

# Apuntes: Reflexiones teológicas desde el margen hispano

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Volume 40  
Number 1 *Spring 2020*

Article 7

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Spring 2020

## Book Review: Juan Wesley y la Reforma Protestante

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### Recommended Citation

Santiago-Vendrell, Angel Ph.D (2020) "Book Review: Juan Wesley y la Reforma Protestante," *Apuntes: Reflexiones teológicas desde el margen hispano*: Vol. 40: No. 1, Article 7.  
Available at: <https://scholar.smu.edu/apuntes/vol40/iss1/7>

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Book Review/Reseña

Justo L. González, *Juan Wesley y la Reforma Protestante* (Nashville: General Board of Education and Ministry, 2020). Pp. ii-73. (Este trabajo se centra en la forma en que John Wesley interpretó a las principales figuras de la Reforma. También discute similitudes de pensamiento entre John Wesley, Calvin y Martin Luther).

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*Juan Wesley y la Reforma Protestante* is an innovative interpretation about how Wesley understood and interpreted the most influential theologians of the Protestant Reformation. This publication is a compilation of three essays by González originally published in *Apuntes*.<sup>1</sup> The dialogue between Wesley, Luther, and Calvin challenges long-held assumptions about Wesley's use of the Reformation theologians and illuminates the reader to have a corrective and better interpretation that merits special attention for its reconciliatory tone.

“Juan Wesley y Martín Lutero,” describes and analyses the way Wesley interpreted Luther. Even though he had read some of the works of Luther, Wesley's interpretation was based on his experience with the Moravians; the German Lutherans who were in the same transatlantic trip to the Colony of Georgia where John was appointed as a missionary. Wesley was challenged by the assurance the Moravians had in their salvation in the midst of a storm while he was terrorized and with a dwindling faith. Much has been said about Wesley's experience with the Moravians in Aldersgate when, after hearing the preface of Luther's preface to the letter of Romans, his heart was strangely warmed by accepting the certainty of justification by faith for salvation. However, what scholars had missed is Wesley's

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<sup>1</sup>González, Justo L. “Juan Wesley: A Quiñientos Años de la Reforma I.” *Apuntes: Reflexiones Teológicas desde el Contexto Hispano-Latino* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2017), 154-172. “Juan Wesley: A Quiñientos Años de la Reforma II.” *Apuntes* 38, no. 1 (Spring 218), 5-25. “Juan Wesley: A Quiñeientos Años de la Reforma III.” *Apuntes* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2018), 39-64.

disagreements with both the Moravians and Luther, which were related to the relation between justification and sanctification and the use of the sacraments. The first important point was the relationship between salvation and sanctification, as Wesley thought that the Moravians were antinomians by overemphasizing that Christians were justified and sinners at the same time, while downplaying the scope of sin. The other point of contention was the use of the sacraments and other means of grace. Wesley accused the Moravians of a type of mysticism that rejected any human activity to reach God, such as the sacraments, the church, the means of grace like prayer, fasting, and even the Bible. Wesley wanted to coordinate justification and sanctification while rejecting antinomianism and legalism, and according to González, the theologian who helped him bridge the divide was no other than John Calvin, the topic of the next part.

Wesley had very positive things to say about Calvin in doctrinal and theological matters. The consensus has been that Wesley was always in conflict with Calvin's views but González argues that this is a myth more than reality. In reality, Wesley was opposing the interpretations of Calvin in the England of the eighteenth century, especially the conclusions of the Synod of Dordrecht (1619) and the Westminster Confession (1646), or what is known today as the five-point Calvinism and not Calvin himself. According to González, "Wesley was a Calvinist." He offers the example of Wesley's interpretation of total depravity. Even though Wesley affirmed a vestige of the image of God after the fall, he was never that eager to defend human beings against total depravity. On predestination, González argues that such doctrine was not the sole product of Calvin, but also, a doctrine that Luther and Roman Catholic theologians such as Domingo Bañez and Miguel Bayo adhered to. Actually, the theological debates between Lutherans and Calvinists in the sixteenth century were about how to understand the presence of Christ in the eucharist and had nothing to do with predestination. Another interesting point was the way Calvin interpreted the relationship between law and gospel. Calvin had three uses for the law: first, it was for people to see their sinful ways and

lead them to the gospel, second, to sustain the social order, and third, to point believers towards the will of God. This had to do with how Calvin understood sanctification as a life lived to delight in the will of God. Therefore, the biggest difference between Calvin and Wesley was about how far sanctification could go, meaning Wesley's position of total sanctification.

González demonstrates through a thorough interpretation of primary sources how John Wesley had more similarities with Luther and Calvin than previously acknowledged. González challenges the notion that Wesley was in constant conflict with the teachings of Martin Luther and John Calvin by arguing that the two reformers had a more positive influence on the English reformer than previously acknowledged. González never disappoints the reader in his teachings of church history. But the book does not stay in the past, as it could be interpreted as an ecumenical exercise written with the vision that the contemporary followers of Wesley and Calvin could be more united in their ministry to God and the world.