

## CHAPTER 5

# Anointed to Preach: Speaking of Sin in the Midst of Grace

REBECCA S. CHOPP

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release  
to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.  
(Luke 4:18-19, RSV)

### *Introduction*

God is a God of freedom and love. From creation to exodus to exile to Christ to church, the Scripture proclaims this reality over and over: God is a God of freedom and love. With the stirring words of Jesus' announcement of public ministry we have come to wrestle with the meaning of God as a living God of freedom and love in our day and age in the midst of our Wesleyan heritage.

Luke's words challenge and invite us to the mission of God and the church. To convey the import of Jesus, Luke selects the arena of history itself and so his Gospel begins with the genealogical narratives from the beginning of creation.<sup>1</sup> In Jesus, history is not escaped but reordered and transformed. Luke recaptures the Jubilee tradition that runs through the priestly and prophetic materials in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> In the priestly tradition the Jubilee is the time in which society is radically reordered: the land gets redistributed, the oppressed are set free and relationships are organized through princi-

ples of justice. The prophet Isaiah picks up the Jubilee tradition and renders it eschatologically to portray God who will reorder all of history through justice and freedom. Then Luke has Jesus announce his mission as the fulfillment of the Jubilee: God's radical reordering of history.

As Jesus becomes the fulcrum point through which all of history is transformed, so the church is assigned the task of continuing the mission of transformation in the world. The church proclaims, mediates, and enacts God's mission of judgment and mercy. The church continues the solidarity of Jesus with the "others" of history: the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, the downtrodden. If in Luke's gospel the "others" of history receive the power to speak and to determine their lives, then today the church exists amidst those who have received, in God's love and freedom, the power to proclaim the good news.<sup>3</sup> Luke challenges and invites us to begin where the church is in the ministry and mission of Jesus amongst the marginalized of the earth and from this place to work towards the transformation of history itself.

I shall develop, in a systematic fashion, a central theme of Wesleyan theology in relation to the option for the poor. A great amount of work exploring possible intersections between Wesleyan theology and liberation theology, particularly the option of the poor, has already occurred.<sup>4</sup> I want to work within the context of that conversation, but move to a somewhat different phase of the discussion in order to develop a Wesleyan theology operating from the option for the poor and oppressed in my own context in the United States. I understand my task as a systematic theologian in the Wesleyan tradition to fall under what Albert Outler has called Phase Three of Wesleyan Studies, the effort to apply Wesley to issues in our times and our future. More specifically, I hope to participate in this reformation of Wesleyan theology in our day which means, to follow Outler's thoughts on Wesley in Phase Three:

... a *theology* less interested in the order of Christian *truth* (as in the school theologies generally) than in Christian *life*. Its specific focus is the order of salvation as an eventful process that stretches across the whole horizon of Christian existence. Its axial theme is *grace*, which makes it Christocentric and yet also preeminently pneumatological. For Wesley the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of *Grace* as well as the Lord and Giver of *Life*. Thus, 'prevenience' is not a stage of grace but the crucial aspect of grace in all its manifestations.

---

It signifies the divine initiative in *all* spirituality, in all Christian experience. Wesley's theology is intensely evangelical but it looks also toward the ethical transformation of society.<sup>5</sup>

When, as a theologian in the Wesleyan tradition, I take seriously the axial theme of grace from the option of the poor in my own situation in the United States, I am led to think of what a discourse of sin might mean for the hegemonic culture in the United States. As occurs in any other theological paradigm, liberation theology finds that it must refashion and rework the doctrine of sin in relation to the contemporary situation, including the appropriation of current systems of thought and popular cultural images.

Yet to reconsider and reformulate the doctrine of sin for the dominant culture of the United States is not simply a requirement for the ongoing reformation of the Christian tradition but a rather desperate necessity for the hegemonic culture in the United States. Only a few books have been written on sin in the United States in the last thirty years; this absence allows many theologies of the center, despite their serious engagement with liberation theology, to continue being formulated through theological anthropologies and views of history with primary analogues to bourgeois existentialist or analytical philosophy.<sup>6</sup> I have a vision that one of the great gifts that the weaving together of liberation theology and Wesleyan theology can contribute to hegemonic cultures is a discourse of sin that names the reality of suffering and destruction, that criticizes unjust systems in need of correction, and that analyzes basic idolatrous forms of life in need of radical transformation. This discourse, which I will explore in this essay, is itself an act of grace, an act of divine initiative that speaks to a culture caught in the throes of idolatry of false gods of national, economic, racial, and sexual sovereignty, the concupiscence of consumerism, and the self-disintegration of isolated individualism.

The aim of my analysis will be to develop a discourse of sin that critically and analytically reveals the deprivation and disorder of the hegemonic culture, that opens up the interlocking structures of injustice and oppression, and that identifies possible modes of transformation. If grace empowers us to see and speak of sin, grace also allows us, as Wesley so strongly maintained, not only to be justified but sanctified, not only to be emancipated from sin but transformed into new life. I will proceed with three specific steps to my argument:

first, I want to clarify some of my operating assumptions in terms of Christian prophetic movements in the United States, the alliance between contextual work and global solidarity, and the nature of systematic theology as I understand it. Second, I will develop a systematic proposal for a discourse of sin in relation to the hegemonic culture of the United States. Third, I want to conclude by suggesting how the discourse of sin correlates with expressions of sanctification in three areas: holy living, new forms of communities, and a poetics of hope in the North American context.

### *Prophetic Movements and Systematic Theology*

By prophetic movements I mean the Christian movements that exist as an emergence of a distinct form of Christianity marked by the empowerment of the marginalized, the critique of hegemonic structures, practices and images, and the envisioning of new ways of life. For the past twenty-five years these movements have been expressed both inside and outside the institutionalized churches in the United States. Certainly many of the African American churches in the United States represent not only a recent reality of prophetic Christianity but also a long tradition of Christian response that cannot be solely identified with the dominant Christian participation in colonialism and, as Wesley would call it, the Gospel of Wealth. Feminist liberationist theology has important communal bases in the institutionalized church but also exists as a para-ecclesial form in women church communities. Feminist theology also has a long history in the United States with special roots in the Wesleyan movement, as Susie Stanley has argued in her essay "Empowered Foremothers: Wesleyan/Holiness Women Speak to Today's Christian Feminists."<sup>7</sup> As Stanley suggests, Wesleyan/Holiness women in the nineteenth century understood the authority of empowerment by the Holy Spirit in a fashion strikingly similar to the view of authority held by twentieth century feminists. As do twentieth century feminists, the women of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement identified their empowerment with an ethic for service aimed towards addressing social issues and alleviating social problems.

It may well be worth exploring what is the relation between these movements and the established institutional church. The adjectives "established" and "institutional" are important to note, for feminist liberation theologians have made very clear that *church* is identified

first and foremost with the ecclesia that lives truly, that represents in sacramental fashion, the presence of God in the world.<sup>8</sup> Institutional churches, as Rosemary Radford Ruether has suggested, too often become occasions of sin, places where the poor are ignored, women belittled and humiliated, and the hegemonic practices receive religious reification.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Wesleyan theologians working in the institutions of the established churches find themselves in a situation somewhat similar to Wesley's times. Not wanting to depart from the established churches, they nevertheless recognize the need to do more to address mission to the larger culture which the established churches fail to both challenge and serve.

Such prophetic movements commit themselves to be in global solidarity with the poor and the oppressed of the earth. I understand that to raise the question of the relationship between local contexts and global situations is itself to invite a rather complex discussion of current epistemological, aesthetic, and political terms. In the United States this is currently discussed under the terms of postmodernism and postcolonialism. I want only to observe, at this point, that cultural context and global solidarity are theologically related as well as structurally intertwined. As theologians we must pay attention both to the social reality that we live in a global environment and we must make this present in our theologies. But we also are making a theological claim about God, sin, and the transformation of all of creation. This is to suggest that not only do worldwide political structures bind us together, but as Christians we live and proclaim a worldwide solidarity in the name of the living God of love and freedom.

These two assumptions, the first concerning prophetic movements in the United States and the second concerning the relation of prophetic movements and global solidarity with the poor, leads to my third assumption about the nature of theology. As a feminist liberation theologian in the United States, I understand systematic theology to create spaces for empowerment, critique, and transformation through Christian community. As my reference to Outler's understanding of Wesleyan theology already suggests, in the Wesleyan tradition systematic theology focuses on grace-filled Christian living. My understanding of Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition in the context of my participation in feminist liberation movements means that the definition of theology shifts from mastering a closed system of doctrine to constructing open spaces for living. Indeed,

one of the great contributions a Wesleyan feminist liberation theology has to make in North America is the expression of grace in the moments of empowerment, critique, and transformation in prophetic Christian movements.<sup>10</sup> In this way of doing theology doctrines become not the rules that control our behavior but the spaces, the ways of grace, that open us to mission. Thus we need to reconceptualize a Wesleyan systematic in ways that express how we understand life to be, and for us that is to take seriously the historical and structural constitutiveness of life, reformulating both the discourses of grace and sin in historical and structural terms.

In this manner I agree with José Míguez Bonino who has suggested that Wesley's theology must be rethought in two ways.<sup>11</sup> First we must rethink sanctification, the vision of the possible in the transforming power of grace, from the unity of creation and redemption. Second, we must rethink Wesley in light of the structural nature of social problems. This requires us to understand theology itself as transformative, as projecting transformation, and as structural, analyzing the depth structure of all of our life, including the interconnected realms of the political, the linguistic, and the subjective.

I want to introduce two terms to expand further how I understand systematic theology to be transformative. These two terms are often scoffed at, in a manner quite similar to the ongoing ridicule of both Wesleyan theology and feminist theology in ecumenical and academic circles. Perhaps we could even explore why the terms I choose to employ—pragmatism and rhetoric—are so often belittled along with Wesleyan and feminist theology. (My initial hunch as a starting point for such a conversation is that all have to do with contextual claims of transformation.) Pragmatism is often criticized as a form of functionalism and instrumentalism, but this is not accurate historically. Pragmatism, as a philosophical system, arose, according to Cornel West, out of the sufferings and destructions of the present age.<sup>12</sup> Pragmatism is characterized by a future orientation of thinking, as the critique of present and the imaginative projection of future possibilities. It is thus experimental, utilizing the logic of abduction which Charles Peirce defined as that which may be possible.<sup>13</sup> A pragmatist theology enacts, therefore, the desire for flourishing, the solidarity of our togetherness, and the anticipation of what is possible for each and for all.

But such transformative thinking must itself be historical, and thus we must retrieve and reconstruct the nature of systematic

theology as rhetorical. Rhetoric is the attempt to persuade, to name, to be critical, to determine that which can be other.<sup>14</sup> In the philosophical tradition of the West, the art of rhetoric is tied to praxis for rhetoric arises out of the communal conditions of the present, and creates new possibilities for the future. I employ rhetoric because it is necessary to be attentive to the concrete conditions of life and to speak constructively in relation to the present situation and to use what is in our power, our words, to provide new transforming spaces for our cultures.

Theology, rethought through pragmatism and rhetoric, is itself transformative.<sup>15</sup> Its discursive function in the nature of the church's ongoing mission is to name sin and grace, to analyze the deprivation and deprivation of our creaturely conditions, to imagine and construct sanctified ways of living. The hegemonic culture is, to use Luther's analogy, like a dying person who does not know he or she is ill and needs total care, including an adequate analysis of the disorder, treatment of the symptoms, healing, and a new way of living. A discourse of sin expresses the grace that gives us a detailed accounting and analysis of sin which itself leads to the envisionment of new ways of sanctified living.<sup>16</sup>

### *Structures of Sin*

As Robert Chiles has noted, the distinctiveness of Wesley's theology is the way in which sin and grace are intertwined and enmeshed.<sup>17</sup> Grace allows us to be moved and to move against sin, grace not only restores us and redeems us but also transforms us. This precarious balance, as Chiles calls it, is noted nearly unanimously in the literature on Wesley.<sup>18</sup> What I want to explore is how this precarious balance has a necessary function in a feminist liberation theology in the United States.

We must begin, again, with a word of grace. Latin American liberation theology has been quite clear on the priority of God's grace, a claim often missed I fear by its readers in the United States. Gustavo Gutiérrez has insisted that the notion for the poor is first and foremost a claim about God's gratuitousness:

God's preferential option for the poor, the weak, the least members of society, runs throughout the Bible and cannot be understood apart from the absolute freedom and gratuitousness of God's love. . . . Universality and preference mark the proclamation of the king-

dom. God addresses a message of life to every human being without exception, while at the same time God shows preference for the poor and the oppressed. . . . The gratuitous love of God requires that we establish an authentic justice for all, while giving privileged place to a concern for the unimportant members of society—that is for those whose rights are not recognized either in theory (by a set of laws) or in practice (in the way society conducts itself).<sup>19</sup>

It is this stress on the utter gratuitousness of God that is in liberation theology and in Wesleyan theology that sets the context for a powerful discourse on sin in the North American situation. An example will suffice to further my argument. Working with women across race and class lines in the United States one quickly discovers that the demons of patriarchy live within many women's internal feelings and thoughts, their souls and their words as well as in political, economic, and legal structures. What is required to break through the demonic powers of oppression and dehumanization internal to the woman, is the affirmation of the woman's self worth when all other messages—internal and external—tell her she's worthless, the lowest of the low, put on earth only to suffer. This ability to move a woman into her own self affirmation is, in my judgment, a current expression of grace.

It is the priority of this grace that allows the development of a discourse of sin aimed toward radical transformation in history. Within God's gratuitousness amongst the poor and the oppressed we name suffering, we criticize systems of injustice, and we analyze the depth structure of sin. Two sides of my argument should be noted. First of all, I am suggesting that a reformulation of the doctrine of sin is necessary in light of theological doctrine of sanctification in relation to the unity of creation and redemption and our current understandings of structural realities of life. Sin is, in my analysis, the depravation and deprivation of the flourishing of existence through concrete historical structures of politics, language and subjectivity. I want in my context to claim that sin is both depravation, the destruction of the basic conditions for life, and deprivation, the loss of the vision of flourishing.<sup>20</sup> Second, not only do I suggest a redefinition of sin, I want to opt for, at least in my context, three parts to each analysis of sin: the lamentation of suffering, critical theories of destructiveness, and an analytic of the depth structure of idolatry that runs through politics, language, and subjectivity.<sup>21</sup> A discourse of sin must describe reality, recollecting suffering and testifying to



the disintegration and destruction of sin. A discourse of sin must lament the brokenness, the death, and the impoverishment of the human condition amidst present forms of oppression. But any discourse of sin must also try to uncover the conditions, interests and forms of false knowledge and power that creates such destruction through systems of injustice. A discourse of sin is in itself a resistance to injustice and the expression of the desire for human flourishing, for correcting all that is false, distorted, depraved. Yet the specificity of such a discourse also resides in its claims about the need for transformation and thus it must analyze the principles and practices of idolatry that run through all the forms of life. I recognize that I am calling for nothing short of a very large doctrine of sin in my context, yet for me this is the good news, the necessary news, the way to combine the universal love of God with the privileging of the oppressed.

The discourse of sin attempts, in the context of grace, to persuade persons of the actual situation in the world. It is a persuasive account that argues that suffering most adequately names common human existence. As such, sin rhetorically needs to name as concretely as possible the events in which life is distorted and impeded from flourishing. As the Scriptures testify to us, such lamentation is itself an act of grace in the midst of suffering. The aesthetic expressions of narratives, music, and art name concretely the reality of the sufferings of the present age. As feminist theorist Iris Marion Young suggests we must name oppression very carefully, and in our very words refuse to reduce all suffering to one term.<sup>22</sup> To name the oppression and suffering as carefully and as detailed as possible is to open us to the specific desires within all critical theories: the desires that these forms of oppression cease and new forms of flourishing ensue.

Thus to name sin in this fashion is also to invite the linkage of naming suffering with developing critical theories of destructiveness. For given the two conditions that José Míguez Bonino suggests, we must today speak of suffering in light of destructiveness in the world. That is suffering is the subjective referent while destructiveness is the objective referent. This challenges much of the Christian tradition at a crucial point: for sin is no longer between an individual and God with side effects on relationships with others. Nor does suffering exist in order that the good may appear, a position, it seems to me, that Wesley came dangerously close to taking in some of his

writings.<sup>23</sup> Rather, from the unity of creation and redemption in rethinking sanctification we think of a discourse of sin that brings about emancipation from the false ideologies that objectify dominant power relations in social organization.

Rhetorically, for a feminist liberation theology in the United States I think we need to develop critical theory relating to four dimensions of destructiveness. First, we need to develop critical theories of the literal physical destruction of human beings by other humans. From analyzing the causes of women's poverties in the United States, as Pamela D. Couture has done in her book *Blessed Are the Poor?* to analyzing worldwide economic structures, to rendering the implicit notion of God in modern economic theory, as Douglas Meeks has done in his book *God the Economist*, we must develop critical theories that reveal the injustices of the present economic arrangements.<sup>24</sup> There are, of course, other forms of physical destructiveness: from political torture to physical abuse by women and children, to sexual exploitation and rape by lovers, friends, strangers, and political enemies. All of these forms of physical destruction must be analyzed for the false ideological assumptions they contain that mask oppressive relations of knowledge, power and interests. Christians, filled with grace, have the courage and the responsibility to speak of destructiveness as caused by injustice.

### **Global Destructiveness**

I want especially to underscore the need to focus on global and international forces. This is of course another opportunity to link and make present the oppression in the world as well as in the US, to name a global solidarity in the midst of a critical theory. It is extremely important, theologically and politically, to realize that projections of future possibilities have to do with worldwide structures and systems. This is extremely necessary in the US since the population has little knowledge of worldwide political problems, are primarily monolingualistic, and have little contact not only with the diverse cultures in the US but with various cultures around the world.

### **Psychic Destructiveness**

Critical theories having to do with the social causes of the high rates of addiction, mental illness, and depression in the United States must be crafted. For example, we have incredibly rich resources in the Wesleyan tradition to analyze how wealth distorts the psychic

health of individual and destroys forms of human relationships. We need, in a full understanding of sin, to show that wealth is a total corruption of humanity. It is important to name this destructiveness in the United States' hegemonic culture. In the Christian tradition naming sin, it seems to me, is breaking through the denial, letting the confusion, the chaos, the dysfunction to be expressed. Sin is, in a sense, a discourse that helps us to be honest to ourselves. Working with the dominant culture in the United States means giving the opportunity for understanding that the subjective conditions created by bourgeois capitalism are not spiritually and subjectively helpful. This is why liberation theologians are quite clear that the point of theology is to create new subjects of history not to make the poor the rich, blacks into whites, or women into men.

### **Environmental Destructiveness**

Especially in light of the unity of creation and redemption from the view point of sanctification, Christian theology should make an important contribution by forming critical theory of environmental destructiveness. This is a somewhat popular concern in the United States, but it is often approached as a way to keep the earth green for leisure or self satisfaction. A critical theory needs to link this form of destructiveness with physical, psychic, and global destructiveness. Especially because discourse of sanctification will give us alternative daily practices in our relations to other persons and the earth, it will be necessary to understand in a critical fashion how present unholy living contributes to environmental destructiveness.

We arrive at two levels: one, the lamentations of suffering—concrete expressions of suffering and destruction in the world today—and two, critical theories to examine injustice and oppression within various dimensions of destructiveness. But intermixed with these two levels, must go an analytical level that uncovers the depth order of the structure of sin as idolatry.<sup>25</sup> By structure I mean the hidden rules or anonymous principles that determine the formation and ongoing function of politics, language and subjectivity in cultures. Sin as idolatry is structural in the sense that it is embedded in the political practices, the everyday habits, the linguistic structures, the ways we are raised as whites, or blacks, or women or men. The depth structure of idolatry refers to the organization of social life in which women do not have rights to their bodies, in which the feminine must represent the inferior linguistic term, and in which women are

raised to think of themselves in negative cultural images. Structures of sin as idolatry in global economic practices refer to specific world wide economic practices of neo-colonialism, as well as to the images of human and non-human oppression that is structured within and behind such practices.

For a feminist liberation theology I want to link together the structure of binary opposition in feminist theory with a reinterpretation of idolatry in Christian tradition. Binary opposition is the analysis that structurally the west has divided the world into two terms: men, women, black, white, the poor, the rich. These differences are structured as diametrically opposite through political, linguistic, and subjective practices.

Patricia Hill Collins, a black feminist scholar in the United States, speaks of the depth structure of this binary opposition in three steps of what she calls a complex social hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> First, the primacy of either/or dichotomous thinking which "characterizes people, things and ideas in terms of their difference from one another."<sup>27</sup> Second, in dichotomous thinking, difference is always defined in oppositional terms. Collins illustrates, "Whites and Blacks, males and females, thought and feeling are not complementary counterparts—they are fundamentally different entities related only through their definition as opposites."<sup>28</sup> This notion of difference as oppositional creates objectification of the opposed term, where it, the opposed term, is defined as an object that can be controlled and manipulated. Collins portrays this structuring reality:

because oppositional dichotomies rarely represent different but equal relationships, they are inherently unstable. Tension is resolved by subordinating one half of the dichotomy to the other. Thus whites rule Blacks, men dominate women, reason is thought superior to emotion in ascertaining truth, facts supersede opinion in evaluating knowledge and subjects rule objects. The foundations of a complex social hierarchy become grounded in the interwoven concepts of either/or dichotomous thinking, oppositional difference, and objectification. With domination based on difference forming an essential underpinning for this entire system of thought, these concepts invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical bonds that mesh with political economies of race, gender and class oppression.<sup>29</sup>

This complex social hierarchy serves as the entry point for a contemporary reinterpretation of idolatry. In the Christian tradition

idolatry is the obedience, that is the daily structured habits and practices, to false and dead gods. Gustavo Gutiérrez, defining idolatry as the acceptance of false Gods, identifies three practices of idolatry: trust and submission to something not God, ranking that which is made with human hands above humans themselves, and demanding the sacrifice of human victims.<sup>30</sup> As a practice that runs through all of life—from formal institutional structures to capillaries of power in common linguistic expressions—idolatry is the destruction of life's relationships, it depraves and deprives the ongoing reverence for life. Idolatry is the destruction of relations through seeking to secure and establish identity through practices that dehumanize and objectify other human beings, demanding their ongoing sacrifice to the false gods of sovereignty and consumption.

In the depth structure of binary opposition, idolatry names the distortion and destruction of relationships and the deprivation of human flourishing. The one in the dominant position cannot form relationships because his or her identity is secured only through the constant dehumanization of others. Sacrifice must be paid to the false god of sovereignty. For the "others" of history, those who are structured as the opposed term, relationships are distorted by practices, images, and institutional relations that prevent them from survival and deprive them of human flourishing. They pay the physical sacrifice rendered in idolatry; from unjust distribution of resources to the physical mutilation of women, the "others" of history are destroyed and deprived of not only survival but also flourishing.

### *Transforming Grace*

If a Wesleyan theology of grace sets the context for developing a persuasive and transformative discourse on sin, it also provides resources and challenges us to find imaginative new ways of life. Indeed a discourse of sanctification for the United States context begins by being taken away from solely privatistic and moralistic tones and rendered as transformative possibilities for all of life. Another essay would be required for even an adequate introduction to this subject, yet the Wesleyan relation of sin and grace as not mere correctionist but transformational requires, wisely so, some concluding comments on sanctification.

Sanctification is built into the logic or we might say grammar of the Wesleyan tradition. The logic runs, I take it, something like this:

God restores us and makes us new through Jesus Christ. Redemption then is not simply reconciliation, but what I would call emancipatory transformation: emancipatory in that persons are set free from the chains of oppression and destruction, from the orders of patriarchy and poverty, from the idolatry and concupiscence of the self. But we are also transformed, and here open possibilities await us.

This is an especially important task for feminist liberationist theology in the United States for two reasons. The first reason has to do with the necessity of combining critical discourses of sin with constructive experiments of grace. Without the sanctifying moment, feminist liberation theology not only risks the problems of nihilism, but finally fails to speak to the desires for flourishing expressed in the protests against all forms of suffering. Second, in order to be true to the movement of feminist prophetic Christianity, theology must reflect on the poetry, the new forms of lifestyle, the different ways of defining oneself, the different social and alternative patterns of life amongst women and men in this movement.<sup>31</sup> I will only mention three areas in which a discourse of sanctifying grace needs developing in feminist liberation theology.

Sanctifying grace might be defined as a way of living differently, a definition of grace popularized in our time by Johannes Baptist Metz.<sup>32</sup> Sanctifying grace has to do, as it did with Wesley, with holy living, with the practices, habits, relations, and patterns that run through our daily life. New discourses of sanctifying grace would image what these new forms of holy living might look like: new relations to our bodies, to economic possessions, to life lived in mission, to prayer as a performative activity of Jesus' dangerous memory in the world.

Sanctifying grace is life within community. Wesley, with his societies, certainly had a keen insight about the necessity and role of community for holy living and the Wesleyan tradition has often continued, in a variety of ways, this insight. Yet it is not clear in the United States what exactly community will mean in a society with radical and rapid transience, with increasing levels of multi-culturalism, and with changed patterns of family life.<sup>33</sup> Could a discourse of sanctifying grace develop images and practices of community that not only addresses these changing needs but also forms the participants in patterns of openness for global solidarity rather than, as is too often the case with community formation, structures of closure to all outside the boundaries of that particular community? One of

the great mission fields for the churches in the United States is to develop new forms of community as places in which persons can confront sin, where they can receive support, where persons can experiment with new forms of relationships.

Finally, sanctifying grace presents a poetics of hope to the larger culture, a manifestation of what life can be, must be, is to be in our situation. In the logic of sanctification, even the most desperate sinner can be moved onto perfection. Perhaps that logic today means that even the most idolatrous structures of life in the United States can be transformed through justice into structures which nourish instead of destroy flourishing. But if this is so, and the logic of Christianity compels me to accept this as the case, then what does this transformation look like? Can the church in the United States serve the culture and the world by giving a vision of God's reign in this concrete time and place, by awakening imaginations to dream, by birthing a *telos* of life and freedom for all of our lives?

### *Conclusion*

I realize that I have not offered a discourse on sin applicable to all situations. Within the tenets of liberation theology, I must speak out of and to my own context, yet always in dialogue with the oppressed of all nations. But perhaps I have opened up an arena for conversation for all of us in our own local contexts: What is the relation of sin and grace today in our world? How is the Spirit of the Lord upon us as Wesleyan theologians? Anointed in the Spirit, how do we announce grace, denounce sin, and yet again announce grace in the world in which we live?

the Methodist tradition.

52. See on this tradition, see Manuel Ossa, *Espiritualidad Popular y Acción Política: El Pastor Victor Mora y la Misión Nacional* (Santiago: Ediciones Rehue, 1990).

### Notes to Chapter 5

1. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–X*, Anchor Bible 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981).

2. Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

3. Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke*, tr. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984); and Luke T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

4. Theodore Runyon, ed., *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in Light of the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981); M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985); and Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

5. Albert C. Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 135.

6. See, for instance, John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3rd edition (New York: Vintage, 1969); Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 2nd edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); and Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

7. Susie Stanley, "Empowered Foremothers: Wesleyan/Holiness Women Speak to Today's Christian Feminists," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 24 (1989), 103–16.

8. For an examination of ecclesiologies in various liberation theologies see Peter C. Hodgson, *Revisioning the Church: Ecclesial Freedom in the New Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

9. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

10. Theodore Runyon, "Introduction: Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation," in Runyon, ed., *Sanctification and Liberation*, 48.

11. José Míguez Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification From a Liberationist Perspective," in Runyon, ed., *Sanctification and Liberation*, 58–59.

12. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

13. In pragmatism abduction is hypothetical, introducing new ideas,



as compared to induction, which determines values and deduction, which evolves the necessary consequences of a hypothesis. Charles Peirce explained this notion of abduction in the following manner "Deduction proves that something *must* be, induction shows that something *actually* is operative; abduction merely suggests that something *may* be." Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 5:151–174.

14. Don Compier, "The Uses of Rhetoric For Theology" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1992); Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); and Steve Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1987).

15. I mean by this claim that the function, nature, and aim of theology is itself transformation. Theology is not about explanation or verification of truth, regulation or governance of language or behavior, or investigation or interpretation of meaning, though all those moments may be interpreted as secondary to the nature of theology. Rather, in liberation theology and in Wesleyan theology, the very act of theology is as a theory of transformation.

16. Rebecca S. Chopp and Duane F. Parker, *Liberation Theology and Pastoral Theology* (Decatur, GA: JPC Publications, 1991).

17. Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790–1935* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965; reprinted Lanham, New York, and London: The University Press of America, 1983.).

18. See, for instance, Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (London: The Epworth Press, 1950).

19. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, tr. Matthew J. O'Connell, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 116–117.

20. See, for instance, Chiles, *Theological Transition*; Vern A. Hannah, "Original Sin and Sanctification: A Problem for Wesleyans," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 18/2 (Fall 1983), 47–53; Leon O. Hynson, "Original Sin as Privation," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 22/2 (Fall 1987), 65–83; Carl O. Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); and Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

21. Rhetorically, I am suggesting that any discourse of sin needs different genres to arrive at the full complexity of destruction. Though I am not a historian of Wesleyanism, my hunch is that Wesley, undoubtedly trained in rhetoric while at Oxford, implicitly used a variety of stylistic genres to describe sin. When later commentators attempt to read him through a Cartesian model of certainty and objectivity, his discourse on sin sounds confusing. Approached from the humanist tradition of rhetoric, however, Wesley may well be simply trying to describe persuasively the ongoing destruction of human life in a variety of ways.

22. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

23. *Works (J)* 6:231–40.

24. Pamela D. Couture, *Blessed are the Poor? Women's Poverty, Family Policy, and Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); and M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

25. I want to utilize what is called poststructuralist theory to analyze the historical structuring of forms of life. Poststructuralism, in the best sense, allows the critic to identify that which must be transformed, not merely corrected. For a good introduction of poststructuralism and its use in feminist practice see Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). For the use of poststructuralism in theology see Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, and God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

26. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

27. *Ibid.*, 68.

28. *Ibid.*, 69.

29. *Ibid.*, 70.

30. Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*.

31. I am suggesting the need to reflect more on the popular expressions of art, poetry, literature that arise in prophetic movements and to use these as appropriate expressions of spirituality and hope.

32. Johannes Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, tr. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

33. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 236–256.

## Notes to Chapter 6

1. See William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 5ff.

2. Indeed, the two ecumenical observers at the Eighth Institute decided to stay with the evangelism working group throughout, rather than circulate among the other groups. In their report, Gillian Evans and Michael Jackson explained that their interest had been held by the way in which the very specificity of evangelistic studies had brought together a wide range of theological interests combined with pastoral and practical application. Gillian R. Evans and Michael Jackson, in "Report on Working Group V: Methodist Evangelism and Doctrine," by David Lowes Watson, *OxfordNotes* 2/3 (Fall, 1988), 11.

3. Petition No. HE-11093-3000-R, *Daily Christian Advocate* (1992), Advance Edition, Vol. 2, p. 1234. The General Conference met in Louisville, Kentucky, May 5–15, 1992.