

TOWARD A DIALECTICALLY TRANSFORMATIONIST WESLEYAN THEOLOGY

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Introduction

One of the outstanding contributions of Wesley to theology is his correlation of justification and sanctification by faith. Any colloquy on Methodist theological studies, including this one, will celebrate and elaborate in many ways the implications of this strong correlation for the meaning and praxis of Christian existence. Precisely because it is so important a point of theological strength, however, any point of associated weakness can also have far-reaching debilitating implications. This paper intends to probe a dimension of weakness at this point of strength, discerned through the influence of contemporary liberation and process theologies.

To state the thesis baldly, it is my judgment that Wesley's deficient doctrine of the atonement still inhibits an adequate Wesleyan understanding of the social and political dimensions of sanctification. A thesis in so abstract a form already reveals my systematic and philosophical interests. I make no apology for them, for whatever contribution I can make to our discussion will likely be at the point of clarifying the logical relation of ideas. But the ethical concern that also permeates this discussion, even when most abstract, is to sustain the praxis of radical Christian love in the world. A systematic theologian's concern for as complete and coherent a conceptual grasp of Christian truth as possible is also to motivate and inform as adequate and effective a praxis of Christian love as practicable.

A discussion of this kind also requires historical, sociological and political competencies that I do not claim fully to possess. Although every systematic theologian must be in part a historical theologian, and every Methodist theologian must have studied Wesley, we are finally dependent upon the primary work of colleagues who are historians. Likewise, every systematic theologian must be concerned about the ethical and political implications of his or her understanding of the faith, but here too we often must be instructed and corrected by those more directly involved in the social praxis of the faith. All of which is prelude to saying that I look forward to learning in this collegial context from the experience, research and reflection of many of you.

Building on the 6th Oxford Institute on Methodist Theological Studies

Transformationist Theology

Indeed, I already have learned much about the issue I want to discuss from colleagues who contributed to the 6th Oxford Institute on Methodist Theological Studies. It is my conviction that we need to build on their labors. Theodore Runyon concluded his reflective editorial introduction to its report in Sanctification and Liberation with the judgment that, "Only a theology that is transformationist can do justice

to the Christian doctrine of sanctification and to the quality of salvation which that doctrine seeks to express."¹ I think we need to amend and extend this conclusion drawn from his review of the 6th Conference by adding in our 7th Conference that it is only theology that is transformationist in a dialectical way, incorporating the insights of liberation theologians about the cost of discerning and transforming demonic structures in our psychic and social existence, that can do justice to the Christian doctrine and praxis of sanctification.

Dialectically Transformationist Theology

Jürgen Moltmann defines the meaning of "dialectical" in our life with God in a way that reveals why it is the clearest concept for modifying the transformationist theology that Runyon recommends:

Therefore in communion with Christ it can truly be said that men live in and from God, 'that they live, move and have their being in him' (Acts 17:28). Understood in pantheistic terms, that would be a dream which would have to ignore the negative element in the world. But a trinitarian theology of the cross perceives God in the negative element, and therefore the negative element in God, and in this dialectical way is pantheistic.²

If our understanding of transformationist theology is dialectical, it shall be both conceived and tested through participation in the sufferings of the poor, oppressed and marginalized, allowing both our thought and action to be shaped in part by the negativity of their and our alienations. It is precisely the theological seriousness with which the struggle with the negative is taken in Christian psychic and social existence that determines whether or not our transformationist theology is dialectical. Liberation theologies make a compelling contribution toward making theology dialectical at just this point.

Moltmann also uses in this pregnant paragraph the process concept "pantheistic" as a short-hand way of saying properly that "all is in God" as distinguished from saying improperly that "all is God," which is pantheistic. I consider the concept of pantheism crucial to protecting any notion of sanctification from hybris and idolatry. When we seek or claim sanctification, we either understand it as a participation in God's holiness or we attribute sanctity to our finite, individuated selves. The latter inevitably tends toward the hybris of idolatry. The former may be communion in the Holy Spirit, or better expressed, participation in the communion which the Holy Spirit is in our trinitarian God. So understood, sanctification is pantheistic. It is the process whereby the Spirit of God is transforming all toward a proper participation in God. This way of conceiving our God relation further implies and requires the concepts of the social nature of both God and ourselves. It is at this point, in my judgment, that process philosophy and theology makes its greatest contribution to our discussion.³ We shall have to return to it later in this paper.

The Role of the Negative

We must first, however, consider further the meaning of the negative in dialectical transformation--what Hegel, and Marxists who learned from

him, called "alienation" in the "labor of the negative" in history, while some Christian theologians have named it "the demonic" as they have struggled toward sanctification in full awareness of the sin, oppression and suffering of history. It was the deeply troubled and engaged theologian, Paul Tillich, who reintroduced this Augustinian concept of the "demonic" into theology in 1926 to interpret the conflicted reality of Europe between the two World Wars.⁴ We need not go back to Tillich, however, to discern its meaning for our discussion. I think that can be demonstrated from a brief review of important elements that constitute one of the threads running through the discussions of the 6th Oxford Institute in 1977.

Prof. Runyon notes the crux of the problem discerned then from the "Latin American standpoint": "...Wesley was reformer, but not a revolutionary. His witness may lend itself to increased justice within the politico-economic system, but can it endorse radical change? Is there not something in the very notion of sanctification that is meliorist and gradualist, and therefore not appropriate as a model in a situation that calls for more fundamental solutions?"⁵ Prof. Miguez-Bonino was more historically concrete as he reflected on the results of our Methodist praxis. We must take to heart two of his judgments: The first about our world is difficult but not devastating: "...the fact that Methodism was unable to disclose for them (the new working class in England) the reality of their condition as a class, but rather led them to accept their role in society and to improve their lot without challenging the rules of the game, was one element in the domestication of the working class in Britain."⁶ But the second is devastating for all Methodists concerned for a just transformation of society: "For us in the third world at least, Methodism as a social force is part of our history--and in some ways part of the history of our domination and exploitation."⁷ Could it be that our concern for sanctification, grounded in Wesley, really contributed to domination and exploitation?

Rupert Davies indicated why the answer may have to be in part "yes": "Wesley's holiness was social in the narrow sense that it related to personal relations with other people...it is wholly fair to say that he thought of Scriptural holiness as being practiced within the existing order. Nor does his belief that a Christian perfection is possible in this life really supply a bridge to the belief that society can and should be transformed within the present historical process."⁸

Prof. John Kent's sociological critique of Methodism in Great Britain during the last two centuries laid bare the social consequences of Wesley's conservative view that the ancien regime adequately contained the divine order (except for slavery), with the theological consequence that Wesley's "myth of the holy life...did not usefully survive the collapse of the ancien regime."⁹ That is, after two world wars had destroyed the optimistic, conservative view of providence on which it was based, no serious Christian could any longer believe in Wesley's form of transformationist theology. It did not allow the Christian to come to grips with the demonic now so evident in European life, to say nothing of its virulence in former European colonies, as indicated by Miguez-Bonino.

Social Optimism as the Context for U.S. Theology

We Wesleyans in North America, however, are another kind of former European colony. Timothy Smith and Donald Dayton illumined the new form Wesley's social optimism took in the majority white constituency of North American churches during the nineteenth century. Prof. Smith, to be sure, analyzed the Wesleyan analogies in the "New Divinity" of Nathaniel Taylor, Lyman Beecher and especially Charles G. Finney during this "Methodist century." But the point is that a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification was grafted on to a Calvinistic covenant theology to express the dynamic faith of Christians in the first American colony to be liberated from European domination. It is Timothy Smith's characterization of the "social context" of this pre-Civil War theological formulation that is most relevant to our purposes: "The social context, moreover, was that of the optimism of a new nation, where hopes were blooming for a social order hallowed by divine grace and hence characterized by justice and love."¹⁰ Donald Dayton analyzed the shift to post-millennial eschatology in the holiness movement that was more directly the inheritor of Wesleyan theology.

The movement emerged in the pre-Civil War intermingling of Methodism and "new measures" revivalism and especially incarnated the revival of the doctrine of Christian perfection that took place in that era, in part in response to the sense of perfectionistic optimism that pervaded the culture.¹¹

It seems clear that the transformationist theology informed by a Wesleyan view of sanctification guided an effective Christian praxis in the social contexts of Great Britain and the United States during that part of our cultural and political histories when an optimistic view of God's governance or providence was possible. But it has clearly lost transforming power in 20th century England and the United States, where a pre-millennial eschatology displaced it in evangelical circles and neo-orthodoxy modified it in the main-line denominations.

American Civil Religion

Some of these 19th century motifs may continue in American civil religion, as in Richard Nixon's second inaugural address in 1973: Above all else, the time has come for us to renew our faith in ourselves and in America. In recent years that faith has been severely challenged... America's record in this century has been unparalleled in the world's history for its responsibility, for its generosity, for its creativity and for its progress.¹²

But Nixon's exhortations rang hollow in that post-Vietnam era, and even more hollow following his own Watergate, so that they have become increasingly unpersuasive despite even the rhetorical gifts of a Ronald Reagan. It remains true that America was built on utopian millennial expectations that looked for liberty and justice to be realized for all. But a more honest realism, expressed in part through black and feminist liberation movements, has deeply eroded these religious and moral expectations for many. This could mean the recovery of that sense of tragedy which may make it possible for us to be instructed by both the triumphs and the failures of our past.

If that is to happen, however, we must become willing to be instructed by insights out of black and other forms of liberation theology. James Cone argued in the 6th Oxford Conference that black Christians knew the necessity of eschatological vision if persons are to remain truly human in the midst of history's often tragic struggles:

Although black religion grounds salvation in history and refuses to accept any view of sanctification that substitutes inward piety for racial justice, there is also an eschatological vision included in salvation.... If the oppressed, while living in history can see beyond it; if they can visualize an eschatological future beyond this world, then the 'sigh of the oppressed creature,' to use Marx's phrase, can become a revolutionary cry of rebellion against the established order. It is this revolutionary cry that is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus...The 'transcendence factor' in salvation helps us to realize that our fight for justice is God's fight, too; and his presence in Jesus' resurrection has already defined what the ultimate outcome will be. It was this knowledge that enabled black slaves, although they lived in history, not to be defeated but to triumph over their limitations in history.¹³

Though the most appropriate response to Cone's proclamation is "hallelujah," we dare return to the abstract in this discussion to point out that Cone is directing us toward a dialectically transformationist theology in this evocation of black theology. It was precisely in the black Christian's struggle with the demonic structures of slavery and racism that they became fully aware that the transformations of history are a titanic and sometimes tragic struggle of God with the demonic, as is most clearly revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. When this historical revelation is expressed ontologically and universally, as in the doctrine of the trinity, it becomes the "dialectical panentheism" of a "trinitarian theology of the cross" in Moltmann's terms.

A Dialectical Understanding of Sanctification and Transformation

The point of this excursion through the thought expressed in the last Oxford Conference is to illustrate the thesis that the Methodist correlation of justification and sanctification by faith has been the profound basis for a theology of transformation, but not always sufficiently profound to be dialectically transformationist. Though a radical praxis of love has sometimes been initiated amongst those confident that God's direct governance grounds and legitimates the established social, political and economic structures which are the context of such activity, this praxis of love was not always sufficiently radical to be sustained when the demonic character of these structures showed its face.

If the gracious empowerment to create just community is the Holy Spirit, our response may be relatively simple, positive and direct if we are convinced that the structural context for our activity is directly grounded in the God whom the Spirit expresses. Then a gracious reconciliation may fully characterize all our actions. But if that structured context of social roles, economic processes and political order is

experienced as demonically oppressive and destructive, then one's response to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit requires a deeper suffering of the pain caused by those structures, a more transcendent vision of possibility beyond such structures, and a more radical praxis of love to change them. It will require such a dialectic as the New Testament expresses about the Prince of Shalom whose love for his enemies is such that he comes not to bring peace but a sword. A soul sanctified by faith in such a savior will have to bear the strain of struggling for structural change while expressing forgiveness and mercy in every relationship; and in this strain to be stretched and torn in such a way as to share some of the heartbreak of Christ. Many not adequately prepared will inevitably become disillusioned, burned out and turned off. But to be sustained by the cross in a radical praxis of love in a sometimes demonically evil world also opens one to the authentic joy of resurrection.

Wesley's Deficient Doctrine of the Atonement

Why does Wesleyan theology not always ground so profoundly dialectical an understanding of sanctification and transformation? I have already suggested the answer in the thesis that a deficient doctrine of atonement has inhibited an adequate understanding of the socio-political dimensions of sanctification. This, of course, is in part a historical judgment, and I realize in making it that I depend upon the historical scholarship of those like Colin Williams. Even he, however, began his discussion by citing the contrasting judgment of another formidable historian of Wesley's theology, Albert Outler. Prof. Outler claimed that a complex doctrine of the atonement is one of the salient theological motifs of the Methodist heritage, which "embraced both the patristic notions of lutron (what Aulen calls the 'dramatic theory of the atonement') and the Abelardian notion of Jesus Christ as the exemplar of God's sacrificial love."¹⁴ Nevertheless, after a careful review of the Wesleyan corpus, Williams concluded:

The struggle of Christ against the demonic evil powers that enslave us in our individual and corporate existence and his victory over them in the cross and resurrection is in his (Wesley's) theology, but its significance is given little attention. It may well be that this is a weakness which has its reflection in his doctrine of sanctification. There the stress is on a conscious individual relationship to Christ, and little emphasis is given to the need for the deepening awareness of or enslavement to these demonic forces and to the need for the repetition of Christ's victory in us, not only as individuals, but in the corporate life of the church and the world.¹⁵

The paper from which Williams quotes was written by Prof. Outler early in his career. I have checked Outler's more recent publications on Wesley's theology, and find nothing in his later work to confirm his earlier unpublished thought that Wesley's doctrine of the atonement significantly included the "classical" or "dramatic" idea of Christus Victor, which Gustav Aulen has shown to be deeply grounded in the New Testament, the Greek patristic theology from Irenaeus to John of Damascus, most of the Western Fathers except Tertullian and Cyprian, and the theology of Martin Luther. When one reviews the voluminous materials gathered from the

Wesley corpus by Outler, and published in the 1964 Oxford Press volume, there is virtually nothing that reflects this classical view of the atonement. The central meaning of justification presented again and again is pardon, forgiveness. The symbol of "ransom" so central to the classical idea is not to be found. To be sure, all three offices of Christ are mentioned, including that of "king," but the interpretation stresses Christ's royal rule "in all believing hearts...until he hath utterly cast out all sin and brought in everlasting righteousness."¹⁶ That is, the stress is placed on the personal and subjective--"all believing hearts"--as the locus of Christ's rule in a world now reconciled to God.

This emphasis on the personal and subjective is even more evident in Prof. Outler's 1975 interpretative essay on Wesleyan theology. What Wesley learned from Greek patristic theology, according to Outler, is not their atonement theology that Christ delivers us from demonic bondage, but the "idea of perfection as a dynamic process."¹⁷ To be sure, Wesleyan theology, according to Outler, knows that "the fruit of sin is bondage," but again this is interpreted subjectively to mean "slavery to our own self-deception, to our illusions about life and society that stir up utopias that never quite transpire."¹⁸

There is no indication in this later work from Prof. Outler that he finds in, or has learned from, Wesley that an important dimension of the truth of the atonement is that God has acted in Jesus Christ to deliver us from bondage to demonic powers, just as a slave was delivered from the demonic structure of slavery by the payment of a ransom. One might dare to conclude that if Prof. Outler has not found it in Wesley, it probably is not there to be found, for no one has sought more than he to recover Wesley as an "ecumenical theologian" creatively related to the whole tradition of the church, nor has anyone labored harder to index the whole of Wesley's thought.

Wesley's Opposition to Slavery

Perhaps the closest that Wesley (and one might add, many of his followers) ever came to basing their thought and action on implications of the classical view of the atonement is in the opposition to slavery. The letter to William Wilberforce written just a week before Wesley's death in 1791 draws upon the classical motifs of the Christus Victor view:

Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and of devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you: Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.¹⁹

It does not appear, however, that Wesley ever considered his sin as having the character of demonic bondage to social, racial, economic or political structures. Thus he neither understood his salvation as an atonement in which God entered history to deliver him from such bondage nor his sanctification as a process in which God led him through the personal and social struggle to realize such liberation.

Relative Dualism of the Classical Doctrine of Sin

The classical view of the atonement presupposes a view of sin so strong that it postulates a relative dualism. Relative in the sense that the creatio ex nihilo which safeguards Christian monotheism from any form of platonic or gnostic dualism is affirmed, but dualistic in the sense that sin is seen as developing demonic structures of evil that stand against God's purposes for his creation. As Paul Tillich has seen more clearly than most, demonic structures unite elements of creativity and destruction, of meaning and meaninglessness. They finally rest upon God's creative power, as all creation does, but have so distorted God's creation over so long a period of history as to become powerful forces of bondage and destruction. Tillich interpreted nationalism and capitalism as such demonic structures at his stage of history, and thus was ready to call Nazism by its proper name of "demonic" when it emerged in Germany.

Wesley's Understanding of Sin

John Wesley also had a profound view of the power of sin. His treatise on "The Doctrine of Original Sin," and the sermon on "Original Sin" derived from it, search the Scriptures to affirm the universal scope and existential depth of humanity's alienation from God. He affirms the text that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5) What he learns in Scripture, Wesley found confirmed in daily experience: that before God opens our eyes, we all are "atheists in the world." We have "by nature" neither fear of, nor love for, God, as we pridefully set up idols in our hearts while living in bondage to our sensual appetites. Yet Wesley's metaphors and analogies are almost all personal and psychological, and the salvation proffered in this sermon is entirely so:

By repentance and lowliness of heart, the deadly disease of pride is healed; that of self-will by resignation, a meek and thankful submission to the will of God; and for the love of the world in all its branches, the love of God is the sovereign remedy....Ye know that the great end of religion is, to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parents.²⁰

It also tells us something of the "development" of Methodist theology, however, when we note that the editor of these sermons in the early 20th century, Edward Sugden, in his annotations, fights Wesley almost every step of the way. He recoils at Wesley's use of "offensive epithets" like atheist and idolator, asserts it "utterly wrong to say that we bear the image of the Devil," and concludes that, "all through this sermon there is a tendency to exaggeration and over-emphasis that really weakens the force of the preacher's arguments."²¹

Radical Praxis of Love In Tradition and Wesley

The importance of carefully reflecting on this limitation in Wesley's theology of the atonement, compounded by the de-development of his thought by "liberal" (one might better say "bourgeois") commentators, is that Methodist theology thereby loses the basis for that radical

praxis of love carried on from the beginning by Christians in and against the structures of the Roman empire. It was precisely this classical understanding of the atonement in the earliest Christian theology that was perceived by the Romans with good reason as having dangerous political consequences for their established power. The Roman physician and philosopher, Celsus, argued in the 2nd century that the demonic powers, which the Christians believe had been conquered by Christ, really rule the world. Therefore, one should be obedient to the Roman rulers on earth because they have reduced the power of these demons to some extent. The Roman Emperors must be obeyed and receive veneration, for through obedience to the orders of this world Rome has become great. By proclaiming the crucified Jesus as Christus Victor, Christians were undermining the greatness and glory of Rome, Celsus claimed, thus undercutting the only power able to prevent the world from falling into chaos and a complete victory of the demons.²²

Justin Martyr and Origen undertook to answer this charge, but a more definitive answer awaited Augustine's monumental apologetic in The City of God. Augustine there elaborated the relative dualism of a Christian philosophy of history: on the one hand, the City of God, and on the other hand, the city of earth with its demonic structures. The City of God is the actualization of God's love, which is partially and ambiguously present in Christ's church. The city of earth is often a "gangster state," in Augustine's term, of compulsion, arbitrariness and tyranny. Only as the Roman Empire has partially and ambiguously established community on the basis of justice does it also express something of God's love.

John Wesley on rare occasions also approached his socio-political context from this perspective of relative dualism. Reflecting about the British conquest of India, he once wrote:

It were to be wished, that none but heathens had practiced such gross, palpable works of the devil. But we dare not say so. Even in cruelty and bloodshed, how little have the Christians come behind them! And not the Spaniards or Portuguese alone, butchering thousands in South America; not the Dutch alone in the East Indies, or the French in North America, following the Spaniards step by step; our own countrymen, too have wantoned in blood, and exterminated whole nations; plainly proving thereby what spirit it is that dwells and works in the children of disobedience.²³

But, of course, nowhere does he suggest that the objective social destruction of these demonic colonial structures would be part of the casting out of the devil that dwells in these children of disobedience. He thinks only individually and subjectively of bringing such sinners to repentance, refining their desires and purifying their affections. In this subjective way God casts out Satan. And most of this particular sermon is then spent on defending the Wesleyan experience that God can use even lay preachers so to do and warning in general against bigotry.

During the revolution of the American colonies, when Wesley was publishing thirteen royalist tracts and open letters opposing the "anarchistic" American rebels, Francis Asbury wrote, "There is not a man in the world so obnoxious to the American politicians as our dear old Daddy; but no matter, we must treat him with all the respect we can and that is due

him."²⁴ We too must continue to treat with all respect the way in which God in Christ through Wesley has and does energize a people to participate in God's sanctification of the creation he has reconciled in Christ. But it is time for us, too, in the light of what God is doing in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the "third world in our midst," to move beyond him at the point of incorporating into our doctrine of the atonement and our praxis of love that more radical perspective that sees and participates in God's work to liberate her people from demonic structures of bondage.

Liberation Theology's Contribution

It is time now to listen to theologians from this "third world" context, some of whom also have been inspired in part by Wesley. Mortimer Arias and his wife wrote the Cry of My People while he served as Executive Secretary of the Latin American Council of Methodist Churches, after serving as Methodist Bishop in Bolivia--just before he was arrested and deported. The book describes the structures of domination and dependence in Latin America that deserve the characterization of "demonic." Arias describes the "cry of my people" as both "the cry of captives" and "the cry of hope."

Out of captivity the Christian churches are coming to new life and new dimensions of mission. Out of captivity a new way of being Christian and a new style of life and spirituality are in the making. And out of captivity a new theology and a new way of doing theology has been born--the theology of liberation. It is the first truly Latin American theology ever.²⁵

We do not detract anything from this Latin American contribution when we note that it can be creatively related to motifs from our whole tradition--like the classical doctrine of the atonement. But we do well to note that we remain dependent upon the creativity grounded in the suffering of the oppressed and the marginalized to save us from our forgetfulness of some of these common ecumenical resources. The inevitable ideological character of our human perspectives requires our openness to what perhaps only "God's poor" can teach those of us in relatively privileged positions. But when we learn from them, perhaps even we can move toward a dialectically transformationist theology that struggles to liberate us from ideological bondage and helps us enter into the struggles against racism, sexism, classism and militaristic nationalism which infect both our psyches and our institutions.²⁶

I think we should understand such enlightening influence through the ecumenical church and elsewhere as a dimension of the prevalent grace that empowers every salvific response. To be caught in ideology, even a comfortable ideology, is to be alienated from being and truth. To be awakened from such "comfortable" alienation by becoming sensitive to the suffering alienations of sisters and brothers who may see us as "enemy" because of our status in a structure of power and privilege, and who may be a part of a program of action that make them "enemy" to our gender, racial, national or class positions, is a part of the salvation that God intends as he moves the whole creation toward the structure of justice which is shalom.

Once we learn to trust God's grace in this salvific process and are converted from reliance upon the anxious and defensive strategies that have become all too "natural" in our fallen humanity, then a part of our sanctification will be learning to be faithful co-workers in the creation of community where a long history of oppression has caused deep and real alienations, and which will require concrete political and economic struggles for justice before any adequate community may be achieved. The radicality of the love we have come to know in Christ will have to be worked out in long struggles with demonic patterns that continue to be transmitted in, as well as against, us. Many in my generation in the U.S. perhaps learned this best from Reinhold Niebuhr. But I have found it expressed superlatively in Daniel Day Williams' thought in The Spirit and The Forms of Love, which is the most insightful theological commentary I know on the proposition:

Love is not an alternative to involvement in the struggle for the rough justice of the world, but the love revealed in the Gospel leads to a distinctive view of the problem of justice. That view does not separate love and justice. It sees them as interrelated aspects of God's work of creating a community between himself and man and between man and man.²⁷

The Social Character of Divine and Human Being

Crucial to fully understanding this dimension of our personal/social sanctification is to recognize the social character of all personal being. The 18th century English milieu in which our Wesleyan theology originated was, from this perspective, unfortunately so individualistic as to make it almost impossible to see this truth. The way in which Methodist theology developed during the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States under the strong influence of Boston personalism only further strengthened this already exaggerated individualism. For it was the intellectual project of Bowne, Brightman, Knudson, and even in some ways DeWolf to derive all ontological, and thus many crucial theological, categories from introspective self-experience. The self-existence of the conscious ego known with the psychological immediacy of the Cartesian cogito became the arche, the fundamental principle, for much Methodist theology. But to make our subjective self-experience the master key to Christian thought tends to lift personality out of the complex network of contingent relationships in which every ego has its being, and thus to enhance the individualism inherited from the 18th century thought forms in which Wesley construed his theology.²⁸

Many of us in the latter part of the 20th century have been convinced long since by depth psychologists' analyses of the unconscious and social psychologists' analyses of the social field that a self-world correlation is a much more empirically adequate concept than any based only on the self-conscious monadic ego. This perspective requires and allows us to see the ego/self as emerging within a dynamic context of inter-relatedness, and dependent in part upon the character and quality of such relations for its realization and fulfillment. Only some such perspective of the social dimensions of selfhood allows us to see how the demonic structures of institutional racism, corporate classism, patriarchal culture and idolatrous nationalism can distort our personal-social being, and thus allow us to enter into the psychic and social struggles of liberation from such structures.

The Contribution of Process Theology

It is at this point that some process thinkers are making their important contribution to Christian theology. Delwin Brown's elucidation of "original sin" in To Set at Liberty is, in my judgment, extraordinarily helpful. Brown illuminates both our experience of "divided will" (Romans 7) and divided world ("principalities and powers," Romans 8:38 and Ephesians 6:12) as tending toward death.²⁹ Then he summarizes and concludes:

Death is present as reality and as threat at the personal level when the social and psychological resources necessary for becoming are denied. The self separated or alienated from other selves lacks the enrichment of the human community, the result of which may be psychic debilitation. But the self dwelling in a poisoned community is also deprived, as we have seen. Vision is distorted, sensitivity dulled, ways of thinking canalized. The eventual effect of impoverishment at this level upon physical functioning is well known. One may suppose that death present here also affects the spiritual dimension. It is true that through careful discipline spiritual vitality may sometime be preserved in spite of acute physical and personal deprivation, but permanent deprivation is scarcely to be recommended as a boon to spiritual strength. Lurking behind the too narrowly-based vision of God lies the threat of futility, the vision of nothingness.³⁰

The Christian's readiness to face fully the reality of sin and death in our world is grounded in a faithful relation to the God revealed and mediated in Christ's death and resurrection. A trinitarian understanding of the cross knows the despair of the cross, not finally as God's abandonment of Jesus, but as God's taking the suffering of sinful alienation fully into himself in the Son. God is internally related to the loneliness, pain and death of the demonic bondage of our world, taking the consequence of sin into her divine being and reconciling herself to the world and the world to herself. Jesus' resurrection reveals the triumph of God over sin and death, and mediates a transforming spiritual power for those who also share God's suffering in a world still dominated in some ways by powers of bondage. Faithful Christians are empowered both more fully to suffer the pain and hostility of alienation in themselves and others, and to struggle in hope and love for the justice that releases from bondage.

Such a theological perspective with its relative dualism undergirds a radical praxis of love. It complements Theodore Runyon's thesis that an "eachatological intentionality" provides more systemic coherence for Wesley's theology than is usually perceived. But it heightens more than may be found in Wesley the awareness of the power of the negative, against which we with God must struggle in ourselves and in our world. And it does so because it recognizes the demonic in both its personal and social dimensions with the ontological connection of these dimensions. That is, it discerns the social nature of both God's being and our human being.

It is process ontology deriving from the thought of Alfred North Whitehead that, in my judgment, most coherently interprets the social

character of God and persons. Fortunately the work of process theologians like John Cobb, Jr. and Schubert Ogden is increasingly well known amongst us, because a paper of this length does not allow for adequate elucidation of this ontology. It must suffice here to say that it is an ontology which illuminates how each unit of being is relational, so that it may be comprehended only in terms of the past occasions that contribute to its content and influence its aim, and the future into which it projects itself. Thus our finite freedom is both empowered and limited by the dynamic environing contexts to which we are internally related. This is true both of the demonic contexts that distort our being, and the ultimate context of God's suffering and saving love that provides the ever renewed forgiveness and hope enabling us to work in love for the new earth that the gospel promises.

Conclusion

Process theology's relational ontology illuminates how context and creativity are the polar elements of our Christian freedom. Sometimes the creativity of the Holy Spirit is deeply known, projecting us with new freedom toward the new future of God's reign, as testified to by Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. Sometimes the context of the immediate and distant past is heavy with inhibition and even prohibition of any new future, as illumined by the social analyses of the liberation movements. Always there is a dialectic going on between divine creativity and historical context in the hearts and social structures of all of us. By positioning ourselves theologically to be more sensitive and responsive to both, we may develop that kind of dialectically transformationist theology which will enable both a more realistic and a more radical Christian witness and praxis in our world.

Endnotes

1. Theodore Runyon, ed., Sanctification and Liberation, Nashville: Abingdon, 1981, p. 48.
2. Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, tr. Wilson and Bowden, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1974, p. 277. Emphasis added.
3. I have considered this concept at some length in my essay, "Dialectical Pantheism: Towards Relating Liberation and Process Theologies," in Process Philosophy and Social Thought, ed. Cobb and Schroeder, Chicago, CSSR, 1981, p. 242-251.
4. Paul Tillich, "Das Dämonische, ein Beitrag zur Sinndeutung der Geschichte," in The Interpretation of History, tr. Rasetzki & Talmey, N.Y.: Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 77-122. Cf. Ronald Stone, Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980, p. 58-61.
5. Sanctification and Liberation, op. cit., p. 14.
6. Ibid., p. 59.
7. Ibid., p. 60.
8. Ibid., p. 80. Emphasis added.
9. Ibid., p. 89 and 97.
10. Ibid., p. 137-8. Emphasis added.
11. Ibid., p. 149. Emphasis added.
12. Quoted in Robt. Bellah, "American Civil Religion in the 1970s," in Richey and Jones, ed., American Civil Religion, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1974, p. 259-260.
13. Sanctification and Liberation, op. cit., p. 190-1.
14. Cited from an unpublished paper in Colin Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980, p. 74.
15. Ibid., p. 87-88.
16. John Wesley, "The Law Established by Faith: Discourse II," in Outler, ed., John Wesley, N.Y.: Oxford Press, 1964, p. 226.
17. Albert Outler, Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit, Nashville: Tidings, 1975, p. 70.
18. Ibid., p. 40.
19. Letters, VIII, 265; reproduced in Outler, John Wesley, op. cit., p. 85-6.

20. Wesley's Standard Sermons, ed. and annotated by Edw. H. Sugden, Vol. II, London: Epworth Press, 1921, p. 224-5.
21. Ibid., notes #7 and 9 on p. 218-9, and note #2 on p. 223.
22. I gratefully acknowledge my dependence here on the insights of Paul Tillich in his lectures on the history of Christian thought.
23. "A Caution against Bigotry," Sermon XXXIII, Wesley's Standard Sermons II, op. cit., p. 110-111. Here too Dr. Sugden comments, "It is most unjust to say that our own countrymen have wantoned in blood, etc." Note 10, p. 110.
24. Cited in Outler, John Wesley, op. cit., p. 24.
25. Esther and Mortimer Arias, The Cry of My People, N.Y.: Friendship Press, 1980, p. 124.
26. I have examined this issue at length in "The Place of Ideology in Theology," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Winter 1978, p. 41-53.
27. Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1968, p. 244.
28. A more complete analysis of this point is in my essay, "The Psychological Method of Personalistic Theology," Religion in Life, Winter 1966, p. 732-750.
29. Delwin Brown, To Set at Liberty: Christian Faith and Human Freedom, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981, p. 75-82.
30. Ibid., p. 83-4.