⁵

Righteousness, peace, and joy are the fruit of the indwelling presence of God. They are the sum of “true religion,” the “kingdom of heaven,” and the “kingdom of God.”

Together they represent a triad of heavenly qualities and dispositions that result in the great end of our creation: holiness and happiness in God.

In considering what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit for Wesley, it is helpful to look at passages where he parses these ideas more clearly. When discussing righteousness, he most often describes the fulfillment of the two-fold love of God and neighbor.¹⁰⁶ Righteousness and holiness stand side-by-side for Wesley, making righteousness a fulfillment of many of the salvific themes expressed most often in his theology – the mind of Christ, the image of God, the love of God, and the kingdom of heaven:

And what is righteousness but the life of God in the soul, the mind which was in Christ Jesus, the image of God stamped upon the heart, now renewed after the likeness of him that created it? What is it but the love of God because he first loved us, and the love of all mankind for his sake? ... And well may this be termed ‘the kingdom of heaven’; seeing it is heaven already opened in the soul,

¹⁰⁴ Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” §2, *Works*, 2:139.

¹⁰⁵ Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” I.7, 10, *Works*, 1:221, 223.

¹⁰⁶ For a concrete example from the list above, see Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” I.7-10, *Works*, 1:221- 23.

the first springing up of those rivers of pleasure which flow at God's right hand for evermore.¹⁰⁷

[Satan] will level his assault against your righteousness also...to destroy the holiness you have already received.¹⁰⁸

Restored righteousness and holiness is none other than the very foundation for the peace and joy that are also constitutive of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Righteousness and holiness are also constitutive of the character of God, so godlikeness is likewise foundational for understandings of peace and joy which follow.

Peace, therefore, is an outgrowth of this new relationship with God and the presence of righteousness in the soul. The consequences of sin are fear of judgment and doubt of one's status as a child of God. Through the salvation of God, however, fear and doubt are replaced with peace in the redeemed soul. The peace of God is the quiet assurance (harkening to the witness of the Spirit!) that one is child of God:

It is a peace, that banishes all doubt, all painful uncertainty, the Spirit of God 'bearing witness with the spirit' of a Christian that he is 'a child of God' [cf. Rom. 8:16].¹⁰⁹

If Satan can to damp our joy, he will soon attack our peace also. ...For the peace of God is another precious means of advancing the image of God in us. There is scarce a greater help to holiness than this: a continual tranquility of spirit, the evenness of a mind stayed upon God, a calm repose in the blood of Jesus. ... For all fear (unless the tender, filial fear) freezes and benumbs the soul. It binds up all the springs of spiritual life, and stops all motion of the heart toward God. And doubt, as it were, bemires the soul, so that it sticks fast in the deep clay. Therefore in the same proportion as either of these prevail, our growth in holiness is hindered.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Sermon 21, "Sermon on the Mount, I," I.11, *Works*, 1:481.

¹⁰⁸ Sermon 42, "Satan's Devices," I.5, *Works*, 2:142-43. This sermon illustrates how Satan attacks righteousness, peace, and joy respectively in the lives of believers.

¹⁰⁹ Sermon 7, "The Way to the Kingdom," I.10, *Works*, 1:223.

¹¹⁰ Sermon 42, "Satan's Devices," I.2-6, *Works*, 2:141-43.

Wesley notes the reciprocal nature of this gift – where peace is hindered by doubt or fear, so too is one’s growth in holiness/righteousness.

Filled with righteousness and peace, the believer is given the gift of genuine joy.

This joy comes from the witness and assurance of the Spirit of one’s adoption, and the hope that those promises of God which are now fulfilled in part will one day be completed in full:

...[The Holy Spirit] inspires the Christian soul with that even, solid joy which arises from the testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God; and that gives him to ‘rejoice with joy unspeakable’ [1 Pet. 1:8], ‘in hope of the glory of God’ [Rom. 5:2] – hope both of the glorious image of God which is in part and shall be fully ‘revealed in him’ [cf. Rom. 8:18], and of that crown of glory which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him.¹¹¹

[Satan] endeavours to damp our joy in the Lord. ... Joy in the Holy Ghost is a precious means of promoting every holy temper; a choice instrument of God whereby he carries on much of his work in a believing soul.¹¹²

Joy is both a fruit of the Spirit, present as a witness to God’s work, as well as a motivating disposition to attain all the holy tempers or fruits of the Spirit. It also harkens back to Wesley’s theological anthropology, wherein God’s human creation was made to be both happy and holy, reflecting perfectly the holiness of their divine archetype.

Righteousness, peace, and joy are not an exclusive list for Wesley. As they are each interdependent ideas from one another, so too they are presented as gateways to the full repertoire of heavenly tempers. In Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” Wesley will list them as the first of all dispositions that “are holy, are heavenly, or divine:”

And being filled with ‘love, peace, joy’, thou art also filled with ‘long-suffering, gentleness, fidelity, goodness, meekness, temperance’, and all the other fruits of the same Spirit – in a word, with whatever dispositions are holy, are heavenly, or

¹¹¹ Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” I.11, *Works*, 1:224.

¹¹² Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” I.1-6, *Works*, 2:140-43.

divine. For while thou ‘beholdest with open (uncovered) face’ (the veil now being taken away) ‘the glory of the Lord’, his glorious love, and the glorious image wherein thou wast created, thou art ‘changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord’ [2 Cor. 3:18].¹¹³

We see them in slightly different lists and different orders in Wesley’s corpus.¹¹⁴ Further, the reciprocal nature of the dispositions is only matched by their united goal of making the believer more like Christ.¹¹⁵ That great goal of Wesley’s Christology, the Christification of believers so as to have the “full mind of Christ” and “to walk as Christ walked,” is practically realized by the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying presence in the lives of believers. The mind that was in Christ – dispositions of holiness, peace, joy, and love, etc. – are imparted and instilled within redeemed humanity as they are filled with the Spirit. Those holy dispositions and tempers are the springs from which *imitatio dei* is possible: believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, are enabled by God’s indwelling presence (grace!), to live lives that reflect the way Jesus walked in the world.

Christian Perfection

Christian perfection may best be viewed through the lens of Wesley’s pneumatology. Rather than being a rousing crescendo of Wesley’s theology, the apex of his theological vision for redeemed humanity, Christian perfection is more a logical

¹¹³ Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” II.12, *Works*, 1:231.

¹¹⁴ See Sermon 18, “The Marks of the New Birth,” *Works*, 1:415-30. There the list is slightly different and enlarged: power over sin (righteousness), peace, hope, joy, and love.

¹¹⁵ For an extended example of this, see Sermon 83, “On Patience,” *Works*, 3:169-79. In this sermon Wesley asserts that the “fruit or ‘work of patience’” are peace, joy, and love (§6, *Works*, 3:173). Moreover, the perfect work of patience is nothing less than the renewal of the image of God: “But what is the ‘perfect work’ of patience? Is it anything less than the ‘perfect love of God’ [1 John 2:5], constraining us to love every soul of man, ‘even as Christ loved us’? Is it not the whole of religion, the whole ‘mind which was also in Christ Jesus’? Is it not the ‘renewal of our soul in the image of God, after the image of him that created us’?” (§8, *Works*, 3:173).

reality of the indwelling and sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit. The scandal of the doctrine has ever been not that God would perfect those whom God redeems – a universal hope for all Christians – but rather that this perfection may be accomplished *in a degree* in this life.¹¹⁶ While a comprehensive treatment of this doctrine falls outside of the scope of this project, it is important to show how Christian perfection fits into Wesley’s overall theological vision of the work of the Holy Spirit.

In point of fact, the arc of Wesley’s entire pneumatology is a pointing to the conviction that the Spirit of God is actively filling, actuating, and leading the adopted children of God into greater and greater depths of the divine life of God. It is telling that the way Wesley speaks of Christian perfection is often in the language of the fruit of the Spirit. Take Sermon 76, “On Perfection,” where perfection is seen as the “glorious constellation” of God’s graces in the Holy Spirit:

St. Paul, when writing to the Galatians, places perfection in yet another view. It is the one undivided ‘fruit of the Spirit’, which he describes thus: ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace; long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity (so the word should be translated here), ‘meekness, temperance.’ What a glorious constellation of graces is here! Now suppose all these to be knit together in one, to be united together in the soul of a believer – this is Christian perfection.¹¹⁷

With regard to the fruit of the Spirit, the Apostle, in affirming, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace; long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance,’ does in effect affirm that the Holy Spirit actually works love and

¹¹⁶ The central contentions against Christian perfection often stem from an understanding that “perfection” for Wesley was a static and absolute state, and confusing Wesley’s *present* perfection as the *absolute* perfection of the eschaton. Wesley argued for a Christian perfection that might be better understood as “maturity,” which allowed (expected!) continued growth in this life, admitted the limitations of fallen humanity, and looked for eschatological fulfillment. See Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection,” I.9, *Works*, 2:104-105 – “Yet we may we, lastly, observe that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no ‘perfection of degrees’, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man hath attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to ‘grow in grace’ [2 Pet. 3:18], and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour.”

¹¹⁷ Sermon 76, “On Perfection,” I.6, *Works*, 3:75.

these other tempers in those that are led by him. So that here also we have firm ground to tread upon, this Scripture likewise being equivalent to a promise, and assuring us that all these shall be wrought in us, provided we are led by the Spirit.¹¹⁸

The working of holy tempers into the lives of believers – that is to say, the sanctification of believers – is the ground of Wesley’s teaching that Christians may actually attain those tempers and dispositions in this life. It is both a calling and a promise of God:

As he has called us to holiness he is undoubtedly willing, as well as able, to work this holiness in us. For he cannot mock his helpless creatures, calling us to receive what he never intends to give. That he does call us thereto is undeniable; therefore he will give it, if we are not disobedient to the heavenly calling.¹¹⁹

God is faithful to enable that which God has promised, and those promises, Wesley contends, begin now in this present life. Insofar as is possible in this fallen world – where body and mind are liable to mistake, weakness, and ignorance – redeemed humanity is able to attain perfect love of God and neighbor and be filled with the mind of Christ, an imitation and similitude of Christ so far as is possible in this world. To deny that believers may attain these dispositions is a denial of the promises of God.

It is striking to note how Christian perfection is not mentioned by Wesley as something supererogatory and exemplary for the spiritually elite, but rather as a glorious reality (or at least *possibility*) for all children of God. Often, he will link Christian perfection as another term for the work he already attributes to the working of the Spirit. He will link perfection as a synonym for holiness or righteousness:

¹¹⁸ Ibid., II.3, *Works*, 3:77.

¹¹⁹ Sermon 76, “On Perfection,” II.5, *Works*, 3:77. See also *An Abstract of the Life and Death of The Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Tho[m]as Halyburton*, Preface §6, *Works*, 13:30. There, as mentioned earlier, Wesley asserts that power over sin is promised by the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, it [Christian perfection] is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus everyone that is perfect is holy, and everyone that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect.¹²⁰

And, most especially, he will link perfection to love:

Question 1. What is Christian perfection?

Answer. The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.¹²¹

Scriptural perfection is, pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions. ... None therefore ought to believe that the work is done till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification as clearly as his justification.¹²²

Put in pneumatological terms, perfection may be described as the Spirit's shedding the love of God abroad in the children of God; perfection is love in the hearts of believers as attested by the witness of the Spirit. In keeping with Wesley's understanding of the Spirit's work, the fruit of God's work on humanity's behalf entails the faithful response of believers. As described earlier, Wesley calls this a type of spiritual respiration or "re-action." We likewise see faith-filled response as a natural expectation for those perfected in love:

'Faith working by love' [cf. Gal. 5:6] is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. ... He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire, of spending and being spent for them [one's neighbors]. 'My Father', he will say, 'worketh hitherto, and I work.' And at all possible opportunities he is, like his Master, 'going about doing good'.¹²³

¹²⁰ Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," I.9, *Works*, 2:104-05.

¹²¹ *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1760), Q. 1, *Works*, 13:57.

¹²² *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1760), QQ. 25-26, *Works*, 13:73. See also *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763), §16, *Works*, 13:102. Christians, Wesley, argues, can know they are sanctified by the witness and fruit of the Holy Ghost.

¹²³ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, §5, *Works*, 13:39.

They rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. Their souls are continually streaming up to God, in holy joy, prayer, and praise. This is a point of fact. And this is plain, sound, scriptural experience.¹²⁴

With thoughts, words, and actions directed by faith working by love, Wesley paints Christian perfection in the pneumatological clothes of sanctification. It is no surprise, indeed it is quite fitting, that *entire sanctification* is Wesley's analogous terminology for Christian perfection.

Actuated by the Spirit

Wesley's enthusiastic emphasis on the indwelling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit led his critics to accuse him of *enthusiasm*.¹²⁵ While a pejorative religious term of his day, Wesley ironically embraces the term in Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," and gives his own definition of what he embraces as true enthusiasm in a positive sense.

The very prophets and apostles, Wesley points out, are "proper enthusiasts:"

... being at divers times so filled with the Spirit, and so influenced by him who dwelt in their hearts, that the exercise of their own reason, their senses, and all their natural faculties, being suspended, they were wholly actuated by the power of God, and 'spake' only 'as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' [2 Pet. 1:21]¹²⁶

Just as the matriarchs and patriarchs of the faith were "actuated by the power of God," so too are the present children of God. Though Wesley is careful in how often he employs such language, there is a sense that when one is filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit leads and directs the believer's words and actions in tangible ways:

They feel that 'it is not they who speak, but the Spirit of their Father which speaketh in them' [cf. Matt. 10:20]; and whatsoever is done by their hands, 'the

¹²⁴ *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763), §12, *Works*, 13:101.

¹²⁵ Pun intended; it also led them to accuse him of being "Montanus re-born," harkening to an early church heretic who claimed to speak authoritatively as God's mouthpiece.

¹²⁶ Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," §8, *Works*, 2:48.

Father which is with them, he doth the works.’ So that God is to them all in all, and they are as nothing in his sight. ... For their ‘eye’ being ‘single, their whole body is full of light’. Whatsoever is needful, they ‘are taught of God’. They ‘have an unction from the Holy One [1 John 2:20],’ ‘which abideth in them, and teacheth them’ [cf. 1 John 2:27] *every* hour, what they shall do and what they shall speak. Nor have they therefore any need to *reason* concerning it; for they see the way straight before them. The Lamb is their light, and they simply follow him, whithersoever he goeth.¹²⁷

They who thus believe do no longer ‘walk after the flesh’, no longer follow the motions of corrupt nature, but ‘after the Spirit’. Both their thoughts, words, and works, are under the direction of the blessed Spirit of God.¹²⁸

These are they who indeed ‘walk after the Spirit’. Being filled with faith and with the Holy Ghost, they possess in their hearts, and show forth in their lives, in the whole course of their words and actions, the genuine fruits of the Spirit of God, namely, ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance’, and whatsoever else is lovely or praiseworthy. They ‘adorn in all things the gospel of God our Saviour’; and give full proof to all mankind that they are indeed actuated by the same Spirit ‘which raised up Jesus from the dead’ [cf. Rom. 8:11].¹²⁹

This is not an absorbtionist mysticism, a divine possession whereby believers are not in control of their behavior or decisions. Such a notion would go against Wesley’s deep conviction that God *assists* faith by grace rather than *coerces* faith by force.¹³⁰ What these passages do point to, however, is a deep indwelling fellowship with the Spirit that allows the children of God to be fully led by God’s Spirit in all their words and actions. They are godly and godlike in all their thoughts, words, and deeds, as they are indeed led by God in all things.

¹²⁷ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Preface, §7, *Works*, 13:44-45.

¹²⁸ Sermon 8, “The First-fruits of the Spirit,” §1, *Works*, 1:234.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, I.6, *Works*, 1:237.

¹³⁰ See Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §11, *Works*, 2:489 – “He did not take away your understanding, but enlightened and strengthened it. He did not destroy any of your affections ... least of all did he take away your liberty ... he did not force you; but being *assisted* by his grace you, like Mary, *chose* that happy choice.”

The Full Presence of God: The Indwelling Spirit

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as a full person of the Trinity, is indeed the indwelling of God in the lives of believers. This titillating reality has been the basis of much mystical theology, and the grounding conviction for ecstatic visions and experiences of God. Wesley, while never limiting how the Spirit *may* work, affirms the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in more reserved terms. The exact nature of God's presence remains a mystery: "We allow, 'such knowledge is too high and wonderful for us; we cannot attain unto it' [cf. Ps. 139:5-6]. The manner of his presence no man can explain, nor probably any angel in heaven."¹³¹

From scripture, Wesley affirms that the Holy spirit dwells within believers, and that they are temples for the Spirit's divine presence:

In order to have the clearest view of this we should remember that (according to the scriptural account) as God dwells and works in the children of light, so the devil dwells and works in the children of darkness. As the Holy Spirit possesses the souls of good men, so the evil spirit possesses the souls of the wicked.¹³²

'There is one God and Father of all' that have the Spirit of adoption, which 'crieth in their hearts, Abba, Father'; which 'witnesseth' continually 'with their spirits' that they are the children of God; 'who is above all' – the Most High, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Governor of the whole universe. 'And through all' – pervading all space, filling heaven and earth:

Totam Mens agitans molem, et magno se corpore miscens.

["The all-informing soul, that fills, pervades, and actuates the whole."]
'And in you all' – in a peculiar manner living in you that are one body by one spirit: "Making your souls his loved abode, The temples of indwelling God."¹³³

Wesley will also affirm that as believers are filled with love, they are filled with God. As is his custom, he leans into the language of scripture to express this marvelous reality,

¹³¹ Sermon 67, "On Divine Providence," §10, *Works*, 2:538.

¹³² Sermon 38, "A Caution against Bigotry," I.1, *Works*, 2:64.

¹³³ Sermon 74, "Of the Church," I.13, *Works*, 3:50. The Latin quote is from Virgil's *Aeneid*.

quoting especially Ephesians 3:19¹³⁴ and 1 John 4:16¹³⁵ as he emphasizes the central role of love in this divine union:

O be not of a double heart! Think of nothing else! To love God, and to be beloved by him, is enough. Be your eyes fixed on this one point, and your whole bodies shall be full of light. God shall continually lift up, and that more and more, the light of his countenance upon you. His Holy Spirit shall dwell in you, and shine more and more upon your souls unto the perfect day. He shall purify your hearts by faith from every earthly thought, every unholy affection. He shall establish your souls with so lively a hope as already lays hold on the prize of your high calling. He shall fill you with peace, and joy, and love! Love, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person! Love which never rests, never faileth, but still spreads its flame, still goeth on conquering and to conquer, till what was but now a weak, foolish, wavering, sinful creature, be filled with all the fullness of God! [Eph. 3:19]¹³⁶

As our knowledge and our love of him increase by the same degrees, and in the same proportion, the kingdom of an inward heaven must necessarily increase also; while we ‘grow up in all things into him who is our head’ [Eph. 4:15]. And when we are ... ‘complete in him’, as our translators render it – but more properly when we are ‘filled with him’; when ‘Christ in us, the hope of glory’, is our God and our all; when he has taken the full possession of our heart; when he reigns therein, without a rival, the Lord of every motion there; when we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, we are one with Christ, and Christ with us; then we are completely happy; then we live all ‘the life that is hid with Christ in God’ [Col. 3:3]. Then, and not till then, we properly experience what that word meaneth, ‘God is love; and whosoever dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him’ [1 John 4:16].¹³⁷

This deeply scriptural language of divine union is a present, though not overstated, reality within Wesley’s teaching. Leaning into his relational understanding of God’s divine nature as love and the Holy Spirit as the personal agent of loving grace, Wesley is far

¹³⁴ Ephesians 3:19 – “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (KJV).

¹³⁵ 1 John 4:16 – “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (KJV).

¹³⁶ Sermon 148, “A Single Intention,” II.9, *Works*, 4:377.

¹³⁷ Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” II.6, *Works*, 3:96-97.

more wont to describe participation with God in the language of communion or fellowship as the model of the Christian life and Christian perfection.¹³⁸

In speaking of the indwelling of God, there is also a real sense of agency on the part of believers in both attaining and preserving this intimate relationship with God. As evidenced earlier, there is a symbiotic relationship between the Spirit's empowerment and human effort:

... spare no pains to preserve always a deep, a continual, a lively, and a joyful sense of his gracious presence. Never forget his comprehensive word to the great father of the faithful, 'I am the Almighty' (rather, the *All-sufficient*) 'God; walk before me, and be thou perfect!' [Gen. 17:1] Cheerfully expect that he before whom you stand will ever guide you with his eye, will support you by his guardian hand, will keep you from all evil.¹³⁹

"Spare no pains to preserve" the Spirit's gracious presence, Wesley exhorts his listeners, while extolling the power of God to guide and support them. The root of religion is "union of the soul with God; the life of God in the soul of man," but that intimate relationship puts "forth branches" of the believers' obedience:

In answer, it is most true that the root of religion lies in the heart, in the inmost soul; that this is the union of the soul with God, the life of God in the soul of man. But if this root be really in the heart it cannot but put forth branches. And these are the several instances of outward obedience, which partake of the same nature with the root, and consequently are not only marks or signs, but substantial parts of religion.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ The relational aspect of God and humanity has also been established earlier in Wesley's understanding of God as loving Parent and Creator, and the explicit connection between God's loving nature and humanity's capacity to love in the *imago dei*. Randy Maddox argues that this grounds humanity's relationship with God in more *relational* than *metaphysical* terms. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 85-86 – "Since love is inherently a relationship between two persons, this identification [of God's grace with God's love] suggests that Wesley's conception of grace, like that of sin, is fundamentally relational in nature. The power that enables our recovery of Christ-likeness is not some metaphysical property bestowed upon us, but an expression of God's renewed presence in our life."

¹³⁹ Sermon 118, "On the Omnipresence of God," III.6, *Works*, 4:47.

¹⁴⁰ Sermon 24, "Sermon on the Mount, IV," III.1, *Works*, 1:541-42.

Wesley's religion of the heart is ever one that moves toward holiness of life, impacting how Christians act in the world.

In passages such as these above it is important to note the divine synergy between the Spirit's work and humanity's response. At times, he will lift up the glorious reality created by the Spirit's indwelling presence, as he does in this passage describing the growth in holiness of perfected believers:

Aforetime when an evil thought came in, they looked up, and it vanished away. But now it does not come in, there being no room for this in a soul which is full of God. They are freed from wanderings in prayer. Whensoever they pour out their hearts in a more immediate manner before God, they have no thought of anything past, or absent, or to come, but of God alone; to whom their whole souls flow in one even stream, and in whom they are swallowed up.¹⁴¹

The image of being so full of God that souls have "no room" for evil, or the glorious image of believers having "their whole souls flow in one even stream" to God alone, is powerfully evocative of the potential telos of humanity in relationship with God. On a more somber note, Wesley can also lift up the unrealized potential of those who choose not to dwell in the Spirit. In Sermon 107, "On God's Vineyard," Wesley gives a vision of his earlier expectation of what God might produce in God's "vineyard" of Methodists:

I could expect nothing less than that all these would have lived like angels here below; that they would have walked as continually seeing him that is invisible, having constant communion with the Father and the Son, living in eternity and walking in eternity. I looked to see 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people', in the whole tenor of their conversation 'showing forth his praise who had called them into his marvelous light'.¹⁴² [But they brought forth wild grapes].

¹⁴¹ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), Preface, §7, *Works*, 13:44.

¹⁴² Sermon 107, "On God's Vineyard," V.1, *Works*, 3:514.

The now aged leader reflects that instead of dwelling in that “constant communion” with God, his beloved Methodists turned away and brought forth “wild grapes.” That God was faithful and that communion was possible, is never questioned by Wesley; in the human/divine synergism his Methodist societies simply did not live into that potential.¹⁴³

Life in the Spirit: Models of the Christian Life

Finally, as we did in the opening section of this chapter, we will consider Wesley’s overall teaching about the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers from texts that weave an overall picture of his theological vision. By considering four passages where Wesley gives an extended definition of a model Christian life, it is possible to hear in Wesley’s own words how the various threads we have explored individually are understood as a unified whole. Taken together, these vignettes give windows into the overarching vision of Wesley’s pneumatology.

Sermon 12, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” (1746). Here Wesley grounds Christians’ joy in the witness of the Spirit attesting to their adoption. Christians rejoice at the love of God, which in turn leads to their love of all humanity. They feel within themselves the mind of Christ: simplicity, power, purity, holiness, and godly sincerity. These tempers and dispositions allow single-minded devotion to Christ and an ability to crucify the world, and thereby a “a renewal of soul after his likeness:”

This is properly the ground of a Christian’s joy. ... I rejoice because his Spirit beareth witness to my spirit that I am bought with the blood of the Lamb, and that believing in him, “I am a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven [composite paraphrase of 1 Cor. 6:15; Rom, 8:16, 17; and

¹⁴³ This harkens analogously to the fact Wesley never claims Christian Perfection for himself, though he always affirms its potential. The failure to attain a promise does not negate its possibility; deep communion with God is possible with the Spirit, even if his Societies failed to live into that glorious hope.

James 2:5]. I rejoice because the sense of God's love to me hath by the same Spirit wrought in me to love him, and to love for his sake every child of man, every soul that he hath made. I rejoice because he gives me to feel in myself "the mind that was in Christ" [Phil. 2:5]: simplicity, an single eye to him in every motion of my heart; power always to fix the loving eye of my soul on him who "loved me, and gave himself for me", to aim at him alone, at his glorious will, in all I think or speak or do; purity, desiring nothing more but God, "crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts" [Gal. 5:24], "setting my affections on things above, not on things of the earth" [Col. 3:2]; holiness, a recovery of the image of God, a renewal of soul after his likeness; and godly sincerity, directing all my words, and works so as to conduce to his glory.¹⁴⁴

Sermon 18, "The Marks of the New Birth," (1748). Here to the picture of being a child of God is added a list of characteristics representative of God's human progeny. It is a belief in Christ that compels believers to not commit sin, to enjoy the peace of God, and to hope in God based upon the witness of the Spirit of adoption. This results in rejoicing, a love of God above all, and from that divine love a brotherly love to all humanity. With an entire life as "one labour of love," believers are holy and perfect like God:

This it is, in the judgment of the Spirit of God, to be a son or a child of God. It is so to believe in God through Christ as 'not to commit sin', and to enjoy, at all times and in all places, that 'peace of God which passeth all understanding'. It is so to *hope* in God through the Son of his love as to have not only the 'testimony of a good conscience', but also 'the Spirit of God bearing witness with your spirits that ye are the children of God': whence cannot but spring the 'rejoicing evermore in him through whom ye have received the atonement'. It is so to *love* God, who hath thus loved you, as you never did love any creature: so that ye are constrained to love all men as yourselves; with a love not only ever burning in your hearts, but flaming out in all your actions and conversations, and making your whole life one 'labour of love' [1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10], one continued obedience to those commands, 'Be ye merciful, as God is merciful;' 'Be ye holy, as I the Lord am holy;' 'Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Sermon 12, "The Witness of Our Own Spirit," §16, *Works*, 1:309-10.

¹⁴⁵ Sermon 18, "The Marks of the New Birth," IV.1, *Works*, 1:427-28.

Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” (1783). This shorthand definition of Christianity is an example *via negativa*, through a series of rhetorical questions, of how many “Christian” groups do not have the basic tenets of the faith – and later in the sermon, how Methodists *do* exhibit these traits. Being a Christian is a matter of holiness, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, having the mind of Christ, and walking as Christ walked:

Are they Papists and Protestants, French and English together, the bulk of one and of the other nation; and what manner of Christians are they ‘holy as he that hath called them is holy’ [cf. 1 Pet. 1:15]? Are they filled with ‘righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ [Rom. 14:17]? Is there that mind in them which was also in Christ Jesus’ [cf. Phil. 2:5]? And do they ‘walk as Christ also walked’ [cf. 1 John 2:6]? Nay, they are as far from it as hell is from heaven.¹⁴⁶

Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” (1789). Here religion is a matter of true happiness. As believers know God by the power of the Spirit, the love of God is shed in their hearts – the beginning of happiness. Cognizant of the favour of God, and enjoying communion with God, believers are filled with heavenly tempers and the testimony of the Spirit. In joyful liberty from sin they rejoice and grow into the full measure of Christ:

This is religion, and this is happiness, the happiness for which we were made. This begins when we begin to know God, by the teaching of his own Spirit. As soon as the Father of spirits reveals his Son in our hearts, and the Son reveals his Father, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts; then, and not till then, we are happy. We are happy, first, in the consciousness of his favour, which indeed is better than the life itself; next, in the constant communion with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ; then in all the heavenly tempers which he hath wrought in us by his Spirit; again, the in the testimony of his Spirit that all our

¹⁴⁶ Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §7, *Works*, 2:488. For elaboration on how Methodists have these marks of Christianity see *ibid.*, §§13-14, *Works*, 2:490-91.

works please him; and lastly in the testimony of our own spirit that ‘in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world’ [2 Cor. 1:12]. Standing fast in this liberty from sin and sorrow, wherewith Christ hath made them free, real Christians ‘rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks’. And their happiness still increases as they ‘grow up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ [cf. Eph. 4:13].¹⁴⁷

Wesley is not a systematic theologian who develops singular ways of talking about the Spirit, but these windows into his pneumatology show an amazing array of shared emphases and ways of talking about the Spirit that guide his theology. The four descriptions above are not exhaustive, yet many of Wesley’s core teachings are repeated within two or more of the summaries above. And in all four, taken together, there are elements of virtually all the pneumatological emphases discussed in this chapter. In each description above, the Spirit serves as the divine mediator to a redeemed humanity that is made for true godlikeness, true holiness, and lasting communion and happiness with a loving God who is both Creator and Parent.

Concluding Thoughts: The Holy Spirit as Agent of Deification

In the economy of God, the Holy Spirit is the great mediator of the divine life of God to humanity. Wesley tends to equate the Holy Spirit as the personal presence of grace within believers: through the Spirit’s preventing work, the world is convinced and convicted of sin; through the Spirit humanity is empowered to respond to the salvation of God; and, yet again, it is through the Spirit’s witness and assurance that redeemed men and women realize their new status as children of God. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is the kingdom of heaven within the soul, filling believers with holy tempers

¹⁴⁷ Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” §17, *Works*, 4:66-67.

and dispositions, and enabling them to live into both the love and imitation of God. The Exchange Formula is the classic way that deification is expressed within Christology, showing how redeemed humanity is elevated to divinity through Christ's condescension. In pneumatology, deification is made intelligible through the ways the Holy Spirit mediates a real elevation of humanity into the divine life of God. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, most often it is expressed in terms of Spirit-enabled divine/human synergy, an impartation of divine attributes, the filiation of believers as children of God, or the Spirit's presence as the actual indwelling of God.

Wesley's pneumatology does not hit each of these notes with the same degree of emphasis nor volume. The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, the conviction that *God is within humanity* filling and actuating believers, is a note that is present within Wesley, but it is not the dominant way Wesley describes the Spirit. He is particularly cautious when using such language, and ties his usage to key scriptures that speak of believers being filled with divine love. He is much bolder to articulate the impartation of divine attributes – joy, peace, love, and righteousness/holiness that fill believers in the Spirit's deifying presence.

Even louder and frequent in Wesley's pneumatology is the sense that communion with God is divine/human synergy. God is ever the first-mover in the divine dance, and the Holy Spirit's presence is grace and empowerment to know and love God. Following the lead of the Spirit, God's human children are invited to "re-act" or match the Spirit step-by-step. Properly speaking, conversion, the purging of the soul from ungodly things, the turn to God in love, and outward actions of holiness are *responses* to God's invitation, grace, and love which inspire and empower humanity's response.

Perhaps loudest and most repeated in the sheet music of Wesley's pneumatology is the glorious new status believers have as sons and daughters of God. As children reflecting their divine Parent, believers are spurred further into the life of God – purging unholy tempers and gaining the fruit of the Spirit – as they experience the witness of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Adoption. This life of God in the soul allows God's human children enjoy the beatitude for which they were originally made: happy fellowship and communion with their loving God and Creator.

These individual notes come together to create a song of salvation that is indeed an elevation of humanity not merely to forgiveness, but to a place at the table of God's family.

Chapter 6

Appropriating the Divine Life: The Means of Deification

In the last three chapters, we have explored the contours of a Wesleyan understanding of deification. Created in the image of God with a capacity for godlikeness, humanity has been redeemed by Christ and thus enabled and elevated to the imitation of God. The Holy Spirit is the divine presence within believers, the grace of God that calls and claims believers not as servants, but as sons and daughters of God capable of fellowship with their divine Parent. Through the Spirit, the children of God respond to God's good work of salvation breathed upon them in a spiritual respiration, returning the action of God on humanity's behalf back to God is a re-action of power, praise, and new life. In a proper sense, that is the work of *theosis*: a becoming *like* God so as to enjoy communion *with* God in a dynamic understanding of salvation.

The Focus of This Chapter

Deification assumes an appropriation of the divine life in the lives of believers; the doctrine has particular emphases on the practices of faith that invite believers into greater godlikeness. The goal of this chapter is to explore how Wesley understands those practices in the life of faith that lead to *theosis* – namely, the nature and role of asceticism, works of piety and works of mercy, the sacraments, and the ecclesial community. Put differently, the goal is to investigate how Wesley understands those practices as restoring the divine image to an imitation of Christ, therefore making them means of deification.

To facilitate a full consideration of the edifice of Wesleyan faith practices, this chapter will begin with a section laying out the foundation of Wesley's theological framework for understanding the means of deification. With that established, we will turn our attention next to how Wesley constructs a proper understanding of the means of grace against a myriad of misunderstandings and misuses which he is adamant *do not build* or constitute loving, active faith. The chapter will conclude by looking the architecture of this theology of faith working by love, noting Wesleyan distinctives in areas that are often associated with *theosis*.

Wesley's Theological Framework

The proceeding chapters have detailed the overarching commitments Wesley has in his understanding of the triune work of God in humanity's salvation, as well as the corresponding anthropological assertions that support God's dynamic salvation. This section does not seek to rehearse all that has been articulated above, but rather to illustrate how those theological and anthropological convictions bear on the praxis and practice of believers. Wesley's emphasis on divine love being constitutive of humanity's creation, redemption, and adoption as children of God is a most illuminative lens through which to understand how he frames human action in the economy of God. As such, this section will proceed by reviewing three overarching Wesleyan commitments that bear on means of grace and works of faith: believers are created to love, redeemed to love, and enabled to love.

Made to Love – The Imago Dei and the God of Love

No conversation about the role of works within Wesley's corpus is complete without considering again the nature of God's human creation. Made in the *imago dei*, humanity reflects God's divine nature. A foundational Wesleyan theme is that God is not only *loving* in action, but love is constitutive of God's very being; ergo, humanity, in the image of God, is created with a will filled with love and endowed with a liberty to love as God loves. The nature of the fall compromises the centrality of love within the will, and as a result frustrates the loving liberty with which humanity was first created, but the fall does not thwart the created purpose of humanity to love. Loving obedience to God and loving action to one's neighbor fits within the very created purposes of humanity. This theme appears throughout Wesley's ministry:

When God had formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him the breath of life ... he gave him a law, even to love him in whose image he was made. And love, the one thing [that] his Creator required in return for all his benefits, he therefore required, because it was the one thing needful to perfect his creature's happiness.¹

When these fountains [love of delight and love of gratitude] have once united their streams they flow with redoubled violence, and bear the Christian strongly forward to please and obey the All-merciful, and to be made one with the All-perfect; to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength.²

For to this end was man created, to love God; and to this end alone. ... But Love is the very image of God: it is the brightness of his glory. By love man is not only made like God, but in some sense one with him. 'If any man love God, God loveth him, and cometh to him, and maketh his abode with him' [John 14:23]. He 'dwelleth in God, and God in him' [1 John 3:24]; and 'he that is thus joined to the Lord is one spirit' [1 Cor. 6:17]. Love is perfect freedom Love is the health of the soul, the full exertion of all its powers, the perfection of its faculties."³

¹ Sermon 144, "The Love of God," §1, *Works*, 4:331.

² *Ibid.*, §3, *Works*, 4:333.

³ Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," II.2, *Works*, 4:355-56.

He [the wise man] knows God: his Father and his friend, the parent of all good, the centre of the spirits of all flesh, the sole happiness of all intelligent beings. He sees, clearer than the light of the noonday sun, that this is the end of man: to glorify him who made him for himself, and to love and enjoy him forever. And with equal clearness he sees the means to that end, to the enjoyment of God in glory; even now to know, to love, to imitate God, and to believe in Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.⁴

... even Christian faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith of the operation of God, still is only the handmaid of love. ... Love is the end of all the commandments of God. Love is the end, the sole end, of every dispensation of God, from the beginning of the world the consummation of all things. ... Love existed from eternity, in God, the great ocean of love. Love had a place in all the children of God, from the moment of their creation. They received at once from their gracious Creator to exist, and to love.⁵

But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love 'rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks' [cf. 1 Thess. 5:16-18].⁶

'What is religion, then?' It is easy to answer if we consult the oracles of God. According to these it lies in one single point: it is neither more nor less than love – it is love which 'is the fulfilling of the law', 'the end of the commandment'. Religion is the love of God and our neighbor – that is, every man under heaven. This love, ruling the whole life, animating all our tempers and passions, directing all our thoughts, words, and actions, is 'pure religion and undefiled' [James 1:27].⁷

Love is the perfection of the law, the imitation of Christ, the end of all commands, Christian perfection, and the goal of religion. And this active, faithful love manifests itself in love to God and love of neighbor. The nature of God's law to fallen humanity was to renew this fallen nature:

... being alienated from the love of God, he was enslaved to the love of his creatures, and consequently to error and vice, to shame and misery. A more

⁴ Sermon 33, "Sermon on the Mount, XIII," II.2, *Works*, 1:692.

⁵ Sermon 36, "The Law Established through Faith, II," II.1-3, *Works*, 2:38-39.

⁶ Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," I.9, *Works*, 2:160.

⁷ Sermon 84, "The Important Question," III.2, *Works*, 3:189.

particular law was accordingly given him, by the rules whereof he was fully apprised of every avenue at which sin and pain might break in upon his soul. By this too he was directed to those several means which God had appointed from the renewal of his nature.⁸

Redeemed to Love

The salvation of God is accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The power of sin is broken, and the believer can claim new life in Jesus' name. Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection" has Wesley quoting Galatians 2:20, one of his favorite scriptural texts to speak of this new reality:

Every one of these can say with St. Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' – words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin. This is expressed both negatively, 'I live not' – my evil nature, the body of sin, is destroyed – and positively, 'Christ liveth in me' – and therefore all that is holy, and just, and good.⁹

This new life in Christ begs the question of the role of good works in the lives of believers: Since redemption is through the work of Christ, are works in the lives of believers some sense optional? How does one speak of work being in some sense necessary without compromising *sola fide* on the one hand or promoting a Pelagian works-righteousness on the other?

In an early sermon, Sermon 144, "The Love of God," Wesley would point out that Christ himself gives believers commands to increase their love of God:

Love is the end of every commandment of Christ, all of which, from the least even to the greatest, are given to man, not for their own sakes, but purely in order to this. The negative commands, what are they but so many cautions against what estranges us from the love of God? And the positive either enjoin the use of the

⁸ Sermon 144, "The Love of God," §2, *Works*, 4:331.

⁹ Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," II.25, *Works*, 2:118-19. Later in the sermon, Wesley links circumcision of the heart with loving God (II.29, *Works*, 2:120-21).

means of grace, which are only so many means of love, or the practice of those particular virtues which are the genuine fruits of love, and the steps whereby we ascend from strength to strength, towards a perfect obedience of the first and great commandment – that commandment which contains all, which preceded all, and which shall remain when all the rest are done away: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.’¹⁰

While this theme remains – namely, that the commands of Christ lead to deeper love of God – Wesley develops several ways of speaking of the works necessary for redeemed humanity. He will speak of the “law of faith,” a term used interchangeably with the “law of love:”

What law do we establish by faith? Not the ritual law; not the ceremonial law of Moses. In no wise; but the great, unchangeable law of love, the holy love of God and of our neighbour.¹¹

Faith then was originally designed of God to re-establish the law of love. ... It is the grand means of restoring that holy love wherein man was originally created. It follows, that although faith is of no value in itself (as neither is any other means whatsoever) yet as it leads to that end – the establishing anew the law of love in our hearts – and as in the present state of things it is the only means under heaven for effecting it, it is on that account an unspeakable blessing to man, and of unspeakable value before God.¹²

The “Law of Faith/Love” (what is required through redemption in Christ) is differentiated from the law of Adam (what was required of unfallen Adam) and the law of Moses (what was required before Christ). *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763) demonstrates the ways in which Wesley navigates these categories to deny works as the basis of salvation:

And no man is obliged to perform it [Adamic law]: God does not require it of any man. For Christ ‘is the end of the’ *Adamic* as well as of the Mosaic ‘law’. By his death he hath put an end to both. He hath abolished both the one and the other

¹⁰ Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” §3, *Works*, 4:332.

¹¹ Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” IV.1, *Works*, 1:194.

¹² Sermon 36, “The Law Established through Faith, II,” II.6, *Works*, 2:40-41.

with regard to man, and the obligation to observe either one or the other is vanished away. ... In the room of this Christ hat established another, namely, 'the law of faith'. Not everyone that *doeth*, but 'everyone that believeth', now receiveth *righteousness*, the full sense of the word; that is, he is justified, sanctified, and glorified.¹³

At the same time, while "the law of faith" is not the basis of salvation, believers are called to active love, or faith working by love:

The whole law under which we now are *is fulfilled by love*. 'Faith working' or *animated* 'by love' [Gal. 5:6] is all that God now requires of man. He has substituted (not *sincerity*, but) *love*, in the room of angelic perfection.¹⁴

And this distinction between the 'law of faith' (or love) and 'the law of works' is neither a subtle nor unnecessary distinction. It is plain, easy, and intelligible to any common understanding. And it is absolutely necessary, to prevent a thousand doubts and fears, even in those who do 'walk in love'.¹⁵

The "law of love" is the privilege and obligation for all believers, a category of thinking about works for the redeemed children of God that seeks to avoid danger of legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other.

Another way Wesley seeks to clarify the necessity and place of works is evident in Sermon 35, "The Law Established through Faith, I." Here one can see Wesley speaking of the "covenant of grace" wherein the children of God now operate. They are accepted, adopted, and forgiven through merits of Christ, which opens them to a *new* covenant. Now the redeemed children of God live under the "covenant of grace" whereby they have a faith working by love, a faith which produces obedience and holiness:

All his sons were and are under the covenant of grace. The manner of their acceptance is this: the free grace of God, through the merits of Christ, gives

¹³ *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763), I.1, *Works*, 13:96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I.4, *Works*, 13:97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.7, *Works*, 13:98.

pardon to them that believe, that believe with such a faith as, working by love, produces all obedience and holiness.¹⁶

To clarify how active faith differs from works-righteousness, Wesley differentiates between the covenant of works, which humanity could have accomplished before the fall, and the covenant of grace, which assumes the merits of Christ as the ground of acceptance:

But we should have been obliged, if we had been under the covenant of works, to have done those works antecedent to our acceptance. Whereas now all good works, though as necessary as ever, are not antecedent to our acceptance, but consequent upon it. Therefore the nature of the covenant of grace gives you no ground, no encouragement at all, to set aside any instance or degree of obedience, any part or measure of holiness.¹⁷

In this sense, works are still “as necessary as ever,” though in a particular understanding of God’s salvific work that places primacy on Christ’s work on humanity’s behalf. There is *preceding righteousness* – through which “God, through the merits of Christ, accepts him that believes as if he had already fulfilled all righteousness” – which is the basis for *subsequent righteousness* which is the obedience of believers.¹⁸ Children of God no longer obey out of fear, but rather out of a faith that works in love (what Wesley elsewhere calls the “faith of a son” versus the “faith of a servant”):

He obeys, not from the motive of slavish fear, but on a nobler principle, namely, the grace of God ruling in his heart, and causing all his works to be wrought in love.¹⁹

The obedience of one made a child of God is the natural outgrowth of God’s salvation, the faith-filled response to one restored to the love of God.

¹⁶ Sermon 35, “The Law Established through Faith, I,” II.3, *Works*, 2:27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II.4, *Works*, 2:27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II.7, *Works*, 2:28. This, of course, is another way to articulate imputed and imparted righteousness.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, III.3, *Works*, 2:29-30.

Wesley's adamant conviction that holiness of heart and life are salient and necessary parts of Christian faith led to charges by his enemies that he endorsed a Pelagian works-righteousness. Rebuffing this charge, he sought to endorse works of faith in ways that differentiate them from Christ's work on humanity's behalf: law of faith/love vs. law of Adam or law of Moses; the covenant of grace vs. the covenant of works; God's work *for us* (justification) vs. God's work *in us* (sanctification). He never, however, is willing to abdicate his core conviction that the children of God are redeemed to do good works:

It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous of good works. And these are so necessary that if a man willingly neglect them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified. He cannot 'grow in grace', in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received, he cannot continue in faith, or in the favour of God. ... the practice of all good works, works of piety, as well as works of mercy (now properly so called, since they spring from faith) are in some sense necessary to sanctification.²⁰

Having the mind of Christ, walking as Christ walked, growing in grace, and restoring the image of God, are each inextricably tied to Wesley's understanding of active faith. As previous chapters have demonstrated, these are core convictions that shape his theology of creation, his Christology, and his pneumatology.

Filled with the Power of Love

Created to love and redeemed to love, a third foundational Wesleyan commitment lies in *how* we are enabled to love – filled with power of Love. “No good is done, or spoken, or thought by any man,” Wesley will assert in Sermon 72, “without the

²⁰ Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” III.5, *Works*, 2:164. Wesley will continue by arguing works are required, but not in the same *sense* or the same *degree* as faith, but only *conditionally*, given time and opportunity (Ibid., III.13, *Works*, 2:167).

assistance of God, working together *in* and *with* those that believe in him.”²¹ Only God can give the power for believers to live out their faith, and that power and obedient love is in direct response to God who first loved us.²² The Holy Spirit, as the indwelling presence and grace of God, is the Person of the Trinity who sheds the love of God abroad in believers’ hearts.

In a positive sense, the key to understanding the impetus for a faith filled with loving action is the clear sense of God’s love for believers. God is the loving Parent whose love elicits a loving response from God’s children:

... where there is no love of God there is no holiness, and there is no love of God but from a sense of his loving us.²³

For his heart is necessarily, essentially evil, till the love of God is shed abroad therein. And while the tree is corrupt so are the fruits, ‘for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit’.²⁴

God hath willed and commanded that ‘all our works should be done in charity’... in that love to God which produces love to all mankind. But none of our works can be done in this love while the love of the Father (of God as our Father) is not in us. And this love cannot be in us till we receive the ‘Spirit of adoption, crying in our hearts, Abba, Father’ [cf. Rom. 8:15].²⁵

For there is no motive which so powerfully inclines us to love God as the sense of the love of God in Christ. Nothing enables us like a piercing conviction of this to give our hearts to him who was given for us. And from this principle of grateful love to God arises love to our brother also.²⁶

The responsive nature of the love of God puts in clear context the emphases that are repeated most often about the work of the Holy Spirit: shedding abroad the love of God

²¹ Sermon 72, “Of Evil Angels,” II.9, *Works*, 3:24.

²² Wesley’s conviction of responsive love is essentially an exegesis of 1 John 4:19.

²³ Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” III.2, *Works*, 1:191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III.4, *Works*, 1:192.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, III.6, *Works*, 1:193.

²⁶ Sermon 36, “The Law Established through Faith, II,” III.3, *Works*, 2:42.

in the hearts of believers, giving witness to the adoption of believers as children of God, and instilling assurance and confidence of faith. These are not mere tokens, but gifts of the Holy Spirit that are springs of action in the soul. Together they create a desire to serve and love God, to attain the full restoration of the image of God. Wesley will paint this strong desire in language of hungering, thirsting, and panting to demonstrate the strong sense of drive to attain deeper levels of godliness:

In like manner this hunger in the soul, this thirst after the image of God, is the strongest of all our spiritual appetites when it is once awakened in the heart; yea, it swallows up all the rest in that one great desire to be renewed after the likeness of him that created us. ... The very same is the same with every soul that truly hungers and thirsts after righteousness. He can find no comfort in anything but this: he can be satisfied with nothing else. Whatever you offer beside, it is lightly esteemed; whether it be riches, or honour, or pleasure, he still says, ‘This is not the thing which I want. Give me love or else I die!’²⁷

“Trample under foot the world and the things of the world – all these riches, honours, pleasures. What is the world to thee? Let the dead bury their dead: but follow thou after the image of God. [cf. Matt. 8:22]. And beware of quenching that blessed thirst, if it is already excited in thy soul, by what is vulgarly called religion – a poor, dull farce, a religion of form, of outside show – which leaves the heart still cleaving to the dust, as earthly and sensual as ever. ... Let nothing satisfy thee but the power of godliness, but a religion that is spirit and life; the dwelling in God and God in thee; the being an inhabitant of eternity; the entering in by the blood of sprinkling ‘within the veil’, and ‘sitting in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus’ [cf. Eph. 2:6].²⁸

... et our whole soul pant after a general revival of pure religion and undefiled, of the restoration of the image of God, pure love, in every child of man. Then let us endeavor to promote in our several stations this scriptural, primitive religion; let us with all diligence diffuse the religion of love among all we have any intercourse with; let us provoke all men, not to enmity and contention, but to love and to good works; always remembering those deep words (God engrave them on all our hearts!), ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him’ [1 John 4:16].²⁹

²⁷ Sermon 22, “Sermon on the Mount, II,” II.3, *Works*, 1:496.

²⁸ Sermon 33, “Sermon on the Mount, XIII,” III.9, *Works*, 1:697.

²⁹ Sermon 112, “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel,” II.7, *Works*, 3:592.

Filled with divine love, believers are filled with holy desire and thirst for more of God. Having been filled with the power of love, they are enabled to act in loving obedience and praise as the adopted children of God.

The Purifying Power of Love: The Role of Asceticism

If the positive work of the Holy Spirit is the instilling of divine love that leads to responsive action-filled faith, the negative work of the Holy Spirit entails the uprooting of the love of the world and anything that hinders the full love of God and neighbor. Wesley will speak of those “who are like God, by choice.”³⁰ Those men and women who

firmly purpose in themselves to make the true use of thy merciful warning; to labour more and more, day by day, to purge themselves from all sin, from every earthly affection, that they may be fit to stand in the presence of that God who is himself the most consuming fire!³¹

This demolition work of the heart, the rooting out of anything that competes with the love of God, is based on the conviction that the love of God is hindered by any competing love of creature. Indeed, Wesley will argue that all loves that do not end in God *leave no room* for the love of God, and that any created being can pull humanity from its center in God:

But two ultimate loves are as flat a contradiction as two firsts, or two lasts. ... All our habitual love must at any one time terminate either in God or in some of his creatures. And if it terminates in him then it does not in them if in them, then not in him. We cannot therefore have two ultimate loves; and by undeniable consequence, when we have any ultimate love but that of God, the love of God is not in us.³²

³⁰ Sermon 143, “Public Diversions Denounced,” I, *Works*, 4:321.

³¹ *Ibid.*, III.1, *Works*, 4:323.

³² Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” II.8, *Works*, 4:339. The sermon goes on to encourage believers to eschew “innocent pleasures” to see the entire love of God: “The entire love of God ... does set us above what are sometimes called innocent pleasures, that is, unnecessary, untending, useless enjoyments; yet is in no wise destructive of that happiness which our blessed religion was designed to establish” (III.6, *Works*, 4:343).

We are encompassed on all sides with persons and things that tend to draw us from our centre. Indeed every creature, if we are not continually on our guard, will draw us from our Creator. The whole visible world, all we see, hear, or touch, all the objects either of our senses or understanding have a tendency to dissipate our thoughts from the invisible world, and to distract our minds from attending to him who is both the author and end of our being. ...The radical cure of all dissipation is the ‘faith that worketh by love’. If therefore you would be free from this evil disease, first ‘continue steadfast in the faith;’ in that faith which brings ‘the spirit of adoption, crying in your heart, Abba, Father;’ whereby you are enabled to testify, ‘The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’³³

That “faith that worketh by love” – a favored quotation of Galatians 5:6³⁴ – entails, in this case, the intentional purifying of one’s life and soul from anything that competes with the love of God.

Asceticism, in a Wesleyan sense, is not a radical peeling away of all earthly pleasures. It is not an endorsement to severely fast or an admonishment that every earthly pleasure must be eschewed as evil. At the same time, while Methodism is not a strict form of ascetic monasticism, Wesley does speak intentionally and consistently about purifying one’s life of any and all affections, activities, and people that hinder the love of God. Consistently throughout his ministry, Wesley gives this call for all believers and not only for the spiritually elite:

This then is the most important work of all, namely, ‘the laying the axe to the root of the tree’; the prevailing on a man to purify his heart, till it be holy and undefiled; to resolve upon giving up all his darling lusts which will not submit to the law of God. ... The next point is to bring him to a resolution of transferring

³³ Sermon 79, “On Dissipation,” §§6, 16, *Works*, 3:118, 122. Dissipation is defined earlier in the sermon: “But whenever the mind is unhinged from God it is so far dissipated or distracted. Dissipation then, in general, may be defined, the uncentring the soul from God” (§11, *Works*, 3:120).

³⁴ Galatians 5:6: “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (KJV).

those which are not so to new objects, of ‘setting these affections on things above, and not on things of the earth’ [cf. Eph. 2:12].³⁵

If Christ be risen, ye ought then to die unto the world, and to live wholly unto God. ... Cutting off both the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, engaging the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, in the ardent pursuit of that one object, is so essential to a child of God ... [love].³⁶

While we steadily look, not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen, we are more and more crucified to the world and the world crucified to us. Let but the eye of the soul be constantly fixed, not on the things which are temporal, but on those which are eternal, and our affections are more and more loosened from earth and fixed on things above.³⁷

‘They who are of Christ’, who ‘abide in him’, ‘have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.’ They abstain from all those works of the flesh³⁸

And all inward holiness is the immediate fruit of the faith that worketh by love. By this the blessed Spirit purifies the heart from all pride, self-will, passion; from love of the world, from foolish and hurtful desires, from vile and vain affections. Beside that, sanctified afflictions have (through the grace of God) an immediate and direct tendency to holiness. Through the operation of his Spirit they humble more and more, and abase the soul before God. They calm and meeken our turbulent spirit, tame the fierceness of our nature, soften our obstinacy and self-will, crucify us to the world, and bring us to expect all our strength from, and to seek all our happiness in, God.³⁹

In general, if they [one’s parents] do not fear God, you should leave them as soon as is convenient. But wherever you are, take care (if it be in your power) that they do not want the necessaries or conveniences of life. As for all other relations, even brothers or sisters, if they are of the world you are under no obligation to be intimate with them: you may be civil and friendly at a distance.⁴⁰

The good life God intends for humanity takes on a cruciform shape: dying (crucifying!) to those things that hinder the love of God, so that believers may live in the fullness of

³⁵ Sermon 142, “The Wisdom of Winning Souls,” II, *Works*, 4:313-14.

³⁶ Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” §1 and II.9, *Works*, 1:401, 413.

³⁷ Sermon 36, “The Law Established through Faith, II,” III.2, *Works*, 2:41.

³⁸ Sermon 8, “The First-fruits of the Spirit,” I.3, *Works*, 1:236.

³⁹ Sermon 47, “Heaviness through Manifold Temptations,” IV.5, *Works*, 2:232-33.

⁴⁰ Sermon 80, “On Friendship with the World,” §25, *Works*, 3:139.

life offered in Christ Jesus. As discussed in Chapter Two, Gorman points to this cruciformity in the life of faith as the following the divine example of Jesus: cruciformity is Christification, and Christification is nothing short than *theosis*.

The purifying love of God is also the framework through which Wesley understands the providence of God in allowing both pleasure and pain in the lives of believers. The end of humanity's creation and redemption is the restoration of the divine image. The work of the Holy Spirit is to positively unite believers to a greater love of God, while at the same time weaning them from anything (or anyone!) who hinders their faith. In Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," this becomes the way of understanding that all that God allows in the lives of believers serves that greater purpose:

The will of God, in allotting us our several portions of all these [pleasure and pain, health and sickness, riches and poverty, etc.] is solely our sanctification our recovery from that vile bondage, the love of his creatures, to the free love of our Creator. All his providences, be they mild or severe, point at no other end than this. They are all designed either to wean us from what is not, or to unite us to what is worthy of our affection. Are they pleasing? Then they are designed to lift up our hearts to the Parent of all good [Milton, *Paradise Lost*, v. 153.]. Are they painful? Then they are means of rooting out those passions that forcibly withhold us from him. So that all lead that same way, either directly or indirectly, either by gratitude or mortification.⁴¹

To the same end are all the internal dispensations of God, all the influences of his Holy Spirit. Whether he gives us joy or sorrow of heart, whether he inspires us with vigour and cheerfulness, or permits us to sink into numbness of soul, into dryness and heaviness, 'tis all with the same view, viz., to restore us to health, to liberty, to holiness. These are all designed to heal those inbred diseases of our nature, self-love, and the love of the world Therefore the renewal of our nature in this love being not only the one end of our creation and our redemption, but likewise of all the providences of God over us, and all the operations of his Spirit in us, must be, as the eternal wisdom of God hath declared, the one thing needful.⁴²

⁴¹ Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," II.4, *Works*, 4:356-57.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II.5, *Works*, 4:357.

Indeed, this understanding that pain, suffering, trials, and temptations serve the purpose of purifying and refining believers appears from time to time in the Wesleyan corpus. Ever-ready to defend God's goodness, Wesley does not press this too far, so as to make God the author of evil in the world.⁴³ Yet God's providence in allowing all things to work together to sanctify believers, and the necessity of believers to strive to live into their vocation as children of God, are real streams of Wesley's understanding of active faith:

[God] knows of what infinite service afflictions are to creatures in our station, and therefore that to be delivered from all while on earth would be the greatest evil that could befall us. ...Neither would it be kindness thus to exempt us from spiritual any more than from temporal danger – to deliver the soul from all temptation, any more than the body from all pain ... [were we without possibility of] vice, so we must have been without virtue, seeing we should have no choice left; and where there is no choice, there can be no virtue.⁴⁴

These medicines are often painful, too. Not that God willingly afflicts his creatures, but he allots them just as much pain as is necessary to their health; and for that reason – because it is so But it is to this end, that [a believer] may be 'made perfect through' those 'sufferings' [cf. Heb. 2:10].⁴⁵

Vain hope! that a child of Adam should ever expect to see the kingdom of Christ and of God without striving, without '*agonizing*' first 'to enter in at the strait gate'! ... without a constant and continued course of general self-denial!⁴⁶

Now, then, 'strive to enter in at the strait gate'. ... *Strive* as in an agony of holy fear. ... Strive in all the fervor of desire. ... Strive by prayer without ceasing, at all times, in all places lifting up your heart to God, and giving him no rest till you 'awake up after his likeness' and are 'satisfied with it'.⁴⁷

⁴³ Indeed, this is a charge he levies against those with a Reformed theology of providence: a denial of human agency makes God the author of evil and sin.

⁴⁴ Sermon 135, "On Guardian Angels," I.4-5, *Works*, 4:227-28.

⁴⁵ Sermon 109, "The Trouble and Rest of Good Men," Proem, *Works*, 3:533-34.

⁴⁶ Sermon 17, "The Circumcision of the Heart," II.7, *Works*, 1:412. The sermon lifts up St. Paul as a biblical example of self-denial.

⁴⁷ Sermon 31, "Sermon on the Mount, XI," III.5, *Works* 1:673.

Striving for holiness, enduring trials and pain, and willingly engaging in self-denial are the “negative” works of faith that open the soul more fully to be transformed by the full love of God.

The Happiness of Love

There is a strong eudaimonia tradition that is the foundational *telos* of God’s good intention for humanity, and informs Wesley’s understanding of acts of obedience and self-denial.⁴⁸ Holiness and righteousness are paired with happiness; there is no substantial, eternal happiness without holiness. Thus we see Wesley comes full circle: creatures created in the image of the God of love find their completion and beatitude in the love of God, and, flowing from that divine love, a love of neighbor:

... love, entire love, is the point wherein all the lines of our holy religion centre. This is the very happiness which the great Author of it lived and died to establish among us. And a happiness it is, worthy of God! Worthy of infinite goodness and infinite wisdom to bestow! A happiness not built on imagination, but real and rational; a happiness that does not play before our eyes at a distance, and vanish when we attempt to grasp it, but such as will bear the closest inspection, and the more it is tried will delight the more. In the happiness of love there is no vanity, neither any vexation of spirit. No delusion, no disappointment is here; peace and joy ever dwell with love. The man who loves God feels that ‘God hath given him all things richly to enjoy’ [cf. 1 Tim. 6:17]. He delights in his works, and surveys with joy all the creatures which God hath made. Love increases both the number of his delights, and the weight of them, a thousandfold. For in every creature he sees as in a glass the glory of the great Creator.⁴⁹

[at death] we shall exchange the gaudy shadow of pleasure we have enjoyed for sincere, substantial, transitory happiness.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Three, happiness as Wesley defines it harkens to the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia*. For a recent dissertation delving into the specifics of Wesley’s understanding of happiness, see Min Seok Kim, “Happiness and Holiness, Joined in One” as the Christian Life Goal in John Wesley’s Theology (Ph.D. dissertation, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2018).

⁴⁹ Sermon 144, “The Love of God,” III.6, *Works*, 4:343. See also Sermon 23, “Sermon on the Mount, III,” I.11, *Works*, 1:516. We are enabled “to see the Creator in the glass of every creature.”

⁵⁰ Sermon 136, “On Mourning for the Dead,” §17, *Works*, 4:242.

O trust in him for happiness as well as for help. All the springs of happiness are in him. Trust in him 'who giveth us all things richly to enjoy'. ... It is his love gives a relish to all we taste, puts life and sweetness into all, while every creature leads us up to the great Creator, and all earth is a scale to heaven. The transfuses the joys that are at his own right hand into all he bestows on his thankful children; who, having fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, enjoy him in all and above all.⁵¹

It follows, 'If thine eye be single', singly fixed upon God, 'thy whole body', that is, all thy soul, shall be filled with holiness and happiness.⁵²

Or does anyone imagine the love of our neighbour is misery, even the loving every man as our own soul? So far from it that next to the love of God this affords the greatest happiness of which we are capable.⁵³

Conversely, while the "the pure in heart see all things full of God,"⁵⁴ those who are worldly are thwarted from true happiness. The happiness of God will never be found in earthly means that do not point back to God:

... wealth, honour, power, or sensual pleasure, if ever he should attain it, when attained, will not satisfy his desires, will not make him happy, even while it lasts. ... The soul, too, before that can be brought to pass, must have its pleasures, as well as the body. But where are those to be found? Not in perishable things, but in objects suitable to its immortal nature.⁵⁵

Your heart is sunk into the dust; your soul cleaveth to the ground. Your affections are set, not on things above, but on things of the earth; on poor husks that may poison, but cannot satisfy an everlasting spirit made for God. Your love, your joy, your desire are all placed on the things which perish in the using. You have thrown away the treasure in heaven: God and Christ are lost. You have gained riches, and hell-fire.⁵⁶

But none of these [wealth, honour, pleasure] can satisfy the appetite of an immortal soul. Any, all of them together cannot give rest, which is the lowest ingredient of happiness, to a never-dying spirit which God created for the

⁵¹ Sermon 28, "Sermon on the Mount, VIII," §21, *Works*, 1:626.

⁵² Sermon 125, "On a Single Eye," §2, *Works*, 4:121.

⁵³ Sermon 84, "The Important Question," III.3, *Works*, 3:189.

⁵⁴ Sermon 23, "Sermon on the Mount, III," I.6, *Works*, 1:513.

⁵⁵ Sermon 138A, "On Dissimulation," III.1, *Works*, 4:259.

⁵⁶ Sermon 28, "Sermon on the Mount, VIII," §13, *Works*, 1:620.

enjoyment of himself. The hungry soul, like the busy bee, wanders from flower to flower; but it goes off from each with an abortive hope and a deluded expectation.⁵⁷

Acts of asceticism and self-denial are put in context with such passages: one must actively let go of secondary, lesser loves, in order to actively take up heavenly affections and actions that lead to the greatest love, the love of God. Actions of asceticism and actions of obedience together are streams to God and the sources of humanity's ultimate happiness and glorification.

Building on a Firm Foundation: The Contours of Active Faith

The preceding section sought to put Wesley's teaching of faithful action in context. In point of fact, the ever-practical theologian is not bashful in his assertion that works are a part of the Christian life. In Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," he speaks matter-of-factly of holiness as God's will for believers:

It is his will that we should be inwardly and outwardly holy; that we should *be good and do good* in every kind, and in the highest degree whereof we are capable.⁵⁸

Such assertions are built upon the critical convictions explored above: God created humanity to be godlike, capable of divine love to God and neighbor; Christ's redemption restores believers not to a faith of passive forgiveness, but a faith filled with active love; and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit fills believers with the energy of love, enabling believers to eschew those things that hinder love of God while giving the means

⁵⁷ Sermon 125, "On a Single Eye," II.4, *Works*, 4:125.

⁵⁸ Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," §23, *Works*, 2:54-55.

for faithful obedience. The full salvation of God is premised on a return to loving liberty for every child of God.

In this section, we explore how Wesley speaks of faithful action, what he often terms the “means of grace.” In succession, we will first investigate the activities Wesley lifts up as avenues of grace. Next, we will consider how these activities are often abused or neglected, and how Wesley navigates both of these extremes. Lastly, this section will conclude with special attention to the means of fasting as an exemplar of the themes explored in this section.

Means of Grace Defined

With the foundational understanding that God has created and empowered believers for active faith, Wesley builds upon this theological conviction by exploring those activities and practices that open God’s presence within the soul. Since the very beginning of the “apostolic church,” Wesley argues, all “agreed that Christ had ordained certain outward means for conveying his grace into the souls of men.”⁵⁹ While Wesley commends many of the same practices to his Methodist audience, there is no set list. Indeed, Wesley is reticent to limit or number the means of grace, and there is deviation across his sermons and treatises. While Wesley’s lists of means shift, they most characteristically take the shape of the two-fold commandment of Christ to love: works of piety lead to love of God, as works of mercy lead to love of neighbor.

By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace. ... The chief of these means are prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the

⁵⁹ Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” I.1, *Works*, 1:378.

Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of him; and these we believe to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.⁶⁰

'But what good works are those, the practice of which you affirm to be necessary to sanctification?' First, all works of piety, such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the Supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows. ... Secondly, all works of mercy, whether they relate to bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succor the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these the fruits meet for repentance, which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation.⁶¹

But in a more especial manner they see God in his ordinances. Whether they appear in the great congregation to 'pay him the honour due unto his name, and worship him in the beauty of holiness'; or 'enter into their closets' and there pour out their souls before their 'Father which is in secret'; whether they search the oracles of God, or hear the ambassadors of Christ proclaiming glad tidings of salvation; or by eating of that bread and drinking of that cup 'show forth his death till he come' in the clouds of heaven. In all these his appointed ways they find such a near approach as cannot be expressed. They see him, as it were, face to face, and 'talk with him as a man talking with his friend' – a fit preparation for those mansions above wherein they shall 'see him as he is'.⁶²

These "ordinary" channels of God's grace are activities whereby redeemed humanity is opened and transformed by God. It is not in the activities themselves, per se, but rather the fact that these activities and works open the practitioner to the presence of God. The grace of God, as explored in Wesley's pneumatology, is not a created reality outside of God; the grace of God is most closely linked to the actual *presence* of God. Thus, in the

⁶⁰ Ibid., II.1, *Works*, 1:381.

⁶¹ Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," III.9-10, *Works*, 2:166.

⁶² Sermon 23, "Sermon on the Mount, III," I.8, *Works*, 1:514.

means of grace believers have the potential to experience God – in “such a near approach as cannot be explained” – and as a result of that divine encounter have true transformative fellowship with God. Put differently, the soul is receptively opened to experience God through these practices. There is reciprocity in the means: they can be *expressions* of love to God and neighbor, and they can also serve as practices that *engender* love of God and neighbor. Thereby they are *means* in a double sense, being actions that deify and make one like God, and actions appropriate to those who fully reflect the divine image in their hearts and lives.

A God Above All Means

For all the ways in which Wesley might have waxed long about his understanding of the means of grace, most of his ink was spilled in nuancing what *he doesn't mean* when he speaks of these actions that open the soul to God. Fittingly, Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” gives the shape of Wesley’s understanding of the limits of the means perhaps most clearly in his entire corpus. After highlighting the means of grace, his first caveat is that of their limitation. There is no intrinsic power in these actions outside of God’s power:

We allow likewise that all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all, cannot conduce in any degree either to the knowledge or love of God. Without controversy, the help that is done upon earth, he doth it himself. It is he alone who, by his own almighty power, worketh in us what is pleasing in his sight. And all outward things, unless he work in them and by them, are mere weak and beggarly elements. Whosoever therefore imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God. We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord’s Supper; but that it is God alone who is the give of every good gift, the author of all grace; that the

whole power is of him, whereby through any of these there is any blessing conveyed to our soul.⁶³

In point of fact, not only is God the source of any benefit derived from practicing the means of grace, God could work without any means at all. In short, while the means of grace point to ways God *does work*, God is not limited in how God works in the souls of God's human children. Nor, indeed, is there only one pattern for the ways in which humanity is drawn into fellowship with God:

... it behooves us, first, always to retain a lively sense that God is above all means. Have a care therefore of limiting the Almighty. He doth whatsoever and whensoever it pleaseth him. He can convey his grace, either in or out of any of the means which the hath appointed. Perhaps he will. ... Secondly, *before* you use any means let it be deeply impressed on your soul: There is no *power* in this. It is in itself a poor, dead, empty thing: separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow. Neither is there any *merit* in my using this, nothing intrinsically pleasing to God, nothing whereby I deserve any favour at his hands, no, not a drop of water to cool my tongue. But because God bids, therefore I do; because he directs me to wait in this way, therefore here I wait for his free mercy, whereof cometh my salvation.⁶⁴

... the means into which different men are led, and in which they find the blessing of God, are varied, transposed, and combined together a thousand different ways.⁶⁵

The only basis for an emphasis in the means of grace is *God's promise* to work in and through the means:

I do expect that he will fulfil his Word, that he will meet and bless me in this way. Yet not for the sake of any works which I have done, nor for the merit of my righteousness; but merely through the merits and sufferings and love of his Son, in whom he is always well-pleased.⁶⁶

⁶³ Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace," II.3, *Works*, 1:382.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, V.4, *Works*, 1:395-96.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, V.3, *Works*, 1:395.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.2, *Works*, 1:391.

The balance between lifting the practices as means to grow in godly love on the one hand, while noting their limitations on the other, is a fine balance Wesley is always attempting to maintain.

Means Without an End

Wesley's treatment of the means of grace is likewise shaped by the *misuse* and *misunderstanding* of his Methodist audience. One common extreme is to see the means of grace as *means unto themselves*. Apart from the proper end – righteousness, holiness, and the pure love of God – the means are pointless:

I allow that you and ten thousand more have thus abused the ordinances of God, mistaking the means for the end, supposing that the doing these or some other outward works either was the religion of Jesus Christ or would be accepted in the place of it. But let the abuse be taken away and the use remain. Now use all outward things; but use them with a constant eye to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness [Eph. 4:24].⁶⁷

But in process of time, when 'the love of many waxed cold,' some began to mistake the *means* for the *end*, and to place religion rather in doing those outward works than in a heart renewed after the image of God. They forgot that 'the end of' every 'commandment is love, out of a pure heart, with faith unfeigned:' the loving the Lord their God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves; and the being purified from pride, anger, and evil desire, by a 'faith of the operation of God'.⁶⁸

'Nay, but I constantly attend all the ordinances of God: I keep to my church and sacrament.' It is well you do. But all this will not keep you from hell, except you be born again. Go to church twice a day, go to the Lord's table every week, say ever so many prayers in private; hear ever so many sermons, good sermons, excellent sermons, the best that ever were preached; read ever so many good books – still you must be born again. None of these things will stand in the place of the new birth.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Sermon 24, "Sermon on the Mount, IV," III.6, *Works*, 1:545.

⁶⁸ Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace," I.2, *Works*, 1:378. Abused means do not lead to the proper end.

⁶⁹ Sermon 45, "The New Birth," IV.2, *Works*, 2:200-201.

Do not then dream that all is well because thou art ‘highly esteemed among men’. Because thou dost no harm, or dost much good, or attendest all the ordinances of God. What is all this, if thy soul cleaves to the dust? If thy heart is in the world, if thou lovest the creature more than the Creator?⁷⁰

A memorable example of mistaking the means for the end is found in Sermon 2, “The Almost Christian.” The almost Christian “hath the form of godliness” and “uses also the means of grace; yea, all of them, and at all opportunities.”⁷¹ Further, the almost Christian even has sincerity, “a real, inward principle of religion from whence these outward actions flow.”⁷² Yet these outward works are empty works without the love of God, love of neighbor, and faith of the “altogether Christian:”

Now whosoever has this faith which ‘purifies the heart’, by the power of God who dwelleth therein, from pride, anger, desire, ‘from all unrighteousness’, ‘from all filthiness of flesh and spirit’; which fills it with love stronger than death both to God and to all mankind – love that doth the works of God, glorying to spend and to be spent for all men, and that endureth with joy, not only the reproach of Christ, the being mocked, despised, and hated of all men, but whatsoever the wisdom of God permits the malice of men or devils to inflict; whosoever has this faith, thus ‘working by love’ [Gal. 5:6], is not *almost* only, but *altogether* a Christian.⁷³

The form of godliness – even activities and means that are constitutive and conducive to it – is meaningless without an eye to *true* godliness. The means are not intended to deliver a similitude of holiness and divine life, but serve as means into the fullness of God.

⁷⁰ Sermon 115, “Dives and Lazarus,” II.7, *Works*, 4:15.

⁷¹ Sermon 2, “The Almost Christian,” I.7, *Works*, 1:134.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I.9, *Works*, 1:134.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II.6, *Works*, 1:139.

Love of Neighbor

Works of piety, those activities that engender greater love of God – prayer, fasting, scripture, worship, the Lord’s Supper, and the like – can become the myopic focus in the life of faith. Over and against this tendency to over-spiritualize faith to the exclusion of social action, Wesley insists that works of mercy – feeding and clothing the poor, visiting the sick, and the like – are essential to the Christian life:

In the same manner have the end and the means of religion been set a variance with each other. Some well-meaning men have seemed to place all religion in attending the prayers of the church, in receiving the Lord’s Supper, in hearing sermons, and reading books of piety; neglecting meantime the end of all these, the love of God and their neighbor. And this very thing has confirmed others in the neglect, if not contempt, of the ordinances of God, so wretchedly abused to undermine and overthrow the very end they were designed to establish.⁷⁴

Do you add to the doing no harm the attending all the ordinances of God? Do you at all opportunities partake of the Lord’s Supper? Use public and private prayer? Fast often? Hear and search the Scriptures, and mediate thereon? These things likewise ought you to have done, from the time you first set your face towards heaven. Yet these things also are nothing, being alone. They are nothing without the weightier matters of the law. And those you have forgotten. At least you experience them not: faith, mercy, and love of God; holiness of heart; heaven opened in the soul. Still therefore you build upon the sand.⁷⁵

[Extended discourse on Matt. 25] If this does not convince you that the continuance in works of mercy is necessary to salvation, consider what the Judge of all says to those on the left hand: ‘Depart, ye cursed. ... Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these, neither have ye done it unto me.’⁷⁶

Love of God and love of neighbor, the two-fold command of Christ, is ever at the center of Wesley’s vision of godliness.⁷⁷ Together, the works of piety and mercy form a united

⁷⁴ Sermon 27, “Sermon on the Mount, VII,” §3, *Works*, 1:593.

⁷⁵ Sermon 33, “Sermon on the Mount, XIII,” III.3, *Works*, 1:694-95.

⁷⁶ Sermon 98, “On Visiting the Sick,” §2, *Works*, 3:386.

⁷⁷ Indeed, this is Wesley’s vision of Christian perfection. See *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), Preface, §5, *Works*, 13: 52-53. Wesley describes the “perfect man” as one who demonstrates love of God and love of neighbor: “He [the perfect man] ‘loveth the Lord his God with all his heart, and serveth him with all his

whole; separated they do not invite the believer into the full love of God that leads to selfless love of neighbor.

Means Neglected

Besides means being seen as ends unto themselves, and works of piety elevated above (or to the exclusion of) works of mercy, Wesley also faces the challenge of defending the means of grace to those who willingly neglect them altogether. There are two major streams of thought that lead to a neglect of practicing the means of grace. One is an antinomian conviction that denies that works have any part of the Christian life. By emphasizing the sole need for faith, these believers deny the activities of faith that lead to greater godliness:

Beware of antinomianism, making void the law, or any part of it, through faith. ... Beware of thinking, 'Because I have faith and love, I need not have *so much* holiness; because I pray always, therefore I need no set time for private prayer; because I watch always, therefore I need no particular self-examination'. ... Beware of sins of omission. Lose no opportunity of doing good in any kind. Be zealous of good works. Willingly omit no work either of piety or mercy.⁷⁸

Another stream lies in an enthusiasm that imagines God will bring believers to the end *without* any means at all, by the immediate action of God:

[a] common sort of enthusiasm ... is that of those who think to attain the end without using the means, by the immediate power of God.⁷⁹

Beware, lastly, of imagining you shall obtain the end without using the means conducive to it. God *can* give the end without any means at all; but you have no

strength.' He 'loveth his neighbor' (every man) 'as himself'. ... Indeed his soul is all love, filled with 'bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering'. And his life agreeth thereto, full of 'the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labour of love'. And whatsoever he doth, either in word or deed', he doth 'all in the name', in the love, and power 'of the Lord Jesus'. In a word, he doth the will of God 'on earth, as it is done in heaven'."

⁷⁸ *Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies* (1762), III-IV, *Works*, 13:85-88. See also *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763), I.34, *Works*, 13:116-17.

⁷⁹ Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," §27, *Works*, 2:56.

reason to think he *will*. Therefore constantly and carefully use all these means which he has appointed to be the ordinary channels of his grace.⁸⁰

One general inlet to enthusiasm is the expecting the end without the means: the expecting knowledge, for instance, without searching the Scripture, and consulting the children of God; the expecting spiritual strength without constant prayer; the expecting growth in grace without steady watchfulness, and deep self-examination; the expecting any blessing without hearing the Word of God at every opportunity.⁸¹

Regardless of whether the neglect stems from antinomianism, enthusiasm, or a general spiritual laziness, Wesley paints the consequences in stark colors. Without attending to the means God instituted, one cannot be a full disciple of Christ, perfected in love; faith is stunted and one's walk and relationship with God is weakened:

[Unwilling to deny himself] he omits one or more, if not all, works of mercy and piety. Therefore his faith is not made perfect, neither can he grow in grace; namely, because he will not 'deny himself, and take up his daily cross'. ... It manifestly follows that it is always owing to the want either of self-denial or taking up his cross that a man does not thoroughly follow his Lord, that he is not fully a disciple of Christ.⁸²

... there is no perfection in this life which implies any dispensation from attending all the ordinances of God, or from 'doing good unto all men while we have time', though 'specially unto the household of faith'. ... We believe that not only the babes in Christ, who have newly found redemption in his blood, but those also who are 'grown up unto perfect men, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ', are indispensably obliged (and that they are obliged thereto is their 'glory and crown of rejoicing') as oft as they have opportunity to eat bread and drink wine, 'in remembrance of him'; to 'search the Scriptures'; by fasting (as well as temperance) to 'keep their bodies under, and bring them into subjection'; and above all, to pour out their souls in prayer, both 'secretly' and 'in the great congregation'.⁸³

And those that neglect them [works of piety and mercy] do not receive the grace which otherwise they might. Yea, and they lose, by a continued neglect, the grace

⁸⁰ Ibid., §39, *Works*, 2:59. See also *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763), I.33, *Works*, 13:113.

⁸¹ *Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies* (1762), II, *Works*, 13:84.

⁸² Sermon 48, "Self-denial," II.6-7, *Works*, 2:247-48.

⁸³ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), Preface, §2, *Works*, 13:50-51.

which they had received. Is it not hence that many who were once strong in faith are now weak and feeble-minded? And yet they are not sensible whence that weakness comes, as they neglect none of the ordinances of God. But they might see whence it comes were they seriously to consider St. Paul's account of all true believers. 'We are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared, that we might walk therein' [Eph. 2:10].⁸⁴

The means of grace are *necessary* parts of faithful discipleship. Not powerful in and of themselves, but avenues for experiencing the presence and power of God.

*A Means Observed: Fasting*⁸⁵

As looking of the means of grace as a whole is helpful, so too is considering one of the means in particular. Spiritual fasting features in early Methodism as one of the practices of faith enthusiastically endorsed and observed by the Holy Club. It remained an important practice for Wesley his entire life, and in one of his later sermons he laments that Methodists by and large no longer practiced fasting with regularity, if at all:

Methodists in general are deplorably wanting in the practice of Christian self-denial. ... To instance only in one. While we were at Oxford the rule of every Methodist was (unless in case of sickness) to *fast* every Wednesday and Friday in the year, in imitation of the primitive church, for which they had the highest reverence. ... But afterwards some in London carried this excess, and fasted so as to impair their health. It was not long there are now thousands of Methodists, so called, both in England and Ireland, who, following the same bad example have entirely left off fasting. ... the man that never fasts is no more in the way to heaven than the man that never prays.⁸⁶

Wesley's endorsement of fasting is not a late development in his theology. Sermon 27, "Sermon on the Mount, VII," is a sermon from the middle of Wesley's ministry where he

⁸⁴ Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," §1, *Works*, 3:385.

⁸⁵ Fasting is not chosen here to argue that it stands higher than other means of grace in general or means of piety in particular. Rather, it is merely an exemplar to help clarify the assertions made above.

⁸⁶ Sermon 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," §14, *Works*, 4:94.

considers the practice with a good deal of intentionality. Preaching from the passage where Jesus taught about self-denial and fasting, Wesley ruminates how often fasting has been misunderstood by believers:

But of all the means of grace there is scarce any concerning which men have run into greater extremes than that of . . . religious fasting. How have some exalted this beyond all Scripture and reason! And others utterly disregarding it, as it were revenging themselves by undervaluing as much as the former had overvalued it. Those have spoken of it as if it were all in all; if not the end itself, yet infallibly connected with it: these as if it were just nothing, as if it were a fruitless labour which had no relation at all thereto. Whereas it is certain the truth lies between them both. It is not all; nor yet is it nothing. It is not the end; but it is a precious means thereto, a means which God himself has ordained; and in which therefore, when it is duly used, he will surely give us his blessing.⁸⁷

Fasting is a prime example of the extremes discussed above. Some have mistaken the means for the end, elevating the practice above its proper station; others, perhaps in response to those who mistakenly see it as the goal of all, consider it a waste of time and neglect it altogether. Wesley steers a middle ground, asserting God's promise of blessing in an activity God instituted. He concedes that there is no intrinsic power in fasting, nor is God limited in bestowing blessing to those who fast:

Not that there is any natural or necessary connection between fasting and the blessings God conveys thereby. But he will have mercy as he will have mercy: he will convey whatsoever seemeth him good, by whatsoever means he is pleased to appoint. And he hath in all ages appointed this to be a means of averting his wrath, and obtaining whatever blessings we from time to time stand in need of.⁸⁸

But he ends with a reminder that fasting is a *means* to a greater end – an ascetic exercise that reorients the believer into greater blessing and relationship to God by strengthening the ability to turn from passions and tempers that thwart the full love of God:

⁸⁷ Sermon 27, "Sermon on the Mount, VII," §4, *Works*, 1:593-94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, II.7, *Works*, 1:600-601.

We abstain from food with this view, that by the grace of God, conveyed into our souls through this outward means, in conjunction with all the other channels of his grace which he hath appointed, we may be enabled to abstain from every passion and temper which is not pleasing in his sight. We refrain from the one that, being endued with power from on high, we may be able to refrain from the other. . . .these little instances of self-denial are the ways God hath chose wherein to bestow that great salvation.⁸⁹

Concluding Thoughts

Built upon a firm foundation that God has created and redeemed humanity with a capacity and ability for active faith, the means of grace are essential activities that form the infrastructure of divine life. As believers are the temple of God, the means of grace are the stones that form the edifice. Whereas Wesley will list various activities in slightly different arrangements – and indeed never tries to limit the ways God might bestow God’s blessing – the love of God and love of neighbor together are essential in Wesley’s vision of the full love of God. The works of faith, be they piety or mercy, have no intrinsic power within themselves, nor do they function in a transactional understanding of grace. The means of grace are not a human-divine *quid pro quo* wherein God bestows grace automatically because of faithful enactment of the means. Yet, at the same time, on the strength of God’s promise to meet believers in the means God instituted, Wesley lifts the means of grace as opportunities to truly encounter God in transformative and deifying ways. Believers are transformed not because of the means themselves, but rather the faithfulness of God whose power and presence are gifted to believers as they live into the new life made possible through Christ.

⁸⁹ Ibid., III.2, *Works*, 1:605.

The Architecture of Works: Wesleyan Distinctives

Having established the foundational understanding of God and humanity that makes faithful action possible and expected of redeemed humanity, and having explored the nature of the means of grace whereby believers grow in godliness through the power and presence of God, this concluding section seeks to address Wesleyan emphases that emerge. If active faith is the means wherein the presence of God is invited to dwell within the believer, what is the architecture of Wesley's theology? And to what extent are those elements uniquely Wesleyan? Thus this section will proceed with an eye to describing Wesley's unique understanding of works, with an eye to how this interacts with other understandings of *theosis*.

Love Sits on the Throne: An Order of Priorities

In the previous section, the discussion of means of grace emphasized Wesley's commitment to *both* works of piety and works of mercy, a reflection of the dual commands of Christ to love God and love neighbor. This emphasis is a consistent throughout Wesley's career. Sermon 91, "On Charity," details Wesley's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13. Here he describes a "beautiful gradation" that leads ultimately to love of God and neighbor:

It is proper to observe here, first, what a beautiful gradation there is, each step rising above the other in the enumeration of those several things which some or other of those that are called Christians, and are usually accounted so, really believe will supply the absence of love. St. Paul begins at the lowest point, 'Talking well', and advances step by step, every one rising higher than the preceding, till he comes to the highest of all. A step above eloquence is knowledge; faith is a step above this. Good works are a step above that faith. And

even above this, is suffering for righteousness' sake. Nothing is higher than this but Christian love – the love of our neighbor flowing from love of God.⁹⁰

The sum of all that has been observed is this: whatever I speak, whatever I know, whatever I believe, whatever I do, whatever I suffer; if I have not the faith that worketh by love [Gal. 5:6], that produces love to God and all mankind, I am not in the narrow way which leadeth to life, but in the broad road that leadeth to destruction.⁹¹

In sequence, eloquence is lower than knowledge, faith is lower than good works, suffering ranks higher still, yet love sits highest of all. In particular, it is the “faith that worketh by love” – the active love of God – that Wesley lifts above all.

Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” is particularly interesting, as it gives rare insight in how Wesley perceives the innerworkings of the Christian life. Unsurprisingly, “love sits on the throne,” the uncontested queen of all graces. What is most telling is the ordering of the other elements of the Christian’s life:

In a Christian believer *love* sits upon the throne, which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all *holy tempers*: long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, fidelity, temperance – and if any other is comprised in ‘the mind which was in Christ Jesus’. In an exterior circle are all the *works of mercy*, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real *means of grace*, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed *works of piety*: reading and hearing the Word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord’s Supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one – *the church*, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.⁹²

⁹⁰ Sermon 91, “On Charity,” II.6, *Works*, 3:300.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, III.11, *Works*, 3:306.

⁹² Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” II.5, *Works*, 3:313-14.

From highest to lowest, from Wesley's own pen we see how he prioritizes faith: love, holy tempers/fruit of the Spirit, works of mercy, works of piety, and the Church. Each is important; indeed, the church as the most exterior circle is the community and context wherein love, holy tempers and good works are united "together in one." At the same time, there is a gradation of importance. Zeal, which is the "flame of love"⁹³ that pushes believers to make progress in the faith,⁹⁴ is to be exerted according the value of its object:

Proportion your zeal to the value of its object. Be calmly zealous therefore, first, for the *church* – 'the whole state of Christ's church militant on earth', and in particular for that 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 'sacrifices wherewith God is well pleased', those marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know his sheep at the last day. Be more zealous still for *holy tempers*, for 'long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, lowliness, and resignation'; but be most 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' [1 John 4:16].⁹⁵

While in some visions of *theosis* a priority is given to works of piety such as prayer, fasting, scripture, asceticism, or contemplation, Wesley's vision places those acts in a circle below works of mercy which flow from that love of God. Wesleyan deification is a picture of love of God that leads to social action and social justice in a growing love of neighbor. While one cannot stretch this too far, as both love of God and neighbor are ever united for Wesley, it is poignant to note that works of mercy are not secondary to more

⁹³ Ibid., I.2-3, *Works*, 3:312 – "Christian zeal is all love. It is nothing else. The love of God and man fills up its whole nature. ... it is properly love in a higher degree. It is 'fervent love'. True Christian zeal is no other than *the flame of love*. This is the nature, the inmost essence of it."

⁹⁴ Ibid., §1, *Works*, 3:308 – "For without zeal it is impossible either to make any considerable progress in religion ourselves, or to do any considerable service to our neighbor, whether in temporal or spiritual things."

⁹⁵ Ibid., II, *Works*, 3:320-21.

“spiritual” works of piety. On the contrary, works of mercy are *closer* to the seat of a heart ruled by divine love, filled with mind of Christ Jesus and the tempers of the Holy Spirit. Wesleyan deification is not a spiritualized reality, but an embodied love made evident in social action.

The Role of the Church

John Wesley lived and died as a priest in the Church of England. His writings to his Methodist audience assumed their active engagement with local congregations, with the Methodist societies serving a para-church function to spread scriptural holiness. The nature and context of Wesley’s ministry shapes greatly how he understood the role of the church and the community of faith in the deification of the believer. While Wesley was ever quick to affirm his status as a churchman, he also did not paint the Church of England, *or any church*, as the locus of salvation. Sermon 33 shows him holding both orthodoxy and church affiliation as mere building on the sand, as opposed to building on the rock of faith:

Is it not built on the sand? Upon my *orthodoxy* or right opinions. ... Perhaps on my belonging to ‘so excellent a church; reformed after the true Scripture model; blessed with the purest doctrine, the most primitive liturgy, the most apostolical form of government’. These are doubtless so many reasons for praising God, as they may be so many helps to holiness. But they are not holiness itself.⁹⁶

Church, while a means of God’s work in the world, was not the endpoint of holiness.

That is not to say, however, that Wesley endorsed a solitary religion. The very structure of the early Methodist movement was structured around class and society

⁹⁶ Sermon 33, “Sermon on the Mount, XIII,” III.1, *Works*, 1:694.

meetings as means of God's grace. In his Preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Wesley strongly opposes the mystic divines who advocate withdrawing in solitude:

He commands to 'build up one another'. They [mystic divines] advise, 'To the desert, to the desert, and God will build you up. ... Whereas, according to the judgement of our Lord and the writings of his apostles, it is only when we are 'knit together' that we 'have nourishment from him' and 'increase with the increase of God'.⁹⁷

Solitary religion is not to be found there [in the gospel of Christ]. 'Holy solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working by love' [cf. Gal. 5:6] is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. 'This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loveth God love his brother also;' and that we manifest our love 'by doing good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith' [cf. Gal. 6:10]. ... He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire, of spending and being spent for them [one's neighbors]. 'My Father', he will say, 'worketh hitherto, and I work.' And at all possible opportunities he is, like his Master, 'going about doing good'.⁹⁸

Social religion, a faith that actively serves one's neighbors, fits seamlessly in Wesley's theology that lifts up works of mercy alongside of (if not slightly higher up ladder of love!) works of piety. Thus Wesley's theology embraces the community of faith, but not necessarily the role of the church alone, in deifying the believer in godlike love.

The Role of the Sacraments: Baptism

Conspicuously absent from Wesley's lists of works of piety is the sacrament of baptism. There are several logical reasons for its absence. Most pertinent is the fact that in Wesley's time the majority of the population in England were baptized. The Methodist movement was therefore a revival movement calling *baptized members* into new birth

⁹⁷ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, §2, *Works*, 13:37.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, §5, *Works*, 13:39.

and newness of life. With baptism being an unrepeatable sacrament, the renewal of faith for a baptized believer was not a work of piety to be considered for those who became active in the movement. Moreover, the power and efficacy of the sacrament was practically undermined as the mission field of early Methodism was wayward “Christians” who led openly unholy lives while leaning on the strength of their baptism as a moniker of their faith.

The second major consideration is that the Methodist movement, as a para-church organization, created a locus for conversion *outside* the established church. Practically speaking, that means the New Birth and all that it entails within Wesley’s theology – both conversion to Christ and the witness of the Spirit of adoption – was outside an ecclesial context where baptisms were taking place. While not challenging the theology of baptism within his beloved Church of England, Wesley is surprisingly dismissive of baptism as a “broken reed” that believers should not confuse with the new birth:

Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye *were* born again in baptism. Who denies that ye were then made ‘children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven’? But notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil; therefore you must be born again. ... And if ye have been baptized, your only hope is this: that those who were made the children of God by baptism, but are now the children of the devil, may yet again receive ‘power to become the sons of God’; that they may receive again what they have lost, even the ‘Spirit of adoption, crying in their hearts, Abba, Father’!⁹⁹

... baptism is not the new birth: they are not one and the same thing. ... What is the outward part or form in baptism? Water, wherein the person is baptized, “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”. What is the inward part or thing signified? A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.’ Nothing therefore is plainer than that, according to the Church of England, baptism is not the new birth. ... one being an act of man, purifying the body, the other a change wrought by God in the soul. So that the former is just as distinguishable from the

⁹⁹ Sermon 18, “The Marks of the New Birth,” IV.5, *Works*, 1:430.

latter as the soul from the body, or water from the Holy Ghost. ... I do not now speak with regard to infants: it is certain, our Church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again.¹⁰⁰

And in general, from all the passages of Holy Writ wherein this expression, the being 'born of God', occurs, we may learn that it implies not barely the being baptized, or any outward change whatever; but a vast inward change; a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost, a change in the whole manner of our existence; for from the moment we are 'born of God' we live in quite another manner than we did before; we are, as it were, in another world.¹⁰¹

Wesley's theological children would later wrestle with how to interpret the divide between sacramental baptism and the new birth in such texts.¹⁰² Pertinent to the topic at hand, Wesley's dismissal of baptism as a key moment in the believer's life is a break from how many theologians historically have understood the relationship between baptism and deification. Baptism, reception into the church, and adoption as sons and daughters of God are three often united elements in theologies of *theosis*, emphasizing both an ecclesial and sacramental reception into deified life. By contrast, in Wesley's theological vision, the deific emphasis is almost exclusively on the believer's new and elevated status as children of God, a status conferred not at baptism but in the New Birth.

The Role of the Sacraments: Communion

Communion, as a repeatable sacrament, functions more prominently than baptism in Wesley's understanding of deification. It is consistently in every list Wesley makes of the means of grace and works of piety. Moreover, it was vital in Wesley's personal

¹⁰⁰ Sermon 45, "The New Birth," IV.1-2, *Works*, 2:196-97.

¹⁰¹ Sermon 19, "The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God," I.1, *Works*, 1:432.

¹⁰² Indeed, Wesley's distinction here would be the fertile ground for some of Wesley's theological heirs to speak of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the "second blessing," and new birth as distinct blessings subsequent to baptism and conversion.

practice, where he saw himself following the example of the “primitive church” in partaking of the sacrament as often as possible:

[Exegeting “Give us this day our daily bread.”] By ‘bread’ we may understand all things needful, whether for our souls or bodies ... ‘the things pertaining to life and godliness’ [2 Peter 1:3]. ... It was the judgement of many of the ancient Fathers that we are here to understand the sacramental bread also; daily received in the beginning by the whole church of Christ, and highly esteemed, till the love of many waxed cold, as the grand channel whereby the grace of his Spirit was conveyed to the souls of all the children of God.¹⁰³

Wesley’s referring to communion as the “grand channel” of God’s grace emphasizes the great emphasis he placed in the sacrament as a means of grace. Indeed, the importance of the sacrament is also evident in his publication of *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (1745), a compilation of over 160 Communion hymns that Wesley published 9 times over the span of 5 decades in ministry.¹⁰⁴

As with baptism, the nature of the Methodist movement impacts Wesley’s theological vision. Removed from an ecclesial context, Methodist societies did not partake in sacramental life together.¹⁰⁵ Yet, quite unlike baptism, Wesley is quick to encourage his Methodist audience of the great benefits of the sacrament, and to

¹⁰³ Sermon 26, “Sermon on the Mount, VI,” III.11 *Works*, 1:584-85. For emphasis on the early church’s frequent celebration of communion, see also Sermon 101, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” I.4 *Works*, 3:430. It is interesting Wesley’s quotation of 2 Peter 1:3 here, as it is the verse preceding the key deific text of “partaking in the divine nature.” The logic of the scriptural passage links the two verses together, and Wesley’s identification of Communion as one of the “things pertaining to life and godliness” ties this sacrament with “partaking of the divine nature.”

¹⁰⁴ The last edition was published in 1786, over forty years after the initial publication. An excellent introduction and text of the hymns is available online, at the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, Duke Divinity School.

¹⁰⁵ For this reason, communion receives little *specific* attention in Wesley’s most of his sermons, or in his treatises on Christian perfection. The result is that communion is among those faith practices Wesley endorses as deifying, but the focus is often more muted than one might expect. One must look at Wesley’s entire corpus to gain an appreciation of the value he places on the sacrament.

encourage them to partake as often as possible at their local church. There, Christ “will meet you at his own table”:

But what are the steps which the Scripture directs us to take, in the working out of our own salvation? The prophet Isaiah gives us a general answer touching the first steps we are to take: ‘Cease to do evil; learn to do well’ [Isa. 1:16-17]. ... And ‘learn to do well’; be zealous of good works, of works of piety, as well as works of mercy. Use family prayer, and cry to God in secret. Fast in secret, and ‘your Father which seeth in secret, he will reward you openly’ [cf. Matt. 6:4, 6, 18]. ‘Search the Scriptures’ [John 5:39], hear them in public, read them in private, and meditate therein. At every opportunity be a partaker of the Lord’s Supper. ‘Do this in remembrance of him,’ and he will meet you at his own table. Let your conversation be with the children of God, and see that it ‘be in grace, seasoned with salt’. As ye have time, do good unto all men, to their souls and to their bodies.¹⁰⁶

Sermon 101, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” highlights the ways in which Wesley lifts up the sacrament even within his parachurch setting. Receiving the Lord’s Supper as often as possible is a Christian’s duty, as it is a “plain command of Christ” with clear benefits: “namely, the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls.”¹⁰⁷

The sermon goes on to elaborate on the benefits of communion in strengthening the soul, leading to holiness and perfection, even if “insensibly:”

The grace of God given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins by enabling us to leave them. As our bodies are strengthened by bread and wine, so are our souls by these tokens of the body and blood of Christ. This is the food of our souls: this gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection.¹⁰⁸

As God, whose mercy is over all his works, and particularly over the children of men, knew there was but one way for man to be happy like himself, namely, by being like him in holiness; as he knew we could do nothing toward this of ourselves, he has given us certain means of obtaining his help. One of these is the

¹⁰⁶ Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” II.4, *Works*, 3:205-06. As is his custom, Wesley lists communion among other works of piety.

¹⁰⁷ Sermon 101, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” I-1.2, *Works*, 3:428-29.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, I.3, *Works*, 3:429.

Lord's Supper, which of his infinite mercy he hath given for this very end: that through this means we may be assisted to attain those blessings which he hath prepared for us; that we may obtain holiness on earth and everlasting glory in heaven.¹⁰⁹

'Do this in remembrance of me.' This therefore we are to do, because he commands, whether we find present benefit thereby or not. But undoubtedly we shall find benefit sooner or later, though perhaps insensibly. We shall be insensibly strengthened, made more fit for the serve of God, and more constant in it.¹¹⁰

With such benefits, the focus for much of the sermon is an encouragement to partake as frequently as possible, whether one feels unworthy, has had time to pray beforehand, or opportunity to examine one's soul. As communion is a "grand channel" of God's presence and grace, the sacrament is a means to grow in godliness.¹¹¹ To that end it is a real means of deification.

The Role of Scripture

As Wesley prided himself to be a "man of one book," it is hardly surprising to see the frequency with which he asserts the importance of Scripture. Like communion, scripture features in virtually every list of the works of piety. Especially in his later writings, Wesley will with greater frequency mention the primacy of Scripture:

It is true the Word of God is the chief ordinary means whereby he changes both the hearts and lives of sinners; and he does this chiefly by the ministers of the gospel.¹¹²

The foundation of true religion stands upon the oracles of God.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., II.5 *Works*, 3:432.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., II.18, *Works*, 3:437.

¹¹¹ This is, of course, part of Wesley's polemic against the Quietist movement, that endorsed "waiting" to partake until one felt worthy to receive. For Wesley, one should wait *in* the means, receiving communion so as experience God's forgiveness and worthiness.

¹¹² Sermon 52, "The Reformation of Manners," II.8, *Works*, 2:311.

¹¹³ Sermon 70, "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," I.6, *Works*, 2:591.

From the very beginning, from the time that four young men united together, each of them was *homo unius libri* – a man of one book. God taught them all to make his ‘Word a lantern unto their feet and a light in all their paths’. They had one, and only one rule of judgement with regard to all their tempers, words, and actions, namely, the oracles of God. They were one and all determined to be *Bible-Christians*. They were continually reproached for this very thing; some terming them in derision *Bible-bigots*; others *Bible-moths* – feeding, they said, upon the Bible as moths do upon cloth. And indeed unto this day it is their constant endeavor to think and speak as the oracles of God.¹¹⁴

Scripture is *the history of God*. Those who bear this upon their minds will easily perceive that the inspired writers never lose sight of it, but preserve one unbroken, connected chain, from the beginning to the end. All over that wonderful book, as ‘life and immortality’ (immortal life) is gradually ‘brought to light’, so is ‘Immanuel, God with us’, and his kingdom ruling over all.¹¹⁵

From the whole we may draw that general conclusion, that standing revelation is the best means of rational conviction, far preferable to any of those extraordinary means which some imagine would be more effectual. It is therefore our wisdom to avail ourselves of this; to make full use of it, so that it may be a lantern to our feet, and a light in all our paths. Let us take care that our whole heart and life be conformable thereto; that it be the constant rule of all our tempers, all our words, and all our actions.¹¹⁶

But a far more considerable degree of light was vouchsafed to the Jewish nation; inasmuch as to them *were entrusted* the grand means of light, the oracles of God.¹¹⁷

The faith of the *Protestants*, in general, embraces only those truths as necessary to salvation which are clearly revealed in the oracles of God.¹¹⁸

This is the *religion of the Bible*, as no one can deny who reads it with any attention. It is the religion which is continually inculcated therein, which runs through both the Old and New Testament. Moses and the prophets, our Blessed Lord and his apostles, proclaim with one voice, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and they neighbour as thyself.’ The Bible declares, ‘Love is the fulfilling of the Law’ [Rom. 13:10], ‘the end of the commandment’ [1 Tim. 1:5]

¹¹⁴ Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” I.1, *Works*, 3:504.

¹¹⁵ Sermon 67, “On Divine Providence,” §4, *Works*, 2:536.

¹¹⁶ Sermon 115, “Dives and Lazarus,” III.7, *Works*, 4:18.

¹¹⁷ Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §2, *Works*, 3:492.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §8, *Works*, 3:496.

of all the commandments which are contained in the oracles of God. The inward and outward fruits of this love are also largely described by the inspired writers.¹¹⁹

This focus on scripture as a chief means of grace has deific implications. Not only is scripture key in conversion, but also as a deifying force in the believer, leading the children of God into the full image of God.

Concluding Thoughts

It [to be a son or child of God] is so to *love* God, who hath thus loved you, as you never did love any creature: so that ye are constrained to love all men as yourselves; with a love not only ever burning in your hearts, but flaming out in all your actions and conversations, and making your whole life one ‘labour of love’ [1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10], one continued obedience to those commands, ‘Be ye merciful, as God is merciful;’ ‘Be ye holy, as I the Lord am holy;’ ‘Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’¹²⁰

The above quote asserts the primacy of love, the status of believers as children of God, and the absolute necessity that faith be filled with active love. It carries with it the call and promise of perfection and holiness that is analogous to the perfection and holiness of God, a creaturely image of the divine archetype. To be a child of God, Wesley here asserts, is to live a life of love that makes one godlike, that entails a sanctification of believers that carries them into similitude with the God whose image they are created. There is an entire theology at work here that asserts the ability to imitate God and the created capacity to reflect the image of God – assertions we have explored and established in earlier chapters. This chapter has sought to complete the picture, noting how Wesley can speak of one’s whole life being a “labour of love.” It is the will of God

¹¹⁹ Sermon 112, “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel,” II.2, *Works*, 3:585.

¹²⁰ Sermon 18, “The Marks of the New Birth,” IV.1, *Works*, 1:427-28.

that we be perfect and holy and complete, and through the redemption of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to live with an active faith lifting us into the love and divine life of God.

Be we then continually jealous over our souls, that there be no mixture in our intention. Be it our one view in all our thoughts, and words, and works, to be partakers of the divine nature, to regain the highest measure we can of that faith which works by love [Gal. 5:6], and makes us become one spirit with God.¹²¹

¹²¹ Sermon 146, "The One Thing Needful," III.3, *Works*, 4:359.

Conclusion

Theosis is a strange and foreign word for most Protestants and Catholics; deification, the Latinized form of the same concept, is hardly less odd to Western ears. The strangeness of the terminology and the conflation of creation and Creator that it seems to imply led to its neglect or outright rejection by many in the Western church for much of Christian history. Yet when the concept became the focus of ecumenical theological exploration in recent decades, *theosis* and deification stepped out of the shadows and into the light of concentrated scholarly inquiry. Facile understandings of *theosis* as being unique to Eastern Christianity have been compellingly challenged, as have misunderstandings that saw *theosis* as Greek idea imposed upon Christianity or as a heretical concept that violates the Creator/creation ontological divide. In the place of quiet or hostile indifference has grown a broad scholarly fascination with deification.

A Wesleyan Study on *Theosis*

Into the plethora of deification scholarship generated in the past fifty years, this project has attempted to add clarity and specificity to how John Wesley's theology reflects deification. Wesleyan theologians, in their exploration of John Wesley's interest in the "primitive church" and Eastern tradition, frequently gesture to the similarities between Wesley and *theosis*. Yet these studies, while adding rich specificity to Wesleyan-patristic studies, are often focused on parallels between Wesley and a particular figure. While tracing the lines of direct attestation and probable influence, they

are not focused on *theosis* in particular, and as a result can only gesture toward *possible* resonances with Wesleyan theology.

Bypassing the question of Wesley's sources and influences, this project focused instead on identifying the content of *theosis* within Wesley's writings. By creating a "lens" of what constitutes the doctrine, as gleaned from recent scholarship, the way was paved to examine in detail what ways Wesley might reflect those core components of *theosis* in a large swarth of his writings, including the entirety of his sermon corpus. This adds meaningfully to Wesleyan scholarship in at least two ways: 1) it is both an explicit study of deification and John Wesley; and, 2) more than merely gesturing to parallels, it traces how those emphases are present throughout Wesley's ministry by a close reading of a large representative selection of Wesley's writings.

Wesleyan Deification

The results of my study overwhelmingly support not only the presence of deification within Wesley as a theological theme, but it has structural significance for understanding Wesley's theology. The Trinitarian structure of Wesley's soteriology is a rich interplay of both an understanding of God as desiring and empowering true union with humanity on the one hand, and a theological anthropology that sees the *telos* of humanity as true Godlikeness on the other.

God the Father and Creation. God created humanity with a capacity to be filled with love, the very nature of God. Wesley's understanding of creation is foundational to understanding the structural significance of deification within Wesley. The *imago dei* roots humanity to an explicit deformity, and for Wesley it articulates not only our

created creaturely similitude to our Creator, but our present capacity and future *telos* to attain godliness. The human condition is never static – one is either progressing toward greater holy and happy godliness, the “image of God,” or toward unholy and unhappy dissolution and ungodliness, the “image of Satan.” Sin, in this way, is an anti-deification, a turning away from the deformity to which humanity was intended to grow in likeness and fellowship with God. Salvation, on the other hand, is a restoration of the *imago dei*, which enables true fellowship with God, the loving divine Parent who desires relationship with God’s human children.

Jesus, the Redeemer and New Adam. Wesley’s Christology can be framed in the historic Exchange Formula that has long given structure to the doctrine of deification. In Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection, humanity is not only redeemed, but elevated to greater godliness. Redemption from sin, restoration of the *imago dei*, and renewed relationship with God are the gifts of God to the believer that serve as starting points for continued growth in godliness. Believers are enabled to live radically new lives, imitating Christ in such a way as to “have the mind of Christ” and to “walk as Christ walked,” scriptural references that Wesley uses to speak of the inner dispositions and outer actions that are transformed by Christ. This imitation of Christ is a Christification of the believer, a transformation to the similitude of the God revealed in Christ Jesus; imitation of Christ is nothing short than imitation of God. Thus, the arc of Wesley’s Christology is not a mere forensic forgiveness of sin, but rather a dynamic *imitatio dei* that is a fulfillment of humanity’s *imago dei*.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Adoption. Wesley’s pneumatology holds that the Holy Spirit is the very presence of grace in the world. Not only does the Spirit convict

and open the eyes of humanity to their need of God, but the Spirit also serves as the very presence of God within believers that enables them to live Christ-like lives. Responding to God's love, believers are enabled and empowered to have genuine fellowship with God, a similitude and fellowship with God that is possible *to a degree* even in this life, as is attested by Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection. This robust divine/human synergy is described by Wesley as spiritual respiration (God breathing in, humanity breathing out), and even in a neologism, "re-action" (God acts, humanity re-acts). Importantly, this grace-enabled synergy is framed in intimate familial terms: the Spirit of Adoption gives witness to believers of their new status as *children* of God. The deific theme of adoption, historically the exegesis of Psalm 82:6 that gave rise to doctrine of *theosis*, is the salient identity marker of believers for Wesley: who the Son is by nature, God's human children become by grace – sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit's role as the "Spirit of Adoption" who gives witness to this dazzling new reality is paramount; believers are able to live in assurance and confidence as they claim their status as the children of God. Filled with the presence and power of God, Wesley's vision of deified life is one of intimate, filial relationship with God, a vision he paints with the boldest language of scripture. Whereas he will at times speak of participation in God as *union* with God, his preferred language is less metaphysical and more relational: participation as fellowship, communion, and dwelling in God.

The Means of Deification. Acts of asceticism are part of a Christian's journey to greater godliness, turning away from all things that hinder a full love of God, but Wesley rejects extreme forms of ascetism. His focus, instead, is more on growth in godliness, which he links to active faith, or faith working through love. Wesley's means of grace are

intelligible only when placed in the context of his Trinitarian theology articulated above: created in the *imago dei*, humanity is created by the God of love to *be loving*; redeemed by the love of God in Christ Jesus, believers are called to the two-fold love of God and neighbor in imitation of Jesus, in *imitatio dei*; empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as sons and daughters of God, the love of God is shed abroad in believers' hearts as the spring of holy action. Thus, in this way, the means of grace are really "means of love:" works of piety and works of mercy are means to fulfill the two-fold command of Christ to love God and love one's neighbor. Wesleyan deification is not a spiritualized reality, but an embodied love made evident in social action – as such, both works of piety and works of mercy are given equal voice, if not slight priority for the latter. Sacramentally, Wesley breaks from the traditional deific focus on baptism as the entry point for the filiation and adoption of the believer as a child of God (for Wesley this locus is in the "new birth"), as well as a strong association with the locus of deification being within the ecclesial community (likely because of the para-church nature of his Methodist movement). But the importance of sacraments and ecclesial life is especially reflected in his emphasis on communion as a means of meeting and growing in God, and his insistence on social holiness (through classes, meetings, and regular church attendance). The means are not the only means by which God can work in believer's souls, nor are they ends unto themselves, but Wesley maintains they are *channels* of God's presence that, if neglected, will stagnate the life of God in the soul. If practiced, the glorious promise of 1 John 4:16 may be realized: dwelling in love, believers may dwell in God, and God in them.

Taken together, these Wesleyan emphases demonstrate not merely a thematic leaning toward *theosis*, but strong structural significance that gives order to his overall

theological vision of the Christian life. Wesley's strong Trinitarian theology boasts an understanding of God, a theological anthropology, and a soteriological thrust that makes *theosis* not only intelligible but prominent in his works.

Wesleyan Deification in Context

Wesleyan deification bears the quintessential qualities elaborated upon in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Aligning with Gorman's scholarship, *imitatio dei* for Wesley has a distinctly Christological character that might be rightly described as the Christification of the believer: having the mind of Christ and walking as Christ walked is nothing short than conformity to Christ, Spirit-enabled imitation of God, and creaturely fulfillment of one's deiform creation in the *imago dei*. Likewise, the graced Exchange and focus on filiation, the core components of deification for Keating, are present and prominent in Wesley, as is the theological anthropology and doctrine of creation that frame Meconi's understanding of deification within Augustine. Wesley's theological framework richly reflects these dimensions of *theosis* at every turn.

As for Russell's typology for the metaphor of deification, at first brush Wesley's theology seems to most closely align with Russell's category of ethical deification, emphasizing imitation of God which leads to attaining likeness to God. In Russell's later schema, he refers to the ethical sense of *theosis* as a "spiritual teaching." This differs from his category of realistic deification (in his later schema a "theological theme"), which emphasizes participation in and transformation by God, through the incarnation and the sacramental/ecclesial reception of believers into the life of God. These two senses

of deification are not independent of one another for Russell, but parallel teachings that mutually inform one another.

This bifurcation, while perhaps helpful to note differing emphases in deification, may belie the ways in which these two aspects are irreducibly united and contingent upon one another. Daniel Keating, in his article “Typologies of Deification,” has recently offered a “friendly amendment” to Russell’s typology that emphasizes the way the ethical/realistic, spiritual teaching/theological theme categories function together:

Here I would want to underline that the realistic and ethical senses are more than just necessarily linked; they are ordered together in a particular way. The ethical sense of deification – our progress in deification through ascetical effort and the full use of our graced capacities – must be founded on the realistic sense of deification and ever draw on what Christ has done (and is doing), due to the real indwelling of the Spirit (and so of the Triune God) in the believer. This is clearly the logic in both the Scripture and the Fathers. . . . We find in some Fathers an accent on the realistic sense of deification, in others an accent of the ethical sense. But even among the latter the foundation in the realistic sense is there, either explicitly or implicitly. And as Russell capably shows, the fullest accounts of deification, found in Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor, impressively combine both senses and show their interrelation, and so display in a profound way ‘what God has prepared for those who love him’ (1 Cor. 2:9).¹

Keating’s amendment to Russell’s typology is both compelling and helpful. Importantly, it more accurately reflects the nature of Wesleyan deification. While Wesley’s accent may fit in Russell’s ethical/spiritual teaching category on one level, to label Wesleyan deification exclusively as an ethical spiritual teaching does injustice to his overall theological vision, as the foundation for Wesley’s ethical focus is the real and dynamic participation of the believer in the life of God. The very basis for Wesley’s emphasis on the imitation of Christ and holiness/godlikeness is the realistic participation in the life of

¹ Daniel A. Keating, “Typologies in Deification,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17.3 (July 2015): 272-273.

God enabled by Christ's incarnation and the indwelling Spirit, who indwells and pours the love of love God in our hearts. This Spirit-enabled transformation of believers undergirds Wesley's holiness theology. To Keating's point, the theological theme of *theosis* within Wesley is the necessary basis for his spiritual teaching of *theosis*; participation in and transformation by God paves the way for imitation of and growing likeness to God. These are not radically different constructs, but related realities that together form a cohesive theology of *theosis*.

Going Forward: Next Steps for Study

This study has attempted to break new ground in Wesleyan conversations about *theosis*, looking particularly at the core elements of *theosis* and then giving a close reading of Wesley to detail the nature and contours of deific understanding in his theology. This study gives a broad overview of Wesley's theology and the essential components of deification, which paves way for more nuanced study of the aspects mentioned briefly above, such as Wesley's understanding of eudaimonia or asceticism as each relate to soteriology and deification, or detailed engagement with the concepts such as *imitatio dei*. On that last point, there is debate within the field about whether Wesley's high Christology overshadows Christ's humanity – detailed engagement with that scholarly debate could establish whether *imitation dei* as a marker for deification is strengthened or diminished by the way he understands and presents the incarnation. Likewise, there is room to explore more fully Wesley's ecclesiology and understanding of community. The locus of deification is historically tied to the church, yet Wesley

presents a mixed bag on this front: emphasizing social religion, church attendance, and receiving communion, yet deemphasizing the sacrament of baptism.

Outside of Wesleyan scholarship in particular, establishing a Wesleyan understanding of deification based on the fundamental elements of the doctrine invites further engagement with different *streams* of theotic understanding. Eastern Orthodoxy is a living tradition, for example, with varied understandings of *theosis*. A shared theological framework of *theosis* holds ecumenical promise, and also engenders conversation about the ways Wesleyan deification is analogous and different from current Orthodox streams of thinking. As the role of deification is a current conversation in many Protestant and Catholic traditions, a clear sense of Wesleyan deification may also open ecumenical conversations in surprising new ways with old conversation partners.

As an ordained Elder in The United Methodist Church, I am also deeply committed to the connection between the academy and the church. I see the promise of further study of *theosis* as a way to strengthen discipleship within the local church, reclaiming our Wesleyan heritage. Wesley's teaching on Christian perfection was not only misunderstood in Wesley's day; his theological children and grandchildren, even those who officially espouse the doctrine, often scratch their head in perplexed bemusement at the grand promise of entire sanctification and prospect of perfect love of God and neighbor. Reclaiming *theosis* as a structural doctrine may helpfully put into perspective (and practice!) those concepts that have perhaps lost their power being unmoored and unrooted from the theological ground that made them intelligible in Wesley's original theological vision. Christian perfection, holiness of heart and life, the means of grace – all these are part and parcel of a presentation of the Christian gospel

with real and titillating hope of attaining genuine godlikeness and authentic fellowship with God, even in this life. Further study of deification may helpfully reconnect the means to the end, reclaiming a vision of the Christian life where believers see godliness, holiness, and fellowship with God not as outliers and exceptions, but as the glorious hope and promise for every child of God.

Concluding Thought

Theosis and deification, if terms recently appreciated and explored in recent theology, were strange indeed to John Wesley. Neither word is found in his sermons, or his treatises on Christian perfection, or even his redaction of the homilies of Macarius, which is one place we know he had exposure to the terminology. Yet the content of *theosis* is decidedly *not* absent from John Wesley's theology. When pressed about his language of Christian perfection, Wesley was wont to abdicate terms and language in favor of the content:

You may not indeed deny the work of God; but speak of it, when you are called thereto, in the most in offensive manner possible. Avoid all magnificent, pompous words. Indeed, you need give it no *general* name, neither 'perfection', 'sanctification', 'the second blessing' nor 'the having attained'. Rather speak of the *particulars* which God has wrought. You may say: "I then felt an unspeakable change. And since that time I have not felt pride, or anger, or unbelief, nor anything but a fullness of love, to God and to all mankind." And answer any other plain question that is asked with modesty and simplicity.²

Now let any man call this what he will. It is what I call 'perfection'.³

² "Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies" (1762), §6, *Works* 13:90.

³ *Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763), §1.28, *Works* 13:108.

Analogously, deification and *theosis*, strange as they are to the Wesleyan corpus, are terms that express with great structural integrity the heart of Wesley's hope for every believer: the restored image of God, the full "mind that was in Christ Jesus," faith working in love, and ultimately fellowship with God as the glorious destiny of every child of God.

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Biography

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