Foreword

The early years of the twenty-first century have seen belated recognition of a global revolution in world Christianity. Although many secular commentators were blinded by the decline of the Christian church in Europe and the rise of a fairly militant secular opposition to the church in North America, the Christian church as a whole is in a period of enormous growth, particularly in the southern hemisphere and in some parts of Asia. Historians from Latourette to Walls tell us that this global expansion of the church is a consequence of the sowing of the seed during "great century" of missionary endeavor in the nineteenth century, and that that sacrificial commitment to the mission of the church to "preach the gospel to every creature" was in turn rooted in the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century.

Right at the heart of the Evangelical Revival was the figure of John Wesley. There were of course other major figures. Jonathan Edwards was not only the key figure in the beginnings of the revival in New England, but his account of it influenced the subsequent revival throughout what were then the British dominions. Edwards also must be recognized as the greatest theologian of that awakening, and indeed perhaps of the eighteenth century. George Whitefield was the great preacher whose spell-binding oratory electrified mass congregations in England, Scotland, and the New World, and whose ability to communicate was envied even by the great Shakespearian actor, David Garrick. A host of other figures contributed: Charles Wesley, possibly the greatest hymnist of Christian history; Daniel Rowland and Howel Harris in Wales; Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, William McCulloch, James Robe, and later Thomas Chalmers in Scotland; William Grimshaw, William Romaine, Samuel Walker, Henry Venn, John Fletcher, John Newton, and later Charles Simeon in England; and in the British colonies which became the United States, Gilbert Tennent, William Robinson, Samuel Davis, Daniel Marshall, and Francis Asbury. Among significant lay people we could also mention Lady Huntingdon, William Cowper, Isaac Milner, William Wilberforce, Hannah More, and Zachary Macaulay. Nor must

we forget the continuing influence of Pietism in Germany from Spener and Francke to Zinzendorf and Rothe, not least in their spearheading of the world missionary movement, and crucial figures such as William Carey who link the revival of evangelical faith directly with the world missionary movement.

But the leading figure in the Evangelical Revival who arguably had the most widespread influence through five or six decades of consistent ministry was John Wesley. Where other evangelists such as Whitefield bemoaned the loss of many converts, Wesley's gift for administration in building up his Methodist Societies, his innovations in including lay people in the care of converts, and his sheer perseverance and personal organization over those decades laid firm foundations for the continued growth of the Methodist movement. Today the World Methodist Council comprises denominations with a world membership of around eighty million, a figure comparable to seventy-seven million Anglicans, seventy-five million Presbyterians, sixty-six million Lutherans, forty-seven million Baptists in the World Baptist Alliance, and forty-eight million in the largest Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God.

But while John Wesley has been revered as an evangelist and church builder, even Methodists paid little attention to his theology until the twentieth century. But the work of George Croft Cell, Albert Outler, Colin Williams, Thomas Oden, Randy Maddox, and Kenneth Collins, among many others, has produced a rediscovery of Wesley the theologian. Part of the story is the recovery of the understanding that Christian Theology is not primarily a matter of intellectual system building for the academy, but an exploration of the coherence of the Christian faith for the sake of the mission of the church. Therefore while Outler may have described Wesley as a "folk theologian," it is recognized today that it is not only the writing of Christian Dogmatics which constitutes a "theologian" (although that remains crucial for mission!), but that the primary articulation of Christian theology is in sermons and letters and occasional writings to meet the need of the hour.

John Wesley, the Oxford scholar who abandoned the groves of academe to preach to the poor in the fields and streets, and who engaged in a lifetime of publication for his preachers and people, must therefore be accounted one of the great theologians of his century. And although he produced no Systematic or Dogmatic Theology, his consistent thinking in the area of pastoral theology for "the cure of souls" is second to none. His doctrinal structure was, as befits a presbyter of the Church of England, somewhat eclectic, or to use another term, ecumenical. But he

stood solidly in the creedal tradition of the Fathers and the evangelical tradition of the Reformers, and particularly within that Anglican tradition influenced by Luther and Calvin but which rejected the later extremes of Calvinism articulated in the five-point scheme of the Synod of Dort. Wesley eventually adopted the term "Arminian" when he started to publish the *Arminian Magazine*, but while he stood in a tradition which was close to James Arminius himself, he had little in common with the later Dutch Arminianism that veered off in the direction of Socinianism and "free will." He was, in Herbert McGonigle's apt phrase, an "Evangelical Arminian," although in fact the so-called Arminian tradition within the Church of England owed more to the Greek Fathers. And indeed as Charles Simeon, the architect of Anglican evangelicalism, recognized, he and Wesley had a common bond in their understanding of the gospel besides which their differences were minor. But of course evangelicals of the Simeon tradition were said to be Arminian in the pulpit, but Calvinist on their knees! And while it is surely largely owing to Wesley that global evangelical Christianity today is more Arminian than Calvinist, it would perhaps be better to say that those terms are somewhat misleading and that there is hope of a resolution of that long-standing debate which will reflect the irenic spirit of both Simeon and Wesley.

It is therefore timely that this new book by Dr Stan Rodes highlights one major way in which Wesley's theology had much in common with the broader Reformed tradition. Classic Anglican theology stands more in the Reformed than in the Lutheran tradition, and among the structures of thought developed in Reformed theology through the seventeenth century was the elaboration of the "federal" scheme. This tried to bring unity to Christian thinking about grace and law by developing the biblical notion of the covenant (*foedus*). While Calvin himself wrote of the one covenant of God and that the covenant made with the patriarchs was "one and the same" in "reality and substance" as the covenant made with us (*Institutes*, II, x, 2), Ursinus, Olevieanus, and Cocciecus developed the differentiation between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace which was given the status of the standard Reformed view in the Westminster Confession. For the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, this federal or covenant terminology therefore became standard, even among those who rejected Calvinism.

Surprisingly, despite the fact that this language appears in Wesley (in, for example, the opening paragraph of Sermon 6, "The Righteousness of Faith"), the standard introductions to Wesley's theology have paid little

attention to his theology of covenant. It has received some attention recently from Jason Vickers in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, but Dr Rodes has presented us with the first full-scale examination of this underlying structure of Wesley's thought. It was my privilege to take over the supervision of his doctoral research at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, when my colleague Dr Herbert McGonigle was forced by health to suspend his work. The resulting thesis was a work of meticulous scholarship, investigating what Wesley meant by his double metaphor contrasting "the faith of a servant" with "the faith of a son." This book based on that research now focuses on what that research uncovered about the significance of covenant theology in Wesley's thought. It is an original contribution not only to Wesley Studies but to the place of Wesley within the broader Reformed tradition. Despite the sad history of past disputes between so-called "Calvinists" and so-called "Arminians," it may help to promote that greater understanding of Wesley's theology, which may promote greater unity within evangelical Christianity around the globe.

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