

John Wesley's Engagement with Islam: Exploring the Soteriological Possibilities in light of a Diversity of Graces and Theological Frameworks¹

"From everyone to whom much has been given,
much will be required." Luke 12:48a NRSV

From Mecca to Kandihar, from Istanbul to Jakarta the Muslim community today is a global one that embraces many peoples, tongues and nations. As a major world religion with well over a billion adherents, stretching from the Middle East to Southeast Asia, Islam is one of the three great enduring monotheistic faiths that is second in numbers only to Christianity. These demographics are likely to continue well into the twenty-first century, and according to one estimate by 2050 "there should still be about three Christians for every two Muslims worldwide."² Given the strength of these two faiths it is imperative that the religious leaders, theologians and historians of each communion develop the appropriate theological resources that will lead to greater understanding.

The Wesleyan tradition, as an important representative of the Christian faith, may have the theological wherewithal to consider the soteriological footprint of the house of Islam in terms of the basic theological frameworks that John Wesley, himself, employed in his practical theology as he looked well beyond the walls of the church. As such we shall consider the Muslim faith in light of Wesley's own theological constructs in the form of all of the following: prevenient grace, a covenant theology that embraces the distinct Adamic dispensation (of works) and every subsequent dispensation of the covenant of grace, the distinction of the faith of a servant, the faith of a child of God, the paradigm of the phrase "fearing God and working righteousness," as well as a consideration of the Abrahamic covenant and its significance for Muslims. After an examination of these elements we shall bring to bear not only Wesley's own assessment of what he called Mahometanism but also the Christological judgments of the Koran, itself, in order to arrive at a balanced judgment with respect to the universal possibilities of grace as well as their more limited saving actualizations.

The Promise of Prevenient Grace

As a good Anglican whose theology was steeped in an Augustinian understanding of original sin, John Wesley was a quintessentially Western theologian who articulated a doctrine of prevenient grace to restore measures of freedom that were never judged to be lacking in some of the theologies of the eastern fathers.³ Indeed, in a way similar to John

¹This work was originally presented (in a slightly different form) at the Wesley and Methodist Historical Studies section of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies that met in Oxford, England in August, 2013.

²Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.

³For more on this theme see Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Critical Appropriation of Tradition in His Practical Theology," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 69-91. For the influences of the eastern fathers on Wesley's theology see Randy L. Maddox,

Calvin, Wesley employed the language of total depravity in his sermon "The Way to the Kingdom," for example, to depict the depth and extent of sin, that is, when he considered a person in "the natural state," unassisted by the grace of God: "Thou art corrupted in every power, in every faculty of thy soul, that thou are *totally* corrupted in every one of these, all the foundations being out of course."⁴ Put another way, in Wesley's theology the universality of his largely Augustinian understanding of original sin is matched by the universality of prevenient grace such that none are left in an utterly depraved state, apart from all measures of the grace of God.⁵ In the sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," Wesley explains:

For allowing that all souls of men 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."⁶

Wesley supported his doctrine of prevenient grace by an appeal to both scripture and tradition, that is, by reference to the Gospel of John ("The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." John 1:9), and to the Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles*. However, this use of specifically Christian resources in no way limited the scope of this grace. Thus, Wesley asserted that prevenient grace, based upon the salvific work of Jesus Christ, is applied to all people, Christians and non-Christians alike, through

"John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences and Differences," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 29-53.

⁴Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 1-4. *The Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:225. ("The Way to the Kingdom") Some of the material in this section on prevenient grace is drawn from my *Theology of John Wesley* as is used by permission. See Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), pp. 73-81.

⁵Umphrey Lee correctly pointed out in his own day that for Wesley the "natural man" is a logical abstraction that does not correspond to actual men and women. "In this world," he noted, "man exists as a natural man *plus* the prevenient grace of God." However, by the use of this phrase "logical abstraction" Lee was not suggesting that the later Wesley had abandoned the assumption of inherent human inability. On the contrary, he not only affirmed the ongoing dependence of humanity on the grace of God, but also maintained that though the effects of original sin are still present, they are no longer total. That is, humanity has a measure of light, due to the divine *restoring* presence, and that light is Christ. See Umphrey Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), p. 124-25.

⁶Outler, *Sermons*, 3:207. ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation") Three works on prevenient grace make important contributions to Wesley studies: Charles A. Rogers, "The Concept of Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John Wesley" (Dissertation, Duke University, 1967); Herbert McGonigle, *John Wesley's Doctrine of Prevenient Grace* (Derby's, London: Moorley's Bookshop, 1995); James Gregory Crofford, "Streams of Mercy: Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester, 2008).

the ministrations of the Holy Spirit.⁷ "Every man has a greater or less measure of this," Wesley declares, "which waiteth not for the call of man."⁸ Again, this grace is "free for all," not limited to the accidents of geography or culture, and it is "free in all to whom it is given," not dependent on any human power and merit.⁹ It is inclusive not exclusive; freely given not merited. Moreover, this first glimmer of grace marks the entrance upon the path that leads to salvation, properly speaking, as is evident in Wesley's following observation:

Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) preventing grace; including the first wish to please God, — the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God.¹⁰

The Benefits of Prevenient Grace

In his writings Wesley points out five benefits that are conveyed universally to humanity by prevenient grace which together mitigate some of the worst effects of the fall.¹¹ First of all, in his commentary on Romans 1:19, Wesley asserts that a basic knowledge of God, chiefly in the form of the divine attributes (such as omnipotence, eternity, etc.), is revealed to all men and women as a result of the prevenient agency of the Holy Spirit. Once again, humanity has not been left in the natural state, devoid of all grace and therefore knowing nothing of God, but all people have at least some understanding of God, however clouded or scant this knowledge may be. In his *Notes Upon the New Testament*, Wesley explains: "For what is to be known of God -- Those great principles which are indispensably necessary to be known, 'is manifest in them; for God hath showed it to them' -- By the light which enlightens every man that cometh into the world."¹² Since this knowledge is universal and independent of special revelation some

⁷In his sermon, "The Good Steward," Wesley strongly associates the grace of God with the Holy Spirit as revealed in the following: "Add, lastly, that on which all the rest depend, and without which they would all be curses, not blessings: namely, the *grace* of God, the power of his Holy Spirit, which alone worketh in us all that is acceptable in his sight." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:286. ("The Good Steward").

⁸Outler, *Sermons*, 3:207. ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation")

⁹Cf. "Free Grace" Outler, *Sermons*, 3:545-52.

¹⁰Ibid., 3:203-04. ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation").

¹¹For a thorough discussion of these benefits Cf. Charles Allen Rogers, "The Concept of Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John Wesley" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1967), p. 196. Note, however, that I have added a fifth category, "the restraint of evil," to the four of Rogers. Moreover, some of the material in this section on the benefits of prevenient grace is drawn with some modifications from Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, pp. 77-81.

¹²John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers), p. 363. (Romans 1:19).

scholars contend that it forms the basis for a natural theology.¹³ Others are quick to point out, however, that though a *theologia naturalis* is indeed in the offing, it never occurs apart from *grace*--a grace that may or may not even be acknowledged in the celebration of reason and its powers.

Second, since men and women, apart from the grace of God, are spiritually dead, they have neither the ability nor the inclination to comprehend the dictates of God's holy law, the same law that was inscribed on their hearts at creation and which is expressive of the image of God. Nevertheless, Wesley affirms that after the fall God did not leave men and women in this utterly dejected state, but reinscribed, in some measure, a knowledge of this moral law upon their hearts. He writes:

But it was not long before man rebelled against God, and by breaking this glorious law well nigh effaced it out of his heart; ... And yet God did not despise the work of his own hands; but being reconciled to man through the Son of his love, he in some measure re-inscribed the law on the heart of his dark, sinful creature.¹⁴

Third, in his "Thoughts Upon Necessity," produced in 1744, Wesley reveals that the ultimate origin of conscience is neither nature nor society, but God Almighty. "It is undeniable, that he has fixed in man, in every man," he writes, "his umpire conscience; an inward judge, which passes sentence both on his passions and actions, either approving or condemning them."¹⁵ And in his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," produced in 1765, Wesley closely identifies the operations of conscience with prevenient grace in particular. Beyond this, in his sermon "On Conscience," written a couple of decades later, the seasoned Wesley continues to argue that although in one sense conscience may be viewed as natural, since this faculty appears to be universal, yet, properly speaking, "it is not natural; but a supernatural gift of God, above all his natural endowments."¹⁶

Fourth, since Wesley taught a doctrine of original sin similar in many respects to the Protestant Reformers, he obviously denied that human beings possess natural free-will.¹⁷ In other words, apart from grace, humanity is a mass of sin. Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, (and in a way similar to Eastern Orthodoxy) contended that though

¹³M. Elton Hendricks, "John Wesley and Natural Theology [Prevenient Grace]," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 12. Moreover, Hendricks contends that "Wesley's approval of the natural theology of Bishop Butler is instructive and would establish *prima facie a case* for Wesley as natural theologian in the absence of any other evidence." Cf. p. 12.

¹⁴Outler, *Sermons*, 2:7. ("Original, Nature, Properties and Use of the Law") See also Wesley's piece, *Predestination Calmly Considered* in which he writes: "His first step is to enlighten the understanding by that general knowledge of good and evil. To this he adds many secret reproofs, if they act contrary to this light..." Cf. Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 9:233.

¹⁵Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 10:473.

¹⁶Outler, *Sermons*, 3:105. ("Spiritual Idolatry").

¹⁷Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 10:229.

free will had been weakened by the fall, it had not been extinguished or lost,¹⁸ a point alluded to earlier.¹⁹ What kept Wesley's theology clear of semi-Pelagianism, on the one hand, as he faced Rome, and from determinism (the elimination of moral responsibility etc.), on the other hand, as he faced Wittenberg and Geneva, was the affirmation that a certain measure of free-will is supernaturally restored to all people by the Holy Spirit (based upon the work of Christ), who apart from such a restoration are not free, soteriologically speaking. For example, in his treatise, "Predestination Calmly Considered," written in 1752, Wesley observes:

But I do not carry free-will so far: (I mean, not in moral things;) 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.'²⁰

Beyond this, as Albert Outler has correctly noted, Wesley's sophisticated understanding of a graciously restored free-will, the presence of prevenient grace, separated his theology, in an important respect, even from that of Jacobus Arminius as well. For example, "Arminius held that man hath a will to turn to God *before* grace prevents him," Outler writes, "whereas for Wesley it is the Spirit's prevenient motion by which `we ever are moved and inspired to *any* good thing.'"²¹ And this consideration gives added credence to Wesley's claim made at the Methodist conference in 1745 that he and his preachers had come "to the very edge of Calvinism" by ascribing all good to the grace of God and by denying natural free-will and merit.²²

Fifth, prevenient grace expressed as a limited knowledge of God's attributes, as an understanding of the moral law, as the faculty of conscience, and as a measure of free will supernaturally restored has the cumulative effect, which can be distinguished from each of the preceding instances, of restraining human wickedness, of placing a check on human perversity. In fact, In his "Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third," Wesley describes "the braking effect" which prevenient grace (and providence) has on human evil, in this instance with respect to the hatred directed against the sons and daughters of God. He writes:

¹⁸H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, Vol 2 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940-1943), p. 104. In this context, Wiley has in mind principally Tridentine Catholicism.

¹⁹In fact, John Cassian, who founded two monasteries near Marseilles and whose *Institutes* had an impact on the Benedictine Rule, tried to find a compromise between the position of Augustine and Pelagius. This gifted monk contended that though all people are sinful as a result of the fall, their wills are simply weakened but not totally corrupted. Men and women are, therefore, free enough to cooperate with grace. See also Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:104.

²⁰Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 10:230.

²¹Outler, *Sermons*, 2:157, n.3. ("The Scripture Way of Salvation").

²²Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 8:285. George Croft Cell's work *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* is well known for having championed the thesis that Wesley's theology was similar in some important respects to that of John Calvin. Cf. George C. Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984).

If we were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, [...] therefore the world hateth you. Yea (setting aside what exceptions may be made by the preventing grace or the peculiar providence of God) it hateth them as cordially and sincerely as ever it did their Master.²³

And again, in his notes on Romans 1:24, Wesley points out that God withdrew "his restraining grace" from the obstinate and rebellious, from those who remained in idolatry.²⁴

Prevenient Grace and the Muslim Community

In light of the preceding it is evident that Wesley affirmed the universality of prevenient grace, along with its five specific benefits, and therefore that such graces mark the Muslim community as well. Moreover, the *benefits* of prevenient grace such as knowledge of the attributes of God, a measure of the knowledge of the moral law, conscience, a freedom that is associated with personhood and responsibility, and the braking effect of such grace on human evil all represent not cooperant grace but free grace. In other words such grace, in the form of restored *faculties*, highlights in a preeminent way the work of God alone. Indeed prevenient grace is given, to use Wesley's own words, in a manner "which waiteth not for the call of man."²⁵

Although prevenient grace is universal, and it marks the *beginning* of salvation in Wesley's estimation nevertheless such grace, it must be noted, is not salvific, properly speaking. Understood in a broad way prevenient grace represents the prior activity of God at any point along the *ordo salutis*, underscoring that the Most High is always ahead, so to speak.²⁶ In a second, more focused sense, however, prevenient grace can be conceived as that grace which literally goes before, properly speaking, the saving graces of justification and regeneration. And so the question in terms of the Muslim community, in light of Wesley's own theological constructs, has now become: Are Muslims

²³Outler, *Sermons*, 1:526. ("Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third").

²⁴Wesley, *NT Notes*, p. 364. (Romans 2:24).

²⁵Outler, *Sermons*, 3:207. ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation"). Since Wesley's doctrine of original sin underscores the notion of total depravity, in a way similar to John Calvin, then it logically follows that "irresistible grace" has to operate at least at some point in the Wesleyan order of salvation. That is, since men and women in the natural state, according to Wesley, do not even have the freedom to accept or reject any offered grace, then this gift itself must be graciously and *irresistibly* restored. In other words, to deny that prevenient grace is irresistible in terms of *graciously-restored faculties* is also to deny that Wesley held a doctrine of *total* depravity. Note, however, that irresistibility in this context pertains not to the call or overtures made to these faculties (that can be resisted) but to the re-establishment of these faculties that constitute responsible personhood and accountability. For more on this topic see, Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, pp. 81-82.

²⁶The broad and narrow sense of prevenient grace is developed by Albert Outler, See his comments on his introduction to Wesley's sermon, "On Conscience." Outler, *Sermons*, 2:479. ("On Conscience").

recipients of more than preventer grace, even of those graces that make holy? Put another way, may it rightly be claimed that Muslims are justified and born of God?

The Import of Covenant Theology

Like the Puritans William Ames and William Perkins, John Wesley understood that salvific graces are communicated through a covenant relationship established by God. However, unlike Ames and Perkins, Wesley parsed the distinction of a covenant of works and a covenant of grace somewhat differently.²⁷ Whereas many of the Puritans considered the moral law to be the primary feature of the covenant of works, Wesley rejected this judgment most likely because it failed to recognize the gracious nature of the moral law itself which is holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12).²⁸ In Wesley's estimation, as expressed for example in his sermon, "The Righteousness of Faith," produced in 1746, the dividing line between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace does not mirror the distinction between Moses and Christ but rather that of Adam before the fall on the one hand and all of humanity since the fall (the Mosaic and Christian dispensations) on the other hand. Put another way, it is only the covenant made with Adam in paradise (and in innocence) that is rightly termed a covenant of works. The covenants represented by Moses and Christ are *both* gracious.²⁹ As such it is proper in Wesley's judgment to distinguish the Mosaic dispensation from the Christian one, both of which fall under the designation of a covenant of grace. This means, of course, that in Wesley's practical theology he is by and large concerned with the gifts, graces and strengths of distinct *dispensations* that carry much of his soteriological concern.³⁰

So then, in order to assess the soteriological status, so to speak, of the Muslim community using Wesleyan theological materials it is helpful at the outset to recognize the priority of dispensations in his thinking that devolve upon Moses and Christ. Indeed, Wesley grappled with the question of the possibility of redemptive graces beyond the church (though not beyond the agency of the Holy Spirit) chiefly in terms of the servant metaphor (faith of a servant/faith of a child of God) as well as with respect to his careful employment of the Apostle Peter's judgment "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in *every nation* he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts. 10: 34-35).³¹ Clearly both of these elements must be understood in the context of the two dispensations already defined. In other words, the

²⁷For a consideration of the influence of covenant theology on John Wesley's soteriological judgments, see Stanley J. Rodes, "From Faith to Faith: An Examination of the Servant-Son Metaphor in John Wesley's Theological Thought" (University of Manchester, 2011).

²⁸See Wesley's sermon "On the Original, Nature, Properties and Use of the Law," in Outler, *Sermons*, 2:4-19).

²⁹Outler, *Sermons*, 1:203. ("The Righteousness of Faith"). See also Rodes, "From Faith to Faith," pp. 73-89.

³⁰Granted the Old Testament can be perverted and misunderstood as a covenant of works in which obedience to the law is viewed as the path to justification.

³¹*The Holy Bible: King James Version*. 1995 (electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version.) (Ac 10:34-36). Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

metaphor of “the faith of a servant,” and the language of “those who fear God and work righteousness,” (which gather up his soteriological interests especially in terms of extent) are dependent upon Wesley’s distinction of the Mosaic and Christian dispensation and they have little meaning apart from that dispensational framework.³² As Rodes puts it, “he [Wesley] restricted his employment of the servant-son metaphor to those who were, *soteriologically*, clearly under the Jewish dispensation or under the Christian dispensation.”³³

This last observation then helps to explain, in part, why Wesley left the Abrahamic covenant (which is of great interest to Muslims) largely undeveloped in this theology, especially in terms of its soteriological implications. For although he affirmed that Abraham is the “father of the faithful,”³⁴ “the father of all them that believe,”³⁵ and though he even declared that the covenant entered into with Abraham was an “evangelical covenant,”³⁶ and a “gospel covenant,”³⁷ nevertheless Wesley specifically pointed out that “Christ is not in any of these instances the direct or immediate object of Abraham’s faith,”³⁸ such that he had to conclude that “neither Abraham, David nor any Jew, was greater than John [the Baptist]. In other words, in this instance “he which is least in the kingdom of God … is greater than he [Abraham].”³⁹ Simply put, it is not the Abrahamic covenant that informs the paradigm of the faith of a servant and the language of one who “fears God and works righteousness,” with their broad soteriological implications, but the dispensations of Moses and Christ.

Two Dispensations: One Gracious Covenant

When Wesley employed the language of “Mosaical dispensation”⁴⁰ or “legal dispensation,”⁴¹ he was not simply thinking historically in terms of the giving of the law to ancient Israel at Sinai, but he was also thinking *soteriologically*.⁴² In other words, gentiles (those to whom the law was *not* historically given) may yet be in the legal dispensation due to their relation to God which is preeminently marked by fear. Indeed, Wesley contrasted “the Pentecost of Sinai, in the Old Testament, and the Pentecost of

³²Rodes, “From Faith to Faith,” pp. 28, 100-106.

³³Ibid., p. 222. In other words one could be a “soteriological” Jew, though not a literal one, due to one’s relation to God that is not only “legal” but is also marked by fear.

³⁴Outler, *Sermons*, 2:8 (“The Original, Nature, Properties and Use of the Law”).

³⁵Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 10:240. (*Predestination Calmly Considered*)

³⁶Ibid., 10:191. (*A Treatise on Baptism*)

³⁷Ibid., 10:194. (*A Treatise on Baptism*)

³⁸Reginald W. Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 23. *Journals and Diaries VI* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), p. 69.

³⁹Outler, *Sermons*, 2:108 (“Christian Perfection”).

⁴⁰John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament*, 3 vols. (Bristol: William Pine, 1765). See the note on Joshua 1:1.

⁴¹John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: William Bowyer, 1755). See the note on Gal. 4:2-3.

⁴²Rodes, “From Faith to Faith,” 175-84.

Jerusalem, in the New”⁴³ which taken together he referred to as “the two grand manifestations of God, the legal and the evangelical; the one from the mountain, and the other from heaven; the terrible [evoking fear] and the merciful one [evoking love].”⁴⁴ As such those under the legal dispensation, soteriologically speaking, will include both Jew and gentile and therefore Muslims as well. Beyond this it must be recognized that gentiles as well as Jews may utilize the moral law of the Old covenant in an improper fashion, that is, not viewing it as the gracious gift that it is but instead making it the principal vehicle for all sorts of attempts at self-righteousness and self-justification.

It is precisely the way in which Wesley contrasted these two dispensations, the Mosaic and the Christian, that bespeaks of his well-worked metaphor of the faith of a servant and the faith of a son. Thus, in his observations on Deuteronomy 34:12, Wesley points out that “Moses was faithful as a servant, but Christ as a son.”⁴⁵ However, not only are these two dispensations emblematic of this vital soteriological metaphor but they are also expressed, at least in some sense, in the typology that Wesley employed in his sermon, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” in which he distinguished between the *natural*, the *legal* and the *evangelical*, a movement along the path of salvation that marks a transition from ignorance to fear and on to holy love.⁴⁶ More importantly for the task at hand, Wesley’s parsing of the dispensations, soteriologically speaking, not only informs the metaphor of the faith of a servant/ faith of a son but also the metaphor itself in turn becomes one of his principal means, in terms of theological structures, through which Wesley thought through the whole matter of justification and those graces that are properly described as “saving.”

Justification

For the sake of clarity it is important to recognize at the outset that Wesley, in a manner similar to John Fletcher, defined justification in at least four different ways. The first sense underscores the *universality* of the atoning work of Christ, in other words that provision has been made for *all*, that is, sin has been forgiven and God is *already* reconciled. In this context, however, justification does not necessarily imply regeneration in the Christian sense. The second way stresses the importance of *receiving* and *applying* this justification⁴⁷ to the individual life such that believers can affirm not simply in a general manner that Christ died for the sins of the whole world (think of

⁴³Wesley, *NT Notes*. See Acts. 2:1.

⁴⁴Ibid. Bracketed material is mine.

⁴⁵Wesley, *OT Notes*. See Deuteronomy 34:12. See also Wesley’s comments on Hebrews 3:5-6 in his *NT Notes*.

⁴⁶Outler, *Sermons*, 1:248-266. (“The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption”).

⁴⁷Wesley republished (with modifications) Richard Baxter’s *Aphorisms of Justification* and cited favorably this second sense of justification as follows: “Through Christ hath satisfied the law, yet is it not his will that any man should be justified or saved thereby who hath not some ground in himself of personal and particular right and claim thereto, nor that any should be justified by the blood only as shed or offered except it be also received and applied.” See Randy L. Maddox, ed., *The Works of John Wesley: Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), p. 65.

Spangenberg's questions to Wesley in Georgia!) but also in a more personal fashion, reminiscent of Wesley at Aldersgate, that Christ "had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."⁴⁸ The third sense of justification developed by Wesley is intimately tied with the whole matter of assurance and the final way has to do with what Wesley on occasion referred to as final justification (which he initially rejected but which he later came to accept) before the throne of Christ in glory, a justification that is manifested in *works*.⁴⁹

The sense of justification that upheld Wesley's soteriological standards and therefore the promises of the gospel as well, and the one that is most often found in his writings, is the second sense enumerated above that Wesley at times specifically referred to as "the Christian sense." Thus, for example, in his sermon "Justification by Faith," produced in 1746, Wesley observes: "in whatever moment a man believes (in the Christian sense of the word) he is justified, his sins blotted out, 'his faith counted to him as righteousness.'"⁵⁰ In a similar fashion, Wesley points out in his comments on Acts 10:4 that although Cornelius had a measure of faith before the Apostle Peter arrived, "in the Christian sense Cornelius was then an unbeliever."⁵¹ Moreover, it is this Christian sense of the term that is referred to when Wesley declares that justification (the work that God does for us) is ever *conjoined* with regeneration (the work that God does in us) as is evident in his sermon "On Sin in Believers," written in 1763:

In doing this I use indifferently the words 'regenerate,' 'justified', or 'believers'; since, though they have not precisely the same meaning (the first implying an inward, actual change; the second a relative one; and the third the means whereby both the one and the other are wrought) yet they come to one and the same thing, as everyone that 'believes' is *both* 'justified' and 'born of God'⁵²

⁴⁸Reginald W. Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 18. *Journals and Diaries I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), p. 250.

⁴⁹Early in his career, in 1741, Wesley had taken issue with Bishop Bull's *Harmonia Apostolica* and its teaching of a final justification. However, by the 1740's Wesley came to appreciate the importance of just such a teaching. To illustrate, in 1745, Wesley wrote to Thomas Church and not only affirmed the notion of another justification but also insisted that "both inward and outward holiness are the stated conditions of final justification. See Rupert E. Davies, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 9: The Methodist Societies, I: History, Nature and Design (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 65. See also Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, from which some of these comments are taken.

⁵⁰Gerald R. Cragg, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 11. *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 117.

⁵¹Wesley, *NT Notes*, Acts 10:4.

⁵²Outler, *Sermons*, 1:319-320. Emphasis is mine. Laura Bartels Felleman failed to distinguish this second sense of justification (she was employing the term largely in the first "universal" sense of the term). As a result of this move, Bartels Felleman was not able to recognize that much more is entailed in the term justification in the *Christian sense* as employed by John Wesley than she has allowed. Logically this same ongoing mistake can be expressed in the form of "affirming the consequent," that is, of not taking into account all that is entailed in

Since justification in the Christian sense and regeneration are associated, never one without the other,⁵³ then this means that justification is also associated with the marks of the new birth that bespeak of both the promises and standards of redemption.

The Faith of a Servant Metaphor and Justification⁵⁴

In terms of its relation to justification in the *Christian sense*, Wesley employed the faith of a servant metaphor in two key ways: first of all, after initially affirming that assurance is the *common*, not rare, privilege of a child of God,⁵⁵ Wesley links the faith of a servant to the spirit of bondage. This is the *broad* usage of the metaphor and it includes many people, both inside and outside the walls of a church. Accordingly, Wesley still did not identify nor confuse the faith of a servant, and its measure of acceptance (a degree of faith and grace), with the assurance that one's sins are forgiven; since being under "the spirit of bondage," a servant, properly speaking, lacks justifying faith. Indeed, in a letter to Thomas Davenport, drafted in 1781, Wesley counsels the suffering gentleman who was then under a spirit of fear that "You have now *received the spirit of bondage*. Is it not the forerunner of the Spirit of adoption? He is not afar off. Look up!...He is nigh that justifieth!"⁵⁶ Such advice clearly reveals, once again, that those under the spirit of bondage do indeed lack justifying faith in the Christian sense. More important, a few years later in his sermon, "On the Discoveries of Faith," Wesley specifically links the spirit of bondage with the faith of a servant indicating that this faith has yet to *receive* the forgiveness of sins. Wesley observes: "Exhort him to press on by all possible means, till he passes 'from faith to faith'; from the faith of a *servant* to the faith of a *son*; from the *spirit of bondage* unto fear, to the spirit of childlike love."⁵⁷

the *Christian sense* of justification. Put another way, such an approach did not allow Bartels Felleman to affirm Wesley's soteriological standards, and with them, their implied promises as well. See Laura Bartels Felleman, "John Wesley and the 'Servant of God,'" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (Fall, 2006): 72-86.

⁵³For a view that denies justification and regeneration are ever conjoined, see Randy L. Maddox, "Continuing the Conversation," *Methodist History* 30, no. 4 (July 1992): 241.

⁵⁴The material in this section, with some slight modifications, is drawn from my book, *The Theology of John Wesley*, pp. 133-136.

⁵⁵Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 26. *The Letters II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 254-55. (To Charles Wesley; July 31, 1747)

⁵⁶John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley*, A.M., 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 5:95. (To Thomas Davenport, December 2, 1781).

⁵⁷Outler, *Sermons*, 4:35-36. Emphasis is mine. (On the Discoveries of Faith). Wesley does not mistake sincerity in religious matters for acceptance as is evident in the following: "A man may be sincere in any of these states [natural, legal and evangelical]; not only when he has the "Spirit of adoption," but while he has the "spirit of bondage unto fear;" yea, while he has neither this fear, nor love. For undoubtedly there may be sincere Heathens, as well as sincere Jews, or Christians. This circumstance, then, does by no means prove, that a man is in a state of acceptance with God." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:263). (The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption). Bracketed material is mine.

What then are the traits of the spirit of bondage displayed in the sermon "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption" written in 1746, and that were later identified with the faith of a servant? Those under a spirit of bondage, Wesley argues, feel sorrow and remorse; they fear death, the devil, and humanity; they desire to break free from the chains of sin, but cannot, and their cry of despair is typified by the Pauline expression: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"⁵⁸ In fact, in this sermon Wesley specifically identifies "this whole struggle of one who is 'under the law'" with the spirit of bondage and with the spiritual and psychological dynamics of the seventh chapter of Romans.⁵⁹

Second, Wesley recognized that in some exceptional cases those who are justified and regenerated (and hence children of God) may lack an assurance that their sins are forgiven due to either ignorance or bodily disorder.⁶⁰ These too have the faith of a servant. This is the narrow usage of the metaphor. This means, then, that Wesley defined the faith of a servant in at least two key ways. The first, which is a *broad* usage and occurs repeatedly in Wesley's writings, *excludes* justification, regeneration and assurance and corresponds to the spirit of bondage detailed above. The second, which is a narrow usage and seldom occurs, corresponds to the exempt cases and exceptions just noted and *includes* justification and regeneration but not assurance. Interestingly enough, although the faith of a servant in this second sense is obviously Christian (saving) faith since it includes justification and regeneration, Wesley still did not refer to it as the *proper* Christian faith since it lacks assurance.

The preceding discussion of Wesley's distinctions pertaining to assurance can now be outlined into three major groups as follows:

⁵⁸Ibid., 1:258. (The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption).

⁵⁹Ibid. Observe that the servants of God are awakened, but they see not a God of love, but One of wrath. It is, therefore, important not to confuse the issue of awakening with regeneration (and conversion).

⁶⁰In addition, Wesley wrote to Dr. Rutherford in 1768: "Therefore I have not for many years thought a consciousness of acceptance to be essential to justifying faith." Cf. Telford, *Letters*, 5:359. See also Starkey, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 68-69.

Faith of a Child of God	Faith of a Servant (Broad)	Faith of a Servant (Narrow) ⁶¹
Under the Spirit of Adoption	Under the Spirit of Bondage	Not under the Spirit of Bondage
Have the Witness (Spirit)	Lack the Witness	Lack the Witness
Justified and Born of God	Accepted (But Not Justified and Born of God in the Christian Sense)	Justified and Born of God
Have the Witness of the Spirit	Lack the Witness Due to Sin (Many People; Common)	Lack the Witness Due to Ignorance or Bodily Disorder (Few People; Exceptions)

By 1771 Wesley had come to a greater appreciation of the faith of a servant and its degree of acceptance; and he had realized that in exceptional cases one may even be justified and yet lack assurance due to either ignorance of the gospel promises or due to bodily disorder. Nevertheless, the theme which Wesley chose to develop during the last period of his life was none other than a strong identification of assurance with the proper (real) Christian faith. To illustrate, in January 1787, Wesley acknowledged that "To believe Christ gave Himself for me is the faith of a Christian,"⁶² and a year later he not only once again clarified the distinction between the faith of a servant and that of a son, but he also maintained that assurance is an integral component of the proper Christian faith. In his sermon "On Faith," Wesley reasons:

Thus the faith of a child is *properly and directly* a divine conviction whereby every child of God is enabled to testify, "The life that I now live, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." And *whosoever hath this*, the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.⁶³

⁶¹Wesley indicates that the dividing line between the faith of a servant and that of a child of God has to do specifically with the direct witness of the Holy Spirit: "He that believeth, as a child of God, 'hath the witness in himself.' This the servant hath not.' See Outler, *Sermons*, 3:498. ("On Faith").

⁶²Telford, *Letters*, 7:361-62. (To Theophilus Lessey, January 1787) Wesley's response to Mr. Fleury, who had claimed that Wesley pretended to extraordinary inspiration, was to associate the witness of the Spirit (assurance) as vital to the Christian faith: "I pretend to no other inspiration than that which is common to all real Christians, without which no one can be a Christian at all." Cf. Davies, *Societies*, 9:392.

⁶³Outler, *Sermons*, 3:497-498. (On Faith) Emphasis is mine. For examples of what Wesley meant by "full assurance," cf. Wesley, *NT Notes*, p. 638; Outler, *Sermons*, 3:549, 4:36; Ward, *Journals*, 22:436.

Even more significantly, there is nothing in Wesley's often-quoted letter to Melville Horne in 1788 which detracts from this identification and emphasis. Thus, in this correspondence, Wesley maintains that the servants of God who lack assurance are not thereby condemned, a commonplace by now, but he then goes on to assert once more that "we preach assurance as we always did, as a *common* privilege of the children of God...."⁶⁴

The Language of "Fearing God and Working Righteousness" and Justification

Just as Wesley employed the faith of a servant metaphor in a twofold way: one that excluded justification (associated with the spirit of bondage) and one that embraced it (the exceptions or exempt cases) so too did he utilize the language of "fearing God and working righteousness" in similar manner. To illustrate, Wesley used this language, in its *broad* sense, to describe those who were contrite in heart but not necessarily born of God and who were about to unite with the Methodists by joining a class meeting. Indeed, Wesley gloried in the fact that one did not have to chronicle a conversion experience or confess that Jesus is the Messiah in order to be among the Methodists. He elaborates:

I have never read or heard of, either in ancient or modern history, any other church which builds on so broad a foundation as the Methodists do; which requires of its members no conformity either in opinions or modes of worship, but barely this one thing, to fear God, and work righteousness.⁶⁵

On occasion Wesley exhorted those that "fear God and work righteousness" continually "to cry to God, that he would reveal his Son in your hearts, to the intent you may be no more *servants* but *sons*; having his love shed abroad in your hearts, and walking in "the glorious liberty of the children of God."⁶⁶

Moreover, though the only requirement to become a Methodist was a desire to "flee the wrath which is to come," to remain a Methodist, however, class members had to keep the *General Rules of the United Societies* which included the following: 1) doing no harm, 2) doing good, and 3) attending upon "all the ordinances of God."⁶⁷ These same three rules emerged elsewhere in Wesley's writings in the context of *repentance*. This last factor demonstrates quite clearly that the very purpose of the class meeting was

⁶⁴Robert Southey, *The Life of John Wesley* (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1820), 1:258. Emphasis is mine. That Wesley maintains that assurance is the *common* privilege of the sons and daughters of God suggests that it is rare when assurance, marked by doubt and fear, does not soon follow the new birth.

⁶⁵Reginald W. Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 24. *Journals and Diaries VII* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), p. 152. The "fearing God" in this context may be equivalent to the kind of fear described in Wesley's typology found in the sermon, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," that is, in terms of ignorance → fear → love. See Outler, *Sermons*, 1:248-266.

⁶⁶Outler, *Sermons*, 3:500 ("On Faith"). Emphasis is mine.

⁶⁷Davies, *Societies*, pp. 70-73.

to foster repentance from an old way of life to a new one. Again, one did not have to have the faith of a child of God to join the Methodists. One need only “fear God and work righteousness.” In this broad sense such language does *not* imply justification and regeneration, properly speaking.

Wesley, however, also utilized this distinct language in a second, more *narrow*, way to refer to those who were indeed the children of God, who knew that their sins were forgiven, and who had the direct witness of the Holy Spirit. Wesley explains:

I believe a consciousness of being in the favour of God (which I do not term plerophory, or full assurance, since it is frequently weakened, nay, perhaps interrupted, by returns of doubt or fear) is the *common privilege* of Christians, fearing God and working righteousness.⁶⁸

Even more emphatically Wesley clearly links those who “fear God and work righteousness,” with those who are nothing less than *real Christians*, in other words, with believers who are justified, born of God and have a measure of assurance. In his sermon, “On Divine Providence,” for example, produced in 1786, Wesley observes:

Within the third, the innermost circle, are contained only the real Christians; those that worship God, not in form only, but in spirit and in truth. Herein are comprised all that love God, or, at least, truly fear God and work righteousness; all in whom is the mind which was in Christ, and who walk as Christ also walked.⁶⁹.

Beyond this, interestingly enough, Wesley wrote about those who “fear God, and work righteousness *evangelically*,” demonstrating once again the high measure of grace that this phrase can depict, even that of a child of God who is redeemed in nothing less than the Christian sense of this important terminology.

Wesley’s Difficult Statements about Mohometans

Before Wesley’s own soteriological standards in the form of justification, the metaphor of the faith of a servant and the biblical language of “fearing God and working righteousness,” can be applied to the Muslim household of faith, it is important to bring forward several of Wesley’s own observations on Mahometans, the language he used to refer to Muslims.⁷⁰ In this way, Wesley’s comments may offer some helpful clues as to how these standards should be properly applied. Wesley’s problematic statements are as follows:

⁶⁸Telford, *Letters*, 5:358 (To Dr. Rutherford). . Emphasis is mine.

⁶⁹Outler, Sermons, 2:543 ("On Divine Providence").

⁷⁰For more on this topic see Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (Spring-Fall 1992): pp. 10-12.

- A little, and but a little, above the Heathens in religion, are the **Mahometans**. But how far and wide has this miserable delusion spread over the face of the earth! Insomuch that the **Mahometans** are considerably more in number (as six to five) than Christians. And by all the accounts which have any pretence to authenticity, these are also, in general, as utter strangers to all true religion as their four-footed brethren; as void of mercy as lions and tigers; as much given up to brutal lusts as bulls or goats: So that they are in truth a disgrace to human nature, and a plague to all that are under the iron yoke.⁷¹
- And, First, a total ignorance of God is almost universal among us. The exceptions are exceeding few, whether among the learned or unlearned. High and low, cobblers, tinkers, hackney-coachmen, men and maid servants, soldiers, sailors, tradesmen of all ranks, Lawyers, Physicians, Gentlemen, Lords, are as ignorant of the Creator of the world as **Mahometans** or Pagans.⁷²
- With how many instances of this melancholy truth, — that those whose eye is not single are totally ignorant of the nature of true religion, — are we surrounded on every side! How many, even of good sort of people, of them whose lives are innocent, are as ignorant of themselves, of God, and of worshipping him in spirit and in truth, as either **Mahometans** or Heathens!⁷³
- That these men, then, have no knowledge or love of God is undeniably manifest, not only from their gross horrible notions of him, but from their not loving their brethren. But they have not always so weighty a cause to hate and murder one another as difference of opinion. **Mahometans** will butcher each other by thousands, without so plausible a plea as this. Why is it that such numbers of Turks and Persians have stabbed one another in cool blood? Truly, because they differ in the manner of dressing their head.⁷⁴
- And whoever reads the history of the Church, from the time of Constantine to the Reformation, will easily observe that all the abominations of the heathen world, and, in the following ages, of the **Mahometans**, overflowed every part of it. And in every nation and city the Clergy were not a whit more innocent than the laity.⁷⁵
- And yet we know the **Mahometans** not only condemn all who cannot swallow them to everlasting fire, — not only appropriate to themselves

⁷¹Outler, *Sermons*, 2:486 ("The General Spread of the Gospel"). I have used the format of boldface for each item in the bulleted list (and the two quotations that follow this list) so that readers can quickly see the word "Mahometan" as employed by Wesley.

⁷²Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 11:159.

⁷³Outler, *Sermons*, 4:124 ("On a Single Eye").

⁷⁴Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises* I, 12:186.

⁷⁵Outler, *Sermons*, 3:470. ("On Attending the Church Service").

the title of Mussulmen, or True Believers, — but even anathematize, with the utmost bitterness, and adjudge to eternal destruction, all their brethren of the sect of Hali, all who contend for a figurative interpretation of them.⁷⁶

Though the preceding evidence is indeed troubling, and may very well be an indication of the kinds of prejudices that could be harbored by eighteenth-century British Christians such as John Wesley, he nevertheless took a more moderate approach as he considered the love of God that is manifested in a superintending providence which embraces all of humanity. This providence is expressed in two key sermons, in “On Divine Providence,” written in 1786, and in “Spiritual Worship,” drafted six years earlier in 1780. In this last sermon, for instance, Wesley elaborates:

And yet there is a difference, as was said before, in his providential government over the children of men. A pious writer observes, there is a three-fold circle of divine providence. The outermost circle includes all the sons of men; Heathens, **Mahometans**, Jews, and Christians. He causeth his sun to rise upon all. He giveth them rain and fruitful seasons. He pours ten thousand benefits upon them, and fills their hearts with food and gladness. With an interior circle he encompasses the whole visible Christian Church, all that name the name of Christ. He has an additional regard to these, and a nearer attention to their welfare. But the innermost circle of his providence encloses only the invisible Church of Christ; all real Christians, wherever dispersed in all corners of the earth; all that worship God (whatever denomination they are of) in spirit and in truth.⁷⁷

Moreover, Wesley mitigates the harshness of many of his statements with respect to Muslims detailed above in his sermon “On Living Without God,” written less than a year before his death. In it he explains:

Let it be observed, I purposely add, "to those that are under the Christian dispensation," because I have no authority from the Word of God "to judge those that are without." Nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and **Mahometan** world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to him that made them, and who is "the Father of the spirits of all flesh;" who is the God of the Heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises* I, 12:185-86.

⁷⁷Outler, *Sermons*, 3:94 ("Spiritual Worship"). See also Outler, *Sermons*, 2:541-43 ("On Divine Providence").

⁷⁸Ibid., 4:174-75. ("On Living Without God"). That Wesley was not willing to judge those outside the Christian covenant has consequence not only for how he understood Muslims, soteriologically speaking, but also Jews. There are two options in this context: the first

In light of the preceding observation, though Wesley maintained that Mahometans were ignorant of God and the nature of true religion, he nevertheless cautioned the Methodists against condemning this people to loss, to an eternity apart from the glorious presence of God. Accordingly, judgment and utter condemnation of the Muslim community by Christians (to take on the prerogatives that belong to God alone) was inappropriate in Wesley's eighteenth century Britain, and it remains inappropriate today. That much at least is clear. Nevertheless the application of Wesley's theological standards and frameworks to Muslims may yet be warranted, if in a twenty-first century global setting of informational exchange it can be presumed that the Muslim community has at least some knowledge of the gospel and its promises.

The Application of Wesley's Soteriological Standards and Frameworks to Muslims

So then there are two major positions on the question of whether Wesley's soteriological standards in the form of the metaphor of the faith of a servant and the language of "fearing God and working righteousness," (terminology that is best understood in the larger context of justification in the Christian sense) can be properly applied to Muslims. The first view argues that these standards are indeed applicable to Muslims simply because Wesley employed the metaphor of the faith of a servant and the distinct language of "fear God and work righteousness," in a very general way to *every* nation, a judgment that surely must include Muslims. Indeed, Wesley's discussion of the "infant state" of the faith that will in the end be properly saving appears to embrace the Muslim community as well. In his sermon, "On Faith," for example, Wesley reasons:

But what is the faith which is properly saving; which brings eternal salvation to all those that keep it to the end? It is such a divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, even in its infant state, enables every one that possesses it to "fear God and work righteousness." And whosoever, *in every nation*, believes thus far, the Apostle declares, is "accepted of him." He actually is, at that very moment, in a state of acceptance. But he is at present *only a servant of God, not properly a son*. Meantime, let it be well observed, that "the wrath of God" no longer "abideth on him."⁷⁹

concludes that Christians can have nothing meaningful to say about Muslims since they are beyond the Christian covenant. The second option argues, however, that both the Mosaic and Christian covenants can be "soteriologically" understood and are therefore applicable to all peoples, including Muslims. But this last view may presuppose at least some knowledge of the gospel.

⁷⁹Ibid., 3: 497 ("On Faith"). Emphases are mine. See also Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 499. Notice here that Wesley specifically connects the phrase "fear God and work righteousness" with the faith of a *servant*.

This soteriological judgment, entailed in this first major position, can be expressed in the following chart, if indeed the standards are applicable:

The Faith of a Muslim (Are the Soteriological Standards Applicable?)			
YES (Mosaic Dispensation; Legal)	NO (Christian Dispensation; Evangelical)	YES (Mosaic Dispensation; Legal)	NO (Christian Dispensation; Evangelical)
Faith of a Servant (Broad)	Faith of a Servant (Narrow)	Fear God and Work Righteousness (Broad)	Fear God and Work Righteousness (Narrow)
Under the Spirit of Bondage	Not under the Spirit of Bondage	Under the Spirit of Bondage	Not under the Spirit of Bondage
Lack the Witness	Lack the Witness	Lack the Witness	Have the Witness
Accepted (But Not Justified and Born of God in the Christian Sense)	Justified and Born of God	Accepted (But Not Justified and Born of God in the Christian sense)	Justified and Born of God
Lack the Witness Due to Sin (Many People; Common)	Lack the Witness Due to Ignorance or Bodily Disorder (Few People; Exceptions)	Lack the Witness Due to Sin (Many People; Common)	Have the Witness as <i>Real Christians</i> , soteriologically speaking

Moreover, this first view can be supported by distinguishing between an historical Jewish dispensation (in which the Jews were given the Mosaic law) from a *soteriological* understanding of this same dispensation in the form of one who, whether Jew or not, is “under the law,” due to illumination and awakening, as expressed in the typology of natural, legal, evangelical found in the sermon, “The Spirit of Bondage and Of Adoption.”⁸⁰

The second major position, however, contends that Wesley’s metaphor of the faith of a servant as well as the language of “fear God and work righteousness” are not properly applied to the Muslim community. In other words, these standards are not, after

⁸⁰Ibid., 1:248-66 (“The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption”).

all, employed in a *soteriological* way as the first view suggests. To illustrate, In Wesley's sermon, "On Faith," (Heb. 11:6), written in April 1788, he distinguishes several kinds of faith in an ascending order: a materialist, a deist, a heathen, a Jew, John the Baptist, a Roman Catholic, a Protestant. More to the point, observe precisely where Wesley places the faith of a Mahometan in this typology in the following observation drawn from this same sermon:

The next sort of faith is the faith of Heathens, with which I join that of Mahometans. I cannot but prefer this before the faith of the Deists; because, though it embraces nearly the same objects, yet they are rather to be pitied than blamed for the narrowness of their faith. And their not believing the whole truth, is not owing to want of sincerity, but merely to want of light. When one asked Chicali, an old Indian Chief, "Why do not you red men know as much as us white men?" he readily answered, "Because you have the great Word, and we have not."⁸¹ 7:196-97.

And since later in this same sermon Wesley clearly distinguishes the faith of a heathen from that of a servant ("There is no reason why you should be satisfied with the faith of a materialist, a heathen, or a deist; nor indeed with that of a servant"⁸²) it is reasonable to conclude that the faith of a heathen which typifies the faith of a "Mahometan," in the end, does not partake of either the Mosaic or Christian dispensation, soteriologically speaking, but that it is at best understood more generally as simply enjoying the prevenient grace of God that is given universally to all nations. In this second view, the failure to receive the deeper graces which these two dispensations just cited enjoy is due, in Wesley's estimation at least, to a want of light, to a *lack of knowledge and understanding* with respect to the promises of the gospel. Moreover, these promises, when viewed in another way, are nothing less than the standards of salvation manifested in Jesus Christ. This means, then, that Wesley set aside his own Christian worldview as he looked toward the house of Islam and proceeded in a largely phenomenological way. That is, he considered what in reality were the "live options" for practicing Muslims whose birth, family ties, education, socialization, and culture had not offered them knowledge of Christ. The judgment entailed in this second major position can be expressed in the following chart, if indeed the soteriological standards are *not* applicable:

⁸¹Ibid., 3:494 ("On Faith").

⁸²Ibid., 3:498 ("On Faith").

The Faith of a Muslim (Are the Soteriological Standards Applicable?)

NO

(Beyond the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations)

The Faith of a Heathen

(Distinguished from the Faith of a Servant)

Ignorant of the Gospel Promises

"How it will please God, the Judge of all, to deal with *them*, we may leave to God himself."

And what is it that may prevent the Muslim community from receiving the illumination that may lead to saving grace, from hearing the gospel that would render them responsible for the light so received?⁸³

Possible Impediments to Receiving Justifying Graces in the Muslim Community

There may be at least two impediments to the reception of justification in its saving sense (in other words as it is conjoined with regeneration and the marks of the new birth) in the Muslim community. The first difficulty has to do with the Christology of the Quran itself, which when taught to Muslims, may confuse them as to who Jesus Christ actually is. Indeed, the Qur'an is replete with verses that specifically deny the divinity of Christ in a way similar to that of Arius centuries earlier. The following material, then, drawn from the Quran itself, clearly evidences a low Christology:

- "Unbelievers are those who declare: 'God is the Messiah, the son of Mary.'"⁸⁴
- And of Allah it is written: "he is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. How should He have a son when He had no consort?"⁸⁵
- "Those who say: 'The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,' preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust."⁸⁶
- "God forbid that He Himself should beget a son!"⁸⁷

⁸³For more on the Christology of the Quran see Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, pp. 113-120.

⁸⁴N.J. Dawood, ed., *The Koran* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 81. (Sura 5:17).

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 102. (Sura 6:101.).

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 219. (Sura 19:88). The Qur'an also intimates that the Jews attach particular significance to Ezra as revealed in the following: "The Jews say Ezra is the son of God, while the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. God confound them! How perverse they are! p. 136. (Sura 9:29-30)

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 216. (Sura 19:35).

In light of this and other pertinent evidence, the question must finally be addressed: Does God/Father have a Son or not? The Qur'an clearly says "No"; the New Testament, on the other hand, repeatedly says, "Yes." It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile these views.⁸⁸

The second impediment concerns the church, itself, which is composed, at least in part, of those whose lives give evidence of dullness, superstition and sin. Indeed, Wesley refers to the lives of Christians as the "grand stumbling block"⁸⁹ set before Muslims that prevents them from hearing the gospel aright. Naturally Wesley was critical of his own Anglican church in this regard, for one thing because it was near at hand, but he reserved some of his sharpest opprobrium for the Greek Church, which today is known, more popularly, as Eastern Orthodoxy. Wesley's censure is worth quoting at length:

Proceed we now to the Christian world....The gross, barbarous ignorance, the deep, stupid superstition, the blind and bitter zeal, and the endless thirst after vain jangling and strife of words, which have reigned for many ages in the Greek Church, and well-nigh banished true religion from among them, make these scarce worthy of the Christian name, and lay an insuperable stumbling-block before the Mahometans.⁹⁰

Among other things, Wesley astutely realized that the use of icons by the Eastern church could easily despoil dialog with the Muslim community before it ever had a chance to begin.⁹¹ Indeed, from the days of Muhammad in the seventh century to the present day, Muslims have repeatedly rejected the use of icons and images to portray the divine (in a way not very dissimilar from Jewish judgment) since such artifacts, these human creations, can over time undermine a monotheistic faith in *practice*, in aberrant and superstitious forms of folk religion. Wesley, however, unlike the Muslim community,

⁸⁸For more on this topic see Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p. 117.

⁸⁹Outler, Sermons, 2:495 ("The General Spread of the Gospel").

⁹⁰ Maddox, *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises* I, 12:186-87. See also Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p. 118 from which some of this material is taken.

⁹¹Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 10:176 (The Origin of Image-Worship Among Christians). For a defense of the use of icons from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Cf., St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, New York: St. Valdimir's Seminary Press, 2001). The justification of the use of icons in terms of a doctrine of the incarnation, here as elsewhere, is actually based upon a specious argument. It makes the subtle and not-often-noticed shift from "person" to "thing." However, in its best sense the doctrine of the incarnation, richly evident in scripture, helps the church to understand, at least in some sense, the divine nature of the *person* of Christ, a divinity that is embodied ("The Word became flesh" John 1:14), though apparently not present in a block of wood or gold paint.

was not an iconoclast, arguing against the use of all images, but he did at least recognize the serious danger in this area not only for Christian life but also for its witness.⁹²

Conclusion

From the preceding evidence it is clear, on the basis of Wesley's soteriological frameworks, that the condemnation of Muslims to eternal loss cannot and should not be affirmed, especially if it is done almost in an unthinking way. To be sure, Muslims are recipients of God's prevenient grace, a grace that marks the very beginning of salvation. Are Muslims, however, the recipients of more than prevenient grace? The answer to that question, as we have seen, is dependent upon how one understands the metaphor of a faith of servant and the language of "fear God and work righteousness" and their applicability to Muslims who as "heathens" (according to Wesley's own designation) may fall outside the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, though they may, after all, be included "soteriologically," if they have at least a measure of knowledge of Christ and his promises. There is therefore at least some basis, then, according to this last view to affirm that Muslims have the faith of a servant in a broad sense as well as "fear God and work righteousness" in that same sense.

Beyond this, however, to affirm that Muslims are redeemed, properly speaking, that they are marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit of the living Christ reigning in their hearts may be problematic, though Wesley does offer some measure of hope even in this context. For example, in a letter to Thomas Whitehead, written on February 10, 1748 Wesley surmised:

‘The benefit of the death of Christ is not only extended to such as have the distinct knowledge of His death and from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefit of His death, though ignorant of the history, if they suffer His grace to take place in their hearts, so as of wicked men to become *holy*.’⁹³

Again is his sermon, "On Charity," written in 1784, Wesley mitigates some of the harshness found in the judgments made by Christians even in his own day. He observes:

Accordingly that sentence, 'He that believeth not shall be condemned,' is spoken of them to whom the gospel is preached. Others it does not concern; and we are not required to determine anything touching their final state. How it will please God, the Judge of all, to deal with *them*, we may leave to God himself. But this we know, that he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the

⁹²Ibid. Moreover, when Wesley considered the Second Commandment, that is, the prohibition against making a graven image, he cautioned: "Our religious worship must be governed by the power of *faith*, not by the power of *imagination*." See Wesley, *OT Notes*, (Exodus 20:3).

⁹³Telford, *Letters*, 2:118. (To Thomas Whitehead). Emphasis is mine. That the wicked become holy is evidence that Wesley has the Christian understanding of justification (and regeneration) in mind.

heathens also; that he is ‘rich in mercy to all that call upon him’, ‘according to the light they have’;⁹⁴

Add to these elements, what impediments may stand in the way of Muslims coming to saving faith, such as the low Christology of the Qur'an and the offensive lives of Christians themselves, and it is clear that the way forward, in its initial phases, should entail greater dialog between these two great monotheistic faiths such that they can both, in a spirit of grace and humility, come to a greater understanding of each other's religious tradition. With mutual dialog in place and with the illumination that will be left in its wake, in terms of greater knowledge of both the gospel and the Qur'an, what will likely emerge from this engagement is a mutual responsibility in which Wesley's theological frameworks will not only be more greatly understood but also their application will become far less problematic. In the end whatever judgments are entertained, the following maxim can at the very least be affirmed by the church that is ever faithful in its witness to the good news of Jesus Christ to a larger world: those who hear the gospel are thereby accountable for their response to the gospel.

⁹⁴Outler, *Sermons*, 3:295-296. (On Charity) See also Wesley, *NT Notes*, Acts 17:28. Here again Wesley considers the Muslim, for example, not through the perspective of Christian consciousness but through an Islamic one. In other words, how do things appear phenomenologically, so to speak, from within the life, culture and socialization of one who is outside the Christian worldview? For more on this topic, see Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (Spring-Fall 1992): 7-29.