

Wesleyan Theological Journal

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Wesleyan Theological Society

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The Society's mission is to encourage exchange of ideas among Wesleyan-Holiness theologians; to develop a source of papers for CHP (Christian Holiness Partnership) seminars; to stimulate scholarship among younger theologians and pastors; and to publish a scholarly journal.

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CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NUMBER

ARTICLE WRITERS

David L. Cubie

Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, Ohio

Alex R. G. Deasley

Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri

Joel B. Green

Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky

Scott Kisker

Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

Randy L. Maddox

Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington

Clark H. Pinnock

McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario

R. Larry Shelton

Western Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon

Henry W. Spaulding II

Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee

Wallace Thornton, Jr.

Union Bible College, Westfield, Indiana

Robert W. Wall

Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington

BOOK REVIEWERS

David Bundy, Barry Callen, Norman Murdoch,

David Thompson, Amos Yong

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The content of this issue emerges primarily from the many papers delivered at the 33rd annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, convened November 7-8, 1997, on the campus of Mount Vernon Nazarene College in Mount Vernon, Ohio. The theme of this meeting was: **"Facing the Future: Wesleyan/Holiness Theological Resources for the 21st Century."** The program chair was Dr. Douglas M. Strong of Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C. Guest keynoter at this meeting was Dr. Clark H. Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

NOTE: For convenience of communication, the names, institutions, and email addresses of the **current officers of the Wesleyan Theological Society** are provided in this issue.

NOTE: Should you not be a member of the Wesleyan Theological Society currently, a **membership application** is found in this issue. Complete and send to the Society's Secretary (name and address enclosed).

NOTE: The Wesleyan Theological Society maintains an **Endowment Fund** that is crucial for the Society's future contributions to scholars and scholarship in the Wesleyan/Holiness theological tradition. Information about the Fund and how to contribute is found in this issue.

NOTE: The **next issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*** (Spring 1999) will feature a series of significant papers delivered at the March 12-14, 1998, meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, which convened jointly with the Society for Pentecostal Studies on the campus of the Church of God Theological Seminary, Cleveland, Tennessee.

NOTE: The **next annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society** will convene on the campus of Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, Oklahoma, **March 5-6, 1999**. The theme will be: "Wesleyan Theology in a Postmodern Era." The program chair is Dr. Al Truesdale of Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri.

BLC, Editor
Sept., 1998

EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIANS FACING THE FUTURE: AN ANCIENT AND A FUTURE PARADIGM

by

Clark H. Pinnock¹

Today is a time of opportunity for Christian theology. With the demise of Marxism, no belief system is better placed than ours is to provide a compelling faith and promising vision of the human future. With the crisis of Darwinistic materialism, there is the possibility again of mutual, beneficial relationships between religion and science being restored and the modern mind being re-opened to the truths of religion. With the waves of pentecostal renewal, the prospect exists for a worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Islam is a serious competitor, but more politically than theologically. Who knows what might happen when the ban on Christianity is lifted in Arab lands? Consider the possible significance of Christianity for China as its leaders seek the path to modernization. There also are the promising new alliances of evangelicals and mainline believers from the spheres of Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism. The time is surely ripe for theological advance in the context of world mission. With the completion of his systematic theology, Wolfhart Pannenberg is already showing us what is possible. Donald Bloesch is doing the same in a different way. The question is—will we grasp this opportunity for evangelical and Wesleyan theology? I think we

¹Keynote Address, annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, convened at Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, Ohio, November 7-8, 1997.

can make a contribution if we are willing to grow as hearers of God's Word.

The Evangelical Big Tent

Let me speak first about the evangelical big tent and the appropriateness of doing theology under its shade. Many theologians work under this umbrella. It is not a space constituted by a confession, but is a loose coalition made up of a great variety of believers who feel religious kinship. Some like myself were "born again" into it through the influences of Billy Graham, the Canadian Keswick Conference, Youth for Christ, Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship, and so forth, and it was natural for such people to identify with it and work within it. We prefer its broad spaces to the more restrictive quarters of the denominations. We benefit from the fruitful interaction of a confluence of traditions. We work, not so much as members of specific traditions, but as participants in a new ecumenical/evangelical world. What makes a theologian "evangelical" is (minimally) the decision to work in this space, which is so rich in nutrients and has such potential to produce new forms of life and thought. Rather than working exclusively on denominational plots, many are drawn into the larger garden. The identity of an evangelical theologian is defined more sociologically than precisely theologically.²

For example, James W. McClendon, Jr., is thought of more as an evangelical than he was previously because he is now associated with Fuller Seminary. Donald Bloesch is evangelical in many senses, but also because he publishes with InterVarsity Press, while Geoffrey Wainwright is evangelical in many senses, but not in the subculture sense. Nothing theological prevents Wainwright from associating with the evangelical coalition except a preference to work in the mainline/ecumenical context. For Bloesch, it is a wise tactic to associate with InterVarsity Press rather than (say) Westminster/JohnKnox. In the context of a Protestant mainline publisher, he would be viewed as a late-term Barthian and not taken seriously. But under the evangelical big tent, what he says feels new and exciting because evangelicals have come so late to an appreciation of Barth. Similarly, Alister McGrath certainly prospers from his identifica-

²I think of evangelicalism as an extended family based on certain resemblances. Compare Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), chapter 15.

tion with evangelicalism because it gives him a splendid opportunity to describe and give shape to the coming evangelical theology. The evangelical movement, then, is a large and vital circle of people who love God's Word and are open these days to a broader than normal set of voices. This constitutes an opportunity for any renewal-minded theologian and supplies a bandwagon well worth the boarding.

Theologians today (like Christians at large) are not as strongly attached to a single tradition or denomination as they once were. We live in an increasingly post-denominational world. God is bringing the church together. Many like myself found faith in the context of evangelicalism (where else are you likely to find it?). Though Baptist (or whatever), we value our evangelical associations more than any denominational ones and derive more stimulation from them, in much the same way as others savor mainline/ecumenical spaces. The rise of the postwar evangelical movement has created a rare opportunity for theologians not to work only in narrow confines, unenriched and ecumenically challenged, but in larger fields and wider rivers which make possible a theology-in-dialogue stimulated by the plurality of a new ecclesial situation. We find that rubbing shoulders with people in some ways like ourselves but from other traditions is productive of fresh thinking in us. It brings people together who might not otherwise come together. For example, it is a good thing for dispensationalists to be able to converse with covenant theologians and Calvinists with Wesleyans, nothing being despised.

Not everyone shares my enthusiasm for the big tent. Not all who identify with the evangelical movement see it as the context for theological work. They are more loyal to sectarian commitments and continue to work as Calvinists, Mennonites, or Wesleyans, etc. Although they appreciate cooperative aspects of evangelicalism, they still operate more as denominational theologians. For them, evangelicalism is a network which serves practical purposes, not theological ones. They are concerned about that fact that significantly different theological models and attitudes exist under the big tent and that they might get confused and run together in a sort of mishmash. They think that better work can be done within the established traditions than in a loose and doctrinally chaotic popular religious coalition. The point is well taken, but the fact remains that millions of believers from many denominations do associate together at this time in the movement (however loose and vulnerable the ties). This constitutes a *kairos* with the potential of theological fruitfulness.

Evangelicalism is informally constituted by people who feel a sense of kinship and enjoy working together for common goals. Early on it was city evangelism under Billy Graham which brought people together in large numbers, not on the basis of theology, but for the purpose of winning others to Christ. It was and remains an informal alliance. Theologically, it is surely a patchwork quilt, kept together more by vital religious experience and commitment to mission than by theological confession. There are doctrinal boundaries, but they are fluid and not closely drawn. The coalition is not without a theological character, but it is more like an ethos—specifically, a post-fundamentalist and anti-liberal ethos. This identity has proved to be a winning ticket in attracting all sorts of people into its sphere, believers who, despite sectarian differences, agree on the importance of defending Christianity against liberal theological innovations.

When it gets right down to it, evangelicalism is more like a distinctive spirituality than a precise theology and it finds its unity in a few basic commitments: fidelity to the biblical message as the supreme norm, belief in a transcendent personal God who interacts with creation and acts in history, belief in the transforming grace of God, and commitment to the mission of bringing the goodness of Jesus Christ to the whole world. There is space here for both theological common ground and rich diversity. On the one hand, there are controls stemming from a conservative theological ethos; on the other hand, there are wide-open spaces.

A Movement in Transition

The situation, of course, is never static or stable. The broad river of evangelicalism contains numerous theological currents. There has always been a tension between scholasticism and pietism, between Calvin and Wesley, between the Presbyterian and the pentecostal paradigm. These emphases rise and fall in their influence and do not stay at the same level of strength over time. The key thing to remember in regard to evangelicalism since the late 1940s is that it was the Presbyterian paradigm that provided the leadership in the first few decades. It thought of itself as supplying the normative theology. It was my experience as a young Christian in the 1950s to be directed to Westminster and Fuller seminaries, Carl Henry, Paul Jewett, Kenneth Kantzer, John Gerstner, Gordon Clark, and others for formation in theology. The Wesleyan and pentecostal tendencies were appreciated for their vigor, but certainly not for their thought.

There has always been a tension between scholasticism and pietism in evangelicalism. In its present form, evangelicalism had beginnings which saw the scholastic impulse on top. To show how strong that still is, the flagship periodical *Christianity Today* even today has to have its articles approved by two Reformed “watchdogs” (J. I. Packer and Timothy George).

This is not surprising. For one thing, the coalition came out of the fundamentalist/Reformed anti-liberal alliance, which in turn was characterized by a particular set of cultural realities. The modern period, with its emphasis on universal rationality, favored evangelical scholasticism, whereas recent postmodern developments, with an emphasis on the particular and the experiential, favor evangelical pietism. This means that the scholastic approach is declining in influence and the pietist approach is gaining in strength. A shift is underway and the older leaders are worried. Change is seldom painless and there is friction around the changing of the guard. A great deal will depend on how the power issue is handled. Will the old guard surrender power to the new impulse or will they go down fighting?³

Promoting evangelical theology under the big tent runs the risk of stirring old polemics and re-opening old wounds. Banning theology can keep us from each other’s throats. Calvinists and Wesleyans (for example) can cooperate in practical causes under the conditions of a truce. Challenging the monopoly of the scholastic impulse, however, runs the risk of letting the sectarian cat out of the bag just when it was under control. But such risk is necessary for the sake of mission and the truth of the gospel. Old issues sometimes have to be re-engaged. Have we given up finding truth? Can progress in theology no longer be made? Can there not be new discoveries and breakthroughs? Like life itself, theology is an adventure. The task is unfinished and the journey beckons.

When I was “born again” into evangelicalism, I did not know its true character as a historically particular movement. I accepted it uncritically as it was and made it my tradition, not aware of its post-fundamentalist and Reformed texture. I just assumed it was the ideal form of Christianity

³From the pietist side, Henry H. Knight gives a hopeful reading in *A Future of Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1997). Speaking for the old guard, Millard Erickson is decidedly nervous in his *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1997).

and did not reflect on its deficits and peculiarities. I accepted its basic method and theology. Naively, I did not realize that behind the appearance of pluralism among the evangelicals in those early days were powerful theological interests. Specifically there was the scholastic methodology and the deterministic theology of old Princeton which have dominated the movement from the first. This old theology occupied the sort of privileged position in postwar evangelicalism that neo-scholasticism occupied in the Catholicism before Vatican II. It was in a position to equate its views with faith itself and could stand in the way of other positions being advanced. The Reformed cadre has occupied this role among us for some time and to a degree it still does. One sometimes can still hear them mumbling about who is “in” and who is “out” of the movement this year. This keeps them occupied, but also impedes more useful work.

Though I did not realize at first the true nature of postwar evangelicalism, over time it dawned on me and, more importantly, the movement grew larger and more diverse. A very large contingent of decidedly non-scholastic believers moved into the big tent and now are making it impossible for the old guard to control the boundaries. What saved me was a naive acceptance of the “scripture only” rhetoric of evangelicalism. I received the impression from my mentors that one should adhere to the Bible and change one’s theology if you must. I was given to believe that prior commitments are in principle reformable by scripture. As time went on, I began to notice certain weaknesses of the prevailing theology, in particular the rational/propositional method and the theological determinism. It became clear to me that if we were to make progress in theology these two problems would have to be addressed. Almost as soon as I began to address them, I realized how shallow the rhetoric of “scripture only” was. Much later I also realized how Wesleyan my moves in method and theism were. For some reason I had to find Wesley for myself in spite of the existence of a vital Wesleyan movement around me. I had to find my own way from the scholastic to the pietist approach.

Reform in Evangelical Theology

My thesis is that evangelical theology can contribute to the renewal of theology under circumstances of reform. There needs to be an improvement in theological method and in the doctrine of God. I think we need to move to a larger concept of method (as represented by the Wes-

leyan quadrilateral) and to a more dynamic model of the nature of God (as intimated also in Wesley's thinking).⁴

The basic problem in evangelical theology is the rationalist/propositional method. What an irony that what was seen initially as its trump card is in fact detrimental to sound theology. The old guard represented by Carl F. H. Henry would suppose that evangelical theology was born with a solidly rational method that has since been placed in danger. In fact, it was born with a birth defect which is at long last beginning to be corrected. At first, in reaction to liberal theology, the rational method seemed necessary and effective, but now it appears as an obstacle which stands in the way of doing better quality work. The appeal of evangelicalism never was its method or excellence in theology; its appeal derived from its being consonant with a mood which was pro-classical and anti-liberal. It always had the potential of being fruitful theologically, but the potential was something that would take time to be realized.⁵

The rational/propositional method as practiced at old Princeton and since defended by scholastic evangelicals embodies a view of revelation consisting chiefly of the doctrinal truths of the Bible. The main task of theology was to systematize these truths into a stable and more or less timeless theology. With a verbatim of God's thoughts in hand, this approach could instill a feeling of high confidence, bolstered by apologetics of the hard rationalist variety.⁶ The Enlightenment strengthened this orientation by encouraging an epistemology which upheld ideals of rational certainty and unshakable foundations. It encouraged the impulse among conservatives to consider the Bible as the axiom required by the theory and the source of the reliable propositions. It fostered interest in an inerrant Bible as the required source and the basis of its apologetic strategy. The Enlightenment ironically influenced both liberal and (in a different way) conservative theology. It encouraged a method which the practi-

⁴See, for instance, the excellent work of Barry L. Callen in his systematic theology titled *God As Loving Grace* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1996).

⁵Stanley J. Grenz was one of the first to identify this problem in his *Re-visioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

⁶On the range of theological models, see Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

tioners thought was ancient, but which was really quite modern.⁷ Of course, we do look to the Bible for truth and there is a place for systematizing its contents and spelling out the implications. But the rational/propositional method is deficient both in its retrieval of revelation and its disregard for context.

1. Retrieval of Revelation. The instincts of evangelical theologians are strong in relation to the retrieval of past revelation. Everyone would agree that we need an “ancient” theology—one that is biblical, apostolic, and historically Christian. Against the cultural accommodation of mainline Protestantism, we have sounded the note of continuity with the past. We warm to scriptural exhortations like “guard the gospel” and “contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.” Our sincere desire is to be true to the teachings of the apostles and not permit human traditions to take precedence over them. Thus the conserving function of theology is valued. We want theology to be congruent with Scripture. We resonate with the Formula of Concord: “Holy Scripture alone is acknowledged as the judge, norm, and rule, according to which it is the touchstone by which all doctrines are to be examined and judged” (3:96). One task of theology is to check and be sure that the proclamation of the church is true to the revelation of God attested in the Holy Scriptures.

However, the rational/propositional method does not foster a sound retrieval of past revelation. With respect to Scripture, this method reduces the Bible’s richness by privileging the propositional dimension. In relation to tradition, it tends to be oblivious to the role tradition plays in interpretation. Owing to the rationalist orientation, there is a tendency to downplay the historical situatedness of both text and reader. Respect for the Bible as the inspired medium of divine revelation is no guarantee of fruitful hermeneutical retrieval if we use the Bible as a treasury of doctrinal and ethical statements to bolster positions we already hold. Even our confessions of faith are frequently proof-texted with a patchwork of biblical citations. The meaning of a text is rarely grasped when quoted out of context or considered without regard for its place in the historical flow of revelation. Revelation is historical and incarnational, and its language

⁷James Barr pointed to the rationalistic character of evangelicalism in his *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977). See Nancey Murphy who now has explained how it happened, in *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996).

often is poetic and symbolic. Although the Bible contains propositional statements, too much emphasis on this leads to distortion. Scripture is not basically a collection of timeless propositions, but a meta-narrative of the salvation through Christ which has a propositional dimension. It is this richness in the Bible which enables it to speak to the whole range of human experience. There are many approaches to the meaning of texts and types of literature, and evangelicals need to make more use of them. Consider for example the complex way in which the New Testament appeals to the Old; and notice how the New Testament itself is not a homogeneous body of doctrine, but a chorus of voices. The complex polyphony of the Bible requires imaginative judgment and prayerful discernment in order to understand and apply it well.

One issue of great importance is the need to recognize the primacy of narrative in scripture. A unique vehicle of truth, it is neglected by the rational-propositional method because it is too open-ended.⁸ God is not self-revealed in history by means of timeless propositions. To miss this fact threatens dimensions of richness and mystery. Recovering narrative does not mean giving up on doctrinal passages, but attending to the story on which the doctrinal texts are reflecting. Evangelicals have difficulty handling the richness of Scripture. They love epistles, but barely tolerate narrative and are downright suspicious of symbols. The liberal tendency to see revelation as chiefly illuminating inner experiences has caused evangelicals to conceptualize revelation in a form that is chiefly informational. This often causes evangelicals to miss the obvious fact that revelatory knowledge is not normally imparted in Scripture through propositional discourse, but through the symbolic patterns which are carried forward by liturgies. Symbols are not a less effective medium of communication which have to be subordinated to the propositional dimension but contain a plenitude of meaning that surpasses discursive speech and draws us into whole worlds of meaning. Perhaps they are ignored because symbols allow for a greater diversity than in what is (incorrectly) called “scientific” theology.

The Bible is not a collection of propositions, each of which is be taken as a divine assertion, but contains a variety of forms and conventions and is filled with poetry and metaphor. Scripture grasps us more

⁸Alister McGrath makes a strong appeal for evangelicals to recognize the primacy of the biblical narrative for theology. See *Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 105-116.

often than not by its suggestive power than by its logic. In this way it speaks to the believer's situation here and now. The propositional approach to theology is imposed on Scripture rather than arising from Scripture. It was shaped more by tradition and philosophical influences than by the biblical text itself. Even the concern for inerrancy has less to do with interpretation than with the apologetic role it is being assigned.

In relation to tradition, rational/propositionalism falls short because the emphasis is on working objectively. This is ironic since one might have supposed that having a scripture principle would foster scrupulous honesty about non-biblical influences on its interpretation. In fact, what it often fosters is the illusion that we read Scripture unaffected by our context and place in history. Wayne Grudem amuses when, having presented a 17th century dogmatic, he subtitles his book *An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. By ignoring the influence of tradition on our work, we are tempted to claim unwarranted certainties for our conclusions and perhaps even look down on those of a different opinion who must be laboring under the weight of prejudice.

The historical situatedness of all theology operates whether it is recognized or not, and when not recognized, its influence is greater. Because of an idealized view of past revelation and our human ability to retrieve it, we tend to be unclear, not only about the Bible's place in history, but also our own. We therefore tend to deceive ourselves into thinking of our own interpretations as pure biblical doctrine and the views of others as morally suspect. Disregarding tradition does not eliminate its effects but only lets them function under wraps. It frees people to select a strand of the past and privilege it. It makes disciples prisoner to that segment of history and short-circuits growth beyond it. It can even lead us to reject other people affected by some other segment. Traditions can be what is really at stake without either side knowing it. As Charles Kraft has taught us, reality is mediated to us through the grid of world-views, and the essence of faith is always mixed up with historical form. Every theology combines the essence of religion with particular forms. Even evangelical versions of Christianity grow out of particular situations.

Neglecting the role of tradition can also make us insensitive to philosophical influences. Few evangelicals reflect on the fact that early Greek theology was deeply impacted by the great Hellenes. We often deny such influence while continuing to read the Bible under its influence. We allow Greek categories to guide our exegesis instead of bringing them under the

critique of Scripture. Stubborn adherence to philosophical influences does not serve God's revelation. It allows philosophy to play an undue role in theology, even when philosophy presumably is being ignored. It hinders us from seeking better philosophical conceptualities. Why do evangelicals keep using ancient philosophies which lack revelational status and poorly express the dynamic biblical categories? Does this indebtedness to Greek ideas have to be permanent? Can there not be dialogue with other philosophical traditions which are more in touch with modern sensibilities as well as more open to biblical thinking?

Evangelical theologians are not insincere in their desire to retrieve past revelation, but they can be smug about the quality of their retrieval. We need to learn to read both the Bible and tradition in richer ways and not disregard the role which history plays in them both. Scripture and tradition present us with an overwhelmingly rich abundance—are we not like guests at a sumptuous feast? Let us welcome one another and listen to what each has to say. Let us sample new foods, learn new customs, and (above all) trust and love one another more. It was understandable in the early days of postwar evangelicalism that we entertained the myth of ourselves alone possessing the truth—privileging our own thinking helped us survive as a movement. But the time has come to take a humbler attitude and place ourselves in the larger stream in which our witness needs to take place. With maturity, hopefully there will be more modesty as well.

2. Disregard for Context. Evangelical theology is not very adept at relating to contexts. If there is weakness in retrieving past revelation, the situation is worse in regard to recognizing present illumination. Again this is probably due to the supposed objectivity of the method and the fact that liberal theology is active in areas of relevance. Our rational method makes us suppose that we do not need and the polemical situation makes us feel that we cannot afford to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches now. This is obviously wrong—we must be open to discovering the meaning of revelation for the present and to be thinking with the mind of Christ in relation to fresh challenges. One of the tasks of theology is to present the truth as a living reality for the present time.

To put it in a nutshell, the classic evangelical method is overly mono-polar and relatively indifferent to issues of context—not immune to their influence, of course, only indifferent. This is the tendency that

slights the Spirit and is not adequately mindful of the relevance of contextual factors. It privileges one pole—the supposedly timeless truths of revelation deposited in the Bible—and refuses to recognize a second. It pretends to work with the data of revealed propositions as if they are not contextually affected. Somehow it is conveniently forgotten that revelation is incarnational, embedded in history, and that theology must engage culture in order to hear God’s word and communicate it effectively.⁹

The basis of the contextual pole is the promise of Christ to guide us into fuller truth in regard to revelation (Jn. 16:13). The Paraclete was given to meet the need created by the death of the apostles. Believers are not to be left orphaned because the Spirit will dwell in their midst, not only to mediate the divine presence, but to be the source of continuing illumination. Determining the authorial intent of a text cannot decide the timeliness of application. The Spirit does not give new revelation so much as cause everything to be revealed in a new light. Changing circumstances require timely applications and a church on mission must be able to grasp the significance of the gospel message for its situation. Theology must be able to say important things that matter for the present time. Continuing inspiration is needed because the goal of the original inspiration of the Bible was to transform readers. Scripture fails if it remains a dead letter and does not impact people. It is the property of classic texts that they can open up in the presence of new readers. By means of them, God leads his people toward the consummation of the age. The Spirit helps us penetrate the Word and integrate it with our own pilgrimage through time.

This may explain the relative dearth of ethical instruction in John’s Gospel—because the Spirit is given to help the church work out its own salvation. The Spirit helps us to shape our lives in obedience to the gospel as we confront new circumstances. The ethical direction is clear from the moral vision of the gospel, but not all the applications of the vision. Living within a world shaped by the Jesus’ story, the community of faith wrestles with challenges of understanding and enactment. How we respond in the obedience of faith is not a function of written instructions only, but also of a Spirit-discerned and empowered conformity to Jesus Christ. The church is called to act in creative freedom to become a

⁹Usually evangelicals are warned about syncretism and the dangerous influence of contexts. It is refreshing to hear Harvey Conn warn against neglecting circumstantial issues when doing theology (*Westminster Theological Journal* 52[1990], 51-63).

living sacrifice. The Spirit alerts the community to truths not yet flagged and causes fresh light to break forth from God's Word. What allows this to happen is the richness of Scripture, replete as it is with narrative and symbol as well as propositions. Thus it is that even today we find that new possibilities can get onto the agenda of theology.¹⁰

The Bible does not present a simple and homogeneous body of doctrine and/or ethics. It supplies a chorus of diverse but finally harmonious voices. It presents us with a range of insight without telling us which emphasis is the one for today. For example, which nuance of Christology, which model of atonement, which aspect of the moral vision is most crucial at the moment? The Bible is not a book of rules as rational/propositionalism construes it. We do not just ask whether there is a rule anywhere about slave owning or women ruling or hope for the unevangelized. Crucial matters are not decided in such a simple way, but rather by digging deeper into the flow of Scripture, tuning one's ears to the Spirit, and opening the heart wider to the ways of God among us now.

Remember with sadness how Charles Hodge defended slavery on the basis of biblical proof-texts. It was not too hard to show that it was instituted by God, part of Israel's national life, and approved by the apostles. Hodge's opponents were forced to appeal to historical factors, deeper moral principles, progressive revelation, and God's leading here and now. How easy it was for conservatives to charge such opponents with setting themselves above the plain teachings of the Bible. Yet Hodge was proved wrong by the leading of God in the communities of faith. Quoting the Bible is not everything—there also is interpretation in which self-serving opinions must be confronted, details examined, and God's will tested. We have all concluded that the continuation of slavery as a social institution is not justified, but we came to that conclusion by wrestling with the issue in context, not staring at the rules. It was decided biblically and prayerfully, but not propositionally.¹¹

Evangelical theology is not strong in the area of timeliness because the propositional method is afraid when contexts become a factor. It concentrates on being in continuity with past revelation, not on intelligibility, relevance, and innovation. It fears new ideas which might possibly be

¹⁰On ethics in John's Gospel, see Richard B. Hayes, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper/San Francisco, 1996), chap. 6.

¹¹Sometimes being "postconservative," Millard Erickson's phrase, is the right thing to be.

“worldly,” merely human ideas. The faculty of old Princeton took pride in never teaching anything new; but Scripture is ever new and is always becoming a fresh text. Good retrieval requires an act of the imagination which integrates text and context. When we appeal to the authority of the Bible, we place ourselves within the world of the text and have to imaginatively improvise (as it were) the themes that we hear. We have to hear the text as something addressed to us. The idea that we could limit ourselves to one pole, to Scripture “alone” (which always was an illusion because interpretation never occurs in a vacuum), mislead us. Scripture is always read by interpreters under the influence of a tradition which uses its own reasoning and experience. No-one comes from no-where. We are always reading the Bible out of a setting and relating to a setting. It is self-deceptive to claim only to be using one pole in theological method. Of course, the church depends on the revelation communicated by Scripture, but its meaning and significance unfolds in the history of its interpretation.

The contextual pole is important because the truth is meant to engage people. Bible doctrines are not abstractions, but timely witnesses whose current significance is to be grasped in our settings. We are warned about tithing mint and cummin while neglecting weightier matters of the law. Jesus condemns leaders who knew weather patterns but not the time of God’s visitation. Theology is meant to engage life and produce fruitful effects. The gospel is not abstract truth, locked in the past, and the province of antiquarians. It is the power of God unto salvation *now*. God is not a distant law-giver who forces on us concepts which are alien and un-illuminating of our situation. God’s Word speaks to where we are now and is meant to evoke a response in us. Theology historically has always been mindful of society and culture, even as Scripture itself was mindful of it. Good theology is never articulated in an ivory tower out of touch with times and places. Christianity is incarnational. God expresses himself not in general truths, but as a human being. The Word became flesh in order to be visible and intelligible and theology too must make itself heard in human situations.

When revelation is understood in terms of timeless truths framed in divinely-given language, as in the propositional method, theology tends to be thought of as unchanging and unaffected by history and culture. Revelation is a richer reality—it is the personal self-offering of God and an offer of friendship and loving relationships. It relates dynamically to real

people. God revealed himself in ways that made sense to Israel in ancient times and later on to the non-Jewish Christians. God's gift was one that always entered real human contexts.¹²

Theology is charged with (re)-contextualizing the truth of revelation for present situations and expressing it in current forms of thought, so that the Bible might speak today as it did in the past. Though content does not change, communication changes and the search for better formulations never ceases. Theology is always an unfinished task. The expression of its truth will differ from culture to culture—different motifs will be noticed and accented because truth participates in a mission which involves two-way contextualization—he gospel is contextualized for people in their world and at the same time subjects cultural experience to the will of God. Here the diversity of the Bible, which is so uncomfortable for propositionalism, proves to be a positive resource for the church on mission because it can open itself to ever new and unexpected insights.

In terms of philosophy, theology is never done without making use of contemporary resources. In the past theologians have used Greek assets for Christian metaphysics. Aquinas constructed an impressive and influential theistic vision on the basis of a Platonized form of Aristotelianism. With Vatican II the dominance of his model was challenged and Catholic theologians are now freer to employ other categories. Evangelicals, on the other hand, lacking a hierarchy to decide such things, still struggle over whether they have liberty to use other intellectual tools which might serve better the dynamic biblical picture of God. We are still stuck at the stage where it is acceptable to use the ancient Hellenes, but not the modern Europeans.¹³

In terms of science, relations with theology were once harmonious, but in modern times have been disrupted by a number of crises. However, theology needs to be in dialogue with science since it is so important in modern culture—the warfare has gone on much too long. What has been discovered about nature must be integrated with the biblical message.

¹²Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), chap. 1.

¹³Norman L. Geisler sets forth a Thomistic doctrine of God, goes on to make observations about the openness model, and concludes that the free-will theists are nearly guilty of idolatry. See his *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New Open View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1997).

This is beginning to happen both with Christians in science making new moves and the scientific establishment being more effectively challenged to drop its absurd naturalistic bias. A new era of interaction is beginning.¹⁴

Evangelicals have to get over their fears born in the fundamentalist/modernist controversies. The specter of liberalism has kept us long enough from celebrating new possibilities and has robbed us of confidence in our imaginations. It has made us suspicious of new suggestions and even grumpy and mean-spirited at times. A new idea often gets greeted with fear-filled phrases like: "This is a dangerous trend" or "Does this cross over the line?" We seem to have lost the ability to believe that in some respects theology might actually move closer to the truth in our day. The fear of timeliness is debilitating and frustrates the ability to engage our generation. I am not advocating exegetical relativism or attempting to introduce worldly ideas into theology. I want to see us do better work and have deeper biblically-based convictions. With a little methodological maturation, there would be fewer failures and more achievements.¹⁵

Reform in the Doctrine of God

Another major area ripe for reform, a reform which could liberate evangelical theology in significant ways, is the doctrine of God. Postwar evangelicalism was dominated by deterministic theology in which God was seen as all-controlling, the One who ordains all things. This was standard fare in Gordon Clark and Carl Henry, in John Gerstner and Paul Jewett, in Cornelius Van Til and John Murray. It was a power-centered theology requiring deterministic freedom and no-risk providence. It is still being well articulated, but seems to be declining in influence within evangelicalism, both intellectually and demographically.¹⁶ It is a difficult position to hold biblically, philosophically, or practically and it is being effec-

¹⁴A helpful voice is John Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995).

¹⁵The best methodology in my opinion, and the one toward which I have been drawn over the years, is called the "Wesleyan quadrilateral." See Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) and W. Stephen Gunter, et al, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

¹⁶For an excellent statement of theological determinism by Paul Helm, see *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994). Interestingly, this book was issued by the same press in the same year as its opposite number, *The Openness of God* by Clark Pinnock and others.

tively eclipsed by the influx of Christians whose reformers are John Wesley and C. S. Lewis, rather than Martin Luther and John Calvin.

This truth came home to me in 1970 while reading the Bible. It suddenly dawned on me that there is a reciprocity between God and the world which classical theism does not make enough room for. I was struck by this verse in Hebrews and similar verses: "The good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them because it was not mixed with faith in the hearers" (Heb. 4:2). I came to see that God is interactive with creatures in time. God responds to what happens and makes his plans in relation to it. I realized that God, though having clear purposes, does not ordain every detail of history. I was drawn to a love-centered theology, with room for real freedom and risky providence.¹⁷ I was responding to one of the tasks of theology which is to grow in understanding and give more adequate expression to the whole truth of a very rich revelation of God.

The issue is an old one and the differences runs deep. Christians have always wondered how God can be supreme over the world and (at the same time) intimately involved in history. In the past, under the influence of Greek thought, theology has over-emphasized transcendence at the cost of depreciating God's personal nature and relations with creation. It gave the impression of God as a remote Being, a metaphysical iceberg, alienating of human significance. Today everywhere there is the sense that modifications are required on aspects of the doctrine of God. Evangelicals with their keen sense of the relationality of God are in a good position to help, though it remains to be seen whether the influence of tradition can be overcome in some of these ways.¹⁸

The trinitarian openness model proposes to modify classical theism and bring the doctrine of God more into line with the biblical portrayal of a personal God, while at the same time enhancing the intelligibility of the Christian message in the modern world.¹⁹ The model arises from a read-

¹⁷I tell the story of my change of mind in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1995, first published in 1989), chap. 1. The end-point of my journey is found in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994). A pilgrimage can take a while!

¹⁸Vincent Brummer captures the underlying issue in *Speaking of a Personal God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁹For a contemporary discussion on the social trinity, see John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

ing of the gospel narrative and captures the contemporary sense of the dynamism of reality. Though an ancient theme, the trinity doctrine fascinates contemporary theologians and philosophers because of the way it envisages loving relationality at the heart of the universe, the perfection of love in a God whose nature consists of three persons in communion. It is the very antithesis of self-sufficiency and the symbol of loving, interacting relationships. More than a mere doctrine, it signals a new Christian way to be human in the world by calling for embodied life which reflects God's own social reality. The social trinity may prove to be the key for the metaphysical understanding of how God can be both transcendent and genuinely responsive to events in the world.²⁰

How could an ancient symbol like the trinity become available in such a fresh way for today? Why was it not already exhausted by now? One reason goes back to the neglect of the biblical narrative. Often theologians have not looked to narrative to give perspectives on how to construe doctrinal texts and have missed (in this case) the social interactions of the divine persons in the Jesus' story. Another reason is the stubborn commitment to hellenistic ideals of divine perfection which take exception to the liveliness of trinitarian existence. Under influences of Greek philosophy, the idea of God as a communion of dynamic persons was overshadowed by the idea of God as pure actuality. It was made difficult even to think of God having "give and take" reciprocal relations with the world. God was never supposed to change vis-à-vis the world, although the world changes in relation to him. God was thought not to be affected by anything that happens in the world lest it disturb his serene unchangeableness. The result was the classical model which makes God remote and almost indifferent to what happens on earth. How very different it is from the biblical picture of God who responds to our prayers and rejoices when a lost son returns home. And how tragically problematic that it often does not incline people toward a valuing of the significance of human life.

²⁰Gregory A. Boyd, *Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-Polar Theism, Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) and Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie H. Suchocki, editors, *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 1997). On this point, for the time being, evangelical theologians like Boyd who show interest in selected process insights can expect to be labeled process theists, howbeit unfairly. In Boyd's case, there are moves afoot to have him removed from his position at Bethel College on the grounds that he is a non-evangelical.

But what a beautiful picture of God the social trinity supplies. The model allows for being and becoming in God. It envisages God being enriched by the being and becoming of the world. It sees God as an event of everlasting movement and dance which embraces the becoming of the world in its own trinitarian becoming. It does not see God as a solitary Ego, but as a communion of shared love. This model celebrates the sublime mutuality of personal interaction and at the same time sheds light on who we are and what the world is. It explains the subtle interactivity of nature, the social character of human life, and even the gift of incarnation which can now be viewed, not as a puzzling paradox, but as the characteristic gesture of a loving and self-emptying God.²¹

In a delightful way, the ancient trinitarian symbol of orthodoxy has become full of life and meaning for today. It holds out a vision of the divine beauty, not of some static being beyond us, unconcerned with us, unrelated to us. It pictures God as movement and communion which overflows into the world and invites us to participate in the divine nature. In a disposition of sheer benevolent openness, the triune God not only wills his own social existence, but desires to mirror it in the sociality of the created order. Thus the world itself is an expression of the overflow of God's delight with his own triune fellowship. The model of the trinitarian openness of God is just one example of the sort of theological fruitfulness which can result from using sounder methods in theology. It can help theology tell the story of Jesus more persuasively, with the promise that more and more people will make it their own story.

What kind of reception will this model get from theologians under the evangelical big tent? How will evangelicals handle this piece of theological creativity from their own colleagues? In his review of *The Openness of God* (1994), Roger Olson asked: "Have we become of age enough to avoid heresy charges and breast-beating jeremiads in response to a new doctrinal proposal that is so conscientiously based on biblical reflection rather than on rebellious accommodation to modern thought? This may be the test."²²

There are reasons why the proposal ought to be welcomed, but there are also reasons why it may not be. First, the model has strengths bibli-

²¹A book which lives up to its name is Colin E. Gunton's *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

²²*Christianity Today*, January 9, 1995, 32. The negative tone of all the ensuing responses that followed Olson's view (by Douglas Kelly, Timothy George, and Alister McGrath) are not reassuring.

cally, though it contradicts traditional exegesis which has been influenced by classical theism. It lifts up the dynamic portrait of God in the Scriptures and celebrates the social trinity, both of which have suffered much neglect. Nevertheless, by endorsing divine/world relationships which impact both parties and in proposing notions such as God taking risks in providence, it will inevitably collide with the classical synthesis and force evangelicals to make a choice between the God of the Bible and the God of the Greek philosophers. For all their talk about biblical authority, not to say inerrancy, I still wonder if the Bible will manage to win out among the evangelicals.²³

Second, in terms of God's attributes, the trinitarian openness model is theologically productive. It can articulate the perfections of a personal God and challenge the tendencies to depersonalization in the tradition. It exposes theology that is the one-sided in favor of transcendence and gives rise to expressions which we have long needed, such as God's self-surrendering power.²⁴ While exciting many, the charge will be made that it "shrinks" God, which from a hellenistic point of view it does. Critics will zero in particularly on the issue of present divine knowledge. The idea of God not knowing the future exhaustively is a new thought for orthodoxy and will attract strong resistance, even though it can appeal to many biblical intimations that the future is open for God to some degree (e.g., Ezek. 12:1-3; Jer. 3:7; etc.). On reflection, it may have been unwise to have linked the model of openness to the theory of present knowledge because the key issue is not omniscience, but personal and reciprocal relations between God and creatures. Specifically, the openness model runs the risk of dividing the proponents of openness from the classical Arminians and giving the Reformed critics a rift to work on. Nevertheless, I believe that present knowledge is the biblical view of God's knowledge and I accept the risks. The Arminian tradition, like the Reformed, is an evolving one and I believe will see that the model of the openness of God is the way to go.²⁵

²³A superb biblical study which brings out the openness of God clearly is Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

²⁴Karl Barth began rethinking the categories and Hendrikus Berkhof has described the results in *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), chaps. 18-22.

²⁵Fretheim lays out the biblical basis for the idea of the present knowledge of God in *The Suffering of God*, chap. 4.

Third, in relation to philosophy, the openness model challenges the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology and calls for more dynamic ways of thinking about God. The critics are right—not just the Bible but philosophy enters into this debate. What they generally mean is that openness theists are flirting with process theologians. But the real problem is otherwise. Traditional theology has been wedded (even when it was Arminian) to Greek views of divine unchangeability which are in sharp tension with thinking of God as personal and relational. For some reason, people are very attached to this piece of intellectual tradition, usually without being aware of it as a tradition or reflecting on how unscriptural it is. I suppose it is attractive because it delivers (or appears to deliver) a high degree of security in the divine planning. To that extent it stands in the way of people fully appreciating the vision of God's dynamic interactions with the world and the risks entailed. I have little doubt, however, which is the winning ticket. Theism cannot continue to do its work against the horizon of ancient metaphysics. Sooner or later we will have to join modern experience. The fact is that we need a resource which can help us put love in the center of theology. Plato cannot help us—maybe Whitehead can.

Fourth, the openness of God model has enormous practical strengths. Think of the motivation it provides by its insistence that our lives really matter and that we are the way God's will gets done on earth! This explains why ordinary Christians tend naturally to be "openness theists" because it is next to impossible to function in any other way. If God has ordained every detail of history, why do anything? Prayer (for example) implies a give-and-take model of the God/world relationship, if indeed God responds to the cries of his people. What a difference it makes if our lives affect God's plans and if what we do really matters! How important for our walk with God to know if the routes of providence are still open. How important to know whether God relates to us as persons or manipulates us. How can classical theism possibly handle the problem of evil, since so much of it proves that a good God cannot be the ultimate cause of everything on earth? Openness theism on the other hand does not see God in omni-causal terms and is not afflicted by these particular difficulties. One of the real contributions of openness theism is the way it resolves the tension and disparity between evangelical experience (dynamic) and evangelical theology (usually undynamic). Our hearts place love at the center, but not our formal theologies because they are prevented from doing so by philosophical assumptions.

In the area of the doctrine of God, there are fears to overcome. Besides the standard evangelical fear of theological change that comes from the liberal trauma, there is the fear involved in the area of trust. Little trust is needed if God is a metaphysical iceberg, but a good deal is needed if there is a living God. One of the attractions of classical theism is its view of history as all sewed up, but it is not an attraction we should be encouraging. God calls us to follow him on a pilgrimage into the open future.

Conclusion

A great opportunity exists for fruitfulness in theology and evangelical theologians can certainly contribute to it. If thus far their contributions have been minimal, were they to correct certain of their weaknesses, they would be in a strong position to help. Distancing ourselves from rational/propositionalism and theological/omni-causalism would take us far in the direction of wider engagements and larger visions.²⁶ What is required is that we grow as hearers of the Word of God and accept the sometimes painful consequences of growing up. I love the evangelical heritage, but have been burdened by its difficulties my whole life. They have set me off on tangents and prevented me from doing the quality of work that I would have wished. Fortunately, a whole new generation of evangelicals is rising which recognizes these problems and will be able to transcend them ever more effectively. Theology is an unfinished task and a venture in hope. May it be that our vision of truth will be continually enlarged through interaction with others on the way to fullness of life in the future of God.

²⁶Were I to add a third area of reform, it would be to make the Holy Spirit as central in theology as it is in biblical thinking. Perhaps it will be the pentecostals in the ranks of the new pietists who will improve this matter. In the meantime, I have had some thoughts. See my *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

RECONNECTING THE MEANS TO THE END: A WESLEYAN PRESCRIPTION FOR THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT

by

Randy L. Maddox

For Morris Weigelt¹

In 1994 Keith Drury had the courage to say publicly what many other insiders have sensed for some time—that the (North American) holiness movement is dead!² He immediately added that the problem was not declining membership. The traditional holiness denominations have done better than most others on this count. But Drury noted that this supposed success is one aspect of the demise of these groups as a focused movement. The movement originally gathered around a distinctive emphasis on holiness of heart and life as the goal for all Christians. The member denominations now focus more on church growth and on being assimilated into “respectable” generic American evangelicalism. The clear result is that the characteristic holiness proclamation of entire sanctification has been broadly abandoned. Indeed, Drury suggests that *any* expectation of regenerating transformation in the Christian life (i.e., even initial sanctification) is becoming increasingly rare.

¹This essay is dedicated to Dr. Morris Weigelt, under whom I began my studies as a religion major twenty-five years ago, and who has been a leader in recent efforts to recover disciplines of spiritual formation in holiness churches.

²Keith Drury, “The Holiness Movement is Dead,” *Holiness Digest* 8.1 (Winter 1994): 13-15.

If the notion of true holiness of heart and life, or Christian Perfection, were only an idiosyncratic creation of the American Holiness Movement, then the transition that Drury is describing might be viewed with mere historical interest, or even be evaluated positively as a return to the mainstream of Christianity. But if the pursuit of such holiness is considered instead a central ideal of the catholic Christian faith, then this transition becomes another accommodation to mediocrity in Christian life. As one who shares the second evaluation, I sympathize deeply with Drury's concern to find a way to reverse this demise.

But how can such a reversal be best effected? Drury connects the decline in emphasis on holiness to a period of overreaction against earlier theological and practical abuses within the movement, which he blames for deflecting holiness denominations from convincing the generations of preachers and laity now in their 40s, 30s, and 20s of the positive importance of entire sanctification. Accordingly, his main remedy appears to be a renewed emphasis on preaching boldly (and enforcing disciplinarily!) the ideal of *instantaneous* conversion and *instantaneous* entire sanctification.³ I do not consider this prescription very likely to be effective; my goal in this paper is to explain why, and to suggest an alternative.

I. Focusing the Diagnosis of the Present Malady

Effective treatment of a malady is dependent on accurate diagnosis of its underlying causes. As one within the generations in question, raised in a holiness church and educated for ministry in holiness schools, I can confirm Drury's judgment that most of my peers shared with me a dissatisfaction with the models of the sanctified life that dominated our upbringing. But our dissatisfaction was not totally reactionary. For many of us it was precisely because we *had* imbibed a conviction of the importance of holiness of heart and life that we were so frustrated: we sympathized with the goal to which we were repeatedly called, but found the means typically offered for achieving it to be ineffective. In particular, we sought instantaneous entire sanctification through innumerable trips to the altar, and then puzzled over why the impact of these "experiences" so consistently drained away. The reluctant conclusion most often reached was that the goal was unrealistic, that we were constitutionally incapable

³See *ibid*, 15.

of experiencing it. *That* is why so many in our generations have let the topic of Christian Perfection fade from view (and why some are extending similar conclusions to the possibility of *any* spiritual regeneration).

In other words, I question Drury's diagnosis that the increasing neglect of—indeed, embarrassment about—Christian Perfection in holiness circles should be attributed mainly to a deficiency over the last forty years in proclaiming the importance of instantaneous entire sanctification. I would suggest that the deeper cause is instead the very tendency of the movement to focus the notion of holiness so heavily on the achievements of such an *instant* when one responds to the proclamation. This focus has led to a relative neglect of the equally essential dimension of spiritual growth in achieving full holiness of heart and life, and of the various means of grace that nurture this growth.

This suggestion is hardly new. It was advanced over forty years ago by John Peters in one of the first insider critiques of the understanding of Christian Perfection in the holiness movement.⁴ Peters framed his critique by comparing the understanding of Christian Perfection and its nurture that were current in holiness circles with the teachings of John Wesley. His initial efforts, combined with a concurrent republication of Wesley's *Works* that made these writings more available to holiness scholars,⁵ sparked a growing realization of the differences between Wesley's model of the sanctified life and that prominent in holiness circles. The outcome has been mounting calls for recovering Wesley's richer network of means for nurturing Christian holiness.⁶

⁴See John Leland Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Pierce & Washabaugh, 1956; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 184-6. Peters was raised and educated in the Church of the Nazarene.

⁵Wesley Tracy notes that it was common for those in holiness schools from the 1940s into the 1960s to complete their education without being expected to read a single page of Wesley ("Foreword," *A Layman's Guide to Sanctification*, by H. Ray Dunning [Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1991], 10-11). This began to turn around when the *Works of Wesley* were reissued by Zondervan (a publisher catering to holiness circles) in 1958.

⁶Two of the clearest recent examples are Paul Merritt Bassett, "Wesleyan Words in the Nineteenth-Century World: 'Sin,' A Case Study," *Evangelical Journal* 8 (1990): 15-40; esp. 30-2; and Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1992).

As my title suggests, I share the conviction that Wesley's heirs in contemporary holiness churches would benefit from recovering his full model of Christian nurture. But how hopeful is such a recovery? And what means are most likely to foster it? Answers to these questions require a further level of diagnosis. In particular, it is important to discern what led the holiness movement to revise Wesley's model so drastically in the first place.

In their recent comparative work, scholars have identified such contributing factors to the holiness revisions as (1) the revivalist context of American religion with its emphasis on immediacy and crisis, (2) the exegetical equation (from John Fletcher) of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with entire sanctification, and (3) the tendency of holiness preaching to portray inbred sin as a material-like substance.⁷ While each of these is significant, as I have puzzled over the developments I have become convinced that another factor is interwoven among them, perhaps as a thread that links them together. My interest in this possible interconnecting factor has grown as I have sensed how it also helps explain the simultaneous demise of Wesley's model of Christian nurture among those American Methodists who rejected the emerging holiness movement.⁸

This factor, which I am proposing needs greater attention in current attempts to revitalize the holiness movement, involves the centrality of assumptions (whether explicit or tacit) about "moral psychology" to both theoretical models of the nature of spiritual life and practical models for nurturing that life. Wesley's model of holiness of heart and life was consciously framed within a very specific moral psychology. I have shown previously that Wesley's immediate heirs decisively (though without realizing it!) rejected his moral psychology, opting for an alternative psychology within which his distinctive emphases regarding Christian Perfection made little sense. The result was pressure either to abandon the notion of Christian Perfection or to reformulate it in terms that fit the alternative moral psychology. The ensuing ferment led to the split in North America between Wesley's mainline-Methodist and his holiness descendants.⁹ My

⁷Cf. Melvin Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, by M. E. Dieter, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 11-46.

⁸Cf. Randy L. Maddox, "Social Grace: The Eclipse of the Church as a Means of Grace in American Methodism," in *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu*, edited by Tim Macquiban (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1994), 131-60.

⁹Randy L. Maddox, "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 51.1 (1996): 151-72.

earlier analysis focused on this split. I want to extend it now to consider later developments in the holiness wing of the split. My hope is that consideration of the dimension of moral psychology will help to enlighten why this wing has reached the present malaise, and what the most promising agenda is for recovering Wesley's overall model of holiness of heart and life.

II. The Range of Alternatives In Moral Psychology

"Moral psychology," as I am using the term, refers to one's fundamental assumptions about the dynamics that account for human moral choice and action. It involves the range of possible responses to the questions: Are our options truly open in any sense at the juncture of a moral choice or act? If so, what hinders us from choosing as we ought? And, what would most effectively "free" us to choose differently? An awareness of the major alternatives on these issues will provide an instructive backdrop for our focal topic (relate the following discussion to the chart in Appendix A).¹⁰

One span of options organizing these alternatives focuses on the identification and relative valuation of the motivating dynamics behind moral choice and action. From the earliest roots of Western culture this span has been cast in terms of a contrast between the rational and the passionate dimensions of our nature. This casting creates three major alternative valuations. Either one stresses the volitional primacy of the rational dimension, or this primacy is assigned to the passionate dimension, or one insists that authentic volition is more holistic, integrating both dimensions to some degree.

¹⁰Moral psychology was a common academic topic into the nineteenth century. But then considerations of ethics and psychology rapidly separated, often being defined in contrast with one another (as normative versus descriptive). This separation has recently been challenged, sparking renewed serious philosophical and historical considerations of the topic. For a beginning orientation to the issues, see such books as Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Albrecht Diehle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982); Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); and Justin Oakley, *Morality and the Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 1992). The following analysis is informed by these and many other studies. The typology that I suggest is my own, since no standard typology (or terminology!) has yet been achieved.

The intersecting set of options that multiplies the range of alternatives in moral psychology focuses on the nature of the relationship between motivating dynamics and actual moral volition. At one extreme of this set is the recurrent “determinist” assumption that motivating dynamics stringently and exhaustively account for human choice and action, a view that ultimately reduces the will to its motivating dynamics. The starkest possible contrast to this would be an “indeterminist” insistence on the pure autonomy of human willing, denying any significant influence or constraint of motivating dynamics on human moral choices. While determinists like to argue that this is the only alternative, and rightly dismiss it as incoherent, it has had few serious exponents. The majority of those reflecting on these issues, being uncomfortable with determinism, have turned instead to a “self-determinist” conception of the will. This mediating strategy acknowledges the significant influence of motivating dynamics on human choice and action, but defends some degree of autonomy for a person’s will as the final arbitrator of moral volition—allowing persons at times to veto even the strongest motives.

When the two sets of options are overlaid, three classic—albeit extreme—alternatives in moral psychology emerge in the deterministic camp. A pure *intellectualist* (like some see in Socrates) assumes that moral action is initiated solely, and necessarily, by one’s rational conviction of the goodness of an action (wrong actions being attributed to false conviction). In essence, intellectual conviction *is* the will, with any felt motives being functions of that conviction. In stark contrast, a strong *naturalist* (like Hume at his most rhetorical moments) insists that what we sense as our will is simply the routine expression of our naturalistic passions (a term casting our appetites, drives, emotional reactions, and so on as ways we *suffer* the impact of our givenness). In this case, any intellectual deliberation involved in moral choice is reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of these irrational determining causes. *Voluntarists* (like Hobbes) join naturalists in denying that intellectual conviction alone is sufficient to move humans to action, but they are unhappy with the reduction of intellect to a function of irrational passions. They prefer to talk about the will as the holistic orientation of the person, incorporating a role for the deterministic impact of rational persuasion within the larger propensities that dictate our choices and actions.

On the self-determinist side of the typology, the focal consideration is less about which motivating dynamics *do* influence our moral choices

and actions and more about which dynamics *ought* to control these. The broad distinguishing question is whether humans are assumed to have greater autonomy (and hence moral integrity) in volition when they: (1) bring the irrational passions under rational control, (2) reject false rational constraints upon the expression of the passions, or (3) recognize and nurture more holistic inclinations to action? Within each of the major alternatives framed by this question can be discerned a spectrum of more subtle differing emphases about what maximizes “freedom” for moral choice and action.¹¹

On the side of the spectrum nearer determinism are those who view the human inclination to give primacy to the preferred freeing motivational dynamic as natural, arising almost spontaneously. The only problem, they warn, is that this inclination can be thwarted (unlike in full determinism), to the detriment of our moral sensitivity and ability. On the side approaching theoretical indeterminism are those who have imbibed the Enlightenment’s tendency to equate freedom with casting off all prior influences. They embrace a decisionistic ideal in which all existing inclinations are viewed ultimately as obstacles to be transcended in the praiseworthy effort to achieve (fleeting!) moral autonomy. In the tension between these alternatives stand those who believe that both sides view motivating dynamics in too static of terms. They insist that inclinations are malleable in nature, capable of being strengthened (or weakened!) and redirected by purposeful interaction. Their point is that careful habituation of the proper inclinations will—somewhat ironically—*increase* one’s freedom from constraints in moral choice and action.

Thus it is that we have the debates among self-determinists between those who think that moral integrity and freedom is ultimately grounded in removing any thwarts to our *spontaneous rational control* of the pas-

¹¹When determinists speak about human moral choices as in any way free, they define this freedom in a “compatibilist” fashion. That is, they try to account for the sense of freedom in a manner compatible with the claim that no other outcome was possible in a given case than the one that actually occurred. For example, intellectualists argue that a decision is free because it is rational (rather than irrationally coerced), even though we cannot resist rational conviction. Similarly, voluntarists and naturalists equate human freedom with having actions determined by internal rather than external factors. By contrast, these self-determinist debates over maximizing freedom assume a definition that is “incompatibilist,” i.e., we are free only to the extent there is some real possibility (however small) of alternative choice or action.

sions (Socrates as others read him), those who emphasize more the need to develop *habituated rational control* of the passions (like Plato), and those urging us not to rely on any inclinations, but to assert *decisionistic rational control* over the habitual and passional dimensions of life (Kant), all in stark contrast with those who place their hope instead in casting off the numerous cultural and intellectual fetters on *spontaneous expression* of our natural—therefore, good—passions (Rousseau), those who strive to develop *habituated expression* of motivating passions so as to enjoy their benefit (prudent hedonism), and those who simply call us to bold *decisionistic expression* of our liberating passions (such as Nietzsche’s “will to power”). Standing between these two polar camps are those who locate moral freedom more in owning our holistic *spontaneous sentiments* (like Hutcheson’s moral sentiments), or in nurturing holistic *habituated virtues* (Aristotle), or finally in simple *decisionistic self-assertion* (à la Sartre).

Such are the classic philosophical expressions of alternative moral psychologies. In order to relate Wesley to this spectrum, we need next to consider briefly how Christians have historically appropriated these alternatives (cf. Appendix B). The initial generation of Christians were too involved in the struggle for survival to engage in extended interaction with the philosophical streams of their Greco-Roman context. Even so, one can discern in most of their writings an uncomfortableness with the fatalism of surrounding religious and philosophical currents. This became more evident as explicit dialogue with alternative moral psychologies began. While there were Gnostic flirtations with intellectualism in Christian circles, more common was Clement of Alexandria’s strong endorsement of self-determinism, in the particular form of Plato’s emphasis on habituated rational control of the passions.¹²

This appropriation of Plato’s moral psychology found broad continuing representation in the church, but it also encountered an influential challenger in the Western church in the person of St. Augustine. Augustine had struggled and failed in his own spiritual pilgrimage to gain habituated rational control over his passions. He drew two conclusions from this failure: (1) that such attempts trust in ineffective human efforts rather than in divine gracious intervention; and (2) that reason is more the slave

¹²Cf. David C. Aune, “Mastery of the Passions: Philo, 4 Maccabees and Earliest Christianity,” in *Hellenization Revisited*, edited by Wendy Helleman (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 125-58.

than the master of the passions. The alternative moral psychology that Augustine developed remains one of the clearest examples of (deterministic) voluntarism in Christian thought.¹³ He argued that all human moral choices flow from preexisting holistic affections like love or hate. As a result of the fall, we humans are born with bent affections that can give rise only to sinful actions. Nothing we attempt in our own power can successfully suppress or remove these bent affections. However, in regeneration God graciously implants (in the elect) new affections that then *naturally* manifest themselves in holy living—within the constraints of our present conflicted situation.

Augustine's controversial proposal served to highlight that Christian appropriations of moral psychology must relate this topic to our central convictions about human depravity and the necessity of God's redemptive grace. For Augustine, any defense of self-determination stood in direct conflict with the affirmation that salvation is by grace. Most of his successors have been dissatisfied with this dichotomous assumption. For example, those who retained the Platonic moral psychology came to emphasize as strongly as Augustine that even the earliest ability we have to exert rational self-determination over the troublesome irrational passions (whose disorder they attribute to the Fall) is a gift of grace—whether a remaining glimmer of the grace of creation or the most nascent universal expression of God's redemptive gracious work. Unlike Augustine, however, they portrayed grace as *empowering* the self-determining role of our will, rather than *overpowering* it.¹⁴

While such nuanced approaches to the interrelationship of grace and human effort offered an alternative to Augustine's first conclusion, they did not necessarily address the second, his rejection of the sufficiency of rational conviction to effect moral action. Many Medieval scholastics simply dismissed this critique, affirming reason as the gracious provision for inclining us spontaneously to moral action—unless we allow our passions to thwart it. Others like Duns Scotus, who found this alternative arid and

¹³A particularly helpful analysis of Augustine's moral psychology is James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁴For a good (Eastern church) case in point, see John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, Bk. II, chap. 12 (translated by Frederic Chase as volume 27 of *The Fathers of the Church* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958], 235-6).

incipiently determinist, used Augustine's insistence on the subservience of reason to the holistic will to defend (ironically) a form of decisionistic self-assertion. The more balanced and influential alternative to both voluntarism and intellectualism in the Medieval church awaited the rehabilitation of Aristotle, particularly Aquinas' mature embrace of his model of habituated virtues.¹⁵ Aquinas came to value the way that Aristotle's model implied an ever deepening co-operation of God and humanity in the spiritual life, and the way that it made sense of how living in spiritual disciplines provides persons with a progressive freedom for Christlike action.

Characteristically, the points valued by Aquinas were more commonly feared by Protestants as verging on works-righteousness. Some like Luther and Calvin found themselves pushed back towards Augustine's voluntarism in the effort to emphasize the priority of God's grace in salvation. Other Protestants balked at the apparent loss of human integrity involved in this move. The majority preferred to stress that God's unmerited grace restores to believers some propensity to self-determination, provided that we do not thwart this gracious work. Protestant scholastics typically focused this gracious transformation in the enlightenment of the mind, which enables humans to restore rational primacy over the troublesome passions. Pietists rebutted that true liberty is grounded in the holistic sentiments awakened when our hearts experience the empowering love of God (a model given later influential expression by Schleiermacher). Those most adamant about self-determination proved ready recruits for the decisionistic emphases of emerging Enlightenment thought. Only the most fringe groups (some libertines) flirted with a moral psychology that gave independent primacy to the passions.

III. Wesley's "Affectional" Model of Holiness of Heart and Life

By virtue of its fluctuating political dynamics, representatives of the full range of Christian appropriations of moral psychology could be found in Wesley's Anglican context. However, the most influential voices at the

¹⁵The issue of Aquinas's moral psychology, and his apparent move from initial emphasis on spontaneous rational control to a mature focus on habituated virtues, is a matter of ongoing scholarly debate. To enter the debate, compare James Keenan, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's "Summa Theologiae"* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992) to Jeffrey Peter Hause, "Thomas Aquinas on the Will and Moral Responsibility" (Cornell University Ph.D. thesis, 1995).

beginning of his century championed the Platonic model of habituated rational control of the passions.¹⁶ This helps account for overtones of this model in Wesley's early prescriptions for the spiritual life.¹⁷ It also casts in bold relief the changing emphases that soon began to shape his mature model of Christian spirituality.

These changes were sparked by Wesley's personal confrontation with the limitations of the Platonic model highlighted by the Augustinian tradition. His deeper encounter with this tradition (via the English Moravians) at the climax of a period of spiritual struggle sensitized Wesley to the subtle tendency of a preoccupation with human habit formation to eclipse the conviction of God's gracious prevenience in salvation. The encounter also reenforced his growing doubts about the ability of rational conviction alone to effect human volition. But Wesley could not accept Augustine's deterministic alternative of voluntarism. And he quickly became suspicious of the quietist tendencies in the Moravians' pietistic emphasis on spontaneous sentiments. So where was he to turn?

Wesley's way forward turned out to be paved by his embrace of the empiricist turn in eighteenth-century British philosophy. For empiricism, truth is experienced receptively by the human intellect, not preexistent within it, nor imposed by it upon our experience. In moral psychology this philosophical conviction led to the parallel insistence that humans are moved to action only as we are experientially affected. To use a practical example, they held that rational persuasion of the rightness of loving others cannot of itself move us to do so; we are ultimately enabled to love others only as we experience love ourselves. The reason for this, they argued, is that "will" is not a mere cipher for intellectual conviction, nor

¹⁶Two helpful studies that place Wesley in this context are Robin W. Lovin, "The Physics of True Virtue," in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, ed. Theodore H. Runyon (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1985), 264-72, and Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁷Perhaps the clearest example is in Sermon 142 (1731), "The Wisdom of Winning Souls," §II, *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984ff), 4:313: ". . . when due care has been used to strengthen his understanding, then 'tis time to use the other great means of winning souls, namely, the regulating of his affections. Indeed without doing this the other can't be done thoroughly—he that would well enlighten the head must cleanse the heart. Otherwise the disorder of the will again disorders the understanding. . . ."

is it a repository of volitional spontaneity; it is a set of responsive holistic “affections” that must be engaged in order to incite us to action.

Wesley self-consciously appropriated this empiricist-inspired *affectional* moral psychology.¹⁸ It is reflected in his typical list of the faculties that constitute the Image of God in humanity: understanding, will, liberty and conscience. “Will” is used in this list as an inclusive term for the various affections. These affections are not simply feelings. They are the indispensable motivating inclinations behind human action. In their ideal expression they integrate the rational and emotional dimensions of human life into holistic inclinations toward action (like love). While provocative of human action, the affections have a crucial receptive dimension as well. They are not self-causative, but are awakened and thrive *in response* to experience of external reality. In what Wesley held as the crucial instance, it is only in response to our experience of God’s gracious love for us, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that our affection of love for God and others is awakened and grows.¹⁹

This grounding of moral volition in responsive holistic affections shares obvious similarities with Augustine. It also calls to mind empiricists like Hume who presented the influence of our passions upon our actions as invincible, thereby undermining human freedom. Wesley’s way of avoiding this implication was to include among our human capacities “liberty,” which he carefully distinguished from “will.” While the affections (i.e., the will) responsively provide our various actual inclinations to action, liberty is our limited autonomous capacity to *refuse* to enact any particular inclination. Though we cannot self-generate love, we do have the liberty to stifle responsive loving! This insistence distanced Wesley’s mature moral psychology from voluntarism.

¹⁸This point is amply demonstrated in Richard B. Steele, “*Gracious Affections*” and “*True Virtue*” according to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994); and Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989). For further discussion and documentation of the following summary of Wesley, see Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994).

¹⁹This point permeates Wesley’s works. For a few examples, see *Character of a Methodist*, §13, *Works*, 9:39; *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, §61, *Works*, 11:70; *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt. I, §1.3, *Works*, 11:106; Sermon 10, “The Witness of the Spirit I,” §1.8, *Works*, 1:274; and Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” §17, *Works*, 4:67.

To appreciate how his developed views also differed from the model of spontaneous sentiments (with its quietist tendencies), we need to bring into our discussion Wesley's interest in moral "tempers."²⁰ He drew on a common eighteenth-century sense of this word to affirm that human affections need not be simply transitory; they can be focused and strengthened into enduring dispositions. The capacity for simple, responsive love is an affection; an enduring disposition to love is a (holy) temper. The crucial point for our discussion is that, for Wesley, God does not typically infuse holy tempers instantaneously. Rather, God's regenerating grace awakens in believers the "seeds" of such virtues. These seeds then strengthen and take shape as we "grow in grace."²¹ Given liberty, this growth involves responsible cooperation, for we could instead neglect or stifle God's gracious empowerment.

By now it should be clear that Wesley's mature moral psychology comes closest to the habituated virtue model of Aquinas. This made it necessary for him to address repeatedly the fear that emphasis on forming virtues was a type of works righteousness. His basic rebuttal was to reiterate the responsive nature of the affections, which requires a spiraling interaction of God's *gracious* prevenience and our *responsible* cooperation throughout the Christian journey.²² The potential strength of this response was the alternative it offered to the unfortunate tendency in Western Christian debates of posing God's agency and human agency as mutually exclusive in the process of salvation—whether by identifying God's agency with instantaneous changes while human agency accounts for gradual changes, linking God with initial changes while attributing to humans any later changes, or whatever.²³

With his mature moral psychology clarified, we need to consider next how integral it was to Wesley's endorsement of Christian perfection

²⁰Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 69-70; and Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Topography of the Heart: Dispositions, Tempers and Affections," *Methodist History* 36(1998), 162-175.

²¹Cf. *Minutes* (2 Aug. 1745), Q. 1, in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 152. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 178-9, for a discussion of two passages where Wesley argues that holy tempers can be implanted in a fully mature state.

²²Cf. his classic Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," *Works*, 3:199-209.

²³For some comments on Wesley's own incomplete recognition of this alternative, see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 153-4.

and his emphasis on the means of grace in the pursuit of this goal. This is signaled by the centrality of the tempers to his understanding of both sin and holiness. In the case of sin, he insisted that the issue was more than individual wrong actions. He frequently discussed sin in terms of a three-fold division: sinful nature or tempers, sinful words, and sinful actions. The point of this division was that sinful actions and words *flow from* corrupted tempers, so the problem of sin must ultimately be addressed at this affectional level. Correspondingly, Wesley's typical definition of Christian life placed primary emphasis on this inward dimension, "the renewal of our heart after the image of [God who] created us."²⁴ This renewal involves both the enlivening of our affections in response to the effect of God's graciously communicated loving Presence and the tempering of these affections into holy dispositions. Since holiness of thought, word, and action would flow from such renewal, Wesley could identify the essential goal of all true religion as the recovery of holy tempers.²⁵

This makes the means of grace central to true religion as well, since Wesley frequently warned his followers of the folly of seeking the end of holy tempers apart from the means that God has graciously provided.²⁶ Reflecting his conviction of God's *responsible grace*, Wesley valued the means of grace both as avenues through which God conveys the gracious Presence that enables our responsive growth in holiness and as exercises by which we responsibly nurture that holiness.²⁷ Reflecting his holistic psychology, his recommendations to his followers interwove both means that present rational enlightenment or challenge and means designed to nurture our affective openness and responsiveness to God's loving Presence. Reflecting his appreciation for the variety of ways in which God's love is mediated, including particularly its mediation through other persons, Wesley made communal means of grace central to his movement, rejecting the solitary search for holiness.²⁸

²⁴*Journal* (13 Sept. 1739), *Works*, 19:97.

²⁵Sermon 91, "On Charity," §III.12, *Works*, 3:306.

²⁶For three of the best known examples, see "Letter to Count Zinzendorf" and the "Church at Herrnhut" (5-8 Aug. 1740), *Works*, 26:27; Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, 1:378-97; and "Letter to William Law" (6 Jan. 1756), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 3:366.

²⁷This thesis is ably defended in Knight, *Presence of God*.

²⁸See Sermon 24, "Sermon on the Mount IV," §I.1, *Works*, 1:533-4; and *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1939), Preface, §§4-5, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 14:321.

How close did Wesley hope we could come in this life, through responsive participation in such means of grace, to the end of recovered holy tempers? He is well-known for the claim that *entire* sanctification is a present possibility for Christians. The place to begin unpacking this claim is to stress that entire sanctification (or Christian Perfection) is not an isolated reality for Wesley, but a dynamic level of maturity within the larger process of sanctification, the level characteristic of *adult* Christian life. Since he considered love to be the essence of Christian life, he could define Christian Perfection as “the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions.”²⁹ Notice that love is not only said to be present, it is *ruling*. God’s love is shed abroad in the lives of all Christians, awakening their responsive love for God and others. But this love is often weak, sporadic, and contested by contrary affections in new believers. In the lives of the entirely sanctified Wesley maintained that it is strengthened and patterned “to the point that there is no mixture of any contrary affections—all is peace and harmony.”³⁰

Affections contrary to love would be “inward sin.” Wesley believed that this inward sin was overcome in entire sanctification. In a few instances he described this overcoming as a “rooting out” or “destruction” of inward sin. As he came to realize, this language is problematic because talk of the destruction of sinful affections can connote the impossibility of their return. By contrast, Wesley became convinced of the sad reality that sinful affections (and resulting outward sins) may reemerge in lives that had been ruled by love. How could one express the benefits of Christian Perfection without obscuring this fact? When Wesley was pressed directly on this point he offered the alternative account that in the soul of an entirely sanctified person holy tempers are *presently* reigning to the point of “driving out” opposing tempers (although these may return).³¹

At this juncture it is important to remember that Wesley’s focus on affections in describing Christian Perfection was not intended as an alternative to actions. He assumed that acts of love would flow from a temper of love. Yet, he also recognized that ignorance, mistakes, and other human

²⁹“Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:446.

³⁰Sermon 83, “On Patience,” §10, *Works*, 3:176.

³¹Letter to Joseph Benson (5 Oct. 1770), *Letters* (Telford), 5:203-4. Note also the definition of Christian Perfection as “love filling the heart, expelling pride, anger, desire, self-will...,” in *Farther Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection*, Q. 12, *Works* (Jackson), 11:418.

frailties often distort the passage from affection to action. It was in this sense that he tired of the debate over whether Christian Perfection was “sinless.” He did indeed believe that it consisted in holy tempers, but not that it was characterized by infallible expression of those tempers in actions. Perhaps the best way to capture Wesley’s affectional view of entire sanctification, then, is to say that he was convinced that the Christian life did not have to remain a life of perpetual struggle. He believed that our sin-distorted human lives can be responsibly transformed through God’s loving grace to the point where we are truly freed to love God and others consistently. Christians can aspire to take on the disposition of Christ, and to live out that disposition within the constraints of our human infirmities.³² To deny this possibility would be to deny the sufficiency of God’s empowering grace—to make the power of sin greater than that of grace.

IV. Nineteenth-Century Methodist Models of Christian Perfection

The more one appreciates how centrally Wesley’s conception of holiness of heart and life was framed by his moral psychology, the easier it is to understand how difficult it might be to maintain this conception if one rejected his moral psychology. As mentioned earlier, this is exactly the situation in which Wesley’s theological descendants rapidly placed themselves, particularly in the North American context. I need to rehearse enough of this story to set the stage for looking at later developments in the (Wesleyan) Holiness Movement.³³

The dismissal of Wesley’s affectional moral psychology by his immediate heirs was not an isolated phenomenon. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed some extreme forms of empiricism, particularly David Hume’s epistemological skepticism and psychological naturalism. The deterministic implications of Hume’s equation of the will with the passions called forth strong reactions, most notably that of Thomas Reid. Reid rejected the identification of the will with the affections (of which he viewed the passions a subset), insisting that it was

³²Note the description of Christian Perfection in terms of taking on the disposition of Christ in Sermon 76, “On Perfection,” §1.5, *Works*, 3:74.

³³Further details and documentation for this section of the paper are in Maddox, “Holiness of Heart and Life,” 156ff. Note, however, that continuing reflection has led me to distinguish in this paper variations of what I class together there as “intellectualist” moral psychologies.

instead our rational autonomy over all stimuli toward action. He allowed to Hume that the affections are arational, if not irrational, but argued that this rendered them strictly *amoral*. Likewise, Reid's maxim that only intentional acts have moral status led him to depict habituated tendencies (tempers) as also *amoral*, if not indeed subversive of truly moral choice, since they operate with minimal conscious intentionality. With this combination, Reid was sketching out the decisionistic rational control moral psychology that quickly came to dominate modern thought!

The rapidity with which Methodists appropriated this moral psychology owed in large part to the prominence that debates with the Calvinists took in shaping Methodist self-identity during this period. Central to these debates were the writings of Jonathan Edwards. In his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746) and later works Edwards developed an affectional moral psychology remarkably like that of Wesley. The crucial difference was that Edwards did not share Wesley's conviction of *responsible grace*. He allowed humans no "liberty" to refuse enacting their dominant affections. Rather, echoing Augustine's voluntarism, he argued that fallen humanity are free only to sin, and that the holy tempers that account for the virtuous acts of believers are infused unilaterally by God in their mature state. Edwards' arguments were so influential that an affectional moral psychology was soon equated with voluntarism, even among Methodists. As a result, when they took up decisionistic rational control emphases to rebut Edwards, nineteenth-century Methodists generally did not recognize that they were moving counter to the course that Wesley had chosen.

The transition toward a rationalist and decisionistic moral psychology can actually be noticed already in Wesley's favored coworker John Fletcher, and traced through the influential second generation British theologians Adam Clarke and Richard Watson. In part because of its fit with revolutionary and revivalist convictions, this revised moral psychology quickly assumed dominance among American Methodists. It held nearly official status through most of the nineteenth century in the moral philosophy texts placed on the required course of study for preachers, and it permeated the influential theological works of the period. As a result, most Methodists came to view the "will" as our autonomous ability to assert rational control over our various motivating dynamics, thereby freeing ourselves to make moral choices. Emotional or affectional motivating dynamics were assumed to be blind (arational), hence technically amoral

in character. Likewise, habits and inclinations were broadly judged to have moral status only when voluntarily embraced, and often considered more an obstacle to than a facilitator of truly moral action.

Adopting such differing emphases from Wesley's affectional moral psychology was bound to impact his correlated conviction that true holiness of heart and life is achievable through the nurture of a holistic set of means of grace. Indeed, it set off a debate among American Methodists in which all sides found it necessary to revise Wesley's model.³⁴ The greatest revisions were by those who stressed most the decisionistic aspect of the new moral psychology. Within decisionistic models, a "virtuous" person is not one who has nurtured inclinations towards desired moral behavior, but one who heroically rises above all inclinations in an autonomous moral act. Moreover, this validation applies only to that act, and must be won anew with each subsequent decision. On such terms, it is no wonder that prominent voices in Methodist circles increasingly characterized "perfect" holiness as simply an *ideal to be endlessly pursued*—being achieved, at best, sporadically and temporarily.³⁵

Understandably, other Methodists judged this a betrayal of Wesley and sought a way to reaffirm the possibility of Christian Perfection within the dynamics of their revised moral psychology. Some joined Asa Mahan and Charles Finney in insisting that the expectation of a consistent series of autonomous virtuous decisions is not so unrealistic, given the provisions of the New Covenant.³⁶ As one Methodist writer put it, "The Christian may, and is required by God, to be perfect every day of his [or her] life in the sense of keeping the whole moral law as the fruit of his [or her] regeneration."³⁷ The specification of regeneration as the basis for this requirement is significant. It reflects a desire (shared by Wesley) to

³⁴Myung Soo Park, "Concepts of Holiness in American Evangelicalism: 1835-1915" (Boston University Ph.D. thesis, 1992), gives a survey putting Methodist developments in a larger context.

³⁵Two classic representatives are Daniel Whedon, "Doctrines of Methodism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 19 (1862): 241-74; and Francis McConnell, *The Essentials of Methodism* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1916), 17-24.

³⁶Cf. Park, "Concepts of Holiness," 74-6; and J. H. Fairchild, "The Doctrine of Sanctification at Oberlin," *Congregational Quarterly* 18 (1876): 237-59.

³⁷Samuel Franklin, *A Critical View of Wesleyan Perfection* (Cincinnati, OH: Methodist Book Concern, 1866), 571. A similar claim can be found in Wilbur Tillett, *Personal Salvation: Studies in Christian Doctrine Pertaining to the Spiritual Life* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 1924), 465.

uphold the expectation of Christian Perfection for all Christians. But it makes this point by consolidating God's gracious transforming work in one event, abandoning Wesley's emphasis on ongoing responsive transformation by God's grace. This was possible because these descendants had set aside Wesley's conception of the purpose of sanctification as the progressive transformation of unholy inclinations (tempers) into holy ones. While they recognized that believers continue to struggle with inclinations to sinful acts, they accepted Reid's judgment (as did Mahan and Finney) that these inclinations have little moral status. Indeed, such inclinations were considered a necessary expression of our probationary situation. The true locus of moral concern, therefore, is not their amelioration, but simply the consistent exercise over them of the *decisionistic rational control* that was restored in our regeneration.³⁸

This first defense of Christian Perfection struck many Methodists as overly moralistic. While they shared the conviction that mature Christians should evidence consistency in their moral lives, they did not believe that it was a realistic expectation of the newly regenerate. Rather, such consistency must be *developed* within the Christian life. This emphasis moved them closer to Wesley's model of habituated tempers, but differences reflecting the rationalist tone of their preferred moral psychology remained (a fact they often acknowledged by disparaging Wesley's model!). In particular, they tended to conceive Christian Perfection as the *habituated rational control* over our lower (affectional) nature that is developed by repeated practice. The *holism* of Wesley's tempers is missing here, as is the *empowering* dimension of the means of grace that correlates to his emphasis on the responsive nature of affections. This helps explain why they typically restricted interest in the means of grace to those aimed mainly at exhorting our intellect: sermon, Bible study, and prayer.³⁹

There is a third major possible way of conceiving (self-determinist) Christian Perfection within the rational primacy spectrum of moral psychol-

³⁸The most influential articulation of this overall scheme was Merritt Caldwell, *The Philosophy of Christian Perfection* (Auburn, NY: Derby & Miller, 1853).

³⁹Major examples of this approach include DeWitt Clinton Huntington, *What is it to be Holy?* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Pye, 1898 [first edition, 1869]); Jeremiah Boland, *The Problem of Methodism* (3rd ed., Nashville, TN: MECS Publishing House, 1888); and James Mudge, *Growth in Holiness Toward Perfection* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1895).

ogy—affirming that Christians are meant to enjoy an enduring *spontaneous* rational control over their passions and affections. Since most Christians do not enter such an enduring state upon regeneration, developing this option would require clarifying what obstructions are blocking its expression and how they can be removed. Like a river bursting its dam, rational control would be assumed to flow *immediately* and *naturally* thereafter.

Phoebe Palmer’s “altar theology,” with its proposed shorter way to Christian holiness, contained elements of this approach. In direct contrast with gradual habituation, she argued that Christians can realize rational sovereignty over their passions (thereby enabling holiness in their actions) by simply consecrating themselves wholly to God. She often described the resulting sovereignty in spontaneous terms, as flowing forth naturally. But her intense focus on the human dimension of consecration created a counteracting *decisionistic* emphasis on the need to “keep our all on the altar” by renewing our consecration moment-by-moment.⁴⁰

Some sympathetic Methodists invoked John Fletcher’s notion of a post-regeneration “baptism of the Holy Spirit” to balance Palmer’s focus on the human act of consecration.⁴¹ They presented this baptism as “sealing” the Christian’s decisive act of consecration to God. They hoped in this way to explain how a *single* act of consecration could induce enduring control over our lower affectional nature by underscoring God’s empowering role. But in the process they stirred up a vigorous debate over the need for and/or benefit of such a “second work of grace.” Representatives of the other approaches to Christian Perfection uniformly rejected the suggestion that the possibility of true holiness was contingent upon some special gracious gift additional to our regeneration. They charged that this created a spiritual elitism and lowered the expectation of holy living for “average” Christians. They also pushed for a specific explanation of what it was that rendered holiness impossible for the merely regenerate Christian, and how the baptism of the Holy Spirit resolved this situation.

The explanation that came to define the last major revision of Christian Perfection in nineteenth-century American Methodism focused on

⁴⁰Palmer’s views are best expressed in *The Way of Holiness* (New York: W. C. Palmer, 1843), 19-38; *Faith and Its Effects* (New York: W. C. Palmer, 1845); and *Entire Devotion to God: A Present to My Christian Friend* (New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1853). See also Harold E. Raser, *Phoebe Palmer: Her Life and Thought* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1987).

⁴¹This reframing of Palmer appears in Nathan Bangs, *The Necessity, Nature, and Fruits of Sanctification* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1881 [1851 original]); and Randolph Sinks Foster, *Nature and Blessedness of Christian Purity* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1851).

Original Sin. While Wesley had preferred to call the unholy tempers remaining in believers “inward sin” or “inbeing sin,” he also occasionally used the traditional language of “Original Sin.”⁴² In the push to demonstrate their Protestant orthodoxy, “Original Sin” rapidly became the standard term his heirs used to designate these distorted inclinations of believers’ affections. But this forced them into a confrontation with the Reidian assumption that inclinations of our affections are morally relevant only to the degree that they represent the cumulative impact of our individual deliberate choices (thereby specifically excluding any innate inclinations). A predictable result of this confrontation was the growing number of Methodists abandoning the notion of Original Sin. The more significant result, for present interests, is the manner in which some chose to defend the notion. They specifically differentiated Original Sin from any inclination of our affections; it became a deeper lying inborn “evil principle,” with distortions in our affections being among its secondary effects.⁴³

The Methodists who pushed this distinction were those most concerned to champion a model of Christian Perfection as something achieved instantaneously, subsequent to regeneration, at the time one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ They made their case by using this revised conception of Original Sin to account for the spiritual struggles of new believers. They argued that the true obstacle to holy living is not wrong inclinations, which might be defused or reshaped, but this deeper lying evil principle (which they described with such additional names as the “Old Man” and the “carnal mind”).⁴⁵ The clear implication was that neither heroic volitional resolve nor thorough habituation can bring true “freedom” for obedience. The only thing that will suffice is for this principle to be entirely removed from the believer’s life. And how is this possible? The core of the final revision was the claim that the baptism

⁴²Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 74-5.

⁴³Cf. John Allen Wood, *Perfect Love*, rev. ed. (South Pasadena, CA: for the author, 1894 [ori., 1861]), 65; and Wood, *Purity and Maturity* (New York: Palmer, 1876), 134.

⁴⁴The pioneering consolidator of this approach was John A. Wood. Other prominent nineteenth-century representatives include J. H. Collins, Lewis Romaine Dunn, William B. Godby, Samuel Keen, Asbury Lowrey, William McDonald, Daniel Steele, and George Watson.

⁴⁵Cf. George Asbury McLaughlin, *Inbred Sin* (Chicago, IL: McDonald & Gill, 1887); Beverly Carradine, *The Old Man* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing, 1899); and D. F. Brooks, *What is the Carnal Mind?* (Chicago, IL: Christian Witness, 1905).

of the Holy Spirit—and it *alone*—effects this removal.⁴⁶ New believers struggling with unholy inclinations should be encouraged to move on rapidly to receiving this additional gift of God, not frustrated with fruitless counsel about nurturing holy character. Those who receive this baptism will find that, with the obstacle of the evil principle eradicated and the Spirit's empowering presence dwelling fully within, *spontaneous rational control* over their affections will flow freely.⁴⁷

V. Tensions in the Holiness Model of Christian Perfection

This final reformulation of Christian Perfection became the classic model of the (Wesleyan) Holiness Movement. Its leading proponents joined in the late 1860s to create an association for promoting the message of holiness, the National Camp-Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness. This association served from the beginning as the major point of connection and identity for “holiness folk,” both the shrinking numbers within long-standing Methodist groups and the growing numbers moving into emerging holiness denominations. It enshrined the central emphases of the third reformulation in the definition of entire sanctification adopted in the Declaration of Principles in 1885:

Entire Sanctification . . . is that great work wrought subsequent to regeneration, by the Holy Ghost, upon the sole condition of faith . . . such faith being preceded by an act of solemn and complete consecration. This work has these distinct elements: (1) the entire extinction of the carnal mind, the total eradication of the birth principle of sin; (2) the communication of perfect love to the soul . . . ; (3) the abiding indwelling of the Holy Ghost. . . . There is such a close connection between the gifts of justification and entire sanctification, and such a readiness on the part of our Heavenly Father to bestow the second as well as the first, that young converts should be encouraged to go up at once to the Canaan of perfect love . . .

⁴⁶For a demonstration of the growing emphasis on eradication among this group, see Leroy E. Lindsey Jr., “Radical Remedy: The Eradication of Sin and Related Terminology in Wesleyan-Holiness Thought, 1875-1925” (Drew University Ph.D. thesis, 1996).

⁴⁷The classic expression of this is Daniel Steele, *Mile-stone Papers* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1878), 134: “The great work of the Sanctifier by his powerful and usually instantaneous inworking, is to rectify the will, poise the appetites, and to enthrone the conscience over a realm in which no rebel lurks.” Cf. Steele, *Love Enthroned* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), 126-7.

growth in grace thereafter should be rapid, constant, and palpable to themselves and others.⁴⁸

The doctrinal statements of the most prominent holiness denominations that emerged from the American Methodist debates (Free Methodist, Nazarene, and Wesleyan [with its Wesleyan Methodist and Pilgrim Holiness roots]) stand in clear continuity with this definition.⁴⁹ Moreover, each group was careful to insure that the distinctive holiness emphases were represented in the courses of study that they assigned for those preparing for ministry. At first they relied on works by the original Methodist proponents of the “holiness” reformulation of Christian Perfection, particularly Daniel Steele and John Allen Wood.⁵⁰ Eventually a series of works

⁴⁸From *Guide to Holiness* 76 (1885): 27-8.

⁴⁹Since the Wesleyan Methodist split predated the solidification of the classic holiness model, their initial doctrinal statement on entire sanctification (1844 *Discipline*) is quite generic. However, a revised article in the 1893 *Discipline* placed them solidly within the holiness camp. An even more detailed classic holiness article was adopted in 1968 during merger with the Pilgrim Holiness Church to form the Wesleyan Church. It was revised again in 1980, but the revisions were mainly stylistic. The Free Methodists added an article on entire sanctification framed in classic holiness terms to their initial *Discipline* in 1860. This article was not revised until 1974, and the major holiness emphases remain in the revision. Finally, the article on entire sanctification in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene went through a series of refinements (each of which heightened its fit with the classic holiness model) from 1898 to 1928, and it has remained basically unchanged since.

⁵⁰To appreciate Steele’s prominence one must compare the section on sanctification in Amos Binney & Daniel Steele, *Theological Compend: Improved Edition* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), 128-34, with Binney’s original edition (Cincinnati, OH: Hitchcock & Walton, 1840), 84-7. Steele’s revision drops all mention of maturing in grace and adds the “holiness” emphasis on the Holy Spirit removing inbred sin and bringing instantaneous purity. The holiness commitment of this revision explains its broad use in holiness courses of study [CN: 1903-36; FMC: 1874-1951; PH: 1919-24, 1946-50; WMC: 1892-1968]. Other Steele volumes used include *Love Enthroned* [WMC: 1892-1943], *Milestone Papers* [FMC: 1943-51], *Gospel of the Comforter* (Boston, MA: Christian Witness, 1897) [CN: 1923-36, 1960-72; WMC: 1963-8], and *Half Hours with St. Paul* (Boston, MA: Christian Witness, 1895) [WMC: 1963-68]. Wood’s *Perfect Love* was also a mainstay in the courses [CN: 1944-76; FMC: 1874-1951; PH: 1924-68; WMC: 1911-63], while *Purity and Maturity* found some use [CN: 1903-11]. Other prominent Methodist works in the courses include Foster, *Christian Purity* [CN: 1911-19; PH: 1950-68]; Asbury Lowery, *Possibilities of Grace* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884) [CN: 1911-60; FMC: 1923-51]; and Dougan Clark, *Theology of Holiness* (Boston, MA: McDonald & Gill, 1893) [WMC: 1911-43]. Finally, one should mention A. M. Hills, *Holiness and Power for the Church and Ministry* (Cincinnati, OH: Revivalist Office, 1897) [CN: 1911-68, PH: 1919-24], which is largely a collection of quotes from Methodist holiness authors.

defending the classic model were produced by their own writers to serve as standard texts on the doctrine of holiness through the 1960s.⁵¹

In a technical sense this series of “standard” texts ended with the 1960s because the various groups terminated the course of study as an alternative to formal education. In a more fundamental sense, as Keith Drury recognized, texts defending the classic holiness model of entire sanctification were simply ceasing to be received as standard in the groups. How are we to account for this weakening reception?

Some might point to the new questions being raised about whether certain elements of the classic model were true to Wesley, particularly Fletcher’s equation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with entire sanctification.⁵² But this does not seem to be a sufficient explanation. After all, one could admit that Fletcher (and the holiness model dependent upon him) differed significantly from Wesley, only to conclude that the difference

⁵¹The most prominent works were Benjamin T. Roberts, *Holiness Teachings* (North Chili, NY: “The Earnest Christian” Publishing House, 1893); R. T. Williams, *Sanctification: The Experience and the Ethic* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1928); William M. Smith, *Bible Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Westfield, IN: Union Bible Seminary, 1934), 123-39; Zachary Taylor Johnson, *What is Holiness?* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Bible College, 1936); Harry Edward Jessop, *Foundations of Doctrine in Scripture and Experience: A Student’s Handbook on Holiness* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Evangelistic Institute, 1938); J. B. Chapman, *Holiness: the Heart of Christian Experience*, 3rd ed. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1963 [1941 ori.]); D. Shelby Corlett, *The Meaning of Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1944); Stephen White, *Five Cardinal Elements in the Doctrine of Entire Sanctification* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1948); George Allen Turner, *The More Excellent Way* (Winona Lake, IN: Light & Life, 1952; expanded reprint as *The Vision Which Transforms* [Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1964]); W. T. Purkiser, *Conflicting Concepts of Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1953); Stephen White, *Eradication: Defined, Explained, Authenticated* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1954); J. Paul Taylor, *Holiness: the Finished Foundation* (Winona Lake, IN: Light & Life Press, 1963); Richard Taylor, *Life in the Spirit: Christian Holiness in Doctrine, Experience and Life* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1966); and Roy Stephen Nicholson, *True Holiness: The Wesleyan-Arminian Emphasis* (Oswosso, MI: Oswosso College, 1967).

⁵²The early 1970s witnessed a vigorous debate over this topic among holiness scholars and a growing awareness that Wesley did not agree with Fletcher. For a brief bibliographical survey of this debate and an analysis of the interchange between Wesley and Fletcher, see Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 48-54, 184-5. The clearest evidence of Wesley’s rejection of Fletcher’s proposal has since been unearthed and discussed in M. Robert Fraser, “Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism” (Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis, 1988), 382-6, 490-2.

was an improvement upon Wesley.⁵³ Indeed, this judgment seems implicit from the beginning in the courses of study of our focal holiness churches, which balance limited assignments of Wesley (at most his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and some sermons⁵⁴) with exposure to Fletcher's refocusing of entire sanctification upon the baptism of the Holy Spirit!⁵⁵

This leads me to suggest that the uneasiness undermining confidence in the classic holiness model of entire sanctification was more general in nature. I believe that the weakening reception reflected a growing awareness of inadequacies in the moral psychology upon which the model had been framed. To make this case I will compare three central aspects of Wesley's moral psychology with that evident in the standard holiness treatments, highlighting the instabilities that repeatedly emerge in the holiness case.⁵⁶

⁵³See this very argument in J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1994), 15.

⁵⁴Free Methodists through the history of their course of study (1860-1951) listed Wesley's *Sermons* and *Plain Account*. The Wesleyan Methodists added to their course (begun in 1867) the *Plain Account* in 1883 and the *Sermons* in 1900, carrying both until the course ended in 1968. The Pilgrim Holiness had both listed in their course in 1916 (the first I have located), but dropped the *Sermons* by 1919 and the *Plain Account* by 1942. The Church of the Nazarene included the *Plain Account* sporadically through the history of its course (1903-76), while never listing the entire set of *Sermons*, choosing instead to assign select sermons focusing on holiness: from 1905-15 they assigned *Wesley's Sermons* (Boston, MA: Christian Witness, 1903) [which contains the sermons numbered in *Works* as 13, 14, 40, 43 & 83], from 1915-32 they assigned *Wesley's Sermons: Ten Select Sermons* (Kansas City, MO: Publishing House of the Church of the Nazarene, 1915) [which adds sermons 39, 49, 80, 82 & 91], and from 1960-68 assigned *The Heart of Wesley's Faith* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1961) which bound the *Plain Account* with his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation."

⁵⁵This might not be evident on casual consideration. Fletcher's *Works* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1849) are found only on the FM course from 1860-87; and his *Checks* on CN from 1948-60. However, one must add to this the listings of Thomas Ralston's *Elements of Divinity* (Louisville, KY: E. Stevensen, 1847), whose chapter dealing with sanctification simply reprints a portion of Fletcher's last *Check* [CN: 1919-40; FMC: 1870-78, 1887-1951; PH: 1924-50; WMC: 1931-55].

⁵⁶Bruce Eugene Moyer has recently argued for the continuing similarities between Wesley and the American holiness movement on the doctrine of Christian Perfection in "The Doctrine of Christian Perfection: A Comparative Study of John Wesley and the Modern American Holiness Movement" (Marquette University Ph.D. thesis, 1992). The similarities he cites are quite general in nature and do not go to the level of moral psychology, where I am highlighting key differences. Part of the reason for this is that Moyer relies heavily in his account of Wesley on secondary studies by holiness scholars (esp. Leo Cox). It is little wonder that he finds *this* Wesley matching holiness emphases.

A. Instability Over the Relationship of Divine and Human Agency in Sanctification

One central aspect of Wesley's affectional moral psychology was his emphasis on the responsive nature of the affections. We noted above the way that this allowed him to interrelate dynamically God's *gracious* prevenience and our *responsible* cooperation throughout the Christian journey. By contrast, the American Methodist switch to a Reidian moral psychology pushed them back toward the Western Christian tendency of posing God's agency and human agency as mutually exclusive in the process of salvation. Holiness writers did not escape this impact. It is evident already in Beverly Carradine's fiery charge that anyone who teaches a growth theory of sanctification "uncrowns Christ, robs him of his peculiar glory of sanctifying the Church . . . and transforms what is recognized in the Bible as a divine work into a mere evolution or development."⁵⁷ The obvious assumption is that all divine work is instantaneous, while any gradual work must be merely natural (or human). Turning this assumption around, holiness writers developed sophisticated accounts of what part of sanctification is God's work (hence, instantaneously perfect) and what part remains human responsibility (hence, gradual and fallible).⁵⁸ But here the instability became apparent. To the degree that they emphasized God's work of unilaterally removing inbred sin, holiness advocates verged upon a monergistic soteriology that could encourage quietism.⁵⁹ To the degree that they tried to protect against quietism by emphasizing our responsibility, they verged upon the Pelagian suggestion of autonomous human abilities.⁶⁰ The difficulty of finding ways within their assumptions to emphasize the primacy of God's grace without undercutting human responsibility has continued to plague the movement.⁶¹

⁵⁷Carradine, *Old Man*, 148.

⁵⁸A good example is R. T. Williams, *Sanctification*, esp. 23, 43, 51.

⁵⁹This irony is highlighted in Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1967), 77-8.

⁶⁰Cf. the evaluation of A. M. Hills in Paul Merritt Bassett, "A Study in the Theology of the Early Holiness Movement," *Methodist History* 13.3 (1975): 61-84; and Otho Jennings' stress on the need to "will to be holy" in "Areas of Growth After Sanctification," in *Further Insights into Holiness*, edited by Kenneth Geiger (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1963), 141-60, see 151-2.

⁶¹As a recent example, note the ironic defeat at the 1989 Nazarene General Conference of the motion that the article entitled "Free Agency" in their *Manual* be retitled "Free Grace"; recorded in the *Journal of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene*, edited by B. Edgar Johnson (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1989), 40, 257.

B. Instability Over the Role of Emotions In Motivating Holiness

A second central aspect of Wesley's moral psychology is his valuing of the affections as holistic motivating inclinations. Despite its vigorous claims to be defending Wesley, the contrast with the classic holiness model is again stark. For example, it is hard to imagine a stronger expression of the alternative rational control commitment in moral psychology than A. M. Hills' charge that Christians must "enthroned the rational and the moral in our lives, over the incitements of appetite and passion, and thus escape the doom of being the passive victim of impulses to evil."⁶² What Hills calls for is precisely what standard holiness treatments described as the result of entire sanctification, ". . . the readjustment of our whole nature whereby the inferior appetites and propensities are subordinated and the superior intellectual and moral powers are restored to their supremacy."⁶³ The rationalist lean of the classic model becomes even more evident when one notes their frequent concern to ensure that the act of consecration leading to this restored balance is not based primarily on emotion! When William McDonald (a Methodist pioneer of the movement) would provide the exhortation following a rousing sermon on the need for sanctification, for example, he would purposefully avoid further emotional appeal, choosing instead in his "cool, deliberate way" to expound his favorite topics: "reason and faith—reason, the ground-work of all religious obligation and faith the most reasonable thing in the whole universe."⁶⁴ And then there is the repeated advice not to trust one's feel-

⁶²A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, 2 vols. (Pasadena, CA: C. J. Kinne, 1931), 1:362. This strong rational control model remains evident in G. B. Williamson's preface to Lauriston J. DuBois, *Guidelines for Conduct* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1965), 4.

⁶³John P. Newman, "The Law of Purity," in *Our Holy Faith* (a textbook prepared for Asbury College), edited by T. M. Anderson (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1965), 219-20. See also Chapman, *Holiness*, 19; Corlett, *Meaning of Holiness*, 33, 87-8; and W. T. Purkiser's chapters on sanctification in *Exploring Our Christian Faith*, edited by W. T. Purkiser (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1960), 350-89.

⁶⁴See the report on his exhortation in *A Modern Pentecost: Embracing a Record of the Sixteenth National Camp-Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness, held at Landisville, PA., July 23d to August 1st, 1873*, edited by Adam Wallace (Reprint ed., Salem, OH: Schmull, 1970), 128-30. Note also the comments on evangelism by Joseph H. Smith (chief expositor for the National Holiness Association in the early twentieth century) in Delbert Rose, *A Theology of Christian Experience: Interpreting the Historic Wesleyan Message* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1965), 121.

ings in determining whether one has obtained entire sanctification. As John Church put it: “your feeling will fluctuate but thank God that does not have to be true of your spiritual state. . . . The fact that you are in Jesus Christ is a fact that was established by a deliberate choice of your will, and that fact can only be changed in one way, and that is by a choice of your will.”⁶⁵ While it may not fit the “holy roller” stereotype, a distrust of the emotional/affectional dimension of human life is strung through all of these dimensions. Unlike Wesley’s more holistic commitments, reason is cast over against “blind” emotion, and affectivity is equated with passive domination by controlling impulses. The result has been an ongoing instability in the holiness movement concerning the legitimate role of emotion in Christian life, with the ever present danger of settling for either an “enthusiastic” emotionalism or a “passionless” moralism.⁶⁶

C. Instability Over the Relationship of Purity and Maturity in Christian Perfection

The third central aspect of Wesley’s moral psychology that provides instructive comparison is his stress on the freedom that comes as affections are shaped into enduring tempers. By contrast, we noted that the pioneers of the classic holiness model argued that the baptism of the Spirit provides *spontaneous* rational control. The later tradition has frequently echoed this claim, but it has also found it to be another unstable position to hold. Consider a representative quote from Richard Taylor in the mid-1960s:

The Spirit-filled believer loves God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength and his neighbor as himself. This is the glad inner quality and spontaneous outflow of his life. He has been purged (even in the subconscious) from bitterness, rebelliousness toward God, hatred, envy, covetousness, and worldly-mindedness. He is now conscientious, spiritually-minded, Christ-centered, and is reaching for more and more of God. But his personality may not yet be a good vehicle of the love within.⁶⁷

⁶⁵John R. Church, *Earthen Vessels* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Co., 1942), 46-7. Church was a holiness evangelist within the MECS.

⁶⁶Read in this light Victor Paul Reasoner’s *The Hole in the Holiness Movement* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 1991); and “The American Holiness Movement’s Paradigm Shift Concerning Pentecost,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31.2 (1996): 132-46.

⁶⁷R. S. Taylor, *Life in the Spirit*, 153.

Notice the qualifying “but” that begins the last sentence. Apparently the outflow of love is not always as spontaneous as the emphasis on the impact of the baptism of the Spirit initially suggests. But how could this be, if the person now enjoys “Christian Perfection”? The standard answer to this question that emerged in holiness circles was to contrast “purity” and “maturity” in the Christian life. Christian Perfection became a state of simple purity entered instantaneously when all evil inclinations are destroyed, allowing nascent holy inclinations to emerge. Maturity was identified with the subsequent entrenching of these holy inclinations.⁶⁸

This distinction raises as many issues as it was meant to solve. To begin with, it correlated Christian Perfection with the *beginning* of developing Christian character, while Wesley had clearly related the term (in its more natural sense) to those of mature character who manifest the full disposition of Christ.⁶⁹ Secondly, the distinction could be used mainly to defend the newly sanctified as already perfect, rather than for stressing the importance of subsequent maturation.⁷⁰ This was particularly the case if one enlarged Wesley’s list of what perfection in love did *not* include to explain how someone was “perfect” who had remaining prejudices, temperament problems, etc.⁷¹ Thirdly, the distinction constitutes another

⁶⁸This model was first framed in Wood, *Purity and Maturity*, 26-32. A more nuanced distinction can be found in Steele, *Love Enthroned*, 126-7 (but see also 44). Wood’s formulation became the standard endlessly repeated in the later movement.

⁶⁹Note this admission within the valiant attempt of Leo Cox to demonstrate Wesleyan precedent for holiness theology, in *John Wesley’s Concept of Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1964), 89.

⁷⁰The history of this distinction in the Nazarene *Manual* is an interesting case in point. Its introduction into the article on Entire Sanctification in 1911 (significantly, in terms of a contrast between a perfect heart and perfect character) appears primarily motivated as a defense of the claim for Christian “perfection.” This concern carries over as it is moved to a footnote on the article in 1923. It is moved again and expanded in 1928 into a distinct “Special Rule on Growth in Grace.” Now members are exhorted to give careful attention to developing maturity, but the only stated rationale is that lack of doing so is undercutting the church’s holiness testimony! Finally, in 1976 the distinction is moved back into the statement on Entire Sanctification (now as a distinction between a pure heart and mature character) and this time the warning about impaired witness is finally subordinated to a stress that failure to nurture maturity frustrates and eventually forfeits the gracious transformation that holiness is meant to provide.

⁷¹For some examples of such debatable enlargement, see Church, *Earthen Vessels*, 50; Lewis T. Corlett, “Holiness and Nervous Reactions,” in *Further Insights into Holiness*, 333-49; and J. Kenneth Grider, “Carnality and Humanity: Exploratory Observations,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 11 (1976): 81-91.

instance of counterpoising divine and human action: proponents typically discounted all human efforts to reshape evil inclinations into holy ones prior to the unilateral eradicating work of the Holy Spirit; but they could be quite rigorous about the need for human discipline in shaping holy habits after entire sanctification.⁷² Finally, the distinction effectively conceded a revision of the original model from “spontaneous” to “habituated” rational control. The only difference from the earlier Methodist alternative of habituated rational control was that a second discrete act of divine transformation was prescribed as necessary before habituation could begin.

Of course, whatever issues the distinction between purity and maturity raised within the classic holiness model, there was a greater challenge for those who overlooked or denied it.⁷³ They were forced to explain how the newly sanctified *did* consistently express Christian Perfection. Most fell back on Phoebe Palmer’s decisionistic suggestion about the moment-by-moment nature of sanctification and the need to “keep the blessing.”⁷⁴

D. Impact Upon the Role of the Means of Grace in the Sanctified Life

With such instabilities in mind, we are at the point of considering how the holiness moral psychology affected the conception of the contribution of the means of grace to the sanctified life. As we saw earlier, the means of grace were central to Wesley’s model of holiness of heart and life. He relied on them both as the ordinary avenues through which God conveys gracious transforming *power* and as trustworthy exercises by which we responsibly *form* holy tempers. Neither role carried through smoothly into the Holiness Movement.

⁷²The best example is again Richard Taylor, this time his book *The Disciplined Life* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1962), esp. 22, 26-7, 50-5. See also T. W. Anderson, *After Sanctification: Growth in the Life of Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1929); Lyman F. Lance, *Soul Habits* (Colfax, NC: Lyman F. Lance, 1942); and Mary Alice Tenney, *Blueprint for a Christian World: An Analysis of the Wesleyan Way* (Winona Lake, IN: Light & Life Press, 1953).

⁷³Ironically, John Allen Wood increasingly played down the distinction in the midst of battles over instantaneous sanctification. In particular, in the revised edition of *Perfect Love* (1894) he argued that the eradication of the principle of sin from the human heart “completes” the Christian character (34), and identified the newly sanctified as not just spiritual babes but adults (228). The first addition of *Perfect Love* (1861) had been much less antagonistic to growth in grace (see 19, 29).

⁷⁴For a convenient collection of the typical advice on how to keep the blessing, see Hills, *Holiness and Power*, 344-65. Also typical is Theodore Ludwig, *The Life of Victory: or Saved, Sanctified and Kept* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1929), esp. 68-87.

Consider first the means of grace as mediators of gracious transforming power. The crucial issue here is not whether any means can convey power, but what type of means can do so (and do so most effectively). Wesley's holistic convictions led him to value both means of grace that primarily address the intellect and means that are focused more on our emotional/affective nature. He purposefully developed a balanced network of these for his followers. To the degree that the initial campmeetings and prayer groups functioned as alternative "intense" communities over against the emerging routinization of Methodist church life, this balance may have existed in practice in the early Holiness Movement.⁷⁵ But these gatherings soon took on a routine of their own that embodied the rationalist assumptions reflected in Luther Lee's justification of Christian worship and communal life: "Christianity requires us to maintain rational and pure Christian fellowship . . . mutual watch care, instruction and support . . . regular and orderly assemblies for public worship . . . [and] healthy moral discipline."⁷⁶ These assumptions also worked more broadly, such that the typical means of grace recommended in holiness works came to align solidly on the intellectual side of the spectrum. About the only means recommended for obtaining entire sanctification was attendance at meetings where one would be challenged to make the appropriate consecration, and the most common means recommended for nurturing growth after entire sanctification were Bible reading, prayer, holiness literature, testifying to your experience, and aggressively maintaining your rational commitment to grow.⁷⁷ The fracture of Pentecostalism off of

⁷⁵Cf. A. Gregory Schneider, "A Conflict of Associations: The National Camp-Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness versus the Methodist Episcopal Church," *Church History* 66 (1997): 268-83.

⁷⁶Luther Lee, *Elements of Theology* (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1865 [1856 ori.]), 486-7. While Lee predates the classic model, he was influential on the course of study [FMC: 1866-70, 1891-9; WMC: 1867-1911, 1923-31].

⁷⁷Hills, *Holiness and Power*, 344-65; Edgar P. Ellyson, *Theological Compend* (Chicago, IL: Christian Witness, 1908), 125; C. W. Ruth, *Temptations Peculiar to the Sanctified* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1928), 41-4; Rose, *Theology of Christian Experience*, 234; William S. Deal, *The Victorious Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954); Allan Coppedge, "Holiness and Discipleship," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 15.2 (1980): 80-97; and the recently reprinted example from ca. 1915 by Warren McIntire, "The Place of the Will in Christian Experience," *Holiness Digest* 11.1 (Winter 1997): 22.

the early holiness shoot was an almost inevitable reaction to this trend, and left both groups searching for a more holistic balance.⁷⁸

The role of means of grace as exercises to strengthen and shape Christian character was also rendered problematic by the fluctuating assumptions of the Holiness Movement. To the degree that the spontaneous rational control model held, there was little perceived need for this role. The emphasis was on how a changed heart naturally works its way out into life, rather than on how “external” exercises help change the heart.⁷⁹ Likewise, those opting for the decisionistic model of moment-by-moment renewed consecration placed little stress on formative disciplines. Even those most emphatic on the need for habituation after entire sanctification typically put more stress on human duty to form holy habits than on how formative means of grace might help this process.⁸⁰ More significantly, they tended to recast the very use of such means into an issue primarily of “duty.”⁸¹

Consider the example of Wesley’s “General Rules” for his Methodist societies, which he encapsulated in a three-fold injunction: do no harm, do as much good as you can, and attend all the ordinances of God. Stated so baldly, these can look like a moralistic list of qualifications for membership. However, Wesley’s primary intention in prescribing them was formative. They were designed for those who may not even have an assurance of justification yet, just a “desire of salvation.” They sketched out the disciplines that Wesley believed would bring assurance and transform their lives, if routinely followed.⁸² Even works of mercy to others were enjoined not simply because this was “right,” but because engaging in

⁷⁸Cf. Charles Edwin Jones, “Tongues-Speaking and the Wesleyan-Holiness Quest for Assurance of Sanctification,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 22.2 (1987): 117-24; and Henry H. Knight III, “From Aldersgate to Azusa: Wesley and the Renewal of Pentecostal Spirituality,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8 (1996): 82-98.

⁷⁹Cf. Wood, *Purity and Maturity*, 135; Steele, *Love Enthroned*, 44; and R. T. Williams, *Sanctification*, 64-5.

⁸⁰Cf. Anderson, *After Sanctification*, 16; and Lance, *Soul Habits*.

⁸¹For just a couple of the clearest expressions of this, see Lee, *Elements of Theology*, 344-63; and J. B. Chapman, *Holiness*, 48.

⁸²Cf. Helmut Nausner, “The Meaning of Wesley’s General Rules: An Interpretation,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 44.2 (1989): 43-60; and David Lowes Watson, “Aldersgate Street and the General Rules: The Form and the Power of Methodist Discipleship,” in *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, edited by R. L. Maddox (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1990), 33-47.

such acts serves reciprocally to nurture the actor's Christian character (holy tempers).⁸³

Each of the holiness groups coming out of Methodism brought over the General Rules into their *Disciplines*, but it soon became clear that these rules functioned very differently in their contexts. This difference can be sensed in the way the General Rules were revised in the first *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene. To begin with, the target audience for the rules was changed from those "desiring salvation" to those who are seeking to be "saved from all sin" (i.e., entirely sanctified). Then the opening to the first section was altered by dropping the first three words (do no harm) and beginning with Wesley's next clause "avoid evil of every kind." While a slight change, it shifts the tone from a concern not to harm one's self or others to a concern to stay separate from anything that might contaminate or call "witness" into question. The second set of injunctions (do as much good as you can) was recast under the framework of "do that which is enjoined in the Word of God." While there were still some specifics cited that involved helping others, the emphasis shifted to the importance of obedience. This is particularly significant because Wesley's third instruction about attending the means of grace was subsumed into this section, and thereby rendered primarily a matter of obedience. Meanwhile a new third section was added which warned that those who want to remain members must not inveigh against the doctrines or usages of the church!⁸⁴

What is suggested in these revisions can be demonstrated in a variety of historical developments within the Holiness Movement.⁸⁵ Disciplinary guidelines largely ceased to be appreciated as formative exercises, becoming instead boundary markers for defining proper holiness lifestyles, or marks of distinction to "testify to the world," or even simple tests of the submission of members to God's authority (as embodied in

⁸³Cf. Sermon 92, "On Zeal," §II.5, *Works*, 3:313.

⁸⁴The revised rules are listed on 28-30 of the first *Manual* (1898). They carry down with only minor additions until 1976, when the first and second sections swap places and the language of the third section is modified slightly.

⁸⁵See especially the perceptive study of Paul Merritt Bassett, "Culture and Concupiscence: the Changing Definition of Sanctity in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement, 1867-1920," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 59-127.

the church).⁸⁶ A major reason for this change was the assumption that human efforts at reform are fruitless prior to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and obedience largely spontaneous after the baptism. On these terms, observation of disciplinary rules (including the rule of attending the various means of grace!) is mainly a way of demonstrating externally that this internal change has already taken place.⁸⁷ And since it is not assumed to do anything for you, the natural tendency is to begin to question the rationale for particular items on the list, as well as how often we *have* to do them. This goes a long way to explaining the difference in Wesley's practice of regular eucharist and that in the typical holiness church.

VI. Reconnecting the Means To the End

In light of all that has been said here, let me return to the opening question of this paper: "What accounts for the present malaise in the Holiness Movement about the importance and possibility of Christian Perfection, and how can this be overcome?" I have tried to show that Wesley's answer would be that the movement is reaping the results of continuing to demand that their members attain this spiritual goal while failing to provide for them the full range of the graciously-provided means for nurturing true holiness of heart and life. The predictable failure of so many people to reach such holiness, apart from these means, has naturally lead them to question the goal itself. Wesley would then press to the level of the changed conception of Christian Perfection that has rendered most of these means either superfluous or mere duties. Ultimately, he would challenge the adequacy of the rationalist and decisionistic emphases of the modern Reidian moral psychology, which the Holiness Movement has broadly adopted.

⁸⁶Thus, in 1951 when the Free Methodists reaffirmed the General Rules, their justification was that rules are essential for witness individually and corporately, and help give clear-cut boundaries for guidance. See the Report of the Committee on Principle and Precedent in the (manuscript) *Journal of Record of General Conference, 1923-55*, 825 (at archive center in Indianapolis). For comments on a similar rationale among Nazarenes, see H. Ray Dunning, "Nazarene Ethics as Seen in a Theological, Historical and Sociological Context" (Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis, 1969), 53, 76-8.

⁸⁷Note the use of precisely this language in DuBois' attempt to explain and defend the place for observing the (Nazarene) General Rules in *Guidelines for Conduct*, 29-30, 37.

This means that those of us who find Wesley's model of the Christian journey to holiness more convincing than the models with which we were raised must do more than simply issue calls for recovering Wesley's richer network of means for nurturing Christian holiness. We must find ways to rekindle an appreciation for the responsive and formative nature of human moral/spiritual choice and action. In other words, we must recover something more like Wesley's affectional moral psychology. Explicit debates about moral psychology were central to the earlier revisions of Wesley's model, and will be central to its recovery.

Some awareness of this is evident in the Holiness Movement's engagement with the modern discipline of psychology. Psychology emerged as an independent "scientific" discipline, freeing itself from its earlier secondary status within philosophy, by focusing particular attention on the nonrational dimensions of the human psyche. One predictable response to this by holiness writers, with their rational control emphasis, has been to view psychology as either a dangerous attempt to explain away sin and moral accountability or an alternative form of healing that should be roundly denounced as ineffective.⁸⁸ A few writers have chosen instead to emphasize those psychologists who define psychological health as an integration of the personality where emotional attitudes are harmonized and directed to one end, invoking them in support of the conception of entire sanctification as restored rational control.⁸⁹ But continuing dialogue with modern psychology and its emphasis on nonrational dimensions of human motivation has encouraged moves to qualify the spontaneous rational control emphasis of the classic model of Christian Perfection. The most common (and conservative) way of doing this has been to invoke the purity/maturity distinction to separate repressed complexes and other psychological issues that require long-term counseling to deal with the "carnal nature" that is said to be instantaneously cleansed in

⁸⁸E.g., John Marvin Hames, *Orthodox Psychology* (Chicago, IL: Christian Witness, 1929), 3, 32-3, 43-4, 72; J. P. Taylor, *Holiness*, 97; and the remark quoted approvingly in J. Harold Greenlee, *What the New Testament Says About Holiness* (Salem, OH: Schmull, 1994), 50.

⁸⁹See esp. S. S. White, *Eradication*, 93-4; and William A. Arnett, "Current Theological Emphases in the American Holiness Tradition," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35 (1961): 120-9, here 128-9.

entire sanctification.⁹⁰ Only a few brave souls have suggested connecting entire sanctification itself integrally with the process of maturation, and these have retained a fairly rationalist model of maturation.⁹¹

The other place that psychological reconsideration has entered recent holiness debates over sanctification is the use of “relational” psychologies like those of Martin Buber and Gordon Allport to counter the possible suggestion that inbred sin is some type of material “substance” that must be removed to release spontaneous holiness. In relational terms the essential nature of human fallenness is identified as broken relationships resulting from human egocentricity or self-sovereignty, and the essence of salvation becomes restored relationships through true submission. While this is certainly preferable to a materialist alternative, these relationalist accounts typically have carried over the decisionistic emphases of their existentialist roots.⁹² Even Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, who has developed the account with the most stress on the need for *growth* in holistic relational holiness, gives little attention to the actual dynamics of forming Christian character (holy tempers), choosing to emphasize instead that holiness is a moment-by-moment impartation of our growing relationship with God.⁹³

⁹⁰E.g., W. Curry Mavis, “Repressed Complexes and Christian Maturity,” in *The Word and the Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Wesleyan-Arminian Theology*, edited by Kenneth Geiger (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1965), 307-15; Leon & Mildred Chambers, *Holiness and Human Nature* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1975; ori. *Human Nature and Perfecting Holiness*, 1972), 24-7, 48-52; David Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1981), 13-15; Dick Howard, *So Who’s Perfect? A Candid Look at our Humanness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1985), 45, 97, 103; and W. T. Purkiser, *These Earthen Vessels: The Christian: His Failures, Foibles, and Infirmities* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1985), 55.

⁹¹The best example is Leslie Ray Marston, *From Chaos to Character: A Study in the Stewardship of Personality* (Winona Lake, IN: Light & Life Press, 1948 [ori., 1935]) [FMC: 1947-51; PH: 1946-66].

⁹²Cf. William M. Greathouse, “A Study of Wesley’s Doctrine of Sin and Perfection as Treated by Cell, Lee, and Cannon” (Vanderbilt University M.A. thesis, 1948), 70-83; Rob L. Staples, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Christian Perfection: A Reinterpretation” (Pacific School of Religion Ph.D. thesis, 1963), esp. viii, 94-8, 121-33; H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1988), 297, 472-5, 483; and John A. Knight, *All Loves Excelling: Proclaiming Our Wesleyan Message* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1995), 19, 25-6, 77.

⁹³See Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1972), esp. 88, 206, 232

So, we have some distance to go in recovering Wesley’s affectional moral psychology. It will not be a simple process, because we must swim against the current of our culture—both in the church and at large. More importantly, it will not be sufficient simply to reach agreement among ourselves as theologians. The vital practical-theological task will be finding effective ways of getting the basic assumptions of an affectional moral psychology renewed “in the bones” of the sisters and brothers in our church communities. It is a daunting challenge, but one well worth accepting. I invite you to join me in the attempt.

APPENDIX A

ALTERNATIVE MORAL PSYCHOLOGIES

	<i>Determinist</i>	<i>Self-determinist</i>
Rational Primacy: Intellectualist (Socrates?)		_Spontaneous Rational Control (Socrates?)
		_Habituated Rational Control (Plato)
		_Decisionistic Rational Control (Kant)
Volitional Holism: Voluntarist (Hobbes)		_Spontaneous Sentiments (Hutcheson)
		_Habituated Virtues (Aristotle)
		_Decisionistic Self-Assertion (Sartre)
Passional Primacy: Naturalist (Hume)		_Spontaneous Expressivism (Rousseau)
		_Habituated Expressivism (Prudent Hedonist)
		_Decisionistic Expressivism (Nietzsche)

APPENDIX B

ALTERNATIVE CHRISTIAN MORAL PSYCHOLOGIES

	<i>Determinist</i>	<i>Self-determinist</i>
Rational Primacy:	Intellectualist (Gnostics)	_Spontaneous Rational Control (Scholastics)
		_Habituated Rational Control (Clement, Etc.)
		_Decisionistic Rational Control (Personalism)
Volitional Holism:	Voluntarist (Augustine, Luther, Edwards)	_Spontaneous Sentiments (Pietists, Schl.)
		_Habituated Virtues (Aquinas, Gregory)
		_Decisionistic Self-Assertion (Scotus, Kierk)
Passional Primacy:	Naturalist (?)	_Spontaneous Expressivism (Libertines)
		_Habituated Expressivism (?)
		_Decisionistic Expressivism (?)

A WESLEYAN/HOLINESS AGENDA FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

R. Larry Shelton

Both the Age of Modernism with its worship of reason and the Cold War with its worship of power have recently expired, symbolized well by the collapse of the Berlin Wall.¹ Change and uncertainty have become the distinguishing marks of the controversial and enigmatic new paradigm called “postmodernism.” Western culture which is “historically based on Judeo-Christian ideology, scientific methodology, and critical reasoning” is now migrating, says one scientist, “toward a culture based on far less reliable guides.”² But this may not be all bad! Thomas Oden suggests that this “terminal modernity” may offer “grace-laden opportunities,” for hearing God in the turmoil, as was the case with Noah, the Babylonian captivity, and Jonah.³

The Age of Reason rejected all consideration of religion as a viable approach to meaning and Marxism dismissed it as “the opiate of the people.” The Christian faith now has lost its influence in the latter twentieth century as the foundation of meaning and hope in the world and the basis

¹Thomas C. Oden, “The Death of Modernity and Postmodern Evangelical Spirituality,” *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, David S. Dockery, ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1995), 20.

²Douglas G. Frank, “A Credible Faith,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, Vol. 48, Number 4 (1996), 254-255.

³Thomas C. Oden, “So What Happens After Modernity?: A Postmodern Agenda for Evangelical Theology,” *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*. David S. Dockery, ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1995), 392.

for hope beyond it. In fact, the reality of anything beyond this world had been relegated to the status of a dysfunctional delusion. The Christian faith has been caricatured by the media and disgraced by its own media personalities. American educational and political institutions have been declared off limits for Christian witness by the judicial establishment.⁴ Economic chaos has resulted from communism's social experiment. Mercifully, something in this sorry modern saga is changing. Where will the church in general and the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition in particular position themselves in the context of this cataclysmic cultural revolution?

Without presuming to assign the agenda for the entire spectrum of Christianity, I think there are several issues that are critical for the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition as it enters the twenty-first century world. It will be essential to develop new paradigms of theology and mission which will be relevant to the needs of postmodern society with its diversity of ideologies, ethnicities, and socio-economic situations. Wesleyans need to reflect on new cultural landscapes as the context for revisioning new directions. We need to move beyond the preoccupation with the culture of Post-Enlightenment modernism which has provided the background for both the significant accommodations of liberalism and the excessive reactions of fundamentalism and evangelicalism. A holiness-oriented Wesleyanism needs to look beyond any domination of its mission focus by the perspectives of white, male, Eurocentrism, while not becoming preoccupied with "political correctness" as a moral rudder.

A fresh exposition of a Wesleyan paradigm should be biblically-centered and not encumbered by either fundamentalist leavening or an indiscriminating canonization of pluralism. As William Abraham has said:

Wesleyans need to recover not just the genius of the Wesleyan heritage in its theology, they also need to recover its genius for organization, social involvement, ecumenical action, and world mission. For example, the single greatest loss over the years within Wesleyan circles has been the abandoning of the pattern of pastoral care established in the class meetings.⁵

⁴*Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39, 1980; see also Stephen Monsma, "Justice Potter Stewart on Church and State," *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Summer 1994), 573.

⁵Abraham, William. *The Coming Great Revival* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 111.

However Wesleyans construct new paradigms of theology and ministry, it is essential that they be relevant to the needs of postmodern society. Following the examples of Jesus, Paul, the Wesleys, and the nineteenth-century holiness leaders, we must contextualize the biblical message and apply Christian love and righteousness to the brokenness, confusion, segmentalism, and pluralism which characterize our time.

These paradigms must be transformational rather than accommodational in their expressions. The value of the commendable concern of liberalism to relate the Christian message to the culture was minimized because it too often overly accommodated the message to cultural values. This reduced or erased the tension between the gospel and the culture and resulted in an assimilation of surrounding cultural values creating a process of secularization of the church and its message. This resulted in a marginalization of the church's impact on cultural values and a corresponding loss of influence as well as membership.⁶ On the other hand, the transformational paradigms of theology and ministry should incarnate a genuine love, acceptance, and forgiveness rather than the theory-centered, middle class, sectarian dogma that too often has characterized the broader evangelical wing of the church—where a concern for the preservation of a movement or institution has often been prioritized over a commitment to an incarnational, sacrificial, and transformational agenda. Purity of dogma and creed have been elevated over love and Christian unity. It is at this point, that a Wesleyan/Holiness model has much to offer the evangelical movement in the service of effective ministry in the new cultural landscape of the twenty-first century.

An effective agenda for theology and ministry in the twenty-first century will need to be praxis-oriented. It must address the issues of personal and societal wholeness. It must express an ethical system which addresses structures and systems rather than just single issues. It must focus on social transformation—the agenda will include human rights and ecological concerns as well as the traditional Wesleyan/Holiness concern for the poor. Single issue ethics (e.g., abortion and pornography) must be replaced by the holistic concern for the entire creation and justice for the entire world. This will require a radical change from twentieth-century evangelical dogma which has become primarily absorbed with subjective

⁶See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

experience and doctrinal orthodoxy. Twenty-first century Wesleyan/Holiness theology will need to clarify its independence from both the fundamentalist and liberal legacies. A transformational theology of empowerment through the ministry of the Holy Spirit must be recovered and re-interpreted to move us beyond the preoccupation with denominational orthodoxy and the statistical fixation brought on by unbalanced suburban church growth methodologies which have not included correspondingly profound concerns and actions for the poor, or ministry to the cities. In short, a Wesleyan/Holiness agenda for the twenty-first century must radically proclaim that holiness is the operationalizing of Christlikeness in the world.

I. The Challenge

A. Overcoming Provincialism. The challenge faced by the Wesleyan/Holiness agenda during this transitional period is to overcome the provincialism which has plagued the tradition while at the same time maintaining its essential identity. This requires that the tradition maintain its historic concern for separation from the world, but doing so in significant and not trivial sorts of ways. Elton Trueblood notes the issue of “Quaker linen” in the Friends tradition.⁷ In the Wesleyan/Holiness revivalist tradition, this separationism involved the tendency to utilize experiential stereotypes as indicators of assurance, the use of quaint and obscure vocabulary, stereotypical patterns of attire, a legalistic attitude toward prudential concerns, and guilt-oriented motivational emphases.

Jesus is the primary example of separation in profound ways—he consistently acted in love, even when his Sabbath healings, for example, were not politically correct according to the religious establishment. This calls to account the culturally accommodated behavior too often associated with the religious establishment today. Some current examples of accommodational behavior are the use of corporate models of church and institutional management and leadership, depersonalized personnel policies which treat people as commodities in Christian institutions, and the use of politicized career advancement systems (or “good old boy” networks).⁸ When Christ interacted with the world, he did not condemn it,

⁷Elton Trueblood, *The Incendiary Fellowship* (New York: Harper, 1967).

⁸See John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

but sought to transform it, as is seen in his relating to “publicans and sinners,” the Samaritan woman, and Zaccheus.⁹

B. Urban Ministry. A particular context which the Wesleyan/Holiness agenda must address with utmost priority is ministry in and to the urban culture. It was no accident that Paul targeted the cities for his intercultural evangelism task. Not only are the prevailing cultural trends formed first in the cities, but the cities are also the most concentrated microcosms of the diversity of the multi-ethnic communities and the most visible concentrations of the poor.

The Holiness wing of Wesleyanism in the twentieth century has seemed to intentionally avoid being contaminated by the cities. The satirical comment that most holiness schools are located “twenty miles from the nearest known sin” is close enough to reality to make us uncomfortable. With few exceptions (such as the Salvation Army and the Free Methodist Continental Urban Exchange network), the holiness denominations have increasingly avoided the inner cities with their concentrations of poverty and multi-ethnic populations. This, ironically, follows a similar pattern of separation from the poor that characterized nineteenth-century Methodism from which these denominations separated originally. My own father’s experience of unsuccessfully attempting to negotiate a merger between the Pilgrim Holiness Church and an African-American denomination in Mississippi in the 1930s is an example of the phobic reaction of the holiness denominational bureaucracies to meaningful involvement in the ministry to the ethnic and poor in the United States. These same denominations have historically developed very aggressive foreign mission enterprises to reach the poor and people of color on other continents.

Rather than consistently concentrating on a contextualized ministry to the poor and socially marginalized people, which was a top priority for Wesley and the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement, the contemporary holiness denominational agendas have focused on gaining ascendancy of socio-economic status which has involved emigration out of even many of the urban locations where they did have ministries! Their new locations? The suburbs, of course! That is where the church growth experts have said they can find “homogeneous groups” which are, after all, more desirable.

⁹Matt. 9:10; John 4; Luke 19.

This is what the nineteenth-century Methodist churches were accused of doing by the founders of the holiness denominations, and this has been called “*embourgeoisement*” by contemporary holiness scholars.¹⁰ The twenty-first century Wesleyan/Holiness agenda needs to examine self-critically its integrity of coherence between doctrine and mission. Obviously, the more prosperous suburban dwellers need the message of Christ. But the proportion of time, money, personal ministry resources, and denominational commitment to church planting are so disproportionately distributed *per capita* in favor of the suburban and rural white populations that all pretensions to being faithful to the holiness tradition of a “preferential option for the poor” are seriously compromised.

C. Responsiveness to Cultural Changes. It is a truism today that, in order to communicate the gospel effectively, we must understand the culture to which we are speaking. The Apostle Paul effectively contextualized the Christian revelation to a Hellenistic world centuries ago, reporting:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under God’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23, NASV).

This apostolic principle of cross-cultural communication and contextualization has been employed effectively for hundreds of years in ministries to countless cultures. Yet, in spite of its validity, the manner in which it is implemented is often problematic. The accommodation to culture of Protestant liberalism was ostensibly an expression of this cultural contextualization, and yet many evangelical Christians would observe that the

¹⁰Donald Dayton, “The Historical Background of Pneumatological Issues in the Holiness Movement,” *The Spirit and the New Age*, ed. by R. Larry Shelton and Alex R. G. Deasley (Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 1986), 239; Robert Walter Wall, “The *Embourgeoisement* of the Free Methodist Ethos,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 25, Number 1 (Spring 1990): 117-130.

gospel was not communicated; it was given away to become indistinguishable from the culture and values surrounding it.

The case could also be made that fundamentalism, on the other hand, instead of maintaining the purity of the gospel, accommodated it to the rationalistic thought patterns of a post-Enlightenment neo-scholasticism in order to develop an anti-liberal apologetic. Evangelicals have been attempting to cleanse themselves from this dip in the waters of cultural accommodation ever since. Because of association with the aims and projects of fundamentalism, the Holiness Movement in America was also significantly altered in its theology and character by this fundamentalist leavening.¹¹ Indeed, it is nearly impossible to prevent a theology from absorbing identifiable traits from the culture on which it is focused. For example, look at the traditional theories of the theology of the atonement. They each reflect characteristics of the cultures out of which they were developed.¹² The solution is not to attempt to maintain a vacuum-sealed separation from culture, but to engage in constant self-critical reflection to ensure that the respective theological nuance does not materially distort and subvert the substance of the gospel which it is attempting to communicate. This safeguard can function only when the theology operates in a context which is sophisticated enough in the characteristics of the receptor culture to recognize points at which the theological expression crosses the accommodational line.

If the motivation for Wesleyan/Holiness theology is to communicate effectively to the twenty-first century culture, it must then profoundly study and understand the world-views and thought patterns of that culture. Many scholars believe that we are experiencing a cataclysmic cultural paradigm shift from the Enlightenment worldview, known as “modernism” and to which Thomas Oden refers as “terminal modernity,”¹³ to a new worldview(s) known as “postmodernism.” He identifies the time span of the Age of Modernism as roughly the 200 years between the French Revolution and the fall of Communism, 1789-1989.¹⁴ The period of mod-

¹¹Paul Bassett, “Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 13 (Spring 1978), 65-91.

¹²See R. Larry Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 19, Number 1 (Spring 1984).

¹³Oden, “The Death of Modernity and Postmodern Evangelical Spirituality,” *op.cit.*, 19.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

ernism he identifies as “technological messianism, enlightenment idealism, quantifying empiricism, and the smug fantasy of inevitable historical progress. We have fooled ourselves on all counts.”¹⁵ Modernism reduced human existence to merely the sum of its parts, and left no room for God. The liberal vision of unlimited human potential based on scientific and technological achievements has proven itself impotent to transmit its values intergenerationally. Only in some academic circles, church leadership bureaucracies, and other settings with vested interest in preserving the modernist worldview does the illusion of a healthy modernism still exist. In the general culture the modernist paradigm exists only as a remnant of its past cultural hegemony.¹⁶ The myth of unlimited progress has borne the bitter fruit of imminent nuclear disaster, ecological chaos, and further exploitation of marginalized peoples. In reaction to this sordid scenario, a growing number of the younger generation have come to believe that reason and truth are subversive political disguises for power and oppression. Therefore, they reject the existence of objective truth altogether. Their position is that reality is always viewed through the lens of culture, and is whatever the respective culture perceives it to be. Since claims to truth are thought to be disguises for power, they are unilaterally denied in favor of one’s own version of reality. This is the new paradigm of reality known as “postmodernism.”

Although an extensive analysis of this movement is beyond the scope of this study, a number of characteristics of the postmodern culture should be noted here. These characteristics establish a whole new set of groundrules for doing theology which will communicate to this age.

1. Anti-Foundationalism. The intellectual paradigms of the Western world have always had specific roots in some kind of foundation for truth such as God, rational thought, economics, or empiricism. Post-modernism is anti-foundational. It seeks to destroy all claims to objective foundations for truth. These are judged to be only constructions of language. Philosopher Patricia Waugh notes:

Counter-Enlightenment, of course, is as old as Enlightenment itself, but whereas in the past, in romantic thought for example, the critique of reason was accompanied by an alternative Foundationalism (of the Imagination), Postmodernism tends to

¹⁵Ibid., 24.

¹⁶See Oden’s comments, op.cit., 27-33.

claim an abandonment of all metanarratives which could legitimate foundations for truth. And more than this, it claims that we neither need them, nor are they desirable.¹⁷

Postmodernism intends to do without frameworks or foundations for knowledge. In doing so, it is a paradigm without paradigms. Since foundationalism affirms that knowledge is a reflection of a truth which has a stable basis in some form of reality, postmodernism says that, since there is no objective truth, a foundation is unnecessary and the person's subjective perception is an adequate indicator of truth.¹⁸ Postmodernist Jean Francois Lyotard says there is a resistance to all metanarratives, or overarching paradigms of truth. The postmodern epistemology shifts from foundationalism to social construction.¹⁹ All the classical foundations for truth, such as the principles of coherence, non-contradiction, and other principles of logic are rejected. Logical inconsistency is a problem for the Western modernist worldview, but not for the relativistic forms of postmodern constructivism. This relativistic view of truth sees it as dynamic, not only in matters of taste or fashion, but in matters of substance, such as spirituality, morality, history, and reality itself.²⁰

2. Deconstructionism. The intellectual heritage of postmodernism is rooted primarily in literary criticism. The methodology of "deconstructionism" grows out of that discipline. This concept assumes that language cannot render truths about the world in any objective way. Language is a cultural creation and meaning is a social construction. Therefore, language shapes the ideas it transmits.²¹ Since language is so culture-bound, it thinks for us, in a sense. Thus, language is a prison-house from which the deconstructionist seeks to escape. In order to escape the oppression of language, deconstructionists have developed a "hermeneutics of suspicion" to approach a text, not to find out what it means, but to find out

¹⁷Patricia Waugh, *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), 5.

¹⁸Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), 49ff.

¹⁹Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn. Press), 198, xxiii-xxiv. Cited in Veith, 151.

²⁰Dennis McCallum, *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 31ff.

²¹Veith, 53f.

what it is hiding.²² This is not an objective, scholarly analysis of the text, for deconstructionists do not believe that there is an objective, transcendent meaning which language can reveal. On the contrary, language constructs meaning. A “subversive reading” of the text thus uncovers not an objective truth conveyed by the syntax, but the cultural power relationships which are masked by the language. Every text is a political creation which functions to maintain the status quo of power in the culture. The result is a reader-response hermeneutic which evacuates meaning from the linguistic structure of the text and replaces it within a meaning constructed by the reader. The intent of the author, the etymology of the language, the thrust of the argument of a text are all subordinated to the perception of the reader and the reader’s re-construction of the meaning of the text. Instead of having a fixed meaning which might be uncovered through a scholarly hermeneutical process, the text may have any number of meanings which only come to light in the reader’s response to it.²³

The implications of such an approach to the exegesis of Scripture are obvious. Culture supersedes Scripture as the source of authority for the reader. The Bible becomes a “cultural artifact,” as it has been described by members of the Jesus Seminar.²⁴

3. Constructivism. In its reaction against the Enlightenment attempts to define and locate objective truth, postmodernists resort to constructing their own meaning. Those who make up their own truth are called “constructivists.” Walter Truett Anderson describes this perspective:

The constructivists—whose thinking runs close to my own . . . say that we do not have a “God’s eye” view of nonhuman reality, never had, never will have. They say we live in a symbolic world, a social reality that many people construct together and yet experience as the objective “real world.” And they also tell us the earth is not a *single* symbolic world, but rather a vast universe of “multiple realities,” because different groups of

²²Thomas Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1992), 79.

²³Norman R. Gully, “Reader-Response Theories in Postmodern Hermeneutics: A Challenge to Evangelical Theology,” *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, David S. Dockery, editor (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1995), 218.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 219.

people construct different stories, and because different languages embody different ways of experiencing life.²⁵

Since societies thus construct their own meaning through their language, all meaning and thought are social constructions. This rebellion against the power structures of language and objective truth results in the political correctness of group thinking as the postmodern version of reality.²⁶

4. Pluralism. Because meaning and language are constructed by each respective culture, the postmodernist rejects all forms of objective or exclusivist truth claims as being oppressive. Therefore, each culture has the right to define its meaning in its own context, and each of these sets of meaning is equally valid. No group can define truth or meaning for any other group. This cultural relativism, based upon a variety of “local knowledges” or “paradigms,” also moves into a cultural determinism because individual differences in people are assumed to be based on the different cultural backgrounds and forces to which people have been exposed. Peter Berger says:

A thought of any kind is grounded in society. . . . The individual, then, derives his worldview socially in very much the same way that he derives his roles and his identity. In other words, his emotions and his self-interpretation like his actions are predefined for him by society, and so is his cognitive approach to the universe that surrounds him.²⁷

Therefore, it is discriminatory to criticize a person’s worldview or religious beliefs, because people have little control over them. It is assumed to be arrogant, therefore, to allege that there are errors in the religious views of other groups. The tolerant thing to do is to accept all views as being of equal value.

5. Multiculturalism, Tribalism, and Segmentalism. As a result of the postmodernist understanding of linguistic relativism and constructivism of views of reality and culture, society is becoming fragmented into competing and “mutually unintelligible cultures and subcultures”

²⁵Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn’t What It Used To Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 6.

²⁶Veith, 48.

²⁷Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1963), 17.

resulting in the emergence of a “new tribalism.”²⁸ The massiveness of changes in society, technology, and ideology in the late twentieth-century has “undermined the very principle of a unified national culture and has driven individuals to find their identities in subcultures,” says Eugene Veith, a Lutheran critic of postmodernism.²⁹ This sorting of persons into mutually exclusive groups leads to intolerance, not the tolerant pluralism which postmodernism claims to espouse. On a global scale, this has historically been evidenced by the “ethnic cleansing” in Eastern Europe which resulted from the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. The genocidal revolutions in Africa and the fundamentalist Jihad in the Moslem world have certainly not reflected the kind of tolerance and mutual respect which postmodernists have claimed will be the result of multiculturalism. Nevertheless, the trend continues.

Group identities have developed along the lines of ethnic and minority issues, political activism causes, and religious identities, philosophies, and values. Many of these issues have developed into “culture wars,” which have only increased the polarization, hostility, and segmentalism. Christians have tended to become marginalized into simply another segment of the culture with their own respective values and institutions.³⁰ Postmodernism blames the unified Western culture for “racism, imperialism, sexism, homophobia, and the whole litany of post-Marxist evils,” says Veith. He continues:

Today universities and their sphere of influence—including public schools, the media, and policy makers at almost every level—are dismantling the concept of a unitary American culture in an attempt to establish a “multicultural” state.³¹

A Wesleyan analysis of culture would certainly affirm the need for sensitivity to multicultural diversity, but it would seem that a more positive form of multiculturalism and diversity should be reflected from the Christian belief that all human beings are created in the image of God and may share in the redemptive community formed by the Spirit of Christ. The unity and diversity of the church, extending through time and throughout the world in all cultures seems a much better model for a true

²⁸Veith, 144ff.

²⁹Veith, 144.

³⁰Veith, 144-148.

³¹Veith, 149.

multiculturalism than the postmodern exclusivist model.³² However, since there are enough troublesome examples of intolerance and oppression associated with Christianity, postmodernists tend to identify it with the most oppressive forms of modernist power structures.

6. Non-ecclesial Spirituality—“spirituality without truth.” The modernist form of religion attempted to accommodate itself to culture through a rationalistic rejection of the categories of the supernatural and the miraculous in order to find acceptance with modernist intellectuals. But the debate between liberalism and evangelical Christianity was always focused on the nature of truth. Is there a God or not? Is Jesus divine or not? Is salvation universal or not? Postmodernism, on the other hand, has abandoned the category of truth altogether. It says that moral values are relative and reality is socially constructed by one’s respective reference communities. Ideas, doctrines, and religious forms are accepted or rejected on the basis of whether or not persons “like” them. People are unwilling to believe ideas they do not enjoy. The validity of truth claims for a particular religious perspective are irrelevant for the postmodernist.

Since personal preference rather than truth is the motivation for spirituality, the “only wrong idea is to believe in truth; the only sin is to believe in sin,” says Eugene Veith.³³ Ultimately, the self becomes god, truth becomes relative, and the objective universe is an illusion. Postmodernist Walter Truett Anderson says:

The rush of postmodern reaction from the old certainties has swept some people headlong into a worldview even more radical than that of the constructivists. Many voices can now be heard declaring that what is out there is only what we *put* out there. More precisely, What *I* put there—just little me, euphorically creating my own universe. We used to call this solipsism; now we call it New Age spirituality.³⁴

This is a spirituality without truth. The self becomes divine. One’s beliefs are a syncretistic blend of their own fantasies, Eastern mysticism, New Age techniques, and old-fashioned paganism.³⁵ Renowned historian Arnold Toynbee has observed that when a transcendent religious consen-

³²Veith, 155ff.

³³Veith, 196.

³⁴Anderson, op.cit., 7-9.

³⁵Veith, 198-201.

sus is lost in a society, new objects of worship fill the spiritual vacuum. He identifies three of these alternative “idolatries”: nationalism, ecumenicalism, and technicalism.³⁶ In nationalism, a transcendent universal faith is replaced by a “deified parochial community.” The ecumenicalism option idolizes some form of unity while accommodating itself to extensive diversity. Rome’s emperor worship was an attempt to corral the disjointed religious pluralism with an overarching ecumenical theme for cultural unity. This worship of unity ultimately leads, he says, to a suppression of individuality and loss of liberty. Finally, the idolization of technology results from the insatiable appetite of the contemporary culture for electronic technology. This tendency can become the defining value and symbol as culture gives it a religious function presided over by the technicians who control a knowledge which is inaccessible to the laity.³⁷ The result of all this is the ascendancy of a syncretistic spirituality focused on the gratification of one’s own desires. It is a spirituality without reference to truth. People looking for real answers find themselves lost in a relativistic fog where truth is exchanged for a lie, reminiscent of Paul’s characterization of the culture of the first century (Romans 1:25).

II. The Resources

The concern for the spiritual welfare of the marginalized and poor of society was a central programmatic principle for John Wesley. The nineteenth-century Holiness Movement also radically applied this priority in its concerns for anti-slavery, women’s rights, and a variety of other social justice issues.³⁸ Precedent has been adequately established for the twenty-first century Wesleyan/Holiness movement to build on. The call to respond to the postmodernist cultural paradigm is particularly appropriate for Wesleyanism. In my opinion, the Wesleyan tradition, along with other pneumatically-oriented groups such as Mennonites, evangelical Quakers, and Charismatics, are well-equipped to relate creatively to this cultural

³⁶Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian’s Approach to Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 219-238.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 219-238.

³⁸Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Nancy Hardesty, *Great Women of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982); Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

shift with its rejection of traditional dogmatic and rational categories of thought and religion. Significant resources exist in the heritage of Wesleyanism which can serve the purpose of developing the relevant models of cross-cultural contextualization called for in the twenty-first century. These include aspects not only of Wesleyan soteriology, but of ecclesiology and praxis as well.

Theological Method and the Work of the Spirit. The Wesleyan theological methodology in itself provides a distinctive approach toward developing a scriptural theology which is effective in addressing the life and praxis-oriented issues which affect postmoderns. Rather than constructing dogmatic theological systems which tend to elevate orthodox creedalism above responsiveness to individual and systemic brokenness, a Wesleyan theology grows out of a “hermeneutic of love,” as Mildred Wynkoop terms it.³⁹ This theology of love focuses on the application of Christlikeness to the spiritual emptiness, personal brokenness, and systemic twistedness which characterize the universal experience of persons. The Wesleyan emphasis on Christian experience and the assurance grounded in a relationship with the Holy Spirit address the postmodern desire for spirituality. This is a “practical divinity.”⁴⁰ Also, the so-called “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” provides a balanced approach which does not allow reason to develop into a hardened category. The Wesleyan theological method maintains its foundation of authority in the truth of Christ as it is communicated through the inspired canonical witness. This necessarily involves an epistemology of the Spirit, the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*, by which the Holy Spirit affirms the authority of the text to the worshipping community.⁴¹

Such a theological method seems admirably suited to address the postmodern cultural antipathy to rational proofs, rigid creedal orthodoxy, and institutional dogma. It addresses the postmodern desire to construct

³⁹Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

⁴⁰Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

⁴¹R. Larry Shelton, “John Wesley’s Approach to Scripture in Historical Perspective,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 16, Number 1 (Spring 1981), 23-50; Rob L. Staples, “Wesleyan Perspectives on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” *The Spirit and the New Age*, R. Larry Shelton and Alex R. G. Deasley, eds. (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1986), 209.

truth and values out of the experience of the reference community by providing a community of faith extended in space and time and enlightened and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Wesleyan Soteriology. John Wesley's biblically-based and experientially-known way of salvation is often summarized as "faith working by love." In his very perceptive and thorough treatment of Wesleyan soteriology, Kenneth Collins notes that the purpose of this Wesleyan way of salvation is "to transport believers to a larger world than they had previously experienced: to God through faith, and to their neighbors through love."⁴² The Wesleyan *via salutis* not only addresses the relationships between the believer, God, and one's neighbor, but the relationship with the life to come—eschatology.⁴³ The operative dynamic in this salvation process is the theme of God's grace. Indeed, "there is no point in Wesley's theology of salvation where divine grace is not the leading motif."⁴⁴ It was grace that formed humanity in creation and instilled the image of God which expresses the relationship the creature has with the Creator. The moral aspect of the image of God, however, is not a sentimental and unstructured relationship, but works in conjunction with the moral law. Collins calls it "normed grace."⁴⁵ It is unbelief, the perversion of this relationship between God and humanity, which constitutes the essence of sin. The desire to be independent, to exist without regard to relationship, is the foundation for pride and self-will which gives rise to corruption of the will, pride, and evil tempers. Thus alienated from the relationship with God, humanity engages in the idolatry of "worshipping themselves as the center of meaning in life."⁴⁶

This worship of the self is the very essence of the postmodern spirituality. The pride placing of self at the core of reality and meaning deprives one of the life-giving presence of relationship with the Spirit of God, and results in the depravation and deception of finding values and meaning only in one's own perception of reality and not in the ultimate reality of God. In his treatment of original sin, Wesley notes:

⁴²Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 16.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 20-26.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 27-35.

For though some of them “run well,” they are still off the way; they never aim at the right mark. Whithersoever they move, they cannot move beyond the circle of self. They seek themselves, they act for themselves; their natural, civil, and religious actions, from whatever spring they come, do all run into and meet in, this dead sea.⁴⁷

Wesley’s analysis of the human condition is amazingly relevant to the analysis of the postmodern condition. In like manner, his understanding of the cure for this self-idolatry is also to the point. Based on the saving work of Christ, prevenient grace is applied to all persons through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This grace leads to the convincing grace which brings the sinner into confrontation with the moral law persuades that they are spiritually dead. This state of the fear of God leads them by grace through a dynamic process of a realization of the grace of God in justification and regeneration by faith.⁴⁸ This begins the process of the restoration of the moral image of God through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Through the grace of God, the restoration of the *imago Dei* begins to develop with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ This process of sanctification leads one into a conviction of inbred sin, and also into a movement away from solitariness to a desire for social religion, a need to share in community with other Christians. Through works of piety and practicing the means of grace, sanctifying grace leads the believer into a desire for holy tempers and a desire to do good works. This sanctifying grace leads the believer into entire sanctification characterized by being perfected in love, which Wesley describes as “the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart by the whole life.”⁵⁰ With this entire sanctification made effectual by grace, love replaces sin at the center of oneself, love overcomes evil passions and tempers, and the moral image of God, reflecting the goodness of God and loving relationship with God is

⁴⁷John Wesley, “The Doctrine of Original Sin,” *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, Vol. 9 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 456. Cited by Collins, op.cit., 35.

⁴⁸Collins, *ibid.*, 47-70.

⁴⁹Collins, *ibid.*, 105, 124-126, 153-154.

⁵⁰John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford, Vol. 5 (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 38; cited by Collins, op. cit., 175.

renewed.⁵¹ As this love of God is actualized in the life of the believer in sanctification and the *imago Dei* is restored, that person is qualified for a future in heaven and final justification. Holiness prepares the believer for reigning with Christ in heaven.⁵²

This salvation model of creation, fallenness, and transformation is in sharp tension with the postmodern subjectivism and deification of the self. However, the dynamic and processive form of Wesley's interpretation of biblical faith has much to commend it to the twenty-first century culture. It is a good corrective to the self-oriented construction of values and reliance upon self-motivated forms of spirituality. The emphasis on grace and love as relational characteristics of God bestowed on His loved ones should have much appeal to a culture which is disenchanted with institutional religion. But the idea of the restoration of the image of God will need to remain clearly based on grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit alone, lest postmoderns reconstruct it in terms of the deification of the self. The role of grace as empowerment also has promise as a cultural bridge to the postmodern concern for empowerment and release from oppression. The social aspects of Wesley's *via salutis* also should have great appeal to contemporary culture, and may be effective in establishing points of entry to the gospel for those who experience alienation and marginalization in society. The emphasis on works of piety and loving one's neighbor, based on the transformation of grace rather than self-effort, may provide a counter-cultural alternative to the postmodern multiculturalism which has a greater affinity with tribalism and the uncritical tolerance for diversity exhibited in pluralism than with any kind of other-centered motivation of love. A truly un-self-serving love for others motivated by Christ's unconditional love is truly a transformational paradigm for postmoderns. The relational aspects of salvation and the image of God will also appeal to the postmodern need for community and communication with the divine. While not so sensational as the New Age channeling process, communion in the Holy Spirit is accompanied by an ethical and behavioral dimension which lends authenticity to the outcomes of spirituality. The pragmatic postmodernist should be impressed with this functional result of spirituality. By the same token, the twenty-first century person will also be equally unimpressed if ethical, loving behavior is not

⁵¹Collins, op. cit., 177.

⁵²Collins, op. cit., 199.

evidenced as the outcome of spirituality. This calls for integrity on the part of the Christian community in maintaining accountability for the behavioral expectations of the gospel.

Finally, Collins has creatively and correctly interpreted Wesley's "Scripture Way of Salvation" as a "conjunctive soteriology" which has significant ecumenical implications. He sees Wesley's doctrine of salvation as a reflection, not of any single theological tradition, but of a synthesis of the diverse aspects seen in Scripture. While individual theological traditions tend to select certain biblical emphases while minimizing others, Wesley developed a sophisticated synthesis which unites, in Collins words:

law and gospel, faith and holy living, grace and works, grace as both favor and empowerment, justification and sanctification, instantaneousness and process, the universality of grace (prevenient) and its limited (saving) actualization, divine initiative and human response, as well as initial and final justification.⁵³

Such a model, with its sound basis in the broad nuances of Scripture, should provide a promising context for cooperative discussion and unity of mission for an evangelical community whose diverse denominationalism often provides significant obstacles to evangelism. A unified front and a message of love, community, and promise for eternal life are contributions and resources which the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition can make that can effectively address the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Wesleyan Ecclesiology. This emphasis on community moves into the Wesleyan ecclesiology which sees the church not as a magisterial institution, but as a community on mission. Colin Williams notes, "Mission is the primary task of the church" in the Wesleyan tradition.⁵⁴ Albert Outler says, "Wesley's understanding of the church was that it is an *act*, a function, a mission in the world rather than a form and institution."⁵⁵ For Wesley, ecclesiology is subordinated to the salvation task. The church

⁵³Collins, op. cit., 207.

⁵⁴Williams, Colin, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 209.

⁵⁵Albert Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" *The Doctrine of the Church*, Dow Kirkpatrick, ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 19.

exists to implement the mission of salvation.⁵⁶ It is a relational community of faith which tolerates a significant diversity in reflecting a “catholic spirit,” while still maintaining the identity which postmoderns desire in their drift toward tribalism. Wesley saw the church as a community made up only of believers in Christ. All those whose lives conformed to the evangelical criteria of faith, regeneration, and baptism were welcomed as members of the true church.⁵⁷ But the exclusivism of this Christ-centered community of faith was defined by its character of grace and love and unity, not by its exclusive list of membership requirements.⁵⁸ It will be the “expulsive power of a new affection” which attracts the postmodern world to Christ, not the exclusiveness of a holiness elitism or a dogmatic tradition or exclusive church membership covenants which focus on individual prudentials as criteria for exclusion.

Wesley also subordinated the external form of the church to its soteriological function. This “evangelical pragmatism” led him to adapt the forms of the church’s expression and of his ministry to the needs of his audience. The effectiveness of Whitefield’s open-air preaching led Wesley to “be more vile” and adapt his own methods.⁵⁹ His other innovations in the form of societies, class meetings, bands, and various agencies for social reform and compassionate ministry were created to enable the church to fulfill its mission of salvation.⁶⁰

It was reported of the early church, “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken” (Acts. 4:31). If we are to communicate with the twenty-first century culture, we must learn the lessons of the first-century church. The worship, music, preaching, and teaching do not have to be perfect, but people have to feel they are accepted and loved. The postmodern hunger for networks and communities of identity is not a new human desire. If people are to experience God in worship, we must love them in our fellowships. They want to be accepted with all their

⁵⁶Clarence Bence, “Salvation and the Church,” *The Church*, Alex R. G. Deasley and Daniel N. Berg, eds. (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1984), 303f.

⁵⁷John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Thomas Jackson, ed. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), VI, 392-400.

⁵⁸Daniel N. Berg, “The Marks of the Church in the Theology of John Wesley,” *The Church*, Alex R. G. Deasley and Daniel N. Berg, eds. (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1984), 323.

⁵⁹John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, Nehemiah Curnock, ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1938), II, 167.

⁶⁰Bence, op. cit., 306ff.

sins and imperfections. They want to be loved. That is how they will begin to experience God. We are God's representatives to them (2 Cor. 5:20). This is certainly an agenda to which the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition can respond with its legacy of love, fellowship, community, and small group ministry.⁶¹ The structure of class meetings, bands, and societies is as relevant now as in Wesley's day. George Hunter III develops strategies for implementing this kind of ministry with his discussions of "Reaching Out Across Social Networks," "Ministering to People's Needs," and "'Indigenizing' the Church's Ministries."⁶² These are resources from which we can draw for the twenty-first century.

Christian Experience. Growing out of his experience of certainty of God's acceptance of him, John Wesley proclaimed that one could actually have a sense of the presence of God. This experience of knowing God's love would lead to an even deeper sense of love of and intimacy with God. This message was radical in Wesley's day when speculation and reason were more socially acceptable forms of religious foundation. This message provoked charges of "enthusiasm" from his critics, but drew massive response from the repressed, lonely, and marginalized persons whose search for spiritual fulfillment had been obstructed by their exclusion from or disillusionment with a stifling Anglican religious establishment. Jerry Mercer shows that "for Wesley, the goal of Christian experience is happiness."⁶³ Mercer says, "Wesley sees Christian experience as the refinement, enlargement and focusing of our natural inclination for happiness (including the search for meaning in life). . . . Our misguided selfishness limits our abilities to realize that only God . . . is capable of quenching our thirst for contentment."⁶⁴ As the evil which hinders our freedom for spiritual growth is cleansed by the love of God and the will is more and more conformed to the Divine will, the aspiration for God is enhanced and authentic happiness is progressively realized.⁶⁵ In commenting on Jesus' Sermon in Matthew 5, Wesley says:

⁶¹D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Publishing House, 1997).

⁶²George Hunter III, *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987).

⁶³Jerry L. Mercer, "Toward a Wesleyan Theology of Experience," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 20, Number 1 (Spring 1985), 80.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 83.

Knowing that happiness is our common aim, and that an innate instinct continually urges us to the pursuit of it, He in the kindest manner applies to that instinct, and directs it to its proper object. Though all men desire, yet few attain, happiness, because they seek it where it is not found. Our Lord therefore begins his divine institution, which is the complete art of happiness, by laying down, before all that have ears to hear, the true, and only true, method of acquiring it.⁶⁶

Whether happiness is a goal or a by-product of salvation, such a message of hope and fulfillment for life here and now is certainly an appropriate gospel for a postmodern culture which is desperately seeking spiritual fulfillment and experience which relates practically to their present lives.

Creativity in Communication. The challenge of communicating the truth of the gospel to a culture which perceives of truth as only a socially constructed concept is indeed a daunting one. Following some of the directions suggested by Pierre Babin in *The New Era in Religious Communication*, Michael J. Glodo addresses this task.⁶⁷ William Larkin also suggests that evangelicals must state the Christian message in forms which are intelligible and relevant to the postmodern culture, while at the same time remaining faithful to biblical content.⁶⁸ This dual task is not a new dilemma. The New Testament recognizes the need for this kind of contextualization, and Jesus and Paul in particular effectively model forms of communication which reach the Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman cultures of their day.

Donald Bloesch highlights the need for evangelicals to reframe the substance of evangelical faith in forms which can be more effectively understood by the broader culture. He comments:

⁶⁶John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1966), 28, verse 2.

⁶⁷Michael J. Glodo, "The Bible in Stereo: New Opportunities for Biblical Interpretation in an A-Rational Age," *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement* (Wheaton: Victor Books/BridgePoint, 1995), 148-150; Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), 148.

⁶⁸William Larkin, Jr., "Culture, Scripture's Meaning, and Biblical Authority: Critical Hermeneutics for the 90's," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992), 174. See Pierre Babin, with Mercedes Iannone, *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991).

Evangelical Christianity can only survive by discovering anew the meaning of the biblical gospel for our day. It must also be willing to subordinate itself to the gospel, to alter its own strategies and programs in the light of the gospel. Unfortunately, latter-day evangelicalism is marked by the tendency to seek mastery over the gospel in order to advance itself. The gospel is either converted into a creedal formula possessed by the church or reduced to a therapeutic product dispensed by the clerics of the church. Unless this tendency is reversed, evangelicalism will most certainly lose its spiritual dynamic and momentum. The evangelical church may then see the new wine of the gospel being placed in new wineskins.⁶⁹

This concern is certainly relevant to the Wesleyan/Holiness movement as well. Wesley himself provides ample precedent for contextualization of the gospel into culturally-relevant forms and methods without falling into the accommodationist pitfall. Those of us in his tradition should, of all people, take leadership in addressing these cultural challenges in effective and creative ways which still retain the integrity of the Christian heritage.⁷⁰

The most perceptive and thorough Wesleyan expression of this need to contextualize for the twenty-first century culture is George Hunter III's work on John Wesley's principles and methods of church growth and evangelizing secular people. His books *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit*, *How To Reach Secular People*, and his new book, *Church for the Unchurched*,⁷¹ contribute significantly to this discussion. Based on many years of experience and massive sociological and pastoral research, Hunter describes the secular population and then presents a chapter entitled "Themes and Strategies for Reaching Secular People." He says, "Secular people, like any tribe in Africa, are reached more effectively through the people, language, liturgy, music, architecture, needs, struggles, issues, leaders, and leadership style that are indige-

⁶⁹Bloesch, Donald, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1988), 111ff.

⁷⁰See Rob Staples, "The Present Frontiers of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 12 (Spring 1977): 5-15.

⁷¹See George Hunter III, *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987); *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992); *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

nous to their culture.”⁷² Where the forms of ministry are culturally foreign to the host culture, the church is ineffective and dying.⁷³ Ministries must address the perceived needs of the audience and enable the secular seekers to develop networks of friends who relate to their addictions, needs for support, and who exemplify positive models of Christianity in practice.⁷⁴ Hunter also presents models of evangelism which have proven to be effective in reaching a secular audience, the first being John Wesley’s “Order of Salvation.” The culture of the early Industrial Revolution exemplified the same kind of cultural and geographic dislocations which characterize postmodern society. Wesley sought first to awaken people to their lostness and need for God. This was the rationale behind his “field preaching” and other innovations. Second, he invited the awakened and interested seekers to join a redemptive community, the class meetings and societies. Next, they were then instructed in how to experience new life in Christ and finally to surrender to God’s will and be freed to live wholly by love and move on toward sanctification.⁷⁵

In *Church for the Unchurched*, Hunter notes that the culture barrier is the greatest obstacle secular people have to overcome in accepting the Christian faith. They do not want to become like the “church people” they have known. They experience the traditional jargon, music, customs, and thought patterns of most church communities as an alien, distinctive, and somewhat unattractive subculture. Hunter says that we must realize that the outer forms through which the Gospel is communicated are negotiable. If we are to reach the twenty-first century culture, we must be willing to use forms of outreach, ministry, and worship which are indigenous to that culture.⁷⁶ Finally, Hunter’s analysis of Wesley’s methods of evangelism in *To Spread the Power* offers extensive treatment of analyzing the target audience and developing effective methods to meaningfully challenge that culture with the gospel of Christ.

Exegeting the Culture. Understanding the culture on which ministry is focused is critical to the agenda for theology and evangelism. Mis-

⁷²Hunter, *How To Reach Secular People*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1992, 66.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 55-72.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 81-83.

⁷⁶George G. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), cited in *Alumni Advance*, Summer 1997, Asbury Theological Seminary, 10-11.

siologists, social scientists, and church growth experts have contributed significantly to this need. "Culture" may be defined as "the integrated system of learned ideas, behavior patterns, and products characteristic of a society."⁷⁷ John Wesley effectively practiced an "exegesis" of his culture, as George Hunter illustrates:

Wesley's approach to evangelism and the movement's spread was even "research based," employing rudimentary versions of what became qualitative behavioral science research methods . . . but to my knowledge the tradition has not adequately perceived how Wesley's field research methods informed Methodism's wider evangelism and growth.⁷⁸

Hunter goes on to describe various aspects of Wesley's field research methods and their application to the growth trends of the Methodist movement.⁷⁹ The Wesleyan/Holiness agenda for the twenty-first century must implement such state-of-the-art methods of cultural analysis if it expects to be effective.

Presentation of the Biblical Narrative. The centrality of the role of Scripture in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition has been thoroughly documented. From Wesley's own bibliocentric theology to the present day the issues of the Bible and its interpretation and application to ministry have occupied a major place in Wesleyan life and ministry. For Wesleyans, however, Scripture has been understood as the means by which the Holy Spirit dynamically communicates the Word of God, rather than as a collection of codified divine propositions whose authority is dogmatically and rationally asserted by philosophical argumentation. Instead, Wesleyans have seen Scripture as a "means of grace" through which the Spirit functions to carry on the life-giving ministry of Christ. The authority and authenticity of this ministry is attested by the classical warrants of the reliability of Scripture and the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Hunter, *To Spread the Power*, op.cit., 155.

⁷⁸Ibid., 45.

⁷⁹Ibid., chapters 2-7.

⁸⁰R. Larry Shelton, *Martin Luther's Concept of Biblical Interpretation in Historical Perspective*, Doctor of Theology dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1974; also, Shelton, "John Wesley's Approach to Scripture," op.cit., 36-43; Staples, "Wesleyan Perspectives," op.cit.

Ray Dunning even asserts that this work of the Spirit is “a special case of prevenient grace.”⁸¹

Such a dynamic and relational understanding of Scripture will be effective in dealing with the postmodern rejection of metanarratives. Because it allows Scripture to function in communication with the spiritual and intuitive receptivity of the audience rather than as a cognitive and rationally authenticated doctrinal instrument, it is not as likely to be interpreted by postmoderns as an oppressive instrument of a dominant cultural institution—the church. Furthermore, when allowed to function as canon in witness to Christ in the context of the Holy Spirit’s illumination, Scripture can work in the same narrative way as the biblical history and apostolic preaching worked in the multicultural pluralism context of the first-century Mediterranean world. This will prove far more effective in communicating with the postmodern mindset than the kind of rational, categorical hermeneutic which has characterized modern fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Interestingly, significant contemporary Reformed scholars are also presenting a similar approach to biblical authority, which is reminiscent of Calvin, Luther and other reformers who did not utilize the Scholastic categories of epistemology which characterized the inerrancy model of seventeenth-century neo-Scholastics, nineteenth-century Princeton theology, and twentieth-century fundamentalism.⁸² If the postmoderns can have direct access to the narrative of the Bible, the Holy Spirit will be faithful in using it to apply the convicting grace of God to their twenty-first century hearts. Sound biblical preaching is an essential part of the Wesleyan/Holiness agenda.

New Apologetics. The ineffectiveness of traditional rational forms of apologetics in addressing postmodern faith issues needs to be accepted. Postmodern thinking has been influenced by the philosophical nihilism of Nietzsche. From this perspective, rational and metaphysical thought is an expression of the dominance and will to power of those making the truth

⁸¹H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 63 (see 55-76).

⁸²See Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 67; Jack Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco: Word Books, 1977), contains relevant chapters by Clark Pinnock, Bernard Ramm, and David Hubbard; Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

claims.⁸³ Rational attempts at justifying the superiority of the Christian faith produce effects which are the opposite of those desired. They confirm to the postmodernist that Christianity is an oppressive instrument of modernist attempts at dominance. A more effective direction for a “new apologetics” is to address the fragmentation, despair, and restlessness of a society which has rejected worldview thinking altogether. The points of contact for the Gospel are more likely to relate to social issues such as abortion, AIDS, crime, ecology, and world hunger, issues which the postmodern person sees as threats to human existence. The pragmatic implications of Christian ethical values has apologetic value.

The unifying potential of the love of Christ is another possible apologetic focus. With the escalation of conflicts relating to ethnic origin and social and national allegiance around the world, and the continued oppression and social fragmentation fueled by bigotry and extreme tribal segmentalism, the unifying ideal of Christ’s reconciliation provides a context for oneness. The Apostle Paul’s words to the Galatians addressed a similar cultural fragmentation: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, we are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Furthermore, the postmodern mind is more receptive to the experiential-testimonial or “story” form of religious views than to argumentation on the basis of formal principles of reason. This raises the important issue of the Holy Spirit’s role in penetrating the diverse cultural baggage of multicultural pluralism and convincing postmoderns of the truth of the Christian faith. This was the strategy of the New Testament church. The gospel of Christ convicted its hearers of its truth not by its power of argumentation, but through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16). John Sims points out the success of Pentecostals and charismatics in the Third World in using as apologetic evidence such things as dreams, religious encounters, and the experiences of personal miracles. The Holy Spirit has always used a variety of vehicles and manifestations in effectively convincing persons in pluralistic contexts.⁸⁴

⁸³Giannimi Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, trans. and intro. by Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 6. Cited by William E. Brown, “Theology in a Postmodern Culture: Implications of a Video-Dependent Society,” *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. by David Dockery (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1995), 315f. The philosophical solipism of many aspects of postmodernism is a rebirth of Nietzsche’s nihilism. He is sometimes called the “fountainhead of postmodernism.”

⁸⁴John A. Sims, “Postmodernism: the Apologetic Imperative,” Dockery, ed., *op.cit.*, 330-331. See note 12, p. 342.

A Participatory Community. Perhaps the most promising strategy in evangelizing the postmodern person is inclusion in a vital and effective participatory community. Because of their group orientation and development of identity in relationship to an interpretive community, postmodern persons are responsive to small group contexts where they may establish friendships and observe mentors and role models and participate in discussing and formulating values and points of view. As long as these community contexts do not reflect hierarchical, authoritarian, or institutional tendencies and do provide an inclusive atmosphere of love, acceptance, and forgiveness, the church can utilize them very effectively for introducing postmoderns to Christ and encouraging them toward growth and maturity. James Emery White, a pastor to many postmoderns, says that the presentation of propositional truths is not effective. What attracts is a “strong, caring community of people who can be trusted.”⁸⁵ The need for a community-based context to mediate meaning, values, and traditions is essential.

This community model has been used effectively in virtually every renewal movement in Christianity since the apostolic period. John Wesley’s formation of class meetings, societies, and bands had strong precedent in the pre-Reformation groups of Wyclif and Hus, and in the Pietist renewal societies (*collegia pietatis*) developed by Spener and Francke and which Wesley experienced through the Moravians. There have been few more effective models for evangelism and pastoral development than the various forms of cell groups and communities in the entire history of revivals. Because of the opportunity for dialogue, nurture, pastoral ministry by other laity, and the lack of an institutional ethos, the small group offers a more subtle, loving, and safe form of encounter with issues of the Christian faith than other more crisis-oriented forms of evangelism. It is particularly well suited to the development of social relationship networks which appeal to postmoderns and has much potential for becoming the interpretive community on which they depend for their formation of values and identity issues. The community or cell model also is an essential part of the multiplication-of-units strategy which was used by Wesley and many growing churches today.⁸⁶ George Hunter, Carl George, Win Arn,

⁸⁵James Emery White, “Evangelism in a Postmodern World,” Dockery, *Ibid.*, 369. White provides a useful list of suggested strategies for effective evangelism to postmoderns.

⁸⁶Henderson, *op.cit.*

Michael Henderson, and numerous other church growth strategists and historians of renewal address the use of the participatory community model.⁸⁷

____ **Contextualized Worship and Ministry Forms.** The Enlightenment perception of reality tended to develop a dualistic distinction between mind and matter, and many evangelicals tended to reflect that modernist point of view in emphasizing “saving souls” rather than “saving persons.” Theologian Stanley Grenz says, “If we would minister in the postmodern world, we must realize that the human person is a unified whole, and the Gospel must exercise an impact on humans in their entirety.”⁸⁸ By this he means that the Gospel must impact the whole person by every means possible. Worship needs to integrate the emotional-affective and the intellectual-rational as well as the bodily-sensual aspects of the personality. Spirituality needs to integrate the heart and the head and be intensely practical. The postmodern world sees the unity between internal experience and external activism, and worship and ministry forms must address this unity.⁸⁹

Worship also needs to address relevant contact points in the cultural experience of the worshipper in order to be meaningful. This raises the issue of appropriate music and worship forms. We need to be sensitive to the diversity of tastes within the postmodern society. Although alternative, contemporary, rock, and other popular musical forms may relate to many postmoderns, others are more drawn to a renewed form of more liturgical expression. The use of drama and the arts as an integral part of the worship context is also called for in view of the postmoderns’ desire for diverse experiential approaches. Various forms of sacramental worship may also appeal to segments of the postmodern culture. The use of the sacraments does appeal to a culture which is responsive to symbolic and ritualistic forms of expression and reflection. If musical forms, lyrics, and styles are strange, unfamiliar, or even unpleasant to the ears of postmoderns, they will not remain to hear the rest of the church’s story. Hunter says:

⁸⁷Hunter, *To Spread the Power*, op.cit., chaps. 4 and 5. See Hunter’s bibliography, 213-218. See D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Press, 1997).

⁸⁸Stanley Grenz, “Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology,” Dockery., op.cit., 100; see also Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, op.cit.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 101.

The outer forms through which the Truth is communicated are negotiable. . . . To reach an undisciplined population, the forms of outreach, ministry, and worship must be indigenous to their culture, because each people's culture is the natural medium of God's revelation to them.⁹⁰

That was Wesley's point in adapting his own patterns of innovative musical styles and preaching methods to the needs of his audience. He did not enjoy many of the methods he used, particularly field preaching. Nevertheless, his "sanctified pragmatism," as Hunter calls it, motivated him to evaluate methods according to their outcomes. Hunter summarizes Wesley's contextual worship and evangelism methods:

1. If an approach or method ought to achieve your apostolic objectives, but does not, scuttle it—even if you like it!!
2. If your employment of a method or approach is effective, use it to the hilt—even if you do not like it!
3. There is no perfect method which, like magic, will do the job for us. Rather, Christians evangelize, preceded and empowered by the Spirit, through culturally appropriate methods.⁹¹

This same pragmatism led Wesley to utilize other forms of ministry which addressed the needs of the whole person. A needs-oriented approach to ministry will be necessary to win the pragmatically-focused postmoderns. Extensive research is presently being done by social scientists, pastors, and youth pastors to analyze and identify effective needs-oriented strategies.⁹²

Ecological Sensitivity. A part of the postmodern experience is a sense of relatedness to the earth. Earthkeeping is widely perceived to be of extreme importance. There is a virtually universal concern for the maintenance and healing of the environment. In fact, this issue often

⁹⁰Hunter, *Church for the Unchurched*, op.cit., 11.

⁹¹Hunter, *To Spread the Power*, op.cit., 44. See Hunter's more extended treatment of Wesley's evangelical pragmatism.

⁹²See Barna, *Evangelism That Works*, op.cit.; George Barna, *Generation Next* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995); William Strauss and Neil Howe, *13th Gen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Strauss and Howe, *The Fourth Turning* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997); Mark Senter III, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry: And Its Radical Impact on the Church* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992).

becomes a litmus test by which postmoderns evaluate ideologies and religious movements. An effective witness to this culture will require that the church seriously reflect on the theology of creation, and explicitly communicate its commitment to the stewardship of the creation, as is called for in the creation account (Gen. 1:26, 27). Christian groups such as Green Cross have defined this issue as a key point of entry in reaching the postmodern generation.

III. The Mission

Jesus gave the church its marching orders in the Great Commission when he said, “But you shall receive power after the Holy Ghost has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NASV). The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians in an urban, multi-cultural, religiously pluralistic culture, “I am all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9.22). John Wesley delineated the boundaries of his calling and vision with the pronouncement, “The world is my parish.” The mission to which all Christians are clearly called requires that we empathize with those cultures and persons we wish to reach. We must then face the challenge of analyzing their needs—spiritually, psychologically, sociologically—and then address the task of contextualizing the Gospel verbally and behaviorally to them. This involves translation into the language forms, values, worldviews, and points of pain and need which are necessary to communicate the character and love of Christ to them. Traditional Western, middle-class, conservative or liberal, liturgical or freestyle church forms cannot be superimposed on a postmodern world. This will be interpreted as oppression and will be counterproductive for evangelism.

However, we do need to learn from the history and sociology of religion and not turn contextualization into the kind of assimilation which erodes the distinctiveness of the Christian gospel and its message of holiness. The Wesleyan/Holiness agenda for the twenty-first century will require the development and maintenance of a core community of love which will maintain a creative tension with the postmodern culture in order to be able to transform it effectively. This core community must not maintain separation from the world in trivial ways, but neither can it tolerate uncritical church growth strategies and an undiscerning and sentimental inclusivism which leads ultimately to universalism. It must be a

redemptively counter-cultural community of faith and love which offers to provide a substantial community context of redemptive love to which the non-Christian postmoderns can turn for relief from the cultural bankruptcy to which their quest for subjectively constructed values and views of reality will eventually lead them. While affirming the substance of the biblical message, however, we cannot allow nostalgia and preference for traditional forms to sabotage the higher priority task of evangelism. In this the Wesleyan /Holiness tradition has extensive precedent, both in England and the American context. Wesley said, "I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious in every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in the church."⁹³

An effective mission which will be relevant to the postmodern culture will require the traditional forms of the church to undergo radical transformation. It would be ironic if the movement which follows the model of Wesley himself were to enshrine its own form of institutionalism, thereby insulating itself from the postmodern culture and failing in its evangelistic mission. The radical changes in the forms of ministry initiated by the Wesleys provide precedents for innovation, not models for emulation. Form follows function for Wesley in the structure of the church.⁹⁴ He said:

I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange new way of preaching in the fields . . . having been all my life (till very recently) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church. . . . I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation. . . .⁹⁵

⁹³John Wesley *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Nehemiah Curnock, ed.* (London: Epworth Press, 1938), II, 167.

⁹⁴Clarence Bence, "Salvation and the Church: The Ecclesiology of John Wesley," *The Church: An Inquiry into Ecclesiology from a Biblical Theological Perspective*; Dieter, Melvin E. and Berg, Daniel N., eds. (Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 1984), 311.

⁹⁵John Wesley, *Journal*, II, 167, 209; cited by Henderson, op.cit., 27, 28.

A twenty-first century counterpart to this precedent will be willing to sacrifice many aspects of tradition, institutional organizational patterns, worship styles, musical preferences, theological language, and comfortable and familiar social patterns and relationships in order to connect with the postmodern culture. This kind of call for a radical renewal of structures and styles has always called forth violent reactions from the religious establishment. Note the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, Paul and the Jews, Luther and the papacy, Wesley and old Anglicanism, the Quakers and Puritanism, the Old and New Lights in the Great Awakening, and the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement and the mainline denominations. The present postmodern transformation of culture reflects at least the magnitude of these cultural conflicts and changes. It also calls for at least as radical a response from the church if Christianity is to permeate this next era.

At the same time, a valid Wesleyan/Holiness response to the twenty-first century will also maintain a creative tension against the prevailing culture. If it is to develop a transformational paradigm of theology and mission, it must be able to articulate its distinctiveness against other available religious options in a pluralistic culture. The mainline denominations in America which have tended to accommodate to the culture have been steadily losing ground in membership in relation to their market share of the U.S. population since the American Revolution. The more evangelical and conservative denominations during the same period have demonstrated a much higher amount of growth in relation to their market share. During the nineteenth century, in particular, it was the evangelical and holiness groups which utilized innovative forms of ministry most effectively. Camp meetings, circuits of ministry, lay preaching, revivalism and its innovations, and social justice activism were all earmarks of a cutting-edge evangelical, Wesleyan, and Holiness movement.⁹⁶ Thus, innovation and relevance of the forms of ministry is not to be confused with accommodation; but neither is a traditional resistance to radical and controversial forms of ministry and communication nor are innovation and pragmatism for their own sakes to be confused with biblical Christianity—and certainly not with a Wesleyan/Holiness version of the faith. The Wesleyan/Holiness agenda needs to exhibit a “counter-cultural creativity.” It must maintain a creative tension with postmodern culture in order to be

⁹⁶Smith, *op.cit.*; Dayton, *op.cit.*

able to contribute to its transformation. This transformational counter-cultural model is examined by John Howard Yoder in *The Politics of Jesus* and by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon in *Resident Aliens*.⁹⁷

It is critical that this counter-cultural tension not be interpreted in terms of a dogmatic creedalism or fundamentalist establishment of separationist boundaries. Neither can it reflect a holiness scholasticism which has deteriorated into a thinly-disguised judgmentalism which does not reflect the character of the Christ who love and cherished sinners. On the contrary, it must affirm doctrines which are of central substance to the biblical message of salvation. This counter-cultural creativity must not reflect any hint of cultural and ethnic imperialism. It should reflect a “new Wesleyanism” which focuses on Christ and oneness of community with Him. It should focus on his love, compassion, sense of justice, and uncompromising distaste for the religious establishment whose priority is self-preservation. It should radically affirm Jesus’ willingness to sacrifice oneself for others—for other social classes, other genders, other ethnic groups, other ideologies. That is the Wesleyan/Holiness agenda for the twenty-first century. It will work because it is incarnational, transformational, loving, and Holy Spirit empowered. It is the operationalizing of Christlikeness in the world. That is the message for the twenty-first century.

⁹⁷John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, rev. 1994); Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

THE FUTURE OF WESLEYAN BIBLICAL STUDIES

by

Robert W. Wall¹

The title of this paper invites two different although related responses. The first is the more general concern which inquires about the future of biblical studies. This is an especially appropriate concern in light of the dismal state of this discipline, the result of the continuing detachment of church from academy, and the academy of Christian theology from biblical studies. The second is the more specific and self-critical query which asks about the role that biblical studies might perform within a particular faith tradition. This more “tribal” concern actually presumes that the study of Scripture serves a theological and ecclesial end. The issue taken up in this paper is how biblical scholars should best understand and then facilitate Scripture’s role within Wesleyan communions of believers.

There are at least three reasons for the divorce of biblical from theological studies in the academy.² They are: (1) the privatization of religious commitment in the church; (2) the hegemonic interest of academic biblical studies to protect the scholar’s autonomy from theological commitments; and (3) the unwillingness to accept the legitimacy of theological reflection as an exegetical discipline in the professional guild of biblical scholars. Further, I want to emphasize the corrupting nature of the modern academy itself, which is profoundly skeptical of the supernatural and deeply suspicious of constructions

¹See also in this issue the article by Joel B. Green, a response to Robert Wall.

²See F. Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1997), 4.

of transcendent truth, scholarly and especially popular in nature. In his brilliant discussion of the modern university, M. R. Schwehn accepts Max Weber's suggestion as true of the present state that the academic life. The suggestion is that the solitary scholar functions in a routine of rationalization, which is best maintained by resisting the intrusive and "messy" concerns for ultimate, more normative questions of human life and relationships.³ The result is that most contemporary scholars remain "disenchanted" with the world, while pursuing truth by formal analysis of impersonal objects (e. g., biblical texts *qua* texts) without ever making normative claims (e. g., theological reflection on the universal meaning of biblical texts). If such is the character of academic culture in which biblical texts are studied, then the church's formative interest in Scripture is necessarily subverted.

The State and Future of Biblical Studies

The battle for the Bible within first-world guilds of biblical scholarship is waged largely over hermeneutical issues. The protocols and prerequisites of the biblical guild and its sponsoring academy help to fashion upwardly mobile professional careers with little time for the different demands of a sacred vocation whose methodological interests are more ecclesial. Biblical scholarship tends to be funded by interpretive strategies that fail to privilege the current faith community as the normative location of Scripture's meaning or deny the importance of spiritual maturity as an important characteristic of the strong interpreter. Such failure or denial actually promotes, however unintentionally, a species of biblical studies largely irrelevant to the formation of theological understanding and so of a vital piety.⁴

³M. R. Schwehn, *Exiles From Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (Oxford, 1993).

⁴See, for example, the pair of essays written by Martin Marty and Jacob Neusner, published in a recent issue of *Religious Studies News* (12/3 [September, 1997], pp. 20-21, 48), which champion the academic study of religion. Both were perceptive and helpful—and typical. Neither defined the academic study of religion in ecclesial terms, which Marty suggested is an "apologetical" interest and prone to violence. The chief value of theological and biblical studies, even within the seminary and church-related university, is to serve the secular interests of a pluralistic culture rather than those more sacred interests of a pluralizing monotheism. In contending for this definition of a "public" religion whose voice is turned to the town square, they seem to follow Paul Tillich, for whom religion is the soul of culture and culture the form of religion. By this understanding, if the church is a public institution, the purpose of biblical studies is to help fashion civil dialogue over topics of general interest.

I contend that if biblical studies is to survive modernity's assault and accomplish what the church formed Scripture to do, the singular aim of theological education is *to help the church be the church*. For the sake of academic purity and resistant to this more parochial definition of theological education, some in the world of academic biblical scholarship even name the church its "Babylon" and bid its practitioners to "come out of her, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues."⁵ The critical suspicion of the modern interpreter directed toward Scripture, coupled with reading strategies that aim at original meanings or that serve political ideology, whether liberal or conservative, simply fail to read Scripture according to its original intention (which is to nurture the theological understanding and guide the moral praxis of God's people). It should come as no surprise, then, that within much of the first-world church, where Scripture has lost its practical authority to speak the Word of God to the people of God, Christian education has become increasingly more interested in secular ideology than in Christian theology, in pastoral care and church growth more than in rigorous biblical and theological studies, in liturgical form more than in biblical exposition. The alarming result, at least in the mainstream church, is a clergy that is biblically illiterate, a serious problem which is only compounded by the lack of a pedagogy that enables them to use Scripture effectively to "teach, reprove, correct and train" their congregations toward partnership with our Lord for the courageous work of holy living in an unholy world.

What a text is permitted or not permitted to say by biblical criticism rarely informs anymore the preaching and teaching offices of the mainstream church. Rather, under the formidable suspicion and skepticism still exacted by Enlightenment epistemology upon the church's magisterium, the one is put at risk by the other. Sharply put, most interpretation that aims at an academic study of Scripture, even when executed by believers, simply does not supply either the raw material or the incentive necessary for robust Christian theological reflection. In spite of the loud and persis-

⁵See, for example, P. R. Davies, *Whose Bible is it Anyway?* (JSOT Sup. 204, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). See also the helpful response to Davies by F. Watson, "Bible, Theology and the University: A Response to Philip Davies," *JSOT* 71 (1996), 3-16. Also, U. Luz's presidential address to the annual meeting of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (1997, Birmingham, England), which poses the question "Kann die Bibel heute noch Grundlage für die Kirche sein?", to which Luz answers (with some qualification) "yes."

tent complaint from rank-and-file believers that biblical scholarship fails to offer a meaningful or even intelligible interpretation of Scripture for today's faith community, the gap between the public church and academy ever widens.

Now I move on to a *constructive proposal*. No battle front is more strategic to win than that waged over the very idea of Scripture. The interpreter's judgments about the Bible determine in a decisive way what approach to and what results are anticipated from biblical interpretation. If the scholar allows that *Scripture is the church's normative rule of faith (or "canon"), whose subject matter is God and whose performance aims at Christian formation*, then the approach to Scripture will not presume it to be merely an anthology of ancient literary art, a record of historical events, or a depository of universal wisdom. Rather, the strong interpreter will approach the biblical text at its current address, which is the entire Christian Scriptures (OT and NT), and do so in light of its current ecclesial role, which is to bear witness to God's word and work in history and so to form the theological understanding of those who in faith submit to Scripture as "the word of the Lord Almighty" for today. Let me unpack four implications of this strategic initiative.

Implication One. The intended meaning of a biblical text is not the property of its author, but of the church to which Scripture belongs.⁶ The hegemony of the "critical" approach to biblical interpretation within the modern guild of biblical scholars, which tends to hold Scripture captive to

⁶In defending the importance of ecclesial over authorial intent, consider the case of the N.T. writing, *Acts of the Apostles*. While the narrator told his story for a variety of reasons, among the most important was to defend Paul and his universal mission against detractors within the Jewish church, especially in Palestine. The cumulative case for this is based on internal evidence and, although exaggerated by F. Bauer and his Tübingen colleagues during the last century, is still entirely persuasive. Yet, when Acts is finally picked up and circulated with a collection of Pauline letters toward the end of the second century, subsequently recognized by the church in this new role as an inspired writing, Paul had long since triumphed and the Jewish constituency, especially in Palestine, had by that time become either mainstream or marginal. Paul was a problem no longer. Indeed, the intended role of Acts within the emergent N.T. was to introduce the Pauline inspired letters, an ecclesial intention that would have been impossible for its narrator to have imagined a century or more earlier. My point is that the historian's presumption is bogus that the author's original intention for a biblical text should "norm" the meaning the church now makes of it, since a text's current canonical address is sometimes at odds with that which occasioned its writing.

serve an “academic” rather than sacred end, has greatly hindered the Bible’s formative influence among contemporary believers as their rule of faith. In my opinion, the only hope for Scripture is to rescue it from the guild of biblical scholars for service in the church’s theological understanding. In this light, today’s great citadels of theological education must recover the Bible’s intended role as the church’s Scripture and train their students to use Scripture as a sacrament of divine grace in the formation of believers who seek a more precise and self-critical understanding of God in order to obey God’s will. This point was made in other words at the 1997 Oxford Institute for Methodist Studies. Jose Miguez Bonino was asked following his plenary address about the mission of the church. His response was simply put: “To convert the world to Christ.” But after a slight pause and with a smile, Miguez added, “The problem is, of course, to *what* Christ.” Isn’t the first task of biblical interpretation to describe with critical precision the Christ to whom all of Scripture bears witness, the Christ upon whom we call for our salvation and after whom we then follow as his disciples?

Not only is Scripture’s normative meaning ecclesial rather than authorial, its reference point is theological rather than historical. Scripture points its reader to God and not to the social or literary worlds of its authors and first readers/auditors. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the gaps in a more precise historical understanding about the world behind the biblical text, which are then filled by competent historical critics, typically contribute little that is essential to Scripture’s performance as the Word of God.⁷ What the interpreter must know about a text’s intended audience, the circumstances that occasioned its writing and the writer’s response to it, a text’s socio-historical frame-of-reference, are details typically found in the biblical writing itself and are available to the careful exegete. My point is this: *If the aim of biblical interpretation is theological understanding and not historical reconstruction or literary deconstruction, the test of sound interpretation is whether it makes the biblical text come alive with meaning that makes sense of and empowers a life for God today.*

⁷The historical task that aims at a more precise reconstruction of the circumstances which occasioned the writing and first reading of a biblical text actually undermines its canonical intent of a universalized meaning. That is, by making a text’s meaning more particular, the inherent depth of its ambiguity and ability to transmit or mediate the word of God to an ever-changing people of God are imperiled.

In this sense, biblical interpretation clarifies the Word of God, which then must be adapted to and embodied in real life. When an interpretation of Scripture accords with the church's intentions for Scripture, it will reproduce in the life of its canonical audience a publicly and distinctively Christian wisdom and witness (see 2 Timothy 3:15-17). Beginning even before biblical texts were written and then continuing today, faithful interpreters seek to render Scripture as God's word for their faith communities so that they might better understand what it means to be and do what God's people ought.

Implication Two. The Bible's authority within the church is imperiled whenever believers perceive that Scripture lacks relevance for their contemporary life or its meaning is incomprehensible. When such a situation persists, believers will neglect the biblical word and their functional illiteracy inevitably will lead to a serious distortion of their Christian faith and a corruption of their witness to Christ in the world. When Scripture does not perform its intended role as the community's rule of faith, some other rule (typically secular) will take its place to delineate the church's theological and moral boundaries.

The act of sound interpretation, when provoked by this theological crisis, intends to demonstrate the Bible's authority for a particular congregation of readers by first clarifying what the text actually says ("text-centered exegesis") and then by recovering from the text that particular meaning which addresses the theological confusion or moral dilemma of the canonical audience in meaningful ways. Of course, the legitimacy of any biblical interpretation is not determined by its mere relevance for a single readership, but by its agreement with what the people of God have always confessed to be true according to our rule of faith, who is the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. In other words, *the limits of sound interpretation are not determined by an interpreter's critical orthodoxy, but by an interpretation's theological orthodoxy, whether or not it agrees with the church's rule of faith.*

Further, the performance of Scripture within a profoundly diverse faith community, which regularly must address new and different questions that challenge its faith in God, requires a multivalent text whose capacity to disclose the word of God stems from an "inherent depth of ambiguity," as James Sanders calls it. That the text of Scripture gathers to itself a community of meanings, each theologically orthodox and at some

particular moment relevant for the Christian formation of one or another congregation of readers, is easily illustrated by the history of biblical interpretation. In their ongoing interpretation, biblical texts have the effect of becoming authoritative whenever they are picked up again and again by different interpreters who seek to make clear their new meaning to “comfort the afflicted” or “afflict the comfortable.” In the hands of faithful interpreters, past and present, the multiple meanings of a biblical text are discovered, always with the theological aim of forming a people who worship and bear witness to the word of the one true God.⁸

Implication Three. The discipline of biblical studies depends on the sound decisions made by the talented interpreter. But the issue is more one of character and less one of technique, with less emphasis on the authority of the author and more on the authority of the current interpreter—and this authority is predicated on character as much as on clever and informed technique. We should ask, *what characterizes the talented interpreter whose exegetical and interpretive decisions find meaning in biblical texts that serve Scripture’s theological aim?* The question of the interpreter’s authority to interpret Scripture meaningfully rests on two credentials. First, is the interpreter’s understanding of Scripture’s subject matter, including competency in those various interpretive strategies that facilitate a text-centered approach to biblical studies and a thorough knowledge of the history of biblical interpretation. Second, while this informed knowledge of Scripture’s teaching and interpretation should be the expected result of a formal theological education, the interpreter must also be spiritually mature since biblical studies must serve first of all the church’s vocation of Christian formation.⁹ Simply said, if biblical interpretation is faith seeking Christian understanding, then it is a sacramental as well as intellectual activity; and its proper setting is the *sanctuary* as much as the *library*. To

⁸This point in no way intends to encourage any species of epistemological relativism which seeks to undermine a text’s determinate meaning. Rather, it only suggests that a text’s determinate meaning is not posited by a single tradition or interpretation, whether intended by the author (if ever this can be reconstructed with precision and confidence) or by its current readers (even critically trained scholars). The text’s “determinate meaning” is, in any case, a theoretical construct and better or more concretely reconceived in the history of a text as its “full” meaning that is approximated by a community of talented and faithful readers (*contra* Watson, 10-12).

⁹Cf. M. Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah* (Indiana, 1992), 16-18.

the extent that the faithful interpreter enjoys a deep and vital relationship with God, which is brought to maturity primarily through worship of God, that interpreter will be better able to recover those meanings from Scripture that contribute to the spiritual formation of its current audience.¹⁰

If the act of sound interpretation adapts Scripture to life, the talented interpreter also pays close attention to the current audience's social and religious locations. The particularity of Scripture's meaning derives from the particularity of its current audience, what faith tradition it belongs to, and what spiritual crisis threatens a more robust faith in God. That is, the status of believers in a particular setting requires discernment of their spiritual crisis so that Scripture may be used by the interpreter to "afflict the comfortable" (prophetic meaning) or "comfort the afflicted" (pastoral meaning). Further, the religious location of a particular audience also determines the theological accent sounded. For example, believers who seek theological understanding as members of a Wesleyan communion will naturally intensify the importance of a "responsible grace," to borrow Randy Maddox's term for the orienting concern of Wesleyan theology. Sound interpretation works from within a faith tradition to revitalize its particular contribution to the whole people of God.

Implication Four. This reformation of theological education will stand against the methodological relativism that currently plagues the academy. It will privilege *text-centered exegetical strategies* that seek to describe with critical precision the theological subject material of the biblical text in its final literary (i.e., canonical) form. Why? For practical and theological reasons. Not only is the canonical text the authorized medium of divine revelation for the church, but unlike some reconstructed authorial meaning, we actually have the text before us to study together—once biblical scholars have settled a range of text-critical and translation issues, which may well be easier said than done.

¹⁰By this emphasis on a "talented/strong" interpreter who can make exegetical and theological decisions that map a distinctively Wesleyan theological trajectory within the church catholic, I am not proposing a species of sectarianism that disregards all other Christian interpretation or interpreters. The focus in this paper is more narrowly restricted to *Wesleyan* biblical scholars and proposes a *Wesleyan* reading strategy for Scripture. My more essential assumption, however, is that, within a more catholic community of interpretation, different interpretations will surely result from different theological loyalties and will finally form a complement of self-correcting and mutually informing conversations. I celebrate and depend on these differences and the robust conversation. They serve to generate a more collective and dynamic understanding of a text's "determinate meaning."

Further, the history of interpreting a biblical writing should be scrutinized in order to anticipate the range or limits of a text's normative or full meaning. Since a biblical writing is a hermeneutical writing, the careful student may learn more of the interpretive strategy employed by the biblical writer, which in turn is used to interpret their texts. The critical investigation into how writers used their Scripture illumines the texture of their writings. This more historical-critical species of intertextuality contributes to but is finally different than the literary interest in viewing the whole of Scripture as a discrete "world of meaning," where different texts repeat similar phrases or ideas and are joined together by the interpreter to "thicken" the meaning of the whole.

In my view, the most profound loss in the academic study of Scripture is the neglect of the *discipline of biblical theology*. The reductionism of modern biblical studies, which separates Old from New, Hebrew from Christian, and then scrutinizes the meaning of only selected parts of the whole Christian Bible, often in ways that are adversarial to its other parts, has made it difficult if not impossible to think of a truly "biblical theology." Most modern critics have thus concluded that Scripture's various theologies can not possibly be formed into a coherent whole, since there isn't a single biblical thematic or theological construct that can account for all of Scripture's various theologies.

Indeed, modern biblical studies have taken on the likeness of "Humpty Dumpty," with scholars playing the king's men who have no interest in putting the pieces of poor Humpty Dumpty back together again. Against this backdrop, a reformation of biblical studies would embrace Scripture's simultaneity in principle and interpretive strategies for putting these pieces back together again, not by artificially harmonizing Scripture's different theological conceptions or by treating similar linguistic or thematic expressions as necessarily carrying the same theological freight, but rather by considering each theology as integral to and a complementary part of the whole biblical witness.¹¹ Indeed, the coherence and unity of the Bible's theological subject matter may well force us back to a precritical-disposition view that Scripture is a book finally

¹¹For this more positive definition of Scripture's simultaneity, which also funds my understanding of Scripture's intertextuality, see J. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

authored by the one true and holy God and read best in terms of divine intent and therefore toward the end of our entire sanctification.¹²

Putting the “Wesleyan” Back into Biblical Studies

In many ways, the 1997 Oxford Institute for Methodist Studies was an exhilarating, even haunting experience for most of us in the biblical studies working group. The Institute is among the few meetings remaining where biblical scholars gather together as confessing Christians to make theological sense of Scripture in service of their church. Here was a truly international community of well-trained men and women, some from Asia and Africa, and others from Latin America, Europe, the UK, and North America, all of whom felt a profound call to be scholars of and for a variety of Methodist communions of believers. Our common lament was and is that we lack the experience to do it well; and our awkward, even artificial attempts to move from critical exegesis to constructive theology during our two weeks together revealed both the importance and the absence of a critical methodology which would allow us to do so in the distinctive idiom of the Wesleyan theological tradition.

A part of this lament of this group, sometimes heard loudest of all, is that the educational institutions of Methodism in the first world have done a poor job, at least when compared with our Reformed Protestant or Roman Catholic counterparts, in producing a competent and theologically sensitive biblical scholarship for and of the church. A colleague even wondered aloud whether there was something deep within the Wesleyan tradition, when viewed as “experiential religion,” that actually works against biblical studies. For evidence, yet another colleague mentioned that the biblical studies working group had its inception late in the Institute’s history—at its eighth meeting in 1982—and even at the tenth gathering of Methodist scholars fifteen years later all agreed that Scripture was rarely used by any of the other ten working groups when reflecting

¹²This shift of focus from the authorial to the divine intent of Scripture envisages a theological commitment to Scripture’s role as the church’s canon rather than to some conception of its production. Depending on a reader’s essential understanding of God, the result of this shift of meaning’s locus from authorial to divine intent carries substantial hermeneutical implications. For instance, if a text’s normative meaning is now located in the “mind of God” whose word is not timeless but dynamically open to the changing character of God’s relationship (or partnership) with the covenant community, then the aim of biblical interpretation is not to seek after a timeless truth, but rather a timely (or “meaningful”) meaning that unfolds over and within time itself.

on the Institute's theme, "Trinity, Community and Power." A strange silence indeed. Biblical scholars have sometimes been made to feel like unwanted guests even at annual meetings of the Wesleyan Theological Society. Indeed, if the cadre of biblical scholars who interpret Scripture under the light of a Wesleyan theological conception is to have an influential voice in the life of the church, we must not only encourage those spiritual disciplines that will make us truly a people of one book, but we also must give a more prominent place in our educational curricula and scholarly meetings to the role biblical studies performs in shaping our church's understanding of God's law and gospel.

What is our starting point? I believe we must begin by working together on reading strategies that can relate the theological subject matter of Scripture to the Wesleyan tradition in persuasive ways. Let me briefly sketch a working model of one such strategy as a conversation piece, before concluding with an exhortation that such a conversation be as interdisciplinary as possible. Indeed, the *only* way to negotiate the chasm between biblical studies and theology is for biblical scholars to begin talking with theologians about these issues of common interest and concern for the whole people of God.

James Sanders argues that the act of interpretation must fully realize these three major factors of the canonical process in pursuit of the meaning of biblical texts: the text itself, the spiritual crisis of the audience addressed, and the hermeneutics of comparative midrash by which the ancient interpreter 'écaused' the sacred tradition to interpret and respond to the crisis of a people's faith in God.¹³ By dynamic analogy, the text picked up again and cited by a biblical writer mirrors and illumines the spiritual crisis to which that writer was responding. Sanders calls this "the

¹³Sanders defines "canonical process" differently than does Brevard Childs. Whereas Childs understands the hermeneutical value of the canonical process in terms of the literary shaping of the final form of the biblical witness, Sanders sees the process in terms of the interpretive strategy of the faith community by which texts were constantly adapted to ever-changing social worlds in order to maintain the community's religious identity and witness to God. Thus, Childs is primarily interested in the *literary* formation of discrete texts into a canonical Text, whereas Sanders is primarily interested in the *social* formation of the community which read and shaped these canonical texts in order to maintain its faith in God. For my discussion and integration of each into another hermeneutical model, see "Reading the New Testament in Canonical Context," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Eerdmans, 1995), 370-393.

tool of the triangle”¹⁴—the three points of which are the biblical text, social context, and the theological tradition by which the unrecorded hermeneutics of biblical writers are employed and may be discerned by their readers. The image of a ‘triangle’ reminds the interpreter of the “necessary and essential interrelatedness” of these three factors whenever the sacred tradition is adapted to life. My present proposal will adapt this theoretical “tool of the triangle” by defining in broad strokes an interpretative strategy for Wesleyan interpreters of Scripture.

Central to this interpretive model is the biblical text itself, whenever it is called upon, recited or alluded to as the Word of God for today. Certainly every critical strategy is a gift of God in due season, when employed to the end of clarifying the theological meaning of the text itself. Most important to this exegetical enterprise, however, are those literary and linguistic strategies which are text-centered and seek to relate a particular text to its wider compositional and still wider canonical contexts. I have already mentioned the value of intertextual analysis in this regard. Also important is a study of the history of a text’s “effect” upon its readers. In our case, the performance of a particular text among Wesleyan and holiness readers is a feature of its textual analysis. For example, a Wesleyan reading of the Book of Acts should consider how Acts was used in nineteenth-century holiness preaching; the education of the biblical interpreter should also include how Scripture is arranged in our lectionaries and read in Christian worship today.

The nexus of Scripture’s performance as the Word of God is supplied by the interplay of biblical text and social context; this is where the Spirit of God is at work, inspiring biblical texts to function in inspiring ways. In fact, the meaning of a particular text is produced from within a particular social location. In the words of Severino Croatto, “what is genuinely relevant is not the ‘behind’ of a text, but its ‘ahead,’ its ‘forward’—what it suggests as a pertinent message for the life of the one who receives or seeks it out.”¹⁵ In this sense, biblical theology is a variety of contextual theology, since the point of a text’s departure is a concrete experience of some kind in some space at some time. The biblical word springs from an historical event and seeks to interpret its meaning for a

¹⁴J. A. Sanders, *A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 77-78.

¹⁵J. S. Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 50.

particular community of its readers. Not only is the biblical text itself a response to some ancient event or a narrative of events, but a text's rereading as Word of God also happens in a particular social context where its current interpreter seeks to make Scripture's message intelligible for its new readers and auditors in light of their current experiences.

This observation suggests that careful reconstruction of the ancient social setting and discernment of the spiritual crisis of the authorial audience are important investigations; but the importance of this interplay between text and ancient historical context fully unfolds as the interpreter imaginatively, analogically relates the ancient and contemporary settings, the authorial and canonical audiences. In particular, the location of Wesleyan readers of Scripture should be extended to include their experience of God's transforming and sanctifying grace.

Finally, the "unrecorded hermeneutics which lie in and between all the lines of biblical texts" (Sanders, 78) reveals the strategic importance of the interpreter's own theological commitments whenever Scripture is adapted to the living context of faith. Scripture's witness to God is discerned and dissected as analogous to the interpreter's own rule of faith.¹⁶ No interpretive strategy should be theologically neutral; "to practise theology is always to practise a particular theology."¹⁷ The word of God to which Scripture bears witness is analogous to the rule of faith confessed and expressed differently by particular and various theological traditions. Thus, the self-critical Wesleyan interpreter seeks after meaning in biblical texts and stories that congrues around the distinguishing themes and deeper-logic of a Wesleyan typology of God's Word, without denying that these same texts and stories might yield other meanings to other interpreters from other theological traditions.

An essential feature of the interpreter's social location is theological. That is, the particular ways we live our lives of faith are shaped and justi-

¹⁶My model of canonical criticism differs somewhat at this point from J. A. Sanders. Whereas Sanders understands the principle of "dynamic analogy" in terms of comparable social contexts, ancient and modern, within which the biblical text continues to address God's people as God's word, I have come to downplay the usefulness of such historical constructions for biblical theology. Rather, in my view, the canonical witness is approached and interpreted as analogous to the community's rule of faith. Yet, such rules are hardly static; rather, different faith traditions conceive and express the church's rule of faith differently. Hence, the interpreter approaches the biblical witness to make meaning of it in ways that are analogous to a particular communion's rule of faith.

¹⁷Watson, *Text and Truth*, 13.

fied by the traditions of particular communions of faith. How an interpreter shapes the theological meaning of Scripture, or how Scripture is related to those of a particular social setting or spiritual crisis, is nurtured within a discrete theological trajectory, whether via formal instruction or informal experience. For example, Wesley's understanding of Scripture as a sacrament of divine grace influences a more functional view of its inspiration and authority. Again, a community's conception of God's salvation, its experience and its idea, reproduces a certain conception of theological orthodoxy which interpreters seek to maintain by the meanings they make of Scripture.

When I speak of a Wesleyan reading of Scripture, then, I do not mean that Wesleyans simply adopt as normative Wesley's particular reading of Scripture or return to a crude, uncritical version of proof-texting. Rather, the particularity of the unrecorded hermeneutic of the Wesleyan trajectory is acquired in more subtle ways, first of all by living and worshiping within a congregation of Methodists who seek to preserve and even privilege: a Wesleyan perspective of Scripture's authority; a Wesleyan typology of the *via salutis* which posits accent on believing humanity's sanctifying responses to God's justifying grace; a Wesleyan variety of Christian spirituality which is more developmental and affectual; of social justice which privileges our ministry to the poor and powerless; a duty-bound resistance to an "almost Christianity" in support of a "practical divinity"; and so on.¹⁸ In this sense, a Wesleyan setting for the reading of Scripture should seek after those particular meanings which occur as the natural and logical yield of participating in a community of believers whose teaching and life are guided by a rule of faith composed in a distinctively Wesleyan heritage context.

This more positive species of a Wesleyan "tribalism," which is neither apologetic in interest nor triumphalist in tone, should also sponsor more self-critical and intentional readings of Scripture whose performance is a word on target for those of and for this particular faith tradition. If the role of exegesis is to deliver the raw material that facilitates theological reflection and Christian formation, then biblical studies in a Wesleyan idiom should reflect on Scripture's meaning in ways that more

¹⁸For my understanding of this point, see R. W. Wall, "Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture," *WTJ* 30/2 (1995), 50-67, which draws upon several recent treatments of Wesley's theology, especially Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1994).

narrowly informs and thus forms a Wesleyan communion of believers. Whether to afflict *our* comfortable or to comfort *our* afflicted, the orienting concern of Wesleyan biblical studies should aim at nurturing an understanding of what Scripture teaches us about being Wesleyan and doing what Wesleyans ought. I ask, where is this currently happening? Unless we do this and do it well, serious biblical studies has no future within the ongoing Wesleyan tradition.

A Concluding Exhortation

The hermeneutical project before biblical scholars of Wesleyan heritage as I have sketched it is fully interdisciplinary. For this to happen, current disciplinary boundaries must be relativized. Every vital element of the proposed reading strategy requires the work of others: contextual theologians from every social location should be recruited to help biblical scholars exegete the currents of contemporary society; and systematic theologians should be gathered to help Wesleyan biblical scholars understand what particular arrangement of Christian beliefs lies at the epicenter of the Wesleyan theological tradition. Surely, if the aim of Wesleyan biblical scholarship is the formation of a holy people actively engaged in holy work, the more practical concerns of pedagogy and preaching must also have voices in this community of interpretation. Indeed, every single methodological interest of biblical scholarship, if employed to serve the end of Wesleyan theological understanding and faithful praxis, must be an active collaborator in this sacred deliberation. There is no longer theologian or biblical scholar, academic or devotional readings of Scripture, critical or postcritical interests in Scripture, Christian clergy or faithful scholars, for all are one in Christ Jesus.

READING THE BIBLE AS WESLEYANS

by

Joel B. Green¹

At the close of his meticulous analysis of *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture*, Scott Jones writes hopefully of the promise of a genuinely Wesleyan view of Scripture being articulated for our times. The first mark of such an approach, Jones observes, would be its high view of the authority and inspiration of Scripture.² This is obvious even to the casual reader of Wesley, who may be stunned with how freely Wesley is willing to embrace the derisive labels directed at him and his movement: Bible-bigots, Bible-moths, and the like;³ and how simplistic his appeals to Scripture can appear: "Bring me plain, scriptural proof for your assertion, or I cannot allow it."⁴ The higher the view of Scripture, though, the more crucial the issue of interpretation—indeed, the more crucial the twin issues of validity and relevance in interpretation.⁵ Communities where the

¹This article is a response to that of Robert Wall which also appears in this issue.

²Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Kingswood; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 222-23.

³John Wesley, "On God's Vineyard," §1.1.

⁴John Wesley, *Advice to the People Called Methodists with Regard to Dress*, §5.1. See further, e.g., S. J. Jones, *Scripture*; Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 55-65; Mack B. Stokes, *The Bible in the Wesleyan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

⁵This concern was helpfully signaled for the wider evangelical community by Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979).

authority of the Bible is affirmed are necessarily concerned with validity in interpretation. Against the backdrop of Wesley's articulation of the authority of Scripture, his hermeneutical motto—"plain truth for plain people"—has heightened significance.

Is it possible to speak of a Wesleyan hermeneutic, a way of reading Scripture peculiar to those who find their identity in the Wesleyan tradition? On the one hand, the question itself presents problems for those of us who have been nurtured on the "scientific method." Weaned on historical criticism, we may justifiably assume that the identity of the hermeneut—whether Wesleyan or urban or Hispanic or whatever—is irrelevant to the task of interpretation. On the one hand, then, we have been taught to make as our aim dispassionate, disinterested readings of Scripture. "What it meant"—the decisive question in the modern era of biblical studies—must be segregated from, not contaminated by, our social location or theological commitments.

On the other hand, in spite of officially sanctioned attempts to exclude reader bias, anecdotes indicating the practice of a Wesleyan hermeneutic are easy to document. During the days of my doctoral work, for example, the New Testament postgraduate seminar at the University of Aberdeen spent some months reading Romans. Happily for me, the seminar was led by Professor I. Howard Marshall, a committed redaction critic *and* British Methodist, who, perhaps unknowingly, ensured that Calvinist readings of Paul on matters related to the atonement or election were held at bay. This, of course, was much to the consternation of the Calvinists among us, who must have outnumbered Wesleyans by a margin of seven to one! Even those who eschew contemporary forays into reader-response hermeneutics thus find themselves drawn to some readings instead of others.

At the same time, we may agree that it is often easier to spot a Wesleyan reading of Scripture than to articulate a hermeneutic that is distinctively Wesleyan. We know it when we see it, perhaps, but how can we articulate this "it"? For this reason, we can be grateful to Professor Wall for devoting his considerable acumen to this task. His prescription of a text-centered, canon-oriented, interdisciplinary engagement with the Bible, which locates meaning in Scripture's witness to God and the faithful life of God's people, is not only a welcome antidote for the malaise of late-twentieth-century biblical studies, but is one that draws deeply from the well of Wesley's own perspective on and use of Scripture. Although I

have been asked to respond to Professor Wall, I must admit that, on almost every point, I have found him in my case to be preaching to the converted. Hence, in what follows, I hope not so much to underscore the arcane minutiae where Professor Wall and I might disagree, but rather to push the conversation a bit further.

It will nonetheless become clear that I am more apt than Professor Wall to characterize the current scene in biblical and theological studies as an opportunity for celebration and fresh thinking. The current disorder in biblical studies has produced an environment in which questions about the practice of biblical studies within and for faith communities can again be raised and receive reflection. Let me mention two additional points of response. Professor Wall divides his presentation into two parts—"The State and Future of Biblical Studies" and "Putting the 'Wesleyan' back into Biblical Studies." I want to urge that he has allowed a false wedge into his analysis, that *both* his analysis of biblical studies *and* his suggestions for resolution of our troubles are already and profoundly Wesleyan. In an earlier essay, Professor Wall apologized that he was neither a Wesleyan scholar nor the son of one;⁶ yet, here he has demonstrated that much of what characterizes a Wesleyan hermeneutic must be that Wesleyans do it. To put this differently, he has already begun to illustrate for us that a Wesleyan mode of interpretation cannot be reduced to a particular set of techniques; there is no Wesleyan apparatus into which biblical texts can be dumped, the handle cranked, and a Wesleyan result guaranteed on the other side. What is needed, rather, is involvement in biblical interpretation by persons formed in Wesleyan communities.

What follows will undoubtedly reflect my anxiety with Professor Wall's notion of a "talented" or "gifted" interpreter and a similarly endowed reader. This language is helpful in what it affirms—namely, our need for hermeneuts whose character is marked by more than good "skills," but more so by the formative influence of the Holy Spirit at work in Christian community⁷—but at least potentially harmful in what it allows. Given our sometimes overwhelming proclivities for finding in Scripture what is needed to legitimate our own lives and traditions, it is

⁶Robert W. Wall, "Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30 (1995), 50-67 (57 n. 18).

⁷Cf. Stephen Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991).

easy enough for us to dismiss the readings of others as deficient, the product of the “untalented” interpreter.⁸

Toward a Contemporary Wesleyan Reading of Scripture

How, then, might we read the Bible as Wesleyans? Let me attempt to move our thinking forward by sketching four theses.

1. To read the Bible as Wesleyans is not to adopt a pre-critical stance with respect to the nature and interpretation of Scripture, but to find ways of being critical that cohere with the Bible’s character as Scripture.

Legion are the “precritical” characterizations of biblical studies prior to the tectonic shifts in hermeneutical foundations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reacting against medieval modes of interpretation, Protestant Reformers emphasized the one meaning of Scripture; hermeneutical handbooks developed criteria for legitimate readings—especially philological, including the historical exigencies governing the meaning of words. At the turn of the nineteenth century, new emphases on the related notions of cultural context and cultural relativism led interpreters to stress the distance between text and reader, and to construe this distance primarily along historical lines. Biblical study began to devote its energies to the mediation of this distance, and this led to various forms of “higher criticism” characteristic of the historical-critical paradigm that has until recently gripped the academy.

Against the backdrop of these developments, perhaps we should not be surprised to hear students of Wesley say of him that, in his use of Scripture, he is “not critical.”⁹ Such indictments typically bemoan the fact

⁸For example, Stanley Hauerwas (*Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993]) indicates his awareness of the “politics” of biblical interpretation, but—in insisting that North American Christians “. . . are possessed by habits far too corrupt for them to be encouraged to read the Bible on their own” (15) and in providing as exemplary readings of Scripture twelve of his own “sermonic exhibits”—he seems to regard himself as exempt from these realities. If, as he argues, the Bible can be understood faithfully only in the context of a disciplined community of the faithful, why do we not hear of his community and the readings of Scripture that are informed by and inform its practices?

⁹E.g., Wilbur H. Mullen writes, “In a brief summary reaction to his method I would conclude that Wesley is not critical” (“John Wesley’s Method of Biblical Interpretation,” *Religion in Life* 47 [1978], 99-108 [106-7]). See also Duncan S. Ferguson, “John Wesley on Scripture: The Hermeneutics of Pietism,” *Methodist History* 22 (1984), 234-45 (esp. 238, 244); George A. Turner, “John Wesley as an Interpreter of Scripture,” in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 156-78 (esp. 165-66).

that Wesley paid little notice of the sacred cows of the historical-critical paradigm, especially the original meaning of a biblical text according to the (reconstructed) historical context and/or the (reconstructed) intent of the author. One might suppose, then, that calls for a reappropriation of a Wesleyan hermeneutic might serve best the agenda of a naive primitivism interested in recovering “precritical” modes of interpretation, or of those hoping to be rescued from the perils of modern, higher criticism of the Bible. This is not the case.

Those who lament Wesley’s precritical approach to Scripture, and who might imagine that recovering Wesley for biblical studies entails our embracing precritical assumptions and practices, are mistaken on at least three grounds. First, the term “precritical” itself, when applied to Wesley, is a dismissive anachronism that has gained its force from the assumption that the only legitimate reading of a biblical text is one oriented toward tradition-critical and historical concerns. Lurking in the shadows here is the fallacy of presentism, the erroneous assumption that our methods and state of knowledge always evolve into higher forms, so that the way things are done in the present is necessarily better than in the past. But dismissing Wesley’s hermeneutic in this way begs important questions about the aims of biblical interpretation; in particular, if we begin from the presumption that at least one of the aims of Bible reading is for Scripture to have a formative role in those communities who turn to it as Scripture, then we might conclude that historical criticism has not been “critical” enough!¹⁰

Moreover, labeling Wesley’s hermeneutic in this way overlooks the degree to which Wesley himself participated in the Enlightenment project—according significance in his theological enterprise to Reason, limiting the authoritative voice of Scripture in deference to scientific discovery, and even engaging in the empirical method of contemporary science. Although he held to the unity of Scripture and steered an alternative course to that of the Deists, his position was not that of a man caught unawares with his head buried in the sand.¹¹ To take seriously Wesley’s

¹⁰Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Hyperactive Hermeneutics: Is the Bible Being Overinterpreted?”, *Catalyst* 19 (1, 1992), 3-4; James Callahan, “The Bible Says: Evangelical and Postliberal Biblicism,” *Theology Today* 53 (1997), 449-63; and the earlier, more programmatic essay by Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Toward a Hermeneutics of Consent* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

¹¹See S. J. Jones, *Scripture*, 36-41.

engagement with Scripture, then, should not lead to a simplistic acceptance or rejection of, nor to a defensive posture *vis-à-vis* science.

Of even greater consequence, however, is the simple absurdity of assuming that the only style of reading worthy of the designation “critical” is historical criticism. The critical tradition is much more inclusive than the hegemony of historical criticism might have allowed us to imagine. Some readings are mimetic in theoretical orientation, others pragmatic, others expressive, and still others objective. Each finds the locus of meaning in its own place—in “the universe,” in “the work,” in “the artist,” or in “the audience”—and so each in its own way is “critical” insofar as each is concerned both theoretically and performatively with validity in interpretation.¹² The Bible is susceptible to critical exploration in each of these ways and, undoubtedly, each has a contribution to make to our understanding of these texts. This is not to say, however, that all are equally compatible with our engagement with the Bible as “the church’s book.” If our aim embraces the religious significance of these books, what modes of critical inquiry are best suited to our critical task? On this point, as we will explore momentarily, Wesley is a helpful pathfinder.

Wesley himself was capable of adjudicating competing views on biblical texts in his concern for validity in interpretation. That he did not locate the validity of interpretation in the intent of the human authors of biblical books, nor in the world or traditions behind the text, does not render him “uncritical” or “precritical.” Neither will it necessarily render us uncritical or precritical, nor allow us to be uncritical nor precritical—those of us who wish to take on something of the Wesleyan mantle of Scriptural exegesis. This, of course, raises the question of how Wesley did involve himself in a critical mode of interpretation, and this brings us to our second thesis.

2. A properly chastised concern with the “literal meaning” of Scripture allows the Bible to lay its claims on contemporary readers *and* provides space for diversity in our reading strategies.

Like those of the Protestant Reformation before him, Wesley rejected the four senses of Scripture characteristic of much medieval exe-

¹²See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1953); cf. Hazard Adams, ed., *Critical Theory Since Plato*, rev. ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

gesis in favor of “the plain, literal meaning.” “You are in danger of enthusiasm every hour,” he wrote, “if you depart ever so little from Scripture; yea, or from the plain, literal meaning of any text, taken in connection with the context.”¹³ Such an emphasis today faces a number of challenges, two of which demand immediate attention.¹⁴

First, innovations in hermeneutics in the twentieth century have emphasized interpretation less as the achievement of understanding and more as the production of meaning. “Meaning,” accordingly, is not so much to be stalked and captured as to be cultivated, actualized, and embodied. One of the corollaries of this shift, however, is that interpretation can no longer be viewed as an objective enterprise, and the whole hermeneutical process is viewed in some quarters as to varying degrees embodying latent ideological commitments. In such an environment, “literal interpretation” smacks of attempts at a power game aimed at masking one’s own commitments while parading them as God’s. Indeed, the horizons of the history of interpretation are marred by examples of recruiting “the literal sense of Scripture” toward heinous ends—to undergird apartheid in South Africa, classism in Great Britain, the treatment of Native Americans in the United States, and the almost global disparaging of women, to name only four. Even against such a backdrop, it is nonetheless arguable that a properly chastised literal interpretation of Scripture may be embraced. This would require, first, that we self-consciously own the reality that we Wesleyans are not approaching Scripture in a value-free mode, but do so precisely as Wesleyans. Second, we must allow that, even though we come with certain theological, even ideological commitments to Scripture, we do so in order “. . . to penetrate so deeply into the text that even these assumptions are called into question, tested, and

¹³John Wesley, *Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection*. For this emphasis in Wesley, see, e.g., Oden, *Scriptural Christianity*, 57-58; and especially S. J. Jones, *Scripture*, 114-23.

¹⁴In addition, we should not overlook the fact that, in using the phrase “literal sense,” Wesley was assuming the classical theory of language that distinguishes between metaphor and everyday language. This view can no longer be sustained (cf., e.g., George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980]; George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987]), although the significance for biblical studies of “the contemporary theory of metaphor” (Lakoff) has not been explored.

revised by the subject matter [of Scripture] itself.”¹⁵ To put it differently, attention to “the literal sense” of Scripture is for us held in tandem with a commitment to the Bible’s right to speak over against the church.

The second significant obstacle facing a “literal” construal of Scripture’s meaning has to do with the challenge of any endeavor today to understand Scripture in a way that does not accord privilege to its historical meaning. One of the legacies of the historical-critical paradigm is that a primary emphasis on “literal meaning” will seem naive to some, ahistorical or even docetic to others. In fact, the paradox we face as Christians reading Scripture is more complex than historical criticism has allowed. For Christians, Scripture has as its primary referent *not* “the world of events behind the text” (as in the old historicism), but the nature of God and life before God. Accordingly, as Professor Wall clearly recognizes, a premium must be placed on text-oriented readings of biblical narrative. At the same time, Christian faith is essentially incarnational, so that we can never be content with the gnosticizing tendencies of new literary readings of biblical narrative.

Seen in this light, a “literal” reading of Scripture does not share with historical criticism a commitment to locating meaning “behind the text.” Nor can we follow Wesley and others of his generation in seeking to ascertain the sense implied by the authors of those biblical texts. “Scripture” is constituted by the text itself, so that concern with “literal meaning” relates above all to the meaning, as it were, intended by the text.¹⁶ Accordingly, “validity in interpretation” would be measured by how a given interpretation: (A) accounts for the text in its final form; (B) accounts for the text as a whole and is consistent with the whole of the text, without masking unfortunate aspects of the text that continue to haunt the interpreter; (C) accounts for the cultural embeddedness of language, refusing the interpretive imperialism that assumes that all people

¹⁵So Brevard S. Childs, “Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997), 16-26 (19).

¹⁶Francis Watson has recently insisted that “the literal sense is the sense intended by the author in so far as this authorial intention is objectively embodied in the words of the text” (*Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997], 115; cf. Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller, *Re-Thinking Theory: A Critique of Contemporary Literary Theory and an Alternative Account* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992]), but this is not “authorial intentionality” in the usual sense.

everywhere and in all times have construed their life-worlds as we do; and (D) is consistent with itself.

What of history and historicism in hermeneutics? In focusing so fully on the text, even when accounting for the text as the product of a particular sociocultural context, have we not adopted a mode of textual engagement that is at best naive and at worst docetic? In reply, we may inquire, Which is more naive—the precritical presumption that everything in Scripture happened in just the way it is described, or the critical assumption that interpretation can be sliced away from events/facts by the precision instruments of the historical-critical paradigm? Which is more naive—the historicism of a John Wesley or the historicism of a scholarly enterprise like today’s *Jesus Seminar*? In point of fact, as philosophers of history have been arguing for decades, historical criticism has left us grasping for false alternatives. Verification and narrative run inescapably together in genuine historiography, so that every single sentence carries with it both an interpretive and a documentary force.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, it is here, in the struggle for a new historicism, that more work is needed, but this does not detract from the reality that a Wesleyan interpretation of Scripture can embrace neither the old historicism that continues to occupy many of our colleagues nor the new literary formalism that arose as its antidote.

Finally with regard to Wesley’s interest in a “literal sense,” it is important to remember that, for Wesley, this “sense” of Scripture was grounded in the intention not only of human authors, but, even more so, in the intent of Scripture’s one author, God. Hence, the “literal sense” must coincide with the general tenor of Scripture¹⁸—an emphasis that introduces for us our final two theses, the one concerned with “the analogy of faith” and the other with “the whole of Scripture.”

3. In contrast to the historical-critical paradigm, which accords privilege to cognitive objectives, a Wesleyan reading of Scripture will be characterized by its soteriological aims.

¹⁷So Albert Cook, *History/Writing: The Theory and Practice of History in Antiquity and in Modern Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988), 55.

¹⁸Cf. S. J. Jones, *Scripture*, 197; and see the parallel remarks in Childs: “[T]he literal sense was never restricted to a verbal, philological exercise alone, but functioned for both Jews and Christians as a ‘ruled reading’ in which a balance was struck between a grammatical reading and the structure of communal practice or a ‘rule of faith’ (*regula fidei*)” (20).

For Wesley, the “plain sense” of Scripture would have been construed in relation to the grand story of Scripture. In actuality, this story was for Wesley not one but two. There is, on the one hand, the overarching story running from creation to new creation, which places its stamp on every biblical text. As important as this might be, the more critical story for Wesley was the soteriological progress of the person coming to faith and moving on to perfection. Thus, for Wesley, the purpose of biblical interpretation is singular:

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men [*sic*]. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his Book; for this end, to find the way to heaven.¹⁹

The centrality of this motif in Wesley’s biblical hermeneutic is widely recognized. Rather than rehearse it again here, it may be more helpful to suggest how this motif might become operative in a contemporary hermeneutic.

First, it must be acknowledged that, in positing a soteriological aim for the reading of Scripture, Wesley could hardly have found himself more out of step with the mainstream of biblical study that would soon come to flourish. The various modes of tradition criticism that were subsequently developed and practiced were oriented toward countering the sort of “interested” exegesis Wesley claimed for himself. For many critical scholars of the twentieth century, acknowledging the search for contemporary significance is already enough to poison the water. It is no surprise, then, that voices bemoaning the irrelevance of modern biblical criticism to the theological task, ethical discourse, and homiletics have become so pervasive and increasingly vibrant. If, as Karl Barth would have it, systematic theology “. . . does not ask what the apostles and

¹⁹John Wesley, Preface to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, §5. That the aim of Wesley’s hermeneutic was soteriological is noted by everyone—e.g., Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), 135-39; Wall, “Wesleyan Hermeneutic,” 63-65; S. J. Jones, *Scripture*, 104-27.

prophets said but what we must say on the basis of the apostles and prophets,”²⁰ it is little wonder that systematic theologians have typically looked askance at modern biblical scholarship. We biblical scholars have generally provided little by way of access to “what the apostles and prophets said,” since (A) biblical scholarship has taken on the guise of a profession open only to those specialists guided by accredited procedures, and (B) the modern paradigm of study has portrayed “the strange world of the Bible” as profoundly remote from our own world, so that the nature and relevance of the truth claims of Scripture are (almost?) impossible to negotiate. Consequently, were we to put the “Wesleyan” back in biblical studies, we would find ourselves swimming very much against the stream.

Second, happily, the rediscovery of the reader in philosophical hermeneutics provides us with a means for swimming against just such a stream. As Wolfgang Iser and Umberto Eco have helped us to appreciate, texts are not self-interpreting, semantically sealed, meaning-making machines.²¹ For Eco, texts like those in Scripture are characterized by the invitation for readers “to make the work” together with the author, so that texts might achieve a vitality that cannot be reduced to the cognitive domain. Rather, they are rendered meaningful in personal and communal performance. Iser observes that narrative texts—incapable of delineating every detail, even in plot—are inevitably characterized by gaps that must be filled by readers; even if the text guides this “filling” process, different readers will actualize the text’s clues in different ways. For both Eco and Iser, then, texts are capable of a range (though not an infinite number) of possible, valid meanings, depending on who is doing the reading, from what perspectives they read, what reading protocols they prefer, and how they otherwise participate in the production of significance.

How are these theoretical musings relevant to a Wesleyan reading of Scripture? A large part of what makes a reading “Wesleyan” is that those doing the reading are nurtured in the Wesleyan tradition of according privilege to some theological categories over others—the pursuit of holiness, for example, and the primacy of grace. In a sense, the perspectives

²⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 16.

²¹See, e.g., Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1974); Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, *Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1979).

on reading from such persons as Iser and Eco (A) indicate the absurdity of reading as the “discovery of meaning,” substituting in its place the notion of reading as text-guided “production” and “performance,” and (B) show how our reading of Scripture is and can legitimately be self-consciously Wesleyan with respect to the aims of our interpretive strategies and habits. As Mack Stokes intuitively discerned, our heritage as Wesleyans shapes our reading of Scripture as Wesleyans. We read with a constant eye to “the Scripture way of salvation,”²² and we do so in ways oriented toward the ongoing formation of the people of God in holiness.

This does not mean that our readings as Wesleyans are complete, or that they constitute the only possible ways of construing texts, but it does indicate how, from diverse communities of reading, we may hear the same pattern of words in new keys. Neither does it sanction every reading as equally valid, but it does indicate in one significant way how diverse readings of the same text might lay claim to legitimacy.

4. Finally, in their engagement with Scripture, Wesleyans can no longer allow for the invidious divisions that have determined our theological map; divisions between biblical studies and systematic theology, biblical studies and ethics, biblical studies and homiletics, and so on—such walls as these must be razed. The most deplorable barricade from a Wesleyan vantage point, however, is that which separates study of the Old Testament from study of the New.

Like Wesley’s grasp of the soteriological aim of biblical interpretation, so his emphasis on “the whole of Scripture” is well documented and widely recognized.²³ On the one hand, this phrase refers to the “unity of Scripture” according to the analogy of faith, the nucleus of which is the doctrine of holiness. On the other, it refers to his notion of the unity of Scripture—one Bible, two Testaments. Although it would be anachronistic to view Wesley as an early proponent of “canonical criticism,”²⁴ it can

²²See Stokes, *Wesleyan Heritage*, chs. 2-3; also, Oden, *Scriptural Christianity*, 60; cf. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

²³For discussion, see Ferguson, “John Wesley on Scripture,” 239-40; S. J. Jones, *Scripture*, 43-61, 219-21; Oden, *Scriptural Christianity*, 57-60.

²⁴On canonical criticism, see the helpful discussion in Robert W. Wall, “Reading the New Testament in Canonical Context,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 370-93.

still be observed that one who moves so easily from one Testament to the other, and who finds witness to God's purpose equally in Old and New Testament, would surely find much to criticize about a church that has in so many arenas proven itself to be Marcion's child and an academy that so easily takes for granted the segregation of biblical studies into testamental specializations.

An analogous criticism would undoubtedly arise from Wesley the pastoral theologian regarding the ease with which we compartmentalize theological education, as though study of Scripture ought naturally to be done in relative isolation from exploration of the church's social witness, for example. One might insist that theological education necessarily requires that students do the work of integration. One might argue further that our pastors-in-training must know something about the Bible before they are able to integrate it with the study and work of pastoral care or spiritual direction or theological ethics. But this argument betrays its own foundational commitment to a particular epistemology and pedagogy that, arguably, Wesley would have found extraordinarily alien. It begs the question of whether faithful study of Scripture can be other than reflection on pastoral care, spiritual direction, theological ethics, and so on. The practice of interdisciplinarity is capable of conceptualization and practice in more organic ways than this.²⁵

Although Wesley did not contend with such issues as these in his historical situation, it might still be said that he has provided a way forward in our struggle. This has to do with his commitment to "conferencing." Even if we cannot turn back the clock of academic specialization, we can find more organic and dynamic ways to engage in vital discussion across, perhaps even through the walls that divide us in our disciplinary commitments and practices.

Conclusion

For those with eyes to see, the contemporary landscape is cluttered with the rubble of the Enlightenment experiment that has pervaded the totality of our lives and life-worlds in ways acknowledged and unacknowledged. The "assured results" of modern scholarship are much less assured, and the time is ripe for hermeneutical reflection on fresh fronts.

²⁵See Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1990)

We are discovering that the years separating us from Wesley have not in every case been favorable to our understanding of and engagement with Scripture. Returning to Wesley, as though the twenty-first century could be the eighteenth, or as though the eighteenth were not in need of the hermeneutical correctives that would come, may not be a worthy aspiration, but this does not require that we relegate Wesley's conception and use of Scripture to exhibits in a museum. We live in a time alive with new possibilities. In our attempts to realize the promise of our era, we would do well to learn from one who stood at an earlier wellhead, to appropriate his wisdom in this new time. Reflecting on biblical study in the Wesleyan spirit, we are urged to loosen our grips on the tradition of modern biblical scholarship, and to loosen its grip on us, in order that we might participate in forms of biblical study that take with utmost seriousness our location within the church, and more particularly within the Wesleyan tradition of the church.

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE WESLEYAN MESSAGE OF HOLINESS

by

Alex R. G. Deasley

One of the remarkable features of the past ten to fifteen years has been the growing evidence across wide areas of Christendom of renewed engagement with the meaning of Christian holiness. One need only recall a few of the books published in that timespan to document the point. From the Roman Catholic side came Donald Nicholl's book *Holiness: A Series of Lectures to a Community of Poor Clare Sisters in Santa Cruz* (1981). From the Orthodox tradition, specifically that part of it known as the Antiochian Synod recognized by the Patriarch of Constantinople as being at least "irregular brethren," came Peter Gillquist's *Designed for Holiness: God's Plan to Shape and Use You for His Kingdom* (1982, rev. 1986). Two symposia, Donald Alexander's *Christian Spirituality*, subtitled *Five Views of Sanctification* (1988) and the collection by Melvin E. Dieter and others entitled *Five Views on Sanctification* (1987), gave expression to a spectrum of views from within what might broadly be called the "evangelical community." More recently have appeared J. I. Packer's *Rediscovering Holiness* (1992) and David Peterson's *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (1995). Both of these were by Anglicans of Reformed hue, while the brief, popular treatment *What the New Testament Says About Holiness* (1994) has come from the pen of the respected Wesleyan scholar, J. Harold Greenlee. The list could be extended without difficulty.

As remarkable as the publication of so many books on holiness within such a relatively brief timespan is the reason which prompted their writing. For all that they represent, a wide spectrum of interpretation as well as varying levels of approach from the academic to the popular, it is fair to say that they are prompted by a single concern, the increasing *unholiness* of the world and the church. That is to say, the books are seeking a theology to confront a practical, spiritual need. For Peter Gillquist the starting-point is the failure of evangelism—individual and mass—to make much difference to the church in terms of holiness and (public) righteousness.¹ Unfortunately, evangelism has brought forth a “vacuum of results” among which he numbers failure to impact the culture, theological thinness, lack of Christian discipline, and individualism.² Holiness has been reduced to behaving correctly. We have stopped talking about purity in the church. People tend to think in terms of “being fulfilled” instead of pleasing God.³

It may be salutary to place alongside Gillquist’s analysis an excerpt from an address delivered by Keith Drury to the 1994 annual meeting of the Christian Holiness Partnership. Speaking under the broad title “The Holiness Movement is Dead,” he said:

My sense is that, as a movement, we are dead. And the sooner we admit it, the better off we will be, and holiness will be. . . . But here is the irony. There has perhaps never been a time in history when the church more needs a holiness movement. Spiritual shallowness is rampant. The river is a mile wide and an inch deep. Sin among believers is commonplace, dismissed as “only human.” Christians—evangelicals—boldly advertise on bumper stickers: “I’m not perfect—just forgiven.” What was once an eroding morality in the world is now an eroding morality in the church.⁴

This I would suggest, gives perspective to the dimensions of the Wesleyan/Holiness task as it musters its forces for the twenty-first century.

¹Peter Gillquist, *Designed for Holiness* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1982, rev. ed., 1986), 9. Emphasis added. Cf. 18f.

²*Ibid.*, 6f.

³*Ibid.*, 24f.

⁴Keith Drury, “The Holiness Movement Is Dead,” *The Holiness Digest* (Winter 1994), 15.

If it is timely to reconsider the needs of the present situation, it is equally timely to evaluate the available resources. In terms of this particular paper and the discipline of biblical hermeneutics, which has not stood still since John Wesley's day, we may ask what a Wesleyan response to the widespread cry for holiness might look like. What are the exegetical/theological building-blocks that seem to demand a place in any understanding of holiness that can claim to be biblical? We begin by examining the setting in which the New Testament teaching on the subject stands. From there we move to the possibilities of sanctity set forth by the New Testament writers. Finally, we will consider the extent to which it is taught biblically that sanctity can be attained.

The New Testament Setting: Purity and Power in Early Judaism

An appropriate place to begin is with the setting of the New Testament in Early Judaism. What were the expectations entertained in terms of deliverance from sin? This brings us directly to the understanding of the working of the Spirit. It is as much an exaggeration to say that, within Judaism at the turn of the eras, the Holy Spirit was believed to have been withdrawn as it is to say that no change was conceived to have taken place in the Spirit's work in comparison with the Spirit's earlier operations. The situation requires careful discrimination in at least two respects. First, one must distinguish among the various elements within Early Judaism; and second, one must distinguish among the kinds of operations the Spirit was believed to have carried out. We may use the latter as the clue to lead us to the former.

From the range of activities attributed to the Holy Spirit, one which achieves a high degree of visibility is purification. This is particularly the case in the Qumran texts and other texts cherished there. The Book of Jubilees, which would fall into the latter category and which is cast in the form of revelations to Moses of the reconstitution of the chosen people following the Exile, records Moses as praying: "O Lord, let your mercy be lifted up upon your people, and create for them an upright spirit. . . . Create a pure heart and a holy spirit for them. And do not let them be ensnared by their sin forever and ever" (1:20, 21b). To this prayer the Lord replies: "I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever. And their souls shall cleave to me and to all my

commandments" (1:23b-24).⁵ The overtones of a variety of Old Testament passages are clear, including Ezekiel 36:27 where a unity is constituted by the images of cleansing by water, the replacement of the heart of stone with a new spirit and a heart of flesh, and the indwelling Spirit as the source of obedience to the divine commands.

This picture is confirmed when we turn to the major texts which originated within the Qumran community. There is no need to undertake a comprehensive review of the evidence; the significance of the individual contexts tells its own story. For example, the idea of the Spirit as a cleansing agent occupies a large place in the liturgy for the renewal of the covenant in *Community Rule (IQS)* I 16—III 12. This was also the liturgy for the admission of new members. It is stated that ritual washings are ineffectual where the heart of the initiate remains stubborn. "For, by the spirit of the true counsel concerning the paths of men all his sins are atoned so that he can look at the light of life. And by the spirit of holiness which links him with his truth he is cleansed of all his sins. And by the spirit of uprightness and of humility his sin is atoned. And by the compliance of his soul with all the laws of God his flesh is cleansed by being sprinkled with cleansing waters and being made holy with the waters of repentance" (*IQS III* 6b—9a).⁶ Several features are notable. First, the cleansing envisioned is moral in character. It is true that compliance with the sectarian halakhah is what is in mind at this point (*IQS III* 5b—7a, 8b—9a), but this is placed squarely within a framework that rejects the efficacy of ritual where the inner attitude contradicts the intent of the outer action. Second, and following from what has just been said, reception of the spirit, which here means the purifying spirit, was central to membership in the sect. As I have written elsewhere: "the chief disaster to befall those who turn back at the critical moment is that they will not receive the spirit (*IQS II* 25—III 12). Exclusion from the Community is exclusion from the spirit, and exclusion from the spirit is exclusion from cleansing."⁷

⁵Translation from J. H. Charlesworth, Ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985, hereafter *OTP*), 2:53f.

⁶The translation here and throughout is that of Florentine Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, The Qumran Texts in English (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

⁷As elsewhere in the Qumran Texts, "spirit" (*ruach*) ranges in meaning from the inner being of the individual to a shared attitude with others to God at work in the inner being of the individual. See my treatment of this in Alex Deasley, "The Holy Spirit in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 21(Spring/Fall 1986), 48-51.

The *Discourse on the Two Spirits* (IQS III 13—IV 26) adds a still deeper dimension to the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. Looking beyond the days in which the Spirits of Light and Darkness war within the human heart, the sectarians discerned another horizon: the ‘last day’ or the ‘time appointed for judgment (IV 17, 20). “Meanwhile, God will refine, with his truth, all man’s deeds, and will purify for himself the configuration of man, ripping out all spirit of injustice from the innermost part of his flesh and cleansing him with the spirit of holiness from every irreverent deed” (IV 20b—21a). This is the sole use of “spirit” in an eschatological sense in the Dead Sea Scrolls,⁸ and it is not to be forgotten that Qumran eschatology is temporal, not transcendental. The sectarians thus envisaged a point “at the end of the days,” that is to say within time, in which the human spirit would experience a radical cleansing.

There are, of course, other operations attributed to the Holy Spirit in the Qumran Texts besides cleansing. Not least among these is the Spirit as the agent of revelation,⁹ a feature shared with other early Palestinian Jewish literature. When Isaac blesses Jacob’s sons, “a spirit of prophecy came down upon his mouth” (Jub. 31:12). Similarly, when Enoch delivers his admonition to his children, he does so because “a voice calls me, and the spirit is poured over me so that I may show you everything that shall happen to you forever” (1 Enoch 91:1). Whether the inspiration of the Spirit at Qumran takes the form of prophecy is doubtful, but assuredly it takes the form of inspired teaching and inspired interpretation of Scripture (IQS VIII 15—16a; IQpHab. VII 4-5).

This feature however, is not confined to early Palestinian Jewish literature; it is found also in the rabbinic literature and has been well documented by George Foot Moore and Samuel Sandmel (among others).¹⁰ In particular, the Spirit of prophecy is associated in the rabbinic literature with the inspiration of Scripture. Indeed, some scholars conclude that, in the words of Craig Keener, rabbinic Judaism “developed the concept of

⁸Cf. W. D. Davies: “It must be doubly emphasized that it is only here that the spirit is ascribed a strictly eschatological function at all in the scrolls” (in Krister Stendahl, ed., *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, N. Y.: Harper, 1957, 173).

⁹See Alex Deasley, op. cit. (WTJ, 1986), 54-56.

¹⁰George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), I:237, 437; Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 174f.

the Spirit as the prophetic Spirit, almost to the exclusion of other possible models.”¹¹ One of those models which Keener concludes is conspicuously absent from the rabbinic literature is the Spirit as the agent of cleansing. He writes: “The virtual absence of this motif from the vast body of early Jewish literature produced by the Tannaim and Amoraim cannot be ignored. Whether the Pharisees or their rabbinic successors suppressed the idea, or more likely it predominated among the Essenes to begin with, emphasis on this aspect of the Spirit was not common to all Judaism.”¹²

If one places the New Testament against this background, there can be little doubt as to where it belongs. That there is much emphasis on the prophetic Spirit is unmistakable: the Lukan birth narratives and the narrative of Pentecost in Acts 2 are two obvious illustrations. But it is equally clear that the note of purity is sounded also. The child to be born to Mary will be holy (Luke 1:35); the name of Mighty One in the Magnificat is holy (Luke 1:49); the fulfillment of the promise in the Benedictus is that they “might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (Luke 1:74-5). Likewise, in Acts, while the dominant stress falls on the prophetic Spirit begetting inspired proclamation and empowering for global mission, the note of purity is by no means absent (Acts 2:38; 15:8-9).

The gospel tradition of the ministry of John the Baptist not only sets the stage for that of Jesus, but strikes the note which will characterize it. The gospel accounts raise many questions of their own which cannot be argued in detail here. These mostly concern the character of the baptism proclaimed by John, together with the baptism which he announces will be effected by Jesus, particularly in light of the absence from the Marcan account of the words “and with fire” (Mark 1:8) in contrast with their presence in Q. If, as seems probable, Mark has borrowed a selection of traditional elements and shaped them to convey his portrait of John as preparing the way for the good news of God’s eschatological salvation, then it is not surprising to find elements in the other accounts which he has omitted. Chief among these is the element of “baptism with fire” and the accompanying explanation (Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:16-17). Suggestions that “baptism with fire” denotes either judgment or cleansing, but not both, overlook that fact that in the Old Testament both meanings are conveyed within single contexts. Thus Isaiah 4:4: the Lord will cleanse

¹¹Craig Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 13.

¹²*Ibid.*, 10.

“the blood stains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning” (NRSV). The same connection of ideas is found in Ezekiel 36:25-7 and IQS IV 20f. “There is thus evidence in Judaism,” concludes Morna Hooker, “not simply for the eschatological hope of the Spirit, but for linking the Spirit with the themes of purification and judgment as well as of renewal.”¹³

It is this meaning, then, which constitutes the prophetic message of John as it does the fulfillment of John’s prophecy by Jesus. Jesus is not only the baptized (Matthew 3:16; Luke 3:21-2); he is also the baptizer, a point elaborated most fully in the Johannine account (John 3: 32-33). The single aim of his baptism is purification, the purification of the penitent by the cleansing of their sin and the purification of the impenitent by their removal in judgment. If one places the New Testament against the backdrop of the times in which the events it records took place and the records of these were written, it seems clear that the New Testament stands with those groups in Judaism which gave singular stress to the purifying work of the Spirit of God. It is in this sphere that we are to look for the Christian understanding of salvation, at least in relation to the saving work of God seen from the perspective of the individual.

The Attainment of Purity In The New Testament

We turn now to a second consideration. Given that Early Christianity stood with those groups within Judaism which affirmed purity as a primary concern of the religious life, what sense was attached to it? What level of purity was enjoined? Still more, what level of purity was held out for actual attainment? And how is it to be attained? A few components of the answers will be examined here. They play a considerable role in New Testament teaching and also have risen to new visibility in recent discussion of the subject of holiness.

A. Distinction Between Levels of Attainment. It has long been maintained in the Wesleyan theological tradition that an important indicator in defining the meaning of sanctification in the New Testament is the use of the term in two senses or at two levels. These are: (1) the religious sense, according to which all believers are sanctified by virtue of their religious relationship to God; and (2) the moral and ethical sense in which sanctification comes to moral expression in the life of holiness. Such a distinction can

¹³Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Black’s New Testament Commentary, Peabody, Mass., 1991), 43.

claim the blessing of authorities such as R. Newton Flew and George Allen Turner,¹⁴ and has constituted a given in Wesleyan-Holiness interpretation.

Recently this distinction has been assailed by David Peterson in his book *Possessed by God*. While insisting that the language of holiness and sanctification must not be abandoned, he affirms that sanctification “is regularly portrayed as a once-for-all, definitive act and primarily has to do with the holy status or position of those who are ‘in Christ.’” This does not mean that there is no place for a moral and ethical dimension. He writes of the First Epistle to the Corinthians: “Paul spends much time in this letter challenging their values and their behavior, calling them to holiness in an ethical sense. He does this on the basis that they are already sanctified in a relational sense, but need to express that sanctification in lifestyle.” Sanctification, he affirms, is “a status that brings change,” but the change does not denote a progress in holiness, but rather an expression of a state of sanctification which already exists. For Peterson, the moral aspect of sanctification is secondary to the soteriological. On this basis biblical promises of transformation, renewal, and growth belong not so much to the idea of sanctification as to the wider idea of the restoration of creation. “In Scripture . . . renewal is a different way of speaking about God’s plan for us, arising from his original purpose for humanity in creation. Sanctification is specifically associated with covenant theology and the notion of belonging to God because of the redemptive work of his Son. In its broadest sense renewal is a more comprehensive term, covering what is meant by sanctification and glorification, but setting these themes in a creation-recreation framework.”¹⁵

For all the skill with which Peterson argues his case, it is questionable whether he is persuasive. Problems arise at several points. To begin with, it is doubtful whether a view such as his does justice to the Scriptural use of sanctification terminology. It is difficult to be persuaded that the New Testament writers do not use *hagios* and its cognates in two distinguishable senses: as the basic description of all Christians (e.g., 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Romans 1:7; Philippians 4:21-22; 1 Thessalonians 4:7, etc.); and also as the goal to which all believers are

¹⁴R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (Oxford, 1934), 53, and George Allen Turner, *The Vision Which Transforms* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1970), 114f, 120ff, 125.

¹⁵Peterson, *Possessed By God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 12, 24, 41, 44, 70, 76f, 103, 133.

called. Paul's prayers for the Thessalonian Christians are difficult to read in any other way (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:23-4). His exhortation to the Corinthians to "make holiness perfect" (2 Corinthians 7:1, NRSV) points the same way. As J. Harold Greenlee comments: "the Greek word translated 'completing' implies a process, but the word *complete* itself implies that such a process is to reach completion, with holiness as its result."¹⁶ A similar conclusion is indicated by 2 Timothy 2:21 in which a distinction is made between special vessels of gold and silver and ordinary vessels of wood and clay. What is impossible in the realm of nature, namely, the transformation of wood and clay into gold and silver, is possible in the realm of grace by cleansing, thereby creating "an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (NIV). This double use of the same term to denote different levels of the attainable is not peculiar to the New Testament, but can be found in Jewish literature contemporary with the New Testament. Full membership of the Qumran sect involved being numbered among the perfect (IQS III 3f, 9-12). The sectaries were evaluated annually in regard to the perfection of their way (IQS II 19b-20a, V. 24), indicating that perfection among the perfect was variable.

A second difficulty with Peterson's view arises from his insistence on a definitive sanctification which he claims is generally underestimated. This leads him to downplay any idea of progress in holiness. Referring to Bishop J. C. Ryle's statement that a person "may climb from one step to another in holiness, and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another," he comments: "My problem is with Ryle's 'step' imagery and the implication that there is a graded form of progress that can lead to ever-increasing measures of holiness. Such an approach creates unrealistic expectations and is capable of producing guilt and despair in those who do not perceive the evidence of such progress in their lives."¹⁷ At the same time Peterson is compelled by the data to concede that an important aspect of the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 4:3 is that "God's will is the 'sanctification' of his people in the sense of their *progressive moral transformation*" (although he places the word "sanctification" in quotation marks).¹⁸ He seems here to be straining to limit any definitive sanctifica-

¹⁶J. Harold Greenlee, *What the New Testament Says About Holiness*, 25.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 81.

tion which he regards as the only kind of hallowing of which the New Testament speaks.

A third difficulty with Peterson's exposition—which is really an aspect of the second—is his handling of ideas from which it is impossible to filter out the notion of spiritual progress, ideas such as transformation, renewal, and growth. He writes:

There are obvious points of contact between Paul's teaching about renewal and his doctrine of sanctification. Hence the inclusion of renewal and transformation under the heading of sanctification in many systematic theologies. In Scripture, however, renewal is a different way of speaking about God's plan for us, arising from his original purpose for humanity in creation. Sanctification is specifically associated with covenant theology and the notion of belonging to God because of the redemptive work of his Son. In its broadest sense, renewal is a more comprehensive term, covering what is meant by sanctification and glorification, but setting these themes in a creation-recreation framework.¹⁹

That the renewal of creation, humanity included, is a biblical theme no one will wish to deny. That large aspects of it fall under the "eschatological reserve" no one will wish to dispute. But to suggest, as Peterson appears to do, that it can be set aside from the redemptive work of Christ, which is throughout a sanctifying work if it is anything, leaves one wondering how it is to be effected. The new creation is "in Christ" through whom God reconciled the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:17-18). The renewal of our fractured and disfigured bodies is an aspect of redemption (Romans 8:22-3), just as our recovery of the image of the man of heaven (1 Cor. 15:49) is the result of Christ's death for our sins and his burial and resurrection on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Perhaps the comprehensive weakness of Peterson's view lies in what he sees to be its greatest strength: that the moral aspect of sanctification is secondary to the soteriological. If there is an obvious sense in which it is true that the holy life of the believer is always consequent upon the prior work of Christ, there is equally a sense in which it is misleading to the point of being untrue in that it posits a holy relationship to Christ which is not *necessarily* expressed in holiness of living, even though *normally* it

¹⁹Ibid., 133.

will be. Underlying this is a defective view of what the New Testament means by righteousness, the topic to which we shall turn next.

B. The New Testament Concept of Righteousness. If the New Testament takes its stance with those groups in its Jewish matrix which affirm purity as a paramount concern, and if further it clearly demarcates one level of sanctity from another, then how does it understand and define the “height of holiness” that it sees as attainable? Our discussion thus far has led us by a natural progression to the theme of righteousness, and thus to the Epistle to the Romans.

No doubt there is a certain foolhardiness in attempting to say anything useful about so large a theme in so small a compass. Still more, the statement of conclusions with little or no examination of evidence inevitably gives a peremptory tone to the exposition. At the risk of such offenses, allow me to define the perspective from which I read Romans. First, I assume that there is a connection between *this* epistle and *that* church. Second, the overriding problem Paul appears to be addressing is that of Jewish/Christian—Gentile/Christian tensions within the Christian communities in Rome. Unsurprisingly, he finds both the explanation and solution of these problems in the gospel. That is to say, Romans is a reading of the Jewish-Gentile problem in Rome through Christian gospel spectacles. Third, the specific form of the solution which Paul prescribes is righteousness by faith. The *dikaïos* root occurs no fewer than sixty-three times in Romans.

There is some recognition that no single meaning will fit all instances and that, while some have primarily forensic force, others have ethical value, and yet others active connotation. The idea of right/righting/righteousness is identified by Anthony Thistleton as a polymorphous concept,²⁰ so that the shade of meaning intended must be determined in each context, yet all are aspects of a single whole. What then is the scope and depth of God’s way of rectifying the human situation?

Recently, in a notable essay, Leander Keck has argued in effect that in Romans we are given a view of God’s way of righting the human situation via a stereoscopic view of the wrongness of the human situation.²¹

²⁰Anthony Thistleton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 407-422, esp. 415-422.

²¹Leander E. Keck, “What Makes Romans Tick?”, in David Hay and Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology*, Vol. 3, Romans (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3-29.

Without in any sense reducing chapters 9-11 to the level of a digression in chapters 1-15, he sees 1:18-8:39 as a major section in which Paul demonstrates that the scope of the gospel reaches from creation to consummation, from the fall to the redemption of the world. In this way the problem is neither a Jewish nor a Gentile problem, but a *human* problem. Consequently, there is only one gospel and it is for all. Paul's argument, therefore, proceeds from plight to solution, from Adam to Christ. In fact, "he unpacks the Adamic situation three times. His argument moves in spiral fashion, each time going deeper into the human condition, and each time finding the gospel the appropriate antidote."²²

The first of these expositions (1:18-4:25) indicts Gentile and Jew alike, demonstrating that because all have sinned, none is righteous, hence the right relationship to God is broken. But God has acted in Christ to rectify the fractured relationship through faith in Christ for Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 3:30). But the human predicament is vastly more radical than a fractured relationship with God, serious as that is. Sin entails participation in a domain marked by sin's enslaving power, whose consequence is death. Hence the second exposition, grounded again in the opposition between Adam and Christ (5:12-21), demonstrates that the tyranny of sin may be overthrown through participation in Christ's death and resurrection. But Paul has not finished since sin is more than a tyrant external to the self; it is also an illegal alien who usurped control, compelling the enslaved self to do the opposite of what it intends, even including obeying the law. To deal with this wretched condition, a superior power must displace sin by becoming resident. This is the Spirit, as 8:1-17 makes clear. It is the third, the climactic resolution of the sinful Adamic situation.

The obverse of this, as Keck indicates through his total exposition, is the grace of God to rectify the relationship broken through sin, to emancipate believers from the tyranny of sin, enabling them to walk "in newness of life," and to make possible a life of ethical righteousness through the fulfillment of the law by the strength of the indwelling Spirit. Each is an aspect of the rectifying work of God which remains incomplete without the other. One may say that the gospel has a single end: to put the sinner right in every regard in which sin has brought wrongness. Paul appears to regard all as aspects of God's way of righting wrong. But this leads by a natural progression to the third topic.

²²Ibid., 25.

The Possibility of Attainment

One may well ask what gave Paul such confidence in commending the message of rectification to his Roman readers. They were real people in a world which knew as much of racial hatred as ours, not least where Jewish-Gentile relations were concerned. Moreover, Paul himself was a realist who knew the corruption of the human heart and its deadly power to distort human attitudes. What convinced him that the solution he commended, if it has been understood with any measure of accuracy, was likely to prove a realistic prescription for the Roman situation? At least two factors play a large part in accounting for the apostolic optimism.

A. The Arrival of the New Era. The heart of the proclamation of Jesus was the announcement that “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15, NRSV). On this basis Jesus did not merely summon his hearers to “repent and believe in the good news,” but proceeded to perform mighty works which showed that in himself “the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matthew 12:28, NRSV).

While Paul continued to use kingdom language (e.g., Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 15:50), albeit in a secondary way in comparison with that of Jesus, the mighty work which seized his imagination and became a main engine of his theology was the resurrection of Jesus. Doubtless his experience on the Damascus Road accounts for this. After all, to find oneself in confrontational conversation with one whom the evidence showed irrefutably to have been crucified, dead, and buried is likely to have precipitated a certain amount of careful reconsideration. All the evidence shows that the conclusion of Paul’s reconsideration was that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Paul, true Pharisee that he was, believed wholeheartedly in the resurrection of the dead—but in the age to come, not now. That Jesus was raised from the dead now could have only one meaning: the age to come had already dawned. But that was not all. Paul also learned that in some way the followers of Jesus were united with him. In persecuting the Master he was also persecuting his followers (Acts 9:4-5). In some such way Paul reached the conclusion that the followers of Jesus shared in the spiritual meaning of his life, death, and resurrection.

In connection with power over sin, it is the resurrection of which Paul thinks particularly. It is by this that we are enabled to walk in newness of

life (Romans 6:2), made alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11,13). It is experimental knowledge of this power that he prays for in Ephesus: "the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20, NRSV). It is these very readers, "even when we were dead through our trespasses," whom God made "alive together with Christ . . . and raised us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:5-6, NRSV). It is this power which is at work within us which can generate within us strength and love up to the measure of God's fullness (Ephesians 3:14-20).

To say that the new era has arrived is to say that the Kingdom or the new era has come within reach so that its power can be accessed. It has not yet come in its fullness. That Paul recognized this "eschatological reservation" is perfectly clear. The body awaits redemption (Rom. 8:23) and is therefore afflicted by "weakness" (*astheneia*) which only the help of the Spirit makes bearable (Rom. 8:26). The created order itself, involved in the ruinous effects of the fall, suffers frustration. In the words of Andrew Lincoln: "Simply to be in the present body is to be part of the earthly order, even without reference to sin according to both 1 Corinthians 15:47 and 2 Corinthians 5:1, so that while the body remains as it is, fullness of heavenly life cannot be experienced. . . . Because believers are on earth the influence of this sphere acts as a drag on them so that they have to be exhorted to 'put to death those parts of you which belong to the earth' (Col. 3:5 NEB). These elements of duality inevitably produce a certain tension for the believer."²³ Yet Paul does not seem to regard them as making sin necessary. Even if the future tenses in Romans 6:5 and 8 are eschatological rather than temporal (which is not certain), the effect is the same: the dominion of sin is broken.

B. The Nature of the Ethical Imperative. A second factor which enters into the possibility of attainment is the ethical imperative. The motif of the indicative and the imperative in New Testament ethics is sufficiently familiar to require no exposition here. By its very nature it transforms ethical requirements from the realm of apodictic "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not" into the sphere of enabled fulfillment of recognized obligations.

²³Andrew Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*, Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought, with Special Reference to His Eschatology (Grand Rapids, 1991), 171-172.

The point has been well-expressed by Richard B. Hays: “Human moral action,” he writes, “is given a distinct place in the syntax of the divine-human relationship. Those who respond to the gospel have entered the sphere of the Spirit’s power, where they find themselves changed and empowered for obedience.”²⁴ Two important points are made in this statement. First, human effort is involved in living the life of holiness. Life in the Spirit is not life on automatic pilot or spiritual cruise control. It is lived in the tension between felt temptation and choices for right. But second, the life of holiness is lived from within the context of a heart wholly presented to God and seeking to please him. As such it is not a naked warfare between equally balanced foes, but one in which the Spirit gives succor from within a relationship of commitment and love. The prevailing ethical formula in Paul is: “Put off the old . . . since you have put on the new” (Col. 3:5-10, 12-14; Eph. 4:17-32). To quote Richard Hays again: “the fundamental force of Paul’s claim must not be missed: God is present in power in the church, changing lives and enabling an obedience that would otherwise be unobtainable. . . . God is at work in you *enabling* you both to will and to work for his good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:12-13).”²⁵ What this means is that ethical righteousness is not an incidental addendum stuck on the end of a rectified relationship with God; it is part of it.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been strictly limited to a reviewing of some selected components of the understanding of Christian holiness from the perspective of New Testament interpretation. No overt attempt has been made to show how these may or should be integrated, even though the analysis of the components carries implications for their mutual relationship. What may be said with confidence is that the elements reviewed demand renewed engagement as building-blocks of a Wesleyan message of holiness for the new century almost upon us. If the prevailing situation is reflected here with accuracy, what is the Wesleyan Holiness prescription for it? Other traditions have set forth their cases. If there is a distinctively Wesleyan/Holiness position, it will be found only in the articulation and inter-relationship of the concepts reviewed here.

²⁴Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 45.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 45.

“TO SHEW THE FLY THE WAY OUT OF THE FLY-BOTTLE”: A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WESLEYAN UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

by

Henry W. Spaulding II

This paper is about finding a way about. It arises from my questions about Christian perfection after years of pastoral service, both in the parish and in the classroom. It is guided by the conviction that each new generation must find its own way about. Ludwig Wittgenstein makes a perceptive comment: “A philosophical problem has the form: I don’t know my way about” (PI 123).¹ The context of this statement suggests that our problem has to do with language: “A picture held us captive. And

¹PI 123. Because of the frequent references here to several of Wittgenstein’s works, I will use the following abbreviations: TLP—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1921, 1961); PI—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1953, 1958); PG—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rush Rhees and trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974, 1978); BB—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Book* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1958, 1969)); C—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, n.d.). References from these sources are made difficult because in most of them Wittgenstein numbers his paragraphs and in others the usual page references are used. For purposes of consistency and clarity, when I am referring to a numbered paragraph no colon will be used. References to pages will be indicated by the use of a colon.

we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat itself to us inexorably” (PI 115). Language frames a “picture” from which we find it difficult to escape, a prison of sorts. This is our problem and as such our challenge, “To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” (PI 309).

What I hope to do in the following pages is, at least, uncork the bottle, if not “shew the fly the way out.” First, I intend to outline the way things come to meaning for Wittgenstein, especially the “Later Wittgenstein.” Second, I will attempt a limited grammatical investigation of John Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. Third, I intend to reconstruct the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection in terms that use Wittgenstein’s philosophy. This is an ambitious undertaking, yet I find myself, as a theology professor and a preacher of the Christian gospel, discontent to be caught forever in a bottle.

Wittgenstein and Pulling Up the Ladder

The turn toward language in our century is one way in which philosophy has attempted to find a way about. Dan Stivers refers to this as the linguistic turn in philosophy, concluding: “The major philosophical movement in the English-speaking world in the first half of this century, logical positivism, was a reappropriation of David Hume in light of the new logical tools and, not least, a new concern for the philosophical significance of language.”² In other words, meaning requires a careful scrutiny of our language because it is a way to get at thought. Ludwig Wittgenstein looks toward language in order to get at meaning. He published only one book during his life, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, a work that provokes philosophical discussion nearly eighty years after its publication. His more mature views are to be found in a series of edited books, the most influential being *Philosophical Investigations* which was composed from notes that Wittgenstein hoped would become a book. He says in the Preface of the *Investigations*, “I have been forced to recognize grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book—to a degree which I myself am hardly able to estimate . . .” (PI vi). In fact, Wittgenstein reportedly wrote in a

²Dan Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol, and Story* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 4. The turn toward language is noted in the analysis of twentieth-century philosophy by John Passamore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Middlesex, England: Penquin Books, Ltd, 1957, 1966, 1972).

copy of the *Tractatus* given to Moritz Schlick that it is "the symptom of a disease."³ Even so, it is a mistake to assume that there is no connection between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. The continuity and the discontinuity of these two philosophical works (or the early and the later Wittgenstein) reveals a theory of meaning which will be of service in our present theological project.⁴

Wittgenstein's interest in language is the thread that runs throughout his philosophy, although it is treated differently in the *Tractatus* and *Investigations*. In fact, in another book, he says, "It is in language that it's all done" (PG 143). This assumption is evident from the earliest portions of the *Tractatus* where questions of meaning are raised in a new way. Glock observes:

. . . it marks the point at which the nineteenth-century debate about the nature of logic, between empiricism, psychologism, and Platonism merges with the Post-Kantian debate about representation and the nature of philosophy. The point of contact is thought.⁵

Wittgenstein says that "the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems" (TLP: 4). Yet, the next sentence illustrates the tension which lies at the center of Wittgenstein's early philosophy: "little is achieved when these problems are solved" (TLP: 4). This is the first expression of a fault line in the *Tractatus* and it opens the door to what will become the *Philosophical Investigations*. I will look at the *Tractatus* first where Wittgenstein devel-

³Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Cambridge: The Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 23.

⁴Anthony Kenny says, "it is a mistake to overestimate the philosopher's change of mind with regard to the picture theory . . ." [Anthony Kenny, *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 22]. Garver says, "In his later work Wittgenstein is often thought to have totally rejected his earlier views, but this is not the whole story. He certainly did reject exclusive reliance on truth-functional form, on rigid correlation of names and objects, on hidden essences, and on there being only one use of language. Nonetheless, he retains virtually the same view about the relation of the forms of language to metaphysics" [Newton Garver, "Philosophy as Grammar," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans Sluga and David Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 142].

⁵Glock, 16.

ops several key ideas: logical constants, general propositional form, tautology, and picture theory.

Wittgenstein calls his most fundamental idea (in the *Tractatus*) “that . . . logical constants are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the logic of facts” (TLP 4.0312). Logical constants refer to propositional connectives and quantifiers which Bertrand Russell, Gottlob Frege, and others felt described the most general aspects of reality.⁶ Wittgenstein critiqued this view by suggesting that propositions are truth-functions and not names as Russell suggests. The point of the discussion in the *Tractatus* is to see that “Propositions represent the existence or non-existence of states of affairs” (TLP 4.1). Thus, logical constants are not truth functions, because they do not represent/name anything: “Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them.... Propositions show the logical form of reality. They display it . . .” (TLP 4.121). Wittgenstein’s “most fundamental idea” assumes that propositions are constructed logically, but their purpose is to depict things as they are. The meaningfulness of language is dependent on the clarity with which it depicts/presents “states of affairs.”

The general propositional form is crucial to the argument of the *Tractatus*: “This is how things stand” (TLP 4.5). Glock calls this the “essence of the proposition. . . .”⁷ Wittgenstein indicates that the “general propositional form is variable” (TLP 4.53). Therefore, a proposition presents a possibility. It is in this way that “A proposition is a truth function of elementary propositions” (TLP 5). This goes back to the fundamental argument which Wittgenstein is making, namely, that meaning is attached to the “state of affairs.” This reveals Wittgenstein’s early assumption regarding logical atomism. He felt that the sure path of clarity, thus meaning, is to break the proposition up in to its irreducible parts. Then, it was hoped that logic could help, not as Russell had proposed by providing

⁶His target here is Bertrand Russell who says: “the validity of any valid deduction depends on its form, and its form is obtained by replacing the terms of the deduction by variables, until there do not remain any other constants than those of logic. And conversely: every valid deduction can be obtained by starting from a deduction which operates on variables by means of logical constants, by attributing definite values with which the hypothesis becomes true” (Bertrand Russell, “The Philosophical Implications of Mathematical Logic,” in *Essays in Analysis*, ed. Douglas Lackey, New York: George Braziller, 1963, 288).

⁷Glock, 140.

names, but by clarifying the truth-functional nature of the proposition. This avoids the tendency to confuse the formal with the ontological.⁸

The issue is the relationship between representation and meaning.⁹ Wittgenstein seems to be assessing the sense in which meaning is a func-

⁸Wittgenstein's understanding of tautology sheds light on the formal, non-accidental dimensions of language. Perhaps it will provide an insight into his theory of meaning. Wittgenstein is rejecting the old axiomatic logic of Russell and Frege. He says, "The propositions of logic are tautologies" (TLP 6.1). This leads to the conclusion that "the propositions of logic say nothing" (TLP 6.11). Any attempt to give content to a proposition of logic is doomed to failure. This is the case, as Richard Brockhaus says, because "any given logical proposition is true precisely because it has been so constructed so as to be always true. Since it makes no claims about the world, nothing in the world could possibly contradict it" [Richard Brockhaus, *Pulling Up the Ladder: The Metaphysical Roots of Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991), 196-197]. This does not, however, suggest that tautologies are meaningless. The basic observation is that tautologies require no proof, since they are their own proof. This goes back to the observation that "in logic nothing is accidental . . ." (TLP 2.012). Therefore, tautologies show the logical framework of the world. According to Brockhaus, "The result is this peculiar position that logic is not merely convention but that its connection with the world cannot be represented . . ." (203). This analysis makes it clear that the tautologies have to do with the sign, the framework of symbolism which presupposes something about reality. Tautology is about the way we handle sentences and the signs contained therein. They are in a sense about the linguistic rules by which we frame our thoughts. According to Glock, "Logical propositions are not truths about an ultimate reality, nor do they express a special type of knowledge, as had traditionally been assumed; for they differ from all other propositions by virtue of being vacuous" (355-356). This may be what Wittgenstein means when he says, "A proposition that has sense states something, which is shown by its proof to be so. In logic every proposition is the form of a proof. Every proposition of logic is a *modus ponens* represented in signs and one cannot express the *modes ponens* by means of a proposition" (TLP 6.1264).

⁹Donna Summerfield addresses the question of representation by pointing to two theories of representation. The first she calls fixing theories (shared feature theories, iconic theories) and the second she calls tracking theories (covariance theories, indexical theories). She says, "The basic insight of fitting theories is that signs point in virtue of resembling other things, and they point to what they resemble. More generally, signs have semantic value in virtue of resemblance/similarity/shared structure: structural relationships among the elements of what is represented" [Donna Summerfield, "Fitting versus Tracking: Wittgenstein on Representation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans Sluga and David Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 102)]. She adds that "The basic insight of tracking theories is that signs point in virtue of tracking other things and they point to what they track. More generally, signs have semantic value in virtue of a nonaccidental connection between signs and what they mean" (103). She argues that the *Tractatus* presents both theories as an attempt to resolve the problems of representation.

tion of the clarity with which a thought corresponds to the reality it depicts. He says, "A proposition must restrict reality to two alternatives: yes or no. In order to do that, it must describe reality completely. A proposition is a description of a state of affairs" (TLP 4.023). This leads us to the well-known picture theory: "A picture is a model of reality" (TLP 2.12). Wittgenstein adds, "A picture is a fact" (TLP 2.141). If we go back to the beginning lines of the *Tractatus*, we will see that Wittgenstein links facts with "states of affairs" and "the world." Therefore, the picture theory is the attempt to depict, that is, model the world. The meaningfulness of propositions is the clarity with which they model the world. He says, "A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false" (TLP 2.21). This is important because "a proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it" (TLP 4.01). In other words, "We picture facts to ourselves" (TLP 2.1). Looking at all these indications in Wittgenstein reveals two characteristics of a meaningful proposition: it represents a state of affairs and is determinate.

Essentially, Wittgenstein is calling into question the "old logic" as it is represented in Russell and Frege. Examining his unhappiness with this way of doing logic is too complex for the shape and scope of this paper to fully address, but we need to call attention to Wittgenstein's fundamental critique. Basically, Wittgenstein tended to concentrate on a theory of symbolism instead of a theory of judgment, as is evident in the analysis of the general propositional form and the picture theory. Wittgenstein is attempting to clarify by holding philosophy and language accountable to reality. He talks about the pictorial form in the following way, "It is laid against reality like a measure" (2.1512). Thomas Ricketts suggests that Wittgenstein "employs two intertwined notions of representation distinguished in German by the verbs *vertreten* and *darstellen*."¹⁰ The first indicates that names go proxy for the objects. The second indicates a representation of logical space. This distinction is set forth in the following way: "The essence of a propositional sign is very clearly seen if we imagine one composed of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, and books) instead of written signs. Then the special arrangement of these things will express the sense of the propositions" (TLP 3.1431). This means that, while Wittgenstein doubts the adequacy of the old logic, he still shares an important commitment, the correspondence

¹⁰Thomas Ricketts, "Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans Sluga and David Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 75.

theory of truth. The fundamental difference is the way that the name or object functions. For Russell, the name has a kind of independence which Wittgenstein rejects. The issue for Wittgenstein is that clarity in propositions is achieved by understanding the state of affairs and the importance of the signs is found in their ability to aid in this process of understanding. Wittgenstein judged that one must be rigorous in this process in order to avoid an overlapping of the simple and the complex.

Wittgenstein gives a clear indication of his intentions in the *Tractatus*: “The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (TLP: 3). He closes with these words, “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them as steps to climb up beyond them. He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed upon it” (TLP 6.54). According to Ricketts:

When we throw away the ladder, we give up the attempts to state what this conception of representation and truth demands of language and the world, give up trying to operate at an illusory level of generality, without however rejecting the conception of truth as agreement with reality. Rather we understand what this conception comes to, when we appreciate how what can be said clearly, when we appreciate the standard of clarity set by the general form of sentences.¹¹

Therefore, Wittgenstein has taken us up the ladder and has kicked it out from under us. He has offered this advice: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (TLP 7). A problem arises, however, when such silence confronts the complexity of life.¹² What happens when the

¹¹Ricketts, 94.

¹²Finch says, “Wittgenstein came to believe in time that in his *Tractatus* years his mind had been held in one rigid position, looking fixedly in one direction and unable to look around. He had been mesmerized by an ideal conception of logic, by a dream of perfection, or what seemed like perfection, of a singularly monstatic sort. The minds frozen in the metaphysical stance, never before so clearly seen” [H. L. Finch, *Wittgenstein* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1995), 30]. Glock says, “The *Tractatus*’ discussion of meaning and sense was an important step in the development of semantics. It features important insights: the denial that logical constants stand for something, and that the contrast between propositions and names; and prefigures others: the importance of linguistic use. But it remains wedded to mistakes: a referential conception of meaning, and the idea that a proposition’s sense must be determinate” (239).

ladder is pulled up in the face of the complexity of life is the occasion for what is usually called the “Later Wittgenstein.”

Wittgenstein begins *Philosophical Investigations* with a critique of Augustine’s understanding of language. He quotes Augustine and then says, “In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of words” (PI 1). Clearly, the view that Wittgenstein is looking at here is similar to the general propositional form, a view he espouses in the *Tractatus*. Here it becomes an example of the general way in which language is oversimplified and meaning obscured. This, in turn, leads to idealized and finally, false pictures. As Marie McGinn says, “The tendency to take a narrow over-simplified view of the phenomenon of language is thereby combined with a tendency to idealize or mythologize it, which arises in connection with our desire to provide a clear model that explains how it functions.”¹³ Wittgenstein suggests that “Augustine . . . does describe a system of communication, only not everything that we call language is this system” (PI 3). The basic problem that Wittgenstein sees is that language is not about communicating “thoughts and wishes” which come from within; it is more like “a tool within a particular activity . . . where the point of using language is not to convey our state of mind, but to bring about a certain sort of response. . . .”¹⁴ It is this critique of Augustine’s “primitive language” which leads Wittgenstein to “whole language.” He says, “We can also think of the whole process of using words . . . as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games ‘language-games’ . . .” (PI 7). This suggests a new turn in Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning and it is one that we need to investigate.

Culture, Language, and Meaning

Four interlaced ideas converge in Wittgenstein’s mature philosophy in response to the problem he addressed in Augustine’s understanding of language: language-games; forms of life; family resemblance; and grammar. The sheer quantity of material written on these ideas makes it clear that they are crucial to understanding Wittgenstein. It also suggests that it

¹³Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1997), 39.

¹⁴McGinn, 40.

is not possible within the constraints of this paper to fully address their nuances. There is, however, a thread that goes through all the discussion—activity. Wittgenstein comments on the meaning of language-games, which is a term “meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life” (PI 23). Language is part of what we do, how we act, and the life which defines us. The idea of a language-game is linked with “forms of life” and “family resemblance.” These ideas remind us of the multiplicity of language-games, which must keep clarity in view (PI 24). Wittgenstein says, “to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life” (PI 19). He also says, “What belongs to a language-game is a whole culture” (C 26). Glock says that “a form of life is a culture or social formation, the totality of communal activities into which language-games are embedded.”¹⁵ This represents a significant shift in Wittgenstein’s thought from seeing language in terms of “object” and “logical space” to “shifting patterns of communal activity.”¹⁶ According to McGinn, “the structure and function of language are inextricably linked with the structure and function of the complex activities in which its use is embedded.”¹⁷

The idea of forms of life is linked to a very interesting comment in the *Investigations*: “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him” (PI, II: 223). Wittgenstein is suggesting that thinking of language as an abstract enterprise associated with learning words in a dictionary is a hollow version of language and meaning. Using his example, a lion who could learn our words would still not be able to communicate with us, because we would not share a culture. It is not the dictionary, it is the culture that is crucial. Wittgenstein says, “Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a ‘proto-phenomenon.’ That is, where we ought to have said: this language is played” (PI: 654).

The other thread that runs through the idea of language-games is family resemblance. This begins to address the question of how language-games are connected. The idea of family resemblance is the path consciously chosen to stress the way that particularity is preserved, even when “some” likeness is evident. He is suggesting that language arises out of a complex set of games/forms of life. He says in the *Blue Book*:

¹⁵Glock, 125.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷McGinn, 59.

Now what makes it difficult for us to take this line of investigation is our craving for generality. . . . We are inclined to think that there must be something in common to all games . . . where our games form a family the members of which have family likenesses (BB: 17).

This is a way of understanding language in the social aspects of human life as opposed to the idealism of positivism. Wittgenstein says, "I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances;' for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc, etc, overlap and criss-cross in the same way, —And I shall say: 'games' form a family" (PI 67). Once again Wittgenstein is determined to avoid a "paper" universal by suggesting that meaning emerges out of the way we are in the world.

Language-games, forms of life, and family resemblance suggest that meaning is not about the clarity with which the world is depicted or the rigor of its formal characteristics. Rather, meaning is an expression of the activities which comprise it. In other words, meaning is the visible expression of life, the intertwining of culture and language. All of these ideas form the fabric out of which the idea of grammar emerges. He says, "Essence is expressed by grammar" (PI 371). Further, "Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)" (PI 373). According to Newton Garver, "It is nonetheless the case that for the last twenty years of his life, the years of his greatest productivity and his profoundest work, Wittgenstein identified what he was doing and should be doing, with grammar."¹⁸

Wittgenstein says, "Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life? In use it is alive. Is life breathed into it there? Or is the use its life?" (PI 432). Therefore, "One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that" (PI 340). It is quite clear that Wittgenstein uses grammar to express the conviction that meaning is use. The general concept of meaning is embedded in the forms of life and the activities which comprise it. Wittgenstein also talks about grammar as rule-following, or obeying a rule. He says, "To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to master a technique" (PI 199). This suggests that life is learning in the midst of struggle. Stanley Hauerwas discusses this and his comments are sugges-

¹⁸Garver, 139.

tive of the meaning of mastering a technique. He says, “To be a person of virtue involves acquiring the linguistic, emotional, and rational skills that give us the strength to make decisions and our life our own.”¹⁹ It seems clear from this analysis that mastering a technique is about living in the midst of things. Wittgenstein adds to this, “And hence also ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’ otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it” (PI 202). Rule following is about the practices which comprise life, and it suggests a public dimension.

Since Wittgenstein is engaged in a general investigation of meaning through an examination of language, his interest in grammar is understandable. “The grammar of a language,” he says, “isn’t recorded and doesn’t come into existence until the language has already been spoken by human beings for a long time” (PG 25). Before we ever say a word we are a part of a culture which forms our life and from which and in which we speak. We are first a part of a form of life, that is to say, a grammar. Only then do we “go on.” This concept links all the central ideas together; it is a total fabric that begins to express a theory of how things are meaningful. Especially toward the end of his life, Wittgenstein looked for grammatical differences, that is, differences in the way language is used. This is what allowed him to see that, just as different activities comprise life, so do different grammars. It is in understanding these different grammars that we will know what things mean. A grammatical investigation is a look at how the activities, forms of life, and language-games clue us into meaning. We now will apply this perspective to John Wesley’s *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.

Plain Account of Christian Perfection: A Grammatical Investigation

Christian perfection lies at the heart of the identity of Wesleyanism.²⁰ It was John Wesley’s conviction that God had raised up the Methodists to proclaim this grand biblical truth. Its centrality is evident in

¹⁹Stanley Hauerwas, *Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981), 115.

²⁰Several important works establish this fact. See, e.g., Thomas Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983, 40), where he asserts: “The idea of Christian perfection was the most distinctive aspect of Wesley’s theology.”

the volume and fervor of theological reflection within the Methodist family related to Christian perfection. Yet, it is clear both in Wesley's writings and in those which have followed that a fully satisfying explanation of this doctrine has been elusive.²¹ It is possible to point to some changes or adjustments in Wesley's own understanding through the years.²² William Greathouse says, "Wesley's fully developed doctrine is set forth in his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, which appeared in 1766. Its fourth edition in 1777 remained Wesley's definitive statement of his position."²³ It is here that Wesley describes his attempt to set forth "a plain and distinct account of the steps by which I was led, during a course of many years, to embrace the doctrine of Christian Perfection."²⁴ The purpose of this section is to attempt a "grammatical" investigation of the *Plain Account* as a part of the process of reconstructing the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection.

²¹Randy Maddox points to a disagreement between John and Charles Wesley when John attempted to "establish a much closer connection between the potential of God's sanctifying grace and the place of our responsible participation in that grace" (*Responsible Grace*, 186). Maddox goes on to suggest that Charles rejected this distinction. John Fletcher disagreed with Wesley on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The very publication of the *Plain Account* is adequate testimony of the many issues which arose during the lifetime of John Wesley regarding the doctrine. Certainly, the issue of gradual vs instantaneousness was a significant issue from the very first, but the meaning of purity of intention, perfection, and the deliverance from sin were also significant issues.

One of the more interesting issues in the Wesleyan community has been the talk about a paradigm shift. Three decades ago Wesleyan theology, especially its holiness and conservative wings, began to shift from its Platonic/Aristotelian moorings. The appropriateness of the prevailing metaphysical metaphors for expressing Christian perfection was questioned—sinful nature, eradication from original sin, filled with the Holy Spirit, etc. This proved to be exceedingly painful, both for those who had been captured by the picture and for those who were beginning to see another "way about." This new picture/paradigm/language tended to talk about Christian perfection in a more classically Wesleyan manner—love of God and neighbor, freedom, gracious relation, being-in-relation, etc. Relational ontology was replacing the older ontology, a fact celebrated by some and decried by others, but undeniable all the same.

²²These shifts or adjustments are reviewed by Maddox, *op. cit.*, 180-187.

²³Paul Bassett and William Greathouse, *The Historical Development*, Vol. 2 of *Exploring Christian Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1985), 205.

²⁴John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" in *Wesley's Works*. Vol. XI, *Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979, reprinted from 1872 edition), 366.

A grammatical investigation, in the sense that Wittgenstein used it, will require that we look for how Christian perfection is used, that is, what forms of life give it energy. When we do this, two things will happen. First, we will understand and, second, we will be able to go on. Understanding is the result of a “grammatical investigation.” The point that Wittgenstein wants to make is that understanding is more than getting hold of a formula. He says, “Try not to think of understanding as a ‘mental process’ at all, for that is the expression which confuses you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do you say, ‘Now I know how to go on,’ when, that is, the formula has occurred to me” (PI 154). He adds:

Thus what I wanted to say was: he suddenly knew how to go on, when he understood the principle, then possibly he had a special experience—and he is asked: “What was it? What took place when you suddenly grasped the principle?” Perhaps he will describe it much as we described it above—but for us it is the circumstances under which he has such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on (PI 155).

It is my hope that a grammatical investigation of Christian perfection will help us to understand, so that we can go on. This means that understanding Christian perfection is not purely a matter of thinking, but of life, of embodiment in the forms of life. Therefore, the purpose of the following paragraphs will not be to reconsider the theological development of the doctrine of Christian perfection.²⁵ I will look at what Wesley said in the *Plain Account* through the lens of a grammatical investigation as conceived by Wittgenstein and then ask what theological importance this analysis suggests.

John Wesley offers a straightforward answer to the question. What is Christian perfection? He says, “The loving of God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none con-

²⁵Here I am referring chiefly to Randy Maddox’s exceptional analysis in *Responsible Grace* which does a good job of tracing the theological development of Christian perfection in the context of Wesley’s “way of salvation.” But there are other books, such as: Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press/Zondervan Publishing House, 1980); John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press/Zondervan Publishing House, 1985).

trary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.”²⁶ The clarity of this answer is dependent on the connection one makes between “loving God with all our heart” and “no wrong temper.” John Cobb illustrates the usual path taken in our attempt to understand what Wesley means. He interprets this to mean “love has its way. . . . There is no competing motive.”²⁷ Yet, this merely says something similar. We could add to this any number of other attempts to restate this definition in other words. Wesley himself offers his own clarification, explaining that when people love God they have “one desire . . . one delight, and they are continually happy in him.”²⁸ In fact, much of the *Plain Account* is an attempt to clarify the meaning of the basic understanding of Christian perfection. We are left to ponder just what Wesley means by “all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love?” Does this adequately describe the way people experience God’s perfecting grace? Is this how people “go on.” Does such a consideration even matter once we have established a scriptural explanation? Maddox offers a clarification by referring to Wesley’s identification of “will” and “affections.”²⁹ Maddox says:

Potential imperfections of obedience flowing from wrong affections would be “voluntary” because they are affected by the will and subject to our liberty; hence, they would be sinful. By contrast, infirmities are non-moral because they are involuntary; i.e., they are not subject to our concurrence (liberty).³⁰

Getting at exactly what this love is all about is complicated by the way that it is usually approached. The way that seems most available is to go to the Scripture, as a “sort of” dictionary of faith, and determine what love means.³¹ How is love to be defined? Once we have determined this,

²⁶*Plain Account*, 11:394.

²⁷John Cobb, Jr, *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 108.

²⁸*Plain Account*, 11:418.

²⁹Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 1994), 184.

³⁰Maddox, 184.

³¹Frank Carver suggests what he calls a “holiness hermeneutic” which he thinks is more “theologically wholistic rather than psychologically analytic” [Frank Carver, “Biblical Foundations for the ‘Secondness’ of Entire Sanctification,” *Wesleyan Theological Theology*, 22: 2 (Fall 1987): 12].

we attempt to present it as the “ideal of holiness.” The point seems to be that the business of theological understanding is a matter of linking our words with transcendental references. Then, holiness is “love having its way” or “heart purity” or any number of other terms.³² Understanding holiness is a matter of finding a definitive metaphor. Those who search for such a metaphor are left to the process of linking Scripture with the Christian tradition in a persuasive manner. The problem is that we can never quite agree on which term to use.

A grammatical investigation may open up another pathway to understanding. If there is difficulty locating a metaphor, we might look instead at how the term is used in actual Christian practice. We look to the dynamic of the lives of the saints and the community touched by the preaching of the gospel and the power of the Spirit to determine the meaning of Christian perfection. How are Christians made perfect? Using Wittgenstein’s method, we understand only when we see circumstances. In other words, understanding is not merging the picture of the Scripture with the picture of the person who is seeking. Christian perfection is defined by coming to understand what happens in the lives of the redeemed, those who have accepted the gracious offer of the gospel. Christian perfection is discovered in the dynamic of a community shaped by the gospel story. It is in this story that we hear of a God who seeks a personal relationship with all human beings. Christian perfection is engendered, not by carefully delineating a place which secures its meaningfulness and truthfulness, but by establishing practices and habits which help us to go on. When we understand, we know how to go on, because we have been found in the gospel, we are encouraged by the saints, and made accountable by the habits and practices of the church. All of this is dependent on a God who continually offers himself to us. It is to the extent that our habits and practices are reflective of this dynamic that they are helped to understand and establish Christian perfection.

Doing a grammatical investigation of Wesley’s basic definition of Christian perfection requires that we look at how love is defined by the activities of the Christian life. It seems that Wesley does this very thing in

³²J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 367-378, is one example of this approach. He treats nomenclature in the first section of his chapter on Entire Sanctification. Here the attempt to understand holiness is treated as fundamentally etymological and philological.

the *Plain Account*, because he defines love in the context of a form of life (a way of being) which is characterized by “no wrong temper.” He also says that Christian perfection is “love filling the heart, expelling pride, anger, desire, self-will; rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks.”³³ Therefore, we can conclude that love, as Wesley is understanding it, is defined by a form of life characterized by a reorientation of affection. Wesley makes it clear that he does not see in the Christian life, as it is lived by the faithful, any reason to believe that this love makes one flawlessly perfect. When we look at Christian perfection the way Wesley does, it becomes clear that flawlessness is the wrong standard by which to define the doctrine. In fact, “the most perfect do, on this very account, need the blood of atonement, and may properly for themselves, as well as for their brethren, say, ‘Forgive us our trespasses.’”³⁴ This is how Wesley qualifies what he means by perfection, not some flawless standard, but a reorientation of life by an “expelling love.”³⁵

What is important for our purpose is that we see him looking at the form of life which arises out of the gospel in order to understand the meaning of perfection. Wesley says:

If I were convinced that none in England had attained what has been so clearly and strongly preached by such a number of Preachers, in so many places, and for so long a time, I should be clearly convinced that we had all mistaken the meaning of those scriptures. . . .³⁶

³³*Works*, 11:418.

³⁴*Works*, 11:419.

³⁵David Bundy suggests, “Wesley describes the life of ‘Christian perfection’ as a life lived expressing the classical Christian virtues in conformity with the ideals set forth by ‘primitive Christianity.’ And, as was the case of the early writers, Wesley was never able to achieve a clear articulation of the extent to which one can become ‘perfected’ in this life. This can be seen in the evolving definitions and expectations in the texts gathered in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*” [David Bundy, “Christian Virtue: John Wesley and the Alexandrian Tradition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 26:1 (Spring 1991): 152]. Perhaps, one might look for clear articulations of perfection in the patterns and liturgies of worship associated with the church, many of which Wesley would have been fully aware of and would have commended to the person seeking after Christian perfection.

³⁶*Works*, 11: 406.

The insight of this comment must not be passed over. Wesley is courageously interpreting the Scripture through the forms of life which emerge from it. He “understands” or interprets the Scripture and shapes doctrine by pressing the issue of how people “go on.” A grammatical investigation frees us to see the extent to which Christian perfection is understood by the way it is evident in the lives of those who are shaped by the preaching of the Scripture, which is God’s call to healthy relationship.

One way to understand Christian perfection is “expelling love.” This way of expressing the doctrine reminds us that it is an affection which begins to exclude other less worthy interests. It also suggests that we should look at the full texture of a life “being redeemed through the grace of God.” Yet, it is easy to reduce the fullness of this doctrine to one or two concerns, such as perfection or intentions. Wesley faced this in four distinct ways in the *Plain Account*. These four fronts are indicated by the types of questions that Wesley raised. The first of these we have already addressed, “What does perfection mean?” The other fronts are: “What does it mean to talk about purity of intention?”, “What does it mean to say we are delivered from sin?”, and “How can Christian perfection be understood as instantaneous?” These questions can become temptations to so qualify the meaning of Christian perfection, that it is lost in the process. Yet, if we do a grammatical investigation of these questions, we will be able to more adequately respond and at the same time preserve the meaning of Christian perfection. I will illustrate my thesis by looking at one of these fronts—instantaneousness.

Toward the end of the *Plain Account*, Wesley summarizes his understanding of Christian perfection. The last point deals with one of the fronts we have indicated above, instantaneousness. He asks, “But is it in itself instantaneous or not?”³⁷ The issue of instantaneousness has been a much contested issue in the Methodist family, partly because we have not done a grammatical investigation of the term. Let us attempt to do this by looking at how Wesley treats the issue in the *Plain Account*. Wesley begins by admitting that no one can deny that some receive Christian perfection in an instant. But he also admits that “in some this change was not instantaneous. They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought.”³⁸ The discussion which follows makes it clear that having the knowledge of

³⁷*Works*, 11: 442.

³⁸*Works*, 11: 442.

a distinct moment that we would call Christian perfection or entire sanctification is not really the issue for Wesley. The only way that such an emphasis makes sense is in the context of an individualized or atomized understanding of the self. Then, it makes sense to talk about Christian perfection as if it were an individual achievement. It seems that the issue at stake in the talk about instantaneousness is whether Christian perfection is an act of God or a human achievement. Greathouse reflects on this issue: "The distinctiveness of Wesley's doctrine is his conviction that the work of full sanctification is a gift, a divine work of God to be received by faith."³⁹ Wesley says, "They never before had so deep, so unspeakable, a conviction of the need of Christ in all his offices as they have now."⁴⁰ He adds in *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, "I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant."⁴¹ Even here the real point is about faith and not an instant. Wesley is after an understanding of Christian perfection which is a gift of grace. In other words, when "Preachers . . . make a point of preaching perfection to believers, constantly, strongly, and explicitly . . ."⁴² a form of life shaped by the grace of God will emerge. This is what he calls Christian perfection.

When we look at the way Wesley treated the issue of instantaneousness in the *Plain Account*, it becomes clear that the point of time span is not the real issue. The only way to make sense of his discussion is to understand that Christian perfection arises in the context of the call of God through scriptural preaching in Christian community. Wesley says:

Now let this perfection appear in its native form, and who can speak one word against it? . . . What serious man would oppose the giving of God all our heart, and the having one design ruling all our tempers? I say, again let this perfection appear in its own shape, and who will fight against it? It must be disguised before it can be opposed. It must be covered with a bear-skin first, or even the wild beasts of the people will scarce be induced to worry it.⁴³

³⁹Bassett and Greathouse, op. cit., 214.

⁴⁰*Works*, 11: 443.

⁴¹*Works*, 11: 446.

⁴²*Works*, 11: 443.

⁴³*Works*, 11: 444-445.

There are many ways in which an understanding of Christian perfection can be clouded. One of those ways is to become lost in a discussion regarding the “instant” one receives it. For example, this happens when we study the tenses in the New Testament or search for metaphors like circumcision and baptism in order to prove that “it” happens in an instant. When this happens the meaning of Christian perfection, at least as Wesley taught it, is lost. Another mistaken course is the attempt to locate the psychological conditions and effects of the experience of Christian perfection. When this is done the idea of attitude or even our attitude about our attitude become the focus. A grammatical investigation of Christian perfection is a much better approach because it allows us to see it in its native form. After all, who would deny that, when the Scripture is preached in a community of faith, character is shaped toward love of God and neighbor? Who would deny that a reorientation occasioned by faith would be a gift offered by God to his children and not the product of reasonable discipline? Understood in this way, it is obvious that one misses the point when the discussion hinges on “when,” because the plain account of things is how all of this arises in the forms of life associated with scriptural preaching and Christian community. In other words, if one is inclined to argue for Christian perfection as instantaneous, the best way to do this is focus on the story which engenders it.

Just before Wesley urges that we look for Christian perfection in its native form, he offers three major interpretations of Christian perfection: purity of intention; having the mind of Christ; and loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. After mentioning these views, he says:

Now, take it in which of these views as you please, for there is no material difference, and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.⁴⁴

This suggests instantaneousness is about a form of life that is shaped by grace in faith. One possible way to envision this “plain account of Christian perfection” is to imagine a grand highway (Isa. 35:8) shaped and formed by the grace of God as it is given substance by the Scripture. Upon this highway there are countless people who are “going on” and as such are living in healthy relation to God and others.

⁴⁴*Works*, 11: 444.

But there are by-passes which can diminish the clarity with which we are able to maintain an understanding of Christian perfection. The name of some of these are perfectionism, intentionalism, deliverance, and instantaneousness. It is to the extent that these by-passes dominate the discussion that we lose sight of the native form of Christian perfection. It is my conviction that a grammatical investigation reduces this risk by reminding us that any attempt to capture Christian perfection in a discussion of one of these issues is to confuse it with a formula, principle, or idea. Much of the debate in the Methodist family could be described in this way. It is the task of the present generation of Wesleyan scholars to “shew the fly the way out of the fly bottle.” I am suggesting that a grammatical investigation of Christian perfection is part of the solution, “the way about.” It is to the task of defining this way about that the remainder of the paper is devoted.

Christian Polity: “Another” Account of Christian Perfection

This paper began by indicating that there is a problem, a philosophical problem, that has to do with the way our words and language can capture us. This problem is intertwined with every informed discussion of Christian perfection throughout the Methodist family. Albert Outler talks about the

greatest tragedy in Methodist history . . . that the arch of Wesley’s own theological “system” came to be a pebble in the shoes of standard-brand Methodists, even as a distorted version of Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification was becoming a shibboleth of self-righteousness amongst a pious minority of Methodists who professed themselves holier than the rest.⁴⁵

We have argued that a grammatical investigation of the doctrine of Christian perfection avoids the pitfalls which often cloud the appropriate understanding of this doctrine. Our final step is to set out the parameters for a comprehensive understanding of Christian perfection.

A fully adequate, or at least a more complete, statement of Christian perfection is a task of systematic theology. The reconstruction of Christian perfection will begin by a change of the identifying term to *Christian*

⁴⁵Albert Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 118.

polity.⁴⁶ This change will help to keep clearly in view the idea that we are talking about a mutually engendered grace. Such a change will remind us that Christians appropriate this grace or reach maturity in community, as God intended. *Polity* is a better word than *perfection* because it is a word that reminds us of our need for one another in the process of coming to maturity. A word of clarification is important. The talk about maturity is always understood in terms of process. There is no time when growth in grace ends, but there is a time when a new and qualitatively different relationality is to become evident.

The idea of polity is developed by Aristotle in *The Politics* where he talks about the basic political nature of humankind. He says that the reason we form associations is to achieve certain goods which are not possible apart from these associations. Aristotle talks about three associations: family, village, and state. Each association is improved and at the same time dependent upon the one that is above it, because the next association achieves a good that is impossible for the one below it. The next level is more mature, that is, more complex or more adequate in the face of the challenges of life. Randy Maddox reminds us that Wesley's most characteristic description of Christian perfection is “adult-mature Christians.”⁴⁷ I am suggesting that a change in name will serve as a vehicle to continually remind us that as mature (and maturing) Christians, we are more aware of our mutuality (both with others and God) and as such are better able to live in light of this grace.

Stanley Hauerwas says, “Any community and polity is known and should be judged by the kind of people it develops. The truest politics, therefore, is that concerned with the development of virtue.”⁴⁸ He sees this, as we should, in the fabric of a story-formed people. There are at least three key characteristics of Christian polity. They are the threads that make up the fabric of the story that should be forming God's people.

1. Vision of True Health: Shalom. Christian polity is characterized by a healthy relationship with God which opens us up toward others,

⁴⁶Actually, Christian polity is a broad term which describes the way believers experience the social graces in community. It must be understood that the term takes seriously the personal dimension of grace, but it seeks to understand the personal in the context of the social matrix.

⁴⁷Randy Maddox, 187.

⁴⁸Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 2.

world, and self. H. Ray Dunning calls attention to this by referring to *shalom* which is “harmony of an individual with himself.”⁴⁹ He goes on to talk about the “complete openness” which characterizes the “restored relationship to God.”⁵⁰ This healthy relationship reorients life. The opposite of this is ill-health or sin which subverts life by alienation and bondage. Therefore, we have two images, one characterized by freedom, mutuality, and health, and the other by bondage, alienation, and ill-health. This shalom relationship is shaped by a grace that opens the world to us through the love of God which guides our life together. This is the sense in which we are swallowed by a grand story which, through the power of the Spirit, transforms life. Clearly, this happens personally, but it is never distinct from a larger picture that is engendered by the community of incarnation, the church. The church engenders Christian polity, which is the community that continues to tell the story of grace, even as it is being constituted by the very story it tells. This indicates how the Scripture operates in the community of incarnation.

2. Interdependence: The Church. Another central characteristic of Christian polity is interdependence. We have already suggested that Christian polity is characterized by health and grace, which together remind us of the mature Christianity described by Wesley. This leads us to see that we are created in the image of God and as such are created as being-in-relation, by a God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christian polity is described as that grace of God which comes to rest upon our life in communion with God and with others in the world and brings us to ourselves in a situation of communal health. It will be no surprise that Christian polity assumes that the church will play an important role in the Christian life. In the *Plain Account* Wesley offers several pieces of advice to the “greatest professors in the Methodist societies.”⁵¹ These are intended to suggest ways which the style of life engendered by the grace of God can be more surely maintained. The sixth of the seven offered in the *Plain Account* links our idea of Christian polity to the church: “Beware of schism, of making rent in the Church of Christ. That inward disunion, the members ceasing to have a reciprocal love ‘one for

⁴⁹H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 486.

⁵⁰Dunning, 490.

⁵¹*Works*, 11:427.

another,’ (1 Cor. xii. 25) is the very root of all contention, and every outward separation. Beware of everything tending thereto.”⁵²

How does the church become a part of the process of Christian polity? It is important to see Christian polity in light of the practices of the church.⁵³ First, it teaches the virtues of the Christian life. This is not easy nor always greeted by joy, but it is the business of the church to set these virtues forth. This requires that the story of God’s grace be told over and over again to each new generation. Hauerwas observes: “Rather I will try to show how an analysis of virtue turns on an understanding of human nature as historical and why, therefore, any account of virtue involves the particular traditions and history of a society.”⁵⁴ It is hoped that, long before the words are fully understood, the young and the “young-again” will see them in the lives of the mature Christians. It is in this way that virtues will be taught as they are lived. James McClendon says, “The character we investigate in a biographical study is always character-in-community.”⁵⁵ The teaching that the church is called to do will come in many ways, not just its role of engendering formal teaching in the classroom, but in the lives of those who are “going on” toward maturity as it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Ignorance of the Wesleyan tradition diminishes self-awareness and thus reduces the capacity for maturity.

⁵²*Works*, 11: 433.

⁵³George Lyons talks about holiness ethos in relation to Thessalonians. He says: “The character of Christians is fundamentally different from that of pagans, not only because of the character of their God, but also because of the character of Christian preachers and the message they preach. The influence of the character of the founder of a community on the ethos of that community can scarcely be over estimated” [George Lyons, “Modeling the Holiness Ethos: A Study Based on First Thessalonians,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30:1 (Spring 1995), 193].

⁵⁴Stanley Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 112.

⁵⁵James William McClendon, Jr, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today’s Theology* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1974), 202. McClendon addresses in another book the issue of the way the church teaches. He says, “The church teaches in many modes—by the visible lives of members as well as by the preached word, by the welcome it extends (or does not extend) to human beings in all their racial, cultural, sexual variety as well as by the hymns it sings and the door-to-door witness it bears, by the presence it affords the defeated and the despairing as well as by the generosity it extends to the down-and-out, and not least by the classroom instruction of members and inquiries young and old. In these ways and others the church teaches” [James William McClendon, Jr, *Doctrine*, Vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 23].

A second way in which the church becomes important in the process of Christian polity is its engendering of social grace. Maddox develops this idea by explaining that “Wesley’s ecclesiological interconnection of intentional small groups (ecclesioleae) and the worship of the larger church (ecclesia) is a central aspect of his dynamic conception of the means of grace.”⁵⁶ He also talks about this social grace in four dimensions: corporate liturgical worship; mutual encouragement and support; mutual accountability; and presence in the society at large.⁵⁷ This is precisely the point that the paper has been attempting to make regarding Christian polity; it is not something we do alone, rather it is what we do in that community called into being by the Spirit through the preaching of the Word. Because of this social grace, we need to listen to Wittgenstein’s plea that we give attention to natural history,⁵⁸ which I take to mean something like Wesley envisioned by urging that we allow Christian perfection to appear in its native form. It is the tendency of the modern understanding of the self to make perfection purely a personal matter. It is this same movement that makes community so difficult to achieve, a fact that has been analyzed often. Likewise, we in the Methodist family have often found it irresistible to talk about grace as if it were unrelated to life in the church. A serious reading of Wesley and Scripture reveals grace as a relational term, first with God and then to all else. It is as we understand this that we will see that social grace, or Christian polity, is an apt description of how the Holy Spirit completes salvation in us. It suggests that, as we are in conversation with one another about what really matters, God’s grace characterizes the maturing process. Therefore, our language becomes the house of our being-in-relation. Understanding this will enhance the way we come to understand the grace of God, and thus Christian polity.

⁵⁶Randy L. Maddox, “Social Grace: The Eclipse of the Church as a Means of Grace in American Methodism,” in *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu*, ed. Tim Macquibban (Cambridge, England: Applied Theology Press, 1994), 133.

⁵⁷Maddox, “Social Grace,” 133-134.

⁵⁸Finch says, “we should note that Wittgenstein draws a line under it and tells us that these language-games arise out of even more primitive natural behavior which he describes as the natural history of human beings” (48). Wittgenstein says, “It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity. And this means: ‘they do not think, and that is why they do not talk.’ But they simply do not talk. Or to put it better: they do not use language—if we except the most primitive forms of language. Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing” (PI 25).

What this comes down to is the importance of our life together as the body of Christ. It is important that we understand precisely the manner in which the individual and the communal interact. Central to this clarification is the fact that holiness is personal. We each reach that place on our way to “Damascus” as a pilgrim. Yet, this is only part of the story. We are always shaped by a culture. The Enlightenment taught us to think individually, to take charge of our life, but that project has crashed and is burning on the mountainside of history. Therefore, any attempt to construct a theology of holiness must include an understanding of the “socially-constructed-self,” a self that is nonetheless a self, but a very different self than what the Enlightenment depicted. Christian polity is dependent upon the socially constructed self and is engendered in community through worship. It is clear that such an understanding includes the way we name God and call a world into existence by our habits and practices in worship, a world not of our personal creation, but of the symbiosis of a community of intentionality in response to the gracious movement of God toward humankind. Here we see the importance of ritual. Attention to worship is a key to engendering the Christian polity which lies at the heart of Wesleyanism.

3. Happiness. It is the business of the church to be that place in the world where social grace characterizes our life together. This brings us to the third aspect of Christian polity which relates social grace to the church and commends it to us—happiness. Here I mean to suggest that Christian polity is evident in the happiness or congruence that it produces in one’s life. Albert Outler suggests that Wesley was an “eudaemonist. . . all his emphasis upon duty and discipline are auxiliary to his main concern from human happiness.”⁵⁹ Put simply, Christian polity creates a happy life, one that is healthy in its relationships, empowered and envisioned by grace, and aware of its deep interdependence. Christian polity in its reconstructed form is the Wesleyan idea that expresses the Christian hope that life will mature by the grace of God, through an appreciation of mutual relationships in the church and be characterized by happiness.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Outler, 127.

⁶⁰Stanley Hauerwas gives a wonderfully clear statement of this: “Moreover, because of the nature of the reality to which they have been converted, conversion is something never merely accomplished but remains also always in front of them. Thus growth in the Christian life is not required only because we are morally deficient, but also because the God who has called us is infinitely rich. Therefore, conversion denotes the necessity of a turning of the self that is so fundamental that the self is placed on a path of growth for which there is no real end” (*Community of Character*, 131).

Christian polity is consciously chosen as a term for what Wesley talks about as Christian perfection, because it suggests a different context for happiness. It is generally acknowledged within the Wesleyan tradition that Wesley's theology is essentially teleological. The problem is that such teleology has usually been conceived in purely personal terms. It is possible that the very term *Christian perfection* is easily interpreted in exclusively personal terms. Christian polity might be a way to remind ourselves that personal perfection cannot be separated from a social matrix. Surely, Wesley's understanding is teleological, but it is important for our reconstruction to see more fully the importance of a community that lives toward the goal. Polity also reminds us that the truth of something can be justified by the kind of person it shapes. The crucial question becomes, What is the character of the people who are called Methodist, Nazarene, Wesleyan, etc? We could contend forever over what text is most crucial to the meaning of Christian polity. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that we often spend time spinning our wheels at whatever "dictionary of faith" is available to us. We could, in fact, spend time attempting to defend a particular strand of tradition within the Methodist family as inherently more biblical or more adequate. But the real question relates to the character of the life which emerges from the gospel call to be holy. This is the final question which must be answered if Christian polity is to survive in a postmodern world. It is my conviction that Christian polity does suggest a happy life, one that is guided continually by the vision of health, grace, and interdependence. Such a life grows out of the narrative of God's grace as it envelops our life.

Albert Outler talks about three central pillars of Wesleyan theology: original sin; justification by faith alone; and holiness of heart and life.⁶¹ These are grounded in soteriology and the practices of the church which engender them. This suggests that Wesleyanism is through and through a theological point of view grounded in the saving grace of God. It is because of this that a highly speculative theology edges away from the spirit of Wesleyanism. The gift of Wesley to the church is a theology that intends to engender a redeemed humanity. Therefore, its native home is not epistemological propositions nor continual appeals to make sense to the world. The meaning of Wesleyanism is wrapped up in the Christian hope for life that it will mature by the grace of God, through an apprecia-

⁶¹Albert Outler, 89.

tion of our mutual relationships in the church, including the graces of the church characterized by happiness. Just as for Wesley, it is true for those who have chosen the Methodist family as home that we have been raised up to live our life in the vision of the story of Christian polity.

The Wesleyan affirmation of a native form of holiness which comes to characterize a believer's life as a gift of grace in the maturity of faith should not be reduced to an experience. A faithful reconstruction of the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection (polity) will force us to look at the forms of life, the activities which engender a native form of holiness. It will raise the importance of the church, as a community of incarnation, to emerge as that form of life which engenders Christian polity. It will guard against the tendency to rationalize, overly structure, or reify in our attempt to preserve the doctrine of holiness. Believers together will come to enjoy the grace of God in a way that would remain closed to them if they were not intentionally together. There can be no assurance on this journey other than the hope that comes from the presence of God in community. Nonetheless, we who choose to journey together in faith are shaped and formed into the image of God by this very hope.

BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS, EMBOURGEOISEMENT, AND THE FORMATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE HOLINESS MOVEMENT

by

Wallace Thornton, Jr.

Until recently, the formation and maturation of the Conservative Holiness Movement (CHM), beginning with a series of mid-twentieth century schisms from “mainline” holiness denominations, have received little scholarly attention. However, in spite of its relatively small constituency when compared with the Wesleyan/Holiness movement at large, it has proven to be more than a temporary mid-century phenomenon. The history of the CHM proves instructive for all Wesleyans as it encapsulates many of the concerns which have characterized Methodism and the Holiness Movement since the era of John Wesley.

The CHM came into existence as a protest movement against embourgeoisement, the drive to achieve middle-class standards of respectability. CHM adherents believed that such a drive was encroaching on the Holiness Movement during the early and mid-twentieth century. Obviously, devotees of the CHM have not stood alone in the Wesleyan tradition as contestants against embourgeoisement. From Wesley to the twentieth century, there have been significant voices of protest against the push for middle-class respectability, especially as it impacted views toward wealth and behavioral standards.¹ However, the CHM has

¹See, e.g., Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: Patterns for Church Renewal* (InterVarsity Press, 1980).

remained the most notable representation of such protest in the twentieth century, while simultaneously perpetuating a significantly different primary logic for maintaining behavioral standards than the rationales utilized by Wesley and early Methodists or even by early Holiness Movement adherents such as Phoebe Palmer. An examination of the development of the CHM reveals this attempt to preserve traditional Wesleyan behavioral standards while utilizing a non-Wesleyan paradigm for supporting the conservative position.

Radical Roots

Perhaps the best way to arrive at a sufficient appreciation of the CHM is to briefly acknowledge its immediate historical antecedents. One can arrive at an adequate understanding of the CHM only by realizing that its development was grounded in the radical leavening of the Holiness Movement around the turn-of-the-century.

The influence of radical “come-outers” such as John P. Brooks and Daniel S. Warner on the entire Holiness Movement in the late nineteenth century has been frequently attested.² Likewise, the acquiescence of Holiness Movement moderates (primarily associated with the National Campmeeting Association) to radical success has been demonstrated by several scholars. The General Holiness Assembly of 1901, held in Chicago, ended with radicals as the victors in a contest determining who would predominate in shaping the agenda of the movement in the early twentieth century (Kostlevy, 96-151). Thus, radical causes such as divine healing and the premillennial return of Christ received increasing emphasis among the new churches and denominations of the movement.

The turn-of-the-century radical leaders, such as Martin Wells Knapp, Seth Cook Rees, Henry Clay Morrison, and William Baxter Godbey also entertained strong feelings of disapprobation against evidences of embourgeoisement, particularly abandoned or shifted behavioral standards. Knapp commented on such changes in general by asserting that “worldliness is one of the most fatal worms that saps the life of spirituality” (“Worldliness,” 8). He offered a clear-cut solution to the problem: “The only remedy for the ravages of this worm is to kill it and magnify in life and home and church Him who said of his own: ‘Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world’”(ibid).

²See bibliography for Barry Callen, Melvin Dieter, Charles Jones, Delbert Rose, and John Smith.

Radicals particularly identified dress as one of the areas in which worldliness would most frequently invade the holiness ranks. Seth Rees contended that “women lose their spiritual force over fashion plates” (8). B. S. Taylor went further by asserting that “many fallen women begin their downward career by selling virtue for fashionable display” (82). H. C. Morrison, in the periodical which he edited, tersely stated his perspective on adornment:

The *Pentecostal Herald* will not call a truce on this subject. It has unsheathed the sword and shall fight against the modern nakedness that delights to display its conceit and immodesty on all occasions. Those camp meetings claiming to be holiness meetings and proposing to fill up their choir with immodestly dressed women had best not send for the editor of *The Herald* to preach for them. Under such circumstances the situation will become embarrassing. I shall not withhold my protest against the immodest dress of the times for any consideration that can be suggested (1).

Likewise, turn-of-the-century radicals vehemently opposed those activities which they considered to be worldly entertainments. Gambling, dancing, and theater attendance were labeled the “Devil’s Big Three” by holiness preachers (Fred Brown and C. O. Jones). These activities were associated with the worst vices conceivable and were denounced accordingly. For instance, holiness preachers often noted the frequency of alcohol consumption and sexual misconduct associated with the dance and depicted it as the fountain from which flowed all sorts of evil. One writer declared, “I charge the dance with being the hotbed of immorality, and the feeder of houses of prostitution” (Reed, 11). C. O. Jones expressed similar sentiment, commenting that “when I see this great army of girls with lost virtue and soiled robes marching out of the ball-rooms into the red-light district, I feel that their blood would be upon me, and God would damn me, if I did not raise my voice against it” (41). C. F. Wimberly likewise condemned the theater, asserting that “the scenes and suggestions of promiscuous plays mark the first downward steps of thousands of innocent boys and girls” (15-16).

Other activities such as novel reading and athletics also came under the condemnation of these radicals. However, holiness preachers reserved special indignation for “worldly” events held under the auspices of the church. Two of the major works committed to fighting “church entertain-

ment” were *The Church Supper and the Lodge* by W. L. Clark and *Church Entertainments: Twenty Objections* by Beverly Carradine. Many other holiness preachers joined these works with their own harangues against worldly church functions.

One of the primary arguments against such activities as church suppers and church athletic programs was that such practices were antithetical to the purpose of the church and diverted energy from fundamental responsibilities such as evangelism and worship. Knapp, in contrasting the ideal holiness or Pentecostal church with others, made the absence of such activities a distinctive. “The Pentecostal Church, unlike much that is called church to-day, was not a social club, or dress parade, or amusement bureau, or a restaurant, or a literary association, but God working through his people to save and edify” (*Lightning Bolts*, 185). Bud Robinson, protesting church kitchens (used for socials) with his unique talent for homespun metaphors, observed:

The church kitchen has about the same effect on an amen corner that a snow storm has on a flock of wild geese; when the snow strikes them they start for a warmer climate and you hear their sad, sweet song as they pass over you going to a warm south land, and how sad to hear the old saints talk of the good old days long, long ago. What a sad day for the church when she exchanged her amen corner for a kitchen (46-47).

For these men, fiery spirituality could not keep company with church functions oriented toward entertainment. Carradine asserted “that the Church entertainment is a perversion and desecration of the House of God” and that “it is a misconception of the mission of the church. The church was never sent to entertain men” (*Church Entertainments*, 14, 23). W. L. Clark similarly contended that the church was established by God “for the *promotion of His worship* and the *due administration of His Word and ordinances*—and it is a recognized fact that all such frivolous and amusing entertainments in the name of the church and many times in the church are destructive of true worship . . .” (11, original emphasis).

Early twentieth-century radicals thus opposed whatever they perceived to reek of worldliness, whether adornment, entertainment, or church function. However, it was not only radicals who wielded the sword against acculturation. All holiness preachers to some extent emphasized the necessity of complying with “holiness” standards. Timothy L. Smith thus notes the commonality of concern with standards among all holiness people.

From our vantage point seventy years later, the rural [identified by Smith as the usual radical] leaders seem to have differed only in the *degree* of their adherence to puritan standards. And they spelled out the reasons for their attitude with surprising good sense. All holiness preachers made a strong issue of worldliness in dress and behavior in the nineteenth century (37-38, original emphasis).

Apparently the radical conservative position was common within the Holiness Movement even during the early years of the twentieth century. However, as a large number of holiness constituents began accepting popular culture, even where it violated traditional holiness taboos, voices of protest were heard from those determined to keep their group(s) "radical" instead of "popular." This undercurrent of resistance to the advance of embourgeoisement involved a wide variety of spokespersons, from general leaders to itinerant revivalists to interested laypersons.

Radical Reaction

General leaders such as J. B. Chapman and R. G. Finch hurled denunciations at the worldliness which they feared was invading their respective denominations. Finch decried "the cheap radio-crazed, fiction-reading, worldly-minded churchanity which is being palmed off on holiness folks" and condemned "religious leaders who excel in worldly knowledge (although making a living off the saints)" as "hell-bound and taking religionists and sinners with them" (86, 54). Chapman warned Nazarenes in 1925 to inspect their churches for the appearance of worldliness:

What is the state and tendency in your church and community? Do people who wear low necks, shortsleeves, short skirts, flowers, feathers, jewelry and bobbed hair profess holiness, sing in the choir, and belong to the church? If they do someone has held his peace too much and too long. . . . One cannot very well feel that he is in an old-time holiness church when he sees a worldly, gum chewing young woman operating the piano and jewelry bedecked, bobbed hair girls taking a leading part in the singing and other performances in the church building. Let our pastors preach and our people practice the General Rules of the Church of the Nazarene and may God save us from the fate that has overtaken many such movements as have gone before us and which wrecked on the reefs of conformity to the world! (2).

Itinerants such as E. E. Shelhamer, a Free Methodist revivalist, joined these leaders in condemning what he considered the encroachment of worldliness on the Holiness Movement. Gradually, however, those most adamant in their opposition to the rise to middle-class respectability were pushed toward the margins of their denominations. This undoubtedly heightened conservative concern over the direction of the movement and led to an increasing preoccupation with behavioral standards and other evidences of embourgeoisement, on their part, confirming the observation of Melton: "As one becomes the center of controversy, the points at issue tend to shift to the center of one's theological system" (270). Thus, behavioral standards increasingly tended to define the focus of conservative preaching and theology. Furthermore, this focus, aggravated by alienation from most denominational leadership, precipitated the mid-century schisms which produced the CHM.

The CHM thus resulted from the desire of mid-century holiness conservatives to perpetuate the radical cause which dominated the movement at the beginning of the century. CHM leaders could rightfully claim to be the descendents of such earlier radicals as Knapp, Rees, and Godbey. However, whereas the radicals had apparently won the allegiance of the movement's majority in the early twentieth century, they only procured a minority following by mid-century. Many of them came to the conclusion that they must either conform to the "worldly" majority or leave their mother denominations. Many chose the latter alternative.

The vanguards of radical reaction actually separated from their parent bodies before mid-century. The first significant conservative "come-outer" group was the Church of God (Guthrie, OK), which pulled radical constituents from the Church of God (Anderson) in the early 1910s. The specific issue of contention was the wearing of neckties by men, while the general issue was that of worldly conformity in dress. John W. V. Smith blames much of the tension on the increasing number of urbanites within Church of God ranks "who were accustomed to urban styles of dress and found difficulty in 'consecrating' to the rural standards" (197). When C. E. Orr, an anti-necktie leader who had served as a contributing editor to the *Gospel Trumpet*, was removed from this position, his sympathizers joined him to start the Guthrie group. However, they have not become identified as part of the later CHM primarily because of their commitment to anti-sectarianism.

R. G. Finch led the next significant radical conservative schism, pulling several followers from the Pilgrim Holiness Church to form the Emmanuel Association. His emphasis on “dying out” as a prerequisite for entire sanctification, coupled with a stress on strict compliance with behavioral standards, created tensions between him and other Pilgrim leaders. This came to a climax in 1930 when his office of general superintendent of foreign missions was discontinued (Thomas, 140). In January, 1936, the break finally took place. The resulting group, and its further splinter group, the Immanuel Missionary Church, have retained reputations as being among the most radical of conservative holiness bodies. Other small secessions from “mainline” holiness denominations preceded the mid-century series of schisms. However, the primary developments in the CHM came after the mid-century mark and affected most major holiness groups, particularly the Free Methodist, Nazarene, Wesleyan Methodist, and Pilgrim Holiness denominations.

The Evangelical Wesleyan Church (1963) was formed as the product of a merger between two bodies of dissident Free Methodist conservatives—the Evangelical Wesleyan Church of North America (1958) centered in Pennsylvania and the Midwest Holiness Association (1962) centered in Nebraska. Notable for its high-quality paper called *The Earnest Christian* (in an attempt to identify with B. T. Roberts’ earlier publication), this group alleged its departure was only “to advance the cause of Christ, and to earnestly contend for ‘sweet radical holiness’ ” (“Midwest Holiness,” 1). The editor wrote that

as she faced her second century, Free Methodism was adrift . . . dominated by a party whose constant cry was “modernization” and “progress”—“progress” away from everything distinctly Free Methodist! Worldliness and compromise were the order of the day. Men of conviction who opposed the church’s tendencies were denounced as “carnal agitators” and “disturbers of the order of the church” (“Midwest Holiness,” 1).

Specific areas of departure from historic Free Methodism which the Evangelical Wesleyans lamented were issues of dress, television viewing, and mixed bathing. They were joined by other conservative Free Methodists in decrying changes in such areas. The United Holiness Church of North America (1966) formed in Michigan among conservative Free Methodists who also expressed alarm at the direction of Free Methodism at mid-century:

For years the clouds of liberalism and apostasy have increasingly darkened the sky over the Holiness Movement and now the ominous rumble of crumbling spiritual foundations is clearly audible to the discerning in these perilous times. Ridicule, scorn, and vicious opposition have been poured out against the individual who has tried to maintain Bible standards of “sweet radical holiness” and who would lift up his voice to sound the alarm. . . . With our schools yielding to worldly pressures, our literature undermining our ministry, and our leaders being strangely silent in pulpit and press on these issues, all hope of reform with the Free Methodist Church seems, to us, to be gone . . . (“Michigan . . .,” 3, 5).

Particular reasons for the United Holiness withdrawal included concern over the removal from the Discipline of the prohibition of the wedding ring, issues of modesty, and “an easy-going attitude concerning questionable amusements” (“Michigan,” 5). They also targeted television viewing, remarking, “There is no standard raised against the misuse of television, which has caused multiplied worldliness and moral decay” (“Michigan . . .,” 5).

The discontent of these conservative Free Methodists with the acculturation of their denomination was mirrored by their counterparts in other holiness denominations. For example, conservative Nazarenes issued similar protests, and eventually a significant number left the Nazarene fold to form new groups. Largest among these were the Bible Missionary Church (originally called Union) formed in 1955 and the Church of the Bible Covenant (1967). Each of these groups drew at least a thousand Nazarenes with its departure.

In his classic *Nineteen Reasons Why I Left the Church of the Nazarene*, Glenn Griffith, founder of the Bible Missionary Union, included his belief that the Church of the Nazarene was “cold, anemic and formal in its worship, generally speaking,” that standards such as the prohibition of jewelry (including the wedding ring) and restrictions on television viewing were being disregarded, and that intellectualism was replacing spirituality. He contended that “there seems to be a distinct preference shown to Seminary Graduates over the self-educated preacher. It also seems that there is a stronger emphasis upon being scholastically prepared than to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

W. M. Tidwell, long-time pastor of Chattanooga (TN) First Church of the Nazarene, who later joined the Bible Missionary movement, revealed the vital place of the issue of dress among conservative Nazarenes when he suggested that “probably the immodest, suggestive, nude craze is damning more souls than any other thing toda y. . .” (12). Conservative Nazarene views on entertainment were just as radical. Tidwell denounced television in a tract, calling it a “satanic miracle.” In fact, the failure to procure an outright ban on television in the Manual led to the withdrawal of Elbert Dodd, Louisiana District Superintendent, and a great number of his followers from the Church of the Nazarene to join the Bible Missionary fold.

Bible Covenant adherents, under the leadership of Remiss Rehfeldt, held similar views to those of their Bible Missionary counterparts. Rehfeldt, after writing that at one time he took a more cautious position, posed and answered the following question: “Do you now boldly advocate the wide-spread leaving of what you call the Compromising Church? The answer: Exactly!” He went on to substantiate his answer:

We have watched the erosion of men’s souls, men who never thought they would degenerate spiritually in their given circumstances. . . . But it is plain to see that too many have gone farther astray in this process than they realize, the problem being that the [denominational] train is going faster toward disaster than they have been able to run down its aisles in the opposite direction. Unwittingly they have become partakers in what they strongly denounced. They need to get off! (2).

Obviously, such appeals did not produce amiable relationships between conservative dissidents and their parent bodies, often resulting in increasing pressure on conservatives who remained with the mother churches. This in turn often led to additional withdrawals so that few conservatives felt comfortable remaining within the mainline holiness denominations.

While the conservative schisms from the Wesleyan Methodist and Pilgrim Holiness denominations bore many similarities to those from the Free Methodist and Nazarene groups, another factor made their process of conservative withdrawal unique. This factor was the merger between the two denominations to form the Wesleyan Church in 1968. For all of the groups leaving these two denominations in the 1960s, merger was a major consideration. However, the reason merger received such opposition among conservatives was that they feared it would further facilitate the

process of embourgeoisement. Mitchell thus contends that “the tensions over outward standards were the basic foundation that caused four groups to withdraw from the [Wesleyan Methodist] denomination” (Caldwell, 319).

Merger made the Wesleyan and Pilgrim dissensions unique in that it highlighted conservative distrust of centralized government. For instance, Edsel Trouten, a leader among Ohio Wesleyan Methodist conservatives, “was adamantly opposed to the purposeful shift within Wesleyan Methodism toward a more centralized church government” (Philip Brown, 10). He has since asserted that “the primary issue [for the Ohio schism] was never standards (worldliness); it was always government” (Philip Brown, 10, citing a telephone interview of Edsel R. Trouten, April 14, 1996). However, for many Wesleyan Methodist and Pilgrim Holiness conservatives, centralized authority was most obnoxious because it was equated with the drive for social respectability which obviously involved worldliness in all its nefarious manifestations. Thus, David P. Denton, Tennessee Wesleyan Methodist conference president and editor of *The Evangelist of Truth*, opposed the growth of ecclesiastical machinery but also vehemently opposed departure from traditional dress and entertainment standards.

By the time the Wesleyan Church was formed, the dynamics of conservative schism were well underway. The results were two conservative Pilgrim groups, the Pilgrim Holiness Church of New York and the Pilgrim Holiness Church of the Midwest, and three conservative Wesleyan Methodist groups, the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection of Churches (Original Allegheny Conference), the Tennessee Bible Methodist Connection, and the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches (combining the Alabama and Ohio schisms). The largest of these was the Allegheny group, which involved the majority of one of the oldest and largest conferences in the Wesleyan Methodist Connection.

While these mid-century dissident bodies provide the bulk of CHM membership, they by no means are all of it. For example, it has been estimated that at least two thousand independent holiness churches identify with the CHM. In addition, several small groups which existed before the mid-century schisms affirm the conservative cause. Among these are the Church of God (Holiness), God’s Missionary Church, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church (Wesleyan)—recently renamed Bible Holiness, the Central Yearly Meeting of Friends, and the Christian Pilgrim and Christian

Nation denominations. This movement, in protest of worldliness and other results of embourgeoisement, has thus attracted a significant number of the heirs of the nineteenth-century holiness revival.

What has welded these bodies of disparate origin into an identifiable movement has been a common cause, radical conservative holiness producing a distinctive lifestyle, and common organizations such as Bible colleges, camp meetings, and missionary organizations. However, probably the most readily identifiable CHM organization is the Inter-Church Holiness Convention. From a reactionary movement to a moderating one, IHC has united the conservative holiness people as no other instrument. Spokespersons for IHC agree that “in the beginning I. H. C. was a resistance movement.... I. H. C. preachers took a strong stand against centralized government, merger, worldliness (rings, television, bobbed hair, immodest attire, etc.) and the degenerating spiritual conditions in denominational schools” (Schmul, et. al., *Profile*, 5). However, as time has passed, IHC leadership has sought to maintain conservative distinctives while being “inclusive, open to each and everyone interested in the cause of salvation and a pure heart” (“Conversation,” 17). Naturally, such an attempt at inclusiveness while maintaining conservative distinctives has drawn criticism—some view IHC as too liberal and others see it as too conservative. Thus, while IHC has served as a unifying force for many conservatives, it would be incorrect to assume that IHC represents all CHM adherents.³ However, IHC has been one of the more significant influences on the development of the CHM and continues to serve as a forum for conservative interactions across denominational lines.

This rather sketchy overview of the formation of the CHM now enables one to examine in greater detail the role of embourgeoisement in that development. It also should prepare one to explore the paradigmatic shifts involving underlying rationales for behavioral standards from Wesley to the twentieth century. Hopefully these investigations will allow a verdict as to the perpetuation of truly Wesleyan views on behavioral standards and embourgeoisement among CHM adherents and the Holiness Movement at large.

³Actually, two of the largest CHM groups, the Bible Missionary Church and the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection of Churches (Original Allegheny Conference), have minimal representation at IHC.

Cerberus and Embourgeoisement

Embourgeoisement has undoubtedly played a decisive role in the formation of the CHM. Radical conservatives viewed embourgeoisement as a fiend like the three-headed hound of hell that would allow souls to enter its abode but would never allow them to leave. Once ensnared in its grasp, victims would seldom find their way back to the highway of holiness. Its three faces were (1) centralization of ecclesiastical authority (marked by an increasingly powerful “headquarters”), (2) intellectual sophistication (characterized by corrupt colleges), and (3) shifting or abandoned behavioral standards (compromise with worldliness). All three “evidences” of embourgeoisement were adamantly opposed by conservatives as different aspects of the same insidious evil.

Opposition to centralized government, or headquarters, often took the form of vitriolic language as conservatives sought to rescue their churches from the clutches of ecclesiastical machinery bent on social advancement rather than spiritual progress. Much of the problem was connected with denominational programs designed to produce numeric growth, which threatened to introduce large numbers of members who lacked appreciation for or commitment to traditional Holiness Movement emphases. D. P. Denton gave typical CHM commentary as he editorialized on the growth of denominational machinery:

When denominational leaders stress Church-loyalty above Christ-loyalty, and budget-paying above soul-winning; when they seek to intimidate those who do not blindly follow their dictates and demands . . . they are simply following the well-beaten path that has been followed by every top-heavy ecclesiastical machine that has ever come into existence. Multiplying its machinery; giving birth to bigger boards; saturating itself with salaried servants; increasing its income; elevating its ego; tightening its tyranny; and doctoring itself into a dictatorship; it soon bloats itself into a denominational frankenstein which in turn destroys the very creators and convictions which brought it into existence (*Bible Basis*, 5-6).

H. E. Schmul, General Secretary of the IHC, saw hidden motives on the part of those pushing for social respectability and denominational loyalty.

As the centralization of power increases in the hands of a few, the voice of the prophet crying out against such encroachments to personal and spiritual liberty must be silenced or nullified. Therefore, devious methods are used to produce or secure “approved men” or “safe men” (*Wilderness*, 6).

Such a view of the untrustworthiness of “headquarters” encouraged a move toward division on the part of many conservatives. At times in IHC conventions, outright revolt was practically encouraged. For instance, one message exhorted conservatives to refuse their support to programs and practices of which they disapproved:

Old-fashioned, high-standard holiness folk all over this country are pouring their sacrifices into coffers of general church budgets that support bobbed-hair missionaries, short sleeved pastors’ wives, TV-watching general officials, and worldly, compromising educational institutions. Let us awake! Let us refuse to compromise with those who serve the god of popularity. Let us refuse to drift with those who follow the god of pleasure. Let us refuse to submit to those who put the god of power before the Lord God who delivered us from the Egypt of the gods of this world (Downing, in Schmul, *Valiant*, 163).

Obviously, the fear of “headquarters” was linked to concern over educational institutions and behavioral standards. W. H. Johnson, Nazarene District Superintendent in Arkansas (1948-1953), associated strengthened hierarchy with an increasing emphasis on academics. He contended that, for the Church of the Nazarene during the late 1930s, “Emphases were changed; from better men to better trained men; better programs in place of deeper passion; building a great denomination instead of an evangelistic movement” (9). His concern thus mirrored that of Griffith and other leaders who felt that the focus of ministerial qualification was moving toward educational credentials and away from spiritual stature.

The fear of intellectual sophistication superseding spiritual character was most acute with regard to institutions of higher education. Decreasing spirituality and increasing worldliness at denominational colleges were frequent themes of CHM preachers. Nazarene conservatives, in particular, expressed alarm at departures from traditional holiness standards which they and others observed on their college campuses. One area that created a great deal of controversy was the introduction of intercollegiate sports

into Nazarene colleges, a practice prohibited by the *Manual* in 1940. C. E. Fleshman asserted that “at least two of our colleges are allowed to openly violate our church manual by having intercollegiate sports. Yet nothing is said and no steps are taken to halt this violation” (12). A related area of concern was the violation of holiness dress standards on college campuses, particularly in relation to athletic programs. Leo Lawrence was a conservative Nazarene who took offense over changes in dress at Bethany Nazarene College. He was appalled by articles in the secular press with titles such as “College Uncovers Knees at Last” and protested personally to the president of Bethany (12-13). Fleshman argued that if, as some people suggested, “Our girls must wear shorts or pedal-pushers to play in at our colleges,” then Nazarenes “have gone too far in the sports program” (27).

Concern over the centralization of ecclesiastical authority and intellectual sophistication, particularly the influence of denominational colleges, clearly remained grounded in the third aspect of embourgeoisement which conservatives feared—changing behavioral standards. It is in relation to this area that the CHM struggle against embourgeoisement remains most evident. Ironically, it is also in connection with the attempt to preserve traditional holiness behavioral standards that CHM adherents departed seriously from Wesley, following instead the paradigm established by radicals around the turn of the century. It is therefore appropriate to examine the radical conservative attitude toward behavioral standards in comparison with the attitude of Wesleyans before the mid-twentieth century.

Shifting Standards and Logic

An examination of Methodist and Holiness views on behavior, particularly in the areas of dress and entertainment, reveals a continuing opposition to embourgeoisement by many leaders in the Wesleyan tradition since Wesley’s era. However, it also reveals significant paradigmatic shifts in the primary rationale utilized in various periods to defend traditional behavioral standards.

The Wesleyan Paradigm: Stewardship. From the time of Wesley to the 1830s and 1840s the foundational logic or guiding principle for Wesleyan behavioral standards appears to have been a concern for proper stewardship. Wesley and other early Methodist leaders primarily empha-

sized such standards as simplicity in dress and frugality in social activities because of an intense desire to most wisely use all resources at their disposal for the advance of the Kingdom of God. Loose living was seen as poor stewardship and a refusal to utilize one's resources for the glory of God and the good of others, particularly the indigent. Accountability to God for the use of all resources and responsibility for ministering to the poor were major emphases under this paradigm. Behavioral standards were also viewed as an evidence of regenerating grace producing fruit in the life of believers who would accordingly act as good stewards.

Wesley encapsulated the ramifications of such a view in his description of "The Character of a Methodist":

By consequence, whatsoever he doeth, it is all to the glory of God. In all his employments of every kind, he not only aims at this . . . but actually attains it. His business and refreshments, as well as his prayers, serve this great end. Whether he sit in his house or walk by the way, whether he lie down or rise up, he is promoting, in all he speaks or does, the one business of his life; whether he put on his apparel, or labor, or eat and drink, or divert himself from too wasting labour, it all tends to advance the glory of God, by peace and good-will toward men. His one invariable rule is this, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (VIII, 345).

In his sermon on dress, Wesley thus discussed the dangers of costly adornment primarily from the perspective of stewardship. He remarked that "the wearing of costly array is directly opposite to the being adorned with good works" (VII, 20). His contention was that, even if pride and lust could be avoided by one who chose to wear expensive clothing, the practice still limited the amount of good the wearer might otherwise do with the money spent on clothing. For Wesley, such behavior was an offense both to God and the poor.

Every shilling which you save from your own apparel, you may expend in clothing the naked, and relieving the various necessities of the poor, whom ye "have always with you." Therefore, every shilling which you needlessly spend on your apparel is, in effect, stolen from God and the poor! . . . When you are laying out that money in costly apparel which you could have otherwise spared for the poor, you thereby deprive

them of what God, the proprietor of all, had lodged in your hands for their use. If so, what you put upon yourself, you are, in effect tearing from the back of the naked (VII, 20).

God had thus entrusted into the hands of stewards the resources which they might choose to waste on expensive clothing or extravagant entertainment. These resources should be seen as sacred trusts to bestow on others, as well as to provide necessities, not luxuries, for oneself. Wesley illustrated this point by giving a personal account:

Many years ago, when I was at Oxford, in a cold winter's day, a young maid . . . called upon me. I said, "You seem half-starved. Have you nothing to cover you but that thin linen gown?" She said, "Sir, this is all I have!" I put my hand in my pocket; but found I had scarce any money left, having just paid away what I had. It immediately struck me, "Will thy Master say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward?' Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?" See thy expensive apparel in the same light; thy gown, hat, head-dress! Everything about thee which cost more than Christian duty required thee to lay out is the blood of the poor! (VII, 21).

To those who would argue that, because they were wealthy, they could indulge themselves, Wesley protested:

It is stark, staring nonsense to say, "O, I can *afford* this or that." If you have regard to common sense, let that silly word never come out of your mouth. No man living can *afford* to waste any part of what God has committed to his trust. . . . And it is far worse than simple waste, to spend any part of it in gay or costly apparel. For this is no less than to turn wholesome food into deadly poison" (VII, 25, original emphasis).

Wesley's view of behavioral standards, anchored in the concept of stewardship, thus oriented itself against Methodist proponents of embourgeoisement. This quest for respectability ran counter to Wesley's cardinal rule for behavior, "Do all to the glory of God." Wesley accordingly feared the acquisition of wealth by Methodists and asserted that "the Methodists grow more and more self-indulgent, because they *grow rich*" (Watson, 155, original emphasis). Of those who gained wealth, he made the startling comment, "And it is an observation which admits of few exceptions

that nine in ten of these decreased in grace in the same proportions as they increased in wealth” (ibid). His remedy for this was the famous tripartite dictum of (1) earn all you can (be industrious), (2) save all you can (be frugal), and (3) give all you can (be benevolent)—a practical plan of stewardship. This plan allowed stewardship to guide behavior in such a way as to act as a bulwark against embourgeoisement.

The Transitional Paradigm: Submission. From the mid-nineteenth century to the 1870s and 1880s the basic rationale for behavioral standards subtly shifted from a concern for stewardship to an emphasis on holiness evidenced by submission (or humility). This second paradigm was initiated through the teachings of Phoebe Palmer and other mid-nineteenth century holiness advocates who stressed the necessity of surrender for sanctification. Humility expressed by surrender to behavioral standards thus became the hallmark of holiness in this period. To abide by accepted behavioral standards was taken to be indicative of a rejection of carnal pride. Lack of compliance with standards was now seen as an arrogant display of carnal pride. This paradigm was transitional; it increasingly encouraged introspection and focus on individualistic piety but still maintained the responsibility of the sanctified to minister to the economically disadvantaged, especially since humility would focus energy on reaching the lower classes. It also promoted the practice of evaluating one’s experience of entire sanctification by compliance with behavioral standards.

The element of surrender was evident in Phoebe Palmer’s explication of “altar theology” in which she encouraged seekers of entire sanctification to “lay their all on the altar.” In one prayer formulating this concept, Palmer clearly linked surrender of behavior in general, and adornment in particular, to a seeker’s consecration. After the words, “My body I lay upon Thy altar, O Lord, that it may be a temple for the Holy Spirit to dwell in,” she adds:

With comminglings of intense yet solemn joy, and holy fear, I do at this eventful hour resolve, in the strength of the Lord Jehovah, on minute circumspection in the sustainment and adornment of my body, to indulge in only such things as may be enjoyed in the name of the Lord, and bear the inscription, “**HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD**” (73).

Therefore, imbedded within Palmer’s altar theology, “the centerpiece of the Holiness quest for entire sanctification,” (Charles E. Jones, “Shadow,”

122) is the concept that sanctification involves a submitting to any behavioral standards which might be enjoined upon the believer by God.

While this paradigm was transitional, gradually yielding to the third paradigm (see below), and doing so at different times among different groups, the emphasis on submission to behavioral standards remained widespread in the Holiness Movement throughout the nineteenth century. But this emphasis, which naturally encouraged assessment of one's sanctification by compliance with given behavioral standards, undoubtedly facilitated the shift to the subsequent paradigm, emphasizing separation from the world.

An individual exemplifying this shift was the Free Methodist founding father, B. T. Roberts. Like Palmer, he discussed dress in the context of submission/humility. In encouraging plain dress, he exhorted his readers to avoid pride and fully surrender the matter of clothing to God: "If you consecrate yourself to the Lord to dress plain, as he commands, then carry it out in all particulars. Do not let the costliness of the material of your dress be a compensation to your pride for the plainness of the style in which it is made" (*Pungent Truths*, 80). However, Roberts increasingly stressed separation, an emphasis for which early Free Methodists were known. Here he was shifting Palmer's primary foundation for behavioral standards, departing even farther from that of Wesley. This focus on separation from the world revealed by compliance with behavioral standards (which presumably were indicators of sanctification) appears in the following quote from *The Earnest Christian and Golden Rule*:

Are we right, or are we wrong? Does it not appear clear as the noon-day sun, that those professing "holiness to the Lord," perfect love, entire sanctification, should be the holiest of the holy—circumspect in their daily walk and conversation—undefiled and *separate from sinners*? Yet, I am astonished—grieved, indeed—[at] the crooked ways of some of these professedly sanctified ones . . . [who] dress gaily, gaudily, extravagantly—adorn themselves in artificials, fashionable gew-gaws—imitate the ungodly in braided hair, gold, pearls, and costly array; gold is seen dangling in their ears—gold chains, seals and keys are dangling from their pockets—gold is on their fingers, on their bosoms, arms and wrists ("Overmuch Righteous," 33, my emphasis).

Roberts' stress on separation, in addition to submission, reflects the growing trend of the Holiness Movement toward the end of the nineteenth century. The increasing alienation of Holiness proponents from mainstream Methodism provided impetus for this development, as "come-outers" from Methodism emphasized coming-out from the worldliness that they believed was engulfing the M. E. and M. E. South churches. Thus, by the end of the century the third paradigm was firmly in place.

The Radical Paradigm: Separation. This paradigm, operating from the late nineteenth century to the present, particularly among turn-of-the-century radicals and CHM adherents, has operated with separation from the world as the fundamental motivation for behavioral standards. While many among the larger holiness groups have recently stressed inclusiveness and minimized distinctive standards, those who emphasized behavioral distinctives, comprising the majority of holiness proponents around the turn-of-the-century, tended to stress separation and even isolation from the world. Lack of compliance with standards was taken as evidence of carnality, or worldliness, often meaning the accommodation to popular culture in order to achieve social respectability (i. e., *embourgeoisement*).

As with the previous paradigm, there was a tendency to evaluate one's experience of entire sanctification by adherence to behavioral standards. This paradigm encouraged fixation on individual experience and personal ethics so that the social dimension of holiness, including ministry to the poor, was eventually diminished. It appears that during this period, self-improvement was maintained as a priority over outreach.

A myriad of quotes could be provided from early twentieth-century radicals and later CHM adherents to demonstrate the primacy of the separation paradigm in connection with behavioral standards, particularly those governing dress and entertainment. However, a few representative statements should prove adequate. For example, George Kulp, general superintendent of what became the Pilgrim Holiness Church (1905-1921), wrote that "A real consecrated life is a *separated life*. Old world, goodbye—and goodbye forever. No Christian can flirt with the world, wear the world's garb, and keep right with God" (207, original emphasis).

Beverly Carradine specifically related dress standards to entire sanctification. "Still the fact remains that to become sanctified will be to have a wonderful change of mind and feeling about dress. And the sweet sim-

plicity of Jesus Christ in us will bring forth something corresponding in our garb and habiliments” (*Sanctified Life*, 162-163). W. B. Godbey saw the dress issue as so fundamental that it even influenced justification as well as sanctification. He commented, “I could not keep justified, much less sanctified, wearing gold or costly apparel” (5). Dress thus became a way of evaluating one’s spirituality, especially his/her entire sanctification, the crucial experience for holiness people. This association continued to characterize radical holiness proponents long after Carradine, Godbey, and their associates had disappeared from the scene.

Radicals viewed entertainment similarly, stressing separation as a necessity for the sanctified in particular and for Christians in general. The title of a booklet by C. F. Wimberly indicates this emphasis: *Are You A Christian? Then—What about the Theater? Dance? Bad Books? Baseball? Cards?* In this work he argued that these activities were incompatible with true Christianity. For example, he asserted that “Men and women who play cards, have no taste for the church and spiritual things; the two are incompatible” (48-49). C. O. Jones similarly declared that “no Christian can afford to patronize the theater, which teaches so many lessons of immorality, debases so many men, and robs so many girls of their purity” (20). As with dress, one’s avoidance of “worldly” entertainment was taken to be evidence of spiritual status, especially sanctification.

This association of sanctification with separation, evidenced by adherence to holiness behavioral standards, continued to characterize radicals well into the twentieth century. Just as glossolalia became the evidence of Spirit-baptism for Pentecostals, proper behavior became the evidence of the second blessing for many holiness people. D. P. Denton has provided one of the clearer statements of this perspective: “Holiness in the heart takes jewelry from the hands, bobs from the ears, and beads from the neck. Holiness eliminates Hollywood on the outside; instills a bit of Heaven on the inside; and makes us acceptable to God on all sides” (*What Do You Mean?*, 6). He also commended the view “that those who got saved and sanctified would shed off and die out to everything but the will of God” (*Amazing Discoveries*, 9).

This emphasis on sanctification as evidenced by separateness through observing behavioral standards has permeated the CHM. While many would agree that willful sin of all types should end with regeneration, statements such as Denton’s reveal that the respective places of “initial” and “entire” sanctification have often become confused in holiness

preaching and literature, so that behavioral standards have become the “test” for one’s experience of entire sanctification for many. Such thinking is not limited to the CHM, for the legacy of turn-of-the-century radicalism lingers in many non-CHM holiness bodies.

The third paradigm for supporting traditional holiness behavioral standards in opposition to the force of embourgeoisement thus provides stark contrast to the paradigm utilized by Wesley and early Methodists, although its seeds appear in the early Holiness Movement led by Phoebe Palmer. The shifts have led to a drastically different ethic than the original Wesleyan view, a fact pointed out by Dunning:

Due to the modification of pristine Wesleyanism in the nineteenth century American holiness revival . . . a different approach to ethics was made possible which could utilize rules as criteria for determining that one had arrived at the point of full cleansing from indwelling sin, a function that is entirely foreign to Wesley’s point of view if indeed it is ever true to Wesleyanism (9).

However, such shifts in logic must not be interpreted too simplistically. While a survey of the materials available reveals these significant shifts, it also reveals that at no time were the other motivations totally absent. For example, even though Wesley emphasized standards of adornment from the perspective of stewardship, he also addressed the issues of pride (or submission) and worldliness (or separation) in his sermon on dress. Likewise, several CHM adherents have protested against the “sloppy” theology which has confused initial and entire sanctification and made adherence to behavioral standards the sign of the latter.

Daniel Stafford is one conservative who has encouraged compliance with traditional standards, but has warned fellow conservatives of the dangers of evaluating their sanctification by their dress:

How wonderful it would be if both the conservative[s] and the liberals would alter their views about Bible standards of dress and behavior. When the conservatives make Bible standards their holiness they are just as wrong as they can be. When the liberals equate the holding of Bible standards to hypocrisy and false profession they are just as wrong as they can be. The keeping of Bible standards is only a means toward an end. The keeping of Bible standards is an act of obedience and they keep one from nullifying his testimony of grace. I have tried to

preach for years that Bible standards come in the work of regeneration (14).

For Stafford, then, dress (and other) standards should be adhered to by all Christians, not just the elite “Holiness” people. In fact, a person not adhering to Biblical principles of conduct is not even a candidate for the “second blessing.” “It would be an insult to the blessed Holy Ghost to ask Him to house a body that is decked out with the things of the world” (Stafford, 14). Thus, while separation is still crucial in Stafford’s thinking, it is a separation begun in “initial” sanctification or regeneration, not in entire sanctification.

Conclusions: The Conservative Holiness Movement and Wesleyan Ethics

The CHM represents at once faithfulness to Wesley and a departure from Wesley. In its attempt to oppose embourgeoisement, the CHM was true to the vision of Wesley who feared that because of wealth Methodism would cease to be a force of vital piety:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out (XIII, 258).

Many CHM adherents thus would see their movement as an attempt to prevent embourgeoisement from destroying the vital piety of the Holiness Movement and would look to nineteenth century Holiness come-outers or “put-outers” and even the early Methodists who left the Anglican Church as ancestors who set precedents for their own defection from their mother churches.

However, in spite of following early Methodist opposition to embourgeoisement in its development, the CHM emphasis on separation over the stewardship or even submission paradigm has made it untrue to Wesley and even Palmer, owing more to turn-of-the-century radicals such as Knapp and Rees. Ironically, this departure from Wesley in an attempt to preserve traditional behavioral standards and resist embourgeoisement may actually have opened the door to embourgeoisement among CHM advocates as they seek to preserve a few select taboos but neglect a

broader application of an ethic based on stewardship. In other words, the separation paradigm taken to an extreme, in which stewardship is almost negated, is not a sufficient buttress against embourgeoisement. It can allow selective “sanctification,” in which specific traditions are followed while inclusive morality declines.

What then can the contemporary CHM and Holiness Movement at large learn from the development of the CHM? For one, the CHM resistance against embourgeoisement reminds us of the incessant interactions between the church and popular culture. CHM proponents have rightly asserted that the call to separation, which is scriptural, must inform ethical decisions. The Holiness Movement at large can learn much from the CHM attempt to “come out from among them, and be . . . separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). Furthermore, the emphasis on “fruit”—producing spirituality, or orthopraxy—should be congratulated by all who wish to encourage vital piety.

On the other hand, the predominant CHM foundation for behavioral standards rests on too narrow a basis. As noted, separation is not an adequate moral foundation in and of itself. The earlier Wesleyan emphasis on stewardship provides much broader and deeper principles for evaluating ethical choices. It also provides a better balance between orthopathy and orthopraxy than an ethic based purely on separation. Stewardship is not contradictory to separation, it simply extends itself farther so as to offer an ethic which operates in all aspects of life, not just a few selected areas. In making ethical decisions, one should not fall prey to the “either/or” fallacy and try to operate solely on the basis of stewardship, submission, or separation. Rather, all three are important components of a biblical ethic, and stewardship provides a solid foundation for the other two elements.

Thus, both the CHM and the Holiness Movement at large would do well to imitate Wesley and base their ethics on the injunction, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:17). Only when this is done will our ethics be truly Wesleyan and be fully biblical.

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A WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

by

David L. Cubie

In the 1960s the evangelical conscience was awakened to its larger social responsibility and came to the conviction that in reacting against the social gospel it had rejected an essential part of its heritage. Another aspect which it now needs to re-evaluate is its ecumenical heritage. Conservative evangelical churches need to rethink their present stance and consider serious participation in the ecumenical dialogue among Christians. Ecumenism is a Christian heritage and mandate and in some form a constantly recurring practice, whether admitted or not. Today, the barriers are breaking down between the ancient churches of the East and West and between them and the Protestant churches. We are now seeing the possibility of the church being one again. The question is, What will be the shape of a united church? Conservative evangelicals have a contribution which is needed for the process. After all, evangelicals do confess, along with the rest of Christendom, "I believe in the holy catholic church."

Whatever one may think of the present state of the ecumenical movement, it must not be forgotten that its original impetus was evangelical and evangelistic. Within Protestantism, Pietism had nurtured an interdenominational evangelistic and missionary concern which transcended the rivalries of the seventeenth century. This was furthered by the interdenominational evangelism, first of Whitefield, Wesley, and Zinzendorf in the eighteenth century, and then of Charles G. Finney and Dwight L. Moody in the nineteenth. Its organizational roots include the Evangelical

Alliance and the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. Negatively, the Evangelical Alliance had in its first invitation in 1846 the call to combat “popery and Puseyism,”¹ a reference to the Anglo-Catholic movement which was then seeking to restore the Anglican Communion to its ancient Catholic relationships and discipline. More importantly, it was remarkable for the breadth of participation and spirit of unity among its participants. The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, which was organized in 1886 by missionary statesman John R. Mott, originated at evangelist Dwight L. Moody’s summer conference at Mt. Hermon, Massachusetts.²

Though generally not a part of the ecumenical movement as such, present evangelicalism is not without its ecumenical concerns. Two examples are the interconfessional National Association of Evangelicals and the more narrowly defined Christian Holiness Partnership, which is composed of those churches within the Wesleyan holiness heritage. Furthermore, who can overlook the contribution of Billy Graham in the latter half of this century to a broadly defined interdenominational evangelicalism, including his sponsorship of international and interdenominational conferences on evangelism. Nevertheless, though participating in interdenominational evangelism, contemporary conservative Protestantism is at best skeptical about wide ecumenical possibilities. Some are hostile even to such ventures as Billy Graham’s crusades and the 1974 World Congress on Evangelism convened in Switzerland.

An Extensive Ecumenical Heritage

Within evangelicalism, the Wesleyan tradition has an extensive ecumenical heritage. It has a special perspective on Christian unity and a unique contribution to make. From its beginning in Wesley’s time, it has combined both realism and optimism. It affirms both human sinfulness and perfectability, but the latter only by grace. Thus, however the church may be divided, the optimism of grace affirms that God can reunite it. This balance has not always been kept in mind. The proclamation of Christian unity which was frequently found in the nineteenth century holi-

¹Ernest R. Sandeen, “The Distinctiveness of American Denominationalism: A Case Study of the 1846 Evangelical Alliance,” *Church History*, 45 (June 1976):223.

²Williston Walker and Richard A. Norris, et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), 687.

ness movement did not keep it from divisiveness; some, in the name of sanctification and unity, radically separated from existing churches.

This contrast of a search for unity with the experience of separation goes back to John Wesley who, while affirming loyalty to the Church of England, gradually created a distinct ecclesiastical structure. Wesley's United Societies developed out of the pragmatic need to find a way of preserving the fruits of the Evangelical Revival. The intent was that the United Societies should be a nurturing agency within the Church of England. Nevertheless, as early as 1755, because of the hostility of many Anglican clergy, many of Wesley's preachers, lay and clerical, urged him to form a Methodist Church of England. His brother Charles led the opposition to this move. As a result, John wrote his strong argument against separation, "Ought We to Separate From the Church of England?"³ Throughout his life he looked for a dynamic *via media* in which separation and union could both operate in creative tension. The Methodist people were to be nurtured unto holiness and they in turn were to reform the church and nation. John Wesley's announced purpose was "to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land."

Wesley's ability to hold views of both union and separation was possible because for him the visible church existed under two formulations—the church composed of believers and the church composed of all those who profess faith; or, to restate the contrast, the church as nurturing and the church as sacramental community. The latter is the organizational church which contains those who profess to believe but who may not in fact be believers. This is the church "which is by law established" and which has prescribed doctrines, sacraments, and polity. Although Wesley himself at times blurs the distinction between the church of believers and that of those who profess to believe, his distinction must be kept in mind if one is to understand his teaching that the believer should separate from the wicked yet also receive the sacraments from an unworthy minister of a parish church.⁴ Wesley held that the unworthy priest or church cannot

³Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), Appendix, 326-40.

⁴John Wesley, Sermons: "In What Sense We Are to Leave the World" (1784) and "On Attending the Church Service" (1788), *The Works of Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1829; rpt. 5th ed. Wesleyan Conference Office, London, 1872), 6:464-75 and 7:174-85. Hereinafter referred to as *Works*.

interrupt the sacramental grace which is communicated by God through these ordained channels. He taught and practiced frequent communion. This practice, though not his reason for it, more than protected him legally from the accusation that he had separated from the church. Wesley reminded his opponents that, measured by the law which defined an Anglican as one who received communion at least once each year, he was more of an Anglican than they were.

The seeds of both division and non-sacramentalism were present. Although Wesley maintained that the sacraments should be administered by ordained clergy, the office of preaching was open to laypersons. What developed was a preaching order of ministry which was organized under Wesley's leadership and yet was independent of the sacramental and parish ministry. This independence was enhanced by his view that preaching and the nurturing community take primacy over the sacraments as a means toward salvation.⁵ The primacy of preaching was indicated by his description of the prophet (or preacher) as one sent directly by God, while the priest is one whose office and ministries, although ordained by God, are commissioned by humanity.⁶ He is not talking here of an ordained preaching ministry, but about his Methodist preachers. God calls whom he will, especially when the ordinary (the ordained) channels are befouled by the wicked and indifferent.

This organizational distinction was furthered also by Wesley's view of the church. The church exists in two overlapping but not necessarily identical forms—the church of believers and the church of those who profess to believe. Both the church of believers (the nurturing community) and the church composed of those who profess faith (the organized church) exist in parallel forms that are universal and particular. Thus, the church composed as “a congregation of believers”⁷ includes: (1) At its outermost circle all those who fear God and work righteousness (Acts 10:36): “[He] is *accepted of Him*—Through Christ, though he knows him not.” Just how inclusive this is Wesley makes clear. He continues, “The assertion is express, and admits of no exception. He is in the favour of

⁵Sermon, “The Ministerial office,” (Bicentennial Edition, “Prophets and Priests”) (1789 or 1790), 11, 17-18; *Works*, 7:273-81.

⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

⁷Sermon, “Of the Church” (1786), 16; *Works*, 6:396.

God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not.”⁸ (2) Within this wider kingdom is the church universal, defined as “all the persons in the universe whom God hath so called out of the world as to entitle them to the preceding character [‘the saints,’ ‘the holy persons’]; as to be ‘one body,’ united by ‘one Spirit;’ having ‘one faith, one hope, one baptism; one God and Father of all. . . .’ ”⁹ (3) Then follow the more particular forms: the true national Church “. . . those members, of the Universal Church who are inhabitants of England.” This and this alone is the Church of England, according to . . . the Apostle,”¹⁰ and at its most particular, the nurturing fellowship, including the Methodists.

The church of believers has all the characteristics of the church, being both catholic, existing since the beginning, and holy. As catholic, “their Teachers are the proper successors of those who have delivered down, through all generations, the faith once delivered to the saints; and their members have true spiritual communion with the ‘one holy’ society of true believers: Consequently, although they are not the whole ‘people of God,’ yet are they an undeniable part of his people.”¹¹ The unity, character, and orthodoxy of this church of believers, whether in whole or in part, are kept inviolate because every member is holy: “And this church is . . . ‘ever holy;’ for no unholy man can possibly be a member of it. It is ever orthodox;’ so is every holy man, in all things necessary to salvation: ‘Secured against error,’ in things essential, ‘by the perpetual presence of Christ; and ever directed by the Spirit of truth,’ in the truth that is after godliness.”¹² This holiness, though not final, is actual, “because every member thereof is holy, though in different degrees. . . .”¹³

Similarly, the church defined as “a congregation professing to believe” also exists from its general and inclusive to its most particular expressions, including the Methodists. One reason why Wesley opposed a new church organization was that he knew of no group that had separated

⁸John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 1754 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., rpt. 1958). Hereinafter referred to as *Notes*.

⁹Sermon, “Of the Church” (1786), 14; *Works*, 6:395-96; see also 7, 394.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 17, 397.

¹¹Letter, “To the Editor of the London Chronicle” (Feb. 19, 1761), *Works*, 3:42.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Sermon, “Of the Church” (1786), 28; *Works*, 6:400.

to form a church that had retained the characteristics of a church of believers for very long. Wesley, although proud of his Methodists and the century-long revival, saw signs of decay among them. Thus, the church defined as “a congregation professing to believe” is for Wesley the “Church . . . taken, in a looser sense. . . .”¹⁴

Wesley sometimes blurs the distinction between the church composed of believers and that composed of those who profess to believe, especially when he uses the definition of the church given in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. From the latter he gained his way of referring to the true church as “a congregation of believers”¹⁵ or “a company of faithful (or believing) people: *coetus credentium*.”¹⁶ Although he can say about the Nineteenth Article¹⁷ that it is “a true logical definition, containing both the essence and the properties of a church,”¹⁸ he was not completely happy with it. He observed, “I will not undertake to defend the accuracy of this definition.”¹⁹ His reason—it excluded the Church of Rome in which “neither is the pure word of God preached, nor the sacraments duly administered.”²⁰ In this we see his ecumenical concern for the church as it is constituted in history.

For Wesley, “the Church of those who profess to believe,” the church with its ordinances and ministry, whether Anglican or Roman, gains its validity from the true church within, rather than from apostolic succession or any other external sign. Even those who truly believe can have wrong opinions. Thus he says:

Whoever they are that have “one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all,” I can easily bear with

¹⁴“Minutes of Some Late Conversations,” Conversation I (1744); June 27, Q. 1; *Works*, 8:280.

¹⁵Sermon, “Of the Church” (1786), 16; *Works*, 6:392-401.

¹⁶“An Earnest Appeal . . .” (1743), 76; *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11, ed. Gerald R. Cragg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 77. Hereinafter referred to as *Works*, Bicentennial ed. Cragg notes that Wesley’s memory was imprecise in this place. The original Latin was *coetus fidelium*; 77, n. 1.

¹⁷Wesley refers to this article as “our Twentieth Article” in his letter to his brother Charles, *Works*, 13:254; see also *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 7:285. Hereinafter referred to as Telford, *Letters*.

¹⁸Letter, “To Charles Wesley” (Aug. 19, 1785), *Works*, 13:254; see also Telford, *Letters*, 7:285.

¹⁹Sermon, “Of the Church” (1786), 19, *Works*, 6:397.

²⁰*Ibid.*

their holding wrong opinions, yea, and superstitious modes of worship: Nor would I, on these accounts, scruple still to include them within the pale of the catholic Church; neither would I have any objection to receive them, if they desired it, as members of the Church of England.²¹

Though he would not anathematize any part of the church as it exists in history, he gave priority to that which was nurturing believers.

The priority which he gives to the converting and nurturing church rather than the sacramental community is further advanced by the term “congregation” used in the Thirty-Nine Articles. This is a term which is common to most of Protestantism. Luther’s term was a *gemeinschaft* (a community). Thus, the church in its essential visible manifestation, rather than being the church universal, is a community. This *congregation* or *community* can be as broad as the Church of England or the Church of Rome, or as narrow as a local congregation. This concept of congregation is the ideological context by which Wesley gives priority to the nurturing community over against the universal or national church.

For Wesley, the nurturing community is the primary expression of the visible church. As he stated, “Be zealous for *the Church*; more especially for that particular branch thereof wherein your lot is cast.”²² The face-to-face characteristic of this “particular branch” he expressed by the clause, “that his [the Lord’s] followers may . . . provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works. . . .”²³ The terms “a congregation” and “a company” as nurturing societies can be and are extended to Wesley’s United Societies. It is not a long step from this concept of congregation to what is later called a denomination. This development is evident in Wesley’s reference in his later correspondence to the Methodists as “the Churches of God that are under my care.”²⁴

This primacy of the nurturing community is also evident in Wesley’s defense in 1748 against the accusation of schism when he gathered his converts into societies. He answered, “That which never existed, cannot

²¹Ibid.

²²Sermon, “On Zeal” (1781; 1758 Smith), 3.9, *Works*, 7:65.

²³*Works*, 8:251.

²⁴Letters, “To Jonathan Crowther” (May 10, 1789), *Letters*, 8:136; “To Richard Whatcoat” (Nov. 1790), *ibid.*, 249. See Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 284-85, for discussion.

be destroyed.”²⁵ He further asks, indicating the ideal character of that fellowship, “Who watched over them in love? Who marked their growth in grace? Who advised and exhorted them from time to time? Who prayed with them and for them, as they had need? This, and this alone, is Christian fellowship: . . . are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand?”²⁶ As he observed in 1754 in *Notes* on 1 Corinthians 11:18, “the indulging any temper contrary to this tender care of each other is the true Scriptural schism.” Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:25, he stated, “Schism here, means the want of this tender care for each other. It undoubtedly means an alienation of affection in any of them toward their brethren. . . .”²⁷ This same definition is behind his rebuke of those who were dividing the societies in the name of Christian perfection: “Beware of schism, of making a rent in the Church of Christ. That inward disunion, the members ceasing to have a reciprocal love ÷ one for another,” (1 Cor. xii.25,) is the very root of all contention, and every outward separation.”²⁸

Although schism may be defined as “causeless separation from a body of living Christians,” Wesley states that this is only “in a remote sense” schism.²⁹ His preferred definition is that schism “is not a separation *from* . . . but a separation *in* a Church,” that is, “destroying Christian fellowship” on the local level.³⁰ Separation “from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united,” he says, “is a grievous breach of the law of love.”³¹ Wesley’s principle application of his opposition to schism was in regard to division within his societies. Thus he warns:

. . . if you would avoid schism, observe every rule of the Society, and of the Bands, for conscience’ sake. Never omit meeting your Class or Band; never absent yourself from any public meeting. These are the very sinews of our Society; and whatever weakens, or tends to weaken, our regard for these, or our

²⁵Ibid. See also Telford, *Letters*, “To Vincent Perronet” (1748), 2:295.

²⁶*Works*, 8:251.

²⁷Sermon, “On Schism” (1786), I.7, *Works*, 6:405.

²⁸“Cautions and Directions . . .” (1762); “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” 25, Q.37; *Works*, 11:433.

²⁹ Ibid.; Sermon, “On Schism,” I.10, *Works*, 6:406.

³⁰ Ibid., I.1, 402; “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists” (1748), I.11, *Works*, 8:251.

³¹Ibid., I.11, 406.

exactness in attending them, strikes at the very root of our community. . . .³²

Wesley's concern for the nurturing community does not imply that his concept of church government was congregational. His concept of government was that of a modified episcopacy through ordained presbyters. For most of Wesley's followers, the nurturing community was the United Societies under Wesley. Avoiding the term "church" for the societies through most of his life, preferring "the people called Methodists," in the 1780s he referred to them as "the Churches of God that are under my care."³³ The people responded by referring to him as their "dear father."³⁴ Although originally believing in apostolic succession, after reading Lord Peter King and Bishop Edward Stillingfleet in 1745,³⁵ Wesley came to the conviction that true succession and spiritual authority is through the church of believers, that is, through "a succession of Pastors and Teachers; men both divinely appointed, and divinely assisted; for they convert sinners to God. . . ."³⁶ Prudentially valuing the episcopacy of the Church of England, he nonetheless insisted, "I firmly believe I am a scriptural *episcopus* as much as any man in England,"³⁷ a pragmatic concept, yet one that affirmed that he, too, along with his preacher-prophets, had an "extra-ordinary" calling.

Wesley's concept of the visible church being essentially manifest as congregations fit the realities of the church in the world. There were many factors other than human sinfulness which made organizational unity difficult, if not impossible. For one, evangelism cannot be limited to church structure. As he affirmed, "It is God alone who can cast out Satan [defined as bringing "sinners to repentance . . . from all evil to all good"]

³²"Cautions and Directions . . ." (1762); "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," 25, Q. 37, *Works*, 11:433.

³³Letter, "To Jonathan Crowther" (May 10, 1789), Telford, *Letters*, 8:136. Similarly, he refers to "the Church of God throughout our Connexion in these kingdoms," Letter, "To Richard Whatcoat" (Nov., 1790), *Ibid.*, 249. See Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 284-85, for discussion.

³⁴Francis Asbury, Letter, "To Joseph Benson" (Jan. 15, 1816), *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 3 vols., ed. J. Manning Potts, et. al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 3:545.

³⁵Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 145-50.

³⁶Letter, "To the Editor of the London Chronicle" (Feb. 19, 1761), *Works*, 3:42.

³⁷Letter, "To Charles Wesley," Aug. 19, 1785, Telford, *Letters*, 7:284.

. . . And he sends whom he will send upon this great work. . . .”³⁸ The “extra-ordinary” work of God transcends structure and results in some degree of pluralism within the church. Thus, “whenever our Lord is pleased to send many labourers into his harvest, they cannot all act in subordination to, or connexion with, each other. Nay, they cannot all have personal acquaintance with, nor be so much as known to, one another.”³⁹ Furthermore, he saw no evidence that people would ever think alike: they never had in the past, not even the apostles.⁴⁰ His Lockean concept of the mind led him to affirm, “I can no more think, than I can see or hear, as I will.”⁴¹ Thus in 1765, while in dialogue with his Calvinistic opponents, he asserted, “allow me liberty of conscience herein: . . . Allow me to use . . . [“imputed righteousness . . . and the like expressions”] just as often as I judge it preferable to any other expression. . . .”⁴² He also saw that physical and temporal distance are obstacles. As he stated: “It is not easy for the same persons, when they speak of the same thing at a considerable distance of time, to use exactly the same expressions, even though they retain the same sentiments: How then can we be rigorous in requiring others to use just the same expressions with us?”⁴³

That which distressed Wesley the most was that physical separation could end the practice of love. As he wrote in 1749 in his sermon “Catholic Spirit”:

. . . although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union; yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.⁴⁴

³⁸Sermon, “A Caution Against Bigotry” (1749), I.13-14, *Works*, 5:483.

³⁹*Ibid.*, II.1, 484.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, II.3, 484.

⁴¹Sermon, “Catholic Spirit” (1749), II.1, *Works*, 5:499.

⁴²Sermon, “The Lord Our Righteousness” (1758; pub. 1766), II.20, *Works*, 5:245.

⁴³*Ibid.*, II.2, 238.

⁴⁴Sermon, “Catholic Spirit” (1749), 4, *Works*, 5:493.

Earlier that year (July 18, 1749), in his “Letter to a Roman Catholic,” he expressed the same sentiments:

I hope to see you in heaven. And if I practise the religion above described, you dare not say I shall go to hell. You cannot think so. None can persuade you to it. Your own conscience tells you the contrary. Then, if we cannot as yet think alike in all things, at least we may love alike. Herein we cannot possibly do amiss. For of one point none can doubt a moment, “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”⁴⁵

For Wesley, “catholic” love within the church transcends organizational distinctions, whether Roman or Anglican, or within the Anglican Church, whether parish church, Lady Huntingdon’s Calvinistic societies, or his own Arminian societies. The concept of congregation permitted pluralism within unity.

In the Holiness Movement in America, the visible expression of the church was also essentially that of a congregation or community. Within American Methodism the idea continued that the particular church or denomination is in some sense a congregation. A term commonly used to describe the particular denomination was “connection.”⁴⁶ This term was used in part in reaction to the tight ecclesiastical discipline imposed by Asbury and his successors in the Methodist episcopacy. Asbury had a somewhat restorationist concept that the Methodist Episcopal Church was the re-founding of a primitive episcopacy. In his organization of Methodism, he left little room for local autonomy. For him, “the apostolic order of things” was a church called and disciplined under a hierarchy of itinerant bishops, who appointed itinerant presiding elders, who in turn appointed the stationing of itinerant preachers, who then formed and gave order to a local congregation.⁴⁷ For Asbury, justification for the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America was that he was

⁴⁵Letter, “To a Roman Catholic” (July 18, 1749), 16, Telford, *Letters*, III.13. See also *Works*, 10:85.

⁴⁶Wakefield, *Christian Theology* (1869), 544, as quoted by A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology: A Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Pasadena: C. J. Kinne, Pasadena College, 1931), 2:289.

⁴⁷See his “Valedictory Address” written to “William McKendree, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church” (Aug. 5, 1813), *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 3:475-92.

restoring the primitive order of things, which he contrasts with the English hierarchy (and by implication all other resident territorial practices of episcopacy) which is “a settled, man made, worldly ministry under no discipline. . . .”⁴⁸ Asbury was far more episcopal than Wesley, for whom the method of government was a prudential, practical judgment. For Asbury, episcopacy was primitive and apostolic.

In response, whether as reaction or out of fundamental conviction, those groups who broke away from Methodism—from the division led by James O’Kelly of 1792 to those of the modern Holiness Movement—affirmed the concept that the primary visible expression of the church of God in history was that of the congregation, especially the local congregation. Thus, in 1801 O’Kelly led his followers quickly from their first name, the Republican Methodist Church, to the name Christian Church, which eventually became part of the Congregational Christian Churches, and now part of the United Church of Christ. Congregational concepts were also adopted by the Methodist Protestants in their separation in 1820. Thus it was that when the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, now named the Wesleyan Church, came into existence in 1843 over the Methodist Episcopal Church’s attempt to silence the abolitionists, they chose a congregational polity. The Wesleyans saw themselves as a connection of local congregations. According to one of the original leaders, Luther Lee, the designation “connection” was consciously chosen. Lee asserts:

. . . the term “connection” was approved by all, as it expresses a principle. Single Christian congregations are held to be Churches, in a New Testament sense, and that all these Christian congregations, collectively, are not a Church. All the Wesleyan Methodist churches in America are not a Church, but being connected by a central organization, they are a connection of Churches, hence we call ourselves “The Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America.”⁴⁹

After the Civil War, when the leaders sought to unite the movement with the Methodist Protestants and failed, this congregational polity made it

⁴⁸Asbury, Letter, “To George Roberts” (Feb. 11, 1797), *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁹Luther Lee, *Wesleyan Manual: A Defense of the Organization of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection* (Syracuse: Samuel Lee, 1862), 155-56. As quoted by Ira Ford McLeister and Roy Stephen Nicholson in *Conscience and Commitment: The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America*, 4th rev. ed., eds. Lee M. Hains, Jr., and Melvin E. Dieter (Marion, IN: The Wesley Press, 1976), 33-34.

possible for about half of the local congregations to unite with the Methodist Protestants or return to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Luther Lee himself, though having argued so strongly for congregational principles, returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁵⁰ More recently, when the Wesleyan Methodists united with the Pilgrim Holiness Church (1966) to form the Wesleyan Church, the Allegheny Conference, one of the original conferences, chose to remain out of the union in order, among other reasons, to protect these congregational principles.⁵¹

The connectional concept was not limited to the Wesleyans. Samuel Wakefield, a theologian of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in his *Christian Theology* published in 1858, describes the emerging government of the primitive Christian Church as existing “in that form which, in modern times, we should call a religious connection, subject to a common government.”⁵² John Miley, quoting from the Methodist Articles (Article XIII), applies the term “congregation” more directly to the idea of denomination. About the statement, “The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men,” he comments, “This is properly the definition of a local church, but, so far as the more vital facts are concerned, may be accepted as the definition of a denominational church, however numerous the local churches which it comprises.”⁵³ Thus we can see that, from the perspective of these nineteenth-century Methodists, denominations, instead of being divisions within the Christian church, are connections of local churches or a congregating within the larger church. Thus the nineteenth century Methodist concept of the visible church is not essentially different from that of the Baptist or Congregational churches, only that for continuity, conservation, protection, and evangelism the connection was made a little tighter.

At the close of the nineteenth century, when the holiness revival within Methodism began to wane and the Methodist hierarchy began to discipline the proponents of entire sanctification, many of those disciplined opted for varied forms of congregational polity. The variety of

⁵⁰McLeister and Nicholson, 76-78.

⁵¹Ibid., 294-95, et seq.

⁵²Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, 2:289, citing Wakefield, *Christian Theology*, 2:544.

⁵³John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, Library of Biblical and Theological Literature, eds. George R. Crooks and John F. Hurst. vol. 6, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1894), 2:387.

church concepts within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition ranged from the radical anti-creedalism and anti-denominationalism of Daniel S. Warner, who, though never a Methodist, had adopted the Methodist doctrine of sanctification,⁵⁴ to the modified Methodism of Phineas F. Bresee, a former Methodist pastor and presiding elder. Possibly the only exception to this choice of congregational polity were the Free Methodists (1860), who retained the Methodist Episcopal discipline, its method of assigning pastors, and eventually even gave the title of Bishop to their General Superintendents. Warner's ecclesiology was derived from the Church of God, General Eldership, founded by John Winebrenner, of which Warner had been a minister. Warner was disciplined by this group for preaching the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification.

Existing concurrently throughout the nineteenth century with the congregational and connectional concept was a widespread concern for Christian unity. While separating from the churches of their origin, those who departed, whether as "forced-outers" or "come-outers," affirmed a call to Christian unity. In fact, their discipline by the parent body was often in relationship to some interdenominational activity which they then sought to defend. As Barton W. Stone was disciplined in 1804 by the Lexington Presbytery for his Methodist theology and participation in the Kentucky revival, a spontaneous and widespread cooperative effort by Presbyterians and Methodists, so also the abolitionists and the participants in the later holiness revival were disciplined because their cooperative life with others was seen as a threat to Methodist unity and discipline. The very furtherance of the message across denominational lines created independent agencies beyond denominational control, which became objects of suspicion. Those opposing their activities slowly but surely managed to enable the denominational machinery to curtail them and reduce their influence. Some in Methodism, after building large congregations, were ostracized to small parishes by unfriendly bishops. It should be noted, though, that part of this ostracism reflected tension within the episcopacy. Holiness bishops such as Bishop Willard F. Mallalieu placed holiness advocates in positions of influence only to have them removed, as was Bresee by Bishop John H. Vincent, who opposed the message. The reaction to denominational control was also expressed by a radical interde-

⁵⁴See Barry L. Callen, *It's God's Church: Life and Legacy of Daniel Sydney Warner* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1995).

nominalism. Thus B. W. Huckabee, editor of the *Pentecostal Advocate*, in 1907 called for a radical “inter-denominationalism.” On the one hand, he could write in an editorial entitled “Inter-denominationalism Essential to Christian Unity”: “Inter-denominationalism is one of the most prominent ideas in the tho’t of the Christian world to-day, and as the churches become more spiritual, this idea becomes more prominent. The spirit of strict and exclusive denominationalism always indicates a falling temperature in the church.”⁵⁵ On the other hand:

We would most emphatically declare that denominationalism (with accent on the “*ism*,”) has ever tended toward exclusiveness and away from unity. What is known as the Church Federation movement offers but little hope of immediate, or even ultimate success. This movement is like a body without life, a form without power. The movement is dominated by the ministry, the hardest of all men to unite. It is not now and never will be but little more than a semblance of unity. What the courtesies of social life are to the social life, the Church Federation is to the church—mostly gush.⁵⁶

Huckabee was not thinking narrowly. Among the interdenominational figures whom he mentions with admiration are Henry Ward Beecher, DeWitt Talmage, Charles H. Spurgeon, and D. L. Moody. These and others “in thought and service and sentiment belong to nothing short of a whole race.”⁵⁷

As with Wesley, although in a variety of different ways, the founders of the Holiness Movement advocated the unity of the church and expressed abhorrence for division while even they were separating from Methodism. Part of the reason for this is that the doctrine of Christian perfection has both separatist and unitive themes in it; the separation of holiness—“. . . come out from them, and be separate from them . . .” (2 Cor. 6:17, RSV)—and the unity of love—. . . put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14, RSV). Wesley unites sanctification and love and defines and redefines sanctification as love. As he states in his sermon “On Patience” (1784), “Love is the sum of Christian

⁵⁵B. W. Huckabee, “Inter-denominationalism Essential to Christian Unity,” *Pentecostal Advocate*, Jan. 24, 1907 (Peniel, TX: Advocate Publishing Company), 8.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 8.

sanctification.”⁵⁸ Divine perfection and the heavenly kingdom are also defined as love. Commenting on 1 John 4:8, Wesley wrote:

God is love. This little sentence brought St. John more sweetness, even in the time he was writing it, than the whole world can bring. God is often styled holy, righteous, wise: but not holiness, righteousness, or wisdom in the abstract: as he is said to be love: intimating that this is his darling, his reigning attribute; the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections.⁵⁹

Because love so consistently defines sanctification for Wesley, we need to examine its influence on the issue of separation versus unity. Actually, the problems of separation and unity are faced and systematized in a complex concept of love formulated by Augustine and expanded by the medieval church. In his doctrine of the church, Wesley uses no less than six different terms of love: (1) *Storge*: love or loyalty to family and nation; (2) Benevolence or beneficence: an equal compassion and care for all; (3) Complacence, delight: love for the saints; (4) Reciprocal love: the *Koinonia* fellowship love which is the opposite of schism; (5) Catholic love: a comprehensive love which includes all the preceding, plus an ecumenical concern for the whole church; (6) Zeal: love aflame, but prioritized according to the degree of value in its object.⁶⁰ It is by the interlay of these concepts that Wesley explains and defends his relationship to the Church of England. Complacence, the delight love reserved for the saints, for those who are worthy objects of love, is that which most tended toward separation from the unworthy. Though Wesley refused to accept the deduction from this that one ought to separate from the church, he did teach that one ought to separate from wicked persons in the church and only “converse with them, First, on business . . . ; Secondly, when courtesy requires it. . . . Thirdly, when we have a reasonable hope of doing them good. . . .”⁶¹

⁵⁸Sermon, “On Patience” (1784; 1761 Smith), 10, *Works*, 6:488.

⁵⁹*Notes*, 1 John 4:8.

⁶⁰In relation to Nygren’s motif analysis, “benevolence” is the term Wesley uses to express *agape*. His other terms are influenced by the *caritas* tradition. See my dissertation, *Wesley’s Concept of Perfect Love: A Motif Analysis*.

⁶¹Sermon, “On Friendship with the World” (1786), 10; *Works*, 6:456.

In his sermon, "In What Sense We Are to Leave the World" (1784), which is an exposition of Paul's words, ". . . come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17, RSV), Wesley wrote against "conversing with ungodly ["unholy"] men when there is no necessity. . . ." ⁶² His reason is that "As Christ can have *no concord* with Belial; so a believer in him can have no concord with an unbeliever. It is absurd to imagine that any true union or concord should be between two persons, while one of them remains in the darkness, and the other walks in the light." ⁶³ Wesley limits the application to unholy individuals and denies that it means separation from the church. To apply this scripture to the church, Wesley says, "is totally foreign to the design of the Apostle. . . . [To have] done so . . . would have been a flat contradiction both to the example and precept of their Master. For although the Jewish Church was then full as *unclean*, as unholy both inwardly and outwardly, as any Christian Church now upon earth, yet our Lord constantly attended the service of it." ⁶⁴

Despite Wesley's reference to some leaders in the church as "mitered infidels," he never went so far as some nineteenth century holiness advocates, such as D. S. Warner, as to refer to any church as Babylon, even though he could say that in them "the kingdoms of Christ and of the world, were so strangely and unnaturally blended together. . . ." ⁶⁵

Despite this possibility that complacency love might require some degree of distance, Wesley's overwhelming emphasis in love is toward unity. Thus, *storge*-love argued for loyalty to the national church; benevolence-love required compassion for the sinners within the church, including ungodly clergy, and Catholic love required not only complacency toward "the saints . . . and upon such as excel in virtue" ⁶⁶ but also equal mercy to all mankind. Beyond the varied concepts of love used by Wesley, central to Wesley's thought was his conviction that "It is the nature of love to unite us together. . . ." ⁶⁷ The sermon "On Schism" (1786) is in part a defense of the emerging separation of the Methodists from the national

⁶²Sermon, "In What Sense We Are to Leave the World" (1784), 6; *Works*, 6:466.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 8, 467.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 2, 464.

⁶⁵Sermon, "Of Former Times" (1787), 16, *Works*, 7:164.

⁶⁶Sermon, "Catholic Spirit" (1749), 2, *Works*, 5:492.

⁶⁷Sermon, "On Schism" (1786), 11, *Works*, 6:406.

church, but it also has the other thrust of seeking to keep the Methodists in that church. That which argues against division is that a principle purpose of the church is to develop love. Unity works love and love naturally seeks unity. Thus he wrote in his sermon "On Zeal" (1781) "that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one body, the Church, dispersed all over the earth. . . ." ⁶⁸ He was especially concerned for unity among the evangelical clergy in the Church of England, whether Calvinistic or Arminian in theology, despite indifference and open opposition to the idea by many who were Calvinistic. As he wrote in 1761 to George Downing, chaplain to the Earl of Dartmouth, the friend of Lady Huntingdon, "For many years [twenty] I have been labouring after this labouring to unite, not scatter, the messengers of God. Not that I want anything from them. . . . But I want all to be helpful to each other, and all the world to know we are so. Let them know who is on the Lord's side." ⁶⁹ His efforts increased during that decade, even seeking to establish a basis of union. He records in his Journal for March 16, 1764: "I met several serious Clergymen. I have long desired that there might be an open, avowed union between all who preach those fundamental truths, Original Sin, and Justification by Faith, producing inward and outward holiness. . . ." ⁷⁰ He was even willing to push aside differences over "absolute decrees on the one hand, and perfection on the other." ⁷¹ What he wanted was an active expression of "Catholic love." To this end he proposed that they

Remove hindrances out of the way? Not judge one another. . . ?
 Love as brethren? Think well of and honour one another? . . .
 Speak respectfully, honourably, kindly of each other. . . ?
 This is the union which I have long sought after. . . . ⁷²

This union never materialized. Instead, division increased. Near the end of the century, when the number of Calvinistic clergy in the Church of England were increasing, those who spoke against Christian perfection were included with the Arians, those Anglican clergy that Methodists

⁶⁸Sermon, "On Zeal" (1781), 2, *Works*, 6:150.

⁶⁹Letter, "To George Downing" (Apr. 6, 1761), Telford, *Letters*, 4:146.

⁷⁰Journal (Mar. 16, 1764), *Works*, 3:161.

⁷¹Ibid. (Apr. 19, 1764), 170.

⁷²Ibid., 170-71.

ought not to have to hear if they were persuaded that hearing them would be spiritually damaging.⁷³

Holiness Movement Views of Christian Unity

The nineteenth-century holiness advocate who expressed the most radical disparity between concepts of separation and unity was Daniel S. Warner, the primary pioneer of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana). While affirming love-unity and often using the term sanctification in this context, he also called for a radical separation. He blamed divisiveness on denominationalism and called for a new unity outside of and separated from the denominations. Despite this emphasis on separatism, for Warner entire sanctification automatically removes divisiveness and brings unity. As he could sing,

How sweet this bond of perfectness,
The wondrous love of Jesus!
A pure foretaste of heaven's bliss,
O fellowship so precious!

O brethren, how this perfect love
Unites us all in Jesus!
One heart, and soul, and mind we prove
The union heaven gave us.⁷⁴

Just as jubilant is his celebration of the saints' separation from denominational Babylon and Babel and their return to the church of God:

Lo! The ransomed are returning,
Robed in shining crystal white,
Leaping, shouting home to Zion,
Happy in the ev'ning light.

Free from Babel, in the Spirit
Free to worship God aright,
Joy and gladness we're receiving,
Oh, how sweet this ev'ning light.⁷⁵

⁷³Sermon, "Of Separation from the Church" (July 22, 1786), *Works*, 13:257.

⁷⁴Daniel S. Warner, "The Bond of Perfectness," quoted by Barry L. Callen, ed., *The First Century*, 2 vols. (Anderson, IN:Warner Press, Inc., 1979), 1:269.

⁷⁵Warner, "The Evening Light," in Callen, *The First Century*, 271.

For him, sanctification “makes God’s children one” and ends sectarian relationships:

The chief object of God’s ministers is to “perfect the saints.” And when perfected in love and holiness, they come into the “unity of the faith once delivered unto the saints.” . . . The pure in heart have perfect fellowship. . . . There is therefore no real cause of division but sin. . . .

To know the truth is our privilege, to teach the truth, our duty. But to have fellowship with the pure and upright of heart is an involuntary and spontaneous fact. Sects are the result of carnality; nothing but perfect holiness destroys carnality and thus removes both sectism and its cause. The fire of God’s love saves the soul, harmonizes all hearts that receive it, leads them into perfect and uniform obedience to all truth, and drives afar all who refuse to pass through its purging fire and gain the plan of holy fellowship.⁷⁶

Observe that last clause—“and drives afar all who refuse to pass through its purging fire and gain the plan of holy fellowship.” The church in which Warner most frequently mentions holding holiness crusades and then dividing the sanctified from “sect Babylon” is the United Brethren (now part of the United Methodist Church), a church which at that time was very open to the holiness message.⁷⁷

In 1907, Andrew L. Byers, also of the Church of God movement, described a sectarian holiness which is preached to attempt to keep the true holiness people in the denominations. As he recollects:

A kind of sectarian holiness arose. In many instances of God’s people leaving the Protestant denominations, the sectarian ministers immediately began to preach holiness, thinking to retain those who were leaving. It is evident, of course, that sectarian holiness is not the genuine, for the latter is certainly destructive of sectarian elements. Holiness associations were formed in which members could still retain membership in

⁷⁶Warner, “The Experience of Oneness,” excerpted from *The Church of God, or What the Church Is and What It Is Not* (Gospel Trumpet Company, 1885), *ibid.*, 1:255-57.

⁷⁷Callen, *The First Century*, 1:68, 76, 151, 152, 217.

their respective denominations. False holiness became more plentiful than the true.⁷⁸

Not all within the denominations were denounced as false professors. As Byers added, "The idea of leaving the churches (so called) began to be strongly denounced by many who had themselves accepted holiness."⁷⁹ Thus Byers follows his affirmation that "Entire sanctification makes God's people one, in accordance with the prayer of our Saviour. . . . 'Sanctify them through thy truth . . . that they all may be one.' "⁸⁰

In all fairness, it must be stated that Warner's radicalism against denominational holiness was spurred by his rejection by those organizing interdenominational holiness associations. He records:

We had supposed that fellowship and cooperation should not exclude any person or truth that is in Christ Jesus. . . . We were positively denied membership on the ground of not adhering to any sect. . . ."⁸¹

In part because of his teaching that unity is an essential characteristic of the church, the Church of God (Anderson) has developed an ecumenical concern. It is officially represented on the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches. Ecclesiologically, its doctrine of unity is based on a radical congregational concept of the visible church, but its vision takes in the entire church.⁸²

All other major components of the Holiness Movement affirm or at least tolerate denominationalism. Unity among them is more usually defined in terms of fraternal relationships. Though they may be, as Donald Dayton describes them, "fiercely ecumenical within their own circle,"⁸³ there is no theological drive toward unity. Attuned to the congrega-

⁷⁸Andrew L. Byers, "The Origins of the Movement," excerpted from *The Gospel Trumpet Publishing Work Described and Illustrated* (Anderson, Ind.: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1907), Callen, ed., *The First Century*, 1:55-56.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 1:56.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 1:55.

⁸¹Warner, "We Forever Withdraw!" excerpted from Andrew L. Byers, *Birth of a Reformation* (Anderson, Ind.: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1921), in Callen, ed., *The First Century*, 1:49.

⁸²See Barry Callen and James North, *Coming Together In Christ: Pioneering A New Testament Way To Christian Unity* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997).

⁸³Donald Dayton, *The American Holiness Movement: A Bibliographic Introduction* (Wilmore, KY: The B. L. Fisher Library, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1971), 52.

tional concept of the visible church, they yet affirm the practical necessity of organization, both nationally and internationally. From this perspective, denominations are not schisms, but a gathering of God's people. Phineas F. Bresee, a founder of the Church of the Nazarene, likens the denominations to regiments within the armed forces.⁸⁴ Those thrust out of the older churches could gather and become a regiment of God's army, loyalty to which would not be radically different from the *esprit de corps* of the Marines, Air Force, Navy, or Army. Similarly, Bresee uses the analogy of families: "As a community may be one with many families, so the Church may be one with many altars and many organizations, not against each other, but all—in their divinely led way—getting men saved and filling the world with the light of God. Those who follow not us may yet do miracles in his name."⁸⁵

Though affirming, as does Warner, that "the carnal nature . . . the 'old man' must be destroyed in order that there may be Christly unity in any form,"⁸⁶ Bresee argues that "Any other general union than that of the Spirit is impracticable and undesirable. Denominationalism is, no doubt, a providential condition of the Church."⁸⁷ Furthermore, possibly in opposition to the ideas of Warner, he states that "Those who fill the air with their cry of 'Church unity' are usually, as far as we have been able to observe, not those who have the spirit of unity with anybody but themselves, whose hand is against every man, who would tear down every instituted thing which God has been and is using to bring forward some vague notion of their own."⁸⁸ To Bresee, divisiveness was not expressed by any new denominational organization of the church.

In one of his last addresses to the students at what is now Point Loma Nazarene College, Bresee advocated "a strong, pure, healthy denominationalism," and added, "We have no sympathy with the twaddle which attempts to express the desire that all people be of one denomination. We believe that such is neither providential nor desirable. We are lovingly, earnestly, intensely denominational. If any one wishes to criti-

⁸⁴Phineas F. Bresee, "To the Nazarenes," *The Nazarene Messenger*, July 18, 1901 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Co.), 6.

⁸⁵Bresee, "The Church," editorial in *The Nazarene Messenger*, Jan. 31, 1901 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing House), 4.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

cize his own denomination, this is a poor place for him to do it.”⁸⁹ Olin Alfred Curtis, a Methodist theologian at the beginning of the twentieth century, took the same view: “I am out of sympathy with every effort to crush out the denominational churches in the name of Christian unity.”⁹⁰ Bresee further affirmed in the context of “healthy denominationalism” that “Any students . . . will, we trust, find no effort here to proselyte, but to help each of them to be ‘a man of God, perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.’”⁹¹

Of all of the founders of the Church of the Nazarene, Bresee probably spent the least time outside of a denominational structure, and that only briefly in the Peniel Mission from which he was shut out by the proprietors. Nevertheless, as he notes, he had no intention of starting a denomination. Instead, what he planned was to start a “center of holy fire,” a center where the poor would not only be evangelized, but nurtured. What he gave as his goal for the Peniel Mission was applied to the Church of the Nazarene: that “those that are being gathered in, who have no church affiliation, who need care and fellowship, and a place to find a home and work”⁹² would have a church home. This practical view was also arrived at by William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, who wrote:

⁸⁹E. A. Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1916), 440-41.

⁹⁰Olin Alfred Curtis, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1905), 424. Curtis, Professor of Systematic Theology at Drew Theological Seminary, is of interest here. He was one of the last theologians at an official Methodist seminary to profess and teach entire sanctification. His *The Christian Faith* is a futuristic personal vision; yet in it he states the following: “*Christian Unity*. At this point I cannot speak an effective word; for I am out of sympathy with every effort to crush out the denominational churches in the name of Christian unity. I believe in uniting all those churches where the fundamental interpretation of the Christian faith is the same; but I do not believe in asking any church to yield any real conviction. In the present state of things there is more Christian vitality in these denominational convictions than in all the superficial combinations of forced external conformity. Solidarity is the ultimate, is the Christian ideal; but real Christian solidarity cannot come by sacrificing personality to machinery. I fully appreciate the dreadful fact of waste; but a waste of life is better than any artificial economy.”

⁹¹Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 440.

⁹²Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative Years* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 51. Smith is quoting from the *Peniel Herald*, vol. 1, no. 3, Dec. 1894.

My first idea . . . was simply to get people saved, and send them to the churches. This proved at the outset impracticable. 1st. They would not go when sent. 2nd. They were not wanted. And 3rd. We wanted some of them ourselves, to help us in the business of saving others. We were thus driven to providing for the converts ourselves.⁹³

This gathering in and creating a home implies that the fundamental expression of the visible church is the local church. Bresee stated: "The unity of the whole church is of the spirit and not necessarily of organization, but local organization, in the Spirit, and under the providence of God is a necessity."⁹⁴ His view of the church was essentially congregational. Though not using the term congregation as broadly as Wesley, the extension of congregation is present in his concept of denomination. The Church of the Nazarene began as a single church in 1895, but in 1899 Bresee wrote, ". . . it is something more than a single church, having several churches."⁹⁵ To those who opposed his "organization of new Churches," Bresee answered: "this is a painful exhibition of ecclesiasticism. Are there to be no new centers of spiritual power? Must the Holy Ghost be put into the leading strings of any dead or half dead organization? Are we to put ourselves over against the coming of the Spirit of God and raising up in these days as in the past new agencies to save and bless men?"⁹⁶ In essence, then, a denomination is a connection of local churches which are gathered together for evangelism and Christian nurture. Through evangelism other congregations are added to that connection.

The language of apostasy was used against the Methodist Church. Bresee himself does not use the "language of Babylon" against it, but one of Bresee's colleagues, F. E. Hill, in 1899, used apocalyptic language to denounce "The iron heel of this monster ecclesiasticism." He added, "Soon, if not already, will the many thousands who are yet under the

⁹³As quoted by St. John Ervine, *God's Soldier: General William Booth* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 1:471; William Booth, in his preface to George Scott Railton's *Twenty-One Years' Salvation Army*. Railton was Booth's principle assistant commissioner.

⁹⁴"A Church," editorial in *The Nazarene Messenger*, Feb. 22, 1900 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing House), 4.

⁹⁵"People's United Church," editorial in *The Nazarene [Messenger]*, Feb. 1, 1900/1899 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing House), 4.

⁹⁶"Holiness Churches," editorial in *The Nazarene [Messenger]*, Jan. 24, 1901 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing House), 4.

power of the lion begin to lose courage; rent and torn by the ravages of the beast, their carcasses will be strewn by the way, and within a very few years will be numbered in the valley of the dry bones, within the castle yard of ecclesiasticism. It is coming! O, it is coming!”⁹⁷ Between 1899-1901 Bresee frequently referred to the Methodist Church as that “ecclesiasticism.” His strongest words refer to it as a “hating church.” He asks, “Why does not the [Methodist] church love the holiness people? Is it not to ‘spread scriptural holiness’ that the [Methodist] church has been raised up? It now dislikes holiness people because it has become worldly. . . . To have souls converted that they might be made holy would only increase the hatred of this hating church.”⁹⁸

More typical of Bresee’s thought is the need of new bottles for new wine. He asks, “Why the Salvation Army? . . . Why the Keswick movement? . . . Why the organization . . . of Holiness Associations . . . [and] why the Church of the Nazarene?” He answers:

Simply because of the failure of Methodism to continue to preach the pure Pauline doctrines of entire sanctification, by a second definite work of grace. Simply because Methodism will not brook holiness revivals, and be an agency for the distinctive work of entire sanctification. It is no child’s play to go out under the blue sky, without means and agencies and try to create them. Anybody would prefer to work through and in connection with those already formed.⁹⁹

J. B. Chapman, Nazarene General Superintendent between 1928 and 1944, continued Bresee’s vision of the church. He equated denominations with districts in a church:

As to denominations, these are justified on just the same ground that district organizations are justified within the bounds of a denomination, and on the same ground that separate organizations of the same districts are set up to meet the needs of the people and to utilize the forces of the Church for the propagation of the gospel. . . . Denominations or local

⁹⁷F. E. Hill, “The Holiness Movement and Its Opposition,” *The Nazarene Messenger*, July 20, 1899 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing House), 5.

⁹⁸“Slipped a Cog,” editorial in *The Nazarene Messenger*, Aug. 2, 1900 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing House), 1.

⁹⁹“A Serious Question,” editorial in *The Nazarene [Messenger]*, June 28, 1900 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing House), 4.

churches which separate from their fellows without due reason are a hindrance to the unity of the Church, and as such are to be bewailed. When the separation is caused by someone's desire for the "pre-eminence" or by some other personal and narrow consideration, it becomes a faction and is injurious to the work of God. But when the grounds of separation are justifiable, separation and organization serve to preserve and promote the work of God in the world. This has been abundantly proved by experience, as well as by the precepts and examples of the early apostles and disciples (Acts 15:36-41).¹⁰⁰

To such founding fathers of the Holiness Movement as William Booth, Luther Lee, Daniel S. Warner, Phineas F. Bresee, Seth Rees, and Martin Wells Knapp, Christian unity was very important. But this was not the only option. A pedestrian denominationalism expressed by the term "the Church of his choice," an expression used in the General Conference Proceedings of 1915 of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, was also evident.¹⁰¹ Bresee, though expressing voluntarism, had a different emphasis. He wrote, "... you can ... find your providential place."¹⁰²

What is the solution to division within the Christian church, at least for those who take Jesus' prayer seriously—"that they may be one"? We have seen Bresee's: that true unity is of the Spirit, and that denominations can be and ought to become healthy manifestations of that church in which "when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:16, RSV). Bresee himself, though, was not adverse to inviting other holiness bodies to unite. The pages of *The Nazarene Messenger* advocate the union of like-minded denominations and local churches into a national holiness church.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, because unity is of the Spirit, there is no sense of ought, that working toward universal Christian unity is our obligation. In fact, the history of the denominational idea includes not only the ideal that we are all one, but also the disturbing reality of divisiveness and hos-

¹⁰⁰J. B. Chapman, *Nazarene Primer* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1949), 48.

¹⁰¹McLeister and Nicholson, *Conscience and Commitment*, 143; see also 168.

¹⁰²Phineas F. Bresee, Sermon, "The Passion That Absorbs," *Sermons on Isaiah* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1926), 164.

¹⁰³See especially *Nazarene Messenger*, *Church Union Number*, July 4, 1907 (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Co.).

tility. As in the armed services, *esprit de corps* has too frequently included an unhealthy rivalry. The danger of denominationalism is that the prayer of Christ—"that they may be one"—is not taken seriously. The inner life of a local church or a denomination or even an association of churches may devolve into sectarianism.

These conditions were not unanticipated. Criticisms of sectarianism were given and teachings advanced both to avoid division and to heal those divisions existing. Wesley expresses his criticism in the poem "Primitive Christianity" (c. 1743):

Ye different sects, who all declare
 "Lo! Here is Christ!" or "Christ is there!"
 Your stronger proofs divinely give,
 And show me where the Christians live.

 Your claim, alas! Ye cannot prove;
 Ye want the genuine mark of love:
 Thou only, Lord, thine own canst show,
 For sure thou hast a church below.¹⁰⁴

Throughout the nineteenth century denominational rivalries both existed and were criticized. D. S. Warner combined Methodist pietism with radical denominationalism and attacked what he called "sectism," not, of course, recognizing that his radical come-outism was itself sectarian. During the same period (c. 1875) A. C. Northcutt, a Methodist minister and son of one who participated in the great Kentucky revival of 1805, suggested that denominational rivalry interferes with evangelism. As he wrote, "It is strange that the Churches did not realize that God had a controversy with them for their own uncharitable bearing toward each other. I have no doubt but that he was waiting for them to lay aside their wicked prejudices, that he might consistently honor and bless them in the work of saving men."¹⁰⁵ Northcutt was convinced that the revival of 1805 was a

¹⁰⁴John or Charles Wesley, "Primitive Christianity," stanzas 9 and 10. Included in the second edition of "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" (1743), *Works*, Bicentennial ed.; 2:91. See Cragg's discussion of the dating, 90, n. 4, and Appendix, 543.

¹⁰⁵H. C. Northcott, *Biography of Rev. Benjamin Northcott: A Pioneer Local Preacher of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Kentucky* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern, 1875), 31.

result of Presbyterians and Methodists laying aside their differences for the purpose of evangelism.

Principles from the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition

Though denominations of the Wesleyan tradition are, like others, usually content with separation, there has existed within that tradition a vision that unity ought to be the reality among Christians. This is evident in the eschatological vision of the church present in Wesley and which was to reappear at different times. For Wesley, the future was to be a restoration of the church at Pentecost, when Christians held all things in common and “were all of one heart and soul.” Thus he wrote:

Then shall “the times of universal refreshment come from the presence of the Lord.” The grand “Pentecost” shall “fully come,” and “devout men in every nation under heaven,” however distant in place from each other, shall “all be filled with the Holy Ghost;” and they will “continue steadfast in the Apostles’ doctrine, and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers;” they will “eat their meat” . . . “with gladness and singleness of heart. . . .” and they will be “all of one heart and of one soul.” The natural, necessary consequence of this will be the same as it was in the beginning of the Christian Church: “None of them will say, that aught of the things which he possesses is his own; but they will have all things common. . . .”¹⁰⁶

A similar eschatological hope was expressed by Francis Asbury. On August 19, 1806, after the united effort of Methodists and Presbyterians to evangelize had come to an end, he wrote: “Friendship and good fellowship seem to be done away between the Methodists and Presbyterians; few of the latter will attend our meetings now; well, let them feed their flocks apart; and let not Judah vex Ephraim, or Ephraim, Judah; and may it thus remain, until the two sticks become one in the Lord’s hands.”¹⁰⁷ John Fletcher, vicar of Madeley, whom Wesley had designated his successor, similarly looked for God to raise “a pentecostal Church again in the earth.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Sermon, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” (1783), 20, *Works*, 6:284.

¹⁰⁷Journal, Aug. 19, 1806. Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, 2:515.

¹⁰⁸Letter, “To Miss Perronet,” Jan. 19, 1777; Fletcher, *Works*, 4:351.

Eschatological hopes were also high at the turn of the twentieth century. The interdenominational holiness revival encouraged a widespread expectation that denominations would disappear in a mighty outpouring of the Spirit. This expectation occurred among both pre- and post-millennialists and included H. B. Huckabee, early editor of the *Pentecostal Advocate*, a paper that later merged into the *Herald of Holiness*, the official magazine of The Church of the Nazarene. Huckabee prescribed an interdenominationalism in which denominations would disappear, in which “creeds will be forgotten in the common zeal for souls. . . . Unity will be the common aim . . . and the heated discussions on dogma and cult will be antiquated by common consent.”¹⁰⁹ Others who were also captured by this eschatological vision were A. M. Hills of The Church of the Nazarene¹¹⁰ and Martin Wells Knapp and Seth Rees, fathers of the Pilgrim Holiness Church, which in 1966 united with the Wesleyan Methodists.¹¹¹ As noted, Bresee saw the promoters of unity as being divisive and was wary of them.

Can present-day Wesleyan evangelicals make a contribution toward the future which God is planning? If so, they must not lay aside those discoveries of grace which have come out of their own traditions. There are some principles from the Wesleyan evangelical tradition which would need to be affirmed if dialogue is to be meaningful.

First: An essential Protestant principle, held by Wesley and most of his followers, is that the fundamental visible expression of the Church of Christ, the Holy Catholic Church, is the congregation. But at present, the concept of unity seems to be working from the concept of episcopacy and hierarchy. An evangelical entrance into the dialogue should of necessity involve a re-evaluation of the congregational principle, both in its local and extended senses.

¹⁰⁹“The Year of 1907,” editorial in *Pentecostal Advocate*, Jan. 10, 1907 (Peniel, TX: Advocate Publishing Company), 9. See his continued discussion of this theme in his editorials entitled “Inter-denominationalism Essential to Christian Unity,” in both Jan. 24 and Jan. 31 issues of 1907.

¹¹⁰See Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, 217.

¹¹¹Paul Westphal Thomas and Paul William Thomas, *The Days of Our Pilgrimage: The History of the Pilgrim Holiness Church* (Marion, IN: The Wesley Press, 1976), 13-17.

Second: Unity to be unity must be pursued within the context of spiritual renewal. The emphasis on Pentecost in this tradition coordinates unity with the coming of the Holy Spirit: “they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1, RSV), reminders that unity must be of the Spirit who brings unity, is present in it, and prepares each of us for it by inward cleansing.

Third: A principle that has largely been lost by the present holiness denominations, except for the Church of God (Anderson), is that the unity of the church is an essential part of eschatological hope. For Wesley, it is a keystone in his attempt to develop his Methodists into an evangelizing and nurturing society within the Church of England without separation from it. His hope was that they would stay in the church for its reformation. Though he saw separation as in some sense inevitable, it was never to be the last word.

Fourth: Wesley’s catholic love and eschatological vision bring into focus an essentially Pauline concept regarding the restoration of apostate churches. If apostate Israel can be restored, so also can apostate churches (see Rom. 11:23, 28). We must have a profound hope for one another and for reconciliation. This is an affirmation of God’s sanctifying grace within his church, which is to be purified and made one (Eph. 5:27, 31-32). Apostate must always be seen as an adverb and not as an adjective, as a description of action rather than a description of kind or nature. Thus every church, however it may have strayed from gospel principles, is still “beloved for the sake of their forefathers.” God is able “to graft them in again” (Rom. 11:28, 23, RSV). The future must include reconciliation, both with God and with each other.

Fifth: Any concept of unity, including unity as an eschatological concept, must include room for departure and return. Either the sins of the church or God’s call to repentance may result in separation. As Wesley and Bresee remind us, “God can send by whom He will send,” and God can raise up “new centers of holy fire.” Paul’s call to “come out from among them, and be separate from them” (2 Cor. 6:17, RSV) is in tension with his call to unity (Eph. 4:1-16) because it affirms that some divisions may be necessary. Though Anglo-Catholics may affirm that the Reformation was a mistake, can evangelicals? Can black Christians ever deny their ancestral exodus from the white churches which were so filled with hos-

tility and paternalism? Both the Reformation and the post-Civil War exodus were necessary within the context of the church of their times. Departure may be necessary for the evangelizing and nurturing of God's sheep. In any unity there may be the oppressed or neglected other sheep of God. With Wesley, we must affirm the priority of love, and in that context the priority of evangelism and nurture.¹¹² People are more than structure. To paraphrase Jesus' words, religious structure was made for man, not man for structure (Mark 2:27).

It should be recognized that, as long as time lasts or our Lord delays his return, division will continue. Man by nature is hostile and divisive. Evangelism, whether of children within the church or pagans from without, brings injured people who defend themselves by identification with a group. Though Christians are called away from a party spirit, they are called away from that which inevitably is there. John 17 and Ephesians 2 and 4 suggest that sanctification is in part a process of moving from innate hostility to the unity of love. The Corinthian church provides an interesting study of division and reconciliation. According to the witness of the Epistle of Clement, the Corinthians had overcome the divisiveness described in Paul's letters, a division between Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, and had become notable for their righteousness. But a new generation found a new occasion for division. This time it was between those siding with young leaders against the elders, reminding us that each generation must be transformed from hostility to unity.¹¹³

Yet return must take place. The greatest tragedy is not the fact of division, but that we tend to justify and perpetuate it. We need some of Wesley's vision which saw beyond the difficulties of the present to God's future. Wesley taught an eschatology of return. Thus in 1783, just the year before he ordained Coke for the superintendency of the church in America, he saw even separation as the beginning of God's general renewal. Thus, out of what to him was a necessary division, he envisioned God's sanctifying restoration of his church: "he will never intermit this blessed work of his Spirit, until he has fulfilled all his promises. . . ."¹¹⁴

¹¹²Sermon, "On Zeal" (1758, Smith), III.9-12, *Works*, 7:65-67. This entire sermon is what Wesley calls an exercise in "comparative divinity," *Works*, 5:7:60.

¹¹³First Clement II, 5; III, 1; XLVIII, 1, and XLIX, 1.

¹¹⁴Sermon, "The General Spread of the Gospel" (1783), 27, *Works*, 6:288.

Sixth: I would affirm the importance of the doctrine of Christian perfection in the quest for unity. Realized eschatology, whatever others may mean by that term, is essentially a perfectionist concept. It affirms that God is able to accomplish in the human situation, whether personal, ecclesiastical, or in the world, that which is impossible to “mere man.” Perfection is a grace term which affirms that what God has promised will be brought to pass. God may need to bring these promises to pass over and over again. Nevertheless, the church must exist within the context of God’s restoration and renewal and both aspire to and claim this promise of unity. The church, which is constantly reborn with every generation and even with every individual who is “added daily to the church,” must always aspire to and work toward Christian unity.

Finally, I would affirm that the unity of the church must first of all be understood as a unity of love. The structures which contribute to unity may well vary from time to time, but structure must never be allowed to limit love. The nature of love, according to Paul, is that it “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14, RSV). It is inclusive rather than exclusive. It does not require a loyalty which keeps others out. The molecules of the body of Christ cannot be bound together by coercion. Denominations ought to never make exclusive claims on local congregations united with it for mission and discipline. Love requires a network of relationships, not only in corporate structures but also in free relationships with other churches. Perfect love cannot be exclusive, but must be catholic in its relationship. Love to be love must have the liberty of sovereignty. Love is “the royal law” and “the law of liberty” (Jas. 2:8, 1:25, RSV). Unity, then, must not be seen exclusively in structural terms, but in the networking of God’s people in loving relationships for the evangelism of the lost for the nurture of God’s people and for the advancement of God’s kingdom.

Christian unity is the ongoing work of God in the church. Young men and women, as well as fathers and mothers in Christ (1 John 2:12-14), will need to become incarnate in the human divisiveness, not to advance division, but to bring the church and the world out of sectarianism to the perfection of unity in Christ. The Christian church exists both to be one and to participate in God’s work of making all one.

THE CLAUDE THOMPSON CONTROVERSY AT ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY: HOLINESS THEOLOGY IN TRANSITION

by

Scott Kisker

The early twentieth century was a time of conflict and shifting loyalties among holiness people with roots in Methodism. Several holiness associations had become the core of new denominations, like the Church of the Nazarene. Others became Pentecostal, adding as doctrine speaking in tongues as the sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Established holiness denominations began looking for commonality across Wesleyan lines in a broader “evangelical” culture. This culture included Reformed, Keswick, and Free-Church denominations whose theology tended to be dominated by Reformed categories—particularly with regard to doctrines of biblical inspiration.

Meanwhile, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) and Methodist Episcopal Church South (MECS), with whom many holiness associations had been connected and from whom many of the holiness denominations had sprung, were looking toward union with each other. Holiness was alive within mainline Methodism. Considerable evangelistic outreach still emanated from holiness corners. However, the “excesses” of the holiness associations in the early part of the century had reduced their political influence within the more genteel denominational structures. Furthermore, liberal “personalist” theology had come to dominate intellectual circles, especially in the North.

These events strained the relationship between sectarian and mainstream forms of Wesleyan holiness, just as they were being institutionally united at Asbury Theological Seminary.¹ This article will examine the transition at Asbury between the years 1942-1951, primarily from 1948-1951. This transitional period began with promise and optimism—a new president, building up of the seminary faculty, accreditation by the American Association of Theological Schools and the establishment of a Free Methodist foundation at the Seminary. The period ended with divisions in the seminary, resulting in the resignation of popular professor Dr. Claude Thompson, the loss of accreditation, and alienation from the mainstream Methodist Church. The events of this period at Asbury provide focus for religious controversies in America in the mid-twentieth century and insights into tensions within the broader evangelical sub-culture which are sometimes missed in the current historiography.

The Nature of Asbury Theological Seminary

Asbury Theological Seminary, located in Wilmore, Kentucky, was organized in 1923 from the vision and under the leadership of Henry Clay Morrison, then president of Asbury College on an adjacent campus. In 1931 articles of incorporation were drawn up, making the seminary a separate institution from the College.² Morrison's personality and that of the seminary he founded were consonant. Morrison, a holiness evangelist, was a more or less faithful member of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, which institution had a correspondingly ambivalent opinion of Dr. Morrison. He never separated from the institution whose roots went deep into his own family history, but he had difficulty submitting to the authority of its hierarchy.³ The seminary was never under the direct control of any Methodist church body. However, as its being named for the most influential of early Methodist Episcopal bishops suggests, the seminary

¹This article arises, in part, out of work done as research assistant for the seventy-fifth anniversary history of Asbury Theological Seminary being written by Dr. Donald Dayton.

²*Bulletin of Asbury Theological Seminary* (June, 1949), 15.

³The holiness movement in the South was always suspect, due to its roots in the North, and its abolitionist aims. When, at the turn of the century, the southern church began to limit holiness preaching by requiring a local pastor's permission for an evangelist to preach a holiness revival, Morrison was brought up on charges and more than once temporarily gave up his MECS credentials in order to preach a revival.

was self-consciously within the stream of American Methodism. That stream was broad by 1931. Section four of Asbury's articles of incorporation indicates its place in that stream.

The institution is to prepare and send forth a well-trained, sanctified, Spirit-filled evangelistic ministry. The Institution will emphasize in its teaching the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Scripture, the Virgin Birth, Godhead, vicarious sufferings, and bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴

The seminary was to be holiness, evangelistic, and committed to traditional dogmatic formulations.

With these aims and designs, and the vision of its MECS holiness-evangelist founder, Asbury got its start. With the death of its founder in 1942, the interpretation of these aims and the relationship of holiness Methodism to mainstream Methodism and to broader evangelicalism provided the fertile ground for controversy as the seminary moved toward mid-century.

In the spring of 1942, Henry Clay Morrison died. Julian C. McPheeters, vice-president of the seminary and editor of the *Pentecostal Herald*, was heir apparent to the presidency. In their lifetimes, both men were holiness evangelists whose authority came through charismatic appeal. Both were members of the Methodist Church and of the pre-union Methodist Episcopal Church South. Both were committed to higher-life Christianity in the idea of holiness sanctification.⁵ Both had vision. As an evangelist in northern California, McPheeters had impressed the wife of one of the wealthiest stockmen in California, Mrs. Elizabeth "Lizzie" Glide, who became the patron for his evangelistic ministry in downtown San Francisco. Mrs. Glide established the Glide Foundation and the Glide Memorial Church where McPheeters pastored. The outreach of the church and foundation included work with the poor, a "dry" hotel, a radio ministry, and support of Asbury Theological Seminary.

One of McPheeters' presidential goals for Asbury was accreditation. The 1942 catalogue listed seven faculty members, including McPheeters. None were listed as having a Ph.D. degree. McPheeters began hiring holiness scholars with the goal of improving the faculty. In 1946, the year the

⁴*Bulletin of Asbury Theological Seminary* (June, 1949), 6.

⁵McPheeters' books, such as *Sunshine and Victory* (Cokesbury: 1933) and *The Power that Prevails* (Pentecostal Pub.: 1938) demonstrate this commitment.

American Association of Theological Schools granted accreditation to the seminary, there were eighteen members of the faculty, five of whom had Ph.D. degrees. Among those added to the faculty in this period of expansion, which continued through 1949, were many of those who played prominent roles in the crisis leading to Claude Thompson's withdrawal from the faculty.

Harold Kuhn, a holiness Quaker, had attended holiness Fletcher College in Iowa and received his Ph.D. from Harvard. Kuhn secured his position at Asbury after a series of lectures he gave at the seminary entitled "An Examination of Liberal Theology."⁶ George Allen Turner, a Free Methodist, attended his denomination's college in Greenville, Illinois, and got his Ph.D. from Harvard. In 1946, Harold Greenlee, a Methodist and Asbury seminary graduate, was on leave at Harvard, completing his Ph.D. Claude Thompson was a Methodist graduate of Asbury who received his Ph.D. from Drew University in systematic theology under Edwin Lewis. Robert Shuler, Jr., a Methodist, an Asbury graduate, and the son of Asbury board member (and friend of McPheeters) Robert Shuler, Sr., of Trinity Church in Los Angeles was hired as Professor of Applied Theology. All but Wilder Reynolds, who had taught at Asbury College or the seminary for 22 years by the time of the controversy, were added during McPheeters' expansion.

Holiness Methodists and Holiness Churches At Mid-Century

The reunion of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church South had strained the relationship between holiness Methodists and the larger denomination. The 1939 plan for union had included the creation of jurisdictions, partly to insure that northern bishops would not be placed over southern clergy. In the West, with most churches established after the Civil War, no easy division was possible. In 1948, McPheeters surrendered the pulpit of Glide Memorial Church just as Donald Harvey Tippet was elected Bishop. Tippet was the second bishop from MEC background to be appointed over California. Tippet, a graduate and trustee of liberal Iliff School of Theology in Denver, had for the previous eight years served First Church, Los Angeles (formerly MEC), which rivaled Bob Shuler's Trinity Church, Los Angeles (formerly

⁶William M. Arnett. Letter to J. C. McPheeters, 8 April, 1943. Archives of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

MECS) in both size and prestige.⁷ McPheeters' choice for his successor was a pastor with "authentic evangelical credentials" from Mississippi. Tippettt chose Grimes Weldon Gatlin, who, though a southerner, was ordained in the Southern Annual Conference of the MEC.⁸

The Glide Foundation had developed strong ties with Asbury Theological Seminary. A lectureship had been established at the seminary and grants were made available to students. One such grant supported Claude Thompson's family at the Florida Holiness Campgrounds in Lakeland while he studied in England before arriving at Asbury to teach. Furthermore, the foundation had set aside \$200,000 as an endowment fund for the seminary and had made a \$45,000 construction loan for campus expansion.

Within a year of leaving Glide Memorial's pulpit, McPheeters lost all influence on the foundation and its financial support of Asbury. McPheeters was still president of the foundation, though he had lost his seat on the board to the new pastor. Another seat came available, but at the next annual conference of the Methodist Church, Bishop Tippettt was nominated from the floor to fill the vacancy. McPheeters' had been nominated by the board of trustees but, by a narrow margin, Tippettt won. To completely remove McPheeters, a proposal was made to amend the by-laws of the board so that only trustees could serve as president. Asbury board member, Bob Shuler, Sr., cast the one dissenting vote. Once McPheeters was removed, the board rescinded all support for Asbury and demanded immediate repayment of the \$45,000 loan.

Also in 1948, Abingdon published Edwin Lewis' *The Creator and the Adversary*. Lewis had been Claude Thompson's advisor at Drew and a bit of a *cause celeb* among anti-modernists in the mainstream Methodist Church. For the first half of the twentieth century, the church's intellectual life, especially in the north, had been dominated by the liberal "personalist" theology of Borden Parker Bowne, Albert Knudson, and Edgar Sheffield Brightman. Lewis had joined the faculty of Drew Theological

⁷In 1947, First Church Los Angeles listed 3,932 members, and Trinity 3,541 members. However, Trinity's pastoral budget was nearly \$2000 more. *Methodist Church Conferences, Minutes* (New York: Methodist Publishing House, 1947), 269-270.

⁸Chilton McPheeters alludes to prejudice against the deep south with regard to the race question as the reason someone other than McPheeters' choice was appointed. McPheeters, Chilton, *Pardon me, sir . . . Your Halo's Showing* (Wilmore: Francis Asbury Society, 1986), 86.

Seminary in 1916 as a solid liberal Protestant Arminian.⁹ In 1926 he began work on a one-volume Bible commentary, *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, in which he made a conscious theological shift from philosophical to more biblical categories of thought.¹⁰ After this change, Lewis lectured in San Francisco, at the invitation of the Bay Area Evangelical Ministers Alliance while McPheeters was its president. He was invited to give the alumni day address at Asbury and supported Asbury graduates who went on to doctoral work at Drew University, including Claude Thompson.¹¹

In *The Creator and the Adversary* Lewis addressed the problem of the presence of evil in the world in relation to “a God held to be a God of goodness and love.”¹² His commitment to Arminian notions of free will caused him to question a Calvinist reliance on the sovereignty of God to solve the problem and his unwillingness to make God responsible for evil led him to the edge of metaphysical dualism. Lewis’ “adversary” was the absolute opposite to divine good, uncreated and co-eternal, active wherever God is active.¹³ This book, although admittedly speculative and perhaps not well understood, was poorly received in holiness Methodist circles and cast suspicion on Lewis and those connected with him.

The middle of the twentieth century posed other questions for holiness denominations, including those which had separated from the MEC prior to the North/South split. In 1943, Harold Ockenga was elected president of the newly formed National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Ockenga had attended Taylor University, a holiness school in Indiana, and later Princeton Seminary. He had served two Methodist Churches in New Jersey before moving in a Reformed direction, first serving as associate

⁹Lewis’ book *Jesus Christ and the Human* (published 1924) portrayed Christ as the highest possible manifestation of God within the milieu of humanity. Paul Sloan, who helped found the Methodist League for Faith and Life (an organization opposing modernist influences), wrote, “Professor Lewis has sacrificed the Theanthropic Person and offers to faith once more a little unitarian Christ” (*The Methodist Review* 108 [Spring, 1925], 803).

¹⁰Edwin Lewis, “From Philosophy to Revelation [How my Mind Has Changed],” *Christian Century* 56:762-4 (June 14, 1939).

¹¹Edwin Lewis. Letter to George Turner. 27 July, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Edwin Lewis, *The Creator and the Adversary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1948), chaps. IX & X.

minister of a Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh and then as pastor of Park Street Congregational Church in Boston. The NAE was an alternative to the “liberal” Federal Council of Churches, whose membership included the Methodist Church, and more diverse than the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches brought into being by Carl McIntire. Holiness and Pentecostal denominations were included in this new organization of “evangelicals.”

There was no statement on inerrancy in the articles of NAE, which would have offended many Arminian traditions with their understanding of divine/human cooperation. Nonetheless, as historian George Marsden points out, a “predominantly Calvinistic core group continually attempted to speak for evangelicalism as a whole.”¹⁴ Throughout the 1940s, many of the holiness denominations in the NAE moved toward neo-evangelicalism’s version of Princeton orthodoxy regarding biblical inerrancy, including Houghton College president Stephen Paine who contributed to the controversy at Asbury. In 1951, he played a major role in rewriting the Wesleyan Church’s “Articles of Faith” which added the doctrine of inerrancy to the article on Scripture.¹⁵

In the Fall of 1948, Paine, who had recently been elected president of the NAE, was the speaker for Holiness Emphasis Week at Asbury. Later recalling the events which led to the crisis, Claude Thompson noted:

Visiting Holiness leader came to give series of lectures. Apparently departed from his planned series to criticize Edwin Lewis’ pluralistic views. Some students came to me asserting that he had implicated me in his message—I am not sure.¹⁶

Most likely these notes refer to Paine’s visit.

The Conflict At Asbury

In December, 1948, Bishop Leslie R. Marston of the Free Methodist Church alerted President McPheeters to irregularities in doctrine taught in

¹⁴George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 49.

¹⁵This information is taken from an unpublished paper presented to the Wesleyan Theological Society, November 7, 1969, by Lloyd Knox, Free Methodist publisher of the Light and Life Press, titled “Toward a High View of the Scriptures,” from the personal files of Dr. Donald Dayton.

¹⁶Claude Thompson, *Sequence of Events*, Thompson’s Private Papers.

Thompson's class. Marston had been Ockenga's immediate successor as president of the NAE, and he and Paine met regularly in NAE executive committee meetings. More personally, Marston's daughter Evelyn had voiced concerns over the Christmas holidays about her husband's theology. Her husband, Jack Mottweiler, a student at Asbury, was deeply influenced by Thompson. In a letter to McPheeters, Marston expressed what he saw as "the subtle danger of having, as theology professor, a disciple of Lewis in a seminary such as Asbury." Thompson, according to Marston, was "dualistic, and this forces him to view God as limited or, in fact, finite (however the professor may insist otherwise)."¹⁷

The Free Methodists, their students, and financial support, had only been established at Asbury by a Foundation in September, 1947. "If this problem becomes acute," Marston wrote, as an obvious threat, "it is bound to affect our denominational relationship adversely. . . . We have bonds that can easily be severed."¹⁸ McPheeters, who received the letter while in California, assured Marston that he would attend to the problem when he returned to Wilmore. He reminded Marston of the Wesleyan understanding of a self-limiting God, granting human freedom, but stated that his "judgment concur[ed] with [Marston's] relative to Edwin Lewis' recent book."¹⁹

Shortly thereafter, Paine also wrote McPheeters to express his concern about Thompson. Though not officially connected to Asbury, there was hope that the Wesleyan Methodists might also establish financial ties. In the letter, Paine questioned Thompson's dependence on Lewis for a "limited" or "struggling" God and, even more emphatically, his "somewhat liberal viewpoint as to the inspiration of Scripture." Paine asked, "Why should Arminians be any less emphatic in their declaration of the certainties of the Word of God than are the Calvinists? Certainly John Wesley was categorical at this point." "If teaching of this kind continues," he wrote, "it would only be a matter of time before Asbury would be just as liberal as Drew Theological Seminary today." He concluded, saying he would make his observations known to "Dr. [Royal S.] Nicholson, the president of the Wesleyan Methodist Church."²⁰

¹⁷Leslie R. Marston. Letter to McPheeters, 21 December, 1948. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Julian McPheeters. Letter to Marston, 13 January, 1949. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

²⁰Stephen Paine. Letter to McPheeters, 27 January, 1949. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

When McPheeters met with Thompson, he was assured of the professor's commitment to Wesleyan-Arminian orthodoxy. Thompson apologized for any confusion on the part of students in the class, attributing this to his teaching method, which presented many different ideas without necessarily stating the correct one. However, it is clear that Thompson's own views on the nature of evil were heavily influenced by Edwin Lewis. McPheeters asked for Thompson's resignation, but did not immediately accept it, believing the controversy could be cleared up to the satisfaction of all parties involved. He appointed a committee composed of members of the board of trustees. They were Marston (Free Methodist), C. I. Armstrong (pastor of the Wesleyan Church at Houghton), and three Methodists, S. H. Turbeville, John Paul, and McPheeters. The purpose of the committee was to look into the charge of heterodoxy in Thompson's theology by means of "a brief series of crucial questions intended to bring out the nature and bearings of [Thompson's] beliefs as to (1) the metaphysics of evil and (2) the inspiration and authority of the Bible."

At the May, 1949, meeting of the Asbury board of trustees, the Committee presented its findings. Thompson's metaphysic was "unsatisfactory. . .because of the highly speculative, rationally inadequate, biblically confusing views." On the Bible, his views were "fairly satisfactory allowing for differences among conservative evangelicals on the problem of inspiration." However, Thompson had "unnecessarily disturbed the campus by contending *against* a mechanical literalness which is *not* prevalent in Asbury Theological Seminary, and that thereby he has tended to weaken the confidence of some in any adequate view of inspiration."²¹ When Thompson had been asked to state his understanding of the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible, he wrote that he regarded "the view of the Scriptures as set forth by some contemporary Calvinistic Fundamentalists as unWesleyan and hence unacceptable."²² Thompson went on to say, "I recognize that no single *theory* of inspiration, to the exclusion of all others, has been held in Methodism. . . . However, the dynamic view has been more characteristic of Methodism than any other."²³

²¹Report of the Committee, 4 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY. Emphasis mine.

²²Claude Thompson. Responses to Questions posed by the Committee, May, 1949. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

²³*Ibid.*

The committee recommended that an acceptance of Thompson's resignation be postponed for one year. In that year, Thompson should refrain from teaching metaphysical dualism, make a conscious effort to treat the Bible authoritatively in class, and subscribe to a statement on doctrine which would be drawn up by the board. Furthermore, Thompson "shall agree to these terms with full purpose, whole-heartedly to carry them out without protest, and shall agree to avoid all active or tacit encouragement of agitation by others on his behalf."²⁴ The board accepted these recommendations.

The recommendations and instructions of the board were presented to Dr. Thompson immediately following the adjournment of the board.²⁵ Thompson did not answer right away, but delayed in order to consider the proposal. His final response was affirmative. McPheeters wrote to the board on June 10, 1949, that "as far as we could discern, Dr. Thompson seemed happy with his decision."²⁶ Also adopted by the board was "a doctrinal statement . . . to which all faculty members and trustees [were] expected to subscribe." Marston, in his June 15 reply to McPheeters' letter, gave evidence of his satisfaction with the handling of the situation.

These developments, however, did not quiet the campus. There were those on the faculty who resented Thompson receiving only a slap on the wrist. The leadership of the anti-Thompson element of the faculty included the trio from Harvard—Kuhn, Turner, and Greenlee. These "Harvard evangelicals" played a major role in defining neo-evangelicalism and the doctrine of inerrancy. It is likely that the "mechanical literalness" which Thompson had "contended against" was a caricature of their views. On November 7, 1949, Turner wrote to McPheeters of his concern for the direction of the seminary and what he perceived as the changing attitude of the students since Claude Thompson's arrival (although Thompson is not mentioned by name).

After being exposed to the rankest liberalism for some three years in a university . . . and defending a Ph.D. thesis on a phase of biblical theology before liberals to their satisfaction, I come before students at Asbury Theological Seminary to be

²⁴Report of the Committee, 4 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

²⁵Julian McPheeters. Letter to the Board of Trustees, 10 June, 1949. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

²⁶*Ibid.*

considered naive for my views which earned the respect of liberals of Harvard.²⁷

He closed the letter by writing that he and his wife would delay their plans for a house in Wilmore until the problem of growing liberalism at the institution was solved.

As Thompson's year of probation continued, unrest on the campus increased and spread to the student body at large. In February, 1950, Bob Shuler, Jr., wrote a letter in support of Thompson to Turbeville, a member of the Committee. He remarked that "almost the entire faculty has taken sides in this affair, and the students know us as 'pro-Thompson,' 'anti-Thompson' factions."²⁸ In this letter, Shuler, Jr., objected to being labeled a "liberal" simply for being on Thompson's side, and took refuge in the Wesleyan tradition.

These weasel words [liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, humanism] need defining. No one has defined for the Committee on Investigation what is included in the Wesleyan tradition. I cannot personally see how any fair investigation can be carried out without some adequate groundwork along these lines.²⁹

As the younger Shuler saw it, Asbury seminary was to hold the middle ground within a theological spectrum.

We [Thompsonians] feel we know the tradition of the school, that we are here to uphold the tradition, that we are within the tradition on every item, and that we will fight to preserve the tradition from either the extreme of liberalism or the extreme of hyper-Calvinism.³⁰

In March, 1950, nine people submitted a statement to the Board of Trustees. Included were Kuhn, Turner, and Greenlee. Others were: James D. Robertson, Holiness-Presbyterian graduate of God's Bible School and professor of preaching, 1946-1975; W. C. Mavis, head of the Free Methodist Foundation; Susan Schultz of the Christian and Missionary

²⁷George Turner. Letter to McPheeters, 7 November, 1949. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

²⁸Robert Shuler, Jr. Letter to Turbeville, 12 February, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Robert Shuler, Jr. Letter to Turbeville, 12 February, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

Alliance, newly appointed librarian (1949); and Harold C. Mason, former President of the United Brethren's Huntington College who had become Free Methodist and served as Professor of Christian Education, 1948-1961; W. E. King, Director of Publicity; and Robert A. Fraley, field representative. Their statement read:

It is our conviction . . . that within the past two years, following the retirement of Dr. and Mrs. Morris, there has been a marked change in campus attitude in the direction of religious liberalism, a trend that has already gone too far. It is noticeable, for example, in the readiness of students to question the reliability and consistency of the Scriptures. We believe this trend to be so basic and far-reaching in its implications as to imperil the historic position and mission of the school.³¹

They recommended that the seminary determine if this trend were indeed present, locate its source, and "effect a remedy."

In May, 1950, the Investigation Committee of the Board of Trustees met to review the information gathered during the previous year and decide whether to accept Thompson's resignation. They spent two late nights reading over and discussing the material. On May 3, the entire Board of Trustees met to hear the Committee's recommendation and to make a decision. The Committee "reaffirm[ed] its earlier finding that Professor Thompson's difficulty is mainly pedagogical, rather than any conscious commitment to clearly non-evangelical positions."³² The Committee also found that Thompson had lived up to the stipulation that he not teach metaphysical dualism, although Committee members continued to be concerned about the danger of having someone on the faculty with dualistic views. They thought Thompson had not cooperated in preventing campus agitation "which was such a crucial point in the decision to give Professor Thompson the advantage of this year before considering his resignation."³³ The committee made no written recommendation as to whether Thompson should be retained, but did recommend several changes to be implemented with regard to the handling of staff relations.

³¹Statement to the Board of Trustees, March, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

³²Report of the Investigation Committee, 3 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

³³Ibid.

Knowledge of this meeting spread throughout the campus, and concern for professor Thompson prompted the students to organize a petition to present to the Board asking that Thompson be retained. The petition was signed by over 85% of the student body. The president of the student body was brought in and testified to the students' support of Thompson. The Board voted to retain Thompson for another year, but it is clear that the pressure exerted by the students was influential. Concerning the events of this meeting, Shuler, Sr., wrote to McPheeters:

I accused Thompson of having organized his friends and the student body so as to make it impossible for us to accept his resignation. He assured me that he had not made one effort. . . . However, it was most unfortunate and in a sense tied our hands and forced us to take a course that was conciliatory and not final.³⁴

The response of those who had been agitating for Thompson's removal was swift and decisive. On May 8, 1950, Professor Harold Kuhn tendered his resignation. Shuler, Sr. advised McPheeters that "the resignation of Dr. Kuhn comes as a pressure move that the board cannot afford to humor or recognize."³⁵ McPheeters did neither. He accepted Kuhn's resignation and even berated him.

In fact Harold, you and I both know that Thompson and Bob and Dean Turkington and Reynolds are not modernists. They may not teach as you teach and they may not please you altogether, and they may not please me altogether, but to say they are modernists is to make a statement that cannot be supported by actual evidence. . . . If you cannot be happy [at Asbury] and cannot co-operate, then the only thing to do is to resign, but I had seriously hoped that you would find it in your heart to do the big Christian thing and help us work that situation out.³⁶

McPheeters' attitude towards Kuhn's resignation is evident in an incident recalled by Greenlee.

³⁴Robert Shuler, Sr. Letter to McPheeters, 14 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Julian McPheeters. Letter to Kuhn, 14 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

I am appalled that Dr. Kuhn's resignation, submitted on grounds of conscience, could be accepted so lightly by both administration and students. Dr. McPheeters, in mentioning it to me recently, actually used the word "providential" in referring to it, then recalled that phrase and re-worded it.³⁷

On May 20, the remaining eight of the nine faculty and staff members who had protested against liberalism to the Board submitted a collective threat of resignation. The eight "interpret[ed] the Board's decision as the first definite indication that the admitted trend toward liberalism is to be fixed and protected. We now see very little hope that the seminary will remain true to its tradition and heritage."³⁸ Although Kuhn was not a signer (he had already resigned), Shuler, Sr., indicated that he thought Kuhn was the organizer of the remaining eight along with Turner and Greenlee.³⁹

Greenlee and Turner also submitted individual letters of resignation in which the importance of the inerrancy issue was made clear. Greenlee compared Asbury students unfavorably to those coming out of Presbyterian seminaries.

My sister has told me that when she was visiting in Beth Callis' home some time ago, a student from Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, also visiting there, apparently had to *defend* the historicity of the story of Adam *against* the arguments put forward by Beth, a student in Asbury Seminary! (I am reasonably sure that Beth did not get such ideas from her parents!)⁴⁰

The different commitments of the faculty factions is revealed in another anecdote from Greenlee's letter. He wrote:

A student a few days ago stated emphatically, in the presence of me and some other faculty members, that Dr. Thompson had some time ago declared that if he had to choose between Calvinism and liberalism, he would choose liberalism. I have

³⁷J. Harold Greenlee. Letter to McPheeters, 20 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

³⁸Statement to the Board of Trustees, 20 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

³⁹Robert Shuler, Sr., "A Strange, Sad Story," *The Methodist Challenge* (August, 1950), 5-6.

⁴⁰J. Harold Greenlee. Letter to McPheeters, 20 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY. Emphasis his.

told Dr. McPheeters this, but I don't know what has been done about it.⁴¹

When the Board of Trustees was called together again on May 27, 1950, it was split as to how to deal with the resignations of nine of the faculty members. Bishop Marston, who had always advocated the dismissal of Thompson, proposed finding a way to get rid of Thompson and save the nine others. Shuler, Sr., opposed this noting that the Board had already hired Thompson for the coming year and no longer had his resignation before them. After heated debate, it was decided that McPheeters and the Dean would privately ask Thompson to voluntarily withdraw from the seminary. Thompson refused. He wanted a full and open hearing. Later in the meeting, McPheeters was called out and returned with a statement from Thompson which read, "In view of the situation which has arisen, I believe it will be best for all concerned if I withdraw from the employ of Asbury Theological Seminary."⁴² The withdrawal was accepted, and the Board agreed to reemploy the "nine" for the following year.

The description of what followed is quoted from Shuler, Sr.'s editorial. Although, he was clearly on the side of Thompson, his description of this occurrence was not contradicted by responses to the editorial.

Immediately upon adjournment, the nine insurgent members of the faculty rushed into the room where the Board had held its session. Shaking their fingers in the face of Dr. McPheeters, two of them demanded a hearing and stated that their resignations were still before the Board. Dr. McPheeters explained that they had all been reelected and had the secretary read the action of the board. Then ensued a scene that is difficult to describe. Two and possibly three of the faculty members sprang forward crying out that their resignations were still in and demanding that a statement be made to the public by the Board exonerating them. They declared that modernism was rampant in the Seminary and that the Board had permitted Dr. Thompson to resign without a word of censure. They urged that this placed the blame on them and that this resolution by which they had been reelected to the faculty

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Claude Thompson. Letter to the Board of Trustees, 20 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

really put them on probation, rather than Thompson. It was a wild and turbulent moment.⁴³

The action of the Board stood. Thompson left without censure.

In the months which followed this decision sent shock waves, especially within mainline Methodist circles. By July, news of Thompson's forced withdrawal had reached Edwin Lewis. Lewis wrote to Professor Turner, initially to get more information, thinking Turner was a friend of Thompson's. Turner's response, which largely blamed Lewis for Thompson's removal, prompted Lewis to write a nine-page jeremiad against the seminary for the way Thompson had been treated. In that letter, Lewis defended himself and compared those who pressured Thompson to withdraw to Pilate who, although finding no guilt, nonetheless allowed injustice to be inflicted on an innocent man.⁴⁴ Lewis also pledged to bring the matter before the accrediting association. In August, 1950, Shuler, Sr.'s pro-Thompson version of the events appeared in *The Methodist Challenge* and the entire October issue was devoted to the incident with a response by President McPheeters. Numerous Methodist alumni also wrote McPheeters to express their outrage.

In February, 1952, the American Association of Theological Schools voted to suspend Asbury's accreditation. For mainline Methodists this was a serious blow. The University Senate of the Methodist Church (created at church union in 1939) had made approval of seminaries contingent on accreditation by AATS. This was not true for the holiness denominations. Dr. Kuhn wrote this to President McPheeters on February 14, 1952:

We have gone through a great doctrinal crisis, and have *come out intact*. If I am correctly informed, every Arminian seminary founded before 1930 has gone the way of liberalism—and probably every one did so after a definite turning point. We have faced that *turning point*, and have *not* succumbed to the forces of liberalism or semi-liberalism. I dare to believe that God is with us—and that is everything.⁴⁵

⁴³Robert Shuler, Sr., "A Strange, Sad Story," *The Methodist Challenge* (August, 1950), 8.

⁴⁴Edwin Lewis. Letter to George Turner, 27 July, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

⁴⁵Harold Kuhn. Letter to McPheeters, 14 February, 1952. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

Conclusion

Robert Shuler, Sr.'s analysis in the August, 1950, issue of *The Methodist Challenge* stated the origins of the controversy were the "personalities [of those involved] and the super-popularity of Dr. Thompson."⁴⁶ However, egos and jealousy cannot fully account for the different perspectives. Shuler dismissed two other possible origins for the conflict, perhaps too quickly. These were (1) the tension between sectarian and mainstream Methodism and (2) the influence of Reformed thought on the anti-Thompsonians.

In his own letter to McPheeters in July of 1950, Shuler, Sr., had written, "I was enthusiastic in my feeling that you were doing a great thing in bringing the Free Methodists in. I now believe it was a great mistake, and the Thompson matter has convinced me."⁴⁷ For Shuler, Sr., mainline Methodists were the real carriers of the Asbury tradition and the legitimate beneficiaries of its ministry. Many of Asbury's Methodist alumni agreed. Pastor George W. Den Hartog of the Methodist Church in Ravenna, Kentucky, wrote, "To me this action [against Thompson] points out the definite trend of Asbury Seminary away from the true Wesleyan tradition, which Dr. Morrison upheld, to the unscriptural, illogical farce that some of the faculty and board members call Holiness."⁴⁸

For many anti-Thompsonians, the smaller holiness denominations and wider generic evangelicalism, like that represented by the National Association of Evangelicals, were the future of Asbury seminary. In his letter of resignation to McPheeters, Turner had written:

My reluctance at taking this step is explained by the fact that nothing has so dominated my motive since joining the staff as seeing Asbury Seminary become the educational headquarters of the entire Holiness Movement, a school that would be second to none in academic standards and at the same time retain the confidence of smaller holiness denominations and evangelicals generally.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Shuler, Sr., "A Strange, Sad Story," *The Methodist Challenge* (August, 1950), 11.

⁴⁷Robert Shuler, Sr. Letter to McPheeters, 27 July, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

⁴⁸George W. Den Hartog. Letter to McPheeters, 16 November, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

⁴⁹George Turner. Letter to McPheeters, 26 May, 1950. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

Kuhn's attitude was similar. In a letter to McPheeters expressing optimism, despite the loss of accreditation, he wrote: "I feel that we have a valuable asset in the confidence of the Holiness people—something which we were in grave danger of losing."⁵⁰ Asbury had lost the confidence of the Methodist Church and its Methodist alumni. For Kuhn, this was relatively insignificant.

Both Thompsonians and anti-Thompsonians considered themselves holiness theological conservatives. But as they looked to their friends on the fringes, they were facing in opposite directions. For the Thompsonians (most of whom were Methodist Church members), Methodism and Arminianism were primary categories. They were willing, and forced by the nature of their polity, to deal with liberals, and the somewhat nearer neo-orthodox. For the anti-Thompsonians, evangelicalism, increasingly defined by organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals, was primary.

What clashed at Asbury Theological Seminary in 1950 were not the forces of liberalism against the forces of traditional Christianity, but theological siblings whose mission and vision for the future lay in different directions. One had a vision of a pure holiness Methodism, free from the impurities of Calvinism, whose mission was tied to a historic denomination whose collapse into apostasy Asbury was to stay. The other had a vision of a pure holiness evangelicalism, free from the impurities of liberalism inherent in an association with the "liberal" Methodist Church, and whose mission was to a denominationally diverse collection of the evangelical remnant from the liberal churches. In the case of Asbury, Calvinist-friendly holiness bodies won the day, indicating a change in the character of holiness and its relationship to the broader Christian world. The important alliance of the seminary was not Methodist, but a less defined, Reformed-influenced grouping called "evangelicalism."

⁵⁰Harold Kuhn. Letter to McPheeters, 14 February, 1952. Archives of ATS, Wilmore, KY.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Clarence L. BENCE, *Romans: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1996. Pps. 248. ISBN: 0-89827-157-6.

Reviewed by David L. Thompson, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

Clarence Bence, Professor of Religion and Chair of the Division of Religion and Philosophy at Indiana Wesleyan University since 1993, has written a fine commentary to launch the Wesleyan Publishing House's series of biblical commentaries "in the Wesleyan tradition." The project aims directly at assisting lay persons and ministers in the teaching ministries of the church, especially but not solely The Wesleyan Church. It intends to unfold the meaning of Scripture in such ways as to support transformational reading and to help persons relate Scripture to personal faith and ethics, and all of this in a relatively brief scope. The works are by design non-technical treatments emphasizing exegesis in the service of exposition. They intend not to enter into lengthy scholarly debate but to focus on the larger theological significance of the text. Although the treatment moves roughly at the paragraph level, attention is paid to significant details. This series joins hands with several recent and highly usable efforts with similar goals, though it aims, perhaps more realistically, at a theologically less informed reader than a series like John Knox's *Interpretation* does.

This work would be very useful to various Christian education or discipleship persons working through the text, or to clergy wanting a quick overview of a section and its possible practical implications. At numerous points Professor Bence's expertise in historical theology serves

the exposition well, enabling him to lay out in brief and helpful scope chief alternatives not only in interpretation of specific of texts, but also in the theological construals flowing from and shaping the hearing of classic passages. His pastoral heart shines through in well taken, practical applications which the series encourages. Only occasionally do we encounter anachronistic readings of the contemporary Wesleyan Church's context and problems intruding into Bence's instructive expositions.

Professor Bence outlines Romans in six parts: Righteousness Rejected: The Nature of Sin (1:1-3:20); Righteousness Revealed: The Act of Faith (3:21-4:25); Righteousness Restored: The Gift of Grace (5:1-7:25); Righteousness Renewed (8:1-39); Israel Redeemed: The Drama of Righteousness (9:1-11:36) and Righteousness Reflected: The Ethics of Love (12:1-16:27). As the outline implies, the commentary takes the letter progressively and extensively develops "the theme of God's righteousness and its availability to humans through faith" (13).

The author resists the temptation to impose an overly simple "two-step" Christian-"holiness" biography onto Romans. He does, however, understand the "righteousness of God" in Romans primarily as a character trait of God to be shared by persons set right with God by faith, making the central concern of the letter a doctrinal-experiential agenda of sorting out and appropriating a correct view of righteousness. The chief needs addressed in the letter emerge, on the one hand, from Gentile Christians who have little in their background to assist them in understanding life with a God who is righteous and, on the other, from Jewish Christians inclined to consider righteousness "to be a moral accomplishment, attained by observing rituals and obeying the law" (15), i.e., "works righteousness" understood as "legalism."

This reader would like to see another edition of Bence's work consider more extensively the refinements in the picture of first-century Jews and pre-rabbinic Judaism now available to New Testament interpreters. The chief problem driving the book will then look slightly different and the Pauline understanding of righteousness will need further attention. Several features of the book that pose difficulty for Professor Bence's exegesis (along with a host of other interpreters) will perhaps then find resolution: the "leap in logic" from 8:39 to 9:1, the major role of chapters 9-11 in the work, and the point and placement of the extended treatment of "adiaphora" in chapter 14. We would then get to see how a Wesleyan reading of Romans, a reading that still retains the letter's clear affirmation

of the transformation of human character by grace and the power of the Spirit, might proceed from this newer information and a different perception of the monumental historical and theological problem driving the letter.

Just a few details need revisiting, among them the following: Who circumcised Moses' son (58)? Does 8:5b actually entail "control" by the Spirit (142)? Can *hagian* refer to the "act" and not the "sacrifice" and can *logikeun* mean "spiritual" in the sense of "Spirit empowered" in 12:1 (198-199 and 195)? What really was the role of Sabbath as opposed to "Lord's Day" in the New Testament churches (221)? Despite these, and potentially other questions which can arise in any commentary project, the overall impact of Bence's work is good. This commentary should go a long way toward meeting the publisher's objectives.

Melvin DIETER, Ed., *The 19th-Century Holiness Movement*, volume four of the “Great Holiness Classics” series. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998. 416 pages, hardback.

Reviewed by Barry L. Callen, University Professor of Christian Studies, Anderson University.

In recent years Beacon Hill Press has been issuing the six volumes of its Great Holiness Classics series. The general intention of the series is to provide the modern reader with a compact library of Holiness literature. The year 1998 now sees volume four titled *The 19th-Century Holiness Movement*. It is edited by Melvin Dieter, with Darius Salter and Barry Callen functioning as volume advisors.

Dieter explains that the nineteenth century “saw the greatest outburst of evangelism and missions activity within Christianity since apostolic times” and also “witnessed an equally unparalleled quest for Christian holiness and a fuller understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual, the church, and the world” (p. 23). The significance of the holiness revival emphasis, while regarded by some historians as little more than a conservative reaction to the progressive advances of mainline Methodism, is regarded in this volume to have been as “radical” as it was conservative. It led by century’s end to a set of circumstances that spawned new Wesleyan-Holiness and Pentecostal-Holiness movements and denominations. It also dealt with issues like the role of laity and women in the church’s life and ministry.

This is a volume rich in the reproductions of selected segments of primary sources that elaborate personal testimonies of experiencing and then explaining the significance of Christian holiness. For space reasons, key representatives of the English and European Keswick movements had to be left out. What has been included is a helpful lead essay by Timothy L. Smith titled “John Wesley’s Religion in Thomas Jefferson’s America.” Following this and other pieces that provide an historical baseline come biographical sketches and pivotal selections of the writings, testimonies, and poetry of: Eight representatives of the “Righteousness and Hope” period (1835-1867); Eight representatives of the “Post-Civil War Holiness Revival” period (1867-1880); and Six more Holiness leaders from the “Holiness at the Turn of the Century” period (1880-1900). Found here are people like Orange Scott, Phoebe Palmer, Charles Finney, J. A. Wood,

Daniel Steele, Catherine Booth, Benjamine T. Roberts, A. B. Simpson, Daniel S. Warner, and Phineas F. Bresee.

These nineteenth-century holiness representatives are identified, fit into the developing dynamics of the proper period, and then allowed in their own words to explain how they came to, experienced, and articulated the implications of “second blessing,” “complete consecration,” “assurance,” “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” “being sanctified wholly,” “perfect love,” and “Christian perfection.” Such phrases are highlighted in the margins to draw the reader’s attention to them throughout the text. The reader soon senses both the considerable diversity and the more significant commonality of these holiness emphases and representatives. One editorial policy is, so far as possible, to let these holiness writers from the nineteenth century speak for themselves. They do so, often with eloquence.

A bibliography of all the quoted sources is provided, along with indexes of authors, subjects, and Scripture references, making the volume an especially useful reference tool. The skilled and obviously qualified editor, Melvin Dieter, justifiably concludes his introduction with this: “Much of the material is of interest only to religious and social historians. But among the collections are works that continue to speak to those who long to know God, serve Him with a pure heart, and authentically represent His love in the world” (28). I commend this (and the other volumes in this series) as a splendid source of spiritual enrichment and as a resource library for teachers and preachers who are interested in enlarging their understanding of a central truth of Scripture, Christian holiness. In these pages, beyond the important historical perspective that is provided, lies the potential of a spiritual impact that carries a vital message and hope for believers of the twenty-first century.

John Wesley Z. KUREWA, *The Church in Mission: A Short History of The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, 1897-1997*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. \$23.95 pb.

Reviewed by Norman H. Murdoch, Professor of History, University of Cincinnati.

John Wesley Z. Kurewa, Vice Chancellor of Africa University in Zimbabwe, is an American-educated (Asbury College, B.A., Northwestern University, Ph.D.) minister in Zimbabwe's United Methodist Church. Like fellow churchmen, Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa and the Rev. Ndaningi Sithole, who led elements of the nationalist movement in the 1970s, Kurewa served as Deputy Secretary (1980-83) and Senior Secretary (1983-89) of the post-independence Zimbabwe Parliament. He aims to bring "a historical and theological self-consciousness" to Methodists, an "essential for the Church in Africa today" (11). Thus the book is as much an ecclesiastical treatise as it is a historical investigation. While Kurewa's history of the American-founded branch of Methodism does not have the sharp edges of Canaan Banana's volume of essays by members of the British branch, *A Century of Methodism in Zimbabwe, 1891-1991* (1991), it is nonetheless an African's history. As such it chides those missionaries who taught Africans to see themselves as " 'heathens,' 'kaffir,' or 'boys,' " while ignoring African cultural contributions to Christianity (13, 9). Kurewa divides his history into three eras: The Church in Missionary Thrust (1897-1921); The Church as an Institution (1921-45); and The Church in Mission (1945-97).

In 1945 change began with the Pan-African Congress at Manchester. There W.E.B. DuBois inspired Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and other African leaders. In 1957 a new African National Congress was formed in Southern Rhodesia to capture African unrest over colonialism in society and the church. The church was urged to identify with the cultural life of Africans and not to continue to speak to them in "strange tongues" (14). Missions and colonial interests had been intertwined. The Methodist Episcopal Church had gone to Liberia in 1822 to prevent "Islam's encroachment further south" (19). Bishop Hartzell, on his way to Africa in 1897, discussed his plans for his mission in Rhodesia with Cecil Rhodes in London. He had told an American audience: "Somewhere in South Africa in the midst of the advancing waves of Anglo-Saxon civilization northward and under the British flag, American Methodism

should have missionary work" (23). His first service in Rhodesia was held with Europeans. Like other mission leaders he negotiated with Rhodes' British South Africa Company for African land, a 13,000 acre site at Old Mutare. The site would be used as an industrial training center. Rhodes attached conditions that Hartzell must set up a school for white settlers at New Mutare (46). Soon Europeans were running the mission and Africans were evangelizing at out-stations. But the means to evangelism was an African craving for education. Catholics claimed: "Who owns the schools will own Africa." Here the interests of church and state intertwined. A 1909 mission conference resolved that the government could count on the church's cooperation (34).

Kurewa claims that missionaries saw "saved and civilized" as undivided aims. Church and state were partners in the enterprise. And missionaries determined which behaviors were "heathen" and which were "Christian" (37-41). But Kurewa argues that "Christianity became a true liberating power only when it was permitted to take African forms, such as going from one village to another, from one church to another, and spending the whole night praying and sharing testimonies" (45). While some missionaries characterized the African as "lazy," others gained an appreciation for African ways. As out-stations became more important, and the role of the teacher-pastor rested on Africans, and African leadership began to develop. After 1921, the Methodist Episcopal Church developed a formal Methodist polity. But Africanization had been touched off in 1918 by a revival that gave the church an emotional uplift that fit the "traditional religious life of African people." As Kurewa puts it: "If the missionary who had prayed for spiritual renewal expected Christ Jesus to come to the African on Western terms and for the African to respond in Western ways, he or she was disappointed" (70). The focus of the church became the camp meeting and class meeting. New converts were made disciples by an indigenous ordained ministry.

Kurewa's discussion of "Christianity Confronting African Culture" is a superb overview of cross-cultural mission. Missionaries had confused their home cultures with their faith. Few had understood African marriage practices, social life, or traditional religion. African dances were forbidden at Mutare, but students were permitted American folk dancing. Missionaries assumed that "Africa was an empty continent, with no history, civilization, or culture of its own," unlike China and India where missionaries knew they were confronting Buddhist and Hindu philosophies. Thus

the churches sent their best educated missionaries to the East (89). Yet Kurewa claims that “the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe always sympathized with the cause and efforts of African nationalism” (116), although the urban white churches refused to welcome Africans (129). Ecumenical bodies nourished African leadership once missionaries gave up control after World War II. The Zimbabwe Christian Council became an affiliate of the World Council of Churches in the 1960s. Interdenominational unity talks did not work out, but churches shed some of their denominational isolation.

Kurewa provides an African eye-view of the liberation war that has had little scrutiny in the West. After Ian Smith’s government announced its Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, the Rhodesian army and security forces killed “many church leaders, both lay and ordained.” Kurewa cites alleged “guerrilla” murders of 7 Catholic missionaries in 1977, and 13 British missionaries at Elim Pentecostal Mission near Mutare in 1978. He asserts that these killings were all “done by the Selous Scouts (Smith’s fifth column) as an effort by Smith’s regime to draw support from Western countries by slaying missionaries” (156-7). He cites as his source for these claims a book published by the Dutch Missionary Council, *A New People and a New Church*. While these claims are still in dispute due to the destruction of police records at the end of the war, there can be little doubt that histories written in the West must reexamine evidence of past government atrocities and Smith’s claim that he was “defending Western Christian civilization and . . . fighting a holy war against communism,” when he was really struggling to “maintain their privileged position and . . . a political and economic system that exploited the majority of Zimbabweans” (164). The All-Africa Conference of Churches committed itself in 1976 to the affirmation that “the struggle for human liberation is one of the ways we confess our faith in an incarnate God” (175).

Kurewa’s is a mature study of the American branch of Methodism in Zimbabwe. He provides superb insights into the African experience of the faith, while not denigrating Western contributions in the field of health, education, and evangelism. He encourages Africans to express with greater honesty their world view in the context of Christian ministry.

Wallace THORNTON, *Radical Righteousness: Personal Ethics and the Development of the Holiness Movement* (Salem, OH: Schmull Publishing Co., 1998). 343 pps.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Librarian and Associate Professor of Church History, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

During the last half century, the Holiness Movement has experienced the social shifts associated with most religious movements. The asceticism and the social vision of the founders, which provided the framework of the religious experience of the tradition, have given way to upward social mobility as the members and their children have prospered economically. Thus, many Holiness theologians have sought to articulate their vision and reinterpret their history in light of the Anglican Wesley rather than the revivalist Wesley, and in light of the values of mainstream society rather than in a vision of a life lived over against society. The resultant sanitized version of what was really quite a rambunctious tradition is historically misleading and relatively devoid of the radical religious commitment of the earlier movements.

The Wesleyan heritage of the larger Methodist family, including the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions, is quite complex, a fact recognized by Thornton, Professor of Church History and Ethics at Union Bible College, Westfield, Indiana. This volume is based on an M. A. thesis presented to the faculty at Cincinnati Bible Seminary. It is an analysis of those Holiness people who have continued to hold to the radical social and spiritual values that were central to the Wesleyan revivalist traditions of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. This "Radical Holiness" movement was brought together from the small denominations and independent churches which refused to follow the accommodationist trajectories of the larger and wealthier Holiness bodies. Central to this more radical stream was the publisher and theologian, Harold E. Schmull, primary organizer and leader of the International Holiness Convention (IHC). This tradition has not received the scholarly attention it deserves and generally has been described in terms of what it is not rather than in terms of the internal logic of the movement.

Thornton argues that Wesley linked asceticism with stewardship and understood that package to be reflective of spiritual values. The Holiness movement, he suggests, radicalized that approach by seeing the ascetic life as indicative of the submission of the individual to the will of God.

Thus “entire sanctification” and “entire consecration” of lifestyle and goods were linked. This is a powerful argument which makes personal asceticism part of the core of Wesleyan spirituality, just as it was at the core of the “Eastern” sources of Wesleyan spirituality such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Pseudo-Macarius, and Pseudo-Dionysius. For the Radical Holiness Movement and for the early Eastern Christian writers, every act and value had an impact on spirituality. Every effort was to be made to strip away the superfluous goods, luxuries, and wasted hours in order to both develop spirituality and provide services to the needy.

This is an important suggestion for contemporary discussions of the sources of Wesleyan spirituality and for a re-visioning of the Holiness Movement for the twenty-first century. Another contribution is the narrative of the development of the Radical Holiness Movement during the last half century. This narration and the judgment which may be inferred (but is not implied by the writer) by readers of the older Holiness Churches may well provoke a series of debates or historical and/or theological justifications of the decisions made by the larger groups during this same period.

Thornton presents a generally balanced view of the data and retains the scholarly detachment from the material required of a good historian. That does not mean that issues are not debatable, but Thornton has gone a long way toward establishing the framework within which the tradition can understand its own heritage, both its strengths and weaknesses, and within which the tradition can be interpreted as part of the larger Christian traditions. This is truly an important book. It is enhanced by a series of appendixes which provide editions of crucial documents, illustrative materials, and chronological charts and organizational graphs. The bibliography is extremely important. An index facilitates access to the material. The author and publisher are to be congratulated on the achievement of this volume.

Miroslav VOLF. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 336 pp.

Miroslav VOLF. *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Cambridge, UK, and Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. xii + 314 pp.

Reviewed by Amos Yong, Ph.D. candidate, Boston University.

Volf, a native Croatian and professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, is one of the more original thinkers the European Pentecostal tradition has produced. He has in previous work (e.g., *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 1991) already begun to engage elements of his Pentecostal-charismatic heritage with the broader Christian theological tradition. This has poised him to make an even more significant ecumenical contribution in these volumes under review, a contribution that brings a wide-ranging charismatic theology into dialogue with the breadth and depth of the Christian tradition, even while it engages relevant social and political issues of our time.

It would be helpful in assessing the import of these books to look at them in the order of their historical genesis rather than following their date of publication. *After Our Likeness* (AOL), Volf's *Habilitationsschrift* at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen, was written during 1989-1991. The initial draft of *Exclusion and Embrace* (EAE) was penned in late 1992 for a conference of the "Gesellschaft für Evangelische Theologie" that convened in the wake of the Balkan War. The manuscript was subsequently tested and revised in seminars and conferences around the world, and in the critical exchanges that come with publication of parts of the argument in scholarly journals. While clearly intelligible separately, these volumes are complementary in that EAE is an extension of the ecumenical and ecclesiological principles developed in AOL.

AOL is, in brief, a trinitarian theology of personhood and of the Church. Volf's avowed purpose is to counter the individualistic tendencies in the Protestant Free Church tradition—a burgeoning ecclesiological movement—and in the process develop a viable understanding of the relationship between the individual and the ecclesial community that responds to the challenge of modern societies. In order to accomplish this,

Volf brings into dialogue the ecclesiologies of John Smyth, the sixteenth-century founder of the General Baptist movement in England, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, and metropolitan John D. Zizioulas, titular bishop of Pergamon and a highly respected Orthodox theologian. His argument throughout is that Christian ecclesiology is conditioned by the doctrine of God upon which it stands—in particular the doctrine of the Trinity.

The free-church model descended in part from Smyth denies that the church is defined either by apostolic succession or the communion of bishops. It highlights the unmediated presence of Christ to each believer through the Spirit rather than understanding such transmission sacramentally, and values the subjective dimensions of ecclesial life over the objective performances. Volf's devotes Part Two of *AOL* to developing an ecclesial model that is inclusive of the best of insights in both the episcopal and free-church traditions. At the center of his ecclesiology is the confession of faith. This presupposes a theological anthropology that draws from the social model of the Trinity recently reinvigorated by Moltmann. In this model, the relations of the Trinity are understood perichoretically: each divine person indwells the other two without ceasing to be distinct. While Volf fully acknowledges that this mutual co-inherence is the exclusive prerogative of divinity, yet he extends this idea of *interiority* to human personhood. Human persons are so constituted by God in relation to their environment, other persons, and God so as to be not only open to them but also able to internalize what is other than themselves. This process of being open to the other (interiorization) is central to Volf's ecclesiology. Salvation is thereby understood pneumatologically as the reception by the individual in faith—the internalizing of the Spirit in the individual even as the individual is internalized (baptized) into God (the body of Christ). The catholicity of the church, viewed eschatologically, is grounded in part in creation, while yet being anticipated. Volf thereby negotiates the tensions faced by Ratzinger and Zizioulas between the one and the many, between unity and multiplicity, between individuality and universality, via the personalistic and temporal categories of *openness* and *anticipation*.

These categories provide the bridge from *AOL* to *EAE*. The latter asks, "What kind of anthropology is needed today in order to maintain social harmony in a world full of strife and in a time of wars fought in the name of 'ethnic cleansing'?" Theological reflection of this kind is all the

more urgent given the recent arguments put forth by some thinkers suggesting that violence is intrinsic to religious identity (e.g., Regina Schwartz's *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*). Volf agrees to the extent that the distinctions between religion and culture are collapsed, that departure is completely severed from belonging, and that differentiation is confused with judgment. To counter this ideological demon, Volf develops a phenomenology and posture of embrace that is modeled after the self-giving and other-accepting love of the trinitarian God. This is accomplished through a dialogue between the biblical text and both modernity and postmodernity—each chapter containing at least one substantive meditation on a biblical passage—thereby in the process participating in the renaissance of a systematically reflective biblical theology.

Postmodernist concerns are at the center of the concrete issues which contemporary human societies have to negotiate. Volf therefore focuses whole chapters to detailed discussions of issues related to justice, truth and peace, and asks how his reconstructed theological anthropology of a “decentered-self” (a new self located in God) can contribute to global justice without colonialistic oppression; how truth can avoid ideological deception; and how peace can be accomplished without imperialistic violence. However, Volf's most intriguing test case—at least for evangelicals—may be his tackling the issue of gender relations. While granting the reality of gender differences, he denies both that there are such things as “gender essentialities” and that gender identities can be normatively defined biblically due to the cultural conditions within which such identities are situated. Volf therefore resorts to the trinitarian relations as the guiding model by which to envision the social construction of gender identities and roles. In this as well as in the other concrete issues under discussion, Volf eschews any claims to final norms, final justice, final truth or final reconciliation, in order to avoid the risk of the perpetuation of oppression. Finality is reserved for God alone, whose eschatological acts will, through final judgment of the oppressors, the liars, and the violent, accomplish the Kingdom.

A mark of good books is whether or not they stimulate thought and further questions. There is space only to briefly articulate three. First, Volf's gender identity test case strains his claim to be doing biblical theology in *EAE*. Even if one believes his moves are the right ones in working through this difficult issue, how can Volf explicitly define this methodol-

ogy as a participation “in the salutary revival of ‘biblical theology’ within the field of systematic theology” (*EAE*, p. 30) when he entirely neglects the difficult portions of the Hexateuch that have arguably at least indirectly contributed to themes related to “ethnic cleansing”? Volf’s exegesis and exposition are viable and full of insights when he does engage the text, but it is indeed remarkable that there is not even an allusion to these texts in a book devoted to the rectification of social, inter- and intra-national and ethnic strife.

Second, Volf is correct to shy away from grandiose claims in the face of the postmodern reaction to totalization. He is rightly cautious in his recommendations about how Christians should live out their basic commitments in the world. Yet is it not to be overly tentative for an attempt at systematic theology to argue against even the desirability, much less the need, for Christians to develop their tradition into a coherent and systematic whole (*EAE*, pp. 209-10)? Granted that systematic theologies are out of fashion these days, partly because they have created universal structures of thought that have marginalized those who did not fit. Yet, the lesson to be learned from the postmodern critique is not to give up on systematic thinking, but perhaps to reconceive systems as fallible speculative hypotheses by which we live, articulate, and continually re-articulate our thinking as we engage the world. Is this not what Volf does in terms of his formulating non-finalistic theological visions of justice, truth, and peace?

It is possible to read Volf’s anti-systematic rhetoric as a signifier of his own theological journey from the church (*AOL*) to the world (*EAE*). *AOL* is arguably a systematic theology formulated within an ecclesiological framework, addressing as it does the doctrine of God, anthropology, soteriology, sanctification, and the place and function of tradition. *EAE*, by contrast, is directed not to the church as church, but to the church as being in the world, and to the world as it encompasses the church. This move, however, raises the third and most pressing theological question confronting the church today. What are the further implications of Volf’s category of “openness” and his metaphor of “embrace” in light of the questions posed by the emerging wider-ecumenism?

It is clear that Volf has the religious other at least in the periphery of his theological vision, as his cursory mention of Asian cultures and the Brahmans (*EAE*, 140, 193) demonstrate. Further, there appear to be numerous entry points into the interreligious dialogue in Volf’s reflec-

tions—e.g., his brief discussion of the “decentered center” (*AOL*, 70), his tracing of the roots of exclusion to covetousness (*EAE*, 78), and his notion of the ever-widening perspective of “double vision” (*EAE*, 250-53), all of which serve as points of contact with core Buddhist motifs such as *anatta*, desire as the root of all suffering and evil, and the doctrine of the two truths. There is an abundance of theological insight in both volumes which, though undeveloped, promises to fuel the reflection of others who may be so challenged to pick up on this matter where Volf has left off.

The synopsis above surely fails to capture the suggestiveness and richness of Volf’s work, just as the critical questions raised may even be a disservice to the books given the constraints in a review of this length. Yet because the issues engaged are critical for Christian theology as it looks into the next century, and because Volf has equipped us with a gold mine of theological resources for our task, it is hoped that readers of *WTJ* will be moved by the thoughts expressed here toward a serious reading of these books.

Announcing the . . .

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Established by the Society, November, 1995

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**Officers of the
Wesleyan Theological Society
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Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, D.C.
E-Mail . . . gnorts@erols.com
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