

1 Not “*What* Is Christianity?” but “*Who* Is a Christian?”

Anyone who reads the works of John Wesley will immediately be struck with how often he refers to the “heart” or the “affections” or the “tempers.” As we will see, this language is not dispensable rhetorical ornamentation, nor is it a reflection of an unsophisticated thinker who is pandering to the masses. For Wesley, one cannot make sense of Christianity without using the vocabulary of the heart.

Note well, though, that Wesley sees the gospel as something indisputably “objective” that comes from outside of us as “good news.” We do not intuit the word of salvation through Christ by introspection or speculation; it comes to us as a proclamation. However, if our life is not marked by very specific and complex patterns of heart-response to that gospel, we have not really heard or understood the good news. Those patterns of response are what Wesley termed the religious “affections” or “tempers” of the heart.

Because of his emphasis on these patterns of response, Wesley is sometimes viewed as a kind of “pietist.” This term is often used to indicate a kind of extreme emphasis on the “inner” life, and the “pietist” movement is typically explained away in the broad sweep of church-history generalizations as a narrow, historically located over-reaction to the excesses of the preceding era of arid, intellectual hair-splitting known as Protestant scholasticism. Even in our own time, when someone is so caught up with their own experience or prayer life that they uncritically accept any feeling or twinge as a “leading” of the Spirit—and, hence, an unquestionable road sign to Reality—they are often characterized as a “pietist.” That characterization, then, is one that invites dismissal, not any serious attempt at appreciation.

4 *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*

I am not interested in analyzing “Pietism” in general, though there are several careful studies of particular individuals often called Pietists, and these studies can lead to a deeper and subtler appreciation of their thought.¹ Here I am interested specifically in examining the thought of John Wesley. Whether what I have to say about Wesley’s understanding of the proper role of experience and emotion in the Christian life can be applied to other so-called Pietists, I will leave to others to judge. What is clear to me, though, is that what passes for the caricature of Pietism that I described above does not at all do justice to Wesley’s vision of Christianity, and that Wesley’s vision holds powerful possibilities for us still today—possibilities that contemporary emotion theory can help us see.

What Was Essential to Christianity for John Wesley?

It is clear that what was essential to Christianity according to Wesley was a life marked by the “religious affections.” This life was made possible by, among other things, both an indispensable kernel of Christian doctrine, and, equally important, a particular *mode* of describing and expressing this doctrine. When trying to understand, or embody, Wesley’s vision, the medium and the message must be completely integrated or Wesley’s paradigm is violated.

John Wesley summarized his essential doctrines in slightly different ways at different times in his career, but there is enough consistency in these various summaries to detect a clear pattern. Three leading interpreters of Wesley’s theology, Richard P. Heitzenrater,² Albert C. Outler,³ and

1. See, for instance, the volumes in the series “Pietist and Wesleyan Studies” edited by Steve O’Malley and David Bundy published by Scarecrow Press.

2. See his *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, where he discusses the different summaries: on 156 he quotes the “Principle of a Methodist” passage reproduced below; on 204 he mentions Wesley slightly different summary in a letter (*The Bicentennial Edition of Wesley’s Works*, hereafter *Works*, 4:146) of “original sin, justification by faith and holiness consequent thereon”; on 214–15, quoting from Wesley’s *Journal and Diary* (*Works*, 21:485) the three are referred to as “original sin and justification by faith, producing inward and outward holiness.” On page 242, quoting Wesley’s sermon at the funeral of George Whitefield (*Works*, 2:343), Heitzenrater lists the grand doctrines as “the new birth and justification by faith.”

3. See his collected works, *The Albert Outler Library*, 1:258ff; 2:240ff; 3:422–47.

Thomas A. Langford,⁴ have each taken Wesley’s statement of his “main doctrines” in *Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained* as a representative summary.⁵ In that piece, Wesley names the three essential doctrines that describe the doctrinal kernel of Christianity.

Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three—that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself.⁶

There are several remarkable things about this statement, and I have commented on this doctrinal summary extensively in my book *As If the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality* (which makes the case for taking a specifically *theological*, rather than a purely psychological, grounding for spirituality). The part of this passage that I want to focus on here, however, is Wesley’s descriptions of “repentance,” “faith” and “holiness” as “doctrines.” To say that these three terms are, in and of themselves,

4. Langford, *Methodist Theology*, 7.

5. Randy Maddox in his “Vital Orthodoxy,” says: “But the four doctrines that were mentioned far more often than any others were 1) original sin, 2) justification by faith, 3) the new birth and 4) holiness of heart and life” (10). Maddox’s note to this passage refers to four different references in Wesley’s works, which might lead the reader to think that this list of four doctrines is found in each of these passages, but that is not the case. For instance, in the reference to Wesley’s sermon on the death of George Whitefield (Sermon 53, 341) Wesley simply refers to “the grand scriptural doctrines” without listing them. Two pages later in this sermon, Wesley does, as Heitzenrater pointed out (see note 2 above), summarize the “fundamental doctrines” in “two words—the new birth and justification by faith,” (343) not the four-fold list seemingly implied by Maddox. Similarly, Maddox’s reference to Wesley’s sermon “On God’s Vineyard” (Sermon 107, 516) yields this quote: “Were not the fundamental doctrines both of free, full, present justification delivered to you, as well as sanctification, both gradual and instantaneous? Was not every branch both of inward and outward holiness clearly opened and earnestly applied?” Again we do not see the fourfold listing. A charitable reading of Maddox here would have him mean that *taken as a sum*, the quotes in his references yield the four doctrines that are central to Wesley, but I think the weight of scholarly opinion makes Wesley’s doctrinal summary in *Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained* to be the best single summary of what Wesley held to be central. Oddly, Maddox never refers to that piece in this article, nor in an even more recent summative look at Wesley’s legacy: “Celebrating the Whole Wesley’ A Legacy for Contemporary Wesleyans.” In my reading, original sin is addressed when unpacking the “porch of repentance,” while justification, the new birth and holiness of heart and life are seen during elaborations of the “door of faith” and “the house itself.” See chapters 2–4 in my *As If the Heart Mattered*.

6. *Works*, 9:227.

6 *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*

“doctrines” is, I think, more than a kind of lazy shorthand on the part of Wesley. This “doctrinal” summary speaks directly to what Wesley held to be most crucial in the whole Christian enterprise—namely, lived Christianity, describable in terms of the affections or tempers of the heart. Wesley’s “main doctrines”—the indispensable components of essential Christianity—were best understood as they were enacted in human lives.

Now, as will be made clear in chapter 4 below, Wesley understood repentance, faith, and holiness as more than, and distinguishable from, feelings. Repentance, faith, and holiness are cognitive/affective embodiments of the Christian gospel experienced by Christian believers. Without these experiences, one might *know* all sorts of things *about* Christianity, and yet not *be* a real, fully mature Christian. However, while they are more than passing sensations, these embodiments of Christian truth clearly represent a different way of viewing “doctrines” than is more usual in the wider tradition.

Ted Campbell, in two papers he delivered earlier during the tercentenary year of Wesley’s birth, makes an interesting distinction between two different lists of essential doctrines in Wesley’s thought. One list of doctrines contains those that Campbell sees as essential “Christian” doctrines that all Christians believed, with a second list that was distinctive to the evangelical movement—those that were “distinctively Methodist.” It is the three doctrines listed above—repentance, faith, and holiness—that make up the list of these distinctively Methodist doctrines. Campbell goes on to make the historical and liturgical point that these three doctrines can be seen in the very structure of a variety of Methodist hymnals going back to the time of John and Charles.⁷

What Campbell does not note, however, is that these three doctrines are key not only, or even primarily, because they are “distinctively Methodist” (the point that Lawrence Meredith makes with regard to these doctrines⁸), but because they are *most important for the foundational for-*

7. Campbell’s papers delivered at the Manchester Wesley Tercentenary Conference, June 18, 2003, and at “The Legacy of John Wesley for the Twenty-First Century” conference, held at Asbury Theological Seminary, October 1–3, 2003. The larger list of Christian doctrines includes such standard tenets as the Trinity, the incarnation, etc. On this topic, see also Campbell’s *Methodist Doctrine*, 19–20 and 31–33.

8. Meredith, “Essential Doctrine in the Theology of John Wesley.”

mation of disciples. Because they are *indispensably formative of the heart* is most likely the reason they *became* distinctively Methodist. It is not their capacity to serve as denominational markers—their sociological “distinctiveness”—that makes them important, it is their formative capacity. They are the most important—or essential—“doctrines” because they shape the heart—they plug into (and/or create) the emotional capacities that Wesley saw as indispensable for being a Christian.

Typically, when the tradition speaks of these experiences with regard to “doctrine,” we find discussions about “the doctrine of sin,” or “the doctrine of justification by grace through faith,” or “the doctrine of sanctification,” and occasionally Wesley himself would use this kind of language.⁹ These latter, traditional formulations of “doctrine” have one thing in common, though—they are abstract, secondary reflections on the primary lived realities that Wesley referred to by the terms “repentance,” “faith,” and “holiness.” A life marked by these doctrine-shaped experiences will be a life marked by the religious affections—the signs of the renewed heart in the believer.

In order to see in more detail Wesley’s theological vision and how it manifested itself in all of his published works, I want now to look at several specific ways that Wesley described the essence of Christianity, looking especially at his Sermons and his *Notes* on Scripture.

True Christianity in Wesley’s Publications

The first sermon in the extant published corpus of Wesley’s sermons is “Salvation by Faith,” and by putting it first Wesley was making a clear statement that the will-mysticism of Law, Taylor, and Kempis—emphasizing our own disciplined efforts at spiritual growth—while useful, was not sufficient to salvation. He had rediscovered, both in his Aldersgate experience and in his studies of the *Homilies* and “Articles of Religion” of his church, that it is grace through *faith* that justifies us. The whole sermon is an exposition of what this faith is.

First of all, Wesley wants to make clear that it is “by grace” through faith that we are saved. “Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salva-

9. Such as when he referred to “original sin” instead of repentance in one of his summaries of the grand doctrines of the Methodists. See note 2 above.

8 *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*

tion” (#1, 118).¹⁰ As with all of his mature thought, grace is everywhere, although it is by no means irresistible.

But more specifically, what manner of faith is under discussion here? First of all, it is not the “faith of a heathen.” Such a faith entailed believing in “the being and attributes of God, a future state of reward and punishment, and the obligatory nature of moral virtue” (#1, 119).

Secondly, Christian faith is not “the faith of a devil.” This faith of a devil assents to what the heathen believes, but in addition the devil knows that “Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ and the Saviour of the World” (#1, 119). Christian faith is neither (thirdly) that which the apostles had while Christ was on earth, for the power of his death and resurrection was not yet available. So what is the Christian faith?

It may be answered: first, in general, it is faith in Christ—Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper object of it. Herein therefore it is fully distinguished by this—it is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart. For thus saith the Scripture, “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” And, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe with thy *heart* that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (#1, 120; emphasis his)

In further explaining this, he says that such faith saves us from guilt and fear, though “Not indeed from a filial fear of offending, but from all servile fear . . .” (#1, 122). Likewise, such faith gives peace and leads to rejoicing “in hope of the glory of God. . . . ‘And the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts through the Holy Ghost which is given unto them’” (#1, 123; citing Rom 5:5). Finally, those who truly believe will use all of the ordinances, do good works, and “enjoy and manifest all holy and heavenly tempers, even the same ‘mind that was in Christ Jesus’” (#1, 125; citing Phil 2:5).

This same structure of alternately describing what a Christian is *not*, then saying what a Christian *is*, can also be found in sermon number 2, “The Almost Christian.” The almost Christian has honesty, truth, justice, and love as well, though only a love “that would not prejudice oneself.”

10. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Wesley’s sermons are to the *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. The sermon number followed by the page will be given in parentheses after the quote.

Such people even have “A form of godliness” though it is only “the *outside* of a real Christian” (#2, 131–32; emphasis his). But beyond this, the almost Christian can even have “sincerity,” a “real, inward principle of religion from whence these outward actions flow” (#2, 134).

But what, then, is implied in being “altogether a Christian?” Nothing other than the love of God, the love of our neighbor, the faith that purifies the heart and yields repentance and good works. He sums this up at the close of the sermon by saying:

May we all thus experience what it is to be not almost only, but altogether Christians! Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus, knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us! (#2,141)¹¹

Denying that faith-as-assent is *by itself* enough to make one a Christian is found throughout the sermons and this can be seen as the obverse of his emphasis on the affections. Compare sermon number 4, “Scriptural Christianity”: “Christianity; not as it implies a set of opinions, a system of doctrines, but as it refers to men’s hearts and lives” (# 4, 161); and number 7, “The Way to the Kingdom”: “He may assent to all the three creeds . . . and yet ‘tis possible he may have no religion at all, . . .” (#7, 220); and number 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming”: “and least of all dream that orthodoxy, right opinion, (vulgarly called *faith*) is religion. Of all religious dreams, this is the vainest; which takes hay and stubble for gold tried in the fire! . . . Take no less for his religion, than the ‘faith that worketh by love;’ all inward and outward holiness” (#62, 483; citing Gal 5:6); and, finally, number 130, “On Living Without God”:

I believe the merciful God regards the lives and tempers of men more than their ideas. I believe he respects the goodness of the heart, rather than the clearness of the head; and that if the heart of a man be filled (by the grace of God, and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, because his ideas are not clear, or because his conceptions are

11. For some mature modifications to his rather unqualified categories in “The Almost Christian,” see his 1787 sermon “The More Excellent Way,” sermon number 89.

10 *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*

confused. “Without holiness,” I own, “no man shall see the Lord;” but I dare not add, “or clear ideas.” (#130, 175)

Related to this is Wesley’s assertion that we should let reason do all that it is capable of and not undervalue it, but neither should we overvalue it. For we must acknowledge that reason is “utterly incapable of giving either faith, or hope or love; and, consequently, of producing either real virtue, or substantial happiness. Expect these from a higher source, even from the Father of the spirits of all flesh” (#70, 600).

As seen in this last passage, Wesley’s stress on happiness and holiness as the marks of the Christian life is present in these published sermons, as it was throughout his writings. Indeed, Outler mentions in a note in his introduction to the sermons that the correlation of happiness and holiness appears in no fewer than thirty of Wesley’s sermons.¹² It is even used negatively in number 78, “Spiritual Idolatry,” where we are told that the best way to keep ourselves from idols is to “be deeply convinced that none of them bring happiness” (#78, 111).

The couplet “happiness and holiness,” as well as the individual component words, appears in Wesley’s *Notes Upon the New Testament* almost as often as the word “love.” While the term “happiness” can conjure images of a kind of insipid shallowness, Wesley was using the term in the classical way that Plato and Aristotle used it. Wesley was a *eudaemonist*—that is, he held that the true end of the human being was happiness—and true happiness meant happiness in God, which implied “holiness,” thus the constant conjunction of these terms. He even translates “makarioi” as “happy” in the Beatitudes instead of “blessed” (as the *Philips* and *Good News* translations also do). The “children of light” therefore are “The children of God; wise, holy, happy” (John 12:36).¹³ Likewise “So great a

12. *Works*, 1:35 n. 28.

13. When referring to Wesley formal reflections on scripture, I will be quoting from his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (henceforth, *N.T. Notes*), which was first published in 1756; and his *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* (henceforth, *O.T. Notes*) initially published in installments over three years, 1765–1767. The reprint of this latter work to which I will refer was published by Schmul Publishers of Salem, Ohio, in 1975. While one should keep in mind that the *O.T. Notes* do not have the same ecclesiastically normative status as the *N.T. Notes*, they can still be a good source of Wesley’s views, especially when seen through the editorial analysis done by Robert Casto in his “Exegetical Method in John Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament*.” Casto sorted out Wesley’s own comments from those interpreters he borrowed from, specifi-

salvation—A deliverance from so great wickedness and misery, into so great happiness and holiness” (Heb 2:3); and “Is for the present grievous, yet it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness—Holiness and happiness” (Heb 12:11) Thus, even the end of humanity is cast in terms of that which satisfies the heart most fully, that affective enjoyment of completeness: happiness.¹⁴

Wesley reproduced the same Preface in every edition of his sermons that appeared in his lifetime from 1746 to 1787. In it he wrote “. . . I now write (as I generally speak) *ad populum*—to the bulk of mankind—to those who neither relish nor understand the art of speaking, but who notwithstanding are competent judges of those truths which are necessary to present and future happiness.”¹⁵ At the conclusion of his thirteen-part series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, Wesley summarizes this pivotal collection of sermons—as well as his whole eudaemonistic vision of Christianity by saying, “In a word, let thy religion be a religion of the heart” (#33, 698).

This last reference to his series of sermons on Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount calls for expansion, because seeing what Wesley thought was key in Jesus’s central discourse shows the heart to be central. How this series of thirteen sermons has been edited recently also shows recent scholarship’s apparent downplaying of this central aspect of Wesley’s thought.

cally Matthew Henry and Matthew Poole. Thanks to Casto’s work, it is only Wesley’s own original comments to which I will refer in this present work. Regarding the *N.T. Notes*, given their normative status, I will not try to get “behind” the text through redaction criticism. For good or ill, Wesley recommended this work to his Methodists, so I will take a canonical approach to this. When referring to either work, I will assume that the Scripture references are themselves enough documentation to find the quotes, so I will not provide more detailed footnotes. When a passage contains a dash (—) the material quoted before the dash is the Scripture passage itself (KJV, sometimes slightly amended by Wesley), while what follows the dash is Wesley’s comment. In addition to the dashes, Wesley and his subsequent publishers have used italics to differentiate Scripture from his notes. When reproduced in quotes, this pattern of dashes and italics can disrupt the flow of the passage so much that it can be harder than necessary to discern Wesley’s points. Accordingly, while I have typically tried to preserve the dashes (—) when they occur to separate comment from Bible, I have avoided the use of italics except as needed to provide emphasis. Aside from these editorial adjustments, all of the words will be reproduced as they are in the original text of the *Notes*.

14. Just a few of the references to happiness and holiness in Wesley’s *N.T. Notes* include: 1 John (Introduction), Matt 6:10, Matt 5:3, Matt 5:12, Matt 5:48, and 1 Cor 15:31.

15. *Works*, 1:103–4.

12 *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*

In sermon number one in the series, Wesley says that this divine discourse is divided into three principal branches, with the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew each dealing with one of the branches. These he describes as:

In the first the sum of all true religion is laid down in eight particulars, which are explained and guarded against the false glosses of man in the following parts of the fifth chapter. In the second are rules for that right intention which we are to preserve in all our outward actions, unmixed with worldly desires, or anxious cares for even the necessities of life. In the third are cautions against the main hindrances of religion, closed with an application of the whole. (# 21, 474-75)

What is most important for our concern here is that Wesley describes the “beatitudes” as “the sum of all true religion . . . in eight particulars.” Wesley then, in sermons 1, 2, and 3 in the series, goes on to describe each of the beatitudes in terms of the affections of the heart. Poverty of spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering, and thirsting after righteousness, being merciful, pure in heart, being peacemakers, and being persecuted for righteousness sake are powerfully described in these sermons in terms of what it is like from the “inside perspective,” so-to-speak, for the Christian to try to embody these eight aspects of true religion.

Yet, surprisingly, the most commonly used contemporary anthology of Wesley’s sermons omits these three sermons from his series on the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁶ Instead, his Sermon on the Mount series begins in this anthology with number four, on social religion. Whatever the motivation for this redaction, the absence of these sermons reinforces the appearance of scholarly diffidence about how heart-centered Wesley’s theology truly was, and itself shows the need for a deeper understanding of Wesley’s views of heart religion to be more widespread.

Perhaps most telling of what Wesley thought was central to Christianity is his “Plain Account of Genuine Christianity” (which started out as a letter to Conyers Middleton), Wesley begins his account not by asking the typically person-*independent* question of “What is *Christianity*?” but instead opens by asking the very person-dependent—and *affection-dependent*—question: “*Who is a Christian?*” His answer tells

16. See Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*.

us that a Christian is marked by *humility*, that the “ruling temper of his heart” is absolute submission to God and the tenderest *gratitude*, that the Christian is above all marked by *love*, which is productive of *all right affections*, and he has no *fear of dispraise*, for since God *loves him*, human dispraise is not to be feared.¹⁷

He begins this account of “genuine Christianity,” then, by first writing about what the personal enfleshment of Christianity looks like, and he expresses this in terms of the affections or tempers of the heart. Only *after* this is done does he turn to discussing what Christianity itself is. But even at that point, it is crucial to note the very *person- and affection-dependent* way in which he describes “Christianity.”

He asks “what is real, genuine Christianity—whether we speak of it as a principle in the soul or as a scheme or system of doctrine?” Seemingly reinforcing his opening reflections on the “true Christian,” Wesley here says that Christianity is capable of being seen as a “principle in the soul.” But what about Christianity as a “scheme or system of doctrine?” Well, this scheme’s primary accomplishment is to “describe the character above recited”—that is, theology’s first job is to describe what Christianity looks like when it is enfleshed by describing the affections it engenders.

What comes next for theology? It should “promise this character shall be mine (provided I will not rest till I attain)” and then it should tell us “how I may attain it.” He concludes this passage by saying

May every real Christian say, ‘I now am assured that these things are so; I experienced them in my own breast. What Christianity (considered as a doctrine) promised, is accomplished in my soul. And Christianity, considered as an inward principle, is the completion of all those promises. It is holiness and happiness, the image of God impressed on a created spirit, a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life.’¹⁸

Wesley then immediately begins section III of this piece by saying “And this [inward principle or holiness] I conceive to be the strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity. I do not undervalue traditional evidence. . . . And yet I cannot set it on a level with this.”¹⁹

17. “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,” first published in 1753, now found in Outler, *John Wesley*, 183ff.

18. *Ibid.*, 191.

19. *Ibid.*

This last statement may sound dangerously close to making irrelevant the historical bases of our faith, giving the appearance, for instance, that the twenty-first-century arguments between the “Jesus seminar” and people like N. T. Wright are irrelevant. These historical arguments are *not* irrelevant for Christianity today, and Wesley would not have seen them as irrelevant in his time, as witnessed by his many arguments with the deists of his day. But Wesley’s statement that this “inward principle” is the “strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity” helps us see just how central the renewed human heart is to his entire theological vision.

Another sermon that speaks to Wesley’s emphasis on the person-relative understanding of Christianity is number 4, “Scriptural Christianity.” In describing Christianity, his threefold analysis discusses “Christianity” as it begins to exist in individuals (speaking about repentance, faith, and love), then as it spreads from one individual to another, and then, finally, as it covers the earth. He closes with a blast against the Oxford of his day, asking where are these people who are supposed to be filled with the Holy Ghost, love of God and love of neighbor?

The evidence already displayed makes it clear that, for Wesley, true religion consists, in great part, of having religious affections. To round out our considerations, I will share just a few other pieces of evidence from his work that show his consistent emphasis on a *person-dependent* description of Christianity, a vision that he frames in terms of the affections of the heart:

- In his sermon “The Law Established by Faith, Discourse II” he saw “faith”—understood as both the summary of the cognitive content of the creeds and Scripture *and* as an experience of trust—as only the *handmaid* to love (#36, 38). The faith on which some Protestants lay virtually their whole emphasis is, in other words, merely the door into the larger house of love and all of the “fruit of the Spirit” that lie within it for Wesley.
- In his sermon “Of the Church” he described “the walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called” in terms of the attitudes of the heart such as lowliness, humility, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another in love, living in peace (#74, 53).

- In his sermon “Justification by Faith” Wesley speculated that God made faith to be the necessary *means* to receiving justification because having to step out in faith, and not having absolute certainty, is an action that works against pride (#5, 597–98). He sees God’s concern for human heart formation, then, to be reflected even in the means (faith) that God has selected for the God-human relationship.
- In the Preface to his *Christian Library* he quotes 1 John 4:19 saying that the Christian religion is “nothing stranger, or harder to understand than this, ‘We love Him, because He first loved us.’”²⁰ Compare this with the addition to his Preface to his *Sermons on Several Occasions* that he inserted in 1788:

I think a preacher or a writer of Sermons has lost his way when he imitates any of the French orators. . . . Only let his language be plain, proper and clear, and it is enough. God himself has told us how to speak, both as to the matter and the manner: “If any man speak,” in the name of God, “let him speak as the oracles of God;” and if he would imitate any part of these above the rest, let it be the First Epistle of St. John. This is the style, the most excellent style, for every gospel preacher. And let him aim at no more ornament than he finds in that sentence, which is the sum of the whole gospel, “We love Him, because He first loved us.”²¹

When we look at his comment on this passage in the *N.T. Notes*, we see that this scripture is at the center of Wesley’s theology:

We love him, because he first loved us—this is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity. None can say more: why should any one say less, or less intelligibly? (1 John 4:19)

- In the opening section of *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* Wesley shows that love is the beginning of Christian doctrine and also the primary way of conceiving of God.²² He also tersely describes the goal of his ministry by saying “You ask me what I would do with them. I would make them virtuous and

20. Found in the Jackson edition of Wesley’s *Works*, 14:222.

21. *Works*, 2:357.

22. *Works*, 11:45.

16 *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*

happy, easy in them-selves, and useful to others” (51). He then goes on to emphasize that happiness is the proper concern of religion (“are you *now* happy?” 60ff.) and that “inward” religion, the religion of the tempers, is what he preaches (63, 88ff.). In *A Farther Appeal*, Part I, he states that while we *are* meant to *feel* peace, joy and love, the best proof of being led by the Spirit is not merely a sensation but a “thorough change and renovation of mind and heart, and the leading a new and holy life.”²³

Given this unmistakable emphasis on the affections of the heart in his overall vision of Christianity, I want now to expand on Wesley’s understanding of the human “heart” and how this relates to human reason. I will start by looking at Wesley’s commentaries on Scripture, for, of course, Scripture is itself home to much heart language. This will set the stage for understanding the orienting concern of all of Wesley’s theology—the renewal of the heart.

23. *Works*, 11:140–41.