

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE EVANGELICAL ENTERPRISE  
AND CATHOLIC SPIRIT IN THE CHAPLAINCY

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*Abba Macarius met [a pagan priest] running and said to him, 'Greetings! Greetings, you weary man!' Quite astonished, the other came up to him and said, 'What good do you see in me, that you greet me in this way?' The old man said to him, 'I have seen you wearing yourself out without knowing that you are wearing yourself out in vain.' The other said to him, 'I have been touched by your greeting and I realize that you are on God's side. But another wicked monk who met me insulted me and I have given him blows enough for him to die.' [. . .] So Abba Macarius said, 'One evil word makes even the good evil, while one good word makes even the evil good'.<sup>1</sup>*

*Jesus said: "Come and see."<sup>2</sup>*

*Contemporary Chaplaincy Paradigm and the Apparent Tension with Wesleyan Ministry*

Chaplaincy is an in-between ministry. Chaplains tend to minister in liminal spaces. For the hospice and hospital chaplain: at the death bed, through cancer treatment or welcoming a newborn. For the law enforcement or military chaplain: before, during, and after the crisis, and through the spiritual fallout of losing a comrade or taking life in the line of duty. For the prison chaplain: delivering the news of a family member's death and holding hope for new life through the injustices of the justice system and the limbo of a 30 (or 80 or 250) year sentence. Those who work in more everyday spaces, marketplace or campus chaplains, are sought for care particularly in times of transition—a tragedy on campus, a divorce at home, or a student's transition from childhood faith.

Chaplains are also in-between regarding professional demands. This occurs notably in two ways. First, in various settings we minister to “employees” and “clients” alike. In hospitals, responsive to the needs of patients and staff. In prisons, caring for both the incarcerated and the correctional workers. In the military, caring for both enlisted and officers. As we occupy the role of spiritual and religious authority chaplains, more than other persons of faith, represent our religious traditions and a general sense of morality and goodness to everyone around us. (I've often heard with regard to my presence, “You can't say that while Jesus is around.”) Second, we balance responsibility to both our endorsing religious body and our employers. The needs of these various groups do not always neatly align, and at times are in conflict—how does a servant of the Prince of Peace pray for soldiers going off to kill in a war where the justice is at best ambiguous? How does a chaplain care for the patient and doctor suffering moral injury after an abortion that appeared to have been medically necessary? How does a chaplain navigate the call to make disciples of all nations, the denomination's expectation for chaplains to “reprove and encourage and seek by all means the conversion of sinners” and the agency's policy prohibiting proselytizing.

In addition to these tensions between faith and policy, current trends in chaplaincy training and prescribed best practices appear to raise a further tension between a Wesleyan practice of ministry and contemporary chaplaincy.

Contemporary chaplaincy has burst the bounds of traditional chaplaincy of Protestant (and shortly after Catholic & Jewish) ministers caring for those in hospitals, prisons, and the military.

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<sup>1</sup> Macarius, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, # 39, trans. Benedicta Ward (Cistercian Publications, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> *John 1:39*

Today, chaplains enter many public spaces—from the traditional contexts mentioned above to universities, office buildings, police cars, locker rooms, and many more. In these spaces, chaplains care for persons of every religious and spiritual path, and those of no particular spiritual tradition. This is a wonderful and needed development of the profession, but the change brings with it growing pains. With the new contexts and clientele have come changes in the chaplaincy paradigm and best practice.

Recently published introductions to chaplaincy have described chaplaincy in the following way:

“Chaplaincy is not about converting others to the chaplain's faith; it's about the chaplain's ability to 'emotionally and spiritually connect to' . . . the other as appropriate” and “A chaplain should start from [. . .] the patient's [. . .] religious beliefs [. . .] to articulate hope, despair, and effective coping options. A chaplain should not judge a patient's [. . .] religious beliefs, nonbeliefs, sexual orientation, race and origin but facilitate the expression of feelings and [. . .] provide an assuring presence.”<sup>3</sup>

“Effective chaplains collaborate with care receivers to construct and live into an identity consistent with and reflecting the best of the person's spiritual/religious commitments” Effective chaplaincy embodies intercultural humility and a not-knowing stance, acknowledging that what we don't know can be as important (or even more important than) what we do know” What chaplains learn about spirituality from their own cultures, training, and experiences might be less helpful than their ability to remain open and curious about how the sacred manifests in a particular person's life and how that person makes sense of those experiences. “Spiritual care providers work to accept difference and recognize the positive, transcendent meanings that emerge across religious, cultural, and social differences.”<sup>4</sup>

While I do not have studies to demonstrate it, anecdotally, there are many in our Wesleyan tradition, and in the professional chaplaincy who experience discomfort at the idea of helping the care seeker construct and live into an identity consistent with the care seeker's religious tradition, unless that tradition were Christian. They also struggle with a “not-knowing stance” and “starting from a patient's religious belief to articulate hope.” These issues that arise especially in the multi-faith context in which contemporary soul care is practiced reveal potential tensions, and perhaps even barriers, between traditional evangelical ministry among persons of other faiths.

This discomfort and the apparent tensions arise from teachings throughout Christian history. Indeed, John Wesley instructed his ministers, whom he called “helpers”: “You have nothing to do but save souls.”<sup>5</sup> In an address to clergy, he stated:

“[The minister] is continually employed, in what the angels of God have not the honour to do, - co-operating with the Redeemer of men in "bringing many children to glory." Such is a true Minister of Christ; and such, beyond all possibility of dispute, ought both you and I to be.” and “It is good to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked: But it is a far

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Gabriel and Dueane R. Bidwell, (2022) “Leading and Facilitating Spiritual Reflection.” Chapter 4 *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century*. Eds. Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo, University of North Carolina Press pages 98-103.

<sup>5</sup> D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, (Francis Asbury Press, 1997), p168-169.

nobler good to "save souls from death," to "pluck" poor "brands out of the burning." And it is that to which you are peculiarly called, and to which you have solemnly promised to "bend all your studies and endeavours." <sup>6</sup>

So, this certainly seems to be at odds with the direction given to the contemporary chaplains: "A chaplain should not judge a patient's [. . .] religious beliefs, nonbeliefs, sexual orientation, race and origin but facilitate the expression of feelings and [. . .] provide an assuring presence." <sup>7</sup>

The primary purpose of this paper is to explore the apparent dissonance between traditional Wesleyan ministerial functions of proclaiming the gospel and "saving souls," and chaplain best practices described above. To show the actual harmony between these positions, I will provide suggestions for reframing evangelism and the catholic spirit. I will ground these suggestions primarily in the sermons and other teachings of John Wesley.

### *Preliminary Proposal for Chaplains in the Wesleyan tradition*

A secondary purpose of this paper is to begin to sketch a Wesleyan theology of Chaplaincy. I hope to provide for chaplains a theological foundation, and a matrix for guiding personal and professional decisions in a variety of ministry contexts. Although, entirely laying this theological foundation may be beyond the scope of this project and may require a more extensive treatment of the scriptures and themes considered in the present paper.

#### *Chaplain as Midwife*

Chaplains, along with other spiritual care givers, have been equated to midwives of the holy.<sup>8</sup> This image evokes the powerful image of attending to the development and delivery of life in another. Watching and waiting, supporting and assuring are much of the work of the midwife. Equally important, however, is the ability and understanding to take decisive action for the life of another in order to bring them out into a new world. The work of a midwife is partnering with the one in whom life is moving. This vividly captures the work chaplains perform, whether at the personal, community, and organizational level.

Considering the Hebrew Scriptures, the work of midwife takes on another layer regarding spiritual care. Shiphrah and Puah<sup>9</sup>, the Hebrew midwives who stood against Pharaoh and made the life of Moses possible, stand as reminders of the justice involved in partnering new life into the world. Whether in organizations considering how to implement a new policy, in communities grieving a recent tragedy, or with a person discerning the movement of God in her or his life, the chaplain's attention must always be on delivering life, the dawning of the light, and the establishment of justice.

#### *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way for Chaplains*

Within this controlling metaphor of midwife of the holy, a foundational matrix for decision making will also prove beneficial in chaplaincy practice. Rueben P. Job, with his book *Three*

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<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, "An address to the Clergy" The Wesley Center, accessible online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/an-address-to-the-clergy/>.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Evans, "What is Chaplaincy?" Website Chaplain Evans (April 15, 2015) accessible online <https://chaplainevans.com/2015/04/15/what-is-chaplaincy/>

<sup>8</sup> Emma M. Churchman, "Midwife for the Holy," *Friends Journal*. (2013)

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 1:15-21.

*Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Life*, has updated and revitalized Wesley's general rules.<sup>10</sup> This way of life resonates with a tradition of spiritual living and pastoral care that stretches back through history and scripture. The three rules, as restated by Bishop Job, are: “1. do no harm, 2. do good, 3. stay in love with God.”<sup>11</sup> I propose these three simple rules may provide a Wesleyan way for chaplains and other spiritual care givers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context of religious pluralism.

The rules are useful in part because they provide a common ground for many religious traditions. This allows chaplains from a variety of traditions to hold a common foundation in caregiving, and chaplain and care seekers to establish a place to start their work together. So, if we can at least agree on these as a place to stand together and connect with one another, then these may provide the space where we can enjoy hearts right with one another<sup>12</sup> and get about the business of casting out unclean spirits together.<sup>13</sup>

Further, though, and more specific to the practice of spiritual care in chaplaincy, the three rules can provide a simple, though not always easy to follow, guide for chaplains navigating the various challenges that arise in the many and varied spaces chaplains enter and occupy. Chaplains in almost all settings find themselves caught between the expectations of their endorsing religious organization and the policies governing their employing agency. For chaplains in the Wesleyan tradition, these rules provide a simple matrix through which we can navigate the many tensions we encounter, and a defensible basis for action if challenged from either side.

#### *Cases Representing the Current Chaplaincy Context*

Many good resources exist that explore the variety of spaces in which chaplains minister.<sup>14</sup> As that is not the purpose of this paper, I will focus on two cases from the setting in which I work, the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Throughout my ministry as a chaplain, I have encountered those who know the Christian story, and yet are firmly devoted to another religious tradition. The following two cases are representative of this type of spiritual care seeker (Both of the cases below are a composite representing themes of various care seekers I've encountered. Both accurately depict a care seeker, but neither describe any particular care seeker):

Khalil was raised in a poor district of one of America's large cities. His grandmother took him to church when he stayed with her, but when he was with his mother—who was addicted to crack cocaine—he did not attend church. Before long, reasoning he needed to help provide for his siblings, Khalil was out on the block running drugs for one of the established dealers. Soon, he was running his own group of dealers. In time he was incarcerated. While imprisoned, he encountered Islam. He began to pray and read the Quran. While practicing the daily, weekly, and annual disciplines of Islam, he found a way of life away from the destruction of the drug life. Through his practice of Islam, he has cleaned up his life and given up physical violence.

<sup>10</sup> Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Life*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 39, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons*, Volume 2, Albert Outler, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 300.

<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, “A Caution Against Bigotry,” Sermon 38, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons*, Volume 2, Albert Outler ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 290

<sup>14</sup> See, Chaplain Innovation Lab, <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/>, and Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022).

Occasionally, Khalil seeks out spiritual care from me: at the death of his brother, the murder of his son, and in the midst of significant interpersonal conflict.

James is a committed Pagan. He has practiced Pagan ways most of his life. He has some family members who have left Paganism to join the church. They have shared their faith with him. James recognizes that how he practiced Pagan ways in the past contributed to his criminal life. However, he has since endeavored to sort the dark elements from the light. He holds to Paganism as a path that can lead him to life. He has sought my spiritual care in dealing with ongoing addiction concerns, for guidance on developing empathy and compassion, addressing past traumas and at the death of his mother. He has participated in spiritual retreats I've led.

These cases raise questions for which John Wesley's teachings suggest a trajectory, but that were outside the ministry experience of Wesley himself. Given his view of the world as his parish and meeting others in their context (e.g. field preaching), we may rightly surmise that Wesley would have sought out James and Khalil in their life situation. Indeed, William Arnett observed, "When Church or ecclesiastical privilege or pronouncement stood in the way of the well-being of souls, then Wesley did not hesitate to put the good of souls first. This was for him a foremost necessity<sup>15</sup>[~~OBJ~~]. In our contemporary chaplaincy context, we encounter and seek to provide faithful care to people like these daily. As we continue to explore current best practices in chaplaincy, and where these appear to constrict pastoral ministry within the Wesleyan tradition, we'll keep these two cases in mind.

#### *Wesley and Other Religious Traditions*

As a baseline for this study, we may consider John Wesley's view of other religions.<sup>16</sup> Though he expressed a variety of sentiments about Muslims and Native Americans throughout his life, Wesley's defining teaching about persons who follow other religions is shown in his sermon "On Charity,"

Accordingly, that sentence, "He that believeth not shall be damned," is spoken of them to whom the Gospel is preached. Others it does not concern; and we are not required to determine any thing touching their final state. How it will please God, the Judge of all, to deal with them, we may leave to God himself. But this we know, that he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the Heathens also; that he is "rich in mercy to all that call upon him," according to the light they have; and that "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him."<sup>17</sup>

John Wesley, following Paul<sup>18</sup>, trusts the Lord has provided a witness and light in every nation and for all people. Even those who have not received the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ

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<sup>15</sup> William M Arnett, "The Many-Sidedness of John Wesley," *The Asbury Seminarian*. Vol. 24: No. 2, (1970) p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Several other scholars have given a much more complete treatment of John Wesley's view of other religions, notably Randy Maddox, "Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 27 (1992) 7-29, available online [https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/18\\_Wesley\\_as\\_Theological\\_Mentor.pdf](https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/18_Wesley_as_Theological_Mentor.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> John Wesley, "On Charity," Sermon 91, *The Sermons of John Wesley*, Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-91-on-charity/>.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 1-2.

have the light of life by the Spirit. Those who reverence God and live lives of charity according to the light they've been given are accepted by the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

By this way of reasoning there is cause to hope for both Khalil and James. They have responded to the light they've been given. Following the religion that brought light as they know it, they have moved from overtly destructive and selfish lives to lives of increasing charity toward their neighbors and reverence for the Creator. Following the three simple rules, it may be best for the chaplain to choose to do good for Khalil and James by fostering their movement from destruction and toward the light as they have received it. That is, the chaplain ought to help them “fear God,” as God has revealed God’s self to them at this point, and “work righteousness,” consistent with the growing edge of their current capability. However, it's not clear what Wesley would make of these, particularly because they have heard the Gospel of Jesus.

### *Extending Wesley's Understanding into a Multi-faith Milieu*

So, our contemporary, multi-faith context raises a problem not addressed directly by Wesley in “On Charity.” While Wesley cannot imagine anyone not embracing the Christian faith if it has been presented faithfully,<sup>20</sup> both in teaching and living, Wesley gives considerable lists of ways Christians do not faithfully represent Christ.<sup>21</sup> These may be enough to make trusting the Christians' message unbelievable.

Developments of psychology and neurology, especially around trauma and religious abuse<sup>22</sup>, since the time of Wesley help us understand this dynamic. Those who have heard the gospel message but also been abused or neglected by nominal Christians would be loath to accept the message. Those who have a deep trust in another tradition, because it has provided much safety and security, it has truly brought a great deal of goodness into her or his life, are often wary of any invitation away from it. Also, groups with historical trauma based on abuses perpetrated by Christians against ancestors often do not want to hear the Christian story. Consider, for example: Native Americans devoutly and honorably practicing Native ways who will hear nothing of Christ, regardless of the righteousness of the Christian speaking with him. So, when the Creator brings the light of grace into lives such as these, God may provide revelation through natural revelation or through another wisdom tradition. Aside from calls for Christians to make their lives worthy of the gospel they represent; it does not appear Wesley directly commented on these issues.

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<sup>19</sup> Wesley, “On Charity,” and John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, Acts 10, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-the-acts-of-the-apostles/#Chapter+X>.

<sup>20</sup> Randy L Maddox, “Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, vol 27 (1992), pp. 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> Wesley, “Against Bigotry.”

<sup>22</sup> For trauma and historical trauma Resmaa Menakem, 2017, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Central Recovery Press, 2017). For developments in neurology and personal/ social development, Daniel J., Siegel, *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (Bantam Books, 2010), for religious trauma, Allison Downie, (2022). Christian Shame and Religious Trauma, *Religions*, 13:10 (2022), 925, and Mari E. Ramler, “When God Hurts: The Rhetoric of Religious Trauma as Epistemic Pain,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 53:2 (2023), 202–216.

John Wesley's most helpful statement on the current issue of multi-faith ministry, is found in his sermon “On Living Without God” Wesley writes:

I believe the merciful God regards the lives and tempers of men more than their ideas. I believe he respects the goodness of the heart rather than the clearness of the head; and that if the heart of a man be filled (by the grace of God, and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels because his ideas are not clear, or because his conceptions are confused.<sup>23</sup>

In the above paragraph, Wesley is talking about those who are atheist “no matter how just, true, or merciful they may be,” they have not developed “clear ideas” about the gospel and so are not Christians. Yet, this humble, patient atheist will not be cast out merely because a history of abuse or some other barrier prevents him or her developing clear ideas about God in Christ.

So, as a chaplain seeks to provide spiritual care to James or Khalil, what wisdom might we draw from this? Considering the three simple rules we may conclude that to bring the gospel into the conversation at the wrong time, in the wrong way, or for the wrong reason is highly likely to do harm in these cases. We must weigh whether to debate religious doctrine or help them live a more humble, just, and loving life. The latter will better care for their souls and will help them better respond to the light the Creator has given them.

#### *Extending Catholic Love to Care Seekers*

Two of Wesley's sermons seem to give weight to the conclusion above. The sermons “Catholic Spirit” and “A Caution Against Bigotry.” Except for a particular passage in “Catholic Spirit,” these two sermons expand the possibility that helping others live faithful to the light they've received and therefore live into the reign of God is more essential than ensuring they intellectually accept proper ideas about God.

The guidance of “Catholic Spirit” is to practice the love God commanded: “Let us love one another; for God is love”<sup>24</sup> and “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (ibid.). Wesley then examines the criteria for being included in this command of love. He gives this basic criterion: “is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?”<sup>25</sup> If so, take my hand—that is, let us cooperate in this life of love.

At face value, this would apply to the relationship between the chaplain and Khalil and James. They have sought my care because their heart is right with my heart. Yet, a portion of Wesley's argument complicates this. In this sermon Wesley acknowledges that every person believes his or her own opinions, all the while recognizing they must be mistaken on some points. For, no person fully understands all things. And yet, the central measures of a “heart right with my heart” are questions of understanding Christian doctrine: Do you believe in God? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Are you submitted to righteousness of God in Christ? If so, give me your hand, for your heart is right with my heart. So, in this sermon there is a distinction between love for Christians and love for others, based largely, it seems, on orthodox understanding of the gospel.

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<sup>23</sup> John Wesley, “On Living Without God” Sermon 130, in *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons*, Volume 4, Albert Outler, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1991), 569.

<sup>24</sup> Wesley, “Catholic Spirit,” Sermon 39, Volume 2, 300.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 301

John Wesley insists on orthodox Christian belief as a measure of a right heart. Yet, we saw above how Wesley also believed God is more concerned with tempers and affections than ideas. So, perhaps faithful response to the light one has received is more important than having come to full Christian knowledge. As spiritual care seekers come to us in good faith, we may conclude he or she has a heart right with our heart. We, in return, may reach out to the care seeker with catholic love. For we need not prejudge them because of where the Spirit has carried them (more on this below under “Chaplain as midwife of new birth”).

Some may charge that the above conclusion constitutes a misapplication of the catholic spirit. Wesley’s teaching from “A Caution Against Bigotry” helps protect against charge of misapplication. Wesley takes for his text the passage about the disciples complaining to Jesus that one who is not of their company is casting out demons. Jesus counsels the disciples not to stop him from doing this good. Following Jesus’ example, Wesley counsels his hearers not to forbid the good work of any who are casting out demons.

Wesley explains that while we do not see the types of possession described in the gospels, the devil still holds many persons captive. They are held captive “by love of money, of pleasure, of praise. And by pride, envy, anger, hate, revenge.”<sup>26</sup> Also, “drunkards, whoremongers, adulterers, thieves, robbers,”<sup>27</sup> and “dissemblers, talebearers, liars, slanderers; in oppressors and extortioners; in the perjured, the seller of his friend, his honor, his conscience.”<sup>28</sup> All these, Wesley says, can be considered possessed, though many do not recognize it.

If these are the possessed, then those who “cast out demons” are any who turn some from these destructive habits toward life. They thereby liberate their brothers and sisters from bondage and move them toward freedom in God.

Having defined casting out demons, Wesley then describes who might be “not of our group.” He moves through several categories. He begins simply with those we do not know but are very similar to us in belief and practice. He ends with those who are “in many respects antisciptural and antichristian: a church which we believe to be utterly false and erroneous in her doctrines as well as very dangerously wrong in her practice.”<sup>29</sup> He goes on in his description of this last group. And yet, he concludes, if they succeed at casting out demons, forbid them not.

If this is the case, may we rule out (forbid) the life-giving power of Islam that has liberated Khalil from what held him bound to destruction? Can we deny (forbid) the light in paganism that has led James to compunction over his crimes, and awoken in him a desire for healing? Short of that, may we deny them our hand in catholic love if their heart is right with our heart? Considering the three simple rules, would not cutting them off from our love do harm rather than good?

Tom Noble makes clear, in his book *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, Christian perfecting, which begins with the first light of preventing grace, occurs only in relationship.<sup>30</sup> In the image of Trinity, we are healed and perfected in the interpersonal flow of love. To deny catholic love to those who would reach out to us, and to forbid them because the light they have received appears

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<sup>26</sup> John Wesley, “A Caution Against Bigotry,” Sermon 38, Volume 2, 290.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People* (Cascade Books, 2013), 219-224.

to come from a foreign source would cut them off from the love we have for them. So, again, meeting them with our love in the light they have received and helping them respond faithfully from within their frame of reference is the good we ought to do, even if that means, in order to avoid doing harm, we sometimes do not talk about Jesus.

### *Expanding Evangelism's Scope*

If this understanding is valid, it necessitates an expanding of traditional understandings of evangelism. Evangelism is typically thought of as telling the story of Jesus with the intent of bringing a person to faith in, or a saving knowledge of, Christ.<sup>31</sup> However, later in life, Wesley did not seem as concerned with right ideas as with right living. So, teaching others to live a life in harmony with the reign of God may, at times, do better than attempting to force all onto the same melody.

For various reasons, in caring for Khalil and James, discussions of the gospel of Jesus lead to stalemate, at best, and a break of the caring relationship, at worst. Yet, discussions of healing, freedom from addiction & compulsive behaviors, right living, justice, and hospitality for others lead to healthy behavior change, improved rapport, and increased openness to light and love. The former tends to do harm, while the latter seems to do good.

Given this dynamic, it is helpful at this point to examine John Wesley's understanding of grace, specifically justification by grace through faith. There is some considerable tension in Wesley's understanding of faith and justification with what was said above about "atheists." Above, the heart of the matter was right tempers and right action. Ideas are considered but determined to be of secondary importance. However, Wesley's determination of who participates in justification and who has faith in Christ hangs almost entirely on ideas.

In the sermon, "Salvation by Faith," Wesley uses the following terms to describe saving faith, "acknowledgement," "assent," "reliance," "trust," and "confidence."<sup>32</sup> Each term holds either the definition or a connotation of an intellectual acceptance of the story of the gospel and an understanding of its importance for me. This seems to hinge on a holding a proper understanding of the Christ story. Further, in his sermon "Justification by Faith,"<sup>33</sup> Wesley writes:

I cannot describe the nature of this faith better than in the words of our own Church: "The only instrument of salvation" (whereof justification is one branch) "is faith; that is, a sure trust and confidence that God both hath and will forgive our sins, that he hath accepted us again into His favour, for the merits of Christ's death and passion."<sup>34</sup>

He goes on:

"By affirming that this faith is the term or "condition of justification," I mean, First, that there is no justification without it."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Church of the Nazarene USA/Canada, "Evangelism" (2023) available online at: <https://www.usacanadaregion.org/evangelism-revivalism>, Howard Culbertson, "What do we believe and teach?," <https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/affirm.htm>, Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "evangelism (n.), sense 2," July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4257341080>.

<sup>32</sup> Wesley, "Salvation by Faith," Sermon 1, Outler ed., 109-130.

<sup>33</sup> Wesley, "Justification by Faith," Sermon 42, Outler, ed., 181-199.

<sup>34</sup> Wesley, "Justification by Faith," 191

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

And further:

“Whatsoever virtues (so called) a man may have, --I speak of those unto whom the gospel is preached; for "what have I to do to judge them that are without" --whatsoever good works (so accounted) he may do, it profiteth not; he is still a "child of wrath," still under the curse, till he believes in Jesus.”<sup>36</sup>

So, where Wesley appears to be defining faith in these sermons, saving faith seems dependent on right ideas. Until a person understands the gospel, and understands they need to believe in Jesus to be delivered, then they remain under the curse. If this is the case, then Wesley here claims our participation in grace is conditioned on our understanding of grace, which hinges on our ideas. This assertion leaves James and Khalil in a very different place. It also seems to press the chaplain who seeks to care for them into a corner between “saving souls” and “accept the differences and recognize the positive” of another’s meaning-making system.

This tension is, at least in part, artificially imposed by the concept, and apparent barrier, of justification. Here Wesley’s understanding of prevenient grace and a post-modernizing of his stages of grace is helpful.

In “On Working Out Our Own Salvation” Wesley describes the progress of salvation. This process begins with prevenient grace, or “preventing grace”; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight, transient conviction of having sinned against him.”<sup>37</sup> These mark the beginning of salvation, though they are far from a full participation in the justification of humanity.<sup>38</sup> So, when Khalil left drug dealing because of the compunction felt at the harm done to countless families and neighbors, as he looked for a stable way of life, perhaps even as he prostrates on his rug and takes his shahada, this marks the beginning of his participation in grace. When James recognizes the destruction that his actions have brought to the lives of others, as he seeks to overcome his addictions and find empathy for his victims, he responds to grace—the grace that prevents further destruction and is the beginning, or conception, of his new life.

Tom Noble has recognized how Wesley, as a thinker of his time, worked with a concept to “types” of grace.<sup>39</sup> So, in the sermon quoted above, Wesley does not conceive of spiritual development so much as continuous growth in grace so much as the application of different graces at different distinct stages of development.

Wesley comes closer to an organic understanding of development in grace in his sermon, “The New Birth.” He recognizes that the child, before being born into the world, has ears but cannot hear and has eyes but does not see. Wesley writes, “It is then only when a man is born that we say, he begins to live.”<sup>40</sup> Perhaps due to developments in prenatal care, we can add nuance to Wesley’s argument and appreciate development in grace “in utero” and the danger of attempting to prematurely bring a person to the new birth.

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<sup>36</sup> Wesley “Justification by Faith,” 195

<sup>37</sup> Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” Sermon 85, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons*, Volume 3, Albert Outler, ed (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 488.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 5:18.

<sup>39</sup> Noble, *Holy Trinity*, p. 100.

<sup>40</sup> Wesley, “The New Birth,” 339.

Following Wesley’s metaphor, which he draws from scripture, only those born from above, or of the Spirit, or of God are alive spiritually. And yet, to be born of the Spirit, one has to first have been borne by the Spirit. To be born of God, one has first to have been carried in the womb (mercy, *rachem*) of God. Accordingly, there must be some spiritual development—growth in grace—even before one does cross the threshold of justification and regeneration.

### *Midwives of Regeneration*

Chaplains, like other spiritual care givers, have been called midwives of the holy.<sup>41</sup> This beautiful metaphor for our work honors the need for attentiveness to the spiritual development before new birth, even over and above pushing for premature “saving of souls.” Rather, chaplains attend to where grace and light appear in the care seeker life. We then help the care seeker respond in ways faithful to the light they have received.

We cannot force our ways of faithful response any more than a midwife can force a baby to be born. As all midwives know, babies come when they're ready, and forcing them to come early causes, sometimes fatal, complications. Some babies, once they are ready, need assistance in coming, and occasionally chaplains are there for the new birth, and help it along. Yet, to urge someone in the second trimester of grace to be born may cause at best spiritual trauma, and at worst spiritual still birth.

James has been awakened to his need for many years, yet his development is slow. He may still be in the first trimester of spiritual development. The light he's been given is the, occasional, horror at the harm his actions have caused and a desire for empathy for his victims. Spiritual care for James does not look like retelling him the story of Jesus but helping him respond faithfully to the light he's been given. This involves expanding his capacity for compassion and concern for others and developing charity to seek healing as far as it depends on him.

Khalil has discovered a stable way of life. He may be further along his spiritual development. Yet, the wise and skilled spiritual midwife will not assume she knows the best intervention until she has listened to both the newly developing spiritual life (the care seeker), and the one who bears this new life (the Spirit).

### *Preparing for Justification*

The metaphor of midwife fits very well the theological concept of regeneration. Turning to the concept of Christian justification, perhaps a reality all too familiar to prison chaplains will be of use--that of reentry preparation. Stepping out of the penitentiary and into the world requires at least as much development and appropriate maturity as does a healthy birth. If a person does not prepare for freedom while incarcerated, he or she often cannot make it outside of the structure of prison.

Charles Wesley penned these beautiful words to describe our liberation in Christ:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;

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<sup>41</sup> Churchman, Emma M. (2013) “Midwife for the Holy,” *Friends Journal*.

My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.<sup>42</sup>

The verdict has been given. The prison door has opened. The dungeon has flamed with light. The chains are gone. And yet, people don't walk out. We come to find that for some, the prison is a comfort. The way of violence seems to be a way of life. Selfishness is soothing. As with the metaphor of birth, springing someone from prison before he or she is truly ready for freedom does not always lead to life. In fact, along with Jesus,<sup>43</sup> we may recognize someone might end up worse than they were before premature justification.

So, the evangelistic endeavor must involve partnering with the Spirit to prepare persons to respond. Even when we do not use gospel language. In the mode of preventing grace, we join with the Spirit to cast out the demons of addiction and violence, destructive sexual habits and toxic self-images. This preparation and healing may use the language of psychology, the 12-steps, Buddhism, Islam, and other wisdom traditions that have some light within them. We need not borrow from other traditions. But, when the person seeking our care has received light through a particular tradition, we do best to meet that one where he or she is in preparation for freedom.

#### *A(nother) Caution Against Bigotry*

Whether taking the midwife (regeneration) or the reentry (justification) metaphor, we run the risk of allowing it to appear that we expect every justified, regenerate, fully mature, wholly sanctified person take on Christian religious forms and ideas. She or he will know Trinity by the names I use. I say risk because I'm not certain this is the case, and I'm not sure it's necessary as we stand in the Wesleyan tradition.

It may be that Khalil will find new birth, a life of love, and eventual union with God through the light he has received. He may, in the way God loves, love himself, others, and God, and yet he may continue to pray on his rug, wear a kufi, attend Jumah, and call the Lord Allah. It may be that as James continues to grow in the light of life the Spirit will continue to use Pagan images and concepts—the Spirit blows where she will. James may continue to think of the Creator as Goddess. By these images and concepts, the Spirit may infuse James with life and charity for all.

Wesley allows, in the sermon “On Living Without God,” “that if the heart of a man be filled (by the grace of God, and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels because his ideas are not clear, or because his conceptions are confused.” Some well-known examples of persons with, or on a trajectory toward, “the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man” who did not embrace Christian ideas and concepts are Fool’s Crow, Mohandas Gandhi, Pema Chodron, and Malcom X.

#### *Conclusion*

A chaplain’s responsibilities usually go beyond caring for persons. We also care for communities and organizations. The image of midwife and the three simple rules provide guidance at these levels as well. However, to explore these applications falls beyond the scope of this paper.

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be, That I Should Gain?”  
[https://hymnary.org/text/and\\_can\\_it\\_be\\_that\\_i\\_should\\_gain](https://hymnary.org/text/and_can_it_be_that_i_should_gain).

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 12:43-35.

If I have accomplished my goals, I have demonstrated from Christian tradition, scripture, and John Wesley's teachings that the contemporary chaplaincy paradigm and Wesleyan ministry standards are in harmony. Chaplains, as midwives of the holy, attend to the growing light and love in the life of the care seeker, address the pains accompanying the coming of the light, and assist in delivering the new life; all the while we seek to do good and avoid doing harm.

As Wesley recognized, this light may come from sources outside Christian revelation. When those who seek our care have received light outside of the Christian tradition, it may do more good to pursue the development of holy affections and tempers, and righteous acts than to push specifically toward an intellectual assent to the Christian story, since the latter may indeed do harm in some circumstances.

From this understanding, evangelism guided by catholic love may look like Daniel ministering to Nebuchadnezzar and the Jews teaching righteousness to Cornelius before he met Peter. It may look like helping Khalil understand why Allah has brought a current trial into his life. It may look like helping James feel his remorse and seek to make amends. In any situation, faithful Wesleyan chaplaincy involves looking for where the Spirit is currently moving in a life and partnering with the Spirit in ways that do no harm, do good, and keep the chaplain in the center of the love of Christ.