From Societies to Society:
The Shift from Holiness to Justice in the Wesleyan Tradition

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Abstract

John Wesley's phrase "social holiness" is frequently invoked in contemporary Wesleyan/Methodist discourse, though often with vague and even misinformed reference to the way in which Wesley himself understood it. This problem is compounded by the fact that "social holiness" appears only once in Wesley's published writing, the *Preface* to the 1739 edition of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Contemporary commentators typically utilize "social holiness" either as a synonym for "social justice" or as one half of the broader phrase, "personal and social holiness." Both of these contemporary usages are revealed to contain significant conceptual problems when the framework in which Wesley's own use of the term is examined, not the least of which is a distortion of the nature of sanctification within the Wesleyan *via salutis*. This essay argues that "social holiness" should properly be understood to represent the *environmental context* in which "holiness of heart and life" is manifest in the Christian life. It thereby seeks to elucidate a key theological concept within the Wesleyan tradition to better inform that tradition's practitioners in the present.

Introduction

The Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA)celebrated its 100th anniversary in April of 2007. In the days prior to that event, a bishop of the United Methodist Church spoke about Methodism's historic involvement in

justice ministries in a newspaper interview. Responding to a question about her hopes for the "Voices of Faith" conference organized to celebrate the centenary of the MFSA, the bishop commented,

> My hope is that we'll reground ourselves in social holiness. As United Methodists, our commitment to social holiness is part of who we are—it's not an option. There are many people all across our denomination who are silently and quietly working on issues of justice, and this gathering should be a great celebration of their work. I also hope we'll spend time connecting with each other, sharing what we've learned and what the Spirit is holding up for us as a vision for social justice in this day and age.[1]

Two significant terms bookend these interview comments: *social holiness* and *social justice.* The bishop's use of them is exemplary of a broader tendency within Methodism, where the terms have come to be seen by many as synonymous. That is, both academic and ecclesiastical discourses within Methodist circles tend to treat the peculiarly Wesleyan term out of the pair (social holiness) as interchangeable with the term that exists as a more widely used category in contemporary ethics (social justice). By fusing the two concepts into one, United Methodists—like the bishop quoted above—are able to locate their denomination's ethical commitments within a Wesleyan theological vocabulary.[2] And while this particular episcopal leader represents just one branch of present-day Methodism, her views are reflective of a similar desire by other branches of the Wesleyan tradition to ground the contemporary ethics of their churches in a Wesleyan framework and idiom.[3]

[1] Bill Fentum, "Q&A: Regrounding Methodism in Social Holiness," Interview with Bishop Minerva Carcaño, *United Methodist Reporter* (Dallas, TX), 6 April 2007. Available online at http://www.umportal.org/article.asp?id=1987 (accessed 11 January 2011).

[2] See, e.g., Donna T. MortonStout and Robert J. MortonStout, "'No Holiness But Social Holiness': New Theological and Mission Statements Reflect John Wesley's Advocacy for the Poor and Zeal for Social Justice," *Christian Social Action* 1/7 (July/August 1988): 15–17. Indicative is the statement where MortonStout and MortonStout write, "From its beginnings the Wesleyan movement has been clearly marked by its social outlook. Wesley noted that there 'is no holiness but social holiness.' His advocacy for the poor and defenseless, his zeal for justice, and his awareness of human frailty and sin rankled many self-satisfied people of the day" (15).

[3] An example of this tendency amongst Nazarenes can be seen in J. Kenneth Grider, *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980), where Grider refers to a "period of renewed zest for social holiness" in [cont.]

There is a problem with the synonymous identification of the two terms, however, in that they actually have very different origins. When the phrase "social holiness" rolled off of the pen of John Wesley in the 1730s, he meant something quite different than did Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio when he began to speak of *giustizia sociale* in the 1840s. And this fact gives rise to a question: regardless of whatever current usage happens to be, *should* social holiness and social justice be treated as equivalent in meaning and interchangeable in use? Answering that question is a task for historical investigation. It requires an examination of the origin and context of both concepts. It also calls for a consideration of how and why they came to be identified together, which can perhaps best be framed by asking why the older, Wesleyan concept of social holiness was eventually superseded by the newer concept of social justice. Finally, it calls for a reasoned argument of whether anything is lost by allowing the terms to be merged into one—an issue that has to do with the function of tradition within a religious community.

The present essay engages the set of issues around social holiness and social justice, arguing that the two terms should not be used synonymously and that the original meaning of social holiness must be preserved in order for Wesleyan soteriology to be considered whole. The route to this conclusion will not turn out to be as straightforward as it might at first seem, however. Social holiness is a term that has gained popularity among Methodists as the desire to become more acquainted with the Wesleyan tradition has increased in recent years, and in the process it has been used more broadly than simply as a synonym for social justice. One other main use of the term in contemporary Wesleyan/Methodist discourse has been as the partner to the concept of *personal*

relation to the social action of the Holiness movement (33). Writing from the tradition of the Salvation Army, the tendency can be seen in David Guy, "John Wesley: Apostle of Social Holiness," in John Stacey, ed., *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Epworth Press, 1988), where Guy writes that Wesley's conception of religion moved persons to "press on towards that holiness which was to be always 'social holiness'" (117). In this instance, it should be noted that Guy's essay represents one of the more nuanced approaches to framing social holiness as an equivalent term to practices of social justice and/or social outreach. Guy attempts to avoid potential anachronism by observing that "Wesley did not set out to alter the structures of society, nor did he view himself as a social reformer, except in the sense that every evangelist hopes to see a changed society through changed people. But that he expected a practical result cannot be doubted" (117). Regardless, Guy's framing of social holiness in the essay does suggest that the concept is to be identified with those activities commonly understood to represent social justice efforts in the present, pointing to an implied social holiness/social justice equivalency.

holiness, with the two usually appearing together as *personal and social holiness*.[4] Here, the intention is typically to represent the breadth of Wesley's view of holiness in general, with the aspect of holiness that is considered "social" identified with social outreach ministries that are inclusive of social justice but also contain all other forms of ministry and discipleship that go beyond the spiritual life of the individual. Social holiness when paired with personal holiness thus refers either to socially oriented *acts* of ministry or to a particular *mode* of social orientation reflective of such acts. In either case, the accompanying term—personal holiness—is meant to signify individualized acts of devotion or the individual faith of a person towards God.[5] A crucial point here is that the questions that pertain to the synonymous use of social holiness and social justice are equally applicable to the paired use of personal and social holiness. Thus the task before the present essay remains the same in each instance.

The aim of this essay, then, is to examine the Wesleyan concept of social holiness in its original historical context and to analyze comparatively the present-day uses of the term as a way to determine their appropriateness. The part of this task that includes a comparative analysis must be done with respect to both of the ways the term is commonly employed today: the social holiness/social justice equivalency and the "personal and social holiness" formula. Moreover, the results of this examination will reveal something fairly startling considering the unselfconscious way social holiness is typically invoked in contemporary discourse. As I will show, social holiness should be *neither* treated as synonymous with social justice *nor* paired with personal holiness. Indeed, social holiness should be properly understood as the key Wesleyan concept that

[4] See, e.g., Thom White Wolf Fassett, "A Return to the Genius of Wesley: 'May we joyously demonstrate the power of love through personal and social holiness,'" *Christian Social Action* 11/10 (November 1998), where Fassett writes, "The central meaning of our Christian experience in the Wesleyan context rests on our understanding of 'holiness.' We hear John Wesley speak of personal holiness and social holiness. Perfection is the combination of these two powerful spiritual dynamics" (10).

[5] Within the United Methodist Church, the form that this usage takes that the average church member would encounter most often is found in the *United Methodist Hymnal*, which includes two subdivisions of hymns for "Personal Holiness" and "Social Holiness" which group hymns according to the tendency described here. See *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 395–450. Further examples of this usage are cited in the relevant section of the essay below. On the other hand, the short description of social holiness in the UMC's *Book of Discipline* offers an account of the concept much closer to that which will be argued in this essay. See *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2008*, ¶101 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 47–48.

names the environmental context in which sanctification is manifest among a community of believers. It is not a term related to social ethics but rather to soteriology. That it has been so misunderstood in recent years is unfortunate, for the loss of its original meaning has meant a loss of the full understanding of present salvation in the Wesleyan *via salutis* itself. My hope is that this essay might provide a starting point from which to reclaim the full concept of social holiness through a disciplining of language within the Wesleyan tradition.

One final note rounds out this introduction: It must be recognized at the outset that language does change over time. A part of my argument here is over the right use of a certain vocabulary, and it could easily be retorted that the terms in question have simply changed in their core meaning. That they have is plainly true. But when social holiness is invoked in the present (either by itself or in any of the ways already described), it is invoked as a *Wesleyan* concept. The authority it is meant to carry is an authority based on the stature of John Wesley within the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition, his practical theology, and his example in ministry. That means that the question of the disciplined use of the concept is truly at the heart of the matter, so long as those of us who use it claim to use it in its Wesleyan sense. In that sense, this essay is aimed at the critical retrieval of one aspect of a tradition that is embraced with great energy but often not read with great care.[6]

Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio and the Concept of Social Justice

We began with an example of the synonymous identification of social holiness with social justice. Because the language of social justice postdates John Wesley's own life, an understanding of its origins represents the best first step toward untangling the Gordian knot of present-day uses of social holiness. As a term and concept, social justice was, in fact, first given articulation by nineteenth-century Jesuit priest and political theorist Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio (1793–1862). Taparelli's life and career overlap with a period of history that witnessed massive shifts in European social life via revolutions both democratic

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[6] I offer this final point in the introduction as a way to point out that my work in this essay is not intended to be an exercise in "Wesleyan scholasticism" but is rather an effort to shed light on operative theological concepts within a particular tradition as a way of better informing that tradition's practitioners in the present. The thorough analysis of a historical tradition with respect to the way that tradition interprets and utilizes its recognized sources of authority is, as I understand it, a key task of historical theology. I will thus return to this point as a way to bring the argument full circle in the essay's conclusion.

and industrial. Born during the turmoil of the French Revolution, the Italian Taparelli witnessed the industrialization of European nations throughout the first half of the nineteenth century together with the widespread social displacement and urbanization of life that followed. In his mature years, the Democratic Revolutions of 1848 convulsed the European continent and presaged the great nationalist wars of the following century.[7] The philosophical and economic discourse of the time was no less contested than the political arena it influenced, with the emergent liberal and socialist movements providing the intellectual grist for the sociopolitical mill of the period's developments.

Taparelli's place in this remarkable period of history was as a Roman Catholic political theorist who viewed the upheavals around him with a troubled skepticism. He rejected both the classical liberal and the socialist points of view, seeing the former as based in an "egoistic individualism" and the latter as promoting a "grasping statism."[8] In Taparelli's view, both liberals and socialists are "economic naturalists" whose theories depend on an understanding of individual and society in materialistic terms apart from any consideration of a unitary human good derived from God. A recent interpretation by historian Thomas C. Behr explains Taparelli's critique of both positions as basing their views of society on "an assumption of the radical autonomy of the individual and of the subjective pursuit of 'pleasure as the supreme law of nature, guiding men to their happiness.'"[9] Taparelli was repulsed by both of them, identifying their flawed political and economic approaches as rooted in the same mistaken anthropology. Liberals would "rely on greater liberty to empower the poor to enrich themselves and defend their own interests" while socialists preferred to "insist on the use of state power to redistribute wealth in pursuit of equality between classes," but in the case of both groups, their "mistaken anthropology,

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[7] For an introductory overview of the intellectual, socioeconomic, and political movements leading up to the 1848 Revolutions in Europe, see Peter Jones, *The 1848 Revolutions*, second edition (London and New York: Longman, 1991). A more detailed analysis can be found in William L. Langer, *Political and Social Upheaval, 1832–1852* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

[8] Thomas C. Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice: Rediscovering the Origins of a 'Hollowed' Concept,'" *Social Justice in Context* 1 (2005), 7. The quoted terms are Behr's own. While there has been little English-language scholarship on Taparelli, the recent work of Behr stands out in bringing Taparelli's views to light. My analysis will thus follow his own. In addition to the articles cited herein, see Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and the Nineteenth-Century Neo-Scholastic 'Revolution' in Natural Law and Catholic Social Sciences" (Ph.D diss., SUNY Buffalo, 2000).

[9] Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice," 7.

their fractured conception of human nature, renders [such] naturalist social science congenitally defective."[10] So whereas liberals and socialists took diverging paths to an economic future, what the two philosophical positions shared in terms of underlying principles was, to Taparelli, much more consequential.

The conception of the individual body and the body politic in essentially materialistic terms is a notion the origin of which Taparelli pegged on Descartes. The historical accuracy of this particular version of Western philosophical and cultural history has been long debated, of course, but accuracy in this instance is less important than what Taparelli believed to be the case: namely, that the rationalist dualism of mind and body arising from Descartes' epistemological investigations set Western philosophy after him in both its rationalist and empiricist branches on a quest to find a self-sufficient conception of the good for human life and society. The Cartesian rejection of the Christianized Aristotelian, hylomorphic anthropology of the medieval Scholastic tradition, which conceived of a united body and soul and an understanding of society as itself organically united in its members, was accepted by Descartes' philosophical successors thereafter all the way down to Taparelli's day. Such a rejection removes the role of the divine from the social equation, so that all that is left are bodies added up to a body politic. And it is in this conception, at once anthropological and societal, that leads in Taparelli's view to disastrous results for politics and society.[11] Without a proper metaphysics, the broadest view of the good ultimately becomes reduced to a level no greater than that of the individual and the individual's perceptions about what is good for himself. The potential consequences are not hard to imagine: personal acquisitiveness and an endless desire for self-gain and self-aggrandizement. In such a scenario, there simply could be no rationally coherent account of the good; the various philosophical options would be dependent on the internal and subjective criteria of their own particular systems, and the lack of any rationally defensible *objective* vision for human and social good within these options could only lead to negative consequences for actual social life. For Taparelli, both liberalism and socialism amount to quixotic philosophical proposals that depend on "imposing arbitrary hierarchies of value, and at the cost of disorder across the political,

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[10] Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice," 7.

[11] Behr, "Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio, S.J. (1793–1862) and the Development of Scholastic Natural-Law Thought as a Science of Society and Politics," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 6/1 (Spring 2003):100–102.

economic, and moral-cultural spheres."[12] Sociopolitical disorder would not be the end of the troubles, either, because disorder would itself lead to the "centralization and idolatry of the state" as the members of society sought some recourse from the social chaos that would otherwise obtain. It was a danger which Taparelli believed was being played out in the politics of his own day.

In place of the philosophical options *du jour*, Taparelli was convinced that a truly coherent account of the good depends on an understanding of human being and human society as derived from a providential God.[13] He proposed instead a retrieval of Thomistic natural law theory couched in the social environment of his own time. This proposal is advanced in Taparelli's magnum opus, *Theoretical Treatise on Natural Right Based on Fact* (1840–43), as well as in essays contributed to the journal *Civiltà Cattolica* from 1850 to 1862.[14] In his work, Taparelli offers a vision for European social life grounded in a model of the constitution of society as intended by God, whereby larger societies at the level of the nation-state should be considered as "protarchies," which exist as the conglomeration of a complex web of smaller societies called "deutarchies" and even smaller intermediary associations termed "consortia."[15] At a level greater than that of the protarchic society is the "etnarchia," a more generalized (but no less important) concept of the common fraternity of all peoples (i.e., mankind or humanity as grouped into their various protarchies).[16] None of these social levels exist independently of one another but rather cohere as an organic expression of the whole body politic.

Two underlying principles help to define the interactions and duties of the intermediary associations within the protarchy. The first is the *principle of*

[12] Behr, "Luigi Taparelli's Natural Law Approach to Social Economics," *Journal des Economistes et des Etudes Humaines* 13/2 (2003): 6–7.

[13] See ibid., where Behr writes, "For Taparelli, the starting point in economics, as it is in ethics generally, is the first question of the Catholic catechism: Why did God make us? According to Taparelli . . . one cannot separate natural law ethics from theistic teleology and a faith in a 'supreme Artisan'" (9). The Thomistic natural law alternative of Taparelli's neo-Scholasticism is described below.

[14] Taparelli was instrumental in the creation of the *Civiltà Cattolica* journal and influenced Catholic social thought of the late nineteenth century through his essays that appeared in it over the last years of his life. For the place of Taparelli among the influential figures associated with *Civiltà Cattolica*, see Dora Guerrieri, "The Attitude of the *Civiltà Cattolica* on the Italian Question, 1866–1870," *Catholic Historical Review* 34/2 (July 1948): 154–56.

[15] Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice," 10.

[16] Behr, "Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio, S.J. (1793–1862)," 104.

subsidiarity, which refers to "the rights of social groupings, within their just relationship, organized toward the common good."[17] These social groupings, or intermediary associations, have the natural right to associate for their own ends, but those ends are always understood as aiming toward the common good of the larger protarchic society. The second underlying principle in Taparelli's vision is that of *solidarity*.[18] Solidarity refers to the natural duty of subsidiary societies to act for the good not only of themselves but also for the other individuals and groups within the social commonwealth. Thus, subsidiarity and solidarity name both rights and duties of a society's intermediary associations, which Behr neatly describes as follows: "The *right* to associate is governed by the principles of subsidiarity. The *duty* of association is governed by the principles of solidarity."[19] Fundamental to these principles is the notion that intermediary associations are given a maximum degree of liberty by the governing authority of the state within society, so that they can pursue their ends in freedom while guided by a strong understanding of the common good.

From this natural law grounding, Taparelli's expression of *social justice* as a virtue concept then follows (as described by Behr):

> Social justice is both a norm and a habit—a social virtue embodied in the political, legal, and cultural institutional conditions obtaining in a given society—of promoting the common good by encouraging the free exercise of the rights of persons and particularly of the intermediary associations they freely form to pursue their own good, according to the complimentary principles of solidarity and subsidiarity.[20]

[17] Tapraelli originally terms the principle of subsidiarity as "hypotactic right" (*dritto ipottatico*). Taparelli's concept would be developed and later articulated within the Roman Catholic social teaching of the late nineteenth century, and Behr prefers to use the later language of subsidiarity picked up and utilized within Catholic thought. See Behr, "Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio, S.J. (1793–1862)," 104–105.

[18] Taparelli's original term is *sociality*, which Behr identifies as the direct forerunner of the later Catholic concept of solidarity. As with subsidiarity, this second tenet of Taparelli's social theory was incorporated and developed in later Catholic teaching. Behr prefers to use solidarity in his analysis of Taparelli, presumably to avoid confusion over the similar terms. See Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice," 9–10; cf. Behr, "Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio, S.J. (1793–1862)," 106–109.

[19] Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice," 10; italics added.

[20] Ibid., 9. Behr offers nuanced descriptions of Taparelli's view of social justice elsewhere. See, e.g., Behr, "Luigi Taparelli on the Dignity of Man," an essay delivered at [cont.]

Importantly, the language of "social virtue" carries weight in Taparelli's concept of social justice as a whole, for the role of government is not to direct the actions of its intermediary associations but rather to ensure that the necessary conditions exist whereby they can pursue the ends for which they exist with excellence of form and action, and with a maximum degree of liberty.[21]

It is Taparelli's work, then, forged in the midst of Europe's nineteenth-century social, political, and economic upheavals, that has bequeathed the concept of social justice to the discourse of our own time. Clearly, not all those who use the language of social justice today do so in the manner that Taparelli does.[22] A charitable reading of contemporary social justice commentators can, however, posit significant connections. The church itself is one of the intermediary associations conceived by Taparelli as constitutive of the larger protarchic society, and insofar as the church's work and witness are aimed at pursuing the good of others and the whole social order, they aim towards the social virtue that Taparelli was at pains to articulate. Less clear is whether social justice in the present-day understanding is based out of a Thomistic view of society as a truly social organism, and much of the political activism of church-based organizations would likely chafe against Taparelli's deep skepticism of the possibility of

the *Congresso Tomista Internazionale* in Rome (September 21-25, 2003): 1–7. Here Behr writes, "For Taparelli, social justice is not a metaphor, nor the extension of virtue language to anthropomorphized collectives. Social justice is distinct from both commutative and distributive justice, and can be stated succinctly thus: a legal order and normative ideal within a society by which individuals and their various associations are given the maximum range of liberty in pursuit of their proper ends, with a minimum of interference from superior authorities, i.e., only to the extent necessary to orient general activity towards the common good, and governed by the principles of conflicting rights, prudence, and, ultimately, of charity" (2). Cf. Behr, "Luigi Taparelli's Natural Law Approach to Social Economics," *Journal des Economistes et des Etudes Humaines*, 5.

[21] Ibid., 12.

[22] See, e.g., Normand J. Paulhus, "Uses and Misuses of the Term 'Social Justice' in the Roman Catholic Tradition," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15/2 (Fall 1987): 261–82. Paulhus sees Taparelli himself as failing to provide a truly Thomistic account of social justice as intrinsic to the common good and instead sees Taparelli as finally viewing justice as a good extrinsic to society that must then be redistributed to the members of society by way of an act of distributive justice, presumably from the state (269–70). The disagreement this represents with Behr's interpretation of Taparelli as presented above is obvious (see, e.g., Behr, "Luigi Taparelli's Natural Law Approach to Social Economics," 5). One of Paulhus' tasks in his essay is the exploration of whether social justice is a coherent concept at all. Significantly, his work is largely within Roman Catholic thought and he makes only passing reference to the need for further work on social justice as appropriated within Protestantism (274).

justice as enforced by a state apparatus that sees itself as the legal arbiter of the social good.[23] The broader point to be made, though, is simply where modern social justice *as a concept* finds its origin. And from the standpoint of Methodist advocates of social justice as the ethical orientation of Methodism, it is enough to observe that their views derive (however imperfectly) from a tradition that is traced from Taparelli's attempts to provide an alternative to the philo-sophical and economic proposals that gripped his own time.

Holiness in the Theology of John Wesley

From Luigi Taparelli and social justice, the turn to John Wesley and social holiness takes us back in time to the century preceding Taparelli's own. The re-verse chronology indicates, first, that any connection between anything in Wesley's thought and the concept of social justice must be made inferentially rather than directly. Just as Wesley's life (1703–1791) predates the social and economic conditions with which Taparelli was engaged, so too does it predate the concepts Taparelli developed. Even for inference, however, a convincing case would need to be made that the notion of social holiness in Wesley's thought points toward something analogous to the arena of social and politi-cal ethics to which social justice would later become attached. Since we have already noted that the overlapping uses of social holiness include both a synonymy with *social justice* and a paired concept of *personal and social holiness*, our first task with regards to Wesley must be to examine what he meant by holi-ness *per se*. We will then move to investigate particular expressions of holiness identified as "personal" and "social."

[23] The differences between Taparelli's conception of social justice and that intended by contemporary thinkers in a Western European or American framework can be put in bold relief by the realization that liberal democracy—to which Taparelli was opposed—is seen by social justice advocates in the present as the ideal form of government in which to establish the just ordering of society. Thus, whereas Taparelli would have conceived of a perfected society as existing in a harmony mutually reinforced by its constituent inter-mediary associations, the implicit view of social justice advocates in the present sees society as always potentially hostile in its internal constitution with the need to establish "rights" at the level of the individual to protect persons and groups from predatory forces (whether on the part of government, non-governmental institutions, or other individuals). This notion of rights conforms to a conception of distributive justice that, as Behr has argued, is foreign to the neo-Thomistic concept of society as social organism that Taparelli was seeking to articulate.

The concept of holiness is central to Wesley's thought and can be understood in the most fundamental way as the moral attribute of God that is expressive of divine love. As such, it is an attribute in which humans are meant to share as creatures made in the image of God.[24] That they cannot do so under the penalty and power of sin is a central part of the human dilemma, for it is basic to the Christian understanding that holiness is God's desire and command for all his children: "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16; cf. Leviticus 19:2). And yet God makes holiness a possibility despite the guilt and utter dysfunction caused by sin, through the person and work of Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. This possibility comes by the grace of God, which we receive through faith and which mediates pardon from sin's guilt and healing from sin's power.[25] Christ's atoning work in *justification* is that which offers pardon, while it is the work of the Holy Spirit in *sanctification* that brings healing (and thereby makes holiness a reality).[26]

Wesley indicates his understanding of holiness as lying at the heart of Methodist identity in the 1742 apologetic treatise, *The Character of a Methodist*. In it, Wesley defends the activities of the Methodists in England by stating that a Methodist is simply one who "has 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him'; one who 'loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his

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[24] See, e.g., John Wesley, "The New Birth" (1760), ¶I.1, in *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 2 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976—), 188. Wesley comments on the character of humanity created in the moral image of God as that "which, according to the Apostle, is 'righteousness and true holiness' [cf. Ephesians 4:24]. In this image of God was man made. 'God is love:' accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions." Future references to the Bicentennial edition of Wesley's works will be cited as *Works*.

[25] Indeed, Wesley was careful to hold both senses of grace—pardon and power—in tandem. See, e.g., Wesley, "The Witness of Our Own Spirit" (1746), ¶15, in *Works* 1:309, where he speaks of God's grace as both "pardoning love" and "the power of his Spirit." Cf. Richard Heitzenrater's description of grace in the Wesleyan understanding as the "active presence or power of God," in Richard P. Heitzenrater, "God with Us: Grace and the Spiritual Senses in John Wesley's Theology," in Robert K. Johnston, L. Gregory Jones, and Jonathan R. Wilson, eds., *Grace Upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Langford* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 92.

[26] See Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (1765), ¶¶3–4, in *Works* 2:157–58. The best overview of the Wesleyan *via salutis* in this regard is Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books 1994), 157–91.

strength'."[27] For Wesley, those who are inwardly renewed by such holy love will necessarily express it through an outwardly transformed life, a fundamental characteristic of his doctrine of holiness that underlies the oft-repeated phrase, "holiness of heart and life."[28] The progressive transformation of holiness in the life of the Christian believer serves, indeed, as the counterpart to justification in Wesley's soteriology. Whereas the latter signifies a *relative* change in one's status before (and thus relationship with) God, the new birth and the growth in holiness consequent upon it result in a *real* change within the believer by the transforming effect of God's love.[29] This salvific process can also be understood in terms of Christ's righteousness—a righteousness implanted and nurtured in the growth of holiness, just as it had been imputed via the forgiveness and reconciliation of Christ's justifying work.[30]

The two terms *holiness* and *sanctification* are in fact synonymous in Wesley's theology; the telos toward which they point (in this life) is *Christian perfection*, a cleansed and "completed" state wherein not only the penalty but also the power of sin is overcome.[31] Yet even as Wesley is willing to adopt (and to defend!) the language of perfection to describe the teleological character of

[27] Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), ¶5, in *Works* 9:35.

[28] See, e.g., Wesley, "Advice to the People Called Methodists" (1745), ¶2, in *Works* 9:123-124, where Wesley states, "By Methodists I mean a people who profess to pursue . . . holiness of heart and life, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God; who place religion in an uniform resemblance of the great Object of it; in a steady imitation of him they worship in all his inimitable perfections; more particularly in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart and governing the life." Though he does not use the phrase "holiness of heart and life" in the sermon, Wesley's "Circumcision of the Heart" is perhaps the best early example of this core concept in his theology, which frames sanctification according to the virtues of faith, hope, and love. See Wesley, "Circumcision of the Heart" (1733) in *Works* 1:398–414.

[29] See Wesley, "The New Birth" (1760), ¶1, in *Works* 2:187. Cf. Wesley, "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God" (1748), ¶2, in *Works* 1:431–32.

[30] Wesley's articulation of the distinction between *imputed* and *implanted* righteousness can be seen in Wesley, "The Lord Our Righteousness" (1765), ¶II.12, in *Works* 1:458–59. Cf. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 221–23.

[31] See, e.g.,Wesley, "On Perfection" (1784), ¶I.8, in *Works* 3:75. Wesley's view is that perfection is the completion of the renewal of the moral image of God in the soul. As such, he connects perfection with holiness: "'So God created man in his own image' [Genesis 1:27]. Now the moral image of God consists (as the Apostle observes) 'in righteousness and true holiness'. By sin this is totally destroyed. And we can never recover it till we are 'created anew in Christ Jesus'. And this is perfection . . . 'As he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation' [1 Peter 1:15]. According to this [cont.]

holiness/sanctification, he is also insistent that perfection itself is never a static state.[32] He rather understands it to be subject to the same kind of dynamic growth that is a facet of ongoing sanctification from the time of new birth, going so far as to claim at one point that those who are perfect can continue to grow in grace "not only while they are in the body, but to all eternity."[33] The connection between all three terms—holiness, sanctification, and perfection—can be seen in his overlapping treatment of them in his commentary on relevant Scripture passages in the *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (first ed., 1755).[34] In Wesley's understanding, the graced transformation

Apostle, then, perfection is another name for universal holiness—inward and outward righteousness—holiness of life arising from holiness of heart" (¶I.8). On salvation as encompassing freedom from both the penalty and power of sin, see Randy Maddox's description of salvation in Wesley's understanding in its fullness as including deliverance from the penalty of sin (immediately in justification), the plague of sin (progressively in sanctification), and the presence of sin (eschatologically), in Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 143.

[32] Indeed, Wesley understands that one can continue to "grow in grace" after having reached perfection in the sense that the soul is not exhausted by the love of God and can come to an ever-greater knowledge of the Father's love in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a point made early by Wesley even before his soteriology reached its full maturity. See, e.g., Wesley, "Christian Perfection" (1741), ¶I.9, in *Works* 2:104–105.

[33] The statement from Wesley comes from "Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection," written in 1761 and first published in 1763. It was incorporated thereafter in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766). It reads in full, "Q.29. Can those who are perfect grow in grace? A. Undoubtedly they can; and that not only while they are in the body, but to all eternity." See Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 85. On the composition and date of "Farther Thoughts," see Wesley, *Journal* for December 21, 1761, in *Works* 21:345.

[34] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (1755), 12th edition (New York: Carlton & Porter). In commenting on the Apostle Paul's counsel in 2 Corinthians that, having received the promises of God in Jesus Christ, we should "cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1), Wesley writes, "Carrying it to the height in all its branches, and enduring to the end in the loving fear of God, the sure foundation of all holiness" (460). Cf. Wesley's comment on Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 ("For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification") that offers a definitional statement: "*Sanctification*—Entire holiness of heart and life" (529). Wesley brings the three terms (holiness, sanctification, and perfection) neatly together in his comment on Jesus' prayer in John 17:17 ("Sanctify them through the truth: thy word is truth") by stating, "*Sanctify*—Consecrate them by the anointing of thy Spirit to their office, and perfect them in holiness, by means of thy word" (263). Holiness, then is viewed by Wesley as that regenerated state of soul that comes by the activity of the Holy Spirit and admits of continual increase so long as one continues to receive grace [cont.]

implied in the concept of holiness is at its core what the Apostle Paul means in his language of the "faith which worketh by love."[35]

Personal Holiness

There are a number of regular phrases Wesley uses to describe holiness, with "holiness of heart and life" or some variation on it being the most prominent. This bipartite phrasing points to the logic of Wesley's psychology in its needful state and the healing effects of grace received: it is the *will* that needs the fullest rehabilitation from depravity, though the *understanding* requires a graced enlightenment as well.[36] But added to the restoration of the soul's faculties is the quickening of *spiritual senses* that give the Christian an ability of pneumatological apprehension he did not experience previously. The word "heart" serves as the shorthand for this transforming work, with "life" as the term to represent the changed attitudes, habits, and engaged participation in Christian activity that follow. The new *life* arises out of the transformed *heart*, as the (super-) natural consequence of the work of grace upon the soul.[37]

This point bears mentioning with respect to those contemporary commentators on Wesleyan thought at both the academic and popular levels who employ the phrase "personal and social holiness" either as a substitute for "holiness of heart and life" or as a stand-in term for a set of practices generally intended to signify the means of grace (e.g., works of piety and works of mercy, or instituted and prudential means of grace).[38] Given its frequent use and its application to Wesley, it can only be seen as remarkable that Wesley does not

and respond in faith—a dynamic process articulated as a kind of "spiritual respiration" by Wesley elsewhere (cf. Wesley, "The New Birth" [1760], ¶II.4, in *Works* 2:193).

[35] See Wesley's comment on Galatians 5:6 in the *Notes*, where he interprets the Pauline phrase as, "All inward and outward holiness" (Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 484).

[36] I have examined the restoration of the soul's faculties via grace more fully elsewhere. See Andrew C. Thompson, "Outler's Quadrilateral, Moral Psychology, and Theological Reflection in the Wesleyan Tradition," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 46/1 (Spring 2011): 58–70.

[37] And thus Wesley will also at times substitute phrases such as "inward and outward holiness" and "inward and outward righteousness" as synonymous terms for "holiness of heart and life."

[38] Examples abound. For such uses in scholarly works, see Felicia Howell LaBoy, "Personal and Social Holiness: The Sacraments and the Mandate of Christian Community and Economic Development for the Black Church" (Ph.D diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2010); Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation* [cont.]

appear to have ever used the phrase "personal and social holiness" at all. Each term appears on its own in his work—i.e., *personal holiness* and *social holiness*—but never as a paired set.[39] Given that fact, it is crucial to come to an understanding of how he uses the terms separately to discern whether they can or should be used together by those seeking to speak with a Wesleyan theological vocabulary and out of the Wesleyan tradition.

The term "personal holiness" appears a handful of times in Wesley's published works, including the treatises *The Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* and *A Preface to a Treatise on Justification*, the sermon "On the Wedding Garment," and the colorfully titled polemical essay, "A Blow at the Root; or, Christ Stabbed in the House of his Friends." The first two of these are extracts by Wesley from other works and thus are not primarily from his own pen, although Wesley's edited publication of them suggests that the views they contain can at least be taken as endorsed by him. The latter two works are in fact Wesley's own and so express his views more directly. In all four works, where "personal holiness" is used, it is employed as part of a claim about the importance of linking *sanctification* along with *justification* within the doctrine of salvation. That is, in each of these texts and in various ways, Wesley

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in the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), where Matthaei refers to "nurture in the Christian life through acts of piety (personal holiness), and opportunity to practice holy living through acts of mercy (social holiness)" (131); Laceye Warner, "Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition: Practicing the Means of Grace," *Quarterly Review* 23/2 (Summer 2003), where Warner references "practices of personal and social holiness" (161) and describes discipleship formation as "the cultivation of personal piety (personal holiness) and practices of justice (social holiness) by individuals within commu- nities of faith over a lifetime" (169). For an example in a popular commentary by a UM episcopal leader analogous to that of Carcaño cited above, see Sally Dyck, "Heading for the church door? Make sure it's for [the] right reason," *United Methodist Reporter*, 26 March 2010, where Dyck refers to personal and social holiness with reference to the means of grace. Other examples in popular-level ecclesiastical literature include Fassett, "A Return to the Genius of Wesley: 'May we joyously demonstrate the power of love through personal and social holiness'" *Christian Social Action*, 10 (cited above, n.4), and Larry Hollon, "Paving a way out of hell: Our call to social holiness," *United Methodist Reporter*, 26 August 2011.

[39] In my own investigations, the only places where I have found Wesley's pairing of the terms "personal" and "social" are in Wesley's use of the phrase, "social and personal happiness" (Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1745), Part III, ¶IV.14, in *Works* 11:323), and "personal and social happiness" (Wesley, *Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions* (1773), ¶I.6, in vol. 11 of *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, reprint edition [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958], 56). Future references to the Jackson edition of Wesley's works will be cited as *Works* (Jackson).

insists that without the *implanted* righteousness of Christ inhering in the soul of the believer, the *imputed* righteousness of Christ alone will not fulfill Scripture's enjoinder to "that holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Wesley argues this point in the 1790 sermon "On the Wedding Garment," where he writes,

> The righteousness of Christ is, doubtless, necessary for any soul that enters into glory. But so is personal holiness, too, for every child of man. . . . The former is necessary to *entitle* us to heaven; the latter, to *qualify* us for it. Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no *claim* to glory; without holiness we could have no *fitness* for it.[40]

Likewise, the other works that utilize the language of personal holiness all engage the relationship of justification to sanctification with an emphasis on the necessity of the latter.[41] The reason for using the language of *personal* holiness is to distinguish it from the holiness of *God*: it is rather the holiness that is planted and takes root in *persons*. In no case does Wesley pair personal holiness with social holiness as a single combined term. Nor does Wesley aim toward the meaning that contemporary commentators often do, which amounts to a bifurcation of holiness into individual and public guises that are *either* equivalent to distinct "ways of being holy" *or* to concrete acts distinctly individual or social in their expression.

Social Holiness

While Wesley only rarely uses the term "personal holiness" in his published work, he uses "social holiness" in just a single instance—a fact that is perhaps surprising given its prominence in contemporary Wesleyan discourse. That single instance takes place in the *Preface* to the edition of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* published jointly by John and Charles Wesley in 1739. A consideration of the *Preface* can therefore complete our analysis of the Wesleyan theological vocabulary and provide a degree of clarity in regards to the relationship of social holiness to the other terms with which it is often identified.

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[40] Wesley, "On the Wedding Garment" (1790), ¶10, in *Works* 4:144.

[41] See Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, Part III, Section VIII, in *Works* (Jackson) 9:340–41; Wesley, *A Preface to a Treatise on Justification*, in *Works* (Jackson) 10:330–31; and Wesley, "A Blow at the Root; or, Christ Stabbed in the House of his Friends," in *Works* (Jackson), 10:366–67.

The aim of Wesley's *Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems* is two-fold: Wesley is interested in establishing both the theological ground of salvation and the context in which salvation should be understood to be manifest in present life. In both of these concerns, he presents himself as responding to the views of the "Mystic Divines." The group is no more closely identified than the broad category that the term itself suggests, but given Wesley's experience in the years prior to 1739, the mysticism he proceeds to react against is identifiable as that introduced to him by William Law through the influence Law had on Wesley in the early 1730s. It was a relationship that communicated a particular understanding of mysticism to Wesley's mind.[42] As sources dating from Wesley's missionary sojourn in Georgia make clear, he came to view mysticism as a flawed and even dangerous approach to the Christian faith that rejected Scriptural teachings about the importance of the means of grace and the significance of the church in favor of an understanding of divine love as apprehended by human beings in unmediated fashion through the operations of the Holy Spirit.[43]

[42] For the influence of Law on Wesley, see Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725–1735" (Ph.D diss., Duke University, 1972), 170–73 and 300. The particular emphases of mystical works—such as the *Theologica Germanica* or the writing of Madame de Guyon—is less important than the general thrust of mysticism that Wesley eventually took to be communicated by them. Wesley's rejection of that understanding is clear enough in a personal memorandum written on January 25, 1738, onboard the ship he took back to England from Georgia. In it, Wesley recounts various theological influences he has considered and rejected in relation to the soteriology they exhibit, and he saves his most critical remarks for "the mystic writers." While initially attracted to the mystics' "noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion," he reports that he came to reject their teaching as antithetical to Scripture, in particular with regard to their belief that the mystical apprehension of divine love gave "a plenary dispensation from all the commands of God." Wesley indicates that the mystics eventually only deepened his sense of spiritual crisis during this period due to their unanchored view of faith and left him more deeply perplexed as to his own state. He then writes, "Nor can I at this hour give a distinct account how or when I came a little back toward the right way. Only my present sense is this: all the other enemies of Christianity are triflers; the mystics are the most dangerous of all its enemies." The previously unpublished memorandum can now be found in the footnotes of Wesley's *Journal* for January 1738, in *Works* 18:212–13.

[43] Wesley's critical comments in the personal memorandum cited above notwithstanding, his rejection of mysticism earlier on during his time in Georgia is evident from a letter written to his brother Samuel Wesley, Jr., in November of 1736. In it, Wesley remarks, "I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was in the writings of the mystics, under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace" (Wesley, "Letter to the Revd. Samuel Wesley, Jun.," November 23, 1736, in *Works* 25:487).

Wesley's first concern in the *Preface* is to assert an evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone over against the view of divine acceptance on the basis of human merit. In this he sees a sleight of hand on the part of the mystic writers, who denigrate the righteousness of human works only so they can substitute human righteousness on the basis of the internal virtue of the will. Wesley writes, "[Mystics] speak largely and well against expecting to be accepted of God for our virtuous actions; and then teach, that we are to be accepted for our virtuous habits or tempers. Still the ground of our acceptance is placed in ourselves."[44] For Wesley, this perceived distinction fails to properly locate the ground of our acceptance by God in the work of Christ alone. For whether the emphasis is placed on outward human action or inward human virtue, the overarching view remains one of justification originating in human being rather than in Christ. Wesley writes, "The sole cause of our acceptance with God . . . is the righteousness and the death of Christ, who fulfilled God's law, and died in our stead. And even the condition of it is not (as they suppose) our holiness either of heart or life; but our faith alone; faith contradistinguished from holiness, as well as from good works."[45] The context, moreover, of this emphasis on faith in the *Preface* makes it clear that faith itself is not something that human beings can claim as their own; while Wesley describes it as the "condition" for one's acceptance by God, it is in no way to be considered the "cause" which is attributable to Christ's righteousness alone.[46]

The second main point of the *Preface* and the subject to which Wesley devotes the majority of attention is an energetic description of the context of sanctification, which Wesley indicates can only be understood properly once

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[44] Wesley, *Preface to 1739 Hymns and Sacred Poems*, ¶2, in *Works* (Jackson) 14:319.

[45] Ibid., ¶2, in *Works* (Jackson) 14:320.

[46] Cf. Wesley, "Salvation by Faith" (1738), ¶3, in *Works* 1:118, a university sermon preached by Wesley at St. Mary's, Oxford, in the weeks following his experience of assurance at Aldersgate. In seeking to distill the utter giftedness of salvation, Wesley writes, "'By grace', then, 'are ye saved through faith.' Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation." It should, however, be noted that Wesley is at his most "Protestant" during the period in which both "Salvation by Faith" and the *Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems* were published. He offers a more nuanced soteriology in subsequent years (e.g., the landmark 1765 sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation") that does not bifurcate faith and works as radically, and indeed, even in "Salvation by Faith" he speaks "of a faith which is . . . necessarily productive of all good works" (*Works* 1:125). The point here is not to make a comprehensive statement about Wesley's soteriology but rather to examine the structure and content of the *Preface* for the framework in which the concept of social holiness is used within it.

the ground of justification is established. Here Wesley takes aim at the mystics once again, using language that evokes images of St. Antony and the early Desert Fathers. He contends specifically that the mystics' understanding of the *environmental context* of sanctification is badly misguided, or as he puts it, "opposite to that prescribed by Christ."[47] He continues, "[Christ] commands to build up one another. They advise, 'To the desert! to the desert! and God will build you up.'"[48] Recognizing the good of periodic retirement from the world for purposes of prayer or spiritual renewal, Wesley asserts that such a practice is something much different than the sanctification-via-isolation that the mystics teach. "Numberless are the commendations that occur in all their writings, not of retirement intermixed with conversation, but of an entire seclusion from men, (perhaps for months or years) in order to purify the soul," he writes. "Whereas, according to the judgment of our Lord and the writings of his Apostles, it is only when we are knit together that we 'have nourishment from Him, and increase with the increase of God.' Neither is there any time, when the weakest member can say to the strongest, or the strongest to the weakest, 'I have no need of thee.'"[49] In Wesley's characterization, therefore, the mystics' solitary path runs counter to the model of a lived faith in Scripture—both as given by Jesus and, as he makes clear through repeated citations, in other portions of the New Testament as well.[50] This critique of mysticism over the proper context of sanctification, while coming on the heels of his shorter critique over

[47] Wesley, Preface, ¶3, in *Works* (Jackson) 14:320.

[48] Ibid. Capitalization has been retained as the text appears in the Jackson edition of the *Works*.

[49] Ibid. The two Scripture paraphrases that Wesley employs here are taken from Colossians 2:19 and 1 Corinthians 12:21ff., respectively.

[50] The mention of the Scriptural model or pattern as the only acceptable one to be pursued cannot be over-exaggerated as it pertains to Wesley's views on soteriology. Whether he always exegetes Scripture well on matters of either justification or sanctification can be debated, but the fact that Wesley *believed* he was conforming to the biblical witness and that he saw Scripture as the authority of first and last resort on matters of faithful Christian practice is without doubt. In *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), Wesley describes a Methodist as "a Christian, not in *name* only, but in *heart* and in *life*. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written Word." (¶17, in *Works* 9:41). Likewise, in "A Short History of Methodism" (1765), written almost twenty-five years later, Wesley describes himself and his Oxford colleagues in the earliest period of Methodism by stating that their practices had been undertaken with an eye to that which "was bound upon them by their one book, *the Bible*, it being their one desire and design to be downright *Bible Christians*—taking the Bible, as interpreted by the primitive Church and our own, for their whole and sole rule" (¶6, in *Works* 9:368).

the ground of justification, is quite different from it. The former dealt with the basis of the believer's acceptance before God, a soteriological issue that Wesley engages in the *Preface* in the juridical terms often favored by Protestants. The latter critique does not touch on the efficacy of Christ's saving work or the place of faith as the sole necessary condition for acceptance by God. It is rather about the *environmental context* of Christian life in which sanctification can be understood to occur.[51]

Wesley finally drives his argument home by reiterating what he sees as the chief aspects of salvation as covered in the *Preface*—the ground of our acceptance in justification (termed the "foundation") and the proper context of sanctification (called the "manner of building thereon"). Because the mystical understanding of both are so fatally misguided, this can only mean that mysticism's overarching soteriological framework (what Wesley calls "the superstructure") must be seen as catastrophically flawed as well. And in that sense, the mystics' endorsement of human virtue and individualized human striving is really all of one piece, as Wesley contends, "For the religion these authors would edify us in, is solitary religion." He then unleashes a rhetorical torrent, and in it we finally come upon his use of the phrase in question:

> Directly opposite to this is the gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found there. 'Holy solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working

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[51] Here and subsequently in the essay, I use "environmental context" to describe the conceptual character of social holiness. I am drawing the phrase from Ole E. Borgen, who uses it as a way of describing Christian fellowship (or Christian conference) as the instituted means of grace "within which all the other instituted means, as well as other prudential means, may be exercised." See Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Definitive Study of John Wesley's Theology of Worship*, reprint edition (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 119. Originally published, Zurich: Publishing House of the United Methodist Church, 1972. Borgen also briefly connects Christian fellowship with Wesley's mention of social holiness in the *Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems* at another point in his analysis, though he does not specifically utilize Wesley's phrase other than in quoting it (see Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments*, 114–15). The connection between social holiness and environmental context is present in seminal form, however, and my adoption of it is intended as a way to extend Borgen's own use of it along the line he was pointing. A consideration of Christian fellowship/conference as the means of grace most fully embodying social holiness is beyond the bounds of this essay, though it is clearly one of the chief ways the concept could be more fully developed and one of the possibilities to which I allude in the conclusion below.

by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. 'This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also;' and that we manifest our love 'by doing good unto all men; especially to them that are of the household of faith.' And in truth whosoever loveth his brethren, not in word only, but as Christ loved him, cannot but be 'zealous of good works.' He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire of spending and being spent for them.[52]

From this excerpt three points should be noted. First, *social holiness* names the environmental context in which Christians are progressively transformed by grace, which is a fundamentally social one. But the referent to which "social" points is crucial: Wesley's sense of social holiness is of a certain reality of graced fellowship, where men and women come to a fuller knowledge of God-in-Christ together via the change effected when grace is actively received. This use of the adjective is in its original Latin sense of *socialis*, describing those allied together for a common purpose.[53] The implied converse to it is *solitary holiness*, which is the form that holiness takes (by Wesley's account) in mysticism and which sees the means of grace given by God and known in Christian community as ultimately unnecessary and even hindering to the individual's reception of divine love. Wesley not only argues *against* holiness in its solitary form; he asserts that such a holiness simply *does not exist*. The polemical language of holy solitaries/holy adulterers is evidence of the stringency with which Wesley rejects this mystical alternative and, indeed, the extent to which he views it as contrary to the salvation that is found in the New Testament and which is only properly known in the body of Christ knit together as one. Social holiness, then, is the environmental context in which sanctification can possibly occur, reflective of true Christian fellowship in a community that is made

[52] Wesley, *Preface*, ¶5, in *Works* (Jackson) 14:321.

[53] See the entry for *socialis* in P.G.W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, updated with revisions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 1777. In both the adjective (*socialis*) and the noun forms (*societas*), the Latin sense is primarily one of close fellowship or camaraderie rather than with our modern sense of society. The words are related to *socius*, a term for a companion often referring to a comrade or ally in a military sense. A good example of the way Wesley tends to use this term is found in the 1750 sermon, "A Caution Against Bigotry," where he writes that "the unavoidable consequence of any of these differences will be that he who thus differs from us must separate himself with regard to those points from our society. In this respect therefore 'he followeth not us;' he is 'not (as we phrase it) of our church'" (¶II.4, in *Works* 2:70–71).

possible by grace and which is given its content by the shared activities of those who constitute its membership.[54]

The second point to note is that, while social holiness refers foundationally to the environmental context of sanctification, the concrete community that finds its life within that context does not exist as an enclosed sphere separated from the outside world. On the contrary, those who are being transformed in love within the fellowship of Christian community will find themselves motivated to go out into the world and share that love more broadly with those who have not been recipients of grace in the same way.[55] Wesley alludes to this movement of engaged discipleship in the *Preface* when he follows the assertion that social holiness implies that "he who loves God, love his brother also . . . by doing good unto all men; especially to them that are of the household of faith," with the statement that such a person "cannot but be 'zealous of good works.'" Still, the wider context in which the *Preface* is written makes it clear that Wesley's chief interest in describing the concept is that of a *social context* rather than *social action*, thus the conclusion that social holiness itself refers to a certain environment in which holiness is made manifest rather than to the works that

[54] Perhaps the best textual example of Wesley's view on how this "environmental context" takes shape in a Christian community is found in the *Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies* (*Works* 9:69–75). A full description of such a community would need to be made with reference to the efficacy of the means of grace when practiced in community and over time, as conceived within the Wesleyan *via salutis*. Such a description is beyond the bounds of this essay, though see my further reference to such a conception in Wesley's thought below.

[55] This outflowing of social holiness in good works is so closely connected to the transformed life implied by holiness itself that social holiness cannot be properly considered apart from it. This does not, however, mean that the works of mercy (Wesley's term for the engaged Christian activity carried on by persons expressing the love of neighbor) are themselves social holiness properly conceived. Such a notion has been considered by other scholars such as R. George Eli and John A. Newton, though I find that their conclusions conflate social holiness as environmental context (as drawn from the *Preface*) with those prudential means of grace grouped generally under the heading of the works of mercy. For examples of such positions, see Eli, *Social Holiness: John Wesley's Thinking on Christian Community and its Relationship to the Social Order* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), and Newton, "Methodism and the Articulation of Faith: 'No Holiness but Social,'" *Methodist History* 42/1 (October 2003): 49–57. On the other hand, the sense of social holiness as I am describing it is captured quite well in Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 109–113.

sanctified people thereafter pursue.[56] In this sense, a necessary companion to reading the *Preface* is Wesley's 1746 sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount (IV)," where Wesley uses the language of Christianity as a "social religion" and accentuates this orientational quality of the holy life with the examples of the city on a hill and the lamp set on a stand from Matthew 5:14-15 as guiding images.[57] While this sermon text speaks repeatedly of the good works done by a "real Christian," he unmistakably points to the *virtue* of the Christian—couched in the language of meekness, mercifulness, and purity of heart drawn from the Sermon on the Mount—as being mutually reinforced within the Christian community so that it might have a positive influence on the ungodly.[58] As a way of describing the meaning of "society" he utilizes the phrase "living and conversing with other men" in apposite, an indication that he is thinking not of society writ large but of the *societas* found within the fellowship of the religious society.[59]

The third point to be made from Wesley's argument in the *Preface* is that social holiness refers neither to the historically later concept of social justice nor to a counterpart for personal holiness, whether understood as a bifurcated way persons can exhibit holiness or to an individual/public division of the means of grace. Any application of social justice to this distinctively Wesleyan phrase is not only anachronistic but conceptually misplaced. With regards to social justice, it must be observed that Wesley is speaking here not of social

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[56] Randy Maddox offers a perceptive insight into this point in Maddox, "Social Grace: The Eclipse of the Church as a Means of Grace in American Methodism," in Tim Macquiban, ed., *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu* (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1994), 148.

[57] Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount (IV)" (1748), in *Works* 1:531–49. While this sermon does not use the term "social holiness," the way in which Wesley utilizes "social religion" helps to flesh out the parameters of the concept.

[58] Ibid., in *Works* 1:535–37. Theodore Runyon brings the *Preface* and "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (IV)" into comparison in a way that illuminates this point particularly well in Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 112-114. Cf. Wesley's description of the marks of a "Methodist" in Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), ¶¶5–16, in *Works* 9:35–41, in the way that the love of God and love of neighbor are expressed. Wesley concludes this section by emphasizing what it means for those who have such a love resident within them being moved to "'[do] good unto all men'—unto neighbours, and strangers, friends, and enemies" both as a natural consequence of their faith and as a means of drawing others to God.

[59] Wesley uses the two terms in apposite throughout the sermon. See, e.g., Wesley, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (IV)," ¶I.1, in *Works* 1:533–34. For the Latin sense of *societas* and related terms, see above n.53.

ethics but of soteriology. With regards to the connection between social holiness and personal holiness, it is clear that personal holiness is not social holiness' counterpart either positively or negatively; the implied corollary to social holiness is *solitary holiness*, a concept that Wesley categorically rejects. Wesley's conception of *personal holiness*, on the other hand, is highly context specific and should therefore be considered within the quite different subject matter of those published works where he invokes the phrase. In short, "personal and social holiness" is simply not a Wesleyan phrase.

From "Societies" to "Society"

So why exactly has the Wesleyan theological vocabulary become so confused in the way described? Any conclusions must be made in tentative fashion, as there are any number of potential reasons that could include a combination of cultural changes, theological shifts, and the influence of individual published works. Analyses by a number of scholars concerning the development of American Methodism in the nineteenth century do provide a framework for how to understand some major causal factors, however, and the final section of this essay will place the foregoing argument in the light of them. Doing so will reveal that the best way to understand the confusion over social holiness is best summarized with reference to the shift from *Societies* to *society* within American Methodism.

When Wesley uses the term "social holiness," he surely has in mind an idea of the kind of concrete community that could embody the environmental context to which he is pointing. That community could simply be the church generally conceived. A more likely candidate though, given the time period in which the *Preface* appeared, is that Wesley is thinking of the kind of voluntary, intentional communities represented either in the religious society at Fetter Lane in London that he had helped to organize following his return from Georgia in 1738 or in the band meetings that he began coordinating in Bristol in the spring of 1739. There are other, analogous examples from earlier in Wesley's life that were no doubt influential as well: the parish life at Epworth during his childhood, the activities of the Oxford Methodists in the late 1720s and early 1730s, and the religious society at Savannah he nurtured during his missionary experience.[60] While Wesley's firsthand connection to

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[60] Indeed, in Wesley's later evaluation, the three instances that stand out as the three "rises of Methodism" are his associations with small intentional Christian communities at [cont.]

the Moravian community at Herrnhut was limited to just a few days in the late summer of 1738, his witnessing of the religious life present on Zinzendorf's estate clearly made an impression as well.[61] So while the mature form of Methodism's eventual "United Societies" was still in the future when Wesley penned the *Preface* in 1739, the pattern of life those Societies would inculcate through such subsidiary structures as the class meeting, band meeting, select society, penitential band, and trial band was already operative in his mind.[62] We can therefore see how the concept of social holiness—given specific articulation in a single instance in 1739 but conceptually infused throughout the subsequent Wesleyan revival—is clearly informed by Wesley's previous experiences just as it finds expression in the developed United Societies of the movement he led thereafter. Wesley implemented that concept by fostering a certain kind of environmental context, where small groups of intentional Christian disciples sought to work out their own salvation together via mutual accountability and shared participation in the means of grace.[63]

As others have demonstrated, much of Wesley's theology was lost by American Methodists in the nineteenth century under the influence, first, of the biblicism of the Second Great Awakening, and thereafter, through such

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Oxford, at Savannah, and London. Chronologically, these three lead up to the advent of the Methodist revival itself in 1739, the same year the *Preface* was published. See Wesley, *A Short History of the People Called Methodists* (1781), in *Works* 9:430. The *Short History* was originally written for inclusion in Wesley's edited work, the *Concise Ecclesiastical History*. For reference to earlier influences in Wesley's life that would have informed his understanding of social holiness, see Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 25–73.

[61] Kevin M. Watson offers a succinct analysis of the impact of Wesley's visit to Herrnhut in Watson, "Forerunners of the Early Methodist Band Meeting," *Methodist Review* 2 (2010): 11–17. Cf. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 82–85.

[62] A good overview of these subsidiary structures can be found in Thomas R. Albin, "'Inwardly Persuaded': Religion of the Heart in Early British Methodism," in Richard B. Steele, ed., *"Heart Religion" in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 38–52. I have examined the class meeting in particular as a context for social holiness in Andrew C. Thompson, "'To Stir Them Up to Believe, Love, Obey'—Soteriological Dimensions of the Class Meeting in Early Methodism," *Methodist History* 48/3 (April 2010):160–78.

[63] "Mutual accountability" was coined by David Lowes Watson and serves as a helpful term to describe the form of life inculcated in the class meeting. See Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985). For the role of the means of grace within the Society and its substructures in sanctification, see Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 95–116.

emerging intellectual currents as Scottish Common Sense philosophy, modern biblical criticism, and evolutionary science.[64] The loss was felt particularly in the area of theological anthropology, where the sense in which all human beings are debilitated by sin and in need of (re-)formation was replaced by the Enlightenment view of the thoroughly rational soul which has the autonomous ability to make moral choices and the responsibility to restrain unruly emotions by acts of the will. The impact of these shifts caused the nuances of Wesley's understanding of the graced rehabilitation of the soul, over time and through a continual reliance on the means of grace practiced in a faith community, to be lost. Indeed, the view that Wesley's perspective offered anything important at all for Methodist theology in the period was increasingly diminished.[65]

These intellectual developments intersect with ecclesiastical life to bring us full-circle with regards to the issues addressed in this essay, for it was in this same time period that the explosive growth of Methodism in America transformed the Methodists from being on the margins of the culture to being, in a

[64] Randy Maddox's examination of the cultural and intellectual trends of nineteenth century American Methodism is helpful on this point, particularly in the way Maddox highlights the changes in theological anthropology in the American context as Enlightenment thought progressively took hold in the culture. See, e.g., Maddox, "Social Grace," in Maquiban, ed., *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu*, 131–60; Maddox, "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 51/1 (1996): 151–72; Maddox, "An Untapped Inheritance: American Methodism and Wesley's Practical Theology," in Dennis Campbell, et al., eds., *Doctrines and Disciplines: Methodist Theology and Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 19–52; and Maddox, "A Change of Affections: The Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's Heart Religion," in Steele, ed., *"Heart Religion" in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, 3–31. Additionally, an insightful treatment of the intellectual trends in American Methodism can be found in Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790–1935* (New York & Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), where Chiles seeks not a comprehensive analysis of the period but rather a representative one through an examination of the key figures Richard Watson, John Miley, and Albert C. Knudson in conjunction with the Wesleyan doctrines of revelation, sin, and grace.

[65] Maddox couches this shift in terms of the loss of Wesley as a "theological mentor." See Maddox, "Respected Founder / Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology," *Methodist History* 37 (1999): 71–88. Note also Chiles' insight into the way in which the *language* of Wesleyan doctrine was maintained for a time among nineteenth century American Methodist theologians while progressively losing its *content*, until distinctively Wesleyan theological language was dropped altogether (Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism*, 37–75). Like Maddox, Chiles sees the shift as owing to a changed understanding of anthropology.

sense, representative of American culture itself.[66] John H. Wigger analyzes the effect of this growth in the first half of the nineteenth century, where he writes,

> As large numbers of American Methodists became well entrenched in American society, they transformed their church from a counterculture to a subculture of American society. By mid-century both the church and its constituency had largely become a part of America's predominant culture. In the process, much of what had been distinctive about the early Methodist movement was jettisoned.[67]

One such distinctive mark was the understanding of Methodist identity as a particular form of community in which the Christian life found expression, that of the Methodist Society with its environmental context of social holiness where the sanctification of its members became manifest.[68] Increasingly, the locus of Christian activity became centered not in the *Societies* of the earlier period but rather in *society* writ large. And the societally oriented ministry that began to emerge in the latter parts of the century—including eventually Methodist participation in the ecumenical Social Gospel movement itself—can only be seen as the logical consequence of that shift.[69] The social justice inheritance bequeathed by Luigi Taparelli would take time to filter into Methodist theological and ecclesiastical discourse (and, as noted, would not be used exactly as Taparelli had done), but the stage was set.

It is not an exaggeration to say that both the qualitative conceptual differences between *social justice* and *social holiness*, as well as within the historical

[66] Commenting on the growth of American Methodism up to the midpoint of the nineteenth century, Nathan O. Hatch notes, "Between 1776 and 1850 the Methodists in America achieved a virtual miracle of growth, rising from less than 3 percent of all church members in 1776 to more than 34 percent by 1850, making them far and away the largest religious body in the nation and the most extensive national institution other than the Federal government." See Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," in Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 27.

[67] John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 193.

[68] Wigger examines a range of distinctive Methodist forms of religious life that underwent alteration (and in some cases, that gradually disappeared), including a religiously-motivated austere lifestyle, the communal "enthusiasm" and "zeal" of the early Methodists (with ties to the understanding of present salvation), the itinerant ministry, the camp meeting, and the class meeting. See Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 180–90.

[69] See Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, & Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*, vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 299–326.

misreadings of *personal and social holiness*, hinge on the meaning of an adjective. The adjective is *social*, and the preceding analysis of the terms and the concepts to which they point shows how widely different the intended referent for it can be. For Taparelli, "social" refers to "society." His society is the protarchic one inclusive of all those persons and intermediary associations within the body politic that can be said to exist in a mutually interdependent way as pertains to political, economic, religious, and cultural life. Taparelli's idea of social justice amounts to a proposal for social and political ethics grounded in a deeply theological framework. The subject of that ethics of course is "society," and likewise it is "society" that is the referent intended by social justice commentators within the contemporary Wesleyan tradition (even if they lack Taparelli's neo-Thomistic sense of society as an organic unity). For those commentators who pair holiness as either personal or social in expression, "social" refers to specific acts or to a general orientation opposite of that concerned with the "private" or the "individual." For Wesley, though, the "social" of social holiness is different. Wesley has in mind not "society" writ large but rather the "Society" of those banded together to—as he would state in the *General Rules of the United Societies*—"watch over one another in love."[70] The "Society" in Wesley's mind is thus a concrete community in which holiness of heart and life finds expression in the lives of its constituent members, and social holiness is the name given to the encompassing contextual reality *in which* the community exists and *by which* its true purpose is manifest.[71] Wesley is not giving us a

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[70] In the introduction to the *General Rules*, Wesley explains that a Society "is no other than a 'company of men "having the form, and seeking the power of godliness", united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation'" (Wesley, *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, ¶2, in *Works* 9:69). In a lecture context, I have heard Randy Maddox of Duke University reflect on this point with an insightful observation about the different audiences to which the *General Rules* and the later Methodist Social Creed were aimed: whereas the *General Rules* were intended as a guide for those in the early Methodist Society, the Social Creed was aimed at addressing ills in American society writ large. On the development of the Social Creed by the Methodist Federation for Social Service and its adoption by the 1908 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, see Richey, et al., *The Methodist Experience in America*, vol. I, 321–26.

[71] This point has not gone entirely unrecognized in Wesley scholarship. See, e.g., Heitzenrater, "Wesleyan Ecclesiology: Methodism as a Means of Grace," in ST Kimbrough, ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 124. Heitzenrater makes the intriguing suggestion that Wesley's framing of [cont.]

constructive proposal for social ethics but rather a descriptive account of present salvation.

In light of the nineteenth century legacy described here, the contemporary misuses of the language of social holiness must be seen as extending that period's diluted appreciation of the Wesleyan tradition that resulted in an abandonment of the full scope of Wesley's *via salutis*. To use social holiness as a synonym for social justice is essentially an attempt to speak in a Wesleyan voice within the realm of Christian social ethics, while the use of a phrase like "personal and social holiness" represents a bifurcation of holiness (and indeed, of the whole religious life) into separate public and private spheres. Both points of view posit "society" as the ultimate locus of true Christian activity and, insofar as they employ the concept, of sanctification. This is clearly not social holiness in its Wesleyan sense, in that the concept for Wesley is an integral part of soteriology. It is a soteriology with clear ethical implications, to be sure, but also one whose ethical content must always be understood as an outgrowth of the kind of life transformed persons are given within communities of faith rather than as a programmatic social ethics (or social action) separate from the sanctification rendered possible within the life of those selfsame communities.

Conclusion

The argument presented in this essay represents nothing more than a reasoned account for why the language of a tradition should be taken seriously by reading that tradition in a careful and disciplined way. The obvious potential objection to what I have set forth is that I have engaged in a type of "Wesleyan scholasticism" concerned with preserving a certain theological language in ossified form rather than attending to the present situation in which the church finds itself.[72] To this I counter that I am engaging not in scholasticism but

social holiness "is a very good summary of Wesley's ecclesiology." See also Maddox, "Social Grace," in Maquiban, ed., *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu*, 134.

[72] For a negative attitude toward such Wesleyan scholasticism, see Theodore R. Weber, "Breaking the Power of Cancelled Sin: Possibilities and Limits in a Wesleyan Social Theology," *Quarterly Review* 11/1 (1991): 4–8. The example in Weber's article is instructive, in that he is attempting to chart a "social theology" out of the Wesleyan tradition constructive in nature and using a Wesleyan basis while avoiding the kind of dogmatic adherence to Wesley's own thought that he would see represented in such a form of scholasticism. Weber does not cite the term "social holiness" in the article, but the [cont.]

rather in the crucial task of evaluating the way in which historical theology can elucidate a tradition for the better understanding of the church in its ongoing theological reflection. The ethics of social justice clearly has an important place in current Christian discourse, as does the theology of the means of grace. I readily agree that further theological work into the concept of social holiness will surely show how this aspect of Wesley's soteriology overlaps with both notions (and in the case of the means of grace, I suspect the overlap is such that neither idea can be fully appreciated without significant reference to the other).[73] It is quite possible, in fact, that a fuller evaluation of social holiness could inform present discourse about engaged Christian activity "in the world" that would provide the church with resources for such activity beyond mere duty. For if there is a lack at present in the church's reflections on its mission in the world, it is the lack of attention to soteriology in a way that leaves current appeals for Christian social action inadequate and unconvincing.

As a source for Christian theology, the *traditio* of the church is that which has been handed over (*tradere*) by one generation to the next as the sum total of its reflections and assessments about how to understand the Christian faith as a response to the gospel message for the life its descendants have been given to live in their own day. Something important is therefore lost when the incautious use of a tradition's language is employed in order to lend authority to concepts that actually serve to obscure the meaning the same language was originally employed to describe. In the case of social holiness, the loss involves an aspect of sanctification so significant that the Wesleyan *via salutis* is rendered incomplete and even incoherent without it. Such a loss means more than a garble of vocabulary; it results in the distortion of the tradition itself.

subject matter he is addressing puts it in the same arena as that with which the present essay is concerned. Weber's interest is also in framing salvation in terms of "societal transformation" (4), which helps to explain why he feels the need to invoke "Wesleyan scholastics" as he does. The position I have attempted to articulate in the present essay is not that of a rigid scholasticism but rather an argument for reading the Wesleyan tradition carefully so as to be able to take full advantage of the conceptual resources it offers and to avoid distorting the tradition's language in a way that renders the claims involved in such distortion incoherent.

[73] For an example of the connection between social holiness and the means of grace in the work of Ole Borgen, see above n.51.

About the Author

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