A REPLY TO RANDY MADDOX

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In response to the recent article by Randy Maddox in Methodist History, "Continuing the Conversation," I offer the following reply in the form of theses.

The Position of Randy Maddox

I. The Faith of a Servant

A) Servants of God are "folk who are awakened to their sin, fear God, and strive to live righteously, but who lack a confident assurance of their adoption by God through Christ."

B) "Wesley stated explicitly that those who are servants of God no longer have the 'wrath of God' abiding on them! What can this mean, but that they are presently justified?"

C) "Wesley understood this grace [prevenient grace] to effect a rudimentary regeneration. . . . As such, even the faith of a servant of God is possible only because of the presence of a degree of regenerating power of God's grace."

D) "Just as with regeneration, the mature Wesley came to talk of 'degrees' of justification."

Therefore:

F) "The limitations of an exclusive "twice-born" model of conversion (born again model) are even more pronounced for the late Wesley, with his valuation of the faith of the servant of God as justifying faith!"

G) "The late Wesley no longer considered the 'twice-born' model to be normative."

Theses Offered by Kenneth J. Collins in Response to Maddox

I. The Faith of a Servant

A) In contrast to Maddox, it must be affirmed that Wesley defined the phrase "the faith of a servant" in at least two key ways: First of all, servants of God are all those believers of whatever religious tradition (Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, etc.) who fear God and work righteousness and who, therefore, endeavor to worship God according to the light and grace which they have (see Wesley's commentary on Acts 10:35). Second, in terms of a specific Judeo-Christian context, the servants of God are characterized
by the spirit of bondage and fear that cleaved to the old covenant. As such, this faith represents the struggles of one who is still "under the law." Wesley notes: "Who is a Jew inwardly? A servant of God: One who sincerely obeys him out of fear. Whereas a Christian, inwardly, is a child of God: One who sincerely obeys him out of love."\(^1\)

B) It is not only the middle but also the seasoned Wesley who specifically identified the faith of a servant, especially in the second sense above, with the spirit of bondage in the sermons "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption" (1746) and "The Discoveries of Faith" (1788), respectively.

1) The characteristics of the spirit of bondage are sorrow and remorse; fear of God, death, the devil, and humanity; and the desire but not the ability to break free from the chains of sin.\(^2\)

C) The faith of a servant lacks assurance (the witness of the Spirit).

D) Though Wesley eventually came to realize that the faith of a servant involves a degree of acceptance, such faith does not constitute what the Protestant Reformers (or Wesley) called justifying faith in Jesus Christ (See thesis #II.B.1 below). Remember Wesley's first definition of a faith of a servant noted above!

E) Wesley taught that the faith of a servant, in the second sense noted above, should in time become the faith of a son or daughter of God in the normal course of spiritual development. However, Wesley did not speculate in any length on what becomes of those of other religious traditions who fear God and work righteousness other than to note that they are now accepted of God.

II. Assurance

A) By the summer of 1740, Wesley realized that justifying faith does not imply full assurance since it is often marked by both doubt and fear.

B) At least by 1747 (and possibly as early as 1745), Wesley maintained that assurance does not always accompany justifying faith. Nevertheless, he repeatedly affirmed that assurance is the common privilege of the children of God.

1) In 1768, Wesley reasoned that the exceptions to the normal association of justifying faith and assurance are usually the result of bodily disorder or of ignorance of the gospel promises. However, since

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\(^2\)Commenting on Romans 8:15 Wesley elaborates: "The spirit of bondage here seems directly to mean those operations of the Holy Spirit, by which the soul, on its first conviction, feels itself in bondage to sin, to the world, to Satan, and obnoxious to the wrath of God." Cf. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers), 382.
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these believers are both justified and regenerated, they are more suitably referred to not as servants, but as the sons and daughters of God.

Therefore:

C) All servants lack assurance and are under a spirit of bondage, but not all who lack assurance are thereby servants nor are they all under a spirit of bondage. There are, after all, exceptional cases.

III. Justification, Regeneration, and Real Christianity

A) Though there are degrees of sanctification in Wesley's soteriology, regeneration itself is a whole work, a significant stage in spiritual life, which leads to subsequent growth in grace and possibly to entire sanctification. Consequently, Maddox's language of "rudimentary regeneration" and a "degree of regenerating power" is not only confusing, but it is also without precedent. Can one be a little bit born of God?

B) Similarly, though there are degrees of acceptance in Wesley's soteriology, justification by faith in Jesus Christ is a whole work which leads to subsequent growth in grace and possibly to final justification. Consequently, Maddox's language of "degrees of justification" confuses the issues of acceptance and justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Again, can one be a little bit justified by faith?

C) Though not fully appreciated by Maddox, Wesley actually developed the motif of real Christianity from the time he saw the goal of religion in 1725 until his death in 1791 in terms of the issues of the faith of a servant, justification, regeneration, and assurance. In fact, the Oxonian's later sermons (1765 and following) are replete with this material.

1) At its minimum, real Christianity entails regeneration (and therefore freedom from the power of sin), as one of its principal characteristics. Indeed, it was precisely the mature Wesley who stressed this identification in his sermons Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith (1788) and On a Single Eye (1789).

2) Since Wesley taught that justification occurs simultaneously with regeneration (although they can be distinguished logically), then real Christianity must also entail justification by faith (and therefore freedom from the guilt of sin).

3) In almost every instance where the mature Wesley employed the phrases "real Christianity" or "proper Christianity" or "Scriptural

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3See my forthcoming article in The Asbury Theological Journal "The Motif of Real Christianity in the Writings of John Wesley." This article, written much earlier, is uncanny in that it has anticipated much of the argument offered in Maddox's piece "Continuing the Conversation." Indeed, I had always suspected that what was actually at stake in the Aldersgate debate were Wesley's doctrines of justification and regeneration.
Christianity” he was referring to the theological complex of justification and regeneration by faith and a measure of assurance. In other words, the Methodist leader almost never identified a faith which lacks assurance and is marked by the spirit of bondage (the faith of a servant) with the real, proper Christian faith.

Therefore:

Maddox’s attempt to minimize and blur the distinction between the faith of a servant and the faith of a child of God, his equation of the faith of a servant with justifying faith, and his failure to appreciate how the seasoned Wesley defined real Christianity in terms of these theological variables has not only undermined the crucial nature of justification and regeneration by faith, as Wesley saw it, but it will also, no doubt, give pause to many Wesley scholars and, unfortunately, to broader Protestantism as well.