

1

THE TRINITARIAN HERMENEUTIC OF JOHN WESLEY¹

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If one consults the entry “Trinity” in the index of an edition of John Wesley’s works or in a book on Wesley’s theology, the pickings are likely to be slim. The superficial impression might be formed that Wesley undervalued the reality and the doctrine of the Trinity. Or else, from another corner, the paucity of references might happily be taken as confirmation that “the Trinity” belonged to that “orthodoxy” by which Wesley seemed to set such little store in comparison with “the religion of the heart.” Thus Wesley could indeed say, in his sermon “The Way to the Kingdom”:

A man may be orthodox in every point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God. He may assent to all three creeds—that called the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian—and yet ‘tis possible he may have no religion at all, no more than a Jew, Turk, or pagan. He may be almost as orthodox as the devil (though indeed not altogether; for every man errs in something, whereas we can’t well conceive him [the devil] to hold any erroneous opinion) and may all the while be as great a stranger as he to the religion of the heart.²

However, two things need to be noted. First, when Wesley appears in his writings to demean orthodoxy, it is *dead* orthodoxy he is aiming at; he is well aware that *living* faith has classic Christian doctrine as the intellectual formulation of its content. Second, it will be observed in the very passage just quoted that Wesley includes “the ever blessed Trinity” among the “doctrines” that are “contained in the oracles of God.” This point should itself suffice to give initial plausibility to looking for the trinitarian dimension in Wesley’s hermeneutics of the Bible.

There is a further reason why people may miss the trinitarian dimension in Wesley: he himself does not often use the term “Trinity” in his writ-

1. Appeared originally in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36/1 (Spring 2001). Used by permission.

2. “The Way to the Kingdom” (1746), I.6, Sermon 7, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:220-21.

ings. In the sermon that bears by way of exception the title “On the Trinity,” Wesley writes:

I dare not insist upon anyone’s using the word “Trinity” or “Person.” I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better. But if any man has scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot; much less would I burn a man alive—and that with moist, green wood—for saying, “Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet I scruple using the words ‘Trinity’ and ‘Persons’ because I do not find those terms in the Bible.” These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text: “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.”³

We shall return to that sermon of Wesley’s and to the problematic character of the scriptural text on which it is based, but meanwhile a passage may be quoted from the conclusion of the sermon that puts us on the right track toward Wesley’s trinitarian hermeneutics. Listen for the soteriological and doxological thrusts in this paragraph:

The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion. . . . I know not how anyone can be a Christian believer till “he hath” (as St. John speaks) “the witness in himself” [1 John 5:10]; till “the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God” [cf. Rom. 8:16]—that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son—and having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit “even as he honours the Father” [cf. John 5:23].⁴

Incidentally, that same passage uses the other term that Wesley sometimes used in place of “Trinity,” namely “the Three-One God.”

Fortified by the passage from the sermon “On the Trinity,” I shall now seek to expound Wesley’s trinitarian hermeneutics, sometimes picking up what may be considered mere hints but at other times drawing on quite explicit statements of his. My argument will be that Wesley was thoroughly trinitarian in his understanding of the composition of the Scriptures, in

3. “On the Trinity” (1775), 4, Sermon 55, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:377-78. Wesley’s ironic reference to Calvin is perhaps not surprising. Outler shows, however, that Wesley’s account both of Servetus’ teaching and of Calvin’s part in the affair is somewhat garbled.

4. *Ibid.*, 17, 385.

his ways of proceeding with the Scriptures and in his reading of the content of the Scriptures.

HOW THE SCRIPTURES CAME TO BE

In the preface to his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley gives the following succinct account of the historical origins of the Scriptures:

Concerning the Scriptures in general, it may be observed, the word of the living God, which directed the first Patriarchs also, was, in the time of Moses, committed to writing. To this were added, in several succeeding generations, the inspired writings of the other Prophets. Afterwards, what the Son of God preached, and the Holy Ghost spake by the Apostles, the Apostles and Evangelists wrote. This is what we now style the Holy Scripture: This is that “word of God which remaineth for ever”; of which, though “heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall not pass away.” The Scripture, therefore, of the Old and New Testament is a most solid and precious system of divine truth.⁵

A human role of various kinds, differing according to historical circumstances, is clearly recognized by Wesley in the writing down of God’s word by Moses and his successors, and by the apostles and evangelists. For present purposes we do not need to go into the question of Wesley’s oscillation in other discussions between a dictation theory—whereby certain parts of Scripture were given to the human writer by “particular revelation”—and the allowance that the human writers used their human judgment in a more general accordance with “the divine light which abode with them, the standing treasure of the Spirit of God.”⁶ What is clear from the passage in the preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* and remains consistently so in Wesley’s thought, is that Scripture is God’s word all through, including now Gospels and Epistles as well as the Law and the Prophets. The God of Israel, who directed the patriarchs and inspired the prophets, is (as we shall later see) the Holy Trinity, who has now been revealed as such in the incarnation of the Son, the Word made flesh, and in the Holy Spirit who was seen to rest upon Jesus and heard to speak through the apostles at Pentecost and beyond.

5. Preface to *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1754-55), 10, in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 14:238.

6. See Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1995), 18-21.

This trinitarian origin of the Scriptures is to be matched, according to Wesley, in our appropriation of them.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Searching the Scriptures is, in Wesley's view, an "ordinance of God," a "means of grace," and a "work of piety." Thus in the General Rules, the "ordinances of God" include both "searching the Scriptures," apparently understood as a family or private exercise, and "the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded" as part of "the public worship of God."⁷ In the sermon titled "The Means of Grace," the list contains "searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon)."⁸ In the sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," the exhortation to "works of piety" embraces "Search the Scriptures: hear them in public, read them in private, and meditate therein."⁹

The guidance that Wesley gives for proceeding with the Scriptures is trinitarian in shape. He begins pneumatologically. In the preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, Wesley declares that "Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given."¹⁰ Similarly in the lengthy letter to William Warburton, bishop of Gloucester: "I do firmly believe (and what serious man does not?), *omnis scriptura legi debet eo Spiritu quo scripta est*: 'We need the same Spirit to understand the Scripture, which enabled the holy men of old to write it.'"¹¹ The Latin tag comes from Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* (I.5) and was taken up by the Second Vatican Council's constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (12), and quoted in turn by the new universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (sec. 111) as "a principle of correct interpretation": "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written."

For John Wesley, this pneumatological principle entailed in practice that the study of Scripture be surrounded by prayer. That is explicitly stated in the same paragraph 18 of the preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*: "Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used

7. "Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies" (1743), 6, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 9:73.

8. "The Means of Grace" (1746), II.1, Sermon 16, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:381.

9. "On Working Out Our Own Salvation" (1785), II.4, Sermon 85, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 3:205.

10. Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (1765), 18, in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 14:253.

11. "A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Gloucester, occasioned by his tract 'On the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit'" (1762), in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 9:154.

before we consult the oracles of God; seeing 'Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given.' Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written on our hearts."¹² In his counsel to the reader of his edition of the English New Testament, Wesley provides a sample prayer whose phraseology we have already heard him echo:

I advise every one, before he reads the Scripture, to use this or the like prayer: "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ."¹³

That is a collect from the Book of Common Prayer, located in the 1662 Prayer Book at the second Sunday in Advent. It carries a subtle trinitarian watermark: the "Lord" of the opening address may be either the First Person or the entire Trinity; "patience" and "comfort" are characteristically in the Scriptures the result of the Holy Spirit's operation; the work of redemption is Christ's.

So we may now proceed christologically. Throughout the Church's history, Christ has been taken as the key to the Scriptures. Again, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sums up the entire tradition thus: "Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover" (sec. 112). In line with the Christian tradition, beginning from the writers of the New Testament, the Old Testament is interpreted by Wesley in a broadly prophetic way, as the preparation for the coming of Christ. The point is put in a nutshell when Wesley recalls Jesus' instruction to Jewish controversialists to "search the Scriptures, for they testify of me" (John 5:39): "For this very end did he direct them to search the Scriptures, that they might believe in him."¹⁴ Then, in the preface to his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley delineates the contents of the New Testament—Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation—christocentrically:

The New Testament is all those sacred writings in which the new testament or covenant is described. The former part of this contains the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles; the latter, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. In the former is, first, the history of Jesus Christ, from

12. *Works* (Jackson ed.), 14:253.

13. *Ibid.*, 307.

14. "The Means of Grace," III.7, Sermon 16, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:387.

his coming in the flesh to his ascension into heaven; then, the institution and history of the Christian Church, from the time of his ascension. The Revelation delivers what is to be, with regard to Christ, the Church, and the universe, till the consummation of all things.¹⁵

Christ himself is our way to the Father. For Wesley, according to the preface of his *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, the purpose of reading the Scriptures is “to understand the things of God”:

“Meditate thereon day and night” [cf. Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2]. So shall you attain the best knowledge, even to “know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent” [John 17:3]. And this knowledge will lead you “to love Him, because He hath first loved us” [1 John 4:19]; yea, “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” [cf. Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 12:27]. Will there not then be all “that mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus” [Phil. 2:5]? And in consequence of this, while you joyfully experience all the holy tempers described in this book, you will likewise be outwardly “holy as He that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation” [1 Pet. 1:15].¹⁶

Thus this particular hermeneutical circle—the trinitarian one—is complete. Study of the Scriptures in the Spirit, by whom they were divinely written, conveys the incarnate Christ, who gives us knowledge of the Father who sent him, so that we may love the Father and thus be conformed to the Son and enjoy the holiness which the Holy Spirit gives. The dynamic pattern described by Wesley matches well the movement which St. Basil of Caesarea sets forth in one of the most important treatises in the history of trinitarian doctrine, his work *On the Holy Spirit*: the Father’s blessings reach us through the Son in the Holy Spirit, in whom then our thanks and prayers ascend through the Son to the Father. Wesley traces the function of the Scriptures in this soteriological and doxological process. With that, we come to what may be called the scope of the Scriptures.

THE SCOPE OF THE SCRIPTURES

John Wesley characteristically spoke of the “general tenor of Scripture” or “the whole scope of Scripture.”¹⁷ As a Greek scholar, he would know that *skopos* connotes both goal and range.

15. Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 13, in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 14:239.

16. Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, 17, in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 14:252.

17. See Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture*, 43-53.

The salvific purpose of the Scriptures is graphically rendered in the celebrated passage of Wesley's preface to the *Sermons on Several Occasions* that appears indebted, perhaps via William Law's *Christian Perfection*, to the arrow and the sparrow of Wisdom 5:9-13 and Bede's story from the court of King Edwin:

To candid, reasonable men I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God; just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence I am no more seen—I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his Book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of lights: "Lord, is it not thy Word, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God'? Thou 'givest liberally and upbraidest not' [cf. James 1:5]. Thou hast said, 'If any be willing to do thy will, he shall know' [cf. John 7:17]. I am willing to do, let me know thy will." I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" [1 Cor. 2:13]. I meditate thereon, with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God, and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.¹⁸

Having been sensitized by the passages already read from Wesley on the subject, we shall perhaps be ready to catch the trinitarian hints here: God's "condescension" in the incarnation of the Son and in the Spirit's writing of the Scriptures; the "Father of lights" [James 1:17], who works by his "Word of truth" [James 1:18] and "reveals deep things by his Spirit" [cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-16].

Moreover, when Wesley speaks of "the way to heaven," the road is intrinsically related to the destination. The pilgrim's encounter with the tri-

18. Preface to the *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1746), 5, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:104-5.

une God is a foretaste of the complete achievement of “man’s chief end,” which Wesley likes to quote from the Westminster Catechism, “to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever”¹⁹—and which Wesley himself describes in a trinitarian way in the peroration to his sermon “The New Creation”: “And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!”²⁰

That universal vision of the end allows us to treat also the range of the Scriptures in their testimony to God’s purpose in the beginning; and it emerges that not only the new creation but also the first creation is presented by Wesley in trinitarian fashion. To interpret “The End of Christ’s Coming,” in a sermon under that title, Wesley backtracked to Genesis.²¹ Without the benefit of Wellhausen’s source criticism, Wesley obviously considered the first three chapters as a single story; whether in “P” or in “J(E),” it was the same Holy Trinity who said, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26-27), and who “formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (2:7): “To take the matter from the beginning, ‘the Lord God’ (literally ‘Jehovah, the Gods’; that is, One and Three) ‘created man in his own image.’” That meant not only in God’s “natural” image (endowment with understanding, will, and “a measure of liberty”) but also in God’s “moral” image, that is, “he created him not only in knowledge, but also in righteousness and true holiness”:

As his understanding was without blemish, perfect in its kind, so were all his affections. They were all set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects. And as a free agent he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding. In so doing he was unspeakably happy, dwelling in God and God in him, having an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son through the eternal Spirit.

But, as is told in Genesis 3, humankind fell; and that is why, for the reestablishment of that communion with the triune God (indeed “a holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise”), the entire trek from Genesis to Revelation had to occur, and “for this pur-

19. “The Unity of the Divine Being” (1789), 10, Sermon 120, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 4:64; cf. “What Is Man? Psalm 8:4” (1788), 13-15, Sermon 116, *ibid.*, 25-26.

20. “The New Creation” (1785), 18, Sermon 64, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:510.

21. “The End of Christ’s Coming” (1781), 1.3-7, Sermon 62, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:474-76, in particular for the following quotations.

pose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8 [KJV], the text of Wesley's sermon on "The End of Christ's Coming").

It is this need for redemption that makes it necessary for the Bible, as it tells the intervening story, to be interpreted according to what Wesley calls "the analogy of faith."

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

Drawn from Romans 12:6, which the RSV translates with a subjective slant as "in proportion to our faith," the "analogy of faith" bears in the older theology the objective meaning of "the proportion of the faith." Still in that line, the 1992-94 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives as its third hermeneutical rule "attention to the analogy of faith" and defines the *analogia fidei* as "the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation" (sec. 114). That corresponds exactly to the advice given by John Wesley in the preface to his *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*: "Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith, the connexion and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness."²² True, Wesley here considers Scriptures and the faith under the aspect of the human appropriation of salvation; but this rests, as Wesley makes amply clear throughout his sermons, upon the self-revelation of the triune God, the redemptive work of Christ, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit.²³

We must note also that Wesley varies slightly, but not substantively, in his listings of the elements in the doctrinal scheme or the links in what he calls, in the sermon on "The End of Christ's Coming," the "connected chain" that "runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end."²⁴ Thus, in *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*, he writes: "Our main doctrines, which include all the rest are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness"; and he likens them to "the porch of religion," "the door,"

22. Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, 18, in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 14:253.

23. Note also this from the treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757), in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 9:429: "A denial of original sin contradicts the main design of the gospel, which is to humble vain man, and to ascribe to God's free grace, not man's free will, the whole of his salvation. Nor, indeed, can we let this doctrine go without giving up, at the same time, the greatest part, if not all, of the essential articles of the Christian faith. If we give up this, we cannot defend either justification by the merits of Christ, or the renewal of our natures by his Spirit."

24. "The End of Christ's Coming" (1781), III.5, Sermon 62, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:483.

and “religion itself.”²⁵ In his commentary on 1 Peter 4:11, Wesley writes this about speaking according to Scripture: “The oracles of God teach that men should repent, believe, obey. He that treats of faith and leaves out repentance, or does not enjoin practical holiness to believers, does not speak as the oracles of God.”²⁶ In commenting on Romans 12:6, Wesley takes up the point from 1 Peter 4:11 about “the oracles of God” and then gives his fullest definition of prophesying “according to the analogy of faith,” that is:

According to the general tenor of them [the oracles of God]; according to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein, touching original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation. There is a wonderful analogy between all these; and a close and intimate connexion between the chief heads of that faith “which was once delivered to the saints.” Every article, therefore, concerning which there is any question should be determined by this rule; every doubtful scripture interpreted according to the grand truths which run through the whole.²⁷

For present purposes, I will now demonstrate the trinitarian character of the “analogy of faith” by which Wesley interprets Scripture. A convenient text is Wesley’s sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation.” Take first what Wesley says here about “preventing grace” or “the first dawning of grace in the soul,” sometimes identified with “conscience,” though Wesley will not allow that it is merely “natural.” In the bringing of persons to repentance and the conviction of sin, Wesley can ascribe a role to each of the three Persons of the Trinity, seen in Johannine terms as the Father who “draws” (John 6:44), the Son who “enlightens” (1:9), and the Holy Spirit who “convicts” (16:8). Thus, prevenient grace comprises

all the “drawings” of “the Father,” the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that “light” wherewith the Son of God “enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world,” showing every man “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God”; all the convictions which his Spirit from time to time works in every child of man; although, it is true, the generality of men stifle them as soon as possible, and after a while, forget, or at least deny, that ever they had them at all.²⁸

25. *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained* (1746), VI.4, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 9:227.

26. *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, ad loc. (1 Pet. 4:11).

27. *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, ad loc. (Rom. 12:6).

28. “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), I.2, Sermon 43, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:156-57.

Then “The Scripture Way of Salvation” takes us to justification and sanctification. Here the emphases are respectively christological and pneumatological. The Father forgives the believer for the sake of Christ, thereby setting us in a new relationship to himself (a “relative” change), and at the same time begins to make us holy (a “real” change) by regenerating us through the Holy Spirit, whereby we start to be conformed to Christ:

Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins, and (what is necessarily implied therein) our acceptance with God. The price whereby this hath been procured for us (commonly termed the “meritorious cause” of our justification) is the blood and righteousness of Christ, or (to express it a little more clearly) all that Christ hath done and suffered for us till “he poured out his soul for the transgressors” [cf. Isa. 53:12]. The immediate effects of justification are, the peace of God, a “peace that passeth all understanding” [Phil. 4:7], and a “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God” [Rom. 5:2], “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” [1 Pet. 1:8].

And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are “born again,” “born from above,” “born of the Spirit” [John 3:3-8; cf. Titus 3:4-7]. There is a real as well as a relative change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel “the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” [Rom. 5:5], producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money; together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper—in a word, changing the “earthly, sensual, devilish” mind [James 3:15] into “the mind which was in Christ Jesus” [Phil. 2:5].²⁹

When “The Scripture Way of Salvation” moves on to treat assurance, the trinitarian structure of the Godhead, of God’s dealings with the world, and of the Christian life in relation to God is made abundantly clear on the basis of Ephesians 4:4-6, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 5:6-12, Romans 8:14-17, and Galatians 4:4-6:

The Apostle says: “There is one faith, and one hope of our calling,” one Christian, saving faith, as “there is one Lord” in whom we believe, and “one God and Father of us all.” And it is certain this faith necessarily implies an assurance (which is here only another word for evidence, it being hard to tell the difference between them) that “Christ loved me, and gave himself for me.” For “he that be-

29. Ibid., I.3-4, 157-58.

lieveth" with the true, living faith, "hath the witness in himself." "The Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God." "Because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying, Abba, Father"; giving him an assurance that he is so, and a childlike confidence in him.³⁰

Given what Wesley describes as "the Scripture way of salvation," it is hardly surprising that he should declare in his sermon "On the Trinity" that "the knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion."

THE TRINITY REVEALED AND BELIEVED

In Wesley's sermon "On the Trinity," the trinitarian experience of the believer confirms the doctrine of the Trinity, while the doctrine rests on the "fact" that "God has revealed" that "God is Three and One." As things stand, Wesley appears to find a divine revelation of the Trinity in propositional form in the sentence he takes as the text of his sermon, namely the so-called Johannine comma at 1 John 5:7-8: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (KJV). The apologetic thrust of his argument is that, as with the creation of light or with the incarnation of the Word, one may believe the fact, which has been revealed, without understanding the manner, which has not been revealed and therefore remains mysterious:

I believe this *fact* also (if I may use the expression)—that God is Three and One. But the *manner, how*, I do not comprehend; and I do not believe it. Now in this, in the *manner*, lies the mystery. And so it may; I have no concern with it. It is no object of my faith; I believe just so much as God has revealed and no more. But this, the *manner*, he has not revealed; therefore I believe nothing about it. But would it not be absurd in me to deny the fact because I do not understand the manner? That is, to reject *what God has revealed* because I do not comprehend *what he has not revealed*?

This is a point much to be observed. There are many things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive" [1 Cor. 2:9]. Part of these God hath "revealed to us by his Spirit" [1 Cor. 2:10]—*revealed*, that is, unveiled, uncovered. That part he requires us to believe. Part of them he has not revealed. That we need not, and indeed cannot, believe; it is far above, out of our sight. Now where is the wisdom of rejecting what is revealed because we do not understand what is not re-

30. Ibid., II.3, 161-62.

vealed? Of denying the *fact* which God has unveiled because we cannot see the *manner*, which is veiled still?³¹

Wesley was aware of the question about whether the text of the Johannine comma was “genuine”: “Was it originally written by the Apostle or inserted in later ages?” He was persuaded of its authenticity by Bengel’s arguments.³² Had Wesley not been persuaded of the verse’s canonical authenticity, it is unlikely that he would have preached on it orally 23 times.³³

I hope a personal intrusion may be allowed at this point. While I believe, in line with teachings of the councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381), that the contested verse is an accurate summary of the scriptural witness to the triune God, and while I have no objection of principle to the notion of propositional revelation, I am nevertheless grateful that Wesley should also have provided other trinitarian confessions of faith that rely on a broader range of Scripture and on a more complex understanding of how the self-revelation of the triune God has taken place in the words and events and authorized interpretations that Scripture records. Note this example from the sermon “On the Discoveries of Faith”:

I know by faith that above all these [the spirits of angels and men] is the Lord Jehovah, he that is, that was, and that is to come [Rev. 1:4; 4:8], that is God from everlasting and world without end [cf. Ps. 41:13; 90:2; 103:17; 106:48]; he that filleth heaven and earth [Jer. 23:24; cf. Eph. 1:23]; he that is infinite in power, in wisdom, in justice, in mercy, and holiness; he that created all things, visible and invisible [Col. 1:16], by the breath of his mouth [Ps. 33:6], and still “upholds” them all, preserves them in being, “by the word of his power” [Heb. 1:3]; and that governs all things that are in heaven above, in earth beneath, and under the earth [cf. Exod. 20:4; Deut. 5:8]. By faith I know “there are three that bear record in heaven, the

31. “On the Trinity” (1775), 15-16, Sermon 55, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:384.

32. *Ibid.*, 5, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:378-79.

33. That figure is given by editor Albert C. Outler, *ibid.*, 373. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley offers quite a detailed exegesis of the passage. Concerning the divine witnesses to Jesus Christ as “the complete, the only Saviour of the world,” Wesley’s exegesis reads in part: “*The Father*—Who clearly testified of the Son, both at His baptism and at His transfiguration. *The Word*—Who testified of Himself on many occasions, while He was on earth; and again, with still greater solemnity, after His ascension into heaven (Rev. 1:5; 19:13). *And the Spirit*—Whose testimony was added chiefly after His glorification (1 John 2:27; John 15:26; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:16). *And these three are one*—even as those two, the Father and the Son, are one (John 10:30). Nothing can separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son. If He were not one with the Father and the Son, the apostle ought to have said, ‘The Father and the Word,’ who are one, ‘and the Spirit are two.’ But this is contrary to the whole tenor of revelation. It remains that *these three are one*. They are one in essence, in knowledge, in will, and in their testimony.”

Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit,” and that “these three are one” [1 John 5:7]; that “the word,” God the Son, “was made flesh” [John 1:14], lived, and died for our salvation, rose again, ascended into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of the Father. By faith I know that the Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life; of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost [Rom. 14:17]; of holiness and happiness, by the restoration of that image of God wherein we are created [cf. Col. 3:10]. Of all these things faith is the evidence, the sole evidence to the children of men.³⁴

The plaiting of scriptural and creedal phraseology is not surprising, given that the ancient creeds offer a summary of what is told in Scripture and traditionally provide a grid for reading it. And the creeds, it is known, grew up around the practice of “baptizing . . . in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).³⁵

Another writing in which Wesley brings together the trinitarian creeds and the Scriptures is the “Letter to a Roman Catholic.” In setting out the content of what “a true Protestant believes,” Wesley weaves into the trinitarian structures and language of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon such further threads as the classical doctrine concerning the *munus triplex* of Christ as prophet, priest, and king and his own scripturally based teaching concerning the Holy Spirit as “not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us”: “enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions; purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.”³⁶ Then, when Wesley comes to set out the matching practice of a true Protestant, he again follows a broadly trinitarian pattern, with scriptural echoes throughout:

A true Protestant believes in God, has a full confidence in his mercy, fears him with a filial fear, and loves him with all his soul. He

34. “On the Discoveries of Faith” (1788), 7, Sermon 117, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 4:31-32.

35. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley makes no comment on the threefold name at Matt. 28:19, but he refers to it obliquely in his explanation of the instruction at Acts 10:48 that Cornelius and his household be baptized “in the name of the Lord”: “*In the name of the Lord*—Which implies the Father who anointed Him, and the Spirit with which He was anointed, to His office. But as these Gentiles had before believed in God the Father, and could not but now believe in the Holy Ghost, under whose powerful influence they were at this very time, there was less need of taking notice that they were baptized into the belief and profession of the sacred Three; though doubtless the apostle administered the ordinance in that very form which Christ Himself had prescribed.”

36. “Letter to a Roman Catholic” (1749), in *Works* (Jackson ed.), 10:81-82.

worships God in spirit and in truth [John 4:23-24], in everything gives him thanks [1 Thess. 5:18]; calls upon him with his heart as well as his lips [cf. Rom. 10:9-13], at all times and in all places; honours his holy name and his word, and serves him truly all the days of his life. . . .

A true Protestant loves his neighbour, that is, every man, friend or enemy, good or bad, as himself, as he loves his own soul, as Christ loved us. And as Christ laid down his life for us, so he is ready to lay down his life for his brethren [cf. John 15:12-13; Eph. 5:2]. . . . Knowing his body to be the temple of the Holy Ghost [1 Cor. 6:19], he keeps it in sobriety, temperance, and chastity.³⁷

As a final example, we may take the passage in the sermon "Catholic Spirit" in which Wesley spells out what is implied in the question "Is thine heart right?" Again the structure is trinitarian (provided one remember that the source of love in the Christian is the Holy Spirit who, according to Romans 5:5, has been poured into our hearts), and the text is a tissue of scriptural phrases:

The first thing implied is this: Is thy heart right with God? Does thou believe his being, and his perfections? His eternity, immensity, wisdom, power; his justice, mercy and truth? Dost thou believe that he now "upholdeth all things by the word of his power" [Heb. 1:3]? And that he governs even the most minute, even the most noxious, to his own glory and the good of them that love him [cf. Rom. 8:28]? Hast thou a divine evidence, a supernatural conviction of the things of God [cf. Heb. 11:1]? Dost thou "walk by faith, not by sight" [2 Cor. 5:7], looking not at temporal things but things eternal [cf. 2 Cor. 4:18]?

Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, "God over all, blessed for ever" [Rom. 9:5]? Is he "revealed in" thy soul [cf. Gal. 1:16]? Dost thou "know Jesus Christ and him crucified" [1 Cor. 2:2]? Does he "dwell in thee and thou in him" [cf. John 6:56]? Is he "formed in thy heart by faith" [cf. Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17]? Having absolutely disclaimed all thy own works, thy own righteousness, hast thou "submitted thyself unto the righteousness of God" [Rom. 10:3], which is by faith in Christ Jesus [cf. Rom. 3:22]? Art thou "found in him, not having thy own righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith" [Phil. 3:9]? And art thou, through him, "fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life" [1 Tim. 6:12]?

Is thy faith *energoumenê di' agapês*, "filled with the energy of love" [Gal. 5:6]? Dost thou love God? I do not say "above all things",

37. Ibid., 83-84.

for it is both an unscriptural and an ambiguous expression, but “with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength” [Luke 10:27]? . . . Dost thou love as thyself all mankind without exception? . . . Do you show your love by your works? While you have time, as you have opportunity, do you in fact “do good to all men” [Gal. 6:10], neighbours or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad?³⁸

Our emphasis in the last few pages has fallen on the soteriological and the doctrinal, but the passage from Wesley’s “Letter to a Roman Catholic” brought back a dimension that I earlier asked you to notice toward the end of the sermon “On the Trinity,” namely the doxological. Christians worship God in spirit and in truth; they honor the Son and the Spirit even as they honor the Father.

WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

In a score or so of passages in his sermons, Wesley quotes or alludes to John 4:23-24: “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (KJV).³⁹ In the words “spirit” and “truth,” trinitarianly attuned ears will pick up christological and pneumatological resonances, echoing such texts as John 1:14 and 17; 8:31-32; 14:6 and 17; 15:26; 16:7 and 13-15; 17:17-19. In a sermon titled “Spiritual Worship,” Wesley sums up his theme as “the happy and holy communion which the faithful have with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”; and it is to that sermon that we shall turn, since it offers one of the most sustained examples of trinitarian hermeneutics in Wesley’s works.

The text of the sermon “Spiritual Worship” was 1 John 5:20: “This is the true God, and eternal life” (KJV).⁴⁰ As a preliminary, let it be noted how highly Wesley regarded the First Letter of John. At Dublin he wrote in his *Journal* for July 18, 1765: “In the evening, I began expounding the deepest part of the Holy Scripture, namely the First Epistle of St. John, by which, above all other even inspired writings, I advise every young preacher to form his style. Here are sublimity and simplicity together, the strongest sense and the plainest language! How can anyone that would ‘speak as the oracles of God’ use harder words than are found there?”⁴¹

38. “Catholic Spirit” (1750), I.12-18, Sermon 39, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 2:87-89.

39. For Wesley’s uses of that text, see Geoffrey Wainwright, “Worship According to Wesley,” *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 13/1 (May 1991), 5-20, especially 7-9.

40. “Spiritual Worship” (1780), Sermon 77, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 3:88-102.

41. *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 22:13.

In the prelude to his sermon "Spiritual Worship," Wesley analyzes the structure of what he calls St. John's "tract." Between the opening statement of apostolic authority and purpose (1:1-4) and the final recapitulation (5:18-21), the bulk of the Epistle is seen by Wesley to fall into a trinitarian pattern, treating first communion with the Father (1:5-10), next communion with the Son (2:1—3:24), then communion with the Spirit (4:1-21), and finally the testimony of the entire Trinity on which Christian faith and life depend (5:1-12).

Wesley spends the first part of his own sermon in establishing from Scripture that Christ is indeed "the true God," which he takes his text to declare.⁴² Not only do the Scriptures directly attribute divinity to him (John 1:1-2; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6) and "give him all the titles of the most high God," including "the incommunicable name, Jehovah, never given to any creature"; they also "ascribe to him all the attributes and all the works of God": he is of all things the Creator (Col. 1:16; John 1:3; Heb. 1:10), the Supporter (Heb. 1:3), the Preserver (Col. 1:17), the Author or Mover, the Governor (Ps. 103:19; Isa. 9:6), and the End (Rom. 11:36), and he is "the Redeemer of all the children of men" (with appeal to Isa. 53:6). Then, in the second part of his sermon, Wesley shows how, according to his text, Christ is "eternal life." Christ is "the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9), "the purchaser of that 'crown of life' which will be given to all that are 'faithful unto death' [Rev. 2:10]." This does not apply only to the future resurrection (John 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:22; 1 Pet. 1:3-4), but begins now (1 John 5:11-12). Here Wesley's description is thoroughly trinitarian:

This eternal life then commences when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts; when we first know Christ, being enabled to "call him Lord by the Holy Ghost" [1 Cor. 12:3]; when we can testify, our conscience bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost [cf. Rom. 8:16; 1 John 5:10], "the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" [Gal. 2:20]. And then it is that happiness begins—happiness real, solid, substantial. Then it is that heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper, heavenly state commences, while the love of God, as loving us, is shed abroad in the heart [Rom. 5:5], instantly producing love

42. It must be admitted that some exegetes take the *houtos* of 1 John 5:20 to refer to the Father, not to the Son. Wesley does not even consider this possibility but proceeds immediately to demonstrate the deity of Christ from Scripture. Among recent scholars, the distinguished Raymond E. Brown favors Wesley's exegetical option at 1 John 5:20; see his commentary, *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible 30 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 639-40. Brown, by the way, does not support the textual authenticity of the Johannine comma, to which he devotes an informative appendix (775-87).

to all mankind: general, pure benevolence, together with its genuine fruits, lowliness, meekness, patience [Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12], contentedness in every state; an entire, clear, full acquiescence in the whole will of God, enabling us to “rejoice evermore, and in everything to give thanks” [1 Thess. 5:16-18].⁴³

That euchological ending encourages me to turn, for one final demonstration of Wesley’s trinitarian hermeneutics, to his exposition of the Lord’s Prayer.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Wesley expounds the Lord’s Prayer as part of his Sixth Discourse on Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. This is what he there says concerning the name that is to be hallowed:

The name of God is God himself—the nature of God so far as it can be discovered to man. It means, therefore, together with his existence, all his attributes or perfections—his eternity, particularly signified by his great and incommunicable name Jehovah, as the Apostle John translates it, “the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End; he which is, and which was, and which is to come” [Rev. 1:8; 21:6]. His “fullness of being” [cf. Eph. 3:19; Col. 2:9], denoted by his other great name, “I am that I am” [Exod. 3:14]; his omnipresence; his omnipotence—who is indeed the only agent in the material world, all matter being essentially dull and inactive, and moving only as it is moved by the finger of God [cf. Exod. 8:19; Luke 11:20]. And he is the spring of action in every creature, visible and invisible, which could neither act nor exist without the continued influx and agency of his almighty power; —his wisdom, clearly deduced from the things that are seen [cf. Rom. 1:20], from the goodly order of the universe; his Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity, discovered to us in the very first line of his Written Word, *bara’ elohim*, literally “the Gods created,” a plural noun joined with a verb of the singular number, as well as in every part of his subsequent revelations, given by the mouth of all his holy prophets and apostles; his essential purity and holiness; and above all his love, which is the very brightness of his glory [cf. Heb. 1:3].⁴⁴

There stands Wesley’s deliberate statement that God is self-disclosed as Trinity throughout Scripture.⁴⁵ It forms the justification for the remark-

43. “Spiritual Worship,” II.5, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 3:96.

44. “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth” (1748), III.7, Sermon 26, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:580-81.

45. To the point about the plural form Elohim being used with singular verbs may be

able hymn that Wesley appends to the sermon under consideration.⁴⁶ The text begins with three stanzas developing “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.” The next two stanzas develop the next two petitions—“Thy kingdom come,” “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”—with a christological and a pneumatological address respectively: “Son of thy Sire’s eternal love” and “Spirit of grace, and health, and power.” The sixth, seventh, and eighth stanzas take the remaining petitions of the Lord’s Prayer according to a trinitarian sequence: the prayer for bread (addressed to the Father), the prayer for forgiveness (addressed to the “eternal, spotless Lamb of God”), and the prayer for preservation from temptation and deliverance from evil (addressed to the “Giver and Lord of life”). The concluding doxological stanza is addressed conjointly to the Triune God. The stanzas follow.

I

Father of all, whose powerful voice
 Called forth this universal frame,
 Whose mercies over all rejoice,
 Through endless ages still the same:
 Thou by Thy word upholdest all;
 Thy bounteous love to all is showed;
 Thou hear’st Thy every creature’s call,
 And fillest every mouth with good.

II

In heaven Thou reign’st enthroned in light,
 Nature’s expanse beneath Thee spread;

added the point noticed earlier about the composite name Jehovah Elohim—which, incidentally, is frequently taken as designating the Trinity in Charles Wesley’s “Hymns on the Trinity” (1767), in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborn (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868-72), 7:201-348. Another indication of Wesley’s perception of the pervasive presence of the Trinity in Scripture is found in his comment in the *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* on the words of Jesus at Luke 4:18: “How is the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity interwoven even in those scriptures where one would least expect it! How clear a declaration of the great Three-One is there in those very words, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me!*”

46. “A Paraphrase on the Lord’s Prayer,” in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:589-91. The hymn had first appeared in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol, 1742), published under the joint names of John and Charles Wesley. In the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, it figured in three equal parts—numbers 225, 226, and 227—among the section “For Believers Rejoicing.” Doubtless adjudged too long for regular liturgical use, the hymn was retained in abbreviated form—with loss of the trinitarian structures and disturbance of the sequence of petitions—as hymn 47 in the *British Methodist Hymn Book* of 1933.

Earth, air, and sea, before Thy sight,
And hell's deep gloom are open laid.
Wisdom, and might, and love are Thine;
Prostrate before Thy face we fall,
Confess Thine attributes divine,
And hail the sovereign Lord of all.

III

Thee, sovereign Lord, let all confess
That moves in earth, or air, or sky,
Revere Thy power, Thy goodness bless,
Tremble before Thy piercing eye;
All ye who owe to Him your birth,
In praise your every hour employ;
Jehovah reigns! Be glad, O earth,
And shout, ye morning stars, for joy.

IV

Son of Thy Sire's eternal love,
Take to Thyself Thy mighty power;
Let all earth's sons Thy mercy prove,
Let all Thy bleeding grace adore.
The triumphs of Thy love display,
In every heart reign Thou alone,
Till all Thy foes confess Thy sway,
And glory ends what grace begun.

V

Spirit of grace, and health, and power,
Fountain of light and love below,
Abroad Thy healing influence shower,
O'er all the nations let it flow.
Inflame our hearts with perfect love,
In us the work of faith fulfil,
So not heaven's host shall swifter move
Than we on earth to do Thy will.

VI

Father, 'tis Thine each day to yield
Thy children's wants a fresh supply;
Thou cloth'st the lilies of the field,
And hearest the young ravens cry.
On Thee we cast our care; we live
Through Thee, who know'st our every need;

O feed us with Thy grace, and give
Our souls this day the living bread.

VII

Eternal, spotless Lamb of God,
Before the world's foundation slain,
Sprinkle us ever with Thy blood;
O cleanse, and keep us ever clean!
To every soul (all praise to Thee)
Our bowels of compassion move,
And all mankind by this may see
God is in us—for God is love.

VIII

Giver and Lord of life, whose power
And guardian care for all are free,
To Thee, in fierce temptation's hour,
From sin and Satan let us flee;
Thine, Lord, we are, and ours Thou art;
In us be all Thy goodness showed,
Renew, enlarge, and fill our heart
With peace, and joy, and heaven, and God.

IX

Blessing, and honour, praise, and love,
Co-equal, co-eternal Three,
In earth below, and heaven above,
By all Thy works be paid to Thee.
Thrice holy, Thine the kingdom is,
The power omnipotent is Thine;
And when created nature dies,
Thy never-ceasing glories shine.⁴⁷

47. This paper has deliberately been kept almost exclusively at the historical level. It will achieve its purpose if it encourages exegetes, historians, and theologians in the Wesleyan tradition to develop a trinitarian hermeneutic in their work. My own systematic developments on the Trinity are found elsewhere, chiefly in "The Doctrine of the Trinity: Where the Church Stands or Falls," *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 117-32; "Renewal as a Trinitarian and Traditional Event," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 25 (1991): 117-24; "Trinitarian Worship," in my *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 237-50; and "The Ecumenical Rediscovery of the Trinity," *One in Christ* 34 (1998): 95-124. Note also my "Psalm 33 Interpreted of the Triune God," *Ex Auditu* 16 (2000): 101-20. A fully systematic proposal of a trinitarian approach to Scripture, by an author in the Pentecostal tradition, is found in my pupil Telford Work's book, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

Robert Wall is a professor and biblical scholar who has contributed significantly within both the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and the larger field of biblical scholarship. This point should not go unnoticed, as he openly laments over the chasm that often exists between biblical scholarship and broader theological conversations within the church. Among his purposes is a reminder of the critical place and role of the biblical canon within the continuing life, practice, and theological conversations of the contemporary church.

Professor Wall suggests that all readers listen to the Bible from their theological context, Wesleyans included. That being the case, he offers several distinctive features of a Wesleyan understanding of Scripture that may potentially shape Wesleyan readings of these sacred texts. Such ways of reading the Bible should contribute to but not dominate the ongoing theological discussions within the broader church. However, what may be most important is not merely the distinctiveness of these Wesleyan readings of the Bible but the ways that such readings shape the life and practices of the church for faithfulness to God and for holy living.
