

Collins, Kenneth J. *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997. 256 pp. Paperback, \$18.95.

This study of Wesley's soteriology is the latest in a recent spate of surveys of Wesley's theology. Following Thomas C. Oden's *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity* (Zondervan, 1994) and Randy Maddox's *Responsible Grace* (Kingswood Books [Abingdon], 1994), *The Scripture Way of Salvation* is probably the most detailed analysis of Wesley's soteriology to appear since Harold Lindstrom's *Wesley on Sanctification* (1946).

Building on a 1984 Drew University doctoral dissertation devoted to a study of Wesley's conception and use of law, Collins's first work was *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons* (Zondervan, 1989), followed by *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology* (Wesley Heritage Press, 1993). Whereas *Wesley on Salvation* limited itself to the Standard Sermons, and *A Faithful Witness* gave a more general survey of the entirety of Wesley's theology (including a section on soteriology), this latest effort represents Collins's most comprehensive study of salvation. Collins draws upon the entire corpus of Wesley's primary writings and vigorously interacted with the most influential students of Wesley's soteriology in the last half of the twentieth century (especially Albert Outler and Randy Maddox).

In seven compactly written chapters, all of the major facets of Wesley's teaching on salvation are addressed. Working from a theme that has received further attention in his recent biography of Wesley (*A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley* [Abingdon, 1999]), Collins argues that nothing less than a full-orbed experience of the renewing grace of God can constitute a person as a "Real Christian." Such an experience involves dynamic movement "from prevenient, to convincing (legal repentance), to justifying, to regenerating, to convincing (evangelical repentance), to entirely sanctifying, and ultimately to assuring (full) grace" (188). Possibly the most helpful insight that Collins offers is found in his analysis of the order and parallel nature of the two major moments on the *via salutis*—justification and entire sanctification (188-190).

Like Maddox, Collins has sought to mine Wesley extensively and to interact self-consciously with the major secondary works. The reader will detect a fairly marked polemical tone in Collins's work (especially contra Maddox) as he tenaciously argues for two key points: (1) Any treatment of Wesley's soteriology must give far greater weight to Scripture (what could be characterized as a more Magisterial Reformation perspective) than to "experience" or tradition (185, 186). This is in contrast to Maddox, who reads Wesley in a more Anglican manner, giving greater weight to experience and tradition, especially the influence of the Eastern Fathers, than does Collins. (2) Closely related to the issue of Wesley's "normative theological elements," Collins' firm conviction that not only the "process" or continuous aspects of Wesley's soteriology must be duly noted, but also its discontinuous or instantaneous moments. Such "instantaneous moments" suggest, according to Collins, that Wesley should be read as having a definite order in his understanding of the way of salvation. The larger Wesleyan salvation experience includes the moments of the "new birth" and its accompanying work of justification and the "second blessing" of instantaneous sanctification, or perfect

love. The former is an instantaneous deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, and the latter is a deliverance from the "being" of sin.

I will leave it to the reader to settle this issue with Maddox and Collins. Both treatments are masterful and exhaustive. I sense that Collins has, to some extent, the better of the argument when it comes to his emphasis on the importance of the instantaneous moments in Wesley, as opposed to "some amorphous process, marked by barely distinguishable increments of grace" (188).

On the debit side, I must confess some disappointment in Collins's treatment of Wesley on justification and imputation (88, 90). There is a sense that he has not grappled sufficiently with the seemingly contradictory way that Wesley treats imputation. Such a criticism leads to one final theological observation. Collins has, thus far in his career, devoted enormous energy and time to analyzing and describing Wesley's theology. He most certainly cares deeply about Wesley's theology, and it is clear that Wesley is the most formative part of Christian tradition for Collins's own theology. In view of this passionate pursuit of Wesleyan soteriology, I would challenge Collins to do something akin to what Theodore Runyon (in the more centrist Methodist tradition—see his *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* [Abingdon: 1998]) and John B. Cobb (in the liberal and process wing of the same tradition—see his *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* [Abingdon: 1995]) have done: produce a work on soteriology in which he confronts the truth question with Wesley. In other words, I challenge Collins to bring Wesley (in good Protestant fashion) to the severe test of the anvil of Scripture and answer not only the question of "what" Wesley actually taught, but the "so what" questions: (1) Is Wesley's thought true to Scripture? and (2) How does Wesley speak to contemporary soteriological issues, especially to the issues of personal salvation? For instance, can Wesley's views on justification (how imputation relates to sanctification), and especially his views on instantaneous sanctification and Christian assurance, really stand up to the truth question in the light of the scriptural witness? Furthermore, does instantaneous sanctification have any precedents in the Christian tradition?

The Scripture Way of Salvation will certainly take its place alongside Oden's and Maddox's works (and possibly Theodore Runyon's *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*) as one of the standard surveys of Wesley's soteriology for the coming decade (if not generation). It should be required reading for all courses on Wesleyan theology and recommended reading for anyone seeking an introduction to Wesley's soteriology.

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Crossan, John Dominic. *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998. 544 pp. Hardcover, \$30.00.

Crossan begins his book by clearly outlining its scope: Christianity in Palestine in the 30s and 40s of the first century. He explicitly limits his investigation to the time period before Paul's epistles.

Much of the book, and quite rightly so, deals with the issue of methodology.