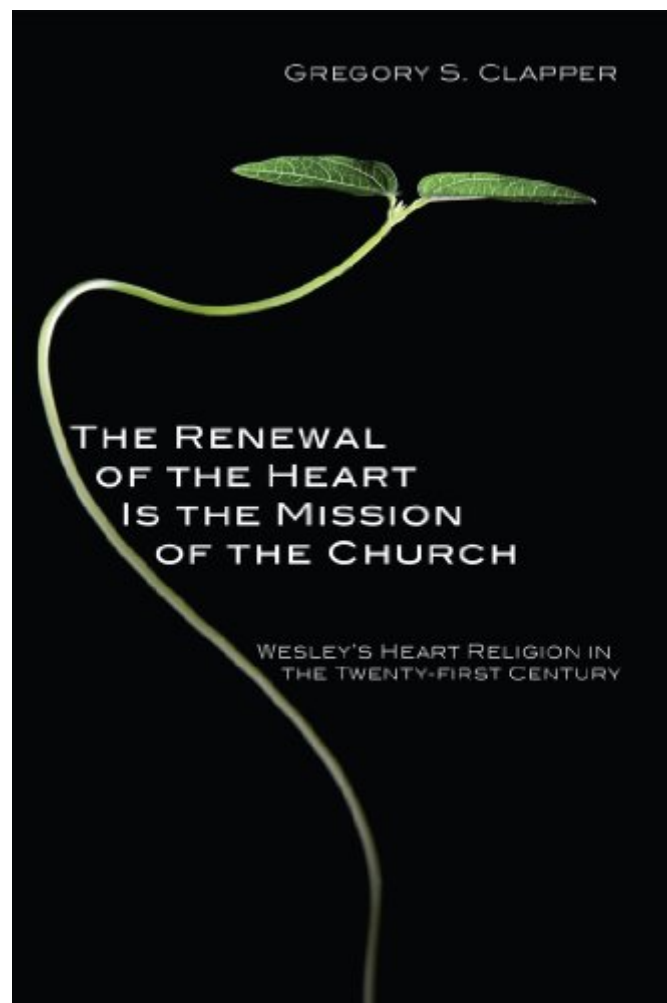




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The Renewal Of The Heart Is The Mission Of The Church: Wesley's Heart Religion In The Twenty-First Century



Synopsis

John Wesley has arguably influenced more American Christians than any other Protestant interpreter. One reason for this wide influence is that Wesley often spoke about the “heart” and its “affections” — that realm of life where all humans experience their deepest satisfactions, as well as some of their deepest conundrums. However, one of the problems of interpreting and appropriating Wesley is that we have been blinded to Wesley’s actual views about “heart religion” by contemporary stereotypes about “affections” or “emotions.” Because of this, it is rare that either Wesley’s friends or his critics appreciate his sophisticated understanding of affective reality. To make clear what Wesley meant when he emphasized the renewal of the heart, Gregory S. Clapper summarizes some recent paradigm-changing accounts of the nature of “emotion” produced by contemporary philosophers and theologians, and then applies them to Wesley’s conception of the heart and its affections. These accounts of emotion throw new light on Wesley’s vision of Christianity as a renewal of the heart and make it possible to reclaim the language of the heart, not as a pandering or manipulative rhetoric, but as the framework for a comprehensive theological vision of Christian life and thought. The book closes with several practical applications that make clear the power of Wesley’s vision to transform lives today. For years Gregory Clapper has given himself mind, heart, and soul to understanding and unpacking Wesley’s vision of heart religion. We have here the fruit of that work in all its beauty and density. In addition he rounds it off with a fine exploration of the significance of Wesley’s heart religion for preaching, counseling, and evangelism. This is a fine achievement that deserves to be read throughout the length and breadth of the Church.

—William J. Abraham Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

After years of careful study Gregory Clapper has produced a very readable and engaging account of the human heart in terms of the religious affections. Not only does he maintain that the heart is the locus of God’s action, clearing up some contemporary misunderstandings, but he also demonstrates quite convincingly that the religious affections for Wesley constituted the very substance of true religion, the nature of real Christianity itself.

—Kenneth J. Collins Asbury Theological Seminary

Among Wesleyan Christians recently there is talk about not being doctrinal, expressing especially a fear of confessionalism. This misconstrual of the tradition represents the equation of confessional truth with creedal litmus tests. Clapper knows better! His important work reflects the Wesleyan teaching that what we believe with our head and with our heart go together. Faith is both a matter of mental affirmation of historic Christian truth as well as a deep abiding trust in that truth as salvific reality. To those who might assert that the mission of God’s Church can go forward with

an Evangel that separates this conjunctive theology, Clapper says loud and clear, “I show you a more excellent way.” W. Stephen Gunter Duke Divinity School By bringing together Wesley’s concern for the renewal of the heart and recent emotion theory, Clapper offers a bold vision for the church. He gives an account of how thinking, feeling, and acting belong together in who we are before God, then he calls the church to consider its role in shaping believers in all these dimensions. This book is a valuable resource for all who take John Wesley as a guide for their ministry. -Sarah Heaner Lancaster Methodist Theological School in Ohio Gregory S. Clapper is Professor of Religion and Philosophy at the University of Indianapolis and is Affiliate Professor of United Methodist Studies at Christian Theological Seminary. He has authored many articles and four books, including *As If the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality* (1997).

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Customer Reviews

Dr. Greg Clapper has written a second book about the religion of the heart (see below), taking the idea and applying to the church’s mission. He begins by using two questions to portray the

difference between a religion of the mind and a religion of the heart: (1) "What is Christianity?"--the question which takes us into beliefs and doctrines, and (2) "Who is a Christian?"--the question which takes into the realm of character and conduct. Pause long enough to ponder how the first question roots the Christian life in dogmas (the head), while the second roots it in dispositions (the heart). Both questions serve a useful purpose, and they must not be pitted against each other. But in the overall history of Christianity, it is the heart question (#2) that has more nearly defined what we mean by 'faith.' This is why people like John Wesley could differentiate between "dead orthodoxy" and "living faith"--what classical theology came to refer to as "the mind descending into the heart" and making us contemplative. Greg Clapper is someone who sees and speaks about this kind of faith in our day.

The first five chapters are written like a seminary theology textbook, thoroughly researched and with foot notes. These lay the foundation on Wesley's thought, but I found them plodding. In the final chapters six and seven Dr. Clapper cuts loose with some lively thought and applications for bringing life into persons' experience of Christ for their spirits and their living. These two chapters are meant for every one and well written.

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