

[*MJTM* 26 (2025–2026) 3–22]

ON THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHAIR OF WESLEY
STUDIES, TYNDALE UNIVERSITY

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I

I shall never forget the faculty meeting, autumn 1993, at which Ian Rennie, dean of Tyndale Seminary, introduced me as the first occupant of the new Chair of Wesley Studies. One faculty member looked askance at me, unable to disguise his aversion, if not to me personally, then certainly to the Wesley Chair and all it held out. He turned to Rennie and sniffed superciliously, “Does this mean that Tyndale Seminary will be moving in a Wesleyan direction?” With his characteristic good humour that defused nascent hostility, Rennie shot back, “Why not? For then we could all get the second blessing!”

Now the extent to which “second blessing” is characteristic of Wesley and the ethos of his descendants I shall leave for you to deliberate. In any case, I rejoiced that the dean of the seminary, a Presbyterian, was undisguisedly delighted with the theological breadth and the spiritual richness the new Chair would lend Tyndale University.

Tyndale’s Board of Governors had already approved necessary changes to Tyndale’s statement of faith. Heretofore the statement of faith had endorsed a predestinarian view of the security of believers, denying the possibility of apostasy. Now, however, it read, “Believers are kept by the power of God”—a New Testament statement no one upholding scriptural normati-

ty could deny. At this point, the trustees of the Chair gladly announced that the Chair would be housed henceforth at Tyndale.¹

While the location of the Chair at Tyndale was now formally a fait accompli, I continued to find untoward putdowns of Wesley in informal settings, such as the faculty lunchroom. Wesley, it was suggested, may have been a remarkable evangelist, but he was surely a theological lightweight, no better than a second-rate thinker compared to the giants of the sixteenth-century Reformation. Apparently overlooked in these informal comparisons, however, was the fact that I was the only faculty member with a doctorate in the sixteenth-century Reformation. No longer could I sit by and allow John Wesley to be defamed. I decided (good-naturedly, of course) to bring down the hammer.

At our next noon-hour confab, I pointed out that John Wesley had written thirty-five tomes,² including a textbook on logic; in addition to his native English, he knew thoroughly eight other languages including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, German, Dutch, Italian, and Spanish; in truth, he knew them so very thoroughly that he wrote a grammar textbook in seven of them. Wesley, I observed, read more comfortably in more languages than Martin Luther, John Calvin, Philip Melancthon, Jonathan Edwards, Joseph Butler or even Immanuel Kant did. Not least, Wesley was a superb patristics scholar, having studied at Oxford in the twilight of a remarkable period of patristic research.

Lest my seminary lunchroom companions thought Wesley to be one more ivory-tower theology professor remote from human anguish, I went on to inform them that when Wesley was eighty-one years old, he was found begging door-to-door in winter, walking day after day through ice-cold slush, garnering money for his beloved poor. Having raised 200 pounds, he stopped on the fourth day; did he pause because he had all the money his poor people needed? Of course not. He had stopped, rather, because he was ill; he was suffering, he wrote in his journal, from a

1. The alternative, in case Tyndale had been unwilling to alter its statement of faith, was Wycliffe College, University of Toronto.

2. The current, critically annotated edition of Wesley's writings is found in *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (hereinafter *WJW*).

“violent flux” (eighteenth-century English for uncontrollable diarrhea). He had stopped only because he was too sick and too shaky to continue.

By now, of course, I was in full flight, and nothing could deflect me from extolling the toughness of early-day Methodist preachers, in the UK to be sure, but more pointedly in the new world where life was far more dangerous. With all the kindness I could muster, I pointed out that Anglicans and Presbyterians thrived on the eastern seaboard of the Thirteen Colonies, but they lacked flexibility and above all, the hard-nosed toughness to thrive on the frontier. After all, of the first 737 Methodist preachers in the new world, 50 percent were dead before they were thirty; two-thirds did not live long enough to serve twelve years.³ Ordination to the Methodist ministry was a death sentence.

What befell these preachers? They got lost in the woods and died of exposure, or they were caught in a forest fire, or they were swept away in a flash flood, or they froze to death, or they were slain by those threatened by the Methodist gospel and its implicates.

Thanks to these preachers, Methodism exploded in the new world, especially on the frontier. In this regard, I often recall the story of Thomas Ware, an itinerant Methodist preacher on the frontier in early-day America. Come nightfall, on one occasion, Ware needed accommodation. He asked a young settler couple if they would share their one-room cabin with him for one night. The settler couple said “No.” In his journal, Ware later wrote, “I looked at him and said, smiling, ‘That would depend upon our comparative strength,’” meaning, ‘Do you really think you can lick me?’” Ware was allowed to stay the night.⁴

I continued to hear that whereas the Reformational tradition had a profound understanding of sin, Wesley had a shallow grasp of it, superficial “Arminian” that he was.⁵ I knew I had to ac-

3. Andrews, *Methodists*, 216–17.

4. Wigger, “Fighting Bees,” 105.

5. Wesley’s theology was set before he had read so much as one word of Arminius, and Wesley’s theology never reflected Arminius’s Aristotelian

quaint my skeptical colleagues with Wesley's understanding of human depravity. At this point, I spoke of Charles Wesley's tract, "Awake, Thou That Sleepest" (1742).⁶ Charles speaks of the sinner's "supineness" or utter spiritual inertia and non-sentience. He speaks of the sinner's "indolence" in the medieval sense of sloth, the condition of those who do not grasp, because they cannot grasp their appointment as children of God and cannot grasp it inasmuch as they are sin-blinded (not merely impaired) and therefore ignorant of their predicament as sinners before the one who does not tolerate sin. Charles speaks, in the same tract, of "stupidity," not in our twenty-first century sense of "feeble-minded" but in the eighteenth-century sense of cognitive stupor and volitional torpor. He speaks of sinners as "insensible of their real condition"; in other words, one of the worst features of our depravity is that it renders us *wholly unaware* of our depravity and its fatal outcome before the Holy God. To make sure no one misunderstands him on this point, Charles insists that we are not only spiritually blind and numb but also corrupt, and our putrefaction renders us loathsome. In other words, not only does sin provoke God's anger, it also (and here Charles is one with Luther) arouses God's disgust. Sinners are an "abomination" (*βδέλυγμα*, *bdelugma*) to God; according to Scripture, that which is an abomination to God is that which God cannot withstand and therefore ultimately destroys.

Perhaps I should moderate my severity concerning those who dismiss Wesley as theological fluff. For as recently as 1998 when I was in Seoul, South Korea, for the meetings of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Professor Heiko Oberman, a Reformation scholar without peer, emphasized that Reformation scholars must maintain the most rigorous scholarship, or else, he expostulated, "We shall end up no better than Methodists!"

scholasticism—Thomas Aquinas had been the most frequently referenced thinker in Arminius.

6. While Charles is the author, the item is published in *WJM* 1: Sermon 3.

My informal lunchroom proffering suspended forever any suggestions that Wesley was a spiritual dilettante who had failed to endorse the Reformers' understanding of the nature, scope, and arrears of sin.

As the first occupant of the Chair and therefore as the person who would determine the ethos of the undertaking for the next several years, I knew that initially I had to magnify the *theology* of John Wesley. As often as I heard the Chair spoken of, at Tyndale, as a Chair of *Wesleyan* Studies, I made an immediate correction: "It is a Chair of *Wesley* Studies."

For too long, I insisted, Wesley has been regarded, not least by Methodist people, as inferior to the major thinkers in the Christian tradition. Overlooked here is the fact that Wesley is the most important Church of England theologian since Thomas Cranmer, and the most important Anglican thinker in the eighteenth century, a theologian who is unquestionably Protestant and therefore belongs to the Western or Latin Church.

I deemed it my first responsibility to slay the notion that, compared to the Reformed or Lutheran or Roman Catholic traditions, the Methodist tradition is theologically unsubstantial and intellectually effete. In fact, Wesley expected (perhaps unrealistically) that his lay preachers, like him, would study five hours per day. He maintained the most important subject for the preacher to study was Scripture, and after that, logic because a self-contradicted preacher will never utter a coherent message and the preacher's utterance ought to reflect the logical consistency of God's action and speech. All theology has to be logically rigorous or else it does not help the would-be preacher; it can only confuse the hearer, and it cannot be communicated in any case.⁷ Then what theology informed Wesley and will continue to inform those who bear his name?

Wesley was thoroughly acquainted with seventeenth-century Anglican thought. He also read the sixteenth-century continental Reformers. Furthermore, he cherished the English Reformers such as Ridley, Latimer, Tyndale, and Cranmer; Cranmer's *Book*

7. Wesley discusses the cruciality of logic in theological formation in *WJW* 10:480–500 (see "An Address to the Clergy").

of *Common Prayer*, Wesley insisted, was the finest liturgical vehicle the church catholic had ever seen. Regularly I point out to my students passages in Wesley where the vocabulary and the word patterns came straight out of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It should also be noted here that Wesley always insisted he agreed without reservation with the Genevan Reformer's understanding of total depravity and was only a "hair's breadth" from Calvin on several other matters.⁸ It was while Wesley heard read at worship the preface to Luther's commentary on Romans that he came to faith; it was while Charles was reading the text of Luther's commentary on Galatians that Methodism's major poet came to faith. When Wesley published his *Christian Library*, a fifty-book collection he edited and expected Methodists to read, thirty-two of the fifty volumes were authored by Puritan divines.⁹ Wesley's studies at Oxford found him meticulously apprised of the patristic scholarship for which the university was reputed. Wesley knew the church fathers thoroughly and, despite being a son of the Western church, he was critical of Augustine, the chief Western thinker, and he always preferred the Eastern fathers whose outstanding representative was Athanasius. Even though Wesley was sharp in his criticism of what he observed concerning the Eastern Orthodox congregation in London, he remained indebted to outstanding Eastern fathers such as Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–373) and Macarius (ca. 300–391). In fact, Macarius was the Eastern thinker whose *Spiritual Homilies* underlies Wesley's understanding of sanctification.¹⁰

Then is Wesley's theology a hodgepodge, little more than a grab-bag through which he runs his fingers, retaining whatever his hand happens to grasp? On the contrary, there is a profound, coherent theology that Christians who bear his name have found compelling; it is a theology that admits many ingredients just be-

8. Wesley speaks of being at the "edge of Calvinism" in several places. See, e.g., *WJW* 8:284–85.

9. Wesley, ed., *Christian Library*.

10. For a discussion of Wesley's understanding and deployment of patristics, see Campbell, *John Wesley*.

cause it disdains no one. Nevertheless, it is stamped ultimately by Wesley's genius as he forged a theology that, as he maintained and as those after him have acknowledged, is formed, informed, and normed by the substance and the logic of "the general tenor of Scripture" as he customarily put it.¹¹ For instance, although some biblical texts might be read as supporting predestination, the "general tenor" of Scripture may not be read in this way. Neither does the "general tenor" permit us to deny that God's mercy is over all his works, thereby ruling out an eternal decree of reprobation; the "general tenor of Scripture" forbids us to narrow the idea that "God desires all to be saved" into "God desires some." Wesley's theology is catholic (i.e., non-sectarian). At its centre, he upholds the three "grand doctrines," without which the gospel is neither needed nor effective: original sin, justification by faith, and holiness ("present, inward salvation").¹² He endorses the Vincentian Canon which has been believed by all Christians, at all times, in all places. To be sure, Wesley wrote no tome of systematic theology. Neither did Luther, however, and no one disputes Luther's theological singularity and profundity. Nevertheless, Wesley thought *systematically*, as an examination of his corpus on any topic shows.

II

Unquestionably, however, we remember Wesley today chiefly on account of his evangelism. While he was, indisputably, the greatest Anglican thinker in the eighteenth century, we remember him today primarily because he was an evangelist.

Contemporary evangelism, however, appears to differ from his in several respects. As for our concern with evangelistic techniques, programs, and the so-called "Ten Effective Steps," he would regard it as manipulation at best and unbelief at worst.

11. Wesley uses this expression repeatedly (see, e.g., *WJW* 4:552 [Sermon 110 "Free Grace"]); see also Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, "Romans 12:6."

12. Wesley maintains that the "three grand doctrines" reflect "the general tenor of Scripture".

Wesley's evangelism presupposes three pillars: predicament, penalty, and provision. Humankind's *predicament* is bleak: the unrepentant sinner "abides in death . . . lost, dead, damned already." There is nothing in Wesley of modernity's psychologizing of the human predicament—namely, we feel guilty (without being guilty), anxious, nervous, and frustrated. Neither is there any existentializing of the human predicament; that is, through our sin, we have alienated ourselves from God, from others, and from self. Wesley insists that we are alienated from God, from others, and from self *not* on account of our sin but on account of *God's judgment* on our sin. We have not sashayed or wandered out of Eden; we have been expelled by a judicial act of God. The *penalty* for our primal disobedience is God's condemnation. Such condemnation is not reserved for the future; it is operative now. The Day of Judgment will merely render undeniable that truth of which the condemned are now culpably ignorant. In light of the foregoing predicament and penalty, the divinely wrought *provision* is the atonement. Before sinners can repent and "return home," provision must be made for them wherein the barricade to their return is removed. Before we can be reconciled to God, he must be reconciled to us. It is little wonder Charles Wesley exults:

His blood atoned for all our race,
 And sprinkles now the throne of grace . . .
 My God is reconciled,
 His pard'ning voice I hear;
 He owns me for his child,
 I can no longer fear . . .¹³

When I recited Charles's hymn in a gathering of people who claimed to be theological descendants of John Wesley, I met fierce objection: "*We* need to be reconciled to God because we sinners are estranged from God"; "it is unthinkable that *God* would need to be reconciled to us. Does he not love us eternally?" As gently as I could, I replied to the objector: (1) God does

13. See the second stanza of Charles Wesley's hymn, "Arise, my Soul, Arise" (*WJW* 7:324).

love us. In truth, he loves us so very much that he refuses to confirm us in our sinful disobedience. It is never loving to confirm sinners in their sin; (2) as sinners, we are indeed estranged from God—but not because sin results in estrangement from God; we are estranged from God because our sin has mobilized God’s judgment, and until God’s judgment has been dealt with, that is, until his righteous anger, his holy hostility to sinners, is dealt with, we cannot be reconciled to him; (3) on the cross of Jesus, God-Incarnate, God’s wrath is averted at God’s initiative; that is, God is reconciled to us. Now and only now may we and must we be reconciled to him. Now and only now can the gospel invitation, the evangelistic summons, “Come home” be issued. Apart from the cross, that act of God by which he reconciles himself to the “world”¹⁴ God loves, and apart from the cross as first God’s reconciliation of himself to us, there is no ground for or possibility of our being reconciled to God. Likewise, apart from the cross as God’s reconciliation of himself to us, there is no home for sinners to go home to. “My God is reconciled”: Charles Wesley is oceans deeper than his detractors.

Wesley typically gathers up predicament, penalty, and provision in his pithy hymn: “Who Hath Done the Dreadful Deed.” First, Charles speaks of the human *predicament*:

Who hath done the dreadful deed
Hath crucified my God?
Curses on his guilty head,
Who spilt that precious blood.¹⁵

Then he speaks of the human *penalty*:

Worthy is the wretch to die;
Self-condemned, alas, is he!—
I have sold my Saviour,
I have nailed him to the tree.

And then, typically, Charles concludes with God’s breath-taking, incomprehensible, and ever-merciful *provision*:

14. In Wesley’s understanding, the “world” is the sum of disobedient humankind tacitly organized in its hostility to God.

15. Wesley and Wesley, *Hymns*.

Yet thy wrath I cannot fear,
Thou gentle, bleeding Lamb!
By thy judgement I am clear,
Healed by stripes I am:
Thou for me a curse wast made,
That I might in thee be blest;
Thou hast my full ransom paid,
And in thy wounds I rest.¹⁶

Methodist hymnody, we should always be aware, sings about the atonement more than about anything else. Repentance and faith are impossible apart from God's prior propitiation. Any so-called evangelism that denies or overlooks this much is shallow and ineffective. It is little wonder that, when people came to faith, Charles Wesley characteristically announced, "They received the atonement."

Make no mistake. The gospel that early-day Methodists cherished, eagerly embraced by Spirit-sensitized hearers, was *not* welcomed in the sitting rooms of ecclesiastical officialdom. Indeed, wherever George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers went, they met shallow, ineffective, and obstructive fellow-clergy. In September 1740, Whitefield, a lifelong Anglican glowing with Methodist light and warmth, arrived in Boston. There were five Anglican parishes in the city. All five denied Whitefield access to their pulpits, whereupon Whitefield went outside on Boston Common and preached to 20,000 people. In October 1740, Whitefield went to New York City. There were ten Anglican parishes in New York. All ten clergy barred him from their pulpits. But he spoke outdoors again to huge gatherings as he had done in Boston.

Whitefield will never be forgotten, and his name will ever remain fragrant. As for the five clergy in Boston and the ten in New York City who thought themselves and their anemic drivel superior to Whitefield, can any person today name *one*?

16. Found in Charles Wesley's hymn "God's Sovereign, Everlasting Love," which was first published in Wesley and Wesley, *Hymns*. This hymn is one of several C. Wesley wrote to protest the limited atonement advanced by some Calvinists in this era.

C. S. Lewis insisted that Jesus was kind, compassionate, caring, sensitive, truthful, merciful, even self-sacrificial; nevertheless, said Lewis, there was one thing Jesus never was: nice. Anyone who reads the written Gospels with even one eye open finds our Lord endlessly sympathetic with sinning, suffering people, whether victimized by others or self-victimized, and at the same time, as our Lord's public ministry always has a sharp edge to it, Jesus shows a laser-like penetration, and all of this is articulated so very pithily and pointedly as to be unforgettable. The Wesley brothers were one with the Master in this regard.

As the Evangelical Revival gained momentum, it threatened ecclesiastical officialdom since church-bureaucrats are always rendered nervous by what they cannot control or co-opt. John Wesley was summoned to appear before hostile bishops. When told his theology was un-Anglican, especially his notion of Christian perfection,¹⁷ he knew how to handle the accusation. "Did you receive Holy Communion this morning, prior to arraigning me before you?" he asked his episcopal interrogators. Of course, they had. "And did you first repeat the Collect for Holy Communion?" That went without saying. "Would you remind repeating it with me?—'Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may *perfectly love thee*, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord.'" "Now when you prayed these words earlier today," continued Wesley fearlessly, "did you mean them?" Of course, they had meant them. "Then," said Wesley, why do you fault me for holding out to my people a Christian perfection, a sanctification neither more nor less than self-forgetful, self-abandoning love to God and neighbour, when you prayed as much for yourself? Tell me what is un-Anglican about my notion of Christian perfection as single-minded, unimpeded love when you implore God for precisely this every

17. While Wesley was faulted repeatedly for his use of "perfection," he refused to abandon the word and its ethos, maintaining that the word was used in Scripture and in much of Christian tradition (see Wesley, *Plain Account*).

time you celebrate or receive Holy Communion according to the Prayer Book you cherish?”¹⁸

On another occasion, the bishop of London summoned Charles Wesley to appear before him and articulate the substance, ethos, and trajectory of the Methodist movement. Charles complied. Before dismissing Charles, the bishop of London said, “I trust you don’t think that by asking you to explain what you and your movement are about I am hereby granting you my approval,” whereupon Charles riposted, “And I hope you don’t think, my lord bishop, that by complying with your request I am seeking your approval.”¹⁹ The Wesley brothers, like their Lord before them, were many things to many people, but they were never *nice*.

Throughout my occupancy of the Wesley Chair, I told every class that I remain persuaded that Wesley needs to be “owned” for what he is in himself—namely, the ecumenical figure who can do so very much to bridge Eastern and Western churches. Unquestionably, Wesley is Protestant and therefore Western, the Western church including both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic. Wesley always maintained that the *Book of Common Prayer* was thoroughly Protestant (in truth it has an undeniable Calvinist “ring” to it), and the Church of England itself was Protestant (Anglo-Catholicism, the predominant expression of Anglicanism in Canada today, did not assert itself until the rise of the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century). Wesley maintained that Article XVII, “Of Predestination and Election,” admitted ambiguity, and because the article was ambiguous, it could be read in a manner that did not presuppose a Calvinistic, twofold decree of eternal election to life (and therefore before the believer was born, or even conceived) and eternal reprobation.

18. For Wesley’s understanding of Christian perfection as self-forgetful, self-abandoned love for God and neighbour, see Shepherd, *Mercy*, ch. 7. Wesley could have added that John Calvin had insisted, no less than 200 years earlier, that the only way for Christians to avoid backsliding was to “resolve to go on unto perfection.”

19. Edmund Gibson, bishop of London, suspected the ministry of both John and Charles. Numerous exchanges between the brothers and their episcopal overseer are referred to in *WJW* 19.

tion to eternal loss (and therefore before the unbeliever could even have sinned). Wesley chose to read Article XVII in a manner that did not contradict his scorching criticisms of Reformed predestination.

In Wesley's mind, Article XI, concerning justification by faith, on the other hand, admitted no ambiguity at all. Therefore, Wesley said that Anglicanism was committed unreservedly to the Protestant *sola fide*, justification by faith alone. Anglicanism is Protestant and Protestant only.

At the same time, Wesley is a Western-church thinker who leans farther East than anyone else. For instance, although the Western church massively emphasized original guilt as a consequence of original sin, Wesley, while never denying that sinners are guilty before God, preferred to emphasize the East's insistence on original sin as the introduction of death and corruption and the loss of the Spirit's immediate presence. In the same vein, while Wesley agreed with the West's Protestant avowal of justification by faith and the doctrine's attendant juridical features, he agreed with the East's greater contention that the main strand in Christianity is not juridical but restorative.²⁰ And whereas Protestant scholasticism (especially in the century following the Reformation) liked to speak of believers living in a "state of grace," Wesley objected, with the East, that the problem with "state of grace" is simply that it is static. Believers live in the ongoing *dynamic* of grace as Christ's life and their life interpenetrate in a mutual indwelling that finds believers living ever more intimately with their Lord and reflecting ever more vividly the fruits of that Spirit which the Lord bears and bestows upon his people. However, lest we think Wesley naïve concerning the East's emphasis on the restorative nature of grace, Wesley maintained the East to have understated the Christological basis of grace: grace is not a substance, especially a substance to be discussed as "uncreated" or "created"; rather, grace is always and only the effectual presence of the living Lord Jesus Christ.

20. For an expansion of Wesley's relationship to Eastern theology, see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, ch. 3.

III

While rightly appreciating the necessary polemical element in the Wesleys, we must not lose sight of the “downbeat” in their ministry and mission, the “bass note” that reverberates throughout their outward articulation and organization just because it lies ever so close to their inward conviction and experience. I speak now of their concern for holiness, “present, inward salvation”. Tirelessly, Wesley insisted that God had raised up Methodism “to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”²¹ He had profoundly come to see that holiness is the preoccupation of Scripture.

Here I am one with my theological ancestor. I have long been convinced that the “general tenor” of Scripture is holiness: the holiness of God and the holiness of God’s people. I have long been convinced that Scripture, cover-to-cover, *re-affirms God’s holiness* in the wake of our denying it and *re-establishes our holiness* in the wake of our contradicting it. As sinners, we deny God’s holiness, God’s sheer, uncompromisable, inimitable Godness, whereupon God reasserts it. And as sinners, we repudiate our own holiness, whereupon God re-establishes it. In this regard, I have insisted, in every course I have taught, that the “root” commandment in Scripture is Lev 19:2 (and parallels): “You shall be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy.” And in every class, I have taught I have pointed out, as our Puritan friends remind us, that all God’s commands are “covered promises”; that is, all God’s commands may and must be read also as promise. When contemporary Christians hear, “You shall be holy,” they always hear rightly as command but wrongly fail to hear as accompanying promise. Not only does God insist that his people *must* be holy, God also guarantees that his people *will* be holy, will appear before him one day without spot or blemish.

Rightly apprehending the substance and logic of Scripture, Wesley consistently pointed to holiness of God and of his people as the *raison d’être* of his movement.

21. “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists (1749)” (*WJW* 9:279).

Yet Wesley magnified the theme of holiness for another reason; namely, he had noticed that where the doctrine was held up, people in the Methodist societies knew and enjoyed a genuine deliverance from sin's grip. Where the doctrine was neglected, the same people may have been assured of forgiveness, relief of sin's guilt, but they remained unreleased from sin's grip. What is the point of being relieved of sin's guilt if sin's power is undiminished? Wesley had noticed that, in his communities where the inculcation of holiness was neglected, his people remained sin habituated.²² Wesley had observed that where release from sin's power was not at the forefront of his communities, they withered quickly.

Wesley announced to his people, "God can do something with sin beyond forgiving it." What, specifically, can God do? Charles Wesley announced, "He breaks the *power* of cancelled sin; he sets the prisoner *free*."²³ Is not any gospel, so-called, that cannot undo addiction ultimately useless? Is not a gospel that proffers forgiveness but does not effect *deliverance* no gospel at all?

We are fond of singing, "He can break every fetter." Can he? If not, why not? If not, which not? In his understanding of holiness/perfection, Wesley was not concerned to defend himself in an abstract argument about doctrine that is abstract by definition; rather, in his insistence on "practical theology," his heart broke for habituated people whose last hope was release *in this life*. For this reason—and this reason alone—he maintained it was nothing less than cruel to pronounce limits to God's deliverance *in this life*. Of course, all Christians are going to be freed definitively in the eschaton. Wesley, however, refused to proffer as spiritual counsel, "Wait until death." We should note that all deliverance groups (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous,

22. How long would an Alcoholics Anonymous group last, for example, if each meeting began with the speaker saying, "We are certainly glad to see all of you tonight; we want you to know you are always welcome. And by the way, no one in this group has *ever* been rendered contentedly sober?"

23. Charles Wesley, "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing my Dear Redeemer's Praise" (*WJW* 7:79).

Porn-Addicts Anonymous, etc.) survive for one reason only: they hold out hope for deliverance *now*.

IV

I want to conclude my address with my vision for Tyndale's Chair of Wesley Studies.

A

Without losing sight of any of the profundities the Chair was designed to uphold, expounded already in my address, I envision the Chair to be Tyndale University's *locus of ecumenical conversation*. While always convinced of his own theological tradition, Wesley appreciated the contribution of others within the church catholic. For instance, while he never hesitated to speak of the "Romish delusion" and its theological deficits, at the same time, he published the works (admittedly thoroughly edited) of eight Roman Catholics from the Counter-Reformation, so highly did he esteem their spiritual discipline, their experience of Jesus Christ, their self-renunciation, and their concern for holy living (Let us not forget that Wesley himself was criticized frequently for being a crypto-Jesuit).

Wesley appreciated the contribution of Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Pietists of different sorts, not least Anglican Calvinists like George Whitefield and John Newton. Then was there anyone of whom Wesley had virtually nothing good to say? Yes: Quakers. Because Quakers elevated the "inner light," their idiosyncratic experience, above Scripture, Wesley denounced them. He knew the whole point of the primacy of Scripture to be the ultimacy of Jesus Christ; therefore, to elevate the "inner light" above Scripture was to deny Christ's lordship and substitute one's self-perception as normative. For this reason, he wrote, in his letter to someone who had recently become a Quaker, "Friend, you have an honest heart, but a weak head."²⁴

24. "A Letter to a Person Lately Joined with the People Called Quakers" (*Works of John Wesley: Volume 10*, 187).

Wesley maintained that for fifty-five years he had not found any Quakers who grasped the foundation of the gospel, justification by faith.

I envision the Wesley Chair promoting conversations with the diverse families in the church catholic, while simultaneously exercising a discernment (discernment being the principal manifestation of the Holy Spirit in Acts) that can properly recognize and charitably forfend theologies, movements, ideologies, novelties, and ethical compromises that are a denial of the gospel.

B

The second aspect of my vision for the Wesley Chair reflects Wesley's position in the burgeoning Enlightenment of his era. Wesley never allowed his gospel-driven theology to be adulterated by developments in world occurrence even as he recognized aspects of world occurrence that were humanly helpful. In this regard, he always urged his people to "plunder the Egyptians" (Exod 3:22).²⁵ On the one hand, the Egyptians were Israel's oppressors, ignorant of *HaShem*, wantonly cruel, and idolatrous. On the other hand, the Egyptians possessed no little worldly wisdom that all people, everywhere, could profit from.

Among other matters, electricity was a preoccupation in Wesley's day, and Wesley himself was entranced. When I first visited Wesley's chapel in London, I was intrigued by his "electrification machine." It consisted of a stator, a rotor, and two electrodes to be attached to a suffering person's temples. The faster one cranked the rotor, the greater the electric shock to the recipient. Whom did Wesley shock? Depressed people, those who today are diagnosed as suffering from endogenous depression. The point is that Wesley came upon severely depressed people whose depression, he insisted, was *not* rooted in spiritual defectiveness or degenerate behaviour or demonic possession. In this regard, he was light years ahead of many contemporaries. To be sure, he had no grasp of the neurological sophistication that underlies today's electro-convulsive therapy. However, when

25. Wesley expands this point in his preface to *Christian Library*.

faced with atrocious human suffering, he was willing to learn from anyone.

In 1747, Wesley penned his *Primitive Physic*, a compendium of treatments, no better than folkloric to us, aimed at relieving human distresses. Those afflicted with “the flux” (diarrhea) were to “receive the smoke of turpentine cast on burning coals.” And for the “bloody flux,” they were to “apply suppository of linen dipped in aqua vitae.”²⁶ At the same time, however, Wesley never disdained professional medical treatment. In 1773 when Wesley was seventy years old, his horse stumbled, throwing him against the pommel of his saddle. Soon he found himself with a hydrocele, a large fluid collection in his scrotum. When he was in Edinburgh next time, he visited three leaders of the university’s faculty of medicine and ultimately underwent surgery for his affliction.

Always aware of the suffering attending gynecological disorders, Wesley also proposed a treatment for menorrhagia: half an ounce of powdered alum was to be drunk with a quarter of an ounce of dragon’s blood—it was the bright red resin that is obtained from different plants. Before we laugh at Wesley, we should note that dragon’s blood is possessed of antiviral and wound-healing effects. Taspine, a component of dragon’s blood, is an alkaloid whose wound-healing efficacy is scientifically documented.

My vision for the Wesley Chair includes a willingness to speak with and learn from anyone, in any discipline, especially where human suffering may be alleviated. What creaturely wisdom (not the gospel, to be sure, but creaturely wisdom, nonetheless), for example, can be gained from the social sciences? Although I am not medically trained, I am hugely immersed in the psychiatric world and have been invited to address both the American Psychiatric Association and the World Psychiatric Association, on the assumption that Christian faith and psychiatric wisdom can together promote the healing of wounded people. What creaturely wisdom can we gain from the rising tide of neuroscience? What wisdom can be found in such disciplines as phi-

26. *WJM* 32:186.

losophy, literature, and history? Cicero once remarked, “To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain forever a child” (*Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum*).²⁷ Is not part of the church’s mission to have people become mature in *all* dimensions of human existence?

Wesley spared no effort to “plunder the Egyptians” not only because of the creaturely wisdom they possessed but also because he already knew, even more profoundly, that “in him [Jesus Christ] all things hold together” (Col 1:17 ESV). Wesley knew there are no dichotomies in the universe (apart from that of sin). Knowing that in Christ all things hold together and aspiring to obey *God’s command* to plunder the Egyptians, Wesley magnified the Lord who is himself the integration and coherence of a creation that the same Lord has already rendered the kingdom of God.

My vision for the Wesley Chair includes a forum where gospel conviction and theological sophistication welcome, gain from, and contribute to *any* discipline that enhances us. Herein the Wesley Chair will anticipate the person, made in God’s image but now wounded as a creature and sinful as a human; herein the Wesley Chair will anticipate that person who will be found on the day of our Lord’s appearing with their creatureliness no longer disfigured by pain and their humanness no longer distorted by sin. In other words, in its multi-disciplinary conversation the Wesley Chair will promote both wholeness and holiness; it will promote nothing less than a *human flourishing* that redounds to the praise of God’s glory.

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