

## WESLEY AND CALVIN ON SANCTIFICATION

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### *Introduction and Orientation*

For at least four centuries, John Wesley and John Calvin have been at the centre of what some call “the ever-smoldering Calvinist–Arminian controversy.”<sup>1</sup> The divide that began in earnest in the eighteenth century has continued in evangelical Protestant Christianity until today and “promises to continue providing occasion for theological warfare into the indefinite future.”<sup>2</sup> In a booklet published by the Presbyterian board of Education in 1909, no less a theological icon than Benjamin B. Warfield is quoted defending Calvinism and rejecting other systems of theology:

Calvinism withdraws the eye from the soul and its destiny and fixes it on God and His glory. It has zeal, no doubt, for salvation but its highest zeal is for the honour of God, it is this that quickens its emotions and vitalizes its efforts. It begins, it centres and it ends with the vision of God in His glory and it sets itself; before all things, to render to God His rights in every sphere of life-activity.

If thus the formative principle of Calvinism is not to be identified with the points of difference which it has developed with its sister type of Protestantism, Lutheranism, much less can it be identified with those heads of doctrine—severally or in sum—which have been singled out by its own *rebellious daughter, Arminianism*, as its specially vulnerable points.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 584.
2. Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 512.
3. Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Theology of John Calvin,” as cited by *Reformation Ink*. <http://reformationink/bbwcalvin2.htm>, p. 2 (accessed 11/03/06). Emphasis

The recent twin book offerings, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, by Walls and Dongell, and *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, by Peterson and Williams,<sup>4</sup> indicate that the controversy has not subsided. Even though Wesley himself spoke approvingly at times regarding Calvinism,<sup>5</sup> he was not immune to the controversies.<sup>6</sup>

Although the theology of John Wesley is generally considered to be primarily Arminian in perspective, there is no consensus on this point.<sup>7</sup> However, in the emphasis that Wesley places on the fall of humankind, he is closer to historical Calvinism than to the High Church Arminianism of his time.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Wesley shares the Reformed principles of *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia*. As Harold Lindstrom writes, “In his strictly personal idea of faith he also agrees with the Reformers.”<sup>9</sup> Timothy George bluntly concludes that “Wesley owed more to Calvin than he was willing to admit.”<sup>10</sup> The reality is that in many points Wesley stood very close to John Calvin. In fact, “there is no really significant difference between

mine.

4. Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). Both books are written with humble and irenic spirits yet the selected titles continue the debate, albeit in more muted terms.

5. “Does not the truth of the gospel lie very near both to Calvinism and Antinomianism? Indeed it does; as it were, within a hair’s breadth: So that it is altogether foolish and sinful, because we do not quite agree with one or the other, to run from them as far as ever we can. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism? 1) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. 2) In denying all natural free-will, and all power antecedent to grace. And, 3) In excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God.” (John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* [14 vols.; Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 3rd edn 1991], VIII, pp. 284-85).

6. See his interaction regarding George Whitefield in *The Works of John Wesley*, I, pp. 426-27; XIII, pp. 504-509; Albert C. Outler (ed.), *John Wesley* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 425-91.

7. See Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1946), pp. 1-18.

8. Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 7.

9. Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, pp. 13-14.

10. Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1988), p. 231.

Wesley and Calvin on their doctrines of man, the atonement and justification.”<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding these similarities, and although both men may have agreed about the beginning of the Christian life, it is most often argued that they disagreed about the goal of the Christian life,<sup>12</sup> or their understanding of sanctification. Tom Oden suggests that, in fact, “long centuries of debate...have contributed to persistent exaggerations and distortions of sanctification teaching.”<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to address the question as to whether John Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification is radically different from that of John Calvin and whether there may be a positive synthesis of the views of these two theologians. Or, to put it another way, does this mean that the apparent conflict of views on sanctification between these two systems of thought and theologians cannot be resolved? As Walls says, “While this is a tempting conclusion, and is often embraced, I do not think we should accept it.”<sup>14</sup>

### *John Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification*

John Calvin is frequently considered a theologian of the Holy Spirit, because Books III and IV of his *Institutes*, which treat the reception of Christ’s benefits and the external means of grace, occupy two-thirds of the *Institutes*, or almost a thousand pages.<sup>15</sup> Pneumatology is central to Calvin’s theology. Theologically the *Institutes* helped to underline the

11. I. Howard Marshall, “Sanctification in the Teaching of John Wesley and John Calvin,” *EvQ* 34 (1962), pp. 75-82 (75).

12. Marshall, “Sanctification,” p. 76.

13. Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998), III, p. 213. Although Oden is referring broadly to the debate between Protestants and Catholics, his focus is on the last four centuries, which include the period of the Reformers and Wesley.

14. Jerry L. Walls, “The Free Will Defense, Calvinism, Wesley, and the Goodness of God,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 13 (1983), pp. 19-33 (25). It appears that 20 plus years of reflection may have changed Walls’s point of reference, resulting in his new book on the subject. See note 3.

15. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., “The Mystery of the Spirit in Three Traditions: Calvin, Rahner, Florensky or, You Keep Wondering Where the Spirit Went,” *Modern Theology* 19 (2003,) pp. 243-60 (245).

dynamic function of the Holy Spirit in admonishing and illuminating individuals in the light of the Word of God: “This pneumatological function was linked to his whole dogmatic framework and gave dynamism to it.”<sup>16</sup> Regeneration, conversion, justification by faith, and sanctification—his entire theological terminology—was associated with the reality and actuality of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> In the broad areas of common grace, regeneration, and the witness of the Spirit, Calvin was the first to develop the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, and to give the whole doctrine of the Holy Spirit a systematic approach.<sup>18</sup> Alister McGrath regards as an act of “genius” the fact that Calvin distinguished but did not separate justification and sanctification.<sup>19</sup> In the final edition of the *Institutes*, the intentional placement of the subject of justification within Book Three, whose theme is participation in Christ through the Spirit, indicates the unity between justification and sanctification.<sup>20</sup> Justification and sanctification are two parts of one complex whole which, for the sake of analysis, must be separated, but which in fact are indissolubly united.<sup>21</sup>

For Calvin, sanctification is described as “the general process of man’s becoming more and more in the course of time conformed to Christ in heart and outward life and devoted to God.”<sup>22</sup> In the thought of Calvin, sanctification remains a gradual process as some remnants of sin remain in the Christian during the course of life:<sup>23</sup>

This process takes place through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection and the power of His word and Spirit indwelling the believer. Hence the

16. Paul Chung, “Calvin and the Holy Spirit: A Reconsideration in Light of Spirituality and Social Ethics,” *Pneuma* 24 (2002), pp. 40-55 (41).

17. Chung, “Calvin and the Holy Spirit,” p. 44.

18. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

19. Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 57.

20. William M. Thompson, “Viewing Justification through Calvin’s Eyes: An Ecumenical Experiment,” *TS* 57 (1996), p. 447-57 (447).

21. John H. Leith, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989), p. 96.

22. R.S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Olive & Boyd, 1959), pp. 24-25.

23. Leith, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, p. 96.

dominion of sin is destroyed, although it is firmly insisted that sanctification is imperfect in this life; there is a continual battle between sin and the regenerate “part” of the believer in which the regenerate part gains the upper hand, so that the saints grow and *perfect* holiness.<sup>24</sup>

For Calvin, rebirth, renewal, sanctification and conversion are roughly equivalent. They can never be considered “as an autonomous state of the believer, but are existentially dependent upon one’s participation in Christ, which is constantly maintained by the grace of God. The Christian life in this perspective can be summed up as an imitation of Christ through self-denial and cross-bearing.”<sup>25</sup> Believers, having been regenerated and justified, begin a new process of sanctification, in which the Spirit gains more and more of the person’s life. Calvin comes perilously close to a dominating or complete sanctification when he writes, “because they have the Spirit dwelling in them, though they find some remains of the flesh still remaining in them: at the same time it cannot dwell in them without having the superiority; for it must be observed that man’s state is known by the power that bears rule in him.”<sup>26</sup> The sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, as it renews individuals toward purity and holiness, is the “surest mark by which the children of God are distinguished from the children of the world.”<sup>27</sup> Calvin insisted that the Holy Spirit is the primary source of empowerment in the Christian’s life. The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to reject sin and to receive strength to persevere in a godly life.<sup>28</sup> The basis for such rejecting power is of course the spiritual union that Christians receive by faith in Christ: “The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ

24. Marshall, “Sanctification,” p. 78. Emphasis mine.

25. Ralph Del Colle, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Grace in Light of the Christian Tradition,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4 (2002), pp. 172-89 (183).

26. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (ed. and trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 290. Calvin does speak of perfection in his writings, but certainly could not use Wesley’s term “entire sanctification.” His comments, however, imply that a person not ruled by the power of the Holy Spirit is outside of the faith, leaving one to wonder if “full or complete” sanctification is the only option for a truly elect individual.

27. Calvin, *Romans*, p. 289.

28. Matthew Everhard, “John Calvin’s Theology of the Holy Spirit,” *Pneumatos* (February 7, 2006), p. 8. <http://pneumatos.blogspot.com/2006/02/theological-study-john-calvins.html>. Accessed 10/18/06.

effectually binds us to himself.”<sup>29</sup> This binding, in Calvin’s mind, must produce transformational change in the Christian. He spares no words in describing the transformation toward righteousness that is engineered by the Holy Spirit: “Since it is his [the Holy Spirit’s] secret irrigation that makes us bud forth and produce the fruits of righteousness, he is repeatedly described as *water*.”<sup>30</sup> Later in the same section he writes, “On the other hand, as he is constantly employed in subduing and destroying the vices of our concupiscence, and inflaming our hearts with the love of God and piety, he hence receives the name of *Fire*.”<sup>31</sup> In forceful and unbending language, Calvin asserts that the work of Christ produces results in the life of the follower of Christ and that apart from union with Christ, no benefits or changes can be expected: “We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”<sup>32</sup> He elsewhere insists that we “are partakers of the Holy Spirit in proportion to the intercourse which we maintain with Christ; for the Spirit will be found nowhere but in Christ.”<sup>33</sup> There is an even and serious tone to Calvin’s instructions regarding the Christian’s union with Christ. For him this is no trifling matter: “For if we have true fellowship in his death, our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin becomes dead, so that the corruption of our original nature is never again in full vigour (Rom. vi. 5, 6).”<sup>34</sup> Calvin holds that

29. John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion: A New Translation by Henry Beveridge* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), I, 3.1.1, p. 463.

30. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.1.1, p. 465. Original emphasis.

31. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.1.1, p. 465. Original emphasis.

32. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.1.1, p. 464. Calvin went on to say, “The whole comes to this, that Christ, when he produces faith in us by the agency of his Spirit, at the same time ingrafts us into his body, that we may become partakers of all blessings” (Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.2.34, p. 501).

33. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 262.

34. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.3.9, p. 515. It is frustrating at times to read the language of Calvin in terms of the death of the old or sinful nature. Although he affirms the power of the cross in our spiritual transformation and growth, and although he emphatically speaks of the power of the cross in dealing with our sinful corruption, he hesitates to allow that power to blossom fully in this life. That is not to suggest that he needs to speak of “perfection,” but rather that he not give so much allowance, or should

when faith is present it is known not simply by the head but also by the heart and becomes a firm confidence that is experienced rather than an idea that is embraced aca-demically.<sup>35</sup> On the basis of faith, Calvin views a double grace of justi-fication and sanctification. He says,

The whole may be thus summed up: Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by faith, by means of which we obtain in particular a twofold benefit: first, being reconciled by faith by the righteousness of Christ, God becomes, instead of a judge, an indulgent Father; and, secondly, being sanctified by his Spirit, we aspire to integrity (blamelessness) and purity of life.<sup>36</sup>

For Calvin, regeneration, or repentance, moves Christians toward the image of God being restored within them. Repentance is “dissatisfaction with and a hatred of sin and a love of righteousness...which things lead to self-denial and mortification of the flesh, so that we give ourselves up to the guidance of the Spirit of God and frame all the actions of our life to the obedience of the Divine will.”<sup>37</sup> At no time does Calvin allow for perfection in this life, but he does, as noted earlier, use language that at least

I say, excuse, for ongoing sinful behaviour in the life of the follower of Christ. “In regenerating his people God indeed accomplishes this much for them; he destroys the dominion of sin, by supplying the agency of the Spirit, which enables them to come off victorious from the contest. Sin, however, though it ceases to reign, ceases not to dwell in them” (*Institutes*, I, 3.3.11, p. 517). At the same time, in defending his point, Calvin obsessively applies a defeating standard to his argument as he continues: “We are enjoined to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength. Since all the faculties of our soul ought thus to be engrossed with the love of God, it is certain that the commandment is not fulfilled by those who received the smallest desire into their heart, or admit into their minds any thought whatever which may lead them away from the love of God to vanity.” Wesley will interact with the idea of perfection and love of God.

35. Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005), p. 89.

36. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.11.1, p. 37. Charles Partee offers the translation “blamelessness” for the term “integrity” in the section quoted above.

37. Petrus Barth and Guilielmus Niesel (eds.), *Opera Selecta Joannis Calvini* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1926), III, p. 6. See also Leith, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, p. 67; Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 1.15.4, p. 164: “In one word, then, by repentance I understand regeneration, the only aim of which is to form in us anew the image of God, which was sullied, and all but effaced by the transgression of Adam” (*Institutes*, I, 3.3.9, p. 15).

semantically brushes very close to the idea:

God abolishes the remains of carnal corruption in his elect, cleanses them from pollution, and consecrates them as his temples, restoring *all their inclinations* to real purity... I make the image of God to consist in righteousness and true holiness; as if in every definition it were not necessary to take the thing defined in its integrity and perfection. It is not denied that there is room for improvement; but what I maintain is that the nearer any one approaches in resemblance to God, the more does the image of God appear in him. That believers may attain to it, God assigns repentance as the goal toward which they must keep running during the whole course of their lives.<sup>38</sup>

There are times when Calvin speaks so strongly to the issue of transformation and perfection that one wonders who he is attempting to convince. It is almost as if he yearns for the experience but cannot bring himself theologically to embrace it: “This work of God is not perfected the same day it is begun in us, but it increases by little and little, and by daily increments as by degrees is brought to perfection.”<sup>39</sup> In his sermon on Job 42:1-5, Calvin states that repentance “is never perfect at the start, but after God planes us, he also needs to polish us.”<sup>40</sup> In his comments on the Gospel of John, Calvin adds these dimensions, “As our faith increases, we are able more and more to inherit the glorious liberty of the children of God” and we are able to receive “fresh additions of the Spirit of God,” which are given “according to the measure of faith,” and thus we make progress towards “fullness of life.”<sup>41</sup> In Calvin’s theology “growth in faith must be accompanied by a growing measure of sanctification.”<sup>42</sup> In describing Calvin’s spirituality, one author notes: “Spirituality means the forms that holiness takes in the concrete life of the believer. The concept of spirituality implies that there is the possibility of progress in holiness, that

38. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.3.9, pp. 515-16. Emphasis mine.

39. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (eds.), *Corpus Reformatorum: Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, (Brunswick: C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1863–97), II, col. 108. See also Leith, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, p. 69.

40. Cited by Geoffrey Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialog* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1995), p. 146.

41. Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialog*, p. 146.

42. Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialog*, p. 146.

there is a need of working toward perfection, and that there are certain means and ways of attaining such a perfection.”<sup>43</sup> Calvin himself says,

I insist not that the life of the Christian shall breathe nothing but the *perfect* Gospel, though this is to be desired, and *ought to be attempted*. I insist not so strictly on evangelical *perfection*, as to refuse to acknowledge as a Christian any man who has not attained it. In this way all would be excluded from the Church, since there is no man who is not far removed from this perfection, while many who have made but little progress, would be undeservedly rejected. What then? Let us set this before our eye as the end at which we ought constantly to aim. Let it be regarded as the goal towards which we are to run.<sup>44</sup>

This goal toward which the Christian is to aim is a consequence of, and result of, faith in Christ. Calvin is very careful to underline this point because in his mind “it is certain that no man will ever know him [Christ] aright without at the same time receiving the sanctification of the Spirit... Christ cannot be known without the sanctification of the Spirit: therefore faith cannot possibly be disjoined from pious affection.”<sup>45</sup> In another place Calvin says, “The whole lives of Christians ought to be a kind of aspiration after piety, seeing that they are called to holiness (Eph. i. 4; 1 Thess. iv. 5).”<sup>46</sup> For Calvin, it is clear that theological understanding and practical piety, truth, and usefulness are inseparable. Theology should first of all deal with knowledge—knowledge of God and of us—but there is no real knowledge where there is no real piety.<sup>47</sup>

43. Lucien Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1974), p. 1.

44. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 3.6.5, p. 5, emphases mine. The language is intriguing: perfection at some level is desired, ought to be attempted, set before our eye as the end, the goal towards which we are to run. All these images declare a direction that pursues perfection. Although Calvin also insisted that “confident belief in the attainability of perfection is a devilish device,” he went on in the same section to insist that “we are nevertheless not to labour feebly or coldly in urging perfection or in striving towards it” (Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 4.1.20, p. 297).

45. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 3.2.8, p. 476.

46. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 2.3.19, pp. 131-32.

47. Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” in Donald L. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 125-52 (125).

Spirituality, for Calvin, included the entire progress of a Christian toward sanctification in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this progress there is a “primacy of love in Christian spirituality—love of God and the fellow person, as well as God’s love for the world. This spirituality is not individualistic...but personally and socially oriented.”<sup>48</sup>

Calvin’s commentary on 1 Tim. 4:7-8 serves as a fitting conclusion to this section, while at the same time compounding the semantic confusion related to “perfection”:

you will do that which is of the highest importance, if you devote yourself, with all your zeal, and with all your ability, to godliness alone...for godliness alone is able to conduct a man to complete perfection. It is the beginning, the middle, and the end, of Christian life; and, therefore, where that is entire, nothing is imperfect.<sup>49</sup>

### *John Wesley’s Doctrine of Sanctification*

Although Wesley’s vision of Christian antiquity was rooted in numerous emphases of faith practice, the person and work of the Holy Spirit was nevertheless a central concern. His experience at Aldersgate was a pivotal event in his religious and theological development:

It is the point in his spiritual pilgrimage at which he experiences the power of the Holy Spirit and at which his theology is confronted by a dynamic pneumatology. From that point on, the Holy Spirit has a central role in Wesley’s definition of the “true Christian,” his understanding of how one becomes a Christian and his explanation of how one knows he or she is a Christian.”<sup>50</sup>

John Wesley’s experience following Aldersgate soon convinced him of the need to distinguish in some sense the new birth and sanctification, “the first being the rejuvenation of our human faculties that accompanies the restored pardoning Presence of God in our lives, while the second is the

48. Chung, “Calvin and the Holy Spirit,” p. 48.

49. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 108-109.

50. Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in Randy L. Maddox (ed.), *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1990), pp. 45-91 (90).

gradual renewal of our moral nature that is then possible. In other words, the New Birth is only the gate or beginning to sanctification proper.”<sup>51</sup>

Wesley wrote very few extended expositions of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, “issues related to the nature and work of the Spirit came up repeatedly...because he placed the Spirit at the center of his understanding of Christian life.”<sup>52</sup> The person and work of the Holy Spirit have a significant role in the theological thought of Wesley. That role is primarily redemptive, and it is therefore interwoven in Wesley’s doctrine of salvation, which was the chief burden of his more than fifty years of evangelism.<sup>53</sup> Many of his standard sermons contain pneumatic soteriological concerns. In fact, “soteriology is an overarching theme in Wesley’s pneumatology.”<sup>54</sup> He believed that the Holy Spirit was the main agent involved in Christian experience and the result was that his “pneumatology was distinctly soteriological. The Spirit is the Divine initiative who awakens, assures, purifies, and guides the believer in the *ordo salutis*.”<sup>55</sup> For Wesley, justification and sanctification are inextricably bound together. His understanding is that “at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, *sanctification* begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit. This is both a real and a relative change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God.”<sup>56</sup> In

51. Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), p. 159.

52. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p. 119.

53. For a brief but powerful overview of Wesley’s passion for evangelism, see Robert E. Coleman, *Nothing To Do But To Save Souls* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2006), pp. 25-40.

54. Winfield H. Bevins, “Pneumatology in John Wesley’s Theological Method,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 58 (2003), pp. 101-13 (101).

55. Bevins, “Pneumatology,” p. 108.

56. John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” in Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (eds.), *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p. 373. Original emphasis. Wesley’s understanding of justification is clearly articulated in his sermons and writings. Plainly understood, Wesley’s view of justification/sanctification accords well with Calvin’s thinking on this subject: “The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he ‘showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past.’ This is the easy, natural account of it given by St. Paul... To him that is

response to the question, “How do you know that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption,” Wesley answered,

I can know it no otherwise than I know that I am justified. “Hereby know we that we are of God,” in either sense, “by the Spirit that he hath given us.” We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit. And, First [*sic*] by the witness. As, when we were justified, the Spirit bore witness with out spirit, that our sins were forgiven; so, when we were sanctified, he bore witness, that they were taken away. Indeed, the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first; (as neither is that of justification;) neither is it afterward always the same, but, like that of justification, sometimes stronger and sometimes fainter. Yea, and sometimes it is withdrawn. Yet, in general, the latter testimony of the Spirit is both as clear and as steady as the former.<sup>57</sup>

Wesley was very careful to preach that,

salvation is carried on by “convincing grace,” usually in Scripture termed “repentance”... Afterwards, we experience the proper Christian salvation, consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God.<sup>58</sup>

Salvation, according to Wesley, was both instantaneous and progressive, which created tension in terms of his understanding of sanctification as the perfecting of the Christian. In his sermon, “On Working Out our Own Salvation,” Wesley contends that the Scripture “shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified...It gradually increases from that moment...till in another instant the heart is

justified...God ‘will not impute sin’ to his condemnation. He will not condemn him on that account, either in this world or in that which is to come. His sins, all his past sins, are covered, are blotted out, shall not be remembered or mentioned against him, any more than if they had not been. God will not inflict on that sinner what he deserved to suffer, because the Son of his love hath suffered for him. And from the time we are ‘accepted through the Beloved,’ ‘reconciled to God through his blood,’ he loves, and blesses, and watches over us for good, even as if we had never sinned” (*The Works of John Wesley*, V, p. 57).

57. *The Works of John Wesley*, XI, p. 420.

58. Wesley, “On Working Out our Own Salvation,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, p. 488.

cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man.”<sup>59</sup> Wesley’s doctrine of salvation is then three-dimensional: as pardon-salvation begun, holiness-salvation continued, and heaven-salvation completed. Echol Lee Nix summarizes it thus:

Salvation emphasizes responsible grace. God did not just pardon us and stop there. Wesley broadened salvation beyond justification. In addition to imputing righteousness in justification, God imparts righteousness to us through sanctification. Wesley has an enduring concern about and never wanted to nullify the essence of holiness in the Christian life. He integrated the doctrine of sanctification to incorporate the significance of holy living as an essential part of the salvation experience. Sanctification implies human beings’ active participation in the transformation purpose of salvation... Our potential for growth in the likeness of God in Christ is dependent upon God’s pardoning grace (justification) while the continuing salvific experience with God is contingent upon our responsive growth in Christ-likeness (sanctification).<sup>60</sup>

For Wesley, a Christian’s “responsive growth in Christ-likeness” was connected to the filling of the Holy Spirit. Wesley correctly saw being filled with the Spirit as the evidence of true Christianity, of what he called “scriptural Christianity.” He asked, “Is this city a Christian city? Is Christianity, scriptural Christianity, found here? Are we, considered as a community of men, so ‘filled with the Holy Ghost,’ as to enjoy in our hearts, and show forth in our lives, the genuine fruits of the Spirit?”<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that Wesley was also very clear on the reception of the Holy Spirit into the life of a Christian. In a letter to Joseph Benson on December 28, 1770, regarding the subject of sanctification, Wesley makes an important comment,

This I term sanctification, (which is both an instantaneous and a gradual work,) or perfection, the being perfected in love, filled with love, which still admits of a thousand degrees... But...the whole thing is what I contend for;

59. Wesley, “On Working Out our own Salvation,” pp. 488-89. In some measure Wesley anticipates the “already, but not yet” nomenclature of the Kingdom of God articulated by George Ladd. See George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 76-77.

60. Echol Lee Nix, Jr., “Themes in Wesley’s Theological Understanding,” in *The Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology: John Wesley*, p. 17, [http://people.bu.edu/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_430\\_wesley.html](http://people.bu.edu/dictionary/mwt_themes_430_wesley.html). Accessed October 18, 2006.

61. *The Works of John Wesley*, V, p. 48.

an entire deliverance from sin, a recovery of the whole image of God, the loving of God with all our heart, soul, and strength... If they like to call this “receiving the Holy Ghost,” they may: Only the phrase, in that sense, is not scriptural, and not quite proper; for they all “received the Holy Ghost” when they were justified. God then, “sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”<sup>62</sup>

Wesley rejected the linkage or identification of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit for a number of reasons, perhaps the most pressing being his understanding of the exegetical and theological difficulties with making such a claim.<sup>63</sup>

Wesley understood, as did Calvin, that sanctification was the process of being renewed into the image of God, in true righteousness and holiness. Faith is the condition and instrument of sanctification. D. Marselle Moore captures the ethos of Wesley’s understanding when he writes, “When we begin to believe, salvation begins; and as faith increases, holiness increases.”<sup>64</sup>

In the widest sense, sanctification can be considered the full sum of Methodist doctrine even during the time of Wesley, because for Wesley, the main purpose or aim of religion was to find “the way to heaven.” Since the way to heaven is by the attainment of that holiness, and since this holiness is obtained “by way of repentance, justification and regeneration, it is fair to describe the whole process of salvation as a search for sanctification or Scriptural holiness.”<sup>65</sup>

There remains no doubt from a reading of Wesley’s sermons and letters that his teaching or emphases on the subject of sanctification evolved or matured over the course of his life. Wesley’s early writings reflect a tension, and some would suggest, a confusion, regarding the pursuit of holiness and whether or not it could be attained or expected in this life.<sup>66</sup> Maddox affirms that such a development occurred when he references “Wesley’s mature descriptions.” He writes:

62. *The Works of John Wesley*, XII, p. 416.

63. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p. 177.

64. D. Marselle Moore, “Development in Wesley’s Thought on Sanctification and Perfection,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20 (1985), pp. 29-53 (37).

65. Marshall, “Sanctification,” p. 77.

66. Randy L. Maddox, “Be Ye Perfect?”, *Christian History* 20 (2001), pp. 32-34 (32).

[A] second dimension of sanctification evident in Wesley's mature descriptions is precisely our gradual spiritual recovery of the likeness of God following the New Birth...Wesley recognized that this gradual transformation was the primary referent of biblical uses of "sanctification." Among his own common terms for this process were "growth in grace" and "going on from grace to grace"... [Wesley] could summarize God's desire for our sanctification as a desire for love to become the constant ruling temper of our soul.

Another way that Wesley expressed his conviction of the vital contribution of tempers to actions was that holiness must become a "habitual disposition of the heart" if it is to be manifest in our lives. Such language warrants the recent claim of several Wesley scholars that his model of Christian life is best portrayed in terms of a character ethic or virtue ethic, where meaningful moral actions are grounded in nurtured inclinations (character dispositions). The crucial implication of this claim is that Wesley's "holy tempers" would not be simply infused by God's sanctifying grace in instantaneous completeness; they would be developing realities, strengthened and shaped by our *responsible* participation in the empowering *grace* of God. The dimension of a gradual "growth in grace" would be integral to sanctification.<sup>67</sup>

There is no question that all who have experienced justifying grace still discover that the roots of pride, idolatry, and anger—to name just three sins—have not been destroyed. In fact, as Christians, we are called upon to continue to struggle with the vestiges of sin, even though we have experienced complete pardon of our sins. As Oden says, "A continuing work of grace is required, in the experience of most believers, following justification. For sin still remains or has remnants of vitality in the life of the believer even after receiving justifying grace."<sup>68</sup> Wesley himself certainly affirmed this emphasis. There is no perfection "which does not admit of a continual increase." However far a Christian may advance in sanctification, "he hath still need to 'grow in grace,' and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God His Saviour."<sup>69</sup>

Wesley's mature or developed idea of Christian perfection can be summarized by saying that he believed God's loving grace can transform a

67. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, pp. 177, 179, emphasis his.

68. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 223-24. Wesley expresses very similar thoughts. Cf. *The Works of John Wesley*, V, pp. 144-70.

69. Cited by Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 118.

Christian's life to the point where love for God and others becomes a "natural" response.<sup>70</sup> Wesley explained Christian perfection in the following words:

Christian perfection does not imply freedom from ignorance, or mistakes or weaknesses or temptation, as some people wrongly suppose. But since Christian perfection is only another name for holiness, every one who is holy is perfect *in the scriptural sense*. However even in holiness there is no absolute perfection on earth. It doesn't matter how far people have progressed on the the path to holiness, there is still an opportunity for them to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).<sup>71</sup>

Early in his ministry, Wesley taught that the normal Christian life may reach a stage of sanctification in which the war with temptation is over. But he later abandoned that idea. In 1765, in his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," he "remphasized the point that in the Christian life, all is of grace—preventing (prevenient), justifying, accompanying, and sanctifying."<sup>72</sup> Further, Wesley defined Christian perfection in the following way:

From the time of our being "born again" the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled "by the Spirit" to "mortify the deeds of the body," of our evil nature. And as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We go on from grace to grace, while we are careful to "abstain from all appearance of evil," and are "zealous of good works," "as we have opportunity, doing good to all men"; while we walk in his ordinances blameless, therein worshipping him in spirit and in truth; while we take up our cross and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead us to God. It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or, as the Apostle expresses it, "Go on to perfection." But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here *it means perfect love*. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.<sup>73</sup>

70. Maddox, "Be Ye Perfect?," p. 33.

71. John Wesley, "Christian Perfection," in *Sermons on Several Occasions* (Ilkeston, U.K.: Moorley's, 1987), pp. 401-20 (405). Emphasis mine.

72. Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, pp. 371-80 (371).

73. Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, p. 374. Emphasis mine.

In “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” an appendix to his book dated 1767, Wesley is even clearer in his view:

By pefection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions... I do not contend for the term sinless, though I do not object against it... I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently in an instant. But I believe in a gradual work both preceding and following that instant... I believe this instant generally is the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body. But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before. I believe it is usually many years after justification.<sup>74</sup>

As early as 1741 it was clear that Wesley sought to clarify his teaching on the subject of perfection:

Christian perfection, therefore, does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for “holiness.” They are two names for the same thing. Thus, every one that is perfect is holy, and every one that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth... So that how much soever any man has attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to “grow in grace” and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour.<sup>75</sup>

Wesley’s progression of thought is seen clearly in several references he himself cites in his work, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.” The first reference records questions and answers from the second Methodist Conference which began on August 1, 1745:

The next morning we spoke of sanctification as follows:—

Q. When does inward sanctification begin?

A. In the moment a man is justified. (Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout.) From that time a believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace.

Q. Is this ordinarily given till a little before death?

A. It is not, to those who expect it no sooner.

Q. But may we expect it sooner?

74. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1952). pp. 112-13.

75. John Wesley, “The Fullness of Faith,” in Outler (ed.), *John Wesley*, pp. 251-305 (258).

A. Why not? For, although we grant (1) That the generality of believers, whom we have hitherto known, were not so sanctified till near death; (2) That few of those to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistles were so at that time; nor (3) He himself at the time of writing his former Epistles; yet all this does not prove, that we may not be so today.<sup>76</sup>

Two years subsequent, at the Fourth Methodist Conference, the following question was asked, “How much is allowed by our brethren who differ from us with regard to entire sanctification?” The answer was provided,

We grant (1) That many of those who have died in the faith, yea, the greater part of those we have known, were not perfected in love till a little before their death. (2) That the term *sanctified* is continually applied by St. Paul to all that were justified. (3) That by this term alone, he rarely, if ever, means ‘saved from all sin.’ (4) That, consequently, it is not proper to use it in that sense, without adding the word *wholly*, *entirely*, or the like. (5) That the inspired writers almost continually speak of or to those who were justified, but very rarely of or to those who were wholly sanctified. (6) That, consequently, it behoves us to speak almost continually of the state of justification; but more rarely “at least in full and explicit terms, concerning entire sanctification.”<sup>77</sup>

The third reference cites yet another meeting of the Methodists, thirteen years later, in August, 1758. The conclusions reached at that meeting on the subject of perfection were expressed in these words:

(1) Every one may mistake [*sic*] as long as he lives. (2) A mistake in opinion may occasion a mistake in practice. (3) Every such mistake is a transgression of the perfect law. Therefore (4) Every such mistake, were it not for the blood of the atonement, would expose to eternal damnation. (5) It follows, that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves, as well as for their brethren, “Forgive us our trespasses.”<sup>78</sup>

By the year 1764, Wesley had further “perfected” his doctrine of perfection and

wrote down the sum of what I had observed in the following short

76. *The Works of John Wesley*, XI, p. 387.

77. *The Works of John Wesley*, XI, p. 388, original emphasis.

78. *The Works of John Wesley*, XI, p. 395.

propositions:—

(4) [Perfection] is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.

(5) It does not make a man infallible: None is infallible, while he remains in the body.

(6) Is it sinless? It is not worth while to contend for a term. It is “salvation from sin.”

(7) It is “perfect love.” (1 John iv. 18). This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits, are, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks (1 Thess. v. 16, &c).

(10) It is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.

(11) But is it in itself instantaneous or not? In examining this, let us go on step by step. An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers: None can deny this. Since that change, they enjoy perfect love; they feel this, and this alone; they “rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.” Now, this is all that I mean by perfection; therefore, these are witnesses of the perfection which I preach. But in some this change is not instantaneous. It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies; yet there is an instant in which life ceases. And if ever sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it.<sup>79</sup>

And then in what sounds like a final apologetic for the subject, Wesley adds this word about perfection,

In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked... It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Now, take it in which of these views you please (for there is no material difference,) and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, Wesley came to the point of wishing simply to leave it as a

79. Wesley included eleven propositions, but for the sake of the historical argument only six are noted here, under the original numeration. (*The Works of John Wesley*, XI, pp. 441-42).

80. *The Works of John Wesley*, XI, p. 444.

real possibility that a follower of Christ may and perhaps should arrive at perfection in love within this life before or at death.<sup>81</sup> “In the later years of his preaching and writing on entire sanctification, Wesley...changed in tone, from an emphasis on sinlessness to an emphasis on the fullness of love... To be cleansed from all inner sin in this life by the heart being filled with the love of God and man was, for John Wesley, the height and depth of Christian holiness.”<sup>82</sup> Despite contrary critics, Wesley’s understanding of Christian perfection is entirely orthodox and a warm reprieve from those who tend to de-emphasize holiness and love in the Christian journey. To paraphrase Roger Olson, Wesley bequeathed to contemporary evangelicalism “orthodoxy on fire.” That is, Wesley insisted that

mere nominal Christian assent to doctrinal correctness does not automatically make one a real Christian. Transforming experience of God is what makes one a real Christian and is the best assurance of orthodoxy. [Wesley] rejected sacramentalism, confessionalism and religious rationalism in favor of conversational piety, faith as trust...and the belief in a supernatural God who works immediately in the world.<sup>83</sup>

### *Convergences in Calvin and Wesley*

Although separated in the pages of church history by two hundred years, Calvin and Wesley both reflect strongly the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, especially in terms of sanctification. It is obvious that a clear affirmation of the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men and women not only to justification, but also to sanctification and glorification, has been central to both Wesleyans and Calvinists. The common interest of Calvin and Wesley in the restoration of God’s image in humanity provides an area of convergence in their doctrines of salvation/sanctification.<sup>84</sup> Both men were deeply troubled by the cultures they lived in, both inside and outside the church. Calvin’s Geneva was in desperate need of moral reform and Wesley’s London left little to the imagination in terms of the practice of vice. So it is not surprising that both men

81. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, p. 515.

82. Herbert McGonigle, “Questions and Answers,” pp. 1-11 (2). <http://www.wesley-fellowship.org.uk/WesleyQA.htm>. Accessed 03/21/07.

83. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, pp. 516-17.

84. Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialog*, p. 143.

spoke often about sanctification, piety, holiness, and the fruit of the Spirit. Del Colle, in reviewing the theology of Luther, Calvin, and Wesley offers a complimentary assessment:

[F]or Calvin, rebirth, penitence, renewal, sanctification and conversion are roughly equivalent. They can never be considered as an autonomous state of the believer, but are existentially dependent upon one's participation in Christ, which is constantly maintained by the grace of God. The Christian life in this perspective can be summed up as an imitation of Christ through self-denial and cross-bearing. The major advancement over Luther is the explicit emphasis upon sanctification (and consequently upon good works and obedience to the law) as a growth in grace that is integral to one's participation in Christ... It is evident that Wesley retains the heart of their doctrines. One's existential participation in Christ wrought indeed by God is the fundamental element in Christian faith and praxis.<sup>85</sup>

Within the theological systems of both Calvin and Wesley we have observed that a Christian's relationship with Christ is grounded not only in the cross but in the presence of the risen Christ who justifies and sanctifies.<sup>86</sup> This pneumatic presence of Christ guarantees the foundation of the progressive experience of enabling or sanctifying grace. Calvinists and Arminians have, in fact, shared numerous convictions with Quakers, Baptists, the German Pietists, Monnonites, Moravians, and with a growing number of the heirs of the Puritans, whether Presbyterian, Anglican or Congregationalist. As Timothy Smith comments, "All such evangelicals ...stressed the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to repentance and faith in Christ, assuring them of forgiveness, and by His presence thereafter in their hearts nurturing in them the love and holiness that pleases God."<sup>87</sup> For Calvin, faith as trust was intended to yield a daily life understood as a vocation given by God and characterized by works of love

85. Del Colle, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Grace," p. 183.

86. Because Calvin places regeneration prior to justification in his *Institutes*, it could appear that regeneration itself justifies: "In fact it is not by regeneration at all, but by the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, that God justifies men" (Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of Religious Thought* [New York, NY: Harper, 1950], p. 256).

87. Timothy L. Smith, "George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19 (1984), pp. 63-85 (66).  
[http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/16-20/19-07.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/16-20/19-07.htm).

and service to others. Peters notes, “The key move is from self-service to neighbor-service, to love of neighbor according to the needs of the neighbor. To love means to wish from the heart what is good for the other person, or to seek the other person’s advantage.”<sup>88</sup> Wesley’s notion of Christian perfection as God’s loving grace transforming a person’s life to the place where love for God and others becomes the “natural response” mimics Calvin’s earlier teaching.<sup>89</sup> “Justification and the Christian life belong together for eighteenth century Methodists as well as their sixteenth century predecessors,” says Peters.<sup>90</sup> Wesley continually affirmed with Calvin that justification is by faith and that, in the words of Outler, “true faith is manifestly shown by good living and not by words only.”<sup>91</sup> Marshall concludes, “According to both Calvin and Wesley holiness is a gift of God received simultaneously with justification by faith and finding increasing expression in the life of the believers.”<sup>92</sup> Indeed, as Witherington affirms, “there does not seem to be much difference between what Wesley says on progressive sanctification by means of the Holy Spirit and what Calvin says on this subject. Calvin’s *Institutes* reflect a far more robust theology of the Spirit and the Spirit’s effects on believers than Luther’s works do.”<sup>93</sup>

At the same time, Ronald Wallace prefaces one section of his study of Calvin’s teaching on the Christian life with the words: “There is a state of achieved victory over sin and whole-hearted surrender which by the grace of God may be called ‘perfection.’”<sup>94</sup> He then continues:

88. Ted F. Peters, “The Heart of the Reformation Faith,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44 (2005), p. 9.

89. See note 70.

90. Peters, “The Heart of the Reformation Faith,” pp. 9-10.

91. Outler (ed.), *Wesley*, p. 129.

92. Marshall, “Sanctification,” p. 78.

93. Ben Witherington, III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), p. 173. Witherington adds this footnote to his statement: “I once gave a quiz on Wesley and Calvin to several of my theological professors at the seminary I attended, with quotes from each, to see if they could identify who said what... They failed the quiz, invariably mistaking Calvin’s remarks for those of Wesley and vice versa. This shows that Wesley and Calvin were close on many key theological topics...” (pp. 282-83 n. 2).

94. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, p. 325.

Calvin at times speaks as if this achievement of victory over sin can become a settled and stable state...the government of the Spirit can be so effectual that our hearts are given an “inflexible disposition” (*affectus*) to follow His guidance. The power of the Spirit is so effectual that it necessarily retains us in continual obedience to righteousness...There can be a wholehearted surrender to God and “a real harmony (*un accord et comme une melodie*)” between us and God, when we seek to give the grace of God the chief place in our life, and when the chief desire of our heart is that God should control us by His Spirit. In this case we may be said to serve God with true *rondeur de coeur*, for He does not impute to us the weaknesses that still remain in us.<sup>95</sup>

Certainly it is hard to deny the measure of agreement between Wesley and Calvin when we speak broadly of the doctrine of sanctification. As Wainwright notes, even on the subject of perfection “there is considerable agreement. ‘Singleness’ of eye and heart is also a Wesleyan expression. Calvin also could look on the fulfillment of the great dual commandment to love God and neighbor as the aim of the Christian life.”<sup>96</sup>

It would appear that later generations of Calvinists have subsumed the nomenclature of “perfection” into the terminology of surrender, rededication, recommitment or, as Calvin himself said, “fresh additions of the Spirit.”<sup>97</sup> At the same time, they may be guilty of isolating Wesley’s earliest declarations on the subject of perfection and entire sanctification:

Sanctification in Wesley has often been restricted to this...notion of entire sanctification, with the result that an incomplete and distorted view of its importance in his theology has obtained. Sanctification has been limited to the instantaneous experience of “the second blessing.” The fact that it also comprises a gradual development of the Christian life has not been realized.<sup>98</sup>

Calvinism, as I was taught, speaks of instantaneous sanctification in muted tones, but nevertheless affirms it through the concept of positional sanctification. Certainly, the intention of such a semantic refinement was to underline a Christian’s judicial position before God the Father, not his ongoing experience in growth and holiness.

Wesley, it appears, “had greater faith in the possibility of deliverance

95. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, p. 326.

96. Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialog*, p. 149.

97. See notes 40 and 41.

98. Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 123.

from the power of sin and of man's experience of it"<sup>99</sup> than did Calvin. As noted earlier, Wesley not only observed, but allowed, that even the most "perfect" Christians were very aware of how much further they had to go in holiness. Toward the latter stages of Wesley's ministry, it appears that on the application of perfection to the Christian (i.e. Calvin reserving perfection for the point of death, and Wesley acknowledging that this was the most obvious and normal point for perfective sanctification to take place) both men came, to borrow Wesley's words, within "a hair's breadth" of each other.<sup>100</sup> Although speaking to the subject of justification at the time, Wesley's subsequent remark seems to reflect the best approach to Wesley and Calvin's doctrines of sanctification, in that Wesley recommended that "it is altogether foolish and sinful, because we do not quite agree either with one or the other, to run from them as far as ever we can."<sup>101</sup> However, it remains to be emphasized that there "is nothing intrinsically impossible about aiming toward 'loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength,' wherein 'all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.'"<sup>102</sup> To this directional pursuit both Calvin and Wesley give their assent.<sup>103</sup> As Melvin Dieter points out,

Wesleyans (and I would add, Calvinists) believe that lying behind the biblical themes outlined above—the meaning of creation, the fall of men and women, the understanding of law and grace, and the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit—is the most prominent of all biblical themes, namely, the call to sanctification, or holiness, itself, with its ultimate end an ongoing relationship in love with God and others.<sup>104</sup>

99. Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 14.

100. *The Works of John Wesley*, VIII, p. 284.

101. *The Works of John Wesley*, VIII, pp. 284-85.

102. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 228.

103. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, pp. 33-39, gives an admirably concise overview of the subject of holiness from the time of Luther to Wesley. His observations affirm the proximity of Calvin and Wesley's views on the subject.

104. Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," in Stanley N. Gundry (ed.), *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 11-46 (15). It should also be noted that most Calvinists would not embrace my effusive inclusion of them in the above quotation, preferring to believe that the overarching theme that they are concerned with is the glory of God. My response would be that within and

Ralph Del Colle, using a seminal sermon that Wesley preached at St. Mary's Oxford on January 1, 1773, offers a schematic representation to highlight the main thrusts of Wesley's teaching on sanctification.<sup>105</sup> This schema, Del Colle insists, "reveals a Wesleyan gospel that is anthropologically processive, christologically founded and pneumatologically determined. The Christian life is a process of growth in holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit made known in Jesus Christ."<sup>106</sup> I would submit that Del Colle is unnecessarily narrow by declaring that the above reveals a Wesleyan gospel. In point of fact, it reveals a gospel that is inclusive of both Wesley and Calvin and those who follow in their steps.

Perhaps a concluding word on this brief study is best provided by I. Howard Marshall who writes,

It thus appears that the differences between Calvin and Wesley are not so great as they are sometimes made out to be. We can in fact arrive at a synthesis of Calvinistic and Methodist teaching in which the healthy Methodist emphasis on holiness as growth towards perfection of love for God is balanced by the sane Calvinistic emphasis on the continuing struggle in which faith is involved in this life. Thus the biblical notion of faith which works by

surrounding the glory of God is the holiness of God, and that, in fact, the two cannot be separated. It follows then that the holiness of the believer is related to and connected with the holiness of God, in the sense that we progressively reflect God's holy character in our own lives. As John Oswalt writes, "In the Old Testament, the bulk of occurrences where God's glory is a visible manifestation have to do with the tabernacle and with the temple... These manifestations are directly related to God's self-disclosure and his intent to dwell among men. As such they are commonly associated with his holiness. God wishes to dwell with men, to have his reality and his splendor known to them. But this is only possible when they take account of the stunning quality of his holiness and set out in faith and obedience to let that character be manifested in them" (John N. Oswalt, "kabad," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke [eds.], *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1980], pp. 426-27 [427]). See also Sverre Aalen, who writes, "Glory with its transforming power is operative even now among believers (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:30) through the resurrection of Christ and our fellowship with him, who is 'the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor. 15:20)" (Sverre Aalen, "Glory, Honour," in Colin Brown [ed.], *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], II, p. 48.)

105. See Appendix, next page.

106. Del Colle, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Grace," pp. 175-76.

love receives fuller justice, and the balancing of the Methodist vision by the Calvinistic psychology produces a richer and sounder doctrine than either can give by itself.<sup>107</sup>

The work of this paper suggests, at least to me, that the apparent conflict of views on sanctification between these two great theologians is in large measure, resolvable. And this is a conclusion that should be embraced.

*Appendix: Highlights of Wesley's Teaching on Sanctification*<sup>108</sup>

	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Goal</b>
<b>Anthropological</b>	<i>Right judgment of the Sinfulness and helplessness of Our nature; faith not only an unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture...but likewise the revelation of Christ in our Hearts.</i>	<i>Striving, agonizing self-denial.</i>	<i>Love...the Essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue and the enjoyment of God in time and eternity.</i>
<b>Christological</b>	<i>Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; those virtues which are also in Christ Jesus humility, faith, hope and charity.</i>	<i>They have learned of Christ, who follow his example and tread his steps</i>	<i>The living sacrifice of the heart, continually offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy Love.</i>
<b>Pneumatological</b>	<i>That spiritual sense awakened: the Spirit of Christ alone can quicken those who are dead unto God, can breathe into them the breath of Christian life; the Spirit which witnesses in their hearts that they are the children of God.</i>	<i>The supernatural assistance of His Spirit, to renew our whole souls in righteousness and true holiness; the Spirit of Christ...so prevent, accompany, and follow them with his grace, as to bring their good desires To good effect.</i>	<i>The being joined to the Lord in one Spirit.</i>

107. Marshall, "Sanctification," p. 82.

108. From John Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart," sermon cited by Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, pp. 23-32. The chart is from Del Colle, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Grace," p. 175.

Wesley's views on justifying faith mirrored Martin Luther and John Calvin. Wesley's own new birth experience occurred at Aldersgate in 1738 while listening to a reading of Luther's preface of the Epistle to the Romans. In his agreement with Calvin on justification Wesley declared, "I do not differ from him a hair's breadth." Wesley's most controversial theological teaching is entire sanctification, or Christian perfection. It often evokes charges of works righteousness from critics. Collins skillfully traces Wesley's view on sanctification and explains the strong influence of English Reformers as well as the Eastern (catholic) Fathers. Wesley's views on entire sanctification also show a blending of Protestant free grace and the more Catholic view of co-operant grace. Wesley and Calvin on sanctification. David Robert Walls. McMaster Divinity College. Introduction and Orientation. For at least four centuries, John Wesley and John Calvin have been at the centre of what some call "the ever-smoldering Calvinist-Arminian controversy." The divide that began in earnest in the eighteenth century has continued in evangelical Protestant Christianity until today and promises to continue providing occasion for theological warfare into the indefinite future. In a booklet published. The recent twin book offerings, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, by Walls and Dongell, and *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, by Peterson and Williams, indicate that the controversy has not subsided. You are here. Home. Wesleyan and Keswick Models of Sanctification. Related Media. I. Introduction. Much of contemporary Evangelicalism is indebted in some way to John Wesley and his theological understanding of the Christian Life, or Sanctification. Wesleyanism, various varieties of Holiness Theologies, Keswick, Deeper Life, Higher life, Victorious Life Theologies all have their root in Wesley's teaching concerning the Christian life. II. Wesley and Wesleyanism. A. Wesley & Sanctification. In the theology of John Wesley one finds a new direction, distinct both from Reformed and classic Arm