

A TRINITARIAN REVISIONING OF THE WESLEYAN DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

by Glen O'Brien

*I bind unto myself the name,
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three*

- St. Patrick's *Breastplate*

*The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit alike
give sanctification, and life, and light, and comfort,
and all similar graces. And let no one attribute the power
of sanctification in an especial sense to the Spirit [alone]...*

- St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Trinity*

*Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
One God in Persons Three!
Bring back the heavenly blessing, lost
By all mankind, and me.*

- Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Trinity*

Introduction

It is the purpose of this paper to suggest a revision of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification along trinitarian lines. Recent Wesleyan thought has tended to polarize toward one or other of two positions - placing a stress either on the Christological or on the Pneumatological aspects of sanctifying grace. In part this has been a historical question. Attempts have been made to establish the position of John Wesley in regard to the use of "pentecostal" and "pneumatological" language in reference to entire sanctification.¹ But it has also involved the very real task of keeping the doctrine alive among the Wesleyan people, saving it from the fate of becoming a mere historical curiosity. An attempt may be made to demonstrate the basic compatibility of these competing historical views when applied to the task of constructive theology, though this is not the task I wish to attempt here.

Whatever may turn out to be the case regarding the appropriateness or otherwise of pneumatological language in reference to sanctification when historically considered, the current resurgence of interest in trinitarian theology may provide us with a means of overcoming this polarisation, and also of advancing the tradition in a constructive manner. The basic thesis which this paper will test is that a trinitarian revisioning of the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification can provide us with a future for this doctrine, and help us to overcome tritheistic tendencies in its current formulation.

Every theologian, consciously or unconsciously, works within the context of a particular community of discourse, and as such, is accountable to that community. Faithfulness to that community and its tradition may be variously defined. For some, it means a mere retelling of past findings, such that to depart from past convictions in the slightest manner is to be unfaithful to the tradition. For others,

¹ See discussion that has taken place in the Wesleyan Theological Society. For a brief historical overview, see Donald W. Dayton, "Wesleyan Theological Society: The Second Decade," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Hereinafter WTJ) 30:1 (Spring 1995). Representative articles would include the following Herbert McGonigle, "Pneumatological Nomenclature in Early Methodism," in WTJ 8 (Spring 1973); Lawrence Wood, "Exegetical Reflections on the Baptism with the Holy Spirit,"; Robert W. Lyon, "Baptism and Spirit Baptism in the New Testament,"; Alex R.G. Deasley, "Entire Sanctification and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit: Perspectives on the Biblical View of the Relationship,"; George Allan Turner, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Wesleyan Tradition,"; Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, "Theological Roots of Wesleyanism's Understanding of the Holy Spirit," in WTJ 14:1 (Spring, 1979).

faithfulness is not possible without a positive critique of past gains in order, both to retain the wisdom of the past, and to go forward into new territory. Alisdair MacIntyre describes the dynamics involved in advancing a tradition, with his image of the philosopher/theologian as one who belongs to a "craft."

The authority of a master within a craft is both more and other than a matter of exemplifying the best standards so far. It is also and most importantly a matter of knowing how to go further and especially how to direct others toward going further, using what can be learned from the tradition afforded by the past to move toward the *telos* of fully perfected work. It is thus in knowing how to link past and future that those with authority are able to draw upon tradition, to interpret and reinterpret it, so that its directedness toward the *telos* of that particular craft becomes apparent in new and characteristically unexpected ways.²

Good teaching, then, will follow the order of reliving the best gains from the past history of inquiry "up to the highest point of achievement which it has reached so far, by rescruinising those arguments which have sustained the best supported conclusions so far."³ Progress in such inquiry may indeed include "more or less radical modification, and even partial demolition with a view to reconstruction."⁴

Initiation into a theological community involves a reappropriation by individuals of the community's story of discoveries, advances, and setbacks.

[In this way] the history of the formation and transformation of belief...and practice is reenacted, the novice learns from that reenactment not only what the best theses, arguments and doctrines so far to emerge have been, but also how to rescruinise them so that they become genuinely his or hers and how to extend them further.⁵

² Alisdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition: being Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh in 1988*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) 66.

³ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

The most successful of attempted revisions of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection have been those which have stressed relational rather than ontological, personal rather than impersonal, and dynamic rather than static categories. These are the very categories which have characterized contemporary trinitarian theology, beginning with Karl Barth and continuing to the present time with the work of Moltmann, LaCugna, Pannenberg, and others. It is hoped that a careful and critical evaluation of these sources and a constructive application of them to the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification may be a worthwhile contribution to the advance of the tradition. A rediscovery, on the part of Wesleyans, of the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity both in the history of salvation and in Christian experience, will provide a suitable trajectory for future propulsion toward the *telos* of our tradition.

Two Attempts at Re-evaluating and Restating the Wesleyan Doctrine of Sanctification

The first approach to revising Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection which I would like to examine is that by the British Methodist, William E. Sangster. In his *Path to Perfection*,⁶ he issued a challenge to his own tradition to overcome the sorry neglect of Wesley's perfectionistic views among his fellow Methodists, and provided his own sympathetic critique of Wesley. He does not, however, provide much of an alternative model. He serves something of a diagnostic purpose, rather than issuing any original proposal of his own. His criticisms of Wesley seem at points to be criticisms of holiness movement renditions of Wesley rather than of Wesley's own teaching. His own negative exposure to certain holiness movement advocates seem to have coloured his evaluation somewhat.⁷

The second attempt to advance the tradition is, I believe, a more successful one. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop in *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*,⁸ begins with a somewhat different assumption than Sangster. Where Sangster begins with the conviction that there were errors in Wesley's own thought that needed correcting, Wynkoop maintains that Wesley was essentially correct in his perfectionism, and places the blame for the distortion of his

⁶ William E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection: A Reexamination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection*. London: The Epworth Press, 1943.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 137-39.

⁸ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972.

teachings in unhelpful ways, at the feet of subsequent "Wesleyanisms."⁹ I now turn to an examination of each of these approaches.

A. William E. Sangster's *Path to Perfection*.

Sangster concedes that the stones upon which Wesley built his doctrine of entire sanctification are clearly to be found in Scripture.¹⁰ If Wesley was a heretic because of his perfectionistic views, by his own admission he became one through reading the Bible.¹¹ However, Sangster finds Wesley's doctrine of sin as "a voluntary transgression of a known law" to be inadequate, especially in light of what we now understand about the life of the unconscious mind.¹² Furthermore, Dr. Cell's well-known dictum that Wesley's doctrine represents "an original and unique synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness" has a fatal weakness. To say that one is justified by faith is an assertion about God. To say that one has been sanctified by faith is an assertion about ourselves, or so Sangster believes.¹³

He agrees with Wesley that the life of holiness must be conceived of as a "moment-by-moment" life. The "faith of one high moment" cannot secure entire sanctification "for a lifetime"¹⁴ He follows Edward H. Sugden's notion, probably erroneous, that Wesley conceived of sin as "a *thing* which has to be taken out of a man, like a cancer or a rotten tooth."¹⁵ Sin is not a thing and therefore, cannot be rooted out, extinguished, or eradicated, nor, along Keswickian lines, can it be suppressed or suspended.¹⁶

Having critiqued elements of Wesley's position which he finds problematic, Sangster now turns to attempt a restatement of the doctrine. He wants to make it serviceable to its cultured despisers

⁹ Wynkoop, 48.

¹⁰ Sangster, 51-2.

¹¹ Wesley, *Letters IV*:216, cited in Sangster, 52.

¹² Sangster, 72-6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 102-3. Sangster's contemporary, R. Newton Flew, a fellow Methodist, also took an interest in perfectionism, writing a helpful historical survey of the subject. Like Sangster he also rejected Wesley's definition of sin as inadequate. See, R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 332-36.

¹⁴ Sangster, 109.

¹⁵ Sugden, ed. Wesley's *Standard Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1955 reprint), II:459; Sangster, 113.

¹⁶ Sangster, 115.

among his fellow Methodists. At the heart of his revision is the assertion that the terminology of "perfect love" is to be preferred to that of "Christian perfection."¹⁷ If the focus of Wesleyan perfectionism had been on "perfect love as the mainspring of holiness" rather than on the eradication of the sinful nature, "the weight of the doctrine would have rested elsewhere and 'sinlessness' would have been thrust from the forefront of thought simply as a happy consequence, if God so gave it, of something positive and more important still."¹⁸ Instead of attention being given to entire sanctification as a "sum of negatives," a focus on perfect love provides a closer cohesion between the ethic of grace and the ethic of holiness.¹⁹ The negativising and ascetic tendency within all perfectionistic movements would be equalized by such a focus with a corresponding positive element. Rather than "purgation and more purgation" there would be a focus on "love and more love. The way forward is to let purgation be the by-product and let love crowd sin out."²⁰

Whilst we find it easy to think of grace and forgiveness as things *given*, it is harder to think of sanctification in such terms. It seems to speak rather of something *achieved* than given. There is a given-ness about love, however, both human and divine love, which helps us to understand sanctification as gift. To take from God perfect sinlessness is one thing. To take from God perfect love is another.²¹

In conclusion, Sangster asks whether the "marrow" of Wesley's doctrine can still be preached today. He summarizes what he believes to be the heart of Wesley's position which would be valuable if restored to Methodist (and presumably all other) pulpits. We ought to preach that the gift of super-natural love, experienced as "the expulsive power of [a] new affection," can exclude conscious sin from the believer's experience.²²

None can place a limit on the efficacy of God's grace. Surely God does more with sin than simply forgive it.²³ If it were an error to believe that a Christian can be saved from all sin in this life, it would still be a lesser error than to teach that a Christian cannot be saved from sin at all. All too readily the heart fixes on "inevitability" as an

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 156-7

²² *Ibid.*, 188.

²³ *Op. Cit.*

excuse for sin.²⁴

Though Sangster's is a powerful, albeit sympathetic, critique, it has accomplished little in advancing an alternative proposal. It has diagnosed the situation well, pointing out some important weak spots in Wesley's doctrine, and calling for a rediscovery of the centrality of love as at the heart of the holy life. This focus will form the heart of the next attempt at revisioning the doctrine which we will examine.

B. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's *Theology of Love*

Unlike Sangster, who writes as a mainline British Methodist, Bangs writes from within the Wesleyan Holiness tradition in America. A Nazarene theologian, she was one of the holiness movement's most able thinkers. Her work represents, I believe, the high water mark of contemporary advances on Wesley's teaching. It does, however, interpret Wesley in contrast to certain aspects of traditional holiness movement thought.

Wynkoop begins with the question of whether there is a hermeneutic available to us which can "explain Christian doctrine and Christian life in the same system without either one undercutting the integrity of the other," and which can enable "theology and real human existence to meet meaningfully."²⁵ Such a hermeneutic is available in John Wesley's ethic of "love to God and man."²⁶ Her central thesis is that "love is the dynamic of Wesleyanism."²⁷ In this, she is at one with Sangster's call for a positive focus on love over a negative focus on purgation.

Wynkoop alerts us to the existence of certain "Wesleyanisms" which diverge from Wesley at significant points. Underlying these is a tendency toward Greek rather than Hebrew concepts. Following Plato, some in the holiness movement tradition have conceived of persons as divine souls trapped in human bodies, rather than the Hebrew idea of a person as a unity.²⁸ Substantial, rather than relational categories, have dominated soteriology. Sin has been thought of as a "thing" inhering in the flesh. This contrasts with the Hebrew/Christian understanding of sin as a relational malfunction, "as alienation [and] moral disorder."²⁹

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁵ Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

Then there is the contrast between *magical* versus *moral* interpretations of salvation. Cleansing from sin tends to be defined as a kind of "sub-rational, psychological mutation" which leads believers "to expect a substantive alteration of the soul in salvation which occurs below the level of rational life [and] changes the impulsive reactions of the self. Anger and pride and all other normal human emotional equipment is said to be removed, so that responsibility for discipline and proper channeling of the emotions is considered a suppression which denies what God ought to do."³⁰ On the other hand, a proper "moral" interpretation of salvation would not despise nor reject anything human. True humanity is fully retained but made to serve a new master.³¹ On the question of subsequence in reference to sanctification, Wynkoop resists any dislocation between justification and sanctification.

Wesley saw that justification and sanctification were two aspects of one truth, not separated by time or experience but in relationships. Everything he saw sanctification to be by way of dynamic vitality was rooted in the work of Christ - the atonement - which justified - reconciled - all men potentially to God. The appropriation of God's forgiveness by each individual - by faith - was the beginning of sanctification. He presupposed justification in every subsequent "stage in the way."³².....To Wesley, sanctification was an ethical relationship, never a moralism, never an emotion or a deliverance from emotions, and never a magical elimination of a thing ("like a sore tooth") or the addition of something, even the "addition" of the Holy Spirit (in the superficial sense so often associated with irrational and "enthusiastic" experiences said to be religious). The direction of one's attention and "aim" was not toward the examination of one's emotional states, or the quantity of one's religious acts and obeyed rules. Religion to Wesley was in the quality and object of one's love. It was not even the attempt to measure one's religion abstractly, but to direct it concretely.³³

Since holiness has to do with "persons in relationship,"³⁴ it must be understood, and pursued, in a relational context - namely in our

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³² *Ibid.*, 20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

two-fold relationship toward God and toward other persons.

Wynkoop ventures to claim that it was "the relating of God's grace to human experience, theology to religion, logic to life, the Church to society," *and the nature of this relation as love*, that is the hermeneutical key to understanding Wesley's theology.³⁵ The Gospel appeal is grounded in "divine-human interaction."³⁶ "Theology infused with a personal experience of God's grace - this is Wesleyanism."³⁷ The task Wynkoop sets for herself is to apply this hermeneutic of love to the doctrine of holiness, "to determine its validity and to reinterpret, if necessary, any faulty concepts which may have slipped into the understanding of it."³⁸

Wesley's understanding of the nature of humanity might be outlined in the following fourfold manner.³⁹ First, a person is rooted in history, historicized by actual events such as the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Cross. He or she cannot stand outside of historical moments, but always inhabits a historical plane. Second, a biblical anthropology, focuses on *personhood*. The holiness of persons is not to be conceived of as a *state*, but as a *relationship*. Third, personhood is dynamic, so that a person is always in the process of *becoming*, either moving toward the fullness of his or her being, or moving away from that fullness, always becoming, but becoming either what God intended or becoming something other than the divine intention. Fourth, a person is a social being. Extreme asceticism, therefore, and particularly that of the anchorite solitary, is antithetical to holiness. Sydney Cave points out how the Gospel of Christ, according to Wesley, is "directly opposite" to mysticism. "'Holy Solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the Gospel than holy adulterers. The Gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection."⁴⁰

Humanity was made in the image and likeness of God.⁴¹ The likeness of God was lost at the Fall, but the image of God remains.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 77,87. Emphasis mine.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁸ *Op. Cit.*

³⁹ This paragraph is based partly on ideas in Wynkoop (79-87) but the development of those ideas is my own.

⁴⁰ Sydney Cave, *The Christian Estimate of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1949), 9, cited in Wynkoop, 87.

⁴¹ The distinction between "image" and "likeness" is an Irenaean one, though Wynkoop does not explicitly refer to Irenaeus in her exposition of the idea.

Through Christ, it is being restored. Believers, in the words of St. Paul, are "predestined to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son."⁴² It is important to maintain a distinction between the "image" and the "likeness" of God, because "[i]f [we] have lost the image of God, practical redemption in this life is clearly impossible without a structural, miraculous alteration in human nature beyond which further sin would be impossible.

This does not square with life as we know it."⁴³ To say that a person is "made in the image of God" does not tell us what a person *is*, so much as "what a person is *capable of being* and becoming...the biblical concept of [humanity] is dynamic, rather than passive or static."⁴⁴

Just as holiness is to be defined in relational terms, so the essence of sin is to defined in terms of *alienation*. Sin is the turning of a person inward, a self-curvature that is the antithesis of openness to God and to others. Though Wesleyan theology implies this relational understanding of sin, Wesley himself was never completely freed from the Augustinian anthropology recovered at the time of the Reformation. From the Eastern fathers he gleaned the idea of a perfection which is always being perfected, and a tendency to look *forward* to perfection, with Irenaeus and Pseudo-Macarius, rather than *backward* with Augustine and Tertullian.⁴⁵

Yet from the Protestant reformers he seemed to have also gleaned an almost substantival view of sin. This led to significant difficulties in regard to the "rooting out" of inbred sin, and in resolving the tension inherent in the idea of a "relative perfection."

At least one thing was clear for Wesley. No matter now radically we are held in sin, Christ came, not to condone it in us, but to free us from it. "Holiness consists of...unobstructed personal communion and deep, personal fellowship with God. God seeks our love and gives His love without measure. Sin is simply the absence of this relationship because [persons have] repudiated it."⁴⁶

Sin, then, is not first of all concupiscence, but "perverted love." Concupiscence is not the *cause* of sin, but its *effect*.⁴⁷ Sin is "a

⁴² Romans 8:29.

⁴³ Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 146-47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 148. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ Cp. Glen O'Brien, "The Influence of the Greek Fathers on John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection," in *Trinity Occasional Papers* (December 1996, Volume XV, No.2), 32-8.

⁴⁶ Wynkoop, 154.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 155-56.

rupture of fellowship with God. Holiness is the healing of that religious malady."⁴⁸ Sin is "love gone astray," love "locked into a false center, the self," whereas holiness is "love locked into the True Center, Jesus Christ our Lord."⁴⁹ A change to this orientation cannot be made by any Pelagian exertion of natural strength, but only through grace.

This sinful orientation is often thought of in a depersonalized way as some kind of "substance which is "further back" and "deeper down" than acts of committed sin – "a virtual substance with *real* existence in some way attached to the substance of the soul but not essential to it."⁵⁰

Its "removal" is taken out of the moral responsibility of [persons] and divorced from a conscious response to the demands of grace. No way of thinking is less biblical nor more magical. (Any concept of acquiring what we want without recourse to the appropriate means is belief in magic. It is the attempt to bypass the causal means between dream and reality).⁵¹

The problem, however, is not "a substructure of some alien substance clinging to [the] soul," but alienation from God.⁵² Purification from this orientation is at the heart of sanctification, which is not being established in a static state of sinlessness, but being initiated into a new kind of *relationship*. Purity, or cleansing, is not a quality of substance in the soul but a moral relationship to God, in Christ. As such, it does not exist in the morally abstract, but in moral relatedness.⁵³

The term "sanctification," post-Wesley, has taken on a limited meaning, and has been used in some circles almost exclusively in relation to a second work of grace. It should be kept in mind that the qualifier "entire" was added by Wesley and his preachers at the Conference of June 16th, 1747, in answer to certain objectors who reminded them that all Christians are termed in Scripture, "saints" and "holy." It was thought that Wesley, by using "sanctification" in reference to a second work of grace, was obscuring that sanctification

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 157-58.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵² *Op. Cit.*

⁵³ Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 266.

which is inherent in the new birth.⁵⁴ Wesley took this objection seriously, seeing the importance of making a distinction between the sanctification inherent in justification, and belonging at the initiatory stage of Christian life, and the fullness of sanctification to be pursued subsequently. The choice of the term "entire sanctification," then, was not based on New Testament terminology, but was chosen for the sake of expediency, in clarifying a point of doctrine. Therefore, it should not be granted ultimacy in Christian, or even Wesleyan, vocabulary.

Wesley would surrender neither the dynamic of growth in holiness nor the decisive nature of entire sanctification. It may be helpful here to make a distinction between "Christian perfection" as a process extending through life (and perhaps beyond) and "entire sanctification" as a point in that longer journey, without strictly identifying the two.⁵⁵

The abstraction of sanctification from justification does violence to its biblical meaning. To those who fear a loss of "distinctives" through departure from certain terminology, it should be pointed out that relating sanctification once again to the whole of the biblical message, to the whole of the theological task, and to the whole of life, where it belongs, cannot weaken, but only strengthen holiness teaching.

According to Wynkoop, Wesley's conclusions about the instantaneous nature of sanctification were derived from observation and experience. In effect, he was saying, "It happens this way to Methodists," rather than elevating an experience to the status of dogmatic assertion.⁵⁶ Some of his followers, however, have done precisely the latter. They have "standardized some of the psychological expressions and feel that the loss of them constitutes a denial of all that Wesleyan theology stands for...Experience [becomes] the pretender to the throne which should be occupied by Christ himself."⁵⁷ Others have been "Wesleyan in the same way Wesley was emphasizing the deep moral obligations of believers to God and pressing toward the full commitment to God which perfect love suggests." These will prefer biblical terms and avoid stereotyped language; whilst the former group standardize a certain experiential psychology and the terminology associated with it.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," in *Works* XI:388.

⁵⁵ Wynkoop, 300-301.

⁵⁶ Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 308-9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁵⁸ *Op. Cit.*

Yet Wynkoop does not want to eliminate either the "secondness" or the "crisis" aspects of sanctification. She does not want to simplify religious experience to "two trips to the altar," of course. Yet she wants to retain the Wesleyan emphasis on that decisiveness which is at the heart of moral choice. Growth in grace is never accomplished without making ethically significant decisions. The "secondness" in Wesleyan language is used "to emphasize a point in Christian life particularly stressed in Scripture where the entire personality is united in total love to God, where the divided heart is made one under the Lordship of Christ and double motives are cleansed."⁵⁹ "First" and "second" are more than numerical distinctions. "In no sense is *first* limited in order to make room for *second*. Properly, *first* is the entrance of the person into the whole provision of the grace of God. Provisionally everything God can do *for us* is done. Nothing is received arbitrarily. But a response is required of [persons] and in this human response *second* has definition."⁶⁰

"Crisis" should not be understood as a "clock-time" word, but as a word which stresses moral decision. A crisis in Christian experience occurs when, in the context of growth in grace, "human commitment is so intelligently complete that the Holy Spirit is not thwarted at any conscious level."⁶¹

For some, this will mean an identifiable spiritual "anniversary" of the new birth and/or of an experience of sanctifying grace. But for others, no such "anniversary" is possible or desirable. They have no less passed from one level of Christian experience to another, or better - from one depth of relationship with God and neighbor, to another. A variety of nomenclature is available to describe this second work of grace, none of which is free from its own strengths and weaknesses. All are "intended to carry the idea that in the progress of the Christian life a notable point was passed that is worthy of mention and which intensifies the reality of Christian faith. It was both a part of and an advance in the Christian life."⁶²

It is perhaps surprising that Wynkoop does not draw on an explicitly trinitarian theology in constructing her creative appropriation of Wesley. Her stress on relationship and personhood, and on the dynamic of Christian growth arising out of these, are

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁶¹ *Op. Cit.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 357.

themes that fit well into the contemporary trinitarian discussion.⁶³ It is sufficient here to say that her advance to the Wesleyan tradition goes beyond the diagnosis of Sangster, and the inferences derived from his critique, to a theological development that confronts "Wesleyanisms" that diverge from Wesley, and at the same time, makes its own contribution to reappropriating Wesley in light of the essentially existential categories of "persons-in relation." This leaves open the tantalizing possibility of taking Wynkoop's program even further, through an application of both classical and contemporary Trinitarian thought to the doctrine of sanctification.

Before doing this, however, we turn to the polarization between "Pneumatological" and "Christological," between "crisis" and "process" categories in relation to sanctifying grace, which has led Wesleyan theology into something of a deadlock, and beyond which, a Trinitarian revisioning may lead us.

The Current Deadlock Over the Doctrine of Sanctification

In the middle nineteen-seventies a discussion emerged in the Wesleyan Theological Society over the use of pneumatological and pentecostal language in reference to entire sanctification. The "first shot was fired"⁶⁴ from Scotland when the Nazarene Herbert McGonigle pointed out that Wesley used the phrase "baptized with the Holy Spirit" in reference to justifying grace, rather than to entire sanctification.⁶⁵ With this, "the theology hit the fan" and after much going back and forth the debate came to a head in 1977 and 1978 before "subsiding without any clear resolution."⁶⁶

Even earlier than McGonigle's "first shot," George Allen Turner had stated, in 1965, that "John and Charles Wesley said or wrote little about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This emphasis is relatively recent. It is not easy to find Wesleyan writers devoting much space to it or associating it with entire sanctification and evangelical

⁶³ She does deal with aspects of trinitarian thought elsewhere, and we will return to her later in the paper, where explicitly Wesleyan resources for a trinitarian theology of sanctification will be examined.

⁶⁴ Donald W. Dayton, "Wesleyan Theological Society: The Second Decade," in WTJ 30:1 (Spring 1995), 224.

⁶⁵ Herbert McGonigle, "Pneumatological Nomenclature in Early Methodism in Early Methodism," in WTJ 8 (Spring 1973), 62.

⁶⁶ Dayton, WTJ 30:1, 224. The issue has reappeared recently in the devotion of an entire issue of the *Asbury Theological Journal* to previously unpublished writings of John Fletcher, and in an as yet unpublished manuscript on him by Lawrence Wood.

perfection."⁶⁷

Perhaps the most sustained defense of the inappropriateness of "baptism with the Spirit" language in reference to entire sanctification, from the standpoint of biblical studies, came from Asbury Theological Seminary professor Robert W. Lyon.⁶⁸

From Pentecost on, all believers receive at conversion the Holy Spirit as promised – in His fullness. No biblical basis exists for a distinction between receiving the Spirit and being baptized in, or filled with, the Spirit...Were someone to ask me where we begin in establishing the biblical roots of Wesley's doctrine of perfection in love, one of the powerful warrants I would offer would be this biblical account of conversion. The dynamic of conversion to Jesus Christ is such that perfection in love is the mandatory follow-up.⁶⁹

From the perspective of historical theology, Alex R.G. Deasley entered the discussion, maintaining that "In what may be called the classical Wesleyan tradition the equation of entire sanctification with the baptism with the Holy Spirit is conspicuous by its absence. Nowhere does it appear in...Richard Watson [or] in the systematic theologies of Miley and Pope."⁷⁰

William Burt Pope, perhaps the most catholic of Methodist theologians in the nineteenth century repudiated the idea that Christian perfection brings the believer into a state that it is in any way distinct from the sanctifying grace received in regeneration.

[Christian perfection is not] the entrance into a new order of life, one namely of higher consecration under the influence of the Holy Spirit. That the higher life is the secret of entire consecration there can be no doubt. But there is no warrant in Scripture for making it a new dispensation of the Spirit, or a Pentecostal visitation added to conversion. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" means "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" In other words entire

⁶⁷ George Allen Turner, *The Vision Which Transforms* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), 149.

⁶⁸ Robert W. Lyon, "Baptism and Spirit Baptism in the New Testament," in WTJ 14:1 (Spring, 1979).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Alex R.G. Deasley, "Entire Sanctification and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit: Perspectives on the Biblical View of the Relationship," WTJ 14:1 (Spring, 1979), 27-8.

consecration is the stronger energy of a spirit already in the regenerate, not a Spirit to be sent down from on high. This kingdom of God is already within if we would let it come in its perfection.⁷¹

The holiness movement theologian H. Orton Wiley, while he does equate the baptism of the Holy Spirit with entire sanctification, devotes only one page to "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" in his three volume systematic. Furthermore, his argument for entire sanctification does not at all hinge on this connection.⁷² In a much discussed correspondence with Joseph Benson in 1770, John Wesley relegates the phrase "receiving the Holy Ghost" in reference to entire sanctification to the status of *adiaphora* – a thing indifferent.

You allow the whole thing that I contend for; an entire deliverance from sin, a recovery of the whole image of God, the loving God with all our heart, soul and strength. And you believe God is able to give you this; yea, to give it to you in an instant...If they like to call this "receiving the Holy Ghost" they may: Only the phrase, in that sense, is not scriptural, and not quite proper; for they all "received the Holy Ghost" when they were justified.⁷³

For John Wesley, all change wrought in the hearts of believers at conversion must be attributed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "This teaching...may appear strange to some who insist that the Holy Spirit is given subsequent to regeneration at the time of a 'second blessing,' but in this concept Wesley is at one with most Reformed teaching."⁷⁴

The historian Paul Meritt Bassett maintains that two distinct theologies have shaped the theology of the holiness movement in the twentieth century, at least as reflected in the formal statements of holiness movement denominations. In spite of their general agreement on the doctrine of Christian perfection these are "essentially different in methodology and in certain ranges of

⁷¹ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, in three volumes, second edition (London: Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom, 1880), III: 64, cf. 44.

⁷² Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1952), II:444, cf. Deasley, 28.

⁷³ John Wesley, "Letter to Joseph Benson," December 28, 1770, in *Works* XII: 416.

⁷⁴ Leo G. Cox, *John Wesley's Concept of Perfection*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), 122.

presuppositions."⁷⁵ The first of these is derived from A.M. Hills' "New School Congregationalism," which placed human free agency at its center, with holiness ancillary to it. The second is the more Wesleyan focus of H. Orton Wiley.

Hills' doctrine of holiness leaves the Spirit as acting almost unilaterally, divorced from solid trinitarian moorings. "For Hills, the Holy Spirit is the agent and animator of the life of holiness...no care at all is taken...to anchor the Christian life in the continuing presence of Jesus Christ, with the Spirit serving as Christ's Spirit. The Spirit is seen as an independent being with an independent work."⁷⁶ It is easy to see how the popular holiness movement and pentecostal idea of the Holy Spirit as a gift given, not with the new birth, but at some later time, might grow from this sort of thinking.

Wiley on the other hand exhibits a more Christocentric approach. "[T]he Holy Spirit supernaturally extends to men, the redemptive work of Christ...Christ communicates to the membership of [his] body, the quickening and sanctifying offices of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁷

On its Methodistic side, then, the holiness movement has developed a deeply Christocentric ethic which is utterly dependent upon Christ's historic and continuing presence and upon his example. But side by side with this ethic is a pneumatological one in which Christ's role is unclear. Rather, the emphasis is upon some sort of spiritual power.⁷⁸

Donald Dayton seems to agree with those who identify two converging (or competing?) visions within the holiness movement.

We are a movement with two generating movements...one in the Wesleyanism of the eighteenth century and one in the holiness movement of the nineteenth century. These are not entirely congruent, and our struggle with these differences may help free us to face the challenges of articulating the Wesleyan message into the twentieth and twenty first centuries. We cannot meet these challenges by repeating the clichés of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Paul Merrit Bassett, "The Interplay of Christology and Ecclesiology in the Theology of the Holiness Movement," in WTJ 16:2 (Fall, 1981), 80.

⁷⁶ Bassett, WTJ 16:2, 87.

⁷⁷ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1940), 3:103.

⁷⁸ Bassett, WTJ 16:2, 88-9.

⁷⁹ Donald W. Dayton, WTJ 30:1 (Spring 1995), 225.

It is well known that John Fletcher popularized the use of pneumatological and pentecostal language in reference to entire sanctification. Though Fletcher's terminology is significantly different from Wesley's at certain points, the teaching of the former clearly gained the explicit imprimatur of the latter.⁸⁰ Wesley, in fact equated Christian perfection with being "filled with the Holy Ghost" in a letter to Joseph Benson.⁸¹

More problematic, however, is Fletcher's "trinitarian dispensationalism" which seems to contain an incipient tritheism. Fletcher divided salvation history into three distinct epochs - the age of the Father, the age of the Son, and the age of the Holy Spirit. Under the Old Covenant, God was known primarily as Father. During the period of Christ's incarnation, God was known in the person of God's Son. After Christ has ascended to heaven, "another Comforter" was sent, one who would remain with God's people until the end of the ages.

As Lawrence Wood summarizes Fletcher's approach, "[e]ven as there were stages in salvation in which God was progressively known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so there may be stages in one's personal history of salvation in which one may know God successively as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet it is the one and the same God who is known."⁸² This seems reminiscent of the ancient heresy of modalism, leaving Fletcher open to the charge that he might be guilty of that error. In a previously unpublished, incomplete manuscript, recently uncovered in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, this tendency to modalism is also apparent.⁸³ In what is intended to be a reply to the Socinian ideas of Dr. Priestly, Fletcher speaks of God having made successive "displays" of himself, "first, as creating Father, secondly as redeeming Son, and thirdly, as sanctifying Spirit."⁸⁴ Nothing distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, says Fletcher, but "the manifestation of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, superadded to the manifestation of the Father...Moral purposes [require] a discovery of the Father's love, of the Son's grace,

⁸⁰ Cp. McGonigle, WTJ, 8 (1973), 68.

⁸¹ Lawrence Wood, "Exegetical Reflections on the Baptism with the Holy Spirit," in WTJ 14:1 (Spring, 1979).

⁸² Lawrence W. Wood, "The Wesleyan View" in Donald L. Alexander, ed. *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 101.

⁸³ John Fletcher, "An Unpublished Essay to Doctor Priestly on the Trinity," in *Asbury Theological Journal* 53:1, (Spring 1998), 79-81.

⁸⁴ Fletcher to Dr. Priestly, 80. Underlinings in original.

and of the Spirit's power."⁸⁵ The problem with this is similar to that raised by the contemporary attempts at replacing the traditional baptismal formula with terms such as "Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier." All three Persons of the Godhead create, redeem, and sanctify. All three Persons bestow love, grace, and power. In fairness to Fletcher, it should be kept in mind, that he is not seeking to develop an ontological or immanent trinitarianism, but rather to delineate the divine *oikonomia* of redemption in trinitarian categories. In doing so however, he seems to do violence to the role of the whole of the Trinity in Christian experience.

Wesley, at least in his earlier writings, does seem to take a more Christological approach to the doctrine of entire sanctification than Fletcher. He stresses, for example, the "circumcision of the heart" defined as "the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus."⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that of the thirty texts identified as those most often quoted by Wesley in his treatment of entire sanctification, none of them has any direct reference to the Holy Spirit or to Pentecost.⁸⁷ When Wesley does use language drawn from the day of Pentecost, he seems to do so in reference to the new birth, rather than to a second work of grace.

And yet, Wesley designated Fletcher as the one most suited to succeed him in the leadership of the Methodist societies,⁸⁸ and approved in an unqualified manner all that he wrote. In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley does equate entire sanctification with being "full of His Spirit,"⁸⁹ and points out that "there has been a larger measure of the Spirit given under the gospel than under the Jewish dispensation."⁹⁰ Wesley also equates perfect love with being filled with the Holy Spirit in a letter to Joseph Benson.⁹¹ And, for Wesley, it is always the "fruit of the Spirit" which characterizes the entirely sanctified believer.⁹²

The most recent research of Larry Wood is an indication of the

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸⁶ Sugden, ed. *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, I:176.

⁸⁷ See "The Thirty Texts of Wesley" in *The Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.) Sangster deals with the textual basis of Wesley's doctrine in *The Path to Perfection*, 37-52.

⁸⁸ Fletcher's premature death, however, made this impossible.

⁸⁹ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61

⁹¹ John Telford, ed. *The Letters of John Wesley* (London: The Epworth Press, 1921), 5:229.

⁹² Wesley, *Plain Account*, 78-9.

fact that the discussion over the agreement or otherwise between Wesley and Fletcher is far from over.⁹³ Wesley wrote to Fletcher's close associate, Joseph Benson in the midst of a controversy at the Countess of Huntingdon's Trevecca College, taking exception to their use of the term "receiving the Spirit." He maintained that the Methodists "can sufficiently prove our whole Doctrine, without laying stress on those metaphorical Expressions" such as "the baptism with the Holy Ghost" referring to this "sentiment" as being "utterly new."⁹⁴ But Wood maintains that Wesley had misunderstood their use of these expressions. He feared that Fletcher and Benson were saying that only the fully sanctified received the "witness of the Spirit." Wesley used the phrase "receiving the Spirit" in reference to the witness of the Spirit.

A letter from Wesley to Benson on December 28th, 1770 would seem to indicate that Wesley was afraid Benson and Fletcher had fallen into the "Zinzendorfan" error.⁹⁵ He tells Benson on March 9th, 1771 that he is to reread the *Minutes* of the Conference "and see whether you can conform thereto...Mr. Fletcher's late discovery...would [only] create huge debate and confusion" among the Methodists.⁹⁶ That Wesley may have been confused about the precise nature of what he termed "Mr. Fletcher's late discovery" is indicated in a letter dated March 6th, 1771 in which he himself uses the phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" as a synonym for being "perfected in love."⁹⁷ According to Wood, this letter shows that Wesley and his associates Fletcher and Benson were in fact, in spite of Wesley's misunderstanding over their use of terms, in full agreement on equating entire sanctification with the fullness of the Spirit.⁹⁸

In Wood's unpublished manuscript on the subject, which is over five hundred pages in length, he documents "the extensive use of Pentecostal phrases as encoded nomenclature for Christian perfection which were universally used by the early Methodists, including

⁹³ Lawrence W. Wood, "John Fletcher and the Rediscovery of Pentecost in Methodism," and a collection of previously unpublished essays by John Fletcher, in *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 53:1 Spring 1998; "Purity and Power: The Pentecostal Experience According to John Wesley and Joseph Fletcher," unpublished paper presented at the 27th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, in special session with the WTS, March 12-14, 1998. Church of God Theological Seminary, Cleveland, Tennessee.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

Wesley, his leading preachers and assistants."⁹⁹ Wood cites Albert Outler's judgment that the latter years of Wesley's thought are those most neglected by Wesleyan scholarship. It was this Wesley, whom Wood calls "the Pentecostal Wesley" who was understood by the early Methodists right through to the end of the nineteenth century. One must not simply rely on the *Standard Sermons* for a full understanding of Wesley's theology of holiness.

His later sermons, *The Arminian Magazine* which was begun in 1778, the writings of John Fletcher which were published in 1771, the close personal partnership between Wesley and Fletcher in forming the ideas of their preachers as they traveled and preached together at Methodist preaching houses and in the annual conferences, and the preaching and writings of his key preachers and assistants must all be brought together in to a single puzzle if a true picture of Methodism is to be seen.¹⁰⁰

In Wesley's original teaching, therefore, as expressed in John Fletcher as its official interpreter, rather than in any later innovation of Phoebe Palmer or Charles Finney, is to be found the identification of Pentecost with entire sanctification. Indeed, Wood even goes so far as to elevate Fletcher's writings to a kind of theological standard with his proposal of a threefold canon consisting of "John Wesley's sermons, Charles Wesley's hymns, and John Fletcher's theology" as having shaped "the matrix of early Methodism."¹⁰¹

Yet, as late as 1775, Wesley writes to Fletcher, stating that their respective views on "receiving the Spirit" differed somewhat.

It seems our views of Christian perfection are a little different, though not opposite. It is certain every babe in Christ has received the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God. But he has not obtained Christian perfection. Perhaps you have not considered St. John's threefold distinction of Christian believers: little children, young men, and fathers. All of these had received the Holy Ghost, but only the fathers were perfected in love.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰¹ Wood, 25.

¹⁰² Wesley, Letter to John Fletcher, 22 March, 1775, *Letters* 6:146. Cited in Paul M. Bassett and William M. Greathouse, *Exploring Christian Holiness. Vol. 2. The Historical Development*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1985), 246.

T. Crichton Mitchell expressed something of the weariness felt by some over the debate when he declared in 1981 that the question of John Wesley's relating (or otherwise) of Pentecost with entire sanctification seemed to him to be "merely academic, of small profit, and rather boring."¹⁰³ Yet, if the tradition is to move forward to that creative development of its *grand depositum* that it needs, it cannot do so by sidestepping this important discussion. Unless the Holy Spirit's work is seen as an extension of Christ's atonement, and of the Father's redemptive activity, an unhealthy modalism will continue to enervate Wesleyan thought and practice. If we continue to polarize toward either a Christological or a Pneumatological pole, we will only perpetuate an imbalance that is part of our historic legacy, and which needs addressing and rectifying.

Overemphasis of one person to the exclusion of the others is in fact a virtual denial of the true God. The Father without the Son and Spirit may be treated as a first cause but not as creator; the Son without the Father and Spirit leads to a Jesusology of one who does not lead us to the Father or give the Spirit. And the Spirit without the Father and the Son may emphasize our subjective experience or the variety of gifts but is loosed from his true context in the divine life.¹⁰⁴

If it turns out to be the case that pentecostal language in reference to entire sanctification is demonstrated to be neither fully biblical nor authentically Wesleyan, one has to ask, as Melvin Dieter does, "what other terminology can express equally well the fullness of life in the Spirit as the Pentecost motif? What motif can better represent the dynamic for genuine holy living which is at the heart of the Wesleyan tradition?"¹⁰⁵ The answer to that question may well lie in a recovery of a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection.

Contemporary Trinitarian Theology

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan settlement, though a monumental achievement in itself, has been thought by many contemporary theologians to have left some unfinished business. It left us, according to Ted Peters, "with an eternal immanent Trinity with only

¹⁰³ T. Crichton Mitchell, "Response to Dr. Timothy Smith on the Wesley's Hymns," in WTJ 16:2 (Fall, 1981), 49.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, 95. Cp *British Council of Churches Report*, 2:21-23.

¹⁰⁵ Melvin E. Dieter, "Presidential Address: Musings," WTJ 14:1 (Spring, 1979), 10.

a dubious tie to the economic Trinity responsible for the saving work in history."¹⁰⁶ Classical trinitarian Christologies, in an attempt to counter gnostic Docetism, made sharp distinctions between the human suffering and the divine *apatheia* of Christ. He suffered as a human, they claimed, but not as God. In doing this they "risked sacrificing the intimate God on the altar of the beyond."¹⁰⁷

Trinitarian theology, particularly in the West, exhibited an increasing concern with the inner relations of the persons within the Godhead (the immanent Trinity), often to the neglect of the relations between the persons in the work of salvation (the economic Trinity). The Cappadocians understood God as one in his being, but not in the mathematical sense of Arian monotheism. They distinguished carefully between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, terms earlier used as synonyms for "being." God is one in his being (*ousia*) but consists in the inseparable relation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the three *hypostases*. There is no "being" of God other than this God in relation.¹⁰⁸

It has often been said that the Western tradition begins with the unity of the being of God, and then attempts to understand the three persons within that framework. Augustine tended to think in this way, and Thomas Aquinas' decision to treat the unity of God first (*De Deo uno*) and, having established that, to go on to deal with God as Trinity (*De Deo triuno*)¹⁰⁹ contributed toward a certain unitarian tendency in Western scholasticism, both in its Catholic and Protestant expressions. On the other hand, the Eastern tradition begins with the community of the three divine persons and then seeks to reconcile that with the unity of God. For the former, "the oneness of God is said to have an ontological priority over the persons," while for the latter, the reverse is true.¹¹⁰

But this generalization should not be overdrawn. St. Augustine's formula, *opera trinitatis ad intra sunt divisa, opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*,¹¹¹ demonstrates that the Western tradition was

¹⁰⁶ Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 9.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 9-10.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Wheaton: Bridgepoint/Victor, 1996) 45.

¹¹⁰ John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 5.

¹¹¹ "The internal trinitarian operations are divided, the external trinitarian operations are undivided."

not entirely devoid of the idea of a trinitarian involvement in God's *oikonomia*. It is the Triune God who relates savingly to the world, and not only the Father, the Son, or the Spirit.¹¹² Nonetheless, it remains clear that the concern tilted in the direction of the immanent Trinity. The Western tradition tended to think of God's "being" as something which *underlay* relation, rather than defining being in terms of communion.¹¹³ LaCugna speaks of the preoccupation with "the structure of God's inner life" as "the theological defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity," and goes on to cite its destructive outcome in the political sphere. "A unitarian, patriarchal, monarchical, hierarchical theism gradually replaced a trinitarian monotheism, with disastrous political results. Christian theologians justified every kind of hierarchy, exclusion, and pattern of domination, whether religious, sexual, political, clerical, racial, as 'natural' and divinely intended."¹¹⁴

When the Trinity is considered primarily as a doctrine, there is a tendency to drive reflection on the trinitarian being of God into obscurity. Modern trinitarian theology has helped us to see that the doctrine of the Trinity begins with a focus, not on God's ontological being, but on God's saving activity. It centers on Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity, rather than being a doctrine derived from philosophical reflection on the nature of Absolute Being (a reflection which always tilts toward sheer monotheism or monarchianism), is rather the result of rational reflection on the saving activity of God in Christ. These divine occurrences confront human reason with the realization that only a triune God can account for them.¹¹⁵ The proper mode of discourse, then, regarding the Trinity, is not philosophical theology, but doxology.¹¹⁶

In the postmodern world, it is more or less a given that individuals are not lone atoms but persons in relation. There is no longer any autonomous person. Each person is who that person is because of intimate connections with other persons. The doctrine of the Trinity speaks profoundly to this realization, for it tells us that God's own being is constituted in precisely this way - God is being in communion. This communion is moreover a loving communion. "The doctrine of the Trinity reaches to the deepest recesses of the soul

¹¹² Peters, 21.

¹¹³ Gunton, 10.

¹¹⁴ Cathryn Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 17.

¹¹⁵ Cp. Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1943) 25.

¹¹⁶ LaCugna, 16.

and helps us know the majesty of God's presence and the mystery of his love. Love is the most authentic mark of the Christian life, and love among humans, as within God, requires community with others and a sharing of the deepest kind."¹¹⁷

Person, not substance, is the ultimate ontological category...the ultimate source of reality is not a 'by-itself' or an 'in-itself' but a person, a toward-another...God...never existed as a solitary figure. God is self-communicating, existing from all eternity in relation to another. The ultimate ground and meaning of being is therefore communion among persons: God is ecstatic, fecund, self-emptying out of love for another, a personal God who comes to self through another.¹¹⁸

Ted Peters alerts his readers to Claude Welch's 1952 book *In His Name* and "its near prophetic insight that the work of Karl Barth would become the wave of future trinitarian discussion."¹¹⁹ The question of the connection between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity was used by Barth in his suggestion that they are in fact one. "Subsequent Trinity talk has been filling out the picture."¹²⁰

With his rejection of any kind of natural theology, Barth insisted on treating the doctrine of the Trinity, not as a hidden mystery, but in terms of God's own self-revelation. There is no ontological God who in God's hiddenness is somehow divorced from the saving God. Herbert Hartwell summarizes Barth's view: "We know God exclusively as one who acts upon us as the triune God...since he is the living God, it is not possible to abstract his real work and action in favor of a being of God in general. Holy Scripture does not allow 'this splitting up of the concept of God'."¹²¹ The reason for this is that the doctrine of the Trinity has been separated from salvation history, and considered purely in ontological categories.¹²²

Similarly, Karl Rahner maintained that the close connection between the relations of the persons of the Trinity and the work of salvation has been so disjoined that the traditional view would seem

¹¹⁷ Robert L. Wilkin, "The Resurrection of Jesus and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Word and World*, 2, no.1 (Winter 1982) cited in Peters, 26.

¹¹⁸ LaCugna, 14-15.

¹¹⁹ Peters, 9-10.

¹²⁰ *Op. Cit.*

¹²¹ Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1964) 50, cited in Thompson, 39. fn. 2.

¹²² Joseph A. Bracken, *What Are They Saying About the Trinity?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 9.

to imply that any of the three persons could have become human, and that any of the three persons could have become the principle of divine love in humanity. In contrast to this, Rahner asserts that it is the Son alone who could have participated in the Incarnation, and the Spirit alone who could have served as the divine indwelling.

According to "Rahner's Rule,"¹²³ the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity. "[N]o adequate distinction can be made between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the economy of salvation."¹²⁴ Rahner's great contribution is his insistence that "the Trinity is the mystery of salvation."¹²⁵ He provides a key to establishing a contemporary Trinitarian theology which removes the doctrine from the rarefied atmosphere of Greek metaphysics and places it in the centre of the church's life and experience.

The contemporary Roman Catholic theologian, Catherine Mowry La Cugna, provides us with a picture of the Trinity as a "mystery of love." It is a picture which, perhaps inadvertently, reflects the characteristically Wesleyan emphasis on the centrality of love in the process of sanctification.

The mystery of God is revealed in Christ and the Spirit as the mystery of love, the mystery of persons in communion who embrace death, sin, and all forms of alienation for the sake of life. Jesus Christ, the visible icon of the invisible God, discloses what it means to be fully personal, divine as well as human. The Spirit of God, poured into our hearts as love (Rom. 5:5) gathers us together into the body of Christ, transforming us so that "we become by grace what God is by nature," namely, persons in full communion with God and with every creature.¹²⁶

¹²³ A term coined by Peters, *God as Trinity*, 22.

¹²⁴ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 24.

¹²⁵ Cited in Thompson, 22.

¹²⁶ Catherine Mowry La Cugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991) 1. Note here contrasts with aspects of traditional holiness movement theology. Instead of certainty there is mystery. Instead of individualism there is "persons in communion." Being made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) does not cancel out being fully human. The stress on love was central, of course, to Wesley's own theology. However, "perfection in love" came to be thought of in rather static terms, as a state achieved rather than a relationship to be developed.

La Cugna calls for a trinitarian theology "in the mode of doxology," which is "situated in the liturgical life of the church." Prayer and worship are, after all, "the inner moments of all dogmatic statements."¹²⁷ Through doxology, the tension between apophatic theology, with its stress on mystery and hiddenness, and kataphatic theology, with its stress on revelation and activism, is overcome. Such a theology will be both Christological and Pneumatological, "anchored in [both] Christ and the Spirit."¹²⁸ "Understood as a way of rendering praise to God, trinitarian theology...reconnects spirituality with theology, orthodoxy with orthopraxis, the contemplative with the speculative, apophatic with kataphatic, the pastoral with the academic."¹²⁹

La Cugna conceives of the life of holiness in these trinitarian categories, drawing from the traditional Eastern Orthodox idea of *theosis*. To be sanctified is to become Christlike, to be deified, to be "ingodded." The goal of following Christ in this way is "the sainthood of every woman, man, and child."¹³⁰

The basis for a Trinitarian revisioning of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification might begin here, on familiar ground, with the recognition that sanctifying grace is expressed in the fullness of love. The advance to the tradition lies in a linking of this love to the divine community among the persons of the Trinity, thus avoiding the atomistic approach that has often led to individualism and an unhelpful pietism in Methodist circles. When an experience of sanctifying grace is understood in terms of being "crucified with Christ" or of "receiving the Spirit" it may too easily be overlooked that this crucifixion or receiving is the work and the gift not simply of *a person to a person* (i.e. Christ to the believer, or the Spirit to the believer) but as a communion between the Triune God and a person in relation. God in divine community is given to the church in God's sanctifying power, thus creating and sustaining, not only holy individuals, but a divine society. It is in this way that the church is made "a partaker of the divine nature."¹³¹

The idea of God's being as becoming, frequently found in contemporary trinitarian theologies, may have its difficulties, but when applied to the believer's growth in holiness it may prove helpful. If God's *being* is in *becoming*, then God can still *be* God and yet have

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 367.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 367.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 409.

¹³¹ 2 Peter 1:4

potentiality. This seems to overthrow classical theism's belief in God's impassibility. On the other hand, if the being of *humanity* is in becoming, then a person can be fully human, and yet still in the process of becoming more fully human, through sanctifying grace. In the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Christians may quite properly be addressed as those who are "sanctified, called to *be* holy."¹³²

In the eleventh chapter of the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*,¹³³ Pannenberg deals with "the Triune God as Reconciler of the World" in his treatment of the Pauline concept of reconciliation. The salvation of the world is accomplished through humanity being "taken up into fellowship with the Father of the Son who became man in Jesus Christ...This takes place through the Spirit. Through the Spirit, reconciliation with God no longer comes upon us solely from outside. We ourselves enter into it."¹³⁴

Because the Spirit lifts us beyond our finitude and into the divine life through reconciliation, the life of believers is "ecstatic." That is, they live *outside of* themselves, because they live *in* Christ,¹³⁵ and Christ in them.¹³⁶ Though outside themselves, they are not, however, estranged from themselves. Estrangement from the self is often the mark of a wrong kind of "ecstatic" behaviour. It may take place in states of extreme frenzy or fury, or in bondage and addiction. Believers escape such bondage for their *ecstasis* lifts them beyond self-centredness into fellowship with Jesus.

For this reason, being outside the self through the Spirit and in faith in Jesus Christ means liberation, not merely in the sense of elevation above our own finitude, but also in the sense of attaining afresh by this elevation to our own existence as the Creator who has affirmed it and reconciled it to himself. It means liberation from the bondage of the world, sin, and the devil for a life in the power of the Spirit.¹³⁷

This does not mean a mystical union with God that would blur the distinction between God and the believer. For the Son differentiates

¹³² 1 Corinthians 1:2, italics mine.

¹³³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology. Volume 2*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 450.

¹³⁵ Romans 6:6-11

¹³⁶ Romans 8:10.

¹³⁷ Pannenberg, 452.

himself from the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. As believers share in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father, so they also share in the Spirit's disposition of seeking, not their own glory, but the glory of the Father and the Son. "Hence the Spirit completes our reconciliation with God by enabling us through faith in Jesus Christ to accept our finite existence before God."¹³⁸

In the holiness movement ecstatic experiences have often been normative expressions of sanctifying grace. Too often, however, they have not resulted in a lifting of the self out of self-centeredness to be set free to live in God and in others. Rather, they have too often resulted in an inability to affirm our continued creatureliness, and a tendency to think of full sanctification as lifting a person beyond human fallibility.

Pannenberg's stress on a trinitarian reconciliation of humanity which enables believers to be caught up into the filial and others-focused dynamic of the divine family, might help us to overcome this tendency in our tradition. The fully sanctified believer would then be able both to participate in the divine nature, and also to affirm and accept the continued finiteness of his or her being.

We now turn to the identification of resources for a trinitarian revisioning of Christian perfection drawn from the Wesleyan tradition itself, before moving on to construct a proposal for such a revision.

Wesleyan Trinitarian Resources

A. John Wesley's *On the Trinity*

John Wesley's only sermon explicitly devoted to the subject of the Trinity was published in Ireland in 1775 under the title, "A Sermon on 1st John, v.7." Albert Outler points out that this is Wesley's only extended comment on the subject, suggesting that "for Wesley as for pietists generally, abstract doctrines are better believed devoutly than analyzed rationally."¹³⁹ This may perhaps have been a reaction to certain rationalizing tendencies in Anglican treatments of the subject, such as those of Richard Hooker, George Bull, and Thomas Sherlock.¹⁴⁰ He cites favorably the treatment of the doctrine in Dean Swift's sermon on the Trinity. Swift, who was the Dean of St.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹³⁹ Albert Outler, ed. *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 2, Sermons II: 34-70* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 373.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Patrick's, Dublin from 1713, published his sermon on the subject in 1744. In it he contended that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, "so far above reason as precludes rational explication altogether."¹⁴¹

Wesley approves of the Athanasian Creed, though he rejects its damnatory clauses, and its claim that a subscription to its precise explication of the Trinity was necessary to salvation.¹⁴²

I dare not insist upon anyone's using the word 'Trinity' or 'Person'. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better. But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot; much less would I burn a man alive - and that with moist, green wood - for saying. 'Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet I scruple using the words "Trinity" and "Person" because I do not find those terms in the Bible.' These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text: 'There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.'¹⁴³

The same generous "benefit-of-the-doubt" attitude that Wesley displayed toward "heretics" such as Pelagius and Montanus seems to be being extended here to Servetus also. On the other hand, it is hard to miss the biting sarcasm here in the reference to "merciful John Calvin." Wesley had uncovered an account of the Calvin-Servetus controversy in the Bodleian library, and was no doubt familiar with

¹⁴¹ fn. 8 in Outler, *Works* II:377.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 377. In the 1767 collection *Hymns on the Trinity*, Charles Wesley composed a paraphrase of the first half of the Athanasian Creed. In it we read of "The Father, Son and Spirit of love," and of "The Father, Son, and Spirit of grace.."Both God and Lord, who him believe, Each person by himself we name: Yet not three Gods or Lords receive, But One essentially the same. Hymn 255, in Franz Hildebrand and Oliver Beckerlegge, eds. *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodist*. Volume XII in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, Abingdon Press.)

¹⁴³ *The Two Treatises of Servetus on the Trinity*. Translated by E.M. Wilbur, 1932. Cited in Outler, *Works* II:378, fn.11. Wesley is aware that the authenticity of the text upon which his sermon is based is open to challenge. He lists Bengelius' reasons for including it, and reminds his readers that its absence from many later manuscripts may have been the result of the Arianizing party under Constantius. *Ibid.*, 378-89.

the events leading to Servetus death.¹⁴⁴ Servetus' own words in E.M. Wilbur's translation of his *Two Treatises...on the Trinity*, seem to reflect the sentiments Wesley represents him as holding here.

The doctrine of the Trinity can be neither established by logic nor proved from Scripture...The Scriptures and the Fathers teach one God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son; but scholastic philosophy has introduced terms which are not understood and do not accord with Scripture. Jesus taught that he himself was the Son of God...But the doctrine of the Trinity incurs the ridicule of the Mohammedans and the Jews. It arose out of Greek philosophy...whereas the church should be founded on the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Cited in Outler, Works II:378).

There are many things that lie beyond human comprehension, yet we have no trouble in believing in them. Wesley lists as examples of these incomprehensible certainties, such things as the motion of the sun, of light, and air, the earth, and the existence of the body and soul.¹⁴⁵ In just the same way, though we cannot understand the precise mode of being within the mystery of the ontological Trinity, we still intuitively know that such relations must exist, not by any process of ratiocination, but through Christian experience. The "knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion."¹⁴⁶

Though babes in Christ could not expect it, fathers in Christ might even share, with the Marquis de Renty, the immediate existential apprehension of the Trinity in an "experimental verity, and a plenitude of the presence of the ever blessed Trinity."¹⁴⁷ But even the merest babe in Christ experiences salvation in clearly trinitarian fashion. "I know not how anyone can be a Christian believer till...God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son - having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit 'even as he honours the Father.'"¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Wesley, *Journal*, July 9th, 1741. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds. *The Works of John Wesley Vol. XXIX Journal and Diaries II (1783-1743)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990) 204.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 379-84.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 385.

¹⁴⁷ *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴⁸ *Op. Cit.*

H. Ray Dunning outlines what might be a "distinctive Wesleyan approach" to the doctrine of the Trinity, based in part on Wesley's sermon, which if followed would lead to "taking a different tack from the usual evangelical approach."¹⁴⁹ First, a Wesleyan approach will refuse to insist on any particular explication of the doctrine. This would not mean indifference to orthodox formulations of the Trinity, but a recognition that creedal definitions are important not because of positive statements, so much as for their negative rejection of errors.

There will also be a distinction between the substance of the doctrine and its philosophical or theological explication, between the *fact* of the Divine Being as existence in Trinity, and the *manner* of that existence. The Church must inevitably use both philosophical and theological language in its teaching of the doctrine as well as strictly biblical language, but this will always take place in the humility expressed in St. Augustine's approach: "When the question is asked, What three? human language labors altogether under great poverty of speech. The answer, however, is given, three 'persons,' not that it might be (completely) spoken, but that it might not be left (wholly) unspoken."¹⁵⁰

Third - and here is the most distinctive aspect of the Wesleyan approach - there will be the recognition that the substance of the doctrine is not ontological but soteriological. In Wesleyan theology, soteriology has a central position, bringing all other doctrines into focus. "Ultimately, Wesleyan theology asks about the saving significance of every Christian doctrine and resists bringing purely speculative questions into the area of fundamental theology."¹⁵¹ The whole of the Trinity is involved in our salvation in the sense that "thinking of the Father as Him to whom we are reconciled, it is the basis of our acceptance with God (the Son) and the basis of the witness of the Spirit."¹⁵² Wesley concludes, "Therefore, I do not see how it is possible for any to have vital religion who denies that the Three are One."¹⁵³

B. The Trinity in the Hymns of Charles Wesley

¹⁴⁹ H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 209.

¹⁵⁰ St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 5:9:10, in Philip Schaff, ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1952-1956). Cited, in Dunning, 211.

¹⁵¹ Dunning, 211.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁵³ Wesley, Sermon LV, "On the Trinity," in *Works*, VI:205, cited in Dunning, 232.

We have seen mystery was a category used by John Wesley in his approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. Mystery is a category that appears also in that other great canon of Wesleyan soteriology, the hymns of Charles Wesley. Indeed, God's whole saving plan is an inscrutable riddle, before which angels and men stand astounded.

'Tis myst'ry all, th' Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all, Let earth adore!
Let angel minds inquire no more.¹⁵⁴

The Trinitarian shape of this wonder may be seen in the following representative sample of Wesley's hymnody.

Thou God that answerest by fire,
On thee in Jesus' name we call;
Fulfil our faithful hearts' desire,
And let on us thy Spirit fall.
Bound on the altar of thy cross
Our old, offending nature lies;
Now, for the honour of thy cause,
Come, and consume the sacrifice!¹⁵⁵

Here we begin to see how resources for a Trinitarian theology of Christian perfection may be found in Wesleyan hymnody. The God who "answerest by fire" is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this name that we call upon our Father. As we place our "old offending nature" upon the altar, the Spirit falls upon us and consumes the sacrifice. It is the Spirit who sanctifies here, but not abstracted from the Father or Son. Consider also the following hymn, included by Orange Scott, the founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion of America, in an 1843 hymnal for the use of that body.

An inward baptism of pure fire,
Wherewith to be baptiz'd, I have;

¹⁵⁴ Hymn 193, in *Works*, VII:322.

¹⁵⁵ Hymn 400, *Works* VII:576, Cited in Mitchell, "Response to Dr. Timothy Smith," 55.

'Tis all my longing soul's desire:
This, only this my soul can save.
Straiten'd I am till this be done;
Kindle in me the living flame;
Father, in me reveal Thy Son;
Baptize me into Jesus' name.
Transform my nature into Thine;
Let all my powers Thine impress feel;
Let all my soul become divine,
And stamp me with thy Spirit's seal.¹⁵⁶

The Father is appealed to that he might baptize the longing believer into Jesus' name. This transformation, this divinisation, is to be accomplished by being stamped with "thy Spirit's seal." One of the most frequently sung of Wesley's hymns, "Arise, my soul, arise" also bear a markedly trinitarian shape: "The bleeding Sacrifice" appears on the believer's behalf as "Surety," interceding on the basis of his "precious blood" before the Father, his "five bleeding wounds" pleading "Forgive!" The Father hears the prayer of "His dear Anointed One" and, unable to turn away the presence of his Son bestows the longed-for gift. But this glorious transaction is not complete until, "His Spirit answers to the blood" assuring the believer of salvation and enabling the confident cry, "Father, Abba, Father!"¹⁵⁷

In the section on "Believers Rejoicing" in *Hymns For the Use of the People Called Methodists* there appear thirteen hymns drawn from the 1767 collection *Hymns on the Trinity*.¹⁵⁸ Charles Wesley had been inspired to put together the original collection by a reading of William Jones of Nyland's¹⁵⁹ *The Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity*.¹⁶⁰ The following may be taken as representative.

Come Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Whom one all-perfect God we own,
Restorer of thine image lost,
Thy various offices make known;
Display, our fallen souls to raise,

¹⁵⁶ *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America*. (Boston: Published by Orange Scott, 1843), 198. Cited in Melvin Dieter, Presidential Address: Musings," in *WTJ* 14:1 (Spring, 1979), 13.

¹⁵⁷ Hymn 194, *Works* VII, 324.

¹⁵⁸ Hymns 242-255, *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁹ b. 1726- d. 1800.

¹⁶⁰ Cf, note in *Works* VII:395.

Thy whole economy of grace.
Jehovah in Three Persons, come,
And draw, and sprinkle us, and seal
Poor guilty, dying worms in whom
Thy lost eternal, life reveal;
The knowledge of thyself bestow,
And all this glorious goodness show.
Soon as our pardoned hearts believe
That thou art pure, essential love,
The proof we in ourselves receive
Of the Three Witnesses above;
Sure as the saints around thy throne
That Father, Word, and Spirit are one.
O that we may now, in love renewed,
Might blameless in thy sight appear;
Wake me in thy similitude,
Stamped with the Triune character;
Flesh, spirit, soul, to thee resign
And live and die entirely thine!¹⁶¹

It is the whole Godhead, in all three Persons, who is the restorer of the *imago Dei*, in the divine *oikonomia* of grace. Jehovah is not here identified strictly and exclusively with the Father but, again, with all three Persons. It is the nature of this Triune God as Love which is stamped upon the believing heart. We "receive the proof" in ourselves, in our own experience of grace, which renews us in love after the image of our Triune God, with whose character we are stamped. We find the same teaching in Hymn no. 243.

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
One God in Persons Three!
Bring back the heavenly blessing, lost
By all mankind and me.¹⁶²

The believer looks forward to the eschatological fulfillment hoping with joy to see "the day of God" through the washing of "the sanctifying blood of an expiring Deity."¹⁶³ Believers may experience the antepast of that great day "when we rise in love renewed" and our

¹⁶¹ Hymn 253, *Ibid.*, 394-5.

¹⁶² Hymn 243, *Ibid.*, 385.

¹⁶³ Hymn 246, *Ibid.*, 387.

souls resemble our God - "the image of the Triune God / To all eternity."¹⁶⁴ The angels never cease to worship "the Triune God of holiness, whose glory fills the sky" and this God himself imparts and the whole Trinity descends "[i]nto our faithful hearts."¹⁶⁵

Nowhere else in the Wesleyan theological canon is the doctrine of the Trinity linked so intricately with Christian experience as here in the hymns. Any development of a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection will need to draw generously from this resource.

C. The Trinity in Wesley's Sacramental Theology

Evangelicals have often been embarrassed by Wesley's sacramental views, and have attempted to show, either that Wesley uncritically accepted the Anglican formularies, or that his theology underwent a change after his Aldersgate experience, such that he was high church sacramentalist beforehand and a low church evangelical afterwards. This is wide of the mark. The only distinction to be made in this regard is that after Aldersgate there was greater stress on *God's* action in the means of grace rather than on *human* action.¹⁶⁶

Whilst John Wesley maintained the importance of the formal validity of sacramental administration among the episcopally ordained priests of the Church of England, this was, for him, a question of church order.¹⁶⁷ He had a much deeper concern and that was the concern to demonstrate that unless God himself validates the sacraments, they are of no effect, regardless of who performs them, or how closely the rubrics are followed. Unless God adds his grace to the sacramental signs, and makes them effectual, they are nothing. In the sacraments, God works to save, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who is the executive of the Godhead. If a sacerdotal view sees the work as accomplished because of the validity of the one who presides, Wesley sees the work done because of the grace of the one who effectuates, a kind of *ex opera Deus*. But it is not the Holy Spirit alone who is at work in the sacraments.

Father the Grace we claim...
Jesu, the blood apply...

¹⁶⁴ Hymn 248, *Ibid.*, 390.

¹⁶⁵ Hymn 254, *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁶⁶ Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley On the Sacraments*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 271-73

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

Spirit of faith come down...
Pardon and grace impart...¹⁶⁸

We will discover in Wesley's sacramental theology, no less than elsewhere, that he understands the Triune God to be savingly at work in the sacramental signs, conveying preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace, "according to their several necessities."¹⁶⁹

Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists exhibits the trinitarian shape of the Wesleyan doctrine of baptism. The following is from a section entitled "At the Baptism of Adults."

Come Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Honour the means ordained by thee!
Make good our apostolic boast,
And own thy glorious ministry...
Father, in these reveal thy Son;
In these for whom we seek thy face
The hidden mystery make known,
The inward, pure baptizing grace...
Eternal Spirit, descend from high,
Baptiser of our spirits thou!
The sacramental seal apply,
And witness with the water now!¹⁷⁰

The sacrament of baptism is here spoken of as having been ordained by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rather than simply by Christ, as we might expect. The Father is asked to reveal his Son in those who are to receive "the hidden mystery" of "pure baptizing grace." And it is the Spirit who comes down and applies the sacramental seal.

And another:

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
In solemn power come down!
Present with thy heavenly host,

¹⁶⁸ J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley, to which is appended Wesley's Preface extracted from Brevint's Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice together with Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), Hymn no.75.

¹⁶⁹ Nehemiah Curnock, ed. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1938), II:360-61.

¹⁷⁰ Hymn 464, *Works*, VII:646-47.

Thine ordinance to crown.
See a sinful worm of earth!
Bless to him the cleansing flood!
Plunge him by a second birth,
Into the depths of God.

Let the promised inward grace
Accompany the sign;
On his new-born soul impress
The character divine!
Father, all thy love reveal!
Jesus, all thy name impart
Holy Ghost, renew and dwell
For ever in his heart!¹⁷¹

The Trinity is present, along with the angels, ready to plunge the candidate into a second birth, into "the depths of God." The divine character that is impressed is not that of any one Person alone. The Father reveals his love, Jesus imparts his name, and the Holy Ghost renews and dwells in the heart.

Wesley rejected Martin Luther's eucharistic views because they seemed to *localize* the presence of Christ, which, in Wesley's view obscures the unity of the Trinity. Christ is certainly present in the Lord's Supper, but the Father is also present as is clear from the following hymn of Charles Wesley:

Father, thy feeble children meet
And make thy faithful mercies shown;
Give us through Faith the Flesh to eat.
And drink the blood of *Christ* thy Son,
Honour thine own mysterious Ways,
Thy Sacramental Presence shew.
And all the Fullness of thy Grace,
With *Jesus*, on our Souls bestow.¹⁷²

Wesley is closer to Calvin's "spiritual presence" position, but whereas Calvin stresses the presence of Christ in terms of "power and strength," mediated through the Holy Spirit,¹⁷³ Wesley stresses the

¹⁷¹ Hymn 465, *Ibid.*, 647-8.

¹⁷² Cited in *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society*, 153:1.

¹⁷³ John T. McNeil, ed. *John Calvin's Theological Institutes* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1362-1381.

Presence of Christ in his divinity. "[I]n fact the whole Trinity is present and acting, bestowing upon men [and women] the benefits of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection."¹⁷⁴ The Eucharist is also a salvific mystery in the hymns of Charles Wesley.

O the depth of love Divine,
Th' unfathomable grace!
Who shall say how bread and wine
God into man conveys!
How the bread his flesh imparts,
How the wine transmits his blood,
Fills His faithful people's hearts
With all the life of God!

Let the wisest mortal show
How we the grace receive,
Feeble elements bestow
A change not theirs to give.
Who explains the wondrous way,
How through these the virtue came?
These the virtue did convey,
Yet still remain the same.

How can heavenly spirits rise,
By earthly matter fed,
Drink herewith Divine supplies,
And eat immortal bread?
Ask the Father's Wisdom how;
Him that did the means ordain!
Angels around our altars bow
To search it out in vain.

Sure and real is the grace,
The manner be unknown;
Only meet us in Thy ways,
And perfect us in one.
Let us taste the heavenly powers;
Lord, we ask for nothing more:
Thine to bless, 'tis only ours

¹⁷⁴ Borgen, 67-68.

To wonder and adore.¹⁷⁵

Here in the much-neglected eucharistic hymns of the Wesleys we also see a distinctively Trinitarian stamp. As the believer approaches the Lord's Table there is the need for a supernatural quickening of the imagination that will make clear the fullness of the Father's love in giving his Son up to death for our sakes. It is the Spirit who provides this supernatural assistance.

Come, Holy Ghost, set to Thy Seal,
Thine inward Witness give,
To all our waiting Souls reveal
The Death by which we live.

Spectators of the Pangs Divine
O that we Now may be,
Discerning in the Sacred Sign
His Passion on the Tree.¹⁷⁶

And another:

Come, Thou everlasting Spirit,
Bring to every thankful Mind
All the Saviour's dying Merit
All His Suffering for Mankind.¹⁷⁷

And elsewhere:

Come, Holy Ghost, Thine influence shed,
And realize¹⁷⁸ the sign;
Thy life infuse into the bread,
Thy power into the wine.
Effectual let the tokens prove,
And made, by heavenly art,
Fit channels to convey Thy love

¹⁷⁵ Cited in J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, 173.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷⁷ Op. Cit. "These prayers to the Spirit for power to realize the Passion and Death of Christ must not be confused with the *epiclesis*, that is to say, the prayer to the Spirit to quicken the bread and wine into means of grace, of which we find examples in later parts of the book." Rattenbury, 27.

¹⁷⁸ i.e. "make real," rather than "come to understand."

To every faithful heart.¹⁷⁹

On of the most distinctively Trinitarian hymns in Wesley's collection is No. 75 in Rattenbury's edition.

Father, the grace we claim,
The double grace, bestow'd
On all who trust in Him that came
By water and by blood.

Jesu, the blood apply,
Thy righteousness bring in,
Us by Thy dying justify,
And wash out all our sin.

Spirit of faith, come down,
Thy seal with power set to,
The banquet by Thy presence crown,
And prove the record true.

Pardon and grace impart;
Come quickly from above,
And witness now in every heart
That God is perfect love.¹⁸⁰

It is the Father's grace that is claimed as the source of that "double grace" of Christ, who came by water and by blood. The dying of Jesus justifies and sanctifies us, but it is only as the Spirit descends to set his seal to the application of Christ's righteousness for the believer, that the eucharistic banquet is crowned. This coming of the Spirit "proves the record true." In other words, the objective record of revelation given to us concerning Christ's redemptive death, and the justifying and sanctifying grace that flow from it, are made efficacious to us - are experienced by us - only through the application of the Spirit's presence and power.

I have dealt with the Trinitarian themes in Wesley's sacramental theology, in part because any revision of the doctrine of holiness along trinitarian lines, will have to provide resources also for a

¹⁷⁹ Rattenbury, 217.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 218. Emphasis mine.

trinitarian spirituality, for a means of appropriating experientially, the saving work of the Triune God. A renewed understanding of sanctifying grace conveyed through sacramental life and piety, would, I believe reinvigorate our tradition in a constructive and spiritually enriching manner. This will involve moving from the individualism of the "bar of decision" type of "altar call" to the communal nature of the Eucharistic feast. Here we sit down together as sisters and brothers at our Father's table, the guests of our Host and Elder Brother Jesus, and through the Spirit anticipate the heavenly banquet.

We turn now to the theme of the Trinity as it appears in several representative theologians of the Wesleyan tradition.

D. Later Wesleyan Resources

Jabez Bunting (1779-1858), became the patriarch of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, in Britain, as it emerged after John Wesley's death as an ecclesiastical organization in its own right. In a sermon on *The Sanctifier and the Sanctified*,¹⁸¹ Bunting refers to Christ as "the Sanctifier" and warns against attributing the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit alone.

Though this work of sanctification is often ascribed in Scripture to the special agency of the Holy Spirit, yet we are not to understand those passages as excluding either the Father or the Son. It is probable that St. Paul refers to the First Person of the Trinity in his prayer for the Thessalonians: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly." And elsewhere we read that Christ is our "sanctification;" and that we are sanctified by faith that is in Him.

The Holy Spirit is given to sanctify us only in consequence of the incarnation, the atonement, the ascension, and intercession of Christ. These mediatorial acts of the Son are the cornerstones of the whole covenant of grace, the whole economy of redemption. He died to procure and lives to dispense the Spirit, by whose communion His grace flows to His mystical Body.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Sermon 34 in *Bunting's Sermons*, 2:117-26 (New York: Carleton and Porter, 1863), cited in Richard S. Taylor, ed. *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, vol. 3 of *Great Holiness Classics* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1985), 51f.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 57-8.

In 1843, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was organized as an outgrowth of abolitionist sentiment among Methodists, and within a year, Luther Lee, formerly a circuit rider in the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was serving as the new movement's Conference President. After the Civil War, he would rejoin the parent church, but not before serving eight years as the editor of the *True Wesleyan*. He also served three years as professor at the Wesleyan Methodist-related Adrian College. His systematic theology, *Elements of Theology*,¹⁸³ published in 1856, contains the following definition of sanctification:

Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Christ, whose blood atonement has power to cleanse from all sin; whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, which is justification, but are washed entirely from its pollution, freed from its power, and are enabled, through grace, to love God with all our hearts, and to walk in His holy commandments blameless.¹⁸⁴

Again we note the references to all three Persons of the Godhead. It is the Holy Ghost who renews our fallen nature, but not in any manner divorced from the blood of Christ's atonement, the efficacy of which provides the power to cleanse from sin. All of this enables us to love and obey God (presumably the Father) with all of our hearts.

William Burt Pope (1822-1903), Canadian by birth, but a resident of England from the age of seven, was British Methodism's most catholic theologian of the period. His *Compend of Theology* was also widely read among American Methodists, being in the Methodist course of study from 1880-89.¹⁸⁵ Richard S. Taylor considers the treatment of "The Methodist Doctrine of Entire Sanctification" found in Pope's *Compendium*¹⁸⁶ to be "a remarkable statement. In all Wesleyan literature there can scarcely be found a more balanced, comprehensive, or perspicuous summary of the unique genius of original Wesleyanism. It provides a plumbline for authenticity."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Luther Lee, *Elements of Theology: An Exposition of the Divine Origin, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity*. New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856.

¹⁸⁴ Luther Lee cited in Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, 94.

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, 137-8.

¹⁸⁶ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology, in three volumes*. 2nd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1880), 3:96-99.

¹⁸⁷ Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, 156-7.

In treating the "means" or "instrumentalities" of sanctifying grace he lists "the truth" [*"Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth* (John 17:7)."] and the sacraments. The latter "seal the covenant of sanctification." As "the word...expressed in act [they] convey the grace of which they are signs."¹⁸⁸ He goes on to assert that it is "the sacred presence of the Holy Trinity in Christ [which] is the means of sanctification, and necessarily of entire sanctification."¹⁸⁹ The prayer of Ephesians 3:19 that believers might be "*filled unto all the fullness of God*" has for its object the indwelling of Christ.¹⁹⁰ The final means of sanctification is given as "the might of divine love: *His love is perfected in us* (1 John 4:12)."¹⁹¹

Pope warns against certain "tendencies to error" in the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification, including the idea that sanctification is not given with the new birth.

[T]here is danger...of forgetting the distinction between sanctification and entire sanctification: as if holiness or consecration to God were a second blessing bestowed at some interval after believing. Its entireness may be called a second blessing, but holiness itself begins the life of acceptance. The Holy Spirit as a sanctifier is given, not after an interval, but when we believe. *In whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance*, as we are children, and, as we are sanctified, *unto the redemption of God's own possession* (Eph. 1:13-14).¹⁹²

Even Daniel Steele (1824-1914), who gave special attention to the work of the Holy Spirit,¹⁹³ insists that the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer from the moment of regeneration,¹⁹⁴ and seems to hold a trinitarian understanding of sanctification.

The work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity in the scheme of salvation is quite definitely stated in the Holy

¹⁸⁸ William Burt Pope, *Higher Catechism of Theology* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, n.d.), 215-18.

¹⁸⁹ Pope, cited in Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, 152..

¹⁹⁰ *Op. Cit.*

¹⁹¹ *Op. Cit.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁹³ See his *The Gospel of the Comforter*. Boston: Christian Witness Co., 1897.

¹⁹⁴ Daniel Steele, "The Spirit's Work in Regeneration," in Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, 254.

Scriptures. The Father originated the plan, the Son by His atoning death provided the means, the blood of the sprinkling, and the Holy Spirit conditionally applies it for the soul's purification. But sometimes the work of the Spirit is ascribed to the Son...[W]hen the Son is spoken of as sanctifying, it is always in a different sense from the Spirit's work of purification.

When Christ is spoken of as our sanctification, it is meant, not that he enters into the hearts of believers and cleanses them but that He provides the purifying medium, His own shed blood, and the sanctifying agent, the Holy Spirit. The Son's work is external, the Spirit's is internal...the work of the one is objective that of the other is subjective; the one sanctifies provisionally and the other effectually.¹⁹⁵

The Nazarene theologian, H. Orton Wiley (1877-1961), deals with the doctrine of the Trinity in the first volume of his *Christian Theology*. His treatment of the subject is thoroughly Wesleyan.

The doctrine of the Trinity is in the Bible as humid air. The cool wave of reflection through which the Church passed, condensed its thought and precipitated what all along had been in solution. While there are philosophical views of the Trinity, yet philosophical analysis probably never could have produced, and certainly did not produce it. It arose as an expression of experience, and that too, of an experience which was complex and rich...It was religion before it was theology, and in order to be effective must again become in each of us, religion as well as theology.¹⁹⁶

In his treatment of the "offices" of the Holy Spirit, Wiley speaks of the Paraclete as "the Executive of the Godhead on earth" serving as the agent both of the Father and the Son. This does not mean that the Spirit is absent from the ontological being of God. He still enjoys eternal communion with the Father and the Son in heaven."¹⁹⁷ In dealing with "the divinely appointed means and agencies" of entire sanctification, Wiley speaks of the role played by each person of the

¹⁹⁵ Steele, "Christ Our Sanctification," in Taylor, 271.

¹⁹⁶ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1952), I:393-94.

¹⁹⁷ H. Orton Wiley, "The Dispensation of the Holy Spirit," in Taylor, *Leading Wesleyan Thinkers*, 376.

Godhead. The originating cause of sanctification is the love of God, the meritorious or procuring cause is the blood of Jesus Christ, and the efficient cause or agency is the Holy Spirit. He goes on to list "truth" as the efficient cause, and "faith" as the conditional cause. "When, therefore, we speak of sanctification as being wrought by the Father, or by the Son, or by the Holy Spirit; whether we speak of it as by blood, or through the truth, or by faith, we are referring merely to the different causes that enter in to this great experience."¹⁹⁸

We have earlier noted that Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, one of the most gifted and insightful of the holiness movement theologians, somewhat surprisingly, did not draw heavily on trinitarian categories in her major work, *A Theology of Love*. She does, however, briefly deal with the subject there, in a passage quite characteristically Wesleyan in its approach.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a clue to the vastly complex and intriguing social nature of the one God. [D]octrines [such as the virgin birth, the two-natures Christology, and the Trinity] are not themselves revelation but attempts to rationalize revelation. There is no better source of information about God and Christ than the Scriptures themselves, which are windows open toward, not shutters against, light. The doctrines of the Virgin Birth and the Trinity are intellectually incomprehensible, but the person of Christ is knowable and God is real in total experience.¹⁹⁹

In an article on the theological roots of Wesleyanism's understanding of the Holy Spirit, Wynkoop maintains that the difference between Wesley and the holiness movement which bears his name lies along ontological lines. Wynkoop points out that Wesley taught the essential oneness of God, accepting the biblical distinctions between the persons of the Trinity without trying to explain them. He also seemed to accept what is now understood as the Hebrew anthropology, that is, that the human person is a unity of personality, rather than a trichotomous or dichotomous conglomerate of ontological centers.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Wiley, *Christian Theology*, II: 478-89.

¹⁹⁹ Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 219.

²⁰⁰ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, "Theological Roots of Wesleyanism's Understanding of the Holy Spirit," in *WTJ* 14:1 (Spring, 1979), 78.

None of us can divorce ourselves from our context to be a "holy" person..."Souls" have no reality apart from the whole person. Grace pervades all that a person is, never merely a part of him. Theology, to Wesley, should reach all that God is in His redemptive relationship to humanity and all that humanity is in its relationships.

Wesley understood God's grace as operating in the context of human experience - in history...To him...crisis experiences were only valid and meaningful in the context of the on-going process of human development. He was very concerned about those who trusted in "experiences" as such, which were not an integral part of the rational, moral life.

Forgiveness is not merely a personal event but the entrance into a community in which forgiveness is the prevailing atmosphere. It is a social connection as well as a personal event. Perfection of love is only "individual" as it becomes the expression of new relationship under the Lordship of Christ.²⁰¹

Wynkoop contrasts this communitarian vision of Wesleyan holiness with what she calls "the apocalyptic interpretation of Christian experience."²⁰²

In this view, crisis experience "happens" but cannot be made to mesh with life prior to the experience...What God does *to* us, or *in* us, is thought to be a divine invasion cutting across our existence as rational beings, unrelated to our understanding and responsibility, resulting either in a new status in God's sight, or in some mutation of human nature below the level of consciousness. The Keswick terms, *surrender* and *possessed by* are favored over the very active terms, "present your bodies," "yield your members," and "put off" and "put on." In the apocalyptic view the human nature is not considered a real asset to the life of Christian grace, in stark contrast to the biblical and Wesleyan understanding of the full need of the whole human person to be the bearer of grace to the world.

In holiness circles (wherever this view prevails) these invasions result in subterranean personality mutations which should produce, automatically, holy character, the graces of the Spirit and the removal of distracting emotional disturbances. The call

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 82-4.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 84.

to holiness, in this context, is to begin the search for a specific kind of experience. It is not the pilgrimage toward love which engages the whole of a person's moral relations...but a disattachment from these relations - a moving inward toward oneself - the kind of separation discouraged by Jesus and Paul, at least.²⁰³

Wynkoop maintains that the holiness movement has committed two ontological errors - tritheism in theology and trichotomy in anthropology. "[T]he extreme ontological distinction between the Persons of the Godhead [issues] in a practical tritheism which] makes it possible to say that Christ is our Savior and the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier."²⁰⁴ To this ontological differentiation is added a trichotomist anthropology which "makes it necessary to suppose that the multiple entities in human persons account for the need for multiple works of grace to achieve entire sanctification. This is probably behind the idea of *discontinuity* of grace in relation to the 'works' of grace."²⁰⁵ It seems apparent that only a re-examination of the doctrine of the Trinity, both in its classical and contemporary forms, can help us to overcome such ideas.

Proposal for a Trinitarian Theology of Christian Perfection

In this final section I would like to offer a brief proposal for a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection from the standpoint of one who belongs to the Wesleyan tradition and who seeks to advance that tradition through a reverent critique of its strengths and weaknesses. The movement of the proposal will proceed from tritheistic to trinitarian categories in soteriology, from a stress on individualism to a stress on community in ecclesiology, and from an apocalypticist to a sacramentalist vision of spirituality. I will then indicate the way in which presently held Wesleyan categories of sanctification may be reevaluated, and either rejected, or retained with modifications.

A. From Tritheism to Trinitarianism in Soteriology

A tendency toward tritheism continues to haunt preaching and devotional writing in Wesleyan holiness circles, and in popular

²⁰³ *Op. Cit.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁰⁵ *Op. Cit.*

evangelicalism broadly. The debate among Wesleyan thinkers over whether or not pneumatological and pentecostal terminology ought to be used in a Wesleyan theology of sanctification is one indicator of the failure to resolve the tension in the holiness movement between the two driving forces of its history - its rootedness in the classical Christian trinitarianism of the Anglican tradition, and the tritheistic tendencies always present in "second blessing" revivalism. To polarize toward the first of these tendencies could lead to a focus on the ontological being of God which would throw into shadow the salvific economy of God appropriated in Christian experience. To polarize toward the latter tendency would be to perpetuate that tritheism which thinks of the Father primarily as "God," the Son as our "Savior," and the Spirit as our "Sanctifier," thus failing to see that salvation is the work of the Holy Trinity. The Wesleyan-holiness tradition must continue to call persons to the fullness of life in God, but it must leave behind any concept of a something or a someone "added on" to the divine life.

B. From an Individualist to a Communitarian Ecclesiology

In the development of a trinitarian theology of Wesleyan perfectionism, it will be the dynamic relation between the persons of the Trinity which provides the model for human relations in the Church and in the world. A focus on these relations in the *oikonomia* of salvation will help us to develop models of sanctifying grace which bear the marks of the kind of outgoing, others-focused love, the antithesis of which has often marred the witness of "holiness" Christians.

Sin and holiness are both relational terms. Sin is a relational malfunction, rather than a substance clinging to the soul. Its "removal," therefore, is not an ontological, but a relational question. To be cleansed from sin is not to be ushered into some kind of new order of being, but rather, to become fully human, completely open to God and to others in outgoing, self-forgetting, love. The trinitarian relations within the Godhead whereby the Father gives his Son for the life of the world, the Son gives glory to his Father through unstinting, though costly obedience, and the Holy Spirit is given to glorify, not himself, but both the Father and the Son, provide the model for our relationships to others. Believers, in their relationships with one another, and with the world, are caught up into the "ecstatic" fellowship of the Divine Family. The fully sanctified believer is one

who shares with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in an "others-focused" orientation.

C. From Apocalypticism to Sacramentalism in Spirituality

The "apocalyptic" model of sanctification tends to divorce sin from its relational components and to conceive of persons as being acted upon unilaterally by God, in the context of essentially individual experiences. Calls to move on from salvation in Christ to the higher ground of the Spirit-filled life abound. Behind such calls is a desire for the kind of "subterranean personality mutations" which constitute the appeal of the apocalyptic model of spirituality.²⁰⁶

An alternative to this model is the recovery of sacramental piety in the Wesleyan tradition. The place of the means of grace in the appropriation of Christian experience has been given too little attention in Wesleyan-holiness circles. If the desired blessing of full sanctification may be received by simple faith, in a moment of divine inbreaking at an altar of prayer, what need is there for a sacramental piety? Yet for John and Charles Wesley, the trinitarian nature of baptismal grace provided a foundation for all subsequent religious experiences, and the work of the Trinity at the eucharistic feast provided the context for the development of the experience of justifying and sanctifying grace throughout the believer's life. The altar has been variously conceived of as a bar of decision, as a mourner's bench, or as a Bethel of promise-making. Such motifs are essentially individualist in orientation. However useful the "altar-call" as a means of grace may have been in the recent history of the church, it must be remembered that it is of very recent origin, and lacks any divine institution. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, on the other hand, have been coextensive with the life of the Christian Church since its inception. The communal acts of being received into the household of God through the waters of baptism, and of sitting at Table to break bread together in that same household, provide a better locus of sanctifying grace in a trinitarian spirituality, than does the present apocalyptic model of the altar call.

D. The Distinction between Subsequence and Secondness

²⁰⁶ Wynkoop, *Theology of Love*, 84.

Wesleyan theology must maintain that salvation²⁰⁷ is the work of God the Holy Trinity. To conceive of the Spirit as acting unilaterally in a second work of grace conceived of as an "add-on" to salvation is to blunder into tritheism. The experience of the fullness of sanctifying grace should not be divorced from the context of the *ordo salutis* as a whole. However, entire sanctification may continue to be thought of as a subsequent experience to the new birth. This is so, because the initiatory stages of Christian life, by definition, form a beginning point, rather than a culminating point in the believer's journey. But such subsequency must be seen as the result of an increasing openness to God, a restoration of the image and likeness of God, conceived of in relational terms, rather than as a superhuman change which elevates one to some higher order of being.

While the retention of "subsequence" in a Wesleyan theology of sanctification makes sense, it might be best to leave behind the idea of a "second" work of grace. To speak of "first" and "second," is to be overly optimistic about the fullness of human capacity to appropriate divine grace in two saving "moments." It also tends to place limits on God who is thought of as dealing with his children in two works of grace only, when a relational soteriology would make way for perhaps many more than two experiences of sanctifying grace. In this way, the immediacy of the call to decisive acts of consecration is retained, without the self-defeating triumphalism that leads to the spiritual complacency involved in the reception of a "first" and "second" blessing, upon the foundation of which believers may mistakenly think they may now rest.

E. The Distinction between Sanctifying Grace as a Subsequent Work of Grace, and Christian Perfection as the *Telos* of Being.

It might also be best to make a distinction between the reception of sanctifying grace in subsequent experience, and Christian perfection. There may be many experiences of sanctifying grace, each an aspect of Christian perfection, and complete in its own way, and yet propelling the believer forward to the full *telos* of her or his being in the fullness of the Divine life of the Trinity.

F. The Distinction Between Holiness as Freedom from Depravity and Holiness as Perfect Love

²⁰⁷ Understood broadly as including prevenient, justifying, sanctifying, and perfecting grace.

The focus on holiness as the perfection of love, a familiar idea for Wesleyans, is fully retained in a trinitarian theology of Christian perfection. The relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, provide the model for this love. Sanctification is not the removal of any sub-stratum of depravity adhering to the soul, but the restoration of the human person to the divine intention - full and unhindered love to God and to other persons. Since sin is not a "thing" with an independent ontological existence of its own, it cannot be "removed." On the other hand, if sin is a relational malfunction, the healing of that malfunction lies in a restoration of the person to unhindered relationships of love.

A trinitarian theology of Christian perfection will stress the whole human personality as the dwelling place of the entire God-head. A "Spirit-filled" person is a "God-indwelt" person, and as such is a "partaker of the divine nature."²⁰⁸ There are not "classes" of elites within the family of God, such as "Spirit-filled," and "not Spirit-filled," but only "children," "young men," and "fathers."²⁰⁹ All have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, residing within, though not all have been as fully transformed by that indwelling as others. The whole of the life of God is given to the whole of the Church - one family in the household of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

²⁰⁸ 2 Peter 1:4.

²⁰⁹ 1 John 2:12-14.