

“Searching the Scriptures, Finding Christ in the World”

Daniel D. Shin

This paper addresses John Wesley’s thoughts on the connection between the means of grace and the renewal of the heart for the flourishing of humanity, transformation of the church, and missional engagement in the world in light of Hans W. Frei’s work. It begins with a brief discussion about Wesley’s sermon “The Means of Grace” focusing on the practice of searching the Scriptures and how it relates to the proper ends of religion understood as the love of God and neighbors.<sup>1</sup> This is followed by Frei’s critique of Wesley’s approach to the Bible that makes the Christian journey its overarching interpretative framework. To shed light on Frei’s critique, his work on theological hermeneutics, Christology and ecclesiology, and theological method is addressed identifying along the way the three movements in the making of a public spirituality, namely, incorporation, refractive enactment, and correlation. Having clarified the promise of Frei’s work toward public spirituality, then the paper concludes with some observations about both convergences and divergences between Wesley and Frei on reading the Scripture, the social character of Christianity, and the use of third order discourse.

In the sermon “The Means of Grace,” John Wesley expresses a grave concern about the use of the ordinances and in doing so points to the perennial issue involving the relation between the inward and outward dimensions of the Christian faith. On the one hand, he addresses those who had mistaken the means for the end and abused them, thus failing to realize the express goal of religion to “conduce the knowledge and love of God.” They were going through the motions alright but there was something missing. In their confusion, they depended solely on the outward means without the inherent power of the Spirit. Wesley reminds them that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace after whom they should seek. In fact, God can give grace without the means, a point Wesley makes by pointing to Christ’s work of reconciliation as the only means by which we are united with God. On the other hand, Wesley also has in mind the Moravians and other quietists who had regarded outward observances as superfluous and did not keep them. What mattered to them was the baptism of the Spirit which superseded water baptism and other sacraments. They took outward religion to be absolutely nothing, condemned it as unprofitable, and thereby deprived themselves of the means of grace. Wesley points to the inward emphasis of their spirituality and says that they wrongly imagined

that “there was something in them wherewith God was well-pleased.”<sup>2</sup> He concedes that the means of grace was not about the elements themselves, which he describes as “weak and beggarly,” “a poor, dead, empty thing,” and “a dry leaf, a shadow,” and yet it is to their objections against the ordinances that Wesley addresses a rebuttal in favor of using all the means of grace. And directed to both at the opposite ends of the spectrum, that is, abusers and despisers, Wesley exhorts the use all the means of grace, especially prayer, searching the Scriptures, and receiving the Lord’s Supper, to seek God and God alone. Christians are to actively use the means of grace to receive God’s grace that grants health and renewal of soul in righteousness and holiness, which Wesley defines in no uncertain terms as loving the Lord and loving neighbors by attending to the matters of law, justice, and mercy.

### *Incorporation*

To explore further Wesley’s straightforwardly clear argument that the relation between the means of grace, such as searching the Scriptures, and the very telos of Christian faith, the twofold love of God and neighbor, is an integral one, we turn to Frei’s thoughts on theological hermeneutics and its significance for the Christian life.

Albeit too brief but poignantly, Frei addresses Wesley’s and the early Methodists’ use of the Bible in his historical investigation of modern theological hermeneutics in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.<sup>3</sup> His criticism of Wesley is reflective of his overall thesis that in modern interpretations of the Scripture the meaning of biblical narrative became separated from its form and it was overshadowed by external frameworks of meaning and truth. He does not deny that Wesleys and Whitefield maintained their objective belief in the redeeming death of Christ and its efficacy, but the problem was that the bond between the meaning of the Scripture and its cumulative narrative depiction became rather loose and tentative because the journey of the Christian person from sin through justification and sanctification to perfection is made front and center.

This shift in hermeneutical sensibility was buttressed by a misuse of figural interpretation, a critical feature of realistic narrative reading. Figural reading operates by maintaining the integrity of the figure in its own place, time, and right, without any dehydration of reality it prefigures, and then bringing together each present occurrence and experience into a real, narrative framework or world so that each person and event is a figure of that providential

narrative. As such, all human experience belongs in a real world with full density. However, Frei thinks that that relation is reversed in evangelical piety so that while the atoning death of Jesus is real, necessary, and efficacious, the atoning redeemer is at the same time a figure or type of the Christian's journey, which is the overarching narrative framework that defines the applicative sense of the cross. Frei writes, "What is real and what therefore the Christian really lives, is his own pilgrimage; and to its pattern he looks for the assurance that he is really living it."<sup>4</sup> What he is advocating is that we should read the Bible in such a way that we are incorporated into the world of biblical narrative, rather than fitting the world of biblical narrative into another world of our own making. To better appreciate Frei's assessment of Wesley's use of the Bible, we turn to his narration of the great reversal in modern theological hermeneutics.

Frei's thoughts on incorporation is deeply influenced by Erich Auerbach's magisterial work *Mimesis*. Auerbach writes,

Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history.... Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world ... must be fitted as an ingredient of the divine plan.<sup>5</sup>

The scriptural world is the primary world that absorbs or subjects the reader by exclusively defining that reader's understanding of the world and the task of interpretation is about fitting one's contemporary world into the imperialistic world of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Frei then explains how this incorporation of the reader and public world takes place through the major features of realistic, history-like narrative reading of Scripture. First, the reader takes biblical stories literally as describing real, historical occurrences in the world. Second, through the interpretive method of figuration or typology, the reader unites the various stories in the Scripture into a cumulative, chronological continuity. And third, this narratively rendered world encompasses the present age and the reader, so that the appropriate hermeneutical response is to fit oneself into that world by figural interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Figural interpretation is, then, an effective hermeneutical strategy not only to give a sense of cumulative and chronological unity in intra-textual reading but also to fit extra-textual realities of the contemporary world into the world of the biblical story. Through such hermeneutical moves, the world of the biblical narrative emerges as the only real world that incorporates the entire history of humanity within its construction of the divine providence.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to the dawn of the modern world, realistic, history-like narrative interpretation was the common practice in the Christian, and Frei provides a *tour de force* historical-literary analysis of modern theological hermeneutics, which will not be rehearsed here other than to briefly describe the great reversal.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the exegetical practices of the Protestant Reformers Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) which Frei heralds as good examples of realistic, history-like narrative interpretation. Both Luther and Calvin accepted the primacy of the literal sense understood as the grammatical-historical sense which was supplemented by figural or typological interpretation. Of particular interest to Frei is that they maintained the unity between the explicative sense and the historical reference in narrative depiction that rendered a world into which the readers were incorporated. He observes that reality representation through realistic, history-like narrative is not necessarily history with substantiated verification, but is *like* history due to its descriptive character that renders historical reality; hence, they are not identical but not of different realities. What makes a writing realistic or history-like is the occurrence character and the cumulative pattern of meaning.<sup>10</sup>

In the post-Reformation era, this unity between the meaning of biblical narrative and its form begins to disintegrate in the hands of different philosophical and theological schools of thought over several generations including the Pietists, Naturalists, , Supernaturalists, Deists, Rationalists, Idealists, covenant theologians, history of salvation school, Neologists and Latitudinarians, and Mythophiles among others. While the specific hermeneutical trajectories they developed are significant in their own right, a far more profound issue that underlies the breakup of the bond between narrative form and meaning is the impingement of external frameworks of meaning, epistemology, and language on biblical narratives. This is at the heart of the eclipse of biblical narrative in the eighteenth-century theological hermeneutics, particularly the work of Collins (1676–1729), a student of Locke and a Deist, and Wolff (1679–1754), a follower of Leibniz and a Rationalist. Whether under the influence of Collins' empiricism or Wolff's rationalism, the meaning of biblical narrative was its extra-textual reference, thus separating the explicative sense of biblical narrative from its historical description.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, there were those who reduced the meaning of biblical narrative to its ostensive, historical reference that required empirical verification. But when this proved difficult to maintain, there were those who, on the other hand, identified biblical narrative's meaning with ideal reference in order to honor the Scripture for purposes of deriving universal moral and religious lessons.

Therefore, under a heavy spell of general epistemology, interpreters were unable to see that narrative makes sense as being mostly realistic and history-like in character. Frei writes, “It is not an exaggeration to say that all across the theological spectrum the great reversal had taken place; an interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story.”<sup>12</sup> Thus the direction in the flow of interpretation is reversed from incorporation of the extra-textual universe into the world of the biblical narrative to assimilation of the biblical world into the modern historical-scientific framework. This great reversal was indeed nothing short of a sea change that has brought about daunting challenges in modern theological hermeneutics of the Christian West.

What then is Frei’s constructive proposal in response to modern hermeneutical developments? Throughout the *Eclipse*, he underscores repeatedly that the meaning of the biblical narrative is inseparably linked with its form. Frei writes, “By speaking of the narrative shape of these accounts, I suggest that what they are about and how they make sense are functions of the narrative rendering of the events constituting them.... This is one of the chief characteristics of a narrative that is realistic.”<sup>13</sup> By its very nature, the very function of the narrative is to render events, or better yet a reality or even a world, through the interaction of characters, descriptive words, and social context and circumstance in which descriptive shape and meaning cohere, and this was commonly accepted as a distinguishing mark of the biblical narrative. Hence, there is much riding on this unity between narrative form and meaning because it renders the world of biblical narrative into which the readers are incorporated.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of incorporation or absorption naturally raises concerns about retreat to sectarian discourse and practice, so it is important dispel such criticism by underscoring that at the heart of Frei’s understanding of the world of biblical narrative lies the public world of history. He writes, “Realistic narrative is that kind in which subject and social setting belong together, and characters and external circumstances fitly render each other.”<sup>15</sup> Frei again reinforces the notion of the public in his explanation when he says that in a realistic narrative reading “persons and publically accessible circumstances are indispensable to each other.... In their interaction they form the story and thereby cumulatively render its subject matter.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in his discussion about realistic novels that inform his understanding of biblical narrative, he observes that one of its chief traits is that characters are “set within a specific historical time and within a definite economic and social structure which served to focus their character, station and identity.”<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, on Frei's account, to be incorporated into the world of the Scripture is far from escaping from the world to an inward or otherworldly spiritual realm, but rather to be set squarely in the public world of history in which subjects and external circumstances in socio-economic and political realities intermingle.

A much longer and complex account of Frei's appraisal of modern theological hermeneutics and proposal of realistic-literal reading of biblical narrative is needed to appreciate the full gravity of his analysis but for now his description of the great reversal is sufficient to cast a new light on Wesley's appeal to search the Scriptures. Wesley's quest for unitary meaning of the Bible under the umbrella of soteriology, more specifically the Christian journey, is largely influenced by his understanding of what it is about. He took the biblical canon to be about God's promise of salvation, which Wall points out as a position influenced by covenantal Arminian redaction of the English Reformation.<sup>18</sup> So the concern Frei raises about this approach is that it is decidedly located in the realm of human experience too regimentedly following the grand doctrines of original sin, justification, and sanctification rather than the world of biblical narrative. When this occurs, biblical narrative is taken to be about the doctrines rather than reverse. Hence, Frei thinks that to take the Bible and read it in second naivete is to receive the linguistic sacrament of God that opens the strange world of biblical narrative to which we are invited, incorporated, and labor as God's co-creators. Post-Enlightenment "reversal" of the great reversal allows once again the narratives about God's providence in history, the identity of Jesus Christ, and the church's mission in the public world of history to foreground the reader's own story of interactions in his or her life-setting. This way of searching the Scriptures, especially through a rule governed use of figural interpretation, bears enormous potential in reconfiguring Wesley's understanding of Christianity as a journey in the larger universe of biblical narrative.

Reversing the reversal between Christian journey and biblical narrative extends the theological sensibility of Wesley at work in moving to *via salutis* from *ordo salutis*, which already complicates soteriology and emphasizes the dynamic, fluid and multivalent character of the Christian life that lends itself to stories and storytelling. And by resituating the Christian journey from sin and repentance, through justification, regeneration and sanctification, to perfecting perfection in the larger world of biblical narrative, not only does the whole complex of historical world become the stage in which that journey takes place but also the notions of change, disruption, continuity, progress, and identity demonstration and constitution over a

cumulative period receive their due attention. To be fair to Wesley, it would be anachronistic to criticize that he made a categorical error by making Christian journey central rather than biblical narrative. Perhaps one can say that just as Richard Hays and others recently have made a case for a narrative approach to Pauline epistles, it may be possible to claim that Wesley inhabits the world of biblical narrative rendered before him him, though how he inhabits there reflects his pastoral-theological sensibilities about the Christian journey.<sup>19</sup>

### *Refractive Enactment*

To explore further what it might mean for Wesleyan understanding of Christian journey to properly attend to the narratives in the Bible, especially the gospel stories, and to come to terms with the presence of Christ mediated through the means of grace, we shift to Frei's work in literal reading and Christology. The public character of biblical narrative that was addressed above is of great import because it makes all the difference to how the identity and presence of Jesus Christ and the mission of his followers in the world are understood. Taking this turn to Christology and ecclesiology is an extension of his narrative approach, but also in conjunction with the literal reading practice of the church. He had earlier made a formal, literary argument that biblical narrative should be read as realistic because that was most reflective of the texts themselves, but now Frei urges the same method because it is compatible with or appropriate to the literal reading practice, the normative interpretive practice of the Christian community, governed by its rule of faith.<sup>20</sup> In a nod to the church as a crucial social-hermeneutical location, Frei says that the rule of faith in the early church ascribed to Jesus—not to someone else or about nobody in particular or about all of us—as the subject or the agent of the gospel narratives, rather than understanding them as symbolic or mythic stories about some general human experience or ideal truth. Hence, Jesus is the subject of his predicates, his doings and sufferings; he is the one to whom gospel descriptions are ascribed. Therefore, the literal sense here is not simply a procedural mechanism that highlights the communal, consensus reading practice of the church, but it is about the church's Christological claim, i.e., the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the center of Christian living, devotion, and thought.

Having identified the church's rule of faith as the normative theological criterion concerning the gospel narratives, what then does Frei have to say about the identity of Jesus Christ? At the beginning of *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, he writes, "Christian affirmation of the

presence of God-in-Christ for the world involves nothing philosophically more high flown than a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, focused on the church, the Word and the Sacrament, and the conviction of a dreaded yet hopeful cutting edge and providential pattern to mankind's political odyssey.”<sup>21</sup> Frei's primary concern is therefore the presence of God-in-Christ for the world, but he explains that beginning this inquiry with the category of presence is problematic because, as seen in modern theology, the presence of Jesus can be reduced to a mere symbolic understanding, which diffuses his mysterious presence into the imagination of the contemporary audience. For instance, the particular person of Jesus of Nazareth can be taken as an archetypal man or a symbol of authentic human embodiment. Frei is troubled by this development for two reasons: one, the real presence of Christ is reduced to mere imagination and thereby dislodged from the public world; two, the category of presence is deeply implicated in “the twin dangers of mystification and of loss of morality to religion which result from making personal acquaintance or personal knowledge the model for what transpires between God and man in religion or Christian faith.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, he acknowledges the center of the Christian message to be the mysterious work and presence of God, but he refuses to allow it to be reduced to the inner and private religion that loses the outer and public dimension of religion.

Therefore, judging “presence” to be a highly dubious term, Frei instead turns to insights from Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of the Mind*, in particular his intention-action identity analysis. He is drawn to Ryle's argument that a person's identity is not merely symbolized but both illustrated and constituted in and through enactment of intentions in the context of social circumstances in the public world.<sup>23</sup> The self is found in the dialectical unity between inner and outer, or intention and action in the world, which are not separable realities. Then he goes on to specify that the interaction between the self and the world involves the public media of a person's name, speech, and body that inextricably interweave the particular objectifications and the concrete public domain.<sup>24</sup> To properly come to terms with the argument Frei is making here, it is useful to contrast it against subject-alienation position rooted in the idealist notion of the self. It understands a person's authentic identity to remain separate from her interactions in the public world because they are taken as disjunctive, foreign entities that tend to misrepresent, estrange, and distort the true inward self. Under such a scheme, the self is essentially understood as a non-objectifiable self-reflectiveness of the self and posited at an infinite distance from its own public world. And the consequence of such an idealist metaphysics that separates history into inner and outer is that it

results in a constant temptation to posit a “ghost in the machine,” e.g., the transcendental ego of both idealism and existentialism.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, in reaction against the inward subjectivist turn, Frei says that a person’s identity is formed not in a vacuum, but through interaction with external circumstances over time. Though the very point of reference in the self’s constitution is internal to the individual person, the self is unmistakably public.

Affirming the insights of intention-enactment identity analysis, Frei approaches the Christological narratives because he takes them to be concerned precisely with Jesus’ enactment of intentions in the public world through his interactions with particular social realities. This approach enables the reader to see that the unity of the person Jesus Christ does not stand ineffably behind the public objectifications in his subjective, self-reflective stance in the world, but is concretely exhibited in the series of phenomena, such as his teaching and practice described in the narratives.<sup>26</sup> Or, more simply stated, the identity of Jesus lies in what he did and underwent, rather than simply his self-understanding.

What, then, is the content of Jesus’ identity? Frei accepts that the pattern of Jesus’ identification is both simple and complex, but summarizes that if “we seek to determine what Jesus was like by identifying the enactment of his central intention, we note that those who told the story about him speak of his obedience to God’s will.”<sup>27</sup> The concrete moral obedience of Jesus enacted in the public world provides the central clue to the content of his unsubstitutable personality. And this moral obedience is most clearly illustrated in the narrative sequence from his passion to resurrection, rather than in Jesus’ teachings, because this is where we come closest to the historical events in Jesus’ life in which his intention is publically enacted. In the final portion of the gospel narrative, beginning from the sequence at the Garden of Gethsemane and in the public events that transpire afterward, the crucial ingredients of Jesus’ intention-action pattern of moral obedience to God and public circumstances collide to render a non-symbolic story, involving a “full and *public* enactment on the cross.”<sup>28</sup> These public circumstances are unsubstitutable events, including public trials, beatings, and sufferings, without which there would not be the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus. What, therefore, comes into a sharp focus is Frei’s understanding of the public, which entails religious, political, and social dimensions of historical existence with which Jesus interacts.

If Frei’s thoughts on theological hermeneutics sets the stage for his work on Christology and ecclesiology, then incorporation into the public world of biblical narrative paves the way for

refractive enactment, the second movement of public spirituality, to come into play. In the last section of *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei interestingly turns his attention to the relation between the church and the world, which even further displays his vivid engagement of the public world. Analogous to how the identity of Jesus is constitutionally connected to the historical details of his life, the church's identity is also constituted through its concrete interactions with the public world. The church is, however, constituted by a somewhat different intention-action pattern than Jesus for two reasons. One, the church is called upon to follow the pattern exemplified by Jesus Christ but not to preempt the role of the Christ figure, because the world's salvation depends solely on the person of Jesus. Therefore, the church is not "to reiterate it completely but only in part, not from too close by but at a distance in the figure of a disciple than in the cosmic, miraculous, and abysmal destiny of the original."<sup>29</sup> Christians are not to echo simply or repeat Jesus' pattern, especially the cosmic scope of his redeeming activity, but to refract it in their own distinct ways. Or simply put, the identity of Christians, personal and collective, is not to be confused with the identity of Jesus. And two, unlike that of Jesus, the church's intention-action pattern in the world at large is not finished because its future is not yet disclosed. The church's future identity entails its ongoing interaction with the world at large which is itself undergoing historical changes.<sup>30</sup>

The above argument for refractive enactment is undergirded by Frei's theological vision of conceiving together the church and the world in unity as instruments of God's providential ordering of human history in Jesus Christ. Concerning the church, he explains that Christ is present indirectly to it through the gifts of the Word and Sacrament, which are the temporal and spatial bases of Christ's mysterious presence. And with regard to the public world, Frei interestingly says that it is also graced with the presence of Christ as an object of divine providence in history. He writes, "So much of the sense of divine agency in both Testaments is attached to public events that can be narrated in their important temporal transitions."<sup>31</sup> So, Christ's presence is not exclusive to the church but also available "in and to the world in its mysterious passage from event to event in *public* history."<sup>32</sup> There is in Frei a deep sense of coherence between the indirect presence of Christ in the church and the public of society, and this engenders a passionate Christian engagement of the world through figural interpretation and refractive enactment. Given a public world understood as also graced by God, there is no place for arrogance and exclusivity in the church because it does not have a monopoly on the presence of Christ; the church is only a frail instrument of God's providence in the world. Not unlike Wesley's thoughts on the means of grace,

Frei says that the written words of the Scripture are feeble, often naïve, and simple, and the spoken word is usually pathetic and clumsy!

Moreover, based on his reading of Romans 11:25-32 Frei goes on to claim that the humanity at large is the neighbor given to the church through whom Christ is present and brings enrichment, and events in history may “parabolically bespeak the presence of Christ in a far more significant and evident way.”<sup>33</sup> Two observations are needed here. One, Frei’s emphasis clearly lies on the need for the church to receive enrichment from the world, rather than the reverse. And two, divine providence in history is enacted in and through the life of Christ that requires a figural reading of the past, present, and the future. But there are caveats to the use of figural interpretation of world history. First of all, Frei admits that this figural interpretation of history is limited and does not illumine all suffering in history that exhibits tragic futility. Secondly, the parable of Christ is not a diagram or a blueprint that can be applied mechanically to understand the course of human history, because he is first of all a person.<sup>34</sup> And lastly, the future of this public history is mysterious and cannot be forecast, so one must proceed with caution to discern how historical summation is providentially ordered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the parable of Christ offers key clues to the divine providential ordering of history, but the future consummation of history will be that of God with whom Jesus Christ is one, rather than a recapitulation in more enormous scope of the events of the story of Jesus. What Frei is pointing to here is the intractable character of history because of the eschatological provisionality concerning the truth of the world.

In the meantime, Christian discipleship entails service in both private life and the public realm. Frei writes, “The one who so gives himself is the very presence of the God of providence, whose grateful and obedient sons and daughters we are called to be in the breadth of our private and public lives, in our prayers, in the church, and in the world.”<sup>35</sup> He urges Christians to work in behalf of fellow human beings in all spheres of secular life in which they are set and advance causes of human and planetary flourishing. This recommendation is by no means a full-blown liberation or public theology, but we see here an explicit gesture toward the public realm of society, especially politics. In no uncertain terms, he exhorts theologians to contribute to the quest for human freedom and justice for the oppressed. And public discipleship has pedagogical value because it is in and through this moral obedience to God in the world the followers of Christ will grasp the meaningfulness and truthfulness of the Christian faith. By hammering out a

shape of life patterned after Christ's life and learning the depth grammar of the church, the pilgrims themselves will be grasped by the persuasive eloquence of the Christian faith.

Here are some reflections on Frei's Christology and ecclesiology as they relate to Wesley's reading of the Scripture. One very important way to recontextualize Wesley's understanding of the Christian journey in its rightful place within the biblical narrative is by maintaining the ascriptive subject of the gospel stories as Jesus Christ whose ministry, life, death, and resurrection, which Wesley clearly does, and then entering into the story through figural interpretation only as a figure of disciple. Frei was just as concerned about the presence of Christ mediated through the means of grace as Wesley was but not without the detour through the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. Insofar as this is secure then there is room in generous orthodoxy to include other interpretations, including Wesley's understanding of Jesus Christ as the only means of grace and *via salutis*. It is not difficult to imagine how the Christian journey can be located in the last stage of biblical interpretation—explication, mediation, and application.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the story of Jesus remains his own rather than a mere figure or symbol of some universal human experience, and the concrete, historical identity of the follower is also safeguarded from some form of universalizing. Yes, both the objective and subjective dimensions of faith, *fides quae creditur* and *fides qua creditor*, have to be present but without putting the cart before the horse.

The traffic between Wesley and Frei does not flow one way as their thoughts can mutually enrich one another. It is clear that Frei's thoughts on narrative, intention action identity analysis, and the public context of Christian thought and life resonate with Wesley's thoughts on personal and social holiness, and it is just as apparent that Wesley's and the history of Wesleyan movement can greatly inform Frei's work. For instance, though Wesley and Frei differ in their descriptions about the proximity with which Christians follow Jesus as his disciples, the former being more optimistic and using the language of holiness understood as having the mind of Christ and walking as Christ walked, and the latter being more cautious and speaking about following Christ at a distance, they were of a kindred spirit with regard to holding in dialectical unity the inner and outer dimensions of religion. Through his emphasis on faith working through love, works of piety and works of mercy, and strictures against antinomian tendencies, Christ's three offices, third use of the law, social holiness, and so forth, Wesley has unequivocally made clear the importance of holding together both dimensions of religion, and Frei has demonstrated it through his use of intention-action identity analysis within realistic-literal reading of biblical narrative. And given

their insight into the nature of social religion, it is not surprising that they both paid close attention to the human body. Wesley knew long ago that along with a heart strangely warmed a body in its varying capacities was needed to fulfill one's zeal for works of mercy, an insight affirmed by Frei's preference for the body as an unmistakable public media for intentional enactment.<sup>37</sup> One other crucial point of contact between Wesley and Frei worth noting is their basic posture to the public world. Wesley makes it clear that Christianity is a social religion and to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it. In graphic language he warns that the grand engine of hell is to withdraw from the world because Christianity could not subsist without society, and instead it must intermingle with it in commerce of a variety of sorts.<sup>38</sup> We also have seen how Frei stresses the importance of the church engaging the world, which is graced just as much or if not more to bespeak God's presence in the world. There is a fundamental agreement that the church cannot not engage the world.

#### *Ad Hoc Correlation*

And lastly, we turn to the third movement in public spirituality, *ad hoc* correlation, in the interest of thinking about Wesley's claim to be *homo unius libri* and Wesleyan quadrilateral in reading the Bible. *Ad hoc* correlation is not separate from theological hermeneutics but it actually defines in greater precision what is entailed in incorporation and refractive enactment as part of figural interpretation. Furthermore, *ad hoc* correlation also illuminates further what it means for the church to receive the enrichment the world offers. For this task, we explore Frei's thoughts on the method of correlation found in his posthumously published work *Types of Christian Theology*. He explores five different types of theology in search of a type of theology that is most hospitable to the literal reading of the Scripture that has a bearing on the meaning of Jesus Christ for believers and for the world at large.<sup>39</sup> Space here does not permit a full breadth of discussion about different types of theology, so I will briefly touch on them and move on to his thoughts on *ad hoc* correlation.

Type one theology is a philosophical discipline in the academy that subjugates theology as Christian self-description to universal criteria of intelligibility. Its chief representatives are Immanuel Kant, J. G. Fichte, and Gordon Kaufman. Frei, for instance, criticizes Kaufman's concept of theology of culture for dissolving the specificity of Christian self-description into mere representations of general metaphysical constructs in the universal human quest for

existential meaning. Type two theology is also a philosophical discipline, but it is different from type one in that it takes seriously the particularity of Christian faith and correlates it with general structures of cultural meaning through a foundational conceptual scheme. Its representatives include Rudolf Bultmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, David Tracy, and Carl Henry. In the case of Tracy's early work *Blessed Rage for Order*, what Frei finds it to be problematic is that the meaning of the Christological texts is subjected to philosophical reflection that explicates and correlates meaning present in common human experience and Christian tradition that ultimately subsumes the latter under general, religious meaningfulness, i.e., the basic faith in the final worthwhileness of existence.

For the sake of the argument, we here fast forward to type five theology that stands in stark contrast to types one and two. Frei has in mind the work of Wittgensteinian fideists and some evangelicals, especially D. Z. Phillips for whom theology functions purely as a descriptive enterprise. General conceptual tools have no bearing on Christian self-description because its language and grammar operate in a specific context with the criterion of intelligibility that is wholly internal within the context of religious tradition, a position Frei thinks is actually a prescriptive philosophical stance to which theology is made subordinate. And when this happens the task of the theologian is limited merely to repetition without conceptually articulating the doctrinal formulations or scriptural statements. In the case of the *sensus literalis*, it reduced to sheer repetition of the same words in a self-enclosed language game, but the Christian tradition certainly has not practiced it that way.<sup>40</sup>

Karl Barth is the principal representative of type four theology. He understood theology as a critical and distinctively Christian self-description performed according to the peculiar norm constitutive of the church.<sup>41</sup> Theology conceived as such means that neither philosophy as a conceptual system making material claims nor philosophy as a set of formal, universal rules for judging claims to meaning and truth is foundational to Christian theology. Instead, Barth set forth the formal rules of reasoning in prolegomena from dogmatics itself so that fundamental theology is internal to and part of its substantive claims. He used those rules to subordinate the formal structures of an independent *Wissenschaftslehre* when used theologically. So, according to Frei, Barth did not at all reject a heuristic borrowing of formal philosophical vocabulary to articulate the specificity of Christian faith. He in fact had unequivocally embraced an eclectic use

of a wide array of third-order discourse as as long as it remained appropriate to the subject matter of Christian self-description and did not become a universal criterion of intelligibility.

And lastly, Frei shows deep interest in Friedrich Schleiermacher who represents type three theology because even though he concentrates on Jesus' self-consciousness behind the narrative, it is nonetheless strongly connected to the literal-ascriptive reading of the Christological narrative. Schleiermacher took Jesus Christ not merely as a symbol or an allegorical figure of a universal principle for present self-understanding, but the ascriptive subject of the gospel narratives who owns his predicates. So, given the possibility of maintaining a literal-ascriptive reading of the gospels in Schleiermacher's hermeneutic, Frei is keenly interested in his theological method. On the one hand, Schleiermacher considered theology an academic inquiry, though not primarily philosophical, into the essence of Christianity in conversation with a general criterion of meaning, and on the other hand, thought of theology as an academic discipline concerned with the professional training of Christian leaders for ministry guided by Christian self-description. There is no conflict here between theology as an academic inquiry and as Christian self-description about the immediate feeling of absolute dependence in human consciousness because it is universally present in both the general character of human experience and the distinctively religious mode found within the church.<sup>42</sup> It is in this way, theology as academic inquiry and Christian self-description are autonomous of each other and yet they are coordinated without a totalizing supertheory.

It is interesting to observe that toward the end of his career, Frei became quite sympathetic toward Schleiermacher displaying an increasing sense of appreciation. While there certainly are Barthian refrains in Frei, it would be a mistake to consider him a mere duplication of him because he is not only seriously considering Schleiermacher's position but has already advanced significantly toward the method of *ad hoc* correlation in his own project. Throughout his work, he has not only explicitly endorsed the use of critical tools, e.g., philosophy, literary criticism, historical criticism, and the social sciences, but has demonstrated their appropriate use. A case in point is his Christology that is profoundly shaped by genre identification in literary theory and identity analysis in philosophy. And as we have seen in his treatment of types of theology, there is an emphasis on eclectic, provisional use of critical conceptual tools appropriate to and modified by the subject matter. The theologian not only can but must use general theories of meaning and truth because he or she is confronted with the enormous task of making universal

truth claims as well as re-describing the internal logic of particular Christian social phenomenon.<sup>43</sup> He advocates robust and sophisticated *ad hoc* correlation of internal and external modes of discourse in order to make the beliefs and practices of the Christian community intelligible and meaningful.

There are some interesting parallels as well as differences between Wesley and Frei on the topic of quadrilateral **or correlation**. Wesley declares himself unabashedly that he is a *homo unius libri* and that he wants to know “one thing, the way to heaven.”<sup>44</sup> There is an unmistakable existential desire for salvation shaping his reading strategy guided by the analogy of faith found in the Bible, which was addressed earlier. Having said that, in catholic spirit Wesley knows better than to not allow the Christian tradition, reason, and experience to also shape his theology, ministry, and life, so he would clarify that if books other than the Bible are not consulted, then he or she would be above Paul because he wanted others too.<sup>45</sup> As Maddox suggests, Wesley sought to read the Bible comparatively in different embodiments with scholarly tools in light of God’s central purpose as well as in conference with the Holy Spirit, the Christian tradition, and nature.<sup>46</sup> For instance, his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* sufficiently shows historical and critical engagement, albeit not in a full blown way as one might like, but certainly borrowing insights from biblical scholars, such as Bengel.<sup>47</sup> In his own way Wesley sought to engage a variety of third order discourse in his second order reflection on the first order speech of the church. The precise nature of Wesley’s demonstration of the quadrilateral in light of Frei’s typology needs to be determined, but given the experimental and eclectic character of his theological method, it most likely hovers over types two, three, and four depending on the topic and juncture of his theological journey.

What obviously has so strongly colored his reading of the Bible are his own religious interest, the context of ministry with people, and the specific practice of preaching sermons. And this intense pastoral dedication and focus is evidenced in his profound interest in the ordinary life stories of the early Methodists, such as Hester Ann Rogers. So it is not difficult to see that the journey metaphor lies in close proximity to the genre of narrative. And the other way too because Frei’s espousal of the cultural-linguistic understanding of religion and theology led him to visitation returns and sermons from the eighteenth-century life of several English parishes. No doubt he would have come across some interesting stories because a good journey is usually full of them, and a great story can make a journey that is already good really interesting.

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons*, eds. Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 157-171.

<sup>2</sup> Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” 158.

<sup>3</sup> Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); hereafter cited as *Eclipse*.

<sup>4</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 152-154.

<sup>5</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 15-16. Auerbach’s influence on Frei is made rather obvious in his statement that “no student of the Bible has ever denied the power and aptness of the analysis of biblical passages and early Christian biblical interpretations in the first three chapters of *Mimesis*.” Frei, *Eclipse*, vii. For further reading on Frei’s use of Auerbach, see Hans Frei, “Karl Barth and the Future of Theology” (unpublished), which cited Erich Auerbach’s *Dante: Poet of the Secular World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) and *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> See also H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 2-3, 28-29, 33-34, 48-49, 73-76, 194-96. For further discussion of the typological interpretation, see Hans Frei, “The ‘Literal Reading,’” in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, eds. George Hunsinger and William Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 120-24; hereafter cited as *Theology and Narrative*. See also Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, 11-75; Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 123-54.

<sup>8</sup> On absorption, see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984); Bruce Marshall, “Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths,” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). For a discussion on the phenomenon of absorption and incommensurability, see also Dan Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 46-51; idem, “Theological Method,” in the *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> For a close reading of Frei’s argument, see Daniel D. Shin, *Theology and the Public: Reflections on Hans W. Frei’s Hermeneutics, Christology, and Theological Method* (Lexington: Lexington Books, forthcoming 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> General epistemology at work here is that of meaning as ostensive reference. Frei, *Eclipse*, 95, 100-101, 119-120, 256-268.

<sup>12</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 130.

<sup>13</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 21-37, 179, 305. For further discussion on the use of narrative in theology, see Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Frei writes, “This coherence between narrative depiction and the reality rendered by it allows a shift in emphasis from depiction or story form to the reality depicted, without a disruption of the conviction that the narrative tissue is what they have inseparably in common.” Frei, *Eclipse*, 21-37.

<sup>15</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 62; hereafter cited as *Identity*. Karl Barth also emphasizes the pivotal significance of the concrete historical character of the Christological narratives. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, III/1, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 340.

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<sup>17</sup> Frei, *Eclipse*, 145. For further discussion on the public context of realistic narratives, see Frei, *Eclipse*, 217, 224-232, 280, 312-313, and 321-323. Also see Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Wall, “Reading scripture, the Literal Sense, and the Analogy of Faith,” in *Wesley, Wesleyans, and Reading the Bible as Scripture*, eds. Joel Green and David Watson (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 33-46.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, see Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*; Norman Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*; and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, “Narrative, Multiplicity, and the Letters of Paul,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 59. Higton observes that Frei made an explicit shift from the investigation of literary categories to the investigation of Christian practice. This is why he inquired what kind of academic theology is appropriate to the practices of the church and engaged himself in social, cultural-linguistic studies of the Christian faith. See Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence and History*, 19. For an excellent discussion of the developments in Frei’s project, see Jason A. Springs, *Toward a Generous Orthodoxy: Prospects for Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41-62; John Sykes, “Narrative Accounts of Biblical Authority: The Need for a Doctrine of Revelation,” *Modern Theology* 5, no. 4 (July 1989): 329; Kathryn Tanner, “Scripture as Popular Text,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 2 (April 1998): 297; Shannon Craigo-Snell, “Command Performance: Rethinking Performance Interpretation in the Context of Divine Discourse,” *Modern Theology* 16, no. 4 (October 2000): 475-494; Gerard Loughlin, “Following to the Letter: The Literal Use of Scripture,” *Literature and Theology* (December 1995): 370-382; Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 241.

<sup>21</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 53, 80, 149.

<sup>23</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 100. The identity analysis Frei prefers is intention-action description, which answers the question of modification of personal identity by examining a particular way an intention is enacted in a specific instance or a limited stretch of time. But he recognizes that self-manifestation analysis is also helpful because it examines the continuity of personal identity as it persists throughout the whole scope of one’s life. Whereas intention-action analysis attends to a person’s enactment of intentions in the public world to answer the question “What is he like?”, self-manifestation description examines the continuity of identity through its changes over a cumulative period to answer the question “Who is he?” For further discussion, see Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of the Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949), 25-61. On the use of identity analyses in theology, see George Stroup, “Theology of Narrative or Narrative Theology? A Response to *Why Narrative?*” in *Theology Today* 47 (January 1991): 428-430.

<sup>24</sup> Concerning external impingements, Frei emphasizes that “a person’s story is not only the enactment of his own intentions or his own identity, but the enactment of others’ intentions and even unintended events as well as those not specifically intended.” Frei, *Identity*, 137.

<sup>25</sup> Hence, Frei’s identity analysis can be understood as a direct challenge to the mind-body dualism of Cartesian understanding of the self from a non-idealistic notion of the self, which is understood through its bodily, linguistic, and interpersonal objectifications. It is an attempt to challenge understanding identity as an inner quality separable from its outer manifestations. Frei, *Identity*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Frei, “The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr,” in *Theology and Narrative*, 115. Charles Campbell helpfully points out that H. Richard Niebuhr’s understanding of the ascriptive logic of the gospels in *Christ and Culture* provides the initial thrust to Frei’s Christology that focuses on the interaction between characters and circumstances in the narratives instead of substance or Jesus’ self-consciousness found behind the narrative. Charles Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 57. See also, H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1951), 12. This is similar to Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* beyond the prolegomena in which Christology and soteriology became closely connected by an understanding of personhood as self-enacted agency or performative project, rather than by

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a notion of revelation as existentially imparted and appropriated knowledge. The best examples are “The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country” and “The Royal Man,” in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2009), IV/1, 157-210; IV/2, 154-263.

<sup>27</sup> See Romans 5:19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8. Frei, *Identity*, 146. On Calvin’s understanding of Christ’s moral obedience, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 507-508. See Gordon Kaufman’s response to Frei’s use of traditional Christian symbols, which he considers not only archaic but also dangerously oppressive and destructive at times. Gordon Kaufman, “Response to Hans Frei,” in *Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 31. On feminist critique of traditional doctrines of atonement and response, see Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Leanne Van Dyke, “Do Theories of the Atonement Foster Abuse?” in *Perspectives* 12, no. 2 (February 1997): 11-13; Sarah Coakley, “Kenosis and Subversion,” in *Powers and Submissions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 59, 62, 165.

<sup>29</sup> Frei, “The Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection,” in *Theology and Narrative*, 56. For a helpful discussion on refraction, see Gene Outka, “Following at a Distance: Ethics and the Identity of Jesus,” in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 145-153.

<sup>30</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 191.

<sup>31</sup> Frei, “The Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection,” 72.

<sup>32</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 189 (italics mine).

<sup>33</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 192.

<sup>34</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 163.

<sup>35</sup> Frei, *Identity*, 194. On the relation between the literal sense and Christian discipleship, see William Young III, “The Identity of the Literal Sense: Midrash in the Work of Hans Frei,” in *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 4 (October 2005): 617. Young argues that Frei’s work is one of indirection, which suggests that by the detour through the literal sense a faithful selfhood can be cultivated.

<sup>36</sup> Frei also writes, “What I am proposing instead is that we raise the question in a drastically nonapologetic, nonperspectivist fashion: ‘What does this narrative say or mean, never mind whether it can become a meaningful possibility of life perspective for us or not? Its meaning, on the one hand, and its possible as well as actual truth for us, on the other hand, are two totally different questions.’” Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> See John Wesley’s sermons, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Discourse IV,” “The Use of Money,” “The Good Steward,” “The Danger of Riches,” and so forth.

<sup>38</sup> John Wesley, ““Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Discourse IV,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons*.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 119; hereafter cited *Types*.

<sup>40</sup> Frei, *Types*, 55. Frei writes, “In matters of doctrinal statement, pure self-confinement to Christian self-description means no self-description.”

<sup>41</sup> Commenting on Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, Frei clarifies that theology is an inquiry into the specific language that is peculiar to and constitutive of the semiotic community called the Christian church. Frei, *Types*, 78-79.

<sup>42</sup> Frei, *Types*, 71. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 29.

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<sup>43</sup> Frei, *Types*, 21. Recognizing Frei's open posture to a wide array of conceptual tools, Kamitsuka has argued persuasively that his theological method is an expression of wide reflective equilibrium dogmatics and indirect apologetics. He suggests that Frei's use of a broad range of critical disciplines to test the validity of Christian beliefs is an endorsement of the importance of validating the theoretical credibility of Christian claims with some kind of accountability to public criteria of intelligibility. David Kamitsuka, *Theology and Contemporary Culture: Liberation, Postliberal and Revisionary Perspectives* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77–80.

<sup>44</sup> John Wesley, "Preface to Sermons on Several Occasions (1746), §5, in *Works*, 1:104–6.

<sup>45</sup> See Randy Maddox, "John Wesley—"A Man of One Book," in *Reading the Bible as Scripture*. For further reading on the use of other sources of knowledge, see Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), Scott Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1995), and Stephen Gunter et al., *Wesley and the Quadrilateral* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Maddox, "John Wesley—"A Man of One Book, 3-18.

<sup>47</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, OH: Schmul, 1975).