

Sanctification and the Nature of Man

by Harald Lindström

Wesley's doctrine of original sin emphasizes the corruption of human nature, guilt and punishment, and the need for salvation through Christ's atonement and regeneration.

Scripture: Romans 3:23, Romans 5:18, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5

Topics: "Original Sin", "Sanctification"

Description

Harald Lindström preaches about the state of natural man determined by original sin, emphasizing John Wesley's view of man's nature as totally corrupt and inclined to evil, deserving God's wrath and damnation. Wesley's doctrine of salvation is intricately linked to his belief in prevenient grace, where God offers grace to all, enabling man to seek Him despite their sinful nature. The concept of inherent sin as an illness to be cured by God's grace is central to Wesley's theology, highlighting the need for sanctification and the restoration of God's image in man. Wesley's abridgement of the Thirty-nine Articles reflects his nuanced understanding of original sin and prevenient grace, balancing between orthodoxy and his individualistic approach.

Transcript

The State of Natural Man Determined by Original Sin.

The key to the understanding of any interpretation of Christianity must be the interpreter's idea of the nature of man. What did Wesley think of man? This is the first question we must try to answer in analysing his view of sanctification in relation to his doctrine of salvation as a whole. The data will be found in his attitude to natural man and to the doctrine of prevenient grace.

Attention will first be focussed on his conception of sin in order to discover how it can be said to determine his view of salvation. In particular I shall try to establish the relation between sin as guilt and sin as an inherent force, between sin conceived on the one hand as an objective factor determining the life of man and on the other as an inherent subjective trait or substance. In his conception of salvation we shall find an analogous correlation, here between justification, which to Wesley means liberation from the guilt of sin and the recovery of God's favour, and sanctification, which to him denotes liberation from the inherent power and root of sin and the restoration of God's image. It would seem, then, that an investigation of his conception of sin should throw some light on the place and purport of sanctification in his theology.

In his attitude to natural man Wesley stands in marked opposition to the shallow rationalizing of Deism. In this matter his profound sense of sin links him up with the Reformation and with later orthodoxy.¹ Some of his remarks point in this direction even before the full crystallization, in 1738, of the Reformed² trend in his doctrine of justification. He finds, for instance, that the natural man is dead to God.³ The humility attending the circumcision of the heart "convinces us, that in our best estate we are, of ourselves, all sin and vanity; that confusion, and ignorance, and error reign over our understanding; that unreasonable, earthly, sensual, devilish passions usurp authority over our will; in a word, that there is no whole part in our soul, that all the foundations of our nature are out of course."⁴ Even at this period stress is laid on the corrupt state of natural man. True, the attitude is not very clearly defined as yet and his sense of sin was to become still more profound.⁵

This deeper insight into man's predicament outside grace is naturally bound up with the new knowledge of justification by faith. Indeed Wesley regards the former as an essential condition of the latter. At one with the Reformed outlook, he insists here on the total corruption of natural man, grounding the tenet on the doctrine of original sin. "Wherewithal then," he says in the discourse which is the first testimony of the new alignment in his doctrine of justification, "shall a sinful man atone for any the least of his sins? With his own works? No. Were they ever so many or holy, they are not his own, but God's. But indeed they are all unholy and sinful themselves, so that every one of them needs a fresh atonement. Only corrupt fruit grows on a corrupt tree." And man's heart "is altogether corrupt and abominable."⁶ Later on he expands this line of thought. He says he is "firmly persuaded, that every man of the offspring of Adam is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil; that this corruption of our nature, in every person born into the world, deserves God's wrath and damnation; that therefore, if ever we receive the remission of our sins, and are accounted righteous before God, it must be only for the merit of Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings of any kind."⁷ In his Minutes for 1744 he explains how it is that Adam's sin can be imputed to the whole human race: "In Adam all die; that is, (1.) Our bodies then became mortal. (2.) Our souls died; that is, were disunited from God. And hence, (3.) We are all born with a sinful, devilish nature. By reason whereof, (4.) We are children of wrath, liable to death eternal. (Rom. v. 18; Ephes. ii. 3)."⁸ Accordingly, he denies that natural man has free will or any power of his own to do good. His only hope is the free grace of God.⁹

Wesley's earlier evangelical sermons reveal the same general attitude. It is based on three main assumptions: natural man is totally corrupt; this corruption is the result of original sin; man can be justified only through God's grace in Christ. The Fall and its consequences are fundamental in his doctrine of justification: "This therefore, is the general ground of the whole doctrine of justification. By the sin of the first Adam, who was not only the father, but likewise the representative, of us all, we all fell short of the favour of God; we all became children of wrath; or, as the Apostle expresses it, 'judgement came upon all men to condemnation'. Even so, by the sacrifice for sin made by the second Adam, as the representative of us all, God is so far reconciled to all the world, that He hath given them a new covenant; the plain condition whereof being once fulfilled, 'there is no more condemnation' for us, but 'we are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption, that is in Jesus Christ'."¹⁰ The righteousness of faith, he says, presupposes that the man to whom it is given has been deprived of the image of God and been visited by His wrath, and that through sin, which has killed his soul, he now hastens to bodily and everlasting death.¹¹ "Is it not then the very foolishness of folly, for fallen man to seek life by this righteousness? for man, who was 'shapen in wickedness, and in sin did his mother conceive him'? man, who is, by nature, all 'earthly, sensual, devilish'; altogether 'corrupt and abominable'; in whom, till he find grace, 'dwelleth no good thing'; nay, who cannot of himself think one good thought; who is indeed all sin, a mere lump of

ungodliness, and who commits sin in every breath he draws; whose actual transgressions, in word and deed, are more in number than the hairs of his head? What stupidity, what senselessness, must it be for such an unclean, guilty, helpless worm as this, to dream of seeking acceptance by his own righteousness, of living by 'the righteousness which is of the law!'"¹² Whereas it is foolish in such circumstances to rely on the righteousness of the law it is wise to submit to the righteousness which comes from faith. The first step on the path, the renunciation of personal righteousness, is nothing more nor less than to act in accordance with the true nature of things: to confess with heart and lips one's true condition: that one came into the world with a corrupt, sinful nature and that consequently one is prone to all that is evil and averse from all that is good, that like one's heart all one's actions too are ungodly and that therefore one deserves nothing but the wrath of God and the due reward of sin, which is death.¹³

Natural man is consistently represented as thoroughly corrupt. His spiritual qualities are thoroughly corrupt. The innate corruption in his heart and innermost nature is described as an evil root from which spring both inward and outward sin.¹⁴ The man who has been awakened becomes aware that his heart "is all sin, 'deceitful above all things, desperately wicked'; that it is altogether corrupt and abominable, more than it is possible for tongue to express; that there dwelleth therein no good thing, but unrighteousness and ungodliness only; every motion thereof, every temper and thought, being only evil continually."¹⁵ His first repentance is accompanied by overwhelming conviction of "the loathsome leprosy of sin, which he brought with him from his mother's womb, which overspreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof." He becomes increasingly aware of the evil inclinations, which have their root in his evil nature.¹⁶ Original, inbred sin, from which all other sins derive, is compared to a sour yeast which to some extent permeates all the movements of the soul and taints words, deeds, and actions: "To consider this a little more particularly: how wide do these parent-sins extend, from which all the rest derive their being; that carnal mind which is enmity against God, pride of heart, selfwill, and love of the world! Can we fix any bounds to them? Do they not diffuse themselves through all our thoughts, and mingle with all our tempers? Are they not the leaven which leavens, more or less, the whole mass of our affections? May we not, on a close and faithful examination of ourselves, perceive these roots of bitterness continually springing up, infecting all our words and tainting all our actions?"¹⁷

The thought of this inward and outward evil, characteristic of the condition of natural man, leads on to the thought of guilt. God's wrath envelops the sinner. The punishment he merits is eternal damnation.¹⁸ The idea of sin as a force inherent in man gives place to the idea of the guilt that man thus incurs with God. An objective and judicial forms side by side with the subjective and psychological view. When the mind turns to the relation to God the sins that fetter man are seen as debts. In a commentary on the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer Wesley writes: " these, considered with regard to ourselves are chains of iron and fetters of brass. They are wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil have gashed and mangled us all over. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave. But, considered as they are here, with regard to God, they are debts immense and numberless. Well, therefore, seeing we have nothing to pay, may we cry unto Him, that He would frankly forgive us all!"¹⁹

This attitude to man persists. By nature man is utterly depraved²⁰, and his depravity is the result of the Fall²¹. The Doctrine of Original Sin, published in 1757, shows more clearly than any of Wesley's other works how firmly his idea of sin was grounded on that doctrine. Here, in marked opposition to such a rationalistic interpretation of Scripture as that of Dr. John Taylor of Norwich, who urged the rejection of the old orthodox view, Wesley staunchly defends the doctrine of original sin. He considers the veiled deism of

Taylor's attack on the doctrine even more dangerous than Middleton's and Bolingbroke's open criticism of the Bible.²² Indeed, he regarded any attack on the doctrine as an attack on the very foundation of revealed religion, whether Jewish or Christian.²³ In controversion of a doctrine that idealized natural man²⁴, he maintains his complete corruption the essential distinction between Christianity and heathenism²⁵.

Fundamentally orthodox features are manifest in the picture of natural man drawn in *The Doctrine of Original Sin* and in contemporary and later sermons. The description of the primitive state and of the Fall brings out the great difference between Adam's original, and the present life of man. Before the Fall man lived in a state of perfection.²⁶ He was made in the image of God, and he enjoyed God's favour. The *imago Dei* was threefold, First, there was the natural image, through which man was furnished with immortality, understanding, free will, and "various affections."²⁷ He was also immune to pain.²⁸ Second, with respect to man as a governing being, there was the political image. This gave him the power of ruling over the other, lower creatures, But man's original perfection was most pronounced of all in his moral image, which meant that he was created in righteousness and true holiness. Just as God is love, so man at first was imbued with love. His whole being bore its imprint. It was the guiding principle of his disposition, thoughts, words, and deeds. Like the Creator, the creature was righteous, merciful, true, and pure. He was innocent of all sin.²⁹ The image of God embraced the intellectual function of man as well. He had true knowledge of God and His work and lived on the intellectual plane proper to him, "in the right state of his intellectual powers."³⁰

The Fall completely reversed the conditions of human life. Primitive perfection was replaced by total corruption of man's nature. The Fall was made possible because Adam misused his free will. Although holy and wise like his Maker, he is nevertheless regarded as having been capable of falling.³¹ He preferred to be guided by his own will instead of by his Creator's; he wanted to seek happiness not in God but in the world and in the work of his own hands.³² He rebelled against his Creator, the sovereign King of Heaven, whom he should have obeyed.³³ He therefore suffered spiritual, temporal and eternal death.³⁴ Both God's favour and the *imago Dei* in which he was created were now utterly lost.³⁵ He lost too his knowledge of God and his love for Him, becoming unholy and unhappy.³⁶ Once the image of God, he was now stamped with the image of the devil: with pride and self-will. And he sank "into sensual appetites and desires, the image of the beasts that perish."³⁷

Wesley, then, ascribes the inbred sin which now pervades mankind to Adam's primal sin. In this he is distinctly and strikingly at variance with the beliefs of the Enlightenment. In Wesley's opinion the corruption and evil habits which prevail and have prevailed among men cannot be explained in terms of bad example and bad upbringing. Such an explanation offers no solution of why good and wise parents did not give their children the same education in virtue and wisdom as they received themselves. Where have such children found a bad example? And conversely, why has the wisdom of later generations been powerless to remedy the errors of their fathers?³⁸ Wesley's answer is because evil must precede bad nurture³⁹, and he goes on to cite the ancient biblical dogma that Adam's sin is the cause of the fall of the race. If we look more closely into Wesley's views on the connection between the Fall and the corruption of man since, we shall find him keeping close to St. Augustine in interpreting St. Paul's doctrine of original sin. Adam is regarded as the first ancestor and representative of mankind.⁴⁰ His disobedience made all men sinners, for they were all "in the Loins of their first Parent, the common Head and Representative of them all."⁴¹ Everyone sinned in Adam.⁴² The fall of the primogenitor was the fall of the whole race.

We can now ask: what exactly did the term 'original sin' mean to Wesley? The Fall, he believed, had deprived man of his original perfection and occasioned total corruption of human nature. Consequently, Adam's descendants are spiritually dead at birth and utterly devoid of the righteousness and holiness in which he himself was created.⁴³ Sometimes original sin is described as an inclination to evil⁴⁴, or a condition in which all the faculties of man, understanding and will and affections, have been perverted⁴⁵. But he can use stronger language, defining it as total corruption of the whole of human nature, a corruption chiefly manifested in atheism and idolatry, pride, self-will, and love of the world.⁴⁶

In determining the nature of original sin Wesley does not take it to mean simply the corruption inherent in man. To him it is also guilt. An objective and judicial is thus conjoined with a subjective and psychological conception. Since the Fall man has not merely come under the dominion of sin: by his very nature he has also become the child of wrath.⁴⁷ He is subject to guilt and punishment, the consequences of sinful actions.⁴⁸ This punishment is seen in the suffering and death inseparable from human life as it now is, the suffering and death which are the outcome of Adam's sin.⁴⁹ Since all suffering, which is the consequence of sin, is punishment, it follows that punishment has been visited upon Adam's posterity because of his sin.⁵⁰ Because of his transgression all men have been punished with death.⁵¹ Moreover, all are guilty, for all through their fellowship with Adam as the representative of the race, share in his trespass. And so the guilt and punishment of that trespass are also imputed to them.⁵² They too are subject to the wrath and the curse of God. Thus, even before the individual has acted in any way whatsoever, he has incurred the wrath of God and stands a sinner before Him. Before God even children are not innocent, but "involved in the guilt of Adam's sin; otherwise death, the punishment denounced against that sin, could not be inflicted upon them."⁵³

In agreement with the orthodox view original sin is considered to involve liability to punishment, reatus, in the sense of damnation. That is, it involves eternal as well as spiritual and temporal death.⁵⁴ Even through birth man deserves damnation. This conception of the consequences in guilt and punishment of original sin is made possible particularly by the way in which Wesley conceives Adam's relationship to humanity. Here Wesley evinces an affinity with Calvinist federalism. Adam is presented, we have seen, as the representative as well as the primogenitor of mankind.⁵⁵ When he fell, therefore, the guilt occasioned by his sin could be imputed to the whole race.

Yet there is another aspect of Wesley's collective view in which his line of thought diverges from the orthodox; in which instead he adopts a position influenced by Moravianism and closely allied to the Arminian view of election. Although man is subject to guilt and punishment because of his fellowship with Adam, he is nevertheless absolved from original sin because of the atonement of Christ.⁵⁶ On this point the orthodox outlook is modified by the introduction of a different attitude, viz., that man is after all not damned eternally by the very fact of original sin.⁵⁷

Wesley never diverged from his belief in the corruption of natural man. His statements vary in emphasis but there is no departure in principle. The same fundamental assumption confronts us everywhere in his writings: original sin is the prime factor in human nature. All men are "shapen in wickedness, and in sin did our mother conceive us." The nature of man is "altogether corrupt in every power and faculty."⁵⁸ We are all "by nature, 'dead in sin', and, consequently, 'children of wrath'."⁵⁹ The present condition of man is distinguished by his complete inability to apprehend the invisible world. He can see nothing of God, he cannot hear His voice, he can savour nothing of His goodness or of the powers of the world to come; nor is he conscious of the workings of the Holy Spirit in his heart.⁶⁰

Stress has already been laid on the fact that this doctrine of original sin is of fundamental importance in Wesley's conception of salvation. The Fall is regarded as the necessary condition of the work of Christ. Wesley says it was the reason of Christ's coming.⁶¹ The two events are regarded as analogous. The depravation through Adam corresponds to the restoration through Christ, although the work of the latter surpasses that of the former.⁶² Just as Adam represents mankind in his disobedience, Christ is our representative in his work of atonement. Just as in Adam all men died, they are all brought to life again in Christ. The new life through Christ is paralleled by death through Adam, although the gift and the grace from the former outweigh the Fall.⁶³ Given the Fall and inbred sin, atonement and regeneration are seen to be necessary. Thus Wesley's attitude to original sin reveals a marked soteriological element in his theology and emphasizes the idea of grace. Since the whole of mankind is involved in guilt and punishment and since human nature has been utterly perverted, man has no chance at all of saving himself by his own efforts. Instead he is referred exclusively to God's grace in Christ. In this way the doctrine of original sin safeguards the idea of grace. The doctrine is necessarily linked up with the essential purpose of the Gospel, which he declared was to humble mankind and to ascribe the whole of his salvation to God's free grace instead of to man's free will.⁶⁴

The theological position outlined above is close to the orthodox outlook, but in Wesley, we also find another, divergent train of thought, which we must now unravel. As well as the collective view of the doctrine of original sin, he employs an individualistic approach. This is implicit in the importance which he attached, in company with the Pietists and Moravians, to personal experience. What he does is to conjoin a subjective attitude with the objective one. Objective facts and circumstances must be not merely comprehended by man but actually experienced. So we find a pronounced interest in psychological factors in his theology. We find it, for instance, in his conception of original sin. Like the Moravians, he puts the chief emphasis on the awareness of sin rather than on sin as an objective fact. "Feel," he says, "that your carnal mind is enmity against God."⁶⁵ In first repentance, man "has a deep sense" of the loathsome leprosy of sin which has been with him since birth, and he "sees more and more of the evil tempers" that spring from that evil root.⁶⁶ The process of salvation in the individual begins when he becomes conscious of his sinfulness, with "conviction of sin." Therefore he is admonished thus: "Sinner, awake! Know thyself! Know and feel, that thou wert 'shapen in wickedness', and that 'in sin did thy mother conceive thee'; and that thou thyself hast been heaping sin upon sin, ever since thou couldest discern good from evil!"⁶⁷ The individual's awareness of his corrupt nature is considered an absolute prerequisite of his faith in Christ, and this in its turn is a condition for his love of God and his neighbour.⁶⁸ No one can come to Christ as his Saviour, "till he knows and feels himself a lost sinner." None "will come to the 'Physician' but 'they that are sick', and are thoroughly sensible of it; that are deeply convinced of their sinful tempers, as well as sinful words and actions." And "these tempers, they well know, were antecedent to their choice, and came into the world with them."⁶⁹ He maintains further that experience corroborates the doctrine of original sin in Scripture.⁷⁰ Such consciousness in the individual of his corruption is pneumatic experience, the work of the Holy Spirit.⁷¹

Awareness of original sin is not only awareness of it as inherent corruption: it embraces experience of the attendant guilt. Consciousness of this accompanies first repentance. Guilt is always present to the mind of the penitent sinner. He "knows the punishment he has deserved, were it only on account of his carnal mind, the entire, universal corruption of his nature: how much more, on account of all his evil desires and thoughts, of all his sinful words and actions!"⁷² The deep conviction of his sinfulness, which is necessary if man is to arrive at true faith in Christ must also include guilt. Such profound consciousness of sin and conviction of guilt is impossible unless he knows his nature is corrupt.⁷³ Thus he must be conscious not

only of his inherent sinfulness but also of the guilt that attends it.⁷⁴

In turning to the problem of the guilt attaching to original sin we find Wesley taking up a particularly individualistic position at variance with the orthodox collective doctrine and in near affinity with the Enlightenment; this is the outcome of his Arminian strain. It is true, as we have seen, that original sin involves guilt, but Wesley regards this guilt as imputed, not personal.⁷⁵ Original sin involves guilt and punishment, which apply to all the children of Adam, yet nevertheless they are not implicated in quite the same way as Adam himself was. Although in a sense all men are burdened with guilt, Adam's descendants cannot feel his sin to be theirs in quite the same way as Adam and Eve felt it.⁷⁶ Accordingly, as original sin cannot be ascribed to later generations the same way as to Adam, his guilt cannot affect them to the same extent as it would if his sin had been their own personal sin.⁷⁷ Thus, alongside original guilt, we have the idea of personal guilt deriving from the actual sins of the individual. It is this latter idea that determines the conception of guilt in the full sense.⁷⁸ Adam was capable of choice and personal action. It follows that guilt could fall upon him in full measure. But his descendants are in a different position: since they cannot choose for themselves, their guilt is only hereditary guilt. It is a guilt which is certainly imputed to them, but it is not personal. The distinction is seen in the punitive consequences. Original sin is not thought in itself to determine man's final destiny. No one, Wesley thinks, is finally damned unless he chooses to be so.⁷⁹ It is true that the imputed guilt of original sin involves the temporal and spiritual death of man. But as such it does not lead to eternal death.⁸⁰ That is incurred only as a result of approving the promptings of original sin. If an individual is punished with eternal death, therefore, it is the result of his own actions.⁸¹

Wesley is trying to reconcile an individualistic approach with the collective view: to combine the idea of personal responsibility and personal cooperation, where man's eternal destiny is at stake, with a conception of the situation of natural man which emphasizes the idea of saving grace. On the one hand, he maintains that through Adam all mankind are implicated in sin and guilt. Only thus can God's work in Christ be represented as the necessary cause of salvation. He is at pains to emphasize the complete inability of man to attain salvation by himself. It can only come to him through faith. In keeping with this, he maintains that sin has been transmitted from Adam to his children; and here he is interested solely in the fact that this is so, not in how it is so.⁸² The reality of original sin as personal sin too, is shown, we have seen, in the fact that death comes to us all as punishment. Such suffering is a punishment of sin. It would not be inflicted if we were not guilty. Thus we must be considered guilty before God. We share Adam's sin and guilt. On the other hand, the participation in Adam's sin and guilt which original sin involves does not amount to guilt in the full sense. For this the personal consent of the individual is also necessary.

The individualism of this qualification is a consequence of Wesley's Arminian view of election. By subscribing to the latter he rejects the Calvinist doctrine of reprobation and makes predestination conditional. It is dependent on personal choice. He who chooses life shall live he who chooses death shall die.⁸³ God's relation to man is governed by His decision that he who believes shall be saved, while he who does not shall suffer damnation.⁸⁴ This being so, Wesley has to repudiate the notion that original sin, which attends the individual through no personal fault of his own, should in itself spell eternal death for him. If it did, man would be lost without having had an opportunity of choosing. Instead, Wesley decided that eternal death must depend upon individual responsibility.⁸⁵ If the individual is damned therefore, he must himself be responsible for his damnation. It is not the will of God that man should be damned, for God's desire that he should be saved is universal. True, original sin and personal sin are very intimately connected. If man allows himself to be swayed by original sin, he ipso facto chooses to retain it. In this

sense original sin certainly does lead to eternal death. Yet it does not necessarily do so, for such a necessity would conflict with God's desire for universal salvation. Not God, then, but man himself, is chargeable with eternal damnation. Eternal death can only be incurred by personal participation in sin, by actual sin.

But in what sense can man, whose nature Wesley considers totally corrupt, be said to have the power of real choice? It is not merely that natural man cannot do good, he cannot will it either. His freedom of choice is but freedom to do evil.⁸⁶ How then in his actions can man withhold response to the evil tendency dictated by original sin? Wesley finds the answer in an argument which is related to his tenet of conditional election and God's desire of universal salvation. Men need not transgress, by virtue of the grace God offers to them all. Thus original sin does not necessarily lead to actual sin. If man takes advantage of God's grace he can conquer the inclination to evil. In other words Wesley finds opportunity of choice on the foundation of grace. If, despite this privilege, man prefers to follow the inclination to evil of original sin and thus commits personal sin, he must be regarded as being himself responsible, for his transgression.⁸⁷

II

Original Sin and Specific Sins. Personal Sin.

Wesley distinguishes between original sin and its manifestations in specific sins. Yet, as we have seen, the connection between the two is intimate and organic. Original sin as innate corruption of the innermost nature of man is compared to an evil root bearing like branches and like fruits.⁸⁸ The specific sins which proceed from original sin are compared to evil sprouts proceeding from the same evil root.⁸⁹

The personal sins, the actual transgressions, are divided into two categories: inward sins and outward sins, There is also a third type which can be distinguished from inward sins and treated as a separate category, namely sins of omission.⁹⁰ These can be defined as negative inward sins. In the Christian life various forms of negligence can divide man from God, such as neglecting to punish one's brother for his sins, failing to rebuke those who sin in one's presence, letting slip any means of grace, and omitting to pray in public, in the family, and in private.⁹¹ Wesley regards these sins of omission as signs of spiritual sluggishness, of shirking battle.⁹² Inward sins of the other kind are manifested in such transgressions as pride, wrath, and foolish desire. The last shows itself in inordinate love of something other than God and what tends to him, in seeking happiness in the creation instead of in God.⁹³ Thus it expresses the reverse of love to God.

Inward sin grows like a root of bitterness and darkens the soul of the man who was previously in a state of grace.⁹⁴ Outward sin is defined as the final phase in a sort of process of sin. It begins when man yields to temptation and acquiesces in it, declining to remain in the state of grace by which God wishes to preserve him. After inward sin, at least after some neglect on the part of man, and after the formation and expansion in the soul of an evil desire, faith and love disappear. And thus man commits outward sin. The stages in this development are described in the following way: "You see the unquestionable progress from grace to sin: Thus it goes on from step to step. (1.) The divine seed of loving, conquering faith, remains in him that is born of God. 'He keepeth himself', by the grace of God, and 'cannot commit sin'. (2.) A temptation arises; whether from the world, the flesh, or the devil, it matters not. (3.) The Spirit of God gives him warning that sin is near, and bids him more abundantly watch unto prayer. (4.) He gives way, in some degree, to the temptation, which now begins to grow pleasing to him. (5.) The Holy Spirit is grieved; his

faith is, weakened; and his love of God grows cold. (6.) The Spirit reproves him more sharply, and saith, 'This is the way; walk thou in it'. (7.) He turns away from the painful voice of God, and listens to the pleasing voice of the tempter. (8.) Evil desire begins and spreads in his soul, till faith and love vanish away: He is then capable of committing outward sin, the power of the Lord being departed from him."⁹⁵ An inward sin on the part of man is thought to precede the loss of faith. Yet before man actually commits voluntary outward sin, faith and love are already lost. We note, however, that in describing these stages in the process of sin, by which man falls from grace, Wesley attributes the responsibility to the individual. The emphasis is laid on man's obedience, although an obedience grounded on saving grace,

We have already seen that the specific sins derive from the sinfulness in man's nature. This corruption is regarded as the seed of all other sins. It is the cause of all specific sins both in our hearts and in our lives.⁹⁶ Wesley's empirical predilection, however, leads him to pay particular attention to the specific sins; it is to these, the inward sins of the heart and the outward sins of action, that he gives most space.⁹⁷

III

The Conceptions of Sin and Salvation.

I have referred above to the fact that Wesley regards original sin not only as guilt but also as inherent corruption. And like sin in general it is seen from both an objective and a subjective angle. He himself describes these aspects as two relations: on the one hand sin in its relation to God, and on the other, sin in its relation to man himself.⁹⁸ Further, since Wesley's doctrine of justification is concerned with sin as guilt, whereas sanctification is concerned with sin as an inherent factor, the relation between the objective and subjective aspects of his conception of sin will find a parallel in the relation between justification (or forgiveness) and sanctification (or new birth and subsequent sanctification) in his doctrine of salvation

The emphasis laid on sin as guilt has already been noted. Just as forgiveness from the causal point of view is considered of prime importance in relation to sanctification, so his view of guilt can be said to occupy a corresponding position in relation to inherent sin. This is implicit in the function attributed to forgiveness in his doctrine of salvation. Forgiveness, as a factor in atonement, is the source of salvation. "Pardoning love," we read, "is still at the root of all. He who was offended is now reconciled."⁹⁹ Through deliverance from guilt, then, man is thought to gain freedom from the domination of inherent sin. The latter follows from the former; "And, if we attain the former, the latter follows of course: If our debts are forgiven, the chains fall off our hands. As soon as ever through the free grace of God in Christ, we receive 'forgiveness of sins', we receive likewise 'a lot among those which are sanctified, by faith which is in him'. Sin has lost its power: It has no dominion, over those who are under grace, that is, in favour with God."¹⁰⁰

It is true that here the conception of sin centres round the idea of guilt, but all the same sin is usually represented in Wesley as inherent corruption. As such it corresponds to sanctification in his doctrine of salvation. He is fond of describing sin as an injury, as corruption, as disease. Original sin he pictures as leprosy infecting mankind¹⁰¹, and the sins proceeding from it as 'wounds' and 'diseases'¹⁰². As sin is thus regarded as an illness, it follows that salvation will be seen primarily from a subjective-medical rather than an objective-judicial angle. Salvation is called a healing: man, is cured of his inherent sinfulness as of a disease. With sin seen in this way as the background of salvation and the motivation of its indispensability, it is natural that the idea of sanctification should come to the fore. "And who might not say, upon this supposition, 'I cannot see that we have much need of Christianity'? Nay, not any at all; for 'they that are whole have no need of a Physician'; and the Christian Revelation speaks of nothing else but

the great 'Physician' of our souls; nor can Christian Philosophy, whatever be thought of the Pagan, be more properly defined than in Plato's word: It is , 'the only true method of healing a distempered soul'. But what need of this, if we are in perfect health? If we are not diseased, we do not want a cure. If we are not sick, why should we seek for a medicine to heal our sickness? What room is there to talk of our being renewed in 'knowledge' or 'holiness, after the image wherein we were created', if we never have lost that image? if we are as knowing and holy now, nay, far more so, than Adam was immediately after his creation ?"103 No one, as we have already seen in another context, can come to Christ, the Physician, before he is conscious of his disease.104 Moreover, this knowledge in man of the depravity of his nature is the extreme subjective condition of his sanctification. It is regarded as the first step in the process of salvation, in which the goal is sanctification: "The power of godliness consists in the love of God and man; this is heavenly and substantial religion. But no man can possibly 'love his neighbour as himself', till he loves God; and no man can possibly love God, till he truly believes in Christ; and no man truly believes in Christ, till he is deeply convinced of his own sinfulness, guiltiness, and helplessness. But this no man ever was, neither can be, who does not know he has a corrupt nature."105

The importance attached by Wesley to the inherent subjective view of sin is clearly shown by his readiness to treat original sin exclusively from this angle.106 The basic corruption of natural man is again portrayed as a disease, salvation as a restoration to health. A conception of religion which accepts such a view of sin must be determined by the idea of sanctification. And this is the case with Wesley. He writes of the true nature of the Christian religion: "It is -- God's method of healing a soul which is thus diseased. Hereby the great Physician of souls applies medicines to heal this sickness; to restore human nature, totally corrupted in all its faculties. God heals all our Atheism by knowledge of Himself, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; by giving us faith, a divine evidence and conviction of God, and of the things of God, -- in particular, of this important truth, 'Christ loved me, and gave himself for me'. By repentance and lowliness of heart, the deadly disease of pride is healed; that of self-will by resignation, a meek and thankful submission to the will of God; and for the love of the world in all its branches, the love of God is the sovereign remedy. Now, this is properly religion, 'faith' thus, 'working by love': working the genuine meek humility, entire deadness to the world, with a loving, thankful acquiescence in, and conformity to, the whole will and word of God."107 The great purpose of religion is said to be to renew man's heart in the image of God, to make good the total loss of righteousness and holiness. Man, thoroughly corrupt by nature, will by grace be completely transformed: "Ye know, that he who seeth what is in man gives a far different account both of nature and grace, of our fall and our recovery. Ye know that the great end of religion is, to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent. Ye know that all religion which does not answer this end, all that stops short of this, the renewal of our soul in the image of God, after the likeness of Him that created it, is no other than a poor farce, and a mere mockery of God, to the destruction of our own soul ... By nature ye are wholly corrupted. By grace ye shall be wholly renewed."108 Man must learn the nature of his disease and how it can be cured.109

Inherent sin, then, can be regarded as an illness which must be cured.110 Accordingly, Christ is thought of as a physician in his work for mankind. Any suffering he causes man is in order to heal him.111

But the healing lies in liberation from objective guilt as well as from inherent sin: "Here is a remedy provided for all our guilt: He 'bore all our sins in his body on the tree'. And 'if any one have sinned, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'. And here is a remedy for all our disease, all the corruption of our nature. For God hath also, through the intercession of His Son, given us his Holy Spirit,

to renew us both 'in knowledge', in his natural image; -- opening the eyes of our understanding, and enlightening us with all such knowledge as is requisite to our pleasing God; -- and also in his moral image, namely, 'righteousness and true holiness'.¹¹² The medical approach, to which Wesley seems to attach increasing importance, can be applied, we see, not only to inherent sin but also to objective guilt. That it could -- even though only a few instances can be cited -- is evidence of the great influence exercised by the idea of sanctification on his doctrine of salvation as a whole.

Thus the idea of inherent sin is not merely subsidiary to the idea of objective guilt in Wesley: on the contrary, it attracts the major interest. A subjective-medical view prevails over an objective-judicial attitude in his conception of salvation. In this way sin is organically incorporated in a theology primarily determined by the idea of sanctification. An orthodox outlook, or rather an orthodoxy modified by Moravianism, is thus crossed by a line, of thought reminiscent of Pietism and William Law and practical mysticism, and the latter gains the ascendancy.¹¹³

IV

Prevenient Grace and Salvation.

Wesley believes that in natural man the image of God was completely lost. This applies to the moral image in which Adam was created and which constituted the essence of his relation to God. It is chiefly this that Wesley has in mind. On the other hand man's natural and political image have not been entirely lost, although, in these respects too he has undergone severe depravation. Consequently man has retained his character as a personal being and certain of the features incidental to this character. He still has "the spiritual nature and immortality of the soul" and also "a degree of dominion over the creatures".¹¹⁴ Like God, his Creator, but unlike material things, which are totally and essentially passive, man has a spiritual nature and is self-moving.¹¹⁵ He has fallen but still retains "an immaterial principle, a spiritual nature, endued with understanding, and affections, and a degree of liberty; of a self-moving, yes, and self-governing power," without which he would be a mere machine or stock or stone.¹¹⁶ In this respect Wesley finds a certain continuity between man's life before and after the Fall. Yet it is a circumstance which in no way alters his idea of natural man. From the point of view of salvation natural man has no resources of his own whatsoever. He is sinful through and through, has no knowledge of God and no power to turn to him of his own free will.

There is another idea, however, which we have touched on above, but which at this point calls for closer scrutiny: the idea of prevenient grace.

Wesley maintains that natural man is totally corrupt, but he also maintains that God gives to all men his prevenient grace. It is a doctrine that appears only in passing and seldom in the years immediately after 1738. Wesley was then so absorbed by the distinction between natural man, dead in sin, and man vitalized by faith, that all his attention was devoted instead to the saving grace operative in justification and the New Birth. With time, however, prevenient grace acquires increasing importance and concurrently his divergence from the Calvinistic doctrine of election and his acceptance of Arminianism, becomes more evident.¹¹⁷

The idea of prevenient grace is in Wesley logically bound up with the Arminian view of election. Although natural man is devoid of free will, all men have been endowed by supernatural intervention with a measure of free will and some power of discernment: "Natural free-will, in the present state of mankind, I do not understand: I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man,

together with that supernatural light which 'enlightens every man that cometh into the world'.¹¹⁸ The liberty thus given to man is a liberty founded on grace. Wesley believes that God redeems man as a freely acting being. Grace is not irresistible. Man can either cooperate with it or oppose it. As soon as God's work has begun in the souls of men they may become "workers together with Him".¹¹⁹ In the last resort the doctrine is based on his conception of God. Such free will harmonizes better to Wesley's mind with God's wisdom, justice, and mercy than the reprobation which he says is the alternative.¹²⁰ It is only through the grace of God that man becomes capable of turning to Christ and believing in Him.¹²¹ Prevenient grace, which in varying degrees is given to everyone, makes it possible for man, despite his natural condition, to seek God.¹²²

Prevenient grace confers some discernment on everyone although natural man as such lacks all knowledge of God. This discernment comes to man through "what is vulgarly termed natural Conscience." At least this throws some light on "the general Lines of Good and Evil."¹²³ Here Wesley concurs with St. Paul's statement in the Epistle to the Romans that even heathens are not without knowledge of God and His law. Yet he does not regard such discernment as something emanating from natural man's own resources, a consequence of the survival after the Fall of a certain residue of the *imago Dei*, but instead as deriving from prevenient grace.¹²⁴ When we are told of the heathens that although they have not the law they nevertheless do by nature what the law prescribes, we must not understand that they could do so merely by their own natural strength. Despite their ignorance of the written law, God works in them all the same by supernatural grace. "It is certain," Wesley writes, "they had not the written law; but had they no supernatural assistance? Is it not one God 'who works in' us and in them, 'both to will and to do'?"¹²⁵ Thus even the heathens know the spirit, though not the letter of the law. This discernment is not considered a purely natural form of perception and consequently cannot be a premise for a *theologia naturalis*; yet neither is it regarded as a saving knowledge in the strict sense. The measure of light conferred on all men by prevenient grace does not involve any knowledge of the main tenets of the Christian faith: atonement through Christ and man's transformation by the Divine Spirit in the image of God in which he was made.¹²⁶ Everyone, however, has "some discernment of the difference between moral good and evil, with an approbation of the one, and disapprobation of the other, by an inward monitor, excusing or accusing." Also, "sometimes at least," they have "some desire to please God, as well as some light concerning what does really please him, and some convictions when they are sensible of displeasing him."¹²⁷

The light given to all men by prevenient grace is particularly associated with conscience and its workings. But Wesley sees conscience, not as something "natural" but as an expression of prevenient grace.¹²⁸ It comprises "all the drawings of the Father the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that light wherewith the Son of God 'enlighteneth every one that cometh into the world' -- showing every man 'to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God'; all the convictions which His Spirit, from time to time, works in every child of man -- although it is true, the generality of men stifle them as soon as possible, and after a while forget, or at least deny, that they ever had them at all."¹²⁹ In a sermon published towards the end of his life, in which Wesley makes conscience his main theme, he writes: "This faculty seems to be what is usually meant by those who speak of natural conscience; an expression frequently found in some of our best authors, but yet not strictly just. For though in one sense it may be termed natural, because it is found in all men; yet, properly speaking, it is not natural, but a supernatural gift of God, above, all his natural endowments. No; it is not nature, but the Son of God, that is 'the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world'. So that we may say to every human creature, 'He', not nature, 'hath showed thee, O man, what is good'. And it is his Spirit who giveth

thee an inward check, who causeth thee to feel uneasy, when thou walkest in any instance contrary to the light which he hath given thee."¹³⁰ Although everyone by nature is dead in sin, no one is in a purely natural state. No one is quite without God's grace, unless he has stifled it. To Wesley, therefore, conscience is a manifestation of prevenient grace: "For allowing that all the souls of man are dead in sin by nature, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed, preventing grace. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Every one has, sooner or later, good desires; although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root; or produce any considerable fruit. Every one has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And every one, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath."¹³¹

It is clear that Wesley cannot reconcile the idea of a knowledge of God arising from the human resources of natural man with his doctrine of original sin. The insight accorded by conscience acquires therefore the character of supernatural grace. It is true that the supernatural character may be obscured by his endeavour to contend that this grace is given to all. In any case the distinction between so-called natural conscience and conscience as a manifestation of Divine grace is not always clearly marked.¹³² Yet he rarely fails to draw attention to it. It is particularly emphasized when prevenient grace is expressly described as saving grace, although not in the same sense as justifying grace. It is with prevenient grace that salvation in the widest sense begins.¹³³ This grace has its source in Christ's work of atonement.¹³⁴

The combination of this view of prevenient grace with Wesley's doctrine of original sin necessarily had a twofold result in his doctrine of salvation. Firstly, man becomes entirely dependent upon God for salvation. God is the only possible Saviour of mankind, for in his natural state man is totally corrupt and dead in sin. Thus the collective view in the doctrine of original sin emphasizes the idea of grace in the conception of salvation. There is no possibility of such a thing as human merit. Secondly, the individualistic approach and the idea of prevenient grace on which this view is based lay stress on man's personal responsibility. Prevenient grace, which is offered to all and enables everyone to turn to God, makes man himself responsible for his own damnation. What Wesley is doing is to try to harmonize an objective with a subjective attitude. It is clear that the latter, a consequence of the change from an unconditional to a conditional view of election, will easily lead to synergistic tendencies.

V

The Conception of Man in the Twenty-five Articles of 1784.

At this point, bearing in mind Wesley's view of man, we pass on to his abridgement of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church, which he published in 1784 to provide American Methodism with basic doctrine.¹³⁵

In the Thirty-nine Articles, the Article of original sin, influenced to some extent by the second Article of the Augsburg Confession, reads as follows: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of

his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek phronema sarkos, which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin."¹³⁶ In Wesley's abridgement the whole of the second half of this Article, together with one or two expressions mentioned above, is omitted. He also makes a small addition. It now runs: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually."¹³⁷ For the Article on free will, however, which, according to Wheeler, in its first part follows the Württemberg Confession, and in its second goes back to St. Augustine¹³⁸, Wesley uses the same formulation as in the Thirty-nine Articles: "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will."¹³⁹

There can be no possible doubt that Wesley's position here, in line with that of the Thirty-nine Articles, is strikingly at variance with Pelagianism. But how exactly are we to interpret the view of man's state after the Fall which he advances?

The statement in the Article on original sin that "man is very far gone from original righteousness," can obviously be taken as a departure from the Reformed outlook. It can be understood as an expression of the view by which the Fall, while bringing a *depravatio naturae*, did not involve a *tota depravatio*. On this point both Pelagianism and pure Calvinism are rejected. The Thirty-nine Articles take a middle path between the two. There is further corroboration for this conclusion, one also drawn by Bicknell¹⁴⁰, in the fact that the definitive version replaced an earlier, purely Calvinistic one¹⁴¹. At all events we are certainly confronted by a modification of Calvinism here.¹⁴²

We have seen, however, that Wesley regarded the corruption of natural man as a total depravity. And he never abandoned this view. Thus his subscription to the definition of the state of natural man in the Thirty-nine Articles need not be regarded as a departure from a view he is otherwise consistent in maintaining. In all probability his concurrence should be interpreted in accordance with that view.

Dogmatic disagreement has been adduced to explain Wesley's drastic abridgement of the Article on original sin. Wheeler holds that he omitted the word 'fault', if this connotes the idea of original guilt, because he did not share such a view. Wheeler also finds dogmatic reasons for Wesley's omission of the whole of the second part of the Article. Wesley, Wheeler thinks, cannot subscribe to the statement that even at birth all men deserve the wrath and condemnation of God.¹⁴³ From what has been said above, however, it will be seen that Wheeler has not taken sufficient note of the scope and importance of sin in Wesley's conception of man. We saw that to Wesley original sin also takes on the character of guilt. In the collective view natural man is certainly thought to deserve damnation even at birth. Yet, as with the Moravians, Christ's atonement has absolved him from it.¹⁴⁴ Further, as a result of his individualistic tendency, original sin, as merely imputed, does not assume the same character of guilt as personal sin, man's own actual sin. Even if Wesley did omit the word 'fault' and the latter half of the Article because of some divergence of opinion¹⁴⁵, as indeed seems probable, Wheeler cannot be said to have given a clear

account of the nature of the divergence. He has failed to realize Wesley's close affinity with orthodoxy. Moreover, the omitted lines contain a point on which Wesley is in full agreement: he too thought concupiscence a sin.¹⁴⁶

Wesley naturally incorporated the Article on free will in unaltered form. It agrees with his own idea of the part played by prevenient grace in salvation. Accompanying the idea of prevenient grace is also that of cooperating grace.¹⁴⁷ The fact that this conception could be reconciled with his doctrine of original sin, is due, as we have seen, to his view of prevenient grace as a supernatural grace, and not as an attribute issuing from the resources with which man was endowed at the creation.

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