

**Reinventing Redemption: The Methodist Doctrine of Atonement in Britain and America
in the Long Nineteenth Century**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the controversy surrounding the doctrine of atonement among transatlantic Methodist during the Victorian and Progressive Eras. Beginning in the eighteenth century, it establishes the dominant theories of the atonement present among English and American Methodists and the cultural-philosophical worldview Methodists used to support these theories. It then explores the extent to which ordinary and influential Methodists throughout the nineteenth century carried forward traditional opinions on the doctrine before examining in closer detail the controversies surrounding the doctrine at the opening of the twentieth century.

It finds that from the 1750s to the 1830s transatlantic Methodists supported a range of substitutionary views of the atonement, from the satisfaction and Christus Victor theories to a vicarious atonement with penal emphases. Beginning in the 1830s and continuing through the 1870s, transatlantic Methodists embraced features of the moral government theory, with varying degrees, while retaining an emphasis on traditional substitutionary theories. Methodists during this period were indebted to an Enlightenment worldview.

Between 1880 and 1914 transatlantic Methodists gradually accepted a Romantic philosophical outlook with the result that they began altering their conceptions of the atonement. Methodists during this period tended to move in three directions. Progressive Methodists jettisoned prevailing views of the atonement preferring to embrace the moral influence theory. Mediating Methodists challenged traditionally constructed theories for similar reasons but tended to support a theory in which God was viewed as a friendlier deity while retaining substitutionary conceptions of the atonement. Conservatives took a custodial approach whereby traditional conceptions of the atonement were vehemently defended. Furthermore, that transatlantic Methodists were involved in significant discussions surrounding the revision of their theology of atonement in light of modernism in the years surrounding 1900 contributed to their remaining on the periphery of the Fundamentalist-Modernist in subsequent decades.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BS	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
CA	<i>Christian Advocate</i>
CAJ	<i>Christian Advocate and Journal</i>
LPM	<i>Local Preacher's Magazine</i>
LPT	<i>Local Preacher's Treasury</i>
LQR	<i>London Quarterly Review</i>
LR	<i>Ladies Repository</i>
MM	<i>Methodist Magazine</i>
MP	<i>The Methodist Preacher</i>
MR	<i>The Methodist Review</i>
MQR	<i>Methodist Quarterly Review</i>
MQRS	<i>Methodist Quarterly Review, South</i>
MT	<i>Methodist Times</i>
NCA	<i>Northwestern Christian Advocate</i>
PM	<i>Preacher's Magazine</i>
Recorder	<i>Methodist Recorder</i>
WCA	<i>Western Christian Advocate</i>
WMM	<i>Wesleyan Methodist Magazine</i>
ZH	<i>Zion's Herald</i>

INTRODUCTION

Evangelicals in the late nineteenth-century Atlantic world were preoccupied with the doctrine of atonement. By 1900 it had become one of the most hotly debated doctrines among Anglicans, Nonconformists and other Protestants. In 1897 John Scott Lidgett, perhaps the most prominent Wesleyan Methodist minister to emerge in late Victorian Britain, shed new light on the issue with the publication of *The Principle of the Atonement*.¹ In this work Lidgett conceptualized the atonement through a metaphorical category known as the Fatherhood of God. It was in the concept of the Fatherhood of God, Lidgett argued, that the traditional and the modern would be successfully harmonized. God, argued Lidgett, was not a judge who fiercely guarded his law-court by dispensing penalties to those who sinned against his laws, but a loving father whose principal concern was the reunion of his spiritual children with their heavenly father through forgiveness and mercy. ‘The Father’, wrote Lidgett, ‘is the source of our redemption’, and it is by ‘His fatherly love’ that Christians are ‘delivered from the destructive power of darkness’.²

On the other side of the Atlantic a contemporary of Lidgett’s, Borden Parker Bowne of Boston University, was making similar theological strides within American Methodism. In 1900 Bowne published a relatively short work on the atonement intended for popular consumption which he appropriately entitled *The Atonement*.³ As religious consumers soon found out, Bowne’s book was a substantial piece of work which brazenly endorsed a form of evangelical transcendentalism, an emerging religious philosophy loosely affiliated with such influential thinkers as Congregationalist Roswell Dwight Hitchcock, president of Union Theological Seminary, New York, from 1880 to 1887. As Lidgett’s work had done, Bowne’s writings on the atonement replaced traditional concepts of God as Lord, Judge and Governor with friendlier, modern notions of God as Father. God became a divine figure whose interests lay in promoting

¹ John Scott Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*, 2nd ed. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1897).

² John Scott Lidgett, *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 67.

³ Borden P. Bowne, *The Atonement* (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1900).

a virtuous life built on love, mercy and forgiveness. Unlike Lidgett's treatise, however, Bowne's work on the atonement downplayed the substitutionary nature of Christ's death while highlighting its ethical benefits. 'The atonement is to be understood', insisted Bowne, in the 'ethical and spiritual work of Christ'.⁴

This thesis is a study of the transformation the doctrine of atonement underwent in one of the largest evangelical denominations in the late Victorian transatlantic world. Beginning in the eighteenth century, it identifies the dominant theological opinions of Methodists on the atonement, and the philosophical and cultural worldview that shaped them, before providing a fuller examination of the ways in which Methodists views on redemption were radically altered during the three decades leading up to World War I. It identifies in particular the ways in which the attitudes and assumptions of Methodists were moulded by the European Enlightenment between the 1750s and 1870s and the effect such intellectual commitments had on their understanding of redemption. Enlightened Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic, for instance, appealed to common sense reasoning as a valuable interpretative tool, extolled the value of Lockean reason and embraced the ideals of individual liberty. Methodists combined these Enlightenment principles with their evangelical heritage to form an alliance of thought which can be identified as an evangelical-Enlightenment synthesis.⁵ Guided by this synthesis of thought, Methodists promoted a mechanical atonement in which divine justice and the necessity of punishment were prioritized. God was viewed as a divine sovereign whose primary concern was the preservation of his righteous government, and human beings as malicious individuals predisposed to violate God's righteous law. As early as the 1870s, a new breed of Methodist emerged to challenge prevailing theories of the atonement. Inspired by aspects of the Romantic movement in Britain and the Transcendental movement in America, modernist Methodists viewed Enlightenment-influenced assumptions about the atonement as antiquated. By appealing

⁴ Ibid., 121.

⁵ This synthesis is expounded more fully in chapter four.

to major features of Romanticism—intuition, the will, emotions and personal idealism—they aimed to construct a more vibrant theory in which a practical, relational atonement informed their opinions about the role human beings and God play in the process of redemption. The appeal to Romanticism represented a significant development in the history of doctrine in the transatlantic world and, I argue, profoundly shaped the identity of transatlantic evangelicals.

This thesis began with a rather simple question: to what extent did evangelicals continue to be shaped by the Enlightenment heritage at the end of the nineteenth century? Over the last three decades historians of religion have ably demonstrated that Enlightenment principles were some of the strongest forces guiding evangelical understanding of religion.⁶ Eighteenth-century Methodists, as so many other evangelicals had during the period, articulated their theological beliefs in a rational fashion acquired by an empirical approach to knowledge. As Romantic patterns of thought, many of which ran counter to Enlightenment principles, ascended during the first half of the nineteenth century, transatlantic Methodists displayed an extraordinary reliance on, and commitment to, the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. They remained indebted to the philosophical and theological patterns wrought by their eighteenth-century forebears. If one were to make prognostications about the future theological commitments of Methodism at the mid-nineteenth century, any forecast would surely point to the continued existence of a substitutionary atonement supported by rational arguments. Yet by the 1870s Romantic sensibilities had been absorbed by a small coterie of Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic who began refashioning the atonement, leading to a fundamental break with the previous intellectual commitments of their religious ancestors.

Why deliver an intellectual history of a mainline, established denomination from a

⁶ Henry D. Rack, 'A Man of Reason and Religion? John Wesley and the Enlightenment', *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 1 (2009): 2–17; David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003); David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006). W.R. Ward, 'Enlightenment in Early Moravianism' in W.R. Ward, ed., *Faith and Faction* (London, 1993), 95-111. Brian Stanley, ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Eerdmans, 2001).

transatlantic perspective when current trends in religious history suggest otherwise?⁷ One reason is that scholars have tended to overlook the relationship between American mainline denominations and evangelicalism.⁸ Many continue to evaluate American Methodism at the turn of the twentieth century as a member of the Protestant, liberal establishment, and therefore place it outside the evangelical purvey.⁹ While Methodism generally can be considered a mainline denomination as early as the 1860s when Methodist bishop Matthew Simpson delivered Abraham Lincoln's funeral address in Springfield, their evangelical traits, I argue, persisted well into the twentieth century and thus make problematic the notion that they are representative of a liberal, Protestant denomination. The pervasiveness of liberal thinking within mainstream Protestantism has too often been applied to Methodism. In many ways the battles over the atonement during this period were not between liberals and evangelicals, but between traditionalist evangelicals and progressive evangelicals.

A second reason for a thesis of this nature is that the end of the nineteenth century is a particularly significant period because not only is it when the first systematic theologies appeared in Britain and America, but because it is a period which witnessed the greatest degree of theological innovation since the inception of the evangelical movement in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, relatively little attention has been paid to the transatlantic connection between evangelicals in the late nineteenth century. Although there are excellent works examining the transatlantic aspect of evangelicalism, the tendency to ignore this aspect of the movement, particularly beyond the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, persists.¹⁰ Finally,

⁷ For some of the trends in religious history see Robert A. Orsi et al., "Forum: The Decade Ahead in Scholarship," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1993): 1–28; Leigh E. Schmidt et al., "The Years Ahead in Scholarship," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 1–25.

⁸ Leigh E. Schmidt and Sally M. Promey, eds., *American Religious Liberalism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

⁹ William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Harvard University Press, 1976); William R. Hutchison, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805 - 1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

¹⁰ The work of Bebbington and Noll in the area of transatlantic evangelicalism is particularly instructive. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); David W. Bebbington,

this lack of attention can also be extended to Methodism itself. While excellent work has been done on other denominations in the nineteenth century, scholarship on Methodism outside the eighteenth century is sparse.¹¹

That scholars have tended to focus on the way in which late nineteenth-century evangelical activities were a foreshadowing of the later fundamentalist-modernist controversy, is a third reason.¹² This approach has created a skewed view of religion during the period so that fundamentalist tendencies and philosophical priorities present in the 1920s and beyond are read back into earlier evangelical commitments, thereby creating the tendency to make the evangelical encounter with modernism fit into the fundamentalist/liberal binary paradigm. A fourth, related, reason for a study such as this one is that when scholars do focus on late nineteenth-century evangelicalism they have tended to follow the secularisation narrative.¹³ This narrative, which charts a denomination's retreat from orthodoxy, is well worn and deserves to be investigated through a new interpretative lens largely because it neglects the very group on which this thesis focuses, namely, the modernist evangelical.¹⁴ Furthermore, the belief that liberalism and secularism are often interpreted as two mutually supportive forces wreaking havoc on orthodoxy is in need of further nuance. As this thesis argues, it was not always the case that cultural movements became an impetus for secularisation. A central aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that not only did many evangelicals adapt their religion to the modern spirit of the age while

“Canadian Evangelicalism: A View from Britain,” in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 38–54; Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*; David W. Bebbington, “Evangelical Theology in the English-Speaking World During the Nineteenth Century,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 2 (2004): 133–50; Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America 1790-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Geoff Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of John R. Mott, J. Gresham Machen and Aimee Semple McPherson* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, Forthcoming).

¹¹ The appearance of two recent works which focus on Methodism in the nineteenth century provide a small measure of hope that this trend might be reversed. See John H. Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Benjamin L. Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads: Revivalism and Social Reform in Boston, 1860-1910* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2011).

¹² George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹³ Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Gerald Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain: Traditions*, vol. 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1988).

¹⁴ Further explanation of this term follows below.

retaining a firm commitment to orthodox Christianity, but in many cases those who did so became more, not less, concerned with religion and their own personal faith. Finally, scholars have mostly assumed or ignored the philosophical currents shaping, and theological beliefs of, transatlantic Methodists, particularly as they relate to the doctrine of atonement.¹⁵

Why a study of Methodist views on the atonement? Methodists, like most evangelicals, placed supreme confidence in the work of Christ on the cross as a redeeming act for their sinful lives. For Methodists, the activities and achievements Christ undertook during his life on earth were a model by which all of their activities were evaluated. For a person to model her life after Christ, she had to learn about him. Thus, Methodists were concerned with achieving knowledge about Christ's work, the pinnacle of which was his death. The atonement, then, is a useful indicator by which a person's commitment to evangelicalism can be measured. If one diminished Christ's work on the cross one tended to reject orthodox Christianity, historically conceived.

Before providing an outline of the chapters to follow, I offer a brief survey on three of the major intellectual and cultural movements which shaped Methodist thinking on the atonement. Firstly, it needs to be recognized that the 'Enlightenment' remains an elusive term. Scholars continue to debate the very nature of the movement. To what degree did adherents of the Enlightenment share a cohesive set of beliefs and attitudes across region and time? Were their efforts at reform scientific or moral? While allowing for a diverse, and at times contradictory Enlightenment, Peter Gay's classic work on the subject, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966), argues for the existence of 'one Enlightenment' united in 'a programme of secularism,

¹⁵ Though there is much that is praiseworthy about the following works, each assumes or ignores the beliefs of transatlantic Methodists. Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965); Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Ernest Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols. (London: Epworth, 1965); Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *The History of American Methodism*, 3 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964); Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

humanity, cosmopolitanism and freedom'.¹⁶ This synthesis, Gay finds, displaced religion as the primary means by which a person discovers truth.¹⁷ Gay's thesis is built on another classic work in eighteenth-century studies, that of Ernest Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932).¹⁸ Translated into English in 1951, Cassirer put forward a view of the Enlightenment which was bound together by reason. For Cassirer, reason was an immutable feature of the movement and was expressed most clearly in the lives of Leibniz and Kant. While at times opposed to reason, Cassirer recognized that religion played a crucial role in the movement, largely because it provided the context for debate about truth.¹⁹ In his work of 1932 Carl Becker, on the other hand, found Enlightenment thinkers united in their attempt to stamp out religious superstition. This endeavour had the unintended consequence of creating a new faith, one rooted in reason and science.²⁰ In his *The Enlightenment* (1968), Norman Hampson maintains that religion played a supporting role alongside science, injecting the movement with coherence and confidence.²¹ Robert Loudon argues that it is inaccurate to describe the social reforms of Enlightenment thinkers as 'scientific' for, he writes, 'their efforts were motivated by moral rather than scientific concerns'.²² From this perspective, Loudon finds the idea of an antireligious Enlightenment unsubstantiated. For Loudon 'the Enlightenment wanted to reform religion rather than to abolish it'.²³

In contrast to the views of Cassirer and Gay, J. G. A. Pocock argues 'that we can no longer write satisfactorily of "the Enlightenment" as a unified and universal intellectual

¹⁶ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*, vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 1966), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:373.

¹⁸ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F. C. A. Koelnn and J. P. Pettegrove (Princeton University Press, 1951).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 134–196.

²⁰ Carl Lotus Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

²¹ Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment: An Evaluation of Its Assumptions, Attitudes and Values* (Pelican Books, 1968), 106.

²² Robert Loudon, *The World We Want: How and Why The Ideals of the Enlightenment Still Elude Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19. For a fuller discussion of Loudon's thesis see pp. 15–26.

movement'.²⁴ Roy Porter, too, argues that it is unwise to speak of 'the' or 'an' Enlightenment, preferring instead the view that there were multiple 'Enlightenments' in the eighteenth century.²⁵ In particular, Porter believes the Enlightenment should be divided along national lines so that one can speak of an English, Scottish, French, German or Italian Enlightenment. Henry May's *Enlightenment in America* (1976) also supports the view that there were several Enlightenments.²⁶ Particularly relevant to this thesis is May's emphasis on the uniqueness of the American scene for its reliance on Scottish thinkers, particularly Adam Smith and Thomas Reid.

Other scholars, such as Robert Darnton, have drawn attention to the fact that the Enlightenment was not simply a concern of elites in the salons of Paris but of common folk, those who produced and distributed the work of the *philosophes*. Thus, printers and businessmen, and those who consumed the literature of the *philosophes*, played a significant role in the Enlightenment. This view has led to the notion of a 'high' and 'low' Enlightenment.²⁷ Still other scholars argue that drawing boundaries along national lines is insufficient.²⁸ Jonathan Israel, the main proponent of this view, argues for two distinct, incompatible enlightenments, a radical and a moderate. While the former, with its anti-religious stance and focus on freedom, equality, materialism, reason, and democracy, was rejected by mainstream European (and American) society, the latter was more readily accepted because it blended the new rationality with traditional and theological categories.²⁹ While displaying differences in timing, both versions, Israel argues, retain the characteristics of 'a single highly integrated intellectual and cultural

²⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12.

²⁵ Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (Penguin Books Limited, 2001).

²⁶ Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford University Press, 1976).

²⁷ Darnton highlights these categories and the ways in which they contributed to social and political upheaval in France in a collection of essays in Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Harvard University Press, 1982).

²⁸ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 22.

²⁹ Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 11–12.

movement'.³⁰ For Israel, then, Enlightenment thinkers, both popular and elite, shared a common set of attitudes and beliefs which made them part of a transnational, Pan-European movement during the eighteenth century.³¹

Allowing for its regional, chronological, social and intellectual variations, it is possible, then, to speak of an overarching Enlightenment stretching from the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth. For transatlantic Methodists operating in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the moderate, mainstream and more religious friendly Enlightenment became the foundation on which their rational religion was built. Thus, influential transatlantic figures such as Adam Clarke and Richard Watson were indebted to Lockean empiricism, Leibniz's monads, and Newton's mortalism rather than to the materialism, rationalism and freedom of thought espoused by Bayle and Diderot, for instance. This indebtedness to the moderate Enlightenment proved true for early nineteenth-century American Methodists as well, though the Scottish Common Sense philosophy was absorbed at a much greater rate than it was by English Methodists.

Like the Enlightenment, Romanticism is a concept that is inhospitable to definition. Generally considered to be a European literary movement with roots in the late eighteenth century, Romanticism is a contested term in part because it shares characteristics in common with the Enlightenment.³² Its beliefs and attitudes drew on, and were found in, the theological, philosophical and aesthetic worlds of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europeans. For this reason, scholars continue to strive for a definition that encompasses women and men, Byron as well as Coleridge and strikes the right balance between fluid and fixed in order to do justice to the diversity of the movement.

One of the first attempts at a definition appeared in 1899. Henry Beer's *A History of*

³⁰ Ibid., vi.

³¹ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*; Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*; Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

³² Miriam L. Wallace, ed., *Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750 to 1832* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009) See in particular, Miriam Wallace, "Introduction: Enlightened Romanticism or Romantic Enlightenment?", 1-20.

English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century conceived Romanticism as the ‘reproduction in modern art of literature of the life and thought of the Middle Ages’.³³ In 1924 Arthur O. Lovejoy argued for a plural use of the term, recognizing the fact that a monolithic Romanticism did not exist.³⁴ By contrast, René Wellek writing in 1949 found there to be a “unity of theories, philosophies, and styles” that transcended national boundaries.³⁵ The imagination, nature, and symbol and myth were the three unifying themes that emerged in his study of German, French and English Romantics.³⁶ In his article “Toward a Theory of Romanticism” published in 1951 Morse Peckham distinguished between ‘negative’ aspects of the movement such as a ‘revolution in the European mind against thinking in terms of static mechanism’, and ‘positive’ aspects such as ‘the redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of dynamic organicism.’³⁷ Its values were ‘change, imperfection, growth, diversity, the creative imagination [and] the unconscious’.³⁸ Following Peckham, Isaiah Berlin divides Romanticism into two distinct categories in his 1965 lectures on Romanticism, published in 1999 as *The Roots of Romanticism*. For Berlin, Romantics were both progressive and reactionary, with the latter most commonly found in the late eighteenth century and the former in the early nineteenth.³⁹

Jacques Barzun’s *Classic, Romantic and Modern* (1961) provides a helpful summary of definitions which Barzun ultimately rejects because ‘none of them can be found uniformly distributed among the great romanticists’.⁴⁰ Thomas McFarland, on the other hand, finds

³³ Henry A. Beers, *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1899), 2.

³⁴ Arthur O. Lovejoy, “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms,” *PMLA* 39, no. 2 (June 1, 1924): 229–53.

³⁵ René Wellek, “The Concept of ‘Romanticism’ in Literary History. I.,” *Comparative Literature* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1949): 2.

³⁶ René Wellek, “The Concept of ‘Romanticism’ in Literary History. II.,” *Comparative Literature* 1, no. 2 (April 1, 1949): 147–72.

³⁷ Morse Peckham, “Toward a Theory of Romanticism,” *PMLA* 66, no. 2 (March 1, 1951): 14–15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 147.

⁴⁰ Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic, and Modern* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), 13. An earlier version appeared in 1943 under the title *Romanticism and the Modern Ego*. Common definitions of Romanticism Barzun rejects are “a return to the Middle Ages, a love of the exotic, the revolt from Reason, a vindication of the individual, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against scientific method, a revival of idealism, a revival of Catholicism, a rejection of artistic conventions, a return to emotionalism, [and] a return to nature”.

‘fifteen hallmarks of Romanticism’.⁴¹ Both Barzun and McFarland seem to complicate rather than clarify any definition of Romanticism. Further complicating any definition of Romanticism is the continued shift ‘in the canon of works gathered together under the name “Romantic”’.⁴² While Scott had once been replaced by figures like Southey, both have been replaced by Wordsworth so that any definition which does not make central characteristics prominent in Wordsworth is rejected.⁴³

The 1980s witnessed a transformation in Romantic studies with the publication of Marilyn Butler’s *Romantics, Rebels and Revolutionaries* (1981) and Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology* (1983), both of which focus on a cultural historical approach to the study of Romanticism which, they hope, will bring a more critical approach to the discipline.⁴⁴ Both, furthermore, find the national contexts of primary importance, with the German, French English and Scottish poetic outputs varying greatly.⁴⁵

With regard to religion, P. M. S. Dawson concludes that many Romantics continued to strive for ‘human betterment’, and found ‘morality and religion’ better suited for this endeavour than ‘political reform’.⁴⁶ This assessment is not surprising given the relative strength of the established church and dissenting bodies in Britain during the period. Coleridge wrote in 1802 that the two subjects which interested him most were ‘Christian Theology and the Theology of Plato’.⁴⁷ Even those who denounced organized Christian religion for its repressive moral and social restrictions, such as Shelley and Blake, never dismissed God entirely, finding comfort in

⁴¹ Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 13.

⁴² Duncan Wu, ed., *A Companion to Romanticism* (Blackwell, 1998), 6.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) In particular McGann finds contemporary critics to be complicit in an “uncritical absorption” that clouds or denies the differences that exist between the Romantic age and the present.

⁴⁵ Marilyn Butler, “Romanticism in England” in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 38.

⁴⁶ P. M. S. Dawson, “Poetry in an Age of Revolution” in Stuart Curran, *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 52.

⁴⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest H. Coleridge, vol. 1 (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), 406.

their own religious creations.⁴⁸

Building on the works from this brief survey above, this thesis employs a definition of Romanticism which combines a number of themes that were both distinct and at times interlinked across Europe from the 1780s to the 1840s. Ideas of self expression; a focus on originality, organic unity, the exotic and the mysterious and the imagination; a recovery of nature and natural religion; and a belief in transcendence and the inward self.⁴⁹ Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic absorbed, blended, and advocated many of these themes into their evangelical religion.

From roughly the 1880s to the 1930s, Modernism was known as a movement that touched nearly every aspect of the intellectual and cultural worlds of the west, from poetry and film to architecture, economics philosophy, religion and politics. Berlin, Paris, London and New York were its main hubs of experimentation, particularly during its heyday at the opening of the twentieth century, but by the 1950s it had extended its reach to much of mainstream western society. Peter Gay has remarked that modernists were ‘at home at the frontiers of the aesthetically safe’ and that ‘moderation struck many a modernist as bourgeois and boring’.⁵⁰ Pericles Lewis writes that modernism ‘resulted from the challenge of representing new content’ in ‘the context of changing social norms about the status of art and literature’.⁵¹ Ezra Pound’s famous slogan ‘Making it new’ called for a constant re-envisioning of the traditional or old. In this sense, modernism possessed a significant degree of irreverence for the past, as Peter Childs remarks: modernists were marked by, in part, their ‘bleak condemnation of the rejected past and an optimistic vision of a refashioned future’.⁵²

More specifically, modernism ‘can be understood’, writes Sarah Blair, ‘as a unified movement promoting a distinct set of concerns, foremost among them a commitment to

⁴⁸ Mary Wedd, “Literature and Religion” in Wu, *A Companion to Romanticism*, 61–71.

⁴⁹ For a helpful discussion of many of these themes see Iain McCalman, “Introduction” in Iain McCalman, ed., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–11.

⁵⁰ Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 2.

⁵¹ Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

⁵² Peter Childs, *Modernism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 1.

experimenting with cultural power of literary traditions and forms'.⁵³ Likewise Gay finds modernism to possess a 'single aesthetic mind-set', what he identifies as 'the modernist style'.⁵⁴ Gay's modernist style possesses two distinguishing marks: the first is 'the lure of heresy that impelled their actions as they confronted conventional sensibilities'; and the second is 'a commitment to a principled self-scrutiny'.⁵⁵ By contrast, Peter Nicholls speaks of 'modernisms' in the plural, rejecting the idea of a unified movement.⁵⁶ Lewis, while recognizing the helpfulness of a 'modernisms' approach has in addressing the complexity of the concept, favours the singular formation because it 'draws attention to the underlying unity of the literary and artistic problem facing writers' during the period, that of 'how to respond to the crisis of representation'.⁵⁷ All three authors, however, find agreement in the origins of the movement, viewing Charles Baudelaire as modernism's first hero.

The metaphysical world remained an important aspect of life for many modernists. While some modified existing dogmas to bring them up to date with modern times such as the Presbyterian minister Harry Emerson Fosdick, others created new, modern faiths such as Madame Blavatsky who blended Christian theology with philosophy and the new Darwinian confidence in science calling it Theosophy. Still many other modernists were hostile to religion, even going so far as to proclaim the death of God, as Nietzsche had.

For the purpose of this thesis, modernism is defined as a movement represented by the challenge of responding to new intellectual and cultural responsibilities which led to in many cases an irreverence for the past; a flouting of religious, social, political and artistic conventions; a preoccupation with innovation and experimentation; was multiform and both national and international in scope. A related feature that developed within the world of modernism through the work of Franz Boas' field-based anthropology is that of cultural relativism. This feature,

⁵³ Sarah Blair, "Modernism and the Politics of Culture" in Stuart Curran, *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 166.

⁵⁴ Gay, *Modernism*, 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁵⁶ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵⁷ Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*, xviii.

while not central to any definition of modernism, played an important role for modernist evangelicals at the turn of the twentieth century.

I now turn to a brief note on terminology. I intentionally use the terms ‘modernist evangelical’ and ‘evangelical modernism’ to describe the relationship between the two while avoiding the term ‘liberal’ for several reasons. Firstly, though some evangelicals at the turn of the century preferred the designation ‘liberal evangelical’, the term tends to confuse or complicate more than shed light. It is too often understood as someone who holds opinions to the left of orthodoxy, with no clear understanding of what particular religious beliefs constitute orthodoxy. Though some traditionalists or mainstream evangelicals believed modernists were liberal, this classification does not accurately represent the efforts of modernist evangelicals. A second problem with using the term liberal is that no definition currently exists. Though attempts have been made to define the term liberal, most scholars have been content to use the term without drawing together a catalogue of shared ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and ways of experiencing progressive religion, that lead to a coherent definition.⁵⁸

By contrast, modernism, as discussed above, is linked more closely to a particular cultural and intellectual context stretching from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s, thus making it a more readily identifiable entity. Scholars attempting to make sense of the Protestant encounter with modernism are able to turn to several leading intellectual developments of the period.⁵⁹ Lastly, the term modernism is preferred because this author believes it is a movement in which transatlantic evangelical Methodists were intentionally engaged. Most were attempting to strengthen the Christian faith by adapting or updating theological views they believed were formed in a particular cultural and intellectual context that left unhelpful and unorthodox imprints on their evangelical theology.

A second term which readers may be unfamiliar with is Wesleyan Methodist. Wesleyan

⁵⁸ See, for example, Schmidt and Promey, *American Religious Liberalism*; Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 3 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001-2006).

⁵⁹ Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*.

Methodism was the largest body of Methodists in Britain during the period under review, and so when this term is used it always refers to those Methodists in England, never America. Finally, the various definitions and descriptions of the atonement (e.g. satisfaction theory or ‘manward’, ‘subjective’, ‘Godward’, etc...) used throughout this thesis rely on the definitions offered by L.W. Grensted in *A Short History of the Doctrine of Atonement* (1920).⁶⁰ Though published nearly one hundred years ago, Grensted’s work remains an excellent source for the different classifications of the doctrine of atonement.

The chapters in this dissertation are organized into two sections. The first section begins on the British side of the Atlantic and includes chapter one, two and three. Chapter one sets the scene by examining the Wesleyan theological context beginning with the emergence of the Methodist movement and continuing into the mid-Victorian period. It identifies the atonement as one of the most important doctrines among Wesleyan Methodists, demonstrating that nearly all Methodists were committed to a universal atonement before examining the specific theories held by English Methodists during the period. From there it moves on to demonstrate that Methodists were deeply indebted to the moderate Enlightenment philosophical heritage in the construction and communication of their theological beliefs. Chapter two demonstrates the continued commitment to, and further entrenchment in, Enlightenment principles in the shaping of the atonement by Wesleyan Methodists during the early nineteenth century. The way in which Wesleyans absorbed and modified the atonement according to Romantic currents of thought is the focus of chapter three.

This investigative pattern continues on the American side of the Atlantic, in which chapter four lays the groundwork for the changes analyzed in chapters five and six. American Methodists displayed, chapter five demonstrates, many of the same theological proclivities towards the atonement as did their counterparts in England, though the governmental theory was more widespread among antebellum Methodists. As in England, Romantic principles were

⁶⁰ Laurence William Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of Atonement* (Manchester: The University Press, 1920).

absorbed by American Methodists beginning in the late 1870s with a significant majority of elite Methodists embracing Romantic patterns of thought by 1900. A final argument of chapter five is that the Methodists' intense debates over the atonement at the opening of the twentieth century contributed to their remaining on the periphery of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in the subsequent decades. Chapter six demonstrates that while some ordinary evangelicals accommodated aspects of modern Romantic thought, many remained indebted to eighteenth century conceptions of the atonement. In this way, Enlightenment principles endured among ordinary Methodists and became, for conservatives, synonymous with the evangelical style of Christianity, a Christianity which rejected modern thought.

CHAPTER ONE
PEDLARS OF THE CROSS: THE ATONEMENT TRADITION IN ENGLISH
METHODISM, 1730s to 1860s

Identifying the specific theological beliefs of John Wesley has been a perplexing task for theologians and historians. Wesley was rarely consistent when it came to controversial topics, preferring to tailor his views to a specific audience or person. This is not to say that Wesley had no core set of doctrines in which he was rooted. On the contrary, Wesley was committed to those fundamental doctrines to which Christians throughout the history of Christendom have been committed, namely, the authority of scripture, the Trinity, God's omnipotence, the incarnation, atonement, resurrection and ascension of Christ. These and many other theological ideas formed the basis of his faith. One doctrine, however, proved to be a distinguishing mark for Wesley and subsequent generations of evangelical nonconformists: the doctrine of the atonement.¹ The task in this chapter is to demonstrate briefly the wide appeal of the universal atonement among the founding members of Methodism and their nineteenth-century descendants. It is sometimes taken for granted that Methodists were defined by their disagreements with Calvinists over the very nature of the atonement. That they preached an atonement which was intended unequivocally for all human beings set them apart from the dominant strand of eighteenth-century evangelicals. The omission of such a feature in a study on the atonement would be a careless act. From there the chapter moves on to explore the extent to which eighteenth-century Methodists shared a particular atonement theory and whether that theory prevailed into the mid-Victorian period. Surveying Methodists' views on the atonement in the period leading up to 1870 allows us to identify a prevailing theory, to the extent that there was one, with which the beliefs of Methodists in subsequent years can be compared. The chapter also sheds light on the fact that beginning with Wesley in the 1730s and extending

¹ As will be shown later in this chapter, Methodists differed very little from Anglicans on the doctrine of the atonement.

into the middle of the nineteenth century, Methodists communicated a redemptive theology that was consistent with Enlightenment sensibilities.

The Diffusion of a Universal Atonement in Eighteenth-Century Methodism

Among the several theological beliefs that distinguished eighteenth-century Wesleyan Methodists from the main Dissenting bodies was their total commitment to a universal atonement.

Methodists' intense focus upon and calculated spread of the universal atonement message for more than a century can be dated to 1739 when Wesley, at George Whitefield's urging, arrived in Bristol to preach to society members nurtured under Whitefield's teaching. Soon after Wesley's arrival Whitefield departed for America. While Whitefield was away, Wesley preached a subversive sermon in which he made it clear he considered the doctrine of predestination, the view that some were elected to salvation while others were not, a belief which 'made God worse than a devil'.² John continued his attacks on election in which he regularly caricatured adherents of the Calvinist doctrine as antinomians. News of Wesley's sermons reached Whitefield in America in the summer of 1740. In a letter dated 25 June 1740 Whitefield urged Wesley to refrain from preaching against Calvinist doctrines. An exasperated Whitefield pleaded:

For Christ's sake, dear sir, if possible, never speak against election in your sermons. No one can say that I ever mentioned it in public discourses, whatever my private sentiments may be. For Christ's sake, let us not be divided amongst ourselves. Nothing will so much prevent a division as your being silent on this head.³

John was not deterred. In 1740 he enlisted the help of Charles and together they published John's sermon preached at Bristol entitled *Free Grace* together with a hymn written by Charles entitled 'Universal Redemption' which attacked the idea of a limited atonement. Agitated by these developments, Whitefield wrote to Wesley on 1 February 1741, one month before he

² Quoted in Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 351.

³ Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 394.

returned to London, demanding to know why they had betrayed his trust.

My Dear, Dear Brethren,—Why did you throw out the bone of contention? Why did you print that sermon against predestination? Why did you, in particular, my dear brother Charles, affix your hymn, and join in putting out your late hymn-book?⁴ How can you say, you will not dispute with me about election, and yet print such hymns, and your brother send his sermon, against election, to Mr. Garden, and others in America?⁵

In a cunning move which revealed Wesley's keen promotional eye and confidence in the power of hymns to spread their evangelical Arminian message, the brothers responded to Whitefield by printing more editions of Charles's hymn book of 1740 and issuing two more collections of hymns in 1741 which went to combat the 'poison of Calvin'.⁶ One such hymn which epitomized Methodist thinking on the universal scope of Christ's death declared:

A world He suffer'd to redeem;
For all He hath the' atonement made:
For those that will not come to Him
The ransom of His life was paid.⁷

This hymn appeared in every British Methodist hymnal after 1808.⁸ A second hymn which became a favourite of nineteenth-century Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic

enthusiastically proclaimed: 'For all, for all the Saviour died, / For all my Lord was crucified'.⁹

The debates between Whitefield and the Wesleys led to a major emphasis on the universal qualities of Christ's death in Charles' hymns throughout the rest of his hymn-writing career.¹⁰ In fact, a vast number of Charles' hymns written during the Calvinist debates of the 1740s were

⁴ The hymn book to which Whitefield refers is most likely *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740). See John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1892), 726.

⁵ Tyerman, *Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, 1:465.

⁶ John Wesley, 30 November 1740, *Journal and Diaries II* (1738-1743), ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, vol. 22 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976–), 174. The two new hymn books were *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns* and *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love*.

⁷ John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborn, vol. 3 (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1869), 4.

⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright, 'Charles Wesley and Calvinism', in Kenneth G. C. Newport and Ted Campbell, eds., *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 194.

⁹ Methodist Episcopal Church, *Hymn Studies*, 4th ed. (New York and Cincinnati: Eaton & Mains and Jennings & Pye, 1900), 132.

¹⁰ John R. Tyson, ed., *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39–40; 159–235.

placed in the large *Wesleyan Hymn Book* of 1780.¹¹ By the 1750s public conflict with Whitefield had subsided, only to become inflamed again after his death in the 1770s when a pamphlet war pitted, among many others, John Wesley and the Swiss-born Anglican minister John Fletcher against the Anglican Augustus Toplady, an Arminian convert to Calvinism, and the Calvinist Sir Richard Hill.¹² In 1778 the *Arminian Magazine* was founded with the subtitle ‘consisting of extracts and original treatises on universal redemption’.¹³ While Calvinist Methodists continued to combat Wesley’s version of Methodism, Wesley and his colleagues, John Fletcher in particular, possessed a relentless desire to see their version promoted over the Calvinist one.

The extent to which the atonement was available to all human beings served as one of the most significant theological conflicts within eighteenth-century evangelicalism. Saturated with the message of free grace, Charles Wesley’s hymns became a major medium for the dissemination of ‘universal redemption’. Those attending Methodist services or prayer meetings regularly found themselves singing hymns glorying in Christ’s death for the entire human race. Furthermore, a steady stream of anti-Calvinist literature pouring forth from the *Arminian Magazine* significantly aided Wesley’s evangelical Arminian propaganda. These efforts, combined with Wesley’s focus on discipline, his extensive organizational skills and the use of popular culture to create a new religious idiom, allowed the Arminian version of Methodism to thrive in eighteenth-century England.¹⁴

Reception of a Universal Atonement among Nineteenth-Century Methodists

¹¹ Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, 726–727.

¹² Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 450–470; Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983); Alan C Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹³ *Arminian Magazine* Vol. 1 (January 1778).

¹⁴ Hempton, *Methodism*; David Hempton, *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century: The I.B.Tauris History of the Christian Church* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Jeremy Gregory, “The Long Eighteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19–39; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.

Methodists continued to preach the universal effects of Christ's death deep into the nineteenth century. Wesley's creation and tight management of a governing body of one hundred preachers known as the 'Legal Hundred' and circuit system, in which a group of local churches were served by a travelling preacher, helped ensure a strong degree of continuity for carrying forward the evangelical Arminian message into the new century. Under the direction of George Story, the *Arminian Magazine*, renamed the *Methodist Magazine* in 1798, continued to print articles, letters, and poems advocating evangelical Arminianism after Wesley's death. In 1803 Joseph Benson, head of the Countess of Huntingdon's college at Trevecca in Wales before he was dismissed for defending Wesley's public comment in 1770 that Methodism had 'leaned too much toward Calvinism', assumed control of the monthly magazine until his death in 1821. Benson, known as a 'high-church' Methodist for his strong Anglican sympathies, had a winsome personality and powerful preaching style that attracted thousands to hear his sermons.¹⁵ Circulation of the magazine more than doubled under Benson's tenure, reaching twenty-four thousand copies per issue, making it one of the most widely read periodicals in industrial England.¹⁶

As a dutiful Methodist, Benson continued to promote a universal atonement alongside other Anglican religious practices throughout the magazine's pages. Articles frequently appeared which argued that Christ's death possessed the potential to save all who professed faith in Christ's death.¹⁷ Deathbed confessions in which the faithful pronounced their unwavering commitment to Christ's atonement for the entire human race were printed for thousands to read. The 1842 obituary for Josiah Anderton, a local preacher in the North Midlands, praised him for 'particularly and constantly refer[ring] to the atonement of Christ' in his sermons and recorded that he even took the opportunity on his deathbed to remind those around him that

¹⁵ Marsh Wilkinson Jones, 'Pulpit, Periodical, and Pen: Joseph Benson and Methodist Influence in the Victorian Prelude' (PhD, University of Illinois, 1995).

¹⁶ *W[esleyan] M[ethodist] M[agazine]* 1 (1822): 5.

¹⁷ *WMM* 34 (1811): 102-107; *WMM* 36 (1813): 179-180; *WMM* 37 (1814): 66.

Christ died for him and for every person on earth.¹⁸ Furthermore, melodramatic letters to the editor recounting battles fought over the universal atonement with Calvinists appeared in the magazine's pages. One Methodist correspondent asked the editor in 1816, for instance, to publish a letter he had received from an 'eminent divine' which 'masterly' defended Christ's death as 'an atonement for the whole world'. The editor proudly gave the title of the published letter 'The Truth of God Defended'.¹⁹

Adam Clarke, one of the leading Methodist intellectuals whose scholarly labours on the eternal Sonship of Christ sparked heated controversy in the 1810s, continued to defend the universal atonement for his entire life. In May of 1824, for instance, Clarke preached a sermon at Lincoln's Inn Fields, London's largest square, entitled 'The Truth, by Which God Shows His Willingness That All Men Should Be Saved'. Appealing to his audience's common sensibilities, Clarke reasoned that just as 'God created all men, so surely has Christ died for all men'.²⁰ Although human beings are separated from God by sin, all are worthy of redemption if only they confess their sins and believe in 'the Mediator...whose business it was to reconcile contending parties'.²¹ 'Urge not', remarked Thomas Jackson, theological tutor at Richmond College, London, and twice president of Conference, in 1838, 'your own unworthiness as a hindrance to your justification.' For everyone can be redeemed, he added, through 'the free grace of God'.²² John Hannah, popular preacher and theological tutor at Disbury College, Manchester, between 1842 and 1867, taught Methodists that 'Christ gave Himself a ransom for all' in his introductory lectures and popular book, *A Letter to a Junior Methodist Preacher* (1853).²³ The universal atonement had become deeply entrenched in nineteenth-century English Methodism.

Beyond a Universal Atonement: The Message of Redemption in

¹⁸ *WMM* 21 (1842): 156-57.

¹⁹ 'Truth of God Defended', *WMM* 39 (1816), 823-825.

²⁰ Adam Clarke, 'The Truth, by Which God Shows His Willingness That All Men Should Be Saved', *WMM*, 3 (1824), 592.

²¹ Clarke, 'The Truth', *WMM*, 592.

²² Thomas Jackson, 'Redemption of Mankind', *WMM* 17 (1838), 810.

²³ John Hannah, *A Letter to a Junior Methodist Preacher* (London: J. Mason, 1853), 28.

Eighteenth-Century English Methodism

John Wesley

Before identifying the theological opinions of Wesley and his followers on the atonement, the nature of Wesley's relationship to the Enlightenment may first be considered. That Wesley was deeply interested in and influenced by the scientific and philosophical developments of the eighteenth century is a view now widely recognized by scholars.²⁴ Wesley read, for instance, Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon and John Locke, and followed closely the scientific experiments of Benjamin Franklin in America.²⁵ In 1760 he publicly recommended the techniques of electrotherapy to his friends and critics alike with the publication of *The Desideratum; or Electricity made Plain and Useful*. Wesley believed, moreover, that Methodists should embrace a reasonable Christianity cultivated by the senses. '[It] is a fundamental principle with us', explained Wesley in a letter to a friend in 1768, 'that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion'.²⁶ 'Whatever is presented to your mind is an idea', declared Wesley in a defence of Locke's empirical epistemology in 1776, 'seeing, feeling, joy, grief, pleasure, pain are ideas. Therefore to be without ideas is to be without either sense or reason.'²⁷ Knowledge, for Wesley, derived from a person's sense experience, a view he shared with Locke. Furthermore, the creation and operation of Methodism itself has been viewed as an Enlightenment innovation. David Hempton rightly argues that 'Wesley's conception of the church was based not upon apostolic authority, confessional orthodoxy, or state coercion, but rather on the free consent of equals to form a voluntary association'.²⁸ In other words Wesley relied on the principle of consent present in natural jurisprudence, an idea inspired by the Scottish Enlightenment. Natural jurisprudence, broadly conceived, posited the

²⁴ Frederick A. Dreyer, *The Genesis of Methodism* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1999), 78–105; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 50–53; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 383–388; Hempton, *Methodism*, 50–52.

²⁵ Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872), 161–162.

²⁶ Wesley to Dr. Thomas Rutherford, 28 March 1768, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford, Vol. 5 (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 364.

²⁷ Wesley, Letter to Betsy (12 August 1776), *Letters* 6:229.

²⁸ Hempton, *Empire*, 51.

notion that human beings had natural and sacred rights which must be respected by all of humanity.²⁹ Wesley found the concept of natural jurisprudence attractive because its principle of free consent opened the doors of membership to all who promised to recognize his authority and long for the same spiritual goals as other members in the society.³⁰ With such a fascination with natural jurisprudence, it is little wonder that Wesley favoured a theory of redemption which elevated the role of justice, a point that will be addressed shortly. By devising an experimental religion which drew on a Protestant theological outlook embedded in eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, Wesley sanctioned reason, common sense and matters of natural law for future generations of Methodists.

In turning towards an examination of Wesley's view of redemption it is worth noting that opinions are divided over which particular theory of atonement is found in his sermons, journals, letters and hymns. On the one hand are those scholars who conclude that Wesley upheld Christ's death as an act which re-established God's justice and made satisfaction for human sin.³¹ On the other hand are those who recognize a strong element of the satisfaction theory in Wesley's writings, yet ultimately find his views enveloped in a legal framework, leading them to conclude that Wesley preached a penal substitutionary view of the atonement.³² The difficulties in assessing Wesley's views on the atonement are numerous. Although the influence of the Church of England on the development of his thought has been well detailed,³³ very little secondary literature exists which explores the atonement tradition in the Church of England in an eighteenth-century context. The literature that does exist, which is generally of a high quality,

²⁹ See James Moore, "Natural Rights in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 291–316.

³⁰ Dreyer, *The Genesis of Methodism*, 93–99 Wesley, Letters 4:273.

³¹ Harald G. Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (London: Epworth Press, 1946), 61; John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), 121; John Rutherford Renshaw, "The Atonement in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley" (PhD, Boston University, 1965); Thomas A. Langford, *Methodist Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1998), 59.

³² Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 99–108; William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1974), 208–209.

³³ Jeremy Gregory, "'In the Church I Will Live and Die': John Wesley, the Church of England, and Methodism," in *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660-1832*, ed. William Gibson and Robert G. Ingram (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 147–78; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*; Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1970).

is restricted to Calvinist/Arminian discussions on the limited atonement and predestination in the Stuart period.³⁴

A second difficulty presents itself in the fact that there is a good deal of common ground between the satisfaction theory and that of penal substitution. Language and ideas central to any criminal justice system, such as debt, pardon, payment, and punishment, are found in both theories. In a letter to James Hervey in 1756, for instance, Wesley used the language of pardon which could be construed as evidence for a commercial transaction (satisfaction theory) or a legal one (penal theory). ‘In this we all agree’, remarked Wesley, that ‘the death of Christ procured the *pardon* and acceptance of believers.’³⁵ Complicating matters further is that most Methodists in the eighteenth century were not deliberately preaching one theory over another but were passing on those ideas which they had, in most cases uncritically, received from previous generations. Perhaps this reason is why some seem to find the notion of substitution in Wesley linked to the penal theory alone.³⁶ The notion of substitution, however, is also an inseparable aspect of the satisfaction theory. In the satisfaction theory Christ’s death is conceived primarily as a compensation for human sin which relieves the sinner of his debt, satisfies divine justice and restores God’s honour.³⁷ The features which appear to distinguish the penal view from the satisfaction view are the priority of God’s law and justice over his honour, an emphasis on an angry deity, the appeasement of that wrathful deity, and the necessity of physical harm to the offender as a just compensation.³⁸

This section, then, assembles the distinguishing features and theological differences mentioned above into one collection, and then uses them to examine the Wesley brothers’ views

³⁴ Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*; Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁵ John Wesley, ‘To James Hervey’, 15 October 1756, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Edited by John Telford. Vol. 3 (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 372. Emphasis mine.

³⁶ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 102.

³⁷ For a fuller explanation of the satisfaction theory of atonement, see Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of Atonement*, 120–143.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 191–252.

on the atonement. While not intended to be an exhaustive study, this section surveys a wide array of the Wesleys' writings and those with whom they were closely associated. Lastly, it contrasts the Wesleys' views on the atonement with the eighteenth-century English penal system, a system with which John was intimately familiar. John referred, for instance, in 1787 to John Howard, philanthropist and eighteenth-century pioneer in prison reform, as 'one of the greatest men in Europe' who possessed the 'power of God' in his reforming efforts.³⁹ The result of such a survey suggests Wesley was concerned primarily with justice rather than punishment.

An investigation of Wesley's sermons, notes and letters suggests a tendency to explain the atonement in penal terms. In his sermon on 'Justification by Faith', preached for the first occasion on 28 May 1738, Wesley declared that Christ was given to humanity as 'the whole and sole Propitiation for sins' and that humans are justified 'through faith in his blood'.⁴⁰ Nearly identical comments are made in his sermon 'Salvation by Faith' preached for the first time in June 1738, when the revival at Oxford was in full bloom.⁴¹ While Wesley's words here suggest an agreement with the penal view, there is no explicit endorsement of it. In a letter to Dr John Robertson in 1753, however, Wesley defended the penal view when it was singled out for attack. Robertson had described the penal view of Christ's atonement as a theory built on 'frivolous and blasphemous notions' which foolishly teach the appeasement of 'vindictive justice'. Wesley responded: "These frivolous and blasphemous notions", do I receive, as the precious truths of God. And so deplorable is my ignorance, that I verily believe all who deny them, deny the Lord that bought them.⁴² Wesley grew irritated when specific theological aspects central to the penal theory were criticised. Further evidence of his endorsement of a penal view is found in his *The*

³⁹ Quoted in Sir Edwin Pears, ed., *Prisons and Reformatories at Home and Abroad* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1872), 792.

⁴⁰ John Wesley, Sermon 5, 'Justification by Faith', §§ 17, 31, in *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 1 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976–), 198, 193.

⁴¹ Wesley, Sermon 1, 'Salvation by Faith', §§ 19ff, *Works*, 1:122.

⁴² John Wesley, Letter to Dr John Robertson (24 September 1753), *Letters II*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 26 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976–), 523.

Doctrine of Original Sin (1757). The sufferings of Christ, explained Wesley, ‘were the penal effects of our sins’. ‘Every chastisement’, he continued, ‘is for some fault’ and the crucifixion ‘was needful to reconcile an offended Lawgiver, and offending guilty creatures.’⁴³ Furthermore, in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1755), one of the standard works frequently read by transatlantic Methodists, Wesley spoke of Christ’s death using language common in expositions of penal substitution. Wesley, commenting on verse two of the second chapter of first John, affirmed Christ’s death as a ‘propitiation’ by which is meant, he wrote, ‘the wrath of God appeased’.⁴⁴ And in a sermon preached in Birmingham in 1788 Wesley declared ‘No suffering, but that of Christ, has any power to expiate sin.’⁴⁵ From the early stages of his ministry to those later in life, Wesley was not reluctant to use penal terms in his discussions of Christ’s death.

Yet to say that Wesley embraced the penal theory is a contention that is not easily defended for a number of reasons. When Wesley employed penal language and legal metaphors his primary concern was justice and salvation from sin, not the appeasement of a wrathful God, one of the central components of the penal theory. Although Wesley believed scripture repeatedly expressed God’s anger at sin,⁴⁶ Wesley saw anger as an extension of justice, just as mercy was an extension of love. ‘I have no objection’, declared Wesley, ‘to the using the words wrath (or anger) and justice as nearly synonymous; seeing anger stands in the same relation to justice, as love does to mercy.’⁴⁷ Wesley’s point was that God’s anger is indeed displayed in scripture, but it is directed at sin and is a demonstration of justice.⁴⁸ Later in the same letter Wesley again defended the legitimacy of God’s anger but defined it as a righteous anger ignited by sin which could be satisfied only when justice was served. Although ‘God executes vengeance’ he does so through ‘justice’, explained Wesley, because justice, not vengeance, is

⁴³ John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1817), 304.

⁴⁴ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, vol. 2 (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1813), 333–334.

⁴⁵ Wesley, Sermon 115, ‘Dives and Lazarus’, §§ 29-1, *Sermons*, 4:8-9.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, John Wesley, ‘An Extract of a Letter to Mr. Law’, (6 January 1756), *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Joseph Benson, vol. 13 (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1812), 357.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Wesley makes this same point in his letter to Dr Robertson as well. See Wesley, Letter to Dr. John Robertson (24 September 1753), *Works*, 26:521.

God's primary motivator for punishing sinners.⁴⁹ When William Law attempted to draw parallels between Wesley's defence of God's anger and the Calvinist concept of appeasing a wrathful God, Wesley responded indignantly. 'Who talks', Wesley exclaimed, 'of wrath to be atoned?'⁵⁰ A more appropriate view, Wesley reasoned, is one in which God's justice is atoned.⁵¹ Wesley was concerned with restoring divine justice, rather than seeing that the exact deserved punishment was distributed to every sinner. After underscoring the sinfulness of human beings, Wesley explained Christ's atonement in a letter to William Law:

There was need therefore of a Mediator who could repair the immense wrong [a person] had done to the Divine Majesty, satisfy the Supreme Judge, who had pronounced the sentence of death against the transgressors of his law, suffer in the place of his people, and merit for them pardon, holiness, and glory. Accordingly, he 'gave himself a ransom for all,' (1 Tim. ii. 6,) and 'by himself purged our sins.' 'He loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.'⁵²

So, Wesley concluded, Christ's sacrifice on the cross 'manifested to angels and men his infinite love of divine justice', and his death 'satisfied its utmost demand'.⁵³ Wesley affirmed this view near the end of his life, in 1778, in a letter to Mary Bishop. 'Although I do not term God "a wrathful being" I know he was angry with all mankind [and] with me till I believed in the Son of His love.'⁵⁴ Wesley minimized God's wrath when given the opportunity to do so.

Further evidence suggesting the penal theory is not fully representative of Wesley's views on the atonement is provided by the fact that he frequently articulated a satisfaction theory with Christus Victor undertones.⁵⁵ '[It] pleased [God]', explained Wesley, 'without any of our deserving, to prepare for us Christ's body and blood, whereby our ransom might be paid, "his

⁴⁹ John Wesley, 'Extracts from the Letters to the Rev. Mr. Law', *Works*, vol. 9 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 484. [find bicentennial edition reference]

⁵⁰ John Wesley, 'Extracts from the Letters to the Rev. Mr. Law' *Works*, vol. 9 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 485–86. [find bicentennial edition reference]

⁵¹ John Wesley, 'Extracts from the Letters to the Rev. Mr. Law' *Works*, vol. 9 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 485–86. [find bicentennial edition reference]

⁵² John Wesley, 'Letter to the Rev. Mr. Law', *Works*, vol. 9 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 490. [find bicentennial edition reference]

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9:491.

⁵⁴ Wesley, 'To Mary Bishop', 7 February 1778, in Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 6:298.

⁵⁵ Ted A. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of the Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 40.

law fulfilled, and his justice satisfied”⁵⁶ The atonement is explained in typical satisfaction terms in which Christ’s death is viewed as a payment which equally satisfied the debt of human sin and the requirements of divine justice. Furthermore, the notion of ransom is a metaphor central to the Christus Victor theory in which Christ’s triumph over evil coincided with a debt or ransom paid to Satan.⁵⁷ The implication is that human beings are in spiritual bondage, a state from which only Christ’s death can deliver victory or freedom from spiritual death.⁵⁸ For Wesley ‘death [was] swallowed up in victory’ when Christ sacrificed himself for human beings on the cross.⁵⁹ When standing before the ‘tribunal of divine justice’, explained Wesley in his commentary on Romans, the Christian can declare his life righteous because through Christ’s death ‘justice is satisfied, sin remitted, and pardon applied to the soul’.⁶⁰ In the *Sunday Service* (1784), a revised version of the *Book of Common Prayer* Wesley created for both British and North American audiences, Wesley described the atonement as ‘a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world’.⁶¹ A final example is taken from his sermon on 24 November 1756 entitled ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’. In this sermon Wesley reaffirmed his words extracted from the *Homilies of the Church of England* which he published as *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works* in 1738. ‘These things’, wrote Wesley, ‘must go together in our justification: Upon God’s part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ’s part, the satisfaction of God’s justice; and on our part, faith in the merits of Christ.’⁶² And, he added, it ‘pleased [God] to prepare for us Christ’s body and blood whereby our ransom might be paid,

⁵⁶ John Wesley, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert Davies, vol. 9, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), § 2–5 9:51.

⁵⁷ See chapter 1 for a discussion on the different atonement theories.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Williams ably demonstrates that the Wesleys often used religious language and metaphors rooted in conflict and violence to describe Christ’s activities on earth and their own faith. See Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 13–40.

⁵⁹ Wesley, ‘Mystery of Iniquity’ 2 Thess 2:7 in *Sermons on Several Occasions* Vol. 5 (New York: Ezekiel Cooper and John Wilson, 1806), 171 [find bicentennial edition reference]

⁶⁰ Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 2:18–19.

⁶¹ *The Sunday Service* (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1817), 133.

⁶² Wesley, Sermon 20, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’, §§ 9–11, *Works*, 1:456.

and his justice satisfied'.⁶³ Wesley used commercial language and divine conflict imagery in his descriptions of Christ's death without distinguishing between the two.

That Wesley endorsed a satisfaction theory of atonement appears more likely when his writings are compared to those of his eighteenth-century Anglican contemporaries. Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury between 1758 and 1768, for instance, used language common in expositions of the satisfaction theory for his explanations of Christ's death. In a sermon entitled 'The Certainty of Divine Aid Being imparted to All Men who Fear God, and Endeavour Seriously to Observe His Moral Precepts', Secker, a staunch defender of Anglican orthodoxy during his archbishopate but also a man who sympathized with the Methodists in their attempts to reform the church, described Christ's work on the cross as 'the intercession of our blessed Lord, founded on his sacrifice of himself to divine justice in our stead'.⁶⁴ His death, preached Secker, served as 'a ransom to divine justice', and, he continued, Christ 'hath bought us to himself with the price of his blood; so that we are his in right of purchase'.⁶⁵ Substitution, divine justice and payment of a debt, three aspects central to the satisfaction theory, are prioritized in Secker's sermons on the cross.

Moreover, James Hervey, a Church of England clergyman who came under the influence of Methodism while at Oxford and retained a close friendship with many Methodists, favoured the satisfaction theory of the atonement. In Hervey's sermon 'The Ministry of Reconciliation' he again explains the death of Christ in satisfaction terms by focusing on divine justice and honour.

Does divine justice demand satisfaction for the wrongs received from sinners? It is not only satisfied, but most awfully glorified, by this wonderful oblation. In short, this [Christ's death] is a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It vindicates the honour of God's holiness; it displays his unsearchable wisdom; it manifests his unutterable goodness; it gives the most magnificent and lovely lustre to all the divine perfections.⁶⁶

⁶³ Wesley, Sermon 20, 'The Lord Our Righteousness', §§ 17-18, *Works*, 1:456.

⁶⁴ Thomas Secker, *The Works of Thomas Secker*, vol. 3, New ed (Edinburgh: J. Dickson, 1792), 188.

⁶⁵ Thomas Secker, *The Works of Thomas Secker*, 2:315.

⁶⁶ Hervey, 'The Ministry of Reconciliation', in *The Whole Works of the Rev. James Hervey*, 5:27.

A child of both the established church and the evangelical revival, Hervey believed Christ's vicarious death not only removed the guilt of sin for human beings but also satisfied God's justice and restored his honour.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the evangelical Anglican John Graham, rector of St Saviour, York, defended the belief that 'Christ died to satisfy divine justice' as both a biblical view and an Anglican one in his *A Defence of Scripture Doctrines, as understood by the Church of England* (1800).⁶⁸ Many eighteenth-century Anglican clergy understood the atonement in satisfaction terms.

Aiding the effort to decipher Wesley's precise views on the atonement is a contrast with the eighteenth-century English legal system. Wesley's focus on justice and pardon rather than God's anger and physical punishment is similar to eighteenth-century notions of justice. The justice system throughout England was a complicated and dishevelled network consisting of various local courts in which each court typically dealt with a different kind and degree of offence. Moreover, the vast majority of offences were overseen by unpaid officials since England lacked any department of law enforcement with paid enforcers until the passing of the Metropolitan Police Act (MPA) on 29 September 1829. Prior to the MPA petty crimes were met with a fine or a conditional pardon.⁶⁹ The penalty imposed on serious offences was often capital punishment imposed by the King's court; but in the latter half of the century many criminals were pardoned on the condition they agreed to be transported to the American or, later, Australian colonies.⁷⁰ While pacifying the anger of one who had been offended certainly came into consideration when that person was someone of position within the community, the focus of many of these hearings was whether justice, according to law or the terms agreed by a

⁶⁷ For a lengthy discussion outlining the differences between Wesley and Hervey see Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (New York: Harper & brothers, 1873), 284–333.

⁶⁸ John Graham, *A Defence of Scripture Doctrines, as Understood by the Church of England* (York: William Blanchard, 1800), 28.

⁶⁹ Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), 279–280.

⁷⁰ J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 479.

mediator, had been satisfied.⁷¹ Physical punishment was not a central component of satisfying justice. On many occasions, crimes were met with a punishment aimed at dishonouring the offender, such as placing them in the stocks. In this way, English law in the eighteenth century functioned in a similar way to the theory of satisfaction in that its goal was to restore justice and honour to the one offended and impose dishonour on the offender. Wesley's focus on justice rather than the necessity of physical punishment closely resembles the eighteenth-century English legal system.

Though some of Wesley's nineteenth-century interpreters believed Wesley 'strongly assert[ed] the moral government of God', a survey of his writings seriously calls this claim into question.⁷² While it is likely that Wesley was aware of the governmental theory—his father recommend Hugo Grotius' commentaries to him and the groundbreaking work *Analogy of Religion* (1736) by Bishop Butler had presumably caught his attention if not before his meeting with Butler in 1739, then certainly after—his work provides little evidence that he subscribed to any such theory of atonement. When Wesley incorporated governmental language into his writings, for example, he did so indiscriminately. 'God may be considered in two different views', briefly explained Wesley in his *Notes upon the New Testament*, 'as Creator and Lord or as moral Governor and Judge.' The former is a spiritual way of 'dealing with us', through divine gifts or spiritual blessings, and the latter is an earthly method of making his divine will known to his 'creatures' through the Bible. While the idea of divine authority mediated through law (as found in the Bible)—a defining feature of the moral government theory—is implicitly present in the latter view, Wesley is hardly advocating a theological outlook which turns on the explanatory power of God's moral universe.⁷³ If Wesley were intentionally introducing the governmental theory he would presumably explain it in greater detail here or, as he occasionally does, refer the

⁷¹ Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60.

⁷² Thomas Jackson, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, vol. 2 (London: John Mason, 1841), 100.

⁷³ See chapter 1.

reader to another piece of writing in which it was elucidated. Secondly, when Wesley has the opportunity to ground justification in the benevolent and righteous law of a moral governor he chooses instead to ground it in the will of a sovereign God. We are justified, Wesley declared, through faith in Christ ‘whom God has set forth for a propitiation’ according to his sovereign will.⁷⁴ While Wesley agreed that Christians were accountable to the law of God,⁷⁵ he does not emphasize, as advocates of the governmental theory do, divine law as a medium designed to promote moral behaviour and secure obedience.⁷⁶ Instead Wesley preferred to promote ‘holy living’ among Christians by pointing them to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit who would help them in their gradual movement toward Christian perfection or ‘entire sanctification’.⁷⁷ Wesley connected moral behaviour to the activity of the Spirit, not to a divine moral governor.

Several impressions arise from Wesley’s writings on the atonement. First, seldom does Wesley outright feature Christ’s death as an expiation or appeasement of God’s wrath as he does in his letter to Dr John Robertson in 1753 and his *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757). Secondly, Wesley often discussed Christ’s death as a payment or ransom which released a person from the penalty for sin, a common feature found in the theory of satisfaction and that of Christus Victor. Thirdly, when Wesley discusses redemption his focus is on restorative justice, not retributive justice as the penal theory advocates. Fourthly, though appearing occasionally in other areas of his writings, the governmental conception of God’s universe is nowhere to be found in Wesley’s discussions of the nature of Christ’s death. Finally, it is important to note that a significant amount of common ground exists between the penal theory and that of satisfaction. While Wesley appears to privilege the satisfaction theory over the penal theory in his writings, one is hard pressed to attribute this theory alone to him since a careful articulation of the atonement

⁷⁴ Wesley, Sermon 5 ‘Justification by Faith’, *Works*, 1:193; see also Sermon 29 ‘The Original, Nature, Property, And Use Of The Law’, *Works*, 1:641-642.

⁷⁵ Wesley, Sermon 29 ‘The Original, Nature, Property, And Use of The Law’, *Works*, 1:632-649

⁷⁶ See chapter 3.

⁷⁷ Wesley, Sermon 10, ‘The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse One’, *Works*, 1:269-284; Sermon 40, ‘Christian Perfection’, *Works*, 2:97-121; Sermon 76, ‘On Perfection’, *Works*, 3:70-87.

was not his ambition. In a letter to Mary Bishop on 7 February 1778, for instance, Wesley portrayed the atonement as a doctrine which could not fully be explained. ‘I can no more comprehend it than [William Law]’, wrote Wesley, or the ‘angels of God’. By attempting a fully articulated theory of atonement, Wesley continued, we frustrate ourselves ‘in wandering mazes lost’. And, he concluded in 1778, the only question that concerns us when determining a theory of the atonement is ‘what saith the Scripture?’⁷⁸ These words ring true when surveying the great mass of his writings. Never does Wesley actually distinguish between theories when preaching or writing about Christ’s work on the cross. The only time Wesley discriminately holds one view over another with regard to the atonement is when the discussion turns to a question of its effectiveness; and on this point he is clear: the atonement benefits all human beings. For Wesley, scripture was sufficiently imprecise, simply portraying Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.⁷⁹

Charles Wesley

Even more than in the case of John, Charles’ theology was filtered through Christ’s redemptive work on the cross. This emphasis became more pronounced after his conversion, a spiritual occasion to which he frequently referred as a moment when a person ‘received the atonement’. In May 1743, for example, Charles recorded that he had ‘spent the morning with several people who had received the atonement under [his] brother’.⁸⁰ Charles constantly vocalized his appreciation for the cross; and it would remain a prominent theme to which he would regularly turn throughout the rest of his life. Despite the enormous and enduring popularity of Charles’ hymns, and what those hymns convey about his and many other Methodists’ religious convictions, few works have appeared which assess Charles Wesley’s theological contribution to Methodism; even fewer have appeared which address his beliefs on one of the central tenets of

⁷⁸ Wesley, ‘To Mary Bishop’, 7 February 1778, in Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 6:298.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6:298.

⁸⁰ Charles Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, vol. 1 (London: John Mason, 1849), 307.

Christianity.⁸¹ In the decades surrounding World War II two works appeared which attempted to draw out Charles' theology of redemption. The first, appearing in 1941 by J. E. Rattenbury, entitled *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, found a range of metaphors in Charles' hymns which pointed to ransom, satisfaction and penal theories. Rattenbury declined to make any definitive statement about which theory Charles held. His restrained estimate was that Charles believed in a universal atonement and that the atonement included the life, not just the death, of Christ.⁸²

The second work was a 1965 Boston University PhD thesis focused entirely on the Wesley brothers' theology of atonement.⁸³ In this thesis John Renshaw explored the Wesleys' beliefs on the atonement through the well-known, yet questionable, Wesleyan quadrilateral typology developed by the Methodist scholar Albert C. Outler in the early 1960s.⁸⁴ Renshaw finds Charles' view of the atonement grounded in satisfaction theory with aspects of several other theories, including a strong dose of the penal substitutionary theory, mixed in. Somewhat indecisively, Renshaw places the atonement views of both Wesleys in the 'Anselmian-Reformation tradition' which is, in his estimation 'between the Reformation penal substitutionary view and the Grotian governmental theory'.⁸⁵

In more recent years John Tyson has produced several careful studies of Charles Wesley's hymns which reveal a number of details about Charles' views of redemption.⁸⁶ In each work Tyson has argued that Charles 'used the language of sacrifice and the forms of the penal

⁸¹ Recent attempts to assess Charles's theological commitments can be found in Newport and Campbell, *Charles Wesley*; and Charles Yrigoyen, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

⁸² John E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941), 188–214.

⁸³ Renshaw, 'The Atonement in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley.'

⁸⁴ Ted Campbell contends that this typology cannot be attributed to Wesley. See Ted A. Campbell, 'The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral': The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth', in *Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas A. Langford (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 154–161.

⁸⁵ Renshaw, 'The Atonement in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley', 126, 283. .

⁸⁶ John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986); Tyson, *Charles Wesley*; John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007).

substitution theory of the atonement to convey his theology of redemption'.⁸⁷ Several sentences after this statement Tyson confesses that he does not think Charles' hymns present a formal theory of atonement; yet he does admit that 'Anselmic imagery dominates in [Charles] Wesley's theology of redemption, with substitution as one of his major categories'.⁸⁸ Although Tyson is correct in thinking that Charles was probably not consciously injecting his hymns with a particular theory, his hymns nevertheless reveal a strong predilection for a particular theory. Debt, payment, pardon, and substitution—all central elements of a satisfaction theory—appear with great frequency throughout his hymns. Charles Wesley's hymn 'Written at the Land's End' prominently portrays the language of satisfaction.

Carry on Thy victory,
Spread Thy rule from sea to sea,
Reconvert the ransom'd race,
Save us, save us, Lord, by grace.

Take the purchase of Thy blood,
Bring us to a pardoning God;
Give us eyes to see our day,
Hearts the glorious truth to' obey;
Ears to hear the gospel sound;
Grace doth more than sin abound.
God appeased, and man forgiven,
Peace on earth, and joy in heaven.⁸⁹

A survey of Charles Wesley's hymns collected in George Osborn's thirteen-volume *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* (1868-72) reveals his use of the word 'pardon' over five hundred times while the word 'blood' appears more than one thousand times. The following verses from one of Charles' hymns are typical of a great many others.

On us bestow the pardon
Bought by His precious blood,
Who paid the utmost farthing

⁸⁷ Tyson, *Charles Wesley*, 37.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborn, vol. 5 (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1869), 134. [hereafter cited as *PW*]

We to Thy justice owed;
The peace and consolation
Incomprehensible,
The knowledge of salvation
To all our hearts reveal.

Pardon'd without condition,
Our debtors we release,
With free and full remission
Of all their trespasses:
The bowels of our Saviour
As we to them extend,
Preserve us in Thy favour
And pardon to the end.⁹⁰

It is clear that Charles believed Christ's blood removed the effects of sin. The language he used to explain how this occurred straddles both the satisfaction theory and the penal theory. At times Charles described the shedding of Christ's blood as a punishment which removes sin and satisfies God's wrath, two concepts which appear in the satisfaction theory but are emphasised to a much greater degree by those advocating a penal theory. An idea central to the penal theory is that of crime. For advocates of the penal view humans' sins are primarily conceived as having a criminal nature because they flout God's divine laws and also anger him. Punishment in this scheme is a necessity. Charles occasionally describes Christ's death as an appeasement of God's fury and sometimes refers to the need for punishment, which implies a committed offence; yet the ideas of wrath, crime and punishment are subtle and appear in the background when compared to the frequency with which other metaphors are used. More often sin, according to Charles, appears as a reference to a debt owed rather than a criminal offence.

One sermon which Charles was particularly fond of preaching came from John 1:29 which reads, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'. Charles preached this sermon at least twenty-two times throughout his life.⁹¹ Charles favoured this sermon because it allowed him to preach extemporaneously on a number of themes related to

⁹⁰ *PW*, 10:182.

⁹¹ Charles Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 2 vols. (London: John Mason, 1849).

his favourite doctrine. His listeners would have been taught that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice and a substitute who ‘died for sinners’.⁹² Charles frequently preached that sinners were redeemed by being ‘washed in the blood’ of Christ the ‘Lamb who died’ for ‘the whole world’. Possessing faith in Christ’s atoning work allowed them to become ‘faithful followers of the Lamb’.⁹³ The uses of such language suggests Charles’ preference for an atonement focused on pardon and purchase, two metaphors found throughout his hymns. The word ‘purchase’ has generally been identified with the satisfaction theory. In fact Charles’ hymns are punctuated with the word ‘purchase’ to a much greater degree than John’s writing. The following stanzas are typical of many others.

Slain for a sinful world, and me,
Our Surety hung upon the tree;
Thy body bore our guilty load:
My Lamb for sin an offering made,
The debt of all mankind hath paid,

And bought, and sprinkled us with blood.
That blood applied by faith I feel,
And come its healing power to tell,
Through which I know my sins forgiven;
A witness I, that all may find
The peace deserved for all mankind,
And walk with God, my God, to heaven.⁹⁴

Yet Charles did not use language found in the satisfaction theory exclusively. As in John’s writings, there is a variety of theories found in Charles’ compositions. His hymns, for instance, also reveal the use of the Christus Victor model to describe the means through which salvation was delivered.

When nature’s strength, and spirits fail,
And all th’ infernal powers combined
My conscience furiously assail,
And Satan brings my sins to mind;
The fierce accusing fiend restrain,

⁹² See for instance *ibid.*, 2:294, 301, 318.

⁹³ Wesley, *Journal*, 1:213, 304; *PW*, 6:302.

⁹⁴ *PW*, 5:135.

Prevent, or break his final blow,
And, ransom'd through Thy bleeding pain,
I trample on my vanquish'd foe.⁹⁵

In language familiar to the Christus Victor model, Charles pitted two opposing spiritual forces against one another which were vying for the conscience of a Christian assailed by sin. Through the power of Christ's atonement the sinner overcomes his torment and defeats his enemy. Conceiving the atonement in Christus Victor terms provided valuable spiritual aid to those deeply troubled by the sin in their lives.

Charles' hymns and John's published sermons and theological tracts enjoyed enormous success among followers of Methodism. The Wesleys and their colleagues were adept at translating their message into the rhythms of daily life which perhaps led them to use a variety of language and metaphors when communicating the nature of Christ's death.⁹⁶ In addition to Charles' hymns, the creation of a monthly journal, aimed specifically at transmitting an evangelical Arminian message, was a way in which their message reached the rank-and-file Methodists. Wesley's works and Charles hymns formed a corpus of theological thought which primarily, though not exclusively, communicated a theory of redemption focused on Christ's substitutionary satisfaction for sin.

Other Methodist Luminaries

Since Wesley was a careful judge of those with whom he surrounded himself, particularly during the latter years of his life, it is worth noting that some of Wesley's closest associates affirmed a theory of satisfaction. Representing the Calvinistic branch of Methodism, George Whitefield, confidant of and competitor to Wesley, testified of Christ's saving activity on the cross in both penal and satisfaction terms. In an evangelistic letter dated 21 May 1740 to Native Americans located along the Allegheny Mountains in the eastern part of the United States, Whitefield,

⁹⁵ *PW*, 7:376.

⁹⁶ Samuel J. Rogal, *John Wesley's Book Stock and the Arminian Magazine Catalogue of 1789* (Lewiston N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006); Hempton, *Methodism*, 58–60.

perhaps the best known preacher in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, wrote of the need for Christ's 'atonement for the sin of fallen man' because human beings had broken divine law and had become 'guilty before God'.⁹⁷ Whitefield also chastised unbelievers for thinking they could 'appease the wrath of God' in a sermon preached from the book of Daniel. Only Christ's righteousness, Whitefield enthusiastically declared, can extinguish God's anger.⁹⁸ In his sermon 'The Folly and Danger of Being not Righteous Enough', Whitefield proclaimed to an enthralled crowd that their sins had been forgiven because 'Jesus Christ hath made satisfaction to his Father's justice' for them.⁹⁹ 'If you are saved', he exclaimed, 'it is by the righteousness of Christ, through his atonement, his making a sacrifice for sin.'¹⁰⁰ In his sermon 'What think ye of Christ?' Whitefield explained to his audience that Christ became, in language reminiscent of Anselm's, a 'perfect, sufficient sacrifice, satisfaction and oblation to infinitely offended justice'.¹⁰¹ In yet another sermon, 'A Penitent Heart, the Best New Year's Gift', presumably preached in January, Whitefield informed his listeners that Christ's 'crucifixion paid the sacrifice for your sins'.¹⁰² Though not neglecting the necessity of Christ's death propitiating divine wrath, maintaining the justice of God was of principal concern for Whitefield in his sermons on the atonement.

Thomas Taylor, ordained as the first itinerant preacher to Wales in 1761 and later in the 1780s a part of Wesley's inner circle of preachers, referred to Christ in satisfaction terms. Writing in April of 1789, Taylor explained that 'for here only [in Christ's death] we have Divine Justice atoned in full weight and measure' which 'God prepared for a sacrifice'.¹⁰³ Christ as the

⁹⁷ George Whitefield, Letter 183, 'To The Allegheny Indians', *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.*, vol. 1 (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 172.

⁹⁸ Whitefield, Sermon 15, 'The Righteousness of Christ', *Works* 5:249.

⁹⁹ Whitefield, Sermon 9, 'The Folly and Danger of Being not Righteous Enough', *Works* 5:136–137.

¹⁰⁰ Whitefield, Sermon 9, 'The Folly and Danger of Being not Righteous Enough', *Works*, 5:137.

¹⁰¹ Whitefield, Sermon 24 'What Think ye of Christ?', *Works*, 5:356.

¹⁰² Whitefield, Sermon 32, 'A Penitent Heart, the Best New Year's Gift', *Works*, 6:18.

¹⁰³ Thomas Taylor, 'The Two Covenants of God with Mankind: or the Divine Justice and Mercy Explained and Vindicated', *Arminian Magazine* (April 1789), 201, 203.

Son of God, he continued, was the only person capable of vindicating God's justice.¹⁰⁴ John Fletcher followed Wesley in writing of the death of Christ as a 'satisfaction for the sins of the whole world' and repeatedly defended God's honour throughout his *Checks to Antinomianism* (1771–4).¹⁰⁵ In his 'Observations on the Redemption of Mankind by Jesus Christ', Fletcher, whom Wesley personally designated his successor in 1773, described the moment directly preceding Christ's death as one in which 'the sacrifice offered to Divine justice was complete'.¹⁰⁶ Joseph Benson, author, editor, and defender of Wesleyan Methodism, also believed that 'God's justice required satisfaction'.¹⁰⁷ The satisfaction theory continued to be advocated by prominent ministers in the nineteenth century. Writing in 1811, for example, Jonathan Crowther, a popular circuit preacher and one of the earliest Methodist historians, portrayed Christ as a sacrificial lamb who, by his death on the cross, 'fully *satisfied* the demands of *divine justice*'.¹⁰⁸ The leading Methodist ministers preached Christ's death as a sacrifice to divine justice.

Changing Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century

Adam Clarke

An autodidact and polymath, Adam Clarke read voraciously on not only theological topics, but also those of medicine, mineralogy and astronomy. Recognizing his many talents, Conference thrice elected him president between 1806 and 1822. His academic reputation, love for evangelism, general conservative theological outlook, generosity and moderate temperament made him a favourite among ordinary and elite Methodists.¹⁰⁹ It is said that Clarke used his considerable influence to elevate his close associates, such as Richard Watson and Jabez Bunting,

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, 'The Two Covenants of God with Mankind', 203.

¹⁰⁵ John Fletcher, *Checks* 2 vols., (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1889), 1:233, 244, 409, 484.

¹⁰⁶ John Fletcher, 'Observations on the Redemption of Mankind by Jesus Christ', *The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher*, vol. 4 (New York: B Waugh and T. Mason, 1833), 224.

¹⁰⁷ Benson, *Notes on the Holy Bible*, Vol. 3 (New York: G. Lane and C. B. Tippet, 1846), 261.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism* (London: Printed and Published by Richard Edwards, 1811), 190.

¹⁰⁹ J.W. Etheridge, *The Life of the Rev. Adam Clarke, LL.D.* (London: John Mason, 1858), 83.

to membership in the legal hundred.¹¹⁰ Among his many works his eight-volume *Commentary on the Whole of Scripture* (1810–24) was the most popular, with several British and American editions published throughout the nineteenth century. Although Clarke’s extensive learning is on display in these volumes, his prose was highly accessible to rank-and-file Methodists, a quality which separated him from other leading Methodist intellectuals.

Clarke’s views on the atonement, like those of the first generation of Methodists, varied. In his commentary on Romans, for instance, Clarke described Christ’s death ‘as a ransom price for the redemption’ of humankind but also affirmed that ‘the passion and death of Christ were an atonement made to Divine justice, in the behalf of man; and that it is through the merit of that great sacrifice, that God forgives sin’.¹¹¹ Furthermore, exclaimed Clarke, God ‘offers thee the pardon He has purchased on the simple condition that thou believe that his death is a sufficient sacrifice, ransom, and oblation for thy sin’.¹¹² Metaphors common to Christus Victor (ransom, merit, purchase) and the satisfaction theory (sacrifice made to divine justice) appear throughout his theological writings. Yet in an unusual move for Methodists during the late Georgian period, Clarke also affirmed the governmental theory. The inspiration for Clarke’s endorsement of the governmental theory is at first unclear. In an 1883 American edition of his commentary on the New Testament, Clarke’s notes cite Jonathan Edwards, the inspirational Congregational preacher and the father of New England theology, as a source.¹¹³ Yet this work was edited by Daniel Curry, one of the leading proponents of the governmental theory among mid-century Methodists, who drew on the Edwardsean tradition in his work on the atonement.¹¹⁴ When the 1883 American edition is compared to the original London edition of

¹¹⁰ Samuel Dunn, *The Life of Adam Clarke* (London: William Tegg, 1863), 240.

¹¹¹ Adam Clarke, *The New Testament with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 2, American edition (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1823), 52.

¹¹² Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology*, ed. Samuel Dunn, 2nd ed. (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1835), 155.

¹¹³ Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: The Gospels and Acts*, ed. Daniel Curry (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 360.

¹¹⁴ See chapter 6.

1817, no mention of Edwards turns out to have existed in the original.¹¹⁵ Further investigations of Clarke's commentaries and notes, moreover, reveal an intimate familiarity with Hugo Grotius' *Commentaries on the Old Testament*. It is to these series of volumes, which Clarke drew on extensively in the writing of his own commentary on the Bible, that his opinions on the government of God can be traced.¹¹⁶

Clarke's endorsement of the governmental view emerged in his concluding observations on the Pentateuch in volume one of his *Commentary* where he defended God's laws and the nature of the atonement as both just and loving against the 'strange metaphysics' of William James, an eighteenth-century Anglican high churchmen and harbinger of the Oxford movement.¹¹⁷ God's penalty for sin, explained Clarke in 1810, is 'ever such as the nature and circumstances of the crime render just and necessary—and its rewards are not such as flow from a principle merely of *retribution or remunerative justice*; but from an enlightened and fatherly tenderness, which makes obedience to the laws the highest interest of the subject'.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Clarke remarked, 'at the same time that love to God, and obedience to his commandments are strongly inculcated; love and benevolence to man are equally enforced'.¹¹⁹ Clarke affirmed all the major features of the governmental theory. Sin, justice, and punishment are taken seriously and are dealt with by God, the 'the Maker and Governor of the universe', in a just manner.¹²⁰ God's loving, rather than wrathful, nature, the necessity of obeying his laws, and the atonement as a self-sacrificing act which encourages a benevolent attitude towards humanity, also appear in his observations on the atonement. Clarke was the first Wesleyan Methodist to expound a moral governmental theory of the atonement.

In many respects Clarke was a traditional Methodist evangelical Arminian. He had after

¹¹⁵ Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, 3 vols. (London: Butterworth, 1817).

¹¹⁶ Clarke cites Grotius' work on numerous occasions. See Adam Clarke, *Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes* (Baltimore: John J. Harrod, 1834), 10, 174, 393, 430, 672, 688, 785.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 513; For more on James see Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁸ Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 513.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

all, along with Joseph Benson and Thomas Coke, been asked in 1807 to create a manual of Methodist doctrine which adhered to scripture and Wesley's writings.¹²¹ Furthermore, as had Wesley, Clarke used vocabulary and metaphors found in several different theories to explain the nature of Christ's death. Yet he introduced Methodists to a moral government concept of the atonement, a view which had heretofore not been advocated by Methodists. There is no indication that Clarke was interested in preserving this view among his fellow Methodists. In fact, nowhere else in his voluminous writings does he refer to the moral government of God when discussing the atonement. There is also no indication that he found the prevailing theories of the atonement inadequate and thought the moral government of God a corrective to these theories. It appears that Clarke was tentatively or perhaps unintentionally advocating a new concept through his reading of Grotius, a work Wesley himself recommended, simply stating biblical truth as he conceived it. 'I propose my own views of truth in as simple a manner as I can', wrote Clarke, 'but never in a controversial way.'¹²² 'I am', he concluded in a letter to a critic of his *Commentary*, 'not fond of novelty.'¹²³ It is highly plausible then that Clarke unwittingly introduced Methodists to a new theory of the atonement but was indifferent when it came to promoting it as a legitimate rival doctrine.

Though Clarke was not fond of novelty, he did possess a penchant for finding new ways of making religion more adaptable to reason. Clarke, as had Wesley, was drawn to an enlightened form of religion, one which drew on reason and scientific inquiry to shape its theological opinions. Clarke, for instance, maintained that the writings of the New Testament were the result of 'pure, unsophisticated *reason*, proceeding from the immaculate mind of God' which 'are addressed, not to the passions, but to the reason, of man'.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Clarke appealed to common sense, not the Holy Spirit, as a lodestar directing Christians to right moral

¹²¹ Etheridge, *The Life of the Rev. Adam Clarke, LL.D.*, 220.

¹²² Quoted in Dunn, *The Life of Adam Clarke*, 123.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Adam Clarke, *Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 3 (Baltimore: John J. Harrod, 1837), 1070.

actions. ‘Common sense, universal experience, and the law of justice written on the heart’, exclaimed Clarke in his *Commentary* on the Bible, ‘testify against rapine and wrong of every kind.’¹²⁵ Clarke shared with Wesley the empirical approach to knowledge. As will be discussed in further detail below with Richard Watson, the concept of public justice found in the governmental theory attracted those Methodists interested in a rational, legal framework for the atonement. When viewing Clarke’s opinions on the atonement against the backdrop of his Enlightenment heritage, his interest in the governmental theory appears to be a natural progression. Clarke shared an appreciation for the empirical approach to religious knowledge, and thus advanced an enlightened evangelical understanding of religion.

Richard Watson and the Evolution of Atonement Thought

That Richard Watson’s *Theological Institutes* (4 vols., 1823–8), a defence against Calvinist protagonists, came to represent the theology of both British and American Methodists for nearly a half century is an ironic twist given his upbringing. Raised among the Countess of Huntingdon’s Calvinistic Methodists, Watson demonstrated an early interest in theology. In an unusual move, Watson joined the Wesleyan Methodists as an itinerant preacher in 1796 only to leave the ministry in 1801 when he was suspected of unorthodox views on the Trinity. Later that year he joined the Methodist New Connexion denomination, the first group of English Methodists to secede in 1797. In 1803 he became an itinerant preacher before rising through the ranks to become secretary of Conference on three separate occasions. His life took yet another turn when he was reinstated as a Wesleyan Methodist minister in 1812 after disagreements over ministerial authority with the New Connexion Methodists. Fourteen years later Watson would be elected president of Conference, a significant achievement for a former Calvinist minister.¹²⁶

Although professional historians have succeeded in placing Wesley within his eighteenth-

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:476.

¹²⁶ Jabez Bunting, *Memorials of the Late Rev. Richard Watson* (London: J. Mason, 1833), 74.

century English context, much more could be done to incorporate the subsequent generations of Methodists into the voluminous Wesleyan historiography. This statement rings particularly true of those nineteenth-century Methodists who had a tremendous impact in mediating his work to future generations. Watson's intellect set him apart from nearly every other Methodist except Adam Clarke. And while some have perhaps downplayed Wesley's religious enthusiasm and eccentricities in their portrayal of him as an 'enlightened' intellectual, there is little need to do so with Watson because his highly rational work put a major dent in what remained of eighteenth-century superstition and folklore.¹²⁷ As the first to systematize a Methodist message which became the standard work in the transatlantic world for nearly fifty years, Richard Watson deserves much greater attention than he has received. This brief exploration of his work aims to add to what little exists.¹²⁸

Watson's outlook was fundamentally that of the eighteenth century, though his formulaic theology resembled that of seventeenth-century scholastics. As had Wesley, he followed Locke's empirical approach to questions of knowledge. 'The doctrine of innate ideas', wrote Watson in his popular theological treatise first published in 1823, 'may with confidence be pronounced a mere theory, assumed to support favourite notions, but contradicted by all experience.'¹²⁹ Wesley's reasoning was mixed with European pietism and tempered by his enthusiasm, while Watson's theological method largely ignored this aspect of evangelical Arminianism.¹³⁰ Watson's

¹²⁷ For further discussion of the ways Wesley's eccentricities have perhaps been downplayed see Henry D. Rack, 'A Man of Reason and Religion? John Wesley and the Enlightenment', *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 1 (2009): 2–17; Works which possibly undervalue Wesley's unenlightened mentality are Frederick A. Dreyer, *The Genesis of Methodism* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1999), 78–105; Ken MacMillan, 'John Wesley and the Enlightened Historians', *Methodist History* 38, no. 2 (2000): 121–132; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 20–74; On the ways in which eighteenth-century intellectuals retained superstitious beliefs see Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹²⁸ E. Dale Dunlap, 'Methodist Theology in Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century: With Special Reference to the Theology of Adam Clarke, Richard Watson, and William Burt Pope' (PhD, Yale University, 1956); Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935* (University Press of America, 1983); Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Barry W. Hamilton, 'Richard Watson and the Theological Crisis of Middle Methodism', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (2010): 25–40.

¹²⁹ Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes*, ed. John McClintock (New York: J. Emory and E. Waugh, 1831), 103.

¹³⁰ Hartmut Lehmann, 'Continental Protestant Europe', and W.R. Ward, 'Evangelical Awakenings in the North Atlantic World', in *Enlightenment, Reawakening, and Revolution, 1660-1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett

central concern in his *Institutes* was making Methodist belief systematically intelligible. Humans were ‘rational beings’ who sought a ‘rational existence’ and thus craved, Watson believed, a rational faith.¹³¹ To achieve this endeavour he coloured Wesley’s theology with his own convictions, filtering it through the lens of scientific reasoning and a strong belief in God’s providence. Watson possessed great faith in reason’s ability to detect ‘the work of an intelligent being’ in creation but he also thought it played a central role in the interpretation of scripture. ‘We rightly use our reason’, explained Watson ‘in the interpretation of a received revelation, when we conduct our inquiries into its meaning, by those plain, common-sense rules, which are adopted by all mankind when the meaning of other writings is to be ascertained.’¹³² Notice in this statement Watson’s indebtedness to Thomas Reid’s philosophy in which reason and common sense are coterminous.¹³³ In other areas of his work Watson elevates common sense to the same level of authority as scripture when justifying his theological opinions. In his criticism of hyper-Calvinism, for instance, Watson remarked that those who hold to ‘eternal justification’, a belief closely associated with high Calvinists, contradict the very idea of justification since an unregenerate person who has not professed faith in Christ cannot be justified by his death. ‘Advocates of this wild notion’, reasoned Watson, ‘must either give up justification in eternity, or a state of condemnation in time. If they hold the former, they contradict common sense; if they deny the latter, they deny the Scriptures.’¹³⁴ Watson’s implication is that both are authorities which should not be opposed by any evangelical. In this endeavour Watson accelerated the strain of reason in Methodism, making all who read his work become familiar with his style of rationalization. Thus, Wesley’s works reveal one version of ‘enlightenment’ while Watson, who distanced himself from the pietistic enthusiasm found in the Wesley brothers’ writings, especially Charles’ hymns, was indebted to a form of the Scottish

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33-53; William R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹³¹ Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes*, vol. 2 (London: J. Mason, 1829), 19, 162.

¹³² Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes*, vol. 1 (London: J. Mason, 1829), 101.

¹³³ See chapter 5 for a discussion of Reid and the Common Sense Philosophy.

¹³⁴ Watson, *Theological Institutes*, 1829, 2:415.

enlightenment.¹³⁵ Yet both embraced the fundamental belief that religious knowledge could be acquired through the exercise of reason. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment had cast its long shadow over the religious opinions of the next century.

Though Clarke introduced Methodists to the moral government theory in his *Holy Bible with a Commentary*, it was Watson in his theological writings who presented a more thorough, dogmatic exposition of the governmental theory while still paying deference to the conventional satisfaction theory. His modifications to the satisfaction theory are found in volume two of his three-volume *Theological Institutes*, written between 1823 and 1828.

As a just Governor, he is satisfied with the atonement offered by the vicarious death of his Son. This effect upon the mind of the Lawgiver is not the satisfaction of an angry vengeful affection, as we have before shown; but... “a satisfaction,” or “contentment” of his justice, which can only rationally mean the satisfaction of the mind of a just or righteous governor. The death of Christ, then, is the satisfaction accepted; and this being a satisfaction to justice, that is, a consideration which satisfied God as a Being essentially righteous, and as having strict and inflexible respect to the justice of his government.¹³⁶

The central focus of Watson’s description in the first Methodist systematic theology is on the satisfaction of God’s justice, which is described as part of his moral administration. Here he incorporates the governmental theory with the satisfaction theory by making Christ’s death both vicarious and a satisfaction to the ‘justice of his government’. A rejection of Christ’s death as an appeasement of an angry God is also present in this description of the atonement. In fact Watson explicitly criticized the penal theory throughout his lengthy denunciations of hyper-Calvinists whom he described as ‘antinomians’. ‘The only true sense of the phrase, that the sufferings of Christ are a full equivalent for the remission of the punishment due to the guilty, is’, explained Watson, ‘that they equally availed in satisfying Divine justice, and in vindicating the

¹³⁵ For discussions on the myth of a monolithic Enlightenment tradition see Helena Rosenblatt, ‘The Christian Enlightenment’, in *Enlightenment, Reawakening, and Revolution, 1660-1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 283–301; J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹³⁶ Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (London: J. Mason, 1829), 2:326.

authority of the law.¹³⁷ Watson displayed the greatest degree of novel thinking on the atonement since the founding of Methodism.

A significant component of the governmental scheme which distinguished it from the penal substitutionary view was that it allowed for a substituted penalty of an unequal amount to the specified debt.¹³⁸ So for Watson, an advocate of the governmental theory, it was not necessary that a substitute ‘bear the same quantum of pain and suffering’ as advocates of penal substitution maintained. Rather, the necessity lay in an ‘incarnate Deity’ who was without sin and who could make ‘a satisfaction to Divine justice’.¹³⁹ In other words, it was not necessary for God to inflict the full penalty on Christ, because it was not about suffering but about Christ being a just and holy substitute. Watson explained that,

When we speak of vicarious sacrifice, we do not mean either, on the one hand, such a substitution as that the victim should bear the same quantum of pain and suffering as the offender himself; or, on the other, that it was put in the place of the offender as a mere symbolical act...but a substitution made by divine appointment, by which the victim was exposed to sufferings and death *instead* of the offender¹⁴⁰

Through his rejection of the penal substitutionary notion that Christ exhausted the entire amount of pain due the offenders, Watson revealed his advocacy of the governmental theory. With this view, Watson subtly rejected one of the major features found in the penal substitutionary view common to Calvinist evangelicals.

While the theory of satisfaction is on wide display throughout his writings, particularly his sermons, it is usually paired with the governmental theory. Watson speaks repeatedly of Christ’s death as a satisfaction paid to ‘God’s moral’ and ‘divine government’. The appearance of the governmental theory in Methodism at the beginning of the nineteenth century is a theological phenomenon. As shown earlier, neither of the Wesleys nor their Anglican contemporaries spoke of the atonement in governmental terms. The Methodist atonement

¹³⁷ Ibid., 2:2:330.

¹³⁸ Robert Mackintosh, *Historic Theories of Atonement* (London and New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), 171–187.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 2:285.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 2:2:341.

tradition in Georgian England was one in which Christ's substitutionary satisfaction played a leading role. From where then did Watson acquire his governmental view?

The introduction of the governmental scheme in Watson's writings can be traced to the seventeenth-century Presbyterian minister John Howe, whose *The Living Temple* (1675) Watson copiously cites. Although Watson drew heavily from other works in the development of his views on natural theology and God's role as governor of the universe, including those by Robert Boyle, Joseph Butler and Samuel Clarke, Howe's work consolidated these ideas with the atonement to create a ready-made theology easily incorporated by Watson. Howe's work was undergoing a renewed popularity in the transatlantic world during the first half of the nineteenth-century. In 1813 a seven-volume edition of Howe's writings was published in London with several later editions appearing in the 20s and 30s followed by an American edition in 1835.¹⁴¹ In 1836, Samuel Dunn, minister, Methodist biographer and disciple of Adam Clarke, edited a collection of Howe's theological works which he published as *Christian Theology*.¹⁴² In *The Living Temple* Howe argued for an atonement that was 'necessary. . . for preserving the honour and dignity of the supreme government'.¹⁴³ Furthermore, Howe reasoned that the atonement was a vindication of God's 'justice and honour', two aspects central to his moral government, rather than a vindication of his wrath.¹⁴⁴ Watson regularly singled out Howe's work for praise. His 'great clearness' of thought, for instance, and the way in which he 'admirably' devised his theological arguments, exert an 'irresistible force', exclaimed Watson, upon his conclusions.¹⁴⁵

Howe attended Christ's College, Cambridge, where he was influenced by the Cambridge Platonists, before graduating from Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1650. Though Paley draws on Howe for the development of his teleological argument, giving the impression that Howe was an

¹⁴¹ John Howe, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Howe*, ed. John Hunt, 7 vols. (London: John Hunt, 1813). I refer to the 1822 edition throughout this chapter. John Howe, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Howe*, ed. John Hunt, 8 vols. (London: F. Westley, 1822).

¹⁴² John Howe, *Christian Theology*, ed. Samuel Dunn (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1836).

¹⁴³ Howe, *Living Temple*, in *Works of John Howe*, 1:371.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:367.

¹⁴⁵ Watson, *Theological Institutes*, 105, 109–116.

original thinker (though in some cases he was), Howe's insights were chiefly drawn from other seventeenth-century philosophers, including René Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), the *Antidote against Atheism* (1653) by Henry More, fellow of Christ's College, and *De satisfactione* (1617), the classic statement of the governmental view by the Dutch political and religious philosopher Hugo Grotius. In *The Living Temple* Howe outlined a theory of natural theology, arguing that the formation of matter required divine input. The 'beginning of matter', Howe reasoned, was the 'first cause' 'of all the motions that are in the world'.¹⁴⁶ 'God is truly everywhere', he wrote on 21 May 1659 in a letter to Presbyterian friend and fellow moderate Calvinist Richard Baxter.¹⁴⁷ Watson drew on these ideas to explain the concept of natural theology to Methodists. Writing in defence of the Bible, for instance, Watson remarked, 'The first and fundamental doctrine of Scripture is, the existence of God; the Great and the Sole First Cause of all things, eternal, self-existent, present in all places.'¹⁴⁸ Watson's *Institutes* are filled with large chunks of quotations from Howe whose 'argument from the existence of motion to the existence of an *intelligent* First Cause is so convincing', Watson happily stated, 'that the farther illustration of it, in which the absurdities of Atheism are exhibited in another view, will not be unacceptable.'¹⁴⁹

In addition to using natural theology to defend theism, Watson used concepts found in God's moral universe to aid Christians in the creation of a free, virtuous, and just society. Watson made use of these arguments in his struggle to abolish the slave trade in Britain. Not only did God's 'just, benevolent, and holy' administration send Christ to restore 'man to the Divine favour', he wrote, but it also commissioned him to encourage 'the moral improvement of man'.¹⁵⁰ Clearly, Watson argued, the enslavement of another person was a violation of God's

¹⁴⁶ Howe, *Works of John Howe*, 1:116–117.

¹⁴⁷ Martin Sutherland, *Peace, Toleration and Decay: The Ecclesiology of Later Stuart Dissent* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 49 (?).

¹⁴⁸ Watson, *Theological Institutes* (1831), 79.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

holy government.¹⁵¹ Faith in Christ's death secured the sinner a place in heaven but it also privileged her to receive spiritual blessings from God's moral government on earth.

It is also likely that Watson relied on John Goodwin's *Imputatio fidei, or, A Treatise of Justification* (1642) and *Redemption Redeemed* (1651) in the development of his atonement theory. Goodwin studied at Queen's College, Cambridge, and was there for nearly a decade after accepting a fellowship in 1617. Goodwin has generally been interpreted as a radical who condemned Charles I's kingship as tyrannical by political historians and a Calvinist-turned Arminian, because he denied the doctrine of predestination and instead embraced an unlimited atonement, by religious scholars.¹⁵² Goodwin, however, was an avowed Calvinist and criticized his detractors for their Socinian beliefs, a common charge volleyed at those considered unorthodox, because they dismissed the need of Christ's death as a satisfaction for sin.¹⁵³ The seventeenth-century portrayal of Goodwin by Edmund Calamy as an individualist whose 'hand was against every man, and almost every man's hand against him', is surely overstated, though Goodwin was a controversialist.¹⁵⁴ For this reason together with his continued commitment to many aspects of Calvinism and interest in Arminianism, Goodwin defies any one label.¹⁵⁵ This statement is equally true of religious figures in the late Stuart period as new philosophical ideas on religion and government influenced and challenged their political and church affiliations.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Thomas Jackson, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Richard Watson* (B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1834), 391.

¹⁵² For his opposition to Charles I see William B. Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Laura Blair McKnight, 'Crucifixion or Apocalypse? Refiguring the Eikon Basilike', in *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688*, ed. Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 141-144; For his portrayal as a committed Arminian see E.S. More, 'The New Arminians: John Goodwin and His Coleman Street Congregation in Cromwellian England' (PhD, University of Rochester, 1980); David Como, 'Puritans, Predestination and the Construction of Orthodoxy in Early Seventeenth-Century England', in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, C. 1560-1660*, ed. Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *Studies in Modern British Religious History* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), 86-87; John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006).

¹⁵³ Thomas Jackson, *The Life of John Goodwin* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1822), 35; Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, 74.

¹⁵⁴ Edmund Calamy, *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (London: Printed for W. Harris, 1775), 151.

¹⁵⁵ The excellent work by John Coffey recognizes the tensions between Goodwin's Calvinism and Arminianism but chooses to label him an Arminian nonetheless. See Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, 199-232.

¹⁵⁶ Geoffrey S. Holmes, *Politics, Religion, and Society in England, 1679-1742* (London: Hambledon Press, 1986); Ernest Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

Nevertheless, nineteenth-century English Methodist intellectuals were overjoyed at discovering such a detailed defence of universal redemption that they enlisted the young Thomas Jackson, minister and editor, to produce a biography of Goodwin. Appearing in 1822, Jackson's *A Life of John Goodwin* (1822) arrived just in time for Watson to consult it before writing the first volume of his *Institutes* in 1823. Watson relies on Goodwin's work in the development of his view on universal redemption and justification, quoting approvingly from several passages of Goodwin's *A Treatise of Justification*.¹⁵⁷ In any comparison of Watson's reliance on primary sources, however, John Howe's work emerges as the clear winner.

Several impressions of Watson arise. Though Adam Clarke had introduced Methodists to the governmental theory prior to the 1820s, it nevertheless remained a doctrine unknown to the average Methodist. Thus, Watson's endorsement of it in his work remained a highly unusual and innovative move away from traditional eighteenth-century Methodist opinions on the atonement. Watson's reliance on several Calvinists who understood Christ's atonement within a governmental framework, including John Howe and John Goodwin, makes it clear that the governmental theory was a Calvinist import. Why would Watson turn to seventeenth-century moderate Calvinists to battle those of the nineteenth century? W.R. Ward and others have demonstrated that the first quarter of the nineteenth century for Methodists was marked by uncertainty, controversy and changing power dynamics.¹⁵⁸ Methodist intellectuals required new, more sophisticated arguments to battle their nineteenth-century detractors rather than those offered by Wesley and Fletcher. Works by Howe and Goodwin elucidated complex subjects on the atonement and provided ready-made arguments against a limited atonement. That they happened to disagree on a range of other significant Christian principles was less important than that they provided thorough and philosophically consistent statements on the restoration of relations between God and humanity. Watson's intellectual ability combined with perhaps his

¹⁵⁷ Watson, *Theological Institutes* (1831), 301–303.

¹⁵⁸ W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850* (Batsford, 1972).

prior exposure to these works during his Calvinist upbringing made him an ideal candidate to produce such a work. Through Watson's *Theological Institutes* English Methodists were presented with a new theory of the atonement.

Mid-Victorian Methodism *Continuity with the Past: Theological*

Like their eighteenth-century ancestors, Methodists in the early decades of the nineteenth century encouraged both the converted and the unrepentant public to trust in Christ's atoning work on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. The religious idiom used by Methodists to explain the atonement remained that commonly found among advocates of the substitutionary (in both its satisfaction and penal forms) nature of Christ's death. That mid-century Methodists retained this outlook on Christ's death was a central factor which helped sustain the bridge of theological continuity between them and denomination's founders. Aspects of Clarke and Watson's governmental focus were rarely absorbed by ordinary Methodists, let alone those in positions of power, before the 1860s and 70s. An example of this can be seen in the work of Jabez Bunting, editor of the *Arminian Magazine*. Though Bunting was vilified as an innovative leader with dictatorial-like powers by his opponents, he was, nevertheless, a representative figure of the legacy from eighteenth-century Methodism when it came to his views on the atonement. Bunting, for instance, used a variety of substitutionary language to explain Christ's death in the 1840s and beyond. He spoke of the 'sacrifice of atonement made by the death of Christ for guilty man' in a sermon before Conference on 4 August 1845. In that address Bunting affirmed Christ's death as a substitution, acknowledged the violation of God's laws and viewed the satisfaction and restoration of those divine laws as a necessity, theological aspects which are all present in both the satisfaction and penal theories of atonement.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Bunting regularly used language such as 'pardon' and stressed 'justice satisfied' to describe the effects of

¹⁵⁹ Jabez Bunting, 'Father's Elect Servant', in *Sermons*, ed. William L. Thornton, vol. 1 (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1862), 37.

Christ's death in his sermons.¹⁶⁰ Bunting's theological opinions on redemption were coterminous with those of the founding members of Methodism.

Likewise, Robert Newton, popular preacher and president of Conference four times between 1824 and 1848, preached a message of redemption rooted in the substitutionary death of Christ. 'Had the teaching and example, the tears and prayers, of the incarnate Son of God been sufficient', exclaimed Newton, 'his blood would not have been shed, his death had been needless, and the Son of God had not been crucified on the cross. But no; nothing short of this sacrifice could avail to reach man's desperate case. In this book it is written, "Without shedding of blood is no remission"; and if there be no remission, there is no salvation.'¹⁶¹ James Dixon, prominent Wesleyan minister who delivered the inaugural address at the opening ceremony of Richmond College, London, in the autumn of 1843, was firmly committed to the substitutionary doctrine of atonement as a sacrifice for human sin.¹⁶²

Conceiving Christ as a suffering sacrifice on behalf of humanity was also a priority for Methodists beyond the mid-century mark. Some, however, followed Clarke and Watson rather than Wesley in explaining the inner workings of the atonement. For these Methodists, the atonement was a satisfaction of public justice which restored God's moral government. 'The vicarious substitution of Christ', wrote a contributor to the *London Quarterly Review* for 1864, satisfied 'the claims of a righteous government'.¹⁶³ God's kingdom 'is a moral *government*', declared one minister in 1857, 'and his rule is the moral law.'¹⁶⁴ When man 'broke this law', the minister continued, an 'atonement was required' to 'pardon man and sustain [God's] own law.'¹⁶⁵ Yet many Methodists tended to carry forward the redemptive message advocated by their eighteenth-century forefathers. For them, as one Methodist insisted in 1857, the atonement was

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, 'The Unreasonableness of Unbelief' in *Ibid.*, 1:346–368.

¹⁶¹ Robert Newton, *Sermons on Special and Ordinary Occasions*, ed. James H. Rigg (London, 1856), 259.

¹⁶² Richard Watson Dixon, *The Life of James Dixon, D.D.* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1874), 457.

¹⁶³ *WMM* 10 (1864), 489.

¹⁶⁴ *LPM* 7 (1857), 2.

¹⁶⁵ *LPM* 7 (1857), 2.

a ‘satisfaction’ made ‘by Christ’s precious blood’.¹⁶⁶ ‘By shedding his blood’, confirmed another in 1866, Christ ‘fully satisfied justice’.¹⁶⁷ ‘A *satisfaction* rendered to *divine justice* for the sins of men’ wrote yet another Methodist in 1867, ‘is what we understand by the atonement’.¹⁶⁸ The governmental view found little support among mid-century Methodists.

Furthermore, the next generation of influential leaders who rose to prominence in the middle period preferred a traditional atonement. James Rigg, influential theologian, editor of the *London Quarterly Review* and from 1860 a member of the legal hundred, for instance, believed Christ’s activity on the cross was a ‘vicarious punishment’ for sin which expiated the guilt of human beings.¹⁶⁹ Divine law and punishment, no matter how repulsive they might be to modern sensibilities, Rigg insisted in 1857, ‘are the terrors of the Gospel’, and possess ‘the power to deter’ and ‘to awaken’ the sinner to repentance.¹⁷⁰ Because ‘Christ has died’, exclaimed William Punshon, a popular minister who served prominent circuits in both England and Canada during the 1860s and 70s, ‘all thy wants may be supplied through his wondrous death’. ‘Is thy heart callous and ungrateful?’, he queried his congregation in 1860; it is no great matter, because Christ ‘has exalted the law and made it honourable. Hast thou dishonoured *justice*? He has *satisfied* its claims. Hast thou violated law? He has lifted up the majesty of its equity.’¹⁷¹ John Hannah, professor of theology at Didsbury, a training college for ministers and missionaries near Manchester, remained indebted to the eighteenth-century Methodist tradition of the atonement. According to William B. Pope, Hannah’s successor at Disbury, Hannah formed all of his theological opinions in relation to ‘the atonement for human sin and the gift of the Spirit for human need’. ‘These were’, Pope continued, ‘the two themes on which hung all the topics of his

¹⁶⁶ *LQR* 8 (1857), 262.

¹⁶⁷ *LQR* 26 (1866), 226.

¹⁶⁸ *LPM* 17 (1867), 114-115.

¹⁶⁹ James H. Rigg, *Modern Anglican Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: Alexander Heylin, 1859), 481.

¹⁷⁰ Rigg, *Modern Anglican Theology*, 347.

¹⁷¹ William Morley Punshon, *Sermons* (New York: N. Tibbals, 1860), 112.

public preaching and private teaching for more than fifty years.¹⁷² In his *Introductory Lectures on the Study of Christian Theology*, published posthumously by Pope in 1875, Hannah defined justification by faith as

that act of God viewed as our righteous, and yet merciful Judge; by which for the sake of the satisfaction and merits of Christ, embraced and applied to the heart by faith, He discharges the criminal at His bar, and treats him as a just person, in full accordance with the untarnished holiness of His own nature, and the inviolable rectitude of His administration.¹⁷³

Here Hannah's explanation resembles a systematic statement of Charles' hymns in which Christus Victor, penal and satisfaction theories are represented. Moreover, in his lectures Hannah defined redemption as 'the provision made for man's recovery to the knowledge, love, and enjoyment of God, by the all-atoning sacrifice which our Lord offered for us on the cross; a sacrifice most pure, vicarious and sufficient'.¹⁷⁴ Hannah celebrated a traditional atonement theology which resembled that of Wesley and other leading Methodists in the eighteenth century. That the governmental theory nowhere appears among the writings of the leading figures of Methodism prior to the 1850s is significant. Though some Methodists followed Clarke and Watson in conceiving the atonement in governmental terms after 1850, it remained a minority view among English Methodists. The tendency to explain the nature of Christ's death in traditional satisfaction terms in the period leading up to 1870 remained.

Continuity with the Past: Methodological

A second factor linking nineteenth-century Methodist conceptions of the atonement to those of the movement's founding members was the enduring legacy of the Enlightenment tradition. Methodists believed reason and common sense were valuable philosophical tools which could be used to instruct their faith. For example, in *A Letter to a Junior Minister* (1836) John Hannah

¹⁷² Pope, 'Preface' to *Introductory Lectures on the Study of Christian Theology* by John Hannah (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 10.

¹⁷³ Hannah, *Introductory Lectures*, 342.

¹⁷⁴ John Hannah, *Introductory Lectures on The Study of Christian Theology*, ed. William Burt Pope (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1875), 324.

highly recommended Fletcher's popular 1772 publication to a new generation of Methodists as a work which commendably conducted its theological arguments along the lines of the 'strictest logical accuracy'.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, Hannah's approach to religious knowledge was built on the Baconian evidentialist tradition of the eighteenth century. Theology, Hannah remarked, was a 'sacred science' which, when studied through the lens of reason, yielded the 'evidences of Christianity'.¹⁷⁶ Hannah endorsed a reasonable faith built on empirical knowledge in his attempts to produce a reasonable Christianity. As mentioned previously, Richard Watson was another influential figure who remained highly indebted to the principles of reason and the apologetic value of natural theology. The Enlightenment worldview was also carried forward by Methodists after 1850. They asserted, for instance, that an evidence-based systematic treatment of theology was the key to religious truth. We explain our theology, proudly wrote one minister in 1851, 'by rational and consistent propositions'.¹⁷⁷ We 'prefer the philosophy of common-sense, and the plain truths of the Bible', insisted a contributor to the *London Quarterly Review* for 1856, as the principal means informing our Christianity.¹⁷⁸ We believe, declared another in 1865, 'in the method by which [each individual minister] may *rationally* investigate and consistently expound the scriptures for himself.'¹⁷⁹ Methodists maintained that spiritual truths could be discerned through the dictates of reason. That Methodists retained such intellectual ties to the methodology of a previous century aided a smooth transfer of theological opinions on the atonement. From its inception in the early decades of the eighteenth-century to its expansion in the mid-nineteenth, Methodism retained close affinities with Enlightenment thought.

Conclusion

Beginning with John and Charles, eighteenth-century interpreters of the atonement used a variety

¹⁷⁵ John Fletcher, *An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense* (Bristol: William Pine, 1772); Hannah, *A Letter to a Junior Methodist Preacher*.

¹⁷⁶ Hannah, *A Letter to a Junior Methodist Preacher*, 63.

¹⁷⁷ *WMM* 7 (1851), 275.

¹⁷⁸ *LQR* 5 (1856), 556.

¹⁷⁹ *LPM* 16 (1865), 182.

of metaphors to explain the doctrine without sharply distinguishing between them. While the satisfaction theory undergirded much of their thought on the atonement, penal undertones were found within John's writings, and Charles' hymns evidence the use of the Christus Victor model. In their use of different theories the Wesleys' views correspond to those of many of their eighteenth-century Anglican and Methodist contemporaries. In the nineteenth century, though not exclusively so, the satisfaction theory of atonement continued to dominate. In both centuries elements of the penal theory were incorporated into Methodist views of the atonement. The dominance of the satisfaction theory was weakened in the nineteenth century when Adam Clarke and Richard Watson introduced Methodists to the governmental model of atonement. While these Methodist intellectuals appropriated the governmental view, most continued to cling to the major features of the satisfaction and penal theories in their interpretations of the nature of Christ's death. In all of these endeavours, Methodists demonstrated a remarkable commitment to the philosophical principles of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as reliable sources for the verification of religious knowledge.

CHAPTER TWO

ROMANTIC AWAKENINGS IN LATE VICTORIAN METHODISM

John Scott Lidgett epitomised progressive evangelicalism. Beginning in the 1890s Lidgett, Methodist minister, theologian, politician and social gospel pioneer, introduced Methodists to the first fully articulated Romanticized gospel. Through a variety of measures aimed at uprooting out-dated conceptions of God, sin, suffering and humanity, Lidgett transformed Methodists' understanding of the atonement. For much of the Victorian period Methodists had remained committed to an atonement theology forged in the evangelical-Enlightenment synthesis. Evangelicals in the eighteenth-century combined Lockean reason, natural and common-sense philosophy, individual liberty, and logic, to form a synthesis of thought that provided the lens through which Christianity was viewed. Within early and mid-Victorian Methodism this synthesis often framed the atonement in governmental terms in which God's moral administration required a just substitute to reconcile a lawless humanity to a righteous ruler. By the end of the Victorian period, however, Lidgett's initiatives reflected a new ethos moulded by Romantic influences and shared by many late Victorian Nonconformist intellectuals in which the notion of God as a stern sovereign was replaced with a caring, fatherly one, who was motivated by love rather than justice in his efforts to restore a filial relationship with humanity. Through his death, wrote Lidgett in 1897, 'Christ realised for Himself and implicitly for believers the true life of love, of fellowship, of trustful surrender and obedience, of the affirmation of righteousness and repudiation of sin, which the Father seeks to produce in all men because they are His sons'.¹ Lidgett undermined the Enlightenment heritage by advancing an atonement message moulded by Romantic currents of thought.

¹ Lidgett, *Atonement*, 291.

Developing a Counter-Cultural Atonement:
F. D. Maurice and the Development of Romantic Theology

That the Romantic spirit infiltrated Lidgett's theological views in the 1890s is not entirely surprising. He, like many other Victorian intellectuals, took an interest in the torrent of religious literature influenced by German theology and Darwinian evolution cascading across Britain after 1860. That these new paradigms of religious thought laid the foundation for much evangelical thinking between 1880 and 1914 presents the need to understand them and their origins before investigating the ways in which they found expression in the leading minds of late Victorian Methodism.

Beginning in the 1830s Frederick Denison Maurice, a Church of England clergyman whose work exercised a persistent influence over Victorian theology, was stimulated by Romantic currents of thought quietly circulating among English theologians. A focus on personal, subjective feelings, a preoccupation with harmonizing tensions or disparate concepts, an imaginative, innovative outlook, and a stress on God's immanent qualities were the principal Romantic features that came to govern Maurice's theological writings.² Such concepts challenged the religious temper then dominating Anglican circles. Bound to the Prayer Book's rites and ordinances, Churchmen generally believed their role was to strengthen the theological, ecclesiastical and political status quo. Pervasive among them was a belief in the value of evidentiary apologetics as outlined in Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion* (1736) and William Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* (1794). Dissatisfied with the evidential method to solve the political and religious turmoil racking the established church in the early Victorian period, Maurice drew on Unitarianism, the religious tradition in which he had been raised, for inspiration.³ But perhaps his single greatest influence came through his encounter with the

² For a general survey on Romanticism see Curran, *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*.

³ On the political and religious unrest in Victorian Britain see Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapters 6–7; Parsons, *Religion in Victorian Britain: Traditions,*

work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Maurice became acquainted with Coleridgean thought while a student at Cambridge in the 1820s through the lectures of Julius Hare, a supplier of German books and frequent attender of Coleridge's Thursday night seminars in Highgate.⁴ By the 1830s Maurice had become an admirer of Coleridge, having read much of his work during that decade.⁵ Maurice, moreover, makes specific mention of Coleridge's influence on him in *The Kingdom of Christ* (1842), a work he dedicated to Coleridge. Though never personally acquainted with Coleridge, Maurice expressed a 'feeling towards him' that was 'strictly and vividly personal' because of the extent to which he was intimately familiar with and appreciative of Coleridge's work.⁶

That Maurice was deeply indebted to Romanticism is evident in a number of ways. First, Maurice employed a subjective epistemological framework derived from Coleridge. In a similar vein to Kant, Coleridge distinguished between 'understanding' (discursive reason) and 'reason' (practical reason). Unlike Kant, however, Coleridge believed one's subjective, internal feelings should play a role in reason's ability to determine truth. 'I must have an interest in this belief', wrote Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* (1825). 'It must concern me, as a moral and responsible Being.'⁷ By contrast Locke's idea of 'pure reason' made truth subject to one's sensory experience which was then verified by a person's prior experience or the 'testimony of others'.⁸ For Coleridge the mind was not a passive receptor of information as it was for Locke, but possessed an active imagination which transcended nature to apprehend divine reality.⁹ 'On intuition', wrote Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), 'all the certainty of our knowledge depends.'¹⁰ One's conscience or intuitive feeling became a powerful source of knowledge which trumped

1:15–64; On Maurice's relationship to Unitarianism see David Young, *F. D. Maurice and Unitarianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁴ N. Merrill Distad, *Guessing at Truth: The Life of Julius Charles Hare* (Shepherdstown, W. VA.: Patmos Press, 1979), 39.

⁵ Frederick D. Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, vol. 1 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842), xi–xviii.

⁶ Frederick D. Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1883), xi.

⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (London: Printed for Taylor and Hessey, 1825), 175.

⁸ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol. 2, New Ed. (New York: Valentine Seaman, 1824), 183.

⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1 (London: Wiley & Putnam, 1817), 295.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:246.

speculative or discursive reason.

Like Coleridge, Maurice believed intuition was a source capable of apprehending metaphysical knowledge. In his *Kingdom of Christ* Maurice described intuition as an ‘organ in man’ separate from speculative reason that is able to affirm reality, ‘not as the intellect affirms a proposition, but as the eye affirms an object’.¹¹ For Maurice, an eye does not speculate about the target it has in view, it intuitively or naturally perceives it. Intuition becomes an active faculty which, while part of reason, cannot be overthrown by reason. In this way discursive reason has no power to assess truths ascertained from one’s intuitive moral knowledge and personal experience. Maurice’s understanding of reason closely resembles that of Coleridge.

Secondly, like Romantics in general, Maurice found Lockean thought insufficient to meet modern philosophical problems. ‘If I find that I cannot interpret the language and thoughts of peasants, and women, and children, and that I cannot interpret the plainest passages of the Bible or the whole context of it, while I look through the Locke spectacles’, exclaimed Maurice in his *Theological Essays* (1853), ‘I must cast them aside.’¹² For Maurice, Lockean thought prevented a person from understanding the true nature of humanity, scripture and divine reality. It was incapable of providing adequate answers to the social, theological and philosophical questions posed by the nineteenth-century world. Thus, purely empirical approaches were incapable of apprehending metaphysical knowledge and must be discarded.

Further reliance on Romantic currents of thought can be identified in Maurice’s stress on organic unity. ‘In the World we see every where evidences of a Unity’, wrote Coleridge in his *Aids to Reflection* (1825).¹³ For Coleridge the unity which existed was not a mechanical unity as put forth by William Paley but an organic, living unity formed by freedom of the human will. Maurice remarked at the end of his life that the ‘very word unity has been haunting me from my

¹¹ Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 1883, 1:196.

¹² Frederick D. Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1853), 466.

¹³ Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality, and Religion*, 68.

cradle'.¹⁴ And, he wrote in 1866, 'whatever I have learnt [sic] or hoped for has been connected with the question [of] how such an agreement is possible without destroying diversities'.¹⁵

Rejecting a rationally calculated theology, Maurice favoured a balanced theology derived from a synthetic process in which disjointed theological elements are united. The concept of unity became a major feature governing Maurice's thought.

By the 1840s Maurice's focus on unity had animated a vision of the gospel in which its salvific message was directly applied to repairing the social evils wrought by the industrial revolution. 'My business,' explained Maurice in a letter to J. M. Ludlow in 1852 in which he summarized his Christian socialism, 'is to show that society was not to be made by any arrangements of ours, but is to be regenerated by finding the law and ground of its order and harmony, the only secret of its existence, in God.'¹⁶ Maurice's utopian vision for society was bound up with the unity of the Trinity and humanity's own identification and unity with God. 'This idea of the unity of God', wrote Maurice in 1842, 'must in some way or other be the ground of all unity among men.'¹⁷ Drawing on Coleridge and Kant, Maurice provided in his writings the chief vehicle for the Romantic impulse in English theology.

With a Romantic theological outlook as his guide, Maurice proceeded to tackle the theological and ecclesiological problems confronting the Church of England, and in the process became a springboard for theological change in the wider Nonconformist world. In developing his theology of redemption Maurice began with the divine-human relationship around which all other ideas relating to the atonement were structured. For Maurice, God and the devil were in a cosmic struggle for control of the human will. 'It is enough for us to know that it is the will in man which God and the devil are both claiming', preached Maurice on 25 January 1857, 'and

¹⁴ Quoted in William C. Lubenow, *The Cambridge Apostles, 1820-1914: Liberalism, Imagination, and Friendship in British Intellectual and Professional Life* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 374.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, ed. Sir John Frederick Maurice, vol. 2, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1884), 137.

¹⁷ Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 1883, 1:138.

that it is the will which must submit to either.’¹⁸ Motivated by love, God sent his Son, as a representative, to rescue humans from spiritual death, that is, a life outside his kingdom. ‘God was there [on the cross] seen in the might and power of His Love, in direct conflict with Sin, and Death, and Hell, triumphing over them by sacrifice’, explained Maurice in sermon preached on 16 July 1854.¹⁹ Thus, Christ’s life and death constituted a demonstration of love which united human beings with God their Father and with one another in a universal family. Christians were now ‘adopted’ sons and daughters within God’s filial kingdom. The unity of love and purpose that existed between the persons of the Trinity had now been extended to human beings. Thus, through Christ’s death Christians were given the same loving sacrificial power that Christ demonstrated in his incarnate life. From this vantage point Christians were to be a redeeming and uniting force in society rather than a destructive, divisive one.²⁰

This focus on unity and familial love directly led to Maurice’s rejection of the penal substitutionary theory which he believed divided God and Christ. The penal view, wrote Maurice, was founded on an unbiblical view of the divine-human relationship because in this scheme Christ had to protect humans from God’s vindictive punishment by taking it upon himself, thereby removing God’s love and mercy from the equation.²¹ ‘How’, wondered Maurice in 1853, ‘can we tolerate for an instant that notion of God which would represent Him as satisfied by the punishment of sin, not by the purity and graciousness of the Son?’²² Clearly Maurice could not endure a view of the divine Fatherhood which relegated his love to a secondary or tertiary role.

Maurice believed his rejection of the penal theory accorded with apostolic tradition. The apostles, he contended in 1853, ‘believed that [Christ] rescued them out of the power of an

¹⁸ Frederick D. Maurice, ‘Conversion of St. Paul’, in *Sermons Preached in Lincoln’s Inn Chapel*, New edition. (London and New York: Macmillan, 1891), 150; Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1853), 50–51.

¹⁹ Frederick D. Maurice, ‘Christ the Advocate’, in *The Doctrine of Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan, 1854), 262.

²⁰ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Church a Family* (London: Macmillan, 1850).

²¹ Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 50–51; 136–138.

²² *Ibid.*, 147.

enemy, not that He rescued them out of the hand of God by paying a penalty to Him'.²³

Maurice insisted that Christ's death was a loving act initiated by a loving Father. Christ did not suffer a penalty or satisfy divine justice; rather his death was the representation of God's love for humankind. The only divine transference that took place for Maurice was that of love. His focus on love, joined with his vision of God locked in a divine struggle with the devil, allowed the concept of wrath a place in his atonement theology. 'Death was the satisfaction to the Divine Love of the Father; the expression of that wrath against Evil which is a part of Love', wrote Maurice in 1853.²⁴ In this view Christ's death as a demonstration of divine love takes on great meaning because God's love for humanity causes him to display his righteous anger against the devil. Misunderstanding God's intentions for sending his Son, insisted Maurice, had a weakening effect on the gospel message and contributed to a cadaverous Christian life. Because the penal theory destroyed the unity between God and Christ, Maurice recoiled from it. Instead he pointed to Christ as a representative of humanity, sacrificing his life out of love rather than out of a need for justice.

Maurice was notoriously, though unintentionally, obscure in his opinions on the atonement. His desire for ecclesiastical co-operation and doctrinal inclusiveness contributed to his oblique style of writing, which created a number of interpretative difficulties for his readers. The result prevents one from assigning any one theory to him. What is evident in his writings, however, is an affinity with both the Christus Victor model and the moral influence theory. That Christ is repeatedly seen as one who rescued humans from the power of death and the devil is apparent throughout both his essays and sermons.²⁵ Likewise, Maurice's focus on the cross as a demonstration and transference of God's sacrificial love is a major feature of his writings.²⁶ Perhaps it is because of Maurice's subsequent role as a spokesperson for Christian socialism that

²³ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1853), 145.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 412.

²⁵ Maurice, 'Christ's Death a Victory over the Devil', in *Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 232–247; Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 111, 114, 145, 478.

²⁶ Maurice, 'Christ's Sacrifice a Power to Form Us after His Likeness', in *Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 217–231.

he has been consistently linked with the exemplary theory. His writings, however, also reveal an inclination for the Christus Victor view, though his emphasis on the unchangeable nature of the Trinity conflicts with this view which marks Christ's death as a decisive change in God's attitude towards humanity.²⁷ Maurice disagreed that the death of Christ rescued humans from the wrath of a vengeful deity and the penalty of sin. Although affirming the atonement's substitutionary qualities and recognizing Christ's death as an exhibition of God's anger at sin, Maurice emphasized God's incarnate life and love over the divine need for justice.

Consequently, Maurice's solutions to the perceived problems inherent in conventional theories of redemption were highly original and made him suspect by both High Church Anglicans and evangelicals. Reform-minded Anglicans such as the Broad Churchmen, however, tended to regard his work with appreciation. One such Churchman believed Maurice's challenge to the penal theory needed to be carried further. In his *Epistles of St. Paul* (1855) Benjamin Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek and later master of Balliol College, Oxford, for instance, severed every forensic aspect from the atonement. All substitutionary theories, remarked Jowett, were 'irreconcilable with the truth and holiness of God'.²⁸ His ambition was to correct conventional evangelical opinions on the atonement in which 'God is represented as angry with us for what we never did [and] is ready to inflict a disproportionate punishment on us for what we are'.²⁹ Jowett offered instead a moral 'mystical' theory in which Christ is 'set always before us as an example'.³⁰ With Christ's activity on earth as a guide, Jowett believed Christians would be provoked to greater intimacy with God, perceive their own imperfections more clearly and extend the same benevolent attitude towards their fellow citizens. In order to do this, Jowett confidently announced in his Pauline commentaries, Christians must discard their traditional notions of the cross and rely on 'nature and Scripture and the still small voice of Christian

²⁷ 'Christ's Death a Victory Over the Devil' in *ibid.*, 232–247.

²⁸ Benjamin Jowett, *The Epistles of St. Paul*, vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1855), 474.

²⁹ Benjamin Jowett, *Theological Essays of the Late Benjamin Jowett*, ed. Lewis Campbell (London: H. Frowde, 1906), 209.

³⁰ Jowett, *The Epistles of St. Paul*, 2:480.

feeling' to provide them with a 'simpler and truer explanation of the doctrine of the atonement'.³¹ Interpreting Jowett's opinions as a venomous attack on orthodoxy, several leading evangelical publications responded with incredulity and outrage.³² Jowett challenged an atonement which framed Christ's death as a vicarious suffering and drew attention to the ethical importance of Christ's life and death for contemporary British life.

The Oxford Movement

At the other end of the theological spectrum the Romantic mood helped produce an Anglo-Catholic revival in the early Victorian period.³³ Confronted with internal crisis, party strife, and general disarray in the Church of England, members of the Oxford movement sought a middle way between popery and Dissenting Protestantism. Frustrated by sweeping parliamentary reforms and an 1833 Bill aimed at suppressing ten Church of Ireland bishoprics, John Keble, professor of poetry at Oxford University and later vicar of Hursley near Winchester, preached a sermon in July 1833 entitled 'On National Apostasy' in which he argued that the established church should have the freedom to exercise her God-given authority over her own affairs. This 1833 sermon is seen as heralding the first phase of the movement which was sustained until 1841 by a series of publications known as *Tracts for the Times*. These controversial tracts saw their supporters, the Anglo-Catholics, elevate the authoritative role of the church by appropriating the principle of apostolic succession from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. The appeal to antiquity by the Anglo-Catholics, while not a new idea within the established church, was accorded status alongside the Bible and became a vital contribution to their rule of faith. Perhaps the best spokesperson for the new outlook was John Henry Newman. Among many other innovative ideas, Newman appealed to the authority of the apostles in defence of his

³¹ Ibid., 2:479.

³² *LQR* 5 (1856): 537-540; *Evangelical Magazine* 34 (1856): 90-91.

³³ Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Owen Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

doctrine of the atonement. ‘The Apostles’, wrote Newman in a letter to a friend on 4 March 1843, ‘are almost silent both about the Divinity of Christ and the Atonement. I only wish to follow their example.’³⁴ Furthermore, other Tractarians, as this group of clergyman came to be called, invoked the early Church Fathers’ veneration of the cross as a ‘visible symbol’ in an attempt to justify their own use of it as an ‘expressive symbol’.³⁵ As the Tractarian movement matured, the idea that ‘antiquity was the true exponent of the doctrines of Christianity and the basis of the Church of England’, as Newman wrote in 1833, became an indelible mark of the movement.³⁶ In typical Romantic fashion, Tractarians rehabilitated the past to function as a powerful authoritative source which was used to bolster their claims for reform.

The doctrine of atonement became a source of tension over which Tractarians, evangelicals and liberal Churchmen of various shades clashed in the period after the parliamentary debates of 1828-29.³⁷ In *Tract 73*, for example, appearing with the title ‘On the Introduction of Rationalistic Principles into Religion’ in 1836, John Henry Newman controversially dismissed the judicial elements of the atonement, preferring instead to view it as a mystery. ‘How His death expiated our sins’, wrote Newman, ‘and what satisfaction it was to God’s justice are surely subjects quite above us.’³⁸ ‘The popular theology of the day’, continued Newman in the tract, incorrectly considers the atonement ‘the chief doctrine of the Gospel’; and rather than viewing it ‘as a wonder in heaven’ perceives its value in ‘its experienced effects on our minds [and] in the change it effects where it is believed’.³⁹ Newman was sceptical of the evangelical view whose theology of the cross concentrated on the this-worldly transformative effects of Christ’s death and thereby neglected the sublime dimension. Confident that the

³⁴ John Henry Newman and John Keble, *Correspondence of John Henry Newman with John Keble and Others, 1839-1845* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1917), 206.

³⁵ *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1833), 31.

³⁶ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua and Six Sermons*, ed. Frank Miller Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 154.

³⁷ Andrew Atherstone, *Oxford’s Protestant Spy: The Controversial Career of Charles Golithy* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 85–161; Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology, 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979).

³⁸ John Henry Newman et al., *Tracts for the Times*, no. 73 (London: Printed for J.G. & F. Rivington, 1836), 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:13.

incarnation deserved more attention in the scheme of Christian thought, moreover, Newman complained that ‘the incarnation is viewed as necessary and important because it gives sacredness to the atonement’ rather than as an essential, distinct doctrine.⁴⁰ To illustrate his point Newman compared the fundamental doctrines of Christianity to the vital organs of the human body. ‘The brain is the noblest organ’, explained Newman, ‘but have not the heart, and the lungs their own essential rights, their own independent claims upon the regard of the physician?’⁴¹ Clearly the atonement was an important part of Christianity for Newman, but in his estimation its role as *the* essential doctrine had been exaggerated; and other doctrines, like those other vital organs of a human body, deserved greater independent attention. In his writings on the atonement Newman challenged the pre-eminent role evangelicals assigned to Christ’s death. While believing it ‘a sacrifice acting in unknown way for the expiation of human sin’, he also insisted on its power to evoke awe and wonder. A pardon for sinners it certainly was, but Christ’s death was also an exhibition of his noble character, displaying such moral attributes as truth, goodness and beauty.⁴² In this way, Tractarians elevated the importance of morality alongside reason. Tractarians seized upon Romantic currents of thought to illuminate and support Anglo-Catholic ideas of the atonement.

Other members of the Oxford Movement registered similar complaints. Isaac Williams, disciple of Keble, fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, and later curate for Newman at St Mary’s, the university church, criticised evangelicals for their irreverent low-church religious practices and advocated restraint in their preaching of the atonement. In *Tract 80*, entitled ‘On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge,’ published in 1837, Williams singled out the evangelical view of atonement for attack. Not only did evangelicals overemphasize the atonement in their gospel message, claimed Williams, but they made a mockery of the doctrine by stressing divine

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3:13–14.

⁴¹ Ibid., no. 73:28.

⁴² Ibid., 3:42.

forgiveness without demanding obedience to the law.⁴³ The preaching of forgiveness, Williams contended, should follow a life of diligent service to God rather than precede it. For this contemptible act Williams labelled Methodism a ‘religion that does not support devotional habits’ and blasted the Methodist view of the atonement for cheapening God’s grace and forgiveness.⁴⁴ Williams also believed untrained ministers who had neither the understanding, the desire, or the divine authority to do so should restrain themselves from preaching about sacred truths. The impenitent heart, Williams exclaimed, cannot grasp the deepest mysteries of the cross. The high-handed tendency commonly levelled against Tractarians was clearly on display. Traditional conceptions of the atonement, and those who underappreciated its real value, were suspect to the mind moulded by the Romantic impulse.

Hoping to rid the church of her individualistic tendencies, Tractarians attacked the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. In *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church* (1837) Newman refers to ‘private judgment’ as a ‘preposterous’ idea. ‘There is something so very strange and wild’, wrote a perplexed Newman, ‘in maintaining that every individual Christian, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, young and old, in order to have an intelligent faith, must have formally examined, deliberated, and passed sentence upon the meaning of Scripture for himself.’⁴⁵ For Tractarians, the idea of scripture alone was a Protestant innovation which fostered individual excess. To combat such thinking Newman again turned to historic Christianity in an effort to validate his theological opinions. Just as evangelicals ‘are eager to secure their liberty in religious opinions as the right of every individual, so do we make it every individual’s prerogative to maintain and defend the Creed’.⁴⁶ Tractarians found that Reformation doctrines refined in Enlightenment thought created ecclesiastical and theological extravagances in private judgment. Like Maurice, Newman abhorred the evidentiary scientific method of investigation to which the

⁴³ Frank M. Turner, *John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 283–287.

⁴⁴ Isaac Williams, ‘On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge,’ in *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford*, vol. 4 (London: J.G. & F. Rivington, 1840), 72.

⁴⁵ John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church* (London: J.G. & F. Rivington, 1837), 173–174.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

older Churchmen cleaved. ‘A mutilated and defective evidence suffices for persuasion where the heart is alive’, declared Newman in 1839 in his sermon on ‘Faith and Reason’, ‘but dead evidences, however perfect, can but create a dead faith.’⁴⁷ Inspired by Romantic currents of thought, Tractarians turned to the past to provide a remedy for the current crisis plaguing the Church of England and in the process challenged traditional Enlightenment notions of theology.

Finally, the appeal to the subjective conscience as a determiner of religious truth was another Romantic innovation which found expression in the Oxford Movement. Though Tractarians decried the evangelical practice of private judgment, which they viewed not only as a symptom of individual excess but also as a negative outcome of evangelicals’ commitment to rational theology, they advanced an idea of moral judgment in which the conscience rather than logic provided the key to religious knowledge. For Keble, the proper approach to religious truth was with a reverent mind and open ear not a logical scalpel. Approached this way, scripture and the sacraments came alive as the Holy Spirit and the inward conscience testified of God’s truth. God speaks to us, wrote Keble in the 1850s, through ‘silent whisperings to our conscience, as well as with His open warnings and tokens in His Church’.⁴⁸ The moral conscience rather than logic apprehended the truths of scripture.

Protestants outside the Anglican fold were also highly susceptible to Romantic currents of thought. John McLeod Campbell, Church of Scotland minister and theologian, for instance, rebelled against the cold, rationalist constructions of the atonement which many Scottish ministers believed the Westminster Confession warranted, by advancing a universal atonement which, he insisted, brought an assurance of faith through the ‘Father’s love’.⁴⁹ In his *The Nature of Atonement* (1856) Campbell referred to the legal understandings of the atonement present in such eminent theologians as John Owen and Jonathan Edwards of the last two centuries as

⁴⁷ John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford*, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and co., 1900), 200.

⁴⁸ John Keble, *Sermons for the Christian Year: Christmas and Epiphany*, vol. 2 (London: James Parker, 1885), 267. Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴⁹ John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1856), 318.

outdated and inadequate representations of God's redemptive activity.⁵⁰ To win the hearts and minds of his congregants, Campbell developed a legal-free concept which cast the atonement in friendlier terms. He found inspiration and support for his views in scripture and through his friendship with prominent Romantic thinkers such as S. T. Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle and F. D. Maurice.⁵¹ The result was an atonement which accentuated the personal, emotional dimensions of the atonement by viewing it in light of God's 'Fatherliness'. So rather than stressing, as traditional evangelicals had, the offences of humanity, punitive justice and the restoration of divine honour, Campbell proposed a synthetic approach originating in the 'Fatherliness of God'.⁵² By locating the atonement within family terms, Campbell was able to combine the love and law of God, thereby blending the objective and subjective aspects of the atonement. 'God's law', declared Campbell in 1831, 'is God's own heart come out in the shape of a law.'⁵³ Furthermore, exclaimed Campbell, God's Fatherhood 'reveals the love in which the law has its root'.⁵⁴ Campbell also believed a person's individual conscience played an important role in understanding the atonement. When 'considering the nature of the atonement', wrote Campbell, a person's purpose should be 'to know what response that doctrine has in the heart of man'.⁵⁵ By presenting God as a Father and highlighting the internal emotional response his actions drew from human beings, Campbell, with Coleridge and Maurice, presented the atonement in personal, subjective terms.⁵⁶ Unlike many other Romantic thinkers, however, Campbell retained objective elements of the atonement in his theory, such as divine justice and punishment for sin, which, as Peter Stevenson points out, created some confusion for Victorians as to which

⁵⁰ Ibid., 49–74.

⁵¹ John McLeod Campbell, *Memorials of John McLeod Campbell*, ed. Donald Campbell, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1877), 115–118, 146, 238, 242.

⁵² Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 335.

⁵³ John McLeod Campbell, *Sermons and Lectures*, vol. 1 (Greenock: R. B. Lusk, 1831), 319.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 377.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁶ See earlier discussion in this chapter on the Romantic theology of Coleridge and Maurice.

particular theory Campbell advanced, a moral influence or a substitutionary one.⁵⁷ Rooted in a filial relationship between Father and Son, Campbell's atonement emphasised a moral understanding of the atonement rather than a legal one.

One of the leading Nonconformists whose theory of atonement was influenced by Romanticism was the Congregationalist Robert W. Dale, minister of Carr's Lane Chapel, Birmingham, between 1853 and 1895. Like Campbell before him, Dale shifted attention away from the atonement as a legal transaction to the realm of moral and personal relationships.⁵⁸ Dale was acutely aware of the transition in intellectual thought percolating through evangelicalism by the 1870s. In his *Nine Lectures on Preaching* (1877), delivered as the Lyman Beecher lectures at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, Dale explained to the young preachers in attendance that the atonement had become a 'great and difficult theological problem' which, he warned, might lead to an inability on their part 'to construct any theory on the relation between the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and human redemption'.⁵⁹ Dale, no doubt, wrote from personal experience as he had wrestled with the doctrine for some time, beginning with an article in the *British Quarterly Review* in 1867 and continuing in his monumental work *The Atonement* in 1875. It is in this latter, lengthy treatise on the atonement that Dale displayed his indebtedness to Romantic thought most clearly. 'The precepts of the Lord Jesus Christ', wrote Dale in 1875, are meant to 'enlighten the conscience, and not merely to control the will.'⁶⁰ For Dale, a direct link existed between divine law and a person's conscience. 'The authority and love of God', explained Dale, 'plead with the heart and conscience of mankind.'⁶¹ 'In God the law is alive', Dale asserted, 'it reigns on His throne, sways His sceptre, is crowned

⁵⁷ Peter Kenneth Stevenson, *God in Our Nature: The Incarnational Theology of John McLeod Campbell* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 54–55, 88–89.

⁵⁸ Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 46–78.

⁵⁹ R. W. Dale, *Nine Lectures on Preaching* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1878), 12.

⁶⁰ R. W. Dale, *The Atonement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1875), 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

with His glory.’⁶² Furthermore, ‘He speaks to us as an objective conscience—a conscience outside of us’, Dale explained in his *Laws of Christ* (1884), ‘with an authority to which we are bound to submit.’⁶³ And, he continued, ‘conscience touches God; God touches conscience. Whatever obedience I owe to the law which is revealed to conscience, I owe to God.’⁶⁴ As it had for F. D. Maurice, the conscience apprehended God’s moral laws and served as internal authority testifying of their truthfulness. By appealing to direct knowledge of God apart from external experience, Dale displayed Romantic sympathies.

Dale’s theory of the cross is also similar to Campbell’s in that he sought an atonement which functioned as an outcome of God’s Fatherly love but which also retained the necessity of divine law and judgment. ‘He has revealed Himself as our Father’, wrote Dale, and demonstrated ‘that Love is the life and glory of all His moral perfections.’⁶⁵ Lest evangelicals should turn the atonement into a purely exemplarist theory or ethical system Dale warned, ‘we should not, however, transform the gospel of the grace of God into a mere system of ethics’ because ‘from the final judgment of God there can be no escape, and upon those who have resisted His authority and rejected His grace He will inflict the just penalties of their sins’.⁶⁶ Dale, however, stressed the necessity of divine law much more than Campbell. For Dale, Christ’s death was ‘proof of God’s love for us’, ‘a propitiation for our sins’ and ‘a revelation of God’s righteousness.’⁶⁷ The view of God as a sovereign Judge was slowly being replaced by one tinged with sentiment and Fatherly affection.

The period prior to 1860 saw an insular established church grow increasingly open to new intellectual currents of thought emanating from Germany and their very own backyard.⁶⁸

⁶² Ibid., 372.

⁶³ R. W. Dale, *Laws of Christ for Common Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1884), 281.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Dale, *The Atonement*, 268.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 189, 390.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 242.

⁶⁸ The Church of Scotland and Nonconformity were also affected by German scholarship during this period. See Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, vol. 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London: A. & C. Black, 1972); W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954).

F.D. Maurice, members of the Oxford Movement, John McLeod Campbell and R.W. Dale all sanctioned a mode of thought that radically altered the theological climate of British theology in mid-Victorian Britain and which would serve as the intellectual wellspring for Methodists in the years between 1880 and 1914.

Continuity, Intrigue, and Refinement

Most leading Methodist theologians and ministers were acutely aware of the new theological emphases coursing through English theology. The need to remain vigilant against its ‘fatal tendencies’ was a view shared by most in the decades leading up to 1870. In 1855, for instance, Methodists praised Martin Luther as a mighty giant defending biblical Christianity while Friedrich Schleiermacher was heralded as a ‘subverter of evangelical doctrine’ and guilty of ‘rationalism’.⁶⁹ Christ’s death was ‘an atonement for sin’, a means to ‘procure our pardon and salvation’, remarked Thomas Jackson, theological tutor at Richmond College, London, between 1842 and 1861, and not ‘merely an example of patience and submission to the Divine will’.⁷⁰ The theological opinions proposed by the leading Broad Churchmen and Tractarians were too far outside the boundaries of accepted orthodoxy for Methodists to find any of them very attractive. Yet Methodists still feared Tractarian innovations might infiltrate the Connexion. Such feelings increased when one of the leading Tractarians singled out Methodism, criticizing members of the denomination for their evangelical enthusiasm and lack of theological acumen. Wesleyans remade the doctrine of justification by faith, condescendingly remarked Edward Pusey, into ‘justification by feelings’.⁷¹ Jackson published a defensive reply to Pusey in 1842 which went unanswered. Further action against the Anglo-Catholic tendencies occurred when a

⁶⁹ *LQR* 5 (October 1855): 275.

⁷⁰ Thomas Jackson, ‘The Atoning Death of Christ’ in *Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1863), 231.

⁷¹ Thomas Jackson, *A Letter to Rev. Edward B. Pusey* (New York: G. Lane & P. P. Sandford, 1843), 5.

group of Methodists published a series of tracts between 1839 and 1842 in a clever attempt to vindicate evangelical doctrines. Appearing in one volume in 1842, the *Wesleyan Tracts for the Times* included such essays as ‘Why don’t you come to church?’, ‘Apostolic succession: a summary of objections to the modern claim’, ‘Justification by faith an essential doctrine of Christianity’, and ‘Wesleyans have the true Christian sacraments’.⁷² These anonymous tracts heavily criticized the ‘Puseyites’ for their ‘Popish’ views and accused them of infecting the established church with ‘Romanism’ to its great detriment. Apostolic succession was identified as a ‘pompous theory’ and the Tractarian view of justification by faith was ‘directly opposed to the whole tenor of Scripture’ because it denied Christ’s death fully pardoned sinners.⁷³ The authors insisted that the Tractarians had no more claim to the Christian heritage than they did. Methodists in the early Victorian period held firmly to received opinion when confronted with the theological changes emanating from the Anglo-Catholic revival.

More trenchant criticism followed when in 1857 James H. Rigg, a young, sharp-witted minister who later became president of Conference and editor of the widely-read *London Quarterly Review* from 1883 to 1898, published his *Modern Anglican Theology*. Initially fond of Maurice’s work, Rigg realized that the Anglican’s use of orthodox language was misleading. Combined with his opaque style of writing, Rigg thought Maurice’s work might potentially lure unsuspecting evangelicals away from orthodoxy. Thus he embarked on a mission to safeguard ‘the evangelical doctrine of atonement’ against the onslaught of ‘Platonism’, a pejorative term assigned to the new Romantic philosophy by some of its early detractors.⁷⁴ In his defence of an evangelical atonement against Broad Church conceptions, Rigg described Christ’s work on the cross as an ‘expiation’ of guilt and a ‘satisfaction’ for sin.⁷⁵ Although there is no extended discussion of the governmental scheme of atonement within Rigg’s treatment of Christ’s death,

⁷² *Wesleyan Tracts for the Times* (London: J. Mason, 1842).

⁷³ ‘Apostolic Succession’ Tract No. 2, ‘Justification by Faith’ Tract No. 6 in *ibid.*, 22; 2.

⁷⁴ Rigg, *Modern Anglican Theology*, 209.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

during the course of his survey of modern thought he does object to portraying God as a Father rather than as 'moral governor'. This instance, however, is a rarity.⁷⁶ Alternatively, Rigg spoke warmly of the 'true Reformation doctrine' of atonement which, he believed, focused on the removal of guilt, the appeasement of God's anger and a 'vicarious satisfaction for the sins of men'.⁷⁷ This three-fold emphasis repeatedly appeared in his defence of an evangelical view of atonement. Rigg emphasised a penal satisfaction view of the atonement while not discounting its governmental qualities. Rigg's work, while expounding evangelical truths, reinforced suspicions of High and Broad Church tendencies and encouraged Methodist alignment with traditional readings of the atonement.

Rigg's ability to explain in popular evangelical terms and cogently defend the traditional Watsonian view, a highly systematic Arminian theology bathed in natural and common-sense philosophy and communicated through an arid rationalist language, inspired other Methodists to do the same.⁷⁸ This tendency grew during the mid-Victorian period when burgeoning liberal Nonconformists and Anglicans were recasting the doctrine in Romantic terms while demonstrating greater preference for the incarnation of Christ. The atonement theories that emerged between the 1850s and 1870s among Methodists all painted Christ's death as a satisfaction for sin. Most of them recognized their neglect of the incarnation and expressed a desire to rescue the doctrine from obscurity and give it a more prominent role in the order of salvation. The differences between the various conceptions lay in whether they emphasised the penal, governmental, or moral elements of the atonement. While some Methodists believed the truth of the atonement lay in some combination between all three aspects, the majority either ignored or rejected the new currents of thought and chose instead to continue to cast the atonement in traditional garb.

One individual advancing traditional opinions on the atonement was Marshall Randles.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 233–234, 492.

⁷⁸ See chapter 2 for a fuller explanation of the Watsonian tradition in Methodism

In 1886 Randles succeeded William B. Pope as theological tutor at Didsbury College, Manchester, and remained in that capacity until his retirement in 1902. Educated under John Hannah at Didsbury in the 1850s, Randles further developed his opinions on the atonement while a minister in the north of England. Randles considered the atonement ‘a principal battlefield of theological controversy’. The doctrine of atonement, he passionately wrote, is ‘the very citadel’ of Christianity, ‘the surrender of which would involve the overthrow of a redemptive scheme to which Christendom has clung through long ages as for very life’.⁷⁹ The ‘war on the nature of atonement’, and Randles’ contribution to it, stemmed from the clash of alternative theories coasting across the British theological waters. Leading theologians such as John McLeod Campbell, F. D. Maurice, Benjamin Jowett, R. W. Dale and Horace Bushnell, wrote Randles in 1877, ‘set up rival theories against substitution’.⁸⁰

Randles divided the warring parties into two camps: the evangelical and the rationalist.⁸¹ With a title that left little room for speculation on what particular theory Randles advocated, *Substitution: A Treatise on the Atonement* (1877) persistently and ironically demonstrated a strong reliance on reason; yet Randles clearly placed himself and his work in the evangelical camp. Though ‘not absolutely necessary’, it is ‘highly desirable’, wrote Randles in the opening pages of his book, for Christians to possess a ‘rationale of the atonement’.⁸² As many of his conservative colleagues had done, Randles placed great trust in reason’s ability to vindicate the truths of Christianity. Randles confessed that he enjoyed applying logic to scripture because it not only proved a ‘helpful companion’ when making scriptural claims appear ‘more probable’, but also brought ‘a wholesome mental delight’ to those exercising it.⁸³ Yet reason can be used incorrectly, complained Randles, to steer one in the wrong direction by developing rationales of

⁷⁹ Marshall Randles, *Substitution: A Treatise on the Atonement* (London: J. Grose Thomas and Co., 1877), 7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vii, 270.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

‘false theories’ which ‘deprive the atonement of its penal and vicarious nature’.⁸⁴ It must, then, be tempered by faith, and some ‘mysteries of the infinite’ should remain intact rather than attempting a complete rationalization for the atonement and the Christian faith. With this qualification, Randles identified his, and the Watsonian tradition, within the evangelical party whereas those downplaying the substitutionary theory held ‘rationalistic views’.⁸⁵ Randles’ conclusions, however, left very little room for the existence of mystery.

Randles highly criticized modern ‘benevolent’ theories for misrepresenting the divine-human relationship which de-emphasized or replaced God’s wrath with softer, more palatable views of God and human nature. These views were unacceptable and served as a primary motive for his work on the atonement. Randles did not see the potential for good in human nature. Rather, humanity was sinful and incapable of upholding the law. ‘Not only is man a transgressor of law’, explained Randles, ‘but God is *angry* with him.’⁸⁶ Christ’s death was both an expiation and propitiation, removing the ‘guilt of sin’ and ‘His [God’s] anger’.⁸⁷ Theories which removed God’s desire ‘to take righteous vengeance on the sinner’ turned many of the explanations found in scripture into ‘absurd make-believe’ statements.⁸⁸ Randles was under the assumption that his view supported a biblical interpretation of the atonement and that his convictions were reinforced by the apostolic tradition. Benevolent theories of the atonement provided inadequate explanations of God, human nature and of the way in which humans were reconciled.

During his tenure at Didsbury and as president of Conference in 1896, Randles was a staunch defender of a Watsonian atonement, which conceived the atonement in strictly governmental terms and was sustained by eighteenth-century rationalist thought. For Randles, substitution was a ‘vicarious punishment’ which met the demands of divine justice. ‘Satisfaction

⁸⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁵ Ibid., vii, 25.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 142 Emphasis in original.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 142.

is the rendering what is due to the Divine law—that is, to the authority and dignity of God, who, as Moral Ruler, is the author and administrator of law.⁸⁹ Moreover, justice was upheld as an ‘essential attribute of God’ which could not be ‘relaxed’ or ‘stopped’, only ‘diverted’.⁹⁰ God’s justice ‘checks and limits the action of simple benevolence’, and though God desires the happiness of others, explained Randles, his justice ‘requires what is due’.⁹¹ Randles even went so far to say that Christ’s sufferings were unjust if not conceived in a penal fashion. Why else would Christ have had to suffer, wondered Randles, if not to reconcile human transgression and satisfy God’s justice? Views which denied the penal nature of the atonement created a ‘monstrosity in the divine government’. No other explanation would do, explained Randles. ‘His sufferings were either penal, or unjust.’⁹² Christ literally bore humanity’s sins in his sufferings upon the cross and satisfied the penal demands of a divine government. Randles advanced Watson’s governmental theory.

Noticeably absent from Randles’ atonement are any discussions of love, the incarnation as it relates to the atonement or a focus on Christ as a harmonizing force between God and humans. Human beings play no other role than that of offender. Divine justice and the appeasement of an angry God are the central ingredients of Randles’ rational atonement. Although he studied under Hannah, who, as noted earlier, ignored the governmental theory, Randles’ views bear little resemblance to Hannah’s.⁹³ On the other hand, Randles’ preoccupation with divine justice and propitiation does bear a strong resemblance to Watson’s theory of atonement, albeit with greater emphasis on the penal character of Christ’s sufferings. Through his persistent use of reason, stress on divine government and prioritization of the penal theory, Randles remained committed to a Watsonian atonement forged in the fires of the evangelical-Enlightenment synthesis.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 95–96.

⁹¹ Ibid., 93.

⁹² Ibid., 112.

⁹³ See chapter 2 for Hannah’s views.

Serving as a transition between traditional enlightened-evangelical conceptions and Romantic-inspired theories of the atonement was the work of William Burt Pope. Born in Prince Edward Island before immigrating to Cornwall, Pope favoured an evangelical theology deeply influenced by the British Enlightenment tradition. Trained at the Theological Institution at Hoxton, London, under John Hannah, the college's theological tutor, Pope served in several circuits throughout England, including Dover, London, Manchester and Leeds, before accepting the chair of theology at Didsbury College, Manchester, in 1867. In this role he succeeded his former tutor at Hoxton, John Hannah, who had moved to Manchester in 1842 to become Didsbury's first theological tutor.

Pope was part of the first generation of Victorian Methodists to attend a ministerial training college created specifically for Methodists. As Hannah's introductory lectures indicate, Pope's training was thoroughly conservative, as Hannah was indebted more to the eighteenth-century Methodist tradition than the one modified by Watson in the early nineteenth century.⁹⁴ In the first volume of his *Compendium of Christian Theology* (1875) Pope stressed the ability of 'enlightened reason' to augment one's faith. For Pope, like many of his contemporaries, reason was compatible with, but also subservient to, faith. '[Reason] is the minister of faith', wrote Pope in 1875, and 'guard[s] faith from 'overbelief and superstition' as well as 'undisciplined unbelief'.⁹⁵ Thus, reason works alongside God's natural and special revelation, and when the two appear to conflict, faith must win because, explained Pope, reason is partial.⁹⁶ The symbiotic relationship between faith and reason is revealed in Pope's vision of the atonement as both a mystery and a fact that could be comprehended. The 'mystery of redemption' is seen, for example, in how the death of God's Son removed human sin and its resultant penalty. To unlock this mystery reason and faith are applied to scripture, which then gradually unfolds the

⁹⁴ See chapter 2 for a discussion of Hannah.

⁹⁵ William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1879), 210.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:209–212.

mystery.⁹⁷ Thus, those aspects of salvation which ‘seem to be paradoxes’ become discernible when investigated through the lens of reason and faith.⁹⁸ In this way Pope was committed to a common-sense reading of scripture inherited from his Methodist forebears whose work was firmly linked to the Enlightenment framework.⁹⁹ Scriptural truths, explained Pope, are ‘confirmed by man’s common sense’.¹⁰⁰ And, he added, a ‘healthy common sense’ reading of the Bible helps prevent theological errors.¹⁰¹ For Pope, the mysterious teachings of Christianity became facts when the Bible was read through the interpretative lens of common sense. Good judgment went hand-in-hand with faith. In his philosophical approach to Christianity, Pope aligned himself with a moderate version of traditional eighteenth-century enlightened Methodism as mediated through Richard Watson.

That Pope remained committed to aspects of the Enlightenment tradition is evident in his theory of atonement. The traditional notion of the universal atonement, the doctrinal rod measuring one’s orthodoxy for much of Methodism prior to the 1870s, is affirmed in its traditional state. Christ’s death is for all, he wrote, but ‘is valid only’ for ‘penitent’ sinners who ‘come unto God by Him [Christ]’.¹⁰² Pope stressed the great gulf separating the divine and human as a result of sin. Unlawful activity deserved a penalty, he wrote, which can only be removed by the ‘vicarious suffering’ of Christ. Pope affirmed the death of Christ as a ‘satisfaction of Divine justice’, an ‘expiation of guilt and the propitiation of wrath’.¹⁰³ Through his work on the cross, Pope added, Christ underwent a ‘substitutionary death for mankind’ and an ‘expiatory satisfaction to the justice of the Lawgiver’.¹⁰⁴ In this way Pope affirmed aspects of both the penal and governmental elements of Christ’s death.

⁹⁷ Pope, *Compendium*, vol. 2:101.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:266–267.

⁹⁹ See chapter 2 for further discussion on the different Methodist traditions advanced by Watson and Hannah.

¹⁰⁰ Pope, *Compendium*, 1879, 2:20.

¹⁰¹ Pope, *Compendium*, 1879, 1:283.

¹⁰² Pope, *Compendium*, 1879, 2:271.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2:264.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:264–266.

Aspects of Pope's theory of atonement did not go untouched by the new Romantic spirit, however. Although Pope framed the atonement in substitutionary terms, he altered the way in which Christians understood God's moral universe by utilizing language and images common to the English Romantic movement. Firstly, Pope rarely spoke of God in terms common to those swayed by Lockean reason. God was not a moral governor or ruler but 'our Father' who came 'to bring God near to man as Father' and 'restore His Fatherly relation to mankind'.¹⁰⁵ The notion of God as Father, for Pope, became 'the perfect design of Christianity'.¹⁰⁶ Conceiving let alone emphasizing the Fatherhood of God was foreign to Methodists for much of the Victorian period. That Pope read Coleridge, Maurice and Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German philosopher of the early nineteenth century who drew on Romantic influences in the development of his theology, in his discussions on the inspiration of scripture demonstrates his awareness of the importance of their work for religion.¹⁰⁷ That he developed his ideas on the Fatherhood of God from Maurice rather than scripture is unclear. It does seem likely that Pope absorbed elements of this notion of God, which by the 1890s had become a fashionable topic of conversation among progressive-minded intellectuals and educated clergy in the transatlantic world, from these leading progressives of a previous generation.¹⁰⁸

Secondly, the idea of appeasing a wrathful God is toned down in Pope's writings and replaced by one that is friendlier and more palatable. Christ's death, wrote Pope, is a 'propitiation of the Divine displeasure'. The use of gentler language is subtle, but when contrasted to the Watsonian tradition in which God's righteous anger and vengeance are frequently emphasized, Pope's language is not only less severe but also remarkably similar to that of his liberal-orientated contemporaries.¹⁰⁹ Pope's conception of God intended to evoke warm feelings rather than ones

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 2:116.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Pope, *Compendium*, 1879, 1:183.

¹⁰⁸ See discussion in this chapter on John Scott Lidgett. Gerald Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain: Interpretations*, vol. 4 (Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1988), 84; Janet Forsythe Fishburn, *The Fatherhood of God and the Victorian Family: The Social Gospel in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁹ Pope, *Compendium*, 1879, 2:263.

of fear or resentment. For instance, God is repeatedly identified as a ‘gentle Lord’ and Christ as a ‘gentle Redeemer’.¹¹⁰ In this way Pope tailored his views to the prevailing fashion without abandoning the substitutionary and propitiatory nature of Christ’s death.

Finally, Christ is viewed as both a ‘representative’ and a ‘substitution’. Thus, explained Pope, the death of Christ becomes not only a ‘tribute to’ but an ‘exhibition’ and ‘satisfaction of Divine love’.¹¹¹ Pope applied this view, moreover, to the traditional understanding of satisfaction in order to give greater weight to God’s ‘Fatherly love’. Thus, the idea of satisfaction incorporated not only the removal of human guilt and the restoration of God’s honour, explained Pope, but also ‘the satisfaction of his unutterable love’.¹¹² The theme of love, an attribute of God which had played a marginal role within Methodists’ traditional schemes of atonement, took on greater significance in Pope’s theology. Current philosophical notions of religion shaped Pope’s view of God as Father and the priority given to certain aspects of his attributes.

Another, and perhaps more profound, way in which the Romantic mood expressed itself in Pope’s writings was through his emphasis on unity of faith among all Christians, an idea that became the first of his ‘seven homiletical canons’ for preaching.¹¹³ While the concept of Christianity unity is hardly original—echoes, after all, are found throughout much of scripture—it is one which was foreign to the early and mid-Victorian Methodist theological tradition.¹¹⁴ Pope’s emphasis on unity is clearly displayed in his view of the atonement. For Pope the atonement became not a single saving act at the end of Christ’s life on earth but a series of united acts encompassing his whole life, which functioned as a ‘means to an end’. ‘We mean by the Atonement’, explained Pope, ‘the whole economy of our Lord’s saving intervention as

¹¹⁰ William B. Pope, *The Inward Witness and Other Discourses* (London: T. Woolmer, 1885), 24, 198.

¹¹¹ Pope, *Compendium*, 1879, 2:264, 266.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 2:274.

¹¹³ R. Waddy Moss, *The Rev. W. B. Pope, DD, Theologian and Saint* (London, 1909), 92–93.

¹¹⁴ See chapter 2.

consummated on the cross'.¹¹⁵ Viewing the atonement as a series of acts allowed Pope to claim that 'when the Son of God became man the human race was declared to be a saved race'.¹¹⁶ Pope went even further in his evaluation of the incarnation by making it not only a vital act in a series but the central act or 'first cause' which linked God's divine purpose with the climax of Christ's passion and death. Placed within the whole framework of God's redemptive activity in scripture, Pope boldly stated, 'the Incarnation is not so much one of the stages or acts of the Redeemer's history as the necessary basis of all'.¹¹⁷ The appropriate view of redemption, Pope advised with unshakeable certainty, was one which affirmed that 'the Divine Purpose was fulfilled in the Mission of Christ, including His incarnation and death'.¹¹⁸ For this reason, he concluded, the 'mystery of the Incarnation occupies its own solitary place in theology' with Christ becoming 'the Incarnate Head of the mystical church'.¹¹⁹ The incarnation became a major theme that occupied Pope's scholarly interests throughout his life. In 1880, for instance, he published *Discourses, chiefly on the Lordship of the Incarnate Redeemer*. Delivered in the Didsbury College chapel, these sermons reinforced his earlier views of the incarnation, stressed, for instance, in his Fernley Lecture for 1871, subsequently published as *The Person of Christ* (2nd edn, 1875), and his *Compendium*, as the central component in the economy of salvation.¹²⁰ Pope's focus on redemptive unity between the life and death of Christ strongly contrasts with the Watsonian enlightened tradition which prioritized Christ's death as the only act which brought salvation. By insisting on a united, protracted atonement grounded in Christ's incarnation, Pope elevated the incarnation to new heights, thereby distancing himself from received tradition.

Pope's emphasis on unity broadened as the century progressed to cover his entire theological outlook. In September of 1881 he delivered a paper at the first Ecumenical

¹¹⁵ Pope, *Compendium*, 1879, 2:275.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:143.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:96.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:141, 120.

¹²⁰ William B. Pope, *The Person of Christ: Dogmatic, Scriptural, Historical*, 2nd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1875).

Methodist Conference held in London which urged all ministers to develop a comprehensive outline of theology because doing so would provide a ‘unity and organic perfection’ of Christian truths.¹²¹ Additionally, Pope stressed Methodism’s continuity and fundamental unity with the apostolic tradition. ‘Training our students in right views of the relation of our own theology to the Catholic theology of Christendom’, Pope declared, should be a primary endeavour of our ministers.¹²² ‘Whatever else we do’, Pope continued, ‘we must vindicate our catholicity both in doctrine and constitution.’¹²³ By appealing to the past, Pope aimed to anchor the Methodist faith, not in a particular philosophical system as had Richard Watson and traditional Methodism, but in history. By doing so, Pope made the legitimacy of the Methodist faith and its ecclesiastical tradition rely on whether or not it aligned with the apostolic faith. The testimony of the apostolic tradition became, as it had for the Romantic-inspired Tractarians a generation earlier, an authoritative source for progressive Methodists.

Pope’s stress on the life of Christ represented a significant development in evangelicalism, and, while part of a growing transatlantic trend to identify the historical reality of Christ and Christianity, inspired and anticipated the direction in which later theologians would travel.¹²⁴ In 1885, for example, the Fernley Lecture of W. F. Slater, professor of Church History at Didsbury College, Manchester, published as *Methodism in the Light of the Early Church*, surfaced as a defence against those who ‘deny the ecclesiastical status of Methodism’. Four years later J. Agar Beet regarded the authenticity of scripture and many essential Christian doctrines as scientific and historical facts in his Fernley Lecture.¹²⁵ Beet continued to ground the Methodist

¹²¹ Conference, ed., *Proceedings of the Ecumenical Methodist Conference* (Cincinnati and New York: Walden and Stowe; Phillips & Hunt, 1882), 330–31.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 332.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 331–332.

¹²⁴ On the general tenor of late-Victorian evangelical theology in a transatlantic context, cf. Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), chapter 5; David W. Bebbington, ‘Evangelical Theology in the English-Speaking World During the Nineteenth Century’, *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 2 (2004): 133–150; David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005). Dale A. Johnson, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity, 1825-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹²⁵ J. Agar Beet, *The Credentials of the Gospel* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1890).

faith in historical facts throughout his tenure as theological tutor at Richmond College from 1885 to 1905, producing several works including *Through Christ to God: A Study in Scientific Theology* (1892) and *Nature and Christ: A Revelation of the Unseen* (1896). In his Fernley Lecture for 1899 Thomas F. Lockyer, minister and amateur biblical scholar, continued the trend of vindicating Methodists' apostolic heritage, but instead of defending an uninterrupted line of succession he argued for an 'evangelical succession' grounded in a spiritual lineage extending from the apostles to Victorian Methodism.¹²⁶ With the publication of such works, Methodists shifted their philosophical moorings from the sensory-based rationalism of Wesley and the eighteenth-century evangelical-Enlightenment tradition to one grounded in historical consciousness. Furthermore, by the 1880s, due in many ways to Pope's efforts, Methodist intellectuals were at the forefront of, rather than behind, transatlantic theology. Methodist publications dealing with historical perspectives of Christianity now appeared before or coincided with other influential works in the transatlantic world, including, for example, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (1893) by A. M. Fairbairn, principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, and *The Truth of the Apostolic Gospel* (1904) by Robert Falconer of Presbyterian College, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Swept along by the Romantic tide, Methodists began to root their theology in history.

Other leading Methodists heeded Pope's recommendation to anchor the atonement in history rather than philosophy. John Shaw Banks, professor of systematic theology at Headingley College, Leeds, from 1880 to 1910, published two significant works influencing Methodist opinion in this direction. The first, *A Manual of Christian Doctrine* (1887), received considerable praise, going through multiple editions in Britain and even more in America, including an expanded edition in 1897 by Vanderbilt professor and southern Methodist bishop, John Tigert. Banks retained a traditional view of the atonement but, like Pope, softened parts of the doctrine to give equal weight to God's love. Thus for Banks Christ's death became both a

¹²⁶ Thomas F. Lockyer, *The Evangelical Succession* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1899).

‘gift of divine love’ and a ‘propitiation’ of God’s anger.¹²⁷ Furthermore, Banks’ work consigned the governmental theory to a lower status among Methodists by making it one rather than the only legitimate view of God’s universe. That Christ’s death ‘was a vindication of the divine law and government’, wrote Banks, ‘is one of the results of the atonement, but it can scarcely be regarded as the chief or only one.’¹²⁸ To recover an authentic view of the atonement Banks encouraged evangelicals in *The Tendencies of Modern Theology* (1897) to return to the apostles and the writings of the church Fathers, whose views, he explained, vindicate Christ’s death as a ‘vicarious penalty’ and ground the union between God and man in divine love.¹²⁹ Banks argued for a traditional vicarious atonement, but again using history rather than philosophy to support his cause.

From the 1850s to the 1880s Methodist intellectuals moved from an initial outrage over Romantic theological sensibilities to one of partial acceptance. The appropriation of new philosophical approaches and theological ideas by leading Methodists in the latter half of the century was a symptom of the gradual transfer of allegiance from an evangelical-Enlightenment synthesis to a Romantic one in the Victorian period. That Romantic sensibilities began infiltrating the denomination to a greater extent in the 1880s is illustrated in the works of moderate conservatives such as Pope, Beet and Banks. The works of these three leading Methodist evangelicals stand as prime examples of the shifting priorities present in transitional Methodism. Though each one was struck by the Romantic tide coursing through English Protestantism, all remained committed to an atonement theory rooted in the Enlightenment framework. Furthermore, their devotion to traditional theories beyond the 1880s indicates the continued strength of the Enlightenment synthesis. More importantly, however, it demonstrates that the atonement, though challenged by a focus on the incarnation, remained the centrepiece

¹²⁷ John S. Banks, *A Manual of Christian Doctrine*, ed. John J. Tigert (Cincinnati and New York: Jennings & Graham; Eaton & Mains, 1897), 196, 208.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹²⁹ John S. Banks, *The Tendencies of Modern Theology* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1897), 225, 230–245.

of evangelical theology.

A Break with the Past: The Rise of a Romanticized Atonement

The atonement remained a prized doctrine among the leading evangelicals in the decades leading up to 1914. Methodists, for instance, continued to debate whether the ‘Maurician school’, which argued, according to one Methodist, that the ‘love of God is the root and origin of Christ’s atoning work’, should be advanced alongside the traditional theory, over it or even at all.¹³⁰ Yet by the 1890s the rise to prominence of the incarnation challenged the atonement as the centrepiece of the Christian message. While the fascination with alternative doctrines relating to the atonement, such as the Fatherhood of God and the incarnation, for instance, began a decade earlier, it was John Scott Lidgett’s pioneering work *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* (1897) that accelerated the interest in newer theories and served to propel Methodists away from received tradition.

Lidgett’s work was the result of the gradual acceptance of Romantic principles by Methodist intellectuals in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. While several Methodists had revised dimensions of the traditional theory of atonement, none had offered a comprehensive restatement of the doctrine. Lidgett’s ambition was to disentangle Methodism from out-dated philosophical modes of thought while simultaneously providing Methodists with a modern theory of atonement.¹³¹ By providing evangelicals with an up-dated theory, thought Lidgett, they would better understand ‘why, if [God] be so compassionate, He demands the sacrifice in order to the forgiveness of sins’.¹³² Lidgett needed a key that would unlock a vibrant atonement, free it from its ‘static’ philosophical confines and provide a ‘scriptural’ and intellectually satisfying answer that would reconcile God’s justice with his compassionate

¹³⁰ *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* (December 1875): 1119. See chapter 4 for further evidence supporting this point, especially with regard to ordinary evangelical belief

¹³¹ Alan F. Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett: Archbishop of British Methodism?* (London: Epworth Press, 2003), 47; Lidgett, *Atonement*, 1.

¹³² Lidgett, *Atonement*, 8.

forgiveness.

To reconcile this paradox, Lidgett drew on Pope, and Maurice before him, to develop a theory fixed in and flowing out of the Fatherhood of God. Lidgett recognized the great value in using the Fatherhood of God as an overarching concept to illuminate theological mysteries. ‘The Fatherhood brings together the divine and the human, the supernatural and the natural, the sacred and the secular’, Lidgett enthusiastically wrote in 1897, ‘insuring [sic] the victory of the divine by the perfecting of the human.’¹³³ For Lidgett, the Fatherhood concept was a tool containing great interpretative power. He ambitiously believed that, once wielded, it would refashion traditional theories into one master theory, thereby solving many of the problems plaguing Christians for centuries. The Fatherhood of God provided the key to unlock the paradox.

Like his evangelical predecessors, Lidgett believed human beings, on account of their inability to obey God’s moral laws, were responsible for the destruction of their relationship with God. The union, sealed by God’s righteousness, ‘which protects the family bond of love and fellowship’, had been severed.¹³⁴ Incapable of reconciling the relationship themselves, humans had to rely on God to restore the union, which he did by sending his Son to live, die and live again. Christ’s actions then fulfilled multiple purposes. Firstly, they satisfied God’s righteousness. By ‘satisfying righteousness’, explained Lidgett, ‘Christ realised for believers the true life of love, of fellowship, of trustful surrender and obedience, of the affirmation of righteousness and repudiation of sin’.¹³⁵ The restoration of righteousness affirmed moral excellence and denounced transgression of divine law. Secondly, Christ’s life and death compensated divine law. ‘The way to restoration is through reparation’, wrote Lidgett.¹³⁶ And,

¹³³ Ibid., 19.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 301.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 291.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 289.

he added, ‘satisfaction is an offering of homage and reparation to the law’.¹³⁷ Thirdly, Christ’s activities on earth restored the ‘filial bond’ between God the Father and his ‘adopted’ children.

Fourthly, Christ’s death served as a demonstration of God’s anger at sin, which Lidgett defined as the destruction of the filial relationship. Seen within the framework of his divine Fatherhood, God’s anger, emanating from and guided by love, targets that which destroys the divine-human relationship. ‘The wrath of God not only co-exists with His love, but is a particular manifestation of it directed against that which would destroy its fellowship.’¹³⁸ Thus the Father’s anger existed, explained Lidgett, ‘to bring home to the child the consciousness of wrongdoing’.¹³⁹

Central to Lidgett’s understanding of forgiveness and God’s demand for justice, was a type of covenant theology or, as he might well have described it, a family theology. Only those who had a cognitive and spiritual awareness of sin and turned from it experienced forgiveness. ‘Men deeply conscious of sin have experienced forgiveness, have received the adoption of sons, and have entered into fellowship with God.’¹⁴⁰ For Lidgett, punishment was reserved only for those who failed to become part of God’s family through repentance and faith in Christ. God, wrote Lidgett, ‘is wrath until the child comes to the true mind’ concerning her relationship with the Father.¹⁴¹ Only once a person is conscious of her sin, repents of it, and places her trust in Christ does she receive the benefits of satisfaction. ‘The satisfaction rendered to Fatherhood depends upon this response on the part of the child’, concluded Lidgett.¹⁴² Those within God’s family experienced God’s forgiveness but not his punishment.

For all of his innovative ambitions, aspects of Lidgett’s theory of atonement appeared unimaginative and more traditional than has often been thought. The general organization of his

¹³⁷ Ibid., 268.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 304.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 268.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 263.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 269.

¹⁴² Ibid., 268.

atonement, for instance, appears similar to Grotius' governmental construction, a theory which had emerged in early nineteenth-century Methodism and remained a favourite of some throughout the mid- and even late Victorian period.¹⁴³ Both emphasized an ordered divine world which revolved around God, emphasized God's moral attributes, insisted on the need for penalty, reconciliation and suffering. The significant theological difference lay in two areas. Lidgett preferred to highlight the loving dimension of God's moral nature while Grotius stressed God's justice. Furthermore, Lidgett rejected the notion that God's moral law could in any way be relaxed, as Grotius proposed. Christ's death, explained Lidgett, is 'a fulfilment of all righteousness, and not a relaxation of it'.¹⁴⁴ Lidgett's faithfulness to scripture and susceptibility to Romantic currents of thought resulted in an evangelical, substitutionary theory dressed in contemporary clothing. What appeared as a cataclysmic theological shift was in reality less so. While Lidgett did make theological modifications to the traditional theory, the real advance came in his ability to translate an atonement theory written in seventeenth-century philosophical language to one written in a modern philosophical and theological idiom. For this reason, Methodists were able to commend his work because he made the 'satisfaction to God', as one reviewer wrote in 1898, 'central and vital' to his theory.¹⁴⁵ Lidgett's theory of atonement was less innovative than might be previously imagined.

Nevertheless, Lidgett's use of God's Fatherhood to reshape his theory of atonement led in some quarters to a greater acceptance of the Fatherhood scheme. 'The power in Christianity' to transform the sinner 'seems to lie in its ability to assure men of the Fatherhood of God as well as the brotherhood of man', wrote John G. Tasker, theological tutor at Handsworth College, in 1901.¹⁴⁶ Other Methodists, however, thought the Fatherhood of God had a metastasizing effect on the atonement. Around 1883, when serving on a catechism committee together, George

¹⁴³ See chapters 1 and 3.

¹⁴⁴ Lidgett, *Atonement*, 154.

¹⁴⁵ *LQR* 89 (1898): 149. See chapter 4 for further discussion on the reception of Lidgett's theory.

¹⁴⁶ John G. Tasker, *Spiritual Religion* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1901), 175.

Osborn, a powerful member of the legal hundred who was president of Conference in 1863 and 1881, vehemently opposed Pope's proposal to replace the definition of God as 'an infinite and eternal spirit' with 'our Father' in the Methodist catechism.¹⁴⁷ Thomas Selby, missionary to China between 1867 and 1882, declared in his Fernley Lecture for 1896 that 'the attempt to make parental instincts a scale by which to measure all the elements in the being and government of God, leads by a straight path to silence, reserve, or denial upon the Bible doctrine of vicarious sacrifice'.¹⁴⁸ Selby, a popular preacher and author who was elected to the prestigious legal hundred in 1891, found the evangelical love affair with the Fatherhood of God distasteful. 'The sentimental view of the divine Fatherhood palliates sin, and glosses over the fact of its heinousness', he warned.¹⁴⁹ For Selby, the Fatherhood doctrine led to a devaluation of sin and a rejection of Christ's vicarious suffering. This view, estimated Selby, implied 'a God of magnificent parental sentiments only' by providing 'inadequate and superficial views of sin' which removes the need for 'vicarious sacrifice and mediation'.¹⁵⁰ Selby was not alone in his critique of the new theology. In 1897, while serving as President of Conference, the conservative stalwart Marshall Randles created a stir among the Methodist élite when he denounced Lidgett's book as heretical for its rejection of the penal nature of Christ's suffering.¹⁵¹ William Moulton, Lidgett's mentor and a well-respected biblical scholar, however, publicly supported Lidgett and no disciplinary action was taken.¹⁵² Conservatives were sometimes prepared to assail the new theology wafting across Methodism.

Despite such criticisms from conservatives, a new generation of Methodist scholars continued to decorate the atonement with Romantic trimmings. In his Fernley Lecture for 1912, George Jackson, Professor of Homiletics and Pastoral Theology at Didsbury, spoke of

¹⁴⁷ Rupert Eric Davies, ed., *John Scott Lidgett: A Symposium* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 84.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas G. Selby, *The Theology of Modern Fiction* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1896), 148.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 151, 149.

¹⁵¹ Davies, *John Scott Lidgett*, 22.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 86–87.

traditional atonement theories as ‘crude analogies drawn from the police-court’ which have been ‘banned by a truer exegesis’ and ‘a keener moral sense’.¹⁵³ A young William Lofthouse, theological tutor at Handsworth College, Birmingham, from 1904 to 1925, approached the atonement from a practical frame of mind in his *Ethics and the Atonement* (1906). In this work Lofthouse followed an earlier generation of theologians such as John McLeod Campbell and F. D. Maurice influenced by the Romantic synthesis. For example, Lofthouse developed an atonement theology based on moral foundations rather than legal ones, imagining Christianity as a living, ethical reality rather than a static system of thought. Lofthouse found the penal theory inadequate to speak to the social problems at the turn of the twentieth century. Christ’s death, he argued, should not be considered an appeasement of God’s wrath for the penalty of sin. ‘There is nothing in the Bible’, Lofthouse confidently exclaimed in 1906, ‘about man’s appeasing the wrath of God.’¹⁵⁴ Rather Lofthouse thought scripture called Methodists to sacrifice their lives for others who were in need, a common plea of F. D. Maurice who thought Christ’s death was better understood in moral representative terms.¹⁵⁵ The penal theory, Lofthouse argued, incorrectly coloured evangelicals’ view of God.

Lofthouse proposed that evangelicals should view God through a different lens entirely. In what had become a fashionable, but still controversial, way of interpreting God by 1906, Lofthouse advanced the Fatherhood concept. Christ, he wrote, ‘never speaks of God as King; the kingdom of God or of Heaven is always the Kingdom of the Father.’¹⁵⁶ Thus the appropriate view of society is one ‘presided over by a Father’.¹⁵⁷ The idea of God as Father had been a fundamental dimension of both John McLeod Campbell’s and Maurice’s theology of the cross. For both of these Romantic thinkers, the atonement was best conceived as a self-sacrificing act emanating from the Father’s love which unified the divine and human. Through

¹⁵³ George Jackson, *The Preacher and the Modern Mind* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1912), 44.

¹⁵⁴ William F. Lofthouse, *Ethics and Atonement* (London: Methuen, 1906), 137.

¹⁵⁵ See earlier discussion in this chapter on Maurice.

¹⁵⁶ Lofthouse, *Ethics and Atonement*, 177.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

this unification humans became members or children in God's family. While Lofthouse appealed to scripture in defence of his Fatherhood thesis, conceptions of God as our Father rather than judge are justified, argued Lofthouse, because 'we have the precedent of Christ's own language'.¹⁵⁸ His appeal to and articulations of such a theory reveal the impact of Romantic currents of thought on his atonement theology and demonstrated the growing trend to view God as Father rather than a sovereign Judge.

Lofthouse's stress on God's Fatherly, loving character did not lead to a dismissal of God's anger. 'The rule of a Father', wrote Lofthouse 'ought to be far sterner than that of a judge or of a monarch; and the anger of a Father is far more terrible, because he loves more.'¹⁵⁹ He reasoned that God is indeed angered by human sin but once a person understands her imperfections and turns to God to remedy her sinful behaviour, God's anger is replaced by the compassion of a sympathetic Father ready to forgive the wrong done.¹⁶⁰ God 'punishes because He is love'. Thus he concluded that 'complete reconciliation must involve love, wrath, mediation, and restoration through the mediator'.¹⁶¹ Lofthouse, like so many Romantic theologians before him, viewed love as the wellspring from which the atonement flowed.

The love of God had become a central theme around which the atonement was organized so that by the first decade of the twentieth century even staunch conservatives could speak of Christ's atonement as a loving act of forgiveness and not fear the questioning of his evangelical credentials. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the writings of Dinsdale Young. A popular preacher whose successful ministry led him from Edinburgh to Wesley's Chapel in 1906 and to the presidency of the Conference in 1914 before accepting the call to minister at the newly built, and highly prestigious, Westminster Central Hall the same year, Young's theological views were moulded at Headingley College, Leeds, under John Banks. Young's staunch

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 176–177.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 178.

¹⁶⁰ Lofthouse, *Ethics and Atonement*, 137.

¹⁶¹ Lofthouse, *Ethics and Atonement*, 179.

conservatism was well-known among Methodists, yet when it came to the atonement he spoke of God's love more frequently than God's anger, an emphasis that would have marked him as a progressive in the 1880s. It is a striking change that he could publicly remark in 1903 without fear of reprisal that 'we cannot hope to understand *how* the Atonement secures pardon. Redemption is an eternal mystery. We accept the sacrifice we cannot understand. Faith glories over knowledge.'¹⁶² Watson and Randles would certainly have objected to the elevation of mystery and faith over certainty and knowledge. By the Edwardian period Methodist intellectuals were no longer committed to an atonement fired in the furnace of rationalist logic.

The Atonement as a Focal Point for Social Christianity

Methodists in the period after 1880 also witnessed the dramatic growth of a new social Christianity. Hoping to rekindle traditional evangelism, social Christianity was particularly marked by a dedication to spread the gospel to the margins of society where many felt it was most needed.¹⁶³ In creating a gospel for the disenfranchised, many evangelicals borrowed support from several leading religious thinkers, including R. W. Dale. Dale's affirmation of standard evangelical views on the atonement, the incarnation and the Trinity, made him popular among conservatives while his stress on ethics and a more socially relevant Christianity endeared him to the progressives. His sermon 'Political and Municipal Duty', delivered in 1884, for instance, outlined his view of the civic gospel. Evangelicals should extend, Dale argued, physical and material aid to the poor as a goal in and of itself, rather than as a means to evangelize the unsaved. 'Medicine, and not the gospel only', proclaimed Dale in 1884, is needed in order to improve the health and moral condition of society.¹⁶⁴ A person who holds a political or

¹⁶² Dinsdale T. Young, *The Crimson Book* (London and New York: Hodder and Stoughton and A. C. Armstrong, 1903), 15.

¹⁶³ Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late-Victorian Britain* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 133–154.

¹⁶⁴ Dale, *Laws of Christ for Common Life*, 199.

municipal office, he brazenly declared, is a ‘minister of God’.¹⁶⁵ Dale’s sermon represented a benchmark in the development of a social Christianity in late Victorian evangelicalism, and served as an inspiration to many younger Methodists.

The first highly motivated reform-minded Methodist to draw on Dale’s work was Hugh Price Hughes.¹⁶⁶ One of the most gifted of the new generation of Methodists, Hughes regularly cited Dale’s sermons and speeches as motivation for the creation of his Forward Movement in the 1880s.¹⁶⁷ The movement, consisting mainly of younger ministers devoted to evangelism and social welfare, gained momentum through the creation of its own magazine, the *Methodist Times*, in 1884. Further efforts by members of the Forward Movement included the launching of the Manchester Mission in 1886, the West London Mission a year later, and Lidgett’s own Bermondsey settlement, South London, in 1891. Hughes’ influential work *Social Christianity* (1889), in which Hughes heralded Jesus Christ as ‘the greatest social Reformer the world has ever seen’,¹⁶⁸ went through several editions in the subsequent decade and directly contributed to the official sanctioning of the Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service in 1905 by Conference. Highly optimistic and emboldened with a mission to demonstrate Christ’s ‘sacred fire of Divine love’, Hughes urged his fellow evangelicals to show kindness ‘to the drunkards of the Regent Street slums, to the harlots of Piccadilly, and to the starving poor everywhere’.¹⁶⁹ For Hughes, the atonement was a demonstration of God’s sacrificial love and served as motivation for all his actions. Because ‘God first loved us’, wrote Hughes, we are able to ‘trust Christ, obey Christ, and imitate Christ’.¹⁷⁰ Progressive evangelicals stressed the need for the development of an ethical agenda and relied on Christ’s entire life on earth as the basis from which all discussions sprang.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 197.

¹⁶⁶ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).

¹⁶⁷ Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity*, Third edition. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), 116, 129, 131.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷⁰ Hugh Price Hughes, *Essential Christianity* (London: Isbister and Co., 1894), 115–116.

While Hughes and Lidgett were busy making Christianity attractive in the slums of several of Britain's most populous cities, another Methodist had begun developing a modern Methodist ethic in order to provide a theological groundwork for social Christianity. As Hughes had done, George Findlay, theological Tutor at Headingley College, Leeds, between 1881 and 1919, drew on R.W. Dale for inspiration. In his Fernley Lecture for 1894 delivered in Birmingham at Dale's Carr's Lane Chapel, Findlay spoke admiringly of Dale's work in the area of Christian ethics and noted in particular that Dale's *The Evangelical Revival and other Sermons* (1880) served as the spark which ignited his own interest in social concern. In particular Findlay's work was important for social Christianity because he re-forged the link between ethics and Christian doctrine. 'Surveyed from the evangelical standpoint', wrote Findlay in 1894, 'ethics and dogma are one.'¹⁷¹ In his Fernley lecture published as *Christian Doctrine and Morals* in 1894, Findlay, like Pope, found the Fatherhood of God extremely appealing. He did, however, move beyond Pope's general emphasis on God as Father by making the Fatherhood concept become the overarching doctrine uniting all of Christianity. 'Christianity is the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God', declared Findlay, and 'the entire gospel' is contained in Christ's words to humankind: 'God is thy Father'.¹⁷² Love for Findlay, not justice, was the central pillar on which the entire Christian faith rested. 'Love to God', remarked Findlay, 'was the basis of the entire ethics of Jesus Christ.'¹⁷³ Findlay made a definitive break with traditional Methodism by replacing views of God as governor and judge with that of Father.

Equally important to the cause of social Christianity was the work of William Davison, tutor at Richmond College, London, then Handsworth College, Birmingham, before his election as president of Conference in 1901. Like many of his late Victorian contemporaries, Davison had broadened his theological horizons to draw on German theology, a source of religious

¹⁷¹ George Findlay, *Christian Doctrine and Morals* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1894), 3.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

knowledge that was once strictly off limits to Methodists of a previous generation.¹⁷⁴ With growth in popularity of German theology in the 1880s, however, it was not unusual for even moderately conservative evangelicals to embrace aspects of German theology. When a third edition of Rigg's *Modern Anglican Theology* was issued in 1881, for instance, Methodists were less enthusiastic about his observations made two decades earlier concerning the German-influenced Broad Church theology. Though the Broad Church is a 'retrograde movement', remarked one Methodist in the *London Quarterly Review*, 'there is much in the writings of these able thinkers that is beautiful and true'.¹⁷⁵ Thus it was not entirely shocking that in his 1888 Fernley Lecture, entitled 'The Christian Conscience', William Davison drew on the work of several German theologians including Martin Kähler, Isaac Dorner and Albrecht Ritschl, in the development of a Methodist Christian ethic. Following these German theologians, Davison placed a great amount of emphasis on the unification of divine and human. Christ's uniting activities through his life, death and resurrection radically alter the Christian conscience so that the world can no longer remain a secular realm disenchanted and unaffected by his love. Since Christ's love has a transformative effect on the conscience, argued Davison, and Christians are vehicles of that love, Christians have a duty to work toward the regeneration of all of society. Davison turned specifically to Ritschl's 'kingdom of God' theology which argued that Christ, through his love, founded an ethical community on earth whose goal is to advance God's kingdom.¹⁷⁶ Living an ethically self-conscious life informed by the inner life of Christ rather than adhering to dogmatic assertions about Christ's divinity became the essence of Christianity and the basis of Davison's theology. Davison adopted this view wholeheartedly when in his 1888 lecture he explained to his fellow Methodists that 'the study of Christian Ethics has been too much postponed to that of

¹⁷⁴ The Methodist aversion to German theology was most prominently on display in James Rigg's *Modern Anglican Theology* (London: 1859).

¹⁷⁵ *LQR* 56 (April 1881): 214, 215.

¹⁷⁶ For an excellent summary of Ritschl's theology see Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Liberal Protestantism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 79–111.

Christian Doctrine'.¹⁷⁷ Methodists should realize, insisted Davison, that 'the teaching of Christian Ethics is far more fruitful' than teaching doctrine, because once the conscience is properly honed within a Christian community a person's natural conscience will be able to 'discern moral truth' and 'prove an adequate guide' for living an ethical life.¹⁷⁸ Through Ritschl, the Romantic mood exercised a considerable amount of influence in Davison's development of a Christian conscience and its implications for a social Christianity.

Situated within this framework was a modified view of the atonement. Davison affirmed the traditional conception of God's moral laws and maintained that human beings had broken these laws. From this vantage point, wrote Davison, 'man deserved punishment'.¹⁷⁹ Yet Christ's atonement ensured human beings 'need no longer be inflicted' with punishment. Through his death Christ 'has borne the suffering, vindicated law, and rendered in a sacrifice of love'.¹⁸⁰ Davison warned, however, that evangelicals should not view the atonement he described within a 'forensic' framework because these ideas 'utterly fail' in their explanation of the relationship between the divine and human. 'The conditions under which justice is administered in a court of law', he explained, 'do not hold in family life.'¹⁸¹ Methodists must, he continued, use atonement 'analogies very cautiously' since the 'Scripture doctrine of sacrifice is easy to confuse with the heathen doctrine of propitiating an angry deity'.¹⁸² 'We must not allow an abuse of metaphors'. Thus, the way around such abuse for Davison was to contend that 'while God is a judge, He is also a Father'.¹⁸³ Conservative evangelicals criticized Davison for this sentiment. 'We cannot agree with the lecturer', wrote the editor in a review of Davison's book in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1888, for elevating ethics over doctrine.¹⁸⁴ In 1892 Davison's progressive views led

¹⁷⁷ William T. Davison, *The Christian Conscience* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1888), 19.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10, 18, 74–86.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 164–165.

¹⁸⁴ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (July 1888): 954.

his fellow Methodists to try him for heresy.¹⁸⁵ Though acquitted, the experience had a deleterious effect on his scholarship so that he became much more reticent with his religious opinions. Davison advocated a substitutionary theory which emphasized Christ's loving, vicarious sacrifice but removed the propitiatory ingredient found in traditional theories. God's love in Christ became a model around which one's conscience and Christian social commitment were built. For Davison, the atonement changed from a focus on a law-court metaphor in which God sat in judgment over sinners to a friendlier doctrine rooted in the love of God, the heavenly father.

Conclusion

Beginning in the 1830s and gaining significant ground near mid-century, English theologians began revising traditional conceptions of God, humanity, sin and suffering. Influential among these pioneering religious thinkers was the belief that the imagination, feeling and intuition rather than strict adherence to highly logical philosophical theories possessed significant power to interpret metaphysical truths. The focus on feeling led to a greater interest in comprehending the relationship between God, his Son and humanity. Christ's life took on greater significance in the redemptive story.

In the years leading up to 1870 Methodist evangelicals severely criticized the new theology emanating from Anglican and other circles. James Rigg and Marshall Randles, for instance, rejected the focus on the Fatherhood of God and the new priority given to the incarnation, as seen in the writings of Maurice. Leading Methodist thinkers also championed a substitutionary theory of atonement and generally continued the trend to view God as a governor or sovereign judge. Yet a slow process of accommodation occurred among Methodists so that by the 1880s many began adopting Romantic-influenced tendencies. Spearheaded by the work of William B. Pope, Methodists paid greater attention to, for example, the person of Christ, especially as it related to redemption, and to identifying their beliefs and activities with those of

¹⁸⁵ 'Heresy Among the Wesleyans', *New Outlook*, 24 December 1892, 1243.

the apostolic church, a practice imported from the Romantic-inclined High Church Anglicans. The epistemological shift from philosophy to history was also a significant symptom of Romantic influences which distanced Methodists from the Enlightenment heritage and demonstrated that even those who consciously strove to be conservative were susceptible to Romantic sensibilities. The 1880s also represented a period in which Methodists welcomed German theology into their theological framework. After a decade of struggle in the 1870s Methodists had, by the 1890s, openly embraced the methods and ideas which had gripped the minds of many other British theologians.

Further developments in the 1890s led to the extensive acceptance of the Fatherhood of God as a principle through which all of Christianity was interpreted. First seen in the work of Pope and George Findlay, the Fatherhood concept was most fully articulated in the work of John Scott Lidgett in 1897. This concept represented a significant shift in the way in which evangelicals viewed the atonement. No longer was Christ's death viewed as a vindication of God's justice but was seen as a satisfaction of his love. God's Fatherly characteristics, defined by his benevolent love, desire for fellowship and stress on virtuous behaviour, replaced the traditional judicial understanding. By stressing a loving God restoring a familial relationship through both Christ's life and death, Methodists broke with received tradition. By 1914 Methodists could agree with John Henry Newman's sentiments, as W. H. Fitchett, president of the Australian Methodist Conference, had in his 1905 address before the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, that 'the heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination'.¹⁸⁶ Methodism was more influenced by Romanticism than has hitherto been supposed.

While many Methodist intellectuals embraced a modern, Romantic influenced atonement, some, such as William Davison, retained aspects of the substitutionary view affirmed by mid-Victorian Methodists. Yet Davison, as did Hugh Price Hughes and George Findlay,

¹⁸⁶ William V. Kelley, 'The Fernley Lectures', *The Methodist Review* (May 1906): 465.

emphasised a doctrine of atonement that stressed Christ's death as a demonstration of God's love. Responding to the modernizing trends of the nineteenth century, the atonement became, for these Methodists, not a necessary punishment for sin, but an example of God's love for humanity.

CHAPTER THREE
RENEGOTIATING THE LINES OF ORTHODOXY:
THE ATONEMENT TRADITION AMONG POPULAR METHODISTS IN ENGLAND,
1880 to 1914

In the period leading up to 1880, Christ's vicarious atonement was the lynchpin of Methodism. Methodists celebrated, as one contributor wrote in 1844, 'the vicarious character of the atonement' as their 'master doctrine, upon which all others depended', and vigorously argued for a universal atonement which was, as another Methodist proclaimed in 1855, 'both consistent with itself and in perfect harmony with Scripture.'¹ Agents of theological change and anyone else who happened to disagree with this sentiment were scolded in book reviews, sermons and articles. Methodists were discouraged, for example, from embracing the theories of atonement proposed by the Broad Churchman F. D. Maurice and William E. Channing, the American Unitarian theologian whose work influenced a generation of Transcendentalists, 'contradict the word of God', as one Methodist declared in 1861, and are simply 'false'.² During this period a distinct line existed between acceptable views of the atonement which stressed the satisfaction of divine justice, Christ's vicarious death and God as a sovereign ruler, and those of a more unsatisfactory nature which portrayed God as a Father who, because of his benevolent love for humanity, sent his Son as a moral example to inspire virtuous behaviour. For those on the side of orthodoxy, the latter view was to be rejected. During the 1870s, however, the development and growth of scientific naturalism, higher criticism and theological liberalism obscured the line of orthodoxy among Methodists so that in the period after 1880 Methodists became more open to new currents of theological thought which in many cases challenged received religious opinions and assumptions. Many who had come under the influence of the new outlook, for example, praised the progressive-minded American Horace Bushnell for his 'creative thought of

¹ *WMM* 67 (1844): 389, 392; *WMM*, 1 (1855): 1081.

² *WMM*, 84 (1861): 120.

which we can never have too much' and thought the traditional opinions on the atonement, so adored by an earlier generation, outdated and unscriptural.³ This chapter begins with an overview of the theory of atonement as it had been received prior to 1880 before it examines the ways in which the new intellectual outlook shaped popular Methodist theological opinions. Finally, it explores the extent to which Methodists succumbed to the new impulse and whether or not the atonement was reformulated in the period after 1880.

The source for much of the new religious outlook coursing through late Victorian Protestantism lay, as we have seen, in Romantic philosophy. In no way uniformly expressed by those who came in contact with it, the Romantic ideology aimed to unleash the imaginative potential found in each human being. The imagination possesses the power, wrote Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), to 'awaken the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom'.⁴ Religion was received, advocated Bushnell, perhaps the quintessential proponent of the new Romantic mood, through the imagination and grasped by the heart.⁵ Intellectual innovation was prized as a vital source which would strengthen Christianity. The effect of such creative thinking led to highly critical observations about traditional theology. Subjected to the new critical thought, the atonement was reworked to become a theory which highlighted the heroic nature of Christ's sacrificial death. Progressives complained that under the microscope of Romanticism Christ's death became nothing more than an act of martyrdom which Christians were to emulate. Recognizing the growing influence of the Romantic ideology over Protestant theology, the British Wesleyan Thanksgiving Fund, an effort in 1878 to support church extension, commissioned Thomas Hayes, minister and missionary, to catalogue his impressions of Methodism over the last century in an attempt to discover whether Methodism had 'left the old path'. In particular Hayes noted that the church's ministers were of an

³ 'The Theology of Horace Bushnell', *LQR* 5 (January 1901): 133.

⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, (New York: B. Leavitt & Co., 1847), 175.

⁵ See 'Our Gospel A Gift to the Imagination', in Horace Bushnell, *Horace Bushnell: Sermons*, ed. Conrad Cherry (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 95–117.

‘evangelical build’ but its urban ministers, while commendably more sophisticated than previous generations, were showing signs of extravagance, an epithet roughly synonymous with unorthodox thinking. The use of Greek in the pulpit, wild hand gestures, eccentric and original thought, explained Hayes, were all used in an attempt to attain notoriety. Thus these ministers followed the ‘revolutionists in theological dogma’ with their ‘desire to gain popular attraction’ rather than ‘search after truth’.⁶ Hayes believed aspects of Romantic philosophy were gaining momentum among Methodist ministers in the 1870s.

Though Hayes was concerned about the effects the Romantic spirit was having on Methodism, he concluded his findings with an overall positive report about the state of Methodism. As a whole, he happily remarked, Methodists ‘have no sympathy with the new religion developed under Comte’.⁷ Auguste Comte, a French philosopher who developed an empirical school of thought nurtured by nineteenth-century European Romanticism, had many admirers in Britain ranging from Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot) to John Stuart Mill. That Hayes targeted Positivism as a dangerous, heretical philosophy was typical of Methodists in the 1870s. We want nothing to do, warned one Methodist in 1874, with the ‘positivist school of philosophy’ advocated by ‘madmen’ such as John Stuart Mill who ‘destroy the moral order by which God rules the universe’.⁸ Hayes found further evidence for his observations in the core organization of the denomination. ‘The whole of the Legal Hundred’, wrote a convinced Hayes, ‘bear record to the evangelical character of the community of which they form a part’.⁹ No other church shows a ‘stronger phalanx’ of evangelical thought, Hayes proudly observed, than the legal hundred.¹⁰ Furthermore, Methodism possessed a growing body of evangelical ministers whose ‘sermons have backbone and brain’ and exhibit the ‘graces of culture, clear intellectual

⁶ Thomas Hayes, *Methodism in 1879* (London: Houghton and Co., 1879), 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸ ‘The Positivists’, *WMM* 97 (1874): 152

⁹ Hayes, *Methodism in 1879*, 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

vision, and argumentative power'.¹¹ These promising ministers revere 'the old Methodist dispensation' yet 'cherish and enforce whatever may be fresh and beneficial in the new' without 'sympathy [for] the fashionable theology'.¹² Hayes determined that 'Methodism is more steady to doctrine than any other Church in this country' and, contradicting his earlier reservations, he claimed her ministers have 'not shown the slightest inclination to give up the rigid hold over the body of doctrine handed over to them by their founder'.¹³ By comparing Methodism to her rival denominations, Hayes was able to rest comfortably in his conclusions that the denomination's theological bearings, leading up to 1880, had not been greatly affected by the Romantic tide.

When surveying the wider literature of ordinary Methodists in the 1870s with regard to their commitment to traditional theories of atonement, Hayes' observations in 1879 appear sound. Between 1850 and 1879 more than one thousand articles, book reviews and obituaries discussing the atonement were published between the pages of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* and the *London Quarterly Review*, two of the most widely circulated Methodist periodicals during the period.¹⁴ Over sixty percent affirmed Christ's death as a vicarious act which reconciled the divine and human. 'We believe', wrote one Methodist in 1854, 'the substitution of Christ to be real and actual' which was enacted by 'the gracious appointment of the sovereign will of God.'¹⁵ Methodists continued to uphold such views throughout the 1870s when, as one had done in 1877, they complained of the theological changes the new religious outlook was generating on the atonement. We cannot agree with the new opinions on the atonement which present 'the sacrificial death of Christ' as 'only the sacrifice of a martyr to truth, not a sacrifice in the sense of the New Testament'.¹⁶ Others who affirmed the vicarious death of Christ, for instance, thought there was little cause to curb innovative theological thinking within their denomination because

¹¹ Ibid., 46.

¹² Ibid., 50.

¹³ Ibid., 65–66.

¹⁴ Samuel J. Rogal, 'A Survey of Methodist Articles Published in England, 1778-1900', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 14:2 (1981), 66-69.

¹⁵ *WMM*, 10 (1854): 982.

¹⁶ *WMM* 100 (1877): 526.

they were sure Methodists readily recognized alternative theories as unattractive and unorthodox. ‘We cannot be too jealous’, wrote one Methodist in 1876, ‘of any attempt to exalt Christ our Teacher and Example above Christ our Saviour and Sacrifice’ because such attempts fall short of the true meaning of Christ’s death on the cross.¹⁷ The implication was that Methodists would not be tempted by any theory of the atonement which did not have as its focus Christ’s vicarious death. Ordinary Methodists had no confidence in a theory that emphasized the ethical life of Christ over one which prioritized his role as a ‘lamb slain’ for humanity. Furthermore, they believed specific theological words must be used to convey the real message of Christ’s death. “‘The satisfaction of Divine Justice’”, the author continued, ‘is a phrase theology cannot afford to be deprived of.’¹⁸ Rank-and-file Methodists were not tempted by alternative theories of the atonement in the period leading up to 1880.

Neither were Methodists deterred in their efforts to retain a traditional theology by ‘rationalistic writers’ who thought the ‘redemption of the world by the death of Christ’ an ‘obnoxious’ idea.¹⁹ ‘We know’, preached one minister in 1879 at Watford Wesleyan Chapel in Hertfordshire, ‘how boldly freethinkers argue that an atonement was altogether unnecessary.’ ‘But let us bear in mind’, he urged, that human beings live in a world governed by a ‘righteous Ruler’ who ‘must be as true to the penalties of His law as to the promise of His grace.’²⁰ If human beings were to receive salvation, be free of guilt, experience reconciliation with God, while keeping his moral government intact, Methodists argued in the 1870s, the penalty for sin must be satisfied, not set aside. Thus, reasoned the minister at Watford, Christ’s vicarious death is the vital organ which sustains Christianity. Methodists in the 1870s overwhelmingly believed that those ‘who revolt against this doctrine’ of atonement, as one Nottingham local preacher declared in 1878, have a ‘very defective’ view of the world because human ‘experience indicates

¹⁷ *WMM* 99 (1876): 1022.

¹⁸ *WMM* 99: 1022.

¹⁹ *WMM* 102 (1879): 606.

²⁰ *WMM* 102:607.

the need of an atonement for sin'.²¹ Ordinary Methodists in the 1870s continued to accept traditional theories of the atonement.

In many cases Methodists in the period before 1880 were unwilling to rearticulate the atonement because their worldview remained welded to the Enlightenment framework. Modifications presented through an alternative philosophical framework started a person down a slippery slope with the perils of liberalism waiting at the bottom. 'When a man substitutes an innate moral sense for the revealed law of God', warned one Methodist in 1877, 'there is no saying what his own particular "moral sense" may allow him to think or to do.'²² Like Locke and many of their denomination's leaders before them, ordinary Methodists believed the mind was shaped by experience and rational judgments. Human beings, Methodists wedded to the eighteenth-century outlook contended, were not born with a moral conscience as Romantic thinkers such as William Blake affirmed. They complained, as one did in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1852, of 'feeling and deploring our innate feebleness and destitution of spiritual good.'²³ This commitment to Lockean principles of thought even led some Methodists to worry that William B. Pope's use of scientific methods of inquiry in his *Compendium of Christian Theology* might lead him to adopt unwittingly 'the doctrine of innate ideas' as one concerned reviewer wrote in the *City-Road Magazine* for 1876.²⁴ Thus in the decades leading up to 1880 Methodists continued to praise one another for their 'sound common sense', 'every-day wisdom', and commitment to traditional theories of the atonement formed by 'careful induction'.²⁵ The Enlightenment heritage continued to govern Methodist thought into the late Victorian period.

Sustaining Methodists' general satisfaction with traditional theories and their commitment to Enlightenment principles was the fact that many local preachers and ministers were reliant on older, second-hand theological works for their sermon preparation. 'I have been

²¹ *LPM* 28 (1878): 357-358.

²² *WMM* 100 (1877): 527.

²³ *WMM* 75 (1852): 540.

²⁴ *The City-Road Magazine* 6 (1876): 191.

²⁵ *LQR* 45 (1875): 222.

trying my best to make myself efficient in the pulpit', wrote one local preacher in 1909 in an effort to acquire second-hand books from the newly established Wesleyan book programme for rural ministers, but 'lack of means, plus a family of six children, make it difficult to obtain the books I need.'²⁶ The book programme strove to send out a wide range of literature, but focused on those books which would help ministers and local preachers in their sermon preparation, such as *The Wesleyan Local Preachers' Manual* (1855) by George Smith, which spoke of Christ's death as an acceptable 'blood sacrifice', a 'ransom' for 'human guilt' and satisfaction of divine justice.²⁷ No doubt second-hand works by John Wesley and Richard Watson filled many packages to rural preachers. For this reason, the theological opinions of a previous generation were perpetuated, being accepted as the standard for gospel truth among ordinary Methodists. Richard Watson's work, explained the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for July 1880, is 'accepted absolutely and universally as the exponent of Methodist doctrine'.²⁸ In a letter to a friend in 1883 Hannah E. Pipe, headmistress at the fashionable Laleham School for girls in Clapham, expressed her love of Methodism's traditional 'hymns and liturgy, and its good and great men', including 'Dr. Pope, Watson, and Dr Osborn, who taught me the true doctrine of the Incarnation'.²⁹ More recent iterations of traditional theories of the atonement were also praised. The *Local Preacher's Magazine*, for instance, highly commended Marshall Randles' *Substitution: A Treatise on the Atonement* (1877) as a work which should be 'read and reread' by every local preacher.³⁰ The doctrine of the cross of Christ, formed in the belly of the evangelical Enlightenment, remained the central doctrine of Methodism in the 1870s.

Additionally, Methodists produced scores of articles, pamphlets, and books celebrating the endeavours of its past leaders. Typical of this type of effort was the work of George Stevenson, owner and editor of the *Methodist Times* between 1861 and 1867, whose six-volume

²⁶ *WMM* 132 (1909): 383.

²⁷ George Smith, *The Wesleyan Local Preachers' Manual* (London: J. Mason, 1855), 270; 232-234.

²⁸ *WMM* 103 (July 1880): 546.

²⁹ Anna M. Stoddart, *Life and Letters of Hannah E. Pipe* (London: W. Blackwood, 1908), 309.

³⁰ *LPM* 27 (1877): 311-312.

Methodist Worthies (1884-86) recounts the heroic tales and intellectual achievements of former Methodists, many of whom are portrayed as underscoring the importance of a vicarious atonement.³¹ It was not uncommon for ministers to arrive at similar conclusions, as one had in 1880, that ‘all the Apostles speak of Christ crucified, put his death in the very front of all their teaching’ and make his life and all his teachings ‘subordinate to the death of the cross’.³² Local preachers envisioned Christians as those who had been ‘purchased by [Christ’s] merits, pierced by His cross, and baptized with His blood’. ‘Let the cross of Christ be our magnet’, encouraged one Methodist preacher in 1875, which draws us closer to God.³³ Methodists, like their forebears, continued to place Christ’s vicarious activity on the cross at the epicentre of their Christian faith.

Absorbing the Romantic Impulse

Yet as the century wore on the initial resistance to Romantic currents of thought slowly gave way to subtle, and occasionally overt, endorsement of the new philosophical mood by ordinary Methodists. The influence of Romanticism on late Victorian Methodists is seen in several ways. The first symptom of the new mood on Methodists was a belief in humanity’s innate moral goodness. ‘Man’s ideal nature is good’, proclaimed one Methodist in 1880, ‘and under the influences of the Spirit of Christ man is born with the possibilities of this ideal nature.’³⁴ When compared to the period before 1880 such sentiments are striking. Methodists, John Bennett, editor of the *Watchman*, had written in 1847, ‘agree in the common faith of orthodox Protestant Churches respecting such truths as original sin, and human depravity and helplessness.’³⁵ That human beings possessed a natural proclivity for goodness, however, was an idea commonly introduced into daily conversation by the 1890s. Methodists spoke of those they admired as

³¹ George John Stevenson, *Methodist Worthies*, 6 vols. (London: T.C. Jack, 1884).

³² *Recorder* 4 May 1880, 292.

³³ Wesleyan Methodist Local Preachers Mutual Aid Association, *LPM* (London: Kent and Co., and Simpkin and Co., 1875), 136–137.

³⁴ *WMM* 103 (September 1880): 678.

³⁵ ‘Notes on Wesleyan Methodism’, *The Christian Treasury* 2 (1847): 116.

‘having a naturally good constitution’ and being a ‘good-natured’ individual.³⁶ ‘Modern thought’, proudly declared one Methodist in 1907, has ‘helped us appeal to the highest in human nature.’³⁷ Those influenced by the new mood undermined the Fall and the idea of original sin.

A second, closely related, symptom to emerge among Methodists influenced by Romantic thought was the reliance on new philosophical authorities for religious knowledge. Methodists appealed to intuitive reason as a legitimate means of support for their faith. ‘Do not our intuitions’, one Methodist rhetorically asked in 1895, ‘confirm Scripture teaching?’³⁸ Methodists, as one correspondent of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1882 had, praised sermons which evidenced ‘penetrative intuition’.³⁹ J. Robinson Gregory, popular preacher and author, and son of Benjamin Gregory, reluctantly admitted in 1884 that intuition and one’s own experience created ‘relative knowledge’.⁴⁰ Yet he unabashedly maintained that behind a person’s intuitive faculties lay the ‘Creator and the Sustainer’ shaping one’s perception of the universe. In the last decade of the Victorian era, Methodists increasingly considered one’s instincts as valid perceptions contributing to one’s understanding of religious truth. Influenced by Romantic currents of thought, Methodists now contended, as Kant had argued, that humans possessed immediate intuitive knowledge of the world whose minds were not a blank slate, collecting passive subjective impressions of the world as Locke had advocated. Methodists under the influence of Romantic theology recognized that the creation of values came not only from Scripture, but from one’s own intuition and experience.

While ‘heart religion’, a highly emotional aspect of the Methodist faith for which many were routinely criticized throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, played a substantial role in early Methodism, the decades after the 1830s were ones marked by a more reserved and logical religion, aided in large part by the highly systematic theology of Adam Clarke and Richard

³⁶ *WMM* 115 (1892): 570.

³⁷ *Recorder* 19 December 1907.

³⁸ *WMM* 118 (1895): 462.

³⁹ *WMM* 105 (October 1882): 797.

⁴⁰ *WMM* 107 (July 1884): 531.

Watson, and the organizational efforts of Jabez Bunting. As Methodism took on characteristics common to established denominations, the emotional excess abated so that by the 1850s it played less of a determinative role when informing one's religious convictions.⁴¹ Reemphasized by Romanticism, emotion, and the closely related sense perception intuition, was once again given a position of status among English Methodists in the 1870s after the American invasion of holiness preachers in the 60s and 70s.⁴² Thus those stimulated by Romantic currents of thought contended that the 'power of imagination' and 'religious experience' connect a person with God.⁴³ Articles even appeared with titles such as 'How to Deal with The Emotions' which contended that 'it is no evidence of brain weakness', according to one minister in 1897, 'to be susceptible to deep emotions, and even to be guided by them, for every feeling has a certain intellectual content.'⁴⁴ Others who prized the value of an emotional religion admired the theological sensibility of the Broad Church and refashioned John Wesley as a 'High-Church-Broad-Church-Evangelical-Nonconforming Clergyman'.⁴⁵ As Romanticism gained currency, however, Methodists eliminated any references that conjured up ideas that suggested Wesley possessed a dry, logical religion and simply referred to him as a Broad Churchman. 'Wesley was a Broad Churchman', confidently declared John Simon, author of the popular *A Manual of Instruction and Advice for Class Leaders* (1892), in a paper read before an official meeting of the London Wesleyan Ministers in 1892, 'before that name was coined'.⁴⁶ One of the leading progressive-minded Methodists agreed. Wesley is a Broad Churchman, wrote Percy Bunting, because he was of the opinion 'that a full and perfect grasp of truth cannot be attained'.⁴⁷ To

⁴¹ A similar transformation was occurring in Primitive Methodism as well. See Gerald Parsons, 'Emotion and Piety: Revivalism and Ritualism in Victorian Christianity', in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Traditions*, ed. Gerald Parsons, vol. 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1988), 215.

⁴² David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 164.

⁴³ *Recorder* 29 August 1907.

⁴⁴ 'How to Deal with Emotions', *Recorder* 7 January 1897.

⁴⁵ *WMM* (December 1880): 958.

⁴⁶ Percy W. Bunting, 'Methodist Notes' Henry S. Lunn, ed., *The Review of the Churches*, vol. 2 (London: J. Haddon, 1892), 13.

⁴⁷ Percy W. Bunting, 'Methodist Notes' in *ibid.*

those Methodists influenced by Romanticism in the period after 1880, one's affections became a vital source of religious knowledge.

Furthermore, those who followed the trend of modern thinking understood that one's cultural environment shaped a person's values and theology and that Christianity had to be made relevant for a new generation. 'All our definitions', explained the Congregational theologian Alfred Garvie, 'must have a temporary and local validity'. 'The language of one age and one people', he continued, 'lose its meaning and worth for another.'⁴⁸ Methodists influenced by Romantic currents of thought echoed Garvie's observations. 'What is chiefly required at present', wrote one Methodist in 1897, 'is a vindication of the fundamental principles in the Christian doctrine of God, viewed in the light of modern science.'⁴⁹ Nearly a decade later Methodists continued to make similar claims. 'The great desideratum of the time', declared one Methodist in the *London Quarterly Review* for 1905, is the 'restatement of Christian doctrine in the light of modern science.'⁵⁰ Methodists can no longer emphasise an unsympathetic deity, urged another Methodist in 1907, when 'the present age' insists upon 'seeing the mind of God through an atmosphere of kinder thought and feeling.'⁵¹ Progressives thought the new currents of thought offered a legitimate way to revitalize the gospel message for a changing society.

That Methodists now peppered their sermons and other religious literature with Romantic-inspired language is a third characteristic of the Romantic influence on Methodism. In an article urging Methodists of the advantages in viewing the year through the liturgical calendar, one Methodist thought in 1900 that doing so would allow a person to see Christmas as an event which 'baptizes into the sublime spirit the angel's song' and views 'Good Friday' as 'white robes washed into more spotless beauty'.⁵² Keeping a person's eyes fixed on eternity, concluded the

⁴⁸ Alfred Garvie, 'Harnack's Christology', *LQR* 12:1 (1904): 56.

⁴⁹ *LQR* 29 (October 1897): 146-147.

⁵⁰ *LQR* 104 (1905): 365.

⁵¹ *Recorder* 19 December 1907.

⁵² *WMM* 123 (1900): 942.

author, ‘bring[s] the soul to completeness and beauty’.⁵³ Words intended to evoke powerful emotional feelings became increasingly common. Sermons preached by Peter Mackenzie, a popular Methodist minister serving districts in northern England who ‘could rouse a crowd to uncontrollable enthusiasm’, were creative, intense, and emotional.⁵⁴ Mackenzie’s sermons, for example, appealed to the power of a person’s inner consciousness as a determiner of reality. ‘When the Holy Ghost gets into the imagination’, Mackenzie enthusiastically argued, ‘all is put right in the soul’. The two combined, he continued, create a ‘paradise’, an inner ‘piety’ in the mind which governs one’s perception of reality.⁵⁵ Life became real when conceived by the imagination and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, conceptual modes of expression are elevated above sensory ones.⁵⁶ Methodists traded a mechanistic, God-centred Christianity moulded in the Enlightenment for one dripping with emotion and intellectual self-awareness.

Methodists also encouraged the cultivation of poetry reading as an act of spiritual devotion and appealed to Romantic poets to defend their Christian beliefs. Methodists should, advised a contributor to the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1886, turn to ‘Longfellow’s poetry’ to combat the present ‘age of reckless scepticism’.⁵⁷ In a review of the recently revised *Methodist Hymn-Book* for 1904, the *London Quarterly Review* praised the editors of the new hymn book for removing ‘misleading and unscriptural expressions, such as “He disarms the wrath of God,” “The Father hath *punished* for you His dear Son,” “The *rigid* satisfaction”’.⁵⁸ Such antiquated phrases have given way ‘to language which is less suggestive of division between the Persons of the Trinity’.⁵⁹ Continuing to communicate the atonement as it had been conceived by Wesley and other leading Methodists of a bygone era seemed almost barbaric to contemporary Methodists. Language describing the death of Christ was softened and updated to generate

⁵³ *WMM* 123 (1900): 942.

⁵⁴ Dinsdale T. Young, *Stars of Retrospect* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), 46–47.

⁵⁵ Peter Mackenzie, *Lectures and Sermons* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1898), 81.

⁵⁶ Robert Wicks, ‘Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 348–377.

⁵⁷ Henry Smith, ‘Theological Bearings of Longfellow’s Poetry’, *WMM* (June 1886): 450.

⁵⁸ ‘Modern Methodist Hymnology’, *LQR* (July 1904), 365.

⁵⁹ ‘Modern Methodist Hymnology’, *LQR* (July 1904), 365.

greater appeal to modern sensibilities among modern Edwardians.

The use of new Romantic-inspired language became a source of tension for Edwardian Methodists, however. 'It is the peril of all language', warned Henry Howard in a pamphlet widely distributed among Methodists in 1907, 'that words by frequent and careless handling come to lose their spiritual significance, so that we frequently find ourselves holding fast to words that sound, instead of to sound words.'⁶⁰ One author even penned an open letter to a fashionable preacher in the *Local Preacher's Treasury* for 1885 warning him that he was 'treading on dangerous ground' because, the author chastised, 'you indulge the habit of quoting from the poets in your sermons.'⁶¹ 'The imagination', indefatigably concluded the conservative author, 'must be curbed.'⁶² To these traditionalists, the ideas conveyed by the words 'blood', 'sacrifice', 'justice', and 'punishment' were central to a biblical understanding of the atonement. The activities of the creative Methodist removed such language from the atonement and weakened its transformative message which in turn moved Methodists in a direction away from Wesley's teachings and historic Christianity. For many traditionalists Thomas Hayes' advice delivered in 1879 was just as relevant nearly three decades later. 'A Methodist pulpit', wrote Hayes, 'is no place for theological experiment, or doctrinal fireworks'.⁶³ Conservative Methodists condemned the use of fashionable language to describe traditional doctrines.

Despite such warnings, progressive Methodists continued to explain the atonement in terms acceptable to the modern age. That Methodists ignored such advice was especially noticeable in a new crop of younger ministers who believed that evangelical doctrines needed to be communicated 'in twentieth-century thought, and by means of a twentieth-century vocabulary'.⁶⁴ Many older ministers, wrote a young J. Ernest Rattenbury, superintendent of the West London Mission from 1907 to 1925, 'think they are true to the old gospel when they

⁶⁰ Henry Howard, *Rally! A Message to the Wesley Guild* (London: Robert Culley, 1907), 7.

⁶¹ 'Poetic Danger to a Preacher', *LPT* 2 (1885): 547.

⁶² 'Poetic Danger to a Preacher', *LPT* 2 (1885): 547.

⁶³ Hayes, *Methodism in 1879*, 46.

⁶⁴ *WMM* 129 (1906): 29.

reiterate its eighteenth-century statement.’ Nothing could be further from the truth, thought Rattenbury. ‘The preacher to-day’, he exclaimed, ‘must serve the present age.’⁶⁵ It was not wholly surprising that Methodists had begun appropriating poetic language in their sermons in the decades surrounding 1900. Since the mid-1870s Methodists had been focusing more closely on the development of a more educated ministry, as seen, for example, in the official formation of the Sunday School Union in 1874. The demand for educated ministers had originally come from Methodists worshipping in urban areas but as the century wore on even rural communities began to favour an educated preacher. Coinciding with these appeals was the general growth and spread of education after the 1876 and 1880 Education Acts which made schooling compulsory for all children. Many Methodists, like the general populace, believed education served a practical purpose that would drive the nation to new prosperous heights.⁶⁶ Education, it was assumed, brought social and economic progress and aided the spiritual vitality of Methodists and the entire nation. Though disagreement existed, most Methodists were aligned with such thinking and moved to take full advantage of the benefits offered by general education.⁶⁷ Beginning in the 1870s, a growing number of ministers thought it imperative for contemporary Methodists to communicate their language in the parlance of the day.

Another way in which Romanticism expressed itself among ordinary Methodists was through a focus on an organic connection between doctrines. At the second ecumenical Methodist conference in 1891, for example, transatlantic Methodists were in firm agreement with their invited guest, S. H. Green, a Baptist minister in Washington, D.C., who spoke of the ‘organic union’ between Methodists and Baptists on account that ‘the sermon, the prayer, and the song have found their inspiration at the cross’ for both denominations.⁶⁸ Furthermore,

⁶⁵ J. Ernest Rattenbury, ‘In the Pulpit’, *WMM* 129 (1906): 27-28.

⁶⁶ Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 80–123.

⁶⁷ F.C. Pritchard, ‘Education’, in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Ernest Gordon Rupp, vol. 3 (London: Epworth, 1965), 292–308.

⁶⁸ ‘Address of the Rev. S. H. Green’, in *Proceedings of the Second Ecumenical Methodist Conference* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892).

Methodists spoke of their church as a 'living organism' formed by an 'organic religion'. 'Christendom', contended one Methodist in 1894, is 'a living organism' which 'possesses the freedom, the elasticity and the adaptability' just like any other organism.⁶⁹ Others, such as one contributor in the *London Quarterly Review* for 1895, contended that an 'organic relation of Christian truth' existed and that such a view was a defence against stale dogma.⁷⁰ Methodists began to revise their theology according to whether or not it harmonized with other doctrines and note, for instance, those elements of their theology which promoted or encouraged division rather than unification. 'There has been', observed one minister in 1881, 'a lamentable separation between the Father and the Son in the work of human redemption' which must be corrected.⁷¹ As Romantic currents of thought gained greater currency among Methodists it increased their unwillingness to accept received theological opinions.

The Fermentation of Romanticism

In the two decades leading up to World War I, Methodists influenced by Romantic sensibilities found greater numbers supporting their cause to realign traditional theology. Launched in 1885, the *Methodist Times*, for instance, was created as a voice for Hugh Price Hughes and his modern-minded Forward Movement. Fashioning itself as 'a journal of religious and social movement', its objective ('to suit modes of expression and methods of organization and work to the changing circumstances of our time') was a thinly veiled attempt to reinterpret traditional Methodist theology through modern thought, and drew on F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley's tracts on Christian Socialism.⁷² A second periodical with progressive tendencies was the ecumenically-engineered *Contemporary Review*. Though founded in 1866 under the direction of Henry Alford, Dean of Canterbury from 1857 to 1871, the periodical took on new life when in 1882 Sir Percy

⁶⁹ 'The Christian Religion and the Life of To-Day' *LQR* 22:2 (1894): 328.

⁷⁰ 'Christian Doctrine', *LQR* 32:2 (1895): 368.

⁷¹ *LQR* 56 (1881): 139.

⁷² *MT* 1 January 1885; Cf. Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 336; Hugh Price Hughes, *Essential Christianity* (London: Isbister and Co., 1894), 174.

Bunting, grandson of Jabez Bunting, refashioned the periodical into one focused on social and moral reform. These two periodicals, and to a lesser extent the *London Quarterly Review*, became a mouthpiece for progressive Methodists susceptible to Romantic sensibilities. In the period after 1880 the grassroots efforts of a few were met with greater support as new media were created to give voice to the progressive cause.

A common symptom of all involved in the effort to realign traditional theology was the belief that higher criticism held the key to restating traditional theories of the atonement. Since biblical criticism had discovered new truths, explained one minister in 1890, ‘the vicariousness of Christ’s sacrifice and the substitutionary character of His work may need to be stated with greater caution’.⁷³ ‘Where historical critics have discovered new facts affecting biblical doctrine’, argued another minister in the *London Quarterly Review* for 1890, ‘and their hypotheses have been duly sifted and verified, it is necessary for [Methodists] to modify traditional views and interpretations of scripture’.⁷⁴ Biblical criticism was clearly emerging as an important method for reconstructing traditional theology, but it was also increasingly being accepted as a means to draw out a fuller meaning of Scripture. ‘The theories and findings of modern science’, declared one minister in 1897, ‘agree with the Scriptural account of the constitution of things.’⁷⁵ With greater acceptance of higher criticism in the 1890s came greater tension between Methodists.⁷⁶ The tipping point came in 1891 when William T. Davison, chair of theology in the Wesleyan ministerial training college at Handsworth, Birmingham, endorsed the new scholarship as legitimate form of science. ‘The higher criticism—including especially the historical and literary criticism of the Bible—is now rapidly advancing toward the position of a science’, declared William T. Davison in his address at the ecumenical conference of 1891 in Washington, D.C. Davison unreservedly believed Methodists should appropriate the methods of inquiry offered by

⁷³ *LQR* 74 (1890): 152.

⁷⁴ *LQR* 74 (1890): 153.

⁷⁵ ‘The Sanction of Science to the Christian Interpretation of the Word’, *Recorder* 21 January 1897.

⁷⁶ W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), 205–218.

the new higher criticism.

The Methodist Churches and all the Churches of Christ which reverence God's Word written and seek to make it the rule of faith and practice, will do well to beware of blindly and rashly setting their faces against the conclusions of truly scientific Biblical criticism. We must not pledge ourselves to what may soon prove be untenable positions, or dare to identify them with the Christian faith.⁷⁷

Concluding with a note of warning to those in disagreement with higher criticism, Davison cautioned: 'Methodists, in common with all earnest evangelical Christians, will do well not to take up an ignorant and ill considered attitude of suspicion toward men who study the Bible at least as carefully as the zealous and orthodox defender of traditional opinions.' One Methodist reporting on Davison's speech in the *Expository Times* for 1891 thought his views 'a barometric indication of the position which had already been assumed by the principal Methodist thinkers.'⁷⁸ Biblical criticism was sanctioned among progressives as a vital tool by which traditional theology could be rebuilt.

Though many Methodists remained unconvinced of the benefits higher criticism had to offer, the Didsbury-educated minister Francis J. Sharr's 1891 Fernley Lecture reaffirmed the full authority of scripture while rejecting much of biblical criticism's methodology, for instance, and William W. Pocock, local preacher and architect of Charles Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington Butts, found the Wellhausen theory unpersuasive in his *A Laymen's View of the Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (1894), by 1893 it became increasingly common to value higher criticism as a means to advance theological orthodoxy. 'We accept', exclaimed one Methodist in 1893, 'the principle of unfettered Biblical criticism as a clear gain to the comprehension of the Bible, and a strengthening of the true foundations of the Christian faith.'⁷⁹ Another minister found the insights provided by higher criticism to have an orthodox effect when used to determine one's theory of atonement.

⁷⁷ *Methodist Magazine and Review* (Canada) 58 (November 1903), 475.

⁷⁸ 'Notes of Recent Expositions', *Expository Times* 2 (1891): 169.

⁷⁹ *LQR* 80 (1893): 7.

It is certain that the old doctrine of satisfaction must be revised in their light [the unsatisfactory nature of received opinions and the new religious outlook], and that some alteration must thereby come to our views of its necessity and nature. But the revision will not lead to the abandonment of the conviction that the death of Christ was a satisfaction for the sins of men.⁸⁰

Others convinced of the benefits of higher criticism now viewed biblical scholarship forged in the recent past with disdain. Although adopting such progressive methods of scientific inquiry involved ‘concessions on the part of traditional opinion’, explained another minister in 1893, Methodists should rejoice because much of the ‘exegesis of our forefathers was crude and unsatisfactory’.⁸¹ The days of using the Bible as ‘a mechanically constructed code of reference’, triumphantly concluded the author, are over.⁸² By embracing biblical criticism, progressive ministers opened a wedge between the philosophical framework which strengthened their efforts at reconstruction and that which had undergirded evangelical truth for over a century.

The notion that scientific inquiry provided the necessary tools to reconceptualise traditional doctrine for modern audiences continued to spread so that even a contributor to the conservative *Methodist Recorder* could write in favour of Methodists adopting higher criticism. ‘The Church itself needs’, declared a contributor to the weekly newspaper in 1907, ‘the perpetually renewed operation of this revolutionary force.’⁸³ With the tools of historical criticism firmly grasped between their fingers, modern Methodists offered a Romantic theology governed by, as one Methodist minister affirmed in 1897, ‘elasticity, variety of effort, [and] versatile power of adaptation to new needs and environments’ which would revitalize and strengthen Methodism for a new age.⁸⁴ While the plea for ‘new development in theology’ became a common phrase for those Methodists who fell under the influence of the Romantic impulse, it was not always about rejecting received opinions. Some ministers did not necessarily want to rewrite the traditional theory of atonement to fit modern sensibilities but desired instead

⁸⁰ *Recorder* 5 August 1897.

⁸¹ *LQR* 80 (1893): 9.

⁸² *LQR* 80 (1893): 24.

⁸³ *Recorder* 24 October 1907.

⁸⁴ ‘The Spirit of Modern Methodism’ *Contemporary Review* 72 (1897): 818.

to prioritize other doctrinal dimensions of Christianity. Thus, whether the atonement should remain the centrepiece of Methodist theology or whether Methodists should consider developing, as many Broad Churchmen were, a ‘Christo-centric character of Christian doctrine’, in which Christ’s life rather than his death served as the focal point of Christianity, became a crucial issue in the period after 1880.⁸⁵ In a survey of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* and the *London Quarterly Review* between 1880 and 1913 over one hundred and fifty articles and book reviews appeared in which the incarnation was discussed.⁸⁶ The articles, of which the vast majority appeared in the decades after 1890, point to the lack of attention given to Christ’s incarnate activity on earth and the importance of his life in the redemptive process. ‘There has been’, thundered one minister in 1881, for instance, ‘a disposition to lay too much stress upon our Lord’s suffering.’⁸⁷ ‘Theology has failed to do justice’, boomed another minister in 1897, ‘to the human side of the Lord’s life’.⁸⁸ ‘No words of Holy Scripture’, explained one minister in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1900, ‘are more full of mysterious significance than those which teach the doctrine of the Incarnation.’⁸⁹ Statements extolling the priority of the incarnation were a stark contrast to those of the previous period which spoke of the atonement, as one Methodist put it in 1867, as ‘the most precious truth which can be made known to us’.⁹⁰ By 1907 Methodists attributed the successful ministries of Wesley and Whitefield to the fact that they were ‘Christ-possessed’ doing good works as Christ had done.⁹¹ Sermons which conceived Christ’s life through Romantic imagery became a more frequent occurrence as well. ‘Christ moulded every atom’, explained one minister in a sermon published in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1883, ‘kindled every star, lighted up every sun, cut a channel through which the

⁸⁵ ‘Christ’s Place in Modern Theology’ *LQR* 80 (1893): 351.

⁸⁶ Author’s own statistical figures.

⁸⁷ *LQR* 56 (1881): 139.

⁸⁸ ‘The Mystery of the Incarnation’, *LQR* 29:1 (1897): 38.

⁸⁹ ‘The Incarnation’, *WMM* 123 (1900): 355.

⁹⁰ *Wesley Sunday-school Magazine* 2 (1867): 173.

⁹¹ *Recorder* 18 April 1907.

waters of the deep might flow.⁹² With the acceptance of higher criticism came a willingness to elevate the incarnation alongside the atonement in the economy of salvation.

Supporting the turn towards a 'Christo-centric' theology were the efforts of Hugh Price Hughes and John Scott Lidgett, members of the Forward Movement. Between 1885 and 1903 members of the Forward Movement created eight Methodist missions in England, the majority of which were located in London. These Wesleyan missions drew attention to the fact that Methodists were in need of a 'civic gospel' and highlighted Christ's life for direction in their endeavours. Though controversial at first, by 1900 their activities had encouraged significant interest in the development of an incarnational theology among ordinary Methodists. Many now declared, as one Methodist did in 1892, that 'the reality of Christ's life in us must be revealed in powerful compassion and effort.'⁹³ Christ's life took on greater significance for Methodists influenced by the Romantic tide.

Scholarly consensus has acknowledged the influence historical criticism had on creating a 'crisis of confidence' in traditional theological opinions in late Victorian evangelicalism.⁹⁴ Many have viewed historical criticism, along with Darwinism, to have had a secularizing effect on evangelicalism to the extent that the movement was severely weakened by World War I with much of the movement losing its theological and spiritual vitality by mid-twentieth century. Modern-minded Methodists thought they were on the right track to uncover a deeper and fuller understanding of Christianity without straying from the evangelical tradition in which Methodism had so long been nurtured. Is it not true, questioned William T. Davison, ex-editor of the *Methodist Recorder*, 'that the same mighty spiritual force is at work in new modes under altered conditions?'⁹⁵ While 'change may mean growth', he continued in his plea for a modern

⁹² 'Christ Preeminent in All Things', *WMM* 116 (1883): 588.

⁹³ *Proceedings of the Second Ecumenical Methodist Conference*, 462.

⁹⁴ Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman, eds., *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief* (London and Stanford: Macmillan Press; Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁹⁵ William T. Davison, 'The Spirit of Modern Methodism' *Contemporary Review* 72 (1897): 811.

Methodism, ‘changelessness is another name for stagnation.’⁹⁶ Other Methodists agreed, believing the key to future vitality was through theological metamorphosis. ‘The remedy’, declared a contributor to the *London Quarterly Review* for 1894, ‘is to re-conceive and re-present the religion of the New Testament in its bearing on the life to-day.’⁹⁷ Historical criticism became an important weapon in the Methodist arsenal, not only to revise traditional theology, but, as progressives contended, to strengthen and revitalize the faith.

Conservative Reaction

Conservatives were generally distressed over the new religious outlook in the period after 1880. ‘The present age, whatever other titles it may bear,’ declared one Methodist in 1903, ‘will be known in the Church hereafter as the age of Biblical Criticism’ and so ‘it is hard for the lovers of Scripture not to be anxious and fretful at such a time.’⁹⁸ Other ministers felt the same. ‘The prevalence of a Biblical criticism’, wrote one minister in the weekly *Methodist Recorder* for 1907, has made ‘the average minister of the Gospel’ apprehensive because he is ‘unable either to controvert or to profit by’ it.⁹⁹ The advance of a theologically progressive outlook and subsequent distress of conservatives nearly halted the defence of traditional opinions among ordinary Methodists. Constantly ridiculed and pushed to abandon their old theology, many felt unjustly preyed upon by proponents of modern theology and were unsure about how to resolve their current theological predicament. One Methodist in 1900 complained that:

‘Orthodox,’ ‘traditional,’ [and] ‘popular theology’ are names of scorn. If Scripture is quoted in proof of a doctrine, this is branded as ‘Bibliolatry.’ If Scriptural views of God are set forth, we are charged with ‘Anthropomorphism.’ If we speak of the Gospel’s glorious triumphs in the domain of character, both the fact itself and our mention of it are set down to the account of ‘enthusiasm.’ If we cite the experience of religious men, it is ‘subjectivity.’ If we enforce the stricter views of ethics, we are ‘puritanical.’¹⁰⁰

Yet conservatives remained vigilant, and in the years between 1880 and 1914 mounted a

⁹⁶ Davison, ‘The Spirit of Modern Methodism’, 811.

⁹⁷ ‘The Christian Religion and the Life To-Day’ *LQR* 22 (July 1894): 347.

⁹⁸ *LQR* 9 (1903): 6.

⁹⁹ *Recorder* 12 September 1907.

¹⁰⁰ ‘The Church’s Duty in Relation to Certain Tendencies of the Times’, *WMM* (1891): 326.

herculean defence of historic Methodism in an attempt to drown out alternative theological opinions. The Wesleyan Conference of 1880, for instance, began by explicitly stating they would not tolerate any departure on the part of their ministers from, as the weekly Unitarian newspaper *Christian Life* reported, ‘the old standards of Methodist doctrine.’¹⁰¹ Ordinary ministers were quick to point out they found the new theological mood unappealing. ‘Having tasted the old’, bellowed one minister in 1885, ‘we do not desire the new; for the old is better.’¹⁰² As the tension grew, conservatives identified the atonement as a rally point from which they could ward off their opponents. So, for instance, they criticized James Wilson’s Hulsean Lectures for 1898-99 on ‘The Gospel of the Atonement’ because they insufficiently treated the atonement as a vicarious act. ‘Archdeacon Wilson’s new doctrine is fascinating’, wrote one Methodist in 1899, ‘but it is altogether unsatisfactory’ because ‘it absolutely ignores the great doctrine of propitiation’.¹⁰³ The new theological mood held little appeal to Methodists wishing to sustain traditional theological opinions.

As a fundamental doctrine, the atonement represented not only the core of Christianity but an excellent doctrine to measure a person’s orthodoxy. It was also a doctrine which had been universally recognized by evangelicals as possessing an objective, God-ward focus. Thus, if a person suddenly began emphasizing its subjective qualities, a view widely considered unorthodox among Victorian evangelicals, his unorthodoxy would shine through in other areas of his theology. One contributor to the *London Quarterly Review* for 1905 described the conflict surrounding the atonement that had developed in the previous decade in this way: ‘The question is’, he explained, ‘whether the view of the death of Christ as *only* displaying the love of the Father, and thereby winning man’s heart, is a sufficient account of the whole mysterious transaction.’ Or, he continued, ‘whether the relation of Christ’s death to the eternal law of righteousness is not an integral factor in its significance, and the vindication of the divine

¹⁰¹ *Christian Life*, 4 September 1880, 111.

¹⁰² *LQR* 4 (1885): 368.

¹⁰³ *LQR* 92 (1899):167.

holiness an essential element in atonement'.¹⁰⁴ The first theory described the fashionable manward-focused moral influence theory while the second retained the traditional substitutional and governmental elements. For many conservatives, the theory which they were to rally around was the doctrine of propitiation. 'There are three great concluding truths to be for ever written on our memories and hearts', urged one contributor to the *Local Preacher's Treasury* for 1889. 'The Divine propitiation is complete; the Divine propitiation is final; the Divine propitiation is sufficient.'¹⁰⁵ Conservatives insisted that dire consequences would follow if Christians did not retain an evangelical understanding of Christ's death. Without an orthodox atonement, one Methodist remarked with an alarmist tone in 1880, 'the whole chamber of the conscience is unswept and unlighted—duties and sins lie about in it in confusion'.¹⁰⁶ In 1891, moreover, one local preacher delivered a series of sermons on the atonement which emphasized Christ's role as 'the Sufferer for our sins' and as an 'Advocate' who 'died in our stead'.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the majority of sermon outlines reproduced in the *Preacher's Magazine* in the 1890s had titles such as 'The Dying Saviour', 'The Crown of Thorns', and 'From Guilt to Pardon'. Conservatives in the period after 1880 were in theological agreement with the opinions of an earlier generation who contended that 'the conscience finds relief in the doctrine of propitiation.'¹⁰⁸ The overwhelming consensus was that Christ's death was a vicarious act.

Unwilling to tolerate innovative thinking on the atonement, conservatives criticized the methods used by progressives. By 'adopting the historic method of interpretation', penned one minister in 1903, progressives 'have evacuated many of the great texts of their contents and read into them new and fanciful meanings'.¹⁰⁹ Clearly scientific developments gaining currency in late Victorian England disturbed the Methodist psyche. To counter the new opinions conservatives

¹⁰⁴ *LQR* 2 (1905): 351.

¹⁰⁵ 'Christ our Propitiation', *LPT* 6 (1889): 31.

¹⁰⁶ *WMM* (February 1880): 84.

¹⁰⁷ *The Preacher's Magazine* 2 (1891): 567.

¹⁰⁸ *WMM* (June 1877): 415.

¹⁰⁹ 'The Death of Christ', *WMM* 126 (1903): 217.

emphasized those dimensions of the doctrine which had proved a success in the past. One aspect judged a success was a focus on human sin as a way to remind people of their guilt before God and of their need of redemption. ‘Too much that passes under the name of religion’, complained Marshall Randles in a remark that delighted conservative ministers, ‘lacks the proper estimate of sin.’¹¹⁰ Conservative Methodists reasoned that in order to retain an evangelical atonement they needed to insist on and cultivate a robust understanding of human beings’ sinful nature. ‘Sin is a very real thing’, wrote one minister in 1887, which, when downplayed, lessens the ‘Gospel of the cross as the cross of propitiation’.¹¹¹ Conservatives were attuned to human emotion and were aware that God’s benevolent love had the potential to be more deeply felt and more readily accepted when people were conscious of their sin and the need of divine forgiveness. Thus, exposing the sinful intentions and character of human beings became a priority in their attempts to revitalize the propitiatory nature of the atonement in the period after 1880. ‘Christ Our Sin-Bearer’ was the title of one sermon appearing in the *Preacher’s Magazine* for 1896.¹¹² In 1908 one preacher spoke of ‘the tyranny of sin’ and of the way in which Christ’s death brought ‘victory over sin’.¹¹³ Christ’s death, thundered yet another minister in 1908, ‘reveals the awfulness of sin’.¹¹⁴ Methodists believed a renewed focus on sin would appeal to a new generation that had lost sight of the real value of Christ’s atonement.

Methodists were encouraged in their focus on the power of the cross to redeem sin by the works of other leading Nonconformists. R. W. Dale and P. T. Forsyth, two popular Congregational ministers, were praised, for instance, for presenting an atonement which had ‘a direct relation to the remissions of sins’.¹¹⁵ Methodist preachers also adored the work of James Denney, a Presbyterian theologian who taught at the Free Church College in Glasgow between

¹¹⁰ Marshall Randles, ‘Suffering and Dying with Christ’, *WMM* (July 1885): 487

¹¹¹ ‘The Offence of the Cross’, *WMM* (May 1887): 323-24.

¹¹² *PM* 7 (1896): 286.

¹¹³ *PM* 19 (1908): 458-459.

¹¹⁴ *PM* 19 (1908): 411.

¹¹⁵ *LQR* 45 (1875): 216. See also *LQR* 106 (190?): pp? and *LQR* 116 (1911): pp?

1897 and 1917. Denney passionately defended the penal substitutionary theory of atonement in his *The Death of Christ* (1902) and *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* (1903) and highlighted the need for the expiation of sin. 'It is good to get hold of a book on the Atonement', declared one Methodist in 1903 in a review of Denney's book, 'which does not reduce the significance of the death of Christ to mere example and its influence to a subjective experience.'¹¹⁶ Such emphases on the objective aspects of the atonement delighted conservatives who hoped Denney's works would restore confidence in the evangelical view and dislodge the new progressive theories many thought were becoming permanent fixtures in certain quarters of evangelicalism.¹¹⁷ Treating sin as a serious spiritual disease which could only be removed by Christ's death remained a central feature of Methodists clinging to a traditional theory of atonement.

Others conservatives concentrated their efforts on suppressing alternative theories which they thought might supplant the substitutionary view. In this endeavour it was not uncommon for conservatives to embellish or exaggerate the ill effects wrought by the theological reconstructions of modern-minded Methodists in order to incite antagonistic feelings towards them. The first alternative theory which gained ground among late Victorian Methodists reconceived the atonement within the framework of God's Fatherhood. The Fatherhood of God, confidently wrote a forward-thinking Methodist in 1894, provides Methodists with a 'fuller vision of beauty' for which Methodists should be grateful.¹¹⁸ Conservatives were not so enthusiastic about the new doctrine and its implications for the atonement. In a critical review of John Scott Lidgett's *Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* (1897) one Methodist complained that Lidgett made the atonement derive from God's fatherly character rather than his judicial character.¹¹⁹ 'We do not see how the idea of satisfaction of God can be retained', asserted the contributor in his review, 'apart from the judicial character.' 'Whatever repugnance there may be

¹¹⁶ *The Epworth Herald*, 11 April 1903.

¹¹⁷ Taylor, 'The Death of Christ' *WMM* 126 (1903): 216-19.

¹¹⁸ *WMM* 117 (1894): 790.

¹¹⁹ *LQR*, 29:1 (1897): 150.

in the modern mind to judicial or forensic representations of God's dealings', the author continued in an attempt to obstruct further interest in the doctrine, 'they seem inevitable to logical thought.'¹²⁰ The implication was that by grounding the atonement in God's fatherhood, Lidgett promoted an illogical and unhealthy doctrine which evangelical Methodists should not accept. Further complaints were levelled against advocates of the Fatherhood of God concept. If Lidgett would have bothered to prove the scriptural validity of the fatherhood concept, angrily remarked Joseph Agar Beet, a conservative tutor at Richmond College to whom many ministers and lay leaders turned for guidance, 'he would have discovered that the doctrine he asserts, has no place whatever in the teaching of Christ and His apostles about His death on the cross'.¹²¹ Conservatives repudiated the Fatherhood of God as a legitimate philosophy.

A second alternative theory conservative ministers vehemently denounced was the moral influence theory. Christ did not 'die as a Confessor in defence of truth', roared one preacher in 1908, but as a 'substitute' and a 'sacrifice for sin'.¹²² Conservatives had nothing but disdain for any theory which did not preach redemption through Christ's propitiation. 'Drain the Bible of the sacrificial, cleansing blood, and it becomes a corpse', preached one minister in 1908.¹²³ Evangelicals must never forget, he continued, that 'if you do away with the blood you do away with the Atonement'.¹²⁴ 'It is impossible', insisted another preacher in 1913, 'to say that Jesus merely died a martyr's death.'¹²⁵ 'That all our notions of the atonement must be rid of these ancient encumbrances and brought up to the standard of a "living sacrifice" as presented by the Representative and Pattern' theories, wrote another minister in 1885, is an untenable claim which is not found anywhere in scripture.¹²⁶ That 'the propitiation was in the blood' of Christ, he

¹²⁰ *LQR*, 29:1 (1897): 150.

¹²¹ J.A. Beet, *WMM* 120 (1897): 797.

¹²² *PM* 14 (1903): 224.

¹²³ *PM* 19 (1908): 506-507.

¹²⁴ *PM* 19 (1908): 506-507.

¹²⁵ *PM* 24 (1913): 119.

¹²⁶ *LQR* 64 (1885): 108.

continued, 'is the sublime simplicity of the Gospel'.¹²⁷ Other preachers agreed. The indisputable fact of scripture, insisted one contributor to the *Preacher's Magazine* for 1900, is that Christ's death was a substitutionary sacrifice of which 'the shedding of blood was the essential act'.¹²⁸ The moral influence theory repulsed ordinary conservatives.

Helping support traditional views of the atonement among ministers and local preachers was Charles Eldridge. A leading minister and author of several popular books and pamphlets directed towards local preachers, such as *The Lay Preacher's Handbook* (1894) which was included on the conference course of study for 1896-97, Eldridge preached a governmental view of the atonement. 'If, after threatening with penalty, God had freely forgiven the sinner, without any satisfaction being rendered to His justice', Eldridge reasoned along traditional lines, 'He would have shown a changeableness entirely inconsistent with His character, and destructive of all faith in His judicial righteousness.' In his defence of the governmental theory, Eldridge was indebted to the architectonic Watsonian tradition which prioritized logic, law and God's honour. Furthermore, in the period after 1880 ordinary Methodists were encouraged in their catechetical lessons at Sunday school to understand and put to memory the fact that 'the death of Christ satisfied Divine Justice'.¹²⁹ With such views firmly in place among a section of conservative Methodists many wondered a decade later why anyone would have an 'aversion to the legal or judicial idea', as one had in 1890.¹³⁰ Traditional conceptions of the atonement were reinforced through the support of lay authors and literature of the Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School Union.

Another substantial way Methodists intervened to save the traditional view from modern minds was to resist the transfer of allegiance from the atonement to the incarnation that was everywhere occurring among the leading theologians and ministers. Claims which threatened the

¹²⁷ *LQR* 64 (1885): 109-110.

¹²⁸ *PM* 11 (1900): 311.

¹²⁹ *The Wesleyan Sunday-school Magazine* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School Union, 1881), 239.

¹³⁰ *LQR* 74 (1890): 228.

priority of the atonement galvanized conservatives who in the years surrounding 1900 insisted on the sufficiency of the atonement for producing a vital Christianity. ‘The Atonement is the central doctrine of Christianity’, claimed one critic of the shift in doctrinal priority away from the cross of Christ in 1903. ‘If we give up the Atonement’, he strenuously declared, ‘we give up all.’¹³¹ John S. Simon, minister and theological tutor, was teaching a similar atonement-centred gospel during his tenure at Didsbury College, Manchester, from 1901 to 1913. Simon’s convictions on the topic were strong enough in fact that he reserved a section in his inaugural presidential address before the Conference in 1907 to drive home the importance of the atonement for Christianity. No other doctrine, Simon unabashedly declared, is as central to the gospel or has the ability to encourage and strengthen one’s faith than the simple fact that Christ ‘atoned for human sin’.¹³² ‘You may turn to [this fact] when your minds are disturbed by unworthy descriptions of the work of Christ and His blessed Cross’, and, he added, when people complain ‘that the incarnation is undermined’.¹³³ The atonement was reemphasized as the central doctrine of Christianity.

With such strong support from a leading Methodist, middling conservatives felt even more emboldened. Christ’s death, wrote one correspondent to the *Preacher’s Magazine* for 1908, was not ‘simply martyrdom for truth’ or the act of ‘a Confessor in defence of truth’ but an act of divine redemption.¹³⁴ Those who prioritized and supported such rival doctrines as the incarnation were labelled unbiblical and un-evangelical Christians. In a review of John J. Lias’ Hulsean Lectures for 1884 on the atonement, for example, one Methodist complained that ‘Mr. Lias makes the un-Scriptural effort, not uncommon in the present day, to fix the believer’s gaze on the Incarnation rather than the Crucifixion.’¹³⁵ In 1892 one contributor to the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* highly criticized Charles Gore’s Bampton Lectures as having ‘one great defect’

¹³¹ *PM* 14 (1903): 224.

¹³² *Recorder* 25 July 1907.

¹³³ *Recorder* 25 July 1907.

¹³⁴ *PM* 19 (1908): 505; 14:225.

¹³⁵ *WMM* (November 1884): 879.

which is that ‘the Incarnation is severed sharply from the Atonement’. ‘In reading these lectures’, continued the reviewer, ‘we might almost imagine that the Atonement was a mere accident of the Incarnation.’¹³⁶ Furthermore, traditionalists observed that the attention given to the incarnation created a horrible contradiction where ‘Christ is set in a sort of competition with Scripture as the final standard of truth’.¹³⁷ The result of such thinking, railed one Methodist in 1893, is that Methodists are now told ‘in pulpits and on platforms that we must go behind Scripture to the living Christ’.¹³⁸ For conservatives, the incarnation was a necessary development without which the atonement could not have happened. Yet they believed the whole purpose of Christ’s birth was ‘deliverance from evil’.¹³⁹ Methodists were in firm agreement with James Denney who argued that ‘the incarnation is not intelligible, nor credible, nor defensible, except when defined by the relation of the Atonement’.¹⁴⁰ They believed the atonement was the key uniting scripture and their system of theology. Those who made the atonement an afterthought to Christ’s incarnation were not true heirs of the evangelical tradition. ‘We find’, declared one Methodist in 1880, ‘that all the Apostles speak of Christ crucified, put his death in the very front of all their teaching’, and make his life and all his teachings ‘subordinate to the death of the cross’.¹⁴¹ Conservatives refused to surrender the atonement to modern reconstructions or allow it to be relegated to a secondary role in their theology.

While most resisted changes to the traditional substitutionary view, some were still willing to concede that they were not completely satisfied with received opinions. ‘The doctrine of Atonement’, wrote one Methodist in 1899, ‘has no doubt been stated in revolting terms.’ The author, however, was unwilling to reject its vicarious nature. ‘But’, he continued with strong

¹³⁶ *WMM* 115 (1892): 217.

¹³⁷ ‘Christ’s Place in Modern Theology’ *LQR* 80 (1893): 351.

¹³⁸ ‘Christ’s Place in Modern Theology’ *LQR* 80 (1893): 351.

¹³⁹ *WMM* 115 (1892): 218.

¹⁴⁰ James Denney, *The Death of Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), xix, 320-321.

¹⁴¹ *Recorder* 4 May 1880.

conviction, ‘that does not justify attempt[s] to reduce it to a mere figment’.¹⁴² The central aspect of the atonement, he confirmed, is ‘redemption by the death of Christ’.¹⁴³ Though conservatives were aware of the fact that their views were unpopular and unfashionable to modern-minded Christians, they nevertheless had supreme confidence that the substitutionary death of Christ was gospel truth. Though ‘the tendency of modern Christian thought [is] to make all theology a Christology’, wrote one Methodist in 1893, ‘we do not regard this tendency with any dread’.¹⁴⁴ The author’s assurance came from his confidence that he believed ‘there is little or no likelihood of the hold which the Atonement has on the Church being weakened’.¹⁴⁵ While some had doubts that ‘our theories may all falter and fail’, as one Methodist wrote in 1895, they remained vigilant in the knowledge ‘that Christ died for sinners’.¹⁴⁶

Though conservatives were generally pleased with their ability to defend traditional Wesleyan views, members of an older generation continued to express their anxiety over the spiritual state of the young folk in the church. ‘Everywhere I find’, wrote a contributor to the *Methodist Recorder* for 1907, ‘the young people are in a state of unrest.’¹⁴⁷ To revitalize the faith of a younger generation Methodists formed the Wesley Guild in 1896. Functioning as a supplementary or para-church organization within the Wesleyan Methodist church, the Wesley Guild, as its manual stated in 1900, provided ‘the missing link between the Sunday school and the church and has solved the problem of how to retain [interest in] our older scholars.’¹⁴⁸ Many considered it a fresh expression of evangelicalism within the church that would draw in young people and bring a greater interest in traditional theology amongst the general population. Initiated by Charles H. Kelly, who believed ‘men would have had better theology if they had had better bodies’, the society focused on spiritual devotion through recreation. ‘If lads are to play

¹⁴² *LQR* 92 (1899):167.

¹⁴³ *LQR* 92 (1899):167.

¹⁴⁴ *LQR* 80 (1893): 42.

¹⁴⁵ *LQR* 80 (1893): 43.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Cross of Christ’ *The Watchman* 23 May 1895.

¹⁴⁷ *Recorder* 2 May 1907.

¹⁴⁸ William A. Quayle, ‘The Wesley Guild Anniversary’, *The Epworth Herald*, 18 October 1902; *Wesley Guild Manual* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1900).

football and cricket’, explained Kelly at the 1901 ecumenical conference held at City Road Chapel, London, ‘they had better do that in the company and under the guidance of people of the Wesley Guild than people they meet in the public-house’.¹⁴⁹ While some scholars found such organizations obstructed the growth and spread of vital Christianity,¹⁵⁰ the Wesley Guild, and her sister organization in America, the Epworth League, were viewed as huge successes by conservative Methodists for their ability to revitalize traditional theology among the young.¹⁵¹ The conservative William Watkinson, who vehemently battled for a penal substitutionary atonement in the period after 1880, gave the Wesley Guild a ringing endorsement in 1897 as president of the conference.¹⁵²

The Solidification of Methodist Conservatism after 1900

In the first decade of the twentieth century Methodists became embroiled in a bitter theological controversy surrounding the atonement. The dispute pitted defenders of the ‘blood atonement’ against proponents of an atonement stripped of its vicarious nature. The two most prominent spokespersons for this ‘new theology’ were T.R. Williams and R.J. Campbell, both Congregational ministers, though Campbell would later become a Church of England clergyman after World War I.¹⁵³ Both men were swayed by Hegelian and Darwinian thought, believed traditional Christianity should be subjected to rigorous scientific investigation, and subsequently conform to modern sensibilities in which the atonement was stripped of its metaphysical qualities. Through such an investigation evangelical views of the atonement would be revealed for their true worth: old-fashioned and obsolete. Yet the new theology also taught that, while a person might lean on the Bible and scientific research for spiritual guidance, her intuition was an

¹⁴⁹ Ecumenical Methodist Conference, *Proceedings of the Third Ecumenical Methodist Conference* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1901), 317.

¹⁵⁰ Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Minutes of Several Conversations at the ... Yearly Conference of the People Called Methodists ...* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1900), 433.

¹⁵² ‘The Wesleyan Methodist Conference at Burslem’ *CA*, 23 August 1900, 13.

¹⁵³ Keith Robbins, ‘The Spiritual Pilgrimage of the Rev. R.J. Campbell’, in *History, Religion, and Identity in Modern Britain*, ed. Keith Robbins (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 133–148.

equally trustworthy source.¹⁵⁴ Campbell's book *The New Theology* (1907) was highly critical of the atonement traditionally conceived, referring to it as 'misleading' and even 'unethical'.¹⁵⁵ 'The doctrine as popularly held', boldly wrote Campbell, 'is not only not true but it is a serious hindrance to spiritual religion.' 'Why in the world', Campbell questioned, 'should God require such a sacrifice before feeling Himself free to forgive His erring children?'¹⁵⁶ Campbell believed Christ's death was vicarious but that ultimately his death was a selfless painful act of love which Christians were to emulate rather than an act which brought salvation. The atonement 'possesses meaning and value', explained Campbell, when Christians repeat similar sacrificial acts in their own lives.¹⁵⁷ For Campbell, sin was overcome by Christ's love and the continued acts of love repeated throughout one's life on earth. Christ's death became a heroic, individual act which each person must accomplish in her life. 'Christ, explained Campbell, 'has to be offered perpetually on the altar of human hearts.'¹⁵⁸ The new theology was a marked departure from historic Christianity.

Campbell's vicious attack on the evangelical doctrine of atonement touched a raw nerve among conservative Methodists who referred to Campbell's theological opinions as 'reckless' and 'vile'.¹⁵⁹ Mr. Campbell's theological reasoning, wrote another minister in 1907, 'would be torn to tatters in any court of justice'.¹⁶⁰ Samuel Chadwick, tutor at Cliff College, Sheffield, considered the new theology 'a dish of moonshine' and 'unfitted to feed the famishing'.¹⁶¹ One minister even felt compelled to compile a list of the fifteen most dangerous heretics in Christian history and place the name of Reginald J. Campbell on the list.¹⁶² Less dramatic in his dismissal of the new theology was one minister who observed in 1909 that 'we may acknowledge that [the new

¹⁵⁴ Reginald John Campbell, *The New Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 199; Thomas Rhondda Williams, *The Evangel of the New Theology: Sermons* (London: W. Daniel, 1905), 56.

¹⁵⁵ Campbell, *The New Theology*, 8.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ 'The Claims of the New Theology' *WMM* 130 (1907): 395.

¹⁶⁰ *Recorder* 14 February 1907.

¹⁶¹ *Recorder* 2 May 1907.

¹⁶² *Recorder* 21 February 1907.

theology] constitutes a real gospel, but it is certainly not that presentation of the Christian faith which is conveyed by the term Evangelical.¹⁶³

Though most responses were brief, sharp attacks against the new outlook, one Nonconformist published a careful study in 1907 entitled *Is the New Theology Christian?* Of all the ink that has been spilt over the controversy, wrote a contributor to the *London Quarterly Review* for 1908 in praise of the new book, ‘Mr. Egerton’s criticism is the closest and most carefully reasoned of all’.¹⁶⁴ In his book Egerton criticized Campbell for his inadequate view of sin and repentance. The love humans express to and for one another, wrote Egerton, cannot suppress sin.¹⁶⁵ Methodists agreed with Egerton when he contended that ‘[Christ’s] blood was shed for the remissions of sins’ which ‘alone constitutes the atonement’.¹⁶⁶ A survey of several of the leading Methodist periodicals for 1907 reveals nearly one hundred articles and reviews condemning Campbell’s theological opinions.¹⁶⁷

Clearly, Methodists were unsympathetic to Campbell’s theology. Many demonstrated a firm reluctance to alter any view of the atonement which prioritized the substitutionary and vicarious nature even when faced with repeated criticism. In reality, Methodists had been battling against fashionable theological opinions for nearly two decades before Campbell’s brash pronouncements. The new theology, wrote a concerned Methodist in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1900, ‘leads us to the mournful conclusion that it is possible to have really a Church without Christianity, and a Christianity without Christ’.¹⁶⁸ In other words, the new theology effectively lobotomized Christianity, rendering it free of the essential ingredient that marked its power to save. For conservatives, the new theological outlook displayed a shocking amount of

¹⁶³ *LQR* 111 (1909): 325.

¹⁶⁴ *LQR* 109 (1908): 315.

¹⁶⁵ Hakluyt Egerton, *Is the New Theology Christian* (London: G. Allen, 1907), 154.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Periodicals surveyed include the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, the *London Quarterly Review* and the *Methodist Recorder*. Nonconformists in general shared Methodist’s distaste for Campbell’s theology. See Keith W. Clements, *Lovers of Discord: Twentieth-Century Theological Controversies in England* (London: SPCK, 1988), 19–48; Peter B. Hinchliff, *God and History: Aspects of British Theology, 1875-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 198–222.

¹⁶⁸ *WMM* 123 (1900): 720

disrespect for traditional Christianity and represented the logical resting place for those who used scientific methods of investigation. Conservatives chose instead to praise the work of Joseph Cook, an English Primitive Methodist lay preacher who later became Prime Minister of Australia, whose publication of 1885 defended the philosophical opinions of William Paley, Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid.¹⁶⁹ Cook's conservative opinions in his popular book *Do We Need a New Theology?* (1885) earned him the moniker 'Mr. Valiant-for-the-Truth' by the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1885 which, together with the *London Quarterly Review*, endorsed his book as essential reading for all Methodists.¹⁷⁰ For the average conservative, Christian doctrine in the Edwardian period was not progressing towards a fuller more accurate testimony of the gospel but demolishing it. Theology did not need to evolve; the truths of scripture had been accurately refined during the eighteenth-century revivals, claimed conservative Methodists, and properly expounded ever since.¹⁷¹ Those who made such assertions preached 'a different gospel'.¹⁷² Conservatives continued to favour the common sense principles rooted in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment framework.

While their modernist colleagues championed change as a means to recover a vital atonement, conservatives eagerly highlighted the theological agreement between one another, the recent past and historic Christianity. 'In Methodism', wrote Benjamin Gregory, editor of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* in July 1890, 'there has been hitherto a marvellous harmony of doctrine, and consequent homogeneity, amongst the ministerial brotherhood, amongst the Methodist people, and between the people and their pastors.'¹⁷³ Percy W. Bunting, uncle to John Scott Lidgett and influential editor of the *Contemporary Review* and the progressive-minded *Methodist Times*, made a similar observation. 'Conservatism is strong in Methodism, partly because of the strong federation of its clergy, partly through the great confidence felt in them by

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Cook, *Do We Need A New Theology?* (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1885).

¹⁷⁰ *WMM* 108 (1885): 797-798; *LQR* 8 (1887): 365.

¹⁷¹ 'Is Christianity an Evolution' *LQR* 19 (1892): 60-78.

¹⁷² 'Is Christianity an Evolution' *LQR* 19 (1892): 78.

¹⁷³ 'What Guarantee Have 'The People Called Methodists' for Integrity, Harmony, and Continuity of Doctrine?' *WMM* (July 1890): 549.

an only moderately cultured laity; but mainly because of the very practical turn of the spirit of the Methodist Church' which has 'moved pretty much together, and with little outward disturbance'.¹⁷⁴ A substitutionary atonement, wrote another conservative in 1907, was held by all the church fathers; and those who are opposed to it concede 'not to reason, but sentiment'.¹⁷⁵ Those who desire to be scriptural in their beliefs, the author continued, must believe that '[Christ] made propitiation for sin'.¹⁷⁶ Methodists in attendance at the 1891 Centenary Celebration rejoiced that their denomination was marked by the 'revival of the old doctrines of the Bible'.¹⁷⁷ In an address before the Conference of 1898, another Methodist sentimentally observed that 'there is no sign of any change in our attitude toward the foundation doctrines of the faith'.¹⁷⁸ The theological outlook of our preachers today, declared another minister at the London Minister's Meeting in 1907, stands 'substantially where Wesley stood'.¹⁷⁹ Conservative Methodists refused to give up their cherished doctrines in the face of mounting theological change.

Methodists after 1900 continued to celebrate aspects of the traditional theory just as much as they had in the 1870s. Though William Lofthouse, Old Testament Tutor at Handsworth College, Birmingham, lamented in 1915 that 'sermons on the Atonement are disappearing from our pulpits', a comparison of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* and the *London Quarterly Review* in the 80s and 90s to that of 1900 to 1913 reveals nearly fifty more articles and book reviews covering the doctrine in the latter period.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, a survey of the *Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School Magazine* between 1875 and 1908 for sermons and lessons on the atonement suggest that Methodists were just as likely to cherish the atonement in the latter half

¹⁷⁴ 'Methodist Notes', Lunn, *The Review of the Churches*, 2:12.

¹⁷⁵ 'More Words on the Atonement', *Recorder* 18 April 1907.

¹⁷⁶ 'More Words on the Atonement', *Recorder* 18 April 1907.

¹⁷⁷ 'The Centenary Celebration', *WMM*, (1891): 313.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in John Fletcher Hurst, *The History of Methodism*, vol. 3 (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1902), 1414.

¹⁷⁹ *Recorder* 31 October 1907.

¹⁸⁰ William Lofthouse, 'The Atonement and the Modern Pulpit', *Harvard Theological Review* 8 (1915): 183.

of the period as they were in the former.¹⁸¹ A new generation of Methodists in the Edwardian period, moreover, continued to recognize the substitutionary atonement as a major feature of Christianity. The theologically conservative-minded, though socially progressive, Samuel Chadwick, editor of the weekly *Joyful News* and tutor and later principal of Cliff College near Sheffield, believed ‘without exception’ that it was a Christian duty to ‘tell every sinner that Jesus Christ has made Atonement for the world’s sin’.¹⁸² An article appearing in the *Methodist Recorder* for 1907 observed that though ‘there are forces of unrest about us’ we can rejoice in our ‘unswerving fidelity to His atonement—the oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.’¹⁸³ Another Methodist proudly declared in 1908 that because Christ ‘offered [his] unblemished life as a ransom for us all’ we are saved from our sin and guilt.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, Denney’s *The Death of Christ* (1902) was heralded as a ‘fresh and illuminative study’ by *Preacher’s Magazine* for 1903, which recommended it ‘not be neglected by any evangelical preacher’.¹⁸⁵ John Simon, president of Conference for 1907, singled out the atonement in his inaugural sermon in July 1907. Methodists should rejoice in the ‘simplicity’ of the ‘fact of the atonement’ which, he contended, is the belief that ‘Christ tasted death for every man’.¹⁸⁶ ‘When your minds are disturbed by unworthy descriptions of the work of Christ and His blessed Cross’, he advised, ‘you may turn to [this fact].’¹⁸⁷ ‘As a Church’, he concluded with a positive tone, ‘we stand firmly by the doctrine of the Atonement.’¹⁸⁸ Conservative attitudes to the atonement persisted in the period between 1880 and 1914.

Conclusion

In the period between 1880 and 1914 ordinary Methodists remained committed to an evangelical

¹⁸¹ [Author’s own statistics]

¹⁸² Samuel Chadwick, *Humanity and God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 33.

¹⁸³ *Recorder* 2 May 1907.

¹⁸⁴ *PM* 19 (1908): 506-507.

¹⁸⁵ *PM* 14 (1903): 97.

¹⁸⁶ ‘The President’s Conference Sermon’, *Recorder* 25 July 1907.

¹⁸⁷ *Recorder* 25 July 1907.

¹⁸⁸ *Recorder* 25 July 1907.

rendering of Christ's death as a vicarious suffering for the sins of the world. That they remained committed to traditionally conceived opinions was due in large measure to the fact that these views had been shaped within an Enlightenment framework which left its eighteenth-century rationalist stamp on the doctrine of atonement. Conservatives could not or were not willing to conceive the atonement in terms outside its eighteenth-century construction. In their estimation, the ideas of divine law, justice, blood sacrifice and the appeasement of an angry God were central to an orthodox view and had to be retained.

Yet as the century progressed, Romantic currents of thought proved too powerful a force, and penetrated the boundaries of Methodism. Those who came under the influence of Romantic thought demonstrated a willingness to alter certain dimensions of the doctrine. Appeals to one's freedom of conscience and intuition, for instance, became valid sources during the period after 1880. Others thought it acceptable to state the traditional doctrine in modern language and removed words such as 'punishment' and 'justice' from their descriptions of the atonement. Still some favoured an 'elastic' religion while others preferred to shift their focus to the incarnation.

To the conservative ear such modernizing efforts struck a horrible tone. Many responded by increasing their sermons on sin, guilt, repentance, and the need of Christ's vicarious redemption. Others mounted a sustained attack against alternative theories such as the moral influence theory and the increasingly popular notion of God as Father. When particularly distasteful views of the atonement threatened to unhinge their evangelical theory, rank-and-file Methodists responded with fervent denunciations of the new theologies and displayed a greater appreciation for non-Methodist evangelical opinions which defended the atonement as a propitiation for sin. Though the tendency to reflect modern religious opinions on the atonement were great in the period after 1880, the average Methodist not only resisted the late nineteenth-century Romantic urge to make Christ's death a symbol but continued to reinforce the theological opinions of traditional Wesleyan Methodism forged in the furnace of the European

Enlightenments.

CHAPTER FOUR
A REASONABLE FAITH:
METHODISTS AND THE ATONEMENT TRADITION IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

From the founding conference of 1784 to the opening of the Civil War in 1861 was a period of dramatic change for American Methodists. At the time of the American Revolution, Methodists were a minority religious group suspected of harbouring Loyalist sentiments. Congregationalism, a denomination largely committed to the revolutionary cause and one which would retain establishment status in both Connecticut and Massachusetts long after the revolution, dominated the religious life of New England. By the middle years of the century, however, Methodism had become something of an established denomination itself. On 4 May 1865 Bishop Matthew Simpson, for example, delivered the sermon address at the funeral of President Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. In the decades between these two momentous events, Methodists were busy creating Bible societies, developing new evangelistic techniques and founding educational institutions and colleges throughout the United States and across the American frontier. In all their endeavours they proved to be skilled recruiters, experiencing immense numerical success. In 1800 Methodists registered roughly 65,000 members. By 1860 membership rates had reached nearly two million, though, as David Hempton has pointed out, the total number of those influenced by Methodism during this period is actually closer to ten million when attendees and adherents are factored into the computation.¹

This chapter provides a survey of the evolution of the doctrine of the atonement among American Methodists in the period leading up to the Civil War. It identifies the most influential theological writings affecting Methodist views on redemption and points of agreement and discontinuity between American and English Methodists. It also notes any theological

¹ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 211–212; Furthermore, Goss showed that Methodists kept pace with, and in some decades even surpassed, the growth rate of the total U.S. population. See C. C. Goss, *Statistical History of the First Century of American Methodism* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1866), 148–149.

innovations, and the sources of those innovations, that might have occurred during the period.

An Evangelical Enlightenment Synthesis

From the American Revolution to the Civil War an evangelical-Enlightenment synthesis pervaded Methodist thought. This synthesis wedded Enlightenment notions of reason and philosophy to evangelical understandings of sin, salvation and atonement.² One particular conception of knowledge forged in the Enlightenment furnace dominating Protestant circles during the period was Common Sense Realism, a philosophy derived from the work of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid. According to Reid, certain ‘principles of common sense’ lay at the foundation of all knowledge and were available to all people. ‘All knowledge and all science’, wrote Reid in 1785, ‘must be built upon principles that are self-evident; and of such principles every man who has common sense is a competent judge.’³ An implicit goal of those shaped by this coalescence was to solve the intellectual dilemmas of Christianity; to demystify it. The Common Sense philosophy dominated American intellectual circles in the period leading up to the Civil War.⁴ Jonathan Edwards, the New England Congregational preacher, theologian and revival apologist, believed ‘common sense’ was a consistent framework for interpreting and communicating Christian truths, as did John Witherspoon, president of Princeton College from 1768 to 1794.⁵ Charles Finney preached ‘common sense’ as an essential tool for ministers.⁶ The Common Sense philosophy became the

² See chapters 4-6 in Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Donald H. Meyer, *The Democratic Enlightenment* (New York: Putnam, 1976); Henry Farnham May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford University Press, 1976); William M. Shea and Peter A. Huff, eds., *Knowledge and Belief in America: Enlightenment Traditions and Modern Religious Thought* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapters 1-4.

³ Thomas Reid, *The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, vol. 1, 6th ed. (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1863), 422.

⁴ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); Mark A. Noll, ‘Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought’, *American Quarterly* 37 (Summer 1985): 217-238.

⁵ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 437, 456; Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36-43.

⁶ Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 174.

guiding philosophical force interpreting religious truths for American Protestants.⁷

Methodists, like other evangelicals, found the Common Sense philosophy highly attractive as a source verifying religious knowledge.⁸ Nathan Bangs, the influential antebellum Methodist theologian who worked to end camp meetings and the emotional excess they encouraged, believed Thomas Reid stood ‘at the head of those metaphysical philosophers who adorned the last century’.⁹ John and Charles Wesley, contended Bangs in 1857, admirably ‘defend[ed] themselves by direct appeals to the Holy Scriptures and the dictates of common sense and sound reason.’¹⁰ Philadelphian preacher Asa Shinn appealed in 1813 to ‘the rules of evidence by which alone the human mind can be successful in the search for truth’.¹¹ The atonement, insisted Timothy Merritt, editor of *Zion’s Herald* and later the *Christian Advocate*, was best ‘support[ed] and defend[ed]’ when interpreted through reason and scripture.¹² Methodists should defend their beliefs, echoed another minister in 1838, ‘in the name of Scripture and of common sense’.¹³ Wilbur Fisk, the first President of Wesleyan University in Connecticut from 1831 to 1839, spoke of ‘common sense’ principles which governed humankind, and appealed to them throughout his writings.¹⁴ George Peck, circuit rider, editor and holiness advocate, insisted Calvinist notions of sin were ‘contradicted by the common sense of every rational man’.¹⁵ Daniel Whedon, editor of the influential *Methodist Quarterly Review* between 1856 and 1884, grounded his arguments in the ‘ordinary laws of mind’ and sought to make Christianity ‘acceptable to reason’.¹⁶ Following Whedon was Charles K. True, professor of moral science at

⁷ Noll, ‘Common Sense Traditions’, *American Quarterly* 37 (1985): 217–238.

⁸ Noll, *America’s God*, 233–234.

⁹ Nathan Bangs, ed. ‘Introduction’, *The Works of Thomas Reid*, 3 vols. (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1822), 1:iii.

¹⁰ Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. 3 (New York: Carlton, 1857), 10.

¹¹ Asa Shinn, ‘Preface’, *An Essay on the Plan of Salvation* (Baltimore: Neal, Wills and Cole, 1813), n.p.

¹² Timothy Merritt, ‘An Essay on Atonement’, *MM* (June 1824): 201.

¹³ *MQR* 20 (1838): 282.

¹⁴ Fisk, ‘Future Rewards and Punishment: Part 2’, 403, 407.

¹⁵ George Peck, ‘The Government of God Vindicated’, in Ebenezer Ireson, *MP* (Boston: John Putnam, 1833), 20; See also Peck, *Appeal from Tradition to Scripture and Common Sense* (New York: G. Lane & P. P. Sanford, 1844).

¹⁶ Daniel D. Whedon, ‘Doctrines of Methodism’ *BS* 74 (April, 1862): 262; Whedon, *Freedom of the Will as a Basis of Human Responsibility and a Divine Government* (New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1864), 4.

Wesleyan University between 1849 and 1860, who held that the Christian faith would be better served ‘if the principles and canons of interpretation were rigidly tested by reason, and especially that nothing should be allowed as a proper rendering of Scripture which is contrary to common sense’. ‘Common sense, the intuitive universal judgment of mankind’, True concluded, ‘is the first and last principle of interpretation.’¹⁷ ‘Religion is reasonable’ declared one minister from Mississippi in 1852, and ‘it is as philosophical as any other system with which we are acquainted.’¹⁸ ‘No revealed truth is more consonant with reason’, wrote another Methodist in the *Christian Advocate* for 1864, than ‘the atonement’.¹⁹ Common Sense reasoning became an invaluable tool for exploring and defending Christian truths.

Making Christianity reasonable for Methodists meant using Enlightenment principles to reinforce traditionally held truths. Natural philosophy, for instance, became a favourite tool used to quantify observed phenomena which could then be used to defend the existence of God. William F. Warren, a Methodist theologian who in 1873 was to become the first president of Boston University, forewarned Methodists of the Romantic philosophical shifts occurring in Europe and the need to defend ‘the existence of God’. The modern Methodist, wrote Warren in 1863 while a professor of theology at a Methodist seminary in Bremen, Germany, must be able to ‘base all [his] reasonings upon facts which no sane mind can dream of questioning, and proceed according to the strictest rules of logic’ when defending fundamental Christian truths.²⁰ Efforts to strengthen the substitutionary death of Christ through the use of rational evidences was a common symptom of the Enlightenment heritage. Thomas Ralston, popular Kentucky preacher and educator, used the evidentiary method of investigation in his *Elements of Divinity* (1843) to determine that ‘the system of sacrifice’ found in ancient Israel was of a vicarious nature. Since the ancient Israelites held an offering to be of a ‘vicarious and expiatory character’,

¹⁷ Charles K. True, ‘The Moral Theory of the Bible and Philosophy Harmonized’, *MQR* 41 (April 1859): 206.

¹⁸ *MQR* 6 (January 1852): 79.

¹⁹ ‘Teachings of the Cross’, *CA*, November 10, 1864.

²⁰ William F. Warren, ‘The Impending Revolution in Anglo-Saxon Theology’, *MQR* (October 1863): 581-582.

reasoned Ralston, Christ's death must be understood within this context.²¹ In 1852, Richard Abbey, from the Mississippi conference, also attempted to prove the existence of the atonement by exploring the sacrificial system of ancient Israel. Drawing on Thomas Hartwell Horne's *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (1818), Abbey believed, much like Ralston, that an historical investigation of the ancient Israelite sacrificial system confirmed an understanding of a biblical offering as possessing an 'expiatory character'. It naturally followed, reasoned Abbey, that Christ's atonement was understood this way by the apostles and should therefore be interpreted in the same fashion by modern Christians.²² Indebted to the evidential tradition, Abbey assembled facts before making his conclusions. Other Methodists exploited reason and science as a general means by which biblical truths might be defended. 'The Bible demands our reason', wrote a contributor to the *Ladies Repository* for 1852, a monthly magazine on religion and literature issued by the Methodist publishing house, 'that we may develop its truths.'²³ Science and reason, the author argued, are 'reservoirs of truth' which plumb the depths of scripture vindicating the 'Divine treasury of knowledge' in the face of 'Skeptics who reject the Bible'.²⁴ Reason, evidence and logic were used to sustain the fundamental truths of Christianity.

The Early Republic Period

Redemption Offered to All

The theological engine driving Methodist expansion in the period leading up to the Civil War was the offer of free grace through a universal atonement. Like their British counterparts, American Methodists were remarkably consistent in delivering a gospel message which opened the door for salvation for all people. The hope of the world, declared one minister of the New England conference in 1832, 'is the atonement made by Immanuel for the whole world.'²⁵

²¹ Thomas Neely Ralston, *Elements of Divinity* (Louisville, KY: Morton & Griswold, 1847), 152.

²² Richard Abbey, 'Jewish Sacrifices', *MQR* 6 (January 1852): 102-105

²³ *LR* 12 (April 1852): 135.

²⁴ *LR* 12 (April 1852): 136, 134.

²⁵ Ireson, *MP*, 156.

Leading the evangelistic charge among American Methodists during this period was Francis Asbury, the most powerful figure to emerge among early nineteenth-century Methodists. As John Wigger has ably demonstrated in his work *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists*, Asbury was a person obsessed with the conversion of a continent. His tenure was marked by fervent, practical piety, and an extraordinary ability, perhaps due to his lower-middle-class artisan background, to connect with common Americans.²⁶

The portrait of atonement that emerges in Asbury's journals is one in which Christ's death serves as a vicarious punishment for the sins of the entire human race. God's salvific grace, preached Asbury on 2 July 1793, appeared for all men.²⁷ Although conversion was an experience which all could potentially have, that did not mean it was an impersonal one. Asbury continually reminded himself and other Christians that their new life came through Christ's sacrificial death. Filled with heartfelt gratitude for Christ's work on his behalf, Asbury recorded in his journal for 14 November 1771, 'Oh how I wish to spend all my time and talents for him who spilt his blood for me!'²⁸ Twenty years later Asbury continued to make the atonement the heart of his gospel. On 20 June 1791 Asbury noted that he preached to a 'serious and attentive audience' in which he 'endeavored to show' how 'the cross of Christ' is the doctrine Christians should glory in the most.²⁹ The cross of Christ as a means of deliverance from sin permeated Asbury's journal. He employed cross-centred language in his sermons and in his daily devotions, all of which provide a clear picture of his commitment to the substitutionary nature of Christ's death for all people. Though not endorsing a specific atonement theory, Asbury carried with him a gospel message rooted in Christ's death for the sins of humankind.

The Nature of the Atonement

²⁶ Wigger, *American Saint*.

²⁷ Francis Asbury, *Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury*, vol. 2 (New York: Lane & Scott, 1852), 199.

²⁸ Asbury, *Journal*, 1:16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:2:125.

Three trestles supporting Methodists' views of the atonement in the early republic period were Wesley's *Sermons and Notes on the New Testament*, Richard Watson's *Institutes* and the *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. These works, discussed in chapter two, reveal an assorted collection of atonement imagery; yet Methodists tended to gravitate towards an objective, substitutionary model rooted in the vicarious suffering of Christ on the cross. Not all American Methodists had access to these works, however; and the more independent-minded Methodists became, the more latitude they took in their interpretations of these foundational texts. The one book, apart from the Bible, to which nearly every Methodist had access, or at the very least was familiar with, however, was the Methodist hymn book. As Stephen Marini astutely observes in his work on music and popular culture, hymns uncover many of the emotions and popularly held beliefs hidden behind the creeds and doctrines embraced by each denomination.³⁰ For Methodists in particular, hymns were, like prayer, a vital part of every gathering, and so they are an especially good indicator of the specific beliefs they held dear. Peter Cartwright, one of the most popular frontier preachers of the period, was said to own 'a library comprising only the Bible, a Hymn-Book, and the Church Discipline'.³¹ Asbury, too, believed the 'equipment of a minister consisted of a horse, saddle and bridle, one suit of clothes, a watch, a pocket Bible, and a hymn book'.³² In 1805 Methodists published a revised version of the *The Methodist Pocket Hymn-Book* which had at its subtitle 'designed as a constant companion for the pious of all denominations'.³³ This hymn book was substantially a collection of John and Charles' hymns, and demonstrates American Methodists' commitment to carrying forward the Wesleyan tradition

³⁰ Stephen Marini, 'Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American Popular Religion', *Church History* 71 (June 2002): 273–306.

³¹ 'Review of Autobiography of Peter Cartwright', *The Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* (March 1857): 312; See also Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher* (New Haven, Conn.: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 6, 243.

³² Henry Boehm, *Reminiscences* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1866), 445.

³³ Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Methodist Pocket Hymn-Book*, 32nd ed. (New York: Kirk & Robinson, 1805); The highly popular hymn book of 1805 originated with the 1781 pocket hymn book which departed from earlier Methodist hymn books in America not only because of its brevity but because it included hymns which Wesley thought "flat and dull". See entry on "Hymnody" in Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 1974), 1190; and Charles Sumner Nutter and Wilbur Fisk Tillet, eds., *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1911), 233.

to a new generation of Methodists. Arranged topically, these hymns affirm, as had the Wesleys, a belief in the vicarious punishment of Christ without prioritizing one specific theory of the atonement. One stanza from a hymn written by Charles Wesley, appearing under the theme ‘Rejoicing and Praise’, read:

All our sins on thee were laid:
By almighty love anointed,
Thou hast full atonement made:
All thy people are forgiven,
Thro’ the virtue of thy blood:
Open’d is the gate of heaven;
Peace is made ’twixt man and God.³⁴

Another hymn, found within a section entitled ‘Divine Goodness in Redemption’, proclaimed:

Oh love divine! What hast thou done!
Jesus my Lord hath dy’d for me!
The Father’s co-eternal son,
Bore all my sins upon the tree:
Th’ atoning Lamb for me hath dy’d
My Lord, my Love, is crucify’d.³⁵

A study of *The Methodist Pocket Hymn-Book* reveals several points about the development of Methodists’ views on the atonement. The first revelation is that within each of the twenty-nine topical sections, ranging from ‘Death and Judgment’ to a section entitled ‘Birth-day Hymn’, lies at least one reference, either direct or indirect, to Christ’s death as a sacrificial offering removing the stain of sin from one’s life. In a eucharistic hymn, for example, stanza two reads ‘In the rite thou hast enjoyn’d/Let us now our Saviour find/Drink thy blood, for sinners shed/Taste thee in the broken bread.’³⁶ Christ’s death is conceived in Old Testament terms in which a person’s sins are atoned for through a guiltless sacrificial offering. The second feature is a conspicuous absence of any use of specific legal language to describe the atonement. No mention of Christ’s death as fulfilling the legal demands of God’s moral government emerges

³⁴ Hymn 181, Church, *The Methodist Pocket Hymn-Book*, 167.

³⁵ Hymn 210, *ibid.*, 195.

³⁶ Hymn 297, *ibid.*, 275.

within the pages of this hymn book. What does emerge is a belief that Jesus was tortured on a tree so that human beings could be forgiven of their sins. Methodists understood the atonement as a redemptive action necessitated by their own sinfulness. Christ was made a substitute, a ‘sacrificial lamb’, on the altar of the cross on their behalf. His death united them with God; and through their faith in this event, accompanied by holy living, Methodists believed they would be permitted to enter the kingdom of heaven. A third observation precipitated by these hymns is that the atonement aroused intense emotions among Methodists. Christ’s redemptive work as expressed in these hymns provoked a range of feelings from anguish and guilt to jubilation, reverence and gratitude. Like other evangelicals, Methodists clung to the cross, finding encouragement, strength and confidence in it when challenged by life’s many obstacles. Together these hymns offer a powerful record of what many Methodists believed regarding the purpose of Christ’s crucifixion and the benefits to be gained by one’s faith in it. Finally, since this pocket hymn book drew heavily on the Wesleys’ hymns, it is not surprising to find that they reveal a high degree of continuity with those of their Wesleyan colleagues in Britain. Like Wesley and his colleagues, American Methodists in the early republic period displayed both a remarkable commitment to the centrality of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross as a means of salvation for all people and an ambivalent attitude when it came to expounding a particular theory.

In addition to this pocket hymn book, Methodist opinions on the atonement during the period leading up to 1861 were also shaped by Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*. First translated into English in the latter half of the fifteenth century, the *Imitation* underwent several translations and editions in England before an American version appeared in 1783 edited by John Payne.³⁷ John Wesley published the standard translation of à Kempis’ work by George Stanhope, the Dean of Canterbury, entitled *The Christian’s Pattern* (1698) in 1735, thereby giving it

³⁷ William C. Creasy, ed., *The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis: A New Reading of the 1441 Latin Autograph Manuscript* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), xxi.

his official endorsement.³⁸ Like Wesley, American Methodists revered à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, finding his practical spiritual insights to be of great value. In 1815, for example, it became the first book published by the newly established Methodist Book Concern in New York.³⁹ Its continued popularity throughout the antebellum period led one minister to remark in the *Methodist Review* for 1859 that 'Whoever fervently desires to be an imitator of the self renunciation of Jesus Christ, what can he read better next to the Holy Scriptures?'⁴⁰ Another minister praised the *Imitation of Christ* in 1860 for leading so many sinners to conversion. 'It has been a world-book for centuries', the author concluded, 'and will never grow old.'⁴¹ As a work dedicated to spiritual devotion, the *Imitation of Christ* functioned in Methodist circles in a similar way to the hymn book, that is, encouraging the absorption of popular doctrines through constant repetition. Methodists regularly gathered around the dining table or blazing hearth to learn, for instance, that:

In the cross is life, in the cross health, in the cross protection from every enemy; from the cross are derived heavenly meekness, true fortitude, the joys of the Spirit, the conquest of self, the perfection of holiness! There is no redemption, no foundation for the hope of the Divine life, but in the cross. Take up thy cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, in the path that leads to everlasting peace. He hath gone before, bearing that cross upon which he died for thee.⁴²

While the Bible certainly held a preeminent place during family devotions and Sunday school classes, American Methodists read spiritual literature such as à Kempis' which packaged biblical principles in pithy statements. As an important piece of religious literature, à Kempis' book helped reinforce interpretations of Christ's death as a sacrificial offering delivering freedom from guilt and a promise of life everlasting.

Other works shaping Methodist opinions on redemption during the period were Adam

³⁸ Thomas à Kempis, *The Christian's Pattern, or, A Treatise of the Imitation of Christ*, trans. John Wesley (London: Printed for C. Rivington, 1735); See Kempis, Thomas à , entry in John McClintock and James Strong, eds., *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 5 (New York: Harper, 1885), 34.

³⁹ Thomas, *The Christian's Pattern, or, A Treatise of the Imitation of Christ*, trans. John Wesley (London: Printed at the Conference Office by T. Cordeux, 1815).

⁴⁰ *MR* (October 1859): 56-561.

⁴¹ *MQR* 42 (April 1860): 289.

⁴² John Payne, trans., *Of the Imitation of Christ in Three Books: Tr. from the Latin of Thomas à Kempis* (New-Bedford, MA: Abraham Shearman, 1805), 127.

Clarke's eight-volume *Commentaries on the Whole of Scripture* (1810–24) and *A Short Scriptural Catechism Intended for the Use of the Methodist Societies* (1793). Highly popular among American Methodists, Clarke's *Commentaries*, published as *The Holy Bible with Critical Commentary and Notes*, reached a third edition in America in 1837, and continued to be recommended to Methodist ministers as late as 1860.⁴³ Though Clarke's *Commentaries* defined the atonement in governmental terms, a significant innovative step among British Methodists,⁴⁴ he also explained the atonement through a variety of substitutionary terms in which the cross represented a 'ransom', a 'sacrifice' and a satisfaction of the law.⁴⁵ Because of Clarke's use of traditional atonement imagery, American Methodists continued to recommend his work as that which represented and helped foster views consistent with Wesley's own. In 1887, for example, southern Methodists continued to recommend Clarke's writings for those whose faith was unsettled by recent developments in theology.⁴⁶ Furthermore, neither Merritt, Fisk, nor, as will be shown later, subsequent generations of Methodists relied on Clarke's work for inspiration in the development of their own governmental theories. Despite Clarke's innovative work on the atonement, his writings continued to foster traditional views among American Methodists.

The second work, *A Short Scriptural Catechism*, published by John Dickins under the direction of Francis Asbury, was intended as an introduction to the Bible for younger Methodists, and continued to be circulated in Sunday school classes until 1852 when the General Conference approved a series of publications entitled *Catechisms of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, a third work shaping Methodists' opinions on redemption.⁴⁷ As was the case with *The Methodist Pocket-Hymn Book*, both the 1793 and the 1852 catechisms conjured up visions of Christ's death which omitted any reference to a governmental theory. Instead, the answer to why Christ had to suffer and die ran along lines typically found in the satisfaction theory: Christ died 'to offer to

⁴³ *MQR* (July 1860): 360.

⁴⁴ See chapter two for a discussion on Clarke's theory of atonement.

⁴⁵ 'Rev. Dr. Adam Clarke's Sermon on 1 Timothy 2:3-6', *MM* 8 (1825): 42.

⁴⁶ *MQR* 2 (March 1887): 95.

⁴⁷ John McClintock and James Strong, eds., 'Catechism', in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper, 1868), 152.

divine justice full atonement for the sins of the world'.⁴⁸ Christ's death is also portrayed as providing 'a ransom for all', terminology commonly found in the Christus Victor theory, and a punishment for sin and vindication of divine law, elements also found in the penal substitutionary theory.⁴⁹ The most popular spiritual works in the early republic period encouraged Methodists to conceive the atonement through a variety of biblical metaphors rather than prioritizing one particular theory.

Although Methodists used a range of metaphors to describe the atonement, the foundation on which all their theories were built was the sacrificial, substitutionary death of Christ. The message of Methodism, wrote Jesse Lee in his *A Short History of the Methodists* (1810), was, in the words of Charles Wesley, 'to spread that victory of the bloody cross'.⁵⁰ The popular preacher and ardent abolitionist Freeborn Garretson was commended by Nathan Bangs for his focus on the power of Christ's vicarious sufferings to save. Writing in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* for 1830, Bangs declared Garretson a model Methodist because 'he would not cease his exhortations until he led the penitent sinner to the blood of atonement'.⁵¹ Christ was viewed as the sacrificial substitute upon the altar, delivering a person from sin to a new life of holiness. In an article appearing in the *Methodist Magazine* for 1825, one Methodist explained what Christ's crucifixion meant to Methodists. Christ's death, the article declared, 'was a great work of redemption' because on that cross he became a 'vicarious sacrifice for man' and 'rescued [us] from sin's 'thralldom'.⁵² In an 1837 *Zion's Herald* article entitled 'Female Piety', women are encouraged to nurture their spirituality by displaying their trust in the atonement. Nothing 'can ornament the female character like piety,—deep, heartfelt, practical piety'; and the way for women to achieve such piety, the author writes, is to 'walk by faith' and trust in 'the blood

⁴⁸ *The Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1855), 57.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 59, 106.

⁵⁰ Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America* (Baltimore: Magill & Clime, 1810), 17.

⁵¹ 'Review: Life of Freeborn Garretson by Nathan Bangs' *MQR* (1 July 1830): 360.

⁵² 'Crucifixion of Christ', *MM* 7 (1825): 469.

atonement' which 'has marked you as redeemed'.⁵³ Similar recommendations were made for men. One Methodist in 1835 credited the atonement as the reason why there had been a recent surge in 'evangelical piety' among Methodists across the country. While Protestant clergy used to spend their time 'card-playing', 'theatre-going' and 'dancing', their time spent as 'open violators of God's law', he observed in the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, had been replaced by a focus on 'the atonement by Jesus Christ'.⁵⁴ The substitutionary nature of Christ's death was an essential element found in every Methodist theory of the atonement during the early republic period.

Expanding the Boundaries of the Atonement: The New England Theology

Beginning with the work of Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century and taking shape in the writings of Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy, the New England theology challenged the assumptions and techniques of an older generation of Calvinists whose views of the atonement inhibited them from preaching outside their own communities. The New School Calvinism produced by Edwards and his offspring represented the nation's first indigenous theological movement.⁵⁵ Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* (1754) revolutionized eighteenth-century evangelical theology by distinguishing between a person's 'natural ability' to repent from sin and her 'moral inability' or unwillingness to do what God requires of her.⁵⁶ Edwards believed Christians should evangelize everyone since, he argued, they could not know who possessed the inclination to repent. Edwards's disciples spread this New Divinity preaching throughout the New England region and later across the American frontier with the help of the Second Great Awakening. By

⁵³ 'Female Piety', *ZH* (November 22, 1837).

⁵⁴ 'Favorable Signs of the Times', *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* (July 1, 1835): 358.

⁵⁵ Douglas A. Sweeney, 'Evangelical Tradition in America', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 225; For a historiographical summary of the literature that has been produced on the New England Theology see Douglas A. Sweeney, 'Edwards and His Mantle: The Historiography of the New England Theology', *New England Quarterly* 71 (March 1998): 97–119.

⁵⁶ Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 15–16; Michael James McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, eds., *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 608–609.

the 1830s the New England theology had become a major intellectual force influencing the course of American evangelical teaching.⁵⁷

During the second wave of the New England theology, several New Divinity theologians adjusted the Edwardsean tradition by expanding the boundaries of the atonement. In 1785, for instance, two significant works appeared which greatly influenced the course of evangelical views on the atonement in the nineteenth century. *The Scripture Doctrine of the Atonement* by Stephen West, graduate of Yale, Edwardsean convert from Arminianism and successor to Edwards as pastor of the Congregational church in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and *Three Sermons on the Necessity of the Atonement* published by Jonathan Edwards Jr, tutor at Princeton, pastor in New Haven and later president of Union College in Schenectady, New York, both articulated a governmental model of the atonement in which God is viewed as a governor whose duty it is to uphold the law. ‘It is essential to the goodness of a Governor’, explained West in 1785, ‘to guard the rights, secure the peace, and promote the prosperity of his subjects.’ Yet, ‘should a ruler suffer crimes to go unpunished’, West continued, ‘the laws, however good and righteous in themselves, would presently lose their authority; and government fall in contempt’.⁵⁸ For Smalley and Edwards the Younger, God’s pardoning of sinners rested on his ability to demonstrate his anger at, and power to punish, lawbreakers. This demonstration took the form of Christ’s death on the cross. That human beings understood God, hated sin and had the power to punish sinners opened the door for God to forgive them. Through this demonstration, wrote Edwards Jr, God prepared ‘the way for the dispensation of pardon’. Discussions of God’s moral government became a favourite subject of subsequent generations of New England theologians. *The Sufficiency of the Atonement of Christ for the Salvation of All Men* (1814) by John Smalley, disciple of the Edwardsean theologian Joseph Bellamy and pastor of the parish of New Britain, Connecticut, for instance, extended the discussion of the way in which

⁵⁷ Sweeney, “Evangelical Tradition in America” in Stein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 217-238.

⁵⁸ Stephen West, *Scripture Doctrine of Atonement* (Boston: Printed at the Herald Office, for Farrand, Mallory, and Co., 1809), 17.

God's righteous government might pardon sinners into the nineteenth century.⁵⁹

Perhaps the most influential New England theologian to emerge in the nineteenth century, however, was Charles G. Finney. Though often portrayed as a critic of Edwards and of Calvinism itself, Finney was very much a part of the third wave of New England theologians whose work significantly contributed to the shaping of evangelical theology in the antebellum period. Converted in 1821 in New York among New School Presbyterians, Finney was catapulted to national fame in the winter of 1830-31 through his use of evangelistic techniques known as 'new measures' and controversial sermons preached at a series of revivals in Rochester, New York. Securing a position as professor of theology at Oberlin College in Ohio in May 1835, Finney went on to publish his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* the same year and his two-volume *Lectures on Systematic Theology* in 1846 and 1847.⁶⁰

At Oberlin Finney joined a faculty moulded in the Edwardsean tradition. Asa Mahan, president of the college, for instance, studied at Andover Seminary in Massachusetts, a hotbed of New Divinity teaching, before serving as a Congregational minister to churches in New York and Ohio. Henry Cowles had studied with Nathaniel Taylor, a revivalistic pastor and Edwardsean theologian, at Yale Divinity School before joining the school as professor of Old Testament. Finney's move to Oberlin brought him into an intense discussion on entire sanctification with Mahan, Cowles and other faculty. Mahan in particular was enamoured with Wesleyan ideas of entire sanctification and would draw heavily on Wesley's notion of a 'second blessing' in his *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* published in 1839. One year after joining the faculty at Oberlin Finney was convinced of the merits of entire sanctification, preaching the new doctrine in his lectures at Broadway Tabernacle in New York in the winter of 1836-37.⁶¹ By the 1840s, the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection merged with the New England

⁵⁹ Sweeney and Guelzo, *The New England Theology*, 144–145.

⁶⁰ An English edition of Finney's *Lectures on Revival* (1835) appeared in 1851 demonstrating its transatlantic appeal.

⁶¹ Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 181.

theology to become a vital part of the Oberlin theology.⁶² To explain his idea of Christian perfection, for instance, Finney used the distinction between natural and moral inability found in Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* (1754). Christian perfection, wrote Finney in his *Lectures to Professing Christians* (1837), is 'perfect obedience to the law of God', which is unattainable by a person's moral ability.⁶³ The only way for a person to obtain a 'perfect, disinterested, impartial benevolence' for Finney was through her own natural ability, which every sinner possessed.⁶⁴ 'That there is a natural ability to be perfect', explained Finney, 'is a simple matter of fact.'⁶⁵ In his development of the doctrine of Christian perfection, Finney reversed Edwards's notion that humans possessed the natural ability to choose sin to argue that humans were also capable of choosing obedience and benevolence.

As it had been for an earlier generation of New England theologians, Finney's entire system of theology turned on the moral government of God. As a 'moral Governor' whose government was designed to influence the action of 'moral agents', explained Finney in 1846, God's 'Moral Government is indispensable to the highest well being of the universe of Moral agents'.⁶⁶ 'Holiness', wrote Finney, 'is nothing else than conformity to Moral law and Moral Government.'⁶⁷ Finney's depiction of human beings inhabiting a world controlled by a divine government was deeply influenced by Nathaniel Taylor's *Lectures on the Moral Government of God*, published posthumously in 1859, though widely circulated throughout the 1830s and 40s.⁶⁸ A close examination of Finney's own lectures, in fact, reveals a striking resemblance to the Yale professor's, not only in its theology and terminology, but also in its topical outline. By the 1840s Finney had wholeheartedly adopted Taylor's new school Calvinism, choosing to follow Taylor's

⁶² E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 361–368; Allen C. Guelzo, 'An Heir or a Rebel? Charles Grandison Finney and the New England Theology', *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997): 61–94; Sweeney and Guelzo, *The New England Theology*, 219–220.

⁶³ Charles G. Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837), 253, 256.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁶ Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oberlin, Ohio: James M. Fitch, 1846), 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Sweeney and Guelzo, *The New England Theology*, 214.

critique of Edwards's natural/moral dichotomy.⁶⁹ 'The natural ability of the Edwardean school', Finney dismissively wrote in 1847, 'is no ability at all...nothing but an empty name, a metaphysico-theological fiction.'⁷⁰ In his revival sermons and lectures, Finney followed the New Haven variety of the Edwardsean theology.

Furthermore, Finney continued to draw on the New England theological tradition throughout the course of his life's work.. As the 'head of the government', wrote Finney in volume one of his *Systematic Theology*, God 'is pledged to protect and promote the public interests by a due administration of law'.⁷¹ Once sinners violated the law, explained Finney, God had two choices: he could either make an atonement or execute the law upon every offender.⁷² By choosing the atonement, explained Finney, God demonstrated his intentions to make Christ's death 'a satisfaction of public justice'. For Finney, this type of satisfaction had several consequences. It allowed God to demonstrate his 'anger at sin', and thereby provide a deterrent against future violations, while also sanctioning his ability to offer pardon to the offenders.⁷³ Finney explained his view more succinctly years later in his *Memoirs*, published posthumously in 1876, writing:

Christ died simply to remove an insurmountable obstacle out of the way of God's forgiving sinners, so as to render it possible for him to proclaim a universal amnesty, inviting all men to repent, to believe in Christ, and to accept salvation; that instead of having satisfied retributive justice, and borne just what sinners deserve, Christ had only satisfied public justice, by honoring the law, both in his obedience and death, thus rendering it safe for God to pardon sin, to pardon the sins of any man and of all men who would repent and believe in him.⁷⁴

As an heir of the New England theology, Finney wholeheartedly embraced a governmental theory of the atonement.

Methodists and the New England Theology

⁶⁹ Douglas A. Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 150–151.

⁷⁰ Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oberlin, Ohio: James M. Fitch, 1847), 14.

⁷¹ Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, 1846, 1:386.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:392.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1:399.

⁷⁴ Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1876), 50.

Methodists during the early republic period struggled to find their own theological and ecclesiastical identity. Although they retained close ties to British Methodists during the period, the American Revolution and the new democratic religious environment it helped create presented American Methodists with new challenges and opportunities that, when embraced, served as an impediment to the influence British Methodism exercised over her American colleagues. Francis Asbury, for instance, was influenced by the early republican culture and used the analogy between Methodists and the new American government to explain their ecclesiology. ‘All men of sense’, declared Asbury in 1808, ‘know that our church government was founded before the Federal Government and state rights in that they copied our government as far as humans could follow or ought to follow a divine government.’⁷⁵ Contributing to this new environment was the fact that the theological foundation on which two of the most powerful denominations in America had been built began to shift. The initial stage for this shift was the Second Great Awakening at the turn of the nineteenth century, which proved an able movement from which innovative ideas could be dispensed, and a prolonged conflict with the Unitarians. In this environment the modification of long-held beliefs about the atonement by the New Divinity schoolmen was hotly challenged by old school Calvinists, such as Bennett Tyler, Congregational minister and later president of Dartmouth, but welcomed by other Calvinists. Billy Hibbard, a Methodist circuit preacher in New England, recounts how the Connecticut Congregational Association in 1809 advised her ministers ‘to preach as near like the Methodists as they could’ and, in another instance, tells of how he heard a Calvinist minister preach ‘in plain words, that Christ died for all’.⁷⁶ Although theological tensions remained between old school Calvinists and Methodists,⁷⁷ the fact that New Divinity Calvinists now openly embraced free grace for all and the moral responsibility of human beings meant that a significant theological

⁷⁵ Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, Elmer T. Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 415.

⁷⁶ Billy Hibbard, *Memoirs* (New York: Published by the Author, 1825), 278, 279.

⁷⁷ See Wilbur Fisk, *Calvinist Controversy*; Nathan Bangs, *Errors of Hopkinsianism detected and refuted* (1815)

barrier had been torn down between the two parties, creating a tantalizing environment ripe for the cross-pollination of ideas.

The attractiveness of the New Divinity school of thought lay in her use of republican language and imagery. The application of governmental metaphors by the New England theologians merged well with the new nation's republican mentality whose government was predicated upon a free, responsible, and virtuous people. For individuals who had defined themselves by their belief in a free human will, the New Divinity emphasis on man's moral agency struck a chord of agreement while her use of governmental imagery to explain theological truths provided a ready-made framework which could be adapted for their own purposes. The Methodist who came closest to sanctioning the New Divinity views was Asa Shinn, minister in the Pittsburgh conference and later a founding member of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1830. Shinn departed from received theological opinions on the theory of the atonement when in 1813 he developed the first fully articulated statement of a governmental theory among Methodists. 'God has given his creatures', explained Shinn in his *Essay on the Plan of Salvation* (1813), 'a law or moral government, that is, his truth has communicated certain rules of action to their understandings, founded upon justice and goodness, with a conviction of their obligation to conform to those rules without any exception or violation.'⁷⁸ For Shinn, God was a moral governor whose laws, predicated upon his own inherent righteousness, were given for the benefit of those living under his government. Within this righteous government, sin, considered to be violations of the divine law, could not be tolerated. 'Sin dishonours God', Shinn explained, 'and destroys the happiness of his creatures, therefore his displeasure against it must be manifested.'⁷⁹ Thus, wrote Shinn, 'the death of Christ manifested God's abhorrence of sin, as well as his love to the sinner, and justified the heavenly government in the pardon of all

⁷⁸ Shinn, *An Essay on the Plan of Salvation*, 147.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

penitents'.⁸⁰ Christ was punished to uphold the law while making allowance for pardon for the penitent violator. Shinn's language and definition of the atonement bear striking resemblance to the first governmental atonement theories developed by the two prominent New Divinity men, Stephen West and Jonathan Edwards Jr. 'God hath given', wrote Edwards the Younger in his *Three Sermons on the Necessity of the Atonement* (1785), 'a moral law and established a moral government over his intelligent creatures.'⁸¹ To maintain both the authority of his divine government, explained Edwards Jr, and his moral character in the face of sin, an 'atonement is made, and the way is prepared for the dispensation of pardon'.⁸² The New England theologians believed, as Edwards Jr explained, that 'if the authority of the divine law be supported by the punishment of transgressors it will most powerfully tend to restrain all intelligent creatures from sin.'⁸³ Shinn's and Edward Jr's depiction of the atonement are fundamentally the same. Christ's death serves as a deterrent against sin, enforces the law and opens the door for pardon. Shinn's work represented the first Methodist articulation of the governmental theory in America, and in doing so departed from Wesley's depictions of the atonement.⁸⁴

Two other leading Methodists who modified received theories of the atonement during the period were Timothy Merritt, onetime editor of *Zion's Herald*, the *Christian Advocate and Guide to Christian Perfection*, and Wilbur Fisk, graduate of Brown University and later president of Wesleyan University in Connecticut. In 1822 both authors were asked to deliver lectures to members of the New England conference in which they were to address the subject of salvation.⁸⁵ Two decades into the nineteenth century, New England Methodists found themselves battling a resurgent universalism. Although their primary target was Calvinism, Universalists created confusion and controversy for Methodists because some, such as Elhanan

⁸⁰ Ibid., 155.

⁸¹ Jonathan Edwards, 'Three Sermons on the Necessity of the Atonement', in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Tryon Edwards, vol. 2 (Andover, Mass: Allen, Morrill & Wardwell, 1842), 15.

⁸² Ibid., 17.

⁸³ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁴ See chapter 2 for Wesley's and other eighteenth-century Methodists' views on the atonement.

⁸⁵ In 1832 Merritt's and Fisk's lectures were combined and published as Timothy Merritt and Wilbur Fisk, *A Discussion on Universal Salvation* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1832).

Winchester, a shoemaker converted through New Light Calvinists before becoming a Baptist preacher, mixed Calvinist and Arminian ideas together making it difficult to tell truth from error. In 1792, for instance, Winchester published an *Elegy on the Death of John Wesley* which praised Methodists for their proclamation of God's free redeeming grace to all people. By the 1820s several prominent Universalists had emerged, including Hosea Ballou, a Baptist minister who denied Christ's death was a vicarious sacrifice, to carry their message of universal salvation forward.⁸⁶ It was in this context that the New England conference invited Merritt and Shinn to expose the errors of Universalism.

The first invited lecture was delivered by Timothy Merritt in Maine in June 1822. To prepare for his lecture Merritt turned not to the founding fathers of Methodist theology, Wesley, Fletcher or Adam Clarke, but to the writings of the English Baptist pastor, Andrew Fuller. Andrew Fuller's writings, anchored in the work of the New England theologians, provided a rich source for anyone wanting to combat the writings of Universalists.⁸⁷ Highly critical of traditional atonement theories, Universalists generally believed the use of commercial language suggested a literal pecuniary indebtedness rather than a judicial one. In *The Gospel its Own Witness* (1801), Fuller defends traditional substitutionary atonement metaphors in which Christ's death is explained in judicial terms, but held the governmental theory to be a superior definition, an approach Merritt found appealing.⁸⁸ Borrowing Fuller's words, Merritt explained to his New England audience in 1822 that 'sin is not a pecuniary, but a moral debt; so the atonement for it is not a pecuniary, but a moral ransom'.⁸⁹ Throughout his lecture Merritt continued to use the governmental theory as a defence against Universalist claims. 'Could government be maintained', asked Merritt, 'by laws without penalties?' 'We know that it could not', ran the answer, and so 'neither could the government of God. To pardon sin without satisfaction to

⁸⁶ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 228–231.

⁸⁷ Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 89–97.

⁸⁸ Merritt and Fisk, *A Discussion on Universal Salvation*, 196.

⁸⁹ Timothy Merritt, 'A Discourse on Future Punishment' *MM* (June 1823): 242.

law...would invite, rather than restrain transgression.’⁹⁰ Filtered through the work of Andrew Fuller, Merritt drew on the New England theological tradition to expound a governmental theory of atonement.

Merritt detailed his view of the governmental theory more clearly in a lengthy article in the *Methodist Magazine* for 1824 entitled ‘An Essay on Atonement’. Merritt’s motivations for writing this article were to clarify and secure an orthodox view of the atonement among Methodists, for, he exclaimed, we live during ‘a time when the article of atonement is denied by some, and misunderstood by others’.⁹¹ Merritt grounded his understanding of the atonement in a distinction between its public and private effects. This distinction stemmed from a view of God as a ‘Lawgiver and Governor’ presiding over a public court and as a thoughtful caretaker who dispensed grace, mercy and forgiveness to private citizens. The proper view of God’s rule over the world, he explained, is ‘when we consider God as the Governor of the world, man a member of society, and sin an injury to society’.⁹² By making this distinction Christ’s atonement is able to restore God’s justice and accurately display his moral attributes. From this vantage point, continued Merritt, ‘we can no longer view sin as a private matter, or as a debt that may be forgiven; but we must view it as a crime that must be punished to satisfy public justice’ and ‘give warning to others’.⁹³ ‘The atonement’, Merritt summarized, ‘goes to secure all the ends of government while pardon is offered to the transgressor.’⁹⁴ In Merritt’s view of God’s administration, as it was for all proponents of a governmental theory, God forgives rather than punishes penitent sinners. Conceiving the atonement through this lens allowed Merritt to dismiss those critics who portrayed God as a ‘mercenary, selfish, [and] inexorable’ deity, an advantage he found particularly attractive in the governmental scheme of the atonement.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Merritt, *MM* (June 1823): 245.

⁹¹ Timothy Merritt, ‘An Essay on Atonement’, *MM* (June 1824): 201.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 204.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

Merritt broke down the separation of private religion and public morality, and in doing so echoed the beliefs of several New England theologians including, for example, John Smalley.⁹⁶ Although Merritt borrowed heavily from the writings of the New England theologians, he absorbed, as Shinn had before him, the broader republican discourse which viewed America as a nation governed by the rule of divine law.⁹⁷ That one of Merritt's concerns in the construction of his theory of atonement was to understand the place of the divine rule in the context of a democratic nation sheds significant light on why he and other early republic Methodists borrowed so heavily from a theological tradition with which they had historically been at odds.⁹⁸ Absorbing the theology of the New Divinity Calvinists, Merritt embraced an atonement theory clothed in governmental garb.

On 17 June 1823 Wilbur Fisk delivered the second lecture to members of the New England conference on the subject of universalism. In his address Fisk viewed the entire redemptive scheme through a lens of divine moral government. 'The Bible', he declared, 'is the history of God, as the Creator and moral Governor of the world.'⁹⁹ As a violation of divine law, sin for Fisk possessed a 'destructive effect' on the moral 'government of God'.¹⁰⁰ Faced with the decision to maintain both his law and demonstrate his mercy, God chose to inflict the punishment due to sinners on Christ instead. The effect of this decision, wrote Fisk, was threefold. It maintained God's merciful character by pardoning the sinner; it upheld his divine law; and it served as a 'motive to obedience', 'maintaining submission and good order'.¹⁰¹ Yet, Fisk claimed in opposition to Universalist claims to the contrary, salvation does not exist for

⁹⁶ Cf. John Smalley, 'The Sufficiency of the Atonement of Christ for the Salvation of All Men' in Sweeney and Guelzo, *The New England Theology*, 147; and Merritt, 'An Essay on Atonement', 203–204.

⁹⁷ For the ways in which the moral government functioned as a trope in broader public life throughout the early republic and antebellum periods see Mark R. Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6–7; Noll, *America's God*, 290–292; George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 21.

⁹⁸ Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983).

⁹⁹ Wilbur Fisk, 'Future Rewards and Punishment', *MM* (October 1823): 361.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 370.

¹⁰¹ Fisk, 'Future Rewards and Punishment: Part 2', 409.

those who do not repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ. The ‘impenitent sinner’, wrote Fisk, will surely experience eternal punishment.¹⁰² In this way, God’s moral government was able to offer mercy while also presenting a strong incentive to obey the law. The moral government theory became a powerfully attractive worldview, able to maintain God’s sovereignty and human beings’ free will. Fisk followed Shinn and Merritt by restating the atonement in moral governmental terms; and like his contemporaries, he felt no compunctions about doing so.

The Governmental Theory Blossoms

By the 1820s the governmental theory had penetrated the thought of several leading Methodist theologians. A decade later, its terminology could be found among a select number of educated New England preachers. ‘Let the sentiment prevail’, declared a Connecticut minister in 1831, ‘that we are under the government of God.’¹⁰³ Though some employed governmental language without specific reference to the theory of atonement, others increasingly began to dress Christ’s work on the cross in typical Taylorite fashion, that is, the maintenance of God’s moral law became their central concern. If God did not punish sin, exclaimed a presiding elder in the New Haven district in 1830, ‘the majesty and perfections of the Divine law and of the Divine government would be essentially weakened if not annihilated’.¹⁰⁴ Therefore Christ’s atoning work on the cross demonstrated God’s anger at sin, he maintained, and upheld the law but also opened the door for repentant sinners. Christ’s atonement, wrote one minister in the New England conference in 1830, went to ‘secure the honour of the divine government’ and simultaneously ‘manifested [God’s] displeasure at sin’.¹⁰⁵ For this reason, affirmed the Connecticut minister, we can confidently state that ‘it is through the atoning sacrifice of Christ that pardon and salvation are offered to guilty sinners.’¹⁰⁶ George Peck, circuit rider and from

¹⁰² Ibid., 412.

¹⁰³ Willson, *MP*, 2:170.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1 & 2:91.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:88.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1 & 2:91.

1840 editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, defended the governmental theory in a sermon entitled ‘The Government of God Vindicated’, published in 1833. Peck held that ‘unrestrained sin would break down the government of God, and lay waste moral order and happiness throughout the whole universe’.¹⁰⁷ To retain order and deter sin, Peck continued, Christ’s death became a public demonstration of justice.¹⁰⁸ By the 1840s, identical statements were issued by Methodists beyond the New England conference. God governs the entire world, wrote one minister in the nationally distributed *Methodist Quarterly Review* for 1841, through his ‘moral government’. The ‘notion of moral government’, continued the minister, ‘lies at the foundation of society’.¹⁰⁹ God’s ‘moral government in the world is absolutely perfect’, exclaimed another minister in 1852, ‘both in its design and in its present execution’.¹¹⁰ Fashioned by New Divinity Calvinists, the moral government theory was gaining popularity among Methodists across the United States.

Aiding the spread of the governmental theory among Methodist preachers and laypeople was Thomas N. Ralston, secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and later president of Campbell-Hagerman College for women in Lexington, Kentucky. Ralston, author of *Elements of Divinity* (1843), the first indigenous Methodist theological treatise in America, drew on the work of the New England theologians to defend a governmental theory of the atonement. ‘The necessity for the great work of the atonement of Christ’, wrote Ralston in 1843, ‘is founded upon the principles of the Divine government.’¹¹¹ Ralston contended that God was ‘under obligations to maintain the principles of his moral government’ and that ‘pardon for sin without an atonement...would abrogate the Divine government’.¹¹² Though not exclusively, the governmental theory was expounded in the first systematic theology produced by an American

¹⁰⁷ George Peck ‘The Government of God Vindicated’, in Ireson, *MP*, 27.

¹⁰⁸ Peck ‘The Government of God Vindicated’, in Ireson, *MP*, 24.

¹⁰⁹ *MQR* (October 1841): 582, 583.

¹¹⁰ ‘The Divine Government’, *MQR* 6 (April 1852): 295.

¹¹¹ Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 136.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Methodist.

A second influential Methodist helping foster a governmental theory among a broader audience was Daniel Whedon, professor of literature at Wesleyan University, and, from 1856 until his death, editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*. Whedon was a highly original thinker who guided Methodists in new philosophical directions in the decades surrounding the Civil War.¹¹³ Although Whedon was raised a Methodist, he also nurtured Presbyterian sympathies, having received his master's and doctoral degrees from Hamilton College, a Presbyterian seminary in Clinton, New York.¹¹⁴ Whedon, however, remained firmly committed to the Methodist denomination and accepted a position as professor of Ancient Languages and Literature at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, in 1833. For the next decade Wesleyan University would have a profound formative effect on his theological bearings. It was there that he became friends with Wilbur Fisk, then serving as president of the university, with whom he had many conversations. Secondly, while preparing his lectures, Whedon discovered the writings of Charles Finney which, after significant reflection, contributed to his joining the Methodist Episcopal Church as an ordained minister in 1843. Shaped by the writings of these two independent-minded theologians, it is little wonder that Whedon embraced their fundamental worldview which perceived a universe ruled by God's moral government. All of Methodism's doctrines fell, contended Whedon in 1862, under the 'fundamental maxim of Divine government'.¹¹⁵ Whedon's view of God's rule by divine government extended to his definition of the atonement. As violators of God's law, contended Whedon, sinners had to be punished. As a moral governor, God opted for the punishment of his Son which served both as a satisfaction of public justice and demonstration of his hatred toward sin.¹¹⁶ By these means,

¹¹³ Noll, *America's God*, 354–359, 362–364.

¹¹⁴ 'Biographical Sketch', in Daniel D. Whedon, *Essays, Reviews, and Discourses*, ed. J.S. Whedon and D.A. Whedon (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1887), 8, 14–15.

¹¹⁵ Daniel Whedon, 'Doctrines of Methodism' *BS* 74 (April, 1862), 242.

¹¹⁶ Whedon, *BS*, 256–259.

wrote Whedon in 1862, ‘a true and just divine government become possible’.¹¹⁷ By endorsing a governmental theory of the atonement introduced by several influential Methodists of an earlier generation, Whedon carried forward the Edwardsean atonement tradition to a new generation of Methodists.

Continuity and Augmentation in the Antebellum Period

Though a novel concept in the 1820s, the moral government theory made popular by the New Divinity schoolmen had been incorporated into the gospel message of antebellum Methodists by the 1850s, becoming one of the central metaphors Methodists used to define the atonement. Many Methodists, for instance, spoke of the need for the ‘great designs of moral government in the preservation of order among men’ and praised Nathaniel Taylor as someone who had ‘vindicated the Divine government by introducing into his system the Arminian view of sin’.¹¹⁸ Yet antebellum Methodists continued to define the atonement in more traditional ways, displaying little preference when it came to choosing a specific metaphor to describe the gospel message. How much, questioned one Methodist in 1856, does a sinner need to understand beyond the knowledge that ‘Christ’s death procures his pardon?’¹¹⁹ Not much, ran the answer, for all a Christian needs to know is that a sinless Christ ‘suffered the punishment’ and ‘bore the penalty’ in the place of the offender.¹²⁰ As long as a theory described Christ’s death in objective, substitutionary terms, it mattered little whether words such as ‘ransom’ or ‘propitiation’ were used. Sinners were redeemed through Christ’s sacrificial death; acquiring knowledge about the cross above and beyond this understanding, some reasoned, was superfluous. An editorial appearing in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* for 1855 gave no other explanation for the

¹¹⁷ Whedon, *BS*, 257-258.

¹¹⁸ *MQR* (January 1860): 147; Joshua Soule, ‘The Perfect Law of Liberty’, in William T. Smithson, ed., *The Methodist Pulpit, South* (Washington D.C.: Henry Polkinhorn, 1858), 151.

¹¹⁹ ‘The Atonement’, *CAJ* January 15, 1856.

¹²⁰ ‘The Atonement’, *CAJ*, January 15, 1856.

atonement beyond it being a ‘vicarious [act] for the sins of mankind’.¹²¹ John M’Clintock, editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review* between 1848 and 1856, held ‘the substitution of Christ to be real and actual’ in the face of Bushnellian modifications by progressive-minded Protestants who prized Christ’s death for its moral effects.¹²² A popular book entitled *Reasons for Becoming a Methodist* (1850) held that ‘Every person coming to the table of the Lord must be a practical believer in the doctrine of the vicarious atonement by Christ.’¹²³ Even Daniel Whedon, who championed the governmental theory, held the substitutionary death of Christ to be the cornerstone on which any theory was built. Methodists ‘fully adopt’, declared Whedon in a commencement address to the student body of General Biblical Institute in Concord, New Hampshire, on 13 June 1858, ‘the old-fashioned but never-to-be-obsolete doctrine of substitutional atonement’.¹²⁴ The governmental theory was recognized as a legitimate model, but rather than replacing traditional notions it became one among several tropes used to spread the gospel message.

The lack of interest in communicating one particular theory of the atonement was also the result of Methodists’ great focus on soul winning. ‘You have nothing to do but to save souls’, advised the *Discipline* in a section originally penned by John Wesley entitled ‘Preacher’s Rules’, ‘therefore spend and be spent in this work.’¹²⁵ Every *Discipline* issued between 1787 and 1864 urged ministers to foster a practical religion. ‘Gaining knowledge is a good thing’, read the *Discipline*, ‘but saving souls is better.’¹²⁶ The Methodist goal was to champion a democratic atonement, one which was offered to all, delivered in plain language. ‘I endeavour’, exclaimed

¹²¹ ‘The Sacrificial Offering of Christ on the Cross’, *CAJ* (November 8, 1855).

¹²² Robert S. Candlish, ‘Mr. Maurice and His Writings’, *MQR* 7 (April 1855): 224.

¹²³ I. Smith, *Reasons for Becoming a Methodist*, 21st ed. (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1850), 100.

¹²⁴ Daniel D. Whedon, *Substitutional Atonement: Admissible by Reason, Demonstrable by Scripture* (New York: Sunday School Union, 1859), 8.

¹²⁵ Methodist Episcopal Church, *Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1848), 51.

¹²⁶ Robert Emory, *History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1851), 33; *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1864), 76.

one Methodist in 1837, ‘to make the atonement of Christ as being a substitute and having died in my stead, as plain as possible to an anxiously lost sinner.’¹²⁷ While ‘intellectual improvement’ and ‘literary cultivation’ constitute a noble endeavour, stated a pastoral report issued by the General conference of 1856, a minister must remember that it is ‘by the preaching of the cross alone that God will convert the world’.¹²⁸ Methodists cherished an atonement message which could be easily grasped by the average American.

Because of the focus on a democratic atonement, Methodists were also free to describe Christ’s death in Christus Victor terms. ‘Christ has bought us off from this [sinful] condition’, declared one minister in 1852, ‘by an adequate ransom.’ ‘Not by giving money’, he continued, but by becoming ‘a curse for us’.¹²⁹ The transition from a sinful life to a redeemed one came by Christ’s victory on the cross. Aiding such thinking was the work of Phoebe Palmer, a popular speaker and holiness evangelist. Drawing on John Fletcher, Bangs and Merritt, Palmer preached a message of ‘total consecration’ born out of an ‘altar theology’, an idea that reinterpreted the Old Testament sacrificial system for modern audiences. Just as the sacrificial lamb when placed on the temple altar became sinless and holy, so Christians when they offer their lives in total surrender to God would become holy.¹³⁰ A person became holy, for Palmer, only through a determination to become entirely sanctified. By promoting a view of the Christian life in which believers retained a degree of ‘bondage to sin’ until they realised the ‘privileges of the Christian faith had been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ’, Palmer appears to foster aspects of the Christus Victor theory, a view which portrayed the Christian life as one of conflict and struggle with sinful temptations.¹³¹ Sin is presented as a barrier preventing a person from obtaining a deeper, ‘entire devotion’ to God. For Palmer, Christ ‘purchased’ salvation for all mankind. Only

¹²⁷ ZH, 3 May 1837, 1.

¹²⁸ ‘Pastoral Address’, in *Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 3:173.

¹²⁹ MQR 6 (April 1852): 184.

¹³⁰ Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness* (New York: Piercy and Reed, 1843), 59–69.

¹³¹ Phoebe Palmer, *Present to My Christian Friend: On Entire Devotion to God*, New Edition, Revised (London: Alexander Heylin, 1857), 83; Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, 9, 63, 152.

by trusting in his ‘victory over sin’ could a person end her conflict with sin and obtain a sanctified life.¹³²

Other antebellum Methodists used the same freedom to embrace a penal understanding of Christ’s death. Jesus Christ became, preached Nathan Bangs in 1856, ‘the propitiation for our sins’.¹³³ That Methodists endorsed a variety of metaphors did not stop some from arguing against certain theories with which they disagreed. One minister writing in 1846, for example, found the ‘penal atonement’ ‘noxious’. A theory in which ‘the Father is spoken of as implacable till the Son quenches his wrath in his own blood’ is a ‘false theory’.¹³⁴ Despite such criticisms, many followed Bangs in his appreciation of the penal theory. The atonement, preached one minister from the Genesee, Michigan, conference in 1856, ‘proposes satisfaction to the claims of *justice* by a propitiatory offering for sin’.¹³⁵ Preaching a specific atonement theory was not an issue for antebellum Methodists. Governmental, Christus Victor and penal themes are presented as accurate biblical representations of Christ’s saving activity on the cross.

It is worth noting here that discussions of the atonement along penal lines by nineteenth-century Methodists were frequently joined by discussions of substitution. A sinner was someone who was under penalty of God’s law, and by default owed a debt she could not pay. Bible verses which pointed to this connection between a penal offence and an equivalent substitutionary gift, such as John 1:29 ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world’ or the fifty-third book of Isaiah in which the messiah is portrayed as someone who was ‘wounded for our transgressions’, were regularly appealed to by Methodists upholding the penal theory. Thus, such connections led one Methodist advocate of the penal theory to opine in 1847 that ‘if Christ was not treated as a sinner for our sake...how are men to be saved?’¹³⁶ Methodists who explained the atonement in penal terms often linked to it the notion of substitution.

¹³² Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, 34th ed. (New York: Piercy and Reed, 1854), 192.

¹³³ Nathan Bangs, ‘Character and Work of a Minister of Jesus Christ’, in Davis W. Clark, *The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1856), 351.

¹³⁴ *MQR* 28 (1846): 409-410.

¹³⁵ Clark, *The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit*, 236.

¹³⁶ *MQR* 29 (July 1847): 432.

Conclusion

For all of the early republic period the universal atonement remained a distinguishing mark of American Methodism. That Christ died for all rather than an elect few was a fundamental belief shared by American Methodists. Christ's death was understood as a vicarious sacrifice, though this belief was communicated through a variety of atonement imagery, from penal to ransom to satisfaction. At the end of the eighteenth century, a new style of Calvinism emerged, and with it a new framework for understanding God's rule over the universe and, in particular, the nature and extent of Christ's death. As the Edwardsean governmental theory of atonement gained appeal among New England Congregationalists, Methodists recognized its ability to defend biblical truths and refute Unitarian and Universalist claims to the contrary. Beginning with Asa Shinn's *Essay on the Plan of Salvation* in 1813, Methodists appropriated the governmental theory from New Divinity Calvinists with such vigour that by the opening of the Civil War it was considered a legitimate model for interpreting not only the atonement, but also God's entire work throughout the universe. Although the moral government theory had taken root among Methodists, terminology found in traditional conceptions of the atonement, such as the Christus Victor and penal theories, remained popular throughout the antebellum period.

In all of their endeavours, Methodists linked their Christianity with Enlightenment principles, particularly Thomas Reid's Common Sense philosophy, but also the governmental theory which itself was a symptom of Enlightenment assumptions about public justice. Sinners were those who had offended God's justice and were therefore deserving of punishment for their crimes against the divine government. Fundamental biblical truths, such as the existence of God, the atonement and scripture, were buoyed by reason and logic. From the closing of the American Revolution to the opening of the Civil War, Methodists held views that were highly compatible with the Enlightenment temper.

CHAPTER FIVE
MASTERS OF MORALITY:
THE EMERGENCE OF METHODIST TRANSCENDENTALISTS IN LATE VICTORIAN
AMERICA

‘The atonement’, wrote Lewis Meredith, a leading Methodist minister in the Illinois Rock River Conference in 1886, was ‘the key to the whole scheme of revealed truth.’ ‘If our conception of the Atonement is untrue’, he surmised, ‘it will distort and invalidate our whole religious system.’¹ Between 1875 and 1914 discussions on the atonement reached levels of intensity among American Methodists not seen since the fiery debates with Calvinists at the turn of the nineteenth century. Hundreds of books, pamphlets and articles appeared. Some believed new modes of thought could be used to defend traditional theories while others rejected the new philosophies then affecting religion. By the 1890s a new breed of Methodist had surfaced. Embracing fresh religious impulses, these modern-minded Methodists transformed the theological foundations on which their faith had been built by exchanging Enlightenment rationalism for Romantic idealism. Traditional Christianity, argued progressives, must be disentangled from unscriptural and unreasonable excretions. Traditional Methodists responded with their own indictments, accusing modernists of discarding theologies fundamental to orthodox Christianity. That traditional Methodists were poised by the 1880s to expel any Methodist in favour of theological revision led Henry Ward Beecher, the highly influential minister of the New Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York, to remark in 1881 that the Methodist Church ‘was not fit to write over its portals “Christian Church”’ because of its deplorable tendency to root out so-called unorthodox ministers’.² In the pages that follow several questions relating to this critical transition will be explored. What brought about this clash over the atonement within the Methodist church? To what extent were Methodist scholars

¹ Lewis Meredith, *The Various Views of the Atonement and an Effort to Ascertain the Correct One* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1886), 7.

² ‘Mr. Beecher and the Methodists’ *New York Times* 10 October 1881.

influenced in their modifications of the atonement by contemporary cultural trends? Did the revisionary work of modern Methodists sever the connections with the evangelical tradition of an earlier generation, or, as some have suggested, revitalize their evangelical religious tradition?

The High Tide of the Evangelical Enlightenment Synthesis

John Miley

Methodist opinions on the atonement in the period leading up to 1914 moved in three directions. Methodists travelling along the first path extended the atonement legacy of an earlier, innovative generation of enlightened Methodists who had absorbed the New Divinity governmental theory.³ John Miley, a minister and self-taught theologian who later became professor of theology at Drew University from 1873, for instance, epitomized the rational philosophical outlook of this group. Like the writings of the New England theologians to whom his work is indebted, Miley's writings are impersonal, mechanical, highly logical and dry. Despite these detractions, Miley's most significant works, *The Atonement in Christ* (1879), and two-volume *Systematic Theology* (1892-94) appeared on the Conference Course of Study for nearly thirty years.⁴

Miley's formative years were spent on a farm in southwestern Ohio, as a student at Augusta College, Kentucky, from which he graduated in 1838, and as a young minister in the Ohio Conference, to which he was admitted in the summer after his graduation. While at Augusta Miley was trained by such notable Methodist educators as Joseph Tomlinson, professor of mathematics and natural philosophy, and later president of the college; Joseph Trimble, professor of mathematics; and Henry Bascom, professor of moral science and later president of Transylvania University located in nearby Lexington, Kentucky.⁵ These three individuals schooled Miley in the ways of natural theology that was nearing its height of popularity in the

³ See chapter 5.

⁴ *The Atonement in Christ* remained on the list from 1880 to 1896 and *Systematic Theology* from 1892 to 1908. See *Conference Course of Study* for each year.

⁵ William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 7 (New York: R. Carter and brothers, 1859), 706–707.

1830s.⁶ It seems that this particular scientific approach to theology was attractive to Miley, for his published works and lectures, as will be seen in more detail shortly, betray a tendency to order, group and classify facts, a common symptom of one devoted to the evidentiary method of the Enlightenment. After serving various appointments in the Ohio Conference between 1838 and 1852, Miley was transferred to the New York East Conference before a final transfer sent him to the New York Conference in 1866. A growing fashion among American Methodists during the mid-nineteenth century was to award prominent ministers honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees, and so in 1859 the newly established Ohio Wesleyan University conferred such a degree on the popular preacher.⁷

In 1872 Miley accepted a chair in systematic theology at Drew Theological Seminary after his brother-in-law and president of the seminary, Randolph S. Foster, vacated the position when he was elected to the episcopacy by the General Conference.⁸ If some had doubts about Miley's appointment at one of Methodism's reigning seminaries, they soon evaporated when they learned that Miley possessed a keen analytic mind which he used to convince others of truth by force of logic.⁹ In his *Treatise on Class Meetings* (1854), for instance, Miley argued for the necessity of the sabbath as an obligation dictated by 'natural law'.¹⁰ While at Drew Miley heralded theology as scientific because it explored the data of religious experience and was subject to rational investigation.¹¹ Any scholar who valued his vocation, contended Miley, arrived at his conclusions through 'scientific discrimination'.¹² For Miley, scientific discrimination was defined by the Baconian method of investigation, in which empirical reason, induction and logic became

⁶ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 180–186.

⁷ D.W. Clark, *The Ladies' Repository*, vol. 19 (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and J.H. Power, 1859), 566; Charles F. Smith, 'Honorary Degrees', *MQR* 7 (October 1889): 136–149; This trend was not unique to American Protestantism. See Timothy Larsen, 'Honorary Doctorates and the Nonconformist Ministry in Nineteenth-Century England', in *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations*, ed. David William Bebbington and Timothy Larsen (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 139–156.

⁸ *Minutes of the New York East Conference for 1896* (New York: Hunt & Eaton Press, 1896), 119.

⁹ *Minutes of the New York East Conference for 1896*, 119–120.

¹⁰ John Miley, *Treatise on Class Meetings* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Poe, 1854), 91.

¹¹ John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 32–39.

¹² John Miley, *The Atonement in Christ* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879), 214.

the essential tools used to interpret and defend truth. Miley's appreciation for clear, rational thinking earned him a space on a six-member commission organized by the General Conference of 1872 to develop a code of ecclesiastical law for the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹³ It is telling that in a commemorative biographical address printed in the *Minutes of the New York East Conference for 1896*, Miley's contemporaries recognized his ability to extend Enlightenment concepts to their extreme limits as a defining characteristic of his work. 'He was eager by the use of reason', W. F. Anderson, secretary of the Methodist Board of Education and later bishop, proclaimed in his address before Conference, 'to push out the boundaries of knowledge to the farthest possible extent.'¹⁴ Miley's long career was marked by his commitment to Enlightenment empiricism.

Miley's reliance on the evidential approach to Christian knowledge is seen throughout the entirety of his work on the atonement. In his *The Atonement in Christ* Miley's chief goal was to investigate the atonement 'in its scientific relation to other cardinal doctrines'.¹⁵ It is with little wonder then that he found the moral government theory attractive. Drawing on the New England theology distilled through early nineteenth-century Methodists such as Asa Shinn and Wilbur Fisk,¹⁶ Miley anchored his atonement in the 'fact and requirements of moral government'.¹⁷ Like other advocates of the governmental theory, Miley placed particular emphasis upon God's moral law. 'The less men know of a divine law', he exclaimed in 1879, 'the lower they sink into moral corruption.'¹⁸ The divine law, Miley held, requires 'the obedience of all' and 'guard[s] the rights and interests of all'.¹⁹ A second feature central to the governmental theory was that of justice. Miley contended that Christ died to preserve the integrity of God's moral government while also freeing the lawgiver to pardon the offender. 'The sufferings of

¹³ James T. Mitchell, ed., *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, vol. 12 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Law School, 1873), 213.

¹⁴ *Minutes of the New York East Conference for 1896* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1896), 120.

¹⁵ Miley, *The Atonement in Christ*, 214.

¹⁶ See chapter 5.

¹⁷ Miley, *The Atonement in Christ*, 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

Christ are a provisory substitute for penalty’, explained Miley, ‘and not the actual punishment of sin.’²⁰ Within this framework, he admitted, ‘Christ takes the place of penalty while the penalty is remitted’.²¹ In this conception Miley followed other advocates of the governmental theory by endorsing a view of Christ’s death as a means of public justice. Yet for Miley punitive and retributive justice still retained a place in God’s moral government, though he does not explain how.²² It appears that Miley’s attempt to preserve the other forms of justice, found most commonly in the idea of penal substitution, was due to the fact that he considered the concept of public justice lacking in its ability to stimulate moral and spiritual reform. Though public justice promoted ‘virtue’ among Christians, Miley admitted, it ‘has no reformatory purpose, no exemplary character, no office as a deterrent from sin’.²³ By this analysis, Miley distanced himself from the New England theologians’ view of public justice while still retaining its fundamental place as a means through which forgiveness was granted. Enshrined in an Enlightenment understanding of jurisprudence, Miley understood law as a moral science which was divinely instituted and preserved through the principle of public justice.

Perhaps in an attempt to make the governmental theory more acceptable to Methodists, Miley chose to distance the theory from its major proponents, the Calvinist-minded New England theologians. Though he does quote with approval from *The Atonement: Discourses and Treatises* (1859), an anthology of Edwardsean views on the atonement by Edwards Amasa Park, professor at Andover Seminary from 1836 and one of the last intellectuals committed to a systematization of the New England theology in the nineteenth century, Miley preferred instead to see the governmental theory as originating with Grotius who had been, Miley contended, a true Arminian.²⁴ With such a move, Miley attempted to make the governmental theory more of an Arminian doctrine rather than one conceived in the minds of the New England theologians.

²⁰ Ibid., 74.

²¹ Ibid., 218.

²² Ibid., 224.

²³ Ibid., 222.

²⁴ Ibid., 198–199.

Yet Miley's indebtedness to the New England theology is easily traced given his reliance on three early advocates of the governmental theory, Daniel Whedon, Wilbur Fisk and Albert T. Bledsoe, lawyer and professor at Miami University in Ohio, whom Miley approvingly quotes throughout his work.²⁵ For Miley, as it had been for the first generation of American Methodist innovators, the atonement was exalted as a doctrine verifiable by 'facts' delivered in highly rational terms. God was conceived as a law-giving magistrate whose duty it was to sustain the moral law. Justice, therefore, became a prominent attribute of God. Like the New England theologians, Miley used a rationalism born out of the Enlightenment to define and defend the governmental theory of atonement.

Miley's Traditionalist Detractors

A second direction in which Methodist opinions travelled in the period leading up to 1914 was towards the recovery of older theories of the atonement embraced by eighteenth-century Methodists. For these Methodists, also indebted to the Enlightenment heritage, the satisfaction and penal theories accurately reflected scriptural teaching on the subject. Typical of this set of thinkers was the view of Henry Anson Buttz, president of Drew Theological Seminary from 1880 to 1912. 'The shedding of [Christ's] blood', exclaimed Buttz during his tenure as president, 'was in fact a sacrifice which had the effect of making a propitiation or atonement for sin.'²⁶ Other leading Methodists, such as Vanderbilt professor John J. Tigert, eschewed the governmental theory of atonement as a foreign doctrine not representative of evangelical Methodists. Miley's atonement, Tigert bluntly insisted, was a 'degraded theory' because it holds 'that if the governmental difficulties were out of the way the personal displeasure [of God] could be removed without atonement'.²⁷ Furthermore, Tigert emphatically exclaimed, 'we challenge

²⁵ Ibid., 212–215.

²⁶ Henry Anson Buttz, *Henry Anson Buttz, His Book: Lectures, Essays, Sermons, Exegetical Notes*, ed. Charles F. Sitterly, vol. 2 (New York and Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1922), 440.

²⁷ John J. Tigert, 'Methodist Doctrine of the Atonement', *MQR* (April 1884): 292. This article was later incorporated into Tigert's revision and expansion of Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity*, (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, J. D. Barbee, agent, 1888).

that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is infinitely more than the embodiment of the forces of moral government!²⁸ While Tigert had several theological difficulties with the governmental scheme, he was most bothered by Miley's innovating efforts. 'There was in Miley, he contended in a somewhat erroneous fashion,²⁹ a marked departure from the views of Miner Raymond, professor of theology at Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, IL, between 1864 and 1895, Daniel Whedon, Richard Watson and W. B. Pope.³⁰ 'The fatal defect of [Miley's] theory', he concluded, 'is that it is not an interpretation of Scripture.'³¹ Instead Tigert upholds the satisfaction theory, that 'true doctrine so lucidly and succinctly' presented by Pope and continued in the writings of southern Methodism's Bishop Thomas Summers.³² When comparing the traditional theory advocated by the Methodist forefathers with Miley's, writes Tigert, 'the superficial theology of Dr. Miley's theory is driven away like chaff before the strong wind'.³³

Miley's work sparked a series of harsh criticisms by many leading Methodists in the 1880s. Reflecting on the presence of the governmental theory in the influential work of John Miley, Wilbur F. Tillett, professor of theology at Vanderbilt University, remarked in *Methodist Quarterly Review, South*, for 1887, that 'although Prof Miley is a Methodist, it cannot be said that this is the accepted theory of evangelical or Wesleyan Arminianism on the doctrine of the atonement'.³⁴ Tillett preferred instead the older notion of satisfaction.³⁵ Miley's atonement theory also came under fire from Tigert's mentor, Thomas Summers, editor of the *Quarterly Review* between 1858 and 1881, and from 1874 professor of systematic theology at Vanderbilt University. In his lectures on the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church delivered while a professor at Vanderbilt University, Summers affirmed that Methodists

²⁸ Ibid., 285.

²⁹ Both Watson and Whedon held to governmental theories of the atonement. See chapter 2 for Watson and chapter 5 for Whedon.

³⁰ Tigert, 'Methodist Doctrine of the Atonement', 287.

³¹ Ibid., 290.

³² Ibid., 295.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Wilbur F. Tillett, 'Hugo Grotius', *MQR* 2 (March 1887): 96.

³⁵ Tillet, *MQR*, 2 (March 1887): 96.

‘hold to all that is scriptural in the governmental’ view of the atonement; but unless [Miley’s theory] be blended with the propitiatory view of the Saviour’s sacrifice, there is no anchor-ground for our hope, which can fasten its flukes nowhere but in “the wounds of Jesus.”³⁶ Summers was not wholly convinced of the governmental view, and insisted that those who reject the ‘orthodox standards’ of the atonement reject Methodism. With strong words Summers advised such deviants that they should ‘either renounce their heresies, secede from the Church, go over to Rome, or form themselves into a new communion’.³⁷ The satisfaction theory remained a prized doctrine among late nineteenth-century southern Methodists.

Northern Methodists were also unsettled by Miley’s conception of the atonement. ‘To me’, candidly wrote L. C. Webster, a presiding elder in Kenton, Ohio, after reading Miley’s *Atonement* in 1894, the theory seems not only inadequate, but seriously faulty’ because it replaced the satisfaction theory with a rectoral theory.³⁸ Simon McChesney, minister in the New York East Conference, observed that ‘Dr. Miley’s book cannot be reconciled with the doctrinal basis of original Methodism’ and concluded his review of Miley’s work with a cautionary statement. Methodists, he wrote, could not ‘permanently and without unrest continue to teach one thing in creed and ritual and another contrary doctrine in a text-book of its course of ministerial study’.³⁹ An extended review of the *Atonement* in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* for 1882 also heavily criticized Miley’s work. The most innovative aspect of Miley’s view, wrote J.C. Allen, a Methodist minister in Plymouth, Massachusetts, is his contention ‘that there is no penal substitution in the sufferings of Christ’.⁴⁰ Miley rejected the traditionally conceived view of Christ’s sufferings, arguing that they ‘could not be a substitution in penalty’ because ‘Christ was at no time the object of his Father’s personal displeasure, but suffered only the signs of divine

³⁶ Thomas O Summers, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity*, ed. Jno. J Tigert (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, J. D. Barbee, agent, 1888), 255.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ L. C. Webster, ‘Atonement: A Substitute for Penalty’, *[M]ethodist [R]eview* 76 (November 1894): 958.

³⁹ Simon McChesney, ‘Methodist Doctrine of Atonement’, *MR* 76 (March 1894): 272.

⁴⁰ J.C. Allen, ‘Miley’s Atonement in Christ’, *MQR*, October 1882, 620.

anger'.⁴¹ Instead Allen offered what he considered to be the evangelical view of the atonement. 'The sufferings of Christ', he maintained, 'are an atonement for sin by substitution in the sense that they were intentionally endured for sinners under judicial condemnation, and for the sake of their forgiveness.'⁴² Because the penal element is conspicuously absent from Miley's account, Allen complained, there is a softening of Christ's sufferings and the vision of God as a strict ruler. In the same editorial for the *Methodist Quarterly Review* Allen stated that after combing through the Bible 'we find some difficulty in becoming completely free from the idea that there was some penal suffering in the atonement'.⁴³ Viewed as the rightful heir to the evangelical theory of atonement, the satisfaction theory, in which God's honour is upheld through a vicarious sacrifice, was defended against foreign intrusions.⁴⁴

The third set of commentators on the atonement, to which the rest of the chapter is devoted, were willing to recast the doctrine in alternative terms, often along moral or ethical lines. Those advocating a new direction in Methodism focused on the relational aspects of God's character. God is conceived as a father who cares for Christians, his children, and wants them to experience his love through a direct and personal encounter with his son. The focus is not mechanical or even doctrinal, but deeply relational. Christ comes to earth as a humble servant but turns out to be an exceptional individual. His strength is found in his loving relationship with his Father in heaven; he performs miracles which free the oppressed; he confounds earthly wisdom with mystical statements; and breaks down culturally constructed boundaries. He is emotional, unique, and a rebel; and after overcoming alienation, pain, and suffering dies the ultimate death so that others might live. The story is deeply emotional, from tragedy to heroic rebirth. The end result of such a view was one which cast Christ as a saviour who became, as

⁴¹ Miley, *The Atonement in Christ*, 194.

⁴² Allen, 'Miley's Atonement in Christ', 620.

⁴³ Allen, 'Miley's Atonement in Christ', 620.

⁴⁴ Although the atonement views held by Methodists moving in this second direction would eventually become unfashionable in subsequent decades (see chapter 7), conservatives cherished them and touted them strongly during Methodism's brief anti-modernism campaign in the 1920s and 30s. See W. A. Tooley, 'Evangelical Methodists and the Transforming Power of Fundamentalism, 1920-1939', (unpublished conference paper, 2011).

one minister preached in 1897, ‘the representative of sinless humanity’ and a ‘human example of what we are to be’.⁴⁵ Similar sentiments were echoed by Methodists at the highest levels of influence. ‘[Christ’s] death to the world and sin’, preached James N. Fitzgerald, presiding bishop of the 1905 Erie Annual Conference in Western Pennsylvania, ‘was an example for our imitation.’⁴⁶ A new moral impulse was on the rise, urging Methodists to conceive Christ’s death as an exhibition of divine love.

The Eclipse of the Enlightenment Synthesis

To understand better the changes occurring in Methodism in the decades surrounding 1900, one must return to an earlier period which had a formative effect on the late nineteenth-century Methodists. Beginning in the 1830s a fresh, alternative religious mood had surfaced among a small loosely affiliated group of progressive clergy in New England. For the last half century, the Edwardsean tradition had dominated intellectual circles in New England. Built on the Lockean doctrine of sensory experience and common sense reasoning, the New England theology had come to represent for this new breed of aspiring clergymen an arid, lifeless religion governed by external evidences or material ‘facts’. Although Transcendentalists, as they came to be identified, were mainly reacting against the rationalism of the Unitarians, they also questioned the adequacy of the New England Calvinist tradition, wanting to subdue the Lockean heritage and unite the metaphysical world with the natural world.⁴⁷ Drawing on Kantian principles, largely disseminated through seminal British Romantics such as Samuel T. Coleridge, the transcendental vision hoped to revolutionize the human consciousness by exchanging a purely empirical method of investigation for one built on intuition, feeling and imagination.⁴⁸ By arguing for a priori reasoning, the notion that the mind has prior knowledge which it uses to interpret its

⁴⁵ *WCA*, 14 April 1897, 8.

⁴⁶ *Minutes of the Erie Annual Conference for 1905* (Warren, PA: The Mirror Print, 1905), 42.

⁴⁷ William R. Hutchison, *Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 19–20.

⁴⁸ Samantha Harvey, *Transatlantic Transcendentalism: Coleridge, Emerson and Nature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 24–39.

experience of the natural world, Kant removed the foundations of Enlightenment thought built on Locke's *tabula rasa* theory.⁴⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian minister, poet and theologian, divided the two opposing groups into 'Materialists' and 'Idealists'. 'The materialist', explained Emerson in his 1842 lecture 'The Transcendentalist' delivered in Boston, the Vatican City of Transcendental thought, 'insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances, and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture.'⁵⁰ Transcendentalists favoured an inward turn to the soul for the discovery of knowledge. Emerson thought Kant's views provided the necessary antidote not only to the ancestral Calvinist orthodoxy then dominating Protestant circles, but also to the older Unitarian philosophies of Christianity steeped in Lockean reason.⁵¹ In 1836 a group of (mostly) Unitarian ministers created the Transcendental Club, of which Emerson was a founding member. Next to Emerson, one other member stood out as a leading evangelist of the Transcendental vision. Theodore Parker, minister at Spring Street Church in West Roxbury near Boston, argued in an 1841 address that all of the historic Christian doctrines were culturally relative and thus open to reinterpretation by a new generation. 'In respect of doctrines as well as forms', explained Parker, 'we see all is transitory.' He continued:

Opinions have changed most on points deemed most vital. Could we bring up a Christian teacher of any age,—from the sixth to the fourteenth century for example,—though a teacher of undoubted soundness of faith, whose word filled the churches of Christendom, clergymen would scarce allow him to kneel at their altar, or sit down with them at the Lord's table. His notions of Christianity could not be expressed in our forms; nor could our notions be made intelligible to his ears.⁵²

Parker's point was clear: past truths were muddled, and do not necessarily correspond to present truths. The only way forward was to offer a dynamic reappraisal of Christianity, distilled, Parker

⁴⁹ Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 62–69.

⁵⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, Centennial ed., Second Series (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), 329–330.

⁵¹ Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 142–143; Paul F Boller, *American Transcendentalism, 1830-1860: An Intellectual Inquiry* (New York: Putnam, 1974), 44–54; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 439–447.

⁵² Theodore Parker, *A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Printed for the author, 1841), 22.

contended, through the intuitive soul not the evidentialism of Locke. ‘The belief always precedes the proof’, boldly declared Parker in 1842, ‘intuition gives the thing to be reasoned about. Unless this intuitive function be performed, it is not possible to attain a knowledge of God.’⁵³ Parker’s views of intuition and cultural relativism were fundamental beliefs shared by other Transcendentalists. In 1838 Emerson declared that ‘the intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance.’⁵⁴ For Transcendentalists, intuition was an irrefutable tool for gaining religious knowledge, lying outside the realm of interrogation. The Transcendentalist message was a striking, revolutionary departure from the Enlightenment enterprise that had dominated intellectual circles for the last three-quarters of a century.

The Transcendentalists also envisioned a universe in which the distinction between the natural world and the divine disappeared, preferring to view God as immanently present in the world rather than as a transcendent deity removed from the physical universe. William Ellery Channing, Congregational and later Unitarian minister at Federal Street Church, Boston, maintained that God ‘delights to diffuse himself everywhere’.⁵⁵ Emerson, too, emphasized a personal God whose ‘immanent presence in the spiritual world’ delivered intuitive knowledge through ‘direct revelation’.⁵⁶ In fact the stress on divine immanence became a distinguishing feature of Transcendentalists, with many other member of the Transcendental Club emphasizing the doctrine, including Unitarian ministers from Massachusetts, George Putnam and George Ripley, and William Henry Furness, minister of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia.⁵⁷ By the latter half of the century the Romantic-inspired immanentist theology was receiving encouragement from the Darwinian evolutionary outlook. By focusing on the material world as a force of creativity, Darwinism reinforced the beliefs of those Romantic-inspired Christians who

⁵³ Theodore Parker, *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (Boston: C. C. Little and J. Brown, 1842), 23.

⁵⁴ Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1:122.

⁵⁵ William Ellery Channing, *The Works of William E. Channing*, vol. 3 (Boston: J. Munroe and Company, 1841), 239.

⁵⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Transcendentalism and Other Addresses* (New York: John B. Alden, 1886), 7.

⁵⁷ Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 159; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 438–439.

claimed God worked within the natural world.

Transcendentalists were also interested in perceiving God as a benevolent father. William E. Channing, for instance, aggressively promoted a virtuous Christian religion over one focused on dogma and creeds. Channing believed the ideas of spiritual kinship and filial love more accurately portrayed the scriptural message of Christianity than other conceptions, and endeavoured to make them the hallmarks of the Christian faith. The 'great principle' of Christianity, wrote Channing in *The Essence of the Christian Religion* (1831), 'is the doctrine that God purposes, in his unbounded fatherly love, to perfect the human soul; to purify it from all sin; to create it after his own image; to fill it with his own spirit; to unfold it ever; to raise it to life and in heaven,—that is, to communicate it from himself a life of celestial power, virtue, and joy.'⁵⁸ Christianity's aim, for Channing, became a practical affair in which God the Father imparted a personal ethic by which Christians could order their lives. Thus under this scheme the atonement was valued for its ability to promote virtuous behaviour and aid Christians in the removal of 'voluntary wrong-doing' from their lives.⁵⁹ 'In this single view of God' as father, contended Channing, 'how much is there to bind us to him with strong, indissoluble, evergrowing love, and to make worship not only our chief duty, but our highest privilege and joy!'⁶⁰ For Channing, the Fatherhood of God fostered love of God and love of neighbour, whereas older views, in which God was presented as an inflexible judge, he contended, did not. Once Christians adapted their Christianity to this doctrine, held Channing, other virtues, such as self-sacrifice and forgiveness, would be developed more naturally. The Fatherhood of God had become a hallmark doctrine among those Christians swayed by the Transcendentalist vision.

By 1850 the transcendental vision had generated significant controversy within Congregationalism, a denomination in which the Edwardsean tradition had been particularly

⁵⁸ William Ellery Channing, *The Essence of the Christian Religion* in *The Works of William E. Channing*, ed. William Henry Channing (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1901), 1001.

⁵⁹ Channing, 'Unitarian Christianity', in *The Works of William E. Channing*, 3:92.

⁶⁰ Channing, 'Christian Worship', in *ibid.*, 415.

strong. Aggressively nurturing Transcendental tendencies within the denomination was Horace Bushnell. Educated in the New Haven theology at Yale under Nathaniel Taylor, Bushnell accepted the pastorate of the North Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1833, and had become, by the mid-1840s, disenchanted with New Divinity Calvinism. The New England Theology, complained Bushnell at mid-century, is ‘essentially rationalistic’ and held captive by a ‘logical understanding’ of the world.⁶¹ In contrast to prevailing notions of Enlightenment thought, Bushnell favored a philosophical outlook which perceived the world ‘through the imaginative and morally aesthetic powers’ and nurtured ‘truths of form and feeling’.⁶² Drawing on Transcendental impulses at home and Romantic ones from abroad, Bushnell envisioned a Christianity free of the mechanical, evidentiary Baconian method. Christianity, wrote Bushnell in 1849, was not a system of speculative theology but ‘spirit and life—Christ dwelling in us’.⁶³ Traditional Christian doctrines refined in the Enlightenment fire were unsatisfactory for Bushnell, and must be purged from the gospel message. In 1866 Bushnell did exactly that by stripping down the evangelical substitutionary view of the atonement in his *Vicarious Sacrifice*. ‘Indeed,’ complained Bushnell, ‘the idea of a penal suffering in Christ, and a satisfaction made thereby to retributive justice, is expressly rejected as a thing too revolting to be thought of.’⁶⁴ Championing a moral influence view of the atonement instead, Bushnell argued that Christ was God’s ‘incarnate love’. Christ’s life and death on the cross constituted the ultimate act of loving sacrifice, he explained, and without this act human beings would not know the true gospel.⁶⁵ Though Bushnell insisted that God’s love removed the guilt of sin and united all humanity,⁶⁶ he was, as was Emerson, principally concerned with the moral development of

⁶¹ Horace Bushnell, *God in Christ* (Hartford, Conn.: Brown and Parsons, 1849), 92, 106.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁶⁴ Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice* (C. Scribner & Co., 1866), 19.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 37–55.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 37–55; Bushnell, ‘Christian Comprehensiveness’ (1848), *Building Eras in Religion* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1881), 386–459.

human beings.⁶⁷ Thus, an atonement which nurtured the moral character took precedence over one which focused on the retributive justice of a sovereign God. ‘The effect [of the atonement] is wholly subjective’, wrote Bushnell, ‘being a change wrought in all the principles of life and characters and dispositions of the soul.’⁶⁸ Rejecting the Baconian evidential tradition, Bushnell chose instead to embrace the Transcendental vision, thereby carrying it forward to a later generation, including members of evangelical denominations.

The Romantic Impulse

Though the Transcendental movement had ended by the 1870s, its vision continued to stimulate the efforts of those leading American intellectuals hoping to transform the social conscience of America, including feminists such as Margaret Fuller and the social gospel pioneer Washington Gladden.⁶⁹ During the latter half of the nineteenth century the fresh challenges posed to traditional philosophical conceptions of knowledge by Transcendentalists blossomed into a catalogue of ideas which amounted to an American version of the British Romantic synthesis.⁷⁰ This version, much in the manner of the British version, highlighted the intuitive faculties of the mind and the ability of a person’s subjective feelings to interpret ordinary reality. Secondly, those indebted to the Transcendental legacy displayed a commitment to cultural relativism, the idea that one’s surroundings created or shaped a person’s moral values. They also incorporated modern science, especially evolutionary science and higher critical methods of thought, as valuable tools for the discovery of Christian knowledge. Finally, a focus on ethics and the importance in developing the moral person were assumed by all. The permeation of these intellectual influences among modernist evangelicals led in turn to the popularisation of Christian

⁶⁷ David M. Robinson, ‘Transcendentalism and Its Times’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15–17; David Wayne Haddorff, *Dependence and Freedom: The Moral Thought of Horace Bushnell* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 57–77.

⁶⁸ Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, 518.

⁶⁹ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805 - 1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xvii, 304–311; Tiffany K. Wayne, *Woman Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in Nineteenth-century America* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

⁷⁰ See chapter 3.

theological concepts such as the Fatherhood of God and a reordering of those doctrines deemed essential to Christianity such as the atonement and the immanence of God. In the period stretching from 1880 to 1914 these features became distinguishing marks of the Romantic flowering among evangelical Protestants. Born in the creative tension of the 1830s, the New England Transcendental movement had by the 1870s evolved into a Romantic synthesis which modern-minded Protestants adapted to reinvigorate and restate prevailing theological opinions.

Progressive Methodists and the Emergence of a ‘Romanticized’ Atonement

Methodists were not impervious to the Transcendental legacy. Much as it swayed Congregationalists at Andover Seminary in Massachusetts in the latter half of the century, the Transcendental legacy helped inspire a new generation of Methodists to question received orthodox opinion and the Enlightenment rationalism of old-guard conservatives while igniting a passion for modern science and social reconstruction.⁷¹ Beginning in the 1870s, Methodists had begun openly embracing features of the Romantic synthesis as a means of correcting the logic of penal views of the atonement. Bushnell’s ideas were seized upon as a proper corrective to prevailing opinions on the doctrine. One of the first to recognize the reformatory power of Bushnellian views on the atonement within the denomination was Hiram W. Thomas, minister of the prominent First Methodist Episcopal Church of Chicago. In a sermon preached in 1880, Thomas credited the Congregational theologian with pointing him to the true understanding of the atonement. ‘For years’, confessed Thomas before his Chicago congregation, ‘I have had the most painful and perplexing doubts on the subject of the Atonement, especially on its Godward bearings.’⁷² The darkness of confusion lifted, explained Thomas, ‘while reading Bushnell’s *Vicarious Sacrifice*’. It was at this point, Thomas excitedly proclaimed, that ‘I got the full view that

⁷¹ There are a number of parallels between the efforts of the Andover theologians and several leading Methodist theologians in the decades surrounding 1900. See, for example, Daniel Day Williams, *The Andover Liberals: A Study in American Theology* (London: Octagon Books, 1970); Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 2001, 290–293.

⁷² Quoted in Austin Bierbower, ed., *Life and Sermons of Dr. H.W. Thomas* (Chicago: Smith & Forbes, 1880), 231.

God loved me'.⁷³ That God's presence was immanent, and his love could be experienced in a personal way, was an important dimension of Thomas' thought. In the early 1870s while a travelling preacher in Iowa, Thomas was beset by several periods of deep personal grief after experiencing the death of several of his children.⁷⁴ Questions about the nature of Christ's life and death flooded his mind. Each tragedy provoked a series of sermons in which he openly questioned prevailing notions surrounding the atonement, leading some members of his congregation to wonder whether he was moving towards New England Unitarianism.⁷⁵ Thomas yearned for a sunnier view of God and the atonement, one which emphasized God's love for humanity rather than any desire to restore justice. His discovery of Bushnell's vision of the atonement cast in moral terms helped Thomas make sense of his own personal loss and develop what he perceived as a more accurate (and no doubt more digestible) explanation for Christ's life and death. 'The moral view...advocated by the late truly scholarly and devout Dr. Bushnell', is the view 'in which I personally rest'.⁷⁶ Mediated by Thomas' reading of Bushnell, the Romantic synthesis had begun infiltrating the Methodist denomination.

In 1872, after three years of service at Park Avenue M.E. Church in Chicago in which the church nearly doubled in size, Thomas was transferred to the prestigious First Methodist Episcopal Church in the same city. Encouraged by such a move, Thomas fed his congregants a steady diet of the moral influence theory throughout the 1870s. The moral view, he preached, 'represents God as a loving father and Savior, finding a way in the suffering of love to save his children, and not as a severe judge demanding and enforcing the execution of penalty upon someone'.⁷⁷ Friends warned Thomas his sermons were causing a commotion, and urged him to limit his speculations to private audiences. Thomas, however, believed his alternative ideas were an encouragement to those who had similar difficulties with received evangelical understandings

⁷³ Hiram Thomas in D.A. Robertson, ed., 'Hiram Washington Thomas', *The University of Chicago Magazine* 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1919), 275.

⁷⁴ Bierbower, *Life and Sermons of Dr. H.W. Thomas*, 16–17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

of God as a stern sovereign. God was a loving deity who sympathized with human beings and was ready to forgive rather than condemn. Feelings, rather than reason, guided Thomas' thinking.

Matters came to a boiling point in 1881 when conservatives created an investigation committee to remove him from the denomination at the annual Illinois Conference of 1882. At an unofficial preliminary hearing in the winter of 1881, the investigation committee ruled 'that after careful inquiry we are constrained to apprehend that much of the teaching and influence of Hiram W. Thomas is at variance with the doctrines of Methodism and detrimental to the interests of Evangelical Religion'.⁷⁸ An official trial before Conference was scheduled for the fall of 1882, and until then Thomas was suspended from all ministerial duties in the Methodist church. In his farewell address to his congregation, entitled 'Liberal Methodism', Thomas once again openly declared his beliefs on the atonement.

I do not believe the old penal or butcher theory of the atonement, which makes Jesus Christ a sinner, and punishes him for sin, and executes the penalty of a broken law upon one who had never broken it, in order that those who had broken it could be pardoned. To me such a theory simply disturbs, unsettles, and undermines the very root-ideas of justice and morality. I do not,— I can not believe it.⁷⁹

At his official trial on 5 October 1882, an event the *New York Times* christened 'The Great Heresy Trial',⁸⁰ Thomas was charged with 'denying the doctrine of atonement as held by the Methodist Episcopal Church and embodied in the second and twentieth of her articles of religion, as set forth in the discipline'.⁸¹ As he had in his farewell address, Thomas candidly admitted his commitment to the 'moral' theory before Conference jury.

I hold to the doctrine of a vicarious atonement; but I hold it in that form that is called moral or paternal. I deny the doctrine of a literal penal substitution. It is, I think, both unreasonable and unscriptural. The moral view finds a place and a necessity for all that is said of the sufferings of Christ.⁸²

⁷⁸ Bierbower, *Life and Sermons*, 38.

⁷⁹ Hiram Thomas, 'A Statement of Facts and Beliefs' in Bierbower, *Life and Sermons*, 263.

⁸⁰ 'Heterodoxy Versus Orthodoxy', *MQR* 4 (January 1882): 176-177.

⁸¹ Andreas, *History of Chicago* vol. 3, 794.

⁸² Quoted in Goodspeed, *The University Record*, 280.

To the judge and jury, Thomas' words were a pure admission of guilt. In the fall of 1885, one vote shy of a unanimous decision, Thomas was 'expelled from the ministry and his membership in the Church'.⁸³ Won over by Romantic sensibilities, Thomas found the penal element of Christ's death grotesque, preferring to view the atonement as an expression of divine, fatherly love rather than as a vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice.⁸⁴

Thomas's view did not accord well with traditional notions of the atonement among evangelical Methodists, and many agreed with Conference's decision to remove him. The *Boston Advertiser*, as reported in the *Zion's Herald*, wrote 'if Dr. Thomas has changed his views, why should he insist upon preaching his new faith as a Methodist? But there could be only one result, and that result is the one that happened.'⁸⁵ The April 1883 issue of the *Methodist Review* affirmed a statement made by the *Christian Intelligencer* which read 'we hope that this prompt and decisive action will put a check upon the confidence game of the Liberal "Artful Dodgers." For God's sake, gentlemen, do not play the pirate's game by staying in the Gospel ship only in the hope of demoralizing her crew, and of finally carrying her off as a prize.'⁸⁶ James Buckley, editor of *Zion's Herald*, wrote an open letter in the 27 October 1881 issue of the *Christian Advocate* to Henry Ward Beecher, who had designated the Methodist church unorthodox for its action against Thomas,⁸⁷ in which he vehemently defended the decision of Thomas' Illinois Rock River Conference.⁸⁸ Though one southern Methodist circulated a pamphlet in which he argued that the Rock River Conference was wrong in removing Thomas because, he confidently wrote, the Methodist denomination is flexible enough to accommodate the 'propitiatory, governmental, and moral aspects of this great doctrine, as set forth in Scripture and in our theology', it is revealing

⁸³ Andreas, *History of Chicago* vol. 3, 795.

⁸⁴ Thomas, 'A Statement of Facts and Beliefs' in *Life and Sermons*, 263.

⁸⁵ Bierbower, 'Dr. Thomas and the Methodist Church' *International Review* 12 (1882), 145.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Richard Wheatley, 'Methodist Doctrinal Standards', *MR* 65 (April 1883), 252.

⁸⁷ 'Mr. Beecher and the Methodists' *New York Times* 10 October 1881.

⁸⁸ James M. Buckley, "An Open Letter to the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher," *CA*, 27 October, 1881.

that he did so anonymously.⁸⁹ Though Thomas and a few others were endorsing alternative theories of the atonement, the actions of Conference and the reaction of American Methodists in general made it clear that contemporary evangelical Christianity demanded a conceptualization of the atonement in substitutionary terms.

Yet as more Methodists were exposed to and became comfortable with Bushnellian themes, the more eager they were to claim Bushnell as kin. One editorial appearing in the *Methodist Review* for 1880, for instance, emphasized Bushnell's Methodist upbringing, reminding readers that Bushnell's 'father and paternal grandmother were Methodists' and that 'Dr. Bushnell got his best traits of character' from his Methodist roots.⁹⁰ By the First World War, they were commending his writings to a new generation of Methodists. In 1912 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (hereafter MEC) formally sanctioned the Romantic ideology within the church when it assigned Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* (1847) as required reading on the course of study.⁹¹ Bushnell's overarching theme in this work is the development of moral character as a means to salvation. Children and young adults, held Bushnell, should be tutored in, rather than converted to, the Christian faith. A person's decision to embrace the Christian faith should be a journey; a gradual process of spiritual education, not an instantaneous, dramatic conversion. Parents are instructed, for example, not to inform a child 'that he must have a new heart and exercise faith in Christ's atonement' but to encourage their children to do good, and tell them 'God desires it'.⁹² Through their parents' virtuous behaviour, wrote Bushnell, children will learn about Christ's sacrificial atonement.⁹³ Convinced by Bushnell's argument, John T. McFarland, editor of the Methodist Sunday School publications, introduced his own work on nurture entitled *Preservation versus the Rescue of the Child* (1906), in which he argued along Bushnellian lines that children raised in virtuous Christian homes have no

⁸⁹ *MQR* 4 (January 1882), 177.

⁹⁰ *MQR* (October 1880), 727.

⁹¹ *Doctrines & Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church for 1912* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1912), 570.

⁹² Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: C. Scribner, 1861), 21.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

need of regeneration but only to be preserved in the Christian faith.⁹⁴ A second work in 1912 by Wade Crawford Barclay, minister and later editorial director of the Board of Sunday Schools of the MEC from 1909, published his popular *First Standard Manual of Teacher Training*, which wholeheartedly embraced Bushnell's arguments. 'The child today is not in need of a spiritual conversion, contended Barclay, but only 'needs proper nurture and development'.⁹⁵ The significance of Christ's death, seen as a vicarious sacrifice and symbol signifying a new spiritual life to earlier generations of evangelicals, was lessened, replaced by an emphasis on moral character. Mediated through Bushnell, aspects of the Romantic synthesis gained a stronger foothold in the denomination.

Interest in the Transcendental vision went beyond a general appreciation of Bushnell's work in the period after 1880. Methodists, for instance, endorsed the distinctive Romantic feature of intuition. In his *Philosophy of Christian Experience* (1891), Ohio Bishop Randolph S. Foster promoted a theology built around the intuitive mind. 'The facts of consciousness, he insisted, 'are the most certain of all human knowledge'.⁹⁶ Foster believed that while a definition of experience does not exclude the use of senses to observe data, a more accurate definition places greater value on 'the internal states and feelings' of a person's conscience in determining what a valid experience is.⁹⁷ Daniel Curry, college president, editor of the New York *Christian Advocate*, *Ladies Repository* and *Methodist Review* before accepting the position of book editor for the northern branch of Methodism in 1884, endorsed intuitive reasoning over Lockean rationalism. For Curry, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, English Romantic, moral philosopher and darling of the Transcendentalists, provided the key that freed the mind from the evidentiary tradition. Coleridge, wrote Curry in 1880, 'not only corrected the aberrations of our philosophy, but also

⁹⁴ John T. McFarland, *Preservation Versus the Rescue of the Child* (New York and Cincinnati: Eaton & Mains; Jennings & Graham, 1906).

⁹⁵ Wade Crawford Barclay, *First Standard Manual of Teacher Training*, 4th ed. (New York and Cincinnati: The Methodist book concern, 1914), xxix.

⁹⁶ Randolph S. Foster, *Philosophy of Christian Experience* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1891), 26–27.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

suggested much valuable matter from his own original reflections'.⁹⁸ Curry believed the Lockean philosophical tradition was a 'quasi-mechanical system' that was 'especially defective and perniciously misleading' when it was applied to theology.⁹⁹ For Curry, Coleridge and the Kantian tradition provided the cure. Like Coleridge, Curry contended that there were universally recognized ideas about right and wrong which 'cannot be apprehended by the senses' but only by the 'intuitive consciousness'.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Curry explained, 'all our knowledge and the materials of our thinking are primarily ideas'.¹⁰¹ Thus, reasoned Curry along Kantian lines, 'our subjective mental conceptions at once carry the thoughts outward, and predicate the things contemplated in the mind as something quite other than that which thinks and knows'.¹⁰² In other words, the subjective mind colours, and thereby limits, a person's knowledge of reality. By advocating intuitive reasoning while also recognizing the limits of human subjectivity, Curry was delivering a powerful endorsement of cultural relativism. As it had for the Transcendentalists, philosophical idealism rooted in Kantian concepts provided the framework through which progressive Methodists viewed Christian knowledge, leading them to embrace intuition and cultural relativism.

Because of this outlook, Curry was reluctant to embrace with any certainty one aspect of the atonement. 'The whole subject of atonement by Christ is of the nature of a mystery,' he wrote, 'and we can know nothing concerning it except as we are taught by the words of revelation.'¹⁰³ But, explained Curry, the revelations of God were also mysterious, and many of the truths of scripture are 'to be accepted simply by faith'.¹⁰⁴ Though Curry was reluctant to embrace any one theory, his view displayed one way in which the Romantic synthesis complemented orthodox thought. By deemphasizing reason and certainty, the Romantic

⁹⁸ Daniel Curry, *Fragments, Religious and Theological* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880), 180.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

ideology provided greater breathing room for such biblical ideas as mystery and faith. Curry's vision of the atonement was also rooted in the Fatherhood of God. 'The redemption of our race by Jesus Christ', wrote Curry, 'originated in the Father's love toward us.'¹⁰⁵ Anticipating similar themes found in the Wesleyan Methodist John Scott Lidgett's *Fatherhood of God* (1897), Curry located the motivation for the atonement in God's loving, fatherly character.¹⁰⁶ 'Divine love to man', held Curry, 'was the primary motive and influence, tending toward the salvation of the world.'¹⁰⁷ When properly understood, Curry contended, 'the Divine fatherhood becomes a revelation and an inspiration in the soul'.¹⁰⁸ The Romantic odour saturated Curry's thinking.

Curry was not alone in his commitment to intuitive reasoning. One Methodist contended in 1904 that to find 'the authenticity and proof of religious truth in the soul's intuitions' was a message 'our age needs'.¹⁰⁹ Henry F. Harris, a minister in Titusville, Florida, and frequent contributor to the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, claimed that Christ's entire ministry on earth derived from intuitive reasoning because of his prior relationship with and knowledge of God.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Harris argued, in what amounted to an all-out endorsement of Noetic rationality, that Christ used his 'intuition' to confirm 'the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God'.¹¹¹ By 1914 it was not unusual for educated, aspiring ministers to incorporate the language of intuitive reasoning into their sermons. One southern Methodist boldly claimed in 1902 that Christ knew 'intuitively when there was sickness or sorrow among his people'.¹¹² Another Methodist in 1914 claimed the apostle 'Peter had great flashes of intuition' which aided his ministry.¹¹³ New England Methodist James Mudge even argued in 1896 that John Wesley

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁶ See chapter 3 for a discussion of John Scott Lidgett's views.

¹⁰⁷ Curry, *Fragments, Religious and Theological*, 70.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Curry, 'Some Causes of the Want of Success of the Pulpit', *MR* 69 (1887): 318.

¹⁰⁹ *MR* 86 (March 1904): 249.

¹¹⁰ *MQR* 59 (July 1910): 544-545.

¹¹¹ *MQR* 59: 544-545.

¹¹² *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Episcopal Church, South, for 1902* (Nashville, TN: Bigham & Smith, 1902), 135.

¹¹³ *MR* 95 (January 1914): 170.

arrived at truth by using his 'keen *intuition*'.¹¹⁴ Broad-minded Methodists in the period after 1880 sanctioned intuitive reasoning as a legitimate means of acquiring Christian knowledge.

Many Methodists also favoured the stress on the immanence of God, first introduced by Transcendentalists in the 1830s. Methodists increasingly appropriated this view in the period after 1880 as a distinguishing mark of their theology. 'No teaching is more important', wrote one Methodist in 1888 from the New England Conference, 'than that of a *God personal and immanent* in and to the human soul.'¹¹⁵ In 1894 Abraham W. Jackson, minister in the East Maine Conference, published a series of sermons entitled *The Immanent God and Other Sermons* in which he exchanged a traditional gospel built 'on the conception of an absentee God, a God outside of, detached from, far away from his world' for a personal God, 'a God', he wrote, 'that is in the world'.¹¹⁶ Jackson advised Methodists to turn to an 'immanent God' whose 'visible garments' are the 'mountains, ocean, flowery fields and blazing stars'.¹¹⁷ For the Methodist whose mind had been awakened by Romantic notions of sensibility, God became an accessible deity, one who empathized with human beings. Finding historical precedents for such thinking was a task taken on by John A. Faulkner, professor of church history at Drew University for over thirty years beginning in 1897, who penned an article in the *Andover Review* for 1892 contending that 'the immanence of God' has been a 'distinguishing doctrine' of the denomination since its founding.¹¹⁸ The Romantic sentiment encouraged a conception of God who was immanently present in nature and the soul.

Another symptom of the Romantic flowering in Methodism was to imagine God as loving father, a view intimately aligned with the immanence of God. In 1881, for instance, Robert Paine, bishop of the Mississippi Conference from 1846, blasted atheists for, among many

¹¹⁴ *MQR* 44 (November-December 1896): 215.

¹¹⁵ *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference for 1888* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1888), 73.

¹¹⁶ Abraham W. Jackson, *The Immanent God and Other Sermons* (Boston and New York: Houghton, 1894), 8–9.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹⁸ Reprinted in *Public Opinion*, 24 December 1892, 285.

other things, denying the ‘fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men’.¹¹⁹ By 1890 Methodists were regularly championing the motto, first adopted by Unitarians in the 1830s, ‘the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man’.¹²⁰ ‘The great fundamental principles of the gospel’, declared one Methodist correspondent of the *Quarterly Review* for 1890, are ‘the brotherhood of man, the Fatherhood of God, [and] the universality of the atonement.’¹²¹ A contributor to the *Christian Advocate* for 1908 echoed this belief. ‘The *fatherhood of God*, the moral free agency of man, [and] the unlimited *atonement* of Christ’, exclaimed the author, ‘have been most distinctive of Methodism.’¹²² Other Methodists found the Fatherhood doctrine a welcome innovation, reflecting a new, modern style of biblical Christianity. In 1914, for example, George P. Mains, publishing agent of the Methodist Book Concern from 1896, rejoiced that evangelicals had found a theology that was ‘no longer a system of cheerless logical architecture erected on a basis of arbitrary assumptions about God, but [fed] itself vitally on the Divine Fatherhood as revealed in Jesus Christ’.¹²³ The Fatherhood of God for Mains was not only an overarching concept which nurtured a correct view of Christianity, but was a teaching that sustained, as it had for Channing, his entire moral outlook on life. Whoever is ‘imbued with the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man’, contended Mains, is able ‘to define the great moral wrong[s]’ of the ‘selfish’, ‘capitalistic’ society a person inhabits.¹²⁴ For modern-minded Methodists such as Mains, the Fatherhood doctrine represented the new theological direction in which they desired to travel. Progressives, such as one southern Methodist in 1910, praised the ‘splendid restatement of the modern conception of the Atonement in the light of the Fatherhood of

¹¹⁹ Robert Paine, ‘Faith in Christ’, in Thomas Osmond Summers, ed., *Sermons by Southern Methodist Preachers* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1881), 283.

¹²⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970); John Hamilton Thom, James Martineau, and Henry Giles, *Unitarianism Defended* (Liverpool: Willmer and Smith, 1839), 49.

¹²¹ *MQR* 7 (January 1890): 379.

¹²² ‘The Distinctive Doctrines of Methodism’, *CA*, 26 March 1908, 12.

¹²³ George Preston Mains, *Christianity and The New Age* (New York and Cincinnati: Abingdon Press, 1914), 75.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

God'.¹²⁵ 'We have', he wrote in the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 'long since passed out from under the penal and legalistic conception of the sacrificial death of Christ. Any interpretation which does not at once imply his complete identification with humanity in its sin must be partial and unsatisfactory.'¹²⁶ Under the influence of the Romantic synthesis, Methodists became enamoured with an ethical Christianity governed by a personal father.

Aiding Methodists in their development of an ethical Christianity was the work of Albert Ritschl, professor of theology at Göttingen from 1864. Though some Methodists had been aware of Ritschl's earlier work, *The Emergence of the Old Catholic Church* (1850), in which he used higher critical methods of investigation to defend the early church's account of Christianity against liberal attacks,¹²⁷ it was not until the late 1880s that his work received a sustained level of interest among American Protestants.¹²⁸ In 1872 an English translation of Ritschl's *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1870) appeared, followed by the translation of his *Christian Perfection* (1874) in 1878.¹²⁹ Though a third edition of *Justification and Reconciliation*, published in 1874, was reviewed in the *Methodist Review* for 1876,¹³⁰ Ritschl's works went largely unnoticed by Methodists until the 1890s when an English translation of Leonhard Stählin's popular *Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl* (1889), and the death of Ritschl himself in 1889, helped ignite a burst of scholarly interest in his work.¹³¹

In his *Justification and Reconciliation*, and later his *Theology of Metaphysics* (1881), Ritschl continued the attack on Enlightenment rationalism begun by Friedrich Schleiermacher, pastor and professor of theology at the University of Halle and later Berlin from 1810. Ritschl, like

¹²⁵ 'The Atonement', *MQR* 59 (January 1910): 194.

¹²⁶ *MQR* 59 (January 1910): 194.

¹²⁷ 'Ritschl on the Origin of the Catholic Church', *MQR* 41 (April 1859): 311-314.

¹²⁸ On the growing interest in Ritschl's work in America see Albert Temple Swing, ed., *The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1901), xiii-xiv. Swing compiled a list of published works on Ritschl appearing in America which demonstrates the dramatic increase of interest on Ritschl in the late 1880s and beyond.

¹²⁹ Albrecht Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. John S. Black (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872); Albrecht Ritschl, 'Christian Perfection', ed. Archibald Duff, Jr., *Bibliotheca Sacra* 35 (October 1878): 656-680.

¹³⁰ *MQR* 58 (October 1876): 759-760.

¹³¹ See for example, Charles W. Rishell, 'The Ritschlian Theology', *MR* 73 (March 1891): 194-211; *MR* 52 (November 1892): 977-979; *MR* 43 (March-April 1896): 123-125.

Schleiermacher, located the nature of religion in the mind's intuitive consciousness. The Christian religion, contended Ritschl, could not be discovered by the evidentiary approach. According to Ritschl, philosophical theology, with its proofs of the existence of God, eroded the essence of Christianity. Any attempt to create a natural theology erred because God revealed himself only in his relationship with human beings. 'A thing "exists" in its relationships', wrote Ritschl in 1881, 'and it is only in them that we can know the thing.'¹³² Whereas knowledge is founded on judgments of existence, faith is built on judgments of value, because of what it does, wrote Ritschl, 'for us'. In this way, Ritschl followed Kant in his attempts to banish philosophy from the realm of theology.¹³³

Furthermore, under Ritschl's guidance, Christianity became a distinctly relational, moral religion built on a community grounded in the historic person and work of Jesus Christ, the founder of the 'kingdom of God'. This latter phrase became a major theme in Ritschl's work and, as will be shown later, was adopted by a new breed of American evangelicals in the period leading up to 1914 in their attempts to modernize Christianity. For Ritschl, the kingdom of God was a community of spiritual agents bound together by love through Christ and his teachings. Possessing a distinctly earthly focus, the kingdom of God was essentially, but not only, ethical. As members of this earthly community, Christians were ambassadors for Christ, agents of change, delivering his message of redemption to the world. Under Ritschl's vision of an earthly kingdom-centred community, Christianity once again became a movement rather than a system of doctrines.¹³⁴ Through his reliance on Kant, use of intuitive reason and emphasis on historical investigation, Ritschl reinforced the central elements of the Romantic impulse

Methodists awoke to the 'Ritschlian theology' in the 1890s. Ritschl was praised, as one contributor to the *Methodist Review* for 1891 noted, for his ability 'to produce a preachable

¹³² Quoted in Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 6.

¹³³ Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 34–38; Pamela Sue Anderson and Jordan Bell, *Kant and Theology* (New York and London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 13–17.

¹³⁴ Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 24–30, 42–50.

theology’, and adopted his ‘kingdom of God’ theme as their own.¹³⁵ Ritschl’s view of the kingdom of God, which emphasised an ethical Christian community drawn together by Christ as the medium of salvation, represented a subtle but marked departure from traditional Methodist conceptions which associated God’s kingdom solely with the church. ‘Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God among men’, declared one Methodist in 1892.¹³⁶ Missionaries, declared the General Conference of 1896, are ‘the kind of men most serviceable to the *kingdom of God*’.¹³⁷ By 1900 Matthew 6:33 had become a popular text from which many Methodists preached. ‘Seek first’, encouraged one minister in 1897, ‘the kingdom of God and his righteousness.’¹³⁸ At the annual New Jersey Conference for 1892 Methodists made ‘seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness’ their ‘guiding conviction’ for the year.¹³⁹ Rural churches in western New York were even encouraged in typical Ritschlian fashion in 1899 to ‘lay emphasis upon [their] dual characteristics as the family of God, and the Divine agency for bringing in the kingdom of God among men by transforming the individual and society’.¹⁴⁰ By 1900 Ritschl’s kingdom of God theology had penetrated Methodism.

Though progressive Methodists had adopted the language of Ritschl’s kingdom theology in the 1890s, it was not until after 1900 that Ritschl’s theology was integrated into their own theological edifice and became, as it did for members of the Social Gospel movement in general, the theological basis for a modern, social version of Christianity.¹⁴¹ Convinced of the need for a social Christianity, Harris Franklin Rall, president of Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado, and later of Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Illinois, drew on Ritschl’s kingdom theology in his development of an ethical, inward-focused Christianity. Jesus, penned Rall in 1910, had as

¹³⁵ Charles W. Rishell, ‘The Ritschlian Theology’, *MR* 73 (March 1891): 197. *MR* 74 (November 1892): 881.

¹³⁶ *MR* 74 (1892): 881.

¹³⁷ *Journal of the General Conference of the M.E. Church for 1896* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1896), 522.

¹³⁸ *WCA*, 31 March 1897, 18.

¹³⁹ *Minutes of the New Jersey Conference for 1892* (Camden, NJ: Gazette Printing House, 1892), 24.

¹⁴⁰ *Minutes of the Genesee Conference for 1899* (Buffalo, NY: McGerald Publishing Company, 1899), 77.

¹⁴¹ For Methodist involvement in the Social Gospel movement see chapter 7.

his goal the transformation of the ‘whole world’ into ‘the kingdom of God’.¹⁴² For Rall, this transformation was initiated by the renewal of the moral consciousness through Christ’s redemptive activity on the cross.¹⁴³ Rall, like so many other advocates of social Christianity, desired the moral uplift of society by inspiring persons with the story of Christ’s life and death. Let them know, he contended, that God is like a father who cares for his children.¹⁴⁴ Some Methodists were among those who celebrated Ritschl’s work as a boon for social Christianity.

Lastly, it should be briefly observed that the Transcendentalist legacy bequeathed to modern-minded Methodists an appreciation of literary criticism. Modern Methodists recognized, as one Methodist from the Erie Conference of Pennsylvania had done in 1892, it as a tool that contained a remarkable degree of explanatory power for present theological conundrums, including the theory of the atonement.¹⁴⁵ Writing in 1890, William P. Harrison, Chaplain to the United States House of Representatives and editor of the southern *Methodist Quarterly Review*, agreed, finding the so-called ‘destructive criticism’ instructive when it came to exposing theological terms that did not originate in the Bible.¹⁴⁶ When viewed through the lens of higher criticism, theological phrases such as the ‘vicarious atonement’, the author frankly and confidently averred, ‘are not to be found in the Bible’.¹⁴⁷ Continuing the discussion of literary criticism and the Bible in the January 1891 edition of the quarterly publication, Harrison approvingly quoted Charles Augustus Briggs, the progressive Presbyterian clergyman and professor of Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary who was tried and acquitted for his theological opinions in 1892, writing: ‘Modern scientific study of the Bible...has made the Bible a new book, and the description of Biblical theology which builds on the results of criticism finds in the Bible a new theology—new not in the sense that it destroys anything that is valuable in the

¹⁴² Harris Franklin Rall, ‘The Social Ministry of Jesus’, in *Social Ministry: An Introduction to the Study and Practice of Social Service*, ed. Harry F. Ward (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1910), 50.

¹⁴³ Rall, ‘The Social Ministry of Jesus’, 35, 53.

¹⁴⁴ Harris Franklin Rall, *A Working Faith* (New York and Cincinnati: The Abingdon Press, 1914), 55–58.

¹⁴⁵ *Minutes of the Erie Conference for 1892* (Philadelphia, PA: 1892), 89.

¹⁴⁶ *MQRS* (October 1890), 185.

¹⁴⁷ *MQRS* (October 1890), 185.

old theology, but that on the one hand it is simpler, fresher, full of life and energy.¹⁴⁸ Harrison was typical of that new breed of Methodist who credited higher criticism for its ability to advance a more biblically correct understanding of received theological opinions. By 1906, modern Methodists were confidently, though naively, claiming that ‘there is not now, and never has been, a feud between Methodism and Biblical criticism’.¹⁴⁹ Methodists influenced by the Transcendental legacy applied the insights of biblical criticism to challenge the received doctrine of atonement.

The Romantic Impulse in Full Bloom

In 1908, two years before his death, Borden Parker Bowne, professor of philosophy from 1876 and then from 1888 dean of the graduate school at Boston University, published a popular summary of his philosophy entitled *Personalism*. Though the term ‘personal idealism’ was first introduced in America by George Holmes Howison, professor of philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, from 1884, in his *The Limits of Evolution* (1901), it was Bowne who was most responsible for spreading the personalist philosophy to a later generation.¹⁵⁰ Bowne, in a letter to his wife shortly before his death, summarized his philosophy this way:

It is hard to classify me with accuracy. I am a theistic idealist, a Personalist, a transcendental empiricist, an idealistic realist, and a realistic idealist; but all these phrases need to be interpreted. I hold half of Kant’s system, but sharply dissent from the rest. I am a Personalist, the first of the clan in any thoroughgoing sense.¹⁵¹

Personalism in America had its origins in German idealism and the early-nineteenth century

¹⁴⁸ *MQRS* (January 1891), 429.

¹⁴⁹ *WCA*, 72 (1906), 11. On the author’s naivety: old-guard conservatives challenged the use of biblical criticism in the decades surrounding 1900. See William W. Shenk, *The Destructive Biblical Criticism* (1900); and Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 111-112, who argues that the use of biblical criticism became a mark of the serious scholar and aspiring university which included such Methodist institutions of higher education as Boston University and Vanderbilt University.

¹⁵⁰ Rufus Burrow, *Personalism: A Critical Introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 54–61; Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 2001, 371–392; Jan Olof Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins And Early Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20, 49–53.

¹⁵¹ ‘Bowne letter to Mrs. K. M. Bowne’, 31 May 1909 in *The Personalist* 2 (1921), 10

transatlantic Romantic movement.¹⁵² Schleiermacher, for instance, had used the term ‘personalism’ in his *Über die Religion (1799) and Walt Whitman, American Romantic poet and humanist, had penned an essay entitled ‘Personalism’ in 1868*. As a student in Germany between 1873-74 at the University of Halle and then under Herman Lotze at the University of Göttingen in 1875, Bowne found German Idealism, particularly Lotze’s elevation of personality a key corrective to Hegel’s Absolute Idealism, a desirable remedy for the ‘impersonal abstractions’ of an Enlightenment-driven rationalistic theology.¹⁵³ Bowne believed the Enlightenment had depersonalized religion and, as a philosophy, was the source of many problems associated with traditional religion.¹⁵⁴ For instance, Bowne frequently dressed received theological opinions in unflattering terms, identifying them as ‘absurd’, ‘crude’ and ‘mechanical’, shaped by a common sense philosophical approach that, he claimed, delivered ‘a great crop of errors’ when used.¹⁵⁵ Bowne proposed instead a philosophy that, as had Kant’s philosophy, began with a practical approach to reason.¹⁵⁶ Bowne’s Personalism distanced itself from Kant, however, by arguing that there was in fact no mutually influential relationship between the mind and experience.¹⁵⁷ The mind, with its perceptions and ideas, Bowne contended, is the agent directing reality and is not informed by the data of experience.¹⁵⁸ Within this framework, the outside world is absorbed by the subjective consciousness, becoming a manifestation of the mind. In other words, human consciousness becomes the foundation on which the validity of knowledge is built. Bowne identified this inner consciousness as moral reason, which functioned as a powerful cognitive

¹⁵² Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism*, 271–283; For a general overview of personalism, and especially as it developed in Boston, see Paul Deats and Carol Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

¹⁵³ Borden P. Bowne, *Studies in Christianity* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 272.

¹⁵⁴ Borden P. Bowne, *Personalism* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1908), 217–267.

¹⁵⁵ Borden P. Bowne, *The Atonement* (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1900), 38; Bowne, *Studies in Christianity*, 65; Bowne, *Personalism*, 8–9.

¹⁵⁶ On Kant’s use of practical reason see Marcus Willaschek, ‘The Primacy of Practical Reason and the Idea of a Practical Postulate’, in *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide*, ed. Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168–196; Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 9, 47–53.

¹⁵⁷ Bowne was no absolute idealist, though. See Deats and Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology*, 41–43.

¹⁵⁸ Borden P. Bowne, *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879), 42–43.

source influencing a person's choices and actions. 'We are not', Bowne remarked in 1909 regarding his entire philosophical approach, 'concerned to find something which might be consistent as an abstract ethical speculation, but something which will commend itself to our moral reason.'¹⁵⁹ When arriving at a decision, Bowne concluded, moral reason must not only be consulted but given the primary decision-making role. 'What the eternal moral reason prescribes,' Bowne confidently remarked, 'is what must finally be.'¹⁶⁰ It naturally followed for Bowne that because reality is generated by the person, the person becomes the centrepiece of his philosophy.

Yet as a Christian, Bowne did not stop with the supremacy of human beings but traced their value back to God, the 'Absolute Person', the creator and definer of true personhood.¹⁶¹ In *The Immanence of God* (1905), Bowne argued for a Romantic conception of God that, as Emerson and Channing had envisioned, was inherently personal, someone who dwelled in the world and was accessible through human experience.¹⁶²

We are, then, in God's world, and all things continuously depend on him. We have not to attempt an impossible division between God's work and that of nature, for there is no such division; we have rather to study the method and contents of God's work which we call nature, and in which God is forever immanent. Thus the naturalistic and deistic banishment of God from the real world is recalled, and the doctrine of the divine immanence is put in its place.¹⁶³

Bowne's focus on personhood led him to an abiding interest in Christ's identification with humanity. Life's difficulties, he optimistically held, were 'canceled by the divine immanence, which allows us to find God as present in the ordinary movements of life and society as in the strange and uninterpretable things'.¹⁶⁴ The implication was that the older notion of God as a transcendent being was incapable of providing any such encouragement and hope to a suffering world. Finding relief in the immanence of God, a characteristic symptom of Romantic thought,

¹⁵⁹ Bowne, *Studies in Christianity*, 147.

¹⁶⁰ Bowne, *The Atonement*, 116.

¹⁶¹ Borden Parker Bowne, *Theism* (New York: American Book Company, 1902), 184.

¹⁶² Patrick J. Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, And Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic Light of All Our Day* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 324; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 439.

¹⁶³ Borden P. Bowne, *The Immanence of God* (Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), 28.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

became a permanent feature of Bowne's theology.

In 1900 Bowne produced a popular exposition of the atonement based on practical rather than abstract notions of redemption.¹⁶⁵ Examined under the microscope of his personalist philosophy, traditional theories became horrific models of the atonement, 'based on abstract considerations of *abstract* moral agents and *abstract* transgression'.¹⁶⁶ For Bowne, any theory founded on abstract thought was beset with problems, for, he held, abstract ideas are unable to connect with ordinary reality. Thus 'abstract notions of justice' and 'Divine Sovereignty', some of the most 'prominent mistakes' featured in older theories, should not be included in a modern reading of the atonement.¹⁶⁷ 'There is', wrote Bowne in his popular work on the atonement, 'no literal substitution of one person for another, no literal satisfaction of the claims of justice, no literal payment of a debt, no literal ransom or redemption, but a work of grace on our behalf.'¹⁶⁸ Another culprit guilty of generating unsatisfactory opinions on the atonement was a 'mechanical literalness' in the reading of scripture which, Bowne held, accompanied most traditional theories. Such mechanical readings were 'untenable', producing absurd assertions 'concerning the Savior's work' and provided little room for forgiveness and love.¹⁶⁹ Inspired by his reading of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1825), Bowne found the chief culprit to be the fact that traditional theories revealed virtually no concern for the 'moral rights' of human beings.¹⁷⁰ 'Man', Bowne declared, is 'a moral being with moral ends.'¹⁷¹ That this most significant feature is left out of nearly every theory of the atonement, held Bowne, demonstrates their worthlessness. Even newer theories which modified traditional understandings of redemption came under attack by Bowne. The governmental theory, a doctrine introduced to Methodists in the first half of the nineteenth century before receiving a

¹⁶⁵ Bowne, *The Atonement*, 3.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 32–34.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20, 40, 104.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 55–58, 34.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

systematic makeover at the hands of John Miley in the 1870s, was abrasively denounced as an ‘abstraction’ which appealed ‘neither to the heart nor the conscience’.¹⁷² For these reasons, Bowne emphatically contended, older theories should be abandoned as antiquated misrepresentations of the atonement. Bowne’s scrupulous attention to the principles of Personalism led him to a definitive rejection of received opinions on the atonement which emphasized divine justice and law.

Accompanying Bowne’s reading of older theories was the notion of cultural relativism. Bowne believed one’s interpretation of the atonement hinged on the most basic hermeneutical question: how are the scriptures meant to be interpreted? For Bowne, scripture employed various metaphors which contained bits of truth. Problems occurred, however, when people attempted to interpret these metaphors as literal facts.¹⁷³ Complicating matters was the reality that the Bible was a spiritually-inspired piece of work delivered through human beings. It was written in several languages by people with dialects particular to a specific time and place which are, Bowne admitted, ‘foreign to our modes of thought’.¹⁷⁴ The same was true of traditional atonement theories, Bowne confessed, which were crafted by culturally conditioned ‘advocates’ rather than ‘inquirers’.¹⁷⁵ It is because these advocates read the atonement through their particular culture, argued Bowne, that there exist so many different theories in circulation. To solve such a dilemma Bowne proposed exploring the ancient customs and languages in which the Bible was written. Only then, he concluded, can the atonement be ‘translated into modern forms of conception’ that will be intelligible to us. Bowne’s views on the relative nature of knowledge are remarkably similar to those of the Transcendentalist Theodore Parker, who believed the tenets of Christianity were conditioned by the cultural contexts in which they

¹⁷² Ibid., 30.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 33.

emerged.¹⁷⁶ As expressions of their culture, received opinions needed to be stripped of their cultural baggage and then reinterpreted for a modern audience. Fired by Transcendentalist thought, Bowne utilized cultural relativism as a tool to discredit traditional theories of the atonement and to illuminate scripture.

Separating Bowne's theory from conventional ones was a trident of points in step with the sentiments of the Transcendentalist heritage. The first was the subjective nature of the atonement. For Bowne, as it had been for Bushnell, this cardinal doctrine of Christianity was first and foremost a virtuous act carried out for human beings.¹⁷⁷ It is imperative, explained Bowne, that we 'confine our attention to the concrete and living human world'.¹⁷⁸ Thus our atonement, he continued, must primarily deal with the 'moral problem of humanity and regard our human circumstances'.¹⁷⁹ To this end, the atonement is pursued along moral influence lines, presenting Christ as an upright figure to whom one can turn for aid in her attempts to cure the ills of society. Yet here Bowne qualified his theory of atonement by distinguishing it from the moral influence theory. 'No theory', he wrote, 'which exhausts itself in anything so impersonal as an "influence" or an "example" will be very effective.'¹⁸⁰ The value of the atonement for human beings lies in the love of God. 'Here', in the love of God, wrote Bowne, 'we have the final illustration and demonstration of what God is and what he means for men.'¹⁸¹ Because the 'God of Love' 'nowhere appears' in those traditional theories that prioritize God as a 'Divine Sovereign', Bowne insisted, they are insufficient models, obscuring rather than elucidating a person's understanding of the atonement. Redemption for Bowne was an action, a demonstration of love for humanity, by God directed towards humans, not a satisfaction of divine or public justice.

¹⁷⁶ On Parker, see Grodzins, *American Heretic*.

¹⁷⁷ C.f. Bushnell in the earlier section entitled 'The Eclipse of the Enlightenment Synthesis'.

¹⁷⁸ Bowne, *The Atonement*, 72.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 68–69.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 117–118.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

Secondly, Bowne was convinced that moral reason was the primary lens through which the atonement should be interpreted. Bowne's concept of moral reason functioned in a similar fashion to Emerson's intuitive reasoning. In 1832, for example, Emerson remarked that '*a man should get his principles* nowhere but in himself. There is no other way for you to arrive at the voice of God but by patient listening to your own conscience.'¹⁸² In a strikingly similar statement Bowne held that 'moral reason' must be the source of our atonement theory because by it only do we retain our grasp of 'reality'.¹⁸³ The appropriate atonement theory, Bowne continued, must speak 'to the consciousness and moral reason' of human beings; and 'the language of Scripture must be interpreted in accordance with our moral reason'.¹⁸⁴ While older theories were viewed as seriously deficient in appealing to the moral reason of human beings, none came under more frequent attack than the governmental theory which, Bowne announced, is the worst theory because it appeals neither to the 'heart' nor to the 'conscience'.¹⁸⁵ Moral reason functioned as an intuitive source guiding a person to a truer understanding of the atonement.

Finally, like William Channing nearly a quarter of a century earlier, Bowne made the Fatherhood of God a central feature of his theology. As a Personalist, Bowne found the Fatherhood concept extremely appealing because it not only represented a practical way of viewing one's faith but also because at its core it was deeply personal, rooted in God's love. In fact one of Bowne's chief criticisms of older theories was that they were not 'thought through with reference to God the Father' but contaminated by the idea of God as 'an incarnation of justice'.¹⁸⁶ It is unsurprising then that Bowne found the Fatherhood concept highly useful in supporting his theory of the atonement. The only way the doctrine would appeal to the conscience of human beings, he claimed, was by 'replacing the conception of Divine Governor by that of the Heavenly Father, and the conception of the Divine government by that of the

¹⁸² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Albert J. Von Frank and Wesley T. Mott, vol. 4 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 79.

¹⁸³ Bowne, *The Atonement*, 55.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 38, 29.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 30, 46, 49–50.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

Divine family'.¹⁸⁷ So convinced was Bowne by the image of God as Father that he made it a necessary ingredient for any theory of the atonement. All theories which 'will not harmonize with this [the Divine Fatherhood]', exclaimed Bowne, 'must be cast out'.¹⁸⁸ Bowne's reasoning for this view rested in the belief that 'God's fundamental purpose is to have a family of spiritual children, made in his image and likeness, who shall know him and love him'.¹⁸⁹ Bowne used the Fatherhood of God to abolish traditional conceptions of the Almighty as a divine governor and sovereign.

Henry C. Sheldon, professor of church history and then theology at Boston University between 1875 and 1921, was another leading figure swayed by the Romantic impulse. In *A System of Christian Doctrine* (1903), the first Methodist systematic theology shaped by Romantic tendencies, Sheldon identified the human conscience as the arbiter of truth. He dismissed Lockean reason, preferring knowledge generated by the intuitive faculties of the mind. So, for instance, he argued that a person's moral barometer was developed but not constructed by his experience of the world because his 'moral sense' is given to him 'at birth'.¹⁹⁰ Like Kant, Sheldon found 'the mind [to be] an active instrument in cognition' which helps 'determine the appearance of objective reality'.¹⁹¹ Yet he also recognized that this led one to a certain degree of relativity of knowledge for, he wrote, 'the mind cannot abandon itself or alienate itself from its own standpoint'.¹⁹² Sheldon also favoured a relational Christianity, one which featured the divine immanence, the Fatherhood of God and the development of a moral life. Sheldon found, for instance, that God's immanence was a doctrine which by its very nature 'suggests God may come nearer to souls in their moral life than' if one simply used 'mental images or

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 66–67.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 92–93.

¹⁹⁰ Henry C. Sheldon, *System of Christian Doctrine* (New York and Cincinnati: Eaton and Mains; Jennings and Pye, 1903), 289–290.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 9–10.

¹⁹² Ibid., 10.

representations' to convey his moral character.¹⁹³ In other words, the pursuit of virtuous life brought one closer to God. In his general philosophical outlook, Sheldon mirrored Bowne.

Like most modernist evangelicals, Sheldon was critical of older theories of the atonement, finding them deficient in their focus on divine love and moral development and excessive in the amount of attention given to God's wrath and judgment.¹⁹⁴ He also singled out, for example, Miley's governmental theory as one which pushed 'the governmental analogy too far in expounding the subject of atonement'.¹⁹⁵ Yet Sheldon also bristled at the moral influence theory, contending in his *System of Christian Doctrine*, that it 'leaves the impression of a deficit' and 'needs to be rounded out by a complementary truth'.¹⁹⁶ For Sheldon, the one piece of truth which properly augmented the moral influence theory was the idea that Christ's death satisfied 'the claims of divine righteousness', a central ingredient in the conventional substitutionary theories.¹⁹⁷ By retaining this 'objective element', wrote Sheldon, the moral influence theory becomes much more attractive to the evangelical mind.¹⁹⁸ Sheldon's aim was to harmonize the objective and subjective theories of the atonement in which Christians understood that Christ's death communicated something to them about God's character and provided a moral code by which they could order their lives.¹⁹⁹ In pursuit of this end, he found love and holiness, the 'inalienable constituents of the self consistent disposition of God', to be two mutually supportive ingredients.²⁰⁰ Christ's self-sacrificing death, according to Sheldon, demonstrated God's 'immeasurable love' for humanity and was 'a testimony to the supreme value and necessity of righteousness'.²⁰¹ 'Thus', wrote Sheldon, 'the subjective demand is at one with the objective

¹⁹³ Ibid., 458, 452.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 393–402.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 407.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 391.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 392–393.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 393.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 403.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

requirement.²⁰² Sheldon prioritized an ethical atonement while retaining the objective element of satisfaction.

Conclusion

Between 1880 and 1914 Methodist views on the atonement were transformed by the Romantic impulse. Though some chose to advance a traditional satisfaction theory of atonement, corresponding theories developed by two influential Methodists challenged prevailing notions. The first individual portrayed God as a sovereign governor whose administrative end was the satisfaction of public justice. This view, nurtured in the Enlightenment evidentiary tradition and originating in America in the decades surrounding 1800 through the efforts of the Edwardsean Calvinists, was expounded by John Miley. Hewing to the theological tenets set down by the New England Calvinists, Miley refined the theory according to the systematic fashion of his age. As it had been for adherents of the New England Theology, the governmental theory, though incorporating a moral, manward element, was primarily an objective atonement, that is, its focus was directed toward God. Though different in emphasis, the governmental theory was similar in substance to the older transaction theories, preferring to stress divine law and justice over forgiveness and love.

A second theory, introduced by Borden Parker Bowne around 1900, revealed an indebtedness to the Transcendental legacy. Beginning in the 1870s evangelicals warmed themselves at the Romantic fire. Starting with Hiram Thomas, Methodists were swayed by Bushnellian concepts of the atonement which centred on the development and perfection of one's moral character. They chose to elevate the divine attribute of love and the concept of divine Fatherhood over traditional concepts of law, justice and divine sovereignty. Further philosophical developments affecting the atonement ensued in subsequent decades. Daniel Curry, for instance, typified the new breed of Methodist in his endorsement of intuitive reasoning, perhaps one of the most significant features of Romantic thought, as a powerful

²⁰² Ibid., 404.

interpretative source for acquiring truth.

As the century advanced, the Romantic synthesis proved a formidable force shaping opinions on the atonement, particularly in the years after 1900. Writing in 1901, Henry Churchill King, president of Oberlin College from 1902 to 1927, believed the following ‘moral and spiritual convictions’ had been brought to the foreground in theology:

...reverence for personality, freedom of conscience, and freedom of investigation; law in the spiritual world, yet the subordination of the mechanical, and the unity of the ethical life in love; no separation of the sacred and secular; the social conscience, the central importance of action, the recognition of Christ as the supreme person.²⁰³

With varying degrees nearly all these fashionable ideas nurtured by the legacy of the Transcendentalist movement found expression in the writings of those modernizing Methodists surveyed between 1880 and 1914. Hiram Thomas, Daniel Curry, Borden P. Bowne and Henry Sheldon all stressed, emphasized and promoted nearly every one of these key Romantic philosophical concepts. In doing so they severed the link between themselves and the Enlightenment tradition, a tradition in which Methodist theology had first taken shape. Conditioned by the tenor of Romanticism, intuitive reasoning, culturally sensitive interpretations of scripture, a turn towards ethics and the Fatherhood of God came to play significant roles in the development of an alternative, manward focused, portrait of the atonement.

²⁰³ Henry Churchill King, *Reconstruction in Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 45.

CHAPTER SIX
RESISTANCE AND REALIGNMENT:
PROGRESSIVE METHODISM AND THE EXPANSION OF THE EVANGELICAL-
ROMANTIC SYNTHESIS

We have no hesitation in saying that the ethical theories of modern scepticism are essentially immoral, and already they begin to bear their appropriate fruit. The most dangerous enemies of moral purity are not the vulgar writers of pestilent tales and filthy poems, but the literary princes, who, with specious argument, enticing rhetoric, fine irony, seek to displace and dishonour the lofty, noble, moral philosophy of our fathers.¹

Alarmed over the present state of Methodist theology, Wesleyan Methodist William L. Watkinson first uttered these words before an audience at City Road Chapel, London, on 2 August 1886. Finding Watkinson's words applicable to the American scene more than a decade later, the American Methodist George W. Wilson prominently displayed this paragraph on the title page of his new book *Methodist Theology vs. Methodist Theologians* (1904). The 'literary princes' Wilson had in mind were the notable American Methodists he criticized at length in his book, including Borden P. Bowne.² Wilson, a lawyer from Virginia, was deeply concerned about the theological direction in which Methodism was heading at the dawn of the twentieth century. He believed there were ominous signs which pointed to the decline and perhaps even collapse of the denomination's orthodoxy and with it its evangelical identity. Wilson's diatribe against several forward-thinking intellectuals within the denomination was based on his belief that these leaders were altering the foundations on which their evangelical faith had been built, namely the vicarious atonement of Christ and the inspiration of scripture. These progressive wolves, he woefully declared, were 'removing from us every cardinal doctrine of Methodism'.³

Other Methodists expressed similar concerns. Leander Munhall, Philadelphia minister and popular conservative spokesperson, believed it was the duty of every evangelical to unmask

¹ William Lonsdale Watkinson, *The Influence of Scepticism on Character: Being the Sixteenth Fernley Lecture, Delivered at City Road Chapel, London, August 2, 1886* (London: T. Woolmer, 1886), 75.

² George W. Wilson, *Methodist Theology Vs. Methodist Theologians: A Review of Several Methodist Writers* (London: Press of Jennings and Pye, 1904).

³ *Ibid.*, 73.

the false theological claims made by progressives. Thus in 1913 he blasted the Methodist Book Concern for ‘publishing and selling carloads of books and periodicals’ which taught doctrines antithetical to Methodism.⁴ ‘We are told that the times and people have changed’, he explained in an address before the Preachers’ Meeting of 1902 in Chicago, ‘but God’s laws are unchangeable.’⁵ Guarding the atonement lay at the heart of Munhall’s concern. Let everyone who is desirous of a modern theory of the atonement know, he confidently wrote, that ‘the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for sinners in all ages.’⁶ Attempting to speak for the entire denomination, Munhall averred: ‘as Methodists, we believe in the vicarious nature of the atoning work of Jesus Christ.’⁷ William Ninde, president of Garrett Biblical Institute from 1879 to 1884 before being elected to the episcopacy in 1884, believed the way to combat the growing threat of liberal thinking was to foster among ministers a greater appreciation for the study of theology. ‘What we need in our day is not a growing indifference to theological study’, he insisted, ‘but a quickened interest in it.’⁸ Wilson agreed, believing many ministers and laymen were indifferent to safeguarding their theological heritage. If Methodism’s evangelical view of the atonement were to be saved, Wilson insisted, more Methodists must become theologically engaged and actively resist the growing tendency to revise their evangelical doctrines.⁹

Yet Wilson’s adversaries argued that only the revision of traditional doctrines like the atonement would bring the denomination into closer alignment with biblical Christianity. The dean of Vanderbilt’s School of Religion, Wilbur Tillett, whose hymn ‘Oh Son of God Incarnate’ was included in the revised *Methodist Hymnal* for 1934, pushed for the inclusion of a revised atonement in the discipline at the 1906 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, (MECS) general conference. ‘I want a doctrine of atonement stated and developed’, he enthusiastically declared,

⁴ Leander W. Munhall, *Breakers! Methodism Adrift* (Philadelphia, PA: E. & R. Munhall, 1913), 37.

⁵ L. W. Munhall, *A Crisis in Methodism: Read Before the Methodist Preacher’s Meeting of Chicago, June 16, 1902*. (n.p., 1902), 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁸ William X. Ninde in Lewis Meredith, *The Various Views of the Atonement* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1886), 6.

⁹ Wilson, *Methodist Theology Vs. Methodist Theologians*.

‘that shall not only assert the necessity of atonement in the justice of God, but also the origin of atonement in the love of God and the method of atonement in the wisdom of God.’¹⁰ When comparing their doctrines to apostolic Christianity, progressives were concerned over whether their present theological tradition had incorrectly interpreted the saving work of Christ on the cross and with it their view of God. Was there, they wondered, too much emphasis on penalty and justice and not enough on love and forgiveness? Conservatives believed the traditional substitutionary view, in which Christ paid the debt of the offender and satisfied divine justice, was an accurate representation of scriptural teaching on the topic and, furthermore, that it was an established doctrine of not only the Methodist church, but the apostolic church as well. Revision of it, they reasoned, was a revision of orthodox Christianity. Thus conservatives agreed with Wilson when he brazenly insisted that those who reject the vicarious suffering of Christ assail ‘everything fundamental to Methodism’ and are the real ‘enemies of the cross’.¹¹ Conservatives feared modern revisions of the atonement would eviscerate evangelicalism.

Methodist scholars, working under the influence of the Romantic synthesis, posed many challenges to traditional interpretations of the atonement and the philosophical principles supporting these traditional views in the decades leading up to 1914. The aim of this chapter is to determine whether or not the influence of the Romantic synthesis persisted beyond the confines of the university. Did it, for instance, mark the work of rank-and-file ministers within American Methodism? To what degree did the average minister sympathize with the modern theological opinions emanating from the halls of the denomination’s premier institutions of higher learning? Furthermore, to what extent were ordinary ministers convinced that the Romantic philosophical outlook was a valuable source for discovering accurate, biblical knowledge about the atonement? And if they did find it to be a valuable source, to what extent did they abandon received opinions on the doctrine and the old philosophical ways supporting

¹⁰ Ernest Hamlin Abbott et al., *The Outlook*, vol. 83, 1906, 258.

¹¹ Wilson, *Methodist Theology*, 6.

those views?

In Defence of Traditional Conceptions

Mid-nineteenth-century America witnessed a revolutionary transition in thought. Works promoting the powerful Transcendental message of idealism by Romantic poets such as Hawthorne, Whitman and Thoreau challenged the eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism then dominating intellectual circles. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published in 1859, disputed the prevailing account of creation found in the book of Genesis. Other popular works, such as Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), championed social justice in the face of the often unjust political and economic activities of the government and many private businesses. Yet more than two decades later while other Protestants were busy incorporating many of these revolutionary ideas into their theological perspectives,¹² conservative Methodists remained almost impervious to such advancements of thought emanating from these works, choosing instead to retain those features of an older, traditional worldview forged by the Enlightenment synthesis. Conservatives praised, for instance, the evidentiary method promoted by such Christian philosophers as William Paley. 'We frankly say', wrote one contributor in defence of traditional religious opinions in the *Methodist Magazine* for 1879, 'that we consider one Paley worth four and twenty Coleridges'.¹³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge remained in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as he had in the first half, the ultimate representation of all things liberal for conservative-minded ministers. In contrast to the intuitive reasoning advocated by the Transcendentalists, the idea of a rational Christianity, in which Locke, Paley and Francis Bacon were used to defend the orthodox cause, continued to exercise a powerful influence over the conservative mind during the period. We must 'train the minds of the youth', one minister

¹² E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 397–481.

¹³ *MM* 61 (July 1879), 579.

argued in 1888, so that they may grow up to ‘be rational, scriptural Christians’.¹⁴ ‘Reason and proof’ are required, another Methodist insisted in 1895, before any truth is to be accepted.¹⁵ The evidentiary method of interpretation remained a central feature of those conservatives indebted to the Enlightenment heritage.

In their defence of traditional views on the atonement, ordinary conservative ministers tended to conflate the governmental and satisfaction theories of atonement upholding both as valid, orthodox theories. In 1878, for example, a contributor to *The Southern Review*, a monthly publication by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South,¹⁶ strongly urged the magazine’s readers to remember that it was only through Christ’s ‘satisfaction of divine justice’ that God could forgive human beings.¹⁷ That same year, the *Methodist Quarterly Review* highly commended the British Wesleyan Methodist Marshall Randles’ book *Substitution: A Treatise on the Atonement* (1877) to its readers for producing a theory which emphasized the penal aspects of the atonement.¹⁸ Sermons, articles and encyclopedia entries framing the doctrine in penal terms continued to appear in subsequent decades. The official church-sanctioned *Cyclopedia of Methodism* (1878), for instance, defined sin as a violation of divine law and Christ’s death as a satisfaction of that law.¹⁹ In a sermon on 1 Peter 1:11 published in the New York *Christian Advocate* for 1887, D.W. Bartine, a successful orator and popular camp-meeting preacher, regularly urged his listeners to understand Christ’s death as a satisfaction of God’s ‘offended justice and violated law’.²⁰ Furthermore, Methodist members of the Maine conference in 1897 were told that all ‘rebellious activity’ was considered a ‘violation of a divine law’ and would ‘be overtaken by a divine penalty, sooner or later, for God does not wink at violations of his law, either in the individual, the

¹⁴ *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference for 1888* (Boston, MA: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1888), 36.

¹⁵ *Minutes of the New Hampshire Annual Conference for 1895* (Bristol, NH: Enterprise, 1895), 49.

¹⁶ Formerly known as the *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* and later changed around 1900 to the *Southern Methodist Review*.

¹⁷ *The Southern Review* 24 (July 1878), 13, 102.

¹⁸ *MQR* (April 1878), 357.

¹⁹ ‘Atonement’, in Matthew Simpson, ed., *Cyclopedia of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Everts & Stewart, 1878), 67.

²⁰ D. W. Bartine, ‘The Sufferings of Christ’, *CA*, 13 January 1887.

corporation, or the government, but follows the offender and administers justice'.²¹ 'To make atonement for sin', explained Bishop Pierce in defence of a legal understanding of the doctrine in 1886, is to solve the problem of 'how the guilty could be rescued from wrath without a forfeiture of the divine veracity.'²² Writing in 1899, one conservative thought the only atonement view 'consistent with Wesleyan Arminianism' was the governmental view because, he concluded, it made divine law and justice central in its theory of redemption.²³ Traditional, legal-based notions of the atonement which perceived Christ's sufferings as a satisfaction of divine justice dominated conservative circles in the decades leading up to 1900.

Late nineteenth-century conservatives, furthermore, continued to stress the value of Common Sense Realism by using its philosophical principles to interpret and defend their reading of the atonement as a satisfaction of divine justice. In a rhetorical question put before his congregation of 1890 as to whether someone else besides Christ might have vicariously suffered for humanity, J. H. Lockwood, a member of the Northwest Kansas Conference, used a common sense reading of scripture to support his penal understanding of the atonement in his reply. 'The answer is plain, and self-evident', Lockwood confidently declared, 'Christ Jesus [was] the only one qualified to take man's place and vindicate God's law'.²⁴ This philosophical tradition continued to hold an important place among conservative Methodists in the years after 1900. Charles F. Creighton, chancellor of Nebraska Wesleyan University from 1887 to 1892 who, after his retirement, devoted himself to public lectures and private research until his death in 1918, employed common sense reasoning to defend an atonement theory centred on penal justice in his work *Law and the Cross* (1911). In this work written for ministers and laypeople, Creighton found such statements as 'the universe is governed according to law' and 'God has a

²¹ *Minutes of the Main Conference for 1897* (Portland, Maine: Transcript Printing House, 1897), 53.

²² Atticus G. Haygood, ed., *Bishop Pierce's Sermons and Addresses* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1886), 163.

²³ MR 59 (November 1899), 995.

²⁴ J. H. Lockwood, "The Power of Christ to Save", William X. Ninde, *The Kansas Methodist Pulpit: A Collection of Twenty-Four Sermons by Bishop W. X. Ninde and Various Members of the Four Kansas Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ed. J. W. D. Anderson (Topeka, KS: G. W. Crane & Co., 1890), 252–253.

moral government' to be 'common sense' assumptions which need no proof.²⁵ 'In all ages', explained Creighton, 'the common sense of mankind has agreed in affirming the universal supremacy of law.'²⁶ As a moral government, Creighton maintained, the doctrine of atonement possessed certain legal requirements that had to be satisfied in order to retain its moral status. So when human beings sinned they violated God's laws which had to be vindicated. Justice, then, for Creighton, takes centre stage. Only when God's requirement of justice has been satisfied, he maintained, can forgiveness take place.²⁷ Creighton's view, of course, was a restatement of the Edwardsean view of the atonement promoted by such antebellum Methodists as Asa Shinn, Timothy Merritt, Daniel Whedon and, in the 1870s, by John Miley.²⁸ And like his Methodist ancestors, Creighton supported his views with common sense reasoning. Creighton received high praise for his theological insights. John Moore, who was to be elected in 1918 to the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, wrote in 1912, for example, that '*Law and the Cross* is beyond praise. It clarifies, convinces, comforts, and inspires.'²⁹ Common sense reasoning remained an integral philosophical framework for explaining and defending traditional conceptions of the atonement.

Conservative ministers indebted to the Enlightenment worldview continued to portray God as a sovereign ruler. Traditionalists agreed with John Tigert, professor of theology at Vanderbilt University, when he wrote in 1884 in defence of the satisfaction view that there is 'no demand for atonement in the divine nature apart from God's office as a Sovereign.'³⁰ Christ's death, declared Tigert in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* for 1884, is a satisfaction which '[upholds] the authority of the Sovereign'.³¹ God was not, as progressives conceived him, a benevolent father but an independent deity whose decisions lay outside the human realm of human

²⁵ Charles F. Creighton, *Law and the Cross* (Cincinnati and New York: Jennings & Graham; Eaton & Mains, 1911), 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁸ See chapter 5.

²⁹ *NCA* 17 January 1912, 30.

³⁰ John J. Tigert, 'Methodist Doctrine of the Atonement', *MQR* 44 (April 1884), 284.

³¹ *MQR* 44 (April 1884), 283.

experience. Thus, God was subject to his own authority not the sentimental grievances of human beings as a father might. 'Justice and judgment', declared one Methodist in 1882, 'are the habitations of His throne.'³² Furthermore, Methodists maintained that those who located God's will in any other place than his sovereignty were mistaken, for everything traced back to God's sovereign will. In 1902 a contributor to the *Methodist Review* upheld divine sovereignty as the wellspring from which his dealings with humanity flowed in the face of fashionable teachings which affirmed God's love as that source. 'Love', he maintained, 'is subordinated to sovereignty, instead of sovereignty to love.'³³ Conservatives retained the essential features of God as a sovereign deity found among an earlier generation of enlightened Methodists.

Though conservatives continued to uphold a traditional evangelical theory of atonement centred on justice and substitution in the later nineteenth century, there also existed an Enlightenment-driven tendency to simplify the atonement by affirming those aspects of the doctrine which many considered undeniable Christian truths. Thomas James of the North Ohio conference, for example, urged his congregation to rely on the blood of Christ, the fundamental fact of the gospel, 'which has made Methodism so powerful, so aggressive, so successful'.³⁴ 'Without the blood of Atonement', explained James in 1877, 'without the Cross in which Paul gloried' the gospel is powerless to remove people's guilt or bring eternal salvation.³⁵ In a section of the *Sunday School Journal* for October 1881 entitled 'Hints for the Teachers' Meeting and the Class', Methodist leaders were encouraged in their teaching on the atonement to 'show how the principle of blood-sacrifice runs through the Bible'.³⁶ Children, moreover, were not taught a particular theory but instructed to embrace Christ's sacrificial death as a Christian truth. In a section entitled 'Words with Little People' the November lesson in the *Sunday School Journal* for 1881 urged teachers to impart to children the simple 'truth' of the gospel, that 'sin stains

³² *Minutes of the Erie Annual Conference of the MEC for 1882* (Akron, Ohio: Beacon Publishing Co., 1882), 95.

³³ *MR* 84 (May 1902), 495.

³⁴ MacGowan, 'Dying Testimony to the Power of the Gospel', *Zion's Herald*, 8 November 1877, 354.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ John H. Vincent, ed., *The Sunday School Journal*, vol. 13 (Methodist Pub. House, 1881), 277.

everybody' and remind them 'that only Christ's blood can take away sin'.³⁷ The message was clear: Christ's atoning death was a fact not a theory. This stripped-down view, in which theories were filtered out of the gospel leaving only facts, continued to be strongly affirmed by conservatives throughout the 1880s and, though decreasingly so, into the twentieth century. 'The *reality* of substitutional atonement', remarked a contributor to the *Western Christian Advocate* for 16 May 1883, is that 'He [Christ] offers up himself an atonement for sin, and with his own blood enters into heaven itself, making intercession for us in the presence of God.'³⁸ The fact of the atonement, opined the *Methodist Review* for 1885, 'begins and ends with the blood' of Christ.³⁹ 'To any one who has been fascinated by the modern theory, and has come to believe there is at last remission without shedding of blood, the language of [the Bible] ought to communicate something like a shock', the author concluded.⁴⁰ 'The doctrine of the atonement must be a statement of the facts, or it is false', insisted a contributor to the *Methodist Review* for 1897.⁴¹ Finally, one Methodist, writing in 1905, believed the atonement was 'a unique fact in the history of the universe', and that the substitutionary theory supporting the atonement was 'so well grounded in biological facts that the soundness of [its] argument cannot be challenged'.⁴² Driven by an Enlightenment worldview, popular Methodism continued to embrace the blood of Christ as an undeniable fact of the atonement.

As alternative, manward focused, views of the atonement increased in the decades leading up to 1914, ministers impatient with detailed discussions on the different atonement theories also found an austere, unadorned view of the atonement attractive. 'Works on the atonement continue to multiply', complained one minister in the *Methodist Review* for 1889, 'but

³⁷ Ibid., 13:296.

³⁸ 'Salvation Through Substitution', *WCA* (Ohio) 16 May 1883. (emphasis added).

³⁹ 'The Last Testimony to the Atonement', *MR* 67 (July 1885): 574.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ 'The Doctrine of Atonement', *MR* (November 1897): 906.

⁴² 'Biological Aspects of the Atonement', *MR* (November 1897): 948.

few there are that do not conceive of it in its theoretical aspects.⁴³ Whether old or new, ‘we are’, confessed another minister in 1889 on behalf of his Methodist colleagues, ‘weary of theories respecting the atonement’.⁴⁴ Our problem with ‘theorists’, the authored continued, is that they ‘are every-where assailing well-established conclusions seemingly to acquire notoriety rather than advance the cause of truth’.⁴⁵ Our wish, admitted the author, is to embrace an atonement which does not ‘diverge from the scriptural representation’ and presents Christ’s death as a blood sacrifice and ‘a sin offering’.⁴⁶ Other ministers in their endorsement of a simplified atonement went so far as to suggest that the Bible did not teach a particular theory, only that Christ’s death was a vicarious blood sacrifice. ‘As to what are called theories of the atonement, it [evangelical Methodism] does not profess to find any in the New Testament’, Robert Crook, a minister from Mount Vernon, New York, confidently declared in a *Methodist Review* article for 1885. Rather, he continued, Methodists affirm the scriptural view of atonement that ‘without shedding of blood there is no remission’.⁴⁷ We regard ‘the sufferings of Christ as vicarious and expiatory’, he wrote; beyond this view we do not hold to any specific theory.⁴⁸ Crook, however, was confident that his Methodist ancestors had correctly interpreted the atonement even though they may have supported a particular theory. New theories, Crook satisfactorily declared, ‘are a poor substitute for these well-tested truths of the inspired word. We need them not. The old wine is better.’⁴⁹ Discussions of the atonement, in which one theory was pitted against another, became tiresome to those who desired a simple, scriptural representation of Christ’s death.

The preference by some for a plain atonement view stripped of any particular theory continued beyond the year 1900. When Benton Solomon Rayner, minister, presiding elder and member of the Mississippi Conference, died in 1905, it was reported to be a joyous occasion

⁴³ ‘The Atonement’, *MR* 71 (September 1889): 795.

⁴⁴ Review of *Medium Theory of the Atonement*, *MR* 71 (July 1889): 633-634.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ ‘The Atonement’, 795–796.

⁴⁷ Robert Crook, ‘The Doctrine of the Atonement’, *MR* 67 (May 1885): 343.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 352.

because ‘his faith in the power of the blood of the atonement to cleanse from all sin never wavered’.⁵⁰ It is only Christ’s blood-stained cross, together with the perseverance of the saints, John Vincent, founder of the Chautauqua Assembly in 1874, wrote in 1906, that allows sinners to ‘be saved in heaven forever’.⁵¹ The Baltimore bishop Alpheus W. Wilson, former Missionary Secretary for the MECS and popular preacher and lecturer, was frustrated that the ‘biblical’ substitutionary theory had become so unfashionable among academics and educated clergy. In his estimation these individuals were denying the very thing on which their denomination was built, the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. ‘There are men to-day’, Wilson observed in 1910, ‘who are trying to get rid of that idea of a bloody sacrifice for human sin.’⁵² When asked how they know Christ’s blood does ‘expiate sin’, Wilson explained, these individuals respond with presumptuous remarks. They say, for instance,

I have studied the [Bible] and looked at the possibilities of the case; I have got every letter and word of the old language in which it is given to us, and I think I can read it better than most men can, and I know what the conditions of the times were and how the Jews thought. I have got an intellectual equipment that nobody else has, and therefore I can interpret it better than anybody else can.⁵³

Wilson derided such thinking. ‘I beg your pardon sir’, he scolded, but ‘you have not got it.’⁵⁴

The most intelligent people of the time did not fully understand Christ’s death, continued Wilson; even the ‘apostles themselves couldn’t understand’.⁵⁵ The only thing we can know for sure, Wilson averred, was that Christ’s blood served as a propitiation for the sin of humanity because Christ himself said “‘My blood is for the remission of sins” and Paul affirmed it when he wrote “‘through faith in his blood we are justified””.⁵⁶ By focusing on the theme of Christ’s blood as a remission for sin, conservatives were able to affirm the substitutionary nature of

⁵⁰ Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the Year 1905* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1905), 241.

⁵¹ Quoted in Daniel Coit Gilman, Harry Thurston Peck, and Frank Moore Colby, eds., *The New International Encyclopaedia* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1906), 383.

⁵² Alpheus W. Wilson, ‘The Atonement: The Unique Fitness of Christ’, *MQR* 59 (October 1910): 634.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 635.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 639.

Christ's atonement without having to defend a specific theory.

Conservatives in the later nineteenth century remained indebted to the Enlightenment heritage. They continued to display the characteristic features found among a previous generation, and believed those traditional views of the atonement, in which Christ's death was portrayed as a vicarious sacrifice which satisfied divine justice and released humanity from the penalty of death, were accurate, scriptural representations concerning the doctrine of redemption. Other conservatives, disgusted in part by elaborate theories of the atonement, turned to a simplified rendering of the doctrine which championed the simple truth that through Christ's blood forgiveness was made possible. Conservatives believed the common thread that united all true evangelicals was a belief in redemption by Christ's substitutionary atonement.

Modern Modifications

While one group of ministers and laity were occupied with the maintenance of traditional theological opinions during the period, the new intellectual and cultural mood, discussed in chapter six, had caught the attention of another set of Methodists who hoped to revolutionize evangelical theology.⁵⁷ Following the work produced by such prominent intellectuals as Borden P. Bowne and Randolph S. Foster, ordinary Methodists went about disassembling the Enlightenment synthesis, hoping to construct a theology more agreeable with their modern sensibilities. Modern-minded ministers, for instance, issued complaints against traditional conceptions of God which viewed him as a lawgiver and judge, and noted the lack of attention given to his role 'as a loving Father earnestly seeking the highest welfare of every living thing' in evangelical churches.⁵⁸ They desired a current atonement which portrayed God as benevolent father and Christ as a moral example. With this new perspective, they declared, Methodism was better equipped to meet the demands of a new Romantic age. Believing conventional constructions of the atonement failed to meet the deepest spiritual needs of a new generation of

⁵⁷ Rufus K. Noyes, ed., *Views of Religion* (Boston: L. K. Washburn, 1906), 549.

⁵⁸ *MQR* 4 (May 1888), 263.

cosmopolitan evangelicals, a broad-minded evangelical party emerged among Methodists in the 1880s.

The appetite for a modern theology built around new philosophical methods represented a landmark development in the history of evangelicalism. Guiding the revisionist efforts of Methodists was a coalescence of ideas rooted in the Transcendentalist heritage of mid-century New England Unitarians.⁵⁹ Methodism underwent a dramatic educational expansion beginning in the antebellum period and stretching to the later decades of the nineteenth century. The devotion of Methodists to higher education and ministerial training was unparalleled before or since in the history of the denomination. In the post-bellum period would-be ministers flocked to seminaries, ministerial training colleges and four-year liberal arts colleges to obtain not simply a theological education, but a broad-based one which would provide them with the necessary skills to join the ranks of the professional classes.⁶⁰ Many of these students in the later nineteenth century were exposed to new currents of thought; and it was not entirely surprising that at least a few of them would give currency to this new theological worldview in their future ministries.⁶¹

Ministers casting their theology in a new Romantic mould were guided by intuition and philosophical idealism. We apprehend knowledge not through the senses or by scientific investigation, declared one minister in 1884, but by our 'intuitions'.⁶² Frederick A. Leitch, a member of the Maine Conference, confessed in typical idealist fashion in 1910 that he believed 'the external world' was perceived by 'the expression of mind' rather than by the senses.⁶³

⁵⁹ See chapter 6.

⁶⁰ Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870-1970* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 246–270.

⁶¹ F. Geral Ensley, 'American Methodism: An Experiment in Secular Christianity', Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *The History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 3:615–626; Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America: A History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 327–336; William McGuire King, 'Denominational Modernization and Religious Identity: The Case of the Methodist Episcopal Church' Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays* (Kingswood Books, 1993), 343–355; David B. Potts, *Wesleyan University, 1831-1910: Collegiate Enterprise in New England*, Reprint. (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 118–160.

⁶² *MQR* 6 (October 1884), 599.

⁶³ Frederick A. Leitch, 'The Moral Responsibility of God to Man', *MR* (May 1910): 363.

Other ministers, too, urged their colleagues to free themselves from the shackles of the Enlightenment synthesis by turning inward to the intuitive realm of knowledge. We need a religion ‘based upon internal evidences’, suggested one Methodist in 1896, which is built on ‘intuitive knowledge’.⁶⁴ By 1914 Methodists frequently championed intuition as a reliable source of Christian truth, welcoming it as a ‘fresh breeze’ in ‘an age of mechanistic and naturalistic thinking’.⁶⁵ A contributor to the *Western Christian Advocate* for 1914 praised the work of those authors who in recent years were leaders in ‘the reaction against the ultra-rationalistic philosophy of the past fifty or so years’.⁶⁶ We are glad, the author continued, to now know that ‘the intellect is only a part of consciousness, and not the most important part at that’, for the ‘laws of the Universe’ are a ‘mystery’ and ‘bigger than the intellect’.⁶⁷ ‘To solve these mysteries from an intellectual standpoint is bound to meet failure. If they [the mysteries] are to be apprehended at all’, the author happily informed his readers, ‘it is by intuition, whereby we may enter into and get in harmony with these laws.’⁶⁸ By the end of the period many ordinary ministers had thrown their support behind the new philosophical mood coursing through the American Protestant landscape, believing it capable of delivering a fresh, reliable religious perspective.

A second trait found among those ministers adjusting their religious views to the tenor of the Romantic age was a benevolent view of God. Drawing on the Unitarian concept of God’s universal Fatherhood advanced in the antebellum period by such spokesmen as Frederic Henry Hedge, New England minister and co-founder of the Transcendental Club in 1836, Methodists endorsed the Fatherhood concept as early as 1877. ‘God is our Father’, declared a contributor to the *Christian Advocate* in the October 1877 issue, and ‘is ever vigilantly watching over us and caring for us with a yearning, tender, parental love, inconceivably great than that of the fondest

⁶⁴ *MQR* 20 (March-April 1896), 72.

⁶⁵ *MR* 95 (November 1914), 847-848.

⁶⁶ ‘Intuition and Religion’, *WCA* 8 April 1914, 423.

⁶⁷ *WCA* 8 April 1914, 423.

⁶⁸ *WCA* 8 April 1914, 423.

mother's heart that ever beat.⁶⁹ One of the most important doctrines Christ taught during his earthly ministry, exclaimed one minister in 1886, was 'the tender, loving Fatherhood of God'.⁷⁰ 'The Fatherhood of God and the atonement', insisted M. B. Chapman, member of the Missouri Conference, in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* for 1890, 'are the great fundamental principles of the gospel, and out of them flows the missionary idea as essentially as a stream gushes from a fountain'.⁷¹ By 1897 progressive Methodists were openly praising Channing and the Unitarian tradition for delivering to evangelicals the concepts of 'the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man'.⁷² Yet after 1900 Methodists attempted to make this doctrine one of their own inventions by rooting it in scripture rather than the Unitarian tradition. In a discussion on the imagination of Jesus Christ in the *Western Christian Advocate* for 1910, for example, South Carolina minister H. F. Harris determined that the concept of divine Fatherhood could be traced through the scriptures having been conceived by Christ's own imagination. 'If it be admitted that Christ possessed an imagination, and if it be granted that the imagination is the faculty of vision, then the conception of the Fatherhood of God must be referred to the imagination, for Christ arrived at it exclusively by vision.'⁷³ Furthermore, Harris contended in an endorsement not only of the Fatherhood doctrine but of apprehending knowledge by intuition as well, '[Christ] did not reason it out' but 'perceived it by...subjective conception'. 'So', Harris concluded in a hearty endorsement of this new understanding of God, 'the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God had always been true, but it required the seeing eye of Jesus of Nazareth to perceive it'.⁷⁴ Though their progressive efforts were rewarded with new converts, many still had to make the argument, as one did in 1917, that 'God is not simply awful personified justice, whose chief interest is to keep his great white throne up straight, but he is a Father, whose

⁶⁹ *CA* 4 October 1877, 631.

⁷⁰ *CA* 30 December 1886, 833.

⁷¹ M. B. Chapman, 'The Rationale of Missions', *MQR* 7 (January 1890): 379.

⁷² *CA* 13 October 1897, 642.

⁷³ *MQR* 59:3 (1910), 544.

⁷⁴ *MQR* 59:3 (1910), 544.

passion is his children.’⁷⁵ The Fatherhood of God, a distinct feature of the Romantic synthesis, was entirely incorporated into the religious worldview of the broad-minded minister.

Methodist ministers swayed by modernist tendencies also developed a deep appreciation for the immanence of God, a third feature of the Romantic age. Whereas enlightened Methodists typically framed the world as a bifurcation between the natural world and supernatural, though affirming that God was the supernatural force behind the earthly world, ordinary ministers disregarded this distinction. Following the lead of their high profile progressive colleagues, they denied the sharp division between the two worlds, and chose instead a view which combined both worlds. This union was made possible, for example, through the incarnation, a divine act which ushered in a new spiritual age. This new age, they insisted, ‘joined two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly’ and ‘evoked a new sense of the *essential* worth of human nature’ which ‘unfolded in the human heart, the sense of the kinship between God and man’.⁷⁶ The ‘immanence of God’, as one minister in 1905 observed, was now heralded as ‘a great truth long neglected’.⁷⁷ No longer was God viewed as a transcendent deity, proclaimed another in 1897, who, ‘as a machinist makes an engine and runs it from outside by the laws of matter’, but as one who ‘is in every particle of matter and in every movement of mind’.⁷⁸ God, they rejoiced, is now rightly viewed as ‘the One not far away, in whom we live and move and have our being’.⁷⁹ Methodists cherished the immanence of God and promoted it by, for example, making it a distinguishing feature of Christianity which separated it from other religions. ‘The Supreme God of Christianity is immanent in the world’, declared Boston minister George Washburn in an 1896 article comparing ‘Christianity and Mohammedanism’, ‘and is ever seeking to bring his children into loving fellowship with himself.’⁸⁰ The central goal of Christ’s

⁷⁵ Raymond H. Huse, *Letters on the Atonement* (New York and Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1917), 33.

⁷⁶ *MR* 85 (September 1907), 810.

⁷⁷ *CA* 28 December 1905, 15.

⁷⁸ *ZH* 6 January 1897, 8.

⁷⁹ *CA* 28 December 1905, 15.

⁸⁰ *The Gospel in All Lands* (December 1896), 556.

earthly ministry, declared another minister in 1894, was ‘to bring the immanence of the spiritual world to their [humanity’s] consciousness.’⁸¹ God was immanently present in the world, intimately linked to his creation. The implication of such thinking was that Christ redeemed humanity, not by the cross through a penal system based on justice and punishment, but by his entire life through his self-sacrificial presence on earth. Humanity is redeemed, one Methodist averred in 1908, through ‘a process’ and is sustained by God’s immanent presence on earth.⁸² Other Methodists went further, viewing the incarnation as a redemptive doctrine in and of itself. In 1899 a contributor to the *Methodist Review* affirmed a definition of Christianity by Adolf von Harnack, professor of ecclesiastical history at the University of Berlin from 1888 to 1921, which located the redemption of the human race in the incarnation of Christ.⁸³ By 1907 some Methodist ministers were presenting the incarnation as ‘the foundation stone of New Testament Christianity’.⁸⁴ Approval of the immanentist theology surged among ordinary Methodist ministers in late nineteenth-century America.

In the decades after 1880 criticisms levelled against traditional theories of the atonement significantly increased. Lawrence College president George Steele, an affable man who amused students by reading the newspaper while walking through campus each afternoon, believed a new generation of Methodists was dissatisfied with Miley’s governmental theory because they thought it a ‘logical artifice—rather than a natural plan consistent with and growing out of the very nature of things’.⁸⁵ Methodists do not want, contended Steele in 1888, a highly processed construction which intrudes on the doctrine’s natural development. Christ’s death for humanity, insisted another minister in 1890, was an act of grace not a vicarious substitution. ‘Christ, the just, suffered for the unjust, but not as a penal substitute, but as a merciful benefactor.’⁸⁶ By

⁸¹ *CA* 10 May 1894, 299.

⁸² *MQR* 57 (July 1908), 458.

⁸³ *MR* 81 (May 1899), 491-492.

⁸⁴ *MQR* 56 (October 1907), 811.

⁸⁵ George M. Steele, ‘Arminian Theories of the Atonement’, *MR* 70 (March 1888): 176.

⁸⁶ *MQR* 9 (October 1890), 107-108.

1900 viewing Christ's death in gruesome terms was an unsavoury idea for those ministers with cosmopolitan sensibilities. Older theories in which Christ was conceived as a crucified saviour whose blood redeemed humanity were cast aside in favour of modern theories which emphasized the moral qualities of Christ's atonement. Randolph S. Foster, bishop and former Northwestern University president, insisted that the penal substitutionary view was wrong because it made Christ a sinner and removed forgiveness from the equation. If human beings were punished, he maintained, they could not have been forgiven.⁸⁷ 'But these are not the only grounds for rejecting the idea of substitutional punishment as a delusion and a snare', he smugly wrote.⁸⁸ Foster maintained that Christ's sufferings on the cross were acts 'of love and pity', grounded in the 'simple inspiration of love'.⁸⁹ After 1900 cosmopolitan Methodists were in complete agreement with Franklin N. Parker, southern Methodist preacher and later interim chancellor and president of Emory University, when he complained in 1910 that 'the Atonement as presented by the older theology is positively repulsive to the moral and aesthetic sensibilities of the modern mind'.⁹⁰ In the later nineteenth century Methodist criticisms against traditional substitutionary theories catapulted to new heights.

The result for many was the broadening of their theological convictions on the atonement. Some, for instance, incorporated the moral theory then in vogue amongst the broader coalition of theological liberals. Though, as one Methodist confessed in 1917, the moral influence theory 'does not go far enough' in teaching the vicarious nature of the atonement, it nevertheless commendably showcases Christ's love and provides the ethical framework around which Christianity should be built.⁹¹ Others wholeheartedly endorsed the moral influence theory finding it 'great in promoting the free acceptance of salvation by faith'.⁹² James Stephenson,

⁸⁷ Randolph S. Foster, *Studies in Theology* (Cincinnati: Eaton and Mains, 1899), 299–308.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Franklin N. Parker, 'Neglect of the Atonement in Present-Day Preaching', *MQR* 59 (January 1910): 5.

⁹¹ Huse, *Letters on the Atonement*, 21–23, 69.

⁹² *ZH* 4 October 1899, 1263.

popular preacher and member of the Cincinnati Ohio Conference, taught a moral influence theory to members of his congregation. ‘Knowledge is acquired’, he wrote in the *Christian Advocate* for 1883, through ‘imitation’.⁹³ For this reason, Stephenson contended, God sent Christ in the form of man so that humans could imitate those moral qualities Christ exemplified. ‘The world has had but one perfect example of moral purity and excellence among men’, he declared, ‘and he was the Man of Sorrows, who bloomed for thirty-three years as a spotless human lily’ before he ‘expired on the cross’.⁹⁴ God needed to become incarnate to serve as an example so that Christians could follow the ‘Christ-like way’ of humility and sacrifice. ‘The Christian life’ today, wrote Stephenson, ‘is not a sentimental dream but an intensely active and earnest life’ which demands the same kind of love and sacrifice Christ exemplified.⁹⁵ Others strongly agreed. Christ, declared one minister in 1905, is ‘the Master of morality, whose life is the supreme example of conduct [and] whose teaching embodies the highest ideals of character’.⁹⁶ ‘His dying’, declared a Baltimore minister at the annual conference for 1890, ‘was in beautiful harmony with the whole spirit of his life of faith and love.’ For this reason he is, the author stated, our ‘example of holiness’.⁹⁷ ‘Christ set the peerless example’, read the address of the bishops before members of the General Conference of 1896, by which all our lives should be ordered.⁹⁸ When attempting to construct a moral theology for the new age, Methodists turned to Christ’s life as portrayed in the scriptures in which he ‘is set forth as the supreme example of self- sacrifice’.⁹⁹ ‘Whatever our theory of Atonement may be’, maintained a contributor to the *Methodist Review* for 1905, ‘our preaching of the Cross must be throughout...an exaltation of the

⁹³ James Stephenson, ‘Christ Our Example’, *CA* 9 August 1883, 499.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *CA* 29 June 1905, 18.

⁹⁷ *Minutes of the Baltimore Annual Conference for 1890* (New York and Cincinnati: Hunt & Eaton; Cranston & Stowe), 112.

⁹⁸ David S. Monroe, ed. *Journal of the General Conference of 1896* (New York and Cincinnati: Eaton & Mains; Curts & Jennings), 56.

⁹⁹ *MQR* 16 (July 1894): 378-379.

ethical splendor of God.’¹⁰⁰ By 1914 ministers were able to endorse the moral influence theory without causing much of an uproar among conservatives. W. Arter Wright, a minister in the North Ohio Conference, for example, delivered a paper before the Preachers’ Meeting of Columbus, Ohio, in 1913 that criticized the substitutionary view before stressing the value of the moral influence theory. Recommended for publication by ministers present at the meeting, Wright’s paper appeared later that year as *The Problem of Atonement*.¹⁰¹ The moral influence theory had gained remarkable currency among ordinary Methodists by the end of the period.

Other ministers desirous of change were doubtful whether or not one particular theory contained the whole truth of such a glorious act. The atonement, confessed a southern minister in 1910, is a ‘sacred mystery’ which cannot be encompassed by any one man-made theory.¹⁰² ‘The marvel of the redemption is great, and the mystery of the atonement is as deep as life itself’, contended another minister in the *Western Christian Advocate* for 1914.¹⁰³ The implication was that Christ’s sacrificial efforts, like the inner workings of life itself, were beyond human comprehension. Christians may have glimpses of truth concerning the nature of Christ’s death, but that it was considered a miraculous act demonstrated the inability of its divine truths to be confined to any one human theory. While some appreciated the mysterious nature of Christ’s death, others believed it their duty to refine the doctrine in light of modern theological and scientific developments. The great need of our time, announced Franklin Parker, is ‘to get the Atonement placed in relation to God as Father and connect it with the social life of the times’.¹⁰⁴ Though not offering any specific insights, another Methodist, writing in 1909, thought the evolutionary theory could be fruitfully employed to recast the theory of atonement because, he argued, evolution is a process just as redemption is.¹⁰⁵ Methodist opinions on the atonement

¹⁰⁰ *MR* (July 1905): 524.

¹⁰¹ *WCA* 8 April 1914.

¹⁰² *MQR* 59 (January 1910), 194.

¹⁰³ *WCA* 8 July 1914, 11.

¹⁰⁴ *MQR* 59 (January 1910), 10.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Evolution and the Atonement’, *MR* (May 1909), 435-445.

broadened even further in the period after 1900.

Conservative Reaction

Methodists whose theological opinions diverged from traditional views of redemption felt the stinging rebuke of the conservative pen. Our ministers, lamented Daniel Curry in 1887, fail ‘to deal with the primary Christian doctrines—sin, atonement, and repentance’.¹⁰⁶ If ‘the strong meat of the Gospel’ is no longer preached from the pulpit, contended Curry, it would slowly ‘disappear from the popular thought and cease to be practically effective’.¹⁰⁷ If progressive ministers continued to lead Methodists down the path of liberalism, Curry predicted, the end result would be a ‘decadence of faith’ for their church.¹⁰⁸ ‘Liberal Christianity’, he insisted, ‘has very little to say about atonement by Christ’s death, for it finds no need of anything of that kind.’¹⁰⁹ Instead of redemption through Christ’s blood atonement, complained Curry, theological liberalism offers redemption through ‘moral influences’.¹¹⁰ For Curry, an evangelical was someone who believed in the vicarious substitutionary death of Christ. James Mudge, a leading New England minister and member of the opposition, complained that the conservative James W. Mendenhall’s editorial labours during his tenure at the *Methodist Review* from 1888 to 1892 were marked by a love of tradition and a prejudice against modern academic attempts to disembowel theological orthodoxy.¹¹¹ The frequency with which Mendenhall ‘denounced those who had strayed from the safe paths of orthodoxy’, candidly confessed a frustrated Mudge in 1895, ‘amaze one by their length and number’.¹¹² When progressive Methodists issued statements arguing that religious knowledge could be grasped intuitively, conservatives

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Curry, ‘Some Causes of the Want of Success of the Pulpit’, *MR* 69 (1887): 270.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ James Rigg, ed., *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, vol. 83 (London: C. H. Kelly, 1895), 202.

¹¹² James Mudge, ‘Seventy-Five Years of the ‘Methodist Review’’, William V. Kelley, ed., *MR*, 76 (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1894), 531.

complained that these works ‘promise light, but give only darkness’.¹¹³ Others warned that ‘a change in any essential part of our faith will logically lead to a modification of the rest’.¹¹⁴

Conservatives were convinced that the new theology spelled the demise of evangelicalism.

In the years directly following 1900, conservatives grew more concerned that the trend to revise the atonement among a few was gaining wider acceptance among the church’s ministers and laypeople. The Virginia bishop Charles C. Granbery, in his Cole Lectures for 1900 delivered at Vanderbilt University, identified a fundamental shift in how evangelicals viewed the divine character, the atonement and humanity. ‘If forgiveness be mentioned’ by liberal-leaning evangelicals, he observed, ‘it is explained not as an act of sovereign mercy through the atonement of Christ, but as one of the effects of [individuals’] inward change’ brought about by their own volition.¹¹⁵ Charles Creighton was convinced that the average Methodist had been persuaded by 1911 to believe the atonement was ‘a mixture of mystery and absurdity no longer tenable in a scientific age’.¹¹⁶ Leander W. Munhall, in his *Breakers! Methodism Adrift* (1913), had similar observations about the state of Methodist views on the atonement. For Munhall, the church’s teaching on the redemption of humankind had been corrupted from her Sunday school literature to her schools of theology.¹¹⁷ William Kelley, editor of the *Methodist Review* for nearly two decades, believed those who were greedy for a new kind of Methodism foolishly brushed aside sacred truths for creative new theories. Picking up his editorial pen in 1904, Kelley warned the thousands of readers of the *Methodist Review* that ‘the Traditional ought not to be sneered at nor disrespectfully spoken of by any beardless and bumptious young theory still in its minority’.¹¹⁸ Writing in 1910 Franklin N. Parker, popular theologian and later dean of Candler School of Theology at Emory University between 1914 and 1938, believed there were many

¹¹³ MR 75 (May 1893), 501.

¹¹⁴ MR 71 (January 1889): 75.

¹¹⁵ John Cowper Granbery, *Experience, The Crowning Evidence of the Christian Religion* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1901), 115.

¹¹⁶ Creighton, *Law and the Cross*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Munhall, *Breakers! Methodism Adrift*, 40, 66–87, 88–111.

¹¹⁸ William V. Kelley, ‘A Word About the Traditional’, MR 20 (July 1904): 618–620.

Methodist preachers ‘who are more or less at sea as to what the death of Christ really means’.¹¹⁹ Richard J. Cooke, elected bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1912, believed the church was on a slow downward spiral because ‘while the fundamental truths of Christianity are not categorically denied, they are neither persistently written about nor vigorously preached’.¹²⁰ Cooke blamed the downgrading of Methodist theology on the new doctrinal impulses which prized a forgiving God who cared little for the repercussions of a person’s sin. ‘The blessed evangel that God is Love’, he wrote in 1907, ‘is so exclusively emphasized that the idea of God as the Holy One who abhors iniquity and will punish the transgressor has become a vanishing remnant of mediaeval theology.’¹²¹ As for the atonement, he complained, ‘the incomparable sacrifice on Calvary becomes in some quarters a martyrdom to a moral ideal. Christ the Redeemer becomes Christ the Exemplar.’¹²² Internal strife over traditional doctrines reached a boiling point in the years surrounding 1900.

Tensions that had been brewing for nearly a decade erupted in 1904 when a little-known minister brought heresy charges against one of the intellectual giants of progressive Methodism, Boston University professor Borden P. Bowne, at the General Conference. George A. Cooke, pastor of a small yet thriving congregation in Brandon, Vermont, began his assault on Bowne shortly after the Boston University professor published his popular book *Atonement* in 1900. Believing Bowne’s treatment of the atonement was a frontal assault on evangelicalism and fearing the growing influence Bowne’s views were having on ordinary ministers, Cooke devised a plan to discredit Bowne’s opinions by publishing a series of works attacking his commitment to historic Christianity. One such publication, for instance, printed in Boston and selling for ten cents, appeared as *The Present and the Future of Methodism* (1900). In it Cooke charged Bowne with denying the ‘evangelical doctrine of atonement’ and issued what had become a standard warning

¹¹⁹ Parker, ‘Neglect of the Atonement in Present-Day Preaching’, 4.

¹²⁰ Richard J. Cooke, *The Incarnation and Recent Criticism* (New York and Cincinnati: Eaton & Mains; Jennings & Graham, 1907), 2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²² *Ibid.*

amongst conservatives to those in support of Bowne's opinions. 'Every church that holds to the evangelical faith' must be 'clear in its statements on the atonement'.¹²³ For Cooke, as it had for other conservatives, such a clear statement must centre on the vicarious suffering of Christ. Furthermore, Cooke interpreted Bowne's meddling with the evangelical view as a subtle, ingenious plea for anarchy in the church. Such views were not only deserving of harsh criticism, contended Cooke, but should be considered tantamount to religious heresy. If Bowne's pioneering thought was not curbed, it would, Cooke held, signal the end of evangelical Methodism.¹²⁴ Innovation, that esteemed Romantic quality, was the Trojan horse come to wreck all that Methodists held dear.

Though Bowne was unanimously acquitted on the charges of heresy because, the New York East Conference found, the claims could not be 'amply sustained', Cooke found many ministers who supported his custodial efforts.¹²⁵ Critics of Bowne's theological progressivism complained, for instance, that the incarnation played such a central role in Bowne's atonement theology that a person was tempted to believe the dictum that 'when Jesus was born the atonement was made.'¹²⁶ 'The Church has been celebrating His death as a sacrament,' snapped one critic, 'not His incarnation.'¹²⁷ The popular Philadelphia minister Leander Munhall believed Bowne's views on the atonement undermined the evangelical consensus. 'I find', he unequivocally confessed, Bowne's views on the atonement 'unbiblical, unmethodistic and infidel'.¹²⁸ Furthermore, Munhall continued, 'they are destructive of spiritual life in the Church and subversive of the Christian faith'.¹²⁹ The popular California bishop Stephen Merrill complained in a *Zion's Herald* editorial for 26 December 1900 that Bowne's conception of

¹²³ George A. Cooke, *The Present and the Future of Methodism: An Examination of the Teachings of Prof. Borden P. Bowne* (The Cushman Press, 1900), 10.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²⁵ *The Week's Progress* 23 (16 April 1904), 359. For a full account of Bowne's trial see Harmon Smith, 'Borden Parker Bowne: Heresy at Boston', in *American Religious Heretics*, ed. George H. Shriver (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1966), 148–187; James M. Buckley, 'The Acquittal of Professor Bowne', *CA*, 14 April 1904.

¹²⁶ Wilson, *Methodist Theology Vs. Methodist Theologians*, 30.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Munhall, *A Crisis in Methodism*, 19.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

redemption retained nothing of the traditional Methodist view. The atonement as conceived by Bowne, grumbled Merrill,

carries two marks on its face giving it presumptive right to be called Methodist. The first is that it emanates from a school for training of Methodist preachers, and the second is that it bears the imprint of the Methodist publishing house. And “here endeth” the list of Methodist qualities.¹³⁰

‘Bowne’, wrote yet another critic, ‘has no smallest appreciation of the Christian truth that Christ died to make atonement for man’s sin. To him this view is utterly artificial.’¹³¹ A common complaint among Methodists was that Bowne’s atonement severed the connection with historic Christianity. ‘Is it likely’, wondered another, ‘that the centuries as well as the Bible are mistaken?’¹³² Many concluded, as had bishop Merrill, that Bowne’s ‘heroic theories’ were simply ‘unchristian’.¹³³

Progressives, however, were not deterred in their attempts to revise traditional doctrines. They remained consistently optimistic about recasting older conceptions of the atonement in modern terms, even in the face of opposition. ‘I venture to think that there is no Evangelical church that on the whole offers more freedom in matters of doctrinal belief than the Methodist’ insisted one minister in a letter dated 11 May 1899 to Wendell P. Garrison, editor of *The Nation* and son of the famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.¹³⁴ In 1909 Borden P. Bowne spoke for many when he expressed his enthusiasm for the present and future state of Methodism. ‘I think the total outlook for good things was never so promising as it is now, and I find myself increasingly optimistic.’¹³⁵ The Chicago minister Joseph W. Van Cleve, who would later become the General Secretary for the Commission on Finance, brazenly declared in the *Methodist Review* for 1910 that ‘the battle between the pessimist and the optimist is always on’. In our day when ‘theology is in constant process of being thought over’, the pessimists ‘are always trying the old

¹³⁰ Stephen M. Merrill, ‘What is the Drift’ *ZH*, 26 December 1900, 1665.

¹³¹ William H. Burns, *Crisis in Methodism* (The Christian Witness Co., 1909), 61.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Merrill, ‘What is the Drift’, 1665.

¹³⁴ ‘At Ease in Methodism’, *The Nation*, 11 May 1899, 354.

¹³⁵ Borden P. Bowne in George A. Coe, ‘Borden Parker Bowne’, *MR* (July 1910): 517.

answers on the new questions—an ill-starred undertaking which is foredoomed to fail'.¹³⁶

Impervious to conservative attacks, progressives continued to champion their denomination's flexibility and openness to new forms of fashionable thinking.

Mediating Methodists

Between 1880 and 1914 a third group of evangelicals emerged who retained a reverent attitude to traditional doctrines but who were also swayed by aspects of the Romantic synthesis, being convinced that some modification of the church's theological heritage was needed. In 1878 Daniel Dorchester, New England minister and historian, hoped to calm those alarmists who thought the emergence of progressive theology spelled the demise of evangelical Methodism. The refining of traditional doctrines, he wrote in *The Problem of Religious Progress* (1881), a work which appeared on the Methodist Episcopal Church's course of study from 1896 to 1904, was not altogether bad because it had the effect of exposing elaborate, outdated theories while producing a truer form of Christianity. By revising our older creeds, he insisted, we 'are shedding the devitalized and retaining the vital'.¹³⁷ In this endeavour, he observed, progressive evangelicals were aligned with historic Protestantism which 'has ever been conscious of imperfections and weaknesses, making necessary some kind of siftings, modifications, and restatements' in its attempt to create a more scriptural Christianity.¹³⁸ Protestantism, he confidently concluded, is not in decline, nor in terrible trouble, but moving in a healthy, progressive direction.¹³⁹ Dorchester was able to make such optimistic declarations because he believed, for example, that the moral influence theory could be merged with the vicarious theory. Christ, he remarked in a series of lectures delivered at Boston University's School of Theology, subsequently published as *Concessions of Liberalists* (1890), is both 'a sublime example of self-sacrificing love' and a 'sacrificial offering to sin' which vindicated divine righteousness and

¹³⁶ Joseph W. Van Cleve, 'An Optimistic View of Life in the Churches', *MR* (May 1910): 395.

¹³⁷ Daniel Dorchester, *The Problem of Religious Progress* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1881), 42.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 419–474.

pardoned sinners.¹⁴⁰ Conscious of the need for revision but retaining a love of the traditional, a new generation of Methodists forged a middle way between the old and new.

Some chose to blend the various atonement theories, citing the need for a greater harmony amongst disparate ideas. Thomas Stalker, member of the Michigan Conference, for example, thought the correct substitutionary view was neither a ‘butcher theory’ nor based on a ‘blood theology’ but a blend of the Bushnellian and governmental theories. Christ’s ‘sufferings and death [on] the cross’, he wrote, are the result ‘of an eternal Father’s love for sinners, truth, and righteousness’, and God’s desire to ‘save man from the grasp of violated law and insulted justice’.¹⁴¹ ‘Love for sinners cannot act apart from love of right and justice’, Stalker declared.¹⁴² ‘The atonement was not an afterthought of God’, admitted Stalker, ‘but an essential part of the creative plan.’¹⁴³ Thus, he explained, ‘Christ became incarnate to express an eternal, immutable, axiomatic truth’ that ‘without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins’.¹⁴⁴ ‘The atonement’, Stalker concluded, ‘is the grandest embodiment and satisfaction of both love and justice.’¹⁴⁵ Although Louisiana minister Franklin N. Parker was critical of certain theological tendencies in modern thought, he nevertheless believed there were viewpoints which possessed great potential for bringing Methodists closer to ‘the power of [Christ’s] cross’.¹⁴⁶ Such newer constructions, Parker estimated in 1910, rightly blended Christ’s ‘suffering’ and ‘sympathetic love’ in their theories of atonement. Parker’s traditionalist underpinnings combined with his ability to appreciate newer viewpoints allowed him to advocate an atonement which joined both objective and subjective aspects. ‘The ideas of fatherhood and lawgiver of God’ he wrote in 1910, ‘must find a union.’ The way forward was difficult, but Parker found hope in the work of John Scott Lidgett, whose recent attempts to revise the traditional substitutionary theory in light

¹⁴⁰ Daniel Dorchester, *Concessions of Liberalists to Orthodoxy* (New York: W.B. Ketcham, 1890), 140–142.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Stalker, ‘Thoughts on the Atonement’, *MR* 69 (September 1887): 729.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 722.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 723.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 729.

¹⁴⁶ Franklin N. Parker, ‘Neglect of the Atonement in Present-Day Preaching’, *MQR* 59 (January 1910): 8.

of modern insights he found inspiring. ‘The attempt of Mr. Lidgett in his *Spiritual Principal of the Atonement*’, he wrote, ‘is in the right direction.’¹⁴⁷ Mediating Methodists grounded Christ’s death in a combination of God’s love and jurisprudence.

Mediating Methodists were also swayed by the Romantic emphasis on mystery and became more comfortable with uncertain knowledge. Camden M. Cobern, minister at St James Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago, taught his congregation that the atonement possessed ‘a mystery too deep for human thought’. ‘We cannot explain the atonement’ he categorically declared, for ‘to explain it would be to deny it’. ‘No theory’, he insisted, ‘can adequately measure the mighty fact’ of Christ’s saving work on the cross.¹⁴⁸ Thomas Stalker, an Englishman by birth who had immigrated to America and joined the Michigan Conference in 1858, argued in an article for the September 1887 issue of the *Methodist Review* that most of the controversy surrounding the atonement was because the ‘atoning work of Christ [was] shrouded in mystery’.¹⁴⁹ A great many ‘distorted, repugnant, and incomplete theories of the atonement’ existed among Methodists, he contended, because so many people ‘have tried to compress infinite thought, love, and suffering into their little, logical, theological, and philosophical propositions’.¹⁵⁰ Enoch L. Fancher, Methodist minister, New York State Supreme Court Judge, and later president of the American Bible Society from 1885 to 1890, argued in 1881 that the atonement is a ‘redemptive mystery’ for which ‘reason strives in vain for an explication’ because reason ‘cannot fathom the depth of the redemptive mystery’.¹⁵¹ Through a celebration of Christ’s death as a mysterious spiritual deliverance from sin, mediating Methodists believed God’s attributes could be more fully appreciated. Recognizing the elusive nature of the atonement, some Methodists reveled in, rather than attempted to explain away, the mysterious qualities of the atonement.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁸ Camden McCormack Cobern, *The Stars and the Book: Sermons Preached in St. James Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago* (New York and Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1904), 72, 74.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Stalker, ‘Thoughts on the Atonement’, *MR* 69 (September 1887): 718.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Enoch L. Fancher, ‘The Mystery of Redemption’, *MR* (November 1887): 851.

Others simply thought elaborate theories, whether conservative or progressive, distracted Methodists from preaching the gospel. The ‘main business’ of any minister, wrote one contributor to the *Methodist Review* for 1906, is ‘to get men and women, boys and girls, to Jesus Christ. I do not care how it is done.’¹⁵² One minister in the New England Conference believed the atonement needed simplifying. ‘Jesus Christ came to earth’ he cried, ‘to show us what we need to do and how to do it. Others may to advantage theorize as to the atonement. I have tried to do so in years gone. Dissatisfaction crowned my efforts. I have one object before me now—to follow Jesus, preach Jesus, lead men to Jesus.’¹⁵³ The only theory of atonement evangelicals need, declared another minister in 1902, is identified in ‘this plain, short, simple line, “Christ Jesus died for our sins.”’¹⁵⁴ Tired of internal arguments about the atonement, some mediating Methodists refocused their attention on the simple yet profound message that Christ’s death procured salvation.

Mapping the Trajectory of Ordinary Methodists at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

It has been demonstrated in this chapter that Methodists, lay and ministerial alike, moved in a variety of directions in their opinions on the atonement. Yet it still needs to be determined how far the various groups concurred with one another. Phrased differently, whose opinions won out or held a position of strength within the denomination at the start of the twentieth century? Furthermore, to what extent was there a polarization of Methodist opinion on the atonement during the period? Were Methodists at theological odds over the atonement or was there a degree of shared assumptions and conclusions about the doctrine? Assessing the relative strength of each position cannot be known with absolute certainty, but it is possible to hazard a plausible guess by sampling two of the most widely read periodicals among Methodists during the

¹⁵² *MR* 87 (May 1906), 391.

¹⁵³ *Literary Digest* 5 October 1901, 405.

¹⁵⁴ *CA* 4 September 1902, 1416.

period.

A survey of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, the leading monthly magazine of the Methodist Episcopal Church,¹⁵⁵ between 1879, the year in which John Miley's influential work on the atonement was first published, and 1914, reveals several relevant insights. Firstly, more articles appeared on the doctrine of atonement—nearly sixty—than on any other Christian doctrine.¹⁵⁶ Seventy-one percent of the articles surveyed affirm a traditional, vicarious view of the atonement, including the satisfaction, penal and governmental forms. Twenty-three percent of the articles level criticism at the traditional view by questioning both the methodology used to garner such a view and the language employed in that view. So, for instance, this group of Methodists criticized the 'cold logic and commercial exchange' type of thinking present among the traditionalists. Critics of the traditionalist view advocated instead a way which took into greater account the moral teaching of Christ's life. While not rejecting the vicarious nature of his death, they preferred to view the cross as both a symbol and reality of Christ's sacrificial love for humanity. The remaining six percent of the articles, penned by modernist Methodists, endorse a moral influence theory. The evidence in this monthly periodical suggests that the position of strength lay with the traditionalists, though it also suggests that critics of the vicarious theory were not insignificant.

A similar survey of the *Zion's Herald*, a popular weekly New England publication which also held national appeal, reveals a much higher percentage of those who are identified as mediating Methodists and modernist Methodists. A survey of articles on the atonement in the 1880s reveals a division between traditionalists and mediating Methodists, with fifty-six percent of the articles favouring a vicarious view of the doctrine. Beginning in 1897, however, the year in which John Scott Lidgett's popular, yet controversial, work on the atonement is reviewed in the journal, a trend emerges in the weekly publication which sees a higher number of

¹⁵⁵ Under new editorship in 1884, the *Methodist Quarterly Review* was renamed the *Methodist Review* and issued bimonthly until its demise in 1931.

¹⁵⁶ Articles on the atonement were compared against those on the resurrection and incarnation, the two other doctrines most commonly discussed between the magazine's pages.

contributors criticizing the traditional theory while viewing with increased favor the moral influence theory. Aiding this trend was a four-part series of articles on the atonement in 1899 by Borden Parker Bowne, the archetypal modernist Methodist. The result was that between 1897 and 1914 the traditional theory was weakened so that articles on the atonement were now split almost evenly between the three parties, with the largest percentage, thirty-seven percent, favouring the position of mediating Methodists.¹⁵⁷ When compared to the advantage held by traditionalists in the 1880s a broadening of views on the atonement is readily discernible.

When determining the extent to which Methodist academics and full-time, vocational ministers were divided in their opinions on the atonement, one has to think that there existed a silent group of ministers on both sides of the debate who did not care to defend their views with a pen but through the pulpit. Yet it is very difficult to assess such views on a national scale let alone at all. Unless one was a relatively famous minister, his voice is lost to future generations. This reality leads researchers to lean more heavily on published sources than they otherwise would have liked. The result is that educated ministers, who tended to be more academically-inclined and thus have more in common with the professional academic, are perhaps overrepresented. Yet if this is the case, it is all the more striking that in a highly popular national periodical like the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, the majority of contributors during the period investigated sided with the traditional view of the atonement. On the other hand, an examination of the more regional publication, *Zion's Herald*, revealed more of a polarization of thought on the atonement, though the mediating position held the position of strength. Taken together, these two surveys strongly suggest that by the outset of World War I, opinions, though different, were not sharply divided over the doctrine of atonement.

Conclusion

In the decades leading up to World War I, tensions over the doctrine of atonement reached new

¹⁵⁷ Those articles favouring the traditionalist position hovered around thirty-five percent while those in favour of modernizing the doctrine were twenty-eight percent.

heights among ordinary Methodists. Underpinning much of the thought on the atonement was a dispute as to whether conventional theological opinions, and the interpretative methods used to secure them, were sufficient for the modern age. In their efforts to restrict the theological progressivism of their colleagues, conservatives remained indebted to the Enlightenment synthesis. A plain, common sense reading of the Bible yielded, they adamantly insisted, a vicarious blood atonement for the sins of humanity. Thus, Christ's atonement had legal ramifications which satisfied divine justice and removed the guilt of sinners. The triune God was a lawgiver not a sympathetic father. Other conservatives softened their views by incorporating the fashionable emphasis on the love, rather than wrath, of God. Still others preferred a stripped-down atonement which focused simply on the idea of redemption by the blood of Christ.

Those in favour of change displayed beliefs common to the Evangelical-Romantic synthesis. They, for instance, championed intuitive reason as a means of acquiring religious knowledge and likened God to a loving and forgiving father who cared for his children, not a heartless judge demanding justice. Furthermore, members of this progressive party conceived God as a divine being immanently present in creation rather than as an impersonal, transcendent deity. They also favoured a revised atonement, one which featured its moral implications for humanity. While some chose to blend substitutionary views with the moral influence theory, others endorsed the latter without qualification.

A third party of ministers continued to affirm the traditional view, portraying Christ's death as a vicarious sacrifice while demonstrating a willingness to incorporate modern theological insights into contemporary discussions on the atonement. Though the intellectual currents stemming from the Transcendental legacy were less appealing to ministers within this group, they were nevertheless swayed by aspects of the Romantic tide, preferring to envision an atonement that was valued for its mysterious qualities and praised for its ability to unleash a fuller understanding of God's loving attributes. The result was to undertake nothing less than a

reassessment of traditional convictions about the atonement, though to a lesser extent than among those modern-minded ministers who wished to abandon the old ways entirely.

As features of the Romantic synthesis spread among evangelicals in the later nineteenth century it was met with stout resistance by conservatives and with some reluctance by those in a more moderate mould. Yet it is clear that the Romantic mood coursing through evangelicalism emboldened some Methodists to jettison legal interpretations of the atonement in favour of modern theories of the atonement. It is also clear that by adopting many of the same attitudes and philosophical approaches to traditional understandings of the atonement as were upheld by many of the leading scholars of the denomination, rank-and-file ministers followed a similar path of realignment. Though some contested the value of the Romantic synthesis as a positive influence drawing Methodists closer to biblical truth, many were persuaded by its insights, believing it delivered a more accurate and clearer form of biblical knowledge to the hearts and minds of evangelicals. The Romantic synthesis proved to be a persistent intellectual force influencing Methodist theology in the period leading up to 1914.

CONCLUSION

From the Great Awakenings to World War I, transatlantic Methodists expended a tremendous amount of effort in explaining, refining and reconfiguring the doctrine of the atonement. Between the 1750s and 1880s Methodists in England and America carried forward a message of redemption rooted in the vicarious death of Jesus Christ on the cross and the sovereignty of God. It was these two emphases, chapters one and four argue, which dominated transatlantic circles during the period. Largely understood in satisfaction terms, in which Christ's substitutionary death restored God's honour and satisfied the sinner's debt, Methodists also adapted their message of atonement to include judicial interpretations in which Christ's sacrifice was seen as a satisfaction of God's offended justice and an act of appeasement wherein God's wrath towards lawbreakers was extinguished. Other Methodists during the period prior to 1880 communicated the atonement through the ransom metaphor, an interpretation which places Christ's action on the cross within a metaphor of divine conflict. In this theory of atonement good battles evil before, through the death and resurrection of Christ, it finally triumphs over evil. For nearly a century and a half, chapters one and four reveal, Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic were willing to use a variety of metaphors without sharply distinguishing one from another.

Transatlantic Methodists were also united in their endorsement of a universal atonement and free will. That Christ died for all rather than an elect few, and that humans had a choice in the salvation process, were fundamental beliefs connecting Methodists in England and America. These core beliefs helped distinguish Methodists from most other varieties of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century, specifically those theological traditions which drew heavily on Calvin's interpretation of the atonement. The universal atonement remained an integral part of Methodists' theology of redemption during the entire period under review.

A further link between Methodists on the two sides of the Atlantic between the 1750s and 1880s was their commitment to the use of Enlightenment philosophical principles in the

development and defence of the atonement. Chapters one and four highlight the fact that eighteenth-century philosophical aspects, such as Lockean reason, natural and common sense philosophy, individual liberty, and logic, formed a synthesis of thought which undergirded Methodist theology during the period. It is difficult to overemphasize the extent to which transatlantic Methodists relied on Enlightenment notions of reason and the Scottish philosophy of common sense to support their interpretations of the atonement beyond the mid-century mark. In many cases Methodists viewed themselves as enlightened evangelicals, and applauded one another for delivering a rational, and at times highly mechanical, explanation of the doctrine of atonement. Interpretations of the atonement based on Enlightenment principles became normative for the vast majority of Methodists so that to question prevailing views of the atonement was in effect questioning sound reasoning and judgment. The European Enlightenment exercised a powerful influence over evangelical Methodists in the period leading up to 1880.

Transitions

England

Chapter one also reveals a subtle, yet highly significant, shift in thought among Wesleyan Methodists regarding the atonement. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, for instance, Adam Clarke and Richard Watson were the first English Methodists to introduce the governmental theory to Wesleyan Methodism. Yet Clarke and Watson did not elevate the governmental theory above the traditional theories, but chose instead to vary their theological opinions on the doctrine as did the first generation of English Methodists. Though the writings of these two leading Methodists were widely read throughout the transatlantic world of Methodism, the governmental theory they expounded was rarely absorbed by subsequent generations of English Methodists, who preferred instead the theories of previous generations, such as the satisfaction or substitutionary theories. Mid-Victorian Methodists, chapter one concludes, remained overwhelmingly committed to traditional views of the atonement.

For English Methodists, the theological landscape after 1880 resembled that of their colleagues in America in that their accommodation to newer theories of the atonement was a gradual process; yet there was less internal division among Methodists in England when it came to renegotiating the lines of orthodoxy over the doctrine of atonement. That the Romantic movement was the main stimulus generating new currents of thought among English Methodists is the focus of chapter two. Transmitted through a variety of religious literature, including, most prominently, the work of Broad Church Anglicans, the Romantic impulse was first absorbed by Methodists in the 1870s through the work of William B. Pope, one of the best known and highly esteemed evangelical theologians of his era. Pope, whose work was shaped by his interest in patristic and modern Catholic theology, expanded discussions of the atonement beyond traditional boundaries by focusing on the incarnate life of Christ in his 1871 Fernley Lecture, later published in English and German.¹ Pope's Romantic sensibilities are evident in his advocacy of the Fatherhood of God concept, a reordering of the divine-human relationship which placed love, care and compassion at the heart of the relationship. In this way, the Fatherhood of God slowly displaced older conceptions of God as an impersonal judge and assertive sovereign ruler whose goal was the reinstatement of divine justice and honor. Pope spoke of Christ's death in less gruesome terms, portrayed sin as 'divine displeasure' and emphasised God as an affectionate fatherly figure. The effect of such views created an atonement that was more palatable to the modern, Romantic mind. Pope was one of the first to engineer a Romantic turn in Methodist theology.

By 1914, chapters two and three demonstrate, the Romantic impulse had sparked a new redemptive narrative among many of the leading Wesleyan Methodists. Older themes which dominated discussions on the atonement, such as justice, honour and wrath, gave way to a focus on forgiveness, love and moral behaviour. John Scott Lidgett, minister, editor and social

¹ William B. Pope, *The Person of Christ: Dogmatic, Scriptural, Historical*, 2nd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1875).

reformer, became the great popularizer of the new thinking on the atonement when in 1897 he published his *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* followed by *The Fatherhood of God* in 1902. Lidgett, deeply influenced by the work of the Anglican theologian F.D. Maurice and William. B. Pope, had as his goal the evisceration of the hardened, impersonal theories of atonement which highlighted divine punishment and ignored the moral benefits afforded Christians as members of the divine family. In its place, he offered a 'civic gospel' that drew on the Fatherhood of God concept and prioritized the incarnational ministry of Christ as a means of developing a moral theology, a fashionable view among modern-minded reformers. Lidgett's endeavours were instrumental in helping a new generation of Romantic Methodists build an atonement theology based on moral foundations rather than legal ones. God as a stern judge was displaced by conceptions of God as an affectionate father.

Chapter three also reveals how the reforming efforts of modern-minded Methodists were met with firm resistance by their rank-and-file colleagues in England. Ordinary Methodists distrusted the new intellectual mood because of the challenges it presented to traditional conceptions of Christ's death as a propitiation for sin. For them, the atonement was rooted in divine law and the blood sacrifice of Christ, which itself was secured by reason and logic, two bedrock principles of the Enlightenment outlook. In some cases, when their own theological tradition did not provide the answers needed to combat the new theology, ordinary Methodists turned to their fellow evangelical neighbours for support. In this endeavour they were encouraged, firstly, to uphold the substitutionary atonement, and secondly, to prioritize the atonement over the incarnation, a doctrine then in ascendancy among modern Methodists. Ordinary Methodists after 1900, chapter three establishes, were inclined to cherish interpretations of the atonement which conceived the cross in commercial terms just as much as they had at midcentury.

America

Devoted to a theory of atonement expounded by English Methodists in the decades immediately

following Wesley's death in 1791, American Methodists had transitioned away from traditional thought on the doctrine by the 1820s. For many American Methodists, chapter four finds, the new governmental theory proved highly attractive and became the chief lens through which they viewed the redemption of humankind. Yet in their reconfigurations Americans Methodists did not draw on the work of their co-religionists in Britain, as one might assume. Rather, in an ironic twist, they relied on the American New School Calvinist movement whose theological tradition had long been at odds with Methodism's. The result was that Calvinist conceptions of the atonement, filtered through the New England theology, an indigenous school of thought descended from Jonathan Edwards, became a wellspring of ideas for American Methodists. Influential Methodist figures such as Timothy Merritt and Wilbur Fisk framed the vicarious death of Christ within a moral governmental framework, an atonement theory at the heart of New England theology. By mid-nineteenth century the moral government theory was the preferred theory among the American Methodist elite who praised it for featuring the sovereignty of God, divine justice and Christ's vicarious suffering on the cross, a tripartite union that many traditionalists would later insist was essential for any orthodox interpretation of the atonement. Such a development had the added effect of making American Methodism one of the largest denominational purveyors of important features of the New England theology, a reality which has largely gone unnoticed in studies related to the Edwardsean religious tradition in America.²

While many of the leading intellectuals of Methodism embraced the governmental theory for much of the antebellum period, ordinary Methodists were not entirely convinced, choosing instead to follow the theological path trodden by an earlier generation of Methodists. Yet, as chapter five demonstrates, for a relatively short period of time, between the 1850s and 1870s, the governmental theory did hold a privileged position among some ordinary Methodists who found

² The otherwise excellent study by Crisp and Sweeney charting the dissemination of New England theology completely ignores Methodism in this regard. See Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney, *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

its emphasis on public justice particularly attractive. At the height of the governmental theory's popularity, with the publication of John Miley's *Atonement in Christ* in 1879, it had already begun its descent, however.

The governmental theory's decline in popularity was affected by two major developments within Methodism. The first was a push by leading conservative ministers, including the distinguished Vanderbilt theology professor John J. Tigert, to return to the teachings of early Methodism, particularly as they had been taught by the Wesleys. For traditionalists like Tigert, the governmental theory represented a foreign doctrine unrepresentative of true Wesleyan teaching. A second development contributing to the decay of the governmental view among American Methodists was the emergence of a new breed of Methodist, one which favoured modern scientific approaches to the study of theology. Modern Methodists, chapter five highlights, had grown tired of the cold logic surrounding prevailing views of the atonement. Not only were they highly critical of the methodology used to defend the governmental theory, believing Miley's long, technical and highly rational defence of the theory was flawed, but they believed the theory itself, too, perpetuated a narrow, incomplete view of the atonement and misrepresented the relationship between humanity and God. The rationalism of the Enlightenment, they concluded, produced complicated and confusing theories and failed, they continued, to instil in Christians a deep love for humankind. What these reform-minded Methodists desired was a fresh theory of atonement which met the demands of a modern cosmopolitan society. For them, God was not an impersonal lawgiver or judge, but 'a loving Father earnestly seeking the highest welfare of every living thing'.³

At the heart of these new approaches to the discovery of truth was an evangelical-Romantic synthesis. Methodists, chapter five unravels, combined Romantic-infused philosophical concepts such as cultural relativism, intuition and philosophical idealism, with evangelical Christian beliefs and practices to form a new religious outlook. For the modern

³ William P. Harrison, *MQR* 4 (May 1888), 263.

Methodist, this new outlook became a useful tool to undermine the prevailing evangelical-Enlightenment worldview. These concepts, mediated to Methodists in many cases through the ideas of Unitarians and Congregationalists, became the foundation for a reformation of theological ideas about the atonement. Thus, the love affair between the moral government theory and academic-minded Methodists in the early part of the century was relatively shortlived; and Miley's work, though placed on the Course of Study for over a quarter of a century, was rendered obsolete by modernist Methodists. Romantic thought acted as a powerful counter-current to Enlightenment notions of reason and served as a springboard for new approaches to theological truth.

The period after 1880 witnessed a numerical increase in those Methodists swayed by Romantic currents of thought. Prevailing theories of the atonement received greater scrutiny, and in some cases traditional theories, and those who clung to them, were publicly vilified in pulpits and the religious press. Whereas many older theories of the atonement had been highly detailed and argued in terms of theological technicalities, progressive Methodists advanced an atonement doctrine that refocused its energies on broad theological concepts. One should expect a modern atonement, these revisionists now urged, to showcase the benevolent love of God and incorporate the entire life of Christ as an act of atonement rather than singling out his death as *the* act of atonement. Methodists within this camp of revisionists developed both moderate and radical tendencies. Moderate revisionists, on the one hand, believed traditional theories simply needed reworking or made to blend in with modern theories, such as the moral influence theory, in order to conform more closely to the broad emphases mentioned previously. On the other hand, radical revisionists, like Borden P. Bowne of Boston University, advanced the view that any modern theory of the atonement must entail the wholesale rejection of traditional theories since those theories were informed by the Enlightenment worldview, a worldview fraught with theological, philosophical and psychological problems. Still, others preferred to focus on the mysterious qualities of Christ's death, eschewing the tendency to

prioritize reason over faith. Beginning in the 1880s modern Methodists challenged prevailing views of the atonement with greater frequency and focus.

As shown in chapter six, restructuring one of the central doctrines of Christianity by modernists predictably led to internal division within American Methodism. Traditionalists stressed Christ's death as a satisfaction of divine justice and clung to the Enlightenment synthesis in their efforts to repel the revisionist faction. Some conservatives turned combative and chose to go beyond public attacks in the popular religious press. A small contentious group of conservatives, for example, devised a plan to remove the most vocal, or those deemed troublesome, modernists from the denomination by formally accusing them of unorthodoxy at General Conference. Though conservatives were almost entirely unsuccessful in their efforts to expel modern-minded Methodists from the conference, they nevertheless retained the majority position and continued to be a strong voice of opposition with which modernists repeatedly had to contend. Bishop Stephen Merrill of Los Angeles, a staunch defender of Wesleyan-influenced Methodism, for example, was one such voice who unreservedly criticized the new breed of Methodist for attempting to divert American Methodism from its eighteenth-century theological foundations. Modernists, though agitated, were largely dismissive of such attacks, insisting older theories, and the philosophical worldview on which they were constructed, were irrelevant in a new social and industrial age. In the face of shifting theological priorities, conservatives remained doggedly committed to an atonement shaped by an Enlightenment outlook.

Transatlantic Comparison

Both English and American Methodists ventured beyond the boundaries of traditional thinking on the atonement prior to 1880. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, several leading scholars of Methodism, including Adam Clarke and Richard Watson in Britain and Asa Shinn, Timothy Merritt and Wilbur Fisk in America, introduced the moral government theory of atonement to Methodism. Interestingly, in their adoption of the governmental theory, Methodist

communities in both England and America drew on the Calvinist tradition independent of one another with the English Methodists favouring the work of seventeenth-century Puritans and the Americans preferring the Edwardsian tradition. In America, the governmental theory gained traction, receiving wholesale endorsement by such notable Methodists as Daniel Whedon. Yet satisfaction and substitutionary views persisted, so that a majority of American Methodists continued to uphold aspects of these two theories. By the 1880s, however, the once popular moral government theory had fallen out of favour with American Methodists, soon becoming associated with an earlier generation of rationalists. In Britain, the moral governmental theory received only occasional endorsements by the next generation of Methodists, with the traditional satisfaction theory retaining its place of dominance.

Though original, innovative thinking on the atonement was present in the period leading up to 1880, the radical shift away from eighteenth-century atonement concepts came in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century for transatlantic Methodists. Thus, the 1880s represented a significant transitional period in which the original redemptive message advanced by eighteenth-century transatlantic Methodists received significant alterations. Mid-nineteenth century ideas on Romanticism, religion and philosophy converged to create a potent synthesis which Methodists absorbed and then applied to one of the most important doctrine of Christianity. The adoption of modern techniques to investigate prevailing theories of atonement and then reconfigure those theories represented a marked departure from the methods and beliefs of early Methodism. Perceptions of God, Christ and the role of humans in the redemptive process were radically altered. Furthermore, Romantic Methodists transitioned away from their reliance on legal concepts to explain the doctrine of atonement. While these moves were made in both England and America, it was American Methodists who imbibed the Romantic, modernist spirit more fully, as seen, for example, in the work of Borden Parker Bowne and Henry C. Sheldon. In the period after 1880 Methodists became increasingly sympathetic to envisioning and articulating an atonement shaped by Romantic sensibilities.

Methodists' transition away from traditional conceptions of the atonement cannot be interpreted as a simple or even complicated move from orthodoxy to liberalism. One significant conclusion of this thesis is that it was not unusual for Methodists to introduce or advance new theological concepts to their colleagues during the period. In most cases regarding the atonement Methodists refracted the cultural and intellectual impulses coursing through transatlantic Protestantism. Thus it can be said that this accommodation to new means of acquiring knowledge was not unique to late nineteenth-century Methodists but was shared with their religious forbears. Just as eighteenth-century Methodists drew on the Anglican and the larger Reformed evangelical tradition, late nineteenth-century modernist Methodists in America drew on New England Calvinism and Unitarian Transcendentalists while Wesleyan Methodists in Britain found the work of Broad Church Anglicans inspiring. Not only were transatlantic Methodists remarkably adept at absorbing the marketplace culture to peddle their faith, as Hatch ably demonstrated in his *Democratization of American Christianity* (1989), but they were also extraordinarily proficient in absorbing theologies outside their tradition to develop their own distinctive Methodist theology.⁴ Establishing a more fluid approach to the atonement freed the doctrine to speak beyond individual salvation or personal conversion to the development of an ethical system of right living. In this way, the Romantic synthesis can be viewed as a medium for recovering biblical principles that had been overlooked or minimized under the Enlightenment, rationalist paradigm, rather than a secularizing tendency that led to the diluting of orthodoxy.

Transatlantic Methodism After 1914

With the exception of such notable figures as Arno C. Gaebelin and Harold Paul Sloan in America and members of the Wesley Bible Union, such as George Armstrong Bennetts, in England, very few Methodists took part in the fundamentalist movement in the decades after

⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

1914.⁵ This absence was due in part because by the 1920s transatlantic Methodists had been profoundly shaped by and committed to the best scholarship in American and Britain. As George Wilson, a lawyer from Virginia, observed in 1904, Methodism was no longer viewed as a denomination with roots in supernatural experiences but one which was ‘born of the university’.⁶ As Russell Richey rightly points out in his co-edited *The Methodist Experience in America* (2010), a significant portion of Methodism by the 1930s had been influenced by a theological education rooted in the work of Borden Parker Bowne’s generation.⁷ A similar progressive development occurred in English Methodism as well.⁸

The lack of Methodist involvement in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy of the 1920s can also be attributed to the theological controversies surrounding the atonement at the opening of the twentieth century. Firstly, debates over the atonement in the years surrounding 1900 helped initiate a larger discussion in which modern methods of investigation and other traditional doctrines could be scrutinized. Methodists were able to have heated discussions about the adequacy of their theological and ecclesiastic traditions in light of modern tendencies before such discussions reached the national stage a few decades later. Secondly, through the acquittal of Bowne, and the widespread agreement among Methodist leadership with the decision, Methodism signaled to traditionalists that their heresy-hunting activities would not be tolerated. Finally, the acceptance of an evangelical-Romantic synthesis by many of Methodism’s leading figures presented a new, evangelically viable, way forward in which Methodists could

⁵ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press US, 1999); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Martin Wellings, “Methodist Fundamentalism Before and After the First World War,” in *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism: The Experience of the United Kingdom During the Twentieth Century*, ed. David W. Bebbington and David Ceri Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 76–94.

⁶ George W. Wilson, *Methodist Theology Vs. Methodist Theologians: A Review of Several Methodist Writers* (London: Press of Jennings and Pye, 1904), 346; On the development of education among transatlantic Methodists see F.C. Pritchard, “Education,” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Ernest Gordon Rupp, vol. 3 (London: Epworth, 1965), 279–308; Douglas Montagna, “Education and the Refinement of 19th-century Methodism in the Midwest,” *Methodist History* 44:2 (January 1, 2006): 94–104.

⁷ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America*, 300–301.

⁸ Martin Wellings, “Methodist Fundamentalism Before and After the First World War”; Martin Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism, and Theological Liberalism 1890-1930* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003); William Strawson, “Methodist Theology, 1850-1950” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, et al., vol. 3 (London: Epworth, 1965), 197-219.

embrace aspects of modernism while retaining a belief in Christ's bodily death and resurrection.

In the years after 1914, transatlantic Methodists remained largely on the periphery of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

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