

BEAUTY, POESIS, AND VISION:
THE FUTURE OF HOLINESS THEOLOGY

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The horizon of Wesleyan-holiness theology must include a serious encounter with John Milbank. One clear place where Milbank might point the way forward for Wesleyan-holiness theology is his gesture toward Trinitarian ontology.¹ This is a thoroughly Wesleyan move as these words of John Wesley indicate, “The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith; with all vital religion”.² While Wesley seems to have been uninterested in metaphysical speculation regarding the trinity, he clearly saw its importance. Those who followed Wesley, while no doubt seeing the importance of the trinity, have not given sustained attention to the doctrine. Therefore, a disciplined reflection upon the trinity will enrich the capacity of Wesleyan-holiness theology to address its most basic theological commitments. It is precisely at this point that Milbank might be of great importance for Wesleyan-holiness theology.³

Anyone who has read much of Milbank will immediately recognize that my task is a difficult one. Understanding his work will require patience on the part of the reader. In order to grasp his theological project I will attempt to sketch out in very basic terms two movements, one critical and the other constructive in each of the three sections. I will look at his critique of secular reason and his ancient postmodernity in the first section. My second task will be to look specifically at Milbank's Trinitarian ontology. Once again the first movement will be critical and then constructive. Finally, in the third section I intend to look at how all of this might help those of us within the ranks of the Wesleyan-holiness tradition to re-narrate the nature of redemption. This is the peaceful flight that I promise in the title of this paper. It is a concept that requires a

¹I am using the term “Trinitarian ontology”, as does Milbank, in order to make it clear that his interest to this point has not been to develop a doctrine of the Trinity. The most that can be said of his work is that it is a gesture toward a way of conceiving reality in a genuinely theological manner.

²John Wesley, “On the Trinity” in *The Works of Wesley*. Third Edition (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 6:205.

³Perhaps, it will help the reader to understand that this paper is part of a larger undertaking in my theological work. My re-consideration of fundamental themes within Wesleyan-holiness began formally with a paper that attempted to reconstruct Christian perfection within a broader polity, which included a richer understanding of the forms of life associated with Christian perfection. This included a fuller understanding of ecclesiology and the sacraments. I continued my reconsideration with an examination of moral theology or more properly the lack thereof within the ranks of Wesleyan-holiness theology. It is in the pages, which follow that I intend to extend this discussion by a fuller accounting of Trinitarian reflection and its promise for Wesleyan-holiness theology.

good deal of work in order to appreciate fully. While it will take some time to get there the path of peaceful flight is the ultimate goal for my reflections.

The absence of sustained Trinitarian reflection by Wesley and those who have consciously sought to work in the Wesleyan-holiness family has been noted.⁴ This fact should not, however, be interpreted as meaning that Wesley was not interested in the Trinity, just that the kind of reflection that could be defined as metaphysical, ontological, and/or speculative was of little interest to him. Even so, the significance of Trinitarian reflection can be seen at the core of Wesleyan theology.⁵ Maddox explains this apparent contradiction by describing Wesley's theology as "practical-theological activity".⁶ It is, perhaps, the task of the present generation of theologians to develop a Trinitarian ontology, which will enrich not only the practice of Christian holiness, but also the speculative capacities of the tradition. This section should be understood as a preliminary gesture in that direction.

Wesleyan-holiness theology must become more explicitly Trinitarian. Such a move will have far reaching effects for our tradition. For example, it is imperative that we lift the horizon of theological reflection in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition beyond an exclusive consideration of the moral imperative. While such considerations are important, there is a great deal more that demands our sustained attention. It will be important to materially relate doctrines such as ecclesiology and Christology.⁷ Trinitarian reflection might also help us to define the relationship

⁴Sam Powell observes, "The doctrine of the trinity among 19th century Arminian-Wesleyans is like a vulgar joke in polite company. It is the Christian antique: to be admired, but not used". Sam Powell, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in 19th Century American Wesleyanism 1850-1900," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 18:2 (Fall 1983): 33.

⁵Randy Maddox makes this claim regarding John Wesley, "He actually argued that the truth of the Trinity 'enters into the very heart of Christianity; it lies at the root of all vital religion'. Of course, he immediately added that it was belief in the *fact* of the Trinity that was involved here, not adherence to any specific philosophical explication of the Trinity". Cf, Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*.(Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood Books, 1994), 139.

Maddox indicates that the Wesley's "sought to form in their Methodist followers a truly trinitarian balance of (1) reverence for the God of Holy Love and for God/Father's original design for human life, (2) gratitude for the unmerited Divine Initiative in Christ that frees us from the guilt and enslavement of our sin, and (3) responsiveness to the Presence of the Holy Spirit that empowers our recovery of the Divine Image in our lives. There can be no better expression of Wesley's theology of *responsible grace* than Christians who preserve such a trinitarian balance as they proceed along the Way of Salvation" (140).

⁶Maddox, *Responsible Grace*: 139.

⁷Cf, Paul Bassett, "The Interplay of Christology and Ecclesiology in the Theology of the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 16:2 (Fall 1981).

between liturgy and the self, or the theological orientation of Christian practice.⁸ Perhaps, Trinitarian reflection could help the Wesleyan-holiness tradition come to terms with the Doctrine of the Spirit in other than purely experiential-expressive ways. A fair reading of the themes which have given shape to Wesleyan-holiness theology might suggest that an articulation of a Second Difference, that is, a Trinitarian ontology will be necessary for our tradition to ‘go on’. Perhaps, our legitimate concern to call attention to the work of Christ have run the risk of turning the Christ into a hero who defeats our enemy and pleads our case to the Divine Judge. There is little need for a Second Difference in such a scheme. One might even wonder if the Trinity could be anything other than an afterthought within such a scheme. Trinitarian reflection in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition could provide the means to re-examine our most basic theological commitments. I want to argue in the remaining pages of this paper that Milbank’s Trinitarian ontology might help those of us within the Wesleyan-holiness tradition to accomplish this task. Further, I want to test this theological conviction by looking at soteriology. Specifically, I want to point to some theological problems associated with the relationship between Wesleyan-holiness theology and the Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement which might be more fully addressed through a renewed reflection on the Trinity.

1. The Problem Stated. The Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement enjoys a long history in the Christian tradition, including the Wesleyan-holiness tradition. H. Ray Dunning talks about “Satisfaction Theories” under which he places Anselm, Calvin, and even Grotius.⁹ It is, of course, true that variations on this view are nearly universal among Christians.¹⁰ Essentially this family of theories assumes the “necessity of an ‘antecedent satisfaction’ as the condition for the

⁸Cf, E. Byron Anderson, “Trinitarian Grammar of the Liturgy and the Liturgical Practice of the Self,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 34:2 (Fall 1999).

⁹H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988): 336. It should be understood that the following analysis of “Satisfaction theories” includes the Punishment and Governmental theories. Further my analysis is not intended to ignore the subtle differences between the theories, but rather to call attention to the fact that they all share a common assumption.

¹⁰Barry Callen observes, “This atonement model remains in common use in the Christian community. The Lausanne Covenant (1974) says that Jesus ‘gave himself as the only ransom for sinners’ (satisfaction). The Junaluska Affirmation (1975) states that ‘by His [Jesus] death on the cross the sinless Son propitiated the holy wrath of the Father, a righteous anger occasioned by sin.’ Such focus on propitiation (appeasement) of God is unacceptable to some who prefer to avoid a theological affirmation presuming God’s wrath and anger”. Cf, Barry L. Callen, *God as Loving Grace* (Nappanee, IL: Evangel Publishing House, 1996), 236-237.

remission of sins”.¹¹ This is all the more problematic in light of the fact that Wesley held to a Satisfaction Theory, which is according to Dunning “antithetical to his central soteriological claims”.¹² This is a problem that many have noted or otherwise struggled with in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition. It is both a theological and a practical problem.¹³

H. Orton Wiley in his *Christian Theology* points to several limitations of the Satisfaction Theory. First, “It is in (the) attempt to impute our sin to Christ as His own, that the weakness of this type of substitution appears”.¹⁴ Sin is not actually punished or it is punished without demerit in the one being punished. Second, there is a tendency to conceive of substitution in a too narrow fashion, that is, only the penal substitution theory is appropriate. Wiley argues that the Governmental theory offers an alternative and better understanding. Third, the “theory leads of necessity, either to universalism on the one hand or unconditional election on the other”.¹⁵ Fourth, Wiley sees that this “theory is associated with the Calvinistic ideas of predestination and limited atonement”.¹⁶ This observation is connected to the way grace is to be understood. Finally, Wiley thinks that it leads “logically to antinomianism”.¹⁷ It inevitably separates faith and sanctity. This alone raises issues of great significance for a Wesleyan-holiness theology. All of this can be summed up in the words of Dunning, “The real problem for a sound theology is making provision for sanctification without losing the biblical emphasis on justification by faith alone”.¹⁸ While both Wiley and Dunning point to important issues there is an underlying concern which links everything together. It is toward this reality that I think our attention should be turned.

¹¹Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 337.

¹²*Ibid*, 362. Dunning is even more direct in another of his books, “No version of the satisfaction theory provides any logical grounds for asserting the necessity of holiness of heart and life. An authentic view of the atonement must provide for both faith alone and holy living, and a fully developed Wesleyan interpretation that looks at Scripture theologically will do this”. Cf. H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 26.

¹³Callen suggests, “While several New Testament references clearly employ the metaphor of substitution or satisfaction, much in the New Testament can be seen as resisting any overemphasis on this metaphor since it hardly pictures the Father of our Lord as bringing ‘good news of great joy’ when the news centers in God’s justice needing to be placated with a literal human sacrifice. If grace is made conditional on required satisfaction, is it really grace?” Callen, *God as Loving Grace*, 237-238.

¹⁴H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1952): 2: 245.

¹⁵*Ibid*, 246.

¹⁶*Ibid*, 247.

¹⁷*Ibid*, 248-249.

The fundamental problem with maintaining a Satisfaction Theory of atonement with Wesleyan-holiness theology is the radically different understanding of God assumed by each. The Satisfaction theory assumes that the real problem in the atonement is with God. Either his honor or his holiness must be addressed before atonement can be consummated. Leaving aside the substantialist notions that such a view of sin and for that matter grace/holiness implies, the real problem is the assumption that God has constructed a barrier separating Himself from humankind. Inevitably this pits Jesus against Father; it is Jesus who as our redeemer pleads for mercy to the Father who is our Judge. Such a construction seems at the most fundamental level to be tritheistic and as such it is sub-Trinitarian, and perhaps, anti-Trinitarian.

Looking at the issue from a more consistent Trinitarian point of view we see a God who in the fullness of his grace has reached us. This view is unapologetically relational, but it is at the same time Trinitarian. I am aware of two interrelated attempts to address the problem within the ranks of Wesleyan-holiness theology. The first attempt is made by H. Ray Dunning in *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* where he argues that Wesley's uses of the threefold office of Christ lends itself to "an Atonement motif".¹⁹ He argues his case persuasively as both biblical and Wesleyan. A second approach is offered by R. Larry Shelton, "The central paradigm of this saving relationship in Scripture is the covenant in both its cultic and its interpersonal elements as understood and expressed in the life of the community".²⁰ He argues that this paradigm has the advantage of being biblical, as well as both personal and communal. He says further, "The covenant relationship between God and His people is thus central to the entire biblical message of salvation".²¹ In this light, it is intriguing that Shelton observes, "Anselm's emphasis on the

¹⁸Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 364.

¹⁹*Ibid*, 366. Cf. John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960, 1985).

²⁰R. Larry Shelton, "The Redemptive Grace of God in Christ," in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*. 2 Vols. Edited by Charles Carter, R. Duane Thompson, and Charles Wilson (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press/Zondervan Publishing House, 1983): 1: 473. Larry Shelton addresses this issue in an article in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* as well. He says, "it is possible to stress the covenant relationship between God and His people while minimizing the insertion of theological constructs which are external to the canonical text or which are occasional rather than universal paradigms for atonement". See, R. Larry Shelton, "A Covenant Concept of Atonement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 19:1 (Spring 1984): 91. He adds to this, "the covenant model, since it is Biblical, provides a balance which prevents an overemphasis on either mere sentimentality or on the rigid deterministic categories which obscure both the seeking love of God and the reality of His actual work in the believer" (105).

²¹*Ibid*.

importance of maintaining God's honor and on the atoning significance of Christ's obedience are important elements to be maintained in a theory of Atonement".²² Both attempts use relational categories regarding sin and holiness. Both Dunning and Shelton believe that such a description is more biblical and truer to Wesley. In other words, approaching salvation either through the threefold office of Christ or the Covenant frees those within the Wesleyan-holiness tradition to avoid the weaknesses named by Wiley. Both are serious attempts to deal with the incongruity described above. Yet, Trinitarian concerns are not central to either view.

After looking briefly at the problem, which is noted by many including Wiley and Dunning, it seems to me that the perspective of Milbank might be of service. I want to argue that the best alternative for resolving the "Satisfaction/Holiness" problem can best be addressed by a more sustained reflection on the Trinity. Wesley himself seems to pull all of this together in a comment on 1 John 5: 7-8:

The testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood is by an eminent gradation corroborated by three who give still greater testimony. *The Father* – Who clearly testified of the Son, both at His baptism and at His transfiguration. *The Word* – Who testified of Himself on many occasions, while He was on earth; and again with still greater solemnity, after His ascension into heaven. *And the Spirit* – Whose testimony was added chiefly after His glorification. *And these three are one* – Even as those two, the Father and the Son, are one. Nothing can separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son.²³

It is important to remember the thoroughgoing saturation of redemption and salvation, which informs the text Wesley, is addressing. This fact when linked to Wesley's own reflection on the Trinity in his notes gives me a warrant call for the same. Specifically, I intend to outline the need to more fully comprehend sanctity through Milbank's Trinitarian ontology. I think that such a gesture, and this is all that I can accomplish here, is not only Milbankian, but Wesleyan and finally biblical. It is in every way the path of peaceful flight . . .

2. Can a Gift be Given?²⁴ The path of peaceful flight unfolds the beauty of God as it opens all reality to the gift of God in Christ and envisions the eschatological presence of the

²²*Ibid*, 505.

²³John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1754, 1976): 917.

²⁴The title of this section is chosen because of a particular essay entitled "Can a Gift be Given: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic". Milbank attempts to look at the meaning of the gift from a theological perspective. He writes, "Eventually, this relation between, on the one hand, primordial give and take, and on the other hand, the historical irruption of *agape*, will be my main concern". See,

Church in the power of the Spirit. Such a re-narration of salvation must include three movements: beauty, poesis, and vision. First, understanding salvation requires a re-emphasis upon beauty/harmonic peace.²⁵ The Christian faith and in particular Wesleyan-holiness theology seems to be positioned to recover beauty as a theological conviction. Beauty begins with an understanding of God as beautiful, whole, musical, and holy. It also means that God invites all of creation to join in the music of His harmonic peace. Perhaps, theology is aesthetics when viewed through the trinity. Music is an apt metaphor for beginning to appreciate beauty. David Cunningham says, “Christianity proclaims a polyphonic understanding of God – one in which *difference* provides an alternative to a monolithic homogeneity, yet without becoming a source of exclusion”.²⁶ Such an understanding cannot be the product of formal logic or a preoccupation with some completed substance, rather it points to a more fundamental beauty of creation out of nothing, the unceasing love of God. Therefore, beauty as a theological conviction finds warrant in a Triune God; it is expressed in creation:

Creation is always found as a given, but developing “order”. As the gift of God, creation also belongs to God, it is within God as the *Logos*. But existing harmonics, existing “extensions” of time and space, constantly give rise to new “intentions,” to movements of the Spirit to further creative expression, new temporal unraveling of creation *ex nihilo*, in which human beings most consciously participate. Yet even this movement, the vehicle of human autonomy, is fully from God, is nothing *in addition* to the divine act-potential, and not equivocally different in relation to him.²⁷

John Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology*. 11:1 (January 1995): 119. He goes on in his analysis of the beginning question to “suggest that the gift is, first of all, inseparable from exchange . . . (121). This means that the giving of the gift is caught up in taking, corruption, donation, and brute principle. These ambiguities suggest that the answer to the question is not as simple as it might on first sight appear. He asks “if gift are only good according to the measure of concealed moral contracts, debts and obligations, what is a gift after all?” (125). Perhaps, a gift is really a concealed obligation. How we intend to answer these questions goes to the heart of re-narrating salvation. Is the one forgiven of an offense obligated to forgive the other? Is it possible to think about ecclesial community as those who are obligated to be holy? Could it be that the economy of grace is reduced to something like commerce? The answer can only be yes, if something other than Trinitarian theology informs us. Salvation, when it is conceived through the Trinity, could never be either a payment to Satan or a satisfaction of the Father.

²⁵While I appreciate the tenor of Marjorie Suchocki when she calls attention to beauty as one dimension of well-being, it is my sense that her formulation is onto-theology, while what I am attempting to get at is theo-ontology. Cf, Majorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994).

²⁶David Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 129.

²⁷Milbank, *Postmodern Critical Augustinianism*, 377.

The unceasing love of God weaves a musical harmony that invites everything to participate in it. It has long been recognized that part of what Trinitarian theology attempted involved a clear linking of God, salvation, and creation.

Wesleyan-holiness theology has talked in terms of the renewal of the image of God, but often stopped short of understanding the cosmological implications of salvation. Beauty is the conviction that within the Triune life of God there is the capacity to fashion a musical harmony for the cosmos. Can the gift be given? Yes, the gift is the beauty of the Triune life of God, which envisions wholeness instead of alienation, peace instead of violence.

The second movement in a re-narration of salvation is *poesis*. Milbank describes this as “the idea that human making is not a merely instrumental and arbitrary matter, but itself a route which opens towards the transcendent . . .”²⁸ Such an understanding avoids the temptation to think of salvation in purely personal terms. At the very least, it seems shortsighted to conceive of salvation “purely” in terms of a decision, or a response. Salvation is not what God and the individual accomplish together, it is what God preveniently brings about in the life of the believer. To the extent that salvation is construed through a “possessive individualism” it becomes a transaction between God and humankind, one that all too often is as much a personal achievement as it is a divine gift. *Poesis* can enhance the capacity of Wesleyan-holiness theology to more fully comprehend the meaning of putting our salvation to work. Perhaps, this emphasis can help us to see salvation/holiness as participation. It resists the tendency to reduce holiness to morality because it reminds us at every point that putting our salvation to work is engendered by a transcendent God. Too often salvation is reduced to “my” moment, a time when “I” made the “choice”. *Poesis* is construed through the triune life of God, the one who offers a gift, one that opens the self to its poetic possibilities. Can the gift be given? Yes, if we understand that in the Triune life of God the gift flows from a plentitude of graciousness. It is not withheld until some satisfaction is accomplished or a punishment is accepted. Salvation has always been given, even from the foundation of the world.

The third movement in the re-narration of salvation is vision. This final movement is eschatological to the core. It is the working out of the counter-ontology into another city/counter-kingdom. One that looks toward its completion as it practices the stubborn hope of

²⁸Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 148.

redemption. Vision is the reminder that there is a “not-yet” about salvation. It admits that evil still exists, sometimes it even appears to reign.²⁹ But most of all it points to centrality of the Church; the “Body of Christ” and the “Temple of the Holy Spirit” for the eschatological vision of redemption. If as I suggested above, salvation is not “just” a personal thing, it is essential that we see the importance of the Church for continuing to incarnate the Christ in the world. Cunningham puts it this way, “It can thus help us to recognize the contours of a specifically *Trinitarian* polyphony; it should also begin to *form* us polyphonically, urging us to understand ourselves and others as the various melody-lines that contribute to the symphony of the Church”.³⁰ Milbank makes it clear that the Counter-Kingdom or The Other City is about salvation. He is equally clear that it is constituted by the Triune life of God. Yet, he is neither blind to the violence that appears to still reign, nor the Church’s complicity with such violence. Milbank speaks clearly to this point:

In the midst of history, the judgement of God has already happened. And either the Church enacts this vision of paradisaal community which this judgement opens out, or else it promotes a hellish society beyond any terrors known to antiquity: *corruptio optimi pessima*. For the Christian interruption of history ‘decoded’ antique virtue, yet thereby helped to unleash first liberalism and then nihilism. Insofar as the Church has failed, and has even become a hellish anti-Church, it has confined Christianity, like everything else, within the cycle of the ceaseless exhaustion and return to violence.³¹

The cross makes such violence absurd, even as it points to the path of peaceful flight. He observes, “An abstract attachment to non-violence is therefore not enough – we need to practice this as a skill, and learn its idiom. The idiom is built up in the Bible, and reaches its consummation in Jesus and the emergence of the Church”.³² What is really at stake for the Church is its faithfulness to situate all of life within the “emanation of harmonious difference”.³³ The obvious sense in which this is consistent with the Wesleyan-holiness tradition is striking. There are two reasons for this; first, Wesleyan-holiness theology sees salvation more fully within the continuing work of the Spirit. Salvation is not only forensic; it is therapeutic. Second,

²⁹There are several implications for theodicy that will be need to be fleshed out, but this exceeds the scope of my current project.

³⁰Cunningham, 135.

³¹Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 433.

³²*Ibid*, 398.

³³*Ibid*, 434.

Wesleyan-holiness is saturated with an eschatological hope that says human beings can indeed become holy, not just apparently, but actually.³⁴

It remains the task of this generation of Wesleyan-holiness theologians to more fully flesh this out. My contention is that such work requires that Trinitarian ontology serve as the prolegomena for a fuller re-narration of Wesleyan-holiness theology. Can a gift be given? Yes, a gift is given in the continuing and unceasing love of the Triune God in the community of the incarnation. It should be understood from the start that the One who sends the Son gives the Spirit without reserve in order to reclaim creation. If giving is a matter of sacrifice, either to Satan who holds the rights to humankind or to the justice of a Holy God, then it is not a gift. Any attempt to reduce the economy of salvation to some sort of contract reduces the capacity for a Trinitarian theology to inform our speculation and practice. Catherine Pickstock attempts to define one such practice (medieval Roman Rite) and as such points to its Trinitarian implications:

This combination of salvific narration and purificatory reading makes of the book a sacrificial altar, which is censed in preparation for the sacrifice, so that its words appear to ascend as an offering to God. But the text thus burns upwards to join the eternal divine text of the Logos which is nonetheless a book perpetually *uttered* by the Father, uttered as writing, only to re-expire in the out-breathing of the Spirit.³⁵

Liturgy, then, is one dimension of the externality of salvation. It is one way in which the Church seeks to extend the sphere of aesthetic harmony first envisioned in the Trinity, but eschatologically completed as all nature joins in the chorus.

These three movements – beauty, *poesis*, and vision – gesture toward a more genuine Trinitarian understanding of salvation. They suggest something of the power and possibility of the gift being given. In order to more comprehend this preliminary reflection it might be

³⁴Theodore Runyon underscores this point, "For Wesley religion is not humanity's means of escape to a more tolerable heavenly realm but participation in God's own redemptive enterprise, God's new creation, 'faith working by love,' bringing holiness and happiness to all the earth". Cf, Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 169. He goes on to address human rights, poverty and the rights of the poor, the rights of women, environmental stewardship, ecumenism, and tolerance. Randy Maddox says, "He (Wesley) vigorously denied any doctrine of 'angelic' perfection, repeating his earlier teaching on the limiting impact of infirmities on our holiness and the continual place for growth in holiness during this life". Cf, Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 185.

³⁵Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 219.

important to look at the demands of soteriology. First, sin must be accounted for, not just dismissed. This Trinitarian ontology begins with an even greater conviction, the harmonic peace of God, but it does not dismiss sin. Yet, it tends to see that evil is never more fundamental. Rather, evil is always and actually overcome in the fullness of the Triune God and eschatologically overcome in the extension of the sphere of harmonic peace through ecclesial doxology. Second, any understanding of soteriology must be careful to define the place of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God, that is the counter-kingdom, has appeared in the Christ. Jesus has walked into the face of sin, evil, and death for us in order to subvert the power of darkness. Graham Ward attempts to deal with this, “From the moment of the incarnation, this body then is physically human and subject to all the infirmities of being, such, and yet is also a body looking backward to the perfect Adamic corporeality and forward to the corporeality of resurrection. The materiality of this human body is eschatologically informed”.³⁶ In other words, the incarnation and the resurrection must be accounted for and in fact are in the eschatological community, the Church. Jesus Christ has “already” subverted evil through his obedience, even unto death. Jesus Christ has eschatologically delivered all of creation through the resurrection to life, as the first fruits of the resurrection to come. This is the “not-yet” which is progressively called into being through the practice of the faith in this new community called into being by Word and Spirit. This points to the adequacy of a new understanding of salvation viewed through Trinitarian ontology.

Trinitarian ontology engenders the practice of charity, first in the life of God, and then in the paradisaal community of peace:

Where Being is already assumed, where Being is what there is to give, even though it is now, for a Christian ontology, seen to be only in this giving, then gift is ‘further’ to Being, and Being itself, as bound in the reciprocal relation of give-and-take, is for-giving, a giving that is in turn, in the Holy Spirit, the gift of relation. And if the created interplay between Being and beings . . . participated in the constitutive distance between Father and Son, then we, as creatures, only *are* as sharing in God’s arrival, his for-giving, and perpetual eucharist. Only if this is the case, if first we really do receive, and receive through our participatory giving in turn, is it conceivable that there is a gift to us, or that we ourselves can

³⁶Graham Ward, “The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. Edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 164.

give. This is the one given condition of the gift, that we love because God first loved us.³⁷

Charity, when it is envisioned through the Trinitarian life of God resists reduction to gift exchange. It means that we are to understand salvation as the free offer to participate in the Trinitarian life of God. It also means that the gracious God of everlasting relation is neither appeased nor fooled, rather God “for-gives”.

I have attempted to argue that a Trinitarian ontology alone is adequate to re-narrate salvation in such a way that the metaphor of punishment/satisfaction is subverted and Christian holiness envisioned. While the covenant is a more adequate approach than satisfaction, it is still possible to miss the gift and reduce salvation to the calculus of a contract. Likewise the attempt to resolve the dilemma through an insertion of the threefold office of Christ may miss the Trinitarian horizon of salvation, by overlooking the unfolding work of the Spirit in the Church. Milbank’s Trinitarian ontology is a preliminary gesture toward a richer understanding. In fact, it is just such reflection that enables us to understand Jesus as more than a ‘moral’ person or a ‘mask’ of divinity:

To identify Jesus, the gospels abandon memetic/diegetic narrative, and resort to metaphors: Jesus is the way, the word, the truth, life, water, bread, and seed of a tree and the fully grown tree, the foundation stone of a new temple and at the same time the whole edifice. These metaphors abandon the temporal and horizontal for the spatial and the vertical. They suggest that Jesus is the most comprehensive possible context: not just the space within which all transactions between time and eternity transpire, but also the beginning of all this space, the culmination of this space, the growth of this space and all the goings in and out within this space. Supremely, he is both work and food: the communicated meanings which emanate from our mouths and yet in this outgoing simultaneously return to them as spiritual nurture.³⁸

Christ lives as the ‘body of Christ’ in and through the telling of and the practice of the story. As Milbank says, “the doctrine of the atonement must be drastically reconceived from an ecclesiological vantage point.”³⁹ It is in this way that atonement, forgiveness, salvation, and even holiness are construed eschatologically. It is in this way that atonement can be “already” and “not-yet”. It is in this way that “transposing Chalcedonian orthodoxy into a new idiom . . .” makes it possible to be orthodox. The Christological question is always a Trinitarian question.

³⁷Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?: 154.

³⁸Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 149-150.

It is in this way that we begin to understand Trinitarian ontology as a gesture of holiness. As often as you do this re-member, that is, as often as you do this re-narrate the gift of the Trinitarian God. Ultimately, remembering is a practice, not as abstract commitment, or as transcendently secured idea. Understanding the link between the Trinity and vital religion is the pathway to a deeper, more profound music. It is understanding salvation as something more than a transaction between a feudal lord and a serf. Neither is it an Almighty God who conquers an inferior challenger. Salvation is the everlasting musical harmony, that we begin to hear in the echo of the eschatological community . . . it is heard in the path of peaceful flight. Robert Jenson sums this up in the following comment:

God will reign: he will fit created time to triune time and created polity to the *perichoresis* of Father, Son, and Spirit. God will deify the redeemed: their life will be carried and shaped by the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and they will know themselves as personal agents in the life so shaped. God will let the redeemed see him: the Father by the Spirit will make Christ's eyes their eyes. Under all rubrics, the redeemed will be appropriated to God's own being.

The last word to be said about God's triune being is that he "is a great fugue". Therefore, the last word to be said about the redeemed is Jonathan Edward's beautiful saying, cited at the end of the first volume to the converse point: "When I would form an idea of a society in the highest degree happy, I think of them . . . sweetly singing to each other."

The point of identity, infinitely approachable and infinitely approached, the enlivening *telos* of the Kingdom's own life, is perfect harmony between the conversation of the redeemed and the conversation that God is. In the conversation God is, meaning, and melody are one.

The end is music.⁴⁰

This is the path of peaceful flight . . .

³⁹*Ibid*, 162.

⁴⁰Robert Jenson, : *The Works of God* , vol 2 of *Systematic Theology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 369.