

John Wesley as a Christian Worldview Thinker

Dr. Daryl McCarthy

daryl@leadershipanvil.org

Presented at the Wesleyan Theological Society Annual Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee

March 1, 2024

© 2017, 2024

Abstract

Many neo-Calvinists see themselves as “*the* Christian worldview” people in a way that hardly any other evangelicals are, in their opinion. They assume that no one else has a corner on a “thinking Christianity” like they do. In contrast, John Wesley is seen by most evangelicals today as the Christian perfection guy (scandalous enough in itself), as a man focused on experience, on the heart, and on emotions, with little emphasis on thinking Christianly and certainly without even an idea of what a holistic Christian worldview might be. This paper will begin by summarizing the key characteristics of the typical Calvinistic Christian worldview. Then it will demonstrate that Wesley presents an exceptionally well-rounded Christian worldview in both principle and in application. Even though John Wesley may not have presented as systematic a worldview as John Calvin before him or Abraham Kuyper or Francis Schaeffer after him, he checks all the boxes for a thorough-going “Reformational” worldview, all without a TULIP in sight. Wesley insisted that the Christian faith is a comprehensive worldview which encompasses everything, not just matters of piety. For Wesley there is absolutely no sacred/secular dichotomy. Through his sermons and his ministry we see a robust, vibrant application of Christ’s Lordship to every facet of life, thought, and culture. This paper will show how John Wesley affirmed, communicated, and implemented a comprehensive biblically-grounded, Christ-centered worldview which is very similar to many Reformed worldviews but without any of the toxic elements of Calvinistic determinism. Wesleyan-Arminians and Reformed believers alike can learn much from Wesley’s truly Reformational worldview, through his application of Scripture to all of life and culture.

For the last several years, my ministry has been focused primarily on working with Christian academics in Europe, mostly professors at secular universities. As a result I spend a lot of time talking to Christian professors and churches about a Christian worldview. One Sunday morning a few years ago, I had just finished preaching at Billy Graham’s home church, a lively, solid, biblically-grounded Presbyterian congregation. I had preached on the importance of affirming the lordship of Christ over all of life and the importance of us individually living in obedience to His lordship. Afterwards, one of the many faithful old Presbyterian saints in that church (and it is populated by a good number of heroes of the faith) came up to me in the foyer and gave me what he probably thought was the best compliment he could pay me, “Thank you for your message on worldview. You must be quite a Reformed man.” It wasn’t the time or place to correct him, so I just replied, “Well, I’m committed to what the Bible says about the lordship of Christ. It’s a message that needs to be heard, isn’t it.”

Over the years I’ve noticed that many in the Reformed community, especially neo-Calvinists, see themselves as “*the* Christian worldview” people in a way that hardly any other evangelicals are.

Daryl McCarthy is Executive Director of The Leadership Anvil, a ministry organization devoted to equipping Christian academics, pastors, and ministry leaders for effective service (www.leadershipanvil.org). Daryl is also a Theological Education Teaching Fellow with One Mission Society (OMS). He earned the D.Min., Fuller Theological Seminary; M.Div., Nazarene Theological Seminary; MA (Philosophy of Religion), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; and, B.Th., Kansas Christian College. You may contact him at daryl@leadershipanvil.org.

In contrast, John Wesley is seen in modern times (even by many Wesleyans), as the Christian perfection guy (scandalous enough in itself, even for many Wesleyans), as a man focused on experience, on the heart, on emotions, with little emphasis on thinking Christianly and certainly no thought of a Christian worldview. For instance, one of my professors at Nazarene Theological Seminary back in the 80's boasted that not one Nazarene college or university taught a course on apologetics. Why would he make such a boast? He explained, "Because we Wesleyans focus on the experiential, not on the cognitive!"

Let's be honest. Whoever quotes John Wesley when they're talking about a Christian worldview? Nobody, or at least, almost nobody. Wesley is universally disregarded as making any contribution to serious worldview thinking. But this is a serious oversight and mistake.

As a matter of fact, John Wesley not only articulated, but also practiced a thoroughly Reformational worldview, and he did it all without a TULIP¹ in sight. After soaking myself in Christian worldview literature for many years, I realized there weren't any foundational principles in the overall structure of the classic Reformational worldview put forth by hardy Calvinists that I couldn't also affirm as a thorough-going Wesleyan-Arminian. Let me explain.

Let's start by defining our terms.

What is a Reformational Worldview?

A "Reformational worldview" or more often, a "Reformed worldview," usually refers to a worldview that has been developed by those with a Reformed or Calvinist theology. One of the most pristine statements of a Christian worldview was made by one of my favorite Calvinists, Abraham Kuyper, (1837-1920) who was a Dutch pastor, journalist, founder of the Free University, and eventually Prime Minister of the Netherlands at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He declared (slightly paraphrased by me), "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine!'" (Three weeks ago after finishing a lunch meeting in central Amsterdam, I walked past Die Nieuwe Kerk (The New Church, new since it was just completed in 1408) where Kuyper first made this declaration.)

Here are five hallmarks of a classic Reformational Christian worldview.

1. **Biblical Authority.** The Bible as God's Word is the foundation and the ultimate authority for a Christian worldview. Consequently, the principles and doctrines taught in the Bible should shape how believers view the world and everything in it. Biblical truth should shape both our thinking and our conduct.
2. **Christ's Comprehensive Lordship.** Christ's lordship is comprehensive in that He has dominion over "all creation" and "all things" (in the language of Colossians 1:15-20). This includes lordship not only over the Church and souls, but over "everything."

¹ TULIP is the acronym summarizing the key teachings of Calvinism which were disputed by the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius but upheld in the Canons (doctrinal norms) of Dordt: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

(Colossians 1:18). Consequently, there is no sacred/secular bifurcation which splits the world into a sacred realm and a non-sacred or secular realm.

3. **Redeeming All Things.** Understanding Christ's comprehensive lordship means that His ultimate aim is to redeem not just souls, but all things. Consequently, we have a mandate to apply the truth of the Gospel to all of life, or as Niebuhr put it, to promote "the present permeation of all life by the Gospel."² God calls for righteousness both in individuals and in institutions and organizations. Christ came to ultimately redeem everything—individuals, institutions, academic disciplines—everything in the cosmos.
4. **The Importance of the Mind and Propositional Truth.** One consequence of the all-encompassing lordship of Christ is that the focus of the Church is not only on the soul and spirit, but on the whole human being--body, emotions, and will, and certainly the mind. We are created as cognitive beings, as well as volitional, spiritual, emotional, and physical. Scripture repeatedly calls us to examine, to meditate on truths, to read, to understand--all cognitive processes. Conversion itself requires cognition, because we hear words. we consider these ideas, and eventually we give mental assent--all cognitive acts. We are called to think Christianly because we have the "mind of Christ."
5. **Sacredness of All Vocations and Fields of Study.** All vocations can bring glory to God, not just "ministry" positions such as pastors, Christian educators, or missionaries. This is in stark contrast to the common sacred/secular dichotomy which emphasizes the calling to minister as a pastor, missionary, or some other vocational ministry role. Consequently, Christ is the Lord of all vocations, occupations, and professions and He is the Lord of all academic disciplines, not only of theology.

These overall points are drawn from what I consider to be some of the best authors on a Christian worldview, such as Francis Schaeffer's works, Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*; Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind*; Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*; and Neil Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*. Schaeffer, Wolters, Noll, and Plantinga are all thoroughly Calvinistic; I'm not sure about Blamires who was Anglican.

Let me give you an example of an excellent summary of a Christian worldview. This is from Calvin College's Neil Plantinga and his book, *Engaging God's World*.

All has been created good, including the full range of human cultures that emerge when humans act according to God's design. But all has been corrupted by evil, including not only culture but also the natural world. So all—the whole cosmos—must be redeemed by Jesus Christ the Lord. What follows is that all of life is sacred: the whole of it stands under the blessing, judgment, and redeeming purposes of God.³

Immediately after this summary, Plantinga goes on to say, "When Christians talk this way they are speaking with a Reformed accent, and perhaps with an Augustinian one." He adds that "this

² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1st Harper torchbook ed., *Harper Torchbooks* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 217.

³ Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), xv.

vision derives from Scripture, centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and grows rich from the contributions of ecumenical creeds, church confessions, and the thinking of such heavyweight theologians as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Barth.” He concludes by saying the Christian worldview he is presenting will be “not only Reformed but also catholic and evangelical.”⁴

The purpose of this paper is to show that John Wesley embraced, affirmed, communicated, *and* implemented a comprehensive, biblically-grounded, God-centered worldview which includes all five of these core principles.

Furthermore, (and this will be scandalous—even heretical—to some of my Calvinistic friends) one of the important insights to be gained by a close examination of Wesley’s Reformational worldview is this. Contrary to the claims of most Calvinists, a TULIP theology is neither intrinsic nor essential to the core features of this classic Reformational worldview. The Calvinistic doctrines of predestination, unconditional election, limited atonement, and perseverance of the saints are simply not essential for affirming a comprehensive, holistic, full-orbed Reformational worldview in the way that most Calvinists assume. Wesley demonstrates this consistently and unequivocally.

Why Do Calvinists Dominate the Christian Worldview Field?

Your first question is probably, “If what you’re saying is true, then why isn’t this recognized and known? Why does everyone quote Calvin and Kuyper and Schaeffer but not Wesley on worldview matters?”

One of the main reasons why so many people consider a Christian worldview as the unique purview of Calvinism is that they themselves declared it so loudly and repeatedly. Kuyper said, “Calvinism is not a partial, . . . but is such an all-embracing system of principles, as, rooted in the past, is able to strengthen us in the present and to fill us with confidence for the future.”⁵ He contrasts it with Lutheranism. “Lutheranism restricted itself to an exclusively ecclesiastical and theological character, while Calvinism put its impress in and outside the Church upon every department of human life.”⁶ His last words there, “impress in and outside the Church upon every department of human life” captures the essence of a classic Reformational worldview.

Kuyper makes a point of saying that Calvin did not invent this worldview, rather, it was the work of God in the heart of believers. “Thanks to this work of God in the heart, the persuasion that the whole of a man’s life is to be lived as *in the Divine Presence* has become the fundamental thought of Calvinism.”⁷

A second possible reason is that Wesley never produced a Methodist systematic theology. That task was left to Richard Watson with his impressive *Theological Institutes*. To his credit Watson presents a vibrant apologetical defense of the faith and a robust biblical worldview which includes discussion of government, culture, and society. He clearly outlines a classic Christian

⁴ Ibid., xv-xvi.

⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 19.

⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁷ Ibid., 24-25.

worldview and sets forth the theological underpinnings for it. But sadly, Watson's work was never as widely read or recognized for its significance, in comparison with Wesley's sermons and other writings. Watson's worldview contribution was never fully acknowledged or embraced even by the Methodist movement.

Thirdly, Wesley's descendants didn't do nearly as good a job of digesting and reformulating the worldview teachings of either Wesley or Watson, as did many of Calvin's descendants who refined his worldview and then assiduously propagated it to this very day.

Calvin has the worldview reputation he has mostly because of what his descendants have done. I say this because there is no particular chapter in which Calvin presents the contours of a Christian worldview. True, his final chapter, chapter 20, is on civil government which is a worldview thing, especially in a systematic theology. Various times he famously refers to the world as a "theater for God's glory,"⁸ which is certainly a vivid thumbnail sketch of a Christian worldview and as such, a mandatory quote for every Calvinist worldview talk (although Calvin's words aren't quite as tidy as this popular paraphrase). In other words, the modern reader would need to comb through the 1,200-plus pages of Calvin's *Institutes* to discern his Christian worldview.

In fact, it is much easier to see John Wesley's worldview when we look for it in his sermons and other writings, than it is in Calvin's writings. But Calvin's offspring such as Kuyper, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), Francis Schaeffer, and our contemporaries, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Neil Plantinga, and others digested Calvin's writings into more systematic presentations of a Christian worldview for us today.

No doubt, Kuyper did the most to make Calvinists known as Christian worldview people. In his famous *Lectures on Calvinism* delivered at Princeton in 1898, he articulated a thorough description of a Christian worldview and declared it as distinctly "Calvinist." His lecture titles included "Calvinism a Life-system," "Calvinism and Politics," "Calvinism and Science," and "Calvinism and the Arts." (His term "life-system" is a synonym for "worldview.") He declared in the first lecture that Calvinism is "the only decisive, lawful, and consistent defense for Protestant nations against encroaching, and overwhelming Modernism."⁹ Throughout the lectures he repeatedly insists that Calvinism is the only ordered and effective version of a Christian worldview.

Sadly, another reason for Wesley's poor worldview-reputation is no doubt the fault of the movement that bears his name. Evangelicals today see Wesley through the lens of the modern holiness and Methodist movements. Clearly, much of the holiness movement for the last century betrayed its heritage by propagating a thorough-going sacred/secular dichotomy within a heavy layer of anti-intellectualism and legalism. On the other hand, sadly, much of the Methodist movement degenerated into a weak and even apostate denial of the core doctrines of evangelicalism.

⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 105–106. Cf. John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 5 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 178.

⁹ Kuyper, 12.

In spite of my serious differences with Calvin over his theology, I admire many of his followers for their efforts to think Christianly with a biblical worldview. That is why my aim is not to show that Wesley was necessarily better at worldview than Calvin or Kuyper or anybody else. Rather, I'm simply seeking to demonstrate that he presents an equally comprehensive and full-orbed Christian worldview and that more importantly, a robust Christian worldview is not the sole property of Calvinism.

Now let's examine Wesley's writings and see how they demonstrate his worldview as considered under the five foundational principles I mentioned earlier.

1. Wesley on Biblical Authority

The Bible clearly served as Wesley's foundation and as his ultimate authority. The founder of Methodism was, by his own admission, *homo unius libri*, a man of one book. "Here I am: I and my Bible. I will not, I dare not, vary from this book, either in great things or small. I have no power to dispense with one jot or tittle of what is contained therein. I am determined to be a Bible Christian, not almost, but altogether. Who will meet me on this ground? Join me on this, or not at all."¹⁰

He often declared his solid conviction that the Bible is to be our sole rule of faith and practice. "I therein build on no authority, ancient or modern, but the Scripture. If this supports any doctrine, it will stand; if not, the sooner it falls the better. Neither the doctrine in question nor any other is anything to me, unless it be the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles...I search for truth, plain Bible truth..."¹¹

Being a "man of one book" didn't restrict him to one Book. It was simply that this Book—the Bible—was his ultimate authority.

Wesley frequently affirmed his confidence in the Bible's declaration that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." "We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice..."¹² He referred to Scripture as the "oracles of God."¹³ He appealed to 2 Timothy 3:16 which affirms God's authorship and inspiration of scripture.¹⁴ Wesley clearly affirmed the plenary inspiration of Scripture.

Wesley believed the very words in Scripture were inspired by God. In commenting on 1 Corinthians 2:13, he observed that Scripture consists of "*words taught by the Holy Spirit*—Such are all the words of Scripture. How high a regard ought we then to retain for them!"¹⁵ Notice he said "words," not "thoughts" or "ideas." Wesley clearly believed in the *verbal* plenary inspiration of Scripture.

¹⁰ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Third ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; repr., Logos Bible Software), Sermon, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity", 7:287.

¹¹ Wesley, *Letters*, 3:157-58.

¹² Wesley ("The Character of a Methodist" 1742), 8:340.

¹³ Wesley ("List of Works Revised and Abridged from Various Authors, LVII"), 14:252.

¹⁴ Wesley 1:278 (Journal, June 26, 1740); ("A Roman Catechism"),10:90.

¹⁵ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, (San Francisco: Carlton & Lanahan; reprint Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers, (1 Corinthians 2:13), 412.

Wesley viewed the Bible as truthful, reliable, and without error. In his sermon, “The Means of Grace,” Wesley argued directly from the biblical declaration that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” to the logical conclusion that “consequently, all Scripture is infallibly true...”¹⁶ At the beginning of a sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 he declared that since we know God is the source of all Scripture, we know the Word therefore to be “true and right concerning all things.”¹⁷

His response to the charge that there were mistakes in the Bible was blunt and without equivocation. “Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth.”¹⁸ In the Preface to his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* Wesley describes the Bible with such words as having “no defect, no excess,” “An exact knowledge of the truth,” “precise,” and “exact in the highest degree.”¹⁹ Wesley clearly believed in the inerrancy of Scripture.

Strangely enough, some Wesleyans have insisted that inerrancy is a uniquely Calvinistic position. This is a strange claim in light of the clear historical evidence of widespread affirmation of inerrancy from the birth of Methodism forward. This is a whole topic on its own, but the fact that Wesley, Wesley, and Clarke²⁰ and every Methodist leader for the next several decades adamantly affirmed inerrancy gives lie to the claim that inerrancy is inherently a Calvinist doctrine.²¹

Wesley clearly believed that the Bible should inform our perspective on everything and that biblical truth and doctrine should shape both our thinking and our conduct.

2. Wesley on the Lordship of Christ Over All Things

A central hallmark of what has come to be known as the Reformed worldview is that Christ is the Lord of all creation, not just of spiritual matters and not just of the soul, but of everything in the universe and every facet of life. Wesley was always insistent that Christ is lord over everything—not only over souls and the church and matters of religion, but over government, education, law, all academic disciplines, and every facet of life and culture.

¹⁶ Wesley (Sermon XVI: “The Means of Grace”), 5:193. In another discussion Wesley once made the statement that he did not like the word “infallible.” He was replying to a letter from Mr. Smith when he said, “‘Infallible testimony’ was your word, not mine: I never use it; I do not like it.” (*Letters* 2:59) However, this discussion was not about the infallibility of the Bible. The case Wesley was attempting to prove was that it is possible for a person to believe he is a Christian, to feel that he is, to think he has the witness of the Spirit—and yet not be truly in Christ. In what sense is the witness of the Spirit to the individual concerning his salvation infallible? Wesley replied that in no sense at all is it infallible. It is too easy for finite fallible human beings to think they have the witness when in actuality they do not. But this in no sense impinges upon the infallibility of the Scriptures for Wesley.

¹⁷ Wesley (Sermon 91: “On Charity”) 7:45.

¹⁸ Wesley (Journal, August 24, 1778), 4:82.

¹⁹ Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 5-6.

²⁰ Daryl McCarthy, “Early Wesleyan Theologians and Scripture,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16:2 (Fall, 1981) 95-105.

²¹ Daryl McCarthy, “Inerrancy in American Methodism,” in John D. Hannah, *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 279-321.

Listen to these stirring words from one of his many messages about the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew 5:34-37) as he declares, in Kuyperian-like language,

God is in all things, and...we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; ~~that~~ we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical Atheism; but, with a true magnificence of thought, survey heaven and earth, and all that is therein, as contained by God in the hollow of his hand, who by his intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of the universe.²²

Okay, it's not quite as poetic or succinct as Kuyper's "Christ declares, 'This is mine,'" or Calvin's "The whole earth is a theater of God's glory," but he is saying the same thing.

In this same message, he points out that all things show God's work, His greatness, and His governance.

They see Him in the height above, and in the depth beneath; they see Him filling all in all. The pure in heart see all things full of God. They see Him in the firmament of heaven; in the moon, walking in brightness; in the sun, when he rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. They see Him "making the clouds his chariots, and walking upon the wings of the wind." They see Him "preparing rain for the earth, and blessing the increase of it; giving grass for the cattle, and green herb for the use of man." They see the Creator of all, wisely governing all, and "upholding all things by the word of his power." "O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world!"²³

In a sermon on education, Wesley argues for the centrality of God in every part of the cosmos and in all of life.

God made the world, so he governs the world, and everything that is in it. Not so much as a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of God. And as he governs all things, so he governs all men, good and bad, little and great. He gives them all the power and wisdom they have. And he over-rules all. He gives us all the goodness we have; every good thought, and word, and work, are from him. Without him we can neither think anything right, or do anything right. Thus it is, we are to inculcate upon them, that God is all in all.²⁴

Wesley's expansive doctrine of God's immensity, omnipotence, and omnipresence certainly remind us that we have a majestic God. He wrote,

The manner of his presence no man can explain, nor, probably, any angel in heaven. Perhaps what the ancient philosopher speaks of the soul, in regard to its residence in the body, that it is *tota in toto, et tota in quâlibet parte*, might, in some sense, be spoken of the omnipresent Spirit, in regard to the universe: That he is not only "All in the whole,"

²² Wesley, 5:283 (Sermon, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse III").

²³ *Ibid.*, 5:281.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7:91-92 (Sermon, "On the Education of Children").

but “All in every part.” Be this as it may, it cannot be doubted but He sees every atom of his creation, and that a thousand times more clearly than we see the things that are close to us: Even of these we see only the surface, while He sees the inmost essence of everything.²⁵

Wesley often referred to God as “the great Governor of the world,”²⁶ as “the only-begotten Son of God, the Creator, Lord, and Possessor of heaven and earth and all that is therein; the Judge of all,”²⁷

He declares that God “governs the world he has made; that he is the supreme and absolute Disposer of all things both in heaven and earth.” He goes on to make it clear that we do have a choice about believing in God’s sovereignty; God will not force our will.

If you do not believe that the Governor of the world governs all things in it, small and great; that fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storm, fulfil his word; that he rules kingdoms and cities, fleets and armies, and all the individuals whereof they are composed; (and yet without forcing the wills of men, or necessitating any of their actions;) do not affect to believe that he governs anything, or has anything to do in the world.²⁸

Wesley spoke of God’s sovereignty in strong terms, sounding almost Calvinistic: “The Lord of all, having absolute, supreme, universal dominion over all things; but more peculiarly our Lord, who believe in him, both by conquest, purchase, and voluntary obligation.”²⁹

In his sermon on “Spiritual Worship, he declared,

God is the Governor of all things; ‘his kingdom ruleth over all.’ ‘The government’ rests ‘upon his shoulder,’ throughout all ages. He is the Lord and Disposer of the whole creation, and every part of it. And in how astonishing a manner does he govern the world! How far are his ways above human thought! How little do we know of his methods of government! Only this we know, . . . thou presidest over each creature as if it were the universe, and over the universe as over each individual creature.³⁰

Then he quotes from his brother Charles’ hymn

Father, how wide thy glories shine!
 Lord of the universe—and mine:
 Thy goodness watches o’er the whole,
 As all the world were but one soul;
 Yet keeps my ev’ry sacred hair,

²⁵ Ibid., 6:316 (Sermon: “On Divine Providence”).

²⁶ Ibid., 6:288 (Sermon, “The General Spread of the Gospel”).

²⁷ Ibid., 6:125 (Sermon, “The Use of Money”).

²⁸ Wesley, *Works* 11:160 (“An Estimate of the Manners of the Present Time”).

²⁹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 10:81 (“A Letter to a Roman Catholic”).

³⁰ Wesley, *Works*, 11:428 (Sermon, “Spiritual Worship”).

As I remained thy single care.³¹

After the devastating 1755 earthquake in Lisbon, Wesley wrote an article demonstrating the global-breadth of his worldview. The holistic nature of his worldview is shown when he easily moves from a theodicy about natural calamities to a rhapsody of worship of our great God.

Let us even dare to own we believe there is a God; nay, and not a lazy, indolent, epicurean deity, who sits at ease upon the circle of the heavens, and neither knows nor cares what is done below; but one who, as he created heaven and earth, and all the armies of them, as he sustains them all by the word of his power, so cannot neglect the work of his own hands. With pleasure we own there is such a God, whose eye pervades the whole sphere of created beings, who knoweth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names; a God whose wisdom is as the great abyss, deep and wide as eternity;...³²

Wesley clearly held a robust and all-encompassing view of the comprehensive lordship of Christ—a core part of any Reformational worldview.

3. Wesley on the Redemption of All Things

An important part of Wesley's view of Christ's comprehensive lordship is found in his insistence that God plans to redeem all things in His future Kingdom. Wesley did not have a narrow view that Jesus died on the cross merely to save souls, as important as that is, but rather to ultimately redeem everything in the cosmos.

Have you ever envisioned what it would be like if everyone in your city or your country lived in obedience to God? Wesley did. He frequently spoke of "A Christian nation, a Christian city."³³ On August 24, 1744, he preached at Oxford University in the grand St. Mary's Church on High Street. His title was "Scriptural Christianity" and Acts 4:31 was his text, about being filled with the Spirit. Before this university audience, he predicted, "the time will come when Christianity will prevail over all, and cover the earth. Let us stand a little, and survey...this strange sight, a *Christian World*."³⁴ He looked ahead to the redemption of all things.³⁵

He asked this striking question, which is more of a declaration, "Why then, let us confess we have never yet seen a Christian country upon earth."³⁶

Is this city a Christian city? Is Christianity, scriptural Christianity, found here? Are we, considered as a community of men, so "filled with the Holy Ghost," as to enjoy in our hearts, and show forth in our lives, the genuine fruits of that Spirit? Are all the

³¹ Charles Wesley, *Scripture Hymns*, II:158.

³² Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 11:10 ("Serious Thoughts Upon the Occasion of the Late Earthquake at Lisbon").

³³ *Ibid.*, 6:262 (sermon, "The Mystery of Iniquity").

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5:45 (Sermon, "Scriptural Christianity").

³⁵ Wesley's commitment to the redemption of all things by no means insinuates that he was a universalist. On the contrary, he was a firm believer in what scriptures teaches about eternal punishment.

³⁶ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 5:47 (Sermon, "Scriptural Christianity").

Magistrates, all heads and Governors of Colleges and Halls, and their respective Societies (not to speak of the inhabitants of the town), “of one heart “and one soul?”³⁷

Personal Holiness and National Transformation

Wesley seamlessly moved from advocating spiritual transformation for the individual to righteousness in government and education. For Wesley, personal holiness and national reformation go hand in hand. When he spoke about spreading Scriptural holiness across the land, he was not speaking only of preaching about entire sanctification or Christian perfection, as important as those topics were to him. Nor was he speaking merely of preaching salvation through justification by faith, as important as that was. He sought to see righteousness and justice in every area of life. He insisted that individual transformation and holiness should result in reformation, both personally and nationally. He didn’t just make general statements about lordship; he drilled down and spoke specifically about a Christian worldview on a broad range of subjects.

Certainly, Wesley was determined to reach the lost. Salvation of souls was the central and driving passion of his life. But he would be befuddled by the split some modern evangelicals make between souls or biblical justice, evangelism or relief and aid. His was not a dualistic focus on souls and nothing else. Rather, he affirmed that salvation in its fullest scope was God’s objective for the world and everything in the world.

He believed God had raised up the Methodist movement, not only for reaching the lost and discipling believers—as important and central as that was—but to reform the nation as well. He declared, “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists? Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”³⁸

This big-picture focus on national reformation shaped American Methodism as well. The founders of the American Methodist Episcopal Church meeting at the Baltimore Christmas Conference in 1784 declared that their purpose was “To reform the continent and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands.”³⁹ What does reforming the nation or reforming the continent leave out? Not much. Wesley scholar Albert Outler asserted, “In the Wesleyan tradition, therefore, the notion of spirituality (however exalted) is never split off from the Christian reformation of society.”⁴⁰ Consequently, the Methodist movement “was self-consciously a reform movement.”

Leon Hynson says the fact that Wesley

emphasized reform, both social and ecclesiastical, and the preaching of scriptural holiness....the doctrine of salvation, defined by the full *ordo salutis*, is a crucial foundation of his reform efforts. By reforming the nation and the church, Wesley is

³⁷ Ibid., 5:48 (Sermon, “Scriptural Christianity”).

³⁸ Ibid., 299 (“Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others”).

³⁹ Leon O. Hynson, *To Reform the Nation: Theological Foundations of Wesley's Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1984), 7.

⁴⁰ Albert C. Outler, “Foreword,” *ibid.*, 10.

defining the work of the Christian ministry in effecting personal and social transformation. Reform means that the full range of God's saving will for the world is being enfolded in the persons and institutions of the world. *Salvation* is a comprehensive word, describing all of God's restoring work for individuals, societies, the world, and the universe.⁴¹

An emphasis on both "personal and social transformation" is the hallmark of a classic Reformational worldview.

When Wesley preached about Christ's lordship, he did not simply call believers to pray more, to read their Bibles, and be faithful in church. No, he addressed every area of life, calling them to reformation individually, in the church, and as a nation.

No Solitary Christian

Wesley declared, "A solitary Christian" is "a contradiction in terms." Here is the heart of his argument against a "solitary Christianity." His whole point is that a true Christian doesn't just have a "soul that is saved," but rather he brings a redeeming influence to those around him.

It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you, to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself, on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper and word and work of yours may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will, in some measure, be given to the corruption which is in the world; and a small part, at least, saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God.⁴²

Notice that even though before Christ's full kingdom is established our actions can make a difference by in some small way slowing down "the corruption" in the world. He goes on to say, "Christianity is essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it." He insisted that Christianity "cannot subsist at all, without society,—without living and conversing with other men." Wesley opposed retreating into holy huddles; he insisted that believers must spread righteousness all around them. "It is the design of God that every Christian should be in an open point of view; that he may give light to all around, that he may visibly express the religion of Jesus Christ..."⁴³ We are to be "social, open, active Christians."

He insisted that believers have an "earnest desire of universal holiness,...tender good-will to all mankind, and fervent love to your supreme Benefactor."⁴⁴ Earnestly desiring "universal holiness" is a longing for Christ's rule over every person and all things.

The Kingdom of God was a central theme in his preaching and ministry. When Wesley referred to "the Kingdom of God is within us," he talks about "when it begins, either in an individual or

⁴¹ Ibid., 16.

⁴² Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 5:298-299 ("The Sermon on the Mount").

⁴³ Ibid., 300.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 308-309.

in a nation,..."⁴⁵ Again, no narrow, privatistic, subjective, mystical faith here. Wesley viewed institutions and even nations—and not just souls—as having significance, in view of God’s kingdom.

For him, it was never simply a matter of converting souls (again as crucial as that is), but seeing the Kingdom of God brought into the world in an ever-increasing measure. As he expounded on “Thy kingdom come,” in the Lord’s Prayer, he declared that we should pray and work that Christ’s “kingdom, the kingdom of grace, may come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth; that all mankind, receiving him for their King, truly believing in his name, may be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy, with holiness and happiness,—till they are removed hence into his heavenly kingdom, there to reign with him for ever and ever.”⁴⁶

Wesley’s vision was not a narrow, limited hope to see a soul saved here and there, but rather, he advocated a broad, expansive, world-encompassing, world-transforming Gospel that changes not only souls, but families, institutions, universities, cities and nations as well—and eventually the whole world. Wesley demonstrated his holistic worldview in the way he refers to the assets we possess, such as money, strength, health, personality, education, knowledge, and influence over others.⁴⁷ He makes it clear that God is not just concerned about our soul and our spirit, but our whole being and everything around us.

Biblical Justice

Wesley was vocal and untiring in his advocacy of biblical justice and he joined with others in this battle. One organization he partnered with was The Society for Reformation of Manners. By “manners” they were not just referring to being polite, but to actions of helping others and to bring righteousness to the society. In one sermon he preached to this society, he reminded them that believers in every age have joined together “to oppose the works of darkness, to spread the knowledge of God their Saviour, and to promote his kingdom upon earth.”⁴⁸

Some Americans think that culture wars are something new and recent and are dubious about the involvement of Christians. But Wesley insists that “making an open stand against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness ... is one of the noblest ways of confessing Christ in the face of his enemies. It is giving glory to God,..." It is an “excellent” way “to render to God the honour due unto his name.” It reminds people that “doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth.” Applying a Christian worldview in the culture also is an “excellent” way to, as he expressed it,

to prevent, in any degree, the dishonour done to his glorious name, the contempt which is poured on his authority, and the scandal brought upon our holy religion by the gross, flagrant wickedness of those who are still called by the name of Christ! To stem, in any degree, the torrent of vice, to repress the floods of ungodliness, to remove, in any measure, those occasions of blaspheming the worthy name whereby we are called, is one of the noblest designs that can possibly enter into the heart of man to conceive.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6:307 (Sermon, “The Signs of the Times”)

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5:335-336 (Sermon XXVI).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 6:139 (Sermon 51, “The Good Steward”).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6:149 (Sermon 52, “Preached Before the Society for Reformation of Manners”).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6:154-155 (Sermon 52, “Preached Before the Society for Reformation of Manners”).

Wesley explained that such work brings “glory to God in the highest,” and it also helps establish “peace upon earth” because sin causes conflict within individuals and in their relationships with others.

This work benefits not only individuals whose lives may be wrecked by sin—theirs or others, but it also benefits the nation. “Whoever, therefore, they are that labour herein, they are general benefactors; they are the truest friends of their king and country. And in the same proportion as their design takes place, there can be no doubt but God will give national prosperity, in accomplishment of his faithful word, ‘Them that honour me I will honour.’” “So far, therefore, as righteousness, in any branch, is promoted, so far is the national interest advanced.”⁵⁰

He commends the society, “This is a work of God. It is undertaken in the name of God, and for his sake.”⁵¹ He points out that the underlying motive for their work is love for God and love for others. The goal for all of us is “always to be fixed on the glory of God and good of man.”⁵² This aptly capsulizes Wesley’s full-orbed Reformational worldview. This dual focus should impel us to act. “Are not you also bound by the most sacred ties, ‘as you have opportunity, to do good to all men?’”⁵³

He insists that the calling of all believers is “doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all men;...”⁵⁴ He specifies that this includes doing good “to their bodies” by caring for the poor, the sick and those in prison, doing good “to their souls.” He emphasizes that since Scripture commands us to especially be attentive to the needs of fellow believers, we should employ them when possible and buy from them. Once again, Wesley is attentive to practical ways we can help others economically and not just spiritually.

Make no mistake. Wesley was not promoting an eighteenth-century version of either the social gospel or social justice. The social gospel was mostly “social” without much “gospel” and became a hallmark of churches who wanted credit for doing good works but who didn’t want to affirm the transforming power of the blood of Jesus. The honest proponents of social justice admit that their goal is socialism or involuntary redistribution of wealth. They underestimate total depravity by assuming that minorities and the oppressed earn some merit for their “suffering.” Added to this, they focus on equity instead of equality. They foist a false guilt based on race and class. While they readily condemn what they inaccurately call homophobia and Islamophobia, they generally disregard the Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality and transgenderism. With his love for the Word, Wesley would be appalled to even be compared to either the social gospel or social justice.⁵⁵

In his sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” he asked a rhetorical question, “But what good works are those, the practice of which you affirm to be necessary to sanctification?” He answers

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6:155 (Sermon 52, “Preached Before the Society for Reformation of Manners”).

⁵¹ Ibid., 6:158 (sermon, “Preached Before the Society for Reformation of Manners”).

⁵² Ibid., 6:162 (sermon, “Preached Before the Society for Reformation of Manners”).

⁵³ Ibid., 6:165 (sermon, “Preached Before the Society for Reformation of Manners”).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8:270-271 (Article, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies”).

⁵⁵ Daryl McCarthy, “Biblical Justice: Measuring the Social Justice Message,” 2020. Available at www.leadershipanvil.org/resources.

first, “works of piety,”—“public prayer, family prayer,” private prayer, communion, study of Scripture through reading, meditating or listening to sermons, and fasting. Secondly, sanctification requires “all works of mercy”—whether spiritual or physical, like “feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted;” teaching, challenging the lost, comforting, helping someone who is being tempted to sin.⁵⁶

Good works such as the ones Wesley listed bring real and specific changes in people’s lives and sometimes even lead to reformation or revival. It is clear that for Wesley, not only is there no bifurcation between sacred and secular, but also it is clear that individual salvation should lead to action which helps others and which can reform society.

All this was pointing toward the eventual redemption of all things. As Hynson notes, “Wesleyan ethics enunciates the promise of cosmic reconciliation.”⁵⁷ God will indeed redeem all things. Ultimately, He will do it by introducing His full reign, but until then, He calls us to work in partnership with Him to spread righteousness and to oppose unrighteousness in that divine/human synergy.

Public Intellectual

Another way Wesley demonstrated his commitment to God’s plan to redeem all things was through his work as a public intellectual. I have written elsewhere that John Wesley was the leading and most influential public intellectual in England in the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ He regularly addressed what today would be considered “secular” topics in his sermons, letters and articles. This is yet another indicator of the breadth and comprehensiveness of his worldview. His preaching and writing didn’t simply address “spiritual issues” like most evangelical leaders today. Rather, he consistently affirmed Christ as the Lord of all things and then gave specifics. This shows that for Wesley there was no sacred/secular dichotomy, no separation of the world between sacred and secular, no subject that he could not address from a Christian perspective.

His preaching and writing included a broad range of current events and political and social issues, including politics, the sciences, health, natural disasters, philosophy, music, linguistics, styles, economic issues, law, corruption, management, business, homosexuality, education, culture, and history.

Wesley was no narrow iconoclastic, ignorant zealot scoffing at the big, ugly world outside the Church. Rather, this is an Oxford don ever-analyzing the world through his full-orbed, robust, Christian worldview. This leads us naturally to consider Wesley and the life of the mind.

4. Wesley on the Mind and Propositional Truth

Nothing captures the Wesleyan commitment to the life of the mind as much as the hymn written for the opening of the Kingswood school. This famous song captures the Wesleyan commitment

⁵⁶ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 6:51.

⁵⁷ Hynson, 54.

⁵⁸ Daryl McCarthy, “John Wesley, Public Intellectual: Recovering Insight, Courage, and Justice,” Presented at Wesleyan Theological Society, March 7, 2020. Accessible at www.leadershipanvil.com/resources.

to a unified approach to the mind and the heart. It includes a plea that God through education will “Error and ignorance remove, Their blindness both of heart and mind; . . .”

The central theme of the hymn is found in the fifth verse:

Unite the pair so long disjoin’d,
 Knowledge and vital piety,
 Learning and holiness combined,
 And truth and love, let all men see,
 In these, whom up to Thee we give,
 Thine, wholly Thine, to die and live.

The final words of the hymn are a prayer demonstrating the cosmic breadth of this worldview, “Till all our earth is fill’d with God.”⁵⁹

A Thinking Christianity

“Learning and piety” is a phrase that Wesley used often.⁶⁰ It was never one or the other for him. This was quite natural for Wesley as a well-educated thinker and man of God. He never realized that he needed to choose either cognitive or experiential, as some modern Wesleyans would claim. As a Christian worldview thinker, he knew God created us as both cognitive beings and as emotive and volitional beings. He consistently preached that Christianity is “rational,” and that it is neither based on emotions (he called that “enthusiasm”) nor “superstition.” He describes Christian faith as “sober, manly, rational, divine.”⁶¹ He insisted that Christianity is “rational as well as scriptural; . . .”⁶²

He preached often on the role of reason and faith. He insisted that we must find a balance between the extremes of “under-valuing and over-valuing reason.” He explains, “It is certain reason can assist us in going through the whole circle of arts and sciences; of grammar, rhetoric, logic, natural and moral philosophy, mathematics, algebra, metaphysics.” He insists that reason is also very important in “religion” and the Christian faith. Reason helps us gain understanding of the Bible and the Christian revelation. It “enables us to understand what the Holy Scriptures declare concerning the being and attributes of God.” It helps us grasp the law and the Gospel, the meaning of repentance, justification and its effects, the new birth, and holiness. Reason helps us understand “. . . what is the mind that was in Christ; and what it is to walk as Christ walked.”⁶³

The depth of Wesley’s commitment to a thinking Christianity is shown in his words, “In all these respects, and in all the duties of common life, God has given us our reason for a guide. And it is

⁵⁹ John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. G. Osborn, vol. 6 (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1870), 407–408. This hymn also appears in the outstanding new Wesleyan hymnal, *Our Great Redeemer’s Praise* (Franklin, Tennessee: Seedbed Publishing, 2022), 436. We sang it at The Leadership Anvil’s Academics in the Alps 2023 Conference and it greatly encouraged and edified the European Christian academics there.

⁶⁰ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:47 (Sermon, “On Charity”); 3:504 (Journal).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7:426 (Sermon, “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, near the City Road, London”).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8:206 (Article, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part III”).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6:352, 354–355 (sermon, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered”).

only by acting up to the dictates of it, by using all the understanding which God hath given us, that we can have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.”⁶⁴

Propositional Truth

Wesley would be aghast at even a hint that propositional truth should be marginalized in favor of experiential knowledge. His whole defense of the immense value of reason and rationality, such as we find in his classic sermon, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” is based on the inherent value of propositional statements which set forth truth. We can safely assume that he adhered to the correspondence theory of truth, viz., a true statement accurately represents things as they actually are. In other words, the words of a true statement describe or match what actually is. He understood that propositional truth is simply using the tools God gave human beings to communicate and that even to oppose the value of propositional truth would require the use of propositional statements.

In his “Case of Reason” sermon, he insists on the necessity of cognition, reasoning, words—all the components of propositional truth.

The foundation of true religion stands upon the oracles of God. It is built upon the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. Now, of what excellent use is reason, if we would either understand ourselves, or explain to others, those living oracles! And how is it possible without it to understand the essential truths contained therein? a beautiful summary of which we have in that which is called the Apostles’ Creed. Is it not reason (assisted by the Holy Ghost) which enables us to understand what the Holy Scriptures declare concerning the being and attributes of God?—concerning his eternity and immensity; his power, wisdom, and holiness?⁶⁵

He concludes his listing of all the many benefits of reason, by saying, “In all these respects, and in all the duties of common life, God has given us our reason for a guide.”⁶⁶ Near the close of his sermon, he hits it one more time.

When therefore you despise or depreciate reason, you must not imagine you are doing God service: Least of all, are you promoting the cause of God when you are endeavoring to exclude reason out of religion. Unless you willfully shut your eyes, you cannot but see of what service it is both in laying the foundation of true religion, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and in raising the superstructure.⁶⁷

It’s quite clear what Wesley thinks about propositional truth.

Education is Valuable and Needed

Wesley—famously the man of “one book”—insisted that we need to be widely read and well educated. He bemoaned the low level of learning among the general populace. “They do not know, they cannot easily imagine, how little learning there is among them.”

⁶⁴ Ibid., 355 (sermon, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered”).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6:354 (Sermon: “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered”).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 355.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 360.

Since God created all things, we are motivated to study and learn widely. Wesley's voracious appetite for reading and learning illustrates well the sentiment shared by Irish poet Evangeline Paterson, who more recently said, "I was brought up in a Christian movement where, because God had to be given pre-eminence, nothing else was allowed to be important. I have broken through to the position that because God exists, everything else has significance."⁶⁸

Wesley preached often on education.⁶⁹ How many pastors or evangelists today preach whole sermons on reason and education, as Wesley did? He obviously thought and read much on this topic, even though we would disagree with some of his educational practices. We would agree with his proposal that "a Christian education should have no other end but to teach them how to think, and judge, and act according to the strictest rules of Christianity."⁷⁰ That is a Christian philosophy of education.

For Wesley learning was "highly expedient for a guide of souls."⁷¹ He advised his niece that God's purpose is that "we should not destroy, but regulate, our desire for knowledge."⁷² On another occasion he said, "It cannot be that the people should grow in grace, unless they give themselves to reading. A reading people will always be a knowing people."⁷³

A Well-educated Clergy

As part of his prioritization of reason and education, Wesley insisted that all Methodist preachers should study and read extensively and consistently. He insisted that Christians and especially ministers should use their mind. He said, "It is no part of my design to save either learned or unlearned men from the trouble of thinking....On the contrary, my intention is to make them think, and assist them in thinking."⁷⁴ Clearly, Wesley would be impatient with the disdain some modern evangelicals have for propositional truth, and their preference to focus on subjective experience.

He insisted that at least all ministers should be able to at least read and understand Greek, Hebrew and Latin. They should be able to read the Greek classics without a dictionary. Each one should be familiar with "the general principles of logic." Familiarity with Euclid's *Elements* and with terms of metaphysics is the minimal level of learning. "I do not depreciate learning of any kind."⁷⁵ Ministers should have an extensive knowledge of the arts and sciences as well. "Both the one and the other may be employed to the glory of God and the good of men."⁷⁶

⁶⁸ Quoted by Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 26.

⁶⁹ Here are a couple of examples: Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3:270, on November 30, 1766, he writes in his journal that he preached on the education of children; 13:474ff ("A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children") 7:86 (Sermon, "On the Education of Children").

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 88 (sermon, "On the Education of Children").

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14:353 (Letter, to Rev. Dr. Rutherford).

⁷² L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 3 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871), 359. I was led to this statement by David Wright's excellent book.

⁷³ L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 3 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871), 632. I was led to this statement by David Wright's excellent book *How God Makes the World a Better Place: A Wesleyan Primer on Faith, Work, and Economic Transformation*, Kindle ed. (Christian's Library Press, 2012).

⁷⁴ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14:252 ("List of Works Revised and Abridged from Various Authors").

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 8:219 (Article, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part III").

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Wesley's own scholarship and thorough education at Oxford inevitably shaped his expectations for Methodist clergy. He was very clear on the skills he demanded of clergy. He insisted on a full set of intellectual skills, including "a good understanding, a clear apprehension, a sound judgment, and a capacity of reasoning with some closeness? Is not this necessary in a high degree for the work of the ministry?" This intellectual sharpness is especially important in dealing with unbelievers. The minister needs "liveliness and readiness of thought" in order to respond to objections and questions about the faith. And, of course, a "good memory" is necessary so what you read is remembered. Wesley just assumed every clergy will be constantly reading.⁷⁷

Besides possessing acute intellectual capabilities, the responsible leader will add several crucial areas of knowledge. The wide knowledge required of clergy included knowledge of the Scriptures, apologetics, history, geography, the sciences, logic, metaphysics, philosophy, geometry, mathematics,⁷⁸ the Church Fathers, and "knowledge of the world"—how people think, act and feel.⁷⁹ No iconoclastic or narrow education will do for Wesley's ministers and followers. Clearly, propositional truth was central to Wesley's vision.

5. Wesley on the Sacredness of All Vocations and Fields of Study

Obviously, if Christ is indeed Lord and Sustainer of all that is, then this destroys any bifurcation between sacred and secular, since now all is sacred from God's perspective. Consequently, an important way non-"solitary, open, connected Christians" bring glory to God is through their daily life and through their studies, regardless of the academic discipline, and their work, even if it is not a "ministerial," "spiritual," or "religious" job. We bring glory to God "with our bodies, as well as with our spirits." We glorify God "through outward work with hearts lifted up to him; to make our daily employment a sacrifice to God; to buy and sell, to eat and drink, to his glory."⁸⁰ So we serve God through our jobs and our daily duties—"our daily employment." This is Wesley affirming the priesthood of all believers in true Martin Luther-style.

At the heart of Wesley's worldview was a conviction that God has called His people to make a difference, not just spiritually, but in the whole of life. Wesley was firmly committed to the Reformation principle of "priesthood of all believers" and was convinced that all (legitimate) vocations can be holy, not just "full-time Christian service," as we like to call ministry positions these days.

In a sermon at Oxford (he preached there often), he challenged his hearers as to whether they sincerely have "a real design of pleasing him in all things. You never so much as intended to devote all your words and works. your business, studies, diversions, to his glory. You never even designed or desired, that whatsoever you did should be done 'in the name of the Lord Jesus,'"⁸¹ Here Wesley included vocation, leisure, education, communication, lifestyle—they all fit under Christ's lordship in his comprehensive worldview of Christ redeeming all things.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10-481-482 ("An Address to the Clergy").

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10:491-492 (Article, "An Address to the Clergy").

⁷⁹ Ibid., 10:482-484 ("An Address to the Clergy").

⁸⁰ Ibid., 5:303,306 (Sermon XXIV, "The Sermon on the Mount").

⁸¹ Ibid., 5:23 (Sermon, "The Almost Christian," July 25, 1741).

In yet another of his sermons at Oxford he directly challenged those in government and leadership to be truly Christian in all their actions because God has appointed them to their positions. He began with a courteous reminder that he thinks of them, the administrators and professors at Oxford, with “reverence for your office sake.”

He reminds them that they are to be “lively portraitures of him whom ye are appointed to represent among men? ‘I have said, Ye are gods,’ ye magistrates and rulers; ye are by office so nearly allied to the God of heaven! In your several stations and degrees, ye are to show forth unto us ‘the Lord our Governor.’” What a forthright affirmation that we can all serve God in various occupations, not only in preaching or other vocational ministry positions.⁸²

He goes on to admonish the professors, “who are more especially called to form the tender minds of youth, to dispel thence the shades of ignorance and error, and train them up to be wise unto salvation, are you ‘filled with the Holy Ghost?’ with all those ‘fruits of the Spirit,’ which your important office so indispensably requires?”⁸³

Christ’s lordship over all academic disciplines and over all vocations and occupations means that we can bring glory to Him in any field of study and through any (legitimate) job or profession. Wesley utterly rejected any sacred/secular bifurcation. He embraced the life of the mind, propositional truth, and the value of all fields of study. He insisted that Christ must be recognized as lord in all facets of life. Wesley challenged his followers to a 24/7 faith, with no space for compartmentalization.

Conclusion: Wesley’s Worldview Was Thoroughly Reformational

Today, worldview scholars recognize that unless a worldview is lived out, it is not truly a worldview, but merely a preference or an opinion. James Sire said, “We live our worldview or it isn’t our worldview.”⁸⁴ In the case of a Christian worldview, it is particularly crucial that those who affirm the worldview, actually practice it.

While admittedly Wesley did not produce as ordered a worldview-theology as did Calvin or his followers, actually he did something that few other Christian leaders in history have done as extensively or systematically—he practiced it and demonstrated it through his own life and ministry and the movement he birthed. He showed what it looks like to think and live in accordance with a full-orbed, Christ-centered worldview. His life was thoroughly immersed in applying a Christian worldview in real time with real people with real issues. Wesley’s holistic worldview was never merely theoretical, as it is with many self-proclaimed worldview specialists today. So, what we may miss in a systematic presentation by Wesley as compared to Calvin and his progeny, we see in living color fleshed out in such a way that it dramatically transformed England. And for many decades after his death, his movement embodied this holistic worldview through their actions.

⁸² Ibid., 5:49 (“Sermon 4, Scriptural Christianity” Preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford, August 24, 1744).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant--Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 133.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:16, “You shall know them by their fruits,” so a brief overall comparison of the fruits of the two movements might be helpful. Wesley didn’t just talk about the whole world being a “theater for the glory of God,” as Calvin did. He showed that glory through his lifestyle and through his breadth of vision in his preaching, writing, and action. He didn’t just talk about the lordship of Christ in all areas of life; he practiced it as he obeyed God’s commands to care for the whole of life and creation. He didn’t just advocate for civil and religious freedom; he practiced it in how he treated others, including his critics and enemies.

Even if I weren’t a Wesleyan-Arminian, I would be very impressed with the record of the Methodist movement with regard to religious freedom, in contrast to Calvin and his early followers. Admittedly, Wesleyans have often demonstrated their depravity, but up to the early twentieth century, the Wesleyan Methodist movement blazed a trail in applying biblical principles—a Christian worldview—to many areas of life and culture with their firm opposition to slavery, their programs serving the poor and disadvantaged, their founding of schools and colleges, and their support for women’s suffrage.⁸⁵

None of us carry guilt for the sins of our forefathers. So let me be clear that my Calvinist friends today are definitely not responsible for the sins of their theological ancestors, but for sake of worldview comparison, we need to remember that neither Wesley nor any of his offspring ever advocated the death of their critics and opponents, as Calvin did with Servetus and Gruet and numerous other individuals.⁸⁶ This callous treatment of non-Calvinists was repeated by the Dutch Calvinists after the Synod of Dordt when they deported more than one hundred Arminian ministers, beheaded their Dutch Arminian brother Oldenbarnevelt, and sentenced others to life imprisonment.⁸⁷ Nearly 300 years later Kuyper deplored and “unconditionally disapproved” of Calvin’s execution of Servetus.⁸⁸ But unfortunately, he makes no mention of the scores of other Genevans who suffered and were executed under Calvin’s iron hand. Instead, he blames the Catholic Church for setting a bad example that it was acceptable for the Church to “execute” (pun intended) justice for crimes regarding “religious matters.”⁸⁹

Now, let us look briefly at the vastly different impact of the Wesleyan revival in contrast to the Protestant Reformation. Admittedly, we must be cautious with any comparison of historical movements, but it is helpful to see the contrast. It is widely recognized that through the

⁸⁵ One of my favorite books showing the holistic application of what I am calling a Wesleyan Reformational worldview is Timothy Lawrence Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, : Abingdon Press, 1957).

⁸⁶ Calvin ruled Geneva with an iron fist. There was a long list of offenses, such as swearing, obscenities, criticizing Calvin, extravagance or immodesty of dress, gambling, reading bad books, drunkenness, singing vile songs, which could bring fines, imprisonment, and even death under Calvin’s rule. Jacques Gruet was arrested for obscenities, defending fornication, threatening and criticizing Calvin, and for writing against the Bible. He was tortured for a month and then beheaded. Cf. Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 489–503.

⁸⁷ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Complete in One Volume ed. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Prince Press, 2006), 2:182.

⁸⁸ Kuyper, 100.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

Wesleyan revival tens of thousands of people were transformed and the entire society was impacted.⁹⁰

Wesley himself was probably unaware of how perfectly suited his evangelical Arminian theology was for just that time and place. But in fact, Bernard Semmel postulates that Wesley's evangelical Arminian message, in contrast to Calvinist doctrine, may well have played a key role in ensuring an English revolution did not take place. He says it was precisely Arminianism which enabled the Wesley revivals to have such a transformative impact on England. "Methodist doctrine, as set forward by the leading spokesmen of the movement, was essentially a liberal and 'progressive' (in the sense of both confirming and helping to advance the movement from a traditional to a modern society) ideology, much more decidedly liberal and progressive than that of Calvinism,..."⁹¹

In contrast, as amazing as the Protestant Reformation was as a civilizational, political, and much needed religious movement, we dare not forget the dirty, little secret that little changed in the moral and spiritual life of the average person in Protestant Germany. The sad fact is that in spite of all the amazing things God accomplished through the Protestant Reformation, there was no evidence of any widespread revival or significant improvement in the moral or spiritual life of most Germans.⁹²

These comparisons with the Reformation and the early Calvinist's disregard for civil and religious liberty is only further evidence that John Wesley was a pioneer—in both theory and practice—of what he called, "social holiness." Wesley was far ahead of his time. He played a central role in recalibrating the priorities of the Church globally.

For Wesley, serving a God of knowledge entails making the pursuit of knowledge a priority in our lives. He showed us how the Good News is truly good news not just for souls and for

⁹⁰ I personally support the theory proposed by Elie Halevy (1870-1937), a French philosopher and historian, that the Wesleyan revival helped prevent England from descending into the same kind of revolution which ravaged France. Bernard Semmel, who translated Halevy's piece about Methodism into English, affirms that "Methodism may have helped to block a violent English counterpart to the French Revolution by preempting the critical appeal and objective of that Revolution. Indeed, it might be said that only because of what the Methodist revolution was accomplishing could the Methodist counter to revolutionary violence be effective."

⁹¹ Semmel points out that many scholars have found Calvinism "more satisfying" than Wesleyanism. After all "Calvin had a 'system' and systems have always been congenial to intellectuals." Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 4-5. Cf. Semmel, 79-80, 194-195.

⁹² This lack of spiritual improvement was documented through the regular territorial "visitations"—the official surveys which periodically investigated the spiritual and moral condition of each region. Comprehensive laws and regulations had been established to bring spiritual life and rejuvenation to the society. For instance, in 1533 Saxony enacted a broad reform mandate. "No one was to be allowed to absent himself from divine service. All youths must attend weekly catechism classes. 'Public blasphemy, cursing, profaning the name of God' were to be severely punished; also 'mocking or deriding the gospel and the holy sacraments, sorcery and similar unchristian superstitions, ... gambling, adultery, idling and loafing, drunkenness, and disobeying parents.'" Officials were directed to keep an eye for "evildoers" and to rebuke them, "not in a spirit of vengeance, but to encourage them to become better Christians." But the visitation reports record the sad fact that the spiritual and moral life of the average person showed little or no improvement. Lewis William Spitz, *The Reformation: Education and History*, 1 vols., *Variorum Collected Studies Series* (Aldershot, Great Britain ; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Variorum, 1997), 268-271.

eternity, but for society and for life here and now. And he did this without in anyway minimizing the passion for evangelism and the longing for heaven.

So whatever Wesley's Reformational worldview lacked in systematic presentation, he more than made up for by his living of it! He established a long list of initiatives which applied his worldview in real life. This important aspect of his life deserves its own treatment, but here are just a few of the projects he launched to put his Christian worldview into practice:

- He founded schools.
- Launched a publishing company to make educational materials more accessible.
- Established a micro-loan program for the poor.
- Ministered extensively to prisoners and worked to improve prison conditions.
- Established a program to provide medicine and home-visits to the sick.
- Provided basic medical help and advice.
- Raised money to help the poor.
- Distributed coal, food, and clothing for the poor.
- Established an orphanage.
- Sponsored a non-profit organization to help the poor.
- Established and funded a home for elderly widows and a way for them to earn money.
- Corresponded with governmental leaders on policy issues.
- Raised funds for the Society for the Reformation of Manners to assist in cultural change.
- And as he was preaching and evangelizing and launching all these initiatives, he repeatedly acted to quell riots and tamp down calls for a revolution.

And it worked. As a public intellectual who wrote extensively, addressing issues of national and cultural significance, Wesley was heard. He was an influencer, an opinion-shaper, and his work touched millions of people over several generations. Maldwyn Edwards said that Wesley as, "A man who had transformed the spiritual nature of England as effectively as the Industrial Revolution had changed its physical aspect was of necessity the most influential person of his day. His influence had its source in religion, but it overflowed into social and political channels...he stood consistently for righteousness in social and political life."⁹³ "As Mildred Wynkoop has emphasized, the social ethics of Wesley is the ethics of love that permeates the world and strives for its transformation."⁹⁴

Wesley declared that our goal is "always to be fixed on the glory of God and good of man."⁹⁵ This aptly capsulizes Wesley's full-orbed Reformational worldview.

⁹³ Maldwyn Edwards, *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century: A Study of His Social and Political Influence*, Rev. ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1955), 202.

⁹⁴ Hynson, 125.

⁹⁵ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 6:162 (Sermon, "Preached Before the Society for the Reformation of Manners").

What Difference Should This Make for Us?

I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated that Wesleyanism is indeed an all-embracing worldview, every bit as much as our Calvinist brothers and sisters claim their doctrine is. This means we need to be serious about affirming, as Scripture teaches and as Wesley advocated, a comprehensive understanding of Christ's lordship—not one that is partial, covering only our spiritual life, but one that is all-encompassing and far-reaching; one that charges all of life and thought with the majesty and holiness of God, one that permeates every part of our lives and ultimately every sector of life and culture.

But the realization that Wesleyanism truly provides a coherent and comprehensive worldview means we have work to do. Historically, we have focused mostly on analyzing Wesleyanism from a theological point of view, but now we need to work out the implications of a Wesleyan worldview as a coherent system of thought. Just as Kuyper presented his classic *Lectures on Calvinism* clearly delineating the impact of his doctrine on society, culture, politics, education, and science, so we need a concerted effort on the part of numerous scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines to flesh out the implications of a biblically-grounded Wesleyan worldview in all the various areas of human endeavor.

What insights does a Wesleyan worldview bring to science, law, the arts, politics, government, public policy, literature, philosophy, history, psychology, economics, linguistics, IT, medicine and all the health sciences, engineering, architecture, anthropology, and a host of other fields?

Consider the abundant contributions Wesleyanism could make to a worldview that is quite distinct from a Calvinistic worldview:

Wesleyan theology affirms a number of positions which could make a unique contribution to a comprehensive Christian worldview:

- Free will of human beings
- Optimism of God's grace
- Vital role of the Holy Spirit in the world today
- The intentionality of perfect love
- Invitation to salvation for "whosoever will"
- The persistence of prevenient grace,
- Crucial role of good works
- Call to holy living
- Prospect of authentic personal transformation
- Holy love
- The divine-human synergy of working in partnership with the Holy Spirit
- The fact that we will be embodied souls for eternity
- Individual responsibility
- All-encompassing lordship of Christ over the entire cosmos
- Promise of both present and eternal fellowship with God.

All these and more could provide significant components of a worldview that would make a difference.

For starters, let's consider that a Wesleyan worldview which affirms the original goodness of the created order even as it recognizes the world is groaning as it awaits redemption and renewal will make a difference in the natural sciences. A theology that doesn't eschew the human body or the material world (as did Calvin's inspiration, Augustine) because it honors God as the Creator of both, will make a difference in the health and medical sciences. A theology which teaches that the sovereign God gives human beings the power of choice will definitely approach psychology, sociology, politics, law, and a host of other fields differently than a deterministic Calvinism. The Wesleyan view of imparted righteousness and not merely imputed righteousness surely would impact psychology and counseling.

As Hynson so eloquently declared, "The eternal God stands astride every human effort and every action is measured by His character and will. Wesley's ethics is characterized by freedom and responsibility within a universe governed by the God whose will is our greatest joy."⁹⁶

In 2010 P&R Publishing released a book entitled *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview* (edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett). The spring 2024 Baker academic catalog lists a new book coming in August, *Calvin for the World: The Enduring Relevance of His Political, Social, and Economic Theology*. My question is, who will write the book—*Wesley for the World—The Enduring Relevance of Wesleyan Theology for Society, Culture, and the Sciences?*

No doubt, there will be some areas of research in which a Wesleyan worldview will not make a distinctive contribution. But theology matters. What we believe about God, the world, and ourselves matters. Our Wesleyan distinctives matter; they make a difference.

But for too long, even as we have looked with embarrassment at the anti-intellectualism of many of our Wesleyan brothers and sisters, we ourselves have practiced our own sacred/secular dichotomy and focused almost exclusively on the theological and spiritual ramifications of our beliefs and failed to unpack the implications of our theology for the whole of creation, life, and culture. As Wesleyan theologians, we need to think beyond the walls of theology. As Wesleyan biblical scholars, we need to think beyond the bounds of biblical studies. The Christ we serve is the Creator and Lord, the Sustainer and Redeemer, not just of souls and theology, but of all things.

When I was a teenager, I was greatly influenced by a little book by J. B. Phillips, entitled, *Your God is Too Small*. I would say today that our Wesleyan theology is too small. We need to demonstrate the breadth and depth and width and height of the Wesleyan vision of God, of humankind, and of the world. Let's get to work, brothers and sisters!

The stirring words of a Wesley hymn will help us as we begin this task.

O Come, thou Radiant Morning Star
 Again in human darkness, shine!
 Arise resplendent from afar!
 Assert thy royalty divine!
 Thy sway o'er all the earth maintain,

⁹⁶ Hynson, 77.

And now begin thy glorious reign.⁹⁷

Bibliography

- Edwards, Maldwyn. *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century: A Study of His Social and Political Influence*. Rev. ed. London: Epworth Press, 1955.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity*. Complete in One Volume ed. Peabody, Massachusetts: Prince Press, 2006.
- Hannah, John D. *Inerrancy and the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984.
- Hynson, Leon O. *To Reform the Nation: Theological Foundations of Wesley's Ethics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1984.
- Kuyper, Abraham. *Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. 1st Harper torchbook ed. Harper Torchbooks. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.
- Noll, Mark A. *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Plantinga, Cornelius. *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Semmel, Bernard. *The Methodist Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Sire, James W. *Naming the Elephant--Worldview as a Concept*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Smith, Timothy Lawrence. *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*. New York,: Abingdon Press, 1957.
- Spitz, Lewis William. *The Reformation: Education and History*. 1 vols. Variorum Collected Studies Series. Aldershot, Great Britain ; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Variorum, 1997.
- Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley*. Third ed., edited by Thomas Jackson. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872. Reprint, Logos Bible Software.
- Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley*. Edited by Thomas Jackson. Vol. 7. Logos Bible Software ed. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872.

⁹⁷ Wesley Hymn Book (London: William Reed, 1864), no. 447, quoted by *ibid.*, 172. .

Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley*. Edited by Thomas Jackson. Vol. 6. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872.

Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley*. Edited by Thomas Jackson. Vol. 8. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872.

Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley*. Edited by Thomas Jackson. Vol. 5. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872.