

## CHAPTER 1

# Trinity, Community, and Power

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At the Seventh Oxford Institute (1982), Albert Outler argued that the renaissance of interest in John Wesley as theological mentor should lead to what he called a third stage of Wesley studies. He described this new stage as "an effort to get beyond Wesley as Methodist patriarch toward a more fruitful place for him on the larger scene, historical and ecumenical." Repositioning Wesley "in his own time and place, against his larger background, and in as wide a historical context as possible" would all be aimed at enabling "an application of Wesley's relevance to issues in *our times* and *our futures*."<sup>1</sup>

In this Institute we are attempting to enter this third stage in our work on Trinity, community, and power. Our hypothesis is twofold: (1) Most of the problems that surround Christian life and mission in the world today center on the issues of community and power; and (2) for Christians the Trinity should define community and power. Our leading question is: Of what relevance to *our times* and *our futures* would be a distinctively Wesleyan perspective on the Trinity?

It is, to be sure, shaky ground on which we are treading. Even though since 1980 there has been a dramatic resurgence of work on the Trinity to which almost all major theologians have contributed, the Trinity nevertheless still does not rank high in the preaching, teaching, and life of congregations. The Trinity is often denigrated as

rarefied intellectual acrobatics.<sup>2</sup> The result in Methodism as well as the rest of modern Christianity is what Wesley feared, a "practical unitarianism."

The most basic function of the Trinity has been to connect Jesus and the Holy Spirit with the God of Israel so that "God" is constituted by the name and history of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. If you have experienced a Methodist worship service in which the names of Jesus and the Holy Spirit were not prominent or not even uttered, you will have run into the practical unitarianism that marks many other aspects of the life of our churches.

What difference does it make that we Methodists too have by and large succumbed to the generic God? Thanking God for the exceptions in world Methodism and yet continuing the generalization, I would say that what is lost in a Methodism lacking the Trinity is our possibility of making a difference in the world. Our failure to live *in the Trinity* leads to a church that is generally turned in on itself, narcissistically incapable of being the household of Jesus Christ and of engaging in the service of God's justice in the world.

But why, then, should Methodists turn to the Trinity? The report on John Wesley and the Trinity in this Institute is likely to be somewhat ambiguous. Wesley held that the Trinity "enters into the very heart of Christianity; it lies at the root of all vital religion."<sup>3</sup> It is also rather clear, however, that on the surface Wesley made no earth-shaking emendation to the classical doctrines of the Trinity *per se*. He eschewed protracted debates on the Trinity and certainly neglected many nuances of the doctrine. Moreover, it was clear to Wesley that salvation in no way depends on adherence to any specific philosophical explication of the Trinity.<sup>4</sup> But in his *via salutis* Wesley did give us, in my opinion, creative trinitarian stimulations. Above all he gave us the most important lead for the doctrine of the Trinity in our time—namely, his insistence that we must not simply know the Trinity, but also practice the Trinity by living in the Trinity. That was the secret of Wesley's theology (over against the Lutheran, Moravian, and Calvinist tendencies). For Wesley the Trinity is not just about the abstract questions of the unity and diversity of God. The Trinity comprehends and expresses God's redemption of the world.

I do not think we will have any disagreement that a Wesleyan view of the Trinity will concur with the great points of consensus in recent trinitarian theology.<sup>5</sup> I mention only three:

1. Newer trinitarian theology begins with the biblical narratives

and therefore with the *oikonomia* of God (rather than the metaphysical definition of substance or the modern conception of the absolute self as a way of defining God).<sup>6</sup> What we can say about the triune God we know through God's self-uncovering. This is exactly Wesley's approach: Perform the doctrine of the Trinity by emphasizing God's way of salvation. The Trinity is first of all the hermeneutic, the grammar, the syntax, the logic, or the rhetoric of the story of Jesus, the history of Israel, and the redemption of the cosmos.

The community's experience of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is the beginning of the knowledge of the triune God. God is who Jesus is through the Holy Spirit; this is not enough to say, but it is the irreplaceable starting point. These narratives must be read within the concrete practices of worship, formation, diaconia, discipleship, and mission. Recent trinitarian theology follows the dictum made famous by Karl Rahner: The economic trinity that we know in revelation is the immanent Trinity. God in God's own internal life is not different from the way God uncovers Godself in the experience of Israel, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be performed in separation from the history of Israel.<sup>7</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity must remain under constant scrutiny: Do trinitarian claims, however philosophically precise, convey the truth of the biblical narratives to changing social and cultural contexts? The doctrine of the Trinity must be able, above all, to comprehend the cross of Jesus Christ and the lives of those who live in the shadow of the cross today.

2. A second consensus is that trinitarian theology should begin with the difference and particularity of the persons instead of with their unity. I will say more about this below.

3. A third consensus is a collective enthusiasm for relationality as opposed to the abstract metaphysical concepts of substance and essence.<sup>8</sup> God is constituted by the relations that come to expression in the narratives of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. "The traditional claim that God was 'a single divine substance' tended to evoke the image of an isolated, passionless monad—thus obscuring both God's internal relationality and God's loving relationship with the world. This image came to dominate most of Western theology—whether in its original metaphysical form, or in its transformation in German idealism into the idea of the absolute subject. In either case, it was used in the service of all sorts of mischief, from starkly monarchical accounts of ecclesiastical, political, and familial hierarchies, to caricatures of God as distant, disengaged, and incapable of suffering."<sup>9</sup>

This renewed emphasis on relationality corresponds to the well-established Wesleyan tilting to the Eastern Fathers.<sup>10</sup>

These, then, are points of consensus that a Wesleyan development of the Trinity will take up. But I believe a Wesleyan doctrine of the Trinity will make its ecumenical contributions in three ways. A Wesleyan way of putting it would be that the Trinity is a short formula for the history of God's grace, the logic of God's redemption of the world. Thus a Wesleyan approach would stress the (1) pneumatological, (2) eucharistic, and (3) doxological aspects of the Trinity.

The reason for this is that the doctrine of the Trinity is not only about God's unique being but also about our different way of being in the world. The opportunity of this Institute is that, working at the Trinity from many different perspectives and disciplines,<sup>11</sup> we might be able to see more clearly the Wesleyan emphasis on the practice of the Trinity.<sup>12</sup>

To that end I would like to reflect on the Trinity in light of concrete, practical questions raised by the United Methodist Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty.<sup>13</sup> I regard this initiative as perhaps the most promising development in Methodism today and want to reflect on it because it represents a problem of life not simply for North America or The United Methodist Church but for the whole church in the whole world. Why are there poor children in all parts of the world? To reflect on this question, to suffer this question, to decide to do something about this question is, I believe, a proper matrix for the doctrine of the Trinity and, perhaps, is the occasion for Methodist revival. The doctrine of the Trinity cannot, of course, be reduced to this question (or any other practical question), but if it does not embrace this question, it is not worth its salt.

What makes us Methodists *methodist* is that we are constitutionally looking for revival and are a miserable lot if revival is not taking place in and around us. The word *revival* comes from *revivre*, "to come to life again." I want to connect the question of "coming to life again" with our life in the Trinity. The word *survival* comes from *survivre*, "to live through." Thus I will argue that our revival is connected with the survival of children around the world. Who is God in the face of children in poverty? Who are we *coram Deo* (before God) in the face of children in poverty? I am well aware that this is not the usual way of doing a theology of the Trinity, but I think it is an authentic Wesleyan way. Why is there no Methodist revival for the survival of children? We will have no community and power for

coming to life again for the sake of the survival of the children without our living in the community of the triune God. Thus trinitarian views of community and power represent the *conditio sine qua non* of Methodist revival that cannot help being engaged in the question of children and poverty.

What are the prospects of the survival of children in our world? The United Nations tells us that forty-two thousand children will not survive this day. They will not be given their daily bread. They will starve to death. Other children will be excluded from home, abused at home, abandoned, or denigrated by laboring before their time. The first to die in the killing fields of Bosnia; Cambodia; Rwanda; Washington, D.C.; and Manchester, England, are the children caught in the cross fire of hatred and violence. Children die in the arms of helpless refugee parents. Children are humiliated in any culture that does not give them a name and a story and thus a future. When there is no power for life, when there is no community, children do not survive the day. And even in the most affluent families and communities we are often losing our own children, for we do not practice the stories we tell them are true. Millions of children all across the world have gone into the "far country" where they experience what was said of the prodigal son, "no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:16).

What is common to children in all places and all times is that children can only survive and flourish if they are *given* what is necessary for life and life abundant. Children live by gifting. Children who are forced to live by other than gifting lose their childhood before their time and are subjected to the conditions of death. Jesus said "Suffer the little children to come unto me" in order to make clear to us that children disclose to us the real situation of all human beings: No one can live in a truly human way without grace, without gift. A Wesleyan doctrine of the Trinity, I believe, exists above all to protect, revivify, and practically display the *logic of grace* and to serve our living in the triune *community of gifting*.

### *Wesley and Gifting*

I have to make a case for all of this. But let us first turn to John Wesley. The year is 1789, not too long before his death. He preaches a sermon that is salty with tears and redolent with exasperation and sorrow. The title by which we know this sermon is "The Causes of the

Inefficacy of Christianity."<sup>14</sup> It is not Wesley's title. A more germane title might have been "Why the Methodist Revival Has Flopped." Beginning with a kind of general disquisition on why Christianity tends to fail, the sermon is nevertheless clearly directed at Methodists, Wesley's own people. The sermon is at once a stinging condemnation and an exquisite theological argument that is just as relevant to our situation at the end of the twentieth century as it was for Methodists at the end of the eighteenth century. What is the reason that Methodists have floundered in revival?

Wesley investigates, first, the possibility that a primary Wesleyan theological rule has been violated. The rule is this: "Whatever doctrine is preached where there is not discipline, it cannot have its full effect on the hearers." No doctrine without discipline; no doctrine without its practice. There is no doubt that this is a primary problem for us Methodists today, but this was not the problem for Wesley's hearers in 1789. Scriptural Christianity, says Wesley, is preached among Methodists; thousands continually hear and receive "the truth that is in Jesus." Moreover, Methodists have discipline. "And have they not Christian discipline, too, in all the essential branches of it regularly and constantly exercised? Let those who think any essential part of it wanting point it out, and it shall not be wanting long."

Why then are Methodists who have both Christian doctrine and discipline not altogether Christians? Why do we not have the mind in us that was in Jesus? Why do we not walk as Christ walked? The plain truth is that doctrine and discipline are not enough. Methodists are missing the one thing needful. *They cannot give.* They have lost the gift of giving.

The Methodist revival began with God's grace manifested among, for, and through the poor. For two generations Methodists followed the discipline of "earn all you can" and "save all you can" and "give all you can." But now they have become propertied and no longer give. Let us get a grip as we hear what Wesley says to Methodists who cannot give: "And yet nothing can be more plain than that all who observe the first two rules without the third will be twofold more the children of hell than ever they were before." Can Methodists fall from grace? Can Methodists fall into apostasy? "[You are the ones] who continually grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and in a great measure stop his gracious influence from descending on our assemblies. Many of your [brothers and sisters], beloved of God,

have not food to eat; they have not raiment to put on; they have not a place where to lay their head. And why are they thus distressed? Because *you* impiously, unjustly, and cruelly detain from them what your Master and theirs lodges in *your* hands on purpose to supply *their* wants."<sup>15</sup>

This teaching of Wesley, which so embarrasses and convicts especially us Methodists of the developed world, goes all the way back to the Torah, to the teachings of Jesus, the church Fathers, and indeed the whole Christian tradition up to John Locke at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> It is the household rule of God's economy: "Do not harvest all the way to the edge of your fields, but leave gleanings for the poor." Wesley taught incessantly that what of our possessions is beyond our "necessaries and conveniences" belongs already to the poor because of God's claim on their life and our life.<sup>17</sup>

But we should not assume for a minute that Wesley is posing just an ethical issue, narrowly construed. It is not a simple problem of not giving enough to the societies and the church or even to the poor. It is not a simple stewardship or social action problem, as nowadays conceived. It becomes clear that Wesley is talking about what he considers the heart of gospel salvation. Methodists cannot give. That is, they refuse to be gifted by God's grace and have lost the gift of giving. They refuse to live in God's grace, which is the same thing as refusing God's gift of life. The problem is that they cannot give themselves away and thus cannot be disciples of Jesus Christ. They are not promised to God and do not praise God's grace. They are not dwelling in God and God in them. They have become dead in the Spirit and the revival is moribund. There can be no revival without gifting.

### *The Market Society and Gifting*

Let's ask about the state of Methodist revival for the survival of the children today, assuming that revival has to do with the peculiar power and community that are created by the gifting—that is, the grace—of God. Let's also assume that, from a Wesleyan perspective, the doctrine of the Trinity is the theory of God's life and work of grace and that practicing the Trinity means dwelling in God's grace for the sake of our revival and the survival of God's creation, whose vulnerability is unmistakably clear in the poverty of children. If we

make these assumptions, which I think are all the right assumptions, we immediately run up against the fact that the dominant forms of power in our world make gifting theoretically inconceivable and practically impossible.

The four primary spheres of power in the world today are *state*, *economy*, *media*, and *technology*. The logic of the state can be seen positively as participation in the commonweal, and negatively as coercion. The logic of the media is positively the conveyance of information, and negatively manipulation through the apparent, the virtual world. The logic of technology positively construed is the human tool for symbiosis with nature, or negatively the production of a human countercreation stubbornly subjugating the rest of creation. And finally, the logic of the market is the exchange of commodities or power as the accumulation of wealth.

Within these four macrospheres the logic of the market (the accumulation of wealth as power and commodity exchange) has become dominant; that is, even where state, media, and technology exert massive power from their own spheres, those forms of power are increasingly in the service of the market logic that is spreading all over the world. At the end of the twentieth century the trend throughout the world is that we have everywhere not only a market economy but also a market society.<sup>18</sup> The market logic may be the only worldly universal in our time. This is what makes the plight of children similar in almost all parts of the world. Children cannot flourish within these logics that cut off gifting; children whose guardians do not flourish within these spheres fall into a fifth sphere of power: the growing wild, ungovernable areas in our cities and countryside where violence reigns.

In a market society all social goods that must be distributed for life are reduced to commodities: food, housing, education, health care delivery, even the delivery of justice. Everything is a commodity. Everything is for sale. There are no commons.

If we have a memory, we who live out of the biblical narratives know that those things that are necessary for life should not be commodities or exhaustively commodities. Children cannot live without gifting. Once it was said that "outside the church there is no salvation." Today it is becoming ever more widely assumed that *outside the market there is no salvation*. The market logic is so pervasive that the time and space that can be occupied by the church as the community of grace is frightfully meager.



The French postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida argues persuasively that our societies have become so saturated by commodity exchange that there is no such thing as a gift anymore.<sup>19</sup> Everyone is suspicious of gifts, for they make one "much obliged." Gifts destroy freedom, the freedom to follow one's whim. Everything that appears to be a gift is merely a contract, merely a disguised exchange of commodities.<sup>20</sup> The pretense of gift conceals coercion at work and reconciles all to such coercion. Gifting at bottom hides contractual exchange and usurious reality. In this mentality gift becomes synonymous with blunder, foolish candor, and private sensibility. Gifts are for sentimental occasions; they are family matters in private occasions. This is why in many of our countries now the reigning public policies assume that all solutions to all human problems should be market and contractual solutions. If our memory served us, we who claim to live out of the biblical horizon would know that in the end the solution of human problems requires gifting as well as commodity exchange.

Here I think we should stand with Wesley. If there is no such thing as a gift, if a gift cannot be given, then there is no content to Christian faith and no possibility of the church of Jesus Christ. For our faith, our hope, and our love depend utterly on the gift God has given and on the gifting God enables us to do. If there is no such thing as a gift, there will be no revival and no survival. If there is no real space and time for gifting, what chance is there for children? I believe that the crisis of Methodism is that we have forgotten how to conceive grace, for its reality of gifting has become arcane and perplexing to us. We have forgotten how to be gifted and to gift. So used to the logic of exchange are we that the logic of grace seems foreign. We are trying to be Christians without the practice of grace.

### *The Rules of Gift-Giving and the Perichoresis of the Trinity*

The most important function of the Trinity, from a Wesleyan perspective, then is to serve as a hermeneutic of gift and a theory of the practice of gifting through the grace of God. The Trinity is the community of divine gifting. God as Trinity is a genuine community of diversity, not simply a differentiated self or being that appears in three different ways; and yet, the Trinity is a community that is

absolutely one in the communion of love. The Cappadocian Fathers, in their doctrine of perichoresis, gave us the best way to describe the gifting of the divine community of persons. *Perichoresis* probably emerged from ancient round dance and means "mutual coinherence." It refers to the constant giving and receiving of the persons of the Trinity. Each person in the Trinity is distinctive, having a unique name, with particular work. But each person is who that person is only in relation to the other persons. No person is autonomous, no person is isolated from the others. We never get one person of the Trinity without the others. They share themselves in order to accomplish their work. Each one gives to the others what is appropriate for the distinctive work of the others and at once for the common work of all. They share themselves in order to accomplish their distinctive work. No person ever does anything in separation from the others.

Thus, though the persons of the Trinity are distinct, they are not divided. God is one; there is never a question of three Gods. How then are the divine persons united? The simple scriptural answer is that "God is love." Unity is always a political term, a power term. The answers to the question of unity have sometimes been in the service of dominative concepts.<sup>21</sup> The alternative answer of the Cappadocians is that persons of the Trinity are perfectly united in their self-giving to each other. They are made one in their love of each other and their love of the creation. They give themselves for the sake of communion and for the sake of the life of the creation. God's being is love; God's being as love determines God's power.

Paul sees this way of describing the difference and union of the community of God as the way to describe the difference and union of the church. The formation of the household of Jesus Christ begins with the difference and particularity of each person in the community. The particular gifts of each person define his or her ministry, and the sharing of these gifts assures that no one ministers alone.

From the perichoretic relations of the divine persons we can derive certain rules of gift-giving. A gift must be given freely. A gift must be appropriate to the giver and receiver. A gift must be returned.<sup>22</sup> The gift is inseparable from the return, giving from giving back. The return gift, of course, is never the same gift; and it is not returned immediately, else we would be talking about something that approximates a commodity exchange. There must be a prior relationship between the giver and the receiver. Thus gifting entails obligation to give, obligation to receive, and obligation to give back.

Modern theology, on the whole, has not helped in the contrast between gift and contract but in many ways has only exacerbated the problem. In response to the sharp distinction between free gift and contract, modern theology has developed a notion of gift as "pure gift" that is defined in opposition to commodity exchange but has no power to offer an alternative to commodity exchange. This can be seen in Nygren's definition of pure agape as pure giving as opposed to the eros of desiring.<sup>23</sup> It can also be seen in the social gospel understanding of love that was accepted uncritically by two generations of ethicists but then confined to the personal realm. The result is an extreme two-kingdoms approach to love and gifting that precludes a doctrine of sanctification that would seek to find correspondences to trinitarian love and giving in the public sphere. I take this to be a primary reason for the quietism that presently rests on much of Methodism.

This theological understanding of pure gift that is limited to justifying grace is after all very similar to the modern character of gift. The character of the modern gift, defined as it is over against commodity exchange, is that it does not expect a return gift.<sup>24</sup> It is unaffected in its gift character by the gratitude or lack of it on the part of the recipient. It is given as a whim. The content of the gift does not matter. A gift can be anything. What matters is correct intention and lack of constraint in the circumstances surrounding the act. This is a formalistic and unilateral definition of gift. There is nothing duty-bound about the gift. As in a commodity exchange, there may be sentiment but not too much emotion. This cleavage between gift and contract embodies a modern distinction between the private and public spheres of life.

Thus, I believe, it is an important function of trinitarian theology to help us again to distinguish between a commodity and a gift, between commodity exchange and gifting, without denying the crucial point that gifts must be returned (since, I will argue, the Wesleyan perspective is that a gift must be returned). Therein lies the theo-logic of sanctification.

Gifts literally cease to be gifts if they are not used and if they are not given further.<sup>25</sup> When gifts are sold or traded they change their nature. That something will come back to the giver is not the condition of the gift, though the character of gifting is that something does come back. Market exchange on the other hand aims at an equilibrium. You pay in order to balance the scales. In gift-giving an imbalance is created that causes momentum and creates new relationships.

In commodity exchange there is neither motion nor emotion; the whole point is to keep the balance, to make sure that the exchange does not consume anything or involve one person with another. The point is that consumer goods are to be consumed by their owners, not by the relationship or transaction. When a thing is bought or sold, it goes out of circulation and ceases to be a gift. As is demonstrated in countless fairy tales, our choice is to keep the gift moving or to be eaten by it. Our property can devour us if we hoard it. God the gift-giver seeks to keep the gift in motion by catching up all things necessary into the dance of life.

### *A Wesleyan View of the Trinity*

Wesleyan doctrine will emphasize our life in the Trinity as the sole source of the power by which we are to be the disciples of Jesus Christ. A Wesleyan view of the Trinity will see the doctrine of the Trinity as the theory of the practice of God's grace. Understanding the Trinity takes place in the experience of lived grace. Everything depends on how we describe God's life of grace, God's gifting, our reception of God's gift, and our return of the gift. All of this happens through our dwelling in the life of the triune God. The Trinity should display God's gifting, and our practice of Trinity should mean the ways in which we live in the Holy Spirit's creation of space and time for gifting. For Wesley grace is always "responsible grace," as Randy Maddox has so convincingly shown in his superb book on Wesley's theology.<sup>26</sup>

Western theology has emphasized the initiating work of the Father in what is sometimes called the *monarchical Trinity*, and it has led to a concentration on sin and justification. Wesley does not diminish this aspect of the Trinity but the distinctively Wesleyan contribution emphasizes the life and initiating work of the Holy Spirit. If we see only the gifting of the Son without the work of the Holy Spirit, we miss the return of the gift of love, which is *sanctification*.

God's original work of creation is an extravagant gift, a donation that is a kind of throwing away or pointless excess. It is a gift that makes possible that there be anything or anyone at all to receive. It is a gift to establish the relationships of gifting. Human generosity belongs within the context of prior attachments or relationships that begin with the prevenient grace of God.

But the Father's giving of the Son is an even more extravagant gift. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). "He who did not withhold his only Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?" (Rom. 8:32). The Father's gift is infinitely great, so great that we are in infinite debt. If one gives so much that a similar gift cannot be returned, then the receiver thereby becomes enslaved. This violates the duty to receive, namely the duty to give in such a fashion that one expects to receive in turn.<sup>27</sup> God would then look like the "strong man" of archaic and modern economies who gives in order to subjugate the receiver. Why is not this the case with the triune community?

The answer of Paul and Luther is the mystery of freedom in justifying grace. Wesley follows both Paul and Luther in affirming the biblical notion that all human beings will be slaves. That is the human condition of the bondage of the will. The only question is, Whose slave? The good news is that to be the slave of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is freedom. A collect in the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* expresses it well when it speaks of Jesus Christ, "in whose service is perfect freedom." The Father is not the "strong man," for in giving the Son, the passionate love of God seeks out what God has created and this in great vulnerability to the subjection to death to which we have fallen. We must speak the Trinity in order to speak the narrative of the cross. In giving the Son, God gives God's own life. In order to save us from slavery God becomes a slave (Phil. 2:4-12).

This infinite gift of God's own life puts us in infinite debt. The reason that the immensity of this gift does not destroy us is that in giving the Son, God for-gives us our debt (Rom. 7:6, 8, 12). The gift of the crucified, risen Son is appropriate; it may not be what we desire, but it is the one thing needful for life. The power of God's love freely given us is the only power that is stronger than death, evil, and sin. All other powers eventually destroy themselves. This then is the freedom in obedience which we know in justifying grace.

But if we do not go beyond justifying grace, we are not yet living in the fullness of the Trinity, for we have not yet returned the gift. Holiness means the practice of love in justice as the return of the gift of God's love. We have been forgiven our debt, and yet in the life of grace we receive a new command: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (Rom. 13:8). Love is not the fruit of our will, and yet, for all that, it is the subject of a strange command: "Love one

another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). We must give as God has given, love as God has loved even though we must do this out of God's grace under the conditions of history. Wesley's whole theology is an exercise in taking this command as utterly serious and in maintaining that it is utterly realistic to keep it because of the sanctifying gift of God. Sanctification is our return of God's gift. The point is simple: God the Holy Spirit gives us the power to return the gift of God. God the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to serve the life-giving grace of God in the world. The work of the Holy Spirit both in the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity is the return of the gift of God. Gifting depends on the Holy Spirit's incarnation of grace in us and in the conditions in which we live.

God expects a return to God's gift. What is our appropriate gift to God? We owe only what God gives us to give further—our lives. I want only to speak of two aspects of the Trinity in sanctifying grace that I think are distinctively Wesleyan because they address the actual possibility of our returning the gift of God. The first is what we may call the *doxological Trinity*, and the second the *eucharistic Trinity*.

### *The Doxological Trinity*

The return of ourselves to God by our giving ourselves to the children of God who are threatened with no gift and therefore no life begins with *doxology*. Has anyone in the tradition understood better than Charles and John Wesley, in their hymns on the Trinity, the ecstatic new creation that results from the Spirit's gift of praise? The Spirit is poured out on all flesh so that it may be eternally living. Just as the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son and the Father, so does the Holy Spirit make it possible for us to glorify the infinite grace of God. Wesley's theology is always stretching from the theology of faith in the love of God to the hoped-for eternal sight in God's glory. It was his conviction that the Holy Spirit gifts us with the spiritual sense, the tempers, emotions, and affections by which we experience the *present* of God. Unfortunately, we are not wont to speak of the ecstatic bliss that God experiences when God is glorified by the return of the gift of grace, nor even less of our own bliss when we experience the new life created by the return of the gift. And that is the weakness of our sanctification, for praise is the beginning of the new community and the new power of life for which we so yearn. Praise

is the beginning of our living sacrifice, the return of our life, for only praise can break the stranglehold of the logics of power and the sphere of violence. Only the gratuitous language of praise can break the suspicion and hatred of gifting and being gifted in our public household.

Why should we give praise to God in return? The reason is that the Spirit of righteousness has broken the power of hell and raised up the Son. To the power of resurrection the only conceivable response is the Easter laughter and dancing in praise. Doxology creates sanctification in the form of *anastasis* (resurrection), a standing-up community against death in all its forms. Wesley fought against charges of spiritualism and enthusiasm, but he conscientiously held to the work of the Spirit as the lively initiation of our life into God's life and of the practice of the Trinity in the world that God loves with God's whole being.

Worship, praise, and glorification go beyond the salvation that has so far been experienced and the thanksgiving that has been expressed. The triune God is worshiped and glorified for Godself. In the praise of the Trinity our gaze passes beyond salvation history to the eternal being of God.

### *The Eucharistic Trinity*

Wesley urged Methodists to participate constantly in the Eucharist.<sup>28</sup> The Eucharist is our mode of being in the Trinity and in the world. It is the logic of grace incarnated. The Eucharist is God's present so that we may know the joy of giving ourselves to God's redemption of the world. It is a primary locus of the work of the Spirit in returning all things to the Father. The aim of the Eucharist, our life in the Trinity, is that our whole life become eucharistic.

This means that the table manners we learn at the Lord's table are meant to be practiced in our public life. Our return of the gift means filling the space and time we occupy with eucharistic practice. Wesley spoke freely of the trinitarian virtues that the Spirit intends to put to work feeding, housing, clothing, encouraging, and giving dignity to the poor. Far from being pure speculation, the doctrine of the Trinity means "get to work." God is giving us the freedom, the community, and the power to create conditions of life for the children.

These table manners, these household rules, can be kept only through the power that God gives us at the banquet of the Resurrection. Like the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son, we are not certain we want to take part in the resurrection party.<sup>29</sup> We can hear the music and the dancing and the laughter of the feast God is giving because God's child is beyond death and because this victory means that all children and the whole creation will be beyond death. We know that there is power of life against sin, evil, and death only in this feast and in the economy rules that spring from it. But the Resurrection household rules put in jeopardy what we have secured for ourselves by the property rights of the public household. The Resurrection household requires that we be gifted by God's grace and that in turn we gift our lives and our possessions.

The whole logic of grace at the Resurrection table is that God has given God's own Son so that we and the world may have access to what it takes to live. This means, if we think trinitarianly, that God gives God's own life. The answer God expects to God's gift is "Much obliged." Yes, we give our lives to what you are doing to redeem the children of the earth; and if the children, then all humankind.

The eucharistic modality in the resurrection economy is a joy so great that it judges and transforms, a judgment that is so absolute that we cannot help being thankful that it is a gift. Joy and judgment are the beginning of God's new economy; they make us outraged by poverty because of the endless generosity of God and shock us with the recognition that not being in the mode of gifting and being gifted is blasphemous.

God's economy depends upon the retaught and relearned generosity of God, upon gifts that give in being given and create dignity in being received. Unless we will mean by the church's mission only what the market intends, the miracle by which we understand ourselves and our community as gifts to be gifted would have to take place.<sup>30</sup> How else will God redeem the world except through God's grace, God's love freely given for God's justice in the world.

Both our revival and the survival of children depend on the actual historical practice of gifting. Where no gift is given, children will not survive; where grace does not abound, all human beings and indeed nature itself are threatened with death. For the church as God's household to participate in the public household in ways that lead to life, first for the children, is a mission so awesome that we



should not even think about it far removed from the Host. God invites us to a meal in which the earth and all its creatures are promised home and in which we have a realistic place (governed as it is by the cross) from which to be so bold as to speak of an economy of life against death. God grant us the grace that we may go into the unending feast of joy in the resurrection economy.

## Notes

### 1. *Trinity, Community, and Power* (Meeks)

1. See Albert Outler, "A New Future for 'Wesley Studies': An Agenda for 'Phase III,'" in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 34-52.

2. If the Trinity is so problematic, is it really necessary? Much of modern theology since the Enlightenment has given a resounding no to this question. From Schleiermacher on, the Trinity has tended to be an afterthought or frosting on the theological cake.

3. Sermon 55, "On the Trinity," § 17, *Works* 2:384.

4. See Sermon 55, "On the Trinity," § 3, *Works* 2:376-77. See also Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 136-40.

5. Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993). Helpful background articles are Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity," *Modern Theology* 2:3 (1986), 169-81; and LaCugna, "Current Trends in Trinitarian Theology," *Religious Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 1 (April 1987), 141-47.

6. See especially Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988); Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); and Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

7. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

8. "The concept of God's unity cannot in the trinitarian sense be fitted into the homogeneity of the one divine substance, nor into the identity of the absolute subject; and least of all into one of the three divine persons of the Trinity" (altered, Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 150). Instead Moltmann speaks of their common divine nature as being "the character of relation with respect to the other persons" (171-72). LaCugna argues that "person," not substance, is the ultimate ontological category. "The ultimate source of all reality is not a 'by-itself' or an 'in-itself' but a person, toward-another. . . . God is self-communicating, existing from all eternity in relation to another" (*God for Us*, 14-15). According to Elizabeth A. Johnson, the "priority of relation in the idea of the triune God . . . challenges classical theism's typical concentration on singleness in God. . . . Since the persons are constituted by their relationships to each other, each is unintelligible except as connected with the others. Relation is the very principle of their being" (Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* [New York: Crossroad, 1992], 216). Relations are internal to God. For ways in which the concept of relation has been used to define the distinction of identities, see also Jenson, *The Triune Identity*; and Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988).

9. David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 37.

10. Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991). For arguments that personhood cannot be divorced from relation, see Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fellowship of St. Alban at St. Sergius (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976); and John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993). "Person" as applied to the Trinity cannot be an isolated individual consciousness, theoretically detachable from the rest of the world.

11. The Trinity is too important to be left in the hands of the systematic theologians.

12. The Trinity has always been thought through in particular ecclesiastical settings and in concrete social, political, and economic contexts, and in terms of the practices of these contexts. The language and the conceptuality of these contexts may no longer make sense to us, but this is no reason to condemn brothers and sisters who have gone before us for getting the Trinity all wrong. Instead it is the occasion for us to reflect all the more crit-

ically in our own contexts and on our own practice—in communion with those who have gone before us.

13. The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, "Children and Poverty: An Episcopal Initiative" (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996).

14. Sermon 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," *Works* 4:86-96. For the following three quotations see §§7-9, pp. 90-91.

15. See also Sermon 87, "The Danger of Riches," §2.9-12, *Works* 3:240-41.

16. M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), chapter 4.

17. Sermon 50, "The Use of Money," §3.1-7, *Works* 2:276-80; and Sermon 51, "The Good Steward," §3.1-4.4, *Works* 2:292-98.

18. See M. Douglas Meeks, "God's *oikonomia* and the New World Economy," in *Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 111-26.

19. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

20. "If gifts are only given in order to render indebted, to ensure continued exact compliance with what has been laid down, marked by the powerful, both dead and living, then there can be, we must judge, no real gift" (John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11 [1995]: 119-61, here p. 129).

21. See Meeks, *God the Economist*.

22. According to Pierre Bourdieu only two features distinguish a gift, and these do not correspond at all to a formalist and universal donation. First, there must usually be a delay of return. Second, the gift given back must be different and, although perhaps equivalent, not obviously equivalent. See Bourdieu, *The Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1-30. Similarly, Milbank argues, "Nonidentical repetition therefore includes not only the return of an equivalent but different gift, but also a non-exact mimesis (but therefore all the more genuinely exact) of the first gesture in unpredictable circumstances, at unpredictable times and to unpredictably various recipients" ("Gift," 131).

23. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1982).

24. For the following, see Milbank, "Gift," 122.

25. For the following, see Meeks, *God the Economist*, 118.

26. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*.

27. Milbank, "Gift," 128.

28. Sermon 101, "The Duty of Constant Communion," *Works* 3:428-39.

29. See Meeks, *God the Economist*, 182-83.

30. "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor. 9:8-12).

## 2. *The Doctrine of God and Dilemmas of Power (Wogaman)*

1. Joan Robinson, *An Essay on Marxian Economics*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 22.

2. Sermon 69, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge," *Works* 2:569.

3. Sermon 120, "The Unity of the Divine Being," §15, *Works* 4:66. In sermon "On the Trinity" (§1, *Works* 2:374), Wesley comments that "persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all. And on the other hand persons may be truly religious who hold many wrong opinions."

4. Sermon 55, "On the Trinity," §§17-18, *Works* 2:385.

5. *Ibid.*, §1, *Works* 2:376.

6. See Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954) for an especially helpful analysis.

7. 1 *Clement* 61.1-2, in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 72.

8. Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 49. According to Tillich, "Nobody felt the weight of this question [how compulsory power can be united with love] more than Luther, who had to combine his highly spiritual ethics of love with his highly realistic politics of absolutistic power. Luther answered with the statement that compulsion is the strange work of love. Sweetness, self-surrender, and mercy are, according to him, the proper work of love, bitterness, killing, condemnation are its strange work, but both are works of love." Critics of Luther can argue that a willingness to accept compulsion as a form of love led directly to some of the reformer's excesses—as in his well-known diatribe against the peasants. But such critics must face the question of what *they* would do to counter what is "against love." The usual answer is direct, positive love is itself the most effective counter to all that is "against love." But we shall have to struggle more with that question later in this essay.

9. Leo Tolstoy was one of the few who have been consistent at this point, renouncing all violence, police, jails, property, and the like. See his *My Religion* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1885) and *Tolstoy's Writings*