TO THE CROSS I THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT: TOWARD A FUTURE FOR WESLEYANISM'S PAST

by
D. Lyle Dabney
Marquette University
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

In the United Methodist Hymnal there is found an anonymous prayer that originated in this century among the churches of South Africa. It reads:

Renew our church, Lord,
your people in this land.
Save us from cheap words
and self-deception in your service.

In the power of your Spirit
transform us,
and shape us by your cross.

I begin my own contribution to our working group with this prayer not just for the sake of its simple profundity, won in the midst of its struggle with the horrors of recent South African history and the church's confession of its own complicity in them, but rather because it manages to bring together in pointed expression the issues I wish to consider. The theme of this Tenth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies is “Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology”, and we have as our stated purpose the task of inquiring into “the implications of a Wesleyan doctrine of God for the questions of community and power in church and world”. In this paper I would like to contribute to that task by beginning to investigate the promise and the

problematic of Wesley’s doctrine of God and how that doctrine shapes our understanding of the community which would call upon the ‘power of the Spirit’ in light of the cross.

When we examine Wesley’s theology proper, we find what appears at first to be a relatively unremarkable and orthodox confession of God as Trinity in which God the Father is described as Creator and governor, and God the Son as incarnate and resurrected savior. But when we come to the third part of that confession, we discover that Wesley depicts God the Spirit in a much fuller and more central way in the context of his Trinitarian theology than was ever the tradition’s wont. Indeed, Albert Outler has written that John Wesley and his brother Charles were “working with a distinctive Pneumatology that has no exact equivalent...up to their time”. In light of this unprecedented pneumatological weighting of Wesley’s theology - one which has been reflected in much of the subsequent Wesleyan tradition - I will in this paper concentrate the question concerning ‘the implications of a Wesleyan doctrine of God’ upon the doctrine of the Spirit.

In the following I will first seek to describe Wesley’s Pneumatology within the context of his larger theology and suggest why this doctrine came to play such an apparently disproportionate role in his understanding of the Trinity. Secondly, I will point out the limitations, indeed, the problematic of Wesley’s doctrine of the Spirit in the context of his larger theological program and the implications that problematic has for thinking about power. And finally, I will suggest how we might critically reclaim Wesley’s Pneumatology - and thus his doctrine of the Trinity - by turning

To the Cross in the Power of the Spirit:
Toward a Future for Wesleyanism's Past

D. Lyle Dabney

Page 3

to a Pneumatology of the cross. In all this I wish to suggest that there is a future for Wesleyanism's past, a way beyond - as the prayer phrases it - "cheap words and self-deception", and that future is to be discovered as we critically reclaim a theology which can point a community to the way to the cross in the power of the Spirit.

I.

Let us begin with a brief description of the distinctive nature of Wesley's theology. This has been a century in which the various theological traditions of the west have struggled to recover and critically reclaim those basic insights which provided their own original and distinct dynamic. We have witnessed, therefore, in the last hundred years a dramatic renewal and reinterpretation of the thought of - among others - Augustine and the early church fathers, of Aquinas and the Scholastics, as well as of the Reformers Luther and Calvin. The rise of critical studies in Wesleyan theology in this century must be seen as part of and in light of this larger movement. For, if it has become increasingly apparent once again that the western theological tradition has been largely defined by two conflicting trajectories or tendencies of thought, it has also become increasingly apparent that if we would understand both the promise and the problematic of the theology of John Wesley, it must

be in terms of locating and analyzing his work on the horizon defined by those two conflicting theological trajectories.  

The first trajectory is seen most clearly in medieval Scholasticism, a form of theology which makes creation, i.e. created nature, its starting point and understands salvation as an ascent to knowledge of God the Creator through the assistance of grace. This type of theology begins with a kind of syllogism: God is good in being and act; creation is an act of God; therefore, creation is essentially good. That is by no means to be understood as denying the presence and pervasiveness of sin in the world, nor as implying that creation is somehow complete. Rather, according to this theology, despite the brokenness and incompleteness in the world, it is ultimately the goodness of God’s creating that defines the creation. That goodness expresses itself above all in an innate human capacity for God (homo capax Dei), an openness to or a desire to ascend to the fulfillment of our nature in union with our Creator. Catholic theology of this sort is, therefore, cast as an appeal to the created nature of human beings to find the fulfillment of their being by ascending to God through a receiving of the grace Jesus Christ has provided in and through the Church.  

---


To the Cross in the Power of the Spirit:  
Toward a Future for Wesleyanism’s Past

D. Lyle Dabney

virtues, both moral and intellectual, it is claimed, lead to even as they are transcended and guided to fulfillment by the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Hence, while Catholic Scholasticism explicitly differentiates between nature and grace, it does not contrast but rather orders them in an unbroken hierarchical relationship. Its clear tendency, then, is to posit a fundamental continuum between nature and grace, the Creator and the created, creation and redemption; for it is a theology of nature fulfilled by grace. Thus the representative affirmation of medieval Scholasticism was: “Grace does not destroy, but rather presupposes and perfects nature.”

Over and against that sort of thought stands the theology of the Reformation, the second dominant theological trajectory in the west. The fundamental logic of Reformation theology is protest, indeed, Reformation theology is protesting, or Protestant theology. What Reformation theology protests against is above all the root affirmation of Scholastic theology: that human nature by virtue of being God’s good creation possesses an innate capax Dei and is intrinsically open to and in search of the Creator. Thus, Luther declared in his Disputation Against Scholastic Theology of 1517: “On the part of man however nothing precedes grace except ill will and even rebellion against grace.”

9 The locus classicus for this schema is, of course, Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1a.1.


simply evil: when Calvin spoke of the 'depravity' of nature\textsuperscript{12}, he did not mean that there was no good in the world; what he meant was there was no \textit{unalloyed} good in the world, no part or capacity or desire untouched by the fall (\textit{homo non capax Dei}). Sin has spoiled all, according to this theological trajectory, and there is no untouched \textit{humanum} or residual \textit{imago} to which one can appeal as purely good, as open to and in search of its Creator. Indeed, according to this theology, the claim that there is such a possibility, such a \textit{capax Dei}, is the essence of sin itself, for it constitutes the claim that one can by one's own efforts be redeemed. Reformation theology, therefore, is cast not in the form of an appeal to the good, but in the form of a dialectic\textsuperscript{13}, according to which the Redeemer Jesus Christ as the Divine Word stands over and against creation, \textit{extra nos}, confronting human beings in their sin and shame and summoning them to faith in the free grace of God made manifest in his death on the cross \textit{pro nobis}. We come to right relationship with God, it is claimed, not through being enabled by grace to fulfill nature's law and so ascend to our Creator, but rather by forswearing such reliance on law and placing our trust in Christ the Redeemer who by grace imputes his righteousness to us. This sort of theology, therefore, finds its point of departure not in creaturely good, but in creaturely sin, and takes the form not of creation's ascent to its God and Father, but of God's descent to creation in Jesus Christ the Son. Its clear tendency, then, is to assert utter contradiction between law and Gospel, God and world, creation and redemption, Redeemer and those in need of redemption. Not creation \textit{and} anything, most certainly not nature \textit{and} grace, but rather \textit{solus}


Christus, sola fide, sola scriptura, sola gratia were the Reformation watchwords. Indeed the one ‘and’ the Reformers allowed, law and Gospel, simply underlines that point, for the ‘and’ in this instance marks a relation not of continuity but of discontinuity; for this is a theology of law contradicted by Gospel. Reformation theology is a theology, therefore, not of continuum but of utter contradiction. As the Anglo-Catholic John Burnaby expressed the issue in the midst of a conflict with Reformation theology earlier in this century: “Against the ‘Both-And’ of the Catholic, Protestantism here as everywhere sets with...insistence its ‘Either-Or’” 14.

To place John Wesley on the horizon of western theology as it is defined by the two trajectories we have just sketched is both to illustrate the central dilemma of the western tradition as well as to illuminate Wesley’s own unique theological trajectory. The dilemma of the western tradition is the result of the clash of the two theological tendencies which dominate it. The one can be helpfully defined as a theology of the first article of the creed, a theology of creation which takes as its chief concern the potentialities and actions of the creature as it seeks to ascend to its Creator and Father. The other can correspondingly be defined as a theology of the second article of the creed, a theology of redemption that emphasizes the sovereign, electing, gracious will of the Redeemer who in the person of the Son Jesus Christ descends to the world to achieve reconciliation between the human and the Divine. The dilemma consists in the fact that the conflicting ‘logic’ of each of these trajectories led them to the constant tendency to champion either the creature at the

expense of the Creator or the Redeemer at the expense of the redeemed, either the potentiality and act of humanity to the detriment of the activity of Divinity or the electing and saving grace of God to the detriment of the works of human beings\textsuperscript{15}. Thus despite the oft declared intention of each party to avoid it - and their just as often repeated denial that they were in fact guilty of it - the clear tendency was for the one side to play off creation against redemption and for the other to play off redemption against creation. Most often this took place in terms of the possibilities of human knowing verses Divine revelation or Divine grace verses the possibilities of human obedience. One side of the problem which thereby arose was indicated by Adolph Harnack - no enemy of the 16th century - when he noted that despite all its good intentions, the Reformation in its emphasis on the act of God over and against the act of human beings, “neglected far too much the moral problem, the ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy’”\textsuperscript{16}. It is here, of course, that we come to the central concern of John Wesley, and to the emergence of the distinctive trajectory that marked his own theological development.

When seen against the background of the western theological tradition, Wesley’s thought manifests a readily identifiable tendency. Time and space will not permit a detailed examination of the particulars of his theology now, and it is certain that this group has no need of such an overview, but at this point it must be said that the development of Wesley’s trajectory of thought began with what was essentially a theology of the first article - clearly discernable in his earliest sermons and

correspondence\textsuperscript{17} - and then moved to and through a kind of theology of the second article - expressed most emphatically in the sermon \textit{Justification by Faith} published in 1746\textsuperscript{18}. But Wesley did not stop there; rather, his contribution to the western theological tradition consists in his pursuit of what can perhaps best be termed a \textit{theology of the third article} of the creed, a \textit{theology of the transforming consummation of creation} in and through the Holy Spirit\textsuperscript{19} which takes as its central concern neither the \textit{fulfillment} of creation nor the \textit{contradiction} of sin and grace but the Divine \textit{initiation} of a process of ‘Christian perfection’ understood as a living expression of perfect love\textsuperscript{20}.

Wesley refused, therefore, to remain mired in the dilemma of the either/or of western theology and so play off creation against redemption or redemption against creation, Creator against Redeemer or Redeemer against Creator. His fundamental and unique concern was, rather, to get beyond that


\textsuperscript{18} \textit{BE} 1:182-199. Cf. especially 197, n. 93.


\textsuperscript{20} Cf. the comment by Henry D. Rack, \textit{Reasonable Enthusiast}, 381: “...[Wesley] resembled Luther rather than Calvin, for like Luther his main concern was with the way of salvation, though if Luther focussed on the way of justification, Wesley may be said to have focussed on the way of sanctification. Both men took many traditional doctrines for granted and had nothing of fresh significance to say about them: for example on the Trinity, the person of Christ, the atonement, heaven and hell".
impasse and pursue a theology which encompassed both those moments of God’s activity in a unified vision of Divine grace. Thus the very first sermon in the first published collection of Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions* began with the - by no means incidental - declaration: “All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of his mere grace, bounty or favor”; and went on to specify that those ‘blessings’ included both creation and salvation, describing the relationship of those two works of God in a phrase drawn from the Gospel according to John (1: 16): χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος, “grace upon grace.” John Wesley’s theology was therefore an attempt, as Outler has remarked, “to transcend the stark and doctrinal disjunctions which had spilled so much ink and blood since Augsburg and Trent.” More specifically, an attempt to overcome the disjunction in the tradition between Divine grace and human holiness, God’s act of the justification of sinners and the

---

21 See Wesley’s sermon *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, first published in 1785, for what was probably his most successful attempt to address the issue in the classical categories of the relation of ‘nature and grace’, *BE* 3:199-209, esp. 207: “...this is no excuse for those who continue in sin, and lay the blame upon their Maker by saying: ‘It is God only that must quicken us; for we cannot quicken our own souls.’ For allowing that all the souls of men are dead in sin by nature, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called ‘natural conscience’. But this is not natural; it is more properly termed ‘preventing grace’. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Everyone has sooner or later good desires, although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root or produce any considerable fruit. Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And everyone, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath”.

22 *BE* 1:117.

23 *BE* 1: 118.

actualization of sanctification in human acts. Moreover, it is no accident that the language Wesley came increasingly to employ in bringing such a theology to expression was that of Pneumatology. For he rightly intuited that it was precisely the perspective offered by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which corresponded to his own theological agenda. It was this theological trajectory towards a theology of the third article which constituted - indeed, still constitutes, it seems to me - the promise of Wesley’s theology - and the promise of the tradition that yet bears his name.

II.

But if there is a promise in Wesleyan theology, there is also a problematic. And that is that it has failed to fully accomplish its own theological agenda; and that despite the fact that both a concern for individual and corporate transformation as well as for Pneumatology has enjoyed far greater emphasis in it than in any of the other theological trajectories in the west. Instead it has from the very beginning attempted to articulate its own vision in the language and thought forms of traditions which are in the final analysis inimical to it. Nowhere is that state of affairs more visible than at the very beginning of that line, in the theology of John Wesley himself. Gerald R. Cragg has aptly written that “Wesley was a serious though not a systematic theologian”. The seriousness of Wesley’s theology is to be observed in the central question with which he wrestled; as noted above,

25 Thus the statement about Wesley’s theology by Melvin E. Dieter, Wesleyan Theology, 166: “Its most basic tenents lie grounded in the maxim that God will not save us because of ourselves, nor will he save us without ourselves”.
27 BE 11:8.
the most fundamental of all the problems in the western theological tradition. But at the same time, the lack of systematic analysis and explication in Wesley’s theology cannot be denied. Wrestling with the basic theological dilemma in the west, Wesley failed to comprehend that his central concern for transforming perfection in and through the work of the Holy Spirit represented not something simply to be added to the theologies of the west, a doctrine of sanctification to be appended to the doctrines of human repentance and Divine justification\(^{28}\), but was rather a distinct perspective that made possible and even demanded a reinterpretation of every area of theology - just as the theologies of the first and second articles had provided from their own points of view. John Wesley failed, therefore, to fulfill the promise of his own theological trajectory for the simple reason that he did not do the ‘one thing (theologically) needful’: he did not develop a truly alternative conceptuality of his own and thus clearly transcend the forms of theology - and the dilemma made manifest in their conflict - that he had inherited. Instead, when all is said and done, he seems to have simply taken the ‘holy living’ tradition from his Anglican background and appended it to the Reformation tradition of ‘justification by grace through faith’ he received through his encounter with the pietists and the evangelical revival - as if these were rightly understood as a set of discrete events occurring

\(^{28}\) See, Wesley’s definition of the “main doctrines” of Methodism in “The Principles of A Methodist Farther Explained”, BE 9:160-337, 227: “Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third is religion itself”. The point to be made here is that while Wesley insisted that the ‘structure’ itself is religion, he never explained what such a claim meant for the ‘porch’ of repentance and the ‘door’ of faith to be viewed from the perspective of that structure; viewed, that is, as defined by being subsidiary parts of a larger and defining whole. How does the shape and size and character of the structure itself determine the shape and size and character of the ‘porch’ and the ‘door’? Wesley seems never to have asked that systematic question. But the theology of the ‘porch’, or ‘repentance’, (the theology of the first article) and the theology of the ‘door’, or ‘faith’, (the theology of the second article) had asked those questions and had answered them from their own respective points of view. For Wesley’s use of this metaphor, cf. Colin W. Williams, \textit{John Wesley’s Theology Today}, 39f.
in a strict chronological order, which could then be theologically arrayed end-to-end like boxcars in a toy train set. The result is an ungainly ordo salutis in which the Holy Spirit plays an all-pervasive though not clearly defined role in the life of the individual and the community on the way toward Christian perfection from prevenient through justifying to sanctifying grace. As a consequence, while his theology is markedly unlike those of the first or of the second article, neither does it fully achieve the form of a genuine theology of the third article either. Thus, if the promise of the Wesleyan theological tradition lies in its aspirations for a theology commensurate to its central concern, then, it must be said, its failure to fully attain to such a theology is its on-going problematic.

That problematic, I would suggest, is germane to our discussions in this Institute. For one of the many places in Wesleyan thought that Wesley’s failure to ask the systematic question makes itself apparent is in the issue of power and the nature of the Spirit. Randy Maddox has quite rightly emphasized that just as John Wesley was concerned to avoid a

"‘unitarianism of the Father’ [which] would approach Christian life on the basis of created abilities, failing to recognize our fallenness and need for grace” as well as a “‘unitarianism of the Son’ [which] might focus exclusively on Christ’s provision of forgiveness, neglecting the Father’s continuing will for our obedience and the Spirit’s empowerment for such”, so Wesley also sought to avoid any “‘unitarianism of the Spirit’ [which] could become enamored with the Spirit’s power per se, forgetting its purpose of effecting our recovery of the moral Image that the Father intended for us and Christ displayed to us”.

Yet in all too many instances the subsequent Wesleyan tradition fell prey to precisely such a one-

sided understanding of the Spirit as simply that which confers power for freedom from sin and overcoming the trials and tribulations of an individual’s life. For the language of the Spirit all too often became the language of Wesleyan triumphalism; a triumphalism which starkly differentiated between the nature of the work of Christ and that of the Spirit. In Wesley’s words: “...As all merit is in the Son of God, in what he has done and suffered for us, so all power is in the Spirit of God”30. Christ may have meant ‘suffering’, the Spirit, however, represented ‘power’.

The reason for this fatal tendency, I would suggest, is to be found above all in the fact that Wesley - and in this he was following the trail blazed by the magisterial Reformers of the sixteenth century - simply continued the medieval subordination of Pneumatology to Christology, as is symbolized in their adoption of the Filioque31. The work of the Spirit, therefore, was thought to simply follow that of the Father and the Son just as sanctification was thought to follow creation and justification. As a result, Wesley and those who came after him thought of the Holy Spirit only in terms of one side of what Hendrikus Berkhof has called “the double relationship between the Spirit and Christ”32. Thus, they spoke of the Spirit of God as the ‘Spirit of the Son’, and located the

30 BE 11:107f.
31 Here I must disagree somewhat with Maddox’s suggestion that, on the basis of his omission of the filioque and its replacement with a statement affirming the equality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son in “A Letter to a Roman Catholic”, “one could argue that Wesley’s ascription to the filioque was simply routine, reflecting the limited contact (and debate) between East and West in his day”, Responsible Grace, 137. If that were so, one would expect to see some evidence of mutuality between the Spirit and the Son in his exegesis of the New Testament and in his account of the work of the Spirit. Unfortunately one finds little or no trace of that in his writings - even when he comments on a text such as Hebrews 9:14 where his ‘explanatory note’ seems to fly in the face of the plain meaning of the text. It is possible, of course, that Wesley simply did not know how to get beyond the de facto effects of the filioque, (see his remark concerning “the secret operations of the blessed Spirit” in the life and ministry of Christ from the time of his baptism, Mt 3:16, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament), and the aforementioned absence is simply a sign of the gap between intention and execution. In that case, Maddox may very well be correct when he continues: “Indeed a very plausible case could be made that Wesley’s deepest sympathies would lie with those who are seeking an alternative to the filioque in current debates”.
Spirit’s work in the event of human proclaiming and believing of the Gospel and subsequent spiritual fruit. Thereby, they overlooked almost entirely the breadth of the work of the Spirit on the ‘other side’ of that relationship: in the incarnation of the Son, in his mission, in his suffering and death and resurrection. In so doing, they largely ignored the profound correspondence between the work of the “Spirit of sonship” (Rom 8:15) both intrinsically in the ‘only begotten Son’ and consequently in the ‘many daughters and sons’ of God which is central to the Pneumatology of the New Testament.

And having missed that, they totally lacked an ‘objective’, or at least ‘non-subjective’, notion of the Holy Spirit which could have served as a measure for all the work of the Spirit in and for human beings in general and in and for Christian discipleship in particular.

The consequence was that Wesleyan Pneumatology - again, just like Protestant theology in general - always lacked a clear theological criterion for the discernment of the ‘spirits’, and thus their talk about the Holy Spirit always threatened to, and indeed, all too often did, collapse into talk about human spirit. In an effort to counter this tendency, Reformation theology has had recourse to an increasingly formal and abstract form of Pneumatology in which the person and work of the Holy Spirit was limited to eternity in the doctrine of the trinity, to the past in the doctrine of the inspiration.

---

of scripture, and to \textit{public proclamation} in a ‘theology of the Word’. A similar tendency can be seen in the Wesleyan tradition. The theological result of this dynamic in Reformation as in Wesleyan thought was, on the one hand, an ever greater subordination of Pneumatology to Christology\textsuperscript{34}. The historical consequence, on the other hand, was the emergence of a long series of protesting, mostly one-sided Spirit-movements, which succeeded in accomplishing little more than being driven to the margins of church and society and calling forth new formalizations of Pneumatology in the main-line church\textsuperscript{35}. From this has resulted the characteristic dynamic of the history of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Protestant theology: a dialectical pendulum movement which swings from a ‘Spiritless’ theology of the Word, on the one hand, to a ‘Wordless’ theology of the Spirit, on the other, and which thus consistently moves between a position which plays off Christology against Pneumatology to one which simply reverses that order and plays off Pneumatology against Christology. That dialectic has, of course, continued down to our own day. If this development has been stultifying for the theologies of the Reformation, then for the Wesleyan tradition it has been devastating, for whereas Pneumatology was of secondary concern to the magisterial Reformers, it was central to Wesley and those who followed after. The failure of Wesley to do the ‘one thing needful’ with regard to Pneumatology, I would suggest, ultimately led to the profound compromising of the Wesleyan language of the Spirit - and thus of God’s gracious presence and activity in the world.


Now if on the one hand the Wesleyan tradition does present us with this problematic, then, on the other hand, it also must be acknowledged that this same tradition points us to resources within itself which can help us address that problematic. For Methodism was not just the product of John but also of Charles Wesley, and - as the research of John Tyson and others have demonstrated - Charles differed from his brother's theology at precisely this point concerning the nature of the power at work in the world for discipleship to Jesus Christ. It was in the context of the debates over the doctrine of Perfection in the 1760s that Charles struck the chord that was characteristic of his theology: a theology of the cross which, as Tyson writes, “did not stop with a doctrine of atonement; [but] ... resolutely pushed toward the ‘way of the cross’” as the way of Christian discipleship. To be Christian was not to receive a power that simply freed one from the sin and brokenness of the world in which we live, but rather a power that involved one kenotically in the very place where that sin and brokenness was laid bare: the cross of Jesus Christ.

That theology of the cross, a theology which has deep roots in the western tradition, has been taken up and extended a step further in recent years through the work of a number of Catholic and Protestant theologians, above all in the ground-breaking work of Jürgen Moltmann who has developed what he terms a Trinitarian theology of the cross corresponding to a discipleship of the cross. Indeed, John Macquarrie has written concerning Moltmann’s work: “The Crucified God would have a good claim to be regarded as possibly the most important theological book to be

published in the second half of the twentieth century"\textsuperscript{37}, for in it he presents, Macquarrie writes, “a fully (or almost fully) Christianized understanding of God”\textsuperscript{38}. As is well known, the key to Moltmann’s interpretation of the cross is found in the death cry of the crucified Christ (Mk 15:34): “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In these words, according to Moltmann, the basic categories of the Trinitarian event of the cross are laid out, of which he emphasizes the identities of the Father and the Son: the Father sacrifices or gives up the Son to the cross and the Son suffers abandonment by the Father.

It is here, I would suggest, in the consideration of the implications of the cross for the Spirit in the context of the Trinitarian event of God that a Wesleyan Pneumatological theology might very helpfully discover and take up its own task today; and it can begin by recognizing that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of the cross, that is to say, the Spirit of the resurrection and death of Jesus Christ. The ecumenical Pneumatology of the last twenty years has begun to respond to that challenge. In my own work - which, due to the constraints of time, I can only briefly summarize here - I have begun to lay out the main lines of just such a theology of the Spirit; a \textit{pneumatologia crucis} which seeks to lay claim to a \textit{theologia crucis}\textsuperscript{39}.

Any such account must begin with a recognition of the fundamental logic of the New Testament’s witness to the Holy Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Eberhard Jüngel has aptly formulated it: “The relation between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, decisive for

\textsuperscript{38} John Macquarrie, \textit{Jesus Christ in Modern Thought}, 323.
\textsuperscript{39} See my \textit{Kenosis des Geistes: Kontinuität zwischen Schöpfung und Erlösung in Werk des Heiligen Geistes}, (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 127ff.
the early Christian experience of the Spirit, is determined by...the Easter encounter with the resurrected Christ. It is from the perspective of this encounter that the earthly life of Jesus is then narrated as a life moved by the Holy Spirit⁴⁰°. Against the background of Ezekiel 37, in which the Spirit of God was portrayed as the eschatological *Spiritus Vivificans* whom God would breath anew upon the dry bones of the people and raise them from their graves to new life, the early church interpreted the resurrection as an act of the Spirit. In texts such as Romans 1:3-4, I Timothy 3:16 and I Peter 3:18 we see examples of fragments of very early hymns and/or credos, each of which, contrasting σάρξ and πνεῦμα, emphasizes that it is by the power of God’s Spirit that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. To take but one example, if Christ “was put to death ἐν σαρκί”, writes Peter, he “was made alive ἐν πνεύματι”.

But in the witness of the early church, the fact that it is ἐν πνεύματι, i.e. by the power of the Spirit, that Jesus is raised to transformed existence in no sense contradicts or excludes the claim that it was that selfsame Spirit of God that characterized his life and work ἐν σαρκί. That is seen perhaps most clearly in the Gospel according to Mark. There the Holy Spirit plays a fundamental, if not always overt, roll from the prologue to the passion in the story Christ. Mark’s narrative begins with the appearance of John the Baptist who points not to himself but to the one greater than he who is to come. Yet the coming of Jesus is marked by his condescension to a “baptism of repentance” at the hands of the messenger who is “not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals”. It is precisely upon that one that the Spirit of God descends and marks as God’s beloved Son, and

it is that selfsame Spirit who then drives that Son into the wilderness to suffer temptation at the hands of Satan. Morna Hooker writes of this prologue which depicts the Son led by the Spirit into suffering as “a kind of theological commentary on the rest of [Mark’s] narrative”\textsuperscript{41}. This theme does indeed emerge elsewhere in Mark’s story, perhaps most pointedly in chapter 8 where Peter’s confession “you are the Christ” becomes the point of departure for the first of three discourses in the second half of Mark in which Jesus is portrayed as explicitly defining his messianic mission in terms of suffering, death and resurrection. And finally, in Mark’s account of Jesus’ temptation in Gethsemane (14:32ff), it is the decisive role of the Spirit that emerges yet again. The prayer which ends with the Son’s embrace of the will of the Father, “not my will but yours” (14:36b), begins with the words which the early church identified as the ‘witness’ of the Holy Spirit that one is a child of God: “αἰσθανόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ” (14:36a). Thereby Mark drives home - as Leonhard Goppelt remarks - that, “this immediacy of devotion to God did not come forth from innate human capacity but from the Spirit”\textsuperscript{42}. It is, then, as the Christ, the one defined by the Spirit of God, that Jesus freely takes up the suffering of the cross. Thus it is that in his portrayal of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, Mark constantly emphasizes that the condemnation and death of Jesus was the condemnation and death of the rejected and crucified Messiah. According to Mark, then, Jesus is led throughout his mission and ultimately to his death by the eschatological power of God’s Spirit.

It is that background, I suggest, which provides the proper context to hear and understand in a trinitarian fashion the death cry of Jesus on the cross found in Mk 15:34: “My God, my God, why

have you forsaken me?". As we have seen, Moltmann has presented a powerful interpretation of the death of Jesus on the cross as nothing less than a ‘God-event’ involving not just the Son but the Father and the Spirit as well. He maintains that for the Father this cry represents the experience of the loss of the Son and for the Son it signifies an experience of abandonment by the Father. But what of the third member of the trinity, what of the Spirit? Our survey of Mark’s portrayal of the work of the Spirit in the self-sacrifice of the Son demonstrates that the *Spiritus Crucis* does not first become active subsequent to the cross, but is rather the motive force in the mission of Jesus from Galilee to Golgotha. It is the Spirit of Life that leads Jesus to his death. What then does that cry of death mean for the Spirit of Life?

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross represents something other for the Spirit than for the Father or the Son. For the Father and the Son the cross means absence: the Father’s loss of his beloved Son, the Son’s experience of abandonment by the one whom he had addressed as ‘αββα ὁ πατέρας’. But the Spirit suffers neither such a ‘loss’ nor such an ‘abandonment’. Rather, what the Spirit experiences is a function not of *absence*, but of *presence*. For the Spirit of the Cross is the presence of God with the Son in the eschatological absence of the Father. Thus, whereas the cry of Jesus reveals the yawning chasm of loss and desolation that opens to separate Father and Son, no such chasm exists between the Crucified One and the *Spiritus Crucis*, the One who suffered death on the cross and the *Spiritus Vivificans*. Indeed, it is precisely the kenotic work of the Spirit of life to plunge himself into death, hell and the grave, to ‘empty himself’ into the abyss of death and raise the one who, by virtue of that selfsame Spirit, gave himself to death on the cross to gain new life for all creation.
To the Cross in the Power of the Spirit: 
Toward a Future for Wesleyanism’s Past

D. Lyle Dabney

Here, I suggest, in a Trinitarian Pneumatology of the cross, we glimpse a way of laying claim to the Wesleyan theological tradition anew; the possibility that there might be a new future for Wesleyanism’s past. For the Spirit of which that tradition speaks as active among us to realize God’s imago in and through us is none other than the Spirit of the cross, the Spirit of the resurrection and self-sacrificing death of Jesus Christ, the presence of God with the Son in the eschatological absence of the Father. Thus we could come to speak of God’s life in the world and the world’s life and death, suffering and blessing, horror and hope in God’s life and death and new life. And not just ‘speak’, but come to live out a discipleship to Christ that realizes that God’s redemption does not save us from but rather through the horrors of the age in which we live. For the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of the power of the resurrection that leads us in the way of the cross. Such is the promise, I suggest, of a Wesleyan *pneumatologia crucis* today, the promise that we might yet make the anonymous prayer with which I began this paper our own:

Renew our church, Lord,  
your people in this land.  
Save us from cheap words  
and self-deception in your service.  

In the power of your Spirit  
transform us,  
and shape us by your cross

---