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Pardoned and Perfect: A Comparative Study of the Soteriology of John Wesley and Ellen White

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ABSTRACT

PARDONED AND PERFECT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SOTERIOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY AND ELLEN WHITE

by

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

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Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: PARDONED AND PERFECT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SOTERIOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY AND ELLEN WHITE

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Problem

Since the 1970s, there has been an ongoing discussion about the extent to which Ellen White's soteriology reflected or was influenced by John Wesley's soteriology. The result has been a general lack of consensus. This study attempted to clearly delineate Wesley's and White's soteriological systems and distinguish them from various theological phenomena within American Methodism.

Method

The research for this thesis was predominantly drawn from primary source material which was organized chronologically in order to allow for the natural

development of thought and ideas over time. The theological contexts of Wesley and White were explored and connected by an overview of American Methodism.

Conclusions

The comparative study demonstrated that John Wesley's and Ellen White's soteriological systems were essentially identical in the following four areas: the conceptualization of justification, the degree to which sanctification was emphasized, the acknowledgment of a progressive aspect to sanctification alongside distinct stages of Christian growth, and the affirmation that sanctification is the highest stage a Christian can reach. While John Wesley and Ellen White were shown to share distinct commonalities, however, Ellen White went beyond John Wesley's articulation of perfection by emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit.

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A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts—Religion

by

Esther Louw

July 18, 2024

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

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Denis Kaiser, Ph.D.

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Cedric Vine, Ph.D. Date approved

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Center for Adventist Research
EGWCF	Ellen G. White Correspondence File
EGWE	Ellen G. White Estate
EGWMC	Ellen G. White Manuscript Collection

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

It has always been acknowledged that Ellen White, the professed prophet and co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, came from a Methodist family and was baptized as a Methodist before ultimately being disfellowshipped because of her Millerite beliefs. These facts about her life are crucial elements within the narrative of her conversion and early Christian experience. At the center of her teenage experience was an extended period of depression and anxiety, which purportedly stemmed from her understanding of Methodist teachings regarding the process of salvation—in particular, sanctification and perfection—and her fear that God, as a divine tyrant, would punish her in an eternally burning hell. Regarding soteriology, Ellen White placed the fault of her spiritual difficulty squarely on ideas she had encountered within the Methodist denomination. “Among the Methodists,” she explained, “I had heard much in regard to sanctification.” However, what she had heard gave her the impression that an ecstatic experience was required. Lacking a feeling that could “electrify” her “whole being,” Ellen believed she was different from other Methodists and, therefore, unable to achieve “the perfect joy of holiness of heart” that she aspired

for.[1] When her religious concerns were finally rectified, she dutifully bore her testimony at a Methodist class meeting. However, when urged to state that she had "received sanctification through Methodism," Ellen refused. She insisted that she had not received sanctification through Methodism but through the Millerite message. This testimony, she later recalled, was the last that she "was to bear in class with [her] Methodist brethren."[2]

In later years, Ellen White maintained a mixed relationship with Methodism. Often, she recorded instances in which she was personally invited to speak to Methodist congregations.[3] These occurrences were cordial events. She typically spoke on the subject of temperance or gave simple biblical discourses designed to interest listeners in distinctive Adventist teachings.[4] Ellen White also possessed volumes of Methodist books in her

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[1] Ellen G. White, "Mrs. Ellen G. White—Her Life, Christian Experience, and Labors," *Signs of the Times*, February 3, 1876, 77.

[2] Ellen G. White, "Mrs. Ellen G. White—Her Life, Christian Experience, and Labors," *Signs of the Times*, March 3, 1876, 100.

[3] Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 15 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 7; Ellen G. White to J. E. White and Emma White, September 1870, Lt 24, 1870, Ellen G. White Correspondence File (hereafter EGWCF), Ellen G. White Estate, Silverspring, MD (hereafter EGWE); Ellen G. White to W. C. White, September 27, 1870, Lt 14, 1870, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to W. C. White, October 24, 1870, Lt 17, 1870, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to Sister Hall, May 26, 1875, Lt 14, 1875, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to W. C. White, February 19, 1878, Lt 9, 1878, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to J. E. White, June 20, 1878, Lt 30, 1878, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to J. S. White, June 24, 1878, Lt 32, 1878, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to J. S. White, July 8, 1878, Lt 38, 1878, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to James White, June 23, 1880, Lt 33A, 1880, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to W. C. White, J. E. White, and Emma White, December 19, 1881, Lt 21, 1881, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White, "Diary/at Father Hare's," March 1, 1893, Ms 37, 1893, Ellen G. White Manuscript Collection (hereafter EGWMC), EGWE.

[4] Ellen G. White to J. E. White, March 2, 1868, Lt 6, 1868, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to J. E. White and Emma White, October 1870, Lt 16A, 1870, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White to W. C. White, October 17, 1870, Lt 16, 1870, EGWCF, EGWE; White to W. C. White, October 24, 1870, Lt 17, 1870, EGWCF, EGWE; White to W. C. White, February 19, 1878, Lt 9, 1878, EGWCF, EGWE; White to J. E. White, June 20, 1878, Lt 30, 1878, EGWCF, EGWE; Ellen G. White, "Visit to Oregon," *Signs of the Times*, July 25, 1878, 221; White to W. C. White, J. E. White, and Emma White, December 19, 1881, Lt 21, 1881, EGWCF, EGWE.

personal library and, in one instance, mentioned purchasing "books and cards for Sabbath school" and for her nieces, May and Addie, from the Methodist Tract and Missionary Society in Oakland, California.[5] Despite this level of conviviality with Methodists, Ellen White strongly condemned what she termed "Methodist sanctification," stating that those who taught it lost the light that they had and became "darker and darker" while departing "further and further from the truth."[6] She emphatically declared that "the theory of the sanctification the Methodists" had was "a delusion of the enemy." Ellen White clarified that the issue related to the mistaken idea that sanctification could be accomplished quickly—in "a moment"—and also to lack of "love for the law of God."[7] She believed that "Methodist sanctification" led people to oppose the law and the Sabbath, ultimately separating them from the third angel's message.[8]

Despite her reservations about Methodist sanctification, Ellen White wrote about John Wesley's theology in highly positive terms. In her book, *The Great Controversy*, she explained that England, at the time of Wesley, had been experiencing a period of spiritual decline. She stated that this decline was the "result of Antinomian teaching," which claimed "that Christ had abolished the moral law" and that the elect—in the Calvinist sense—were unable to do anything that could displease God.[9] By

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[5] Ellen G. White, "Oakland," January 12, 1876, Ms 2, 1876, EGWCF, EGWE; *A Bibliography of Ellen G. White's Private and Office Libraries*, 3rd ed. (Silverspring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), http://www.ellenwhitecenter.org/sites/default/files/bibliotheque-privee-ellen-white.pdf.

[6] Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 8 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1862), 40.

[7] Ellen G. White to Sister Dayton, August 5, 1870, Lt 9, 1870, EGWCF, EGWE.

[8] White, *Testimony for the Church*, no. 8, 40.

[9] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 5 vols., *The Conflict of the Ages*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888), 260.

contrast, Ellen White portrayed John Wesley as "devoted to the preaching of the great truths which he had received" regarding salvation: justification, regeneration, and sanctification.[10] To demonstrate the veracity of her claim, she selected portions of Wesley's writings in which he declared "the perfect harmony of the law and the gospel." Ellen White evidently believed that Wesley taught the gospel while also seeking "to magnify the law and make it honorable."[11] Thus, Ellen White distinguished between "Methodist sanctification," which she depicted as leading believers into disobedience against the law, and John Wesley's exposition of the law in the process of salvation. Could it be that Ellen White actually agreed with Wesley's entire framework of sanctification and perfection even while she disagreed with the Methodist church on those exact points?

Literature Review

Whether or not Ellen White was in complete agreement with John Wesley in terms of soteriology is a question that has resulted in various conclusions within Seventh-day Adventist scholarship. One of the earliest comparative studies of Ellen White's soteriology and that of John Wesley was undertaken by William Lesher in 1970. His doctoral dissertation, "Ellen G. White's Concept of Sanctification," provides what he termed a "cursory background" of Ellen White's understanding of sanctification in comparison to several other models as exemplified by Martin Luther,

[10] White, *The Great Controversy,* 256.

[11] White, *The Great Controversy,* 263–64.

Albrecht Ritschl, Thomas Aquinas, and John Wesley.[12] Lesher's interest in this study was stimulated by an ongoing discussion within the Seventh-day Adventist Church on sanctification that had been carried over from the early 1960s as well as a lack of exhaustive studies on Ellen White's various theology positions.[13] Although his analysis of John Wesley's soteriology was brief, consisting of only eleven pages of his roughly three-hundred-page dissertation, Lesher concluded that Ellen White held "Wesley's strong emphasis on sanctification" but rejected any notion of instantaneous change in favor of gradual "character development." He further argued that Ellen White's understanding of justification resembled Luther's. Thus, he stated that Ellen White's soteriology was "a synthesis of the views of Luther and Wesley."[14]

Rolf Pöhler contributed to the discussion in 1978 with a paper titled "Sinless Saints or Sinless Sinners? An Analysis and Critical Comparison of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley and Ellen G. White." Pöhler, like Lesher before him, concluded that Ellen White differed from Wesley in terms of the doctrine of Justification. According to Pöhler, while Wesley "reduces justification to the act of forgiveness" and thus "to man's (preliminary) acceptance with God," Ellen White "identifies justification with salvation. . . . the highest stage which the Christian can reach in this life."[15] He also agreed with Lesher that Ellen White did not uphold Wesley's view

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[12] William Richard Lesher, "Ellen G. White's Concept of Sanctification" (PhD diss., New York University, 1970), iv.

[13] Lesher, "Ellen G. White's Concept of Sanctification," ii–iii.

[14] Lesher, "Ellen G. White's Concept of Sanctification," 283–84.

[15] Rolf J. Pöhler, "Sinless Saints or Sinless Sinners? An Analysis and Critical Comparison of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley and Ellen G. White" (Seminar Paper, Andrews University, 1978), 108.

of instantaneous sanctification.[16] Pöhler, however, also claimed that the most significant departure of Ellen White from Wesleyan soteriology was her denial, in contradiction to Wesley, "that original sin is removed at any time during the Christian life." He understood Ellen White to teach that although Christians may "develop a perfect character," prior to glorification, they will not "attain to a state. . . when the flesh is no longer opposed to the spirit." Therefore, Christians will not fully cease "acts of inward sin" until "original sin is annihilated in man."[17] In this way, Pöhler believed Ellen White avoided participating in what he referred to as "Wesleyan errors."[18]

A third voice joined the debate over Ellen White's soteriology in 1978. David Duffie, a medical specialist in internal medicine and psychiatry, authored a term paper while completing his M.A. in Religion at Fuller Theological Seminary, titled "John Wesley and Cross Currents in Adventism." In direct contradiction to Lesher and Pöhler, Duffie claimed that Ellen White's views on justification were "essentially the same as Wesley's" and that Wesley and White could both agree "that man is liable to making mistakes as long as he is mortal."[19] Indeed, it was Duffie's opinion that Wesley and White shared "extensive" areas of agreement tempered only by slight differences in their use of vocabulary. While analyzing Wesley's view of instantaneous sanctification, for example, he pointed out that Wesley appeared to describe "a remarkably non-

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[16] Pöhler, "Sinless Saints or Sinless Sinners," 110.

[17] Pöhler, "Sinless Saints or Sinless Sinners," 115–16.

[18] Pöhler, "Sinless Saints or Sinless Sinners," 127–28.

[19] David Duffie, "John Wesley and Cross Currents in Adventism: An Introductory Survey of the Wide Congruence of John Wesley's and Ellen White's Views on Perfection, and Its Relevancy to Opposing Emphases Upon Reformation Theology within Contemporary Adventism" (Term Paper, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1978), 13.

instantaneous kind of instantaneousness" that "would also accord" with Ellen White's understanding of gradual sanctification.[20]

Roughly ten years later, in 1989, Woodrow Whidden completed his dissertation on "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White: The Persistent Path to Perfection, 1836–1902." The motivating factors to Whidden's dissertation were the "ethical controversies of the last decade" regarding allegations of plagiarism against Ellen White and "protracted controversy" about her soteriology, including justification and perfection, which had taken place "over. . . the last thirty years."[21] Whidden's work was the most extensive overview of Ellen White's soteriology up until that point. His dissertation was not a comparative study and only dealt with Wesley's theology tangentially. However, he directly engaged with Pöhler's analysis of Ellen White's understanding of sanctification within a Wesleyan framework, believing instead that Ellen White was likely influenced in her views by Methodist revivalist Phoebe Palmer. "Here," Whidden countered, Pöhler had "not paid enough attention to. . . American Methodism." Indeed, while Pöhler had concluded that Ellen White did not believe that sanctification was some "higher stage" in the Christian experience, Whidden took the position that Ellen White's "later expositions of sanctification. . . never effaced the essentially Wesleyan orientation" of her theology and that she did consider it a "higher stage."[22]

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[20] Duffie, "John Wesley and Cross Currents in Adventism," 21–23.

[21] Woodrow Wilson Whidden, "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White: The Persistent Path to Perfection, 1836–1902" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1989), xviii–xix.

[22] Whidden, "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White," 45–47. Whidden perceived Palmer's influence within Ellen White's account of her "second blessing" experience, particularly her need to testify of it.

In the thirty-five years that have passed since his dissertation, Whidden has revisited Ellen White's theological relationship to John Wesley in various papers and articles and suggests that Ellen White's soteriology was "for all practical purposes nearly identical to Wesley's" while admitting that a "comparison of their thinking on sanctification and perfection" requires a certain "nuanced treatment."[23] Crucially, Whidden recognizes a distinction between Ellen White's "expressed negative views on American Methodism" and "the core of Wesley's theology, especially the main outlines of his teachings on salvation."[24]

More recently, Adventist scholars have continued to disagree on this topic. For example, Australian New Testament scholar Norman Young, in a short article comparing John Calvin and John Wesley to Ellen White, stated emphatically that by rejecting instantaneous sanctification, "White rejects the central teaching of John Wesley and sides more with Calvin on this point."[25] Meanwhile, Ronell Mamarimbing argued in his Ph.D. dissertation, completed at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines, that while there are many theological similarities between John Wesley and Ellen White, Ellen White did not inherit these similarities from Wesley but obtained them from divine revelation.[26] Furthermore, he suggests

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[23] "Adventist Theology: The Wesleyan Connection," (2005), https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/adventist-theology-the-wesleyan-connection/.

[24] Woodrow Wilson Whidden, "The Wesleyan Connection and Discipleship," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 122 (2016): 54–55

[25] Norman H. Young, "John Calvin, John Wesley, and Ellen White's *Steps to Christ*: A Comparison," *Spectrum* 454 (2017): 61

[26] Ronell Ike Mamarimbing, "A Historical-Theological Evaluation of John Wesley's Understanding of Human Free-Will and the Prevenient Grace of God: An Adventist Perspective" (Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2012), 136.

several areas of major divergence regarding the nature of man and the nature of grace, such as the possibility that grace can allow for instantaneous perfection or that there is a difference between the effects of sin on the body versus on the soul.[27]

Statement of the Problem

Since the 1970s, there has been an ongoing discussion about the extent to which Ellen White's soteriology reflected or was influenced by John Wesley's soteriology. However, the major contributions to this discussion have either focused exclusively on Ellen White's theology with only brief comparisons with Wesley's theology or have failed to distinguish between Wesley's teachings and the theological milieu that existed within American Methodism at the time of Ellen White. The result has been a general lack of consensus. Several questions thus remain unanswered: how does Ellen White's understanding of Christian perfection compare with John Wesley's? Is there a difference between "entire sanctification," as John Wesley taught it, and "the sealing," as believed by Ellen White? How does the belief in Christian perfection relate to ongoing sin within both frameworks?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to address these questions by comparing the models of soteriology that John Wesley and Ellen White taught. This comparison will clearly delineate Wesley's and White's soteriological systems and distinguish them from various theological phenomena within American Methodism.

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[27] Mamarimbing, "A Historical-Theological Evaluation of John Wesley's Understanding of Human Free-Will and the Prevenient Grace of God," 138–39, 148, 154–57, 166–67, 201–03.

Justification for Study

While several thorough dissertations and a number of smaller papers have touched on Ellen White's soteriology with John Wesley's, the discussion is far from closed, and the topic still retains significance within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. First, the tools that were available to researchers such as Lesher and Pöhler in the 1970s and 1980s were considerably more limited than those available today. By 1989, when Whidden completed his dissertation, he was able to make use of the *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White,* a laser disk index with the same content, and a newly developed "computerized index of all her unpublished manuscripts and letters," which he described as "very exhaustive in the concordance style." However, he acknowledged that his use of the computerized index was limited and that it "offered no really definitive additions" to his dissertation. Instead, he primarily utilized the laser disk index of published writings.[28] The result is that while Whidden's dissertation remains the first—and only—dissertation on the topic to be somewhat exhaustive, his limited use of unpublished materials prevented him from accessing the majority of all written content by Ellen White during the first thirty years of her ministry when her use of Methodist language was most marked.

In recent decades, the materials that Whidden had at his disposal have become more accessible to researchers through further digitization and by the Ellen G. White Estate, making the complete published and unpublished writings of Ellen White publicly available online. Beyond this, current tools offer more efficient search possibilities. While Whidden was forced to perform searches using a computerized

[28] Whidden, "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White," xxi–xxii. This "limited use" consisted of using the computerized index to locate and read all of Ellen White's unpublished manuscripts and "most" letters between 1885 and 1894 and all diary entries between 1859 and 1902.

index “in the concordance style,” the EGW Writings website now allows for advanced Boolean searches and permits the researcher to sort results in various ways, including chronologically. Results can also be quickly previewed in order to make it easier to determine relevance and context. Although these tools have been widely available for almost ten years, recent contributors to the discussion comparing Ellen White’s and John Wesley’s soteriology have not made extensive use of them. Additionally, Eric Louw, a PhD student at Andrews University, has recently compiled an extensive database of all Adventist publications that are currently available in a digital format. This database allows the researcher to instantly and chronologically compare Ellen White’s writings with those of her denominational contemporaries, providing more context for her statements in a way that could not be easily done before. It is possible that the use of these tools will help uncover previously unnoticed aspects of Ellen White’s soteriology.

Second, most currently existing studies do not compare White’s and Wesley’s theological systems equally. For example, although Pöhler does give equal space to both John Wesley and Ellen White, Lesher’s treatment of Wesley is limited to eleven pages, and Whidden restricts his direct references to Wesley almost exclusively to three pages of his more than four-hundred-page dissertation. Conversely, Mamarimbing dedicates roughly two-thirds of his dissertation to analyzing Wesley’s understanding of grace and human nature within his soteriological model, while his references to Ellen White are largely limited to statements intending to support a traditionalist perspective rather than build a wholistic picture of her theology. It is difficult to believe that a fair comparison can be made between two positions when priority has been given to one

position over the other. For example, while one could question as Whidden did if Pöhler had "paid enough attention" to American Methodism, it is possible to question whether Whidden, despite producing a dissertation and a number of shorter articles touching on the topic, has ever understood Wesley as thoroughly as he does Ellen White or even American Methodism.

Third, with the exception of Whidden, contributors to this discussion have generally not recognized any difference between Wesley's theology and early nineteenth-century American Methodism. The result appears to be that Ellen White's statements critiquing Methodist sanctification are often reflected back onto Wesley's personal theology, which may or may not be an accurate assessment. Since this crucial factor has been overlooked in almost all comparative studies, it bears to reason that the current debate has not yet reached its full conclusion.

Methodology

The research for this thesis predominantly relies on primary source material and has been organized chronologically in order to allow for the natural development of thought and ideas over time. While it is impossible to analyze all extant documents written by John Wesley and Ellen White, care was taken to consider all documents available from Ellen White's pen during the crucial early period of her ministry (1845–1863) when her language most closely reflects Methodist theology. The remaining analyses of John Wesley's and Ellen White's soteriological frameworks have been performed by selectively considering writings produced during key chapters in their lives up until their deaths in 1791 and 1915, respectively. The primary source documents that have been analyzed in relation to both Wesley and White include

personal correspondence, books, manuscripts, sermons, diaries, newspaper articles, religious periodicals, and various other printed formats. In addition to the analyses of Wesley's and White's theology driven by primary source material, an overview of American Methodism has also been included to serve as an ideological bridge between the two religious revivalists and is supported by primary and secondary source literature. An attempt has also been made to explore the theological contexts within which Wesley and White communicated their views. In order to do this, analyses of contemporaries and their theology have been included.

Delimitations

Because American Methodism is a broad field of study, certain subjects that bear similarities to Seventh-day Adventism but are not immediately relevant—such as the abolition movement, women's rights, temperance, and church organization—have been excluded from the discussion. Search terms for key periods of Ellen White's life after 1863 have also been restricted to include only statements relating to perfection, such as "perfect love," "Christian perfection," "entire sanctification," "baptism of the Holy Spirit," and "seal." Quotations from John Wesley have been selected on the basis of such terms as "imputed," "inherent," "instantaneous," and "perfection." In addition, data relating to fanaticism shortly after 1844, the General Conference session in Minneapolis in 1888, and Ellen White's increasing Christological emphasis in the 1890s have not been assessed because the quantity of data is greater than can be given justice within the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, this study seeks only to understand the theological positions of each person without attempting to determine whether these positions are a faithful reflection of the New Testament writers.

Design of the Study

Chapter 2 focuses on John Wesley and provides background to his life and theology, as well as a discussion of his key soteriological teachings, including justification, regeneration, and sanctification. Particular interest has been given to his choice of words: for example, his reluctance to use terms such as "imputed righteousness" and "sinless perfection." Additionally, a portion of Chapter 2 has been dedicated to understanding John Wesley's doctrine of sanctification and its relationship to both faith and "instantaneous" perfection.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of Methodism in America and its development into an independent denomination. The majority of this chapter analyses soteriological developments relating to perfection during the early-to-mid-nineteenth century and the practical implications of these developments within the contexts of revivalism and the emerging holiness movement.

Chapter 4 introduces Ellen White through the lens of her Methodist childhood and early phase of ministry. As in the analysis of John Wesley's soteriology, attention has been given to Ellen White's use of vocabulary. For example, her use of Methodist terminology to describe her understanding of perfection, the relationship of perfection with her understanding of the final "sealing" of the saints, and her tendency from the 1880s onward to place perfection within the context of a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Five concludes the study with a summary of similarities and differences between Ellen White's and John Wesley's soteriological positions alongside areas that have been misconstrued or simply misunderstood.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOTERIOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY

Introduction

John Wesley entered the scene at a pivotal time in religious and political history. The turmoil of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had dissipated into tenuous peace. Protestantism had become well-established, and religion was now more or less aligned with national identities. Meanwhile, the Church of England had thoroughly divested itself of Puritanism while also giving up on dogmatic theological uniformity. Instead, it had begun to seek a certain level of tolerance and "open-mindedness in the pursuit of uncertain questions."[29] The result was a national flourishing of respectable orthodoxy and—as some viewed it—a corresponding decline in spiritual engagement.[30] At the beginning of John Wesley's active ministry, there were no material indications that his work would be the success that it was. Indeed, he came to prominence at a time when it appeared that England possessed "an open and professed disregard to religion."[31] By the end of his life, however, John Wesley had thoroughly transformed the British religious

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[29] B. A. Gerrish, *Thinking with the Church: Essays in Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 5–7.

[30] Fred Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life: The Heart Renewed in Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 73–76.

[31] Thomas Secker, *The Charge of Thomas Lord Bishop of Oxford to the Clergy of His Diocese, in His Primary Visitation 1738* (London: J. and J. Pemberton, 1738), 3–4.

landscape and had initiated a chain of events that would exert a profound influence on North American religion and politics throughout the next century.[32]

Soteriological Beginnings (1703–1737)

John Wesley was born in Epworth, England, in 1703 to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel Wesley was a minister for the Church of England and had grown up in a dissenting Puritan family, while Susanna was the daughter of a dissenting minister. Thus, it was natural that John Wesley's childhood was characterized by strict religious instruction and moral education.[33] The soteriology that Wesley was "carefully taught" during his formative childhood years left him with the impression that he could only achieve salvation "by universal obedience, by keeping all the commandments of God." As a result, he concerned himself only with obedience relating to "outward duties" and failed to discern any need for "inward obedience or holiness." By the time he was in his teens, he believed that he was saved on the merits of "not being so bad as other people," enjoying religion, and practicing the basic Christian disciplines such as "reading the Bible, going to church, and saying. . . prayers." Once he reached university, Wesley's spiritual life consisted of "habitually" sinning while experiencing "some intermissions and short struggles" only at certain times, such as "before and after the Holy Communion."[34]

Wesley's theology continued in this vein until he was "about twenty-two" when his father encouraged him to become a minister. At this juncture, Wesley was introduced to *The*

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[32] David W. Bercot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up* (Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing Company, 1999), 150.

[33] *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 9–13.

[34] W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, vol. 18, *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 243.

Imitation of Christ by Thomas A. Kempis, which convinced him that biblical religion "was seated in the heart" and that the extent of God's law included "all . . . thoughts as well as words and actions." He now began a serious attempt to create "a new life" by spending daily time in "religious retirement," "watching against all sins," and aiming and praying "for inward holiness." This religious fervor increased after reading the books *A Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* by William Law. His attempts to keep the "whole law inward and outward, to the utmost of [his] power" persuaded Wesley that he "was even then in a state of salvation."[35]

By 1730, Wesley had become known for his activities associated with a small club of like-minded academics at Oxford where he was now employed.[36] Variously known as "The Holy Club," "Methodists," or "Supererogation Men," the society advocated for "visiting the prisons, assisting the poor and sick in town," and doing good.[37] Wesley further began to deprive himself of "superfluities" and many "necessaries of life" in order to give more money to his charitable endeavors and also fasted twice a week.[38] His program of good works and the pursuit of holiness soon earned him censure from his peers and colorful rumors.[39] Despite this opposition, Wesley's father supported his efforts of self-improvement and good works. Samuel Wesley believed that as long as John took care "to subdue" the flesh "by fasting and prayer," there would be nothing more to do except to continue "steadily in the same course and expect the crown" of

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[35] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 243–45.

[36] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 122.

[37] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 126, 132, 245.

[38] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 245.

[39] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 123, 245.

salvation.[40] Although Samuel apparently agreed that the law was all-encompassing, he did not hold that God expected a standard of righteousness that was unattainable. "I question," he wrote to John in 1730, "whether a mortal can arrive to a greater degree of perfection than steadily to do good. . . . He by whom actions and intentions are weighed will both accept, esteem, and reward you."[41] Unsurprisingly, when Wesley left Oxford in 1735 to minister in the American colony of Georgia he did so not "to gain the dung or dross of riches or honour" but in order to save his soul.[42]

Wesley's departure from England proved to be the undoing of his soteriological assurance. Only a few days into his journey by boat, he was woken in the middle of the night by a violent storm. Coming into close proximity with what he perceived to be almost certain death, he discovered that he was "unfit" to meet God and "unwilling to die."[43] Throughout the succeeding week, he questioned the standard of inward purity that must be required if one "would rejoice to appear before God at a moment's warning." Incredulously, he asked himself, "How is it that thou hast no faith?"[44] While Wesley was privately struggling with doubt, publicly, he continued his program of good works by limiting his diet "to vegetable food" and beginning to learn German as a means of fraternizing with a group of religious Moravians who were also on board.[45] Wesley appears to have initially viewed the Moravians as a group of Christians like himself who were also

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[40] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 125.

[41] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 127.

[42] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 136–37.

[43] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 140.

[44] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 141–42.

[45] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 137.

pursuing a life of strict obedience and holiness. Soon, however, he began to perceive that their morality was superior to his own. He recorded observations in his journal about their "great seriousness of . . . behaviour," "humility," and "meekness which no injury could move." Finally, while joining them in a worship service, "the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces . . . and poured in between the decks." Wesley wrote that this event triggered "terrible screaming" among his compatriots, but "the Germans calmly sung on." Afterward, he asked one of the Moravian believers if they were afraid. "I thank God, no," the man replied.[46] This marked the beginning of Wesley's high regard for the Moravians, and for the next few years, he frequently sought out their company and spiritual advice.

Indeed, the Moravians had been inspirational. Wesley began his ministry in Georgia with renewed vigor in the pursuit of total obedience. One of his first actions was to experiment with further limiting his diet to only bread. "Blessed are the pure in heart," he exclaimed on reflection of his new eating habits. "But let them who know and feel that they are not thus pure, use every help and remove every hindrance."[47] Wesley's lack of assurance, however, continued to haunt him. Six months after his arrival in Georgia at the beginning of 1736, a powerful storm ripped through the town of Savannah, where he lived. "This voice of God, too," he admitted, "told me I was not fit to die. . . . When shall I wish to be dissolved and to be with Christ?"[48] Wesley concluded that his spiritual condition was the result of unexpected "ease, honour, and abundance."[49] The remainder

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[46] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 142–43.

[47] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 155.

[48] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 165.

[49] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 186.

of Wesley's time in Georgia was not successful. He seems to have not been well-liked. One of the members of the Trustees for Georgia that oversaw his employment in London remarked on his unpleasant character. "Mr. John Wesley . . . [appears] to be a very odd mixture of a man, an enthusiast, and at the same time a hypocrite, . . . distasteful" to the population of Savannah, "and an incendiary of the people against the magistracy."[50] Eventually, John Wesley's personality and expression of religious fervor brought him into legal trouble as "an enemy" and "hinderer of . . . public peace." To avoid a prison sentence, he fled America and returned to England roughly two years after his arrival.[51]

Conversion and First Soteriological Treatise (1738)

Wesley's failure in Georgia was the impetus he needed to seriously reevaluate his religious experience. On January 8, 1738, while on the boat to England, he wrote in his journal, "I am convinced . . . of unbelief, having no such faith in Christ as will prevent my heart from being troubled." He also identified "pride, throughout [his] life" and "levity and luxuriancy of spirit . . . whenever the pressure [was] taken off." In response, he began to pray for "such a faith as implies peace in life and in death," "humility," continual dependence on God, and "sobriety of spirit."[52] On January 25, he reflected again.

> For many years I have been tossed about by various winds of doctrine. I asked long ago, What must I do to be saved? The Scripture answered, 'Keep the commandments. Believe, hope, love; follow after these tempers till thou hast

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[50] John Percival, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont: Diary of the First Earl of Egmont (Viscount Percival). Vol. 2. 1734–1738* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1923), 481.

[51] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 194–95, 214.

[52] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 208–09.

> fully attained, that is, till death, by all those outward works and mean which God hath appointed, by walking as Christ walked.[53]

Wesley then explained that he had taken care to avoid "laying, as the Papists do, too much stress either on outward works or on a faith without works." Likewise, when he encountered Lutheran and Calvinist authors, he rejected them on the basis that they "magnified faith to such an amazing size that it quite hid all the rest of the commandments." He concluded that his "rule for interpreting Scripture" was to follow the consensus of Christian tradition. Thus, he also rejected the theology of the mystics "whose noble descriptions of union with God . . . made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid," including "good works" and "faith itself."[54] Wesley arrived in England on February 1. "This then have I learned in the ends of the earth," he stated, "that . . . my own works, my own sufferings, my own righteousness, are so far from reconciling me to an offended God" that "I have no hope" except for "the righteousness which is of God by faith." As of yet, however, he did not have that kind of faith.[55]

For the next few months, Wesley engaged in a number of preaching appointments and personal evangelism efforts. During this time, he repeatedly met with a Moravian bishop named Peter Böhler. Böhler spent much of April and May attempting to explain the gospel to Wesley. On April 5, Wesley mentioned that Böhler "clearly convinced" him that he lacked "that faith whereby alone we are saved."[56] For several weeks, however, Wesley struggled to understand Böhler's soteriological system. He failed to see how he

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[53] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 212.

[54] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 212.

[55] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 215–16.

[56] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 228.

could achieve such faith or what Böhler meant by "an instantaneous work." He did discover, to his "utter astonishment" that most records of conversion in the Bible described "instantaneous conversions—scarce any other so slow as that of St. Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth." In terms of faith, though, he "could now only cry out, 'Lord, help thou my unbelief!'"[57] Finally, on the evening of May 24, Wesley attended a Moravian society meeting, where someone was reading a translation of Luther's work, *Vorrede auf die Epistel S. Paul an die Römer*. The burden of the book is to explain the necessity of the heart being renewed by the Spirit in order to obey God for the reason that "the Law is spiritual," but the natural heart is carnal.[58] As Wesley heard "the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ," he began to feel that he "did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation," and he received assurance that his sins had been forgiven and he had been saved "from the law of sin and death."[59]

Following his conversion experience, Wesley was eager to travel to Germany in order to meet more members of the Moravian church. He "hoped . . . conversing with those holy men" would be a means of establishing his soul in truth so that he "might 'go on from faith to faith, and from strength to strength.'"[60] Wesley promptly set out in June 1738 and, on July 4, reached Marienborn-bei-Büdungen, where Count Zinzendorf, who

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[57] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 234.

[58] Martin Luther, *A Methodicall Preface Prefixed before the Epistle of S. Paule to the Romanes, Very Necessary and Profitable for the Better Understanding of It. Made by the Right Reverend Father and Faithfull Servant of Christ Jesus, Martin Luther, Now Newly Translated out of Latin into English by W. W.* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1594), [12, 41].

[59] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 249–50.

[60] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 254.

financially sponsored and housed the Moravian Christians, was currently staying.[61] While at Marienborn, Wesley "continually met" what he termed "living proofs of the power of faith: persons 'saved from inward as well as outward sin." He also listened to Count Zinzendorf preach on justification and summarized Zinzendorf's theology in eight points.

1. Justification is the forgiveness of sins.
2. The moment a man flies to Christ he is justified.
3. And has peace with God, but not always joy.
4. Nor perhaps may he know he is justified till long after.
5. For the assurance of it is distinct from justification itself.
6. But others may know he is justified by his power over sin, by his seriousness, his love of the brethren, and his 'hunger and thirst after righteousness', which alone proves the spiritual life to be begun.
7. To be justified is the same thing as to be born of God.
8. When a man is awakened, he is begotten of God; and his fear and sorrow and sense of the wrath of God are the pangs of the new birth."[62]

Having spent a few days in Marienborn, Wesley traveled on to Herrnhut near Dresden, where the majority of the Moravian Christians resided.[63] Wesley continued to listen to sermons and conducted interviews—of which he took copious notes—with various individuals regarding their conversion and Christian experience.[64] After several weeks busily learning the history and theology of the Moravian Christians, Wesley left Germany on August 12 and returned to England.[65] On "Sunday, September 17, [he] began . . . to declare in [his] own country the glad tidings of salvation."[66]

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[61] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 259.

[62] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 260–61.

[63] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 266.

[64] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 267–91.

[65] W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, vol. 19, *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 5.

[66] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 12.

Now that Wesley had become certain of the truths of his new gospel, he began to question whether his understanding was reflected within the doctrines of the Church of England. He promptly set about studying both Scripture and church documents with a particular interest in the doctrine of justification by faith. The result was his first printed exposition of soteriology titled *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works.*[67] The pamphlet defines the kind of righteousness that Wesley believed would save Christians.

> Because all men are sinners against God and breakers of his law, therefore can no man by his works be justified and made righteous before God. But every man is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands. And this justification or righteousness, which we receive of God's mercy and Christ's merits embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification. . . . God sent his only Son into the world to fulfill the law for us, and by shedding his blood to make satisfaction to his Father for our sins, to assuage his indignation conceived against us.[68]

Wesley explained that God's grace does "not shut out the righteousness of God in our justification, but only . . . the righteousness of man—that is to say, the righteousness of our works." Likewise, faith does "not shut out repentance, hope, love, and the fear of God to be joined with faith" but only shuts "them out from the office of justifying." Neither does "faith shut out good works. . . . But we may not do them to this intent, to be justified by doing them."[69] Wesley grounded the necessity of Christ's righteousness on the sinful human condition. He argued that "our corruption through original sin is so great that all our faith, charity, words, and works cannot merit or deserve any part of our justification for us."[70]

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[67] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 21.

[68] Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, vol. 12, *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 32.

[69] Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, 32–34.

[70] Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, 36–37.

Wesley also placed justification as the root from which sanctification springs forth. He declared that truth faith not only believes in biblical truth but also possesses "a sure trust and confidence to be saved . . . by Christ," from which follows "a loving heart to obey his commandments."[71] After all, "if we truly believe that [God] has made us his dear children" and given us "great and merciful benefits," we will be moved "to render ourselves unto God wholly, with all our heart, might, and power." Doing good and advancing God's glory, Wesley affirmed, "are the fruits of true faith."[72] Although he now possessed a dramatically different relationship to the law than he had prior to his conversion experience, Wesley continued to uphold the necessity of obeying the law of God. As he brought his pamphlet to a close, he stated, "We are taught by Christ's own mouth that the works of the commandments of God are the true works of faith." He then affirmed that "labouring continually" to keep the commandments, "which, wrought in faith, God has ordained to be the pathway unto heaven, Christians will "not fail" to be given "everlasting life where [they] shall live in glory and joy with God for ever."[73]

Beginning of Public Ministry (1739)

Wesley had tentatively shared his new gospel even before he fully accepted it, having been intellectually persuaded by Peter Böhler that it was true.[74] On his return from Germany, he began to do so more boldly as opportunities presented themselves. He subsequently spent the next few months visiting people in prisons, writing letters to old acquaintances, leading

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[71] Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, 37.

[72] Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, 38.

[73] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 43.

[74] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, 228.

small groups, and preaching whenever a church was opened to him.[75] However, it was not until he was exposed to George Whitfield's outdoor preaching that Wesley's fervor would spill over into the kind of ministry that would characterize the rest of his life. At the end of March 1739, Wesley was invited to meet Whitefield in Bristol. When he arrived, he "could scarce reconcile [himself] to this strange way of preaching in the field" that Whitefield demonstrated. Wesley had been "so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order" that, he confessed, in the past, he "would have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." Wesley was inspired enough by Whitefield's example to overcome his hesitation. Several days after his arrival in Bristol, he "submitted to 'be more vile,' and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation."[76]

The success of Wesley's new-found preaching method was immediately obvious and was quickly accompanied by phenomena that Wesley interpreted as divine evidence of favor. Within his very first month of outdoor preaching, Wesley presented the gospel to roughly 38,600 people—far more than would have been possible had he continued relying on invitations to speak at churches.[77] In addition to a suddenly expanded ministry, Wesley also began to experience what he viewed as miraculous signs and wonders.[78] Already, he

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[75] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 12–45.

[76] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 46.

[77] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 46–53.

[78] Wesley argued that "shedding tears . . . falling into fits, or crying out" were not the actual fruits that demonstrated that these experiences were of divine origin. Instead, he judged that these experiences were genuine because of the changed lives that resulted. These changed lives, he countered, were "living arguments" for what he asserted: "that God does now, as aforetime, give remission of sins and gift of the Holy Ghost, even to us and to our children; yea, and that always suddenly, as far as I have known, and often in dreams or in the visions of God." He further developed this idea a few weeks later, saying that people should not judge whether signs were accomplished by the Spirit on the basis of "appearances, or by common report, or by their own inward feelings . . . but [they should] be tried by a farther rule, to be brought to the only certain test, 'the law and the testimony.'" See Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 59–60, 73.

had had at least one ecstatic experience in private.[79] Now, however, his public preaching became punctuated with screams, cries, and spiritual manifestations from his audience. Wesley later wrote of the first of these events while he was preaching at Newgate. He felt himself led, "without any previous design," to pray that if his gospel were true, God "would bear witness to his Word." The result was immediate. Suddenly, "one and another and another sunk to the earth: they dropped on every side as thunderstruck."[80] These phenomena quickly proved to be both divisive and persuasive, with some people becoming "offended at the cries of those on whom the power of God came" and others being converted by them. For example, one man who initially doubted Wesley's message unexpectedly "dropped down as thunderstruck" and became convinced that Wesley was "a prophet of the Lord."[81] At this juncture, Wesley's public ministry had fully begun.[82]

Developing a Doctrine of Sanctification (1741–1745)

Within a few years of John Wesley's conversion, his relationship with the Moravian Christians was growing strained.[83] Seeking to reach some form of reconciliation or clarification, Wesley met with Count Zinzendorf in September 1741 to discuss the process of justification and sanctification. The issue between them had to do with perfection. Zinzendorf stated in his interview with Wesley that "the moment [the

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[79] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 29.

[80] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 51.

[81] Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 52–53.

[82] On June 11, 1739 Wesley wrote in a letter that he now viewed "all the world" as his parish and that he believed it to be his duty "to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation." See Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, 67.

[83] Sarah Heaner Lancaster, Randy L. Maddox, and Kelly Diehl Yates, eds., *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, vol. 14, *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2022), 11–13.

Christian] is justified, he is sanctified wholly. And he is neither more nor less holy, from that moment to his death." Zinzendorf went as far as to claim that "[e]ntire sanctification and entire justification are in one and the same instant, and neither of them admits either of increase or decrease." Wesley, on the other hand, could not agree with Zinzendorf. Instead, he insisted that as a believer "grows in love" he also grows "in holiness."[84]

The issues around perfection ran deeper than simply whether or not sanctification is achieved in a moment or is a progressive work. It also related to obedience. Wesley argued that the Moravians "affirmed also that there is no commandment in the New Testament but to believe; that no other duty lies upon us." He, however, held that while "what God commands is a believer's privilege, that does not affect the question—he does it nevertheless as his bounden duty and as a command of God." Moreover, Wesley affirmed that obedience "is the surest evidence" of belief.[85] In other words, because the Moravians taught that entire sanctification occurred the moment a believer was justified, they also minimized the value of obedience. Imputed righteousness was thus emphasized to the exclusion of imparted righteousness.[86] Wesley, on the other hand, believed that imputed righteousness did not preclude the need for growth in holiness and the progressive work of

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[84] Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 34.

[85] Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 35–36.

[86] This imputed righteousness that the Moravian Christians taught differed from how many Christians understand imputed righteousness today. They did not teach so much that Christ offers his righteousness to the Father on their behalf, imputing his own righteousness to their account, but that "the blood shed upon the cross . . . put away and blotted out" all our sins in the historical past (that is, the moment Christ died on the cross). "By believing which, our hearts and consciences are made as perfectly clean as though we had never sinned." Indeed, they asserted, the body might still be "vile, sinful" and the mind "continually" disposed to evil, but "the blood of Jesus makes us free from sin" and "destroys the connexion" between the body and the heart. In other words, it appears they believed that the "imputed" righteousness of Christ was a righteousness that placed their souls in a glorified state even while they continued to sin with their bodies and minds. See Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 57.

imparted righteousness. Zinzendorf expressed this difference by affirming, "I acknowledge no inherent perfection. Christ is our only perfection." To which Wesley replied, "I believe the Spirit of Christ works Christian perfection in true Christians."[87]

Over the next decade, Wesley's controversies with the Moravian church—which had begun to take root in England—focused on the topic of antinomianism. Zinzendorf had apparently adopted a number of extreme ideas as a result of conflating justification and sanctification. Namely, discouraging reading the Bible because he viewed it as "dangerous rather than useful to common people," and declaring, among other things, that Christ had "abolished" the law, that the Holy Spirit was the "wife of God, the mother of Christ and the church," and that "the male [genitals]" were the "seal of office" entrusted to males as "procurators" of the spousal relationship that Jesus was to have as the "spouse of all the sisters."[88] Discussion between Wesley and the Moravians continued sporadically until 1762, when Wesley published one of his last public disputes against their theology titled *A Blow at the Root; or Christ Stabbed in the House of His Friends*.[89]

In this exposition, Wesley explicitly stated that "[n]one that is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter." He proceeded to outline various methods of supplanting inward holiness: for example, the "penances, pilgrimages, praying to saints and angels" of the Catholics and the philosophy of "doing no harm, doing good, going to church and sacrament" of the Protestants. However, those who correctly understood that "none can be justified . . . but by faith," Wesley saw as being in danger of believing that

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[87] Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 33.

[88] Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 98, 103, 111.

[89] Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 118.

Christ's "righteousness being imputed to us, we need none of our own; that seeing there was so much righteousness and holiness in him, there needs no more in us." Such an exaggeration of the purpose of imputed righteousness, Wesley insisted, was "indeed 'a blow at the root,' the root of all holiness, all true religion.'"[90] In contrast to this view, Wesley encouraged his readers not to say, "I can do nothing," because "if you believe, then you 'can do all things through Christ' who strengtheneth you. You can love him and keep his commandments, and to you his 'commandments are not grievous.'" This kind of faith, he explained, was based on "[t]rust in Christ, to live and reign in your heart" or, in other words, having "confidence in Christ that he will fulfil in you all his great and precious promises." Indeed, Wesley walked the line between faith and works, insisting that faith must produce works. "Let Christ do all. Let him that has done all for you, do all in you. . . . This is the gospel, the pure, genuine gospel; glad tidings of great salvation."[91]

The Path to Perfection (1760–1762)

Towards the end of the 1750s, as Wesley was still engaging in debates with the Moravians concerning imputed and imparted righteousness, he also found the need to respond to growing criticisms and confusion about his "increased emphasis on attainment [of entire sanctification] *now*."[92] To address this issue, Wesley published a short tract at the beginning of 1760 titled *Thoughts on Christian Perfection*.[93] Crucially, Wesley stated in the introduction that the theology he then possessed on perfection was "just the same"

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[90] Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 118–21.

[91] Lancaster, Maddox, and Yates, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises III*, 124–25.

[92] Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, eds., *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, vol. 13, *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 54.

[93] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 57.

as he had "entertained for above twenty years," although "extremely different" from what people had claimed he taught. The broad outline of his theology was direct and simple. Wesley defined Christian perfection as "loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength."[94] He was careful not to use the term "sinless perfection" because he differentiated between being "filled with the love of God" and being "liable to . . . involuntary transgressions."[95] Therefore, his logic implied "that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions" and would feel the need to pray for themselves, "Forgive us our trespasses."[96]

Further, although some of what Wesley said suggested the idea of an instant or immediate attainment of perfection, he clarified that perfection was the result of "a gradual mortification" of "inbred sin" such that the believer finally "experiences a total death to sin, and an entire renewal in the love and image of God." This attainment he also referred to as "entire sanctification," because he saw that the daily progression of sanctification had merely reached a point of wholeness or completeness.[97] This reflects a statement he had made as early as 1740 in his preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Here, he had affirmed that "full salvation" was not "at once given to true believers, but that there was a "gradual" as well as "instantaneous" work performed by "God in the souls of his children."[98] In 1760, part of this gradual work seems to have included, in his mind,

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[94] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 57.

[95] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 62.

[96] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 60.

[97] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 73.

[98] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 46. Speaking further of the instantaneous work, Wesley explained, "And there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received in one moment, either a clear sense of the forgiveness of their sins or the abiding witness of the

praying and wrestling to receive entire sanctification. While he assured his readers that they should not be anxious if they "should die before" attaining it, he queried why they would be content to wait until death. "Nay, but ask that it may be done now, today, while it is called today. . . . Certainly today is his time, as well as tomorrow."[99]

By 1762, Wesley had begun encountering "a considerable number of persons" who believed they had received entire sanctification. Some of these had gone on to proclaim extreme ideas such as the belief that they would never die, that they could not err, and that it was "impossible for them to sin and fall."[100] Anticipating "that Satan would be endeavouring to sow tares among the wheat," he quickly published *Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies*.[101] In this tract, he warned believers of the dangers and possibility of falling away from perfection after it had been reached through various temptations such as "pride and strong imagination, and . . . antinomianism."[102] In particular, he encouraged his readers not to share their experience using the terms "perfection," "Sanctification," "the second blessing," or "the having attained." Instead, he counseled them to "speak of the particulars which God has wrought" and say, for example, "I then felt an unspeakable change. And since that time I have not felt pride, or anger, or unbelief, nor anything but a fullness of love, to God and to all mankind."[103]

Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person's receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new clean heart."

[99] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 75.

[100] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 91.

[101] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 81, 179.

[102] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 83, 87.

[103] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 90.

That same year, Wesley clarified his soteriological position further by publishing a pamphlet titled *Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ*. In this short work, he endeavored to demonstrate that Jesus "is made unto us righteousness, or justification, just as he is made unto us sanctification." In other words, Jesus is the author of both aspects of our salvation, and both are received by faith in him.[104] Wesley interpreted the phrase "He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness" to imply that justification is achieved by the application of Christ's merits to the believer by faith. However, he was hesitant to directly use the word "impute" because it had been "so frequently and so dreadfully abused" by "the antinomians."[105] This short work helps to provide perspective to Wesley's ongoing emphasis on Christian perfection and entire sanctification. While he believed that Christians should strive and pray for entire sanctification, ultimately, he viewed salvation as the result of the justifying righteousness of God, from which regeneration and sanctification spring forth. He closed the pamphlet with the words of James Hervey. "Only let men be humbled as repenting criminals at the Redeemer's feet, let them rely as devoted pensioners on his precious merits, and they are undoubtedly in the way to a blissful immortality."[106]

A Plain Account (1766–1783)

Until now, Wesley's written works explaining his soteriological system primarily consisted of short tracts, sermons, or pamphlets that had been published

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[104] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 371.

[105] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 373.

[106] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 373.

sporadically in reaction to controversies or disputes. In 1766, however, Wesley compiled and expanded his previous publications to create a full-length book, which he titled *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, As Believed and Taught by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, From the Year 1725–1765*.[107] In the first portion, when recounting his understanding of perfection prior to his conversion in 1738, Wesley affirmed that the view that he had then—as to what constituted perfection and holiness, rather than how to get it—was the view that he still possessed "without any material addition or diminution."[108] When recounting his early exposition of perfection shortly after his conversion experience, he explained that he soon faced opposition, not because he "stated perfection wrong," but because his opposers claimed "there is no perfection on earth." Wesley felt he had been "clear on justification by faith, and careful to ascribe the whole of salvation to the mere grace of God." He also expressed surprise at opposition because all that he had taught was that Christ "will reign in our hearts alone, and subdue all things to himself!"[109]

Wesley continued throughout the book to summarize and quote many of his previous publications and statements on perfection. Included amongst these statements was a set of questions and answers on perfection that had been created during the second Methodist conference that Wesley had organized with his clergymen and preachers in 1845. "When does inward sanctification begin?" it was asked. "In the moment we are justified. Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of sin, till he is sanctified throughout." In other words,

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[107] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 139.

[108] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 139.

[109] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 146.

Methodist sanctification, as Wesley understood it, entailed that "a believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace" until the point that "all inward sin is taken away."[110] Toward the end of the book, Wesley summarized his doctrine of perfection in ten points.

1. There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.
2. It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to 'go on to perfection.'
3. It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect.
4. It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man—no, 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. This is the essence of it. Its properties, or inseparable fruits, are 'rejoicing evermore,' 'praying without ceasing,' and 'in everything giving thanks.'
8. It is improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before.
9. It is amissible, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances. . . .
10. It is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.[111]

Following this summary, Wesley briefly discussed whether or not perfection is an instantaneous work. He observed that "[a]n instantaneous change" had occurred in the lives of some believers, but in others, "this change was not instantaneous," and it was not possible to perceive the moment it took place. That said, he felt that this particular aspect had "been much abused" as had "justification by faith" by those who thought they had "no need of the merits of Christ." On the contrary, Wesley felt that those who possessed entire sanctification "never before had so deep, so unspeakable a conviction of the need of Christ" as they did now.[112]

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[110] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 159.

[111] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 187.

[112] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 188.

Wesley made it clear in 1783 that his position on entire sanctification remained unchanged by publishing a letter he had sent to his brother in 1767 as an articulation of his theological thought. In this letter, Wesley was able to reduce his distinctive ideas to only three points. The most salient of these was his second point regarding the troublesome question of "instantaneous sanctification." He affirmed as he had done since his conversion, that "perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith." He explained, how that because an act occurs at a particular moment, perfection consequently occurs "in an instant." Despite this instantaneous aspect of faith and perfection, he also asserted that sanctification consists of "a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant." Rather than teaching that Christians can instantly achieve the full stature of the image of Christ—as many suppose he believed—he simply inferred that it is possible to become fully surrendered to Christ in an instant. Although some have understood him to mean otherwise, Wesley would never conflate justification with sanctification as the Moravians had, nor would he assume that perfection is a static, unchangeable experience devoid of continued growth or need for a Savior. This publication represents "the most succinct" expression of "Wesley's mature teaching on Christian perfection" and can be considered his final word on the topic.[113]

Conclusion

Although John Wesley often communicated his soteriology in writing reactively rather than proactively, he possessed a clear system of belief that remained largely unchanged from the point of his conversion in 1738. He continually held that both

[113] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, 198–99.

justification and sanctification were received by faith but that while justification consisted of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the account of a sinner, sanctification consisted of a gradual transformation of the sinner's nature into the likeness of Christ by the impartation of his righteousness. Through this gradual transformation, he taught that the sinner, at last, could become holy not only by pardon but also by state. While Wesley clearly taught that sanctification was a lifelong process, he also taught that a higher state of perfection could be reached instantaneously at any point on the Christian journey. By this he meant, that a believer could become so fully subsumed by the love of God that it became the actuating principle that governed the whole life, even as the Christian continued to rely on Christ's merits and grow in grace.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN METHODISM

Introduction

One of the great ironies of history is that America, the country in which John Wesley met abject failure prior to his conversion, became the stage upon which Methodism flourished and developed to its greatest extent. Wesley himself never returned to America, and initial evangelistic efforts in the far-flung colonies resulted in only a small number of adherents.[114] As this chapter demonstrates, however, the Revolutionary War necessitated a series of events that unshackled American Methodism from its British counterpart and helped establish an independent denominational organization. This new denomination, developed as it was from the egalitarian connexion model that Wesley had devised, was remarkably suited to the American spirit and geographical conditions of the age. Within a few decades, American Methodism was overtaken by the Second Great Awakening, which set American Christianity on fire with a protracted series of powerful religious revivals. Although revivals persisted for decades, the church entered a period during which the doctrine of perfection was neglected. In the early 1830s, denominational leaders sought to revitalize the doctrine, bringing two key figures and their opposing soteriological models to the forefront.

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[114] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813*, vol. 1 (New York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), 6.

Emergence (1760–1784)

In 1787, the now-established American Methodist Episcopal Church published *A Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*. In its opening section, the *Discipline* outlined the history of Methodism in the New World. It explained that the movement had been introduced to the continent roughly thirty years prior when "certain Persons, Members of the Society, emigrated from England and Ireland, and settled in various Parts" of the colonies. During the mid-1760s, one of these emigrants, Philip Embury, "began to preach in the City of New York, and formed a Society" in his local area. "About the same time," another emigrant, Robert Strawbridge, similarly began preaching "in the State of Maryland, and . . . there formed some Societies."[115] Strawbridge was accompanied in his efforts by his wife, Elizabeth, who "gained the first convert." Meanwhile, Embury was urged into his efforts by the insistence of his cousin Barbara Heck. They subsequently formed a Methodist class initially consisting of five "auditors" among whom was included a black servant woman known as Betty. Thus, from its inception, American Methodism demonstrated several key characteristics, including the involvement of "female as well as male initiatives" and drawing in "black as well as white converts."[116]

Wesley eventually took notice of these efforts and, in 1769, appointed two preachers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore, to provide assistance and support.

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[115] *A Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Considered and Approved at a Conference Held at Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday the 27th of December, 1784: In Which the Reverend Thomas Coke, L.L.D. And the Reverend Francis Asbury, Presided. Arranged under Proper Heads, and Methodized in a More Acceptable and Easy Manner.* (Cleveland, WA: Ingham, 1900: repr., New York: W. Ross), 3–4.

[116] Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt. *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 10–11.

American Methodism now boasted a handful of meeting houses and roughly one hundred adherents. The day after their arrival, on October 22, Boardman preached "to a small but serious congregation," an almost prophetic message "on the call of Abraham to go forth into the Land of Canaan."[117] Indeed, this seems to have been the mission that early American Methodists took upon themselves: to "claim, occupy, and if necessary, conquer this new Canaan, this land of heathens."[118] Two years later, in 1771, Wesley sent Francis Asbury and Richard Wright to provide further leadership.[119] While sailing to America, Asbury wrote in his journal, "The people God owns in England, are the Methodists," and noted his belief that his work in America was, indeed, a call from God to do in America what no other movement could do.[120]

Asbury and Wright arrived in America on October 27. By November 18, Asbury had concluded that the "Americans [were] more ready to receive the word than the English." He subsequently began recreating "the Methodist plan" of "a circulation of preachers" that would allow Methodist preachers "to avoid partiality and popularity" and to spread the message beyond the confines of the cities.[121] Already, however, there were signs of organizational problems. Thomas Rankin was appointed by Wesley as the new "general assistant" of Methodist activities in America and arrived in June 1773.[122]

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[117] Frederick E. Maser and Howard T. Maag, eds., *The Journal of Joseph Pilmore, Methodist Itinerant: For the Years August 1, 1769 to January 2, 1774* (Philadelphia: Message Publishing Co., 1969), 20.

[118] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:15.

[119] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:18.

[120] Francis Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church from August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815, vol. 1, from August 7, 1771, to July. 4, 1786* (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1821), 2.

[121] Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury,* 4–6.

[122] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:23.

Minutes from a Methodist conference held in Philadelphia that same month reveal that every Methodist preacher acting "in connexion with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labour in America" was expected "to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper."[123] This injunction was important if the Methodists were to remain within the confines of the Church of England. American Methodists, having acted on their own accord for years already, had been offering the sacraments. Thus, leaders wondered whether the local people would be satisfied with Wesley's insistence that this not be permitted.[124] Rankin, who was more experienced than the other leaders, "demanded and got . . . suspension of sacraments" and "conformity with the church." His efforts in creating organizational unity, however, also created tension amongst American Methodists. America was, after all, a society currently experiencing "crisis over . . . British control."[125]

Just as the Sacramental Controversy, as it came to be known, was beginning, political discontent and foment were also spilling over into outright war. Although Wesley initially encouraged American Methodists to remain united, it became increasingly difficult to promote "a Religious Society in Communion with the Church of England," whose leadership was all European.[126] By the time the Revolution came to an end, it was clear that the best step forward for the Methodist Movement in America was to part ways with "the Anglican establishment." Wesley acknowledged the necessity of

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[123] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:5.

[124] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:21.

[125] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:24–25.

[126] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:28.

separation in a letter written in September 1784.[127] In response to this assent, American Methodists quickly organized themselves within a few months into a formal organization known as the Methodist Episcopal Church.[128] In 1785, Wesley explained the need for formal separation as arising out of pastoral care. "The [Anglican] Clergy," he said, "having no sustenance, either from England, or from the American States" since the Revolution had "been obliged almost universally to leave the country, and seek their food elsewhere." Because of a lack of authorized clergy, church members now "had none either to administer the Lord's supper, or to baptize their children." Wesley, then "exercised that power" that he felt had been given to him by "the great Shepherd and Bishop of the church" and appointed three additional workers to go to America and support the Methodist Church "by not only preaching the word of God, but likewise by administering the Lord's supper and baptizing their children."[129]

Struggle for Control (1785–1792)

As it turned out, Wesley's act of appointing "clergy" for the burgeoning denomination would later prove to be a further sticking point for the American church. Wesley had designated Thomas Coke to be a joint superintendent over "the Brethren in North America" alongside Francis Asbury.[130] Coke, with two other assistants, subsequently

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[127] Paul S. Sanders, "The Sacraments in Early American Methodism," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1993), 82.

[128] Sanders, "The Sacraments in Early American Methodism," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, 82.

[129] John Wesley, *Letters*, vol. 13, *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1872), 256.

[130] Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt. *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 71.

arrived on American soil in time to participate in the Christmas Conference of 1784, in which the Methodist Episcopal Church was formally organized. Having just been ordained by Wesley, he progressively ordained Asbury over several days of the conference as deacon, elder, and then superintendent.[131] Signs of tension and desire for control soon became apparent. At the 1788 general conference convened by the Methodist Episcopal Church, minutes indicate that Coke and Asbury now referred to themselves as bishops rather than superintendents.[132] Wesley was livid. Addressing both Coke and Asbury, he expressed his indignation: "How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave or a fool; a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content: but they shall never, by my consent, call me bishop!" Wesley was equally upset by the pride both men demonstrated in establishing the new Cokesbury College. He declared, "I study to be little; you study to be great. I creep; you strut along: I found a school; you a College! Nay, and call it after your own names!"[133]

Coke and Asbury theoretically accepted Wesley's criticism.[134] Records from the 1789 general conference reveal their attempts to accede without actually laying aside titles. "Who are the Persons that exercise the Episcopal office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America?" The minutes questioned. "John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury." It answered. This was followed by a second question. "Who have been elected

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[131] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:51–52.

[132] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:69.

[133] T. H. Colhouer, *Sketches of the Founders of the Methodist Protestant Church and Its Bibliography* (Pittsburgh, PA: Methodist Protestant Book Concern, 1880), 144.

[134] Asbury, it seems, never actually had a change of heart. He continued using the term "bishop" and eventually went so far as to refer to himself, in his last written statement to the general conference, by the title "Apostle." See Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:88.

by the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference, to superintend the Methodist connexion in America?" The answer: "Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."[135] That same year, however, Coke and Asbury began attempts to centralize the administration of what had become eleven American Methodist conferences by creating a "council" consisting of the two "bishops" and eleven elders that they themselves elected. Asbury claimed that "a general conference of the bishop, ministers, and preachers of the Methodist Episcopal church" was too difficult and expensive to realistically continue to function. Instead, with "almost the unanimous judgment of the ministers and preachers," he determined that it would be "highly expedient" that a general council be formed to provide oversight and organization for the eleven conferences. The council eventually went ahead, though Coke and Asbury conceded by allowing the conferences to elect representative elders.[136]

Not surprisingly, the general council soon faced opposition. Asbury wrote in his journal on January 12, 1790, that one of the presiding elders, James O'Kelly, made "heavy complaints" of Asbury's power and asked him to "stop for one year," or else O'Kelly would "use his influence" against Asbury. Asbury interpreted this as a bid for undue control from O'Kelly exclaiming, "[P]ower! power! There is not a vote given in a conference in which the presiding elder has not greatly the advantage of me . . . this advantage may be abused; let the bishops look to it: but who has the power to lay an embargo on me, and to make of none effect the decision of all the conferences of the

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[135] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:77.

[136] Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America; Beginning in 1766, and Continued Till 1809. To Which Is Prefixed, A Brief Account of Their Rise in England, in the Year 1729, Etc.* (Baltimore, MD: Magill and Clime, 1810), 149–50.

union?"[137] O'Kelly was persuasive, however, and soon other influential Methodist leaders sided with him, including preachers from southern Virginia who decided not to send an elder to the council.[138] Coke was in London during 1790 and arrived back in America in February 1791. Asbury noted wryly that "James O'Kelly's letters had reached London" with the result that Coke's "sentiments, with regard to the council" were "quite changed." Faced with opposition and the threat of division, Asbury agreed "to a general conference, for the sake of peace."[139]

In March 1791, John Wesley died, and despite the great geographical distance, "his death was felt by the Methodists in the United States."[140] Because of this, the general conference did not occur until November 1792, at which point "the plan of the former council had become exceedingly disagreeable to the greater part" of American Methodists, including "both preachers and people." In response to the general attitude that prevailed, "the bishops and the preachers in general, shewed a disposition to drop the council" and it was requested "that the name of the council might not be mentioned in the conference again."[141] The result of the 1792 general conference was the restructuring of American Methodism to reflect a more democratic process. It was determined that there would be "another general conference at the end of four years" and that "all the travelling preachers" would "be intitled to a seat" as a delegate with the right to vote on governing concerns. Groups of "circuits" typically traveled by Methodist preachers would be

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[137] Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury,* 62.

[138] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America,* 1:65.

[139] Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury,* 95.

[140] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 168.

[141] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 175–76.

formed into "districts . . . according to the judgment of the bishops," and these districts would hold their own conferences at regular intervals. Moreover, governing power was further placed with the general conference delegates who were now given authority to elect a bishop to office and to also "expel him for improper conduct" if necessary.[142] With this structure in place, American Methodism was now less episcopal and instead relied more heavily on the philosophy of connexion that Wesley had practiced and fostered throughout his decades of ministry and leadership.

Revival and Expansion (1793–1812)

Following the restructuring of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1792, the Methodist movement in North America fell into a period of turmoil. O'Kelly had left the general conference session unreconciled to the current leadership and determined to create his own organizational structure. He drew away a number of Methodist circuits and societies in Virginia, and they became known as Republican Methodists. Early Methodist minister Jesse Lee explained that many members "were drawn off" even while they refused to join the other group. "Brother was turned against brother, and one Christian friend against another" all because of contention "about the government of the church; who should govern it, or in what manner it ought to be governed."[143] Eventually, in 1801, O'Kelly, having set up his own "connexion" of circuits and ordained ministers, repudiated the name of Methodist entirely and referred to his group as The Christian Church. Writing a decade later, Lee explained that The Christian Church became

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[142] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 178–80.

[143] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 201–03.

"divided and subdivided, till at present it is hard to find two of them that are of one opinion.[144] Another group also split off from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1792 and styled themselves "Primitive Methodists." However, they eventually reconciled with the main Methodist movement and were reunited in 1799.[145]

By 1800, the Methodist Episcopal Church was once again the only Methodist contender in North America. Records show that the prior fifty years of activity on the continent resulted in a total membership of roughly 65,000 members and 287 preachers across twenty states and territories. The vast majority of these members resided in southern states with only about 6,000 members in New England.[146] These members variously met once a year at annual conferences designated according to region for local administrative needs, of which seven were currently active.[147] After 1801, however, growth suddenly saw a quick increase. By 1802, an additional 13,860 members had been gained.[148] Another 17,336 were brought in by 1803 and membership in the Kentucky District had tripled.[149] 1804 saw an increase of almost 10,000 members.[150] Meanwhile,

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[144] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 204–05. Members of O'Kelly's Christian Church eventually merged with "a similar movement . . . in New England under the leadership of Abner Jones and . . . Elias Smith." This union became known as the Christian Connexion until it merged once again with the United Church of Christ. See Crawford Leonard Allen, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1988), 101–02.

[145] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 206–08.

[146] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:243.

[147] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:248.

[148] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:274.

[149] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:290, 294.

[150] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:316.

1805 recorded a total membership of roughly 120,000 members.[151] In other words, the denomination's membership almost doubled within a span of five years.

What appears to have contributed to these numbers was a series of revivals that began to take place. While convening the general conference session in Baltimore in May 1800, it was noted that "a glorious revival of religion" took place in the city and that "such a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord had not been felt in that town for some years." The Methodist preachers who had come to attend the general conference session "tarried in town for a few days" and "were all on fire of love" before they set "out for their stations in different parts of the United States."[152] The revival in Baltimore soon spread to attendees of the annual conference being held at Duck Creek, Delaware, in June.[153] Here, "a wonderful display of the divine power was soon seen among the people, and many souls were brought into the liberty of the children of God in a short time." These meetings were accompanied by the kinds of phenomena that had been present years earlier in England when Wesley had preached in the open fields. Jesse Lee described how "[m]any of the saints, as well as sinners, would tremble, shake, and fall helpless on the floor, and remain in that condition for a considerable time." Frequently, the meeting house was filled with "loud praises to God" and "the songs of praise." The result was that many "were converted," and Lee remarked he "never saw before, for so many days together, such a glorious work of God, and so many people brought to the knowledge of God by the forgiveness of their sins." The revival now spread like a

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[151] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:347.

[152] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 272–73.; *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:231.

[153] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:231.

"heavenly flame" throughout Maryland and Delaware "in an uncommon manner" so that "preachers and people carried the fire of love with them to their different circuits, and places of abode."[154] Revival was not restricted to these states. Lee mentioned that following Baltimore, "[t]here was scarcely any part of the country where the Methodist preachers travelled and laboured, in which there was not a revival of religion."[155]

Some of the preachers who had been present at the Baltimore general conference had circuits in far-flung corners of the United States, including its newly opening western states such as Kentucky and Tennessee.[156] Peter Cartwright, who would later become a Methodist preacher and revivalist, was a teenager living in Kentucky at this time.[157] He explained that while "[m]inisters of different denominations came in, and preached through the country," it was the Methodists who "were the pioneer messengers of salvation in [those] ends of the earth."[158] In June 1800, shortly after the Baltimore General Conference, a Presbyterian minister in Kentucky advertised a camp meeting and invited the Methodist preachers to participate.[159] Cartwright recounted that one of these Methodist preachers, John Page, "was a powerful Gospel minister." During the meeting, "[t]he power of God was wonderfully displayed: scores of sinners fell under the preaching, like men slain in mighty battle; Christians shouted aloud for joy." To

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[154] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 273–74.

[155] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 285.

[156] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:240–43.

[157] Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher*, ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati, OH: L. Swormstedt & A. Poe, 1859), 17, 36.

[158] Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright,* 29.

[159] Jason E. Vickers, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 126.

Cartwright, it seemed that from this point, "there was a great waking up among the Churches."[160] Jesse Lee likewise recalled that towards the end of 1800, "there was a most remarkable revival of religion in the western country . . . such a work as had never been seen in that part of the world, since the first settling of the country."[161]

Roughly a year after these events, in August 1801, "some of the Presbyterian ministers" organized a camp meeting in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, and Methodists again were present "in large numbers."[162] In fact, attendance at Cane Ridge exploded. Cartwright estimated "that there were . . . from twelve to twenty-five thousand people" at various times throughout the meeting. Once again, the preaching was accompanied by "the mighty power of God" such that "[h]undreds fell prostrate . . . as men slain in battle," and "many were moved to tears, and bitter and loud crying for mercy."[163] The fruit of this revival was that "[f]rom 1801 for years a blessed revival of religion spread through almost the entire inhabited parts of the west." Throughout this work, the "Presbyterians and Methodists in a great measure united . . . met together, prayed together, and preached together."[164]

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[160] Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright,* 36–37. Cartwright claims this revival occurred in 1801 after the Cane Ridge Revival, but his recollection must have been incorrect since others indicate that it occurred in 1800, over a year before the revival at Cane Ridge occurred. See Vickers, *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, 127.

[161] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 274–75.

[162] Vickers, *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, 127.

[163] Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright,* 30.

[164] Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright,* 45–47. Cartwright observed that the "Presbyterian preachers and members, not being accustomed to much noise or shouting, when they yielded to it went into great extremes and downright wildness, to the great injury of the cause of God." Eventually, Cartwright explained, the Presbyterians were expelled from their denomination and formed their own with a theology that combined the perseverance of the saints and free will.

After Cane Ridge—which was termed a "sacramental meeting" by the Presbyterians who ran it—camp meeting revivals occurred in various states.[165] They quickly became so general that Jesse Lee "never could learn whether they began in the upper parts of South-Carolina, in Tennessee, or in Kentucky."[166] In many ways, camp meetings provided the same benefits and served the same purpose as preaching in the fields had done for Wesley. That is to say, early camp meetings "took place through necessity, and without design. . . . There was no plan laid for them in the beginning." Since there were few large buildings in newly opened territories and crowds were too large for everyone to find lodging, "[t]he ministers were obliged to preach in the woods, and some of the people to lodge on the ground in order to be at the meetings the next day." Powerful ecstatic experiences and the fervor of revival also added to the difficulties. Lee recounted that "on some occasions . . . the meeting would continue all night without intermission" and sometimes too, "persons were struck down by the power of God, and lay helpless most part of the night and could not be taken away." In response to the general expectation that they might "be detained all night," attendees began to arrive prepared with tents and provisions.[167] By the end of 1801, some preachers gave "public notice" that people should "come to meeting prepared to lodge on the ground" and soon these meetings earned "the distinguishing name of camp-meetings."[168]

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[165] Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright,* 30.

[166] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 280.

[167] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 281.

[168] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 282.

Revivals continued to follow the circuits of Methodist preachers throughout 1802 and 1803. Jesse Lee, who recorded events and statistics in his *Short History,* admitted that an attempt to "give a full account of the spread of the gospel, and of the revival of religion" among the Methodists between 1802 and 1803 "would exceed the bounds of a short history."[169] Just as Wesley had perceived the revivals accompanying his work decades before, Methodist revivalists likewise viewed these events as an opportunity for listeners to be "the subjects of an extraordinary work, either of conviction, conversion or sanctification."[170] Revivals were, in essence, seen as a means through which God could manifest himself and transmit faith and grace to those who were waiting to receive it. Language used throughout the following years demonstrates this continued expectation. One revival resulted in "persons of all descriptions" becoming "the subjects of the pardoning love of God."[171] Others noted such things as many people being "savingly delivered from their sins," professing "to find peace with God," professing "justifying faith," "converted," awakened as "sinners," professing "a deeper work of grace," and "brought to the knowledge of God.[172]

As revival burned across the United States year after year, Jesse Lee began observing how people behaved as they were "awakened" and "converted" by powerful experiences. For example, in 1806, he recorded "one strange circumstance" involving a young woman who "was under conviction" while attending a camp meeting. She had fallen

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[169] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 292.

[170] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 295.

[171] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 303.

[172] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 304, 306–07.

to the floor, helpless and speechless, on Sunday night of the meeting. She revived partially on Monday morning to say only, "Love, love, love: Glory, glory, glory," before she sank "away into her helpless state again." Eventually, her friends took her home, and she stayed in this condition for "nine days and nights," during which she was unable to speak or eat anything except what was placed in her mouth. Lee was bewildered by his encounter with the woman and said that he could not "account for it" but was "persuaded" that she was "truly born again while she was under that strange operation."[173]

The Second Blessing (1813–1832)

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Wesley understood sanctification to be a progressive work beginning at justification that could instantaneously translate into a higher experience, which he referred to using various terms such as "entire sanctification," "perfection," or sometimes just "sanctification." This doctrine had always been part of Methodist belief and practice. However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, shifts in language amongst American Methodists began to become perceptible. Examples of this shift can be seen in the obituaries of Methodist preachers. For years, notices simply described these individuals with adjectives such as "holy," "blameless," "devout," "full of faith and the Holy Ghost," possessing "patience," or having "victory in death." Sometimes, there were indications that individuals had an "uncommon" spiritual experience, but observations were limited to general descriptions only.[174]

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[173] Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America,* 316–18.

[174] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:58, 64, 71–72, 80, 90, 101, 112–13, 124–25, 138–39, 153–54, 170–74, 189–90, 204–07.

In 1799, obituaries began to appear that read as overt testimonies to entire sanctification. Hezekiah C. Wooster was "convicted of sin, October 9, 1791, born again, December 1, 1791," and "sanctified, February 6, 1792."[175] William Ormond died in 1804, "declaring with his latest breath," that he had "peace, peace, victory, victory, complete victory." The brief account of his life provided by his brother stated, "born . . . 1769," "convicted of sin the 10th of December, 1787," "converted 11th of December, 1787," and "sanctified 20th of March, 1790."[176] Tobias Gibson died in 1805, and "some of the elders present" were persuaded that he possessed and practiced "Christian perfection."[177] Meanwhile, Wilson Lee also died that year, reportedly "professed the justifying and sanctifying grace of God."[178] In 1807, Richard Whatcoat died having "professed the justifying and sanctifying grace of God." The summary of his life claimed that he was "converted, September 3, 1758" and "sanctified, March 28, 1761."[179] Edmund Henley died in 1809. He was "about thirty years of age, and had several years professed sanctification."[180] In 1811, William Hunt died from a "consumptive complaint." He was described as a "Christian, in the profession both of justifying and sanctifying grace."[181] Samuel Mills died

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[175] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:222.

[176] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:309–10.

[177] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:336.

[178] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:339.

[179] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:338.

[180] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:444–45.

[181] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:511–12.

in 1812 and was described as "a witness of sanctification."[182] Robert Hibbard, who "professed to receive the blessing of sanctification," died in 1813.[183]

The reason for this shift in language was undoubtedly related to the nature of dramatic revivals that were sweeping across America from around 1800 onwards. These revivals, characterized as they were by ecstatic experiences, convinced Methodists "that persons under the powerful operations of the Spirit of God" were either "suddenly and strongly" convicted of sin or filled "with [God's] own pure love." Indeed, many of these "exercises" were associated with the intense joy of a believer being "instantaneously delivered from . . . guilt" and attaining "either penitence, conversion, or sanctification," even though it was understood that these experiences were not, in themselves, indisputable evidence.[184] This understanding was held and confirmed by Methodist itinerant preachers. For example, Joseph Jewell "traveled extensively" on "four large four weeks' circuits" and observed everywhere he went "the displays of the power and grace of God in awakening and conversion of sinners, as well as the sanctification of believers."[185] Methodist preacher and theologian Nathan Bangs later recalled that during this time, "[t]he doctrine more especially urged upon believers was that of sanctification or holiness of heart and life." Preachers presented this doctrine to people "as their present privilege," and "[i]t was this baptism of the Holy Ghost which fired and filled" their hearts.[186]

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[182] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:542–43.

[183] *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; from 1773 to 1813,* 1:536.

[184] Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from the Year 1793 to the Year 1816.*, vol. 2 (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane, 1840), 116–18.

[185] Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 2:121–22.

[186] Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 2:75.

War visited North America once more in 1812 and dampened the spirit of revival that had been ongoing since the turn of the century.[187] In fact, this period saw a "decrease of members." With the return of peace in 1816, it was hoped that American Methodists would "see the returning glory of the Lord revealed, and the quickening power of the Spirit diffusing its reviving influence."[188] Indeed, revival did return and continued in a similar character to former years. However, there was a recognition that some revivals had included undesirable "extravagances." In 1821, Methodist minister Thomas L. Douglass reported a revival in Nashville. He rejoiced that here they "had nothing of what is called the jerks, or dance," and that "the work of conviction in the hearts of sinners" had been "regular, powerful, and deep."[189] Although "the sacred flame" of revival continued to spread across the country throughout the late 1810s and 1820s, descriptions of these events suggest that they were less dramatic and less emphasis was placed on instantaneous perfection than in earlier years, although it was mentioned that on at least one occasion, several "professed to be filled with 'perfect love."[190] Likewise, the many obituaries that were included in the third volume of Nathan Bang's *History* omitted references to being sanctified, with the exception of an account of the life of a man named Mr. Shadford who reportedly "professed to enjoy that perfect love which excludes all slavish fear." This account was tempered by the statement: "If Christian tempers and a holy walk

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[187] Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from the Year 1816 to the Year 1828*, vol. 3 (New York: G. Lane & C. B. Tippett, 1845), 30.

[188] Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 3:37.

[189] Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 3:187.

[190] Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 3:77, 180, 182–83, 187–88, 200–05, 209, 211, 213–14, 241, 228, 301–02, 307–08, 320.

are proofs of it, his claims were legitimate."[191] Indeed, language from this time period reflects the generally understood opinion that "the doctrine of perfection was neglected in the decades immediately after the American Revolution."[192]

Always Progressive (1832–1841)

At the 1832 General Conference session, a pastoral address specifically spoke directly to the state of holiness within Methodism. Basic Methodist concepts were clarified. "When we speak of holiness," it was explained, "we mean that state in which God is loved with all the heart, and served with all the power." This state, it confirmed, "may be secured instantaneously, by an act of faith, as justification was." The address went on to reflect on the current condition of the church.

> Why, then, have we so few living witnesses that 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin?' Let us beware lest we satisfy ourselves with the correctness of our creed, while we neglect the momentous practical effects which that creed was intended to have upon us. Among primitive Methodists, the experience of this high attainment in religion may justly be said to have been common: now, a profession of it is rarely to be met with among us. Is it not time for us, in this matter at least, to return to first principles? Is it not time that we throw off the reproach of inconsistency with which we are charged in regard to this matter? Only let all who have been born of the Spirit, and have tasted of the good word of God, seek, with the same ardor, to be made perfect in love as they sought for the pardon of their sins, and soon will our class meetings and love feasts be cheered by the relation of experiences of this higher character, as they now are with those which tell of justification and the new birth.[193]

Whether it was in reaction to this felt need or completely incidental, that same year, the Methodist Episcopal Church published a book on perfection by one of its

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[191] Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 3:70.

[192] J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, *Encyclopedia of World Religions* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2005), 270. Although the author claims this was the general condition after the American Revolution, an exception to this neglect seems to have been between the years 1800 and 1812.

[193] Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 3:81–82.

preachers, Timothy Merritt.[194] Merritt had already published this book in 1824 as an independent effort, and it consisted primarily of extracts from John Wesley and John Fletcher, an early British Methodist. Titled *The Christian's Manual, A Treatise on Christian Perfection; With Directions for Obtaining That State*, Merritt compiled it with the intention that lay members who had "neither time to read, nor money to purchase" the larger books from which the extracts had been taken, would be able to better understand the doctrine.[195] The choice of the Methodist Episcopal Church in officially publishing the book appears to indicate an effort to make teachings on the doctrine of perfection more readily available to the broader church body.

Timothy Merritt was an itinerant preacher serving in the New England Conference. "Christian Perfection," it was claimed some years after his death, "was his favorite theme, and he was a living exemplification of that Wesleyan doctrine," being "most lovable and amiable."[196] Merritt did not limit his passion for the doctrine of perfection to the publication of one book. Throughout the 1830s, Merritt "zealously proclaimed" the teaching both from "the pulpit and in private."[197] Following the apparent success of *The Christian's Manual*, Merritt compiled and published the diaries and letters of a young Methodist woman in 1833. The express purpose of this publication was to

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[194] T. Merritt, *The Christian's Manual, a Treatise on Christian Perfection; with Directions for Obtaining That State. Compiled Principally from the Works of the Rev. John Wesley.* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1832), i.

[195] T. Merritt, *The Christian's Manual, A Treatise on Christian Perfection; with Direction for Obtaining That State. Compiled Principally from the Works of Rev. John Wesley* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1824), 1–4.

[196] James Mudge, *History of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church: 1796–1910* (Boston: The New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1910), 51–52.

[197] D. Sherman, *Sketches of New England Divines* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 339.

provide "an example" to "instruct and quicken [the youth] in the pursuit of holiness."[198] Finally, beginning in July 1839 and continuing until his death in 1845, he began publishing a periodical under the title *The Guide to Christian Perfection*. Each issue of the periodical was "filled with letters, experiences, poems, short sermons, and other edifying matter bearing on the highest religious experience."[199]

Letters and personal experiences that were published in *The Guide to Christian Perfection* shared common ideas and language. For example, one testimony explained that this individual had received entire sanctification "five months" previously. "My theme has been a full, free and present salvation through a crucified Redeemer, by faith." The writer exclaimed. "[E]arnest prayer for the salvation of souls has been my daily exercise. . . . Trials I have had, temptations not a few; but whereas once they weighed me down with sorrow and overcame me, now I fly to Jesus, and their power is gone."[200] Another correspondent related how, after their conversion, they had become convinced that their "heart was not wholly conformed to the image of Christ; that there were many roots of bitterness lurking within." Over time this individual came to feel "the necessity of entire sanctification" but struggled on in discouragement, unable to understand how to receive it for several years. At last, the blessing was obtained.

> It was in secret prayer, on the evening of August 25th, 1837, that I was enabled to venture my whole soul, body and being upon the atoning blood of Christ, and he accepted the sacrifice. The holy fire came down, and I felt for the first time in my life the evidence of perfect love casting out fear! I sunk down in humility at the feet of Jesus, and was filled with wonder, love and praise. . . . I have for the last

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[198] T. Merritt, ed., *Memoir, Diary, and Letters, of Miss Hannah Syng Bunting of Philadelphia, Who Departed This Life May 25, 1832, in the Thirty-First Year of Her Age.*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), 5.

[199] Mudge, *History of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 366.

[200] J. G. C., "Personal Experience," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, July, 1842, 15.

> year felt quite established in the enjoyment of perfect love. I do, most of the time, 'walk in the light of his countenance, and in his salvation I do rejoice all the day;' and hope, through divine mercy, to continue to do so as long as I live."[201]

Another testimony reflected the emotional experience that often accompanied the reception of the "blessing." "In a moment," one writer stated, "the heavens were thrown open to my view; glory descended on my soul, and all around me; refining fire went through my entire system like electricity; my heart seemed dissolved in love, like wax before a hot fire." This experience, the writer urged, was not obtained by special efforts, but "by a simple act of faith." They "sank beneath the purple flood, and rose renewed in God. Glory to his name for ever."[202]

Articles also expressed a consistent idea as to what perfection or entire sanctification is and how it could be obtained. In harmonization with Wesley's articulation, there was a dual insistence that sanctification could be obtained in a single moment by faith while also including a progressive work. For example, one article made a clear distinction between justification and sanctification. "Justification . . . is a thing which is done or completed. . . . Sanctification, on the other hand, is a thing which is always progressive." How so, it could be asked? The answer: "It is progressive until all the evils of the heart are subdued. And even when it is in some degree complete. . . . There will never be a period, either in time or eternity, when there may not be an increase of holy love."[203]

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[201] S. T., "Personal Experience," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, July, 1842, 18–19.

[202] O. H., "Personal Experience," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, August, 1842, 30.

[203] A. K., "Principles of the Interior or Hidden Life No. XVII: On the Distinction between Justification and Sanctification," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, August, 1842, 27.

A Shorter Way (1841–1843)

At the same time that Methodist preacher Timothy Merritt was passionately advocating for Christian perfection, a woman named Phoebe Palmer was also beginning to teach on the topic. Phoebe Palmer had a solid Methodist pedigree. Her father, Henry Worrall from Yorkshire, England, had been converted and received into Methodist fellowship by John Wesley himself.[204] In 1832, a revival broke out at the church that she and her husband attended. She wrote in her journal of the revival stating that "[w]hen those who desired a deeper work of grace were invited forward, feeling that no one could need it more than myself, I was among the first to kneel at the altar,—my husband leading the way." The result was she "was quickened" and received a degree of peace with God but she continued "getting on feebly in the divine life."[205]

In 1835, Palmer nearly died while giving birth to her second child. The experience troubled her spiritually—not that Jesus would cast her out, but she regretted that she would "just be able to enter the door of heaven, when [she] might have had an abundant entrance."[206] These troubled thoughts continued until July 1837. All this time, she felt assured that she "retained a state of justification" and was thus saved, but she longed to follow God more closely and become holy.[207] At last, after a long struggle, Palmer came to the place where she was able to exercise the faith that she longed for. The result was instantaneous. "O! into what a region of light, glory and purity, was my soul at

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[204] Richard, Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), 13–14.

[205] Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer,* 25.

[206] Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer,* 27.

[207] Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer,* 38–39.

this moment ushered!" She later wrote. "I felt that I was but as a drop in the ocean of infinite LOVE, and Christ was All in All." Those feelings were accompanied by a realization that she "was not sufficient" by herself "to think a good thought, much less to perform a righteous action" but must instead rely fully on Jesus.[208] Around the same time that she had this experience, Palmer began to share her thoughts on holiness at a Tuesday meeting held in her house. Initially, this meeting was restricted to women, but it was eventually expanded in 1839 to include men.[209] Seeking to share her views even further afield, in 1840, Palmer "began . . . long series of evangelistic expeditions" that continued until her death thirty years later.[210]

Palmer's influence within the Methodist Church became more pronounced after the 1843 publication of her book *The Way of Holiness*. Unlike Merritt, who came before her, Palmer heavily emphasized the immediacy and ease of attaining entire sanctification. The opening chapter includes a short dialogue between two "children of Zion." "I have thought," said one, "whether there is not a shorter way of getting into this way of holiness?" The other replied, "Yes, brother, THERE IS A SHORTER WAY!"[211] Palmer described this "far better" way as a process of "bringing every diversified state of experience . . . to compare with 'law and the testimony.'" Such that nothing would be deemed "satisfactory that could not be substantiated with an emphatic 'thus saith the

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[208] Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer,* 43–44.

[209] Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer,* 239.

[210] Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer,* 259.

[211] Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness, with Notes by the Way; Being a Narrative of Experience Resulting from a Determination to Be a Bible Christian.* (New York: Piercy and Reed, 1843), 5.

Lord.'"[212] She referred to this process as keeping "the offering . . . upon the altar." She had "obtained this blessing, by laying all upon the altar." And now she saw that she would retain it "by still keeping all upon the altar, 'a living sacrifice.'"[213] The result of Phoebe Palmer's teachings—especially her emphasis on "a shorter way" to achieve holiness—was a departure from Wesleyan theology. Rather than perceiving sanctification as a progressive experience punctuated by a second blessing of God's grace, Palmer taught that people could be sanctified immediately "not only if they willed but when they willed."[214] Furthermore, because she viewed faith as originating in the "immutability of the word of God," she believed that all who had experienced "entire sanctification" were "now and forever the saved of the Lord!"[215] In other words, she believed that Christians were not truly saved without receiving entire sanctification, but they could not be lost after receiving it. Thus, the soteriological of 1840s Methodism had now been set with several contradictory streams of perfectionist theology. Was it necessary to engage in a progressive work before and after perfection, or could it be acquired permanently in a moment at will? That was the crucial question.

Conclusion

American Methodism was a unique product of John Wesley's movement. Severed, as it was from the official Church of England by the American Revolutionary War, the Methodist Church quickly overcame significant structural and organizational

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[212] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness,* 50–51.

[213] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness,* 146.

[214] Charles Edward White, "Phoebe Palmer and the Development of Pentecostal Pneumatology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Volume 23, nos. 1–2 (1988): 205

[215] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness,* 29.

challenges. From 1800 until the War of 1812, a series of powerful revivals crisscrossed the country and contributed to rapid denominational growth. These revivals were quickly associated with ecstatic religious experiences and demonstrations that were believed to be linked to conversions as well as the bestowal of entire sanctification. During the war years, however, as the denomination struggled with the challenges of retention, the Methodist church lost sight of the doctrine of perfection. As leaders identified the need for a greater focus on sanctification throughout the 1830s, several figures came into the spotlight with contradictory ideas. Timothy Merritt, who relied heavily on Wesley's writings to develop his theology, clearly taught that sanctification was a progressive experience both before and after perfection. Phoebe Palmer, on the other hand, insisted on "a shorter way" that bypassed the need for a progressive experience and gave individuals the power to choose if and when they would achieve a higher life. As a result, Methodism in the 1840s communicated mixed ideas about how perfection could be attained.

CHAPTER 4

THE SOTERIOLOGY OF ELLEN WHITE

Introduction

In 1842, just as Timothy Merritt and Phoebe Palmer were rising to prominence with their teachings on perfection, a fourteen-year-old girl from New England was struggling to obtain entire sanctification. A devout Methodist, Ellen Harmon's soteriology was formed by the revivalist spirit of her time. However, after obtaining the perfection that she was seeking, Ellen became deeply involved in the Millerite movement and was subsequently excommunicated from Methodist fellowship. In 1844, shortly after the expected time for Jesus' return had passed, Ellen received her first vision and quickly began touring New England with prophetic messages for the scattered Millerite believers. Ellen married her chaperone, James White, and together, they gathered a group of like-minded people who had been similarly disenfranchised from the established churches of the day. This group began to develop distinctive doctrinal ideas and eventually organized into a formal organization in 1863. As one of the three co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and as an accepted prophetic voice, Ellen White's soteriological views naturally exerted a dominant influence on Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and practices. The focus of this chapter is to uncover and trace Ellen White's soteriological development through several key phases of her life and ministry beginning in 1842 and extending until her death in 1915.

Soteriological Struggle (1840–1842)

Ellen White's parents, Robert and Eunice Harmon, were devout Methodists who had been converted to the Methodist faith during the decade of revival and growth leading up to the War of 1812. In the 1830s, Robert and Eunice relocated their family of ten from Gorham, Maine, to the nearby city of Portland, and it is in this city that Ellen White spent most of her childhood.[216] When she was nine years old, Ellen was violently attacked by a school bully with a rock. The resulting physiological and psychological trauma, combined with the overtly religious atmosphere of her upbringing, triggered a series of spiritual crises about her salvation. During the summer of 1840, Ellen accompanied her family to a Methodist camp meeting that was held at Buxton, Maine. In typical Methodist fashion, the twelve-year-old anticipated that at this camp meeting, she would "seek the Lord in earnest . . . and obtain, if possible, the pardon of [her] sins."[217] At this camp meeting, Ellen heard a sermon that presented the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Realizing that "all self-dependence is vain" and that Jesus "has pledged Himself to listen to the petition and grant the prayer of those who come to Him in faith," Ellen responded to an altar call for those who wished to be converted. As she bowed in prayer, she was given "assurance of the pitying tenderness of Jesus" and was able to testify that she had found Jesus.[218]

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[216] Arthur White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years: 1827–1862*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 18–22.

[217] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 1:9–16.

[218] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:17.

Although Ellen experienced conversion, this was not the end of her distress about salvation. By 1842, the Harmon family had become frequent attendees at Millerite meetings. In June, William Miller gave a series of lectures in Portland on the soon return of Christ, and Ellen listened anxiously. She "believed that Jesus was soon to come in the clouds of heaven," but she was afraid that she would not be ready or "entirely accepted of God" because she lacked "holiness of heart."[219] In other words, Ellen had not experienced the Second Blessing and she was not sure if she could be saved without it. Ellen's difficulties stemmed from the theological state of the Methodist church at that time. "Among the Methodists," she later wrote, "I had heard much in regard to sanctification." Indeed, she had "seen persons lose their physical strength" and "heard this pronounced the evidence of sanctification." The cause of her distress was that she had not undergone a similar experience and did not know how to obtain sanctification.

Ellen's language and that of her friends at this time reflect the heightened emphasis on "immediate and definable turning points" of the Christian life that had arisen out of the dramatic revivals of earlier decades.[220] Ellen was unable to "comprehend what was necessary in order to be fully consecrated." In response, some of her friends urged her, "Believe in Jesus now! Believe that He accepts you now!" This caused her to have difficulty distinguishing between justification and sanctification, even though she believed them to be two separate experiences.[221] Other

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[219] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:22.

[220] Melvin E. Dieter, Anthony A. Hoekema, Stanley M. Horton, J. Robertson McQuilkin, John F. Walvoord, and Stanley N. Gundry, *Five Views on Sanctification*, *Counterpoints Exploring Theology*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 38.

[221] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:22–23.

confusing ideas were also present. She recounted that "[m]inisters in the pulpit . . . taught that God proposed to save none but the sanctified."[222]

This statement demonstrates the soteriological confusion that then existed within the Methodist church. Certainly, some preachers during the 1840s, like Luther Lee for example, continued to harmonize with Wesley by asserting that "the principle of holiness is implanted in the heart" when the believer is justified and is progressive, so that "they do not exist in all the perfection and strength which ripening years of Christian experience and faithful perseverance will give them."[223] This group of preachers claimed that the true model of Wesleyan soteriology should be described as "a continuum in which certain radical points of decision and infusions of justifying and sanctifying grace were set within a lifetime of process." Revivalist preachers, on the other hand, increasingly taught that "God called all Christians to receive entire sanctification as a work of grace subsequent to regeneration."[224] The revivalist view was further popularized by the efforts of Phoebe Palmer, who had likewise come to believe that entire sanctification is "a state of grace" that "every one of the Lord's redeemed ones" must attain in order to please God.[225] Confused by the process of salvation and convinced that God wanted to condemn her to an eternally burning hell, Ellen began to view God "as a tyrant" rather than a "tender, pitying Friend of sinners."[226]

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[222] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:24.

[223] Luther Lee, "Sanctification: What It Is—and How It Differs from Justification and Regeneration," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, September 1842, 1842, 71.

[224] Dieter et al., *Five Views on Sanctification,* 38.

[225] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness,* 25.

[226] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:24–25.

Receiving the Second Blessing (1842–1843)

During this despondent phase, Ellen received two dreams that were instrumental in adjusting her theology. The first dream highlighted the importance of confession and pardon. In this dream, she saw a "mangled and bleeding" lamb tied to a massive pillar. This pillar was the sole support of a "vast temple" representing salvation—everyone who wanted to enter and be saved was required to stand in front of the lamb and "confess their sins."[227] The second dream depicted a visit, up a flight of stairs, to a loving and inviting Jesus. On returning from the visit, an angel handed her a "green cord coiled up closely," which could be taken out and stretched to its full length whenever she desired to visit Jesus again. This dream inspired her with hope. She believed the green cord represented faith and began to comprehend "the beauty and simplicity of trusting in God."[228] Shortly after these two dreams and a clarifying interview with the Millerite and Methodist preacher Levi Stockman, Ellen received the evidence of God's acceptance that she desired.[229]

One evening, while attending a Millerite prayer meeting, Ellen began to pray. As she did so, "[t]he promises of God appeared . . . like so many previous pearls that were to be received only for the asking." Her burden of anxiety and fear was removed, "and the blessing of the Lord descended . . . like the gentle dew." Describing her experience in language similar to other Methodists who were "sanctified," she testified of its physical and spiritual effects. "Wave after wave of glory rolled over me until my body grew stiff.

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[227] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:27.

[228] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:29.

[229] Stockman began preaching for the Methodist denomination in 1836 and was based in Paris, Maine, until 1840. See William B. Lapham and Silas P. Maxim, *History of Paris, Maine from Its Settlement to 1880 with A History of the Grants of 1736 & 1771 Together with Personal Sketches, a Copious Genealogical Register and an Appendix* (Paris, ME: William B. Lapham and Silas P. Maxim, 1884), 302.

Everything was shut out from me but Jesus and glory, and I knew nothing of what was passing around me." Indeed, the "Spirit of God" came over her so powerfully that she "was unable to go home that night." When she did return, "a great change had taken place," such that her heart was now filled with "a deep and fervent love," obedience to God now "seemed a joy," and she possessed the inner witness of the "indwelling Saviour."[230] In short, Ellen's experience was typical for a Methodist who had received entire sanctification, and she understood it to mean that her prayers had been answered. It also demonstrates that she shared the Methodist understanding that entire sanctification was not earned by self-improvement but received by faith—the kind of faith that could only be obtained as "a special gift of God through the operation of the Holy Spirit."[231]

Not long after this experience, Ellen was given the opportunity to share her testimony at her Methodist class meeting. Her testimony indicates that she believed she had been sanctified. She had sought "earnestly for the sanctification of the Spirit of God" and had subsequently found "peace, joy, and perfect love." The Methodist class leader likewise understood her to be professing entire sanctification. However, the leader was irritated by the suggestion that it might have anything to do with desiring to be ready for the soon return of Jesus. Interrupting her testimony, the leader exclaimed, "You received sanctification through Methodism, through Methodism, sister, not through an erroneous theory." Following this testimony, Ellen ceased attending the class meeting, and shortly thereafter, she, along with her family, was excommunicated from the Methodist faith.[232]

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[230] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:31–32.

[231] A. K., "Principles of the Interior or Hidden Life. No. XXI," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, February 1843, 171.

[232] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:37–43.

A Visionary Arises (1844–1848)

Leading up to October 22, 1844, when Millerites expected Christ to appear, Ellen White's soteriology integrated with her eschatology simply and directly. She clearly believed that entire sanctification was necessary in order to be ready for the second coming of Christ. Having received this gift, "glory flooded" her soul, and she "rejoiced in the prospect of soon meeting [her] Redeemer and living forever in the light of His countenance."[233] During this time, the Millerite movement was united and possessed clarity regarding their mission and expected hope. By early October, Millerites had largely determined that probation had closed—the door to salvation was shut.[234] After the expected date for Christ's return passed, however, eschatology and soteriology gradually became areas of debate and turmoil within Millerite circles. As various Millerites struggled to comprehend what had happened, factions in the movement began to appear.[235]

It was within this context, in December 1844, that Ellen received her first vision. The earliest published account appeared as a letter in the Millerite paper, *The Day-Star*, in January 1846. In this vision, she saw the Advent believers traveling to the heavenly Jerusalem on a high, narrow path. The pathway was lit by a bright light symbolizing the "Midnight Cry," which Millerites believed was the proclamation of the October 22 date that had occurred in the summer of 1844.[236] Continuing to believe in the message of the Midnight Cry behind them and looking forward to Jesus, who walked ahead of them,

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[233] White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 1:55.

[234] Merlin D. Burt, *CHIS 674: Development of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 5th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, 2019), 43–45.

[235] Burt, *CHIS 674: Development of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 46–53.

[236] Burt, *CHIS 674: Development of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 43–44.

would ensure salvation. Meanwhile, those who denied the truth of the Midnight Cry were effectively lost—they no longer saw Jesus and "fell off the path down in the wicked world below." Everyone who remained on the path, however, eventually received a "seal" just prior to the second coming of Christ. At the arrival of a resplendent Jesus surrounded by thousands of angels, there is a brief pause as the remaining believers question their salvation. Jesus then affirms that "those who have clean hands and pure hearts" will be able to stand because His grace is sufficient for them. The vision then concludes with a description of various scenes in heaven and the new earth and the blessings awaiting the faithful.[237]

Two additional visions appeared in *The Day-Star* several months later. The first vision depicts a scene in which Jesus is seated on a throne receiving worship. After a while, Jesus moves to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary in order to continue His intercessory ministry there. Those who are faithful follow Jesus to His new place of ministry, but those who are unfaithful remain to worship the throne. Satan soon sits down on this throne and impersonates Jesus, breathing on them "an unholy influence." The second vision expands on the concept of Jesus' role as High Priest and hints again at the presence of a heavenly sanctuary. Ellen hears "the tinkling of bells" on Jesus' priestly garments and sees a cloud descending to the earth at His second coming. All who have "received the seal of the living God" are saved while the remaining "Synagogue of Satan" fall down at their feet and worship them.[238]

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[237] Ellen Harmon, "Letter from Sister Harmon," *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 31–32.

[238] Ellen Harmon, "Letter from Sister Harmon," *Day-Star*, March 14, 1846, 7.

A fourth vision received in 1847 similarly highlighted the heavenly sanctuary and focused on the Ten Commandments kept within the ark of the covenant. When Ellen gazed at the tables of stone, she noticed that the fourth commandment "looked glorious—a halo of glory was all around it." The vision suggested that anyone who rejected the doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath "would shut the gates of the Holy City against themselves." This rejection in favor of Sunday would result in the reception of "the mark of the Beast, and of his Image." The vision rapidly outlined events relating to the second coming of Christ. At last, Jesus "threw open the gates of the Golden City" and led the Advent believers in. They were freely welcomed because they "had kept the 'Commandments of God,' and had a 'right to the tree of life.'"[239] These four early visions highlighted several distinct ideas: the requirement of a final sealing of the righteous before the second coming, the nature of Christ's high-priestly ministry in heaven, and the importance of the Ten Commandments. All three ideas relate to sanctification and its significance at the close of human probation.

The Seal of God (1848–1849)

The seal is a concept that can be found in both Millerite and Methodist literature from the 1830s and 1840s. Among Methodists, the term "seal" was often used in reference to the seal of the Holy Spirit on the heart of believers who had obtained entire sanctification. Various testimonies demonstrate this use. For example, the 1836 *Memoir of William Carvosso*, which records the life of an early Methodist, recounts how he was once "so overpowered with the glory of God, that, had there been a thousand suns shining

[239] Ellen G. White, in *A Word to the Little Flock* (orig. 1847, reprint; Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1847), 18–20.

at noon-day, the brightness of that divine glory would have eclipsed the whole!" The experience was accompanied by a sense of "the overwhelming power of saving grace," and he "received the impress of the seal and the earnest of the Spirit" in his heart.[240] An 1842 testimony of another Methodist, shares similar language. "O what a delightful peace ensued," he wrote, "sealed on my heart was the work of redemption, sanctification."[241] Phoebe Palmer also picked up on this idea in 1843. She declared that everyone who had been "redeemed . . . should be sanctified, set apart for holy service . . . by having the seal legibly enstamped upon the forehead, proclaiming them as 'not of the world,' a 'peculiar people to show forth his praise.'"[242]

Millerites, who were naturally concerned with eschatology, focused much of their discussions on the Seal of God described in Revelation rather than the Seal of the Holy Spirit. It seems evident, however, that they interpreted the Seal of God as an extension of the Seal of the Holy Spirit. For example, Millerite preacher Josiah Litch defined those who had the Seal of God simply as God's worshippers.[243] Millerites also recognized that there was a final sealing time that would occur prior to the second coming of Christ to determine who would be saved. Writing at the end of 1844, H. B. Woodcock declared, "This sealing time commenced with the opening of the sixth seal, and might have closed on [October 22, 1844], had those that were bidden been found worthy." He warned that

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[240] William Carvosso and Benjamin Carvosso *The Efficacy of Faith in the Atonement of Christ: Exemplified in A Memoir of Mr. William Carvosso, Sixty Years a Class-Leader in the Wesleyan-Methodist Connexion.*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Mason, 1836), 74.

[241] Edwardian, "A Scrap from My Diary," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, August 1842, 36.

[242] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness,* 40.

[243] Josiah Litch, "The Three Wo Trumpets. Wo! Wo!! Wo!!! Fall of the Ottoman Empire, or Ottoman Supremacy Departed, August 11, 1840," *Midnight Cry*, November 24, 1842, [2].

when the final sealing does take place, "those that were bidden, and have hitherto refused to come will be cast out." He also argued that the purpose of Christ's return was to gather "the elect" from the earth. "But who are the elect? They are the 144,000 sealed . . . having their Father's name written in their foreheads."[244]

In late 1848, Ellen White received a vision that directly explained the Seal of God. Co-founder of the Sabbatarian Adventist movement, Joseph Bates, was present and transcribed her utterances while in vision. "That truth," Ellen White reportedly stated, "is the seal . . . that commandment that has been trodden under foot."[245] A second vision shortly after, on January 5, 1849, dwelt further on the topic. As with several of her earlier visions, this vision emphasized closing eschatological events and depicted two polarized groups of people: the saved, whose "faces were lighted up with the glory of God," and the lost, "who were howling in agony." The lost group—to all indications, fallen Adventists—consisted of those who had rejected the seventh-day Sabbath.[246] A few weeks later a broadside was published containing material drawn from these visions and aptly titled *To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God*. The broadside clarified the nature of the final sealing. According to Ellen White, the sealing was a currently occurring event that would be "very short, and soon . . . over." Importantly, it

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[244] H. B. Woodcock, "The True Millenium," *Western Midnight Cry*, December 30, 1844, 31–32. Woodcock's view was a minority view at the end of 1844. Others, such as a man referred to as Brother Williamson, held that "God sealed" everyone who remained with the Millerite movement up until October 22, 1844, and that believers would "never have 'time' to preach again." See M. Williamson, "Bro. Williamson," *Western Midnight Cry*, December 30, 1844, [2–3].

[245] Ellen G. White, "Report of E. G. White Utterances during Vision," November 19, 1848, Ms 1, 1848, EGWMC, EGWE.

[246] Ellen G. White, "The Sealing," January 17, 1849, Ms 2, 1849, EGWMC, EGWE

would be completed through the acceptance of the seventh-day Sabbath, which she identified as the seal.[247]

Toward the end of the broadside, Ellen White recounts meeting created beings on unfallen worlds who "lived in strict obedience to the commandments of God." Then she was "taken to a world which had seven moons" and "saw good, old Enoch, who had been translated." Enoch was depicted as wearing a wreath of victory on his head, tied with a bow on which was written, "Holiness."[248] In other words, to someone steeped in Methodist perfectionism, as Ellen White was, there was only one possible meaning. To receive the final sealing, Adventists, too, must obtain entire sanctification and keep the law of God—including the seventh-day Sabbath—as a mark of their allegiance. The directions were clear. "Now is the time," Ellen White declared, "to make our calling and election sure. . . . Have faith in God and trust wholly in him, that when Christ who is our life shall appear we may appear with him in glory."[249]

This was the beginning of Ellen White's continued insistence that the Sabbath is the Seal of God. Such a focus on perfection and the law might seem troubling. After all, these visions appear to focus on obedience to the exclusion of grace. However, it is important to note that Ellen White and other early Adventists had been part of the Second Great Awakening and were accustomed to revivalist preaching focusing on themes of faith and transformation.[250] Ellen White herself had claimed to receive entire sanctification in 1843. As

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[247] Ellen White, "To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God," January 31, 1849, Ms 4, 1849, EGWMC, EGWE.

[248] White, "To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God," January 31, 1849, Ms 4, 1849.

[249] White, "To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God," January 31, 1849, Mst 4, 1849.

[250] J. Garnett, *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), 127.

discussed in Chapter 3, these claims were commonplace and often associated with ecstatic experiences and deep emotions concerning the love of God and his free gift of grace.[251] Furthermore, Methodists and other perfectionists of the era did not traditionally define entire sanctification as absolute sinlessness. Like Wesley, they taught that perfection was a state of perfect love resulting in obedience while simultaneously allowing for errors in knowledge, mistakes, sins of ignorance, and imperfect thoughts and feelings.[252]

Furthermore, Ellen White had been catechized and baptized as a Methodist. Although she had repudiated several teachings by 1849, including an immortal soul, eternally burning hell, and Sunday sacredness, there is no evidence that she ever rejected other key articles of Methodist faith, such as original sin, prevenient grace, or justification by faith. Indeed, because the Methodist Church affirmed that "the nature of every man . . . is very far gone from original righteousness," it insisted that a person "cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to faith, and calling upon God." Therefore, "we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith."[253] Thus, while Ellen White's statements on the necessity of obedience and holiness may seem Pelagian in character, the context within which those statements were made was one in which reliance upon Christ was thoroughly at the center.

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[251] Commonplace enough that the *Guide to Christian Perfection* was able to publish accounts of entire sanctification sent in from its readership every month for years. See Timothy Merritt and D. S. King, eds., *The Guide to Christian Perfection*, vol. 4 (Boston, MS: Timothy Merritt and D. S. King, 1842–3).

[252] Congregationalist Observer, "Entire Sanctification—Its Nature," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, April 1843, 227.

[253] *Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: George Lane, For the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840), 12–13.

The Laodicean Message (1850–1860)

By the 1850s, Sabbatarian Adventists had been daily expecting the soon return of Jesus for over five years. The small group of believers had battled prejudice, spiritual confusion, and severe disappointment while promoting the unpopular message of the seventh-day Sabbath. Perhaps it was natural that they began to become spiritually complacent. Ellen White's visions now focused on awakening Advent believers from a state of being "too dull, too dormant and unbelieving."[254] For example, a vision dated July 29, 1850, depicted Sabbatarian Adventists as lacking "childlike simplicity" and failing to persevere with a living vibrant faith. Those who were relying on human merit and feeling their unworthiness were encouraged to "look away from self to the worthiness of Jesus," while recognizing that their dependence and inability were proofs of their deep need for mercy and spiritual power.[255]Another 1850 vision likewise focused on spiritual revival. An angel explained that "a theory of faith will not save you; vital godliness you must have, the life and power of religion in the soul."[256] A similar vision tied this religious experience back to the issue of perfection. Satan's time was short, Ellen White claimed, and he was working to prevent believers from being sealed and placed "beyond his power," but they could overcome through "strong and living faith."[257]

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[254] Ellen G. White, "A Copy of E. G. White's Vision, Which She Had at Oswego, N. Y. January 26, 1850," January 28, 1850, Ms 4, 1850, EGWMC, EGWE.

[255] Ellen G. White, "A Vision the Lord Gave Me in Oswego, July 29, 1850," July 29, 1850, Ms 5, 1850,EGWMC, EGWE.

[256] Ellen G. White, "To the Church in Your Place," July, 1850, Ms 5a, 1850, EGWMC, EGWE.

[257] Ellen G. White, "A Vision the Lord Gave Me at Brother Harris', August 24, 1850," August 24, 1850, Ms 7, 1850, EGWMC, EGWE.

Beginning in 1850, Ellen White also started emphasizing the pursuit and experience of perfect love, a synonym for entire sanctification.[258] "Love one another as [God] has loved you." She wrote in one letter. "Swim, swim, swim, plunge deep, deep, deep in the ocean of God's love. Come into a nearness with God."[259] In another letter, she expressed a longing "to plunge deeper and deeper in the ocean of God's love and be wholly swallowed up in Him."[260] Expounding one month later on the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice to save the sinner from sin, she concluded that believers should not rest until they had come to know "the length and breadth, height and depth of perfect love."[261] Several years later, Ellen White wrote an account of her experience obtaining entire sanctification for the *Youth's Instructor*. "Dear Children," she encouraged, "you can be wholly consecrated to God, and rejoice in a full and free salvation. . . . Do not rest satisfied until you know that you love God with all your heart, and that his will is your will."[262] Similar language can be found scattered throughout her letters and manuscripts during the 1850s—often in the same paragraphs as rebukes against spiritual lethargy, worldliness, and empty, external religion. Certainly, Ellen White believed that God calls

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[258] It was commonly understood that "holiness, sanctification, entire consecration, perfect love, and the phrase 'wholly the Lord's,' are synonymous terms; as either state must necessarily include the other." See a reprint from *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, in "What Is Gospel Holiness, or Sanctification?," *Guide to Christian Perfection*, September, 1842, 58.

[259] Ellen G. White, "A Vision the Lord Gave Me at Sutton, Vermont," September 26-29, 1850, Ms 14, 1850, EGWMC, EGWE.

[260] Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Loveland, November 1, 1850, Letter 26, 1850, EGWCF, EGWE.

[261] White to Brother and Sister Loveland, December 13, 1850, Letter 30, 1850, EGWCF, EGWE.

[262] Ellen G. White, "Communications," *Youth's Instructor*, December, 1852, 22.

his people to a high standard of obedience. However, the only way to live out that life as she saw it was "to live humble, close to the bleeding side of Jesus."[263]

By the mid-1850s, the Whites, along with several other Sabbatarian Adventists, had moved to Battle Creek, Michigan. Although this was a period of growth and expansion, the spiritual condition of the general church body was gradually becoming worse. In response, Ellen White's letters and counsels began to remind believers that perfect love is the result of justification. Writing to early Adventist David Lamson in 1856, Ellen White enquired whether Jesus was his personal Savior or if he had lost his first love. Then, bursting forth in a rapturous description of Christ and his love, she petitioned him earnestly. "Oh come, David, come to salvation's Fountain and drink, that your soul may revive and flourish."[264] Meanwhile, she urged readers of the *Youth's Instructor* to repent and receive divine pardon and cleansing from sin so that "through the merits of Christ," they might enjoy the fruit of the Tree of Life.[265] Ellen White's overall message during the 1850s could be summarized by an 1856 statement. "If you love Jesus, your lives will be marked with that love."[266]

In October 1856, James White published an article in the *Review* that directly characterized the current spiritual condition within the church as Laodicean.[267] Ellen White immediately followed suit. Already, she had claimed, "full salvation from God is

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[263] Ellen G. White to Sister Kellogg, December 5, 1853, Lt 9, 1853, EGWCF, EGWE.

[264] Ellen G. White to David Lamson, January 1856, Lt 10, 1856, EGWCF, EGWE.

[265] Ellen G. White, "Salvation Through Christ," *Youth's Instructor*, August 1, 1856, [1].

[266] Ellen G. White, "The New Year," *Youth's Instructor*, January 1, 1856, [1].

[267] James White, "The Seven Churches," *Review and Herald*, October 16, 1856.

scarcely felt; daily communion with God and consecration to Him is a rare thing."[268] The problem, as Ellen White saw it, was a lack of love for God. "There are those in the church," she warned, "who love this world better than they love Jesus."[269] Not only this, but the lack of an indwelling Christ had translated, in some parts of the church, to a loss of love for each other. In its place, "a faultfinding, accusing spirit" had taken over, and "love and pity" had been utterly suffocated by a tendency to pick "at everything bearing the appearance of wrong."[270] Thus, Ellen White suggested that the key sin of the church was self-reliance and legalism. Pointing at this problem, she offered a solution:

> You do not trust enough in Jesus, precious Jesus. You do not make His worthiness to be all, all, as you should. The very best you can do will not make you merit the favor of God. It is Jesus' worthiness that will save us; His blood cleanses us. Do what you can on your part. Be zealous and repent, then believe.[271]

In other words, Ellen White's understanding of justification reflected Methodist doctrine. She clearly agreed that believers "are accounted righteous before God" by "the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus" and that good works following "after justification" are "pleasing and acceptable to God" as the "evidence of true faith."[272]

As the Laodicean message disseminated throughout the church, Adventists showed signs of responding to Ellen White's calls to pursue "perfect love." However, as the

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[268] Ellen G. White, "Testimony for Brethren Arnold and Ross," May 27, 1856, Ms 2, 1856, EGWMC, EGWE.

[269] Ellen G. White, "Lack of Appreciation for the Ministry," June 1857, Ms 1, 1857, EGWMC, EGWE.

[270] Ellen G. White, "Church Trials," July 24, 1857, Ms 2, 1857, EGWMC, EGWE. During this time, the infamous Laodicean "church trials" began to cause friction within the church. For a discussion on church trials, see Kevin M. Burton, "Cracking the Whip to Make a Perfect Church: The Purge of the Battle Creek Church on April 6, 1870," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 29:1–2 (2018)

[271] White, "Church Trials," July 24, 1857, Ms 2, 1857, EGWMC, EGWE.

[272] *Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* 13.

following accounts demonstrate, these efforts created a new problem. Testimonies and exhortations filtered into the *Review* from those who believed they had received this spiritual gift. For example, S. C. Wellcome wrote in early 1859 praising God for what had been done in his life. He explained that God had shown him his "sinful and lost condition" and revealed "the way of life and salvation." Coming to God in faith despite "having nothing but sinful self to give," love was "shed abroad" in his heart by the power of the Holy Ghost. "O what glory filled my soul!" he exclaimed. "What a fullness in Jesus! What perfect love to God and man! It seemed that I was bathing in the boundless ocean of his love." He then encouraged other Adventists to pursue "that perfect love that casts out fear" so that they could "love God so fervently" that they would "fear to offend him even in the smallest matter."[273]

A few months later, Elder B. F. Robbins addressed a letter to "the female disciples in the third angel's message." He expressed his fear that many Adventist women lacked "that entire heart consecration to God and his cause which requires of us all." He called for women to recognize their equality before God in receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he explained, "but a few months ago the testimony of a sister in a public assembly . . . resulted in the consecration of myself, my all, a living, and I trust an ever-consuming sacrifice upon the altar which sanctifies the gift laid upon it." He then encouraged his readers, "Let the consecration to God of your all be entire. Rest not until your all is in sacrifice laid upon the altar. Rest not until in perfect love you are consciously the Lord's, dead indeed unto sin . . . but alive unto God."[274]

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[273] S. C. Wellcome, "From Bro. Welcome," *Review and Herald*, February 10, 1859, 95.

[274] B. F. Robbins, "To the Female Disciples in the Third Angel's Message," *Review and Herald*, December 8, 1859, 22.

Other testimonies were in a similar vein. "Dear brethren and sisters," C. Drew wrote in January 1860, "if we are what we profess to be, we must be holy. This blessing, I believe, is for us in this life. I think I have known something about it." He then provided reasons why he believed the doctrine of "full sanctification in this life" was biblical before concluding, "We shall never hate sin with a perfect hatred, nor love God with a perfect love, till we are sanctified wholly."[275] J. H. Waggoner shared his opinion on the topic in February. "There is no neutral ground." He explained when expounding on 1 Peter 4:18: "It is either gathering or scattering; righteous or wicked; life or death. Not the bare absence of inveterate or openly avowed hatred, but active, perfect love is required. Not merely abstinence from great outbreaking sins, but holiness of heart, and walking in the Spirit."[276] M. E. Steward also shared her struggle to obtain entire sanctification. After several years of seeking the blessing, she related, "Suddenly my heart was shown me clean and pure. I clasped my hand upon it exclaiming, 'I have got it!' I went into the house shouting, 'Glory to God! I know I have a clean heart. . . . I know I am prepared for the coming of Christ.'" She described this experience as being obtained by faith "without any effort." The following day while praying, she received "the gift of the Holy Ghost," which she termed "a sample of the latter rain."[277] These testimonies continued appearing in the *Review* for several years, alongside articles aimed at promoting the teaching of

[275] C. Drew, "Christian Perfection," *Review and Herald*, January 26, 1860, 77.

[276] J. H. Waggoner, "The Day of the Lord, Its Length, Nature, Etc.," *Review and Herald*, February 16, 1860, 99.

[277] M. E. Steward, "Christian Experience," *Review and Herald*, July 31, 1860, 82.

entire sanctification. For example, in October 1860, the *Review* ran a two-part series on "perfect love" and how to obtain it drawn from selections by John Wesley.[278]

Instantaneous or Progressive? (1861–1863)

While these developments were occurring within Adventism, the Methodist Church was going through a period of soteriological controversy. In 1857, Benjamin Titus Roberts published an article in the *Northern Independent* titled "New School Methodism." In this article, Roberts accused the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, serving New York and Pennsylvania, of being controlled by a group of thirty preachers with new theology. These preachers had purportedly "held several secret meetings" in which they created "a plan to . . . spread their doctrines." The result was a devastating schism over "creeds" versus "liberalism."[279] Roberts called this group the "New School Methodists" and scathingly compared their theology with "Old School Methodists." Old School Methodists, he explained, taught that the "'principal grace of the inner Christian life' is LOVE TO GOD" and the conditions upon which the gospel is received are repentance and faith. By contrast, New School Methodists taught that the "chief and principal" grace of the Christian life is "love to man." Moreover, Old School Methodists taught that sanctification is a separate stage from justification. The New School Methodists, on the other hand, conflated the two states and taught "that when a sinner is pardoned, he is at the same time made holy—that all the spiritual change he may

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[278] John Wesley, "Satan's Devices," *Review and Herald*, October 2, 1860, 1860, 154–55; John Wesley, "Satan's Devices," *Review and Herald*, October 30, 1860, 186–87.

[279] Wilson T. Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church of North America*, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1915), 96–97.

henceforth expect is simply a growth in grace"[280] Essentially, the New School Methodists were promoting "very largely the Moravian view of holiness, or sanctification, as taught by Count Zinzendorf."[281]

Confounding the theological disagreement between the two parties was the fact that Old School Methodism had been largely influenced during the preceding two decades by Phoebe Palmer and her "shorter way."[282] Palmer, in turn, had been influenced not so much by Wesley but by Methodist theologian Adam Clarke, who rejected the gradual process of sanctification and emphasized the instantaneous aspect. Palmer also adopted Clarke's view that sanctification was not a goal of Christian life but its condition.[283] While Roberts believed he was upholding Wesleyanism in its pure form, he was, in fact, upholding a modified version of Wesleyanism. In 1860, the schism between the two groups had grown so decidedly that Roberts and his followers parted way with the Methodist Episcopal Church to form the Free Methodist Church. Seeking to uphold the doctrine of entire sanctification, they created an additional article of faith that "placed a special stress on Christian perfection."[284] However, a motion to include the gradual aspect of sanctification in the article was rejected in favor of maintaining "the instantaneous view" only.[285] It could be said at this juncture that American Methodism, as a Wesleyan institution, was dead.

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[280] Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church of North America,* 1:98–99.

[281] Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church of North America,* 1:13.

[282] Henry H. Knight, *From Aldersgate to Azusa Street: Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal Visions of the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 90–98.

[283] Arnold Klaus, *Full and Present Salvation in Christ: Life and Work of Theodor Jellinghaus* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 28–29.

[284] Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church of North America,* 1:39.

[285] Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church of North America,* 1:322.

Adventism also appears to have been influenced by Phoebe Palmer during these years. For example, S. C. Wellcome had framed his 1859 testimony in the *Review* in terms of "a living sacrifice to God," reflecting her model of laying oneself on the altar.[286] M. E. Steward's personal testimony also reads like a direct imitation of Palmer's book *The Way of Holiness*. Like Palmer, she struggled against doubts caused by "evil spirits" but could not seem to attain her goal, ultimately taking several years. On that point, she remarked, "I now see that I did not strive . . . in God's appointed way, and hence did not obtain. Six or seven months of struggling are not necessary." Like Palmer, she discovered that submission was entirely her own work, not the Lord's. Thus, she found a shorter way that was "the work of a moment, a simple volition and requiring no more time than other acts of the will, as for instance rising from our chair," or "leaving the room."[287]

In 1862 Ellen White published a testimony addressing this form of entire sanctification. She called Wellcome's theology "a false theory of sanctification" and "Methodist sanctification," which "wherever received destroys the love for the message." Meanwhile, she stated that M. E. Steward had "tried to follow out" this theory and had been carried "into dreadful fanaticism." Ellen White warned that many went "directly contrary to . . . scripture." This group of people did not "manifest the truth in their lives." While they experienced "special exercises upon sanctification," yet they "cast the word of God behind them," and their deeds testified against the truthfulness of their claims.

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[286] Wellcome, "From Bro. Welcome," 95. Phoebe Palmer wrote, "I now saw that I had obtained this blessing, by laying all upon the altar. I had retained it, by still keeping all upon the altar, 'a living sacrifice.' So long as it remained there, I perceived that both the faithfulness and the justice of God stood pledged for its acceptance." See Palmer, *The Way of Holiness,* 146.

[287] Steward, "Christian Experience," 81–82. Palmer described at length "severe buffetings from Satan." She also wrote about the "shorter way," calling it God's "own appointed way." See Palmer, *The Way of Holiness,* 15, 160.

Then, addressing the comment by M. E. Steward directly, she stated, "Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, or a day. It is a continual growth in grace. . . . As long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetments to overcome, and there is no stopping place. There is no point to which we can come and say we have fully attained." Ellen White, while repudiating Palmer's model of sanctification, however, did not reject the idea that perfection could be reached. "Jesus sits as a refiner and purifier of his people, and when his image is reflected in them perfectly, they are perfect and holy, and prepared for translation."[288]

The Road to Minneapolis (1864–1888)

Ellen White's correction regarding the progressive nature of sanctification triggered a response from the church. In 1864, D. T. Bourdeau published a book entitled *Sanctification or, Living Holiness*.[289] Bourdeau explained in his introduction that the purpose of the book was to present a subject "of momentous interest to the people of God. . . . upon which a great deal of misunderstanding exists, and wrong views by many entertained."[290] He grounded his understanding of sanctification upon human nature, stating unequivocally, "The depravity of our race is the doctrinal fact upon which rests the necessity of our being sanctified." Because of this foundational truth, he concurred that those who think they can turn themselves "from sin to holiness" have not come to "realize the depth of their degradation and misery, and have

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[288] Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 8 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1862), 39–44, 46.

[289] Daniel T. Bourdeau, *Sanctification or, Living Holiness* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist publishing Association, 1864).

[290] Bourdeau, *Sanctification,* 5.

not felt the force of this humbling truth, that they are carnal, sold under sin."[291] He argued that "Christians are sanctified or perfect as far as they understand and practice the truth;" therefore, "pious and devoted men and women" should expect to often mourn "the remains of inbred sin."[292] Despite this, Bourdeau believed that the third angel's message in Revelation possesses "all the sanctifying truths of God's word," and thus, "partial sanctification is not sufficient for the church living under the blazing light of the last message of mercy. They must be 'wholly' sanctified."[293] Bourdeau thus concluded that "it is possible to overcome fully and be wholly sanctified."[294] He estimated that "the last church will be one year on the earth without an intercessor, while the plagues are falling," thus necessitating the development of "perfect characters previous to the time of trouble."[295] How could Adventists reach the perfection required? Bourdeau's answer was simple: "Practice makes perfect."[296] Unfortunately, Bourdeau's book almost entirely focused on the standards that he expected Adventists to reach, and he provided little in the way of pointing his readers to Jesus or explaining how holiness might be brought into their lives by faith.

The effect of this view of sanctification appears to have counteracted Ellen White's primary goal. In 1870, she observed sadly that the works of church members residing in Battle Creek had "been in selfishness, in unrighteousness." Their works, she explained, had "not been wrought in God," and "their hearts [were] strangers to his renewing grace." They

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[291] Bourdeau, *Sanctification,* 6–7.

[292] Bourdeau, *Sanctification,* 10–12.

[293] Bourdeau, *Sanctification,* 19–20.

[294] Bourdeau, *Sanctification,* 104.

[295] Bourdeau, *Sanctification,* 106–07.

[296] Bourdeau, *Sanctification,* 111.

lacked "the transforming power which leads them to walk even as Christ walked."[297] Throughout the 1870s, Ellen White continued to push back against a legalistic model of sanctification. For example, in 1871, she warned that there was a danger "with a certain class of minds, of systematizing away the Spirit of God, and the vitality of the religion of Christ . . . preserving an exactness of a wearisome round of duties and ceremonies." She said that "God will not accept" this kind of service. Instead, believers must "be first consecrated by the surrender of the soul to him and his love."[298] A year later, she warned that the distinguishing mark of God's people "is not their profession alone, but their . . . character, and their principles of unselfish love," initiated by the "powerful and purifying influence of the Spirit of God upon the heart."[299] "Christ has done all for us because we were helpless . . . and could do nothing for ourselves." She emphasized. "It is through the exercise of faith, hope, and love, that we come nearer and nearer to the standard of perfect holiness."[300]

During the next decade, Ellen White increasingly placed sanctification within the context of the work that Christ has accomplished for us. "Jesus did not come to men with commands and threatenings, but with love that is without a parallel." She declared in 1874. "Christ came to the world to perfect a righteous character for many and to elevate the fallen race."[301] Within her framework, it is those who "reject the perfect righteousness Jesus offers

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[297] Ellen G. White, *Appeal to the Battle Creek Church* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870), 4.

[298] Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 20 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1871), 143.

[299] Ellen G. White, *Testimony to the Church,* no. 21a (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1872), 79.

[300] Ellen G. White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1872), 123.

[301] Ellen G. White, *Redemption; or the Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1874), 73.

them" after they have experienced justification who are condemned.[302] "Gather up your childlike faith," she encouraged her son, Edson. "You may find it . . . by placing your hand in the hand of Jesus Christ and letting Him lead you."[303] With this kind of faith, believers may "perfect Christian character in the name of Jesus who overcame on their behalf."[304]

Despite the soteriological confusion the Adventist church had experienced, Ellen White did not cease using Wesleyan language to describe her understanding of perfection. "My yearning heart's cry is for entire conformity to the will of God," she wrote to a friend in 1878. "I am not content. I must know the length, the breadth, the height and depth of perfect love. I cannot rest. . . . I must be imbued with His Spirit. I am hungering and thirsting after righteousness."[305] Elsewhere, she explained that "Christian perfection" could only be obtained through obedience to Scripture. She described this as a process of observation and imitation. "The Pattern must be inspected often and closely in order to imitate it. . . . By beholding [the Christian] becomes changed." While fixing attention "upon Christ, his image, pure and spotless, becomes enshrined in the heart," and "unconsciously . . . we become imbued with the spirit of the Master which we have so much admired."[306]

By the end of the 1870s, the church was hurtling toward the controversy and division of the 1888 General Conference session. Ellen White, meanwhile, continued to uphold "Christian perfection" as the only way that the body of Christ might become unified,

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[302] Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 24 (Battle Creek, MI: Stem Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1875), 46.

[303] Ellen G. White to J. E. White, October 28, 1874, Lt 56, 1874, EGWCF, EGWE.

[304] Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 25 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1875), 83.

[305] Ellen G. White to Sister Hall, June 19, 1878, Lt 29, 1878, EGWCF, EGWE

[306] Ellen White, "Search the Scriptures," *Review and Herald*, November 28, 1878, 1878, 169.

harmonize their wills with God's will, imitate Christ, become patient and kind, repulse Satan, and prepare for heaven.[307] In fact, she became more insistent and used the phrase "Christian perfection" more often as the 1880s progressed. In 1882, Ellen White published the book *Bible Sanctification: A Contrast of True and False Theories,* compiled from eleven articles she had published in the *Review* the previous year.[308] This book covered the same ground as D. T. Bourdeau's book on the topic with the addition that it placed obedience within the life of faith. She acknowledged that believers might feel they are "too great a sinner for Christ to save." However, she counseled her readers to "meet the tempter with the cry, 'By virtue of the atonement, I claim Christ as my Saviour. I trust not to my own merits, but to the precious blood of Jesus, which cleanses me.'"[309] Ellen White followed up the publication of this book with a series of articles on Luther, published in *Signs of the Times* between May and October 1883.[310] A further fourteen sermons against legalism were also published in the *Review* during the first half of 1884.[311] In 1887, she explained that "the result of union with Christ is purification of heart, a circumspect life, and a faultless character." However, those who attain "to this degree of Christian perfection are the last to claim that they have any merits of their own," instead feeling unworthy and depending entirely upon God.[312] A month later, she declared that it "is not only a privilege . . . but a duty, to reach the highest standard of

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[307] White, "Search the Scriptures," 169; Ellen G. White, "At the Southern Camp-Meeting," *Signs of the Times*, May 25, 1882, 235; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:170, 311, 408, 479.

[308] Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1937), 5.

[309] Ellen G. White, *Bible Sanctification: A Contrast of True and False Theories*, (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1882), 76.

[310] *Signs of the Times*, May 31, 1883–September 20, 1883

[311] *Review and Herald*, March 4, 1884–July 8, 1884

[312] Ellen G. White, "Christ the True Vine," *Signs of the Times*, March 10, 1887, 146.

Christian perfection."[313] Finally, in 1888, she wrote, "There is nothing the church lacks so much as the manifestation of Christlike love. . . . Power is provided in Christ sufficient to enable us to reach the high standard of Christian perfection."[314]

Receive Ye the Holy Ghost (1889–1901)

Following 1888, the Seventh-day Adventist Church experienced a revitalization of the doctrine of justification by faith. Ellen White immediately supported it, saying, "The present message—justification by faith—is a message from God; it bears the divine credentials, for its fruit is unto holiness."[315] One of the key figures in this awakening was A. T. Jones. By 1892, Jones had begun incorporating language into his discourses and writing that reflected a developing theology of perfection. In particular, he began teaching "that the Holy Spirit was about to descend" and be manifested in the work of physical healing.[316] Jones was picking up—and radicalizing—elements of Ellen White's own theology. From her teenage years, she had always understood "entire sanctification" or "Christian perfection" to be a work performed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and she had continued to teach this. In the late 1880s, she started using the phrase "baptism of the Holy Spirit" to describe this process of indwelling and perfection. For example, writing in 1888 about the day of Pentecost, she stated that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit . . . is no less necessary in this age." She encouraged her readers to "obtain this heavenly gift, and realize, by a blessed experience, what is the meaning of the words of the apostle: 'filled with all the fullness of God.'" With

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[313] Ellen G. White, "Courtesy in Workers for God," *Review and Herald*, April 26, 1887, 257.

[314] Ellen G. White, "Counsel to Ministers," October 21, 1888, Ms 8a, 1888, EGWMC, EGWE.

[315] Ellen G. White, "Camp-Meeting at Rome, N. Y.," *Review and Herald*, September 3, 1889, 545.

[316] Gary Land, *The A to Z of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 135.

such an experience, she promised, "the beauty of holiness will be seen in your life."[317] Similarly, in 1889, she wrote, "The baptism of the Holy Spirit" will result in the hearts of his followers being pervaded by "the love of Jesus."[318]

In 1893, Ellen White sent a series of letters to A. T. Jones. One of these clarified the experience of justification should lead to a life of good works. "While good works will not save even one soul," she warned, "yet it is impossible for even one soul to be saved without good works."[319] This appears to mark a shift in his relationship to faith.[320] Meanwhile, revivals were occurring at various Adventist events. In 1892, the Adventist church in Colorado reported, "We have felt some of the droppings of the latter rain in our meetings of late. . . . We have every reason to believe that the Lord is ready to do a great work for his people."[321] A. P. Heacock from Alabama also praised God that they had "been permitted to feel and see some of the droppings of the latter rain."[322] Writing from Kansas in 1893, W. W. Stebbins and A. E. Field similarly shared that their meetings had recently been attended with "a manifestation of God's Spirit."[323] These testimonies increased in frequency so much that at the end of 1894, F. M. Wilcox wrote that where there was "one instance of divine manifestation last year, there are ten this. Have we

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[317] Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, February 24, 1888.

[318] Ellen G. White to Howard Miller, June 2, 1889, Lt 5, 1889, EGWCF, EGWE.

[319] Ellen G. White to A. T. Jones, April 9, 1893, Lt 44, 1893, EGWCF, EGWE

[320] George R. Knight, *A. T. Jones: Point Man on Adventism's Charismatic Frontier* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2011), 105–10.

[321] George W. Anglebarger, "Colorado," *Review and Herald*, June 28, 1892, 412.

[322] A. P. Heacock, "Alabama," *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892, 731.

[323] W. W. Stebbins, and A. E. Field, "Kansas," *Review and Herald*, May 2, 1893, 284.

witnessed droppings of the latter rain in our past history, we have now reached the time of its outpouring, the season of bountiful, refreshing showers."[324]

By 1897, Jones, having been redirected by Ellen White in 1893 to focus more on sanctification, was convinced that the message for the hour was, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." He tied this message directly into his soteriology. He argued that "God is a consuming fire only to sin." Therefore, if a Christian were to "open wide to him, heart, soul, and spirit,—the whole being,—and bid him welcome," then "the perfection of his holiness" would consume all sin "within and about" and make them a "partaker of his holiness."[325] "Therefore," he concluded elsewhere, "instead of being required to be perfect in order to receive the Holy Spirit, we must receive the Holy Spirit in order to be perfect."[326] He explained the relationship of perfection to justification in terms of the presence of the Holy Spirit. He believed that Christians must be righteous in order to receive the Holy Spirit, but this can only be accomplished through faith. "The righteousness that is *imputed* to the new-born believer in Jesus" makes "the life righteous," so that the Holy Spirit can come "upon the new-created believer in Jesus . . . *imparting* the righteousness of God, that, instead of sin, the life may forever bear the fruits of righteousness."[327]

In 1898, A. T. Jones' prior interest in faith healing found a new expression. He hypothesized that "perfect holiness can not be attained without health." He came to this

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[324] F. M. Wilcox, "Notes from the Field: Reading for Wednesday, December 26," *Home Missionary Extra*, December, 1894, 19.

[325] Alonzo T. Jones, "Editorial," *Review and Herald*, October 26, 1897, 678.

[326] Alonzo T. Jones, "Unto Perfection," *Review and Herald*, December 14, 1897, 790.

[327] Jones, "Unto Perfection," 790.

conclusion by observing that the English word "whole" originates from the Old English word *hāl*, meaning "hale, hearty, whole, *saved*." He then took this idea one step further and declared that "perfect holiness embraces the flesh as well as the spirit; it includes the body as well as the soul."[328] Even though Jones meant only to indicate that perfect saints would practice the health message perfectly, resulting in perfect health, Adventist leaders in Indiana took these ideas more literally.[329] They started teaching "that true conversion replaces corruptible earthly flesh with incorruptible 'translation flesh,' thereby producing 'born' sons of God who would live to see Christ's reappearing."[330] This new "fanaticism" reached its peak at the 1900 Indiana camp meeting. Stephen N. Haskell was present at this camp meeting as a representative of the General Conference and was "appalled" by what he observed. His wife, who was with him, quickly wrote a letter to Ellen White's secretary.[331]

Ellen White responded to the "Holy Flesh" movement with a testimony that she read to the ministers at the General Conference session in 1901. In this testimony, she outlined her views on Christian perfection perhaps more clearly than she had yet done. She declared that "while we cannot claim perfection of the flesh, we may have Christian perfection of the soul." This is obtained by surrendering "ourselves wholly to God" and fully believing that "the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin." It is "through faith in His blood" that "all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus." She exclaimed,

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[328] Alonzo T. Jones, "Saving Health," *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1898, 752.

[329] Knight, *A. T. Jones,* 194.

[330] Land, *The A to Z of the Seventh-day Adventists,* 135.

[331] Norma J. Collins, *Heartwarming Stories of Adventist Pioneers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2007), 109.

"Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities! We may claim sanctification." She counseled her listeners "not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute." Ellen White then concluded her testimony by affirming where A. T. Jones had been correct. "We need to contemplate Christ," she said, "and become assimilated to His image through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit."[332]

This response to the "Holy Flesh" movement echoes Ellen White's statement in Christ's Object Lessons which had been published the year before. "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people," she had stated, "then He will come to claim them as His own." How might this be achieved? "As you receive the Spirit of Christ . . . you will grow and bring forth fruit."[333] In Ellen White's view, the perfection of Christ could only belong to the believer who has received the Holy Spirit. It is with the regenerating power of spiritual life that spiritual fruit is produced. Spurned on by this encouragement, efforts to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit among church members continued after 1901. However, a survey of Adventist literature from 1901 to 1907 suggests that aside from Ellen White, within a few years, only A. G. Daniells was still regularly contributing feature articles to Adventist publications on the topic of the Holy Spirit.[334]

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[332] Ellen G. White, "Regarding the Late Movement in Indiana," April 17, 1901, Ms. 76a, 1901, EGWMC, EGWE.

[333] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1900), 67–69

[334] For example, see A. G. Daniells, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit" *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1906, 6–7 and A. G. Daniells, "The Church's Greatest Need To-Day," *Signs of the Times Australia*, September 30, 1907, 617

Onward to Perfection (1902–1915)

In the final years of her life, Ellen White continued to develop the theme of perfection, often within the context of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It becomes clear that the daily work that Ellen White attributed to sanctification is a relational work of coming near to God by faith and being filled with his presence. She insisted that believers may "receive every day the baptism of the Holy Spirit."[335] "Christ must dwell in your hearts," she said elsewhere, "as the blood is in the body, and circulate there as a vitalizing power."[336] There is also an indication that she conceived of a special work of the Holy Spirit beyond the daily experience. "Before giving us the baptism of the Holy Spirit," she wrote in 1902, "our heavenly Father will try us, to see if we can live without dishonoring Him. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." She followed this with a caution. "Do not think, my children, that you have received all the spiritual help you need. And do not think that you can have great spiritual blessings without complying with the conditions God Himself has laid down. . . . Live very near the mercy seat."[337]

Ellen White described the order of events within her soteriological framework in 1903. Beginning with justification, the outline explains much of her seemingly confusing statements about the daily work of sanctification and the fullness of perfect love.

> If a man sow true repentance, he will reap the reward of sound, good works. If he continues in the faith, he reaps peace. If he becomes sanctified and cleansed from his appetite for cheapness and folly, he shall—if he continues to sow in faith and repentance and hope—reap righteousness and perfect love. If he continues to sow faith, he shall reap. He subordinates himself to an entirely different experience, accepts daily the sanctifying processes, and a continuance in the well-doing in

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[335] Ellen G. White, "A Message to the Los Angeles Church," August 19, 1901, Ms 80, 1901, EGWMC, EGWE.

[336] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:189.

[337] Ellen White to J. E. White and Emma White, February 1, 1902, Lt 22, 1902, EGWCF, EGWE.

> overcoming makes him a daily victor because he keeps the mark of Christ's perfection ever before him.[338]

Thus, Ellen White conceived of sanctification as a constant experience of growth springing up out of justification and progressing onward to the point of "perfect love," in which the whole heart is controlled by love for God and others. Even after perfect love is attained, however, she saw a continuing daily experience, ever growing, ever overcoming. In 1913, Ellen White made one of her final statements on perfection. She wrote that she had "been pleading with God to reveal to every [Adventist] the beauty of holiness." She exhorted believers to fix their eyes on Christ's perfection and "be melted by God's grace and sanctified through the truth."[339]

Conclusion

Ellen White's theology of perfection remained largely unchanged throughout her lifetime. As a teenager, she believed that she had received the gift of "entire sanctification" and testified to this experience during a Methodist class meeting. Her first visions, rather than pointing her away from perfection, encouraged Ellen White to believe that perfection is a necessary grace for translation and a qualifying characteristic for receiving the Seal of the Living God. Thus, throughout the 1850s, Ellen White counseled Adventists to pursue "perfect love." In the early 1860s, many Adventists were influenced by Methodist ideas, primarily originating with Phoebe Palmer. These Adventists began to promote a model of instantaneous sanctification that denied the necessity of growth or progression. In response,

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[338] Ellen White to Leaders in the Medical Work, August 4, 1903, Lt 291, 1903, EGWCF, EGWE.

[339] Ellen White, "Interview/Report of an Interview with Elder E. E. Andross Regarding Loma Linda," October 2, 1913, Ms 22, 1913, EGWMC, EGWE.

Ellen White clarified that sanctification is the work of a lifetime, not a one-time momentary act. Towards the end of the 1880s, Ellen White began to refer to perfection as a baptism of the Holy Spirit. While Adventists responded favorably to the message and experienced revival, A. T. Jones went beyond Ellen White's theology and suggested that moral perfection requires perfect health. The result was an outbreak of fanaticism in Indiana among those who thought that they could receive "holy flesh." In response, Ellen White clarified that perfection is grounded by faith in Christ's imputed righteousness and involves the soul only. Toward the end of her life, Ellen White communicated a clear soteriological model that was progressive but included four distinct stages of development. Each of these was defined in terms of the believer's relationship to God and depended on the continued exercise of faith: pardon, empowerment, peace, and perfect love.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

From a superficial perspective, John Wesley and Ellen White shared many traits in common. Both religious leaders experienced difficulties understanding how to be saved and find assurance with God. Both were influential in the establishment of uniquely American denominations, and both believed that God intended his followers to pursue lives of holiness and obedience to the Ten Commandments. The previous chapters demonstrate, however, that they were also very different from each other. While Ellen White was excommunicated from the Methodist denomination, Wesley never separated from the Church of England. Wesley was also quite brash and direct in his personality, being described prior to his conversion as "odd" and "distasteful."[340] The account of Ellen White's early experience, on the other hand, gives the impression that she was reticent to be the center of attention. Regardless of character traits, however, Ellen White's early soteriology was indebted to Wesley. To what extent and for how long will be analyzed in this closing chapter.

The Role of Justification

Justification was the primary doctrine that triggered Wesley's conversion. Naturally, he gave justification a crucial role within his model of soteriology. He

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[340] Percival, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont: Diary of the First Earl of Egmont,* 2:481.

reasoned—both from Scripture and his own experience—that "all men are sinners against God and breakers of his law." Because of this "can no man by his works be justified and made righteous before God." Since no one can earn justification or make themselves righteous, righteousness must be received as a free gift by faith. This gift, he declared, "is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification."[341] Wesley was also very clear that sanctification does not supersede justification. Good works may and should be done, he said. "But we may not do them . . . to be justified by doing them" because "our corruption through original sin is so great that all our faith, charity, words, and works cannot merit or deserve any part" of our salvation.[342] Wesley taught that justification provides the Christian with "a sure trust and confidence to be saved . . . by Christ," from which follows "a loving heart to obey his commandments."[343] In other words, justification, for Wesley, is the root from which holiness grows up and flourishes and on which it continually depends.

Ellen White appears to have retained her Wesleyan assumptions about human nature and the role of justification. As early as 1857, she counseled Adventists to "make [Jesus'] worthiness to be all, all," since the best that anyone "can do will not make [them] merit the favor of God." Ellen White believed that "it is Jesus' worthiness that will save us; His blood" that "cleanses us." Ellen White remained unwavering in this view throughout her life. In 1901, she advised believers "not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our

[341] Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I,* 32.

[342] Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I,* 32–37.

[343] Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I, 37.*

Substitute."[344] Ellen White upheld the view, like Wesley, that "justification by faith. . . bears the divine credentials, for its fruit is unto holiness."[345]

As discussed in chapter one, William Lesher and Rolf Pöhler have suggested that Ellen White's understanding of justification became more Lutheran later in her life, such that she identified justification as "the highest stage which the Christian can reach in this life."[346] However, this view appears to lack a clear understanding of both Wesley's and White's theological models. Firstly, as has been clearly demonstrated, Wesley, as well as White, believed that justification is the Christian's only ground for salvation. Secondly, both perceived that a life of holiness springs up or arises out of the justification experience.

The Nature of Sanctification

Wesley is often misunderstood in terms of the nature of sanctification. While he believed that there is an immediate work of grace that can be done in the heart to bring a believer into a state of perfect love, he qualified his views with several caveats. First, he did not teach that perfection is "absolute" or "infallible," and he did not "contend for" the term "sinless." He also believed that perfection is "capable of being lost" and is "constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work."[347] In fact, it is perhaps unfortunate that Wesley used the term "instantaneous" at all since it appears he was merely attempting to

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[344] White, "Regarding the Late Movement in Indiana," April 17, 1901, Ms 76a, 1901, EGWMC, EGWE.

[345] White, "Camp-Meeting at Rome, N. Y.," 545.

[346] Pöhler, "Sinless Saints or Sinless Sinners," 108; Lesher, "Ellen G. White's Concept of Sanctification," 283–84.

[347] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II,* 187.

communicate distinct stages of development rather than an immediate state of sinlessness. His use of the term "instantaneous" was, in fact, connected to faith rather than speed. He declared that "perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith," but the "instant" act of faith is preceded and followed by "a gradual work." [348]

Ellen White was more careful than Wesley in describing the process of salvation. "Sanctification," she said, "is not the work of a moment, an hour, or a day. It is a continual growth in grace."[349] Like Wesley, however, she also conceived of perfection as a state in which there will still be "self to subdue, besetments to overcome."[350] Clearly, Ellen White did not envision the attainment of holiness prior to glorification as absolute, and like Wesley, she never used the term "sinless perfection" to describe Christian believers. In addition, Ellen White also communicated a model comprising of distinct stages of growth. Through the continual exercise of faith, Ellen White saw the Christian life as one that progressed from repentance to good works and from good works to peace until, at last, "righteousness and perfect love" have become the daily experience.[351]

The nature of perfection is an area of confusion on the part of several Adventist scholars who have commented on Ellen White's theological relationship to John Wesley. Lesher, Pöhler, Young, and Mamrimbing all identified instantaneous sanctification as an area of major divergence between Wesley and White, with Young even stating that instantaneous sanctification, which Ellen White rejected, was "the central teaching of John Wesley."[352]

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[348] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II,* 198–99.

[349] White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 8, 39–44, 46.

[350] White, *Testimony for the Church,* no. 8, 39–44, 46.

[351] White to Leaders in the Medical Work, August 4, 1903, Lt 291, 1903, EGWCF, EGWE.

[352] Young, "John Calvin, John Wesley, and Ellen White's *Steps to Christ*: A Comparison," 61

This conclusion is incorrect primarily because Wesley did not perceive "instantaneous sanctification" to be a static, entirely sinless state, which precludes further growth in grace. Neither did Ellen White view progressive sanctification as a process lacking any distinctive stages of growth that could be attained through faith. Indeed, as shown in Chapter 4, Ellen White's rejection of "instantaneous sanctification" was more directly related to countering ideas promoted by Phoebe Palmer, who herself had diverged from Wesley by presenting perfection as an immediately accessible, permanent grace available to all Christians on demand. In this regard, Duffie seems correct by affirming that Wesley's view of instantaneous sanctification was "a remarkably non-instantaneous kind of instantaneous" that is compatible with Ellen White's articulation of gradual sanctification.[353]

The Necessity of Perfection

Wesley taught that the attainment of perfection is a necessity for all believers at some point in their lives. He ambiguously placed this point somewhere between conversion and the close of personal probation. It is "not so early as justification" and "not so late as death," he explained.[354] However, he did not think Christians should be anxious about dying before achieving perfection, apparently believing that God will grant perfection to a faithful Christian as a gift just prior to death if it has not already been attained.[355] Whatever the case may be, although Wesley did not believe that sanctification makes a sinner righteous—this being the function of justification by

[353] Duffie, "John Wesley and Cross Currents in Adventism," 21–23.

[354] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I,* 187.

[355] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I,* 75.

faith—it seems he also did not believe that a person can be fit for the presence of Jesus without having received his imparted righteousness.

Ellen White appears to have taken this principle further than Wesley. Her early visions communicated the necessity of perfection in order to receive the Seal of God prior to his second coming. Thus, instead of telling Adventist believers not to be anxious if they had not achieved perfection, she continually encouraged them to press forward to perfection in order to be ready when Christ will appear in the clouds of glory. She depicted Jesus "as a refiner and purifier of his people" and wrote that "when his image is reflected in them perfectly, they are perfect and holy, and prepared for translation."[356] Ellen White also explained the process by which perfection could be given to faithful Christians as a "baptism of the Holy Spirit," which is just as necessary now as it was in the days of Pentecost.[357] Although Ellen White went beyond Wesley in this regard, she did not go to the extreme position taught by Phoebe Palmer, that everyone must achieve perfection in order to be a Christian or that it is a permanent state that cannot be lost. Instead, she held that everyone who is a Christian should pursue perfection and that only those who are sealed are beyond the possibility of moral failure.

From this comparison, it appears that Whidden was correct in his estimation that Ellen White, like John Wesley, perceived sanctification to be an important "higher stage" in the Christian experience and that her "later expositions of sanctification. . . never effaced the essentially Wesleyan orientation."[358] However, his conclusion that

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[356] White, *Testimony for the Church*, no. 8, 39–44, 46.

[357] White, *The Signs of the Times*, February 24, 1888.

[358] Whidden, "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White," 45–47.

Phoebe Palmer partially influenced Ellen White's early understanding of sanctification does not appear supported by current data. Whidden's only reason for this conclusion is his observation that Palmer required those who had attained "entire sanctification" to share their testimony, which Ellen White did on several occasions.[359] As demonstrated in Chapter 3, however, testifying to the experience of "entire sanctification" was common among Methodists long before Phoebe Palmer began teaching her views. In fact, as was noted in Chapter 2, Wesley himself instructed his followers to share their testimony of attaining perfection by stating "the particulars which God has wrought," such as freedom from pride or anger or being filled with perfect love.[360] Ellen White's language in her testimony reflects Wesley's guidance and lacks any unique linguistic indicators pointing toward Phoebe Palmer's "altar theology." There is no mention in Ellen White's testimony of typical terms used by Palmer, such as "a living sacrifice," "laying all on the altar," "a shorter way," or "the appointed way."

Recommendations for Further Research

This thesis has attempted to compare John Wesley's soteriology with Ellen White's while providing context to help differentiate his theology from views that were current in Methodism during Ellen White's lifetime. There are several areas that could not be addressed thoroughly in this paper for which further research would be beneficial. The first is Ellen White's understanding of inward sin in comparison to Wesley. Wesley appears certain that perfection can result in the complete or at least partial eradication of

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[359] Whidden, "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White," 47.

[360] Chilcote and Collins, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II,* 90.

fallen human nature, thus removing all temptations caused by inward sin. Ellen White's statements that were encountered during the research process, however, seem ambiguous, with some statements appearing to contradict Wesley's conclusion and others seeming to support it. Another area of potential research that could be greatly expanded upon is the relationship between nineteenth-century Adventists and Phoebe Palmer, as well as the broader holiness movement that arose out of her influence.

Conclusion

John Wesley and Ellen White appear to have held almost identical models of soteriology, particularly in regard to the preeminence of justification as the cause of salvation for sinful, fallen humanity and the calling for all Christians to press toward perfection. Both Wesley and White conceived of sanctification as a progressive work moving toward definite stages of growth and holiness. Both also viewed perfection as a state that must be reached in this lifetime if the believer expects to live in the presence of a holy God. However, there are nuanced differences. For example, while Wesley emphasized immediate faith with his term "instantaneous sanctification," Ellen White emphasized the need to continually exercise faith day by day. Whereas Wesley emphasized the outcome of perfection resulting in perfect love and obedience, Ellen White went beyond this description to emphasize knowing God and reflecting his image by looking to Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, while Ellen White affirmed all the major points of Wesley's soteriology, she expanded and adapted the doctrine of perfection by placing it more securely within the bounds of a personal relationship with an indwelling God.

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