

**WESLEYAN  
FOUNDATIONS  
FOR  
EVANGELISM**

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## INTRODUCTION

Gonzales's sermon text struck me as humorous. The setting was the Turbeville Correctional Institution, Turbeville, South Carolina. The text was Hebrews 2:3: "How shall we escape . . . ?" (KJV). However, there was nothing humorous about his impassioned appeal to his fellow prisoners: "Receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and he will completely transform your life, just as he has mine."

Raised in witchcraft, Gonzales was taught to hate the Bible. Nevertheless, one day he discovered a New Testament, with a red cover, lying in the middle of the street. He began to read. He continued until he had finished it. Soon he attended an evangelistic campaign conducted by a nearby church. On his third visit, he could no longer "escape . . . so great a salvation" (v. 3, KJV). As a broken and penitent sinner, Gonzales surrendered his life to Jesus Christ.

As I listened, the Holy Spirit seemed to remind me of the amazing ways Christ works through his church to bring the lost to himself. "The Church exists by mission just as a fire exists by burning," Emil Brunner said.<sup>1</sup>

But "mission" requires equipping.

Initially, Jesus's disciples were willing but not yet equipped. According to the Gospel of Matthew, before Jesus sent his disciples out to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19, NIV), he taught that "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom" entails preparation (9:35, NIV). He detailed the kind of community the church must be to bear faithful witness to the gospel (5:3-16; 6:1-24; 7:12, 21-27). By the time we reach the Great Commission, Jesus has delivered five teachings or discourses.<sup>2</sup> Together, they explain the kingdom of God, what entering and living in it requires and what faithful witness to the gospel entails.

Jesus is equipping his church for life and mission in a highly diverse world. Twice Matthew uses the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ek-klay-see-a, an “assembly” or a “convocation”; 16:18; 18:17), translated “church,” to indicate the primary audience of his Gospel.

A Christian doesn’t have to master the Gospel of Matthew before telling others that through Jesus Christ, old things can pass away and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Nevertheless, solid foundations are imperative for the church.

Church history is littered with persons and institutions that proceeded to speak before clearly understanding the good news of God’s kingdom. The book of 2 Samuel tells of a zealous messenger named Ahimaaz. He ran to King David to report on a battle. However, upon arrival, all he could say was that he had heard a lot of noise (18:19-30).

Churches of all sizes and national contexts have an enduring responsibility to prepare members to fulfill Jesus’s Great Commission. This should be done in a manner faithful to the God whose mission Christians serve.

This is certainly true of denominations whose understanding of the Christian faith is directly influenced by John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism. These denominations hold distinct convictions about Christian discipleship, evangelism, and the church’s mission. They believe those convictions are faithful to the Old and New Testaments. Wesleyan foundations for evangelism are simply distinguishing characteristics, identifying markers, and guides. They are certainly not unique among Christians. When correctly understood, they explain the astonishing *mission* of God to redeem his creation. And they show the joyous *mission* God has assigned to the church.

This book rests upon the conviction that a church that evangelizes in accordance with the New Testament should be one where the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifest. “Evangelism,” says theologian Bryan Stone, “relies from first to last on the beauty of holiness made real in the church by the operation of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

Church historian Alan Kreider makes the sobering observation that numerical growth in the early post–New Testament church resulted primarily because Christians “lived by a habitus [virtues, embodied faith] that attracted others.” Facing a pagan Greco-Roman world, they believed

“when people’s lives are rehabilitated in the way of Jesus, others will want to join them.” Church growth “was the product, not of the Christians’ persuasive powers, but of their convincing lifestyle.”<sup>4</sup>

*Foundations* for evangelism, not *strategies* or *methods*, frame this book.<sup>5</sup>

It locates the Wesleyan family within the broader Christian faith. Then it examines the Great Commission for today. Next, it explains the good news of the kingdom of God and what it means to become a messenger. Subsequent chapters examine distinctive features of Wesleyan theology as they affect evangelism. Chapter 10 explores the relationship between Christian practices, evangelism, and discipleship. Each chapter provides questions for group discussion and additional resources for expanding the topic.

Evangelism needs congregations where the Holy Spirit is trusted, discipleship is being learned and lived, Christian koinonia and holiness are passions, new Christians are being nurtured, and God’s love is being expressed to all.

The purpose of this book is to explain Wesleyan foundations for evangelism and to encourage and equip clergy and laypersons who identify with this doctrinal family. At their best, Wesleyan foundations for evangelism are simply *servant vehicles* for telling everyone the God of all mercy and peace is ready to rescue them “from the power of darkness” and transfer them “into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13, NRSV).

The contributors believe carefully laid foundations can help prepare Christians for effective witness in all contexts.





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## WESLEYANS AND APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN FAITH

*Steven Hoskins, PhD*

*Al Truesdale, PhD*

**A**s a six-year-old, one of us was trapped between his parents on a tent-meeting bench. During the lengthy sermon, he focused on rearranging sawdust with his bare feet. Another of us, as a baby barely two months old, was bathed in the creek at a holiness camp meeting. These were our introductions to the Church of the Nazarene and the Wesleyan theological tradition.

By God's grace, at age seventeen one of us became a Christian and was called into the ordained Christian ministry. The other was converted during a revival at a Nazarene college, followed by a path to ordination. Thus began our journey in Christian discipleship, theological education, and service in Christ's church. Over the years, through serving the church in various roles—pastor, preacher, professor, administrator—our knowledge of and appreciation for the Wesleyan theological tradition has intensified.

What characteristics justify a book titled *Wesleyan Foundations for Evangelism*?

Let's examine Wesleyans from four perspectives: (1) church history, (2) relationship to Scripture, (3) doctrine, and (4) enthusiasm for mission.

### THE WESLEYAN TRADITION HISTORICALLY

After the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, Protestantism divided into denominations and independent groups along theological and geographical lines. The process began quickly, with the conflict between Martin Luther (1483–1546) in Germany and Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) in Switzerland over the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Other divisions resulted from debates about God's sovereignty in Continental churches and the Church of England, and controversies over church government.

Where do Wesleyans fit into the Protestant panorama?

In 1534, Henry VIII (1491–1547), king of England, declared the English Church independent of the Roman Catholic Church. His primary reasons were both political and theological. Having produced no male heir, Henry appealed to Pope Clement VII (1478–1534) for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. He wanted to marry Anne Boleyn. Clement refused. On November 3, 1534, at Henry's urging, Parliament passed the first Act of Supremacy. This Act made Henry supreme head of the Church of England (Anglican), thus displacing the pope as head of the English Church and instilling theological and political power in the office of the monarch. In England, the office of the monarch would make the political decisions for the nation and also produce the church's prayer book, sermons, and official Bible, as in the King James Version of 1611.

Declaring the Church of England independent of Rome was one thing, establishing it as a church was quite another. For more than one hundred years, the Church of England would be graced by stellar theological creativity *and* plagued by bitter, often violent conflict.

Towering theological leaders included Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556)—archbishop of Canterbury and chief composer of the Book of Common Prayer, Matthew Parker (1504–75), Richard Hooker (1554–1600), and John Jewel (1522–71).

Conflict would include the five-year reign of Mary I (1516-58), during which the Roman Catholic Church was restored, persecution of Protestants became severe, and many Protestants fled for protection to Geneva, Switzerland. In other periods Catholics were persecuted.

The 1559 Elizabethan Settlement under Protestant Queen Elizabeth (1533–1603), in which the Catholics were deposed and the Church of England reinstated, established some lasting religious order.<sup>1</sup> Still, many “nonconformist” groups (also known as “dissenters” and “separatists”) emerged; they rejected the established church. Nonconformists included Presbyterians, Puritans, Baptists, Free Churchmen, and Friends (Quakers).

The 1559 Elizabethan Settlement capped efforts to establish doctrinal order. But the church that emerged from the Settlement and the 1662 Act of Uniformity was neither strictly Protestant nor Roman Catholic.<sup>2</sup> The Anglican Church identifies itself as a *via media*, a “middle way” between Protestantism and Catholicism. Out of the period of conflict, the church embraced what it believed to be the best of the Protestant Reformers and the worldwide spirit of Catholicism. However, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England are clearly more Protestant than Catholic, especially Articles 6, 11-14, 22, 25, 28, and 32.<sup>3</sup>

Accepting the early confessions of the faith such as the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the Church of England is primarily defined by “how it prays.” The Latin phrase Anglicans use to describe how they “do” theology is *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, which means “the rule of prayer [is] the rule of belief.”<sup>4</sup> So instead of formal theological confessions, Anglicans have the Book of Common Prayer (they also have the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and the Book of Homilies<sup>5</sup>). What and how they *pray* is what they *believe*. Thanks largely to Thomas Cranmer, their prayers and Homilies are richly endowed with Scripture.<sup>6</sup> The designation “prayers” covers church services of reading Scripture and preaching, the rituals of baptism and the Eucharist, private prayers, and specific prayers for the nation and aid in spreading the gospel to all people in a variety of situations.

Wesleyan theology is rooted in the Church of England. The theology of John (1703-91) and Charles (1707-88) Wesley, founders of Methodism, was grounded in the Anglican *via media*, the Book of Common Prayer, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, and the Book of Homilies. Until death,

both were Anglican priests. They intended that Methodists would constitute an assembly *in* and *under* the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Church of England. But when independence came to the American colonies after the Revolutionary War, John reluctantly gave his blessing to American Methodists to become independent while writing an abbreviated Book of Common Prayer for the American Methodist movement. This happened formally in the 1784 Christmas Conference held in the Lovely Lane Chapel, Baltimore, Maryland. After John's death, Methodists in England formally separated from the Church of England. They became the Methodist Church of Great Britain.<sup>7</sup>

John and Charles Wesley largely adhered to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. A notable exception is their rejection of Article 17, "Of Predestination and Election."<sup>8</sup> They taught instead that the atoning work of Jesus Christ is intended for all persons. They believed God's Word clearly teaches that Christ "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2, NIV).<sup>9</sup> Their position had been clearly stated nine hundred years earlier by the Council of Quierzy (AD 853): "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer." This remains the doctrinal standard of the Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> It is also the theological guide for Methodists and often found in their writing and singing:

*Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;  
Let ev'ry soul be Jesus' guest.  
Ye need not one be left behind,  
For God hath bidden all mankind.*<sup>11</sup>

John and Charles believed God's grace is "FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL."<sup>12</sup> John's text for his sermon "Free Grace" was Romans 8:32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (KJV). Through prevenient grace the Holy Spirit works in all persons, seeking to lead them to salvation.<sup>13</sup>

So, with modifications, historically the Wesleyan lineage runs through the Church of England (Anglicanism) back to the Protestant Reformation. The doctrinal standards of Methodism and its daughter denominations reveal theological and linguistic dependence on the Thirty-Nine

Articles of Religion.<sup>14</sup> The Wesleyan tradition is also grounded in the great apostolic tradition as preserved in the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodoxy. Wesleyans are taught by, belong to, and contribute to the whole church.

### THE WESLEYAN TRADITION AND SCRIPTURE

Characteristic of the Protestant Reformation were the “five *solas*”: (1) *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), (2) *sola fide* (faith alone), (3) *sola gratia* (grace alone), (4) *solus Christus* (Christ alone), and (5) *solus Deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone). Protestantism placed the authority of Scripture above all councils and papal authority. Church tradition is subservient to Scripture.

Wesleyans affirm the “five *solas*.” Their characteristic understanding of biblical authority is similar to John’s statement in his Gospel: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31, NIV). John concentrated on those things that would most clearly reveal the Redeemer. Similarly, for Wesleyans the authority and principal importance of Scripture resides in its faithful and definitive testimony to how God is *for* and *with* his creation in Jesus Christ. In their statements about the Bible’s authority, most Wesleyan denominations adhere to Article 6 of the Anglican Thirty Nine Articles of Religion, “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scripture for Salvation”: “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”<sup>15</sup> The Bible is fully sufficient in its declaration of “all things necessary”; that is its purpose. Its authority rests in its “sufficiency”—namely, its testimony to God’s saving work in Christ. Culturally limited worldviews, for instance, found in the Bible are not “necessary to salvation” and are “not to be required” of anyone as an “article of the Faith.”

Jesus Christ is the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God secondarily, *as* faithful and definitive witness to Christ (Luke 24:25-27). The Bible’s primary purpose is to lead persons to confess, by the Holy Spirit, that in Jesus Christ we encounter God the Redeemer, “the Lamb of God,

who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, NIV). Therein rests its binding authority.

The Bible remains a closed book until opened by the Holy Spirit. Just as “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3, NIV), even so, only the Holy Spirit can transform the Bible into Scripture, into a living witness to the “Word of God” (2:6-16).

Wesleyan New Testament scholar Joel B. Green takes the topic a step further. “The authority of Scripture,” he says, “is best discerned in the lives (and not only the claims) of communities oriented around Scripture.”<sup>16</sup> That is where and how the trustworthiness or “truth” of the Bible is confirmed. Green is echoing John Wesley, who preached that as important as doctrine is, true religion doesn’t primarily reside there. John Wesley taught that true religion doesn’t end with right doctrine (*orthodoxy*). It must result in *orthokardia* (“right heart” or “passions” or “values”) and *orthopraxy* (“right action”).

Wesleyans study the Scriptures diligently to learn how to live as faithful citizens in God’s kingdom. Authoritative in all things that pertain to salvation, the Bible’s moral norms faithfully express God’s holy character and his will for his people.

In the preface to his *Sermons on Several Occasions*, John Wesley said, “At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri* [a man of one book].”<sup>17</sup> However, Wesley stressed the importance of other books for Christian nurture and learning. For the education of Methodists, Wesley produced a “Christian library.” The 1821 edition contained thirty volumes, with works on the Scriptures, testimonies, church histories, and theology.<sup>18</sup>

Wesleyans must heed a lesson from the Pharisees, who trumpeted their fidelity to the law of Moses. Jesus rebuked them for undercutting the Torah by elevating their rules above its spirit (Matt. 23:1-36). Similarly, denominations can boldly declare *sola Scriptura* while in practice placing their own cherished doctrines beyond the reach of biblical critique. To be truly Wesleyan, each identifying doctrine must regularly be subjected to examination and refinement by the Word of God.

All this means that Wesleyans are primarily children and servants of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ by the will of the Father and the faithful witness of the Holy Spirit. Only secondarily are they loyal to their

theological tradition, always engaged in “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10, KJV).

### THE WESLEYAN TRADITION THEOLOGICALLY

All orthodox denominations have their distinctive characteristics. However, all must submit to judgment by *catholic* or universal doctrinal norms. An exhaustive examination of those norms is beyond this chapter. But we will identify four essential bases for Christian orthodoxy: (1) early creeds in the New Testament, (2) the Apostles’ Creed, (3) the AD 325 Nicene Creed (Nicene-Constantinople Creed), and (4) the AD 451 Creed of Chalcedon. We will ask how Wesleyans measure up.

When we speak of Christian creeds, we mean the living faith of the church, carefully stated and embodied in practice (Rom. 10:9-11). *Credo* means “I believe.”

#### *First, Early Creeds of the New Testament*

Broadly understood, the entire New Testament is a confession of faith that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of God. Before the close of the New Testament era, Christians were summarizing this faith in compact ways.

- Romans 1:2-4 (RSV). At the beginning of his letter to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul stated the gospel he preached everywhere. Through the prophets, God “promised beforehand . . . in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (RSV). Here Paul wrote the church about the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist (thanksgiving). Paul “received from the Lord” instruction about this sacrament. This indicates that the early church had already placed the Lord’s Supper at the center of its faith. The body and blood of Jesus the Messiah, shed on the cross, along with an expectation that Christ will return in glory, forms the center of the new covenant.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,

and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

For Wesleyans, the Eucharist as the gospel of God, received by faith, is central to their faith. They do not claim to know *how* Christ is present in the Eucharist, but they know by the Holy Spirit their ascended Redeemer *is* present as their spiritual food and drink. With Charles Wesley they affirm,

*Here all Thy blessings we receive,  
Here all Thy gifts are given,  
To those that would in Thee believe,  
Pardon, and grace, and heaven.  
Thus may we still in Thee be blest,  
Till all from earth remove,  
And share with Thee the marriage feast,  
And drink the wine above.*<sup>19</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NIV). Christianity is an Easter faith or nothing at all. Had the Father not raised Jesus from the grave, the gospel would be a lie (vv. 12-20). Paul expresses the church’s Easter faith: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (Vv. 3-8)
- Philippians 2:6-11 (RSV). The “kenotic” (self-emptying) affirmation of Christian faith appears in the form of an early hymn.<sup>20</sup> It is Paul’s “master story.”<sup>21</sup> In it we encounter the essential nature of the triune God, who freely gives himself to redeem sinful human-



kind. The passage not only tells us about the incarnation but also “is a new understanding of God.”<sup>22</sup> God is self-emptying. The hymn tells of the willing incarnation of the Son of God, his servanthood in full human form, his obedient death on the cross, his resurrection, his exaltation, and his final manifestation as Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- 1 Timothy 3:16 (RSV). The New Testament’s most succinct confession of faith is the six-part affirmation in 1 Timothy.

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:

He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated in the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
preached among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory.

The gospel John Wesley proclaimed was “that faith which the Apostles themselves had while our Lord was on earth.” It “acknowledges the necessity and merit of Christ’s death, and the power of his resurrection. It acknowledges his death as the only sufficient means of redeeming man from death eternal, and his resurrection as the restoration of us all to life and immortality.”<sup>23</sup> Wesleyans affirm each part of the preceding creedal statements.

### *Second, the Apostles’ Creed*

Wesleyans do not have a formal institutional “creed” of their own as do some Protestant churches. They affirm, without equivocation, the

great creeds formulated during what John Wesley called “primitive and apostolical” Christianity.<sup>24</sup> His emphasis upon a heart warmed by the transforming Holy Spirit should never be confused with doctrinal negligence or relativism. Wesleyan theologian David F. Watson says John Wesley “assumed the truth of the church’s great Creeds and he assumed other Christians did as well.”<sup>25</sup> A truly “catholic Christian,” Wesley taught, “is fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine.”<sup>26</sup> The great creeds of Christendom buttress the “grand scheme of doctrine”<sup>27</sup> found in the Scriptures.

The Apostles’ Creed is a universal confession of Christian faith. Its origins are not precisely known, but it was in use in the church by the time of the writing of the Gospels. Its name derives from a legend that it was written by the apostles on the day of Pentecost, each apostle contributing one article. The creed was used as a catechism to prepare new Christians for baptism as their witness to the faith believed by all Christians in all places. In its present form the creed probably derives from the third century. Its original form goes back to the Old Roman Creed. It might have achieved its final form as late as the seventh century. Once formulated, the creed spread throughout the church as the basic form of its faith. In some parts of the church the creed continues to form part of the liturgy for baptism.<sup>28</sup>

The Apostles’ Creed has twelve articles or sections.<sup>29</sup> Wesleyans affirm each article without reservation.

- I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
- I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
- He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
- He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.
- He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- I believe in the Holy Spirit,
- the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,

- the forgiveness of sins,
- the resurrection of the body,
- and the life everlasting. Amen.<sup>30</sup>

### *Third, the Nicene Creed (AD 325)*

Early in the fourth century a theological dispute erupted in Alexandria, Egypt, between a presbyter (priest) named Arius (ca. AD 256–336) and his bishop, Alexander (ca. AD 312–ca. AD 328). The dispute would lead to the church’s first ecumenical council, to decades of theological conflict, and to churches that followed the teaching of Arius. Held in high regard as a preacher, Arius taught that the Son of God, who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, was not God as the Father is God—not of the same essence. Instead, the Son was the Father’s first creation—the first born of creation—through whom the rest of creation came to be. The Father, who is eternal, has no beginning; but as created, the Son does. To Arius’s credit, he was trying to protect the absolute unity of God (monotheism) against the polytheism (multiple gods) characteristic of Greco-Roman culture. But his efforts came at the deadly price of denying the Redeemer is God. The logic of the Nicene Creed remains our standard of faith. Only God, the one who is truly fully God, can save. If Jesus is not fully God, then he cannot save us. Therefore, the church affirms in the Nicene Creed that Jesus Christ is fully God, begotten and not made, sharing the same substance and being with the Father. Jesus saves.

The controversy burned like wildfire in the Eastern (Greek) part of the church and threatened to split Christianity just after Emperor Constantine had embraced the Christian faith and elevated Christianity to a legal religion within the Roman Empire. It led to the first general (ecumenical) church council, which met in the town of Nicaea<sup>31</sup> in AD 325. The majority of the approximately 318 convening bishops concluded that the Son is of the same substance or essence as the Father. The council adopted the Greek term *homo-ousia* (same substance) and rejected an alternative possibility that would have declared the Son to be of “similar essence or substance” (*homoi-ousia*) with the Father.

Today, in the Nicene Creed all orthodox Christians confess that God is one. They also confess “one Lord, Jesus Christ, . . . eternally begotten of

the Father, . . . true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.” They also confess the church is “one holy catholic and apostolic,” with faith in the one Lord.<sup>32</sup> These are the four “marks” of the church. When Christians affirm the church is holy, they don’t mean it is flawless but that Christ’s redeeming and sanctifying presence resides in it, making of it “a dwelling place of God” (Eph. 2:19-22, RSV) and equipping it as “salt of the earth” and a light to the world (Matt. 5:13-16, RSV).

The Nicene Creed of 325 affirmed “and in the Holy Spirit” as part of what the church believes. But it did not clearly affirm the full deity of the Holy Spirit. That deficit was corrected in AD 381 in the Council of Constantinople, the second ecumenical council. It consisted of 150 bishops (all from the East).<sup>33</sup> This council affirmed the deity of the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity with the Father and the Son: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son [added later by the Latin Church]. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.”<sup>34</sup>

So the Nicene Creed Christians confess today is actually the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, commonly shortened to the Nicene Creed.<sup>35</sup> Nicaea and Constantinople spelled out with clarity what the New Testament repeatedly affirms. So orthodox Christians are Trinitarian monotheists—one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The essential parts of the doctrine of the Trinity were in place. But it would require more time for the church to show how best to articulate Trinitarian life.

With all orthodox Christians, Wesleyans affirm the Nicene Creed. In John Wesley’s 1784 abridgment of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Article 1 is “Of Faith in the Holy Trinity”: “And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”<sup>36</sup>

#### ***Fourth, the Creed of Chalcedon***

The Council of Nicaea settled the question about the eternal, pre-existent Godhead of Christ. But it did not address an equally important topic: Christ’s humanity. The central paradox of the Christian faith is that the eternal God became fully incarnate in the equally fully human person

Jesus of Nazareth. But how was the church to explain how Jesus could remain fully human while all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him (Col. 1:19; John 1:1)?

Numerous Christian thinkers who affirmed Nicaea and Constantinople tried unsuccessfully to answer the question. Two of these attempts occasioned the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.<sup>37</sup> The council reaffirmed the Nicene Creed and established the orthodox way of expressing our Lord's humanity in relationship to his deity.

Wisely, the Council of Chalcedon did not try to offer a rational explanation for how Christ's two natures—divine and human—reside complete in one undivided person. The mystery of the incarnation is a confession of obedient faith. Chalcedon affirmed what *must be true* of the Redeemer and *how* the mystery can be explained as consistent with the Scriptures. As is true of the incarnation, the Creed of Chalcedon is suprarational but not irrational, offering the explanation of the mystery of Christ according to the church's confession of faith in the Scriptures.

The creed affirms Christ is “perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; coessential [same divine essence] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial [of the same nature] with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin.” Christ is to be “acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person.”<sup>38</sup>

Philip Schaff says Chalcedon means “the whole work of Christ is to be attributed to his person, and not to the one or the other nature exclusively.”<sup>39</sup> The importance of Chalcedon is that “it substantially completes the orthodox Christology of the ancient Church.”<sup>40</sup> It is this firm belief that underlies the Wesleyan enthusiasm for mission and evangelism.

## THE WESLEYAN TRADITION AND MISSION

A “profound gratitude to God and a deep compassion for others” propelled John and Charles Wesley. They had “received a message that made all the difference in their own lives,” and they gave themselves in sermon

and song to “sharing that message with others in the hope it would transform their lives as well.”<sup>41</sup> They were servants of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God.

When speaking of the mission of the church, we first speak of the *missio Dei*. The church’s mission is defined and fulfilled by its faithfulness to God’s mission, which Wesleyan New Testament scholar Andy Johnson defines as bringing God’s “creation to its full potential and to do[ing] so through the agency of humanity.”<sup>42</sup> Its very nature is mission; in its whole being and in all its members, the church is sent to announce, bear witness to, and make present the revelation of the triune God in Jesus Christ, “in whom we have redemption through his blood” (Eph. 1:7, KJV). Paul says that in Christ, God has made known to his church “the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (vv. 9-10, RSV). This is the redemptive action of the “missionary God,” constituting, sanctifying, and empowering his “missionary church.” In his church, visible but endowed with invisible graces, Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery, the embodiment (1 Cor. 12:12-14; Eph. 5:30-32) of God’s eternal plan (Eph. 1:9-10).

The missional God became fully incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus obeyed his Father’s will, even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Being the expressed “image” (Gk., *eikōn*, “likeness”) of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), Christ fully revealed his heavenly Father (John 10:30; 14:9). In the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself as the “I AM” who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exod. 3:13-15, NIV).<sup>43</sup> Jesus fulfilled all the Scriptures of promise. And he gathered about himself an unlikely band of disciples, the core of the new and true Israel. As promised, at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in power, took up his abode in them, and made of them agents of God’s mission in the world. They were to embody God’s will and declare him among the nations. They were to faithfully mediate to the world God’s love, will, and glory (Phil. 1:9-11). What began at Pentecost continues in the members of Christ’s church, servants of the Great Commission.<sup>44</sup>

Wesleyan theologian Phil Meadows says the *missio Dei* is “fundamentally what God does to lead humanity through the whole way of sal-

vation—by setting us free from sin, filling us with the divine life, and renewing us in holy love.”<sup>45</sup> The mission of the triune God is to reveal or declare himself in creative and redemptive glory and love and to create a covenant people who will faithfully reflect God *in* and *to* his creation. The purpose of the creation, says Joseph Ratzinger, is to “open up a space for response to God’s love, to his holy will.”<sup>46</sup>

Meadows identifies two dimensions as it relates to God’s coworkers. “First, we become coworkers with God as *recipients* of the *missio Dei*, when we are caught up in the missional flow of God’s prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.”<sup>47</sup> “Second, we are coworkers with God as *participants* in the *missio Dei*, when the love and grace we have received reaches out to others in a life of witness and service.”<sup>48</sup> To borrow from New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, as heralds of God’s new creation inaugurated in the cross of Christ, Jesus now sends his witness into the world as “rescued rescuers, justified justice-bringers, reconciled reconcilers, and the new Passover People.”<sup>49</sup>

Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26) maps the *missio Dei*. *First*, Jesus prays for himself. *Second*, he prays for the apostles. *Third*, he prays for all who will believe in him through the apostles’ word. In Jesus’s prayer, there is a *triple sanctification* (vv. 17-19), each of which is integral to the mission of God. In the strictest sense, sanctity or holiness belongs to God alone; it uniquely marks his singularity as God. But he can claim a person or thing for his purpose and so make them holy by association. Therefore, the verb “sanctify” (Hebr., *qādaš*, “make holy,” “consecrate,” “set apart for God”; Gk., *hagiazō*, “to purify,” “make holy,” “consecrate”) means completely “handing over” or “consecrating” a person or thing to God as a vehicle of worship and service (Rom. 12:1). What is sanctified is not only *for God* but also *for the world* on God’s behalf, for its healing and reconciliation with God.

Consider the three “sanctifications” in John 17:17-19 as they relate to “mission.” In the *first*, the Father sanctifies his Son—consecrates him to his own will—and sends him into the world for the healing of the nations. Jesus is joined to his Father in unbroken obedience and to the world in redemptive mission.

In the *second* sanctification, the Son *offers* himself to the Father’s will. “Here I am, I have come to do your will” (Heb. 10:9, NIV). Jesus

prayed, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39, RSV). This is the unbroken pattern of Jesus’s life and ministry. Through his sufferings Jesus “learned obedience” and was thus “made perfect” (Gk., *teleiōtheis*, “complete”; Heb. 5:8-9).<sup>50</sup> His yes to the Father “consecrated” (sanctified) him to “become a merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17, RSV).

*Third*, on the basis of and in conformity with Jesus’s own sanctification, he prays that all his disciples be sanctified “in the truth” (John 17:17, RSV). Jesus draws them into his own sanctification, into his and his Father’s own life and mission. The church’s sanctification for mission is grounded in and provided by Jesus’s own consecration, his own sanctification. The apostle Paul says this is the meaning of Christian baptism. In baptism the old self “lived” in opposition to sanctification “dies,” just as surely as Christ died on the cross. By God’s resurrecting power, a new “self” comes to new life in the Spirit. Now, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21, RSV). Christian sanctification means living out our baptism into Christ, by the Spirit’s power (Rom. 8:1-5) in all dimensions of life. Paul states it plainly: “No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (6:13, NRSV). Resurrection life is sanctified life (vv. 5-8), the answer to Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer (John 17:17-19).

Sanctification is about becoming thoroughly equipped for obedient, worshipful mission. It means being “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:11, NIV). Sanctification certainly includes the individual. But its chief end is to glorify God in all things, just as in Christ’s obedience he glorified his Father. Correctly understood, this is what “entire sanctification” means in the Wesleyan tradition; it is loving, practiced confidence and life in the sanctified Christ, who by the Holy Spirit sanctifies his church (1 Cor. 1:2) for God’s own mission and glory (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 1:6).

It is this positive understanding of mission—combined with the Wesleyan adherence to the apostolic faith—that is the catalyst for our beliefs about and attempts at sharing Christ with the whole world. The following chapters explore, in more detail, how these foundations should guide Wesleyans in evangelism.



### Questions for Consideration

1. Why is grounding in Christian doctrine essential for evangelism?
2. What is there about the Wesleyan tradition that prepares it as a vehicle for evangelism?
3. Why is it essential to speak of a “missional God” before speaking of a “missional people”?

### Additional Resources

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