CONVENTIONAL OR REVISIONARY? SITUATING THE DOCTRINES OF SIN AND THE WORKS OF GRACE WITHIN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

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Introductory

Conventional Wesleyan theology analyzes sin usually in terms of broad categories such as: original sin, inherited depravity, estrangement, sin versus sins, ongoing sin in the life of the believer, and so on. The works of grace then said to apply to such needs are drawn from the traditional *ordo salutis*: awakening, justification, regeneration, entire sanctification, etc or from less informal jargon: forgiveness, cleansing, empowerment for service, etc.

These all are important themes. However, we should be wary of beginning any exposition of God's gracious works with a discussion of sin (or sins) and human needs. Indigence - our needs - should not constitute the tail that wags the theological dog. It is not that the human subject is unimportant, but if there is one lesson to be drawn from modern theology, it is this: If you begin with the human subject - its sin, finitude, needs, desires, etc - you rarely get around to God, and if you do, then the Almighty usually has been trimmed to fit 'what you need'.

The danger of proceeding this way, especially in a western consumer-driven culture at once individualistic and hyper-conformist, is apparent: I have my needs, and God (or the church) is there to meet them. I need forgiveness, I need to have my emotional wounds healed, I need to be freed from my addiction, I need a meaningful worship experience, I need fellowship, I need divine guidance and provision, I need comfort in times of sorrow, I need a place of service. God is said to be of paramount importance – desperately so - insofar as God is necessary to fill my needs. And the church on this score more often than not is taken to be a kind of 'one-stop shopping' spiritual mega-mart. This may be good

marketing, but it is lousy theology. My basic warning is this: we should not base a theology on human indigence. Rather, our first instinct should be to indwell the story of what God has been up to, and find out what our needs should be, given that narrative. With that caveat in mind - on doing theology in the contemporary west's cultural quagmire - we can move on to the material considerations of this paper.

Doctrines and Paradigms

Doctrines like "sin" and "works of grace" function and have their significance only in relation to larger theological frameworks, and those contexts must be made plain in order to grasp what is at stake in those doctrines. In what follows, I attempt a thought experiment - I aim to sketch the contours of two theological paradigms that can be found among Wesleyans today: what I am calling the dominant paradigm (or theology A), which operates in most congregations, and an alternative paradigm (or theology B) that is largely still inchoate but steadily emerging.

My construal of these paradigms proceeds somewhat intuitively and is admittedly a work of *bricolage* – I have cobbled Theology A together from theological fragments that seem to recur in many American and Australian congregations. Theology B is assembled from dialogic fragments culled from conversations with those involved in house-church networks, the emerging church movement and the return to classical forms of liturgy, and also seeks to incorporate insights from some important recent work in systematic theology that several theologians in the Wesleyan theological stream have also engaged. It is not in any sense the result of a closer reading of Wesley or an attempt to repristinate Wesley; it is more of an attempt to articulate rumblings that can be heard in our midst.

What follows is not the articulation of systems, but paradigms - that is, loose collections of ideas that seem to have overarching thematic connections. No attempt has been made to tie up all loose ends or settle longstanding doctrinal disputes on particular points, and I realize that not all proponents of Theology B, especially, would agree with me. I am merely taking a systematic stab at making theological sense of, or giving a coherent voice to, fairly fluid ideas and discussions. Now within these paradigms I have given particular attention to the doctrines of justification and sanctification – the two foci in thinking about the works of grace - although I hasten to add that the entire drama of salvation is a work

of grace as is it the story of the redemptive transformation of God's good creation.[1]

Theology A

In my judgment, the dominant theological paradigm in most Wesleyan congregations is the result of three, unequally weighted, traditions converging: a dollop of John Wesley, a bit more of the American holiness tradition, and a great deal of contemporary pop evangelicalism (what in a moment of theological whimsy I have called Neo-Gnostic Pragmatic Anabapticostalism – of the sort that lurks on the shelves of many Christian bookstores). This dominant theology runs close to the following extended (!) summary:

The prevailing doctrine of God in this paradigm is drawn from what one might call "conventional" metaphysics. I mean that if you were to ask the average Sunday School teacher for a basic definition of God, he or she might well reach for the dictionary (how often is Noah Webster quoted in our Sunday School classes!?) and find the following definition, or something similar, ready at hand: "the supernatural being conceived as the perfect and omnipotent and omniscient originator and ruler of the universe; the object of worship in monotheistic religions" (from *WordReference.com* dictionary) – a definition that owes more to our pagan Hellenistic philosophic heritage than one might guess at first glance.

If we were to press people on what exactly is meant by "supernatural" being, after a bit of philosophical waffling at least a few folks would land upon the notion of eternity: the very essence of God is to be eternal. God is said to live in an eternal present, unsullied by the muck and mire characteristic of creation in time.

[1] Theology A and Theology B are not conceived as diametrically opposed or mutually exclusive. Where there is disagreement, it sometimes tends to be a matter of emphases, exaggeration or minimization. I also do not mean to imply that one of these theologies is 'always right' (although my leanings will be clear enough); there is room enough for healthy debate and mutual edification. But, on the whole, the different orientations, emphases and questions held by proponents of Theology B do provide a kind of alternative paradigm for understanding the *ordo salutis* and hence spiritual transformation. Those who have been following the rollicking (and sometimes nasty) arguments among contemporary evangelicals will find some similarities in the following discussion to the evangelical / postconservative debate – but that particular debate, in my judgment, has not addressed the question of 'conventional' v. 'revisionary' metaphysics in an adequately Trinitarian vein. Nor, of course, has that particular debate addressed the issue of sanctification with Wesleyan concerns in mind.

God, in other words, is transcendent, but – depending on your religious tradition — God is also said to be somehow immanent, mysteriously close to creation. The relationship between God's transcendence and immanence, however, cannot be adequately addressed without addressing the relation between eternity and time – but because this latter relationship remains something of a conundrum, a number of fault lines are set to run throughout Theology A.

In our standard definition, this God also is said to *do* things like originate (or create) and rule the universe. In other words, God does things like someone who creates or rules, only supremely so, like the Big Man or "The Donald" (Trump!) Upstairs. In sum, the popular conception of God is that of an individual who possesses an interior subjectivity and attributes similar to human beings, only in God's case the divine subject has an eternal essence or being and those attributes are elevated to the nth degree. Given this conception, it is relatively easy to see the force of Feurbach's critique.

In this paradigm, then, usually the first move in getting a "handle" on God is to try to sort out God's essence and attributes – what *Godness* is and what attributes God possesses. A number of hidden assumptions about subjectivity, agency, power and eternity are appropriated uncritically, however, with the result that many people would have no problem with the proposition that, at the end of the day, we monotheists all worship the same God. If we think about God's *identity* at all in terms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then this tends to happen subsequently, with God's attributes and essence already largely in place. In other words, Theology A operates for the most part with a default doctrine of "God in the abstract" first, then tries to work out how this God can be triune – usually with considerable mental constipation: how can three be one and one be three? and so on (the math, so we are told, is difficult). But in proceeding this way, the dominant paradigm succumbs to a number of neo-Gnostic and modalist pitfalls, which will become apparent in this exposition.

Moving to theological anthropology, we affirm that the eternal God has created humankind in the divine image, and has invested in each one of us an immortal soul. The image of God and the soul are closely related; one might even venture that the *imago Dei* is the form given to the soul-ish substance. On account of Adam's fall, we bear the damnable results of original sin and the damning burden of inherited depravity, so that the sin which mars Adam's helpless race –issuing in all manner of sins—separates us from God. The point of

salvation, on this score, is largely a matter of being saved from this corruption so that we can live forever with God in heaven, i.e., in eternity. The immortal soul must get ready to meet its eternal Maker.

The eternal God at critical times attempted to create a redemptive beachhead in this fallen world, especially through the giving of the Law and the Prophets. But the problem lay much deeper than what a legal code could touch; in fact in retrospect we see that point of the law was to reveal just that. Saying "Be good!" – even in a loud voice from Sinai - was not enough. In our sinful state we were never able, through our own effort, to "be good," to meet the standards of righteousness whereby we might restore and maintain fellowship with the eternal God.

The sin problem was indeed so intractable that the eternal God himself had to invade the historical pitch, which he did by sending his son, Jesus Christ. By leading a blameless life and offering himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin (of which the Old Testament sacrificial system was merely a foreshadowing), Jesus took our justly deserved punishment upon himself and bore the brunt of God's wrath. Through faith in Jesus and his work on the cross, when we repent we are "justified" –i.e., acquitted. The familiar forensic image is perhaps that of an offender standing alone before a judge who slams the gavel and pronounces him or her "Not guilty!"

But the effects of sin run deeper than the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. There are other "dimensions" to the problem of sin, namely, human nature remains weakened and depraved on account of the Fall and original sin. Hence we also need empowerment and cleansing, so that the Christian life will not be drudgery. Spiritual foot-dragging is not part of God's wonderful plan for your life. God wants us to *want* to obey him and be *able* to obey him. So he has given his Holy Spirit to inhabit us. And as Christians walk in the Spirit and become increasingly set apart from the world to follow Jesus, we are in process of being sanctified and of being "fitted" for heaven.

But now, of course, comes the Wesleyan rub. My sense is that a majority of our pastors, if asked about the peculiar Wesleyan contribution to understanding sanctification, would answer along the following lines: "God has promised and provided for our full sanctification in this life, and in a moment of crisis [i.e., an experientially discrete moment in time] can sanctify a person 'entirely.' This means that the Spirit can 'take away your bent to sinning' - can cleanse your heart of even the desire to do wrong or

violate God's laws - and enable you to love your neighbor "perfectly" (i.e. perfect in intention and without ulterior motive)." Wesleyans have always been careful, however, to emphasize that this work of grace does not commit us to the position of "sinless perfectionism" - the entirely sanctified can and do commit errors of judgment (do they ever!), continue to have character flaws, need to rely constantly on Christ, and so on. In short, we may be entirely sanctified but tend to shy away from claiming, with a straight face, that we are entirely sinless.

By way of an aside, it should be noted that, in many Wesleyan churches, this more or less traditional understanding of entire sanctification (conceived as a divine act in which the Spirit sanctifies the believer) has been slowly eroded and replaced by expositions of, or testimonies to, the human work of entire consecration. One frequently hears testimonies of the order: "For several years Jesus was my savior, but was not really Lord of my entire life. And so one day I came to the point where I realized that I needed to give myself completely over to him." This total surrender to the lordship of Christ is taken by many to be the experience of entire sanctification. Of course the notion of receiving Christ as savior but – somehow and for some reason - not confessing him as Lord is foreign to the New Testament. Those who share such testimonies are confessing, in effect, that they were not fully converted.

But to return to my exposition: Turning to ecclesiology, in the dominant paradigm the church is conceived as an association of like-minded individuals who happen to be converted and bound for heaven, but who meet with other creatures here below for worship, discipleship, equipping for evangelism and mission, fellowship etc. Christians need to worship, have fellowship, be discipled and empowered, etc., so there is the church. Frequently, however, the results of operating with an understanding of the God of conventional metaphysics come home to roost. I mean that, an irremediable relation between God's eternity and human time often results in a romanticized, immanental Jesus (as can be evidenced in, e.g., 'Jesus as my boyfriend' or 'heaven is in my heart' choruses). A default "immanentalist" pietism is the almost predictable backlash against those things "too far above us." Speculative theology cannot be trusted (too difficult); time and history are of little value where the eternal God is concerned – so what place is left for Jesus except that in my heart? (But what place remains for Christ the Pantocrator?)

Sacramentally speaking, Theology A operates with a kind of theological minimum. Baptism is almost always a wholly Anabaptist affair – the believer declares his or her intention to follow Jesus, "no turning back, no turning back." Rebaptism is hardly ever denied, since infant baptism was administered before conversion and happened oh-so long ago that it hardly seems meaningful to the new convert. In the Lord's Supper, the believer pauses to remember Jesus' atoning work and pledges himself or herself further to the Master. Memorialism more or less carries the day. The diremption between God's shiny, happy eternity and the perishability of earthly elements renders the Lord's Supper an eminently cerebral affair: It is not that God works "in, with and under" these elements – rather, the believer takes the bread and cup and remembers, i.e., thinks about, the work of Jesus.

And finally, eschatology in Theology A is for the most part a matter of a premillennial diary. Generally speaking, passages from the prophets (especially Daniel), the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation are cobbled together to form a sequence of events comprising the 'end times.' The unthought relation between eternity and time is again evident in the rhetoric of rapture and heaven. By and large little thought is given to the implications arising from the nail-scarred flesh of the risen Christ, the resurrection rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 15, or the notion of a new heaven and new earth. I suspect that, given much of our funeral consolations and 'end times' speculation, eschatology has come to refer to our upcoming escape to a disembodied and timeless existence. In sum, in the dominant paradigm eschatology is not used as a theological category in the precise sense, and consequently, it bears little relation to either justification or sanctification.

Theology B

Instead of beginning with 'conventional' metaphysics, the alternative paradigm I am delineating can be characterized by attempts in a variety of theological quarters –and undertaken for a variety of reasons—to develop what one might call a "revisionary" metaphysics. In general, one might include Robert W. Jenson (Princeton CTI), Eberhard Jüngel and Jürgen Moltmann (Tübingen), and Michael Welker (Heidelberg) as examples, despite their differences. By "revisionary" I mean a way of thinking that challenges several cardinal assumptions about God, which have been inherited from our pagan Hellenistic philosophical heritage (chief

among which is the notion of God as a single subject, immutable, leading an unruffled life in timeless eternity).

In this paradigm, and in contrast to Theology A, we turn first not to a discussion of God's eternal essence or attributes, but to the identity of God as revealed in the biblical story of salvation. So if you were to ask, "What do you mean by God?" the answers would be of the order: "I mean whoever rescued Israel from Egypt" or "Whoever raised Jesus from the dead" or "Whoever poured the Spirit out upon the church."[2] In other words, God's identity comes first, God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the basis of the biblical story – and *then* we try to work out what we mean by things like divine essence and attributes.

In this paradigm, what happens in revelation is not considered ancillary to the deity of God but belongs both to God's identity and essence, so God cannot be determined in advance, as it were, by recourse to conventional metaphysics of the sort one might find in standard theological textbooks, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or Noah Webster. Finding out the *who* and *what* of God is like putting a composite sketch together from a story, or series of stories. As Robert W. Jenson puts it, God's identity is established in "dramatic coherence."[3]

It is not that the eternal God remains aloof from our time and only occasionally makes incursions into it on account of his salvific "to do" lists. The three divine identities comprehend our time; they actively shape it and work within it, so there is no *competition* between God's eternity and our time, but rather *transformation* as God the Father opens the divine life through his Son Jesus Christ, and enables us to share in that life through the power of the Spirit.[4] As God is *what happens* between these relations, there is no part or

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[2] In what follows, I am hugely indebted to Robert W. Jenson's doctrine of God. See his *Systematic Theology*, 2 Volumes (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1997, 1999). Hereafter *ST*.

[3] Jenson, *ST* 1, 64.

[4] As Jenson develops his doctrine of the Trinity, the three divine identities are said to bracket our time. In this regard it may be helpful to think about the Father who retains the past and preserves the creation from falling into nothingness, the Son who occupies the specious present, and the Spirit who brings about God's own future - which is to say that God is not awaiting any future into which he must peer; rather, God creates God's own future. God's eternity means that God is always surpassing himself, always creating new possibilities, so that nothing can keep up with the horizon of his own life. In other words, God is *infinite*. Because God's infinity is motored particularly by the Spirit, who brings about the divine future, eschatology remains essentially a theological category.

dimension of God that is not defined by the triune persons. So Trinitarian dogma is a summary statement of who God is, based upon the biblical narrative.

Putting the matter this way has four revisionary effects upon the way we ordinarily do theology: To begin, God's eternity and our time are seen not as polar opposites, but rather God's own eternal life is understood to be expansive or capacious and inclusive of created time, to use Jenson's way of putting things. Secondly, on account of this capacious life of God, which the church as the body of Christ inhabits - extended throughout time and space - our theology should listen to voices beyond our parochial American boundaries. The polyphony of the triune community should be reflected in the way we undertake to talk about this God.[5] Thirdly, mission is not something *principally* undertaken by the church; mission is primarily God's doing. It is the Father's sending of the Son, the sending of the Spirit by the Father and Son, and our being sent to follow in the "wake" of these sendings. Our participation in mission, then, is coterminous with God's own triune life. And finally, on account of the blessed Holy Spirit who brings about God's own future, replete with possibilities that surpass all that we can even imagine, eschatology in this paradigm is a predicate of the doctrine of God proper – and not merely an "end times" itinerary.

So proponents of this alternative paradigm try not to think of God "in the abstract" - God as a supernatural individual possessing certain attributes - but rather, God irreducibly as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I do not mean to imply that Theology A ignores the doctrine of the Trinity. It is there in our articles of religion, in our baptismal formula and in some of our benedictions and worship music. But the doctrine of the Trinity remains for most congregations a mathematical mystery of the eternal God, instead of the revealed mystery of our salvation. The fact that, as a "confessional" church we do not confess the Athanasian or Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed serves only to reinforce my point. (One might even hazard the judgment that any purely hypothetical symposium daring to treat the works of divine grace without showing their organic connection to the Christian doctrine of God would be theologically irresponsible.) We would do well to remember Basil of Caesarea's dictum: Every act of God is initiated by the Father, executed by the Son and perfected in the Spirit. It will

[5] See David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (London: Blackwell, 1998).

not do at all to say that God is triune, *really* triune - all the way down, so to say - and then go off and talk about justification and sanctification, for example, in very un-trinitarian ways.

As our particular interest in this discussion is in the works of grace through which God declares us righteous and makes us righteous, the question cannot be avoided: What does it mean to understand righteousness as a *theological* concept? In other words: If God is righteous in making us righteous, what does that righteousness tell us about God's own life? Broadly speaking, recent theological work emphasizes understanding righteousness as a relational concept. For example, Eberhard Jüngel says that righteousness signifies a well ordered relation, through which a group of relations is ordered in such a way that all persons included in these relations come into their own right, without needing to seize it for themselves. To this extent righteousness is that ordering of diverse relations of persons who are distinct, yet who exist with one another and must rely on one another.[6]

Righteousness therefore is a matter of the being of God, i.e., God is intrinsically righteous in the self-relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus difference is affirmed in God. "The Father, Son and Holy Spirit affirm each other in their mutual personal otherness [*Anderssein*], and precisely in this way they form the most intimate communion, the Trinitarian communion of mutual otherness."[7] Only on account of this - that God is antecedently righteous as the triune God - is God able to declare and make *us* righteous.

When we turn to theological anthropology, then, Theology B's Trinitarian orientation leads to an emphasis on the traces of the Trinity (*vestigia trinitatis*), not only in terms of traditional theological anthropology but also in terms of understanding the *imago Dei* in a relational or intersubjective context. As God is a community of persons, so the image of God is most adequately represented and reflected in a community of mutually enriching relationships, in which people trust, serve and reciprocally depend on each, even as the divine persons do.

Sin effects a rupture in relationships – with the divine identities, with human persons and society, and with the wider creation. Its

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[6] Eberhard Jüngel, "Leben aus Gerechtigkeit. Gottes Handeln – Menschlichen Tun." *Wertlose Wahrheit. Zur Identität und Relevanz des christlichen Glaubens. Theologische Erörterungen III* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1990) 351. See also Jüngel, *Justification - The Heart of the Christian Faith: A Theological Study with an Ecumenical Purpose* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2001).

[7] Jüngel, "Leben aus Gerechtigkeit," 353.

effects derive from a refusal to trust God to be God, and from the attempt to seize for oneself the power to have one's way at any cost - in short, to be The Big Donald Upstairs. Hence the lack of faith at the root of all idolatry, especially self-idolatry. And hence human society after the Fall becomes a *dis*-trustful struggle for what is claimed for my ego, family, clan, tribe, and so on. In other words, human activity becomes a flight from love – and creation suffers on account of our unbelief. The only possible result of living under such an arrangement is that we should suffer the wrath of God, the effects of being handed over to our unrighteousness.

As we saw in the first part of this paper, the great temptation for Theology A at this point is to say that God must therefore "fix" the human soul: forgive and renew the individual, etc. The problem in the dominant paradigm is the lack of an articulated relational context in which this rescue mission takes place. This is a direct reflection of the dominant model of God: because God is eternal and metaphysically simple, and the soul is immortal and metaphysically simple, the works of grace are understood to apply to the interior depths of the human soul ("when Jesus came into my heart" and so on) – so that the body, the community of faith and the creation are all of secondary or ancillary concern. But if the doctrine of God in Theology B is on the right track, it is surely bootless to talk about the works of grace apart from the people of God.

So, for example, the giving of the Law cannot be understood in separation from the creation of a people in which the righteousness of God - in the sense delineated above - can be embodied. The Law is an expression of God's love and mercy, the faithful following of which incarnates God's righteousness within the life of God's people. Israel is the servant of YHWH in which his saving righteousness is to be enshrined and exemplified. In Christian perspective, however, the story of Israel reveals the truth about humanity as a whole: our lack of trust and the unrighteousness that results is too deeply embodied to be addressed adequately by the heteronomy of Law (in other words, how the Law functions).

A renewal of the web of divine and human relationships must take place.[8] And so God does invade the pitch, but the story of Jesus

[8] This is not to say that Theology A is concerned with the individual and Theology B is concerned with the corporate. For in this alternative paradigm, the individual understands himself or herself only *indirectly* - one's identity is always mediated through a larger narrative, or series of narratives, with many characters and twists and turns in the plot. To borrow from Paul Ricoeur: the human subject is never fully given at the start, nor is it a matter of sheer change. See Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest

is not the story of a metaphysical problem that God must overcome (How does the eternal God broach temporality?). God does not have a "problem" with time or materiality; God is opposed to sin. Nor does Jesus die because God, upset at our behavior, must hurl invisible quantities of wrath at someone (poor Jesus!) so that he may be appeased – as though God himself were not at stake in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The only way the wrath of God can be fully executed (and understood) is if God himself gets involved in that tangled web we have woven. The Passion of the Christ is theologically intelligible when we dare to talk about the Passion of the Triune God.

Recalling what was said earlier about divine righteousness, the mystery of God's righteousness is that God takes the curse of our sin -- the godless and reckless drive away from divine righteousness - upon himself in the person of Jesus. He exposed himself in our place to the relationless effects of our sin, in order to make a new beginning where sinful life must end: in death. And as he bears in himself the deadly curse of sin, the richness of divine relations which circumscribe and define his own being prevails upon us in such a way that we are made justified sinners.[9] So 'in our place he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' (2 Cor 5.21) And so Luther's 'joyful exchange.'

Juengel says that from this theological perspective it makes sense to say that God is righteous when he justifies the sinner by grace alone – i.e., by externalizing and extending the community of difference which he is as the triune God.[10] God's being, as we have said, is capacious. Justification, on this reading, is less strictly a discrete forensic act and has more to do with the union of the believer with Christ and the new community in which he or she receives a new identity.[11]

The more deeply we are implicated in the life of God, the more we are enabled to trust this God above all self-righteous grasping of

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of Narrative," in David Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity," *Philosophy Today* 35 no. 1 (Spring 1991), 73-81.

[9] Eberhard Jüngel, *op cit*, 356.

[10] Ibid, 354.

[11] See, for example, Toumo Mannermaa, *Der Im Glauben Gegenwärtige Christus* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989), and Carl Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Cambridge and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

our own, and the more we come to reflect the self-giving love that is the inner dynamic of the triune life. And as we are comprehended in this love, within the capacious network of relations divine and human, we come to resemble "transcripts of the Trinity." That is, the triune life of God comes to be reflected, as Randy Maddox says, in a lived "grammar of responsible grace" so that the narrative contours of our own lives are shaped by the Father's original design for us to bear the image of God, the Son's sacrificial death and resurrection to restore us to fellowship, and the Spirit's ongoing transformative work in us, conforming us to the image of God in Christ.[12] The image of God renewed in sanctification is therefore a Christological and ultimately eschatological reality.

Testimonies to the experience of entire sanctification raise some interesting questions when heard within the acoustics of this alternative paradigm. Conventional Wesleyan discourse is usually carefully circumscribed so as to avoid "sinless perfectionism," to stress that continual growth in grace follows the critical moment of being entirely sanctified (growth which is sometimes said to lead to other 'crisis moments') and to stress the believer's continual need of the merits of Christ's redemptive work. Yet proponents of Theology B might well ask a couple of questions: For example, wouldn't a consideration of a "crisis moment" within a process of growth and a series of other crisis moments lead more naturally to a description of spiritual transformation as a *sanctification narrative,* coextensive with the narrative shape and 'flow' of our lives?

Further, conventional Wesleyan testimony emphasizing the purgative or "cleansing" dimension of entire sanctification lays heavy emphasis on sins of commission - the Spirit has so cleansed my heart of unrighteous desires and empowered me so that I do not willfully transgress God's laws. With respect to the more active dimension of being "perfected in love," this love is frequently conceived of as a love with pure intention, expressed towards both God and neighbor.

But, while to say that the Spirit has cleansed my heart so I have no desire to flagrantly flout God's ordinances and so my intentions are good may be true enough, it is our ongoing involvement – our passive complicity - in the web of unrighteousness that remains problematic. Sins of omission are still sins, after all. With respect to purity of intention, this reading of Christian love remains somewhat

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[12] Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood / Abingdon, 1994).

dull to our social and intersubjective contexts. (And besides, we all know what the road to hell is paved with.) With these concerns in mind, Ted Runyon respins the notion of perfection as follows:

> Perfection is not so much for the self or for our own sakes as for the fulfillment of the vocation to which we are called, to image and reflect to others what we have received and are receiving from God. Our sanctifying is linked to and directed towards the sanctifying work of the world, and as such is an ever-beckoning, never-finished project, even though the love we direct is complete as it comes from the divine source.[13]

To compress Runyon: sanctification is never merely *my* sanctification. If it is, I might add, then it may come to function as a holiness *fetish.*

In this paradigm, ecclesiology becomes of signal importance. The church is not an afterthought, a pleasant addendum that promises opportunities for worship, fellowship and so on for individuals of like-minded persuasion. In its strictest sense, the believer's status in Christ cannot be separated from the body of Christ, enjoying the fellowship of the Father and the Spirit. In such fellowship, and in the righteous ordering of its own life, the church should reflect, as Miroslav Volf argues, the image of the Trinity.[14] Through the ministry of the Word, the story of God is recounted and the promise of the Gospel proclaimed, inviting all to share in the life of God and to live in fellowship with those who are the righteousness of God in Christ.

Proponents of Theology B are suspicious of any *ordo salutis* that remains abstracted from church life and practice, as though the participating in the life of God exists apart from the life of the covenant people of God. As Telford Work puts it: "In the New Testament, hearing the Word in faith, being baptized, and participating in the body and blood of Christ are not just external means or aids of the order of salvation. They *are* the order of salvation – the necessary embodiments of conversion, justification and sanctification."[15] Apart from this embodied life, justification and sanctification threaten to dissolve into the interior passivity of

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[13] Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 225.
[14] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Cambridge and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
[15] Telford Work, "Reordering Salvation: Church as Proper Context for An Evangelical *Ordo Salutis*," http://www.westmont.edu/~work/articles/reordering.html.

the believer's soul (a la Romanticism) or remain in theology textbook discussions (a la Rationalism) – but no one was ever justified through personal sincerity or sanctified by reading a text on holiness.

Hence a fine analytical distinction but no real separation can be made between the believer coming to share in the life of God via the divine works of justification and sanctification and participating in the righteousness of God as it exists in the communion of saints. If this notion were taken seriously or pushed far enough – that the salvation of individuals does not belong in categories of justification and sanctification abstracted from social relationships but belongs in the church – we would see a significant revision within the way evangelical theology is usually articulated. It would mean, as Work maintains, that "ecclesiology should be the category within which the *ordo salutis* is treated"[16] –and I should rearrange much of the second half of this paper!

Consistent with the ecclesiology I have been describing is a theological retrieval of the sacraments – baptism and the Lord's Supper are means through which God comes to meet us as God does nowhere else, and opens his capacious fellowship to us. In Theology A, the implicit rift between God's eternity and temporality/ materiality often has the effect of chasing God from the earthly elements in the sacraments. In this alternative paradigm, God's capacious embrace of creation means that God is no stranger to materiality. Even as through the incarnation and bodily resurrection of Jesus flesh and blood is sanctified and brought to share in the life of God, so the Spirit continues to work through the mundane mediums of water, wine and bread, sanctifying both it and - by embodied extension - us, that we should share in God's triune life. To put the matter succinctly: *our* sanctification is linked to the Epiklesis.[17]

Eschatology in Theology B is treated as a theological category, insofar as the Spirit who is poured out upon us as a sign of the coming kingdom is always expanding the realm of God's grace. As Jenson says, on account of the Spirit nothing can keep up with, let alone outpace, the expanding horizon of God's infinite life. Inasmuch as our final conformity as the people of God to the image

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[16] Ibid.

[17] We are not thereby committed to a 'change' in the elements, but we do recognize that the sacraments first of all are the means through which God extends grace to us – God is the subject—and only on that basis are we enabled to remember the passion and death of Jesus for our sakes, pledge ourselves to him, etc.

of the Son is inextricably linked to the fullness of the kingdom -when God will be all in all- so we look forward not to a disembodied heavenly retirement village but to the day when the "spiritual body" is raised. In view of the promise of that coming kingdom, and in the power of the Spirit, our present life as the people of God should be characterized by a love for the world that draws upon the ever-creative, surprising and renewing energy of God's own love. From Ted Runyon again:

> When we focus on divine perfect love and make it genuinely available in today's world, we tap into the energy which...renews creation...Indeed, the greatest strength of the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection may lie in its ability to mobilize believers to seek a more perfect future that surpasses the present. It turns the Christian life into a project constantly open to new possibilities.[18]

New possibilities of grace! A doctrine of grace that holds out for such possibilities is congruent with the doctrine of God as it is understood within this paradigm.

[18] Runyon, *op cit*, 227-228.