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Abstract

In this paper I argue that Charles Wesley understands sanctification as growth into maturity as a human being, and that the overriding image of such sanctification for Charles Wesley was the resignation of the person to God. The core of this paper is an exegesis of Charles Wesley's use of resignation in his published hymns. I argue that for Charles Wesley resignation is a developing attitude or habit of renunciation based on deep trust in God. This analysis is set within the context of 21st century understandings of human maturity from both secular and Christian perspectives, which enables conclusions to be drawn about how Charles' theological and spiritual insights relate to and might inform the ministry of the church today.

'Becoming truly human: Charles Wesley's understanding of sanctification as human maturity and its implications for 21st century ministry.'

Introduction

How is sanctification to be understood in the 21st century? Human maturity is perhaps a more accessible way of comprehending today what the Wesleys meant by sanctification in the 18th century. This is not to claim a direct correspondence between these concepts, but there is an interconnection worth exploring, particularly to achieve what Hauerwas articulates as an ability to 'characterize perfection' for our current generation.[1]

This paper first explores the notion of human maturity and its relation to sanctification. For this we draw initially on secular insights from the contemporary social science studies of psychology and gerontology, and then from current theology and spirituality. Given the scope of this paper these insights are merely glimpses into the world of these disciplines, cameos of selected writers and thinkers in the field, but they give a sufficient introduction for our purpose. The second section examines how sanctification and human maturity can be identified in the hymns of Charles Wesley particularly through his use of resignation. Finally we consider what this understanding has to contribute to the ministry of the church in the 21st century.

1. Human Maturity: social science perspectives

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[1] Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth : Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).141-2

Human maturity is an inter-disciplinary concept and so to set a 21st century context we first draw on insights from psychology and gerontology.

Insights from the social sciences: psychology and gerontology

Developmental Psychology

Stage theories of development are a key element of developmental psychology and can be identified in the work of three central thinkers.

Erik Erikson: Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson established an eight section taxonomy for his analysis of his eight stages of development ranging from infancy to old age.   In his analysis of the psychosocial crises of each stage, Erikson identifies a dominant antithesis, two dominant ways in which humans respond, for each stage.   At old age this is integrity versus despair. Erikson describes integrity as 'a sense of *coherence* and *wholeness*,'[2] and the strength he attributes to this stage is wisdom.

James Fowler: Stages of Faith

Fowler goes beyond Erikson in his analysis of the final stage of life. In 1981 Fowler published *Stages of Faith*. The highest of these stages of faith, is stage 6 'Universalizing Faith.' At this stage Fowler argues, the paradox between universalising and the preservation of one's own self-being, characteristic of stage 5, is overcome and stage 6 'becomes a disciplined, activist *incarnation* – a making real and tangible – of the imperatives of absolute love and justice.'[3] Fowler continues, '[t]he self at Stage 6 engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality.'[4] Even at Stage 6 however, the person is not perfect, nor necessarily self-actualised. Fowler makes an interesting comment in the light of the discussion we will come to later about suffering:

> It is my conviction that persons who come to embody Universalising faith are drawn into those patterns of commitment and leadership by the providence of God and the exigencies of history. It is as though they are selected by the great Blacksmith of history, heated in the fires of turmoil and trouble and then hammered into usable shape on the hard anvil of conflict and struggle.[5]

Whilst we might not want to pursue this image too far at this point, particularly the theological implications of selection, Fowler's identification of suffering and struggle and the contribution they make to those he considers to be at stage 6 is one to note.

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[2] Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed : A Review* (New York ; London: Norton, 1985).

[3] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith : The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 1st ed. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).200

[4] Ibid.200

[5] Ibid.202

Abraham Maslow: Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs culminates in self-actualisation, and this indicates an additional dimension to an understanding of human maturity. Maslow identified a number of components of self-actualisation.[6] The quality of detachment is one. Maslow identifies dangers of misinterpretation within detachment: obliviousness to surroundings, aloofness; but what Maslow understands by this term is serenity, autonomy and freedom of the will. Other characteristics he notes are the qualities of creativity and spontaneity, with an 'ease of penetration to reality';[7] familiarity with 'mystic experiences' or peak experiences where emotions 'get strong … chaotic and widespread.' Maslow continues, ' Such 'peakers' seem 'to live in the realm of Being; of poetry, esthetics; symbols; transcendence' "religion" of the mystical, personal, noninstitutional sort; and of end-experiences.'[8] Finally, Maslow says self-acutalisers have a deep feeling of identity with others, a strong sense of right and wrong, justice and injustice; they are strongly ethical with clear moral standards, 'they do right and do not do wrong'.[9]

Maslow's research led him to conclude that this sort of self-actualisation was found in older subjects;[10] and to the interest in human maturity from the perspective of gerontology we now turn.

Gerontology

A building block for those writing within the field of gerontology, particularly from a Christian perspective, is the relationship of human maturity to spiritual well-being and health. Is maturity quantitative, defined by the number of years lived, or qualitative, referencing states of being? Both authors considered above advocate stage theories of advancing toward maturity, with an inherent implication that the stages progress as people get older. Such an assumption is however critiqued. Barbara Payne, for example considers stages 'too structured and constricting'.[11] She argues that spiritual maturity is related to relational interaction, emerging from the context of relationships with others and society, both in the past and in the present.[12] David Moburg considers that stage theory can become oppressive 'by implying that everyone must fit the pattern and that those who do not are mentally or spiritually ill, deficient, or inadequate.'[13] This is an important point which highlights a significant danger. Moon and Fantuzzo draw parallels between *positive* mental health and Christian maturity, with reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They suggest that 'Christian maturity and positive mental health share a common process (i.e. the actualization of individual potentialities) and a common environmental pre-condition (i.e. the experience of love from a significant external source).[14] God's love is the 'love from a significant external source' in their

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[6] Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).Chapter 11
[7] Ibid.158
[8] Ibid.165
[9] Ibid.168
[10] Ibid.150
[11] Barbara Payne, "Spiritual Maturity and Meaning-Filled Relationships : A Sociological Perspective," *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 7, no. 1/2 (1990).28
[12] Ibid.29
[13] David O. Moberg, "Spiritual Maturity and Wholeness in the Later Years," ibid.12
[14] Gary W. and John Fantuzzo Moon, "An Integration : Christian Maturity and Positive Mental Health," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 2, no. 1 (1983).33

analysis. Moon and Fantuzzo suggest that human maturity and positive mental health are in some way symbiotically related, such that,

> …it is reasonable to assume that one may prevent or enhance the development of the other. That is, the absence of positive mental health may impede the progress or totally obstruct the ripening of Christian maturity, and, conversely, the presence of positive mental health may provide a preparation for the development of Christian maturity.[15]

This is a serious concern; such an assertion is neither reasonable nor correct.   Suffering, for example, whether physical or mental, can enable a deepening of faith and trust in God. Furthermore, the love and belongingness of Maslow's hierarchy necessary for self-actualisation and referenced by Moon and Fantuzzo, and seems to be God's role in the process, is not always felt by the psalmist, or by Jesus on the cross. Consequently self-actualisation is an ambiguous indicator of human maturity, and seems to leave God largely out of the equation. An additional complication is that self-actualisation predominantly reflects western middle-class values.[16]

Moburg in his analysis identifies two 'major paradigmatic orientations' to spiritual well-being and maturity. One centres on the development of the self, and he cites Maslow's theory of self-actualisation, noting that for Maslow self-actualising people are 'great improvers and reformers of society.'[17] The second paradigm however has an opposite orientation:

> It views serving others and "loss of self" as the means for attaining self-fulfillment and spiritual maturity. It is exemplified best by Jesus, who said that he came to give fullness of life to all who accept it as a free gift of God's grace. The way to save one's life is to deny oneself, take up one's cross daily, and follow him…He taught his followers to love others by deeds of kindness and service, not merely feelings and attitudes, as well as to love God and oneself.[18]

Moberg also asserts that we are never completely mature in this life,

> my own research interviews reveal that even the most mature Christians recognize that they have not attained the ideal level of perfect maturity. They are the most likely to recognize their need to continue growing toward "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Others see them as "spiritual giants," but they expect to become fully mature only after leaving their earthly life.[19]

Among the scholars working in the field of human maturity and ageing, from within the Christian tradition and from outside, there are several key features which reoccur, one of the most notable we consider next.

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[15] Ibid.34

[16] For example MacKinley recruited the participants of her qualitative research on spirituality and ageing from members of the University of the Third Age. Elizabeth MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001). 33

[17] Moberg, "Spiritual Maturity and Wholeness in the Later Years."14

[18] Ibid.14

[19] Ibid.9

Activity and Passivity

The tension between agency and passivity is a recurrent theme in writing about maturity. For gerontology issues raised centre around the experience of loss, which occurs later in life; for example dealing with retirement and the consequent loss of status and prestige, coping with the death of loved ones, facing the loss of physical and mental health. Within this context activity and passivity are viewed in different ways.

Moberg notes the activity theory and ageing, which he says, 'has dominated the orientations of most religious leaders concerned with ageing.'[20] This has as its goal keeping older members actively involved in the congregation and community life. A theory which Moberg says can be a form of tyranny.[21]

MacKinlay also notes the dichotomy between being and doing, and emphasizes the importance of enabling older people to move towards being.[22] MacKinlay also introduces the disengagement theory, which, citing Cummings and Henry, she describes as 'a mutual withdrawing from former social roles – 'mutual' meaning that it is accepted both by the older persons and by the society at large, and is of mutual benefit to the individual and society.' Within the Christian tradition, she continues, Cummings sees this 'stripping away' is a 'sacramental process of "emptying that leads to God."'[23]

Activity and passivity, doing and being in relation to the experience of loss and the development of Christian maturity are key issues for today's church. They are themes we will return to later.

2. Human Maturity: theological and spiritual perspectives

Insights from Theology and Spirituality

Spiritual growth

Diane Westmoreland in her doctoral thesis focuses on enabling growth in the spiritual maturity of the congregation. She uses the Ignatian Exercises as the basis of her qualitative research. She examines and critiques psychological and spiritual models of maturity and develops a 12 point model of spiritual maturity. Westmoreland identifies the importance of the corporate nature of spiritual maturity which tends to be neglected at best in the models provided by psychology and gerontology examined above. Westmoreland summarises her twelve criteria for assessing spiritual maturity as follows:

> a sense of interdependence; compassionate loving resulting in loving action; seeing the
> world through God's eyes; self-knowledge; practising forgiveness, resolving conflicts and

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[20] Ibid.11
[21] Ibid.12
[22] MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*.21
[23] Ibid.61

mediating peaceful relationships; reflexivity; self esteem through the awareness of God's undeserved love; sense of surrender to God's will; loss of self-importance; ability to cope with complexity, doubt and failure; a sense of life being integrated into God's purpose and learning to find God in all things.[24]

She comments '[t]he person who is developing spiritually towards mature faith will show some or all of these twelve characteristics.'[25] Westmoreland also sees this as a dynamic model, 'involving process and movement rather than stasis. The type of mature faith sketched above is something *towards which* we move – thus the spiritual life is conceived as *trajectory*, or direction, rather than as a goal to be achieved.'[26]

Surrender

Westmoreland concludes that surrender is the most significant component of Christian maturity, and an aspect which is not addressed by psychological understandings of maturity. This conclusion was drawn from her own spiritual experience and her observations of others as part of her research. Westmoreland comments,

> Of the behaviours that seemed to denote spiritual maturity, one seemed very significant: the decision to submit to, trust in, rely on or be obedient to God. ... This did not take the form of dependency, nor an inability to think and act for oneself, or an unquestioning acceptance of life events as being 'fated'. Rather it was an understanding of the limitations of human agency, in a way that leads people not into fear, or loss of self-esteem, but rather into freedom to act humanely; to make the choice to submit one's own will to the will of the God who is deemed worthy of worship and service. I decided that a suitable umbrella term for these ideas was 'surrender', as a descriptor of what seemed to me to be a key aspect of the process of spiritual development.... it has been chosen carefully to reflect something which seems to me to be a gradual and gentle process.[27]

She notes the significant contrast between the 'independence and individuality' of secular psychology and the Christian emphasis on 'community and relationality'; though she continues 'we should acknowledge that within the Christian churches perhaps there has been too great an individualistic emphasis in the latter half of the twentieth century.'[28]

Westmoreland also notes the difficulty such a concept might have from feminist and liberationist perspectives. However drawing on the work of Mark McIntosh and Sarah Coakley she concludes, 'I think we need to resist gender stereotyping and an unquestioning acceptance of 'gender normative' behaviour.'[29] Westmoreland concludes, 'This for me is the paradoxical heart of Christian spiritual

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[24] Diane Ruth Westmoreland, "Can Spiritual Maturity Be Nurtured in Northern English Anglican Congregations? : An Exploration of Whether Parishioners Can Grow Spiritually through an Experiential Course on Prayer Using Methods Based in Ignatian Practice" (Durham, 2011).202
[25] Ibid. 96
[26] Ibid.99
[27] Ibid.17
[28] Ibid.100
[29] Ibid.105

maturity; that it is only as we give up, surrender, yield ourselves to God that we discover our truest and most authentic selves and begin to be the people we were created to be.'[30]

3. Human Maturity: Charles Wesley's perspective

> Then let us patiently attend,
> To him the time and manner leave,
> Till God the long-sought blessing send,
> Till Christ his gracious fulness give,
> And faith's maturest fruit we prove
> In finish'd holiness and love.[31]

Differences between John and Charles Wesley

In order to identify Charles Wesley's view of sanctification as Christian maturity it is important to note how his thinking differed from that of his brother. As I have explored elsewhere[32] there were four key areas of difference. Firstly, whether sanctification was a process of gradual growth or whether it could be instantaneous. John persistently maintained both, but Charles, particularly in the aftermath of the Perfectionist Controversy of the 1760's was critical of the possibility of instantaneous sanctification and emphasised a process paradigm. Secondly John maintained that if sanctification could be instantaneously given by God it could happen now; this life was the possible arena for the experience of sanctification. Charles, whilst not denying that sanctification was possible in this life but wanting to avoid any possible grounds for spiritual pride, became increasingly convinced that sanctification was a gift given by God a few moments before death. Thirdly the brothers differed in their understanding of the relationship between sanctification and sin. Different paradoxes characterise both. For John the paradox was of a perfection which was not perfect. He allowed 'mistakes and infirmities' within the parameters of perfection. Charles did not; he maintained that those who were sanctified would not and could not sin, that God would remove the root of sin from within them and that even the stain of original sin would be taken away. His paradox was to set the bar of perfection so high that John considered it unobtainable; yet for Charles, the impossible was possible with God. Finally the brothers differed over the relationship of suffering to sanctification. [33] For Charles the relationship between suffering and sanctification was an intimate one rooted in the actuality of his own experience and his aspiration for holiness, and held the potential to deepen Christian maturity and enable complete submission to God. This was the key to sanctification for Charles, as we will see in the final point to be made regarding the

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[30] Ibid. 103

[31] *Scripture Hymns* (1762), Vol. 2, p214, v2

[32] Julie A. Lunn, "The Concept of Sanctification in John and Charles Wesley," *The Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 14 (2010).

[33] The importance of suffering for Charles Wesley's faith and theology has been excellently researched by Joanna Cruickshank, *Pain, Passion, and Faith : Revisiting the Place of Charles Wesley in Early Methodism* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009).

differences between John and Charles in relation to maturity and sanctification. [34] This point concerns the sovereignty of God.

The Sovereignty of God

Underlying the disagreement between the Wesleys regarding instantaneous sanctification was the question of the sovereignty of God. John Wesley insisted on the possibility of instantaneous sanctification because if God so chose he could do it. He was known to note in the margin of his hymn book, against Charles' expression of gradual growth, the words, 'whenever God pleases',[35] and his comment in his letter to Arthur Keene clearly states his position: 'As after a gradual conviction of the guilt and power of sin you was [*sic*] justified in a moment, so after a gradually increasing conviction of inbred sin you will be sanctified in a moment. And who knows how soon? Why not *now?'[36]* John continued to encourage Charles to declare the same conviction; after all rejecting sanctification in this life might suggest that Christ's sacrifice and God's grace are insufficient. Charles however, saw God's sovereignty manifest in a different way. For Charles Wesley, sanctification is a question of maturity in grace and God's sovereignty is manifest when the believer allows the grace of God to sanctify. Charles saw sanctification as a two part process; the work of God - sanctification is only possible through God's grace – and the work of the believer; the believer must cooperate with God's sanctifying grace[37] and divest himself of pride, sin, the things of the world, the desires of the flesh, and embrace humility, even nothingness, the emptying of kenosis, so that God's work of sanctification through grace might be accomplished. Even this however is not accomplished without the work of God,

> Nature's high-mindedness
> How shall I lay aside?
> I cannot, Lord, myself abase,
> Myself divest of pride:
> But if thou speak the word,
> The word imparts the fear,
> And poor, and vile, and self-abhor'd
> I at thy feet appear.[38]

For Charles sanctification occurs through the grace of God and the resignation of the believer to the will, purpose and desire of God for the believer's life. This mutual symbiosis is what leads to true Christian maturity.

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[34] There were a number of additional components to Charles' understanding of sanctification for example: the communal aspect of sanctification, it concerns social holiness; sanctification as participation in God and union with God; the centrality of the work of the Spirit, sanctification is the seal of the Spirit; sanctification as the work of the Trinity; and sanctification as health and healing. These last two are explored in J. R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids M.I.: Zondervan Press, 1986).

[35]*Scripture Hymns* (1762) Vol. 1 fn 32 p95

[36] W. E. Sangster, *The Path of Perfection : An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1943). 84-5

[37] For a thorough analysis of the relationship between grace and the responsibility of the believer in justification and sanctification see Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville TN: Abingdon, 1994).

[38] *Scripture Hymns* (1762) Vol. 2 p532 v1

> This, this is all my heart's desire,
> When mercy doth my soul require,
> By Jesus found *mature in grace*,
> In full conformity divine
> My spotless spirit to resign,
> And see my Saviour face to face.[39]

The above verse indicates not only maturity in the grace of God, the desired state to be found in at death, but the themes of sinlessness and conformity to God - shaped in God's image - indicated above, and also that the final task of the believer is to resign the spirit. This is a recurrent image in Charles' hymns. Out of 83 documents containing the texts of Charles Wesley's published hymns in the Duke Divinity resource, 228 instances of resignation appear in 32 of the documents. In Charles' manuscript verse there are 47 documents with 225 instances when 'resign', or variations such as 'resign'd' are used. There is some overlap when the same hymns are repeated in different collections, but this number is not significant. Here I have used examples from the published verse; but a similar case can be made using the manuscript verse.

Furthermore, in Wesley's day the verb 'to resign' or 'resignation' could convey the meanings it has today: 'To relinquish, give up (an office, position, right, claim, etc.); to yield (a position, right, etc.) *to* another person.' 'To hand over (a physical object, a possession, an asset, etc.); to give up ownership of or claim to (something in one's possession or charge); to cede'. 'To yield up (oneself, one's heart, etc.) with confidence to another person for care or guidance.' It also however held the meanings which are now rare: 'To submit oneself, yield, give way *to* a person or thing; to reconcile oneself *to*.' 'To make surrender or relinquishment; to yield', and '[t]o give up (one's being, soul, etc.), to depart from (life).'[40] These last two definitions are particularly important for Wesley's use of resignation in relation to resigning the will, and resigning the whole being to God, as identified below.

Resignation is a predominant motif in Charles' hymns for the work of the believer in sanctification, and essentially how Charles understands maturity. To substantiate such a claim it is necessary to examine how Wesley uses 'resign' and 'resignation'. [41] There are four ways in which Wesley uses these terms which directly relate to the work of the believer in sanctification and demonstrate maturity of faith. The first looks to Jesus as the model for resignation, and the others address three different areas of resignation for the believer.

Jesus' resignation: the model for the believer

Jesus' resignation is evident firstly in the freely chosen kenosis of the incarnation,

> The King whose glorious face ye see,
> For us his crown resign'd;

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[39] *Preparation for Death* (1772) p46 v4, my italics

[40] *The Oxford English Dictionary [Electronic Resource]*, (Oxford, UK; New York: Oxford University Press). http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/163595?rskey=Kl9pwu&result=2#eid

[41] Some instances of his use of these words are not relevant to our purpose here; for example he speaks of opponents resigning their weapons or of the Gentile world resigning its wealth.

That fulness of the deity,
He died for all mankind![42]

It is also evident through Jesus' embracing of suffering on earth and the yielding of his life,

Once a spotless victim slain,
Thou didst here thy life resign[43]

This resignation is a model for the believer:

7 To rescue me from woe,
Thou didst with all things part,
Didst lead a suffering life below,
To gain my worthless heart
 …
9 Tho' late, I all forsake,
My friends, my life resign
Gracious Redeemer, take, O take
And seal me ever thine.[44]

In the last verse above Charles hints at two areas of resignation for the believer – friends and life. There are however three areas, as intimated above in which he sees resignation required, which are progressively more demanding and more all-encompassing.

Resignation of the other: earthly things and people
Resignation of earthly delights and of idols:

All earthly delights I forego,
All creature enjoyments resign,
When blest with the heaven, to know
My Jesus eternally mine.[45]

My every idol I resign,

By thy afflicting love compell'd;
Jesu, the victory is thine,
Hardly at last I yield, I yield
With every creature-good to part,
I give thee all this worthless heart.[46]

Resigning confidence in human strength,

To thee our only help we fly;
All human confidence resign,
Nor trust in any arm but thine.[47]

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[42] *Trinity Hymns* (1767) p101 v4 lines 4-8
[43] *Scripture Hymns* (1762) Vol. 2 p362 v1 lines 3-4
[44] 'The Resignation,' *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740) pp76–79 v7 lines 1-4 and v9 lines 1-4
[45] *Scripture Hymns* (1762), Vol. 1, p263 hymn 824 lines 4-8
[46] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol. 2 p51 v2 lines 1-6

The resignation of friends,

My bosom-friend receive,
Whom back to thee I give:
Strengthen'd by thy Spirit's power,
Him I chearfully resign,
Him I thankfully restore,
Leave him in the arms divine.[48]

And the resignation of friends and family through death is expressed in numerous hymns:

O Saviour, her spirit receive,
Which into thy hands we resign.[49]

The suffering this sometimes required is keenly felt in his hymns, 'Oblation of a Sick Child' and 'On the death of a Child'.

Father, thy will be done, not mine,
Thy only will be done!
To thee my Isaac I resign,
I render up my son.[50]

The child, of whom we seem bereav'd,
Whom feeble flesh would still deplore,
Our heavenly Father hath receiv'd,
And kindly bids us weep no more,
But chearfully his loan resign,
And leave him in the arms divine.[51]

That this was a common experience is clear through Charles' hymn written for mothers – 'A Mother's Act of Resignation on the Death of a Child'.[52]

Resignation of the self: resigning the will

The second area in which resignation is required is the resignation of the self, and in particular the resignation of the will, requiring obedience and submission to God.   This section corresponds most closely to Diane Westmoreland's thesis that surrender is the key to Christian maturity. Charles Wesley doesn't use 'surrender' in this context; his only references speak of surrendering armies. However the submission to God inherent in Wesley's understanding here corresponds closely.

Beneath a mountain-load of grief,
Subdued, submissive, and resign'd,

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[47] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol. 2 p115 v1 lines 4-6
[48] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol. 2 p287 v2
[49] *Funeral Hymns* (1746) pp5-6 v6 lines 1-2
[50] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), Vol. 1 p278 v1
[51] *Funeral Hymns* (1759) p42 v2
[52] *Family Hymns* (1767) pp82–83

I find in prayer my sure relief,
Returning peace with Christ I find[53]

According to thy will
If now thy Spirit prays,
The prayer of faith the sick shall heal,
And lengthen out his days:
Thou knowst the Spirit's mind
To us, O Lord, unknown;
But lo! We wait on thee, resign'd,
'Till all thy will be done.[54]

I do at last comply,
My stubborn will resign;
Chuse thou for me to live, or die,
And let thy choice be mine.[55]

Set my face, and fix my heart,
Now the promis'd power impart,
Meek, submissive, and resign'd
Arm me with thy constant mind.[56]

These examples are written from and for different contexts – in grief, waiting for an answer to prayer, having fallen from grace seeking forgiveness and restoration, and on the way to answer a charge for treason when courage was needed; this attitude of resignation and submission is appropriate for the whole life of the believer, and indeed is the aim of the whole life of the believer,

When, my Saviour, shall I be
Perfectly resign'd to thee![57]

This cry intimates the third aspect of resignation in Charles' hymns, the resignation of the whole of one's being to God.

Resignation of the self: resigning the whole being
Wesley's use of resignation in this respect takes several forms. As noted above, resignation to God in the midst of life means more than the resignation of the will alone, but the resignation of the entire self. There is a notable shift in the spirituality Charles expresses when it comes to this area of resignation, a different level of engagement with God. This is not an expression of justifying faith where the symbiotic relationship of the active resignation of the will, or of earthly goods, or of attachments are offered to God, that God might save, restore and gradually purify the soul. Here, in this context of the resignation of the whole being, there is a spirituality of abandonment of oneself to God, of seeking God for himself alone, of simplicity, disengagement, of desire for God.

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[53] *Scripture Hymns* (1762), Vol. 1 p142 hymn 444, lines 1-4
[54] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol 2 p96 v4 lines 7-8
[55] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol 1 p118 v5 lines 5-8
[56] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol 2 p239 v5
[57] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742) p152 v1 lines 1-2

With resign'd simplicity
And patient earnestness,
Thee we seek; not thine, but thee
We languish to possess[58]

Meek and lowly be my mind,
Pure my heart, my will resign'd!
Keep me dead to all below,
Only Christ resolv'd to know,
Firm, and disengag'd, and free,
Seeking all my bliss in thee.[59]

Give him thy meek and quiet mind,
Patient, and perfectly resign'd
In all things let him be,
Nothing desire above, beneath,
Nor ease, nor pain, nor life, nor death,
But to be all like thee.[60]

Yes, Lord, we are thine,
And gladly resign
Our souls to be fill'd with the fulness divine.[61]

Sometimes this entire resignation to God is expressed through the resignation of the self in death, even as a desire to die, emerging for Charles from his deep experience of suffering,

O 'tis enough! I ask no more,
Full of a few sad sinful days,
Sated with life, 'till life is o'er
I languish to conclude my race,
And silently resign my breath,
And sink into the shades of death.[62]

However, resignation of the self in death is usually expressed not with retrospective focus but the forward-looking focus of life in God.

Sure, when I my soul resign,
Life, eternal life, is mine,
When into thine arms I fall,
Heaven will make amends for all![63]

Me, me for his dear sake alone

[58] *Family Hymns* (1767) p30 v3 lines 1-4
[59] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1747) p42 v4
[60] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol. 1 p271 v4
[61] *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745) p131 v4
[62] *Scripture Hymns* (1762) Vol. 1 p197 hymn 632 v1
[63] *Scripture Hymns* (1762) Vol. 2 p371 hymn 720 v6

Into thine arms receive,
And let me feel the peace unknown,
And consciously believe;
By holy confidence divine
Made ready to depart,
I then my spotless soul resign,
And see thee as thou art.[64]

There is one final classification of Wesley's use of resignation for the resignation of the whole being and that is his language about being lost in God. It is only possible to explore this briefly here, in relation to Wesley's use of resignation. Of the four verses, from different hymns, which appear below, the first two suggest being lost in God within the context of life. The context of the second is a hymn about the resignation of pleasure, wealth, sensual delights, and the deep pain of having to resign his 'Isaac', a reference to the death of his child. The second two however express a mystical concept of being subsumed into God. Perhaps here we have an indication of Charles' understanding of sanctification as union with God.

Happy the man, who poor and low,
Less goodness in himself conceives
Than Christ doth of his servant know;
Who sav'd from self-reflection lives,
Unconscious of the grace bestow'd,
Simply resign'd, and lost in God.[65]

Wherefore to thee I all resign,
Being thou art, and good, and power,
Thy only will be done, not mine;
Thee, Lord, let earth and heaven adore,
Flow back the rivers to their sea,
And let our all be lost in thee.[66]

O might I now thy goodness taste,
And know the pardning God is mine,
Calmly lament, and groan my last,
Into thy hands my soul resign,
And plunge into the depths above,
The ocean of thy heavenly love![67]

Hasten to grant my sole request,
Take me into that second rest,
That glorious liberty,
And let me then my soul resign,
Receiv'd into the arms divine,
Forever lost in thee.[68]

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[64] *Family Hymns* (1767) p96 v6
[65] *Scripture Hymns* (1762) Vol. 2 p415 hymn 828 v1
[66] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol 2 p21, v11
[67] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol 2 p52 v4
[68] *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) Vol 2 p153 v5

Before we leave this identification of resignation as Charles' predominant image for sanctification, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of what is presented here and which indicate the areas of my current doctoral research. First this exegesis of Charles' use of resignation needs deeper analysis. Second, whilst I have argued that resignation is the predominant image for sanctification in Charles' hymns, it is not the whole picture. There are other concepts of sanctification employed by Charles, as indicated in above (fn33), and other images related to resignation used by Charles, such as nothingness, absorption, emptiness, and aspiration, which might offer a greater depth and more nuanced interpretation of his meaning.

Thirdly, it is important to note that for Charles the disengagement suggested by resignation should not be conceived as the ascetic detachment from the world argued for by Sangster,[69] or even possibly Flew's 'intra-mundane asceticism'.[70] Kimbrough makes the important point that such detachment is rooted in Charles's concern for the poor; it is located within the context of Gospel poverty, which finds its outworking in social holiness.[71] The balance maintained by Charles between personal and social holiness is one which bears further exploration.

Finally there is a dialogue to be held with Phyllis Mack's important work on agency and passivity in early Methodism.[72] The complexity of agency and passivity in resignation needs further exploration and whilst Mack does not analyse Charles Wesley's contribution in great depth, she does comment that in some Methodist hymns 'the fusion between surrender and agency is total, both style and substance conveying the essential paradox of Methodist soteriology.[73] The effect towards which Charles used this in his hymns of resignation offers a promising arena for further research.

4. Human Maturity: a correlation of insights

Correlating the various perspectives outlined above it is possible to identify resonances between the insights from the social sciences and theology and spirituality with Charles Wesley's emphasis on resignation. Notably themes of suffering, loss, detachment, being, surrender and death are evident, suggesting some consensus of opinion regarding human maturity.

Moburg's identification of the two 'major paradigmatic orientations' to spiritual well-being and maturity resonates with the Wesleys. His first, which focuses on self-actualisation, with the recognition that self-actualizing people are 'great improvers and reformers of society'[74] would be

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[69] Sangster, *The Path of Perfection : An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection*. 91

[70] R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life* (Oxford University Press: London, 1934). 338-9

[71] S. T. Kimbrough, "Perfection Revisited: Charles Wesley's Theology of "Gospel Poverty" and "Perfect Poverty"," *Poor and the People Called Methodists, 1729-1999* (2002).

[72] Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment : Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[73] Ibid.48

[74] Moberg, "Spiritual Maturity and Wholeness in the Later Years."14

the interesting subject for another paper; considering the profound impact the Wesleys had on the society of their day and since. For the purposes of this paper however his second paradigm with its orientation towards the loss of self as the means for attaining self-fulfilment and spiritual maturity clearly connects with Charles' perspective.

As we have seen, within the field of gerontology the experience of loss is a major concern, whether of others or of self, be that of mental or physical health, or facing death. Within this context activity and passivity are viewed in different ways. Charles advocates an active passivity in resigning others, things and the self to God. This is not an experience of powerlessness, where these things are stripped away against a persons will; but resignation transforms such experience through the spiritual discipline of active surrender which enables growth towards maturity and ultimately sanctification.

This theme can be identified, to some extent at least, in Fowler's stage 6 where the paradox between universalising and the preservation of self-being, characteristic of level 5, are overcome. It is also evident in Moburg's quality of detachment, characteristics of which he identifies as serenity, autonomy and freedom of the will. Similarly the disengagement theory cited by MacKinlay is described as 'a *mutual* withdrawing from former social roles'; the mutuality is accepted by and benefits both the older person and society as a whole. Furthermore, as noted above, MacKinlay indicates that Cummings sees this as a self-emptying, a kenosis which leads to God.

There is, as we might expect, a close connection between Wesley's' view of resignation and Westmoreland's emphasis on surrender, which she describes as 'the decision to submit to, trust in, rely on or be obedient to God,' and which she notes is 'a gradual and gentle process.'[75] I suggest that this corresponds to Wesley's use of resignation as the resignation of the *will*. It does not however directly correspond with Wesley's resignation of the whole being, the attitude of relinquishing oneself, '[t]o give up (one's being, soul, etc.), to depart from (life)',[76] to be lost in God's immensity, the point of resignation which indicates the fullness of human maturity, and through which sanctification can occur. There is perhaps a hint here of Charles as one of Maslow's self-actualisers, those who are familiar with 'mystic' or 'peak experiences' who 'live in the realm of Being; of poetry, esthetics; symbols; transcendence', and for whom religion is of end-experiences.[77]

The end-experience of death also features in the various perspectives examined. Payne comments, '[i]t may be that the greatest spiritual growth occurs as one struggles with physical losses and dying. We know very little about this late growth experience from older persons.'[78] In the 18th century this was often not a late growth experience. Given the child mortality rates and the incidence of the death of mothers during child birth, death was generally encountered more frequently and at earlier stages in life. The spiritual experience of resignation to God in death, which was so significant for the Wesleys, not only for those dying but also through their deathbed testimonies to faith for those

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[75] Westmoreland, "Can Spiritual Maturity Be Nurtured in Northern English Anglican Congregations? : An Exploration of Whether Parishioners Can Grow Spiritually through an Experiential Course on Prayer Using Methods Based in Ignatian Practice."17

[76] *The Oxford English Dictionary [Electronic Resource]*.
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/163595?rskey=Kl9pwu&result=2#eid

[77] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*.165

[78] Payne, "Spiritual Maturity and Meaning-Filled Relationships : A Sociological Perspective." *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 7, no. 1/2 (1990) 37

left behind, is also one we have largely lost. In our culture death is clinical; the dying are frequently sedated against pain, but also at the cost of any significant spiritual experience at the point of death.

Finally I would argue that for Wesley the death of a friend, a family member, and especially a child, was used as an opportunity for resignation to God, not only to help deal with grief, but to establish an attitude, a habit of resignation which eventually would enable the whole being to be resigned to God. The constant act of resignation shapes us to be the people who can receive the grace of God.

Conclusion: how might these insights inform the ministry and mission of the church today?

If, as I have argued, sanctification for Charles Wesley was essentially fulfilled through a cooperative relationship between the grace of God and an attitude of the entire resignation of things, people, the will and the whole being to God, how might such a conviction inform the growth towards maturity and sanctification of people today? There are four points to make:

First, the context of Charles' use of resignation is still entirely appropriate; the same experiences of loss, suffering, death etc. are still felt. The question, however, of whether and how these are transformed needs attention. More intentional work on the theology and spirituality of ageing is necessary, to enable those undergoing such experiences to cooperate with the grace of God that these experiences might become moments of spiritual significance and growth.

Secondly, Charles' use of resignation with the humility and self-emptying it requires is helpful today as it was for Charles, because in Hauerwas' words, 'perfection is a troublesome notion'. With reference to John Wesley he continues,

> it does not seem possible for us to speak with the same confidence about perfection as Wesley. The fragmentation of our world, and the correlative fragmentation of our lives, makes us less sure than Wesley that we are in fact continually being sanctified. We are happier thinking of ourselves at best as troubled sinners and certainly not as righteous saints.[79]

The tenor of resignation, with the acute awareness of sin and shortcomings Charles felt, and corresponding entire reliance on the grace of God suggest a similar attitude towards sanctification. Was Charles ever secure in his conviction that he was being saved to the uttermost?

Thirdly, the words 'resign' and 'resignation' may cause some difficulty today. As noted earlier Diane Westmoreland recognised a similar problem with 'surrender' from feminist and liberationist perspectives. The difficulty is rooted in the suggested reluctant passivity 'resignation' can imply. Charles however, we have noted, had active renunciation in mind. Therefore perhaps that is a more appropriate alternative, or even 'assent'. 'Renunciation' and 'assent' have positive inferences and allow the same attitude of cooperation with God's grace through active, participatory giving of the self. Perhaps we need to develop a more intentional spirituality of renunciation or assent to encourage growth in maturity towards sanctification.

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[79] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth : Holiness Exemplified*. 125

Fourthly, it was suggested above that for Charles the resignation of things, people in death, the will, were means through which an attitude of resignation towards God of his whole being was formed. Sanctification was for him the goal of a gradual progression. Habituation is a virtue Wesley's insight can contribute for today. The habituation of an attitude of resignation – or renunciation – or assent to God, in the little things – which forms the believer gradually, which allows the self to be increasingly aligned with God. Habituation is a particularly important virtue in the world and the lives Hauerwas describes above as fragmented. This is how Hauerwas understands 'agency',[80] that the habits of the past determine how we are today. Habituation is not only about the end-experience but also about the stages on the way.

Finally a reminder that this is a journey of gradual progress, the stages on the way, as well as the end-experience is not taken alone, but is a journey of the body of Christ,

> For the *telos* of the Christian life is not a goal that is clearly known prior to the undertaking of the journey, but rather we learn better the nature of the end by being slowly transformed by the means necessary to pursue it. Thus, the only means to perceive rightly the end is by attending to the lives of those who have been and are on the way.[81]

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[80] Ibid. 93
[81] Ibid. 128

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