

HOLY PERSONS
Thomas A. Noble
Professor of Theology
Nazarene Theological Seminary

Our holistic approach to our Articles of Faith in this conference brings us now to the fifth paper, ‘Holy Persons’. Here we come to the area of doctrine which we usually deal with under the heading of ‘Christian Holiness’. But in this conference our method is somewhat different: we are trying to look *holistically* at holiness as it relates to every area of our sixteen Articles of Faith. And so here especially, I want to attempt to look at our traditional doctrine of ‘Christian holiness’ *holistically*, that is, in the context of Christian Theology considered as an organic whole. To do that, I want to relate Christian holiness to the topics of each of the other five papers, that is, to ‘Holy Trinity’, ‘Holy Sacrifice’, ‘Holy Spirit’, ‘Holy Church’, and ‘Holy Mission’. But because of limits of space, I will have to concentrate mainly on the first two topics (in sections 1 and 2), and deal with the others together somewhat more briefly (in section 3).

1. Christian Holiness and the Holy Trinity

According to John Zizioulas, the concept of ‘person’ has its historical origin in Christian Theology.¹ The ancients had no such word in their vocabulary – in any language. They might talk of ‘souls’ and some of them

¹ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (St Vladimir’s, 1985)

might even believe that the human ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ was inherently divine, but they lacked the concept of the ‘person’. It is all the more ironic (and sad) then, that fairly early in the story of Christian Theology, the word ‘person’ was misunderstood because of the definition given by Boethius (5th century), ‘an individual substance of rational nature’.² If there ever was an *impersonal* definition of personhood, that was it! It was so detached, distant and uninvolved, so supposedly ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’. In true Aristotelian fashion it began with what was general (the *genus*), namely ‘nature’, that which was held in common. It then moved to what was more specific (the *species*), namely that it was the ‘rational’ kind of nature, and then finally to an actual concrete instance of that rational nature, the ‘individual’. There, with what was ‘individual’, or *indivisa* - that which could not be further subdivided - you had reached as far as you could go. You had ‘defined’ (set *fines* or limits on) the ultimate particular, according to its ‘type’ or ‘kind’. You had reached the basic ‘atomic’³ reality of what humanity was – the *individual*. And therein, in the way in which that Boethian definition of ‘person’ was understood, interpreted against the whole Hellenistic idea of an inherently and independently immortal divine ‘soul’, was the seed of the rampant *individualism* which was to reach its peak in the age of modernity.

² Boethius, *The Theological Tractates and the Consolations of Philosophy*, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester, new edition (Harvard University Press, 1978)

³ ‘Atom’ comes from the Greek *a-tomos*, that which is ‘in-divisible’.

The Immanent Trinity of Interpersonal Love

But that, as Zizioulas points out, was not the Christian origin of the concept of ‘person’ at all. The Latin word *persona* originated in the theatre, where each actor in classical drama had to ‘sound’ (*sonare*) his words ‘through’ (*per*) a mask, the *per-sona*. From there, the word came to refer to the *rôle* the actor played in the drama, the *dramatis persona*. And the essence of drama lay in the dramatic interchange, the *relationships* between the dramatic characters in the course of the narrative. But Zizioulas maintains that the essence of classical tragedy lay in the fact that although the hero tried to assert his independent *persona* or ‘character’ to shape the course of events, in fact the *persona* had no reality. The hero could not shape the course of events because his *persona* was an illusion. It was not ‘persons’ in their interrelationships who shaped the future. The future of events was actually shaped by the Fates. The tragedy came as the hero was destroyed by hurling himself against what the Fates had decreed.⁴

The Latin theologian, Tertullian, had been first in writing to apply the word *persona* to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the three *rôles* played by the one God in the drama of salvation. The implication was that these Three had their very *being* in their *inter-relationships*. The Father was only ‘Father’ in that he was the Father of this unique Son: the Son was only ‘Son’ in that he was

⁴ Whether Zizioulas is right about classical tragedy does not really affect the theological point.

the Son of this unique Father (see Luke 10:21). But the contribution of Greek Christian Theology (argues Zizioulas) was to use another word. Instead of speaking of three *prosopa* in God (*prosopon* in the singular, meaning ‘face’ or ‘mask’, being commonly translated into Latin by the word *persona*), the Greek theologians, following Origen, spoke of three *hypostaseis*. *Hypostasis* (the singular form) usually meant ‘the underlying reality of some specific concrete entity’. In other words, the Greek theologians were asserting that God did not just appear to be three *personae* or masks: the three *personae* were objectively real. God *really is* Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to Zizioulas, then God has his very *Being* in the inter-personal *koinonia* – the ‘communion’ of love and fellowship – of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The implication is that the ‘holiness’ of the ‘Holy Trinity’ lies in the fact that God is a fellowship of divine *Love*.⁵ These Three Persons are the reality and origin of ‘Holy Personhood’, and these ‘Holy Persons’ may be distinguished by their *inter-relationships* as revealed in the drama of salvation.⁶

⁵ Ironically, given Zizioulas’s thesis, the Greek Fathers missed that! It was Augustine who first proposed that the Holy Trinity was a communion of love: the Lover, the Beloved and the Love between them. I do not suggest that Zizioulas has written the last word on the Trinity. See the sympathetic critique of Zizioulas at the end of Chapter 4 of Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion* (T. & T. Clark, 1996), and my article, ‘East and West in the Theology of John Wesley,’ in the forthcoming supplement to the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* comprising papers at the Wesley Tercentenary Conference held at the University of Manchester, *John Wesley: Life, Legend and Legacy*.

⁶ Theologians use the word ‘personhood’, *not* ‘personality’, which is a psychological term for a construct which enables us to classify people into ‘personality groups’ on the basis of a list of traits. ‘Person’ in Christian Theology has quite a different meaning: it is an ontological, not a psychological term, and it refers to the *unique* reality of each ‘person’. Persons (as distinct from personalities) are beyond classification. God is Three Persons, *not* three personalities. It is clear then from what Zizioulas has written, that the concept of ‘person’ emerged from Christian Theology long before it was taken up by the

The approach of Zizioulas then is in accord with many theologians who have been part of the revival of vibrant new thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity in the last sixty years. Generally, the ‘social’ model of the Trinity is being favored over the ‘individual’ model: that is to say, the three Persons of the Trinity are thought of as three Persons in community rather than as one Person. God is not ‘a Person’: God is Tri-Personal.⁷ Instead of thinking of the Trinity in terms of Augustine’s ‘psychological’ analogy of the Memory, Understanding and Will of one *individual*, one thinks rather of the ‘social’ analogy of three persons in community. There is a danger of course that this relapses into ‘Tritheism’ (three gods), but provided there is some way of insisting on a true and full union of the Three so that together they are the One God, then the ‘social’ analogy throws light on how we think of what it means to be truly human. Unlike Augustine, who thinks of the Trinitarian ‘Image of God’ (Memory, Understanding and Will) being in each *individual*, we think of the ‘Image of God’ as being the human participation in intelligent loving relationships. Human beings are created then for loving fellowship (*koinonia*), and we attain our true humanity only therefore within the redeemed

philosophy of ‘Personalism’ in the late nineteenth century. See the excellent monograph by Samuel M. Powell, *Holiness in the 21st Century: Call, Consecration, Obedience, Perfected in Love* (PLNU Monographs 3, 2004), in which he hails the advance made by Wynkoop and Staples in highlighting *relationship* as the key to Christian holiness, but sees their approach as too much based on philosophical Personalism and not sufficiently on Trinitarian theology.

⁷ From the perspective of Christian Trinitarian Theology then Personalism was wrong in thinking of God as personal in the sense of being one Person.

community (*koinonia*) of the Church, where ‘our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’ (I John 1:3).

Since the holiness of God then is his Being as a Fellowship of Perfect, Holy Love among the Persons, then true human holiness only becomes possible within the Love of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of ‘perfect love’ therefore is securely based not just in isolated proof-texts, nor in the doctrines of humanity and sin, but in that Article of Faith which is the first and most fundamental, the Christian doctrine of God the Holy Trinity. When we begin there, we see that it is by no means a threat to Christian orthodoxy (or Nazarene orthodoxy) to speak of Christian holiness in terms of ‘love’ and ‘personhood’ and ‘relationships’. On the contrary, it is based on the Christian doctrine of God. To speak this way of Christian holiness has another advantage: it gets us away from the *individualism*, arguably originating in Augustine, and reaching its peak in the era of ‘modernity’.⁸ It enables us to present Christian holiness in a way that resonates with the ‘post-modern’ generation, in terms of love and community.⁹

2. Christian Holiness and ‘Christ Crucified’

⁸ See Samuel M. Powell’s comments on individualism in *Holiness in the 21st Century*, page 30. As to whether the individualism characteristic of modernity originates in Augustine, see the current debate between Philip Cary (*Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*, OUP, 2000) and the Radical Orthodoxy theologian, Michael Hanby (*Augustine and Modernity*, Routledge, 2003).

⁹ For a recent exploration of how far Wesley was influenced by the Trinitarian concept of ‘Person,’ see M. William Ury, ‘A Wesleyan Concept of “Person”,’ *WTJ*, 38:2 (2003), 30-56. Note too that the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles is entitled ‘Of *faith* in the Holy Trinity’.

At this point in the paper, however, I can imagine some of the defenders of the traditional categories used in the later Articles of Faith becoming deeply worried! Does this accentuation of the positive – understanding holiness as ‘perfect love’, ‘loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength’ – not leave huge gaps? The accent on love may go well with ‘Prevenient Grace’ (the welcome new title for Article VII). But what about ‘sin, righteousness and judgment’? Does God’s holiness not require *judgment* on all that divides, corrupts and destroys? Does it not require *separation* from sin? Is the doctrine of Original Sin (Article V) not going to be undercut here? And how do Repentance, Justification, Regeneration and Adoption (Articles VIII and IX) fit into this? And are we not focusing on ‘perfect love’ to the exclusion of ‘entire sanctification’? Does the language of ‘entire sanctification’ (the main terminology of Article X) not imply being cleansed *from something*?

Such defenders of the traditional categories would be right to be worried were we to stop at this point. If we accentuate the positives (as Eastern Orthodoxy is sometimes thought to do) and the love of God (as classic Liberalism does) will we not end up in universalism?¹⁰ Will we not lose the whole Western or traditional *evangelical* emphasis on guilt and sin? Will we not have forgotten what P.T. Forsyth once put so memorably, that the last word

¹⁰ This has been the trajectory of John Hick, for example, who had an evangelical conversion as a student at Edinburgh University, but made ‘Love’ the key to his theology instead of Christ, eventually ending up in a syncretistic universalism which is beyond doubt ‘another gospel’.

about God is not that ‘God is Love,’ but that ‘God is Holy Love?’¹¹ Does the holiness of God not mean that God ‘is of purer eyes than to behold evil’ or ‘look upon iniquity’?

These are good questions. If we stop here, we will indeed run all those dangers. But I am only proposing that we *start* here. I suggest in fact that if we start with the ‘positives’, ‘perfect love’ as the image of the Holy Trinity, we can give a much better account of the ‘negative’ reality of sin.

Original Sin

First of all, to start with love gives us a much deeper understanding of the doctrine of original sin. Augustine’s doctrine of original sin has some strange twists to it which none of us would defend,¹² but I believe that its genius is in its analysis of human motivation. Augustine sees that humans cannot but love. The heart of our sinful condition then is that our love, instead of being turned to God and neighbor, is turned in upon ourselves. Augustine’s term *concupiscentia* does not mean merely ‘sexual lust’ (like the English word ‘concupiscence’): rather it means *all* self-centred desire. Self-centredness (rather than pride) is the heart of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin – self-

¹¹ P.T. Forsyth, *God the Holy Father* (Hodder, 1897, Independent Press, 1957).

¹² I am thinking primarily of his belief that original sin is passed down the generations by the lust of the father involved in the birth of every infant, a bizarre idea which seems to have come (through Tertullian) from the equation made in the religion of the old Roman republic between sanctity and complete chastity, and certainly not from the more positive biblical view of human sexuality. Cf. Gerald L. Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (John Knox, 1979) and Jacques Le Goff, ‘L’Amour et la Sexualité,’ *L’Histoire*, 63 (1984), 52-59. For an analysis of ten aspects of the complex concept of ‘original sin’, see T.A.Noble, ‘Prolegomena to a Conference on Original Sin,’ *European Explorations in Christian Holiness*, 2 (2001), 6-18.

sovereignty,¹³ self-glorification and self-promotion, self-sufficiency, self-importance (all of which are aspects of pride and lead to envy and malice), and self-gratification (sloth, lust, avarice and gluttony).¹⁴ At the heart of this self-centredness is our tragic self-deception. This comes from our rejection of God (unbelief) and the self-delusion in which we make ourselves our own gods by adoring our own mythological self-projections (idolatry). It is important to see too that self-centredness can take other sick forms, such as self-hatred, self-denigration and self-loathing.¹⁵ It is also important to see that it is not a merely individualistic thing: it takes corporate forms where the family or group or nation becomes the center of motivation, resulting in tribalism, racism and sick forms of nationalism.¹⁶ Altogether the Augustinian view of sin as self-centred

¹³ This is highlighted in Richard E. Howard, *Newness of Life: A Study in the Thought of Paul* (Beacon Hill, 1975), cf. 43, 47, 59.

¹⁴ The identification of original sin with self-centredness is one made by many theologians over the centuries. See my examination of the Reformers in 'Original Sin in the Evangelical Reformers,' *European Explorations in Christian Holiness*, Vol. 2, 2001, 70-87.

¹⁵ It is important to take note of the feminist critique of the Augustinian definition of original sin presented by Dr Diane Leclerc, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin and Holiness in Historical Perspective* (Scarecrow, 2001). The call to self-denial has been used oppressively, especially to women. However we must not see self-centredness and pride as only 'masculine' and self-denigration as only 'feminine'. Both are vulnerable to both. And (very important!) the fact that self-denigration and self-hatred are forms of our perverted sinful condition means that there is a true, right and appropriate form of self-love (cf. Lev. 19:18 and Matt. 22:39). But appropriate self-love is only possible as the reflex of our love for others, and is only fully healthy and holy when it is the reflex of our grace-given love for God. Appropriate self-esteem is impossible for the isolated individual: it is only possible within *personal relationships*, supremely our *adoption* into the loving *personal relationships* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Cf. Joanna McGrath and Alister McGrath, *The Dilemma of Self-Esteem: The Cross and Christian Confidence* (Crossway, 1992), written by a psychologist and theologian, wife and husband, team; and Terry D. Cooper, *Sin, Pride and Self-Acceptance* (IVP, 2003), arguing that pride and self-contempt are dual processes.

¹⁶ It is the corporate mythology of corrupt forms of nationalism which produces the most destructive and violent form of idolatry. See Walter Wink's trilogy, *Naming the Powers* (1984), *Unmasking the Powers* (1986), and *Engaging the Powers* (1992), in which as a biblical scholar he develops the thesis that such corporate evils lie at the root of the demonic. See also the exploration of the contemporary relevance of the Augustinian approach to evil, drawing upon Reinhold Niebuhr and Hannah Arendt, in Charles T. Matthews, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (CUP, 2001).

desire is a profound interpretation of the Pauline concept of ‘the mind set on the flesh’ (*phronema tes sarkos*),¹⁷ which might be paraphrased as ‘the mind set on purely human goals and values’, in short, ‘the self-centred mind-set’. According to Augustine’s model, then, the only remedy for *concupiscentia* (self-centredness) is *caritas* – loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves.¹⁸ That is why ‘perfect love’ cleanses ‘original sin’: it is the ‘expulsive power of a new affection’ (Thomas Chalmers).

Christ our Sanctifier

But the danger is that we understand this in simply individualistic terms, as Augustine’s model may appear to do. Then sanctification can be understood (contrary to Augustine) as a matter merely of my repentance, my turning over a new leaf, and my determining to love God and neighbor. If, on the contrary, sanctification is truly to be seen as a matter of *grace* and not merely of unaided individual human effort, then we must try to understand how the Triune God works here to sanctify us. And it is imperative that we get away from our habit of mind (so typical of the individualistic thinking of modernity!) which understands grace and sanctification first and only in terms of the life-history and ‘testimony’ of the individual. Sanctification must be seen first in its

¹⁷ This is the NRSV translation of *phronema tes sarkos* (Rom. 8: 6f.), the phrase specifically quoted by Wesley in Greek and translated in the KJV as the ‘carnal mind’. See also Mark 8:33: ‘You do not have the mind/inclination (*phroneis*) of God, but of the merely human.’ Cf. ‘On Sin in Believers’, I.3, III, 1-9, IV.1-9 *Works*, Vol. 1, 317-334, and ‘The Scripture Way of Salvation’, III.6, *Works*, Vol. 2, 165.

¹⁸ Nygren (*Agape and Eros*, 1932) helps us to understand here that *caritas* is not the same as *agape*. But the best account of this aspect of the thought of Augustine is in John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study in the Religion of St Augustine* (1938; Canterbury Press, 1991).

corporate nature as it relates to the whole human race.¹⁹ And *grace* must not be understood in a merely *individualistic* way as operating *within* the individual.

Grace is to be seen first of all as God's action in Jesus Christ and the story of the *corporate* salvation achieved *in* Him and *through* Him for all humankind.²⁰

The story of our sanctification then is only secondarily the individual testimony of the believer: it is primarily the *story of the gospel* – the story of God's economy of salvation in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Son. At the center of this story is the 'Holy Sacrifice' of 'Christ crucified'.

What then does the cross have to do with our sanctification? Why was this 'Holy Sacrifice' necessary? We have sung for years in the Holiness tradition about 'the sacred fountain, open wide for all my sins,' and about being 'cleansed in the blood'. But what does this language actually refer to? Do these phrases have any meaning? How exactly does the death of Jesus Christ on the cross bring about my *sanctification*, my cleansing from sin? Although Western theology has focused on the cross, it has connected the cross primarily with

¹⁹ I prefer the term 'corporate' to 'collective'. I take 'collective' to be a collection of faceless 'individuals' who are herded together and dealt with as mere statistics (cf. the 'collectives' of that variety of modernity, Marxist-Leninism). 'Collective' as a correlate with 'individual' is therefore a concept of 'modernity'. But the Old Testament works with the category of the 'corporate', a more organic view of humanity, and only within the corporate may true 'personhood' be nurtured. Modernity works from the *individual* to the *collective*: Christian thinking works from the *corporate* to the *personal*.

²⁰ Of course this does not lead to universalism (the automatic salvation of all) because humanity not only exists in corporate solidarity but *also* as distinct *persons*, free to respond or to reject what has been done for them. Don't worry! We shall come to the need for personal response in its proper place in the next section, but it is vital to see that the *corporate* atonement in the Head precedes the *personal* response in the members.

justification, the pardon of our acts of sin.²¹ But how does the cross deal with *original* sin? How does the death of Christ bring cleansing from our sinful condition? Is it only ‘moral influence’ – that when I as an *individual* see the love of God in Christ on the cross, then I complete the at-one-ment *individualistically* by loving God in return? But then did nothing actually happen on the cross to sanctify us? Was the cross just an object lesson for what was true anyway? And what is meant by saying that the ‘blood’, i.e. the death, ‘of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin’ (I John 1:7)? And what does Paul mean when he bases our ‘dying to sin’ upon Christ’s dying to sin (Rom. 6:10)? In what sense did Christ ‘die to sin’ on the cross?

The greatest insights here are found in the Greek Fathers. For all that they do not have Augustine’s psychological penetration into the nature of sinful motivation, they do have light to shed upon our sanctification in Christ. Their insight, found in so many of their writings, is summed up in the short statement of Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the great pillars of orthodox Christian doctrine revered by Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestant Reformers alike. In arguing against the Apollinarian heresy, Gregory

²¹ This is certainly true of Protestant theology, and ironically this is one of Wesley’s weaknesses as a systematic theologian. His Anselmic view of the atonement provides a necessary basis for justification, but he never really explored the basis in the atonement for his doctrine of sanctification. Incidentally neither the so-called ‘moral influence’ view nor the *Christus Victor* view begins to explain how the cross provides *justification* of the guilty. The question how God can justly justify the *ungodly* is only seriously tackled by the much larger and more highly developed (though sometimes flawed) tradition of Western theology stemming from Anselm and including a galaxy of major theologians: Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Grotius, Wesley, McLeod Campbell, Forsyth, Barth, Brunner, McIntyre, Gunton and numerous others.

enunciated the rule, ‘The unassumed is the unhealed.’²² The implication of this is that we cannot understand the sanctifying work of Christ on the cross if we do not see it in the closest connection with his incarnation in *our* humanity *and with his obedient life*. In taking seriously the Johannine doctrine that ‘The Word became flesh’, the Greek Fathers understood the term ‘flesh’ in a fully Old Testament way. ‘Flesh’ was the corporate solidarity of humankind, weak and mortal without God, but not (as the Gnostics said) inherently evil. It followed then that when the Son of God assumed ‘flesh’ – our human nature – it was not a glorified or resurrection body which he assumed: it was a *body* taken from a member of Adam’s sinful race (Heb.10:5), but so *sanctified* by the Holy Spirit in the taking of it that he was without sin. In such a *body*, with all the normal human drives and impulses, he lived in such inner and outer obedience to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit that he fully sanctified our physical and mental human life. He had assumed our flesh (*sarx*, human nature) and was ‘tempted on all points as we are’ (Hebrews 4:15), but he did not live ‘according to the flesh’.²³ In him therefore there was no ‘mind set on the flesh’ (*phronemates sarkos*). On the contrary, instead of the life and motivation of this human-being being self-centred, it was fully God-centred. Here was a human whose

²² Gregory’s ‘Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy’ are in Edward R. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Library of Christian Classics, Westminster Press, 1954), 215-232. See esp. page 218.

Apollinarianism was the heresy that Christ did not have a human mind since the human mind was sinful.

²³ The New Testament emphasis is that the One who is to be our Judge is human. How enormously reassuring that the one who is to be our Judge is ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities’!

inner secret was his ‘perfect love’ for his ‘Abba’ in the Holy Spirit (see for example Luke 10:21ff.) and his perfect obedience to ‘Abba’. Here was the first (and in one sense, the only) entirely sanctified human being. Nonetheless, it was still a mortal body subject to corruption (*phthora*) and death, our mortal ‘flesh’, which he voluntarily took to the cross. There the old dying corporate humanity (*anthropos*) definitively died, and the new ‘perfected’ humanity rose from his tomb (Romans 6:1-11).²⁴ The resurrection is therefore inseparably part of this *theologia crucis*, for in His resurrection and exaltation the sanctification or ‘perfecting’ of the new humanity (*anthropos*) was *corporately* completed in him for all humankind.²⁵

3. Christian Holiness, the Holy Spirit, the Church and Its Mission

What was complete in the Head, however, was not yet complete in the members. There was further work to be done by the ‘Other Paraclete’. Christ had been ‘born from above’ by the Spirit. At his baptism he had gone down into the water and risen again to be endued by the Spirit, so that it was in the power of the Holy Spirit that this truly human human had lived the holy life, the life of perfect obedience and service, loving God with all his heart, mind,

²⁴ The fact that *anthropos* could be translated as ‘self’ in this passage in the RSV instead of ‘humanity’ (and retained in the NRSV) is an amazing tribute to the individualistic spectacles of the ‘modern’ translator.

²⁵ For this Greek Patristic understanding of the sanctification of our humanity in Christ, see, for example, Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 7 & 8, and *Against the Arians*, I,43; II,55,56,61,66,69,73,76; and III,32,33,53 (both works in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. IV). For the language of ‘perfecting’ (i.e. that this was not a static perfection) see also Hebrews 2:10, and 5:9, and Article II of our Articles of Faith.

soul and strength. So now at Pentecost, since he has gone down into the ‘baptism of blood’ and risen again, the Spirit is again poured out on his Body, but now it is the corporate Body of his Church.²⁶ Pentecost was the Spirit-baptism of the Church, making possible its life of holy love.²⁷ Within the body of the Church, Christians are to have the same purity and power as their Master. The Spirit is ‘poured out on all flesh’, and *within the loving fellowship of the Church*, the Pentecostal fullness is available to all.²⁸

Of course, new Christians do not start out where Jesus did. By the Spirit he was ‘born from above’ in his natural birth, so that by his own free will, he was never a sinner. We come to God as sinners who need to *repent*. Our birth ‘from above’ therefore involves the simultaneous pardon of our sins, our *justification*. This is what Wesley called a ‘relative’ change, that is, a change in our *relationship* to God. Being ‘in Christ’, we are *adopted* into the family of God as his children, and, with our elder Brother, we can say, ‘Abba!’ We are not ‘in Christ’ because we are justified: we are justified because we are ‘in Christ’. We are *justified/vindicated* by sharing in his *justification/vindication* by his Father in his

²⁶ Cf. T.F. Torrance, ‘The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church,’ *Theology in Reconciliation* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 82-105.

²⁷ Cf. A.R.G. Deasley, ‘Entire Sanctification and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit: Perspectives on the Biblical View of the Relationship,’ *WTJ*, 9 (1979), 27-44.

²⁸ For a recent exploration of the Patristic roots of Wesley’s pneumatological understanding of Christian holiness, see Rob King, ‘Eastern Patristic Spirit-Christology for Contemporary Wesleyan Faith Practice,’ *WTJ*, 28:2 (2003), 103-123.

resurrection. So it is no pretence: we are declared just or righteous 'in him'.²⁹

So at the same time there is a genuine *regeneration* or *new birth*, for since the Spirit unites us to Christ - makes us to be 'in Christ', members of his Body - what John Wesley called 'the real change' begins. If justification is not to be merely a legal fiction ('status' or 'standing' without transformation), it is necessary then to see that *regeneration* is the beginning of *sanctification*, 'initial sanctification'. It is the initiation of what Wesley called the 'gradual work' of sanctification.³⁰ But this is never merely an inner private thing. It involves outward bodily behavior and practices. For Wesley therefore, the born-again Christian was 'so far perfect as not to commit sin,' but he qualified that of course to mean *deliberate outward* sin, 'a voluntary transgression of a known law'.³¹

But at this point we must pause. This is all good Wesleyan doctrine, but it is in danger once again of defining the doctrine according to the 'negative' side and in a merely individualistic way – not committing sin. So we need to put all this in a much more 'positive' way, in the context of 'love' and of the corporate Church. The newly born-again Christian is only able to be victorious

²⁹ Wesley's phrase 'relative [i.e. relational] change' surely accords well with the emphasis of contemporary biblical scholarship that justification is not solely a juridical model, but, within the covenant, is to do with faithfulness to the covenant *relationship*.

³⁰ John Wesley, Sermon 43, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation', *Works*, Vol. 2, (Abingdon, 1985), 160.

³¹ John Wesley, Sermon 19, 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,' *Works*, Vol. 1 (Abingdon, 1984). How often in students (and occasionally from Nazarene pulpits) I have come across the idea that it is entire sanctification which brings victory over sin. That may be the Keswick doctrine, but it is not Wesley's position. For him voluntary, deliberate, intentional, outward sin ceased when there was a genuine new birth. Of course, there was still *inner* sin (attitude), and it does happen that Christians have to seek fresh forgiveness even for outward actions which are sinful. I John 2:1 expresses the balance.

over deliberate sin because she has been seized by the love of Christ and *is embraced within (and embraces) the fellowship of His Church.*³² And it is vital that in the first hours, days and weeks of her commitment to Christ she be carefully ‘discipled’ – for the initial emotional and spiritual ‘high’ will not last. This is where *corporate* Christian fellowship and nurture become vital. It is at this point that she must be introduced to the spiritual disciplines,³³ and this can only be done within the *koinonia* of the corporate Church, which *is* the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here as a member of this communion, this damaged person can become a whole *person*, a ‘holy person’, sharing in the ecclesial *imago Dei*,³⁴ which is enacted in the drama of the *koinonia*, the *Holy Communion* of the Lord’s Supper.³⁵ Only this fellowship of love, the love of God *mediated to her in the love of his Church*, can hold her steady in the tests which lie ahead. She must participate in the practices of the Church.³⁶ And she must early be taught the discipline of corporate and personal *confession*, for if Wesley insisted that the new-born Christian did not commit *deliberate* sin, he equally insisted that we all commit ‘involuntary transgressions’ all our lives. We

³² Dr Bassett suggests that this was the significance of the kiss of peace.

³³ Cf. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

³⁴ Cf. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pages 49f., a section entitled ‘From Biological to Ecclesial Existence: the Ecclesiological Existence of the Person’: we really only become truly personal as we are born again into the Church.

³⁵ It is not wrong of course to adopt the ‘high church’ term ‘The Eucharist’, for it is a ‘Thanksgiving’, but the term ‘Holy Communion’, favored by the Reformers, is surely much more profoundly Trinitarian.

³⁶ This of course is what develops holy ‘character’: cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame Press, 1983). All this is not to say of course that the Holy Spirit cannot minister to isolated Christians, but that is the exception, not the norm, and even the isolated Christian is within the communion of saints.

consequently need the disciplines of self-examination and need to confess how far we fall short. To fail here is to fall into the trap of what we have traditionally called ‘Pharisaism’.³⁷ In contrast to that judgmental attitude, the Holy Church must always exemplify the compassionate, redemptive love of God in every possible way, even to His erring children.

But when we talk about ‘self-examination’ and ‘confession’, we have to say that there *is* an inner dimension to all this. While we are not committed to the ‘Cartesian self’, we are committed to what Holy Scripture calls ‘the heart’ with its ‘thoughts and intensions’.³⁸ ‘Purity of heart’ was not a term coined by Wesleyans wedded to the ‘Cartesian self’ (!), but coined by the Wisdom writers of the Old Testament,³⁹ and taken up by Jesus. It is fully biblical then for Wesleyans to say that they are concerned with ‘inner holiness’. Paul moves on in Romans from the corporate (Adam/Christ) to the out-working of Christ’s corporate sanctifying work through the identification of each believer with his dying and rising, and specifically to the defeat of the ‘alien resident’ of *sin within*

³⁷ I say ‘traditionally’ because E.P. Sanders has reminded us that the Pharisees as a whole were not particularly ‘Pharisaical’. For Wesley’s most mature statement on the ‘imperfections of the perfect’, see Sermon 129, ‘This Treasure in Earthen Vessels’, *Works*, Vol. 4 (Abingdon, 1987), 161-167.

³⁸ For an introduction to the ‘Cartesian self’, see Chapters 2 and 3 of Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Westminster John Knox, 2001). A synopsis of the argument of the book is given in Stanley J. Grenz, ‘The Social God and the Relational Self: Towards a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context,’ *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 24 (2002), 33-57.

³⁹ See R.E Clements, *Wisdom in Theology* (Paternoster/Eerdmans, 1992), 170ff., a section entitled ‘The Importance of the Inner Life’; and John N. Oswalt, *Called to Be Holy: A Biblical Perspective* (Evangel, 1999) esp. pp. 52ff., a section entitled ‘The Perfect Heart’.

(7:17) and to the *inner* sanctification of the believer from the ‘mind set on the flesh’ (8:5-7).⁴⁰

It is here that our classic Wesleyan doctrine joins the historic spiritual teaching of the Church catholic in speaking of a journey in holiness we must each make, and of meaningful stages on the journey. Repeatedly down through the centuries, Christian writers on the spiritual life speak of the highest stage as characterized by ‘perfect’ or ‘mature’ love. Clement, Antony, Athanasius, the Gregories, Augustine, Aquinas and Bernard all agree.⁴¹ Although this doctrine of ‘Christian Perfection’ was down-played by the Reformers in reaction to Rome, Calvin cautiously admits that despite continuing sin, one may speak of wholehearted devotion as Christian ‘perfection’.⁴² But where Wesley follows Clement, Antony, Aquinas and Bernard, and not Augustine or Calvin, is in his clearer teaching that this ‘perfect love’ for God and neighbor effects the nullification of the *phronema tes sarkos*, the ‘self-centred mind-set’.⁴³ It is in this

⁴⁰ See the use made of Leander Keck’s analysis of the ‘spiral’ argument of Romans by William M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ* (Beacon Hill, 1998), 86f., and Alex R.G. Deasley, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics and the Wesleyan Message of Holiness,’ *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 33:2 (1998), 130-144, esp. 141.

⁴¹ For two excellent histories of the historical development of the doctrines of ‘Perfect Love’ and ‘Purity of Heart’ in the Patristic and Medieval eras, see Harriet A. Luckman & Linda Kultzer (eds), *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature* (Liturgical Press, 1999, and Mayeuil de Dreuille, *Seeking the Absolute Love: The Founders of Christian Monasticism* (Gracewing, 1999). No one could doubt the Patristic roots of Wesleyan doctrine after reading these. These complement the earlier studies by Wesleyans such as R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection* (Clarendon, 1934), Paul M. Bassett and William M. Greathouse, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, Vol. 2, *The Historical Development* (Beacon Hill, 1985), and Paul M. Bassett, *Holiness Teaching: New Testament Times to Wesley* (*Great Holiness Classics*, Vol. 1, Beacon Hill, 1997).

⁴² Cf. R.S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Oliver & Boyd, 1959), 322-332. Wallace gives numerous references in the commentaries and sermons: but see also *Institutes*, IV, i, 17.

⁴³ This is of course what we have traditionally called (in KJV language) the death of the ‘old man’ or the ‘carnal mind’. Those Wesleyan theologians who were concerned here to guard the ‘substantive’ concept of

sense that he teaches that *as long as the Christian loves God and neighbor with a whole heart*, this inner sinful bias is nullified. Clearly then, this is not something that comes about through an exclusively introspective gazing within. That would only be the ultimate stratagem of the enemy – a self-centred, individualistic pursuit of sanctification as a kind of spiritual consumer good to be enjoyed as a private experience. That religious self-centredness is surely the most subtle form of original sin! ‘Perfect love’ can only come by gazing up to Christ and out to our neighbors, by that kind of unselfconscious absorption in God and neighbor which is Love (that is, the Holy Spirit) filling the heart. The ‘perfecting’ of Christian holiness, therefore, which Wesley believed began at a specific point in the Christian’s journey (‘entire sanctification’), can only take place in the web of relationships of love which is only to be found within his ‘Holy Church’.

But even that is not, of course, the end of the journey. Even when we pass out of our self-absorption into absorption in those we are given to love, we still remain in the old mortal ‘flesh’.⁴⁴ The eschatological tension of the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ characterizes the Church and each of its members. Even the holiest are ‘perfect’ only in this one sense (wholehearted, undivided love)

original sin did have a genuine concern, namely, that original sin is not just a matter of moral relationships: it is an *ontological* matter – sin affects our very *being*. That concern however is satisfied when we see that the ontological dimension of our fallenness is dealt with corporately in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, so that by the fullness of the Holy Spirit it thereby becomes possible for each Christian to identify with His death in such a way as to ‘die to (inner) sin’, the *phronema tes sarkos*.

⁴⁴ For a Patristic understanding of this in terms of a distinction between ‘person’ and ‘nature’, see Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (James Clarke, 1957), 114ff.

but imperfect in another sense: that we still await the redemption of our bodies. *Already* we may be filled with the Holy Spirit, but the kingdom has *not yet* come in glory and power. So it is as ‘clay jars’ filled with this treasure that we share in our Father’s ‘Holy Love’ for the world and the great Hope of cosmic redemption, and so pursue the ‘Holy Mission’ of the Church. Within the *koinonia* of the Church we may *already* be truly ‘holy persons’, filled with the ‘perfect love’ of Christ by his Holy Spirit, and so reflecting together the image of the ‘Holy Persons’ within the *koinonia* of the Holy Trinity. But of course Holy Persons in the Holy Church only really image this Holy Trinitarian Love when, focused on the Holy Sacrifice, and so filled with the Holy Spirit, we pour ourselves out into the world in the genuine *agape* of Holy Mission.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ I have concentrated on a positive, contemporary expression of the doctrine of Christian holiness which attempts to be less individualistic and to set Christian holiness in a Trinitarian, Christocentric and Ecclesial context. I have not entered into the details of the division which Quanstrom identifies between the ‘American holiness’ version and the ‘classic Wesleyan’ version. Cf. Mark R. Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene, 1905-2004* (Beacon Hill, 2004). Quanstrom’s most useful account must be put in longer perspective by looking at the way in which the nineteenth-century ‘American holiness’ version of the tradition modified the eighteenth-century ‘classic Wesleyan’ version. But the real issue is not historical: it is hermeneutical, namely, whether the ‘American holiness’ version (which is really the innovation) can be justified exegetically and hermeneutically. In other words, this is a matter of the authority of *scripture* over our *tradition*. But is there now an impatience among our younger contemporaries with this whole debate? It seems to me in any case that we need to concentrate on (a) what unites these two positions – which is much, much more than what divides them, and (b) a contemporary expression which gets away from the individualistic focus of ‘modern’ thinking. I have tried to suggest within the very brief confines of this conference paper how the latter may be done by substituting a genuinely Christian, Trinitarian and Ecclesial understanding of the ‘person’ for the individualism of the era of modernity. I am grateful for comments from Dr Paul M. Bassett, Dr Kent E. Brower, Dr Andy Johnson, Forrest Cunningham, Dr Alex Deasley and Prof. John Allan Knight, Jr. Rev. Craig Laughlin commented that from his pastoral experience this ‘strong articulation of holiness theology in a post-modern paradigm’ (when translated by the pastor into a preachable format!) speaks to people of all levels of education. He writes: ‘My people seem somewhat tired of what some have called radical individualism and are searching for relationship and community.’