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# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

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<b>THE SOTERIOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF JOHN WESLEY'S MINISTRY TO THE POOR .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Kenneth J. Collins	
<b>DECONSTRUCTING EPISTEMOLOGICAL CERTAINTY: AN ENGAGEMENT WITH WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM'S <i>Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology</i> (1998) .....</b>	<b>37</b>
Review by Stanley J. Grenz, Response by William Abraham	
<b>THE "DISCIPLINE" OF THEOLOGY: MAKING METHODISM LESS METHODOLOGICAL Philip R. Meadows .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>JOHN WESLEY: CONCEPT OF "CONNECTION" AND THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM.....</b>	<b>88</b>
H. O. Tom Thomas	
<b>WESLEYAN-HOLINESS-FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS: HISTORICAL RENDERING, CURRENT CONSIDERATIONS .....</b>	<b>105</b>
Diane Leclerc	
<b>QUILTING A CHURCH: THE CHURCH OF GOD (ANDERSON) IN 1900.....</b>	<b>133</b>
Merle D. Strege	
<b>WILLIAM BAXTER GODBEY: APOSTLE OF HOLINESS .....</b>	<b>144</b>
Barry W. Hamilton	
<b>WESLEY, WHITEFIELD, A PHILADELPHIA QUAKER, AND SLAVERY .....</b>	<b>164</b>
Irv Brendlinger	
<b>THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE "SOCIAL PRINCIPLE": THE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF ASA MAHAN .....</b>	<b>174</b>
Christopher P. Momany	
<b>A FORK IN THE WESLEYAN ROAD: PHOEBE PALMER AND THE APPROPRIATION OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.....</b>	<b>187</b>
Kevin T. Lowery	
<b>THE SYMBOLIC TURN: A SYMBOLIC CONCEPTION OF THE LITURGY OF PENTECOSTALISM.....</b>	<b>223</b>
Wolfgang Vondey	
<b>HONORING DAVID L. McKENNA .....</b>	<b>249</b>
Tribute by David Bundy	
<b>BOOK REVIEWS .....</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>ADVERTISING .....</b>	<b>283</b>

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The Society's mission is to encourage the 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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## EDITOR'S NOTES

At issue in these pages is a determination of what comprises responsible theological reflection in our times, especially if pursued in a Wesleyan perspective. Challenging the adequacy of common readings of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, Philip Meadows laments the tendency to tie believers to tenets of modernism and counters with the potential of a better “postliberal” way that features community and discipleship as essential elements of all valid theological reflection. Kenneth Collins highlights soteriology as a crucial hermeneutical framework for historic and contemporary Wesleyans. Tom Thomas explores the dangers of misreading Wesleyan “connectionalism,” while Merle Strege offers a case study of the importance of church community and Diane Leclerc relates the Wesleyan/Holiness traditions to feminist hermeneutics.

William Abraham's 1998 book *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* won the 2001 Smith/Wynkoop Book Award given by the Wesleyan Theological Society (see the ad by Oxford). In this issue, Stanley Grenz engages the content of this book insightfully and Abraham responds. The 2001 Lifetime Achievement Award was given by the Wesleyan Theological Society to Dr. David L. McKenna. The Tribute to McKenna written by David Bundy appears herein. Also appearing are essays on other Wesleyan-related issues and personalities, eight book reviews, and a series of important book ads. The first book review is on *Heart of the Heritage* edited by Barry Callen and William Kostlevy (Schmul Publishing, 2001). Reviewer Sharon Clark Pearson, current president of the Wesleyan Theological Society, speaks well of the book and then, in light of its contents, raises some important questions about the Society itself.

Should the reader wish to communicate with officers of the Wesleyan Theological Society, their names, roles, and email addresses are listed in the back cover of this issue. May this publication serve to advance informed conversation about responsible theological reflection, especially as understood in the Wesleyan/Holiness traditions.

Barry L. Callen  
Anderson, Indiana  
October, 2001





# THE SOTERIOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF JOHN WESLEY'S MINISTRY TO THE POOR<sup>1</sup>

by

Kenneth J. Collins

The evidence pertaining to John Wesley's ministry to the poor in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland is considerable. Indeed, reforming activities of one form or other were a part of the life of Methodism during its early days at Oxford, as well as the preoccupation of the seasoned Wesley.<sup>2</sup> Field preaching in the midst of coal miners, providing employment for the indigent, establishing lending stocks for the poor, and creating charity schools for the ignorant were a few of the many works of mercy undertaken by Wesley and the Methodists.

In the face of such evidence, the preliminary task of the historian must be to develop an appropriate hermeneutical framework that is best able to make sense of this rich diversity of activity and also be able to demonstrate the overarching motivation and purpose behind it. In a real sense, to address the theme of "Good News to the Poor" exclusively or almost exclusively along economic lines, as is often done today, is to make a judgment about the nature of Wesley's ministry to the poor that

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<sup>1</sup>This essay was originally presented at the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies at Somerville College, Oxford, in August, 1997. It appeared in a slightly different form as "The Soteriological Orientation of John Wesley's Ministry to the Poor," *The Asbury Theological Journal* (50:1, Spring 1995, 75-92). Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup>Many of the works of charity undertaken by the early Methodists are described in considerable detail in Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 361.

may belie not only its scope, but also its eighteenth century context.<sup>3</sup> Two problems typically emerge from this approach.

First, a predominantly economic reading of the “good news” to the poor often leaves the larger soteriological and valuational context of Wesley’s ministry underdeveloped. In this setting such teleological questions as “why did Wesley do what he did?” and “to what end did he do it?” are shunted aside in favor of the descriptive question “What did Wesley do?” Such an approach, then, often issues in a “flat” or “horizontal” reading of Wesley’s reforming activity since it brackets out, to a significant degree, the depths of his specifically spiritual motivation.

Second, an overly economic reading, usually informed by contemporary political judgments, runs the risk of defining good and evil principally along economic or class lines where the sins of the oppressor, but not those of the oppressed, are clearly recognized.<sup>4</sup> Here the non-poor are not really a part of the environment where the redemptive activity of God takes place, although their continued presence is undoubtedly required, if only to give added value, by way of contrast, to the poor. Indeed, the value-laden language of “preferential options” and the like, which have become a part of the rhetoric of liberation theology today, reveal the proper inclusions as well as exclusions—although in a way perhaps foreign to Wesley’s own ethic.

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<sup>3</sup>For an example of a treatise that discusses “Good News to the Poor” principally in economic terms, cf. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990). It is an interesting exercise, however, to check the references to Wesley’s writings in this work. What one finds is that Jennings often cuts off the quotation at a suitable point in order to favor a particular reading of the text and also in order to eliminate its larger soteriological context. For example, in citing Wesley’s letter to Freeborn Garrettson in September, 1786, Jennings writes: “Most of those in England who have riches love money, even the Methodists—at least, those who are called so. The poor are the Christians. I am quite out of conceit with almost all those who have this world’s goods.” Unfortunately, Jennings omits the following two lines—perhaps he was fearful of an otherworldly interpretation—which are a vital clue to the meaning of this passage: “Let us take care to lay up our treasure in heaven. Peace be with your spirit.” Cf. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 7:343-44.

<sup>4</sup>The great danger in defining evil along class lines is the tendency to consider “the other” as the epitome of evil. In fact, Elsa Tamez writes that the redeemed poor now have “the ability to distinguish between life and death. We can identify those who produce death, the principalities and powers that govern the earth, the anti-Christ.” Cf. Elsa Tamez, “Wesley as Read by the Poor,” in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 80.

In light of these two considerations, this present work seeks to demonstrate that the soteriological orientation of Wesley's ministry to the poor is able to unite his multifarious reforms in terms of motivation, valuation, and purpose. Soteriology as a hermeneutical framework will not only be able to embrace the themes of economic justice, as in other approaches, but will develop and evaluate such themes as part of a larger, more inclusive whole.<sup>5</sup> Here all people, poor and non-poor, will be a part of the soteriological environment, although each group will undoubtedly play a different role. More importantly, here the love and worship of God, hardly a concern of modern economic theory, will be factored into the equation.

### I. Impediments to Ministry: Riches, Idolatry, and Love of the World

One of the difficulties of a work like E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is its failure to realize sufficiently that not only were Wesley's economic categories, for the most part, medieval,<sup>6</sup> but that they were also, more importantly, soteriologically and ecclesiastically construed. For example, Wesley's definition of riches as "anything more than will procure the conveniences of life,"<sup>7</sup> as found in his sermon "The Wisdom of God's Counsels," or his claim often repeated in his sermons that "one [who] has food and raiment sufficient for himself and his family, and something over, is rich,"<sup>8</sup> are judgments hardly reflected in any

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<sup>5</sup>Note that in Wesley's commentary on Luke 4:18 ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel [good news] to the poor . . .) he conceives the phrase, by his own admission, both literally and spiritually. Cf. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, Ohio: Schmull Publishers), 151.

<sup>6</sup>Robert C. Haywood, "Was John Wesley a Political Economist?" *Church History* 33 (September 1964): 314-321.

<sup>7</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 1-4, *The Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 2:560. The "exceptions" which Wesley allows to the rule of not laying up treasure on earth are found in his sermon "Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse, VIII" where he states: "Lastly, we are not forbidden in these words to lay up from time to time what is needful . . . in such a measure as, first, to 'owe no man anything'; secondly, to procure for ourselves the necessaries of life; and thirdly, to furnish those of our own house with them while we live and with the means of procuring them when we are gone to God." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:619 ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," VIII).

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:520, "On Riches." Bracketed material is mine. For similar definitions of riches, cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:230, 3:237, 3:520, and 4:179.

reputable economic theory, past or present. It is therefore all the more disturbing when contemporary Methodist interpreters of Wesley's economics ignore the ecclesiastical context of this definition and thereby render the transitions from church to state and from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first that much easier, but also that much more dubious.

One of the clues, however, to Wesley's assessment of riches is found in his departure from the much-touted equation that rich *equals* evil, an equation that has numerous modern variations. Although the Methodist leader's criticism of the rich was extensive, it was by no means total. The preceding equation is undermined and its continuity broken in several places in Wesley's writings. For example, in his journal entry of 17 November 1759, Wesley notes, "It is well a few of the rich and noble are called." And he adds, undoubtedly with hope and expectation, "Oh that God would increase their number!"<sup>9</sup> Second, in his piece "The General Spread of the Gospel" produced in 1783, the Methodist evangelist exclaims: "Before the end even the rich shall enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, just a few years before his death, Wesley opined that "it is no more sinful to be rich than to be poor." But he immediately added, clarifying his meaning: "But it is dangerous beyond expression."<sup>11</sup>

What the preceding material from Wesley's writings suggests, then, is that the rich are neither evil by definition nor do they constitute evil's irreducible core. In other words, the dividing line between good and evil does not by necessity run along economic lines, although it often does. Interestingly, Wesley held both of these ideas in tension and thereby preserved the basis for an even more radical assessment of human evil, one which moved beneath the realm of economics in order to probe the very depths of human desire and will, a substratum which, for Wesley at least, lay behind sinful social structures.

In substantiation of the foregoing claim, it should be noted that Wesley underscored the danger of riches not only by an appeal to economic considerations, but also by an appeal to the rhetoric of the heart. He did this in two key ways. First, riches were deemed exceedingly dangerous in that they strike at the very root of the personality and often displace the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4:358, "The One Thing Needful."

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 2:494, "The General Spread of the Gospel." It is interesting to note that in this sermon the very last to enter the kingdom of God are not the rich, but "the wise and learned, the men of genius, the philosophers...."

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 4:11, "Dives and Lazarus."

love of God with the love of the world. Indeed, riches as a temptation to idolatry and as a detraction from the glory of God, is a recurring theme in the Wesley sermon corpus. For example, in his piece "On Riches," Wesley counsels:

What a hindrance are riches to the very first fruit of faith, namely, the love of God! "If any man love the world," says the Apostle, "the love of the Father is not in him." But how is it possible for a man not to love the world, who is surrounded with all its allurements?<sup>12</sup>

Elsewhere the Methodist leader maintained that one of the more pernicious effects of this idolatry, of not keeping one's eye singly fixed on God, is the disruption and pollution of holy tempers. "Yea, if thine eye be not single, if thou seek any of the things of earth," Wesley warns, "thou shalt be full of ungodliness and unrighteousness, thy desires, tempers, affections, being all out of course, being all dark, and vile, and vain."

Beyond this, Wesley stressed the danger of riches by means of a distinctive "Platonic" vocabulary—a vocabulary which reveals some of the more important value judgments made by this eighteenth-century leader. In this particular idiom, believers are cautioned against setting their affections on "transient objects . . . things that fly as a shadow, that pass away like as a dream." Wesley elaborates in his sermon "Walking by Sight, and Walking by Faith" produced in 1788:

I ask in the name of God by what standard do you judge of the value of things? By the visible or the invisible world? Bring the matter to an issue in a single instance: which do you judge best, that your son should be a pious cobbler or a profane lord.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, the members of the Methodist societies were enjoined repeatedly to lay up their treasures not on the earth but in heaven; to set their hearts

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 3:521, "On Riches." The association of riches and the evil of idolatry is also evident in Wesley's understanding of "mammon," a term which does not merely refer to riches or money, but also to "any thing loved or sought, without reference to God." Cf. Wesley, *N. T. Notes*, 27.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 1:616, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, VIII." For an pertinent discussion of Wesley's thoughts on holy tempers and the role they play in Christian experience, cf. Gregory S. Clapper, "Orthokardia: The Practical Theology of John Wesley's Heart Religion," *Quarterly Review* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 49-66.

not on penultimate things, but on that which is ultimate. "He who is a child of God can truly say," Wesley exclaims: "All my riches are above! All my treasure is thy love."<sup>14</sup> The first danger of riches, then, is that it strikes at the very heart of true religion. It magnifies the visible and discounts the invisible; it displaces, in other words, the love of God and all holy affections with the love of the world.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the danger of riches consists in their being a great hindrance to the love of neighbor. In other words, with the love of God despoiled, with the affections of the heart now turned towards temporal things and self will, it is impossible to love the neighbor as one ought. "A rich man may indeed love them that are of his own party, or his own opinion," Wesley observes, "but he cannot have pure, disinterested goodwill to every child of man. This can only spring from the love of God, which his great possessions expelled from his soul."<sup>16</sup> Again, riches intensify self-absorption and therefore beget and nourish "every temper that is contrary . . . to the love of neighbor,"<sup>17</sup> such tempers as contempt, resentment, revenge, anger, fretfulness and peevishness.<sup>18</sup>

With these unholy tempers in place, with the love of neighbor overshadowed by an inordinate love of self, those who seek to lay up treasure on the earth are likewise corrupted in their souls in that they quickly lose their zeal for works of charity such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick. Put another way, the proper dispositions that would have issued in such gracious service have been destroyed. Clearly, then, the lure of wealth, the deceitfulness of riches, often pulls the rich away from the humble task of ministering to their neighbor as they ought. "You are so deeply hurt," Wesley writes concerning the affluent, "that you have wellnigh lost your zeal for works of mercy, as well as of piety. You

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 4:56, "Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith."

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 4:137-138, "On Worldly Folly."

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 3:522, "On Riches." Leslie Church and Leon Hynson maintain that the love of God, from which flows the love of neighbor, is the key to Wesley's ethics, both personal and social. In fact, the former contends that the early Methodists were actually philanthropists rather than social reformers. Cf. Leslie F. Church, *More About the Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 207 ff., and Leon Hynson, *To Reform the Nation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1984), 93-106.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 3:526, "On Riches."

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., "On Riches."

once pushed on, through cold or rain, or whatever cross lay in your way, to see the poor, the sick, the distressed.”<sup>19</sup>

Regrettably, this subtle but no less malign influence of riches was present in the earliest days of the church as well. “But how soon did ‘the mystery of iniquity’ work again and obscure the glorious prospect!” Wesley writes. “It began to work (not openly indeed, but covertly) in two of the Christians, Ananias and Sapphira.”<sup>20</sup> And of the second and third centuries, using Tertullian as a source, Wesley notes that real internal religion was hardly found, that is, “not only the *tempers* of the Christians were exactly the same with those of their heathen neighbours (pride, passion, love of the world reigning alike in both), but their lives and manners also.”<sup>21</sup> However, what was a trickle in the earliest centuries of the Church turned into a full flood by the fourth. The chief culprit here, in Wesley’s eyes at least, was none other than the emperor Constantine who, in looking favorably on the church, heaped riches and honor upon it and thereby despoiled it. The Oxford don explains in his sermon “On the Mystery of Iniquity” written in 1783:

Persecution never did, never could, give any lasting wound to genuine Christianity. But the greatest it ever received, the grand blow which was struck at the very root of that humble, gentle patient love, which is the fulfilling of the Christian law, the whole essence of true religion, was struck in the fourth century by Constantine the Great, when he called himself a Christian, and poured in a flood of riches, honours, and power, upon the Christians; more especially upon the Clergy. . . . Then, not the golden, but the iron age of the Church commenced.<sup>22</sup>

However, even without a powerful leader like Constantine who heaped riches and honor upon the community of faith, Wesley realized

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 3:244, “The Danger of Riches.” Along these same lines, Wesley notes in his *Farther Appeal*: “Inasmuch as covetousness knows no mercy, nor can a lover of money be a lover of his neighbor.” Cf. Gerald R. Cragg, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 11., *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 245.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 2:456, “The Mystery of Iniquity.” Observe, however, Wesley maintains that the counsel given by Jesus to the rich young ruler was never designed as a general rule. “For him that was necessary to salvation,” Wesley states, “to us it is not.” Cf. Wesley, *N. T. Notes*, 65, 191.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 2:461, “The Mystery of Iniquity.”

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 2:462-463, “The Mystery of Iniquity.”

that the church, ironically enough, ever contains within itself the principles of its own destruction. And in considering the case of Methodism in particular, as a reflection of the universal church, Wesley revealed the insidious dynamic in three movements. First, any revival of religion, like the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, “must necessarily produce both industry and frugality.”<sup>23</sup> That is, disciplined Christians will not only work assiduously, taking care to use wisely their talents and graces, but they will also cut off all needless expense. Second, these very characteristics, the fruit of vital religion, “cannot but produce riches.”<sup>24</sup> Third, as riches increase, “so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches,” the very things which will vitiate the love of God and neighbor and thereby destroy vital religion. The movement has now come full circle.

## II. Stewardship and the Promise of Ministry: The Love of God and Neighbor

One solution to the problem of undermining vital Christianity through riches is to maintain, as Theodore Jennings does, that the economic counsel of John Wesley as expressed in his well-known sermon “The Use of Money” is seriously flawed and, therefore, must be rejected—at least in part. To illustrate, Jennings, no doubt influenced by Marxist economic analysis, is apparently unwilling to grant Wesley the first two movements of his economic triad, namely, the advice to “gain all you can” and “save all you can.”<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, for the phrase “gain all you can” Jennings substitutes something like “gain all you need.” In other

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<sup>23</sup>Rupert E. Davies, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9. *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9:529. For a detailed examination of Wesley’s economic ethics and their relation to piety and spirituality, cf. Wellman J. Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), 165-187.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.* Although Wesley clearly rejected what the twentieth century has termed “the gospel of wealth,” he nevertheless strongly associated vital religion and the specter of riches as detailed above. However, his statement that industry and frugality will necessarily produce wealth is dependent on the assumption that one lives in a rich country at the start. Indeed, no amount of industry and frugality on the part of the poor (save all you can; gain all you can) will ever produce riches in some of the poorest countries today.

<sup>25</sup>Theodore Jennings, *Good News*, 166-67. For a view which maintains that Wesley’s rules on the use of money are no longer applicable in modern, industrial societies, cf. Charles M. Elliot, “The Ideal of Economic Growth,” in *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution*, ed. E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (Edward Arnold Publishers, 1967), 75-99.



words, people should be allowed to earn no more than what they require for subsistence, regardless of the amount or difficulty of the work done. In addition, this American Methodist is equally critical of the phrase "save all you can" since Wesley substantiates its value not by a specific appeal to the needs of the poor, but by an appeal to avoiding the "self-indulgence that leads to sin."<sup>26</sup>

The problem with Jennings' analysis, and others like it, is its failure to appreciate a truth readily acknowledged by Wesley, namely, that vital religion *necessarily* produces both industry (gain all you can) and thrift (save all you can), a point alluded to earlier. "For wherever true Christianity spreads," Wesley affirms, "it *must* cause diligence and frugality. . . ." In a similar fashion, Wesley admonishes the Methodists in his "Use of Money": "No more *sloth!* Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might." And again: "No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand."<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the prohibition or stifling of industry, the frustration or elimination of thrift by well-meaning social policy or by law may have, in the end, some unintended but nonetheless serious ramifications.

Moreover, it must be affirmed that Wesley's economic standards not only grew out of a consideration of the needs of the poor, but also out of a probing estimation of the very nature or essence of religion itself. In fact, during the crucial period of 1725-29, when the young Wesley first properly understood the end or goal of religion, which is none other than holy love, his readings in Jeremy Taylor and other sources convinced him not only of the value of discipline in the areas of time, money, and talents, but also of the importance of stewardship. Gaining and saving, therefore, are not necessarily evidence of rebellion against a holy God. On the contrary, they can be, and often are, the very ingredients of stewardship, the prerequisites of ministry.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>27</sup>Albert Outler, *Sermons*, 4:95-96 ("Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity"). Emphasis is mine. For Wesley, "giving all you can" was to be voluntary, uncoerced. Indeed, he feared that legislation in this area, either by the church or by the state, would remove not only freedom, civil liberty in particular, but also the element of worship in such gracious ministry. For example, in a letter to Miss March in 1776, Wesley writes: "It is impossible to lay down any general rules, as to 'saving all we can' and 'giving all we can.' In this, it seems, we must needs be directed from time to time by the unction of the Holy One." Cf. Telford, *Letters*, 6:207.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 2:279. ("The Use of Money")

Fortunately, the solution which Wesley himself offered to the continuing problem of undermining Christianity through wealth was to add to the first two counsels a third, namely, "Give all you can."<sup>29</sup> Although this normative statement, this guide to behavior, is well known in Methodist circles, what has not been fully appreciated is the complex motivation that lay behind it. For example, in exhorting his own Methodist societies, Wesley actually made three distinct kinds of appeal by means of this prescription. First, and perhaps most important of all, he noted that believers should give all they can because it is the Lord who is the Creator and rightful Governor of the world. In other words, for Wesley, God is the true owner of all things; believers, therefore, are merely stewards of this bounty. The proper worship of the Most High entails at the very least the stewardship and distribution of one's goods. Consequently, after the real needs of the person, his or her family, and the community of faith have been met, then whatever remains is to be distributed among the poor as an instance of the love and honor of God. Wesley explains:

The directions which God has given us touching the use of our worldly substance may be comprised in the following particulars . . . first, provide things needful for yourself. . . . Secondly, provide these for your wife, your children, your servants, or any others who pertain to your household. If when this is done there be an overplus left, then "do good to them that are of the household of faith." If there be an overplus still, "as you have opportunity, do good unto all men."<sup>30</sup>

Second, for Wesley, the love of God through the discipline of stewardship must issue in the love of neighbor. Put another way, God has placed in the hands of those who have the necessities of life and a something left over—Wesley's definition of rich—the wherewithal to minister to the poor. Therefore, the "rich" are to be the conduits, the channels, of the blessings of the Most High. "Let thy plenty supply thy neighbours' wants," Wesley urges in his sermon "On Worldly Folly."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, to

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<sup>29</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:277. ("The Use of Money")

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:277. ("The Use of Money"). Elsewhere, in his sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Eighth," Wesley makes the connection between the worship of God and ministry to the poor even more explicit: "Give to the poor with a single eye, with an upright heart, and write, 'So much given to God.'" Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:629.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:133-34. ("On Worldly Folly")

stifle through needless self-indulgence this gracious movement from God to humanity is nothing less than robbing the poor. "Everything about thee which cost more than Christian duty required thee to lay out is the blood of the poor!"<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the reason why so few rich will enter the kingdom of heaven is revealed in one of Wesley's mid-career sermons. He writes:

May not this be another reason why rich men shall so hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven? A vast majority of them are under a curse, under the peculiar curse of God; inasmuch as in the general tenor of their lives they are not only robbing God continually, embezzling and wasting their Lord's goods, and by that very means corrupting their own souls; but also robbing the poor, the hungry, the naked, wronging the widow and the fatherless. . . .<sup>33</sup>

And to the claim made by the rich that they can afford the things of luxury, that it is no sin, Wesley curtly replied, emphasizing once again a twofold obligation towards God and humanity: "No man can 'afford' to waste any part of what God has committed to his trust. None can 'afford' to throw any part of that food and raiment into the sea which was lodged with him on purpose to feed the hungry and clothe the naked."<sup>34</sup>

Third, Wesley acknowledged one last motivating factor, improving the spiritual life of those who ministered to the needy. Thus, in the larger economic and soteriological environment of ministry to the poor, there are three (not two) principal agents for Wesley: God and the poor, of course, but also those who served the poor. Indeed, Wesley's economic ethic is remarkably distinctive in that it expresses pastoral concern for the "rich" as well. Thus, believers should give all they can, among other reasons, in order to avoid corrupting their own souls with such unholy tempers as greed and inordinate desire. In his 1786 sermon "On Dress," for instance, Wesley warns that "the putting on of costly apparel" is contrary to "the hidden man of the heart": that is, to the whole 'image of God'

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 3:255. ("On Dress"). Rack cautions contemporary interpreters of Wesley's economic ethics that "the category of 'the poor' in the eighteenth century is itself an imprecise term. . . . The poor that Wesley begged for in times of distress were often tradesmen down on their luck." Cf. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 441.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 1:628-629. ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, VIII")

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 3:260. ("On Dress"). In this same sermon, Wesley once again expostulates and reveals a dual reference: "Therefore every shilling which you needlessly spend on your apparel is in effect stolen from God and the poor." Cf. 3:254.

wherein we were created.”<sup>35</sup> Beyond this, he cautions in this same sermon: “Instead of growing more heavenly-minded, you are more earthly-minded . . . and you insensibly sink deeper and deeper into the spirit of the world, into foolish and hurtful desires.”<sup>36</sup>

### **John Wesley’s Variegated Ministry to the Poor**

Though seldom noticed, Wesley’s writings, especially in his sermon corpus, employ the term “the poor” in two key ways. First of all, commenting on Matthew 5:1-4, he specifically rejects a mere economic reading of the term “the poor” as found in “Happy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, by means of this judgment, Wesley sought to reaffirm, once again and in a critical way, the radical nature of human evil that can not be utterly identified with the particular sin of greed or with the acquisition of wealth. In fact, in his 1748 sermon “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First,” the Methodist leader not only denies that the love of money is the root of all evil, but he also indicates something of the Lord’s design in offering the Sermon on the Mount. Wesley writes:

This sense [an economic reading] of the expression “poor in spirit” will by no means suit our Lord’s present design, which is to lay a general foundation whereon the whole fabric of Christianity may be built; a design which would be in no wise answered by guarding against one particular vice; so that even if this were supposed to be one part of his meaning, it could not possibly be the whole.<sup>38</sup>

The poor in spirit, then, the blessed of the Lord, are all those of whatever outward circumstances who “have that disposition of heart

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 1:256. (“On Dress”). For an example of an interpretation of Wesley’s concept of stewardship that draws a relation between its soteriological context and contemporary political theory, cf. Gary L. Ball-Kilbourne, “The Christian as Steward in John Wesley’s Theological Ethics,” *Quarterly Review* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1984): 43-54.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 3:256. (“On Dress”)

<sup>37</sup>Wesley, *NT Notes*, 19.

<sup>38</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 1:476-477. (“Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, I”). Bracketed material is mine.

which is the first step to all real substantial happiness."<sup>39</sup> Poverty of spirit, in other words, entails lowliness in heart, and it begins "where a sense of guilt and of the wrath of God ends; and is a continual sense of our total dependence on him for every good thought or word or work."<sup>40</sup> In short, not outward circumstances but inward dispositions define this first definition of the poor, and, more importantly, these same dispositions constitute the general foundation of all true religion.

But Wesley also employed this term, secondly, in a largely economic way. To illustrate, in his sermon "Dives and Lazarus," produced in 1788, Wesley exclaims:

Hear this, all ye that are poor in this world. Ye that many times have not food to eat or raiment to put on; ye that have not a place where to lay your head, unless it be a cold garret, or a foul and damp cellar! Ye are now reduced to "solicit the cold hand of charity." Yet lift up your load; it shall not always be thus.<sup>41</sup>

Ever energetic in ministry, Wesley sought out those who lacked the necessities of life: he visited them in their homes and preached to them in the fields. As a result, he knew by firsthand experience how "devilishly false is that common objection, 'They are poor, only because they are idle.'"<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Wesley's lifelong association with the destitute resulted in his love, respect, and appreciation for these children of God. In

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 1:476. ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I"). Nevertheless, Wesley did not always keep apart his two definitions of the poor. At times, for example, he conflated them and identified the qualities of the poor in spirit, like humility and gentleness, with the penniless. And, on the other hand, he associated pride—the opposite of poverty of spirit—with the rich. "O what an advantage have the poor over the rich!" the Methodist leader writes. "These are not wise in their own eyes, but all receive with meekness the ingrafted word which is able to save their souls." Cf. Curnock, *Journal*, 7:436.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 1:482.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 4:13 ("Dives and Lazarus"). Some of the descriptions of the poor found in Wesley's sermons are no doubt problematic for the modern reader. For example, in his "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Eleventh," Wesley states: "Nor does this [the way to perdition] only concern the vulgar herd, the poor, base, stupid part of mankind." However, see Outler's comment (number 20) found on page 667, volume one, of the sermons.

<sup>42</sup>Reginald W. Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 20. *Journals and Diaries I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 445. Moreover, Wesley criticized the insensitivity of Juvenal, who in his ignorance concerning poverty, declared: "*Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se: quam quod ridiculos homines facit!*" Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:227.

1757, for instance, in a letter to Dorothy Furly, he exclaimed: "In most religious people there is so strange a mixture that I have seldom much confidence in them. I love the poor; in many of them I find pure, genuine grace, unmixed with paint, folly, and affection."<sup>43</sup> In 1765 Wesley once again demonstrated his affection for the impoverished and wrote in his journal: "I preached at Bath, but I had only the poor to hear, there being service at the same time in Lady H[untingdon]'s chapel. So I was just in my element."<sup>44</sup>

**A. The Temporal Needs of the Poor.** So concerned was Wesley with the plight of the poor that he sought to improve their temporal condition through numerous ministries. Thus, in November, 1740, for instance, he undertook a humble experiment which involved about a dozen unemployed people, drawn from the Methodist societies, in the carding and spinning of cotton.<sup>45</sup> The next year, in 1741, greatly offended by the poverty within the United Society itself, Wesley developed a systematic program to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, employ the poor, and visit the sick.<sup>46</sup> In fact, according to Ward and Heitzenrater, for over forty years "all the class-money in London, amounting to several hundred pounds a year, was distributed to the poor by the stewards."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, these attempts to ameliorate the temporal condition of the needy, some more successful than others, were augmented in 1746 by the opening of a free dispensary to provide medical services<sup>48</sup> and by the institution of a

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<sup>43</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 3:229.

<sup>44</sup>Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 5:148-149.

<sup>45</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal*, 19:173.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 19:193-94. For an assessment of Wesley's social ministries from a third-world perspective, cf. Aubin de Gruchy, "Beyond Intention—John Wesley's Intentional and Unintentional Socio-economic Influences on 18th Century England," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 68 (Spring 1989): 75-85.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 20:176, note number 45.

<sup>48</sup>Marquardt points out the need for this benevolent activity and writes: "Eine weitere wirksame Hilfe neben der Versorgung mit Lebensmitteln und Kleidung brachte eine andere Massnahme, die Wesley 1746/47 in London und Bristol eingeleitet hatte: die medizinische Versorgung der Armen. Der hygienische Zustand vieler Unterfunfte war katastrophal, die medizinische Versorgung völlig unzureichend, die Ernährung oft schlecht und die Kenntnisse in bezug auf Lebensweise und Krankenpflege waren minimal. . . ." Cf. Manfred Marquardt, *Praxis und Prinzipien der Sozialethik John Wesleys* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 26-27

lending-stock to offer cash to the impoverished. And though at its inception the stock did not amount to more than fifty pounds, it eventually served more than two hundred and fifty people.<sup>49</sup>

With these and other structures of ministry in place, Wesley was notably diligent in raising money for the poor throughout his career, undertaking collections on their behalf from the early 1740s until his death. The following extract from his *Journal* of 22 March 1744 is typical of the many examples that could be cited. Wesley writes:

I gave the society an account of what had been done with regard to the poor. By the contributions and collections I had received about one hundred and seventy pounds, with which above three hundred and thirty poor had been provided with needful clothing. Thirty or forty remaining still in want, and there being some debts for the clothes already distributed, the next day, being Good Friday, I made one collection more, of about six and twenty pounds. This treasure, at least, neither rust nor moth shall corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.<sup>50</sup>

However, in other places in the *Journal* Wesley alters his language somewhat and describes his "begging" on behalf of the poverty stricken. On 8 January 1787 he recorded the following:

Monday the 8th and the four following days I went a-begging for the poor. I hoped to be able to provide food and raiment for those of the society who were in pressing want, yet had no weekly allowance.<sup>51</sup>

In light of the preceding material, it should be evident by now that a significant portion of Wesley's benevolent activity actually took place not indiscriminately but within the context of the Methodist societies themselves. That is, lending stocks, dispensaries, collections and the like most

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<sup>49</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal*, 20:125. One of the reasons for the efficiency of this stock was that Wesley laid down a number of ground rules: first, only twenty shillings was to be lent at a time; second, this sum was to be repaid weekly within a three month period. Cf. Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal*, 20:204.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 20:18. Observe that even when Wesley describes the temporal needs of the poor, he points beyond them to a treasure which is not temporal but eternal, "which neither rust nor moth shall corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal." For other examples of Wesley's collections for the poor, cf. Curnock, *Journal*, 5:107, 5:234, 6:450; and Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal*, 19:135-136, and 20:15.

<sup>51</sup>Curnock, *Journal*, 7:235-236. See also 6:451 and 7:42-43.

often serviced those poor who were already participating in some way in the institutional life of Methodism.<sup>52</sup> Wesley's sermons demonstrate a hierarchical order in meeting the temporal needs of the poor that clearly privileges those in the church over those beyond its walls. Thus, as noted earlier, in assessing the proper distribution of goods beyond the real needs of one's family, Wesley counsels: "If when this is done there be an overplus left, then 'do good to them that are of the household of faith.' If there be an overplus still, 'as you have opportunity, do good unto all men.'" <sup>53</sup> Not surprisingly, then, there are relatively few instances in either Wesley's journal or his letters that chronicle acts of charity which are not somehow purposely related to a larger ecclesiastical and soteriological context.

Furthermore, Wesley's ever-present soteriological orientation is revealed not only in his concern with the temporal needs of the poor, but it is also demonstrated in his emphasis on the spiritual state of those who minister and in his critical assessment of their ministerial labors. To illustrate, in his homily, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth," Wesley maintains that, although believers may do good to their neighbors by dealing bread to the hungry and by covering the naked, they still may have "no part in the glory which shall be revealed."<sup>54</sup> And he displays the reasoning behind this judgment in the following excerpt from this same sermon: "For how far short is all this of that righteousness and true holiness which he has described therein! How widely distant from that inward kingdom of heaven, which is now opened in the believing soul!"<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup>It should be noticed that the leading motif which informs Wesley's concept of justice is not equality but "the rendering to each his or her due," as found, for instance, in the writings of Plato, Cicero, and other classical authors. Holland and Howell who, quite perceptively, note this difference write: "Wesley's definition of the 'just' is Ciceronian, connoting rendering to all 'their due' and prescribing exactly what is right, precisely what ought to be done, said, or thought, both with regard to the Author of our being, with regard to ourselves, and with regard to every creature which he has made." Cf. Lynwood M. Holland and Ronald F. Howell, "John Wesley's Concept of Religious and Political Authority," *Journal of Church and State* 6 (Autumn 1964): 301.

<sup>53</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:277. ("The Use of Money")

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:689-690. ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse XIII")

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:690. ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth"). Vilem Schneeberger affirms that Wesley's benevolent activities grew out of soteriological considerations, that is, the love of neighbor is nothing less than the outworking of vital faith. Cf. Vilem Schneeberger, *Theologische Wurzeln des sozialen Akzents bei John Wesley* (Zurich and Stuttgart: Gotthelf Verlag, 1974).



Viewed from yet another perspective, Wesley affirms that, before the love of God and neighbor is established in the heart through faith in Jesus Christ all works of piety and mercy are not good, technically speaking. Thus, in his 1746 sermon "Justification by Faith," Wesley affirms:

If it be objected, "Nay, but a man, before he is justified, may feed the hungry, or clothe the naked; and these are good works," the answer is easy. He may do these, even before he is justified. And these are in one sense "good works"; they are "good and profitable to men." But it does not follow that they are, strictly speaking, good in themselves, or good in the sight of God. All truly "good works" (to use the words of our Church) "follow after justification. . . ." By a parity of reason all "works done before justification" are not good; in the Christian sense, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ (though from some kind of faith in God they may spring), "yea, rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done. . . ." <sup>56</sup>

And though Wesley was obviously unwilling to call works of charity done apart from justifying faith good, strictly speaking, he was equally unwilling to call them "splendid sins" as some of his Calvinist friends were willing to do.<sup>57</sup> And, in a real sense, his doctrine of prevenient grace explains such reluctance.

At any rate, Wesley endeavored to root his ministry to the poor not only in terms of a "horizontal axis," corresponding to the scope of the various temporal needs of the less fortunate, but also in terms of a "vertical axis" which plumbed the depths of motivation and purpose and thereby recognized the value of holy affections for those who ministered. In his sermon "The Repentance of Believers," written in 1767, Wesley explains:

And while they [those who do not have their eye singly fixed on God] are endeavouring to do good to their neighbour, do

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<sup>56</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 1:192. ("Justification by Faith"). For a Roman Catholic perspective on Wesley's estimation of works preceding justification, cf. Carolo Koerber, *The Theology of Conversion According to John Wesley* (Rome: Neoboraci Publishers, 1967).

<sup>57</sup>For instance, in his sermon "The Reward of Righteousness," Wesley writes: "when you visit them that are sick, or in prison—these are not 'splendid sins,' as one marvelously calls them, but 'sacrifices wherewith God is well pleased.'" Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:404.

they not feel wrong tempers of various kinds? Hence their good actions, so called, are far from being strictly such, being polluted with such a mixture of evil! Such are their works of *mercy*! And is there not the same mixture in their works of *piety*?<sup>58</sup>

Elsewhere, in several of his sermons, Wesley specifically links good works with the inculcation of what he termed “holy tempers.” “Although I give all my goods to feed the poor,” he writes, “. . . yet if I am proud, passionate, or discontented; if I give way to any of these tempers; whatever good I may do to others, I do none to my own soul. O how pitiable a case is this.”<sup>59</sup> Again in his sermon “On Zeal,” produced in 1781, Wesley declares that “no outward works are acceptable to him unless they spring from *holy tempers*, without which no man can have a place in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”<sup>60</sup>

But perhaps the clearest expression of the indissoluble relationship between works of mercy and holy tempers is found in Wesley’s sermon “On Charity” which was written in 1784. In this piece, Wesley states: “That all those who are zealous of good works would put them in their proper place! Would not imagine they can supply the want of holy tempers, but take care that they may spring from them.”<sup>61</sup> Two elements are of note here. First, Wesley’s caution to his readers to put works in their proper place suggests something of his valuation of both works and holy tempers, a judgment which is often ignored in the contemporary secondary literature.<sup>62</sup> Second, Wesley’s advice to his readers to take care that good works flow from those holy tempers established in the heart by faith

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 1:343. (“The Repentance of Believers”). Bracketed material is mine.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 3:304. (“On Charity”). Marquardt, interestingly, places equal emphasis on the actual material condition of the poor (praxis) as on the crucial nature of inward religion as the engines of Wesley’s social ethic. Cf. Marquardt, *Praxis und Prinzipien*, 145-150; 163-68.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 3:320. (“On Zeal”)

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 3:305. (“On Charity”). Bett affirms that Wesley strongly associated good works and the love of God simply because “there is no real love of our fellows that does not ultimately spring from the love of God, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” Cf. Henry Bett, *The Spirit of Methodism* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), 200.

<sup>62</sup>Jennings, for example, disregards Wesley’s caution to put works in their proper place and instead maintains that “If Wesley emphasizes the inward [sic] it is not because this is somehow more real or important than the outward.” Cf. Jennings, *Good News*, 143.

is indicative of his own theological judgment and transformation during the year 1738. Indeed, prior to this time Wesley had, by his own admission, reversed the priorities and sought to be accepted by God through his own labors.<sup>63</sup> "Men are so exceedingly apt to rest in 'practice,' so called," I mean in *outside* religion"; Wesley notes, "whereas *true religion* is *imminently* seated in the heart."<sup>64</sup>

Wesley's economic ethic, then, demonstrates a highly complex motivation and purpose. It not only encompasses the issues of time and eternity, the temporal needs of the poor and the worship of God, but also the spiritual needs of ministers, both lay and clergy. Simply put, dispensing wealth improved the spiritual state of the giver as well as the temporal condition of the receiver. Hoarding wealth, on the other hand, spoiled the spiritual state of the rich and left the temporal needs of the poor neglected. In fact, in his *Notes on the New Testament* Wesley reveals a symbiotic relationship between the indigent and those who minister to them which operates under the larger providence of God. Commenting on the continuing existence of the poor in Matthew 26:11, he says, "Ye have the poor always with you," Wesley exclaims, though perhaps somewhat insensitively: "Such is the wise and gracious providence of God, that we may have always opportunities of relieving their wants, and so laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven."<sup>65</sup>

**B. The Spiritual Needs of the Poor.** Though the descendants of the social gospel movement and some of the modern progenitors of liberation theology have, at times, looked askance at the language of "saving souls" as an instance of theological obscurantism, such language reverberates in the writings of John Wesley. At an early Methodist conference, for instance, Wesley asked those assembled to consider what is the office of a

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<sup>63</sup>Wesley writes in his *Farther Appeal*: "I was ordained Deacon in 1725, and Priest in the year following. But it was many years after this before I was convinced of the great truths above recited. During all that time I was utterly ignorant of the nature and condition of justification. Sometimes I confounded it with sanctification; (particularly when I was in Georgia)." Cf. Cragg, *The Appeals*, 11:176.

<sup>64</sup>Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 26. *The Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 179. Emphasis is mine. Moreover, Wesley's judgments on this score are likewise expressed in his sermon "An Israelite Indeed" where he points out: ". . . the love of our neighbour is only the second commandment . . . benevolence itself is no virtue at all, unless it spring from the love of God." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:280.

<sup>65</sup>Wesley, *NT Notes*, 86.

Christian minister? He and others replied: "To watch over souls, as he that must give an account."<sup>66</sup> And when he detailed the responsibilities of a "Helper" shortly thereafter, Wesley exclaimed, revealing much of his mission and purpose: "You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spent and be spent in this work."<sup>67</sup>

To be sure, this particular emphasis on the redemption of souls, far from being an unusual or occasional one, continued throughout Wesley's life. Thus, in 1763, as he considered the purpose or end towards which the church should be directed, he wrote the following in his sermon "The Reformation of Manners":

This is the original design of the church of Christ. It is a body of men compacted together in order, first, to save each his own soul, then to assist each other in working out their salvation, and afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of Christ.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, when John wrote to his brother Charles in 1772, ostensibly to consider an aspect of the doctrine of Christian perfection, he reminded him, among other things, that his business as well as his own was "to save souls."<sup>69</sup>

In view of this emphasis, part of the good news to the poor, according to Wesley, consists in the transformation of the Christian community such that, with the holy tempers of love in place, the body of Christ is impelled to share sacrificially to meet the temporal needs of the poor. But it also consists in the glorious proclamation to the poor of the redemption of the inward person, that all people of whatever rank and station in life can be renewed in spirit, that the deepest recesses of the heart can be

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<sup>66</sup>Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 8:309.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>68</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:302. ("The Reformation of Manners"). In addition, in his "Letter to a Clergyman" Wesley writes: "I think he is a true, evangelical Minister, *diakonos*, 'servant' of Christ and his church, who . . . 'so ministers,' as to save souls from death, to reclaim sinners from their sins; . . ." Cf. Jackson, *Works*, 8:498.

<sup>69</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 5:316. More than a decade later, in 1784 to be exact, John reminisced about the founding of Methodism and the employment of lay preachers and exclaimed: "He chose a few young, poor, ignorant men, without experience, learning, or art; . . . seeking no honour, no profit, no pleasure, no ease, but merely to save souls." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:558-559.

made anew. Indeed, in his sermon "Salvation by Faith" preached at St. Mary's Oxford in 1738, Wesley points out that "whosoever believeth on him shall be saved"<sup>70</sup> and, more importantly for the task at hand, he affirms in this same sermon that the poor themselves have a "peculiar right to have [this] gospel preached to them."<sup>71</sup>

This right to the gospel by the poor, however, is also matched by a need for the gospel in terms of both its temporal and spiritual aspects. In other words, just as Wesley was reluctant to draw an exact equation between the economic condition of the rich and their soteriological status, so too was he reluctant to draw a similar equation in terms of the poor. That is, though the poor are often characterized by the graces of humility and patience, Wesley was well aware of the sins often peculiar to this estate. To illustrate, in an early manuscript sermon, Wesley asks the question, "O faith working by love, whither art thou fled?" To which he curtly replies: "among the wealthy? No. The 'deceitfulness of riches' there 'chokes the word.' Among the poor? No. 'The cares of the world' are there, 'so that it bringeth forth no fruit to perfection.'" <sup>72</sup> And much later, in 1784, the seasoned Wesley continued this theme and observed how "the poor were overwhelmed with worldly care, so that the seed they had received became unfruitful."<sup>73</sup> Beyond this, in his sermon "Spiritual Idolatry" Wesley affirms that idolatry in the form of "the desire of the flesh" plagues not only the rich, but the poor as well. "In this also 'the toe of the peasant . . . treads upon the heel of the courtier.' Thousands in low as well as in high life sacrifice to this idol."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 1:128. ("Salvation by Faith")

<sup>71</sup>Ibid. ("Salvation by Faith"). Bracketed material is mine.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 3:536. ("The Trouble and Rest of Good Men"). Manuscript sermons are those that, for whatever reason, Wesley saw fit not to publish, although he did keep copies of them among his papers. Interestingly, all these pieces were written early, relatively speaking, and range from 1725 to 1741. Among the manuscript sermons are such important works as "The Image of God," and "The One Thing Needful." See Outler's introduction to his critical edition of Wesley's sermons for more on this particular genre.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 2:565. ("The Wisdom of God's Counsels")

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 3:106. ("Spiritual Idolatry"). Wesley also tried to comfort poor believers by directing their attention to the providence of God. In his journal on 31 December 1772 Wesley wrote: "Being greatly embarrassed by the necessities of the poor, we spread all our wants before God in solemn prayer; believing that He would sooner 'make windows in heaven' than suffer His truth to fail." Cf. Curnock, *Journal*, 5:495.

Undoubtedly the substance of what Wesley preached to the poor is found in his *Sermons on Several Occasions*, a work that was published in several editions during the eighteenth century.<sup>75</sup> In this material, Wesley demonstrates that part of the “good news to the poor” (as for all people) consists in liberation from the guilt of sin, on the one hand, as revealed in the sermon “Salvation by Faith,” as well as in liberation from the power of sin as described in the piece, “The Great Privilege of Those Who are born of God,” produced in 1748. And these two liberties just cited correspond to the theological doctrines of justification and regeneration respectively and receive additional treatment in such important and summary sermons as “The Scripture Way of Salvation” and “Sin in Believers.”<sup>76</sup>

In addition, an examination of Wesley’s sermon corpus reveals that the language of holy tempers and proper affections in the form of the love of God and neighbor (as well as the impediments to this love in the form of the sins of the desire of the flesh, the love of the world, and the pride of life) constitute the message directed by Wesley to the poor. None, not even the worst off economically speaking, despite their great suffering, were excluded from the call to and necessity of repentance. On the other hand, this leveling of all men and women as sinners, poor and non-poor, this universal flavor of sin, actually resulted in the enhanced status of the poor within the Methodist societies where rank and privilege, so valued by the world, counted for nothing. In fact, to know oneself as a sinner, to desire “to flee the wrath which is to come,” was the only requirement for

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<sup>75</sup>Albert Outler’s categorization of this corpus at the back of volume one of his edition of Wesley’s sermons highlights the editions of 1771 and the revised edition of 1788. Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:699 and 1:701. Furthermore, Outler reveals that the entire sermon corpus of the critical edition of Wesley’s works, published recently by Abingdon Press, is made up of the additional elements of (a) a “miscellany of published sermons,” (b) those pieces which were originally published in the Arminian magazine, as well as (c) manuscript sermons. Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 1: 704-05.

<sup>76</sup>Indeed, it is in this latter sermon that Wesley clearly distinguishes the issues of guilt, power, and being. “The guilt is one thing, the power another, and the being yet another.” Wesley affirms this: “That believers are delivered from the guilt (justification) and power of sin (regeneration) we allow; that they are delivered from the being (which awaits the work of entire sanctification) of it we deny.” *Ibid.*, 1:328. For additional references to Wesley’s distinction between the guilt and power of sin, cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 1:122-24, 261, 348-349, 432, 560, 586; 2:120.

membership in a Methodist society—a characteristic of Methodist life often resented by the rich.<sup>77</sup>

**C. Wesley's Valuation of Different Kinds of Ministry.** One way of understanding the relation between holiness of heart and life and the works of mercy that flow from it, especially as such works relate to ministry to the poor, is found in the work of Theodore Jennings. This contemporary scholar sets up a means/end relationship and maintains that the love of God reigning in the heart is a suitable means to works of charity and to the-yet-higher end of reform of the political order. "Wesley emphasizes inward transformation," Jennings maintains, "because he is so earnestly interested in outward behavior."<sup>78</sup> Elsewhere in his writings, Jennings specifically links holiness to political goals, that is, to the elimination of private property and to the establishment of communism. "Wesley supposes that the Methodist movement will produce not only a spread of the gospel throughout the earth," he writes, "but also, and therefore, bring in the communist society."<sup>79</sup> Although these political goals themselves are questionable, especially in light of recent events in eastern Europe, the valuational structure into which they are placed is even more dubious. Is the satisfaction of the temporal needs of the poor, though important, the very highest goal, the telos, at which Wesley aimed? Was political transformation really the end, the major purpose of the eighteenth-century revival? Or is this modern reading of Wesley, in its attempt to be relevant, actually reductionistic in that it entails the substitution of the penultimate for what is truly ultimate?

Another way of reading Wesley, of construing the relationship between the love of God reigning in the heart and all manner of good

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<sup>77</sup>In his sermon, "On Riches," for instance, Wesley points out the contempt that the rich often hold towards their "inferiors," and in his "On the Danger of Riches" he underscores the reluctance of the wealthy even to be among the poor. Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:108 and 3:244.

<sup>78</sup>Jennings, *Good News*, 144.

<sup>79</sup>Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., "Wesley's Preferential Option for the Poor," *Quarterly Review* Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall, 1989), 22. Ignoring the political and social context of eighteenth-century England, Jennings contends that Wesley repudiated the right of private property. However, there is sufficient evidence in Wesley's own writings to demonstrate that he upheld both religious and civil liberty. More to the point, in his "Thoughts upon Liberty" Wesley observes that civil liberty entails "a liberty to enjoy our lives and fortunes in our own way; to use our property, whatever is legally our own, according to our own choice." And in his "Observations on Liberty" he adds: "Civil liberty is a liberty to dispose of our lives, persons, and fortunes, according to our own choice, and the laws of our country." Cf. Jackson, *Works*, 11:41, 11:92.

works (individual, political, social) is to contend that the one endlessly leads to the other in a cyclical fashion. In other words, in this interpretation, the love of God and neighbor issues in works of mercy which in turn enhance the love of God and neighbor.<sup>80</sup> Here each element is a means to the other and the question of valuation, of an ultimate telos, is avoided. Indeed, when the historian focuses on particular kinds of evidence, Wesley can in fact be read in this way. Accordingly, if inward transformation does not lead to good works, Wesley cautioned, one's faith and love cannot remain. Commenting on James 1:27, he writes: "The only *true religion* in the sight of God is this, to visit—With counsel, comfort, and relief, *the fatherless and widow*—Those who need it most, *in their affliction*—In their most helpless and hopeless state. . . ."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Wesley likewise affirmed that good works are often a means of grace to spiritual growth and maturity. Thus, he points out in his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" that all good works, works of piety as well as works of mercy, are "in some sense necessary to sanctification," that is, if there is time and opportunity for them.<sup>82</sup>

Though this second reading of Wesley is much more plausible than the first, it too must be judged as inadequate simply because it cannot incorporate the kinds of value judgments which Wesley did, after all, make in this area. For example, in his 1786 sermon "On Visiting the Sick," Wesley advises his visitors in the following fashion:

But it may not be amiss usually to begin with inquiring into their outward condition. You may ask whether they have the

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<sup>80</sup>Wesley maintained that works of piety as well as works of mercy are in some sense necessary to sanctification. In other words, if there be time and opportunity, these works are the normal means to an improvement of the rich grace of God. Wesley, however, did not contend that doing good works necessarily results in an increase in holiness. The emphasis here, as elsewhere, is on the grace of God and works of mercy as a means of that grace. Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:164. ("The Scripture Way of Salvation")

<sup>81</sup>Wesley, *NT Notes*, 599. A contemporary Methodist scholar who holds this view of a balance between inward, personal transformation and social activity is Howard Snyder. Indeed, his chart on the various models of the kingdom of God places the individual (personal) and the social in symmetrical relationship. Cf. Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 17.

<sup>82</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:164. ("The Scripture Way of Salvation"). Please note that Wesley is in no way suggesting salvation by works, but he is affirming that good works, informed by the grace of God and by proper motivation, are a real means of grace to the believer.



necessaries of life. Whether they have sufficient food and raiment. If the weather be cold, whether they have fuel.<sup>83</sup>

But after this, Wesley asserts, the visitor is to proceed to things of *greater* value. "These little labours of love," he writes, "will pave your way to things of greater importance. Having shown that you have a regard for their bodies you may proceed to inquire concerning their souls."<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Wesley repeats this judgment, no doubt for emphasis, but this time he clearly displays what is the *telos* of all ministry:

While you are eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless, see that you still keep *a higher end in view*, even the saving of souls from death, and that you labour to make all you say and do subservient to *that great end*.<sup>85</sup>

Although these value judgments have seldom surfaced in the secondary literature, they are by no means idiosyncratic but represent Wesley's own thinking throughout his career. For example, much earlier, in 1748, Wesley had written concerning those engaged in ministry that "He doth good, to the uttermost of his power, even to the bodies of men. . . . How much more does he rejoice if he can do any good to the soul of any man!"<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 3:390. ("On Visiting the Sick")

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 391 ("On Visiting the Sick"). These hortatory comments found in the sermons reveal that in his ministry to the poor Wesley was never simply preoccupied with their temporal needs, important though they were, but he also was ever concerned with the transcendent, with the issues of God and eternity, a trait which gave his economic ethic, at least at times, a decidedly "otherworldly" emphasis. "Every pound you put into the earthly bank is sunk," Wesley writes in his "The More Excellent Way," "it brings no interest above. But every pound you give to the poor is put into the bank of heaven." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:276.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 3:393. ("On Visiting the Sick"). Emphasis is mine.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 1:519. ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third"). With respect to the roles of ministry, the task of visiting the sick (and the poor) demonstrates not separation as in some praxis models, not ministry which occurs in one direction only, from the poor to those who minister to them, but it reveals, once again, a mutuality of need and of love in an ever larger circle of ministry. Moreover, this mutuality of need and love is amply displayed in Wesley's sermon "On Visiting the Sick," in which he counsels his readers to visit the afflicted in person for two principal reasons. First, unlike a physician, the visitor can do great good to the souls of men and women. Second, sending relief by another likewise does not improve one's own graces; there is no advance, in other words, in the love of God and neighbor. "You could not gain that increase in lowliness, in patience, in tenderness of spirit, in sympathy with the afflicted," Wesley notes, "which you might have gained if you had assisted them in person." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:389, 393.

And two years later Wesley continued this theme in his sermon “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth,” writing:

Over and above all this, are you zealous of good works? Do you, as you have time, do good to all men? Do you feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction? Do you visit those that are sick? Relieve them that are in prison? Is any a stranger and you take him in? Friend, *come up higher*. . . . Does he enable you to bring sinners from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God?<sup>87</sup>

Two points are noteworthy in light of the preceding evidence. First, for Wesley at least, a part of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself always involves the exercise of both material gifts and spiritual talents; it entails the employment of all those gifts and graces which will enhance the physical well being of the poor *and* their spiritual character. Second, and perhaps more importantly, although the material needs of the neighbor have valuational priority, they clearly do not have valuational priority in Wesley’s thought,<sup>88</sup> for their fulfillment prepares the way, to use Wesley’s own terminology, for things of *greater importance*. Once again in his sermon “On Visiting the Sick” the Methodist leader instructs his visitors and writes:

And if your delicacy will not permit you to imitate those truly honourable ladies, by abasing yourselves in the manner which they do, by performing the lowest offices for the sick, you may, however, without humbling yourselves so far, supply them with whatever they want. And you may administer *help of a more excellent kind*, by supplying their spiritual wants; instructing them (if they need such instruction) in the first principles of religion; endeavouring to show them the dangerous state they are in, under the wrath and curse of God through sin, and point them to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 1:695. (“Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth”). Emphasis is mine.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid. (“Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth”)

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 3:389. (“On Visiting the Sick”). Emphasis is mine. Though the ministry of visiting the sick was one open to the poor, women, the young, as well as the old, Wesley contended that “the rich” have a special calling to this labor. He reasons: “You have likewise a peculiar advantage over many, by your station in

Perhaps the most lucid expression of the value and necessity of personal, inward transformation (spirituality) for social reform is found in the following selection from the sermon "On Zeal," a sermon which epitomizes Wesley's thought in this area and that provides insight into his ethical motivation and concern. Notice, for instance, what is at the heart of this ethic and the consequences that flow from it. Wesley declares:

In a Christian believer *love* sits upon the throne, which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all *holy tempers*: long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, fidelity, temperance—and if any other is comprised in "the mind which was in Christ Jesus." In an exterior circle are all the *works of mercy*, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real *means of grace*, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed *works of piety*: reading and hearing the Word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord's Supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, 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—the *church*, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.<sup>90</sup>

In this sermon, then, it is as if Wesley has allowed us to peek into the throne room of his entire theological and moral enterprise.<sup>91</sup> And on the

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life. Being superior in rank to them, you have the more influence on that very account. Your inferiors of course look up to you with a kind of reverence. And the condescension which you show in visiting them gives them a prejudice in your favour which inclines them to hear you with attention, and willingly receive what you say. Improve this prejudice to the uttermost for the benefit of their souls, as well as their bodies." Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:393. ("On Visiting the Sick")

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:313-14. ("On Zeal")

<sup>91</sup>Though there is no evidence that Wesley ever read St. Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, the central images that both spiritual leaders use to describe the Christian life are remarkably similar. Both, for instance, employ paradigmatic metaphors that not only contain implicit value judgments, but they also highlight the crucial nature of love. For example, Teresa's seventh mansion and its "geographical" location in the center of the castle are analogous to Wesley's placing of love on the throne from which all else in the Christian life flows. Compare Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 206ff, with Outler, *Sermons*, 3:313-14. ("On Zeal")

throne sits no political ideology or works of mercy, however noble or valuable they may be. No, love itself sits on the throne, and next to it are all those holy tempers (holiness) described earlier. And it is precisely only when these elements are in place, as motivating factors, at the very heart of things, that Wesley is then willing to consider works of mercy, piety and the like. As noted earlier, “No outward works are acceptable to him [God] unless they spring from *holy tempers*,”<sup>92</sup> he cautions. And again, “That all those who are zealous of good works would put them in their proper place! Would not imagine they can supply the want of holy tempers, but take care that they may spring from them!”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, all those “dispositions of mind” like meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering are not beside the point, a pious extravagance or indulgence, but are “absolutely necessary . . . for the enjoyment of present or future holiness.”<sup>94</sup> Indeed, they are nothing less than the lodestars of the moral life, the key to Wesley’s ethic.

Moreover, without holy love as its impetus, without a concern for “souls” as its highest ministry, the church runs the risk of self-righteousness, a partisan spirit, an incipient materialism, and much worse, a fostering of perhaps all those unholy tempers which Wesley so often warned against.<sup>95</sup> Again, in his homily *On Zeal*, the Methodist itinerant cautions:

And, first, if zeal, true Christian zeal, be nothing but the flame of love, then *hatred*, in every kind and degree, then every sort of *bitterness* toward them that oppose us, is so far from deserving the name of zeal that it is directly opposite to it. . . . Secondly; if lowliness be a property of zeal, then pride is inconsistent with it. . . . Thirdly; if meekness be an inseparable

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 3:320. (“On Zeal”). Bracketed material is mine.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 3:305. (“On Charity”)

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 4:223. (“On Living Without God”). The danger of beginning not with love and holy tempers but with political and economic concerns is that “justice” so conceived will most likely be unreformed, speckled with anger, class animosity, and perhaps even outright hatred of the middle-class or the rich. In other words, its concern for the poor will be expressed in all those unholy tempers against which Wesley inveighed. Once again, love and holiness are the proper starting point. Only then will the poor be properly ministered to and receive the justice they deserve.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 3:304. (“On Charity”)

property of zeal, what shall we say of those who call their anger by that name? Why, that they mistake the truth totally; . . . Fourthly; if patience, contentedness, and resignation, are the properties of zeal, then murmuring, fretfulness, discontent, impatience, are wholly inconsistent with it. . . . Fifthly; if the object of zeal be "that which is good," then fervour for any *evil thing* is not Christian zeal.<sup>96</sup>

Therefore, a bitter zeal for justice, which views matters of the soul and of human affection as of little consequence is no substitute for the justice which grows out of a holy, loving, Christlike concern.

### Conclusion

It should be apparent by now that the soteriological orientation of John Wesley's ministry to the poor is marked by three carefully drawn axes. First, Wesley's horizontal axis of ministry is more broadly conceived than some and includes the principal agents of God, the poor, as well as those who are engaged in service. Second, Wesley's vertical axis of ministry is attentive not only to the proper spiritual motivation of those who minister to the poor, underscoring the crucial nature of right tempers, but it is also attentive to the spiritual life of the poor themselves. Indeed, for Wesley, all people, poor and non poor, young and old, male and female, need to be renewed through faith in love. Third, Wesley's valuational axis, present in several of his later sermons, not only assesses the worth of temporal and spiritual ministry, but it also places nothing other than holy love at the center of things in terms of both motivation and purpose. Next in importance, of course, are all those holy tempers of the human heart from which flow works of mercy and works of piety. Indeed, for Wesley, only when this "inward" work has begun is one ready for vigorous, redemptive service.

Viewed from another perspective, these three axes demonstrate the truly radical nature of John Wesley's ministry in that he realized that the evils of economic injustice, though significant, were informed by more basic evils that had their roots in the human heart. Accordingly, the greed of the rich, their taste for luxury and waste, could not be overcome simply

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 3:315-17. ("On Zeal")

by state fiat, nor by moralizing, but by a transformation of the inward person as well.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, with respect to the poor, Wesley was critical enough to realize that no group or class has a privileged soteriological status since all have fallen short of the glory of God. Indeed, it was precisely on this basis of a universal need for redemption, of a radical transformation of the human heart, that Wesley was able to break out of the political strife and animosity so typical of his day to bring together the poor and those who ministered to them in a larger, more inclusive circle of ministry, to foster mutual concern and affection among them as joint members of the body of Christ, and ultimately to unite them in the broadest circle of love.

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<sup>97</sup>With the notable exception of slavery, Wesley, as an eighteenth century thinker, was hardly aware of the institutional and structural dimensions of sin. Indeed, when he does attempt, for example, to examine the evils of poverty and unemployment in his treatise “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions,” he reduces this complex economic and social problem, oddly enough, to the evils of distilling and luxury, two of his usual objects of moral censure. However, Wesley’s understanding of ministry to the poor is valuable and remains relevant to contemporary leaders, not in terms of its critical awareness of social structures, but in terms of the love of God and humanity that must be wed to such an awareness. Wesley’s thought, then, can indeed make a much-needed contribution to the resolution of modern social and political problems, but, in the end, this contribution can only be partial. Cf. Jackson, *Works*, 11:57-59.

**DECONSTRUCTING EPISTEMOLOGICAL  
CERTAINTY IN THEOLOGY: AN ENGAGEMENT  
WITH WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM'S *CANON AND  
CRITERION IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY*<sup>1</sup>**

by

**Stanley J. Grenz**

In his magisterial work, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (N.Y.: Clarendon/Oxford, 1998), William J. Abraham, Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology, narrates the history of the understanding of canon in Western theology. The basic thesis of this work, which carries implications for the role of scripture in theology and hence for the question of authority, is that a “Constantinian fall” in the realm of theological method occurred when theologians forsook the original sacramental or soteriological understanding of canon and chased after the Pied Piper of epistemology, understood as “the quest for absolutely sure and certain foundations of knowledge” (p. 48). That is, theologians exchanged the canonical heritage as mediating an encounter with God for theories of knowledge “which sought to explain by means of a theory of reflective rationality how they could claim to possess genuine knowledge of the God they worshipped and served” (p. 470). When this occurred, Abraham claims, ecclesial canonicity gave way to epistemic normativity. The main task of *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* is to trace this historical development from the patristic era to the present.

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<sup>1</sup>This book by William J. Abraham was chosen by the Wesleyan Theological Society as the 2001 winner of the Timothy L. Smith and Mildred Bangs Wynkoop Book Award.

## Back to Canon

Like all good historians, Abraham is not interested in the past for its own sake. Instead, his primary concern is with the present. He is convinced that the contemporary demise of classical foundationalism marks the exhaustion of the dominant trajectory in Christian theological history, characterized as it is by an epistemological fixation. Rather than being despondent at the prospect of the end of this type of foundationalism, however, Abraham views the current situation as an opportunity for a recovery of the original canonical understanding, which in turn could spark an impulse toward a more appropriate or richer account of the epistemology of theology. The ultimate goal of *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, therefore, is to contribute to this post-foundationalist renewal.

Although it addresses this broader agenda, Abraham's book focuses primarily on the humbler task of recounting theological history. Crucial to the entire narrative is the author's reading of the situation of the early church. He is convinced that Christians in general and Christian thinkers in particular initially conceived of scripture as one aspect of a larger canon, and not as itself constituting an epistemological criterion. As an aspect of canon, scripture, to cite Abraham's words, "functions to bring one to faith, to make one wise unto salvation, to force one to wrestle with awkward questions about violence and the poor, to confront those in sorrow, and to nourish hope for the redemption of the world" (pp. 6-7). In short, in the early church, scripture was construed "as first and foremost a means of grace," rather than primarily as "an epistemic norm of morality and of theology" (p. 7).

Abraham concedes that the transition from canon to criterion was "natural." Nevertheless, in his estimation, this does not mean that the move was correct (p. 8). On the contrary, he is convinced that a great price was paid in the process, a conclusion that he believes is born out by subsequent theological history, especially in the West. In Abraham's estimation, the demise of the "canonical symphony" that had developed in the early church "helped precipitate a massive epistemological crisis for Christian intellectuals" (p. 21). This crisis, in turn, opened the door for the kind of foundationalist approach to epistemology that emerged in the Enlightenment and that has characterized the "series of dead ends" he finds in modern theology. Abraham's interest in confirming this thesis



leads, as a matter of course, to a telling of the story that is largely negative in tone.

Viewed from another perspective, however, Abraham's agenda supports a program of retrieval, which reflects another strand of thought that has characterized much of Protestant theology throughout its history but has gained a renewed urgency in the wake of the postmodern dismantling of the modern project. In *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, Abraham adds his voice to the growing chorus of thinkers who suggest that the way through the current malaise is to go back, that is, to undo the damage precipitated by the wrong turn made at a crucial fork in the theological road. Despite their agreement that the way forward is backward, advocates of the strategy of retrieval are not in agreement regarding the precise point when the fateful error was made, and hence they differ as to how far back we must go.

In this conversation Abraham emerges as a kind of radical. In contrast to the recent proposals of certain other "retrievalists," he does not believe that we can solve the current crisis by simply returning to Puritan New England or to the Reformation. Nor is he advocating that we merely elevate the glory days of the unified church before the Great Schism in some naive or uncritical manner, a romantic idea that has gained popularity in certain circles. Although his sympathies clearly rest with this option, Abraham offers a profound understanding as to why theology must retrace its steps back to the patristic era. He argues that the forsaking of the idyllic realm of Eden was tied up with the canonical division between East and West, initially symbolized by the addition of the *filioque* to the creed. In his estimation, this addition marked the first stage in a trajectory in the West that effectively removed the locus of theological reflection from the quest for spirituality and placed it within the realm of the academic search for knowledge (p. 69). Hence, it launched, at least symbolically, the move to *scientia*, the changing understandings of which comprise a kind of scarlet thread running through theological history from as early as the Middle Ages to the present. For Abraham, therefore, the way forward is not merely back to the patristic era, but back to the understanding of canon that he finds prevalent during the early days of the church.

I will not engage with the twists and turns of Abraham's narrative of theological history. I leave that important task to historians of theology who are far better equipped to appraise the details of Abraham's rendition

of the historical score than I am. Above all, I will leave it to others to determine the extent to which his is an appropriate portrayal of the patristic understanding of both “canon” and “criterion,” a portrayal so crucial for his characterization of the book’s thesis. Let it suffice for me to say that, apart from this caveat, taken as a whole I find *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* to be a brilliant recounting of the story of Christian theological method.

Instead of pursuing the question of historical portrayal, I want to raise two larger and related meta-questions about the book, spending most of my time on the second. First, I come away from *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* with the sense that in his conclusion Abraham retreats from the bold thesis that he set out to confirm. He devotes almost the entire book to his narrative of the dire consequences of creating a theology enamored with epistemology. But just when we anticipate that our beloved preacher will drive the point home and call his parishioners to walk the aisle, repent of their fixation on criterion and vow that they will follow the pathway of canon, his passion seems to cool. Hence, Abraham concludes on the penultimate page of the volume that “the canonical heritage of the Church encourages, rather than inhibits, the pursuit of epistemic questions” (p. 479). He even goes so far as to give Christian communities the liberty “to develop and even canonize this or that epistemology” (p. 479), so long as they avoid the potential pitfalls that such a move involves.

Rather than calling for the abandonment of the epistemology of theology, therefore, in the end Abraham emerges as the eternal optimist. He anticipates future progress in this field of endeavor. But his optimistic stance appears incongruent with the pessimistic tone of the narrative. This leaves me with the gnawing question: What basis can he possibly find in his largely negative narrative of theological history for being so sanguine about the future prospects of the epistemology of theology?

Far weightier, however, is my second query. I come away from *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* wondering about the details of the actual proposal our author is advocating. I must admit that I found a bare-bones sketch of just such a proposal in the book. I learn from the work that Abraham’s canon is bigger than scripture, for it includes a “network of materials, persons, and practices” (p. 470) which together comprise “a means of grace given by God to be received through the working of the Holy Spirit” (p. 477) and “which are to function together in har-

mony for the welfare of the Church and for the salvation of the world” (478). But further than this four-line statement, Abraham appears reticent to go, at least in this volume.

I raise this matter only reluctantly. I realize that in a treatise running a mere 420 pages an author can barely recite the historical narrative, let alone set forth a complete agenda for the future. And I do not want to be guilty of criticizing Abraham for not writing a book that he did not set out to compose. Furthermore, I have a hunch that *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* might function as a prequel to a more constructive proposal. In view of the uncompleted work that the book anticipates, therefore, let me abandon the posture of reviewer, in which these paragraphs to this point have been cast, and muse briefly as to the implications of Abraham’s narrative for evangelical theology and for a specifically evangelical constructive proposal. I will limit these musings to two brief aspects of such a proposal.

### Beyond Criterion

I suggest that the tale told in *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* calls first for an outlook toward theology that views it more as *sapientia* than as *scientia*, to draw from a distinction brought back into the conversation by Ellen Charry<sup>2</sup> but advocated by a variety of theologians across the theological spectrum and about which I too have written.<sup>3</sup> The move to wisdom has far-reaching implications for evangelical theology. For example, the rediscovery of the focus on *sapientia* stands as a reminder of the practical character of theology.

Abraham narrates how theologians in the modern era, including evangelicals, have sought to fit their craft within the Enlightenment project and to view theology as a science. According to this model, the theologian applies the scientific method to the deposit of revelation so as to discover the one, complete, timeless body of right doctrine, formulated as

<sup>2</sup>Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>See Stanley Grenz, “An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context,” *Didaskalia* 9/2 (Spring 1998), 1-16. Also see Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty-first Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 61-85; Stanley J. Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism,” in John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *Evangelical Futures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 107-136.

propositions that supposedly comprise the facts of theology. Theology does have a cognitive dimension, of course. Nevertheless, more than being a science in the Enlightenment sense of the term whose goal is the amassing of knowledge, theology is a practical discipline, the *telos* of which is wisdom. Theology seeks to provide the intellectual foundation for Christian proclamation and for Christian living. Theological reflection assists in the missiological task of facilitating the process of others meeting the God who in Christ offers salvation to all, and it serves the ecclesial task of facilitating the process of creating a community of disciples who are being shaped by the biblical story of Jesus.

To this end, theological reflection moves beyond *stating* beliefs; it explores the “tapestry” of the Christian canon, to cite Abraham’s apt description. But, I would add, it does so with the goal of hearing the voice of the Spirit instruct the community gathered around the text so that believers can learn and live out what it means to be the community of Christ in the contemporary context.<sup>4</sup> The goal of theological reflection is a truly godly spirituality and obedient discipleship. In short, good theology always makes a difference in how we live. As the old Pietists used to say, true theology always moves from “head” to “heart” and to “hand.”

The move to wisdom also marks a reminder of the ecclesial context of theological reflection. The Enlightenment effectively took theology out of the church and put it into the academy, insofar as theologians believed that they could now emancipate doctrine from the competing confessional churches and discover the one, ecumenical theology. Drawing water from the same well of Enlightenment rationalism, evangelical theologians generally pitch their theologies as being generically evangelical, rather than self-consciously confessional. Or if they do reintroduce the confessional element, they do so in a manner that elevates the evangelical coalition to quasi-ecclesial status, rather than viewing it as a renewal movement within the wider church. This is at least symbolically evident in the fact that many evangelical theologians carry out their vocation in non-denominational seminaries or in schools that downplay their denominational connections.

While the quest for a generic, non-denominational theology brings certain advantages, it also exacts a cost. It risks buying into an Enlighten-

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<sup>4</sup>For a fuller delineation of this proposal, see Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 114-118.

ment-influenced model that treats the pursuit of knowledge as a detached, objective enterprise carried out by neutral observers. According to this model, in theory anyone, regardless of faith stance or the lack thereof, could be a modern theologian, even a modern *evangelical* theologian. For in the modern view, a theologian is simply someone who engages in the task of discovering objective knowledge about God that lies “out there” waiting to be discovered. Moreover, when viewed as *scientia*, theology becomes a task reserved for the theological scientist, the skilled specialist.

In contrast to this kind of modernist outlook, the proposal arising out of Abraham’s work would suggest that theology can only be properly understood within the context of the life of the people of God. Ultimately, theology can only be engaged in “from within” the ecclesial community. And theological reflection is ultimately the privilege of the faith community, with the vocational theologian functioning as servant to the wider fellowship.

I suggest that the constructive proposal toward which Abraham is pointing entails a second aspect as well. It takes seriously the importance of tradition in theological reflection far more than Protestants in general and evangelicals in particular have historically wanted to admit. The evangelical movement harbors an ambiguous relationship to church tradition, understood as the reservoir of theological reflection and ecclesial practices beginning in the post-apostolic era and extending to the recent past. Yet since the 1970s, a growing chorus of evangelical voices has come to bemoan the ahistorical amnesia of the movement.<sup>5</sup> With the publication of *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, Abraham’s name can be added to the list of singers in this choir.

Despite what some historians suggest, the severest attack on the concept of tradition did not come in the Reformation itself, but in the Enlightenment, as the appeal to reason that characterized the Age of Reason provided a powerful acid that effectively dissolved the role of tradition in theology. Enlightenment thinkers declared that the best approach to knowing, including theological knowing, is to cut oneself loose from the influence of tradition in order to pursue knowledge in an objective, dispassionate manner, unencumbered by the authorities of the past. Evangelicals who reject categorically the concept of tradition may discover to

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<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Daniel H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

their chagrin that they are reflecting more of an Enlightenment spirit than the teaching of the Reformers or the stance of early evangelicals such as John Wesley.

Having said this, however, I must quickly add that the introduction of tradition into the theological conversation raises a host of thorny difficulties. With good reason, evangelicals instinctively recoil from any suggestion that tradition should be given a place above or even alongside of scripture in the theological task. Moreover, calling for a renewed interest in tradition may simply substitute one type of foundationalism for another, as tradition is evoked as the “lost” foundation for theology. Abraham is not advocating this, of course. But any evangelical proposal that takes his narrative seriously must work through these difficulties. And despite the advantages it promises, Abraham’s expansion of “canon” beyond the boundaries of scripture introduces potential problems that must be tackled, including the question of the relationship of other dimensions of canon to scripture as the *norma normata*, before it can win a positive response.

### **Future Agenda**

Although sketching an evangelical theology of tradition(s) lies well beyond the scope of these paragraphs, allow me to voice one suggestion.<sup>6</sup> The Reformation elevation of Word and Spirit indicates that the way forward lies in an exploration of the possible connection between the Spirit and tradition. The pathway to such an understanding, however, proceeds indirectly, via ecclesiology. This move results in a pneumatological-ecclesiological understanding of tradition, that declares that the same Spirit whose work accounts for the formation of the Christian community empowers it to accomplish the Spirit’s purposes. One such Spirit-endowed task was the production and authorization of the biblical texts. This in turn was connected to the process of “traditioning,” to cite Avery Dulles’ term,<sup>7</sup> that preceded the canonization of scripture and has continued throughout the church age. As the deposit of this ongoing “traditioning” process, “tradition” is in a certain sense the product of the Spirit’s ongoing work in directing each successive contemporary embodiment of

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<sup>6</sup>For a fuller delineation of this proposal, see Grenz/Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 114-118.

<sup>7</sup>Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (N. Y.: Crossroad, 1992), 96.

the community by speaking through scripture. As such, it offers a resource to the church today in its task of being a scripture-formed, Spirit-endowed people.

This leads me back to the volume at hand. In *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, Abraham has given us an archeology of the modern epistemology of theology. His retelling of the history of theological method effectively serves to undercut the centuries-long fixation on the pursuit of an epistemologically-focused theology. In short, Abraham has deconstructed the reigning paradigm of theology with its focus on epistemic certainty. He has, if you will, cleared the theological deck.

Deck-clearing, however, can never serve as the be-all and end-all of theological work. As many of us have learned from personal experience, a cleared deck invariably attracts an even greater pile of clutter. Rather than being an end in itself, deconstruction is merely the necessary precursor to, and the step that opens the way for a renewed commitment to the task of construction. Abraham has masterfully accomplished the former. He has cleared the theological deck of modern theology, even the deck of modern *evangelical* theology. In so doing, he has opened the way for an engagement with the task of refurbishing our methodological cruise ship, not only in a more promising manner but also with a greater sense of urgency.

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## A RESPONSE TO STANLEY GRENZ

by

William J. Abraham

Few authors receive more pleasure than to receive a probing and fair review of their work. This is exactly how it stands for me with the carefully nuanced analysis provided by Stanley Grenz. With an exception to be noted shortly, Grenz has gotten hold of my central claims and grasped their significance for contemporary theology. Indeed, in some ways he may well have understood what I am doing better than I do. Besides, he has written a wonderfully elegant response that explores the implications of my work for the future. In my reply, after a couple of preliminary remarks about the origins of my work, I shall question the place of foundationalism in my proposals and indicate how far I want to join the happy chorus of renewalists that Grenz has identified.

My book *Canon and Criterion* (Oxford, 1998) represents fifteen years of work trying to sort out the crucial questions that swirl around the problem of authority in theology. I began thinking about this after two initial books on inspiration and revelation. The topic of authority seemed the natural follow-up. I quickly realized that far more was at stake than was recognized in conventional treatments of the subject. So I decided to take detours into other areas, all the while keeping the issue of authority on the back burner. This proved to be extremely fruitful. The breakthrough came when I was teaching a course tracking the interaction between theology and philosophy across the millennia. It was then that I realized how far modern philosophy, especially modern epistemology, was really unintelligible once it was severed from its roots in theological disputes and commitments. The severing is now standard fare, given the secularization of the academy; earlier theological origins are simply ignored or displaced. What especially amazed me was how far early modern epistemology in crucial figures like Descartes and Locke was both a response to and transposition of earlier positions in the epistemology of theology. Not surprisingly, their work looped back into theology, leading to a displacement of extremely important earlier themes and concerns.

Extensive reading in the patristic period complemented this work. Two things in particular got my attention as I pursued the history of evangelization. First, the church reached agreement on much more than its canon of scripture. This was what led me to think of a canonical heritage of persons, practices, and materials. Moreover, it was clear that the rule of faith or the canon of truth was absolutely pivotal in catechesis and spiritual formation. Second, I was almost awestruck by the lack of agreement on epistemology and the readiness to treat epistemology as secondary, compared, say, to the Trinity and the Incarnation. Theologians deployed various epistemic proposals, but there were no canonical or agreed commitments in this domain. I remain acutely aware that my treatment of these matters, while it is crucial to the story I tell, requires much more work. One of my hopes is that historians will become more sensitive to the complexity, and that they will be more careful about the half-baked epistemological concepts they sometimes deploy.

This observation pertains also to the way we handle the fate of classical foundationalism in contemporary theology. At this point Grenz and I differ. We agree that classical foundationalism is pretty much dead; but I am not necessarily calling for a post-foundationalist renewal, even though



I think that much good can come from this experiment. The danger, as I see it here, is that we may simply be continuing in business as usual, that is, looking for one more turn of the epistemological crystal ball for our theological salvation. Moreover, we would also be agreeing that foundationalism in itself has no future epistemologically. The evidence does not support this. The mistake here is to confuse classical foundationalism with foundationalism. There are versions of foundationalism that have not been overturned by the demise of classical foundationalism, as the different proposals of Swinburne, Plantinga, Alston, and Audi make very clear. In my judgment, it is crucial that theologians be aware of this and not rush too quickly to the next move in epistemology as the way forward for theology.

Incidentally, I am puzzled by Grenz's desire for me to work through the question of the relationship of other dimensions of canon to scripture as the *norma normata*. My central argument is that this sort of enterprise is fraught with unforeseen dangers and insuperable difficulties. There are important epistemological issues to be resolved, but this is not the way I want to proceed. What is fascinating about Grenz is that at this point he is implicitly supporting foundationalism within theology. Has he missed the full force of my point that classical foundationalism eventually failed in theology before it was picked up in secular epistemology and failed there too? Does he still want to keep some kind of foundationalism in place in theology after all?

Because of these differences, I am a little wary of signing on to *sapientia* as the way ahead. I can agree with nearly everything Grenz builds into this project. Indeed, I applaud unreservedly the move to recognize the practical dimension of theology, its ecclesial context, its missiological significance, its confessional nature, and the like. However, *sapientia* has a strong epistemological ring to it, and the last thing I want to do is to switch simply from *scientia* to *sapientia*, for this too would perpetuate the standard journey whose dead-ends my book is at pains to delineate. I envisage a whole range of epistemic positions and insights being deployed by theologians. Indeed, as my last chapter indicates, I think that the epistemology of theology is a thriving enterprise. Retrieving a more patristic outlook fits with this, for what I see there is the ability of theologians to live with and draw from a variety of positions. I expect some theologians to make their own contribution to epistemology.

Grenz is a little puzzled by my optimism at this juncture. I think that this optimism is entirely justified. The last fifty years have been extraordi-

nary in the field of epistemology; there has been a freshness, vigor, originality, and brilliance unmatched since the dawn of the Enlightenment. Christians who are superb professional philosophers have done much of this work. Despite this, many theologians (and I do *not* include Grenz in this group) have written as if little or nothing has been gained, continuing to advance, for example, the notion of criterion as the only relevant concept at issue. Hence I think it crucial that good work be done in this arena, and that theologians be held accountable to the highest standards in their forays into this domain. One of my next projects involves an extended exploration of the nature and place of divine revelation in our knowledge of God. So, nothing I have argued about the dead-ends of modernity shows that we should give up on epistemology. The alternative to bad epistemology and its misuse by theologians is good epistemology and its proper use within theology proper.

Grenz is right to press me on where I want to go in theology proper. That too is a project that is very much on the front burner. I see systematic theology as a sophisticated form of university-level catechesis, and I am pursuing what this looks like currently in courses in systematic theology. In this work I assume the essentials of Christian initiation into the canonical heritage of the church of the first millennium, even though securing such initiation is a tall order given the divisions that exist among Christians and given the barren and emaciated nature of so much of Christian practice. Hence, in tandem with work in systematic theology, I am currently engaged in exploring the nature of ecclesial renewal, as that has surfaced in the western Church over the last fifty years or so. One of the most pressing issues for me is the nature of ecclesiology and how this is to be related to pneumatology. Grenz is extremely perceptive in drawing attention to these issues in the latter part of his review. I look forward to pondering his proposals in this field. I shall keep a watchful eye on the extent to which they involve an overly epistemic deployment of tradition, a trap lurking under the surface for the unwary.

Stanley Grenz and I both agree that my work can rightly be seen as an extension of the evangelical tradition, even though some of my own teachers in the Wesleyan tradition find this impossible and even immoral. Happily, historians are grappling with the fecundity and diversity of the evangelical tradition; I will leave it to others to ferret out the possible connections between my work here and elements that lie buried in the evangelical tradition. More interesting at this point is the claim that I am pro-

posing a “Constantinian fall” in the realm of theological method. I can see why Grenz gets this impression, but I am wary of agreeing to this description. I have long thought that Constantine’s significance has been grossly overrated, that he has had a bad press from the historians, and that in the world to come he will be due apologies all around.

The deeper reason for caution is this. What I have offered is a slice of the history of theology, a slice that concentrates on the twists and turns of epistemology. There is far more to the history of theology than what I covered. Moreover, while I do not take back a word on the fatal effects of the privileging of epistemology in theology, theologians have often in practice been much more insightful and helpful than their theories initially permit. Again and again, they have been able to transcend the bad theories they inherit or invent, even when it comes to matters of method. I did not make this sufficiently clear, but I believe it nonetheless; hence I happily join with Grenz in exploring the full contours of the tradition in search of material that would be of great value today.

# THE “DISCIPLINE” OF THEOLOGY: MAKING METHODISM LESS METHODOLOGICAL

by

Philip R. Meadows

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 (John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Methodism*).<sup>1</sup>

In the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, the church’s theological task is defined as the “effort to reflect upon God’s gracious action in our lives. . .the author and perfecter of our faith,” in order that we might be “more fully prepared to participate in God’s work in the world.” Described this way, theological reflection would seem entirely consistent with the historic Methodist commitment to the coincidence of *doctrine*, *discipline*, and *practice* in the formation of authentic Christian life. The argument advanced here, however, is that this commitment has been compromised, if not supplanted, by a preoccupation with “theological method.” These methodological concerns, cultivated by the inclusion of “theological guidelines” within the *Discipline* and authorized as the so-

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Baker, ed., *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, hereafter *BCE*, vol. 9, Sermon 67, *A Caution Against Bigotry*, IV.2-5.

called “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,”<sup>2</sup> keep us captive to the problematic trajectories of modernity. They obscure our common calling to *disciplined discipleship* by sundering the integrity of *doctrine* and *practice*. I suggest that Methodist theology does not need a clearer account of its “method,” but to recover its true identity as a fruit of disciplined discipleship. This will require a significantly different re-reading of Wesley’s own theological commitments, setting aside the Quadrilateral lens in favor of a more postmodern or postliberal critique.

I argue that in making Methodist theology less methodological, we can be more faithful to the idea of “practical divinity” as Wesley understood it: the *disciplined* formation of “theological competency” that embodies an integrity of *doctrine* and *practice* in the life of discipleship. It is our common identity as Methodists, formed through a common commitment to disciplined discipleship, that will prove and improve the adequacy and catholicity of our tradition through the vagaries of life in the world.

## 1. The Conditions of Modernity

For most people in John Wesley’s day, living under the authority of God meant adopting an attitude of faithful obedience to Jesus Christ, shaped by the scriptural story, through submission to the doctrine and discipline of the historic church. It was this account of authority, however, that the emerging modern mind chose to reject, setting a trajectory that

<sup>2</sup>The two most sustained works on the Quadrilateral are Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990); Thomas A. Langford, *Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991); and Stephen Gunter, Scott J. Jones, Ted A. Campbell, Rebekah L. Miles, Randy L. Maddox, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997). Other treatments can be found in Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 36ff; John Cobb, *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), chap. 8; William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), especially 56ff; and Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), chap. 1. Other useful texts on the question of Methodist doctrine include Thomas C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1988); Geoffrey Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialog* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995); and Henry H. Kinght III & Don E. Saliers, *The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

would dominate theology up to the present time. Seeking liberation from the pre-scientific uncertainties of scripture, and the historically unreliable witness of ecclesial tradition, the primary means for knowing God and understanding the Christian life were relocated from the *transcending authorities* of scripture and tradition (as the means of God's self-revelation to the world) to the *immanent authorities* of reason and experience (as more secure foundations for our knowledge of God, self, and the world).

**1.1 What Method?** At the origins of the modern era lay a project to find indubitable truth about God in an age of increasing skepticism, fueled by the rise of scientific discovery and cosmological revolution. A common starting point is the work of René Descartes (1596-1650), who found that the only indubitable reality was the existence of his own doubting mind (hence his famous *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am"), and made this the rational foundation for a system of thought built with the logic of mathematical certainty. Cartesian thinking, therefore, makes critical reasoning the final arbiter of truth, insofar as truth is construed as propositional certainty, refined through the fires of methodological doubt. It became incumbent on faithful people, therefore, to demonstrate the rationality or reasonableness of presumed divine revelation on these terms, if it is to be taken as true or authoritative. These were terms which the rationalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries chose to accept, and whose conclusions Wesley opposed with uncompromising vigor.

With the Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, came the rise of Deism that sought to demonstrate that Christianity could commend itself to human reason alone, without appealing to the authority of divine revelation. The mechanistic thinking of this post-Newtonian era provided a model of the universe perpetuated by its own inherent lawful regularity, which would yield all its secrets to scientific methods of rational inquiry. Indeed, Deists assumed that the rationality of the universe could only be preserved by removing God from the world, lest God should be providentially involved with it (especially by miraculous interference) and thereby compromise our human capacity to know reality unaided. For Deists like John Toland and William Tindal, many essential Christian doctrines (such as the Trinity, incarnation, original sin, the atonement, and divine providence) which rested upon divine revelation, mediated through scripture and tradition, were ruled out of court at the bar of reason. Knowledge of God and the attainment of virtue were possible through exercising univer-

sally available capacities of human nature (reason, common sense, and natural conscience) that, it was hoped, would yield public agreement in the areas of social and religious life.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a slightly younger contemporary of John Wesley, is a figure of pivotal importance for transmitting the Enlightenment project to modern theology. Kant's own "Copernican Revolution" posited that one's experience and subsequent rational understanding of the world is itself shaped by our own cognitive apparatus. In other words, we are each involved in creating the reality within which we dwell, and the possibility of dwelling in a shared reality arises from the universal nature of these conditions for rationality. Kant responded to the rationalistic optimism of his day by demonstrating that "pure reason" was incapable of establishing the reality and nature of God, since our cognitive apparatus only functions properly within the bounds of ordinary experience, which God must lie beyond. By imposing these limits, he made room for faith only within the context of what he called "practical reason": grounding the knowledge of ourselves as free-willed yet dutiful beings in a compelling but unthematic moral "experience" which is inexplicable without a rational belief in God. Kant's legacy, therefore, has been (1) an enduring emphasis on the fundamental unknowability of a transcendent God, (2) the central role of human subjectivity in establishing the conditions under which reasonable belief in God can be held, and (3) a reduction of faith to the realm of practical reason and moral experience.

Whereas Deism sought to preserve the rationality of the universe by removing God from it (which led to what Wesley called "practical atheism"), Kant's successors have tended to locate our knowledge of God, and even the reality of God himself, within the realm of human reason and experience. The result has been a persistent radicalization of divine transcendence into *absence* turned unknowability, and divine immanence into a *presence* constituted by our own subjectivity. Following Descartes and Kant, therefore, modern theology freed itself from traditional authorities, only by becoming captive to the methodological problem of accounting for how we might know that which is essentially unknowable. Under these conditions, the development of theological method turned to the structures of human subjectivity (i.e. reason and experience) in pursuit of universally secure foundations upon which we can claim to know, and agree upon anything at all—but especially the being and nature of God.

In the paragraphs that follow, we pursue three interrelated arguments. First, United Methodist commitment to the Quadrilateral is indebted to the modern quest for a theological method that can ground both our catholicity and the possibility of consensus. Second, insofar as this passion continues to re-inscribe us into the categories of modernity, so far does it prevent us from recovering Wesley's primary concern for disciplined discipleship, laying an axe to our Methodist roots. Third, such a captivity to the Quadrilateral can itself account for our failure to be truly catholic and the foreclosure of our best means to attain it.

**1.2 Whose Reading?** It still comes as a surprise for most contemporary Methodists to discover that we are actually more indebted to Albert Outler<sup>3</sup> than John Wesley for the so-called "Wesleyan" Quadrilateral; and to discover how thoroughly the Church has been inscribed into this "modern Methodist myth."<sup>4</sup> John Cobb is surely right when he says that the phrase "theological method" is "alien to Wesley, as indeed it was to the Reformers, the Medieval scholastics, the church fathers, and, still more emphatically, to the Biblical writers."<sup>5</sup> Cobb is representative of scholars more generally, however, in reading this lack of explicit theological method as a shortcoming in Wesley's work that we, who are more theologically advanced (i.e., modern), have the possibility and privilege of fixing! Despite this, there is considerable disagreement in descriptions of how the "elements" of the Quadrilateral should be defined and how they should be configured as a method for theological reflection.<sup>6</sup> The work of

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 20:1 (Spring, 1985), 7-18. See also, in the same issue, Leon Hynson, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in the American Holiness Tradition" (19-33); and William J. Abraham, "On How to Dismantle the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: A Study in the Thought of Albert C. Knudson" (34-44).

<sup>4</sup>Ted A. Campbell, "The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral': The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth," in: Langford (ed.), *Doctrine and Theology*, chap. 11. Despite Campbell's reservations about the place of "tradition" in the Quadrilateral, he is one of the contributors to the recent volume co-written by W. Stephen Gunter, *et al*, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral*, which attempts a consensus about how this method should be understood and employed.

<sup>5</sup>Cobb, *Grace & Responsibility*, 155.

<sup>6</sup>So, John Cobb draws upon Wesley in support of a pluralistic reading of the Quadrilateral in which the elements are each "relatively autonomous" (*Grace & Responsibility*, 172ff.); while Gunter, *et al*, prefer to speak of "the rule of scripture within the trilateral hermeneutic of tradition, reason, and experience" (*Wesley and the Quadrilateral*, 142).



William Abraham, however, is almost unique in its rejection of the Quadrilateral as a theological method,<sup>7</sup> and my sympathy with his position will be evident throughout this essay. Our question is, “Can the destructive virus of epistemological theory present at the very core of the church’s life be eliminated?”<sup>8</sup> Abraham argues that the Quadrilateral has become the unofficial dogma of the United Methodist Church, thus competing with, and largely eclipsing, the binding significance of its own doctrinal standards. Thus, the healing of the church depends upon a confessional recovery of those standards that connect us to the historic and apostolic tradition. What I seek to demonstrate here is the connection between this concern and the failure of disciplined discipleship in the Church, but in a way that goes beyond Abraham’s own prescriptions for the recovery of doctrinal confession.<sup>9</sup>

It is, of course, entirely consistent for moderns to think that they are capable of uncovering methodological foundations that remained implicit and unthematic in Wesley’s own theological reflection. It is unfortunate, however, that this preoccupation with theological method persistently

<sup>7</sup>Abraham, “Why we must reject the Methodist Quadrilateral,” in: *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia*, 56ff. See also William J. Abraham, “United Methodists at the End of the Mainline,” *First Things* (June/July, 1998), 28-33; “Confessing Christ: A Quest for Renewal in Contemporary Christianity,” *Interpretation* (1997), 117-129; “Staying the Course: On Unity, Division, and Renewal in The United Methodist Church” (unpublished paper presented to a gathering of the Confessing Movement).

<sup>8</sup>Abraham, *Confessing Christ*, 128.

<sup>9</sup>It seems to me that the confessional stance articulated by Abraham is seriously weakened by offering no clear account of its relationship to the wider practices of discipleship in which it might make sense. What is the deeper significance of claiming that the United Methodist Church as an institution has not fallen into “apostasy,” but a great many of its members have? Especially when that apostasy is itself encouraged by the *Discipline* (cf. *Staying the Course*, 9). Ironically, if Abraham’s argument is correct, that a commitment to the Quadrilateral really does define the United Methodist Church, then it is the Confessing Movement that is *de facto* apostate (at least with respect to the Church’s working “rule of faith”)! My point is that to reject the Quadrilateral without connecting it to a failure of discipleship is in itself incapable of critiquing the existing situation or bearing witness to our historic commitments (6). The shortcoming of the Confessing Movement, then, lies not in its cogent critique of pluralism, nor in its proper summons to doctrinal assent, but in an approach to doctrine which too *easily*, albeit *unintentionally*, repeats the foundationalism of modernity. Insofar as this is the case, it will never be able to beat the liberals at their own game!

lures scholars into mis-reading Wesley as a putative modern,<sup>10</sup> rather than contemplating the alternative; that is, Wesley was working with a very different account of theological reflection which we might do well to recover.<sup>11</sup> What follows is not an attempt to retrieve the true “historical Wesley,” however, but to offer some trajectories for a contemporary postliberal re-reading of the tradition, which I am persuaded would be more faithful to Wesley’s own accounts of the Methodist movement.

If we were to accept the distinction that modernity has created between theology *and* church practice, we would be constrained to say that Wesley was preoccupied with the formation of disciples and not theologians. Alternatively, we might learn from Wesley to understand theo-

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<sup>10</sup>Robert E. Chiles’ work, *Theological Transition in American Methodism 1790-1935* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), helpfully plots a three-fold shift in Methodist theology post-Wesley: “from revelation to reason,” “from sinful man to moral man,” “from free grace to free will.” Wainwright interprets this as a shift from “what had been secondary poles in a Wesleyan ellipse”—reason, the moral character, free will—taking over from “the primary poles”—revelation, the sinful condition, and free grace. Methodism thus “both helped shape and, even more important, allowed itself to be shaped by an American culture that was already subject to the strong humanistic influences of an (at best deistic) Enlightenment. The distinctive Christian message was being lost” (*From Pluralism Towards Catholicity?*, 224). While concurring with Wainwright’s basic conclusion, the argument offered here is that there were no such “modern” poles in Wesley’s thought. The transitions plotted by Chiles represent a long misconstrual of Wesley through the categories of modernity. It is worth noting that the Quadrilateral still remains a relatively little known idea among rank-and-file British Methodists.

<sup>11</sup>Maddox offers some helpful criticism of various attempts to uncover a theological method in Wesley, especially those that present him as a type of scientific observer/experimenter detached from the concrete socio-culturally defined particulars that shaped his preunderstandings (e.g., tradition). He does go on to claim, however, that “if there was a process to Wesley’s doctrinal reflection, it is best described as a ‘hermeneutical spiral’ of becoming aware of and testing pre-understandings” (*Responsible Grace*, 47); which is also the source of the conclusion to the study provided by Gunter, *et al*, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral*. Although there is certainly this kind of doctrinal awareness in Wesley, Maddox most helpfully notes that “Wesley’s reconsiderations of theological convictions were rarely methodical in the classic academic sense: he dealt with them drawing on the sources and criteria most relevant to the particular situation or audience; and, he usually only dealt with the specific aspects of a doctrine at issue. These characteristics of his theological activity have been considered detriments in the past. By contrast, they are exactly what is expected of (and desired in) theology pursued as a practical discipline” (*ibid.*). We still want to question, however, the way in which these “sources and criteria” are construed, and what it means to be “relevant.”

logical reflection *as* church practice: that the early Methodist commitment to disciplined discipleship was itself the very mode and character of their theological competency. It is ironic that the present attempt to encourage theological reflection in our churches so often defers to the very methodological enterprise which divorced church and academy in the first place.

The closest that Wesley comes to speaking of a “method” comes in the conclusion to his treatise on *The Character of a Methodist*:

I would to God that thou and all men knew that I, and all who follow my judgement, do vehemently refuse to be distinguished from other men by any but the common principles of Christianity that I teach. . . . And whosoever *is* what I *preach* . . . he is a Christian, not in *name* only, but in *heart* and *life*. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written Word. *He thinks, speaks and lives according to the “method” laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ.* His soul is “renewed after the image of God,” “in righteousness and in all true holiness.” And “having the mind that was in Christ” he “so walks as” Christ “also walked.”<sup>12</sup>

Surely this must be the “method” of the Method-ists! To have the mind that was in Christ, and to walk as Christ walked; to cultivate Christlike habits of mind and life in the pursuit of holiness.

Indeed, it is significant that Wesley does not provide a methodology for a discrete activity called “theological reflection,” for it demonstrates how little he is caught up with the skeptical persuasion of modernity. Rather, he preaches *sermons* which embody the teaching of Jesus and the Christian life it calls forth.<sup>13</sup> He provides *rules* for Christian conferencing that keep us accountable to that teaching,<sup>14</sup> and he records *minutes* from conferences on matters of doctrine and practice to provide standards for the emerging Methodist movement.<sup>15</sup> He gives *accounts* of Methodism:

<sup>12</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 9, Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, para.17. Emphasis is in the original.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. especially Wesley’s thirteen part series on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Baker, *BCE*, vol. 1, Sermons 21-23).

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Wesley, *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies* and the *Rules of the Band Societies*.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958-59), hereafter *WJW*, vol. 12, Wesley, *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others*; and, *Minutes of some Later Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others*.

defended as plain scriptural Christianity; distinguished only by a zeal for keeping doctrine and practice inseparably connected; and described as a whole economy of accountable fellowship for making disciples.<sup>16</sup> He offers *advice* as a spiritual mentor and father of the people called Methodists,<sup>17</sup> and he publishes collections of *hymns* and *spiritual reading* to nourish them in all requirements of practical divinity.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, he keeps *journals* and recounts short *histories* that locate the *raison d'être* and the living particulars of the Methodist movement within God's mission to save the world.<sup>19</sup> Wesley's works many not provide a theological method on modern terms, but they do narrate a story in which the teaching of scripture (doctrine), the necessity of accountable fellowship (discipline), and the patterns of discipleship (practice) all naturally coincide.

The work of John Wesley, then, may be read as an attempt to preserve scriptural and historic Christianity against the rising cultural tide of modernity. It would be ironic for present-day Methodists to find in Wesley a support for the kind of Kantian project he sought to save us from.

## 2. The Captivity of the Quadrilateral

Before attempting to provide some suggestions for a constructive postliberal re-reading of Wesley, let me offer a preliminary critique of the ways in which Quadrilateral thinking ties us to the narratives of modernity, and so removes us from the story of Wesley.

**2.1 Suffering Discipline and Securing Foundations.** The liberal-modern "turn to the self" has inscribed generations of people into a culture that prizes individual autonomy and self-possession; and for many theologians, it is this account of freedom that has secured the possibility of thinking reliably about God. Thus, being liberated from the supposedly capricious authorities of scripture and tradition, our critical reasoning and human experience are set free to establish more reliable and intelligible

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Baker, *BCE*, vol. 9, Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist; The Principles of a Methodist*; and *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Baker, *BCE*, vol. 9, Wesley, *Advice to the People Called Methodists; Thoughts upon Methodism*; and *Thoughts upon a Late Phenomenon*.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Baker, *BCE*, vol. 7, Wesley (ed.), *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists*; and Wesley (ed.), *A Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1747-1755).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Baker, *BCE*, vol. 9, *A Short History of Methodism*; and *A Short History of the People Called Methodists*.

conditions for faith and practice in a modern world. Wesley, however, would consider it absurd that Christians would look to human reason or experience as more secure foundations for the knowledge and love of God than God's own Word to us! That Word comes to us in and through the historical Jesus as a call to discipleship: "If any [person] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."<sup>20</sup> For Wesley, any condition for the possibility of knowing God comes through suffering discipline, not a turn to self.

The root of discipleship lies in the teaching authority of Jesus Christ, and our willingness to be teachable, expressed through the obedience of faith that he calls forth. Nowhere is this more clearly articulated than in Wesley's description of Jesus as teacher in his commentary *Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount*. He introduces this sermon series by giving an account of why we should submit to the teaching of Jesus about the way of salvation, and the teachable spirit we are to embody in hearing it:

[Jesus, our teacher, is] the Lord of heaven and earth, the creator of all . . . our Governor, whose kingdom is from everlasting, and ruleth over all: the great lawgiver . . . the eternal Wisdom of the Father . . . the Son of God, who came from heaven, is here showing us the way to heaven. . . . *From the character of the Speaker, we are well assured that he has declared the full and perfect will of God.* . . . All His words are true and right concerning all things, and shall stand fast for ever and ever.<sup>21</sup>

This also accounts for the authority with which Jesus teaches, and the authority of scripture insofar as it becomes a means of grace for disciples of all generations, to sit and learn at their Master's feet. Wesley concludes his commentary on the Beatitudes in the following way:

Behold Christianity in its native form, as *delivered by its great Author!* This is the genuine religion of Jesus Christ! Such he presents it to him whose eyes are opened. See a picture of God, so far as he is imitable by man! A picture drawn by God's own hand. . . . These are indeed the fundamentals of Christianity. O that we may not be hearers of it only! . . . *Let us not rest, until*

<sup>20</sup>Luke 9:23. This verse (or its synoptic equivalents) is one of Wesley's favorite descriptions of Christian discipleship; and the exposition of its meaning lies at the heart of his spirituality.

<sup>21</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 1, Sermon 21, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," Discourse I, paras. 3-4. Emphasis is mine.

*every line thereof is transcribed into our own hearts. Let us watch, and pray, and believe, and love, and “strive for the mastery,” till every part of it shall appear in our soul, graven there by the finger of God; till we are “holy as He which hath called us is holy, perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect!”*<sup>22</sup>

We will explore this important idea of “transcription” in more detail later. Under the conditions of modernity, however, the idea of divine authority as God’s binding revelatory address to humankind has been hard to sustain. The broad reason for this is made clear in Kant’s claim that “Enlightenment” can be defined as freedom from tutelage:

Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. . . . “Have courage to use your own reason”—that is the motto of enlightenment.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, modernity marks the freedom to be self-governed, or self-disciplined, through the use of our own reason, without subjection to other authorities. But, to what extent does our preoccupation with theological method engender such a contempt for the teachable spirit of disciplined discipleship? Although the question of *authority* has been a distinctive element in most accounts of the Quadrilateral, noticeably absent is the idea that our total theological life is oriented toward suffering the discipline of Jesus Christ, the *Author* and *Perfector* of our faith. Rather than asking how this *singular* authority is mediated through a complex relation of outward means (i.e., scripture and tradition) and subjective involvement (i.e., reason and experience), we are frequently ensnared in the methodological problem of defining how a multiplicity of *competing* or *complementary* authorities can be unified to a common end.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 1, Sermon 23, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” Discourses III, IV. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>23</sup>Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in: *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1959), 85.

<sup>24</sup>So, in his book *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral*, Donald Thorsen dedicates a separate chapter to scripture, tradition, reason and experience as distinct but related “authorities” for theology. Gunter, *et al*, however, attempt to designate more subtle “roles,” but the language of multiple “sources” or “authorities” remains present throughout.

solution is often to treat scripture and tradition merely as “theological consultants” for independently constructing rational accounts of the truth rooted in our experience.

The problem, then, does not lie in the enormous difficulty of defining such a methodological enterprise, but that the unavoidable investment of reason and experience with some measure of authority, in the interest of “theological freedom,” is simply wrong-headed.<sup>25</sup> First, the Quadrilateral too easily captivates us to liberal-modern patterns of human autonomy and self-possession that obscure the truth that Methodist discipline is actually *supposed* to bind our theological life in a common response to the teaching authority of Jesus Christ. There is a grave danger, then, that our preoccupation with theological method simultaneously *undermines* the need for ecclesial discipline as it *underwrites* the modern thirst for theological autonomy and self-sufficiency.<sup>26</sup> This, in turn, runs the risk of theological idolatry inasmuch as the revelatory function of scripture and tradition (i.e., as means of grace) becomes reduced to “sources” or “criteria” that can be assimilated by our self-possessed subjectivities.<sup>27</sup> Second, insofar as the Quadrilateral perpetuates the foundationalist assumptions of modernity by securing the very presence and possibility of knowing God in human subjectivity itself, then we will remain mired in the subtle temptations of rational self-determination (or “practical atheism”) and self-absorbed spiritual experience (or “enthusiasm”).

Discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition involved a radically faithful obedience to Jesus Christ, characterized by self-denial, and was embodied in the corporate scriptural discipline of intimate and mutually accountable

<sup>25</sup>William Abraham makes this point well in describing the Quadrilateral as “a hastily contrived shotgun wedding between scripture and tradition, the bride provided by the church, and reason and experience, the bridegroom, provided by the European Enlightenment” (*Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia*, 61).

<sup>26</sup>In the pre-modern era it would have made no sense to speak of theology without discipleship; yet there is no contradiction in having non-Christian theologians in the theological schools of the modern academy.

<sup>27</sup>I fear that this danger remains, in all its deceptive simplicity, by claiming that the Quadrilateral “is intended simply to affirm some self-conscious awareness of the role of all four of these elements [scripture, tradition, reason, and experience] in theological reflection” (Gunter, *et al*, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral*, 129). This self-consciousness is then writ large as a description of Christian conference: “What conference actually provides is *access* to the wisdom of tradition, the *benefit* of others’ experience, and reasoned *interrogation*” (132, emphasis is mine).

Christian fellowship. Theology requires discipleship if it is to escape the idolatrous self-possession of modernity that suppresses the transcendent otherness of God and mutes the divine call for loving obedience to Christ and responsibility toward our neighbor.<sup>28</sup> Only disciplined discipleship is capable of bearing witness to the real presence and real authority of Jesus Christ, in obedience to whom our every thought is made captive. In the Wesleyan tradition, disciples are drawn into the divine presence through the means of grace, and made responsible for answering Christ's call upon their lives in and through the mutual accountability of intimate small-group fellowship. So, as we bind our theological reflection to the doctrine and practice of community, we come to understand that it is actually Christ who does the teaching. The most natural prerequisite for theology, then, is a willingness to be teachable; that is, to grow spiritually in our discipleship means deepening our theological understanding through the commitment of one's whole life to Christ, in and through the discipline of Christ's body, the church. For those with a teachable spirit, such discipline is a complex means of grace that integrates doctrine and practice in the ecstatic movement of our theological life towards God. It is through suffering such discipline that we yield to, wait upon, and wrestle with the Spirit of Christ, our Divine Teacher.

**2.2 Doctrinal Catholicity and Privatized Opinions.** Wesley is consistent in his descriptions of Methodist doctrine as nothing other than plain Scriptural teaching embodied in a few prudential practices of fellowship that are consistent with primitive Christianity. He insisted, therefore, that Methodists were not to be distinguished from other Christians by their "principles" as such, but by the quality of their disciplined discipleship that kept their commitment to doctrine and practice inseparably bound in the pursuit of holiness. This was particularly important because Wesley also insisted on the movement remaining both *ecclesially located* and *ecumenically composed*. Defending the movement against accusations of schism and bigotry, Wesley noted that one circumstance "quite peculiar to the people called Methodists" was "the terms upon which any person may be admitted into their society":

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<sup>28</sup>For a helpful discussion of theological idolatry, see David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 3. Ford draws upon the critiques of modern theology (i.e., as dominated by Western metaphysics or ontotheology) made by Emmanuel Levinas and Eberhard Jüngel.



They do not impose, in order to their admission, any *opinions* whatever. Let them hold particular or general redemption, absolute or conditional decrees; let them be Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Independents, it is no obstacle. Let them choose one mode of baptism or another, it is no bar to their admission. The Presbyterian may be a Presbyterian still; the Independent or Anabaptist use his own mode of worship. So may the Quaker; and none will contend with him about it. They *think, and let think*. One condition, and one only, is required, a real desire to save their soul. . . . Is there any other society in Great Britain or Ireland that is so remote from bigotry? that is so truly of a *catholic spirit*?<sup>29</sup>

So, Wesley organized an ecumenical movement whose *catholicity* was rooted in a form of discipline that integrated plain scriptural teaching with the pursuit of holiness, for people who also remained *committed to their tradition-specific doctrines and practices*. Methodism was to help Anglicans become holy Anglicans; Presbyterians to become holy Presbyterians; and Baptists to be holy Baptists. Wesley's difficult task, therefore, was to define a movement in terms of doctrinal commitment, but without ascribing any particular orthodoxy to the movement itself.

Wesley's sermon on the *Catholic Spirit* has received the most attention as a resource for thinking about the nature of doctrine in the Methodist tradition. Thankfully, many recent commentaries have demonstrated that his apparent ambivalence about "orthodoxy" or "right opinions," coupled with the admonishment to "think, and let think," should not be read as an attitude of indifference in matters of doctrine or practice. What is typically neglected, however, is Wesley's third point, "that a catholic spirit is not indifference to all congregations."<sup>30</sup> Rather, "a man of truly catholic spirit . . . is fixed in his congregation as well as his principles." Lack of attention to this most important point belies a failure to plot the changing significance of specifically Methodist principles in a

<sup>29</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 9, *Thoughts upon a Late Phenomenon*, paras. 9-10. Emphasis in mine.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today: A Study of the Wesleyan Tradition in the Light of Current Theological Dialogue* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), chap. 1; Geoffrey Wainwright, "From Pluralism Towards Catholicity? The United Methodist Church After the General Conference of 1988," in Langford, *Doctrine and Theology*, ch.18; and Knight & Saliers, *The Conversation Matters*, chap. 3.

*movement* turned *church*. The result has been a persistent mistranslation of Wesley's commitment to ecumenically oriented *doctrinal catholicity* in terms of *institutional diversity*, supported by the misconstrual of catholic spirit as a theological method.

Insofar as catholicity becomes confused with institutional diversity, a methodological commitment to the Quadrilateral is not only wrong-headed but self-destructive. The problem can be illustrated by way of a simple syllogism: (1) Wesley used the catholic spirit to describe Methodism's status as an ecumenical movement, not a church; but (2) United Methodism uses the Quadrilateral to express its institutional diversity in terms of catholic spirit; therefore, (3) the Quadrilateral denies the existence of United Methodism as a church! The point is that Wesley's catholic spirit cannot be made a methodological principle of institutional diversity without doing violence to its proper nature since *an institutional church cannot be a self-possessed ecumenical movement*. The Quadrilateral has certainly provided a way for the church to *simulate* the catholicity of a movement, but only by re-inscribing it into the fabric of modernity that today, like United Methodism, is falling apart. On the one hand, the early Methodists understood "doctrinal catholicity" to be a spiritual principle that binds *differently churched* people in a common discipleship. Under the conditions of modernity, however, "institutional diversity" has replaced it as a methodological principle that binds *similarly unchurched* people in a common suspicion of discipline. We confuse these two at our peril!

At the heart of Wesley's vision for the Methodist movement was a belief that Christians should be wholly given over to their particular tradition-specific confessions, and that such a commitment was not only *compatible* with, but *constitutive* of a genuinely catholic spirit which takes the "theological other" seriously. Thus, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Baptists were to be "fixed as the sun" in their judgment concerning the truth of doctrine and practice in their particular "congregations" or ecclesial traditions. Membership in the Methodist movement, therefore, was not meant to constitute one's Christian identity, but to embody the possibility and truth of a catholic commitment to holy living. It would be ironic if, by misconstruing doctrinal catholicity as institutional diversity, a methodological commitment to the Quadrilateral actually rendered the United Methodist church incapable of both doctrinal consensus and ecumenical catholicity simply because there cannot be any theological opinion or

ecclesial tradition that is genuinely “other.” Inasmuch as the Quadrilateral becomes such a totalizing narrative, subordinating all Christians as “anonymous Methodists,” we are lead once again to the very edge of theological idolatry. This problem is present in the beguiling notion of theological “pluralism” as a form of methodological “inclusivity,” not only as the *exclusionary* consequence of rejecting such methodological commitments, but the *inescapability* of being included in its discourse and the silencing of real difference in the process.

The Quadrilateral ensnares us in the methodological principle of diversity through two interrelated moves. First, we have become accustomed to making a false division between “essential doctrine” and “theological opinion,” as though reason and experience could help us abstract a universally livable gospel from the concrete traditional particularities in which it is enfleshed. This problem is, of course, rooted in Wesley’s own deeply ambiguous claim that Methodist doctrine represented the ecumenical essentials of real scriptural Christianity, while tradition-specific variations in doctrines and practice were to be understood as theological opinions and modes of worship about which scripture remains indifferent.<sup>31</sup> We mistake Wesley, however, by reading this distinction as a dialectical

<sup>31</sup>It helps to remember that Wesley typically uses the idea of “opinions” in reference to forms of *church government* (whether Episcopal or Presbyterian, etc.), *modes of baptism* (who should be baptized and how it should be performed, if at all), and *approaches to prayer* (extempore or written forms), and so on. See *Catholic Spirit*, II.2. He does also include traditional specific variations in how “essential” doctrines should be formulated, doctrines such as the Trinity, incarnation, and atonement. Wesley even admits that seriously divergent interpretations of redemption, whether predestinarian or universal, belong to those opinions “which do not strike at the root of Christianity.” The deep ambiguity in Wesley’s claim will be evident to anyone familiar with the historical development of the Methodist movement under the leadership of one with such strong theological opinions! The normativity of certain theological doctrines, especially those of universal redemption and Christian perfection, eventually led to a parting of the ways between Wesley and Whitefield, for example. The mature Wesley famously claimed that the doctrine of “full sanctification” or Christian perfection was the “the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up” (*Letter to Robert Carr Brackenbury*, September 15, 1790). This does, of course, further demonstrate the difficulty of distinguishing essentials from opinions, especially in a missionary movement whose primary constituency was the *unchurched* poor. Ironically, it was this emerging theological particularity, embodied in a set of distinctive practices, that contributed to the shift from missionary movement to church. This history should provide salutary reading for the ecumenical conscience of mission-oriented “para-church” organizations.

opposition that reifies certain doctrinal essentials by making tradition-specific opinions peripheral to Christian discipleship. Of course, such a misreading does support the principle of institutionalized diversity, but only by privatizing theological reflection as a matter of individual opinion or personal preference.<sup>32</sup> This usually leaves liberals and conservatives arguing over what counts as essential and what is “merely” opinion. Wesley, however, begins his exposition of what it means to join hands in catholic love with the following remarkable words:

I do not mean, “Be of my opinion.” You need not: I do not expect or desire it. Neither do I mean, “I will be of your opinion.” I cannot; *it does not depend on my choice: I can no more think, than I can see or hear, as I will. . . .* I do not mean, “Embrace my modes of worship”; or, “I will embrace yours.” This also is a thing which *does not depend either on your choice or mine.*<sup>33</sup>

For Wesley, theological opinions belong to traditions, not individuals; and they are formed in us by participation in an ecclesial tradition, not by the exercise of a “theological freedom” which liberates us from ecclesial discipline.<sup>34</sup>

Wesley expected all real Christians to embrace *both* plain scriptural teaching (exemplified by membership in his movement) *and* tradition-specific opinions (exemplified by membership in a church congregation) as equally essential for the doctrinal work of making disciples in any historic tradition.<sup>35</sup> If I am right, then we must also resist misreading Wesley’s criticisms of “dead orthodoxy” as an indifference to “orthodoxy” in general. Indeed, it would seem that those with a lifeless assent to right

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<sup>32</sup>Maddox is typical of the vast majority of scholars in assuming that Wesley designated “all *individual* theological views as ‘opinions’” resulting from the exercise of reason within the limits of human understanding (*Responsible Grace*, 41; emphasis is mine). It may well be that Wesley considered the variations among theologians as matters of “individual” opinion; I suspect, however, that he would have held the more classical view that a theologian operated within and on behalf of a particular ecclesial tradition.

<sup>33</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 1, Sermon 39, *Catholic Spirit*, II.1-2. Emphasis is mine. It is intriguing that this portion of the text is often omitted by those adducing Wesley as a guide to ecumenical relations. Cf. Williams, *Wesley’s Theology Today*, 15.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Baker, *BCE*, vol. 1, Sermon 38, *A Caution Against Bigotry*, II. Here in particular, Wesley makes clear the ecclesial context of tradition-specific opinions.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Baker, *BCE*, vol. 9, *Advice to the People Called Methodists*, para. 9.

opinions are only as far from true heart-religion as those who have failed to truly interiorize the heart-forming theological opinions of their tradition. In other words, we must not take Wesley's admonition that "right opinion [i.e., orthodoxy] may subsist without right tempers [i.e., true religion]" unless first we acknowledge that "right tempers cannot subsist without right opinion."<sup>36</sup>

Second, a continuing attraction of the Quadrilateral has been the irresistible promise of a methodological neutrality that can transcend and therefore unify a hopelessly conflicted diversity of theological opinions. This strategy can only succeed, however, if such a theological method can subordinate all differences by relativizing them to positions of penultimate or finally disposable significance. This is, of course, the tyranny of theological pluralism. Insofar as the methodological commitments of both liberals and conservatives are indebted to the categories of modernity, it is actually *sameness* not *difference* that becomes the insurmountable problem: conservatives typically seek rational and experiential foundations for securing the authority of scripture and tradition, while liberals use the same kind of strategy for casting traditional authorities into suspicion. The difficulty, then, lies not only in giving a coherent account of how the Quadrilateral is to be employed, but in giving an account which everyone will agree upon!<sup>37</sup> Yet, even to attempt such a description invites commitment to another set of opinions, thus investing the method itself with dogmatic importance, and compromising its self-assigned neutrality. It would seem, therefore, that any account of the Quadrilateral as a theological method must either succumb to the problems of modern foundationalism or it must remain so underdetermined as to be practically meaningless. So, while the Quadrilateral continues to perpetuate the myth of method-

<sup>36</sup>The full text is: "Nay, but I affirm, right tempers cannot subsist without right opinion: The love of God, for instance, cannot subsist without a right opinion of him. . . . But this is another question. Though right tempers cannot subsist without right opinion, yet right opinion may subsist without right tempers. There may be a right opinion of God, without either love, or one right temper toward him. Satan is a proof of it" (Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 10, *Some Remarks on "A Defense of Aspasio Vindicated,"* para. 2). Knight & Saliers have a helpful account of "Why Doctrine is Not Dead Orthodoxy," in *The Conversation Matters*, 36. ff.

<sup>37</sup>The solution, then, cannot be found by attempting a middle way between the pluralism of John Cobb and the outright rejection of the Quadrilateral by William Abraham, as Gunter, *et al.*, suggest in *Wesley and The Quadrilateral*, 12ff. By doing so, Gunter, *et al.*, simply perpetuate the same methodological problems under the auspices of a more authentically Wesleyan reading.

ological neutrality, it must be identified as a fraud of “deceptive simplicity,” as Thomas Langford has so clearly demonstrated,<sup>38</sup> which more or less eclipses the theologically binding significance of Methodist discipline (standards of doctrine and practice) in a *movement* turned *church*.

Unmistakable, however, is Wesley’s conclusion that the catholic spirit is synonymous with “catholic or universal love. . . . For love alone gives the title to this character: catholic love is a catholic spirit.”<sup>39</sup> Catholic love, not methodological neutrality, is capable of sustaining a breadth of theological reflection; and it is through suffering discipline, not commitment to theological method, that a loving character is cultivated. Only by the ecstatic movement of our mutual love for God and neighbor can the theological “other” be embraced; yet only by disciplined discipleship can such ecstatic love be practiced, and doctrinal catholicity expressed (through mutually self-surrendering unity). It is the character of love to be both binding and liberating; indeed, the Spirit sets us free only by binding us to Christ and to one another in Christ. The freedom and richness of our theological life, then, should emerge as a fruit of our common discipleship, in a reciprocal self-abandonment to the teaching authority of Jesus Christ, embodied by a mutually accountable commitment to Methodist discipline.

**2.3 Practical Divinity and Theological Reflection.** The obsession of modernity with establishing secure foundations for knowing and doing has led to a wide-scale sundering of “theory” and “practice” that has deeply infected our theological life. The modern academy has embodied this distinction by becoming the center of theoretical learning, abstracted from the concrete practices that it will finally determine. At the risk of

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<sup>38</sup>Langford, “The United Methodist Quadrilateral: A Theological Task,” in Langford (ed.), *Doctrine and Theology*, chap. 19. Langford’s point is that all four elements of the Quadrilateral can be given such different accounts that its value as a common theological method is fatally undermined: “The basic deception is the assumption that each of the categories is clear and all that is needed is to work out a proper relationship among them” (233). It is somewhat surprising, then, that he still gets lured into providing his own set of definitions, presumably hoping it will make sense to most. For an excellent demonstration of Langford’s point, see the way that Kathy Rudy employs the Quadrilateral in defense of a “pro-choice” position on abortion, and the convincing rebuttal by James Howell: Kathy Rudy, “Abortion, Grace, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” *Quarterly Review* (Spring, 1995), 71-88, and James C. Howell, “Abortion and the Quadrilateral: A Reply to Kathy Rudy,” *Quarterly Review* (Fall, 1995), 321-334.

<sup>39</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 1, Sermon 39, *Catholic Spirit*, III.4.

oversimplification, we can see how this pattern has been replicated in the Christian community when the proper distinctions between seminary and church life, theologians and pastors, pastors and laity, have been unhelpfully interpreted in dualistic terms. The *Discipline* has sought to correct this by stating that the task of theology “is not limited to theological specialists. Scholars have their role to play in assisting the people of God to fulfill this calling, but all Christians are called to theological reflection.”<sup>40</sup> This much is clear, but in defining how “our theological task is essentially practical,” the division is reasserted by the use of language which continues to subordinate practice to theological reflection—if we get our theology right, then presumably right practice will follow. Again, it would be ironic if a methodological commitment to the Quadrilateral, intended to liberate and equip people for theological reflection, actually undermined the requirement of disciplined discipleship by capturing us within the very division of theology and practice that it sought to overcome. Indeed, this danger is only too evident in the lack of explicit attention given to the practical context of our theological reflection in most works on the Quadrilateral, Methodist doctrine, and accounts of Wesley’s theology more generally.<sup>41</sup>

The Quadrilateral effectively sunders theology and practice by providing our modern selves with an interpretive vantage point that transcends the *practical relations* between scriptural revelation, the light of tradition, vivifying experience, and rational argumentation (to use the language of the *Discipline*). In other words, theological reflection becomes an activity abstracted from practice by subordinating these particularities as “sources and criteria” to be read and interpreted by our independently rational selves. This approach, however, only repeats the “synoptic illusion” of methodological neutrality. Indeed, to authorize the modern self

<sup>40</sup>United Methodist Church, *Discipline*, para. 63, section. 4, 73.

<sup>41</sup>So, there is nothing on Christian practice or the means of grace in Thorsen’s work. Similarly, there is no sustained treatment of practice in the more recent work by Gunter, *et al.* Maddox’s recovery of Wesley in *Responsible Grace* offers an oddly abstract account of his “practical theology,” dealing with practice as a separate matter as late as chapter 8. Again, Ted Campbell’s recent book on *Methodist Doctrine* concludes with a chapter on “Methodist Ethos,” but only after first denying the necessity of its presence in such a work! In *The Conversation Matters*, Knight & Saliers do connect doctrine with the practice of Christian conferencing, but it is again rather detached from the wider context of disciplined discipleship.

with such a divine perspective effectively usurps the truly transcendent otherness of God as the means and end of our theological life. This threatens us once again with theological idolatry. For Wesley, however, our theological identity has no such advantage *over* scripture and tradition; rather, it is itself formed by dwelling *within* them.

In a time of great controversy between Christians, Wesley prefaced his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* with the following plea for catholicity in reading the scriptures:

Would to God that all the party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms, which have divided the Christian world, were forgot, and that we *might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his life in our own!*<sup>42</sup>

This text provides us with an important key to understanding how Wesley might have described the activity of theological reflection in early Methodism. The integrity of discipline, theology, and practice is maintained through the metaphor of “transcription,” which we have already encountered in his discussion on the teaching authority of Jesus Christ. In these terms, we are not first called to *do* theological reflection (i.e., *on* and *for* our practice), but we are called to *be* theological reflections of God’s Word uttered to the world (i.e., *in* and *through* our practice). The danger with theological “reflection,” then, is that it too easily reflects our own theological self-possession rather than the ecstatic re-writing of our subjectivity by the Holy Spirit. Christians rightly *handle* theological texts, however, when they do so to the end that their very lives *become* theological texts. The development of theological competency does not lie in a transcending mystery of multiple sources, but in a transforming participation in our Master’s call to common discipleship. I suggest this is why testimony was such an important ingredient of early Methodism: not because it enabled people to explore their own inner spiritual states, but because the lives of those who proved the truth of the gospel in their own experience became spiritually potent theological texts worthy of transcription. It is for this reason that Wesley included a great number of spiritual biographies of those “experienced in the ways of God” (but whose own inner

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<sup>42</sup>Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 14, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, preface, para. 9. Emphasis is mine.



experiences have long since been forgotten) among the works he revised and abridged for general readership among Methodists.

Of particular interest, however, is Wesley's preface to his edition of Thomas a Kempis' *The Christian's Pattern: or, a Treatise of the Imitation of Christ*, where he included directions for how to read "this (or any other religious) treatise":

First: Assign some stated time every day for this employment. . . . Secondly: Prepare yourself for reading . . . by fervent prayer to God, that he would enable you to see his will, and give you *a firm resolution to perform it*. . . . Thirdly: Be sure to allow time for the enlightenings of the divine grace. To this end, recollect, every now and then, what you have read, and *consider how to reduce it to practice*. . . . Fourthly: Labour to *work yourself up into a temper correspondent with what you read*; for that reading is useless which only enlightens the understanding, without warming the affections. . . .<sup>43</sup>

In the preface to his *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament*, Wesley combines this practice of spiritual reading with the idea of transcribing the Word, as the means and end of searching the scriptures:

[I]t is no part of my design to save either learned or unlearned men from the trouble of thinking. . . . On the contrary, *my intention is to make them think, and assist them in thinking*. This is the way to understand the things of God: "Meditate thereon day and night;" so shall you attain the best knowledge, even to "know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." . . . Will there not then be all "that mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus?" And in consequence of this, while you joyfully experience all the holy tempers described in this book, you will likewise be outwardly "holy as He that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation."<sup>44</sup>

The theme of transcription is closely related to the idea of "practical divinity" in Wesley's work. Together they describe the intimate connec-

<sup>43</sup>Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 14, *The Christian's Pattern; or, a Treatise of the Imitation of Christ*, preface, IV.1-6.

<sup>44</sup>Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 14, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, preface, para.17. Emphasis is mine. Immediately following this he outlines a pattern for reading the scriptures which is clearly based on the preface to a *Christian's Pattern*.

tion between the teaching authority of Jesus Christ and the cultivation of spiritual wisdom in his disciple, mediated through scripture and tradition.

In *A Christian Library*, which he designates as a “complete body of practical divinity,” John Wesley records the teaching of “those burning and shining lights . . . whom the Spirit of God endued with the truest wisdom, and taught to understand even the deep things of God.”<sup>45</sup> He endeavored to make a collection in which every part might “conspire together to make ‘the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work.’ ”<sup>46</sup> To that end he provides a diachronic reading scheme of theological texts from the early church to contemporary times, as a historically connected chain of authors who effectively transcribed the gospel through their lives. First, the Apostolic Fathers “were themselves of a very eminent character in the church” and “had a most comprehensive and perfect knowledge of the faith as it is in Jesus.” Second, the Martyrs, in whom we “see this Christianity reduced to practice,” and from whom we should learn to be “not almost only, but altogether, Christians!” Third, the Puritans “who sprung up, as it were, out of their ashes” who speak of Christ “as those that have seen his glory” and “lead us by the hand in the paths of righteousness, and show us how, in the various circumstances of life we may most surely and swiftly grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Wesley concludes with a number of contemporary works and an edited version of Clark’s *Lives of Eminent Persons*.

Again, in the preface to *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, Wesley describes not only the nature of hymns as theological texts, but the pattern of their particular embodiment in the hymnal itself as a transcription of real Christian experience gathered from and for the mature Methodist movement:

[The Hymn Book contains] all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason. And this is done in a regular order. The Hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is, in effect, a little body of experimental and practical divinity.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 14, *A Christian Library*, preface, para. 2.

<sup>46</sup>Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 14, *A Christian Library*, preface, para. 9.

<sup>47</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 7, *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, preface, para. 4.

Wesley opens his earliest collection of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* with an account of scriptural Christianity as a “social religion,” meaning that our spiritual maturity comes not by solitary contemplation but when we are “knit together” in Christian fellowship: “Ye are taught of God ‘not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is;’ but to instruct, admonish, exhort, reprove, comfort, confirm, and in every way ‘build up one another.’”<sup>48</sup> In other words, “social religion” was Wesley’s expression for belonging to a Methodist society.

This leads us to the *General Rules*, one of Methodism’s most important theological texts from the perspective of practical divinity. As *Rules* of membership for the Methodist “society,” they defined the “social context” for Methodist theological life, and the pattern of their theological reflection: “all which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these, we know, *his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart.*” Here we have the means in which the Spirit creates a “public space” of mutual confession and accountability; which simultaneously dispossessed its members of theological self-sufficiency as it directed the formation of Christian self-understanding and expression, in and through the practices of discipleship.

The modern appeal to “relevancy” is persuasive only because it plays into the hands of ready-made interpretive selves, shaped by the narratives of modern culture embedded in our wider “social contexts.” Under these conditions, we become individual “meaning makers” with a seemingly priceless freedom to render the received wisdom of scripture and tradition “practically relevant” to our many contexts of experience. The problem with this is not simply the danger of accommodating the gospel to secular culture, but making our theological reflection so self-possessed that it can no longer be an authentically “public” witness at all. Paradoxically, the gospel invites us to *find* ourselves by *denying* ourselves, through suffering a life of discipleship patterned after Jesus Christ. The pathos of theological freedom, then, is to have our self-possessiveness ruptured through the ecstatic re-writing of our lives by the Spirit, in and through the discipline of Christian community. On that basis, the immediate “social context” for our theological reflection is the “public” life of the Church itself, shaped by a *Discipline*, with its particular doctrines and

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<sup>48</sup>Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 14, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), preface, para. 6.

practices, and embodied by a community of *disciplined* people who prove its truth in the witness of their lives.

Finally, we should consider the publication of Wesley's own sermons and journals, tracts and letters, as an exercise in practical divinity, the work of a theological mentor whose teaching is commended by his life and whose spiritual vision we seek to transcribe into our own lives as contemporary heirs of the Methodist tradition. We are to search our way through the scriptures; to read our way through the Christian Library; to study our way through the Sermons; to sing our way through the Hymn Book; and to confess our way through the *General Rules*. All these constitute the mode of theological reflection as a fruit of disciplined discipleship in early Methodism.

### 3. A Cure for the Quadrilateral

The *Discipline* states that “the theological task, though related to the Church’s doctrinal expressions, serves a different function. Our doctrinal affirmations assist us in the discernment of Christian truth in ever-changing contexts. . . .”<sup>49</sup> That is to say, there is an inherent tension between identity and change, or the need for both “faithfulness” and “relevancy” in the church’s witness. This tension is encoded in the distinction between our “doctrinal standards,” protected from change by restrictive rules, and our “theological task” as the faithful but changing articulation of those standards in the concrete particularities of life in the world. In addition, this task must be flexible enough to encourage both a *breadth of theological reflection* and the *possibility of consensus* about what our tradition-specific “opinions” or “theological-doctrine” might be. This is because the question of what to teach includes both our binding doctrinal standards and the historically provisional theological-doctrines that constitute our particular identity as Methodists at any given time.

I have argued that disciplined discipleship should be understood as the very mode of Methodist theological reflection, and that our preoccupation with theological method has undermined such discipleship. If I am correct, then the Quadrilateral cannot adequately embody this tension between faithfulness and relevancy in the Methodist tradition. One significant way this inadequacy gets exposed is in the underwriting of two *competing* views about doctrine through a *common* appeal to the categories of modernity. On the one hand, conservatives tend to have a “cognitive-

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<sup>49</sup>United Methodist Church, *Discipline*, para. 63, section. 4, 72.

propositional” view that understands doctrine as universally true statements of *fact*, unencumbered from the historical particularities in which they are situated. As such, they provide data for constructing rationally founded and publicly verifiable systems of Christian belief that demand our intellectual assent. Indeed, modern accounts of biblical inerrancy and infallibility have typically turned to such rational foundations for establishing the authority of scripture. Under these conditions, the necessity for doctrinal fidelity is made clear, but theological-doctrines also tend to take on the binding status of doctrinal standards, making the question of adaptability deeply problematic.

On the other hand, liberals tend to assume an “experiential-expressivist” view that takes human experience to be the foundation upon which doctrine is subsequently articulated. As such, doctrines become the culturally particular expressions of certain underlying universal *values*, thus relativizing any and all claims to normativity. Insofar as this is also true of scripture, the Bible becomes just one source among many for uncovering the primordial meaning of universal religious experience. Under these conditions, the possibility and need for constant change is made clear, but typically by reducing doctrinal standards to the status of private theological opinion, thereby subordinating faithful witness to wider cultural norms. This leaves little room for the possibility of a corporate confession of faith, and throws the question of Methodist identity into an impossible ambiguity. The “fact-value” distinction, so deeply embedded in modern culture as a whole, has helped to eclipse the intimate connection between theology and discipleship. The need for disciplined commitment of heart and life is clearly peripheral to both intellectual assent and private opinion.

The work of George Lindbeck, however, may provide us with a more faithful and relevant way of recasting the integrity of doctrine, discipline, and practice in the Wesleyan tradition.<sup>50</sup> Lindbeck’s postmodern or

<sup>50</sup>George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984). See also, Knight & Saliers, *The Conversation Matters*, 47ff, and Charles M. Wood who makes some preliminary moves in the direction of such a postliberal account in “Methodist Doctrine: An Understanding,” *Quarterly Review* (Summer, 1998), 167-182. It is unfortunate that Wood misses the subtle distinction between doctrine and opinion in Wesley (claiming that they are largely synonymous) and perpetuates the misunderstanding of opinion as a private matter. So, he claims, for Wesley “*doctrine* is the grammar of the church’s language, while *opinion* is the individual Christian’s conscious understanding of that grammar” (172).

“postliberal” alternative is to understand the nature of doctrine in principally “regulative” terms; that is, the way doctrines function as binding “rules” for governing the life of a particular ecclesial community. First, like *rules of “grammar,”* they shape the theological “language” we speak (i.e., doctrinal standards). This means that our theological competency is to be understood as a form of linguistic proficiency, with a theological “vocabulary” that can adapt to changing circumstances (i.e., theological-doctrine). Second, like *rules of “performance,”* doctrines shape the practices of the Christian community, the means through which our theological competency is formed and sustained.<sup>51</sup>

So, unlike cognitive-propositionalism, religious life is not primarily “a matter of deliberately choosing to believe or follow explicitly known propositions or directions.” Rather,

. . . to become religious—no less than to become culturally or linguistically competent—is to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training. One learns how to feel, act, and think in conformity with a religious tradition that is, in its inner structure, far richer and more subtle than can be explicitly articulated. The primary knowledge is not *about* the religion, nor *that* the religion teaches such and such, but rather *how* to be religious in such and such ways.<sup>52</sup>

This also reverses the order of experiential-expressivism. Thus,

To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one’s world in its terms. A religion is above all an external word, a *verbum externum*, that molds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a pre-existing self or preconceptual experience. The *verbum internum* (traditionally equated by Christians with the action of the Holy Spirit) is also crucially important . . . as a capacity for hearing and accepting the true religion.<sup>53</sup>

Lindbeck describes this approach as “intratextuality.” It is the function of doctrine and practice to inscribe us into the biblical story, which is

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<sup>51</sup>It is telling that Wood, Knight and Saliers can all speak of doctrine in terms of grammar, but do not make adequate reference to performance.

<sup>52</sup>Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 35.

<sup>53</sup>Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 34.

our primary theological text, such that it comes to shape all our thinking, experiencing, and speaking about God, self, and the world. On these terms, reason and experience cannot be taken as universal foundations of an interpretive self which exists prior to the story and interprets its meaning. Rather, it is the story that interprets us, constitutes our rationality, and creates the possibility of authentic Christian experience. Scriptural authority, then, is not secured by affirming its methodological primacy, but by the extent to which we faithfully indwell the biblical story and, in Wesleyan terms, transcribe it through our own lives. Indeed, the question of scriptural authority is not a scriptural question: the Bible itself does not provide the reader with extrabiblical foundations for inviting our trust! In other words, we are not called to prove the truth of the Bible against the reality of an extrabiblical world, but to indwell the truthful reality of a world narrated by the biblical story itself, through our doctrines and practices. It is not difficult to see how the Bible formed Wesley's world of discourse or language of faith: *breathed in* through devotional reading, and *breathed out* through all his preaching and writing. This is also how Wesley leads us to think of Christian tradition: the continuing transcription of the biblical story (which is more than primary) through the lives of the saints in all ages. We cannot dwell within the story without indwelling the tradition (which is more than secondary) that continues to narrate it.

On these terms, reason and experience are not universal categories of an autonomous self, because all rationality and experience is intratextually and socially formed. In his apologetic tracts, Wesley argued for the *reasonableness* of Christianity by demonstrating the scriptural consistency and "intrasystematic" coherence of Methodist doctrine and practice, not by a modern appeal to *universal reason*.<sup>54</sup> This apologetic strategy made good sense in the context of arguments between ecclesial traditions that differed only in matters of theological opinion but rooted in the same scriptural intratextuality. The ambiguity, however, lay in his appeals to those traditions whose primary text was no longer the biblical story, but the emerging narratives of modernity. A combination of Lockean empiricism and Aristotelian logic did provide Wesley with an instrumental understanding of *reason*—as simply a common human capacity for a shared understanding of the world, and not as a universal source of

<sup>54</sup>This would mean that Gunter, *et al*, are wrong to assume that "in this unbridled confidence in the reasonableness of Christianity, Wesley was preeminently a child of the Enlightenment era" (*Wesley and the Quadrilateral*, 134).

authority.<sup>55</sup> His failure to discern the extrascriptural nature of his opponents' *rationality*, however, led him to mistakenly assume that sound scriptural reasoning and "common sense" would win them over.<sup>56</sup> Wesley does begin to expose this difference of particular rationalities, however, by noting that only those with the evidences of faith, to whom the truth of scripture has been revealed by the Holy Spirit, are capable of perceiving the rationality of real scriptural Christianity. Intratextually speaking, it is helpful that Wesley understood that *reason* could not generate faith; rather, that scriptural *rationality* was formed through the exercise of faith. Actually, Wesley's most frequent pastoral appeal to the use of reason, as understanding,<sup>57</sup> is not found in the apologetical tracts, but in his sermons and letters. There he urges people not to become ensnared in worldly reasoning, but to keep their reason captive to scripture—through faithful attendance to Christian doctrine and practice—such that they may prove the truth of its promises in their own experience.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, we should resist reading Wesley's appeal to experience as a neutral or universal source of evidence for theology derived from a ready-made world "out there," but the experience of a world already absorbed by the biblical story, narrated to the believer by the Spirit, through the eyes of faith. Again, spiritual experience is not some unthematic "inner reality" requiring subsequent doctrinal expression, but the disciplined shaping of human affections according to the biblical story, which is interiorized by the Spirit through faithful attendance to the means of grace.<sup>59</sup> This is how Wesley embodied Peter Böhler's exhortation, "Preach faith until you have it!" Thus it was, through the discipline

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<sup>55</sup>Rebekah Miles has provided us with an excellent account of this in "The Instrumental Role of Reason," in Gunter, *et al*, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral*, chap. 4.

<sup>56</sup>Randy Maddox does highlight this ambiguity well through a treatment of Wesley's tract on *The Doctrine of Original Sin* in "The Enriching Role of Reason" in Gunter, *et al*, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral*, 112ff.

<sup>57</sup>It is interesting to note the etymology of understanding as a "standing under," meaning that scriptural rationality requires the subordination of our rational capacity to the rule of scripture.

<sup>58</sup>This interpretation would, again, place Wesley within a more classical view of the function of doctrine and practice. Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>59</sup>This does, of course, give us another way to reconsider the meaning of Wesley's own Aldersgate experience.



of society fellowship, that all those “fleeing from the wrath to come” learned how to think, speak, and feel like real Christians.<sup>60</sup>

Reinhard Hütter helpfully expands on Lindbeck’s postliberal approach by filling out the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in theology. Hütter describes our intratextuality as the “poetic pathos” of theological life or the fruit of suffering (*pathos*), the work (*poesis*) of the Spirit in and through our doctrine and practice. He concludes:

The task is to understand church doctrine in its relation to the core practices of the church as the *poesis* of the Holy Spirit with which theology is pathically related. That is, theology does not constitute itself “poetically”; rather, the *poesis* of the Holy Spirit constitutes the pathos of theology insofar as theology is shaped by the *poimata* of the Holy Spirit, namely, by the core practices of the church and by church doctrine.<sup>61</sup>

Our theological life is soteriologically and eschatologically oriented, therefore, as the Spirit draws us into the pathos of Christ’s own suffering, death, and resurrection through participation in the core practices of discipleship (i.e., baptism and eucharist).<sup>62</sup> Wesleyans will undoubtedly want to affirm all the means of grace established in the *General Rules*, including both works of piety and mercy, as central practices for our theological reflection. It is through the regulative function of binding doctrine, however, articulated in and through these core practices, that the church is constituted as the “public of the Holy Spirit,” the intratextual “space” in which theological reflection takes place. Hütter argues that only by understanding this poetic pathos of theology can we overcome the divisive ambiguity of “theory” and “practice” in modernity,<sup>63</sup> not least because the task of theology itself can become a discursive church practice within its own distinctive “public space.”

Insofar as the Quadrilateral has kept us captive to the methodological commitments of modernity, we have seen that theological freedom gets construed in self-possessive terms, and is made antithetical to suffering the discipline of traditional authorities. In a postliberal approach,

<sup>60</sup>This also provides an alternative context for describing the historic development of doctrine and practice in the Methodist movement.

<sup>61</sup>Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 113-114.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 124-125.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 172f.

however, theological freedom coincides with suffering discipline precisely because the Spirit liberates theology from our self-possession through the pathos of disciplined discipleship. So, as Hütter argues, “theology is a participation in God’s freedom insofar as it is rapt into that freedom by allowing itself to be ‘taken prisoner’ by the work of the Holy Spirit—through enactment of . . . the core practices of the church and church doctrine.”<sup>64</sup>

In the final section, I will argue that Wesley’s understanding of practical divinity can be restated with this view of theological freedom in mind. This restatement will provide an account of Methodist discipline capable of preserving the tension between faithfulness and relevancy in our theological life.

#### 4. A Case for Methodist Discipline

I anticipate that the reader will already have noted that the above postliberal approach bears some close affinities to the reading of Wesley’s theology also offered above. In conclusion, however, I will draw together two common strands for reconnecting theological reflection with practical divinity in the Methodist tradition.

**4.1 Learning the Faith.** To say that all Christians are *called* to the task of theological reflection is too ambiguous to be helpful, unless it is followed by at least two supplementary questions: What makes a Christian *capable* of authentic theological reflection in the Methodist tradition? and, Who is best able to *judge* which theological opinions are desirable to teach?

The Quadrilateral, as an agent of modernity, can be adduced in support of the idea that Christians are universally capable of theological reflection. So, experiential-expressivism points us in the direction of each person’s struggle to articulate their own private spiritual journey, as collectively diverse but equally valuable instances of some universal spiritual experience or putative encounter with God. On these terms, faithfulness typically becomes a matter of finding our own stories in the biblical story. Alternatively, cognitive-propositionalists tend to equate theological reflection with a form of rational argumentation that can render Christian doctrine universally intelligible and applicable to all people in all places. Faithfulness, in this case, is a matter of assent to the unchanging truth of

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<sup>64</sup>Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 152.

doctrinal confessions. It would seem, however, that the practice of disciplined discipleship remains somewhat peripheral to both these accounts of faithfulness in theological reflection.<sup>65</sup>

Lindbeck's postliberal perspective, on the other hand, affords us the possibility of reconnecting doctrinal fidelity with the practices of discipleship:

The proclamation of the gospel . . . may be first of all the telling of the story, but this gains power and meaning insofar as it is embodied in the total gestalt of community life and action. Furthermore, interiorized skill, the skill of the saint, manifests itself in an ability to discriminate "intuitively" (nondiscursively) between authentic and inauthentic, and between effective and ineffective objectifications of the religion. Having been inwardly formed by a given tradition—by, for example, "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), as Paul puts it—the saint has what Thomas Aquinas calls "connatural knowledge."<sup>66</sup>

Why did Wesley provide the Methodists with stories of the saints? It was because they were paradigmatic embodiments of the doctrines and practices at the heart of the Christian faith. In Wesleyan terms, then, we might take the idea of "connaturality" to mean that only those pursuing "the character of a Methodist" (or sanctification) are finally capable of *Methodist theological reflection*, both personally and corporately. Those who are best able to judge in matters of theology-doctrine are not those

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<sup>65</sup> Knight & Saliers also have a helpful account of how we are indebted to Enlightenment thinking for the division between doctrine and practice, and how this continues to be perpetuated by both liberals and conservatives (*The Conversation Matters*, 33ff). The rest of their book seeks to renegotiate this difference through an appeal to Wesley that bears some similarities with the argument presented here. Their conclusion, however, that we should "conference about essentials" appears to perpetuate the confusion about how theological opinions should function in an ecclesial tradition or in an ecumenical movement turned church. The authors make the ambiguous claim that United Methodists will "have to do something that John Wesley neither imagined nor desired: We will have to conference together about the essentials of Christianity and the distinctive doctrines of United Methodism, as well as how we determine what is essential to Christian or United Methodist identity" (56-57). The confusion is evidenced, however, in the genuinely helpful but apparently contradictory statement that United Methodists need not "ask what are the essentials but to reflect on those doctrines that our church has determined to be essential" (57).

<sup>66</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 36.

who have *mastered the Quadrilateral*, but those who have *interiorized the discipline*, who have developed habits (or skills) of thinking and doing that embody our doctrine, and who are thus capable of responding faithfully to the vagaries of a changing world. At an ecclesial level, one might say that the authenticity of Methodist theological reflection is dependent on the extent to which the whole church embodies its own doctrines in practices of mutually accountable discipleship, having its end in holiness of heart and life.

This approach lends support to my argument above that the first qualification for being a Christian theologian of any kind is to have a teachable spirit. Thus, Reinhard Hütter describes the cultivation of theological competency as a lifelong matter of “learning the faith,” which has two basic forms. First, there is “catechetical learning” that is “the initiatory learning of the central configurations of language and traditional activities of the Christian faith.” This is naturally accompanied by “peregrinational learning,” learning the faith as part of our Christian “journeying” in the world that “a person begins anew daily and never really completes.” Learning the faith, then, requires that we develop “the implications of the praxis of Christian faith in various contexts; that is, the person interprets faith with regard to precisely these contexts and maintains faith within them.”<sup>67</sup>

Hütter argues that our theological task is correlated to this twofold practice of learning the faith:

As “catechetical theology,” it is concerned with gradually accommodating a person to the faith praxis (catechetical learning); as “intratextual theology,” it is concerned with maintaining the praxis of Christian faith in the most varied life situations and with interpreting these situations within the context of faith praxis (peregrinational learning).<sup>68</sup>

In classical terms, then, Hütter notes that “every Christian is a catechumen only once—and yet, as a saint in the Protestant sense, that person is always also a theologian in the intratextual sense.”<sup>69</sup> In the Wesleyan tradition of disciplined discipleship, however, the mutual accountability of the Methodist societies presents us with a model for the lifelong combina-

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<sup>67</sup>Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 50.

<sup>68</sup>Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 50-51.

<sup>69</sup>Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 51.

tion of catechetical and peregrinational learning. In reflecting on the development of the Methodist societies, Wesley himself observed a pattern that was “the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity.” Preachers joined together those who responded to the gospel and “advised them to watch over each other, and met these *katechoumenoi*, ‘catechumens’ (as they were then called), apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, as this became embodied in the class meeting, the peregrination of saints had the catechesis of seekers for its immediate fruit. As together they sought “to flee from the wrath to come,” seekers would be *inscribed* into the biblical story as the saints faithfully *transcribed* it through mutual accountability to the *General Rules*. The intratextual functioning of the class meeting involved seekers *finding the faith* (catechesis, inscription) through the practice of saints; while *learning the faith* (peregrination, transcription) was further intensified in the saints through regular band meetings.

Charles Wood is right to argue that “theology begins not with an arrogant effort to ‘make sense’ of a religious tradition by subjecting it to supposedly universal standards of intelligibility, but rather with a patient attempt to learn and explicate the sense already present in it. That may not be all that theology has to do, but it is an indispensable beginning.”<sup>71</sup> As a whole, then, this “learning the faith” comes closer to St. Augustine’s famous dictum, *credo ut intelligam*, “I believe in order that I may know”) than the methodological quest of modernity to ground certain knowledge in the foundations of reason and experience. Lesslie Newbigin uses the metaphor of apprenticeship to make the point:

We do not know anything except by believing something. We have to begin by believing the evidence of our senses, the veracity of our teachers and the validity of the tradition into which we are seeking apprenticeship. These may all have to be questioned at some stage, but we can only question them on the basis of things which we have come to know as the result of this kind of apprenticeship. We do not begin to acquire any kind of knowledge by laying down in advance the conditions upon which we will accept any evidence. *We have to begin with an openness to*

<sup>70</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 9, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, I.10.

<sup>71</sup>Charles Wood, *Methodist Doctrine*, 169.

*a reality greater than ourselves in relation to which we are not judges but pupils. . . .*<sup>72</sup> The proper human relation to the reality with which we have to do is that of learner, an apprentice. All our knowing comes to us through our apprenticeship in a tradition of knowing which has been formed through the effort of previous generations. . . . We are responsible for internalizing the tradition by our struggle to understand the world with the help of the tools it furnishes. In this process the tradition itself develops and is changed. This calls for reverence for the tradition and courage to bring our own judgment to bear upon its application to new circumstances.<sup>73</sup>

In the Wesleyan tradition, faithfulness to doctrine has always been connected to disciplined discipleship; and those qualified to teach have been those who have learned the faith, whose theological lives commended their judgment as spiritual leaders. The recovery of authentic Christian fellowship, accountable to Methodist doctrine, must be a core practice for the apprenticeship of learning the faith in any authentic account of Wesleyan theological reflection.

**4.2 Interpreting the World.** Earlier, I claimed that one of the most seductive arguments for the Quadrilateral is that it provides a method for making the gospel “relevant” or meaningful to contemporary experience and culture. I also argued, however, that it accomplishes this only by handing over the task of theological reflection to pre-existing interpretive selves, capable of rationally manipulating scripture, tradition, and experience as theological consultants. If I am right, then there is a considerable danger of theological idolatry inherent in this approach. In the postliberal view, however, learning the faith means that the order of interpretation is reversed: it is not that we find our stories in the biblical story (as an *interpreted* word), but that the biblical story becomes our story (as an *interpretive* Word). It is not that we come to the story as ready-made interpreters, but that our scriptural doctrine and practice (or discipline) actually makes and remakes our Christian self-identity (as disciples) and provides an interpretive “scheme” through which we experience and interpret the world. Lindbeck says:

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<sup>72</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, “Truth and Authority in Modernity,” in Philip Sampson, *et al* (eds), *Faith and Modernity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997), 61. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>73</sup>Newbigin, *Truth and Authority*, 65.

A scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe. It supplies the interpretive framework within which believers seek to live their lives and understand reality. . . . Traditional exegetic procedures . . . assume that Scripture creates its own domain of meaning and that the task of interpretation is to extend this over the whole of reality.<sup>74</sup>

Wesley puts it this way: “Let the hearers accommodate themselves to the word; the word is not, in this sense, to be accommodated to the hearers.”<sup>75</sup> The primary task of theology, therefore, is not making our doctrines meaningful on the world’s terms, but making the changing world meaningful to a disciplined people through the freedom of our doctrinally bound theological reflection upon scripture. So, “intratextual theology re-describes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.”<sup>76</sup>

From this perspective, we are seriously misled by the Quadrilateral insofar as it lures us into the synoptic illusion of methodological neutrality, by appealing to the modern myth of an autonomously rational and “extratextual” self. The truth is, all of our lives are intratextually determined. The question is, Which text(s) do we indwell? Or, to use Hütter’s analogy, By which text(s) are we taken prisoner? Risking overgeneralization, we might say that the text of modernity is embodied in the practical atheism of secular culture, while the biblical text is embodied in the disciplined discipleship of Christian community. I have been arguing that, insofar as the Quadrilateral has captivated us to the text of modernity, it has undermined the Spirit’s work of making us captive to the teaching of Jesus Christ. To put it bluntly, there is a competition for our souls in the task of theological reflection! If theological reflection occurs at the point where these “worlds” collide, the question then becomes, Which text will be extended, and which world absorbed? My suspicion is that our methodological commitment to the Quadrilateral has served to absorb the biblical story into the text of modernity, thus eclipsing the binding function of our discipline in both doctrine and practice. It is deeply ironic that the Quadrilateral has accomplished this through its insertion *within* the Methodist *Discipline* itself.

<sup>74</sup>Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 117.

<sup>75</sup>Baker, *BCE*, vol. 4, Sermon 137, “On Corrupting the Word of God.”

<sup>76</sup>Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 118.

If theological reflection occurs in the context of those practices that shape our understanding and experience of the world, then of particular concern will be the points at which our Christian discipline is faced with the competing claims of “other texts” on our lives. By definition, a disciplined approach to this cannot be individualistic. Instead, the poetic pathos of theology means that the Spirit incorporates us into an interpretive community so that the meaning of our doctrine is to be found in the communal patterns of life to which it gives birth. From a Wesleyan perspective, discerning what it means to follow Christ occurs through the binding practices of discipleship, in which the Spirit liberates us from private habits of mind and life that are all too easily taken prisoner by the self-possessiveness of modern culture. One of those binding-yet-liberating practices is “Christian conferencing” which, insofar as it is synonymous with mutually accountable fellowship, defines the “public spaces” in which disciplined theological reflection takes place. In early Methodism, this ordinary means of grace extended a continuity of theological reflection between the catechesis and peregrination of disciples in the societies and the doctrinal deliberations of Connectional Conference. The formulation and re-formulation of theological-doctrine was inseparable from the formation and re-formation of disciples.

It is unfortunate that the Quadrilateral has so often trapped us in self-reflexive conversations about theological method, such that our conferencing becomes preoccupied with finding ways to justify diversity, rather than testing the adequacy of diverse opinions against our standards of doctrine and practice.<sup>77</sup> As a practice of faithfulness and relevancy, Christian conferencing did not aim at a diversity of theological-doctrine unified by a common commitment to a supposedly neutral theological method; rather, it aimed at theological consensus about all that was desirable to

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<sup>77</sup>Gunter, *et al*, give an account of Christian conferencing as aiming at a “collective perspective” of all individual participants (*Wesley and the Quadrilateral*, 137ff). This does not amount to consensus, but a modern misconstrual of the “collective wisdom” found in Wesley’s *A Christian Library*, very carefully edited for continuity of content. Such a “collective perspective,” then, becomes a grand resource for authorizing and maintaining a conflicted diversity of individual opinions. This is made possible by making the practice of conferencing a metaphor for the dialogical relations between the “elements” of the Quadrilateral themselves, reinforcing “the point that Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are *resources* for ongoing doctrinal reflection” (141). Emphasis is mine. Not least, this significantly contradicts the purely instrumental role of reason lifted up earlier in the book.



teach. Such consensus was possible because theology in the mode of disciplined discipleship is capable of remembering that the true end of our reflections is the life-transforming presence of Jesus Christ, calling forth responsible love for God and neighbor. This practice does not diminish the breadth of our theological reflection or exclude the possibility of diverse personal opinions in matters of theological-doctrine. What is circumscribed, however, is any privatization of such opinions that would render them incapable of being judged by the corporate discipline of a faithful community. Paradoxically, the freedom of the Christian community to engage in faithful-yet-relevant theological reflection is secured by the very dispossession of such individualism, made possible through the call to mutually-accountable and disciplined discipleship.

As I conclude this essay, I am quite sure that the internal structure of my argument means that its very accuracy will be reflected in its sheer unpopularity! Nevertheless, let me summarize this redefinition of “practical divinity” in the Wesleyan tradition. First, yielding to Methodist discipline is a means for embodying the authority of Jesus Christ over all our Christian life and thought. Second, such a commitment involves the poetic pathos of learning the faith in and through the doctrines and practices of our Methodist tradition. Third, only a well-formed Methodist disciple is capable of practicing theological reflection with and for the people called Methodists. Practical divinity, embodied in our practices of disciplined discipleship, may then be thought of as a continuity of apprenticeship and improvisation that makes possible the non-identical repetition of our Methodist tradition through the vagaries of life in the world.

# JOHN WESLEY: CONCEPTION OF “CONNECTION” AND THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

by

H. O. Tom Thomas

“Connectionalism” is as Methodist a term as you will find. Bishop Roy Short noted, “The primary mark of United Methodism as a church is that it is a connection.”<sup>1</sup> When United Methodists want to touch the nerve of covenantal commitment, they appeal to their sense of “connection.” The concept of Methodism as a “connection” today denotes the inter-relatedness of every United Methodist person, structural entity, and local church.<sup>2</sup> Connectionalism is understood to be a global unity of various local parts of members, clergy, boards, and agencies, and annual conferences bound in a covenant relationship and cooperating in a common ministry and mission. It acknowledges existing diversity while celebrating unity of worship and ministry together.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, from a theological perspective, connection, since the ratification of the Theological Study Com-

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<sup>1</sup>Roy H. Short, *United Methodism in Theory and Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, “Connectionalism: The New Polity?” *The Christian Century* 81 (July 1, 1964), 858-861.

<sup>3</sup>*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), paragraph 112.3. In J. W. Mendenhall’s late nineteenth-century essay on “connectionalism,” he stressed the sense of local parts cooperating to promote the unity of the whole denomination. He stated that connectionalism came to mean “the Methodistic spirit of internal harmony and unity.” See, J. W. Mendenhall, Ed. “Connectionalism,” *The Methodist Review* 74 (1892), 443-450.

mission's doctrinal proposal at General Conference in 1972, has been integrally linked to "theological pluralism." Namely, since then we have celebrated our connectional identity as constituted of radically diverse theologies bound together in a common christological unity.

The interests of this article are twofold. First, we set forth John Wesley's and the early Methodist's conception of "connection." What were the essential, unifying elements constitutive of that which John Wesley recognized and taught as Christian connection? We will find that he conceived of "connection" as fellowship constituted by "the old Methodist doctrine" and "the whole Methodist discipline" under his authority. Second, following from this, we focus on the constituent of "the old Methodist doctrine" in order to demonstrate that it was constitutive of genuine connection precisely as a connection of societal unity, a unity of shared and mutually affirmed Wesleyan doctrine. Further, I argue that, although John Wesley promulgated a theological method of distinguishing between theological "essentials" and "opinions" (referred to as his "catholic spirit"), Methodist connectional fellowship was constituted not in a formula of diverse "theological pluralism" in unity but rather in the doctrinal unity of a mutually-agreed-upon set of theological realities. This study challenges United Methodism's conception of "theological pluralism" of the last thirty years. The contemporary concept is not integral to and constitutive of "connection" as understood and practiced by John Wesley.

### **John Wesley's Concept of "Connection"**

Let us consider John Wesley's and the early Methodists' conception of "connection." John Wesley advanced his analysis of the birth of the Methodist connection and his theological conception of its nature. According to his own report, "hearers," after hearing the saving Gospel preached, asked him if he would talk, prod, direct, advise and pray further with them.<sup>4</sup> Having more persons request this than he could adequately handle individually, he recommended their meeting collectively. In order to answer their needs, he grouped people to "pray together," to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over and to help one another work out each other's salvation.<sup>5</sup> Heretofore, though they had had a prior connection in their common

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<sup>4</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), vol. 8: *Addresses, Essays, Letters*, 250.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

desire for Jesus Christ and to work out their salvation in Him, they had been structurally unrelated. These, who were linked not only spiritually but by their recognized need for prayer, the word of exhortation, and spiritual direction, John Wesley with his authority and under his supervision brought together into a formal, structural relationship. This was the birth of the Wesleyan Methodist “society,” the Wesleyan “connection.”

Having already a spiritual connection with one another prior to John Wesley’s formal structuring of them into a “society,” a “connection,” their external ordering into a formalized “society” realized and externalized their connection with one another. “Connection” was extended when the persons in one society became connected to persons in another society by their common desire for salvation in Jesus Christ and to engage in Christian formation under the authority and leadership of John Wesley. Namely, the Bristol society was connected to the London society in that each society was constituted of persons in Jesus Christ desiring to pray together, hear the exhorted word, and watch over one another under the leadership and direction of John Wesley.

John Wesley himself marks this as the beginning of the “society” and “connection.” In his answer to church critics, he highlighted the nature of “Christian connection.” In short, it was fellowship. “Christian connection” stood in stark contrast to that which “the bulk of the parishioners” in the churches had experienced. He pointedly asked, “What Christian connection is there between them (parishioners)?<sup>6</sup> Who watched over them in love? Who marked their growth in grace? Who advised and exhorted them? Who prayed with them?”<sup>7</sup> Without these, he rhetorically asked, “Are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand?” The lack of these, he contended, was indicative of the fact that Christian fellowship and connection in the churches was “utterly destroyed.”<sup>8</sup>

John Wesley favorably compared his conception of Christian connection with that of the church in the beginning of Christianity. He asserted that what constituted the nascent Methodist connection (praying

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 251f.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 250f.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 251f. What would John Wesley find is the case in United Methodism today? Would he find “the bulk of parishioners” “connected” in his sense of the term? Would he discover that an intentional desire to be joined together, directed, advised, exhorted, rebuked, watched over in love, and prayed with are the primary motivations of the plurality of United Methodists associating with a local church?

together, hearing the word, etc.) was also that which constituted connection among those in the earliest times of Christianity. Hearers of the Gospel were joined together by preachers who did with them as John Wesley was doing with the society.<sup>9</sup> That is, the gospel of Christ was preached and those convinced of the truth were joined together and watched over, prayed for and with, advised, taught, rebuked and exhorted.<sup>10</sup> This was the essence of "connection." This connectional fellowship which was embodied in the Methodist societies was the essence of primitive New Testament Christianity.

Soon after Wesleyan-Methodist connectional fellowship began, it encountered both external and internal theological and disciplinary challenges which threatened connection. John Wesley responded in ways which re-asserted and further brought out the nature and meaning of early Methodism's self-conscious identity as a Christian connection.<sup>11</sup> The responses were issued only to continue to foster what a society so constituted purposed to fulfill: Christian fellowship and connection enabling persons to work out their salvation.<sup>12</sup>

Disciplinary issues challenged John Wesley to develop structures in order to carry out more effectively disciplinary purposes integral to connection and fellowship. Likewise, the doctrinal challenges from the Moravians, Calvinists and the predestinarians, the varying critics of the Church of England and elsewhere, prompted Wesley to set forth the doctrine and draw out inferences which were presupposed in and substantiated Christian connection. He viewed both the disciplinary prescriptions and the doctrinal teaching as constitutive elements of Christian connection. In addition to these, his overseeing authority also became an absolutely integral element of connection.

In summary, the Wesleyan responses to these challenges made explicit what was already implicit in connection. They sought to maintain and carry forward Wesley's vision of connectional fellowship under new sets of circumstances. Namely, Methodist-Christian connection was a fellowship of spiritually-kin persons uniquely characterized by particular

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 250f.

<sup>11</sup>Wesley, *Works*, 250f.

<sup>12</sup>John J. Tigert, D. D., *A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism* (Nashville, Tenn.: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1894), 27.

Wesleyan doctrine, by particular Wesleyan discipline, and under the particular oversight of John Wesley.

### **Role of “The Old Methodist Doctrine”**

En route to discussing connection and “theological pluralism”, I want to show more particularly how one particular constituent, “the old Methodist doctrine,” functioned as an absolutely essential constituent of Wesleyan-Christian connection. From the connection’s inception, alternative doctrinal explications sought to explain and elucidate the theology of their fellowship. John Wesley presented biblical and theological teachings which were presupposed in and which articulated the essence of the identity of those who desired to be saved from their sins and connected together in Christian fellowship. As he addressed himself to such theological subjects as “quietism,” “election,” the cause and condition of salvation, justification by faith, and entire sanctification, to name some, he was constructing a particular body of theology and doctrine that connected Methodists as Methodists. This theology was understood to be Wesleyan-Methodist theology and was constitutive of the Wesleyans unique, shared identity as a connection.

In 1769, as John Wesley contemplated the future of the Methodist connection after his death, he considered how might “this connection be preserved when God removes me from you?”<sup>13</sup> To begin laying the foundation for the continuance of the firm connection already established among his traveling preachers, he suggested “articles of agreement” as follows:

We, whose names are under-written, being thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a close union between those whom God is pleased to use as instruments in this glorious work, in order to preserve the union between ourselves, are resolved, God being our Helper—

1. *To devote ourselves entirely to God*; denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, steadily aiming at one thing—to save our souls and those who hear us.
2. *To preach the old Methodist doctrines*, and no other, contained in the Minutes of the Conferences.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 26; John Wesley, *The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley*, A. M., ed. John Telford, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1960), 5, 143ff.

3. To observe and enforce the whole *Methodist discipline* laid down in the said *Minutes*.<sup>14</sup>

Plainly, continued union for John Wesley was predicated upon, in addition to devotion to God and observation of Methodist discipline, the preaching of the "old Methodist doctrines, and no other." Wesleyan-Methodist connection was constituted in societal union in a particular, strict set of doctrines.

Doctrine's crucial role in constituting, securing, and maintaining connection is again witnessed in John Wesley's establishment of the Deed for legal settlement. Settling the deed and establishing actual control of the preaching houses scattered around England became the occasion to unify and bind legally the isolated chapels into one connection.<sup>15</sup> "Preaching the old Methodist doctrines" was made absolutely integral to the deed that legally established the preaching houses and bound them into one connectional fellowship. Both in the revision of the deed in 1763 and in its final revision in February, 1784, appointment to preach in the preaching houses was restricted to those who "preach no other doctrines than is contained in Mr. Wesley's *Notes Upon the New Testament* and four volumes of *Sermons*."

The same was the case with Methodism in America. In the conferences of 1773, 1780, and 1781, one of the three bases that established union was preaching "the old Methodist doctrine." In the spring of 1784, American Methodism reaffirmed that it would "accept no European preacher" who "did not preach doctrine taught in the four volumes of *Sermons* and *Notes*."<sup>16</sup>

Christian connection in its very nature presupposes sharing a common teaching and particular doctrine that unites Christians in their very hearts and souls. The initial hearers in 1739 who heard the Word of God expounded by John Wesley and responded by seeking his further direction

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 27, 145.

<sup>15</sup>See E. Benson Perkins, *Methodist Preaching Houses and the Law: The Story of the Model Deed* (London: The Epworth Press, 1952), 82.

<sup>16</sup>Some have argued that because of doctrine's inauspicious place in the Christmas Conference of 1784 (among other reasons), doctrine has a subsidiary role for American Methodists. Contrarily, silence speaks more loudly than words. That there is no statement implies both a lack of doctrinal uncertainty and lack of perceived need for further statement. A long, running Methodist precedent partially enumerated above had already established the absolutely necessary place of "the old Methodist doctrines" for Methodist, Christian connection; see, also, Tigert, *Constitutional History*, 136.

were already in some rudimentary theological union. Coming together with others of like mind to hear the Word expounded further would make explicit their Christian experience and inform, develop, and deepen their shared theological understanding. This societal union in a strict set of doctrines, joined in forming the tripartite essence of what was known as the Methodist “connection.” Therefore, one concludes that, for John Wesley, Christian connection without unity in mutually affirmed doctrinal teaching is an oxymoron.<sup>17</sup>

John Wesley’s conception of the role of doctrinal unity in constituting Methodist connectional fellowship calls into question today’s United Methodist construal of “connection” as constituted of “theological pluralism.” This may puzzle many whose doctrinal understanding of United Methodism has been formed in the last thirty years. It may seem to fly in the face of the doctrinal understanding of the Theological Study Commission on Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards accepted into the *Discipline* in 1972 and thereafter etched into United Methodism’s theological psyche. Indeed, some of that doctrinal statement was revised in 1988, including the deletion of the term “doctrinal pluralism.” This deletion attempted to shift the emphasis away from the celebration of many diverse theologies and sought to identify those connections that express common doctrinal identity. I applaud this effort to put “doctrinal pluralism” within a more responsible framework of theological consensus. However, the 1988 doctrinal statement does not necessarily divest United Methodism of the theoretical conception or theological constructs of “theological pluralism” (although John Cobb feared it might).<sup>18</sup> Though the term “theological pluralism” is somewhat “passé”, it is because it won the day and is everywhere assumed now as the theological method constitutive of United Methodist connection.

Originally, the Doctrinal Commission of 1972 validated the method in attributing its origin to John Wesley. Fresh research into John Wesley’s

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<sup>17</sup>Ogletree, in Thomas Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 170.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 162, 167; William Abraham asserts that theological pluralistic vision is “so embedded in the life of the church that to question it is nothing short of revolutionary.” William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in the United Methodist Church* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1995), 55. As a Board of Ordained Ministry member, I have not observed the 1988 doctrinal statement redirecting our thinking in these regards. Members routinely say to a candidate: “It is not a particular theology we want espoused, but can you articulate *your* theology.”



theological method, what Albert Outler labeled "theological pluralism," questions the conception of this attribution.<sup>19</sup> Namely, it challenges the assumption that Methodist "connection" is constituted of "theological pluralism." In challenging this assumption that Methodist "connection" is constituted of "theological pluralism," I argue that some of our assumptions about John Wesley's so-called "doctrinal pluralism" must be revised in light of a closer investigation of the evidence. This may clear the way for us to see better where United Methodism is in relation to early Methodism in regard to "connection," our doctrinal commitments and their intimate interdependence. Rather than a vision of a theologically pluralistic connection where Deists, Arians, Unitarians, Latitudinarians, skeptics, Socinians, rationalists, hyper Calvinists, and revivalists united in a common, theological denominator (which would be congruent with the 1972 Doctrinal Commission's vision cast for United Methodism), John Wesley's vision of the Methodist connection was radically different. For him, theological unity was radical and rooted in developed, definitive doctrine that is comparatively more exclusive than inclusive.

### Essentials and Opinions

Investigation into the aim and an evaluation of the use of John Wesley's method of distinguishing between "essentials" and "opinions" will demonstrate the way in which unity of heart and mind in a mutually affirmed, definitive set of doctrines rather than a unity of radical theological diversity was constitutive of Methodist connection. Indeed, John Wesley nurtured a method from the 1740s to his life's end in which he distinguished between ultimate, unequivocal theological realities essential to true Christianity (further distinguishing between those that are cognitive and those that are experiential) and those "opinions" that are indifferent to the essence of saving faith. The "things essential" were intrinsic and absolutely necessary to current and final salvation and could not be compromised without dissolving Christianity into heathenism. On the other hand, given compatibility with and not subversion of "things essential," "opinions" were theological matters that were debatable and allowed

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<sup>19</sup>"Theological pluralism" in a nutshell, as defined by Albert Outler, is "doctrinal diversity-in-Christological unity," Landford, *Doctrine*, 21.

Christians to recognize one another as they “think and let think.”<sup>20</sup> This distinction, by which he attempted to foster union and cooperation among true Christians of different opinions, is what is referred to as his principle of “theological pluralism” and “catholic spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

My aim is not to set forth the nature of the method per se. Rather, the goal is to describe how, under what circumstances, and to what audience the method was used. As we shall see, the manner in which Wesley used the method makes clear the kind of doctrinal affirmation he held constitutive of Methodist connectional fellowship.

First, John Wesley used the theological distinction between “the uncontroverted truths of Christianity” and “opinions” as an apologetic aid in defending Methodists against outside criticism that Methodists were odd “enthusiasts.” Bishop Warburton accused the Methodists of promulgating zealously “strange” and “erroneous” opinions as essentials, like the Puritans of a by-gone day.<sup>22</sup>

In order to make the case that Methodists were loyal members, an integral part of the established Church of England, and faithful proponents of its doctrine, John Wesley played down so-called Methodist “opinions” and “singularities.” Rather, he stressed Methodist agreement with the Church of England on theological essentials upon which salvation was dependent. In his *Earnest Appeal*, he said of the Methodists, “They contend for nothing *trifling* as if it were important; for nothing *indifferent* as if it were necessary; for nothing *circumstantial* as if it were essential to Christianity. . . .”<sup>23</sup> In 1745 he assured John Smith “that no singularities are more, or near so much, insisted on by me as the general, uncontroverted truths of Christianity.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See, H. O. Thomas, Jr., *Methodist History*, “John Wesley’s Understanding of the Theological Distinction between ‘Essentials’ and ‘Opinions,’” Madison, N. J., April 1995, Volume 33, #3, 139-148; Thomas, “John Wesley’s Understanding of the Distinction Between Theological Essentials and Opinions” (M. A. Thesis, University of Bristol, 1984).

<sup>21</sup>Compare and contrast Albert Outler’s “Introduction to the Report of 1968-1972 Theological Study Commission,” Langford, *Doctrine*, 21ff.

<sup>22</sup>John Wesley, *Letters*, 4, 353, 338.

<sup>23</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, editor in chief, Frank Baker, 34 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975- ), vol. 11: *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, 278.

<sup>24</sup>Wesley, *Letters*, 2, 49.

In assessing the degree of success John Wesley enjoyed using his distinction to establish common ground with established church clergy, one may point to the following: for the occasional testimony of clergy conceding his point, there were many more, especially high-profile clergy of the established church like John Smith, Dr. Lavington, Bishop Warburton, John Downes, and Thomas Church who remained unmoved and unconvinced.<sup>25</sup> Bishop Warburton rejected John Wesley's equating the essence of Methodist doctrine with the "plain old doctrine of the Church of England."<sup>26</sup> Neither the Bishop nor Wesley would grant that the other with whom he differed was a true Christian who, nevertheless, held a position equally acceptable within the doctrinal pale of the Church of England.

John Wesley's use of so-called "theological pluralism" was ineffective in providing common theological ground on which to unite even the mainstream Church of England clergy—much less the Unitarians, Arians, or Deists—and Methodists in mutually affirming connectional Christian fellowship. In fact, Bishop Warburton and John Wesley could not even agree on who was a Christian.<sup>27</sup> Was not even christological oneness in Christ lacking between them?

Second, in assessing the kind of doctrinal affirmation John Wesley held constitutive of Methodist connectional fellowship, we must keep in mind under what conditions his "catholic spirit" appealed for union

<sup>25</sup>For positive responses to John Wesley's argument, see John Wesley, *The Journal of The Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, stand. ed., 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 4, 158; 3, 178-180. For Thomas Church's negative reaction, see Wesley, *Letters*, 2, 267. Gerald Cragg concludes that John Wesley's *Appeals* were going either unread, unstudied, ignored, or just rejected, Wesley, *Appeals*, 13.

<sup>26</sup>In writing to Bishop Warburton, John Wesley argued that those who spoke against the Methodists really spoke "against the plain old doctrine of the Church of England." Bishop Warburton responded that Wesley "grossly misrepresented his adversaries." That is, the Bishop considered the Methodists "adversaries" and not people who were teaching "the plain old doctrine of the Church of England." See John Wesley, *Works*, Jackson, 9, 130. Moreover, these clerics were not brought into conciliar and sympathetic relations with John Wesley as a result of his "catholic spirit." It did not draw the opponent's focus away from Methodist particularities and "singularities." Throughout his career Wesley had to cope repeatedly with the same criticisms which focused often on Methodist "singularities."

<sup>27</sup>For instance, though Bishop Warburton deemed "christened or baptized" people of England Christians, John Wesley disputed the assertion. Moreover, putting it forthrightly, Bishop Warburton labeled John Wesley a fanatic, a "false prophet," and an "imposter prophet." See Wesley, *Works*, Jackson, 9, 163, 118f.

among those of differing opinions: *only* when he assumed the existence of a certain pre-understanding among the parties to whom he was appealing. The method came into its own when parties who differed in “opinions” were, nevertheless, already believed to be, or expected to be, “children of God” united in “the most essential parts of real, experimental religion.” Implicit evangelical faith which already presupposed certain experiential and objective theological realities was the pre-understanding for Christian union of those with differing “opinions.” Though recognition of this fact has gone missing in the current theological pluralism project, it is critical for a proper understanding of John Wesley’s “catholic spirit.” He laid down his guiding principle to James Clark in 1756: “When I meet with any whom I have reason to believe to be children of God, I do not ask of him. . . . Do you agree with me in opinion? . . . I let these stand by till we begin to know and confirm our love to each other.”<sup>28</sup>

When John Wesley spoke of uniting with one of true Christian experience who was a “child of God,” the phrase “child of God” denoted specific content. A “child of God” was one who had had both an inner conviction of sin and of saving faith that “Christ loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*.” In his sermon “Catholic Spirit,” he argued that persons may not be of one opinion, but they may be of one heart. He asked his reader, “Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?” Then he asked those who considered themselves to be a “follower of Christ”(or “children of God”<sup>29</sup>), “But what is implied in the question?” He then proceeded to heap sentence upon sentence of biblical and theological affirmations which he said were “properly implied” in the heart question. For instance, he asked,

Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God over all, blessed forever? Is he revealed in thy soul? Dost thou know Jesus Christ and him crucified? Does he “dwell in thee, and thou in him”? Is he “formed in thy heart by faith”?<sup>30</sup>

One need go no further. There is theological work enough in this paragraph alone to challenge some classic liberals, existentialists, liberationists—whether Latin American, woman, black, Asian or gay—liturgical, process, ecological, evangelical, or charismatic theologians on the

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<sup>28</sup>Wesley, *Letters*, 3, 181.

<sup>29</sup>See Wesley, *Works*, editor-in-chief Baker, 2, 87, 90, 94 where a number of terms such as these are used synonymously.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

subject of "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" Asserting that these theologies involve only differing "opinions" and thus can be meaningfully united in the common ground of essential Christian doctrine ("Christological unity" as Albert Outler declared) stretches reality. In distinguishing between essentials and opinions, Wesley had no intention of including within his scope of Christian unity any clergyperson or theologian of whatever diverse theologies who appropriated the name "Christian." Naming the name of "Christ" was not enough.<sup>31</sup>

At no time did Wesley envisage or seek to promote an ecclesial confederation uniting in intimate, connectional fellowship those of theologies diverse at the essential core. He expressed no interest in a union of connectional fellowship with the mystic William Law, established clergy Bishops Warburton or Butler, or the saved-by-faith-and-works George Horne, Deist and Arian Dr. Samuel Clarke, Socinian-leaning Dr. John Taylor, anti-Trinitarian Dr. J. B. Priestley, or skeptics of the supernatural Professor Conyers Middleton or David Hume. To do so would have been neither harmonious with his theology nor consistent with his desire.

Such a stance of Wesley is in contrast to the espoused 1972 Theological Study Commission's vision done in Wesley's name for a church where all manner of theologies co-exist with none officially sponsored and few declared out of bounds. Contrary to how this has been promoted or rationalized, historical evidence does not demonstrate this as doing theology in the Wesleyan spirit. To the contrary, Wesley intentionally made overtures for Christian connection and fellowship to a narrowly select group of clergy. He proposed union "only to them that believe," to those whom he deemed were "brethren in Christ" united to the one common Head, Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> He described these "fellow labourers" as those who agreed and preached "these essentials":

- I. Original Sin
- II. Justification by faith
- III. Holiness of heart and life provided their life be answerable to their doctrine.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>He countered Bishop Warburton's claim that England was a "Christian country." He asked rhetorically if persons "are not Christians till they are renewed after the image of Christ and if the people of England in general are not thus renewed, why do we term them so?" See Wesley, *Letters*, 4, 376.

<sup>32</sup>Wesley, *Letters*, 4, 236f.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 146, 237.

Wesley judged this group to consist of only a “few” of the “clergymen” in England. Nonetheless, it was precisely this particular cadre of ministers (among whom were Wesleyans and Calvinists) which he had “for many years” been “labouring to unite.”<sup>34</sup> Regarding this, he declared in his *Journal*, “I have long desired that there might be an open, avowed union between all who preach those fundamental truths. . . .”<sup>35</sup>

In other words, this enduring desire of Wesley was more than a situational apologetic such as that of “A Letter to a Roman Catholic” that appealed for sympathy and mutual, theological affirmation between Methodists and Roman Catholics.<sup>36</sup> Not diminishing the irenic spirit herein, this move was not at the same level and was of a different order from Wesley’s push for union with fellow evangelicals. Indeed, it was with evangelicals that Wesley conceived, cultivated, and consistently worked at union—whether it was for fellowship, co-laboring, organizational unity, or all three—from the first fissure with the Moravians up to the cleavage with the Calvinists in 1770.<sup>37</sup> This counterchecks the way we often have thought of Wesley’s pluralism project as essentially an approach toward those of radically disparate theologies.

How fruitful did Wesley’s theological distinction between “essentials” and “opinions” prove to be with those evangelicals with whom he desired a union in love and cooperative action? In a culminating appeal sent in a circular letter in 1764 to “Various Clergymen” whom he believed preached “those fundamental truths,” out of forty to fifty “various clergymen” only three responded in writing to his letter. In 1765, he lamented to

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 146, 236.

<sup>35</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, 5, 47.

<sup>36</sup>The vicious and tragically violent outbursts in Cork towards Methodists moved John Wesley to reason his way to mutual understanding and sympathy between Romans and Methodists. See “A Letter to a Roman Catholic” in Wesley, *Works*, Jackson, 10, 80-86.

<sup>37</sup>In 1746 and 1747, Count Zinzendorf frustrated John Wesley’s move toward Moravian reconciliation with the Methodists. Again, as late as 1760, Wesley made overtures to the British Moravians to unite with the Methodists. Nothing became of it. See, Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 130-31. In 1746, Welsh Calvinist Howell Harris and John Wesley met together to consider “How we may remove hindrances of brotherly love which have been.” Consult “Extracts from the Trevecka, M.S.S.: An account of an association held at Bristol, January 22, 1746/7,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 15 (1926), 120. Moreover, after a serious theological falling out, John Wesley and George Whitefield worked at reconciliation which they achieved by 1749.

Henry Venn, "I have sought it [union] again and again; but in vain."<sup>38</sup> However, the method did give the "brethren in Christ" a way to recognize their mutual adoption by the one Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit while retaining differences. Specifically, Wesley and Calvinist-leaning evangelicals Henry Venn and Scottish Presbyterian Dr. John Gillies exchanged pulpits. Moreover, Wesley and George Whitefield saw past their differences and recognized one another as Christian brothers.

### Theological Control Within Methodist Societies

In consideration of the fact that Methodist connection and fellowship were constituted in part by the shared unity of heart and mind of mutually affirmed, definitive "old Methodist doctrine," one finds that John Wesley did not intend the method of "theological pluralism" so-called to function *within* the Wesleyan-Methodist connection in general. This does not mean that there was no awareness of the dichotomy between "essential" realities and "opinions." Rather, whatever latitude Wesley extended in doctrine and discipline to those genuine Christians *outside* of the Wesleyan Methodist connection, he did not extend it to those *within*. Wesleyan-Methodists were expected not only to agree with Wesley and the Conference on "essentials," but also on "opinions."

While silent disagreement was allowed, "opinions" were not viewed as matters over which Society members might "think and let think." Rather, approval of Wesley's opinions was integral to continued membership in the Wesleyan-Methodist connection. When Wesley said Methodists "think and let think," he meant that, while Wesleyan-Methodists thought roughly as he thought, they did make allowances for those outside their pale to think differently from themselves on "opinions."

His understanding may be amply exemplified. He summed up his policy in his 1761 letter to his Methodist traveling preaching Alexander Coates: "I advise you, if you are willing to labour with us, preach no doctrine contrary to ours."<sup>39</sup> His understanding was also reflected in his consideration of the "predestination preachers" (predestination was consid-

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<sup>38</sup>Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of The Rev. John Wesley, M. A.: Founder of the Methodists*, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 2, 542. For a discussion of some of the contributing factors leading to the disappointing results, see H. O. Thomas, Jr., *John Wesley's Understanding of the Distinction*, 120ff.

<sup>39</sup>Wesley, *Letters*, 4, 158.

ered an “opinion”) at the 1749 Conference. The *Minutes* ask, “The predestination preachers have done much hurt amongst us. How may we prevent this for the future?” The answer came, “Let none of them preach any more in any of our Societies.”<sup>40</sup> Wesley’s policy was codified in the Legal Deed as early as 1749 and reiterated from then on that any one who preached in the Societies should “preach no other doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley’s *Notes Upon the New Testament*, and four Volumes of Sermons.”<sup>41</sup> He specified that no one—whether George Whitefield or Henry Venn or whomever—who preached in his pulpits was to preach opinions contrary to his.

In 1769 he proposed that the traveling Methodist preachers sign an affidavit “to preach the old Methodist doctrines.”<sup>42</sup> He refused to allow several traveling preachers to go to America because he was convinced they did not like Methodist discipline or doctrine. Further, he warned American Methodists to guard against “with all possible care” letting some growing up in their ranks who might bring in “new doctrines, particularly Calvinism.”<sup>43</sup>

The place of “opinions” in his societies was further illustrated in the controversy over whether or not his lay preachers would be permitted to administer the sacraments. Since he refused to allow the lay preachers to serve communion, did not he deny his brethren the liberty of acting according to their own conscience? He allowed that certain things were a matter of individual conscience in which he dared not dictate, e.g., whether or not persons should listen to a minister who preached absolute decrees or against perfection. However, if members of a society differed with him over certain opinions, they must keep quiet and not argue their case. Otherwise, they would be asked to leave the society.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, he concluded that separating persons from a society whom he believed practiced what was contrary to the Word was not perse-

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<sup>40</sup>*Minutes of the Methodist Conferences From the First, Held in London, By The Late Rev. John Wesley, A. M. in the Year 1744*, 3 vols. (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1812-13), 1(1812), 43.

<sup>41</sup>*Minutes*, 1, 42; Wesley, *Works*, Jackson, 8, 331.

<sup>42</sup>Wesley, *Letters*, 5, 145.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 7, 191.

<sup>44</sup>John Wesley threatened Nicholas Norton in 1756. If Norton chose his conscience over Wesley’s, he would not appoint him to a charge. He counseled Norton thusly: “You believe it is a duty to administer; do so, and therein follow your own conscience. I verily believe it is a sin, which consequently I dare not tolerate; and herein I follow mine” (*Ibid.*, 3,186f.).



cution. He agreed that the form of church government and the manner and mode of worship were allowable "opinion" on which "children of God" could disagree while still working together—as long as he was dealing with those children outside the society. However, within the society, he would not tolerate this kind of liberty of opinion and conscience.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Wesley's liberal admission policy into the society has often been noted (even by himself).<sup>46</sup> However, one must also note that remaining in the society was much more demanding than gaining admission. If "catholic spirit" prevailed within his society, he would not have made the re-issuing of band tickets (tickets necessary for quarterly admission to the Society) dependent on such non-essentials as not "curling hair," wearing ruffles, or "calashes, high heads or enormous bonnets."

### True Connectional Fellowship

To summarize and conclude, genuine Methodist "connection" for John Wesley was constituted by three constituents: "the old Methodist doctrine," "the whole Methodist discipline," and John Wesley's authority. The constituent "the old Methodist doctrine" comprehended sharing a unity of a mutually affirmed, definitive set of doctrines. Having been rationalized as deriving from John Wesley's principle of "theological pluralism," so-called by the 1972 Theological Study Commission, we have attempted to show that the "principle of doctrinal pluralism" was not a theological principle of John Wesley's at all constitutive of Wesleyan-Methodist connection. Rather than a vision of a theologically pluralistic connection where all manner of divergent and even conflicting theologies

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<sup>45</sup>He reconciled his position this way: "To me the preachers have engaged themselves to submit, to serve me as sons in the gospel." See Wesley, *Works*, Jackson, 8, 313. None needed to submit to his power unless he or she willed. Every preacher and every member could leave him when he or she pleased. If someone wanted to preach Calvinism, Wesley advised, one might—but not *among his societies*. Nicholas Norton vowed: "I never will again unite with any who will not let others choose their own religion." John Wesley responded, "Then you will never unite with any but knaves." Wesley defended his position by stating that no one presiding over any community would allow members to do what was judged hurtful and wrong to the community without endeavoring to prevent it. See Wesley, *Letters*, 3, 191. In his sermon "On Schism," John Wesley argued that if a person could not continue in a society without committing sin, he ought to separate. On the other hand, if he was not required to do anything which Scripture forbade, or to omit anything which Scripture enjoined, it was his indispensable duty to continue. See Wesley, *Works*, Jackson, 6, 409.

<sup>46</sup>Wesley, *Works*, Jackson, 8, 270.

were united by some common theological denominator, John Wesley's vision of the Methodist connection was radically different. For him, theological unity was radical and rooted in a developed, definitive set of doctrinal realities that is comparatively more exclusive than inclusive.

That is, an overarching criterion of being Methodist "connection" was *not* a self-consciousness of being a *theologically, radically diverse* group united in a simple common affirmation. Indeed, liberty within the context of the doctrinal essentials was allowed those *outside* the Wesleyan-Methodist connection believed to have saving faith. However, being a part of the "connection" was defined by submitting to John Wesley's authority and confessing "the old Methodist doctrine"—even that which was clearly "opinion."

United Methodism's conception of connection as that which is constituted by a "unity" of sometimes radically divergent theologies is based on a misconstrual of both John Wesley's method of distinguishing between theological "essentials" and "opinions" and his understanding of "connection." This is not the way of true connectional fellowship in the Wesleyan spirit. Though Wesley's "catholic spirit" models an imitative, irenic spirit, as much needed today as then, according to its own track record, it may not model a hopeful alternative for constituting real unity in doctrinal diversity, and, consequently, a vital connection. On the other hand, the societal union of hearts and minds bound in a mutually affirmed, particular body of doctrines constituted the Wesleyan-Methodist Connection which has borne a potent witness to our saving God across three centuries. If United Methodism is to recover its connectional heritage and vitality, it will re-appropriate a vision for establishing a true connection of a societal union in a mutually affirmed, definitive body of doctrines.

# WESLEYAN-HOLINESS-FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS: AN HISTORICAL RENDERING WITH CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS

by

**Diane Leclerc**

A distinctly Wesleyan interpretation of Scripture reaches many conclusions with tremendous theological and practical import. One of the more significant aspects of Wesleyan hermeneutics, which has played itself out in the history of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, is that it affirms an underlying equality of all persons, Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. I argue, then, that Wesleyan hermeneutics is race hermeneutics, class hermeneutics, gender hermeneutics by nature of an underpinning that could be called a *hermeneutics of love*.<sup>1</sup>

It is not coincidental that the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition has affirmed the equality of women from its inception. This reality has not been disjoined from biblical interpretation within the tradition, but rather strongly connected to it. Thus it is appropriate to speak of a Wesleyan-holiness-feminist hermeneutic. But interestingly, no one has ever juxtaposed these four words. It is thus my task here to attempt to construct such a juxtaposition. Since I stand as a historical theologian and not a biblical scholar, I will approach the topic from a historical point of view and

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<sup>1</sup>I have reference to the title of a highly influential book within the Holiness Movement. See Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamics of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

conclude with some constructive theological reflections. I will first consider what John Wesley himself said about women, touching briefly on his interpretation of the difficult biblical passages. I will then consider the hermeneutics of the matriarch of the holiness movement, Phoebe Palmer. I will then consider how Wesleyan hermeneutics relates to present-day feminist hermeneutical method, concluding with some theological considerations of Wesleyanism and gender.

### **Wesley's Hermeneutical Hedging: Women in Early Methodism**

Paul Chilcote and Kent Brown are among those scholars who have provided primary evidence of John Wesley's very strong advocacy of women.<sup>2</sup> Such evidence is highly credible. Methodism in the second half of the eighteenth century, under the leadership of Wesley, reveals a growing acceptance of the giftedness of the women of the movement. This giftedness included the leadership of bands and societies, pastoral care of the sick and dying, public prayer and testimony, and eventually preaching because of the extraordinary call of many extraordinary women. Some of these women earned the name "female brethren" from Wesley and his associates. It was a name that denoted considerable respect. According to Chilcote, "In the evangelical revival under the Wesleys, the waters of reform and renewal would once again sweep through the ever-widening channel of human equality, women riding the crest of the wave."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991), and Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1983). Other historic studies include: George Cole, *Heroines of Methodism: Sketches of the Mothers and Daughters of the Church* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857); Maldwyn Edwards, *My Dear Sister: The Story of John Wesley and the Women in His Life* (Leeds: Penwork, nd.); Abel Stevens, *The Women of Methodism; Its Three Foundresses, Susanna Wesley, the Countess of Huntingdon, and Barbara Heck; with Sketches of Their Female Associates and Successors in the Early History of the Denomination. A Centenary Offering to the Women of American Methodism, from the America Methodist Ladies' Centenary Association* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1866); and Zechariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women, Whose Eminent Usefulness and Successful Labours in the Church of Christ, Have Entitled Them to be Enrolled Among the Great Benefactors of Mankind*, 2 vols. (London: Mr. Kershaw, 1825).

<sup>3</sup>Paul Wesley Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 21.

After beginning the revival in England, Wesley discovered that a high percentage of the members of the societies were women. He very quickly allowed women to lead bands, and then societies, even when men were members. Women who were otherwise disenfranchised in a world dominated by men began to develop a new sense of self esteem and purpose.<sup>4</sup> In the setting of the societies, women were encouraged to pray publicly, offer personal testimony, and exhort the other members, often using Scripture as the basis for such exhortation. The steps toward public preaching were being made by numerous women across England.

We find in his journal Wesley's reaction to a woman giving public testimony. He records that this particular woman could not refrain from declaring before them all what God had done in her soul. The words which came from her heart went to the heart. Reports Wesley, "I scarce ever heard such a preacher before. All were in tears round her, high and low; for there was no resisting the Spirit by which she spoke."<sup>5</sup>

Wesley offers an even more overtly positive view of women assuming ministerial roles. From a sermon entitled "On Visiting the Sick" we find these bold words:

Herein there is no difference; there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus. Indeed it has long passed for the maxim with many, that women are only to be seen, not heard. And accordingly many of them are brought up in such a manner as if they were only designed for agreeable playthings! But is this doing honour to the sex? or is it a real kindness to them? No; it is the deepest unkindness; it is horrid cruelty; it is mere Turkish barbarity. And I know not how any woman of sense and spirit can submit to it. Let all you that have it in your power assert the right which God of nature has given you. Yield not to that vile bondage any longer! You, as well as men, are rational creatures. You, like them, were made in the image of God; you are equally candidates for immortality; you too are called of God. . . . Be not disobedient to the heavenly calling.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 34.

<sup>5</sup>John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Churnock, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1909-1916), 3:250.

<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984), 7:125-126.

By 1771 Wesley seems to have moved beyond the pragmatic benefit of women preachers and have begun to wrestle with the idea theologically, as he reflected on the whole nature of the movement called Methodism. On June 13, 1771, he writes to Sarah Crosby:

I think the strength of the cause rests here; on your having an extraordinary call. So I am persuaded has every one of our lay preachers; otherwise, I could not countenance his preaching at all. It is plain to me, that the whole work of God termed Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation of his providence. Therefore, I do not wonder if several things occur therein which do not fall under ordinary rules of discipline. St. Paul's ordinary rule was "I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation." Yet in extraordinary cases, he made a few exceptions; at Corinth in particular.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately it can be said with confidence that, compared to church leaders of his era, John Wesley stands out as an exception to the rule. The women of early British Methodism were afforded ecclesiastical opportunities rare to women in the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Wesley himself made exceptions to rules that prevented women preachers; he believed that God would use extraordinary means to accomplish extraordinary ends in extraordinary times.<sup>9</sup> He finally even made preaching by women an official position of Methodism (as in the case of Sarah Mallet, the first such sanctioned female preacher).<sup>10</sup> While formal institutional power remained with the male preachers who Wesley himself placed and moved at will, his class leaders—often women—served, for all practical purposes, as the veritable pastors of Wesley's congregations, for the male circuit preachers were rarely present.<sup>11</sup>

These more pastoral relationships with women do reveal Wesley's more "feminist" impulses. But he also deeply valued his more reciprocal

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 356.

<sup>8</sup>See Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 4-17, for a review of similar "feminist" activities just prior to Methodism's inception.

<sup>9</sup>See "Letter to Mary Bosanquet" (3 June, 1771), *Letters* (Telford), 5:257.

<sup>10</sup>See Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 192-218, esp. 192-198.

<sup>11</sup>After explaining his reasons for moving a certain preacher from her society, Wesley tells Sarah Baker to "Feed the lambs!", "Letter to Sarah Baker" (30 July, 1785), *Letters* (Telford), 8:275. Also see "Letter to Mrs. Downes" (Oct., 1776), *Letters* (Telford), 6:233, for Wesley's rationale for allowing Mrs. Downes to lead even mixed classes.

friendships with women, counting them his true equals. Women such as Sarah Ryan, Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher, and Sarah Crosby acted the part of Wesley's confidants; they were clearly part of his inner circle.<sup>12</sup> To his female correspondents "he writes with peculiar effluence of thought and frankness of communication. He in fact unbosoms himself, on every topic which occurs to him, as to kindred spirits, in whose sympathies he confided, and from whose re-communication he hoped for additional light."<sup>13</sup> He wrote and visited them as often as he could. As they apparently were to him, Wesley remains loyal to his women friends over the decades. When Mary Fletcher lost her husband,<sup>14</sup> Wesley wrote, "should not you now consider me as your first human friend?"<sup>15</sup> He invested even more in the relationship for the remainder of his life.

Sarah Ryan was converted out of a life of ill-repute, and Wesley took a pastoral interest in her spiritual progress. However, he also soon found himself depending on her for emotional support; she was often the bearer of his burdens. This alarmed some of Wesley's colleagues. Still, in 1758 he comments:

The conversing with you, either by speaking or writing, is an unspeakable blessing to me. I cannot think of you without thinking of God. Others often lead me to Him; but it is, as it were, going round about: you bring me straight into His presence. Therefore, whoever warns me against trusting you, I cannot refrain, as I am clearly convinced He calls me to it.<sup>16</sup>

Wesley seems to have placed himself under the spiritual direction of Sarah Crosby, a prominent female preacher. There are several examples of Crosby's "plain dealing" with Wesley. The Leytonstone society was apparently disposed to criticize Wesley's own spiritual experience. Crosby wrote a letter in which she outlined their complaints. Wesley

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<sup>12</sup>They were also a part of their own type of circle. Edwards alludes to an almost convent-like environment in their household. See Edwards, *Dear Sister*, 87.

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Knox, "Remarks on the Life and Character of John Wesley," in *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism*, ed. Robert Southey (London: 1864), 2:295.

<sup>14</sup>John Fletcher can be considered John Wesley's closest male friend. Wesley appointed him as his successor in the leadership of Methodism, although in the end Wesley outlived him (see Edwards, *Dear Sister*, 93-97).

<sup>15</sup>Letter to Mary Fletcher (2 Oct., 1785), *Letters* (Telford), 7:295.

<sup>16</sup>Letter to Sarah Ryan (20 Jan., 1758), *Letters* (Telford), 4:4.

responded that they knew nothing about his personal experience and thus had no basis for their harsh dealings with him; he added, however, that Crosby had been given access to his inner life, and she therefore had more right to judge him.

My Dear Sister,—Last night I received yours, and was in some doubt whether to write again or no; and if I did, whether to write with reserve or without. At length I resolved upon the latter, and that for two reasons: (1) because I love you; (2) because I love myself. And if so, I ought to write and write freely; for your letters do me good. . . . I take well all that you say; and I love you the more, the more free you are. That is another total mistake, that I dislike any one for plain dealing. And of all persons living Sarah Crosby has least room to say so.<sup>17</sup>

In a comment reminiscent of Jerome when speaking of his male co-laborers, Wesley says that “I have none like-minded.”<sup>18</sup> But in a selected few women in his life, he found kindred spirits. These brief examples show that not only did Wesley allow for women to serve in places of leadership within his movement, but he also considered his intimate friendships with women invaluable.

Can a case be made, then, for recognizing a feminism in Wesley’s exegesis?<sup>19</sup> Evidence can be found in Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*. And yet, most notes about women further display an equivocalness in Wesley’s exegesis. Three texts will serve as examples. First, Acts 17:4:

Our freethinkers pique themselves upon observing that women are more religious than men; and this, in compliment both to religion and good manners, they impute to the weakness of their understandings. And indeed, as far as nature can go in

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<sup>17</sup>Letter to Sarah Crosby (12 Sept., 1766), *Letters* (Telford), 5:25-27.

<sup>18</sup>Letter to Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher (12 July, 1782), *Letters* (Telford), 7:128.

<sup>19</sup>It should be noted that one study is available that implicates Wesley as a rank misogynist and that interprets his leadership of the Methodist movement in terms of sexual seduction. See Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990). Many Wesley scholars, including myself, are at great odds with Abelove’s driving thesis. See the critique by Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Book Review: The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists,” by Henry Abelove, *Methodist History* 30 (1992): 118-20.



imitating religion by performing outward acts of it, this picture of religion may make a fairer show in women than in men, both by reason of their more tender passions, and their modesty, which will make those actions appear to more advantage. But in the case of true religion, which always implies taking up the cross, especially in time of persecution, women lie naturally under a great disadvantage, as having less courage than men. So that their embracing the gospel was a stronger evidence of the power of Him whose strength is perfected in weakness, as a stronger assistance of the Holy Spirit was needful for them to overcome their natural fearfulness.<sup>20</sup>

When commenting on Paul's infamous passage that women are to keep silent in the church (1 Corinthians 13:34), Wesley writes, "be in subjection to the man whose proper office it is to lead and to instruct the congregation." But he also writes, "Let your women be silent in the churches—unless they are under an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit."<sup>21</sup> The first section of 1 Peter 3 deals with the subjection of wives to their husbands. Here Wesley advises men to "Dwell with the woman according to knowledge—Knowing they are weak." He clarifies, "Yet do not despise them for this, but give them honour—Both in heart, in word, and in action; as those who are called to be joint-heirs of . . . eternal life."<sup>22</sup> In accordance with this type of exegesis, Wesley writes to one of his female preachers, "Be subject to no creature, only so far as love constrains. By this sweetest and strongest tie you are now subject to, dear Sally, Your affectionate friend and brother."<sup>23</sup> While Wesley maintained the typical (and misogynistic) interpretive conclusions of his day regarding women, a certain degree of ambivalence nudged his exegesis in novel directions.

### **The Hermeneutics of a Holiness Heroine**

Thomas Oden writes, "Phoebe Palmer, after having been one of the most widely known women of her time in England and America, has remained virtually unknown during the past hundred years." It is clear that Phoebe Palmer was considered the great heroine, even matriarch of

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<sup>20</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1950), 462.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 632.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 881.

<sup>23</sup>Letter to Sarah Crosby (1 July, 1757) *Letters* (Telford), 3:219.

the holiness movement during her own day, thus making her quick descent into obscurity a great irony and historical puzzle. Oden, among others,<sup>24</sup> has attempted to re-present her not only to the movement which owes her so much, but also to wider Christianity. He offers his own interpretation of Palmer. “[Her] spirituality . . . is deeply rooted in classical Christianity, not on the fanatic, idiosyncratic fringe of centerless enthusiasm. She deserves to be counted among the most penetrating spiritual writers of the American tradition.”<sup>25</sup> His anthology of her writings was published under the *Sources of American Spirituality* series by Paulist Press, which indicates that Palmer should be seen as more than an insignificant sectarian figure. And yet, despite Oden’s endorsement, her immense popularity in the nineteenth century, and the continuation of her influence—although unattributed—on holiness theology throughout this century, Palmer is a neglected and even despised figure by some holiness scholars today.

The character of Palmer’s interpretation of biblical holiness has been a matter of much interest and debate. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve extensively into the intricacies of her expansive theology. However, a bit of commentary on her commentators’ interpretations is in order here. It is not my intention to defend Palmer against her various critics, but rather to clarify that the many negative assessments of Palmer’s theology represent only one reading of Palmer. Other readings are available. The following reading establishes Palmer’s hermeneutics as a crucial foundation of her broader doctrine of holiness.

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<sup>24</sup>See John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Nashville: Pierce & Washabaugh, 1956). Perhaps one of the first to call Phoebe Palmer the “founder of the holiness movement” was M. L. Haney. See M. L. Haney, *The Inheritance Restored: or Plain Truths on Bible Holiness* (Chicago: Christian Witness Co., 1904), 215. Also see Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957). Smith’s thesis is that the holiness movement preceded and anticipated the themes of the Social Gospel movement; he believes the holiness movement’s social concern partly originated from Phoebe Palmer’s Five Point Mission. For full-length biographies, see Harold Raser, *Phoebe Palmer: Her Life and Thought* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987); and Charles E. White, *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer As Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986).

<sup>25</sup>Thomas Oden, “Introduction,” in Phoebe Palmer, *Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Oden (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 2-3, 8.

Because of Palmer's initial hesitancy to embrace the sentimentalized American appropriation of Wesley's doctrine of assurance, charges of rationalism have been leveled against her.<sup>26</sup> Almost exactly one hundred years after Wesley's own experience of assurance at Aldersgate,<sup>27</sup> Palmer disposed of this type of assurance as a great hindrance to many seeking heart purity. In its place she prescribed a faith independent of a specific emotional response and initiated what critics call a new rationalism that chilled the warmth of Methodism.<sup>28</sup> This prescription was given because of her own difficulty in attaining an assurance (or "witness of the Spirit") that precisely fit the exhortations of early nineteenth-century Methodist preaching. Al Truesdale has examined the holiness movement's "reification" of and demand for a specific type of experience in entire sanctification. According to Truesdale, "The fallacy of reification and misplaced concreteness [Alfred North Whitehead] are the same. The fallacy consists

<sup>26</sup>I would suggest, as others, that Palmer was in fact playing out the logical conclusion of Wesley's own scheme. Charles White agrees that "she was carrying Wesleyan doctrines to their natural conclusion; she was working out their inner logic." White continues: "If it is true that all Christians will eventually be sanctified, and if it is true that it is better to be sanctified than merely justified, and if it is true that God can sanctify the believer now just as easily as a thousand years from now, and if it is true that God gives sanctification in response to the believer's faith, then every Christian should be sanctified now. Wesley preached each of the protases and he admitted the truth of the apodoses, but as he said, *non persuadebis etiamsi persuaderis* (you will not persuade me even though you do persuade me): he was not confident of the conclusion, no matter how logical it seemed." White, *Pentecostal Pneuma-tology*, 204. Howard elaborates: "Wesley states that one knows he is sanctified by the same means as that by which he knows he is justified, or by witness of the Spirit he hath given us. [This] statement alone [is] perfectly clear, but Wesley is equivocal, or at least confusing, in further elaboration of the evidence of the experience. In another statement he says there are times when the witness is weak or even completely withdrawn and adds that the witness is not always clear at first nor is it afterward always the same. With such statements he has implicitly contradicted his first assertion of the witness of the Spirit, or at least he has greatly weakened it." Ivan Howard, "Wesley Verses Phoebe Palmer: Extended Controversy," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 6 (1971): 31-32.

<sup>27</sup>For interpretations of Aldersgate, see Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990). Joe Gorman has most recently argued that despite Wesley's "warm heart" of assurance, his spiritual life very soon evidenced continuing doubts and struggles. See Joe Gorman, "John Wesley and the Age of Melancholy," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 7-8.

<sup>28</sup>For a very recent study that attempts to counter the tendency to see Palmer as anti-emotional, see Chris R. Armstrong, "Ravished Heart or Naked Faith: The Kernel and Husk of Phoebe Palmer," presented at the Society for Pentecostal Studies (in special session with the Wesleyan Theological Society), Cleveland, Tennessee, March 13, 1998.

of treating an abstraction as a substantive.<sup>29</sup> Truesdale examines several nineteenth-century holiness figures and highlights how a particular type of experience of entire sanctification was demanded by such figures. But, rather than charging that Palmer was guilty with the others, he calls Palmer a creative detour from this tendency in Methodism.

Palmer did not simply correct popular Wesleyanism. In important respects she replaced it by setting aside its reification of experience and inserting a predictable theological formula that minimized (if not negated) experience, and could not fail to deliver certainty. In the replacement, there were no experiential patterns to approximate and no hurdles to overcome.<sup>30</sup>

Palmer did struggle for several years to match her own experience with a dictated experience of assurance. In retrospect, she attributed much of her struggle both to the obtuse sophistication of more professional Methodist theology and to a sentimentalized ethos found among the Methodist grassroots. In an attempt to sort through her own spiritual struggle, she dismissed the theologians and the expectations of a sentimental experience and turned to the Scriptures directly. For this, she has been characterized as anti-theological and anti-Wesleyan. Paul Bassett critiques Palmer's shift away from Wesley's more balanced understanding of the theological sources, i.e., the "quadrilateral" (although he resists this term), toward a shallow bibliocentrism and he mournfully attributes the unfortunate course of mid-to-late nineteenth-century holiness thought to Palmer's naivete.<sup>31</sup> While evidence does show that Palmer considered herself a woman of one book, she, like Wesley, respected and utilized other sources for her own thought. Besides evidence that shows she read extensively in the works of Wesley and Fletcher and even in the patristic sources themselves, by her own admission she always read the Scriptures with commentaries at her side.<sup>32</sup> It is also crucial to note that some schol-

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<sup>29</sup>Al Truesdale, "A Reification of the Experience of Entire Sanctification in the American Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31:2 (Fall 1996), 96.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>31</sup>See Paul Merritt Bassett, "The Theological Identity of the North American Holiness Movement," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, eds. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 72-108.

<sup>32</sup>See Phoebe Palmer, *Israel's Speedy Restoration and Conversion Contemplated; or Signs of the Times in Familiar Letters By Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: John A. Gray, 1854), 3.

ars rightly see that Palmer read the Bible through a particular lens, through a presupposed or assumed theology. David Bundy argues that this lens and its assumed theology is specifically Eastern in origin.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, what Palmer was attempting to reject through her “biblicism” was the technical theology of her day, not theology in general.<sup>34</sup> It could be said that Palmer refused to idolize the prescribed experiential patterns of such theology and of a more popular holiness ethos, and through such a refusal, she opened up other creative pathways to the holy life. Her call to biblical holiness was anything but a naive call.

It is also important to note that when Palmer called for radical faith in the biblical promise of entire sanctification, she was not rejecting Wesley’s doctrine of assurance altogether. She writes this about her own sanctification experience: “While thus glorying in being enabled to feel and know that I was now altogether the Lord’s, the question, accompanied with light, power, and unquestionable assurance, came to my mind. What is this but the state of holiness which you have so long been seeking?”<sup>35</sup> In her own theological formation, however, Palmer greatly modifies the meaning of assurance and its means of attainment. For Wesley, the attainment of assurance was quite dependent on the Spirit’s movement and required a responsive stance (i.e., dependent on God’s initial action) on the part of the seeker. In Palmer’s scheme, feelings of assurance would come, but only after consecration, entire devotion, and through an active faith.<sup>36</sup> Melvin Dieter has commented that “the newness then essentially

<sup>33</sup>See David Bundy, “Visions of Sanctification: Themes of Orthodoxy in the Methodist, Holiness and Pentecostal Traditions,” 1-21.

<sup>34</sup>Oden observes that while she “constantly disavowed that she had anything original to contribute to theology,” nonetheless “her powers of theological reasoning were subtle, original, biblically and classically grounded, historically aware, clear, extraordinarily influential, and spiritually vital.” Oden, “Introduction,” 14.

<sup>35</sup>Palmer, “Letter X to Mrs. W.,” in *Phoebe Palmer, Faith and Its Effects; or Fragments from My Portfolio* (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1867), 72. Italics mine.

<sup>36</sup>Although I do not wish to contradict Palmer’s reliance on grace here, it is also important to note that this human element need not be interpreted as necessarily negative. This personal spiritual “activism” can be explicated as a positive movement toward greater spiritual liberties for women. I have suggested elsewhere that such can be seen as providing women with an unmediated access to spirituality and with a means of overturning the stereotypical and damaging portrayal of woman as spiritually “passive.” See Diane Leclerc, “A Woman’s Way of Holiness: An Analysis of Phoebe Palmer’s Theology with Reflection on its Intrinsic Feminist Implications,” paper presented at the American Society of Church History conference, Chicago, April, 1996.

was a change in emphasis resulting from a simple, literal Biblical faith and the prevailing mood of revivalism combined with an impatient, American pragmatism that always seeks to make a reality at the moment whatever is considered at all possible in the future.”<sup>37</sup> There is no doubt that this pragmatism was at work in Palmer’s theology.<sup>38</sup>

Such pragmatism can be readily found in Palmer’s “altar covenant”<sup>39</sup> which was a rhetorical formulation of her own experience; this phraseology is most clearly seen in her famous *The Way of Holiness*. Her motivation for this work was to help others who also had possibly struggled with a sentimentalized presentation of the doctrine of assurance. Palmer intended this “altar principle” as a source of assurance to the seeker after holiness who was following her method of attainment, and it clearly served this purpose for her and for many who embraced her teach-

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<sup>37</sup>Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 31.

<sup>38</sup>Harold Raser also recognizes a pragmatism in Palmer’s theology: “Her’s is a very practical theology which eschews strictly theoretical considerations in favor of those things which have a direct payoff in terms of bringing about the desired religious experience. One might even say that Palmer’s thought constitutes in its essence a ‘theory of means’ pertaining to holiness, so preoccupied is she with actually getting persons to the place where they are made ‘holy’ and live lives of ‘perfect love’ . . . a kind of holy pragmatism.” Raser, 150.

<sup>39</sup>Raser sees a possible dependency on Hester Ann Rogers, a correspondent of John Wesley, for the seed of altar terminology. It is unquestionable that the life and letters of Rogers were immensely popular with Methodists of later generations. Raser writes, “Rogers both reflected and contributed to the development of the Wesleyan tradition on the popular level along those paths marked out by Fletcher and Clarke on the more scholarly level. In other areas, however, Rogers contributed some more or less original elements to the popular tradition, elements which were potent influences upon Phoebe Palmer” (Raser, 247). Palmer acknowledges Rogers’ influence on her own spiritual journey. Although Raser goes on to list the specific ways Palmer has utilized Rogers’ ideas in her own theological formation, he fails to mention among these elements the fact that part of Rogers’ spiritual struggle concerned her loss of a child. I would suggest that Hester Ann Rogers perhaps represents the best link between Wesley’s conceptualization of “singleness of heart” expressed in his letters to women, including Rogers, and Phoebe Palmer’s own hamartiological ideas. During Palmer’s travels in England, she visited Rogers’ house, where she wrote, “How her vows [to God] were fulfilled, and the persecutions which followed, are known to thousands in both hemispheres. Being dead, she yet speaketh and will continue to speak as long as time endures,” Phoebe Palmer, *Four Years in the Old World* (New York: Foster and Palmer, Jr., Publishers, 1866), 446. Also see Hester Ann Rogers, *Autobiography of Hester Ann Rogers* (reprint, Hampton, TN: Harvey and Tait, 1981), 74-5. David Bundy traces the altar covenant further than Rogers to Madame Guyon. See Bundy, 15.

ings.<sup>40</sup> This altar phraseology reduced what could be a complicated and perplexing search for holiness into what she termed a “shorter way,” one that offered assurance on the basis of the truth of a typology found in Exodus.<sup>41</sup>

Palmer is often severely criticized for this type of exegesis. What is often overlooked is that Palmer took Adam Clarke’s commentary note on Exodus 29:37 which displayed the same exegetical typology and applied it to the experience of sanctification. Clarke explains that in Hebrew ritual, whatever was laid upon the altar became God’s possession; it was from then on to be used for sacred purposes. Clarke alludes to Christ as the altar. Palmer took Clarke’s suggestion and held that the altar of sacrifice is a type, i.e., a prefiguring and foreshadowing of something yet to come, the antitype, namely Jesus.<sup>42</sup> According to Palmer’s scheme, a person who seeks entire sanctification must first and foremost consecrate everything completely to God by “placing all (all of one’s being and all of one’s idols) on God’s altar.” After this consecration is complete, the seeker must then have faith that the altar sanctifies the gift.

Because of Palmer’s emphasis on the human element in this step of faith, she has been accused not only of rationalism, but also of a type of Pelagianism.<sup>43</sup> Yet I suggest that this is a gross over-reading of Palmer’s

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<sup>40</sup>Raser, 160,

<sup>41</sup>This phraseology takes prominence in almost all of Palmer’s written works. Thus, there are innumerable texts that could be used for citation. The following comes from the chapter entitled “Is There Not a Shorter Way,” in *The Way of Holiness*. “Over and again, previous to the time mentioned, had she endeavored to give herself away in covenant to God. But she had never, till this hour, with the solemn intention to reckon herself dead indeed to sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord; to account herself permanently the Lord’s, and in verity no more at her own disposal, but irrevocably the Lord’s property, for time and eternity. Now, in the name of the Lord Jehovah, after having deliberately counted the cost, she resolved to enter into the bonds of an everlasting covenant, with the fixed purpose to count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus.” Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness, with Notes by the Way* (New York: W. C. Palmer, 1867), 29-30. Also see “A Covenant” from *Entire Devotion*, where Palmer takes a person through the three-step process as a type of confession/profession of entire sanctification, which the person then signs and dates (in Palmer, *Selected Writings*, 198-200).

<sup>42</sup>Raser, 160.

<sup>43</sup>E. g., Raser, 260-62. Although such charges are directed toward her supposed emphasis on human effort, they implicitly question whether Phoebe Palmer had a doctrine of original sin. This chapter quite obviously argues that she held to the doctrine, although not in its traditional Augustinian form.

point.<sup>44</sup> Palmer affirms that one's ability to turn from idols, consecrate everything, and believe the biblical promise is not accomplished through human ability, but rather through one's reception of God's prevenient grace. She writes often of the absolute necessity of grace: "I saw that nothing less than the omnipotence of grace could have enabled me thus to present my whole being to God."<sup>45</sup> She resists and rejects her own efforts as utterly fruitless, writing this to a friend: "Such a deep, piercing sense of helplessness prevailed, that it seemed as though I could not go forward until endued with power from on high."<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere she writes, "The idea that I can do anything myself, seems so extinct, that the enemy is not apt to tempt me in that direction."<sup>47</sup> Her assertion of faith is filled with language of God's prior, prevenient action, specifically through His Spirit.

Charges of Pelagianism also represent a reading that fails to take into account the rhetorical difference between *The Way of Holiness* and Palmer's description of sanctification elsewhere in her writings, particularly in her letters and diaries. When critiques of rationalism and Pelagianism are made, it is *The Way of Holiness* that is most often quoted. However, like Wesley, Palmer's theology takes on different nuances and emphases in her more personal works. *The Way of Holiness* is written as a testimony of Palmer's sanctification and therefore has been interpreted as if it were an exact replica of her actual experience. In my reading, producing a simple summary of her experience was not Palmer's agenda or literary motivation. Rather, this book was written for popular consumption<sup>48</sup> and therefore structures and formulizes its agenda so that the reader may also take specific steps to attain a similar experience. Failure to make this rhetorical distinction has skewed interpretation of Palmer's broader theology.

In Palmer's more personal works, it is more transparent that she is not resting on her own efforts in the process of reaching the crisis of

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<sup>44</sup>Palmer's preference for Pentecost as the primary paradigm for entire sanctification in itself argues against any type of human or Pelagian attainment of holiness.

<sup>45</sup>Palmer, "Letter XIII, to Mrs. W.," in *Faith and Its Effects*, 86.

<sup>46</sup>Palmer, "Letter IX, to Mrs. W.," in *Faith and Its Effects*, 66.

<sup>47</sup>Richard Wheatley, ed., *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Publisher, 1876), 83.

<sup>48</sup>This parallels the differences scholars have noted between John Wesley's journals and diaries.



entire sanctification, nor is she separating faith from devotion. While *The Way of Holiness* does portray faith as believing the promises of God as represented in the written Word, Palmer's expression of faith in her diaries and letters is deeply personal; she incisively perceives the relational and devotional aspect of faith. It is all here: "I, through the Spirit's influence, have given all for Christ, and now he hath revealed himself, and given himself to me, and become my all in all."<sup>49</sup> Abraham is often used as a model of faith in her letters and diaries;<sup>50</sup> she represents him as believing the promise of God, but also as representing a deep trust in the person of God. This type of trust enabled Abraham to place Isaac "on the altar." There is an intricate interdependency of each step in Palmer's altar formula, particularly the first two. Consecration of other potential rivals for God's proper place in one's heart opens a person to the potential of holding a faith that expresses itself as entire devotion.

Palmer is known for her typological use of imagery from Exodus. She is just as well-known for her appropriation of the biblical account of Pentecost, which more directly impacts her feminist concerns. John Fletcher, Wesley's friend and theologian of early British Methodism, was the first to link entire sanctification with "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Asa Mahan, Phoebe Palmer's contemporary, wrote a book by that title that gave biblical and theological justification for linking the Pentecostal image with the experience of entire sanctification. Palmer took the image and popularized it. What occurred in Acts 2 occurred to the disciples, to those who already believed in Christ for salvation. Their Pentecostal baptism was thus interpreted by Palmer as an instantaneous event and a "second work" of the Spirit, different from anything they had experienced previously. Later theologians would more delicately define the relationship of this second work with holiness terms such as "cleansing" and "eradica-

<sup>49</sup>Palmer, "Letter X to Mrs. W.," in *Faith and Its Effects*, 74.

<sup>50</sup>E. g., Palmer's diary entry for September 11, 1837, in Wheatley, 46-48. According to Oden, "The testing of Abraham in the command to sacrifice his only son would henceforth become for her a principal metaphor of her own experience," Oden, "Introductory note to September 11, 1837," in Palmer, *Selected Writings*, 132.

tion” of the carnal nature.<sup>51</sup> But Palmer readily adopted the Pentecostal experience as a transferable experience for all believers and preached its imperative necessity in her revivals and camp meetings and in her written works. This would greatly affect the way the doctrine of entire sanctification was expressed in the holiness movement; and “her popularization of Pentecostal language . . . laid a firm foundation for later Pentecostal developments.”<sup>52</sup>

Arising out of the conceptualization and utilization of baptism language is the linking of holiness with power. White states: “Fletcher noticed this connection but did not develop its significance. Adam Clarke devoted one sentence to the idea, but Phoebe Palmer made it a central element of her teaching.”<sup>53</sup> “Holiness is power” is an oft-repeated phrase in Palmer’s writings.<sup>54</sup> The disciples in Acts were empowered by the Spirit to accomplish what was impossible without divine assistance. Persons who had experienced entire sanctification also were empowered to accomplish what was beyond their own human limitations. According to Palmer, through empowerment and unhindered freedom a person was enabled to progress in his or her spiritual journey as never before and to accomplish what was beyond human expectation or conventional custom. This theology was particularly significant for women’s religious experience. Palmer’s *The Way of*

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<sup>51</sup>For an extensive treatment of later usage of eradication language, 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). Also see Paul M. Bassett, “Culture and Concupiscence: The Changing Definition of Sanctity in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement, 1867-1920,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 28 (Spring/Fall, 1993): 59-127. Bassett’s thesis can be summarized by the following quotation: “Wesleyan Holiness people as a whole, in the period between the late 1860s and the late 1910s. . . re-defined some of the most critical elements in their theology. Most important were the nuances of the understandings of original sin/inherited depravity, and, by implication, of entire sanctification. More precisely, in the 1860s and 1870s, Wesleyan/Holiness people believed that original sin/inherited depravity characteristically manifests itself in ‘worldliness.’ By the 1880s, they began to believe that the characteristic manifestation of original sin/inherited depravity is pride. By around 1900, the grassroots of the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement, if not its theologians, had come to believe that lust is the characteristic mark” (60-61).

<sup>52</sup>White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 158.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>54</sup>During her travels in England, Palmer visited Wesley’s grave and there said, “Holiness is power; and it was an apprehension of this fact that fitted the founder of Methodism for his wondrous calling, and then God thrust him out to raise a holy people,” Palmer, *Four Years*, 33.

*Holiness*, possibly more than any other Christian book of doctrine available during the first half of the nineteenth century, brought the Romantic vision of inner autonomy and unlimited personal growth to middle-class women, a highly significant development.<sup>55</sup>

Such women began to see their own potential for ministry and usefulness in church and society and started to challenge structures that would limit them. Nancy Hardesty elaborates:

[Palmer] affirmed that Christians were not only justified before God but were also regenerate, reborn, made new, capable of being restored to the Edenic state. For women it made possible the sweeping away of centuries of patriarchal, misogynist culture in the instant. . . . The argument that “this is the way we’ve always done it” holds no power for someone for whom all things have been made new.<sup>56</sup>

Palmer’s theology contains a strong call for women to live out their new spiritual potential. Since her theology contained an idealism that made all things seem possible, limitations were determined only by one’s own disobedience. As a result of this theological premise, women began to strive toward the realization of the new life they claimed. These women believed they had equal access to the Pentecostal power available through the Holy Spirit; they were equally capable of being Pentecostal witnesses to what God can do in a life that is entirely devoted. Richard Wheatley includes the following anecdote in his biography of Palmer:

In Tully [New York] Mrs. Palmer’s loving instructions were blest, to the entire sanctification of a minister’s wife, who was changed from a timid, shrinking, silent Christian, into a tearful, modest one, but one filled with Pentecostal power, and who afterwards spoke in public with remarkable effect.<sup>57</sup>

To be empowered through sanctifying grace compelled women to enter the sphere of society and effect change. It often meant ministering to the physical needs of others, especially to those of a lower social position, as evidenced by Palmer’s strong emphasis on mission work. But most

<sup>55</sup>Theodore Hovet, “Phoebe Palmer’s Altar Phraseology and the Spiritual Dimension of a Woman’s Sphere,” *Journal of Religion* 63 (1983): 279.

<sup>56</sup>Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 83.

<sup>57</sup>Wheatley, 66.

importantly for our purposes here, sanctifying power meant empowerment to speak.

The final requisite of Palmer's three-step vision that led one through the experience of entire sanctification—formula faith, consecration, and testimony—is crucial for women. Even if a person had surrendered every-one and everything to God and had faith in Him, if she was not willing to testify, she would lose the experience, without exception. Testimony was a verifiable performance of the fact that the domestic sphere had ceased to be absorbing and that a woman was in fact entirely devoted to God. Note this about the teaching of Palmer:

Her emphasis on public testimony usually took the form of varying degrees of insistence that testimony was not only essential to the promulgation of Christian holiness, but even more essential to the personal retention of that grace. One had to give public testimony in order to be clear in his experience. Indeed if personal testimony lagged, it was one of the most certain signs of a lack of religious life which would finally culminate in complete apostasy.<sup>58</sup>

As Porterfield says, "it was better to refuse the coming of the Spirit than to refuse afterward to prophesy."<sup>59</sup> Palmer describes her own experience:

The Spirit then suggested: If it is a gift from God, you will be required to declare it as his gift, through our Lord Jesus Christ, ready for the acceptance of all; and this, if you would retain the blessing, will not be left to your own choice. You will be called on to profess this blessing before thousands!<sup>60</sup>

Because of the requisitional nature of Palmer's injunction to speak, women across the United States, in Canada, and in Great Britain began, like her, to testify in public, standing in mixed assemblies to proclaim God's sanctifying power despite the fact that it was considered undignified for a woman to speak in public at all.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 36.

<sup>59</sup>Amanda Porterfield, "Phoebe Palmer," presented at "Women in New Worlds Conference," Cincinnati, Ohio, February, 1980, 19.

<sup>60</sup>Palmer, *The Way*, 39-40.

<sup>61</sup>Such a "public" role was not only considered undignified, it was also considered dangerous. Deborah Rhode writes, "A common premise within the nineteenth-century scientific community was that individuals had limited "vital forces" available for cognitive and reproductive tasks. Females who diverted their

Charles White offers an account of the experience of a Mrs. Butler. When a certain Dr. Butler brought his wife from Vermont to New York City in 1855, he hoped to get her mind off holiness. She had made “a perfect spectacle of herself by professing sanctification . . . in the local Congregational church, pastored by her brother-in-law.” Dr. Butler was apparently unaware that the author of the book that had so influenced his wife lived in New York City. She met Mrs. Palmer personally, which only fueled her desire to witness.<sup>62</sup> Dieter generalizes experiences such as these and states: “It was the theology of the movement and the essential nature of the place of public testimony in the holiness experience which gave many an otherwise timid woman the authority and power to speak out as the Holy Spirit led her. . . . To those who allowed the theology, the logic was irrefutable.”<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, if a woman professed entire devotion to God and counted herself free from idols and an absorption in domestic cares, she must be willing to do what God next asked of her, even if it went against social norms or protocol. Thus there was an intricate connection between the requisite to surrender idols and the requisite to speak in Palmer’s theology. As Nancy Hardesty shows, “Palmer declared that a person must first consecrate everything to God. Volumes of subsequent testimonials showed this to usually include one’s children, spouse, material possessions and reputation; for women it often included being willing to preach.”<sup>64</sup> Sacrifice could mean a “giving up,” but also a “willingness to.” While Palmer does speak in terms of freedom, her rhetoric also often identifies speech as “self-sacrifice.” It is crucial to see that for Palmer self-sacrifice did not mean playing the typical, martyr-like role of the subservient wife and mother. This, if fact, would have been the easiest or widest road, in her mind. Rather, sacrifice meant being courageous in the secular sphere: it was a personal sacrifice for a woman to be considered

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scarce biological reserves to intellectual endeavors could expect a host of maladies including, in some cases, permanent sterility. Rigorous education or vocational pursuits could result only in deforming, defeminizing, or eventually depleting any group of women who sought to avoid their domestic destiny,” Deborah L. Rhode, “Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference,” in *Theoretical Perspective on Sexual Difference* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>62</sup>White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 187-188.

<sup>63</sup>Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 42.

<sup>64</sup>Nancy A. Hardesty, *Great Women of Faith: the Strength and Influence of Christian Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 90.

undignified by society for overstepping her feminine boundaries. But such an undignified position, according to Palmer, was required by God. Rather than fulfilling their Christian responsibilities in the home alone, women were finding in Palmer's theology a religious imperative that necessitated a conceptual shift of women's calling and women's place. What is clear is that women in the 1840s and 50s, "emboldened by a religiously-engendered individualism . . . were forging an autonomous self and voice. They were allowing themselves to view this self-development as part of their Christian duty, rather than something egotistical or evil."<sup>65</sup>

Amanda Porterfield has offered an essay that analyzes the nature of Palmer's language and her requisites of female consecration and, specifically, female testimony. In Palmer's own life, "liberty meant freedom of speech, and, of course, more specifically, the freedom to prophesy—the liberty to speak in metaphors."<sup>66</sup> The Promise of the Father portrays women's call to prophesy not as a right to be won, but as a responsibility. This subtle linguistic difference had powerful consequences. Although Palmer argues that Scripture supports the imperative of speech placed on women and offers a quite sophisticated exegetical argument to that end, the greatest portion of her four-hundred page work is composed of verbatim accounts and summaries of women obeying God's injunction to preach. The effect of the words of women themselves is masterful. Going beyond this specific work, Porterfield illumines Palmer's overall use of language:

Phoebe Palmer invested language with the power to structure experience. Her view of language is the key to her power as an evangelist, and the key to understanding her mysticism and theology as well. She slipped back and forth with ease between language and life itself, not with any intention to trick or confuse, but to enlighten. At the heart of her spirituality, language and life were the same. In her role as poet of such religious inspiration, Phoebe Palmer functioned as agent in the radical transformation of the feelings and behavior of thousands of persons.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Joanna Bowen Gillespie, "The Emerging Voice of the Methodist Woman: The Ladies Repository, 1841-61," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, eds. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993), 255.

<sup>66</sup>Porterfield, 23.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

It could be said that theory and practice collapse into one where language and life are so tightly integrated.

Galea argues that Palmer's use of mystical language gave her an authority that bypassed traditional and conventional sites of (male) authority.<sup>68</sup> It was this same type of authority, unmediated and directly from God, as well as a new confidence, that Palmer challenged other women to embrace. Schneider offers a helpful summary:

The cultivation of confidence was essential to the task [of building a more visible feminine identity]. One is tempted to call it self-confidence. The quest for holiness, however, led to a curiously convoluted sort of self-confidence. It was a confidence in calling, in duty, and ultimately in God who called a woman and who assisted her duty. It was confidence in a self that was no longer a woman's own self, but God's, and that nevertheless, felt freer and more authentic than she had ever felt simply on her own.<sup>69</sup>

Palmer's religious vision provided nineteenth-century holiness women with a new confidence, not only to know themselves as fully devoted to God, but also to be fully themselves.

Phoebe Palmer offered women access into a specifically female subjectivity, while forging particular and novel liberties under the rubric of devotion to God. In other words, Palmer re-gendered the Eastern and Wesleyan theories of subjectivity—which affirmed the necessity of holy women becoming symbolic males—by actually occupying the traditionally female roles of wife and mother, and thus barring a sweeping rejection of her own and other's maternal bodies. Still, she maintained the freedoms for women offered by the Eastern/Wesleyan theological framework by also rejecting an Augustinian paradigm of sin that promoted submission as virtue. Palmer accepted the basic assumption of the cult of domesticity—that women had more “natural” access to spirituality and sanctity; yet, paradoxically, this enabled her to transcend such a traditional configuration because, while women were “naturally” domestic, in Palmer's

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<sup>68</sup>See Kate Galea, “Anchored Behind the Vail: Mystical Vision as Possible Source of Authority in the Ministry of Phoebe Palmer,” *Methodist History* 31 (1993): 236-247.

<sup>69</sup>A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 182.

estimation they were also equally implicated in the experience of Pentecost and thus equally responsible for Christian service outside “women’s sphere.” They were specifically responsible to speak. Especially in light of Joel’s injunction,<sup>70</sup> Palmer believed women to be prophesying daughters of God, not female sons. They were dignified by their calling, while simultaneously considered undignified in society for being speakers at all. Yet, for women whose only “lord” was God alone, speech could be both female and dignified. In a diary entry only a year before she died, Palmer reflects:

Well do I, as a daughter of the Lord Almighty, remember the baptism of fire that fell upon me, over thirty years since. Not more assuringly, perhaps, did the tongues of fire fall in energizing, hallowing influences on the sons and daughters of the Almighty, when they ALL spake as the Spirit gave utterance, on the day of Pentecost, than I felt its consuming, hallowing, energizing influences fall on me, empowering me for holy activities and burning utterances.<sup>71</sup>

Palmer’s burning utterances changed history—not only the religious history of the nineteenth-century, but also the individual histories of women who walk in Palmer’s footsteps. She not only gave them an example, she gave them theologically-based requisites that demanded that they refuse to keep silent in the churches and in the world.

### **Contemporary Hermeneutical Considerations for Wesleyan Women**

It has been stated that Phoebe Palmer’s *Promise of the Father*, a defense of women in ministry written in 1859, anticipates many of the interpretative moves of late twentieth-century feminist exegetes. I would argue, however, that while Palmer reaches many of the same conclusions, her methodology could not have anticipated many of the methodological nuances of present-day feminist hermeneutics. Perhaps the most well-known of the feminist exegetes is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. She has developed a hermeneutic known as the “hermeneutic of suspicion and remembrance.”<sup>72</sup> Highly popular, this hermeneutic challenges biblical

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<sup>70</sup>See Joel, 2:28-29.

<sup>71</sup>Wheatley, 83.

<sup>72</sup>For the most conspicuous example, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1986).



texts and patristic texts as androcentric in nature, but discovers within these very texts a means subverting a misogynistic reading.

Averil Cameron has offered a deft analysis and implicit critique of specifically “feminist” readings of early Christian texts.<sup>73</sup> She accurately illumines the purposes and procedures of this hermeneutic, which has been enthusiastically embraced by many Christian-feminist exegetes and historians, to the detriment, it has been charged,<sup>74</sup> of their own objectivity. Since the Christian texts themselves are “fixed,” such scholars are “bound and constrained” to deal with them in some manner; more specifically, according to Cameron, feminist scholars of early Christianity who embrace the hermeneutic of suspicion methodology cannot escape, but only manipulate<sup>75</sup> apparently misogynistic passages by proposing redeemed reinterpretations that make them more palatable to feminist tastes. Cameron, herself a feminist, is anxious about the potential abuses of this approach; when the feminist agenda becomes so apologetic as to force rhetoric in certain and perhaps even contrived directions, the integrity of the interpretation can be legitimately questioned.<sup>76</sup>

Lone Fatum echoes Cameron’s concern, specifically as it applies to biblical hermeneutics. It is worth quoting him at length:

What I am concerned with is the project of feminist reconstruction which seems to me to be a highly problematic attempt to achieve two different results through one analytical process, namely exposing the suppression of women by the biblical material and, at the same time, seeking the affirmation of women by the biblical material. . . . The hermeneutical con-

<sup>73</sup>See Averil Cameron, “Virginity as Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity,” in *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History*, ed. Averil Cameron (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 181-205. Cameron references biblical and patristic literature.

<sup>74</sup>E.g., Kathleen E. Corley, “Feminist Myths of Christian Origins,” in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack*, eds. Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 51-67.

<sup>75</sup>Cameron, 187.

<sup>76</sup>Cameron asserts that all “history is itself indeed a matter of interpretation” and emphasizes the inherently subjective stance of every interpretation. She does not, I believe, imply that every interpretation is of equal value or legitimacy. For example, “it may be theoretically possible to recapture, or rather to postulate an unpolluted source in the Gospels, but a more sympathetic reading of, say, Jerome, is hardly in the cards” (188).

sequence, it seems to me, is a faulty methodology, allowing utopian vision and wishful thinking to stop critical questioning and consistent analysis in an effort to explain away or make light of the suppressive evidence in the texts and tradition before us. . . . The result of this historical reservation in feminist exegesis is very often, I find, critical inconsistency, feminist apologetic interest allowing itself to turn a blind eye to the full and unpleasant implications of the fact that Christian faith and interpretation are rooted in androcentric structures, symbolic values, transmitted and institutionalized through patriarchal organizations. Thus Christian interpretation is androcentric interpretation, but feminist Christian exegesis cannot bear to acknowledge the full implications of this hermeneutical insight. Therefore, instead of deconstructing with critical consistency to the bitter end where androcentric values and patriarchal strategies can be fully unveiled and analytically exposed, it stops half way and chooses to (re)construct a pattern of utopian values which may serve as an affirmation of Christian women. Deconstruction becomes reconstruction and the hermeneutical difference between the two is blurred by apologetic endeavors.<sup>77</sup>

In Cameron's estimation, feminist exegetes, in an attempt to argue for a kind of early Christian feminism, "claim that whatever the Christian texts themselves might imply, there was once a golden age of early Christianity in which women played a role they were scarcely to enjoy again until the rise of the feminist movement."<sup>78</sup> This presupposition impels historical reconstruction in certain directions. Yet when faced with charges of lost historical-critical objectivity, the reply given is that (false) hopes of objective interpretations of history have faded with postmodernity and that the "hermeneutic of suspicion and remembrance" should be commended for its forthrightness concerning its underlying agenda.<sup>79</sup> The consequent reinterpretation of early Christianity (as an institution

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<sup>77</sup>Lone Fatum, "Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence. Challenges and Possibilities in Androcentric Texts," *Studia Theologica* 43 (1989): 61-62.

<sup>78</sup>Cameron, 184.

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Bernadette J. Brooten, "Early Christian Women and Their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 66.

embodying principles of feminism) is not compromised, according to the proponents, by its programmatic approach to Christian texts.<sup>80</sup>

At first glance, Wesleyan women who embrace an interpretation of certain scriptures that allows for full ecclesiastical leadership for women may seem programmatic and even apologetic in their (re)interpretation of problematic biblical texts. However, it is not necessary to operate under the presupposition that affirms a feminist “golden age” during the early church period. Wesleyan hermeneutics is a methodology that can read biblical androcentricism, even misogyny, for what it is, while also advocating the full equality of all persons in all functions within the church. Through a utilization of the Wesleyan hermeneutical principle of the “analogy of faith,” it is possible to avoid the pitfalls of feminists such as Schüssler Fiorenza, who, not unlike Wesleyan feminists, find their historical task fueled by a desire to reach theological conclusions with feminist implications. It is not necessary to manipulate texts. It is not necessary to seek to justify, hide, or explain away the clearly difficult passages. It is not necessary to argue that biblical writers somehow meant something other than what they said, or that the message is, by necessity, strictly independent of the author’s intentions. It is not necessary to assert that biblical writers are—intentionally or unintentionally—subversive “feminists” despite their own rhetoric.

The analogy of faith provides an entirely different approach that has the potential to yield equally positive results. It considers each biblical text in light of overarching biblical themes. As Randy Maddox explains, “For Wesley, this term referred to a ‘connected chain of Scripture truths.’

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<sup>80</sup>Speaking of a more general category of theological biases, Castelli and Taussig declare, “The point here is not to eliminate theological convictions—an impossible task, even were one to consider it desirable. Rather, the point is to call the whole study of Christian origins to a higher level of consciousness in which those both with and without Christian convictions develop a heightened awareness of the ways that Christian presuppositions can frame and color the critical analysis of how it all began. Put more positively. . . the process of reimagining Christian origins must start with an awareness of the ways various cultural and theological forces can cause important sources and approaches to be ignored or enthroned uncritically,” from Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig, “Drawing Large and Startling Figures: Reimagining Christian Origins by Painting Like Picasso,” in *Reimagining Christian Origins* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3-22. In Castelli and Taussig’s scheme, the question becomes whether a feminist hermeneutic is, in fact, honest about its subjectivity or whether it “enthrones” its methodology uncritically; and therefore it follows that it should be evaluated not on the basis of its product, but on its sincerity.

He highlighted four soteriological truths in particular: the corruption of sin, justification by faith, the new birth, and present inward and outward holiness. He believed that it was the shared articulation of these truths that gave the diverse components of Scripture their unity. Accordingly, he required that all passages be read in light of these truths.”<sup>81</sup> Each of these soteriological truths, interpreted from a Wesleyan perspective, have powerful implications for women.

Scholars such as Maddox suggest that a correct interpretation of Wesley’s doctrine of sin must recognize the strong influence of the Eastern fathers on Wesley at this point. This is important in two regards. First, these patristic fathers imaged sin as a disease needing healing, rather than just a forensic problem needing legal justification. This greatly influences Wesley’s understanding of the new birth and sanctification. Secondly, the eastern patristics in general interpreted gender distinctions primarily as a result of the Fall, and posited that the process of *theosis*, finally culminated in the afterlife, would produce genderless saints. It was the Western, Augustinian paradigm of sin and the Fall that argued that female subordination was God’s intended design. Wesley is progressive on this point. As Maddox points out:

In 1754 [Wesley] invoked with no qualifications the common supposition that Eve’s creation subsequent to Adam demonstrated that women were originally intended to be subordinate to men. However, by 1765 he inclined more to the view that male and female were created by God to be equal in all ways, with women’s subjection to men being one of the results of the Fall. . . . [This created] at least the possibility of advocating restoration of the social equality of women as one aspect of the Christian healing of the damage of the Fall.<sup>82</sup>

I have argued at length elsewhere that a Wesleyan understanding of sin has dramatic implications for women. Suffice it to say here that a Wesleyan hamartiology deconstructs images of the saintly woman that are directly tied to Augustine’s paradigm. Wesley and Wesleyan theology and hermeneutics offers a new imago of the “holy woman.” Female virtue need no longer be imaged as humility, submissiveness, complicity, and

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<sup>81</sup>Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 38.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 72-73.

silence. Rather, Wesleyan theology allows for a reimagining of the holy woman as strong, dependent on God, free through grace, and even vocal.<sup>83</sup>

Related to this is Wesley's interpretation of justification and the new birth. His concept of unlimited atonement, that justifying grace is available to all who believe, presupposes the (equal) value in the eyes of God of each individual. The effects of free grace gives each person *real* new birth; all are deemed new creations, the old is gone, the new has come. Righteousness is imparted, not just imputed to the graced individual. But as much as Wesley valued the individual's spiritual renewal, he was not content to leave faith as an individual matter. New creation, for Wesley, had strong social implications. A deep sense of social justice permeates the Wesleyan vision. Women are thus affected doubly by Wesley's understanding of new birth; they benefit from Wesley's optimism about grace in two ways. Individual women find new birth, and the spiritual and social equality of women (and all marginalized persons) is (or at least should be) affirmed in Wesley's analogy of faith.

Finally, Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, and the inward and outward holiness that he expected to be a present experience for his Methodists, also has "feminist" implications. Wesley strongly believed that Methodist women should be entirely devoted to God. This is a theme that was picked up and strongly emphasized in the holiness movement a century later. For Wesley, this level of consecration, absolutely necessary in order to be open to God's sanctifying work, at times required women to disobey family obligations in order to serve God.<sup>84</sup> Inward and outward holiness was conditioned on such servanthood; it was servanthood not in the home, as it has been traditionally understood, but in the bands, the societies, and in society itself.

Many women of early British Methodism performed responsibilities usually connotative of more traditionally male roles. Women of John Wesley's movement led class meetings, carried on pastoral functions, traveled itinerantly, and preached. These religious duties offered women a spiritual transcendence as well as opportunity to transcend the established social roles for women of eighteenth-century England. Such opportunity was

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<sup>83</sup>See Diane Leclerc, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective*, Scarecrow Press, forthcoming.

<sup>84</sup>Again, see Leclerc for substantiation of this strong reality within Methodism.

afforded to these women because of an underlying theological anthropology, based firmly on Wesley's interpretation of Scripture. He held to an overarching optimistic theology that gave women equal spiritual status that overcame any "natural" essentialisms. His strong concept of prevenient, redemptive, and sanctifying grace, as well as a strong belief in the restoration of "original freedom," allowed women in particular to strive for a more transcendent existence in a spiritual context that approximated a new Eden.

This is our Wesleyan heritage. The question is whether or not we still make the connections between the Wesleyan doctrines of sin, justification, new birth, and holiness and women that were readily enacted in Wesley's day and carried on by the holiness movement of the nineteenth century. I am optimistic enough to believe that identifying a Wesleyan way of reading Scripture will re-birth the powerful affirmation of women that has been a part of our tradition, a part of our experience, and an affirmation which many can reason through quite well. It is time we said with great confidence, the Bible is on our side.

# **QUILTING A CHURCH: THE CHURCH OF GOD (ANDERSON) IN 1900<sup>1</sup>**

by

**Merle D. Strege**

When Editor Enoch E. Byrum greeted readers of the *Gospel Trumpet* on the eve of the twentieth century, his note of confidence belied the condition of a movement held together at that moment by some rather frayed threads. After twenty years of existence as a radical holiness reform movement, the Church of God (not yet located in Anderson, Indiana) looked toward a new century while, intentionally or not, it sewed together practices of several different origins to create the Church of God movement. The men and women who often referred to themselves simply as “The Saints” were in the initial stages of stitching together the first patches on the quilt that was become the movement.

I examine here some aspects of the life of the Church of God movement around the year 1900. Personalities and events of those years prepared the way for the rapid institutionalization of the movement that occurred between 1917 and 1930. In fact, the rapid proliferation of boards and agencies during that later period finished a work that in some instances had begun not in 1917, but roughly two decades earlier. These are important matters in the history of the Church of God (Anderson) because of the movement’s original and sharp repudiation of all forms of church organization.

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<sup>1</sup>This article was initially an address by Dr. Strege, Historian of the Church of God, delivered as the presidential address to the founding meeting of the Historical Society of the Church of God (Anderson), convened in Anderson, Indiana, in June, 2000.

The first steps toward the institutionalization of the Church of God movement were the approbation and development of practices that were essential to the theological instruction and formation of the movement. Many, if not most, of these practices were not created *ex nihilo*. Some were new, but many were packed in the theological and ecclesiological baggage that the first generation of movement adherents carried with them into the earliest fellowship of “The Saints.” All the members of the movement’s first generation were “come-outers.” They abandoned their memberships in denominations and rejected what they termed “denominationalism,” “Sect Babylon,” or “sectism.”<sup>2</sup> In some instances they simultaneously abandoned certain religious practices as worn-out vestiges of a failed human system of church life.

For example, Daniel S. Warner, primary pioneer of the movement, repudiated his ordination in the Northern Indiana Eldership of the Churches of God (Winebrennerian), finding it necessary to be ordained anew according to a simpler form he judged more in keeping with the simplicity and purity of the New Testament church. But the Saints did not forsake all the practices of sect Babylon. Thus, from the General Eldership of the Churches of God Warner retained the practice of footwashing. That this was an ordinance of the true New Testament church made perfectly good biblical sense to the influential Byrum clan, H. C. Wickersham, and others who had come out of Brethren denominations that traditionally followed this practice.

It is not easy to determine the yardstick by which some practices were excluded while others were sewn into the quilt that became the Church of God movement. Without question, every practice had to conform to the group’s understanding of what the Bible endorsed or permitted. But this general standard does not alone account for the persistence of some practices and the demotion or demise of others. What is offered here are case studies that illustrate some practices that were included by the year 1900 and others that eventually were shifted to the margins of the quilt of the movement’s existence.

### **1. Theology and Practice: A Definition**

Before examining these case studies, we need to establish a common understanding of the concept of a “practice” and its relationship to the

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<sup>2</sup>By “sectism” the Saints meant the human practice of inappropriately dividing or sectioning the church universal.



teaching of the church's theology. Since the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*<sup>3</sup> in the early 1980s, theologians and religious historians, as well as people concerned for the life of the contemporary church, have paid increasing attention to the idea of practices.<sup>4</sup> MacIntyre explains a practice by such examples as "throwing a football with skill is not a practice; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice, architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is."<sup>5</sup> As MacIntyre defines them, practices are socially established cooperative activities that aim at some desirable end and which require the development of virtues in practitioners if those practices are to be sustained.

Perhaps no theologian more than James McClendon has extended MacIntyre's understanding of practices and applied it specifically to the church's enterprise of teaching theology. Like MacIntyre, McClendon defines best by example:

The practice of Christian teaching can best be understood in these terms. Just as "medicine" denotes not merely bottles on a pharmacy shelf, but a practice, and "law" not merely statutes, but another kind of practice, our practice of doctrine is far more than the individual doctrines involved. In each case the named practice is definitive for and inclusive of its ingredient doctrines, laws, or medicines. There is no "thing taught" without teaching; no Christian doctrines apart from the practice of doctrine.<sup>6</sup>

McClendon distinguishes this "practical" understanding of theology from the two major definitions of doctrine.<sup>7</sup> The first is the idea that doctrine consists in revealed truth being imparted to the church. While such doctrines are often said to be biblical or Bible-based, they are formally contained in distinct propositions (dogmas, doctrines) that convey the substance of divine revelation to believers. The second concept of doc-

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<sup>3</sup>All references here will be to the 2nd edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, James W. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); David D. Hall, Editor, *Lived Religion in America: Toward A History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); and Dorothy C. Bass, Editor, *Practicing Our Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997).

<sup>5</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

<sup>6</sup>McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 28-29.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

trine is the one embedded in liberal Protestantism. It views doctrines as what appears in a church not as revealed dogmas, but as accounts of the Christian religious affections being set forth in human speech. So doctrines express human states, not states of mind, but of awareness, since awareness is the human faculty that apprehends God. Not only does McClendon argue that a practice offers a third understanding of the nature of doctrine and doctrinal teaching. He also lists several groups, the Church of God among them, that he believes illustrate this understanding in the history of Christianity.

The application of a practical understanding of theology to the Church of God (Anderson) is, of course, open to question. Since I think that McClendon's inclusion of the Church of God in such groups gives every appearance of a good fit, I will move on to examine some cases involving theological teaching in the Church of God in this practical vein.

## **2. Church Discipline: Dealing with Heretics and Backsliders**

The issue that took priority in E. E. Byrum's retrospective view of 1899 was the "Zinzendorf theory." Among some holiness movement preachers within the Church of God and without, an alternative theology of sanctification had developed out of the teaching of Nicholas Zinzendorf. The details of this theology are not important here, save to say that Zinzendorf's view that the full cleansing of the soul in entire sanctification was attributed rather than real earned his latter-day followers among the Saints the label "Anti-Cleansers." A significant number of preachers in the Church of God appear to have espoused this view. These Anti-Cleansers arrived at the general campmeeting in Moundsville, West Virginia, ready for a showdown. In his report of this meeting, Byrum claims to have used the Scriptures to publicly refute their argument. Those who persisted in this teaching either left the Saints of their own accord or were barred from fellowship. Readers of the *Gospel Trumpet* were warned to have no dealings with these people so long as they persisted in their error.

Historian John W. V. Smith says that the "Anti-Cleansing Heresy" and its aftermath dealt a very serious blow to the young Church of God movement.<sup>8</sup> It is very difficult to accurately portray the number of men and women in the Church of God ministry at the turn of the century. Some esti-

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<sup>8</sup>John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1980), 185ff.

mates, likely exaggerations, put the number of defections as high as fifty percent of the ministry. Smith says that the departing group was significant both in number and in stature. Although names and numbers of defectors in 1899 continue to elude us, we do know the names and number of ministers who attended the Moundsville campmeeting of 1902. Three years after the campmeeting where Byrum repudiated the Zinzendorf theory, only 91 ministers were at Moundsville.<sup>9</sup> In 1905 a total of 393 ministers registered in the ministerial list that validated ministerial status so people could qualify as clergy for reduced railfare. Clearly the departure of the “Zinzendorfians” dealt a body blow to the young movement.

Six months after the Anti-Cleansing campmeeting, Byrum was understandably still worried about the effects of this schism.<sup>10</sup> The Zinzendorf theory had been propagated to some extent and some of the saints were becoming confused, even “losing their experience.” Byrum seems to have kept track of at least some of the Anti-Cleansers. He noted that some had repented while others persisted in preaching this doctrine. Still others had left the ministry and “gone to work with their hands,” a step “which is much better,” opined Byrum, “than to go forth propagating something that would be detrimental to souls.”<sup>11</sup> Byrum remained adamant in refusing fellowship to the sizable minority who remained outside the tiny fold. He encouraged the saints to pray for the restoration of the heretics, but he also took comfort in the fact that the Zinzendorfism episode “is only a fulfillment of the word of God.” Byrum invoked 2 Peter 2:1-2 as a forewarning of such episodes.

Four years after the Anti-Cleansing campmeeting of 1899 movement leaders followed essentially the same procedures in dis-fellowshipping W. G. Schell. It was Schell who had delivered Daniel Warner’s funeral sermon in 1895 and who some had thought would succeed him as editor of the paper. In other words, we are talking about a very prominent minister. But prominent ministers D. O. Teasley and H. M. Riggle collaborated on an announcement that warned all readers of Schell’s apostasy.<sup>12</sup> As in the Byrum article, the two men cited a New Testament text that warned of

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<sup>9</sup>File titled “Ministers Lists,” Archives of the Church of God, Anderson University.

<sup>10</sup>“Words of Greeting,” *Gospel Trumpet*, vol. 19, No. 51 (December 28, 1899), 1.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>“Departed From the Faith,” *Gospel Trumpet* (June 18, 1903).

days when some would depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-2) and specified the heterodox views that Schell had come to espouse.<sup>13</sup> This announcement formalized the beginning of a seven-year spiritual, occupational, and geographical odyssey that culminated in Shell's restoration to the movement after a public and published repentance.<sup>14</sup>

These two episodes suggest that by 1905 there were clearly understood and applied procedures for disciplining people who deviated from the doctrinal norm. Before this date official minister's lists, complete with the name of an endorsing minister, identified the men and women who were in good standing in the church. Such lists and such procedures are the marks of a "church" rather than a movement of saints governed only through the gifting of the Holy Spirit. By about 1900, then, the movement's leaders had worked out a clear understanding of a theology of the church's ministry, what constituted fellowship within that ministry, and what constituted breaches of that fellowship. The leadership had also acted in accordance with these understandings; in a word, they were *practicing* what they understood and thought.

### 3. Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation

Unlike other groups with origins in the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement, some Bible scholars in the Church of God began employing the historical critical method of biblical studies in the 1930s and certainly by 1940. Again, around the year 1900 attitudes and practices set the stage for later developments. In this case it was biblical inspiration and authority.

In 1894 H. C. Wickersham published the second edition of his book *Holiness Bible Subjects*<sup>15</sup> including an essay entitled "What the Bible Is Not, and What It Is." This essay suggests that Wickersham had at least a passing awareness of recent developments in biblical scholarship related to authorship, etc. He seems to have steered a middle course between those

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<sup>13</sup>Schell was said to have stated to "reliable brethren" that he no longer considered the "present reformation" to be of Godly origin, in essence asserting the same view of the cultural and historical origins of some of Warner's ideas as were stated at the outset of this paper. Timing is everything. Schell also denied that footwashing was a NT ordinance and espoused triune immersion as the true NT form. Teasley and Riggle also made vague charges that "from time to time there has been manifest in his life that which is not consistent with the character of a pure New Testament minister."

<sup>14</sup>For detail on this odyssey, see Barry L. Callen, editor, *Following the Light* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2000), 123-126.

<sup>15</sup>Grand Junction, MI: Gospel Trumpet Publishing Company, 1984.

developments on the one hand and a plenary view of inspiration on the other. When it came to inspiration, Wickersham insisted that God did not inspire the words or even the ideas of the Bible, but rather the people who wrote it. He followed a logic that said, "If God had inspired the thoughts and the words of the Bible, the Bible would have been written in the same style of words and expression of thought."<sup>16</sup> As far as inspired authors were concerned, Wickersham explicitly limited inspiration's effects. As he put the matter, "Remember, and the idea cannot be too strongly enforced, that inspiration is not omniscience. The apostle Paul could write the epistle to the Romans, but he never knew how to make a steam engine or a locomotive. . . . Look not to the Bible for what God never put in it—look not there for mathematics or mechanics, for metaphysical distinctions or abstruse sciences; but look there simply for the way of spiritual life and salvation from all sin, and you will find enough. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

Little more than a decade later, E. E. Byrum published a book specifically on the authorship and transmission of the Scripture entitled *How We Got Our Bible*.<sup>18</sup> Apparently he thought that his brother in the faith as well as his uncle by blood did not have all the light that there was to be had on this subject. Byrum took the more conservative view that the words of the text were inspired and that the same Spirit guarded the transmission and translation of the text so that "we can clasp hands, as it were, with the apostles, and when we serach our New Testament, feel assured that we are speaking the same words that they spoke."<sup>19</sup> Clearly Wickersham and Byrum differed on this important point of church doctrine.

The practice of biblical interpretation in the Church of God before 1900 seems to have favored Wickersham's more dynamic view of inspiration. The last two numbers of the 1893 volume and the first number of the 1894 volume of the *Gospel Trumpet* ran a series of three articles from the pen of Editor Warner dealing with the interpretation of several specific passages of scripture and the issues deriving therefrom. Warner clearly perceived the movement's practices of biblical interpretation to be a larger matter, of which the readings of specific passages were particular instances. While he spoke to the particular instances, he also addressed the larger question.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 19

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>18</sup>Moundsville, WV: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1905.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 87.

Warner adduced several texts to assert the idea that the ministers of God “agree in faith and doctrine, being in the one ‘faith of the gospel.’” They are of the same mind. The sameness does not reside in what they have compiled in a creed and subscribed to, but in that mind, faith, doctrine and practice that is “according to Jesus Christ.” This harmony of sentiment and teaching “is attained and only can be attained by having our former education and our wisdom destroyed and purged out; and be led of the Spirit of God into all truth, according to the promise of Christ (Jn. 16:13).”<sup>20</sup> Such harmony was the ideal, but Warner also recognized that not all of God’s messengers possessed the same gifts and abilities, nor had they all attained to the same measure of gospel truth. Nevertheless, there is harmony in all that is taught as long as each teacher is confined within that measure of truth received by the Holy Spirit. How did this vision of hermeneutical harmony actually play out?

The first of Warner’s articles was entitled, “Do the Ministers of God See Eye to Eye?” Within weeks he received answers to that question which led him to write a second article, entitled “The Ministers of God Must See Eye to Eye.” The issue was that some ministers differed with Warner over the interpretation of Jesus’ saying that a camel could sooner pass through a needle’s eye than a rich man enter the kingdom. After adopting a literal reading of that text, Warner exhorted his ministerial colleagues:

And now beloved, if we are going to fulfill the prophecy of a holy ministry returned from Babylon confusion, to see eye to eye, and teach the same things, be sure that you take up and teach nothing that has the traditions of sectism to sustain it. Only teach what you know by the sure Word and Spirit of God, and there will be harmony.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting that, despite clear differences of interpretation, Warner did not use the authority of the Editor’s chair to enforce doctrinal uniformity. Instead he appealed to the Word and Spirit of God and implicitly trusted in an ongoing conversation between minister and minister and between minister and editorial office. This suggests a practice of Bible reading and interpretation wherein participants engaged one another in the common

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<sup>20</sup>Daniel S. Warner, “Do the Ministers of God See Eye to Eye?” *Gospel Trumpet* (December 14, 1893).

<sup>21</sup>*Gospel Trumpet*, December 21, 1893.

belief that the Word and Spirit would guide honest and sincere efforts, leading them into “all truth.”

The final article in Warner’s series was titled “The Ministers of God See Eye to Eye,” wherein he continued to take up dissenting readings of biblical passages.<sup>22</sup> As in his previous articles, he claimed neither authority over his colleagues nor that he possessed greater light on the Scripture. Rather, Warner continued to follow an emerging practice of interpretation that allowed for divergent views in a conversation that trusted the Spirit to lead the church into all the truth.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Church of God was divided in its theology of the inspiration and interpretation of the Bible. Authoritative voices spoke in favor of more dynamic theories of inspiration while others advocated more conservative views. But the example of a conversational style of hermeneutics suggests the greater force of the former view and the basis for the later acceptance of more contemporary views of biblical exegesis and interpretation.<sup>23</sup>

#### **4. Theological Practices Established and Lost: Divine Healing and Pacifism**

My final illustration of theology as practice involves two different doctrines, one that was sewn into the movement’s theological quilt with very strong thread and another that, while it may never have been cut out of the quilt, certainly has faded over the years. I am referring respectively to the doctrines of divine healing and pacifism.

As E. E. Byrum peered into the twentieth century, he worried that the ministers of the movement were not sufficiently emphasizing the doctrine of divine healing. In fact, he believed that both the preaching and practice of divine healing had declined. Byrum was determined to reverse this tendency. He exhorted his fellow ministers to a re-dedication to this specific doctrine and its practice, warning them that their failure to do so would invite Satan into the camp of the saints, inciting all manner of false teachings and generally hindering the work of the Lord. Byrum also saw to it that the movement could not avoid the doctrine. During his tenure as editor the back page of the *Gospel Trumpet* was dedicated to articles and testimonies

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<sup>22</sup>*Gospel Trumpet*, December 28, 1893.

<sup>23</sup>For a fuller discussion of this topic, see my “The Peculiar Impress of the Mind: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation in the Church of God (Anderson),” unpublished paper (September, 1995).

concerned with divine healing. He also insured that the practice of divine healing was embedded in the movement's life, even to the extent of praying over small hankies anointed with a drop of oil and then mailing the same to isolated saints who had no nearby elders to call for the prayer of faith.

At the same time that Byrum made divine healing an article of faith and practice in the life of the Church of God, the doctrine of pacifism came to be neglected. When the Spanish-American War erupted in 1898, the *Gospel Trumpet* initially paid scant attention to it, although Noah Byrum said that war news filled the secular newspapers.<sup>24</sup> But when a reader asked the *Trumpet* whether it was the duty of a Christian convert to desert the United States Army, the paper answered that desertion violated the teaching of Romans 13. Besides, "God can keep him saved where he is until he has served his time."<sup>25</sup> A few months later the *Trumpet* responded to what it called a number of letters concerning the question of whether or not a Christian should go to war:

We answer no. Emphatically no. There is no place in the New Testament wherein Christ gave instructions to his followers to take the life of a fellow man. In olden times it was "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." In this gospel dispensation it is quite different. Jesus says: "But I say unto you, do good to them that despitefully use you," etc. (Matt 5:44). "Avenge not yourselves." "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink"—not shoot him.<sup>26</sup>

The paper did not comment further on the Spanish-American War. Nor did the publications of the Gospel Trumpet Company teach the doctrine of Christian pacifism at any point during the following decades. When World War I began, the paper took a compromise position that supported men who volunteered for military service as solidly as it encouraged pacifists. By the war's end the paper was endorsing the sale of Liberty Bonds.<sup>27</sup> A comparison of the doctrines of Christian pacifism and

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<sup>24</sup>Noah Byrum, 1898 Journal, Noah Byrum Papers, Archives of the Church of God, Anderson University.

<sup>25</sup>"Deserting the Army," *Gospel Trumpet* (Feb. 10, 1898), 4.

<sup>26</sup>"Should We Go To War?", *Gospel Trumpet* (April 15, 1898).

<sup>27</sup>For a fuller treatment of this topic, see my "The Demise [?] of a Peace Church: The Church of God (Anderson), Pacifism, and Civil Religion," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, vol. LXV, No. 2 (April 1991).



divine healing in the Church of God strongly suggests that the long-term weakening of the former can be attributed to the absence of what ensured the strengthening of the latter: a determination to practice a doctrine in addition to the formal pronouncement of it.

What all of this suggests is that, especially for a group like the Church of God, we know its theological life only superficially and in a distorted way unless we understand its practice of theology as well as its doctrinal statements. If we understand the movement's theological life as a matter of practices as well as formalized statements, we will discover some practices developing well in advance of related theological teaching. We may also discover that formal, printed statements of our theological commitments do not necessarily insure their reception into the life and habits of the church.

## **WILLIAM BAXTER GODBEY: APOSTLE OF HOLINESS**

by

**Barry W. Hamilton**

William B. Godbey was one of the most influential evangelists of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement in its formative period (1880-1920). Thousands of people experienced conversion or entire sanctification under his ministry, and Godbey gained a reputation for having revivals everywhere he went. A prolific author, he authored over 230 books and pamphlets and wrote numerous articles for holiness periodicals. He produced a new translation of the New Testament in 1901 and published a seven-volume *Commentary on the New Testament* (1896-1900). Godbey's publications, along with his preaching and "Bible lessons" at camp meetings, earned for the evangelist a widespread reputation among "holiness people" as the "Greek scholar" and "Bible commentator." Relentlessly on the move, Godbey traveled extensively across the continental United States and circled the globe five times. He was widely reputed to be the holiness movement's expert on "Bible lands" and "Bible manners and customs."

Through his publications and sermons, Godbey joined a limited number of other ministers who introduced premillennialism into the holiness movement. He was also one of the principal agents responsible for keeping the "tongues movement" out of the holiness movement. Godbey encouraged large numbers of people to join the new holiness denominations, and through his preaching and publications he shaped popular opinion on holiness and millennial doctrines. However, he never joined any of these new denominations; rather, he chose to remain in "Babylon" as a

lifelong member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Today Godbey has in large measure been forgotten in Methodism as well as among most people in the separatist-holiness denominations. His most honored remembrance may be found in the ranks of the Conservative holiness denominations. Unfortunately, Godbey is remembered almost universally as an “eccentric.” Indeed, many of Godbey’s contemporaries regarded him as an eccentric, and some stated that Godbey’s odd personal habits hindered his capacity for positive influence.

Historical research cannot overturn the judgment that Godbey had several eccentric personal habits; however, it can restore Godbey to a balanced remembrance that appreciates the evangelist’s singular achievements in shaping the holiness movement, in publishing a considerable body of holiness literature, and in garnering a large number of converts for the movement. To dismiss Godbey because of his “eccentricities” or to present the story of his ministry without mentioning his personal habits would betray a lack of integrity in the research. While historians of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement may be tempted to “clean up” history in the name of respectability, honest scholarship must admit the eccentric elements that shaped the early days of the movement. William B. Godbey spent more than seven decades in Christian service, and his radical pursuit of holy living—from his perspective—often involved the principled rejection of respectability.

### **Striplinghood**

William Baxter Godbey was born June 3, 1833, in Pulaski County, Kentucky. Reared on the family farm until age twenty, Godbey grew up in a pious Methodist home in which he had a conversion experience and call to preach at age three.<sup>1</sup> Two significant characteristics of his mature ministry were rooted in his childhood nurture in Kentucky Methodism. The first characteristic was the revivalism that permeated rural Kentucky society in the nineteenth century. Born in a family with deep roots in Methodism, Godbey understood his entire life and ministry within the context of revivalism. This is the most fundamental characteristic of his ministry—the holding of pro-

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<sup>1</sup>William B. Godbey, *Autobiography of W. B. Godbey* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, 1909), 26-29. See also William B. Godbey, *Infantile Christianity* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, 1911), 13-14; J. Lawrence Brasher, *The Sanctified South: John Lakin Brasher and the Holiness Movement* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 19; and Barry W. Hamilton, *William Baxter Godbey: Itinerant Apostle of the Holiness Movement* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 23.

tracted meetings (often without a predetermined date for ending the services—this depended on the leading of the Spirit) that moved people toward God. The second characteristic was the legacy of the Cane Ridge revival meetings of 1800-1801 in Kentucky that became models generating a climate of expectancy for many other revivals.<sup>2</sup> Rural Kentuckians expected revivals to be emotional and transformative events in which people fell down under the power of the Holy Spirit and through physical exercises—weeping, shouting, running and/or jumping—gave public evidence of God’s work in their souls. These expectations played a key role in shaping Godbey’s own expectations for intended outcomes of revivals.<sup>3</sup> Godbey may have encouraged the conjunction of the Cane Ridge legacy with Wesleyan-holiness doctrine to form a distinctive culture that prized physical demonstration as evidence of the work of God in the human soul.<sup>4</sup> In light of the expectations manifested in the culture of Kentucky revivalism, Godbey’s conversion as a three-year-old was undoubtedly bereft of the drama that was normally expected to accompany a “sound” conversion experience.<sup>5</sup>

At age 16 (November 1849) Godbey attended a Baptist revival and engaged in an intense, inward struggle for a “clear” conversion experience.<sup>6</sup> Godbey’s own account of his conversion experience reveals a

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<sup>2</sup>The best interpretation of the Cane Ridge events can be found in Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America’s Pentecost* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup>A good example of how these expectations shaped revival outcomes can be found in William B. Godbey, *Cherubim and Flaming Sword* (Nashville, TN: Pentecostal Mission Publishing Company, 1917), 94-95.

<sup>4</sup>However, this valuation of physical demonstration was never officially sanctioned in the holiness movement. Godbey hewed closely to Phoebe Palmer’s “altar theology” which never required physical demonstration as an accompaniment to the inward witness of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>5</sup>Godbey provided an example of the expectations that shaped public testimony to religious experience within the revival culture, stating that when the Methodist churches were “orthodox” they would keep seekers at the mourner’s bench for “not only days and weeks, but months and years” until they had experiences which satisfied observers. See William B. Godbey, *My Better Half* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Press, n.d.), 5-6.

<sup>6</sup>The theological and philosophical foundations of revivalism required the elimination of every vestige of doubt from the mind. This may have been the outcome of revivalism’s partnership with Scottish common-sense realism in the battle against skepticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For an example of Godbey’s rhetoric against doubt in the life of a Christian, see William B. Godbey, *The Abundant Entrance: 2 Peter 1:12* (Greensboro, NC: The Apostolic Messenger Office, n.d.), 17.

struggle with doubt that reached a point of despair, a divine-human drama resolved through an overwhelming sense of divine power and accompanied by unbounded joy. The intensity of the drama magnified the behavioral manifestations of the religious experience, which contributed to the public recounting of the event—the personal testimony—as a credible story that convinced others of its veracity and moved people to seek similar experiences. Furthermore, the movement in Godbey’s experience from doubt to despair to joyful resolution is not only similar to other conversion accounts, but is virtually identical with the description of his experience of entire sanctification.<sup>7</sup> In fact, when Godbey recounted his experience of December 1868, witnesses at the scene thought he had “completed his conversion,” since they could not distinguish his behavior from the kind typically manifested in those experiences labeled “conversion” in the revivalistic culture of that era.<sup>8</sup> By his own accounts, Godbey read the “old Methodist books” on sanctification, but had no idea how to obtain such an experience, and lacked a guide who had the experience and could lead him into it.<sup>9</sup> After Godbey had a profound experience at the altar of the Methodist church where he was pastor, along with fifty other seekers—many of whom shouted with him—his ministry was distinctly changed. Godbey’s ambitions for the Methodist episcopacy were “burned up,” and he experienced an outpouring of divine power along with significant results in his subsequent revival work. He credited the Holy Spirit’s work in entire sanctification for making him a “cyclone of fire,” with the result that he had revivals everywhere he went.<sup>10</sup> For Godbey, his experience of entire sanctification was the most important qualification for his work as a minister.<sup>11</sup>

### Cyclone Evangelist

Godbey’s ministry began when he was licensed in 1853 as a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. During his student

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<sup>7</sup>For a similar account of entire sanctification, see “Experience of Seth C. Rees,” *God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate* (February 21, 1901), 4.

<sup>8</sup>See William B. Godbey, *Mundane Restitution* (Nashville, TN: Pentecostal Mission Publishing Company, 1917), 15-16.

<sup>9</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 64. This was the principal reason why he later published numerous guides to entire sanctification—to eliminate the aimless wandering and help Christians find the experience as quickly as possible after conversion.

<sup>10</sup>Godbey, *My Better Half*, 10. See also James McGraw’s evaluation of Godbey’s post-1868 ministry in James P. McGraw, “The Preaching of William B. Godbey,” *The Preacher’s Magazine* (March 1956), 7-8.

<sup>11</sup>William B. Godbey, *Popular Evangelism* (n.p., n.d.), 3.

days at Georgetown College (KY) he preached to African-American slaves in Methodist “colored churches.”<sup>12</sup> He also spent several years teaching school in order to pay for his college education. Godbey received a “classical education” from Georgetown College, graduating with a baccalaureate degree on June 30, 1859. The marks of this “classical education” can be found throughout his books, articles, and pamphlets, and undoubtedly influenced his revival sermons. Stories from the Greek and Roman classics adorned his publications, and word studies in Greek and Latin were liberally sprinkled in his Bible lessons. As a teenager Godbey participated in rural debating societies, and he credited his debating experience with the acquisition of rigorous study habits which served him throughout his lifetime. His debating experience may also have been the origin of his speaking style—ornate, after the fashion of the day, yet addressed to common people—a style consistently reflected in each of his publications, and attested in personal reminiscences of those who knew him.<sup>13</sup> Godbey was admitted on trial to the Methodist ministry in 1866, and into full connection in 1868.<sup>14</sup> He served as president of Harmonia College in Perryville, Kentucky, from 1859 to 1868, and moved the school to Indiana during the Civil War since Godbey was a “Union man.”<sup>15</sup> In 1860 he married Emma Durham, whose family had been prominent in early Kentucky Methodism; they had eight children, only one of whom survived past early adulthood.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 83-84.

<sup>13</sup>See Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 68-74.

<sup>14</sup>*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1866* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870), 66; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1868* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870), 258.

<sup>15</sup>*Minutes of the Annual Conferences* (1868), 260. Godbey’s status as a minister was his reason for non-involvement in the conflict. See William B. Godbey, *Apostasy* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, n.d.), 33.

<sup>16</sup>For a short biography of Emma Durham Godbey, see *My Better Half*, cited above. For more information on the children, see William B. Godbey, *Our Glorified Children!* (n.p., n.d.). Emma eventually inherited her family’s ancestral property two miles east of Perryville, Kentucky (bounded on the north by present-day U.S. 150 and on the east by “Godbey Lane”). This is where Godbey settled his wife shortly before his Texas campaign of 1884. When Emma’s father died in 1889, she inherited the property and remained there until her death in 1915. The property had been the location of the first Methodist class meeting west of the Allegheny Mountains, according to a marker on the property. See Hamilton, *William Baxter Godbey* (2000), 32-33.

From all appearances, Godbey's career was typical of Kentucky Methodist ministers in this period—with the exception of his “classical education.” However, the experience of entire sanctification in 1868 set Godbey on a course that would carry him to the very edges of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and at the center of the holiness movement. After 1868, Godbey served several Methodist charges as pastor, was appointed twice as a presiding elder on the Kentucky Conference from 1873-1876, and served several smaller pastorates from 1877 to 1884. He held revival meetings in every place he could, usually with spectacular results. Appointed to the Methodist Church in Foster, Kentucky, in 1872, he saw more than 500 conversions in one year.<sup>17</sup> Revival meetings eventually took a toll on Godbey's career in the Methodist ministry. In his final charge in 1883-1884, he spent the entire year outside the boundaries of his conference, holding revivals in every place where he had been invited.<sup>18</sup> In 1884 Godbey found himself at the end of the Annual Conference without an appointment to a Methodist charge. When he spoke with his bishop, Rev. Holland N. McTyeire, the bishop encouraged him to become an evangelist located in Texas, where the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, needed rapid statistical growth. For the rest of his life, Godbey pointed to this event as the time when Bishop McTyeire “turned him loose on the whole connection.”<sup>19</sup> The bishop may have intended to frustrate the evangelist and eventually drive him out of the Methodist ministry. He probably anticipated that Godbey's talents for revivalism would bring statistical gains for the Methodist churches on the Texas

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<sup>17</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 270.

<sup>18</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 103. Godbey pointed out that the Kentucky Conference, aware of his talents for revivalism, “drifted into the habit” of appointing a helper for Godbey's charge—often two helpers—to free the evangelist for his travels.

<sup>19</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 103-104, 280-281. W. C. Wilson, a general superintendent in the early years of the Church of the Nazarene, recalled the prevailing attitude of Methodist bishops toward specialized evangelists: “The anti-perfectionist bishops were glad to encourage holiness preachers to enter the field of evangelism, as it spared them the embarrassment of having to send them to pastor churches that were trying to avoid having such pastors. Evangelists expected no guarantee that they would be kept busy or that their remuneration would be sufficient to cover traveling expenses for the long distances between meetings.” Mallalieu Archie Wilson, *Well Glory! The Life of William Columbus Wilson, 1866-1915*. Early edited manuscript, Nazarene Archives (Kansas City, MO), 37. This manuscript was brought to the author's attention by Dr. Stanley Ingersol, Nazarene Archivist.

frontier. In less than ten years most of Godbey's ministry would be conducted among widely-scattered Methodist churches and camp meetings, until the new holiness denominations were formed after 1895. However, once driven to the periphery of Methodism, Godbey became one of the most prominent evangelists in the holiness movement, and prepared a foundation for many of the holiness denominations that would soon be started. His own account reveals an energetic, restless evangelist with a driving passion for his work, a minister profoundly influencing the men and women who attended his meetings.<sup>20</sup>

Godbey's success in conducting revival meetings may be attributed in part to the dramatic character of his sermons. He developed strong proficiency in preaching colorful, emotional sermons that produced visible effects in congregations. This proficiency enabled him to move people toward a dramatic "crisis" experience at the mourner's bench. He typically surveyed a revival congregation on the first night of a meeting, ascertained a large number of people who needed conversion (this knowledge was allegedly a gift of the Holy Spirit), and preached the "Sinai Gospel" to awaken them. Godbey transliterated the Greek term *dunamis* into the English word "dynamite," thus rendering Romans 1:16 as "The gospel is the dynamite of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."<sup>21</sup> He equivocated on the meaning of "dynamite," connecting the connotation of explosive charge to the demonstrative worship style of the frontier revivals and camp meetings. For Godbey, "dynamite" referred to "hellfire and damnation" preaching, that aimed to kindle conviction of sin in unbelievers. He called this type of preaching "taking Mount Sinai for our pulpit," with "thunderbolts, earthquakes and lightning-shafts."<sup>22</sup> Godbey credited this type of preaching with producing phenomenal results in his revivals, and he was convinced that entire sanctification was the foundational experience which had equipped him to preach the "Sinai Gospel" with "the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."

Godbey advocated the "Sinai Gospel" as a means for bringing sinners to a point of ripe conviction, and refused to bring his revival meetings to a

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<sup>20</sup>Hamilton, *William Baxter Godbey* (2000), 56.

<sup>21</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 127-129; *Commentary on the New Testament*, 7 vols. (Cincinnati, OH: God's Revivalist Office, 1896-1900), vol. 5, *Romans* 14-18. Notice that the pagination in this volume starts over with the Book of Romans.

<sup>22</sup>William B. Godbey, *God's Gospel Preacher: When, Where, How* (Cincinnati, OH: God's Revivalist Office, 1911), 11.



point of resolution—through opening the mourner’s bench—until he sensed that the congregation had reached the breaking point.<sup>23</sup> He would preach in this manner for several nights, allowing the emotions in the congregation to climb until there was a general breakdown in order. Then Godbey would preach the “Calvary Gospel” and move people from despair to joy, while emphasizing the “dying love of Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> His emotional style can be gleaned from his description of the preacher standing “on the crimson hill of Golgotha and with solemn wails and breaking heart, preach the dying love of Jesus to the souls crushed by the thunder-bolts of Sinai.”<sup>25</sup> His revival practices often divided churches, and coupled with his odd mannerisms, brought down on himself the charge of being “crazy.”<sup>26</sup> Large numbers of people often came to his revival meetings out of curiosity, in order to hear a “crazy” preacher. On one occasion a young cowboy preacher named Bud Robinson drove a wagon twenty miles to hear Godbey preach on entire sanctification.<sup>27</sup> However, while many people opposed Godbey’s

<sup>23</sup>See Godbey, *Autobiography*, 344-345.

<sup>24</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 288-289; Hamilton, *William Baxter Godbey* (2000), 56-57; see also Barry W. Hamilton, “Preaching the ‘Narrow’ Way: William B. Godbey and the Homiletical Agenda of the Early Holiness Movement,” *Methodist History* XXXVIII, no. 1 (October 1999), 40-52. When Alma White was converted in a Kentucky schoolhouse revival in 1878 under Godbey’s preaching, she recounted that “some were so convicted that they left the room and threw up their suppers, and staggered back into the house as pale as pale as death.” Alma White, *The Story of My Life*, 5 vols. (Zarephath, NJ: Pillar of Fire, 1919-1943), 1:217f.

<sup>25</sup>Godbey, *God’s Gospel Preacher*, 13. Godbey’s homiletical style was not original—his graphic descriptions of Scriptural “scenes” such as the torments of Hell and the sufferings of the crucified Jesus were deeply rooted in Methodist revival preaching. Godbey may have inherited this style from his family’s rich Methodist heritage and from other revival preachers in rural Kentucky. He mastered the techniques of this style of preaching—a style that flourished in rural Kentucky—and carried this emotional style into modern contexts, such as urban Southern Methodist churches where he was regarded as “crazy.” For further discussion of Methodist religious language, see Steven D. Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language: Poetic Strategies and Campmeeting Piety in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Church History* 63:4 (December 1994), 570-586.

<sup>26</sup>For example, see Godbey, *Autobiography*, 100-101, 277-278.

<sup>27</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 341. See also Bud Robinson, “God Ran a River Through My Heart,” sermon preached in 1941 at Asbury College (Wilmore, KY). Recorded on an audiocassette obtained by the author in 1979 from the Minister’s Tape Club (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1979). The audiocassette copy of the sermon was produced from a wire recording in the archives of Trevecca Nazarene University (Nashville, TN). Robinson recollected that people in the region of Alvarado (TX) at that time were saying (in reference to Godbey)—“there’s a crazy man going around preaching holiness.”

preaching, those who approved of his dramatic manner of presenting conversion and entire sanctification as “epochal” (instantaneous) experiences endorsed him as an “old-style Wesleyan.”<sup>28</sup>

Not surprisingly, Godbey met strenuous opposition in several places, especially in his travels across Texas (beginning in 1884), because of his preaching on the subject of “sanctification.” Even though Hardin Wallace had introduced specialized preaching on entire sanctification in his Calvert, Texas, revival meeting in the winter of 1876-1877, and connected the doctrine with John Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, sanctification had become associated with fanaticism, especially in Central Texas where extremists in the two decades before Godbey’s arrival had poisoned the reputation of the subject.<sup>29</sup> Two groups that had infused the term with extreme teachings were most responsible for the controversy over sanctification. The “Corsicana Enthusiasts” joined holiness and premillennialism to form a millennial sect which Methodists and other “outsiders” associated with the Millerites.<sup>30</sup> The group also required husband and wife to separate subsequent to entire sanctification if the couple disagreed over the experience.<sup>31</sup> Another group that served to discredit the cause of holiness in Central Texas was a band of women officially known as the Woman’s Commonwealth, but commonly called the “Sanctified Sisters” or the “Belton Sanctificationists.” Walter Vernon gives a succinct

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<sup>28</sup>For example, see George McCullough, *History of the Holiness Movement in Texas, and the Fanaticism Which Followed* (Aquilla, TX: J. H. Padgett, 1886), 71-72.

<sup>29</sup>For more information on Hardin Wallace, see Macum Phelan, *A History of the Expansion of Methodism in Texas, 1867-1902* (Dallas, TX: Mathis, Van Nort and Company, 1937), 118.

<sup>30</sup>*Texas Christian Advocate* (22 November 1879).

<sup>31</sup>For a detailed account of the “fanaticisms” of the “Corsicana Enthusiasts,” see McCullough, *History of the Holiness Movement in Texas*. On page 35 McCullough mentions that in the teaching of this sect a husband and wife should separate if they should disagree over sanctification. Apparently this teaching was aimed at circumstances where one spouse (usually the woman) had experienced entire sanctification and the other spouse (usually the husband) would not permit the profession (required for retention) of the experience. The Corsicana Enthusiasts reasoned that the experience of entire sanctification took precedence over matrimony to the extent that, if husband and wife could not live in harmony over its profession in the household, they should separate. This teaching challenged male dominance in domestic relations, brought down the indignation of nearby communities on the Corsicana Enthusiasts, and infused the term “sanctification” with overtones of religious fanaticism and domestic rebellion.

account of the origins of this sect, which took place in the Central Texas town of Belton:

Mrs. Martha McWhirter had an experience in 1866 in which she believed she heard God speaking to her; she in turn spoke in tongues. She decided that she was experiencing guidance from God in all aspects of her life, and opposed the move of the Methodist congregation from a union church to their own. She gathered some other women around her . . . [who] decided that they should not have physical relations with their husbands.<sup>32</sup>

The Belton Sanctificationists challenged the male-dominated society of nineteenth-century Central Texas, and in turn received opposition and hostility from townsfolk, especially men.<sup>33</sup>

News of these rebellious women may have spread over Central Texas and compounded the “fanaticisms” of the “Corsicana Enthusiasts.” According to Godbey, people in this region were strenuously opposed to sanctification.<sup>34</sup> The term “sanctification” had become associated with domestic rebellion, and represented an experience that empowered women to leave their husbands and lead independent lives. The holiness movement would thus have appeared divisive, rendering asunder the sacred bonds of matrimony and threatening male dominance. This association could explain the violent attacks on Godbey during his evangelistic campaigns in Texas, when groups of men pelted him with rocks, dirt and eggs.<sup>35</sup> While holiness movement tradition has typically viewed these accounts of persecution as “martyrdom,” these attacks were probably reprisals from men

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<sup>32</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Robert W. Sledge, Robert C. Monk, and Norman W. Spellman, *The Methodist Excitement in Texas: A History* (Dallas, TX: Texas United Methodist Society, 1984), 144. See also George W. Tyler, *The History of Bell County* (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1966, reprint of 1936 edition), 392.

<sup>33</sup>For more information on the Belton Sanctificationists, see Sally L. Kitch, *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); *This Strange Society of Women: Reading the Letters and Lives of the Woman's Commonwealth* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992); and Patricia Anne Florence, “In God We Trust: The Woman's Commonwealth of Belton, Texas,” M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Dallas, 1998.

<sup>34</sup>“We found in that country deep and inveterate hostility to sanctification, resulting mainly from a fatal fanaticism which had visited the land in preceding years, preaching a counterfeit sanctification, which required husband and wife to separate.” Godbey, *Autobiography*, 328.

<sup>35</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 353-354.

whose wives had attended the revival meetings. Godbey often recalled instances of women who sought sanctification in his revival meetings. He reveled in an account of a presiding elder who censured him for preaching sanctification, while the presiding elder's wife was at the mourner's bench seeking the experience. Godbey never mentioned opposition from women in these campaigns—his opponents were angry men who perceived sanctification as a challenge to their domestic authority.<sup>36</sup> In spite of the violent opposition, Godbey became one of the most successful evangelists of the holiness movement between 1884 and 1893, and developed an extensive network of ministerial and lay supporters across the South—a network that quickly became national and international by 1900.

### **Bible Scholar**

As the “holiness people” became aware of their distinctive status, they sought firmer biblical-exegetical foundations for apologetic purposes, and expressed their concerns for a set of Bible commentaries “from the full salvation standpoint.” Beverly Carradine rejoiced in the “double pleasure” that a set of holiness commentaries would be written, and that Godbey would be the author: “Dr. Godbey is the man to do the work. His wide range of reading, his familiarity with the different versions of the Scripture, his knowledge and experience of the blessing itself, all fit him for the task. There will not be a dissenting voice to this throughout the holiness ranks.”<sup>37</sup> Godbey's popularity testified to his success as an evangelist, Bible teacher and author prior to the publication of the first volume of his *Commentary on the New Testament* in 1896. His earlier publications—*Baptism* (1884), *Sanctification* (1884), *Christian Perfection* (1886), *Victory* (1888), and *Holiness or Hell?* (1893)—enjoyed an extensive circulation, with some titles going through several printings. Godbey credited his friend Martin Wells Knapp with persuading him to write the *Commentary on the New Testament*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>The author speculates that innumerable women in revival meetings sought religious experiences as a means for dealing with domestic oppression. Women in Godbey's meetings may have viewed sanctification as a means of inwardly dealing with abusive or alcoholic husbands. Sanctification may have promised spiritual transcendence over the hardships of an intolerable household.

<sup>37</sup>Godbey, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1:4.

<sup>38</sup>For a biography of Knapp, see A. M. Hills, *A Hero of Faith and Prayer; Or, Life of Rev. Martin Wells Knapp* (Cincinnati, OH: Mrs. M. W. Knapp, Mount of Blessings, 1902). See the prayer and sermon given by Rev. Godbey at Knapp's

By the mid-1890s Godbey had become “one of the most prominent evangelists of the last quarter of the [nineteenth] century.”<sup>39</sup> He states, “The holiness people had been exceedingly clamorous a full dozen years for me to write commentaries expository of the New Testament. This conception had originated from my constant habit of teaching the Scriptures during my evangelistic meetings, utilizing the day time in the instruction of the Lord’s people and preaching in connection with my evangelistic meetings at night.”<sup>40</sup> Godbey frequently mentioned his extensive use of the Greek text in his teaching ministry. Since most people in his congregations were not acquainted with biblical languages, they would have uncritically accepted Godbey’s expertise as a Greek scholar. He could read Greek, but his scholarship was comparable to other college-educated ministers of his generation. Knapp persuaded him to write the commentaries; however, Godbey refused to begin this project until he had traveled to Palestine, for he believed the “land and the book” to be inseparable. Godbey set out on his first trip around the world in 1895 (with subsequent trips in 1899, 1905, 1912, and 1918), after receiving a gift of \$500 from J. S. Hunton subsequent to a lecture at the Texas Holiness Association’s campgrounds in Waco, Texas.<sup>41</sup> Godbey wanted to travel in “Bible lands” and improve his understanding of the geography, manners, and customs of the land and the people. To the pre-critical mind, these factors were important in developing an accurate interpretation of the biblical text.<sup>42</sup> Godbey also wanted to make firsthand observations concerning the fulfillment of prophecy—the “signs of the times”—in order to confirm the truthfulness of premillennialism. He intended to establish premillennial-

funeral on pages 300-310 and the “Tribute of the Bible Commentator, W. B. Godbey,” on pages 403-404. See also William Kostlevy, “Nor Silver, Nor Gold: The Burning Bush Movement and the Communitarian Holiness Vision” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1996). Prior to 1896, Godbey also published *Woman Preacher* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1891), which urged women to preach and testify—but did not deal with the issue of the ordination of women.

<sup>39</sup>Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Studies in Evangelicalism, No. 1 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1996), 98.

<sup>40</sup>Godbey, *Autobiography*, 366-367.

<sup>41</sup>See William B. Godbey, *Holy Land* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, 1895), 5.

<sup>42</sup>For a discussion of the “populist hermeneutic” which figured prominently in Godbey’s publications, see Stephen John Lennox, “Biblical Interpretation in the American Holiness Movement,” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1992), 26-79.

ism as the prevailing orthodoxy on eschatology in the holiness movement, and traveled around the world to gather evidence. He could not have constructed a convincing argument for this controversial eschatology until he had traveled widely and could cite firsthand observation of the “signs.”

His travel accounts would have carried conviction to the minds of his readers; Godbey was a prominent evangelist in the movement who had traveled where most of them had never been (and would never go), who had observed these “signs” with his own eyes (potent evidence for common-sense realists), and who concluded from his experiences that certain Bible prophecies were thereby fulfilled. Godbey’s commentaries confirm this purpose when he discusses the fulfillment of prophecy pertaining to the return of Christ, for it is in this context where he recounts his observations in foreign travels. Godbey’s references to his travels in “Bible lands” figure prominently in Volume One of the *Commentary on the New Testament*, which deals with the Book of Revelation, a book which in Godbey’s perspective is “all on the Second Coming of Christ.”<sup>43</sup> Godbey’s extensive travels also garnered a wealth of personal knowledge of the “Bible lands” of his day, as well as a personal acquaintance of holiness missions around the globe—knowledge which would have significantly increased his stature as a teacher in holiness circles. His travels also provided material for subsequent publications, several of which can be found in minister’s personal libraries today. One of Godbey’s most popular accounts of his travels was *Footprints of Jesus in the Holy Land*.<sup>44</sup> Primarily an exposition of the Old Testament, *Footprints of Jesus* could be characterized as a sermonizing travelogue. Places and events were occasions for digressing on Bible stories, sermon illustrations, and personal

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<sup>43</sup>Godbey, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1:9. Godbey’s commentaries began with the Book of Revelation and moved backwards to the Gospel accounts. This highlights the prominence which he gave to premillennialism in his teaching. Godbey chose not to make his commentaries “critical” but wrote them in the language of the “holiness people.” He intended the commentaries as a means for preparing laity to preach the Gospel to the whole world and thus hasten the second coming of Christ. See Godbey, *Autobiography*, 372.

<sup>44</sup>Godbey stated in this book that “the Commentaries were the real incentive” for his international travels. William B. Godbey, *Footprints of Jesus in the Holy Land* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, Mount of Blessings, 1900), 170-171. One of the best accounts of Godbey’s global tours is *Around the World, Garden of Eden, Latter Day Prophecies and Missions* (Mount of Blessings, Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, 1907). See also William B. Godbey, *The Apocalyptic Angel* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Press, 1914).

anecdotes that illustrated such “Bible truths” as entire sanctification. As in his other travel accounts, Godbey mentioned the “multitudinous perils” which he faced on his journeys and admitted, “Very few comparatively undertake this voyage, and the number would be much smaller if they knew beforehand the labor and danger involved.” When one considers that Godbey was past sixty years of age when he began his first tour, it becomes evident that he was a remarkable person of uncommon courage and motivation.

Besides his *Commentary on the New Testament*, Godbey’s most remarkable publishing achievement was his *Translation of the New Testament* (1901). In the “Apologue” he called it the “hardest work of my life,” the fruit of twenty-five years of using only the Greek New Testament in his preaching, and the result of a dozen years of popular demand from the holiness movement. Godbey shared with his nineteenth-century Protestant colleagues a historical perspective that exaggerated the “apostasy and barbarism” of the “Dark Ages” which began shortly after the beginning of the fourth century and ended in the sixteenth century with the Protestant Reformation. Calling this historical period “Satan’s millennium,” Godbey emphasized the widespread illiteracy of these centuries, as well as the efforts of the “heathen” (Goths, Vandals, and Muslims) to destroy all books and learning, “sparing not the Word of God.” Providentially, God preserved the pristine text of the New Testament of the apostolic age, which was hidden in the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai. God revealed this text to “His faithful servant, the learned Tischendorf” in 1859, and this text subsequently become known as *Codex Sinaiticus*.

Shortly after graduation from Georgetown College, Godbey had procured a copy of this Greek text from Germany, and based his *Translation of the New Testament* on it. He was convinced that the resulting translation was “the most literal, lucid, and perspicuous translation now extant in the English tongue.” Why did the “holiness people” need a new translation of the Bible? Godbey claimed that the English Version (the “Authorized” or “King James” translation of 1611) had “two thousand mistakes. . . of which nine hundred and four are corrected in the Revised Version.” The restoration of the New Testament text would augment the restoration of “New Testament Christianity,” and would provide textual support for the doctrine of entire sanctification as a second work of grace distinct from justification and regeneration.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the holiness movement articulated a vision of lay preachers—men and women—who would preach the restored gospel of the apostolic age to the world’s entire population. Godbey shared this vision and believed that God would call “millions” of laity to this task. This preaching of the laity would hasten the “Return of Jesus” for His saints.<sup>45</sup> Godbey supplied the holiness movement with his publications—especially his *Commentary on the New Testament* and his *Translation of the New Testament*—to support the movement’s vision of lay preaching. Indeed, Godbey himself was the living embodiment of this vision. He fervently believed that the end of the age was at hand, the Second Coming of Christ would take place no later than 1923, and that the “signs of the times” signaled an extreme urgency for the task of preaching the gospel to every living person on earth. Godbey’s *Commentary on the New Testament* and *Translation of the New Testament* stand today as monuments to the vision of the early holiness movement to “spread scriptural holiness” around the world, concomitant with the restoration of the primitive gospel of the apostolic age and in preparation for the coming millennial restoration of the created order.

Godbey’s contributions to holiness literature also included numerous small booklets that nourished the holiness people in sound doctrine and inoculated them against the “heresies” which were sweeping across America in the late nineteenth century. These booklets were printed on cheap (high acid content) paper in order to make them affordable (usually ten cents each), and as a consequence, most of them exist today in a state of marked deterioration. Topics included expositions of holiness soteriology, critiques of “popular evangelism,” indictments of the “fallen churches” (especially Methodism), warnings against such “heresies” as Mormonism, and devotional studies of the geography of “Bible lands.” However, the most prominent topic was the second coming of Christ. Godbey wrote numerous booklets concerning the “signs of the times,” expositions of dispensationalist chronology (outlining periods of history, the Rapture, the Tribulation Period, the Millennium, and the final judgment), and exhortations to be “robed and ready” with the experience of entire sanctification. These booklets contain an abundance of Godbey’s

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<sup>45</sup>See William B. Godbey, *Translation of the New Testament from the Original Greek*. “A KPOF Christian Classic Reprint” (Westminster, CO: Belleview College, 1991 [1901]), 5-7, 372-373. The first edition was published in Cincinnati, Ohio, by M. W. Knapp in 1901.



sermon illustrations—personal anecdotes, allusions to classical Greek mythology, references to rural life, and stories taken from religious biographies of such notable personalities as George Whitefield, John Wesley, Benjamin Abbott, and Charles G. Finney. These booklets provide today’s readers with snapshots of Godbey’s preaching style—homespun stories, rhetoric, pointed exhortations, allusions to classical literature—and provide a clear picture of a distinct personality. Like the rest of his publications, Godbey’s booklets were not polished productions; rather, they were transcriptions of his reminiscences, taken in Gregg shorthand by “amanuenses”—most of them students of God’s Bible School. Godbey had serious problems with his eyesight, and his handwriting was very difficult to decipher. He dictated his books and pamphlets from memory, and the transcriptions were apparently not edited for style. His publications appear to represent a raw transcription of his personality and speaking style.

### **Gospel Ranger**

William Godbey was indeed unique—a complex personality with several distinctive aspects that must be held together in order to have an accurate assessment of his ministry. First of all, he was a well-educated Methodist minister who could communicate most effectively with common people—especially those who had a rural background. Second, he had a profound religious experience in 1868 that dramatically altered his ministry. Third, he was effective in communicating this experience to large numbers of people, persuading them to receive a similar experience. Fourth, he had a passion for relentless travel—he was constantly on the move, from meeting to meeting, from the time he left the presidency of Harmonia College (1869) to the last four weeks of his life (1920) when he was physically unable to travel. Fifth, his personal habits included unconventional patterns of behavior that encouraged people to label him as “eccentric.” These sides must be held together in tension or an unbalanced picture of the man emerges.

Godbey’s brilliance and eccentric personal habits often produced a mixed reaction from colleagues who admired his intense dedication to the holiness cause, appreciated his biblical scholarship and preaching, and at the same time eschewed some of his behavior. Students at God’s Bible School, where Godbey occasionally taught (when he wasn’t holding revivals or touring “Bible lands”) remembered him with reverence and

affection. They also remembered his “eccentricities,” which included his speculations on “celestial evangelism” and his personal habits.<sup>46</sup> Godbey’s eccentric traits included extreme thrift, which he attributed to his desire to send as much money as possible to missionaries. When he planned his funeral, he requested that no flowers be purchased and that his former students (alumni of Harmonia College) dig the grave free of charge. He desired his possessions to be sold for missions support—“about ten or twenty thousand dollars worth” of unsold publications.<sup>47</sup>

When Godbey passed away on September 12, 1920, those who knew him best responded with unmitigated admiration and respect. The most detailed description of Godbey’s final illness and funeral was an article written by Mrs. Martin Wells Knapp, editor of *God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate*. The article, “Into the Beautiful Beyond” thoroughly described and eulogized Godbey from the perspective of those who were steeped in personal reminiscences of one who lived and taught among them as a Bible teacher and saint—a living embodiment of the ideals of the holiness movement. Godbey was remembered for his innumerable publications, his extreme thrift (according to the article, a form of self-denial), and his godliness.<sup>48</sup> H. C. Morrison expressed similar sentiments in the *Pentecostal Herald*, and emphasized Godbey’s accomplishments and Christian spirit: “Dr. Godbey had many eccentricities, but the innocent and beautiful spirit [which] characterized him, made his eccentricities attractive and amusing rather than offensive.”<sup>49</sup> Other remembrances of Godbey were more subdued when measuring his ministry by denominational expecta-

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<sup>46</sup>Reacting to speculations in nineteenth-century “scientific” publications (especially those of Thomas Dick) that life might exist on distant planets, Godbey himself speculated that if these distant inhabitants were under “probation,” transfigured saints might be dispatched from heaven to preach the gospel to them. See William B. Godbey, *Mundane Restitution*, 50. Some of his odd personal habits were recounted in an interview with one of his former students, which included a preoccupation with thrift, as well as his views on “celestial evangelism.” Mrs. Francis R. Guy, interview with the author, June 1978.

<sup>47</sup>William B. Godbey, *My Funeral* (Greensboro, NC: Apostolic Messenger Office, n.d.), 32. For further discussion of Godbey’s eccentric personal habits, see Hamilton, *William Baxter Godbey: Itinerant Apostle of the Holiness Movement*, 110-115.

<sup>48</sup>Mrs. Martin Wells Knapp, “Into the Beautiful Beyond,” *God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate*, vol. XXXII, no. 40 (October 7, 1920), 2.

<sup>49</sup>H. C. Morrison, “The Ascension of Dr. W. B. Godbey,” *Pentecostal Herald* (September 29, 1920), 2-3.

tions, but still expressed appreciation for the effectiveness of his revival preaching. Mallalieu Wilson, writing the biography of his father, Rev. W. C. Wilson, a general superintendent in the early years of the Church of the Nazarene, characterized Godbey as “one of the most colorful, eccentric preachers and writers of his day. Probably more people were influenced to seek entire sanctification as a direct result of his preaching and writing than any other one man, more than any other two men combined except for Beverly Carradine, H. C. Morrison, and ‘Bud’ Robinson.” Wilson stated that Godbey was “small in size” and in his “early ministerial career. . . carried a gold-headed cane, and dressed in the most foppish style.” However, “after he was sanctified, he went to the opposite extreme . . . and cared absolutely nothing about his personal appearance, or about the ordinary observances and courtesies of society.”<sup>50</sup>

Wilson presented a balanced appraisal of this evangelist, expressing appreciation for his education and censure for some of his extreme teachings: “Godbey was intelligent, highly educated for his day, and on many points extremely sensible. On many points he was really fanatical, and undoubtedly encouraged the holiness people in some of their fanatical ideas.”<sup>51</sup> Wilson also placed responsibility on Godbey for popularizing among holiness people the “misleading expression, ‘Holiness or Hell.’” Wilson stated, “whatever the expression may have meant to him, it has usually been preached as if it meant, ‘Unless you have the experience of second-blessing holiness as I teach it, you will go to hell for sure.’”<sup>52</sup> Godbey probably intended to emphasize the teaching, based on an interpretation of Hebrews 12:14, common in the holiness movement, that all believers were required to be seeking after holiness until they received the

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<sup>50</sup>See Mallalieu Archie Wilson, *Well Glory! The Life of William Columbus Wilson, 1866-1915* (early edited manuscript in Nazarene Archives, Kansas City, MO), 57-59. All cited portions belong to the edited manuscript and do not appear in the published work.

<sup>51</sup>“He [Godbey] boasted that he had never tasted coffee, tea, chocolate, or Nervine. He boasted also that he had never attended a barbecue, dance frolic, theatrical, or circus. When he received the ‘completion of his conversion,’ which he later identified as ‘entire sanctification,’ he not only quit the Masonic Lodge, but dropped all life insurance. He preached a thoroughly un-Wesleyan doctrine of Pre-millennialism [sic] which was widely accepted by holiness people in the South and by most fundamentalists everywhere. Again and again in his books he predicted that the Second Coming. . . would occur in 1923 at the very latest.” Wilson, *Well Glory!*, 58-59.

<sup>52</sup>Wilson, *Well Glory!*, 60.

experience of entire sanctification. Unfortunately, this teaching apparently came to be understood by many holiness people as requiring entire sanctification for entrance into heaven.<sup>53</sup>

The obituary published by the Kentucky Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, also struck a balance between appreciation for his revival work and recognition of his limitations. "He was neither a pastor nor a presiding elder. He knew nothing of organization and conservation, and gave himself little concern about the management of the affairs of charge or district. He was an evangelist, and this alone occupied his mind and engaged his effort." The writer then epitomized Godbey's style of ministry: "Temperamentally and by choice he was a gospel ranger." But the author of the obituary still had a measure of respect for Godbey's contributions to Methodism: "Out of his abundant labors sprang one of the greatest revivals of modern times; and when the history of the Church is written, the name of W. B. Godbey will loom large in that part of its dealing with the revival which came to Methodism during the latter part of the last century." Even though Godbey had, in the opinion of his colleagues, "made the serious mistake of drifting away from his Church," he was readmitted to the Conference in 1918 "and died as a member of our body, September 12, 1920."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>This misunderstanding may have resulted from Godbey's intention to provide revival crowds, as well as his readers, with as much incentive as possible to seek the experience of entire sanctification. Pressing the importance of the experience to his audiences, Godbey may have misled people into thinking that God required entire sanctification for entrance into heaven. Furthermore, there is no evidence in his publications that he ever tried to clear up this impression. For Godbey, heaven could admit only those who had the experience of entire sanctification. See Godbey, *Cherubim and Flaming Sword*, 97-99. Godbey would not deny admission into heaven for Catholics, Mormons, or adherents of other religions—however, everyone was required to have a "clean heart." In his exposition of premillennial eschatology, Godbey also taught that only those who had experienced entire sanctification would participate in the "Rapture" as the result of his "holiness hermeneutic" that saw "doubleness" as a biblical theme. "In regeneration, Christ comes into the heart the first time homogeneously with his first advent into the world. In sanctification, He comes into the heart the second time to sit on the throne of His glory and reign forever. . . . Nothing but entire sanctification, which is wrought by the spiritual Christ in His second coming into the heart, can prepare us to meet our glorious coming King." Godbey, *Commentary on the New Testament* 2:122-123.

<sup>54</sup>*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1921), 56-57.

Godbey was indeed a remarkable man in an era of unprecedented social and religious upheaval—a fiery “cyclone” evangelist of unrelenting energy; a “gospel ranger” who traveled the world; a man of exceptional courage who faced numerous dangers on his global tours; a revivalist whose share of the harvest included thousands who professed conversion and entire sanctification under his ministry; and an apologist and Bible teacher who profoundly shaped the holiness movement’s theology in its early days. Undoubtedly, Godbey’s personality and radical convictions created the impression that he was eccentric—or mistakenly, “crazy.” Today the holiness movement should balance its remembrance of Godbey’s eccentricities with appreciation and respect for his positive contributions. Wesleyan scholars should recognize his “eccentricities” as part of the movement’s history and culture, since the charge of “eccentric” could just as readily be applied to several other prominent figures in the nineteenth-century holiness movement. While Wesleyan scholars cannot accept Godbey’s teachings without qualification, they should give serious consideration to his publications as resources for insight into the history and culture of the movement’s early years.

# WESLEY, WHITEFIELD, A PHILADELPHIA QUAKER, AND SLAVERY

by

Irv Brendlinger

“Wesley” and “Whitefield.” The two names are well known among those interested in the eighteenth century, theology, preaching, Methodism, or Calvinism. I remember meeting a “Mr. Whitfield” in Edinburgh one day as I chose a new route to walk home from the University. He had a sailboat in his front “garden,” and that was the topic that began our conversation. After exchanging names I commented on his name being the same as that of a rather famous preacher. He acknowledged not only knowing about George Whitefield, but being distantly related. His family, however, had changed the spelling to “Whitfield” to end the incessant mispronunciation of “White-field” with the long “i.” He didn’t seem to know much about George’s life or theology, only the inheritance of the name, and I do not recall running into him again. George, on the other hand, I *have* run into and he always provides interest, whether from his amazing preaching, which even impressed Benjamin Franklin, or his eye problem (he was “cross eyed”) caricatured in cheap plays as “Dr. Squintem,” or his numerous transatlantic travels under harsh and dangerous conditions, or his “Calvinistic Methodism” which many conceive to be a kind of oxymoron.

The relationship between John Wesley and George Whitefield is well known. It goes back to the Holy Club in Oxford and provides numerous glimpses into the style and personality of each man. While Whitefield was not part of the cadre of Holy Club members that accompanied Wesley to America in 1736, their lives intersected at other key points.

It was Whitefield who introduced Wesley to “field preaching,” that practice which Wesley almost initially rejected as inconsistent with the inherent goodness of the gospel, but which became the hallmark of his reaching the common folk. It was Whitefield who bequeathed so many new converts into the care of Wesley (while Whitefield sojourned again to America) that organization was needed, and the foundations of the Methodist group dynamic were laid. It was Whitefield into whose arms Wesley fell when he discovered that his love, Grace Murray, had been persuaded by Charles (without consulting John) to suddenly marry someone else. Wesley and Whitefield embraced and sobbed together as true brothers when words were inadequate to describe the ache; they could share the deep pain.

It was Whitefield who later broke their agreement to avoid coming out in public and revealed their core doctrinal difference on predestination by preaching it. Wesley countered by preaching and publishing his rejection of predestination in his now famous sermon entitled “Free Grace.” It was Whitefield with whom Wesley agreed to heal that breach, which would certainly hurt the cause of Christianity through disunity, by the pact that whoever died first, the other would preach his funeral as a final and lasting testimony to the unity of their love and the gospel. And Whitefield conducted a significant ministry in Georgia after Wesley’s return to Britain. It is one aspect of Whitefield’s time in Georgia that constitutes the central concern of this essay.

### **The Slavery Divide**

Predestination was not the only issue on which Wesley and Whitefield disagreed. That difference has been vindicated by history in that there are still respectable strands within Christianity that side with each man. The other difference, however, is not one that history looks upon so charitably. Rather, it designates one of the men as simply a man of his time and culture without the insight to see beyond, and the other man as beyond his time, transcending his culture and even generating good within it. The issue is slavery.

It would be interesting to do a major comparison of Wesley and Whitefield on slavery, but it is sufficient here to say that Whitefield supported slavery and even owned slaves. Wesley completely rejected slavery and preached and wrote against it. When we bring in a third character, the interaction, disagreement and development become even more interesting

and profitable. The person who influenced both men on the issue of slavery was Anthony Benezet, a Philadelphia Quaker.

Benezet was born in France of Huguenot parents in 1713. Because of persecution, the family fled in 1715, living in London for sixteen years and then settling in Pennsylvania. Although his parents became staunch Moravians, Benezet joined the Quakers as a young man and remained a “convinced Friend” for the rest of his life. His circle of friends came to include the noted Quaker John Woolman, Benjamin Franklin, and Benjamin Rush, the first Surgeon General under George Washington. Benezet was primarily an educator, teaching in Germantown and Philadelphia from the age of twenty-six. He was one of the earliest to teach black persons, establishing an informal school of evening classes in his home in 1750 and finally persuading Quakers to establish a school for black children. His concern for the slave is evidenced from 1754 when he began to write against slavery and the slave trade. A similar concern can be seen in his support of a group of war refugees, the “Acadians,” who were exiled from Nova Scotia, and his advocacy of peace with Native Americans.

Benezet’s antislavery activity included the writing of some eight tracts on the subject and a pattern of extensive correspondence with persons he judged could be helpful in this cause. His influence on John Wesley is clear, important, and relatively unknown. He was the pivotal influence on Wesley’s decision to enter the antislavery cause in 1772, culminating in Wesley publishing his influential tract *Thoughts Upon Slavery* in 1774. More than half of Wesley’s tract is taken directly from Benezet’s 1771 tract *Some Historical Account of Guinea*. Frank Baker details the relationship of the two pieces in his fine article “The Origins, Character, and Influence of John Wesley’s *Thoughts Upon Slavery*.”<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Benezet’s influence on George Whitefield was not as successful. It is true that Whitefield was initially opposed to slavery. Benezet remembers, “He at first clearly saw the iniquity of this horrible abuse of the human race, as manifestly appears from the letter he published on that subject, addressed to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia North & South Carolina [sic] in the year 1739 after his first Journey thro’ those Colonies.”<sup>2</sup> However, after continued exposure to slavery, White-

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<sup>1</sup>Published in *Methodist History*, Vol. 22, January, 1984, 75-86.

<sup>2</sup>Benezet to Lady Huntingdon, March 10, 1775, p. 2 (Haverford Collection, 852).



field completely changed his view. The dramatic change is recorded in his now famous letter to Wesley in 1751.

Reverend and Very Dear Sir: Thanks be to God that the time for favoring the colony of Georgia seems to be come. Now is the season for us to exert our utmost for the good of the poor Ethiopians. We are told that even they are soon to stretch out their hands to God; and who knows but their being settled in Georgia may be overruled for this great end? As for the lawfulness of keeping slaves, I have no doubt, since I hear of some that were bought with Abraham's money and some that were born in his house. I also cannot help thinking that some of those servants mentioned by the apostles in their epistles were, or had been, slaves. It is plain that the Gibeonites were doomed to perpetual slavery; and, though liberty is a sweet thing to such as are born free, yet to those who never knew the sweets of it slavery, perhaps, may not be so irksome. However this be, it is plain to a demonstration that hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes. What a flourishing country might Georgia have been had the use of them been permitted years ago! How many white people have been destroyed for want of them, and how many thousands of pounds spent to no purpose at all! Though it is true that they are brought in a wrong way from their own country, and it is a trade not to be approved of, yet, as it will be carried on whether we will or not, I should think myself highly favored if I could purchase a good number of them in order to make their lives comfortable, and lay a foundation for breeding up their posterity in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I had no hand in bringing them into Georgia, though my judgment was for it, and I strongly importuned thereto; yet I would not have a Negro upon my plantation till the use of them was publicly allowed by the colony. Now this is done, let us diligently improve the present opportunity for their instruction. It rejoiced my soul to hear that one of my poor Negroes in Carolina was made a brother in Christ. How know we but we may have many such instances in Georgia! I trust many of them will be brought to Jesus, and this consideration, as to us, swallows up all temporal inconveniences whatsoever.

I am, etc.,

George Whitefield<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Benezet's letter to Lady Huntingdon. Whitefield's complete letter is in David D. Thompson, *John Wesley as a Social Reformer*, 43-45.

What went wrong? Why did Wesley respond so positively to Benezet's influence and bring a huge number of his followers to bear witness against slavery, yet Whitefield acquiesced to the prevailing view of his age? While we may never know all the answers to these questions, it is possible to trace the thinking of the two men and even read Benezet's evaluation and conclusion on Whitefield's slavery position.

As a preface to that discussion, and with the Wesley/Whitefield slavery contrast in mind, it is remarkable that Wesley and Benezet never met personally (they knew each other only through writing), but Whitefield and Benezet were personal friends. Born in 1713 and 1714, respectively, Anthony Benezet and George Whitefield knew each other in London, where the Benezet family lived until 1731. There was a strong friendship and respect between Whitefield and Stephen Benezet, Anthony's father. Once settled in Pennsylvania, Stephen and Judith Benezet hosted Whitefield when he was in their area. After Stephen's death this opportunity fell to Anthony Benezet. As late as 1770, shortly before Whitefield's death, he lodged with Anthony.<sup>4</sup> Because of their strong difference of opinion on slavery, one wonders if they discussed the issue or if they corresponded when separated. Did either attempt to persuade the other? Fortunately, there is some key correspondence which sheds light on these questions.

Brookes indicates that when Whitefield was still alive, Benezet corresponded with Whitefield's patroness, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, about the wrongness of slavery and was assured that she had not proposed it, but would prohibit it. If this is the case, it is interesting that Benezet addressed Whitefield's patroness, as well as Whitefield himself.<sup>5</sup> It is also interesting that at Whitefield's death there were still slaves at the Orphanage, and the Countess inherited them. If this correspondence occurred before 1770, either Lady Huntingdon did not convey her wishes to Whitefield or he did not follow them.

### **Whitefield's Change of Position**

This background gives the setting for two revealing letters from Benezet to Lady Huntingdon after Whitefield's death. These letters

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<sup>4</sup>George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937), 96.

<sup>5</sup>Brookes, 97. Although Brookes indicates that this correspondence with the Countess occurred before Whitefield's death, documentation is not given and it may be that Brookes is referring to the letters Benezet sent to her in 1774 and 1775, after Whitefield's death.

clearly answer the questions about Benezet's interaction with Whitefield regarding slavery, as well as his assessment of Whitefield's position and rationale. In 1774, four years after Whitefield's death, Benezet wrote Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, an impassioned eight-page letter.<sup>6</sup> He wrote to her because she had become the director (functioning from England) of the orphanage and had the undisputed authority to deal with slavery policy there.

Benezet's correspondence indicates at least two factors that seem to have influenced Whitefield to move from his 1739 opposition of slavery to his 1751 position of support. One of his primary ministry concerns was the Orphan House in Georgia, which he viewed both as a ministry of compassion and a tool of evangelism. However, keeping it afloat financially was an ongoing concern to him. One means of support was the land, some 640 acres. If properly cultivated, it could be financially productive. However, the intense labor of cultivation seemed to be a problem, and Whitefield believed that the climate in Georgia was too hot for strenuous physical labor by white people. His commitment to the orphanage coupled with the prevailing view of the landowners of the south convinced him that black laborers, because of their previous African climate, were well suited to such labor. He began to think that slavery was necessary if the land was to be cultivated and cultivation was necessary to the survival of the orphanage. The result was that he rejoiced when slavery became legal in Georgia, and, as indicated above, became a slave owner. Further, he believed that, by bringing Africans into contact with Christian Europeans, slavery provided a means of preaching the gospel to them. This was an additional justification for slavery. Whitefield kept some fifty slaves on the acres of rice and flax that sustained the orphanage.<sup>7</sup>

The other factor influencing Whitefield's change of view, according to Benezet was the principle of attenuation. In his second letter to Lady Huntingdon, 1775, we receive invaluable insight into Benezet's view of Whitefield. Early in the letter Benezet makes the strong point that good people initially respond to evil with clear disdain, but from ongoing exposure they begin to practice and defend the same evil. He wrote:

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<sup>6</sup>Benezet to Lady Huntingdon, March 10, 1775, p. 1. This theme is also found in Benezet's tracts. See Epistle of 1754, paragraph 6, and Benezet's *Short Account*, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Brookes, 97.

Many well disposed people are ready as their first prospect of some prevailing evils to say, with one of old, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" and yet from a repeated sight & habit of that which flatters self, which soothes [sic] our pride & interest, we are too often gradually drawn into the practice & defence of that which we at first [. . .] looked upon with abhorrence. This I have observed to be more particularly the case with respect to the bondage of the Negroes.<sup>8</sup>

It appears that Benezet is setting the stage for describing what specifically happened in Whitefield's thinking. On page two of the letter he continues:

I have more than once conversed on this interesting subject with my esteemed friend George Whitefield deceased. [. . .] after residing in Georgia & being habituated to the sight & use of Slaves, his judgment became so much influenced as to paliate, & in some measure, defend the use of Slaves. . . .

Benezet's assessment is that, through continued exposure to slavery, Whitefield, like so many others, became accustomed to and accepting of what had previously been abhorrent to him. He became attenuated to this moral evil.

Benezet's response to Whitefield's attenuation is not left in question. He states, "this was a matter of much concern to me, and which I repeatedly, with brotherly freedom, expressed to him." However, Whitefield did not change his opinion and amazingly, their relationship did not suffer. Benezet expresses unusual charity and tolerance in his conclusion, "Nevertheless I esteemed & loved him, having long had opportunity to observe his zeal for what he apprehended truth required."

**"Now is the season for us to exert our utmost for the good of the poor Ethiopians"<sup>9</sup>**

Having failed to persuade Whitefield to oppose slavery, Benezet directed his influence to others after Whitefield's death. More to the point, he was aware of the weight of Whitefield's position and interested in "damage control." He desired to counter Whitefield's influence on those concerned in the orphanage. Relating specifically to Whitefield's 1751 letter to Wesley, he reasoned:

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<sup>8</sup>Benezet to Lady Huntingdon, March 10, 1775, p. 1. This theme is also found in Benezet's tracts. See Epistle of 1754, paragraph 6, and Benezet's *Short Account*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, quoting Whitefield to Wesley, March 22, 1751.

What particularly causes me *now* to remark upon his sentiments is, lest his approbation thereof should have any influence upon those who now [my emphasis] have the management of his interest in Georgia, some of whom, I apprehend, are like minded, if not yet more inclined to favour the use of & slavery of the Negroes than he was. There is particularly in the Collection of his letters, published since his decease, one wrote from Bristol, the 22 March 1751, which I am apprehensive may give much strength, & be a standing plea to such who catch at every thing, much more a letter wrote by a person of so much weight, to defend their favorite *Diana* by which they have their wealth. His reasonings in that letter appear to me, & indeed to everyone with whom I have reasoned upon it, to be very inconclusive, rather beging [sic] the question: for tho' the spiritual advantage of the Slaves is pleaded, yet it plainly appears that the temporal advantage, resulting from their labour, is the principal motive for undertaking to defend the practice.

Citing Whitefield's words to Wesley, "it is plain to a demonstration that hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes," Benezet uses a similar phrase to counter argue and uncover what he believes to be Whitefield's true motive. He asserts, ". . . from the whole of this letter, it is clear, to a demonstration, that the main aim of his desire of purchasing Slaves was the pecuniar advantage arising therefrom & the outward advancement & prosperity of the province."<sup>10</sup> Attempting to find a balance between criticism and charity, Benezet adds, "However we may in general retain an esteem & love for individuals, yet we must not suffer ourselves to be blinded by ill grounded pretences, founded on those selfish motives too apt, if not thro' divine help particularly guarded against, to intrude in a time of weakness upon the heart, of even otherwise valuable persons."<sup>11</sup> He then cites John Wesley, who also lived and did physical labor in Georgia, to refute the climatic need for slaves, referring to part of Wesley's tract, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*: "As to the plea that hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes, the contrary is asserted by John Wesley, from his own experience in the piece intituled [sic] *Thoughts on Slavery* which I herewith send at page 41." He encloses his republished, annotated edition of Wesley's tract.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 2-4.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 4.

**To Be Silent . . . Would Be Criminal**<sup>12</sup>

After closing the letter, Benezet could not resist adding another lament about Whitefield. Whitefield had made the statement that, whether one liked it or not, the trade will continue. In reaction, Benezet levels his most pointed response: “Indeed we may expect this trade will continue, whilst those who have been the particular objects of the notice of the nation, as promulgators of the Gospel reason in this manner, instead of bearing their Christian Testimony, against the outrageous violation of the rights of Mankind.” There is no doubt that Benezet’s phrase “the particular objects of the notice of the nation, as promulgators of the Gospel” is a clear reference to Whitefield’s celebrity status and makes a dramatic contrast to Wesley, who used his celebrity status and position of leadership to influence people in support of the antislavery cause. To Benezet, the entire matter has to do with speaking truth in the face of a horrid evil, or as Wesley termed the slave trade, that “execrable trade” and slavery, the “sum of all villainies.”<sup>13</sup> There is no question that Benezet loved and had great respect for Whitefield, but still he was constrained to speak truth, even to oppose his friend because “. . . where the lives and . . . [the] welfare of so vast a number of our Fellow Creatures is concerned, to be silent . . . would be criminal.”<sup>14</sup>

Benezet not only disagreed with Whitefield, but he also did his utmost to persuade him—to no avail. While his regard for this fellow Christian was not diminished, he had no qualms about confronting him in life about the inconsistency in the practice of his faith or about exposing his rationale and its weakness after death. He also did not hesitate to use his friendship with Whitefield and the weakness in Whitefield’s argument to persuade Lady Huntingdon to work for the cause of the slaves. He believed he was called to bring an end to slavery and he would do whatever he could.

**Conclusion**

Wesley and Whitefield intersected at many points in their lives and the two of them also intersected with Benezet at the crossroad of slavery. What can be learned from their relationships and decisions can instruct

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*.

<sup>14</sup>Benezet to Lady Huntingdon, March, 1775, p. 7.

thoughtful people of the present age in regard to looking beyond their culture and deeper than the accepted hermeneutic of the majority. Whitefield used Scripture to endorse slavery by citing biblical examples in which slavery was not condemned. Benezet and Wesley saw beyond such use of oft-quoted examples to the larger biblical call to love and treat others as one desires to be treated. This reflects the hermeneutic that Tertullian encouraged—the challenge of every age is to view individual texts of Scripture in light of the whole of Scripture and to see the penetrating truth of Scripture and be led to higher mores rather than using Scripture as a proof-text to support one's bias and practice.

The example of being faithful in using one's gifts and being passionate to make a difference in the world is one to be followed. Believers are to speak truth in the face of differing opinions, but do so with unfeigned charity. All three were great men, followers of their consciences and they made a difference in the world. It is hoped that the clearer glance from the perspective of history will enable us to take the best from their lives and model our lives from the truth they lived into.

# THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE “SOCIAL PRINCIPLE”: THE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF ASA MAHAN

by

**Christopher P. Momany**

In the early 1880s, Asa Mahan (1799-1889), venerable philosopher within the Holiness Movement, pondered a linguistic construction in the first chapter of Genesis: “Every individual who is at all acquainted with the Scriptures in their original languages, is aware of the fact that the first time in which the term ‘God’ appears therein, that term has not the singular, but the plural form.”<sup>1</sup> For Mahan, this plurality could only be explained with reference to the Trinity, and such thinking symbolized a lifetime of struggle with the notion that God is simultaneously many and one.

This trinitarian contemplation has received little attention from students of Mahan. Indeed, he left a multifaceted legacy, and the most scrupulous examination can overlook a multitude of theological and philosophical emphases within his writing. Mahan is best known as the first president of both Oberlin College and Adrian College. His role in charting a trajectory for much of the late-nineteenth-century Holiness Movement is well documented, and his social convictions regarding anti-slavery and women’s rights are respectfully remembered.<sup>2</sup> Most commen-

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<sup>1</sup>Asa Mahan, *A Critical History of Philosophy* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), vol. 1, 352.

<sup>2</sup>One must begin a general study of Mahan with reference to Edward H. Madden and James E. Hamilton, *Freedom and Grace: The Life of Asa Mahan* (Metuchen, N.J., & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982). One of the best examinations of Mahan’s social views is found in James E. Hamilton, “The



tators have paid particular attention to Mahan's ethical principles, and these observers have drawn varying conclusions.

According to Randy Maddox, Mahan's antebellum emphasis on human agency expressed itself through a "decisionistic" ethic.<sup>3</sup> Donald Dayton has identified a mid-century shift in the thinking of Mahan from a christocentric articulation of perfection toward a pneumatocentric emphasis on the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. He sees this shift as evidence of a larger shift from the ethical to the experiential and personal.<sup>4</sup> These two contemporary judgments of Mahan's moral emphases are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they do invite a question: Was Mahan's legacy primarily that of a legalistic social reformer or that of a postbellum pietist? Much of this interpretive dilemma has centered on how one juxtaposes the respective christological and pneumatological categories in Mahan's thought.

I argue that to pose the quandary of interpretation as a tension between christology and pneumatology may be correct, but, in light of Mahan's multidimensional theology, it is incomplete.<sup>5</sup> When viewed through the lens of his theology of the entire Trinity, Mahan's moral philosophy or ethic takes on a striking consistency—a consistency that did

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Church as a Universal Reform Society: The Social Vision of Asa Mahan," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 25:1 (Spring 1990): 42-56. See also Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976) and Edward H. Madden, *Civil Disobedience and Moral Law in Nineteenth-Century American Philosophy* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Randy L. Maddox, "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 50:2/51:1 (Fall 1995/Spring 1996): 160 and Randy L. Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:2 (Fall 1998): 46-47.

<sup>4</sup>Donald W. Dayton, "Asa Mahan and the Development of American Holiness Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 9 (Spring 1974): 66 and Donald W. Dayton, "The Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Its Emergence and Significance," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 114, 123-124. See also Donald W. Dayton, "From 'Christian Perfection' to the 'Baptism of the Holy Ghost,'" in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1993), 294-296.

<sup>5</sup>In suggesting a move beyond the christological/pneumatological bifurcation, I am not seeking to enter the dispute regarding earlier shifts in the Wesleyan lineage from christological to pneumatological themes. My primary concern is to chart the implications of Asa Mahan's purported shift in terminology and what these developments may have meant for a postbellum holiness ethic and what they may mean for a contemporary appropriation of the tradition.

develop and mature, but was persistent nonetheless. Mahan's theology was ultimately relational, and the relationship of divine tri-unity established what it means for people to be restored to proper relationship with God and with each other.

Mahan termed this relational dynamic the "social principle" and spoke of its application in three ways: (1) the relationship of the Infinite with the Infinite (the divine "tri-unity"), (2) the relationship of the Infinite with the Finite (God's redemptive initiative among humanity), and (3) the relationship of the Finite with the Finite (the restoration of whole relationships among the human family).<sup>6</sup> This last emphasis grounded Mahan's ethic in a doctrine of the image of God among humanity which mirrored both the unity and plurality of the Trinity.

### **The Unity and Tri-Unity of the Godhead**

If one were limited to a few oblique trinitarian references in the later writing of Mahan, it would be easy to characterize his contribution as some twilight interest in the Trinity. This, however, would not square with the evidence. A careful reading of the Mahan corpus uncovers intriguing trinitarian linkages early in his public life. While noted for its revolutionary focus on sanctification, his 1839 *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* carries the following dedication: "This work is respectfully dedicated, with fervent prayer to the blessed Trinity, that its perusal may be to the Reader a source of as great comfort and profit, as its preparation has been to the Author."<sup>7</sup> When confronted with the charge that his concern for scriptural perfection makes him a "perfectionist," Mahan responds that one "might, with the same propriety, affirm that I am a Unitarian, because I believe in one God, while I hang my whole eternity upon the doctrine of the Trinity, as to affirm that I am a Perfectionist, because I hold the doctrine of holiness as now presented."<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere he does lift up the "unity" of God (without detailed attention to plurality), but this is always done in the context of his overarching trinitarian conviction.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Asa Mahan, *A Critical History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, 354-356.

<sup>7</sup>Asa Mahan, *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (Boston: D. S. King, 1839), dedication.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>9</sup>Asa Mahan, *Abstract of a Course of Lectures on Mental and Moral Philosophy* (Oberlin, Ohio: James Steele, 1840), 127 and Asa Mahan, *Science of Natural Theology* (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1867), 80.

In the early 1850s Mahan critiqued the notion that the second and third persons of the Trinity possess unequal ability to communicate the love of God to humanity. Why, he muses, should the Holy Spirit not have the same efficaciousness? This is not an early attempt to elevate the Holy Spirit at the expense of the Son. Mahan is merely cautioning against christological universalism on the one hand and a limited pneumatology on the other. In short, he believed passionately in a cohesive and consistent partnership among the persons of the Trinity.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most profound and enticing records of Asa Mahan's trinitarian theology can be found in a collection of unpublished lecture notes, aphorisms, and essays now housed in the Adrian College Archives. Sometime near the early 1860s, Mahan wrote of what he described as both the "unity and triunity of God."<sup>11</sup> He begins by emphasizing the unity of the Godhead with reference to Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 4:35, and other texts. He continues by stating, "At the same time, in the earliest revelations, God is so spoken of . . . as if there was in a certain form a plurality in the Godhead."<sup>12</sup> This affirmation of plurality is clearly grounded in the language of Genesis 1:26: "Let *us* make humankind in our image" (NRSV). Mahan accepts a traditional trinitarian reading of this text and then applies the standards of reason to his conviction that God is both one and many. Reason cannot deny that God exists as a plurality consistent with unity. Mahan reinforces this reference to the Godhead's plurality by appealing to the suggestive term "social principle." The community that is Trinity lives as this social principle "perfectly and eternally" realized.<sup>13</sup>

Such an assertion that God exists as simultaneous unity and plurality is far from a static claim of mathematical agreement. Mahan's trinitarian theology reverberated with a more dynamic interplay and active coinher-

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<sup>10</sup>Asa Mahan, *Lectures on the Ninth of Romans* (Boston: Charles H. Peirce & Company, 1851), 168.

<sup>11</sup>Asa Mahan, "Manuscript Writings, Miscellaneous," Archives, Shipman Library, Adrian College.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.* Mahan does not question whether language of plurality might be interpreted in non-trinitarian terms. See the fine discussion of several theological and anthropological issues related to Genesis 1:26-27 in Craig Keen, "Homo Precarius: Prayer in the Image and Likeness of God," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:1 (Spring 1998): 128-150.

ence reminiscent of the term *perichoresis*.<sup>14</sup> In a series of *Divine Life* articles published in 1878, Mahan develops thoughts that had been suggested earlier by his longtime colleague Charles Finney. Mahan writes: "There appears to be something wonderfully mysterious and, if I may be allowed the expression, divinely unselfish in the love of each of the Tri-Personalities of the Godhead towards each of the others."<sup>15</sup> He continues by explicating the self-emptying of each person of the Trinity for the sake of the others. The three exist as God through the dynamism of self-giving activity. The three function not simply as a numerical mystery, but as the supreme expression of love. Hence, for Mahan, God *is* love.<sup>16</sup> It is in the wake of these years of reflection and writing that we find Mahan's later and most complete exploration of the Trinity in his *A Critical History of Philosophy*.

Amid this extended discussion of issues raised in earlier works, Mahan returns to the theme of the "social principle."<sup>17</sup> Not only do the relationships exemplified among the Trinity demonstrate this principle; this relatedness is the wellspring of both human and divine joy: "The action of the social principle seems to be the immutable condition of real happiness on the part of all sentient, and more especially of all rational,

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<sup>14</sup>A detailed analysis of more recent interest in this seminal concept is beyond our current examination. For one of many treatments see David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 180-181. An excellent consideration of the way *perichoresis* relates to both contemporary theology and historic Wesleyan emphases can be found in E. Byron Anderson, "The Trinitarian Grammar of the Liturgy and the Liturgical Practice of the Self," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34:2 (Fall 1999): 152-174.

<sup>15</sup>"Revealed Relations of the Persons of the Divine Trinity Towards One Another," *Divine Life* (1 March 1878): 201. I wish to thank Professor James E. Hamilton for bringing these trinitarian reflections to my attention.

<sup>16</sup>"Revealed Relations of the Persons of the Divine Trinity Towards One Another," *Divine Life*, (1 April 1878): 221.

<sup>17</sup>Asa Mahan, *A Critical History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, 354-356. Mahan sketched many of the same trinitarian themes a few years earlier in Asa Mahan, *Out of Darkness Into Light* (Boston: Willard Tract Repository, 1876), 160-167. This 1870s piece, however, does not build upon his earlier notes regarding the "social principle." In addition to Mahan's reference to the "social principle" in his manuscript writings, there is a rich development of this term, without specific reference to the Trinity, in Asa Mahan, "The Absolute Adaption of Theism, and of Christianity as the Only True Theism, to the Immutable Laws of Mind and Necessities of Universal Humanity," *The Freewill Baptist Quarterly* 8:30 (April 1860): 125, 136.

finite natures. . . . If there is, on the other hand, in the Godhead the actual intercommunion and fellowship of the Infinite with the Infinite, the result must be infinite and eternal blessedness.”<sup>18</sup> This is the God worshiped and studied by Asa Mahan—a God whose very identity defines the human idea of fulfillment in relationship and a God who is known, at least in part, because human beings are capable of reflecting this relational identity. Mahan’s theology is both remarkably variegated and painstakingly well integrated. But, just as recent scholars have reminded us that it is not possible to drive a wedge between the immanent and economic Trinity, Mahan’s consideration of internal dynamics leads inevitably to careful articulation of the way the Godhead creates human community.<sup>19</sup>

### The Image of God and the Moral Life

Most discussions of Mahan’s moral philosophy have been organized around his participation in the debate between deontological and teleological ethical theories.<sup>20</sup> Mahan’s passion for intrinsic values (characteristic of deontology) as opposed to calculated ends (characteristic of teleology) provides a backdrop for raising a host of ethical questions. But apart from the theoretical convictions operative in human action, what *kind* of person emerges from Mahan’s moral philosophy?

This question is best answered with reference to Mahan’s anthropology and his reliance on the doctrine of the *imago Dei* when probing both the nature and destiny of the human person. In this regard, he integrated two historic alternatives for understanding the divine image in humanity. On the one hand, there is considerable evidence that Mahan appreciated what may be termed the *analogia entis*, that is, an ontic connection and

<sup>18</sup>Asa Mahan, *A Critical History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, 356.

<sup>19</sup>This, of course, was a major theme in the work of Catherine Mowry LaCugna and others who have unpacked Karl Rahner’s observation that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 21-22 and Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper/Collins, 1991). See also David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, 37-41.

<sup>20</sup>See especially James E. Hamilton, “A Comparison of the Moral Theories of Charles Finney and Asa Mahan” (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1972). See as well Edward H. Madden, “Oberlin’s First Philosopher,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968): 57-66 and James E. Hamilton and Edward H. Madden, “Edwards, Finney, and Mahan on the Derivation of Duties,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 13 (1975): 347-360.

similarity between the individual person and God. On the other hand, he often lifted up what may be termed the *analogia relationis*, that is, a relational renewal established through God's redemptive initiative with humanity and, subsequently, the restoration of whole relationships among the human community. Use of these two terms requires a recognition of the problems inherent in applying them to any one tradition or thinker, but they nevertheless serve to mark important polar emphases within the anthropology of Mahan.<sup>21</sup>

One of Mahan's earliest concerns for the dignity of the *imago Dei* in humanity is explicitly linked to his uncompromising opposition to slavery. In 1836 he wrote of the way this evil institution "blots, from human nature itself, the image of God, . . ." <sup>22</sup> Mahan also demonstrated his awareness of relational issues when he observed one of slavery's worst effects: the tyrannical break up of families. By 1840 Mahan arranged for a limited printing of his lectures on mental and moral philosophy, as they had been presented to students of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute during the prior five years. While sketching an argument around ethical principle that would be developed eight years later in the *Science of Moral Philosophy*, Mahan presents his own deontological theory in opposition to all forms of utilitarianism. But even here his argument turns back to the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. When faced with the contention that human beings may prefer the intrinsic values of deontology, while perhaps God sees things from a more utilitarian perspective, Mahan counters: "We are, as reasonable beings, made in God's image. We must therefore suppose our Reason in all moral judgments, to be identical with His."<sup>23</sup> The analogy

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<sup>21</sup>This distinction has longstanding connotations relative to both anthropological concerns and religious language that are beyond the scope of our present discussion. In addition to classic articulations of the "analogy of being" within the Catholic tradition, one might consider the response given by early and mid-twentieth-century dialectical theology. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3/Temptation* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1959), 35-41 and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, Part 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 191-206. For an analysis that places much more focus on Barth's appropriation of the *analogia fidei*, see Craig Keen, "Homo Precarius: Prayer in the Image and Likeness of God," 138.

<sup>22</sup>Asa Mahan, "Principles of Christian Union, and Church Fellowship," (Elyria, Ohio: A. Burrell, Printer, May 1836), 25.

<sup>23</sup>Asa Mahan, *Abstract of a Course of Lectures on Mental and Moral Philosophy*, 207. See also Asa Mahan, *Science of Moral Philosophy* (Oberlin, O.: James M. Fitch, 1848), 85.

between God and people is such that one cannot fathom an irreconcilable arrangement of divine and human principle.

This is not to say that humanity stands naturally before God without sin. It is simply a declaration of dignity in spite of alienation from God, self, and others. In 1845 Mahan wrote in his *Intellectual Philosophy* that people alone are created in the image of God.<sup>24</sup> Then, in a curious borrowing of language from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he continues his description of humanity: "Fallen though he is, 'his form has yet not lost all its original brightness, nor appears less . . . than the excess of glory obscured.'" <sup>25</sup> Mahan identified these indelible marks of humanity with the endowments of reason, self-consciousness, and free-will.<sup>26</sup> In his *Natural Theology* (1867) his language reflects a traditional faculty psychology when he writes that God is a spirit after whom humanity is "the miniature 'image and likeness;' a spirit possessed of the attributes of Intelligence, Sensibility, and Will."<sup>27</sup> According to Mahan these are characteristics of universal human nature. They are not, in the parlance of some contemporary expression, socially constructed realities. They are part of the permanent and changeless contours of human identity, and this commonality determines the obligations that every person bears for every other person. Mahan makes a fastidious distinction between this unitary nature of humanity and the diversity of people when he admonishes his listeners to love the neighbor as the self. He argues: "If we ask for the reason why this precept is binding upon us, the only true answer is this—Our neighbor is made in the same image and after the same likeness as ourselves."<sup>28</sup> Despite frailty, brokenness, and sin there is a universal dignity accorded human nature and a corresponding obligation to respect all people.

It is a testament to Mahan's integrative mind that this heavy stress on intrinsic human value does not in the least prevent him from offering a

<sup>24</sup>Asa Mahan, *A System of Intellectual Philosophy* (New York: Saxton & Miles, 1845), 291.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.* See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 29. See also Asa Mahan, *The System of Mental Philosophy* (Chicago: J. C. Buckbee & Company, Publishers, 1882), 188.

<sup>26</sup>Asa Mahan, *Abstract of a Course of Lectures on Mental and Moral Philosophy*, 96.

<sup>27</sup>Asa Mahan, *Science of Natural Theology*, 207.

<sup>28</sup>Asa Mahan, "Certain Fundamental Principles, Together with their Applications," *Oberlin Quarterly Review*, Article 35 (November 1846): 228.

fervent plea for redemption, renewal, and restoration to whole relationships. As early as 1839 he employed language from Wesley to emphasize not some natural manifestation of the *imago Dei* but rather a “renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of him that created it.”<sup>29</sup> The care for reclamation and re-ordered relationships is every bit as present in Mahan’s writing as the focus on innate human worth.

This more relational accent finds emblematic expression in Mahan’s almost perennial concern with the interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3:18. He devoted an entire chapter of *Christian Perfection* to exegeting this text: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (NRSV). This passage served as a springboard for considering the person and work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, but it also moved Mahan to understand the *imago Dei* as something more than simply a collection of natural endowments. As the Spirit presents God in Christ to the believer, one is changed, transformed into the “same image.” Mahan’s fluid application of the word “same” is instructive. At times he construed this language of sameness as an assurance that human beings can actually be changed into something identical to the image of God in Christ.<sup>30</sup> At other moments he interpreted the “same image” to mean that the body of believers is made up of those who share a common restoration and a collective reflection of God’s glory.<sup>31</sup> In both cases, Mahan understood the “image” to be an eminently relational reality, restored by God’s redemptive engagement with humanity and perfected in the divine/human community.

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<sup>29</sup>Asa Mahan, *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, 17. See also John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, Vol. XI, *Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), 444.

<sup>30</sup>Asa Mahan, *Autobiography: Intellectual, Moral, and Spiritual* (London: T. Woolmer, 1882), 334-335. Mahan ties this discussion directly to the way in which “every Person of the sacred Trinity makes His abode” in the human heart. The extended treatment of 2 Corinthians 3:18 in *Christian Perfection* serves as the last chapter of the book. See Asa Mahan, *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, 201-237. The multiple references to 2 Corinthians 3:18 throughout Mahan’s writing are too numerous to exhaust here. In addition to those texts already cited, some of the most intriguing allusions are found in Asa Mahan, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1870), 9, 11, 31, 44, 51, 53, 117, 127, 140, 145, 159, 190, 201, 210.

<sup>31</sup>Asa Mahan, *Autobiography: Intellectual, Moral, and Spiritual*, 99.



This relational motif is especially clear in Mahan's landmark 1870 piece, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*. While explicitly emphasizing pneumatological dynamics, this text actually represents the flowering of an implicitly trinitarian theology, and it is here that the social aspects of God's image in humanity are juxtaposed with the communal character of the Godhead. In a telling statement, Mahan suggests that "Christian fellowship . . . implies friendship in the strongest form in which kindred minds can, by any possibility, be united. It is love the same in kind as that which blends into one the hearts of the persons of the sacred Trinity."<sup>32</sup> The analogy is thus complete. The intended terminus of human personhood embraces the same unity and plurality that are perfectly integrated within the Godhead.

### Some Interpretive Pointers

Our discussion has attempted to demonstrate a discernible and life-long uniting of emphases in the writing of Asa Mahan. This is not to deny the inescapable presence of development, growth, or even significant shifts in his thinking. It is simply intended as a consideration of particular themes that complemented one another throughout the course of his life. From this conjunctive perspective, we may suggest some interpretive observations and offer a few pointers for our future.

1. The most obvious and in many ways the most promising connection between Mahan and contemporary trinitarian theology is found in his proleptically relational and "social" focus. It can be argued that reading Mahan on the Trinity prepares one well for considering the "social" doctrines of Jürgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff, and the variations on such themes in Catherine Mowry LaCugna and others.<sup>33</sup> These writers certainly differ from one another in important respects, and it would be naïve to claim for Mahan the kinds of solidaristic sensitivities expressed by many current thinkers. But his insight anticipates important aspects of their work.

Perhaps most significant is Mahan's careful integration of unity and plurality. As we have seen, he did not simply assert a static collectivism

<sup>32</sup>Asa Mahan, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*, 192.

<sup>33</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Koh (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Tunbridge Wells: Burnes and Oates; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), and Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*.

within the Godhead. Rather, he carefully affirmed a dynamic relationship between the one and the many. This is especially evident in those places where he stressed the mutual self-giving of divine persons among the Trinity. Mahan came close to the recent observation of David Cunningham that the persons of the Trinity embody an ideal and equitable community not because they are identical but because they are “always about the business of giving themselves to one another—completely and absolutely.”<sup>34</sup> For Mahan, this empowered a human community characterized by a similar dynamism of self-emptying love.

2. The second observation leads us to consider the place of Mahan’s thought in his own theological environment. His life of almost ninety years was, in many ways, a personification of nineteenth-century developments within evangelicalism. It is therefore easy to indulge in two kinds of interpretive temptation. On the one hand, it is possible to locate a particular emphasis of Mahan and the way it interacted with the specific social, political, or ecclesiastical issues of any one era in his century and declare the meanings of this contextualization to represent the core of his thought. On the other hand, it is possible to wrench his prolific work completely from its context and hail it as some comprehensive articulation for the contemporary church. But any attempt to place Mahan within the context of his times also entails recognizing the sweeping breadth and length of his times, and any contemporary appropriation of Mahan’s legacy for our world must still recognize the limited horizon of his world.

I do not suggest that Mahan’s trinitarian thinking represents some exclusive paradigmatic framework for understanding his theoretical engagement with every issue of his day. Neither do I claim that his reflection on the Trinity can be uncritically lifted from its context for today. I do, however, believe that the unitive themes inherent in his appreciation for the Trinity answer some important questions about the otherwise seemingly contradictory emphases within his theology, and these same themes also provide helpful links for trinitarian dialogue between the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.

3. A third observation pertains to Mahan’s philosophical loyalties and is perhaps more provocative. It is a well-documented fact that Mahan

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<sup>34</sup>David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, 294.

stood as a child of the Scottish Enlightenment, at least in terms of his epistemological predilections.<sup>35</sup> This means that from the beginning to the end of his career he accepted, embraced, and even expounded the philosophical realism of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century America. In truth, if anything can claim to stand as a constant organizing principle of Mahan's life, it may be his devotion to Common Sense Realism. For all of his notable emphasis on sanctification, it is a passion for epistemological realism that frames the entire discussion of his *magnum opus* two-volume history of philosophy.<sup>36</sup>

Mahan's reliance on reason is especially germane for our study since he referred to this trusted critical faculty when probing the mysteries of the Trinity.<sup>37</sup> His astute analysis of human community was also inspired by a philosophically moderate and theologically evangelical appreciation for reason. In our age, when it has become intellectually fashionable to dance on the grave of the Enlightenment, we might think twice before assuming that any proper renewal of trinitarian theology must extricate itself from entanglements with reason.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps our present yearning for emancipation from philosophical "foundationalism" displays a tendency to caricature the problematic heritage of the Enlightenment by making the legacy of Kant/Reid into some representative wrong turn in eighteenth-

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<sup>35</sup>One collection that often refers to Mahan's grounding within the Scottish Enlightenment was published as the entire issue of *The Asbury Seminarian* 32:4 (October 1977). See also D. H. Meyer's classic treatment in D. H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience: The Shaping of the American National Ethic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).

<sup>36</sup>Asa Mahan, *A Critical History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 88ff.

<sup>37</sup>This is especially evident in his "Manuscript Writings, Miscellaneous." Mahan's affirmation of reason is all the more significant given his measured consideration of its stature in human understanding: "We have Reason just as we have Free Will, because 'we are made in the image of God.' Yet Reason in us is not God, any more than Free Will is." See Asa Mahan, *A System of Intellectual Philosophy*, 198.

<sup>38</sup>The almost uniformly pejorative reference to the Enlightenment is, in my view, the major weakness of David Cunningham's otherwise excellent book. See David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, 13, 24, 27, 52-53, 140-141, 170-171, 187, 220, 223-224, 274, 291-292.

century thinking.<sup>39</sup> It may be that forebears such as Mahan can challenge us to revisit the complexities of the Enlightenment before dismissing all ongoing contributions out of hand. In any case, Asa Mahan's fascinating expression of trinitarian theology provides fertile soil for contemplating the continuities between the divine and human community of persons.

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<sup>39</sup>I am well aware that my own assertion requires a corresponding detail in working very carefully through the appropriate criticisms of the Enlightenment heritage. For starters, one might consult Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). The groundswell of admittedly trenchant and well-argued criticism of Enlightenment assumptions has now become a reigning hermeneutic of the tradition, and its acceptance is an almost mandatory requirement for participation in the "guild" world of theological reflection. It is this institutionalized critique of the Enlightenment that I (perhaps somewhat playfully) wish to hold up for critique. This may lead one in the rather inelegant direction of criticizing the postcritical critique of the critical Enlightenment! But it also might draw forth a more nuanced appraisal of the Enlightenment legacy and its impact upon nineteenth-century American theology.

# A FORK IN THE WESLEYAN ROAD: PHOEBE PALMER AND THE APPROPRIATION OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION<sup>1</sup>

by

Kevin T. Lowery

Phoebe Palmer has long been a source of inspiration as well as a center of controversy within the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement. In 1838 she began to speak at camp meetings for the purpose of promoting “holiness,” not only the doctrine, but the experience which she had personally encountered a year earlier. At the end of the following year she initiated a weekly meeting on Tuesdays in her home with the same goal. In spite of chronic health problems, she continued the camp meeting visits until her death some thirty-five years later. En route, she spent four years promoting holiness in the British Isles through revival services. Of her numerous publications, her books *The Way of Holiness, Faith and Its Effects*, and *Promise of the Father* (which argues for the legitimacy of women in ministry) are perhaps the most notable.<sup>2</sup>

For the greatest part of the twentieth century, historiographies of American Evangelicalism did not pay much attention to Palmer. Harold E. Raser attributes this to the fact that she influenced a great many schis-

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to George Marsden for his helpful critique of an early draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup>A good biography of Phoebe Palmer can be found, among other places, in Charles Edward White, *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1986).

matics, even though she was not one herself.<sup>3</sup> In any event, historians are beginning to rediscover the various aspects of her overall impact on Evangelicalism. Meanwhile, some Wesleyan theologians have lately questioned the consistency of her teachings and practices with those of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism and the Holiness Movement's ultimate font.

Raser concludes that "in filling [the traditional expositions of holiness] with very specific meaning, Palmer created something new."<sup>4</sup> John Leland Peters believes that between Wesley and the subsequent Holiness Movement (in which Palmer played a key role early in its history) there are three main differences in the type of perfectionism that each claimed. First, the Holiness Movement's methodology has traditionally been more strict and rigid than that of Wesley. The Holiness Movement proposed specific steps that would produce perfection, but Wesley's approach was more open-ended. Second, whereas Wesley only utilized the testimony of individuals in specific cases where it might prove especially helpful, Palmer and her followers considered testimony a duty and a necessary means of retaining the "blessing." Third, the moment in which perfection is attained is, in Wesley's mind, both preceded and followed by a gradual process. In contrast, the Holiness Movement has often isolated the event from the process. It is suggested that purity (which is achieved by an instantaneous volitional act) can be separated from maturity (which is achieved by a gradual, more intellectual process).<sup>5</sup>

In order to critically appraise Palmer's departure from Wesley, the sources of the differences must be identified. Most Wesleyan scholars agree that the crux of the matter is the way that perfection is redefined by Palmer. The question now becomes whether the shift is strictly one of method (which several scholars have proposed) or stems from a deeper theological shift. I believe that a methodological shift led to a theological one. My thesis is two-fold. First, I believe that, while Palmer attempted to merely appropriate Wesley's doctrine through a new methodology, a closer examination of her writings will reveal a theological shift which was necessary to justify the new methodology. Hence, she essentially

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<sup>3</sup>Harold Raser, *Phoebe Palmer: Her Life and Thought* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1987), 2.

<sup>4</sup>Raser, 155.

<sup>5</sup>John Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 114.

altered Wesley's doctrine. Second, Palmer made these changes in an effort to promote holiness as an ecumenical concern, and she did succeed in reaching a diversified audience. Nevertheless, the shared experience of "entire sanctification" (i.e., "holiness," "perfection," "second blessing") was not enough to unite these various groups. Instead, each one appropriated perfection according to its own theological schema. Even the Holiness Movement itself could not be united through the shared experience of entire sanctification, but became even more fragmented than it was at the start.

Melvin Dieter suggests that Palmer's changes are somewhat justified because they reflect the culture of nineteenth-century America. White goes a step further by claiming that Palmer merely carried out Wesley's doctrines to their natural conclusion.<sup>6</sup> This stronger assertion is one which I believe does not hold up to close scrutiny, but a full rebuttal of this thesis would go beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, it will be sufficient to (1) detail the shift which occurs from Wesley to Palmer, (2) suggest some possible sources beyond Wesley which might account for the shift, and (3) use the shift as a means to connect Palmer with the divergent groups which appropriated the experience of holiness for their own purposes.

### 1. Divergence from Wesley

**A Common Core.** At first glance, it does not seem that Palmer was teaching a doctrine of entire sanctification (i.e., Christian perfection) different from that of Wesley, for she generally agrees with his theological construal. With Wesley, she asserts that Christian perfection is not a state of absolute perfection, neither is it angelic perfection or Adamic perfection (i.e., the created human state before the fall). Instead, Christian perfection is a relative state of perfection.<sup>7</sup> It might be best characterized as a moral perfection within the limits of human reason. From this perspective, she can assert that "in the present state of existence . . . perfection can only exist in the gospel sense."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Charles White, "Phoebe Palmer and the Development of Pentecostal Pneumatology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 23 (1988), 204.

<sup>7</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects: Fragments from My Portfolio* (1867?; reprinted in *The Devotional Writings of Phoebe Palmer*, New York: Garland, 1985), 51-53.

<sup>8</sup>Palmer, *The Way of Holiness* (1867, reprinted in *Devotional Writings*), 58.

Also, Palmer remains consistent with Wesley by claiming that in sanctification the image of God is “re-ensamped upon the soul.”<sup>9</sup> For Wesley, the image of God (which was lost in the fall) includes body, soul, and spirit. The redemption of the body will not be consummated until the final resurrection. In the meantime, believers can experience a full spiritual restoration within the confines of diminished bodily powers. Hence, Wesley declares, “It is a ‘renewal of believers in the spirit of their minds, after the likeness of Him that created them.’”<sup>10</sup>

**Outlining the Differences.** Palmer truly believes that she has captured the content of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection and that her version will produce the same results as Wesley’s account. Consequently, the difference between her and Wesley is best described as a variation of a doctrine, rather than as a different doctrine altogether. It is with Palmer’s successors that the shift from Wesley was great enough to produce entirely different doctrines (e.g., Keswick’s denial of salvation from all sin, Pentecostalism’s emphasis on the spiritual gifts, etc.). Thus, the issue with Palmer is her alteration of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection. White outlines six aspects of this change. Palmer:

1. Equates entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit;
2. Relates holiness to power;
3. Stresses the instantaneous to the neglect of the gradual;
4. Sees entire sanctification not as the goal of the Christian life, but as its beginning;
5. Reduces sanctification to consecration, faith, and testimony by using “altar theology”;
6. Claims that the only evidence needed for the assurance of sanctification is the biblical text itself.<sup>11</sup>

The first alteration can be traced back to John Fletcher, Wesley’s heir apparent who unexpectedly preceded Wesley in death. The next four relate to the theology of Adam Clarke, one of Wesley’s young ministers who went on to write one of the most celebrated Bible commentaries of his time. The final alteration seems to be a precursor to the literalist

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>10</sup>John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” in *The Works of John Wesley* (1872; reprint, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1978), 11: 378.

<sup>11</sup>White, “Pentecostal Pneumatology,” 198-199.



hermeneutic that emerged with fundamentalism at the end of the century.<sup>12</sup> Along the same lines as George Marsden, I surmise that some form of Thomas Reid's "Common Sense Realism" was at work here.<sup>13</sup> I will use these six differences as the foundation for developing my thesis, focusing on them in greater detail. However, I believe that these six points can be better understood if they are addressed in a slightly different order. Palmer's divergence from Wesley begins with her adaptation of a Pentecostal model of sanctification, in which entire sanctification is equated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (#1). Arguably, this might be regarded as the introduction of new doctrine, although Fletcher and Palmer did not think so. This theological alteration essentially supports Palmer's methodological innovations, those which spring from her quest to shorten the process of attaining the experience of entire sanctification. She depicts the experience as an event rather than as the culmination of a process (#3). Since she understands the event to be initiated by complete consecration, she employs the model of a sacrifice being laid upon an altar (#5).

Nevertheless, Palmer still expects this experience to free the believer from all sin. For Wesley, this freedom is achieved through a long, arduous process of conquering sinful desires and thoughts. Palmer's short-cut to this methodology is to insist that the long process can be replaced by an instantaneous bestowal of divine power which will produce the same effect (#2). Unfortunately, she fails to appreciate the depths of Wesley's grappling with sinfulness, and this aspect of his doctrine of Christian perfection seems to be the pivotal point between emphasizing sanctification as a gradual process or as an instantaneous event.

Palmer's writings also reveal her constant thirst for assurance. Even though she feels that ecstasy is a natural concomitant to entire sanctification, she knows that such cannot be the motivation for the event, neither can it be the assurance. Therefore, she attempts to base her assurance in the veracity of Scripture (#6). However, she diminishes the role that reason plays in the process, just as she does when she replaces Wesley's

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<sup>12</sup>If this is true, then it is doubtful that the biblical literalism which is so characteristic of fundamentalism is wholly attributable to the development of modern higher criticism.

<sup>13</sup>George Marsden suggests Reid's "Common Sense Realism" as an intellectual source which bolsters fundamentalist literalism. See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1980), 14-21, et. al.

more cognitive approach to conquering sin with non-contemplative mystical experiences.

Finally, Palmer's modified version of perfection is an experience that she feels can and should be experienced early in the Christian life (#4). According to her, all believers can be sanctified holy, regardless of their theological commitments. This allows her to promote her doctrine as an ecumenical endeavor. The task at hand is to explore each of the aspects of this divergence according to the outline I have just described. This investigation will reveal the other sources Palmer attempts to synthesize with Wesley. It will also uncover some of her underlying assumptions which are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with Wesley's thought. It should then become apparent how Palmer's and Wesley's accounts are only partially compatible.

**The Pentecostal Model.**<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most obvious difference between Palmer and Wesley is her use of Pentecost as the model for sanctification. She says that the experiences encountered in the upper room at Pentecost "furnished a model for all future generations of disciples."<sup>15</sup> Making this move has some inherent difficulties. To start, it takes the general state of perfection and relates it to a specific event. Granted, Wesley asserts that perfection culminates at a point in time, but the time and the conditions under which it occurs cannot always be specified, let alone predicted. Accordingly, Palmer focuses on Pentecost, which is clearly a more tangible event. Also, the pentecostal model not only redefines perfection as a singular event (as opposed to the culmination of a process), it also moves away from theology toward experience. The significance here is the fact that one is usually used to define the other. While Wesley wants experience to confirm and nuance his theology, Palmer uses experience to derive hers. As such, the pentecostal model changes the theological content of perfection, adding some concepts and overlooking others. These changes will unfold before us as we proceed.

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<sup>14</sup>For the sake of clarity and consistency, I will use the non-capitalized "pentecostal" to denote something which takes the day of Pentecost (as described in Acts 2) as its model, pattern, or example. In contrast, the capitalized "Pentecostal" will refer specifically to the movement (and adherents of the movement) which occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, giving rise to such groups as the Assemblies of God. Obviously, the use of the term in titles or any reference to the day of Pentecost will require capitalization for grammatical reasons.

<sup>15</sup>Palmer, *Pioneer Experiences* (1868; reprint, New York: Garland, 1984), xii.

**Streamlining the Process of Attainment.** What Palmer really wanted to do is develop a method that can bring believers into the experience of holiness. Hence, she indicates this as her specific qualm with Wesley's treatment of the subject:

Though I have ever been a firm believer in the doctrine of Christian holiness, embracing the entire sanctification of body, soul, and spirit, as taught by the apostolic Wesleys, and their contemporaries; yet the terms made use of, in speaking of this attainment, were objectionable to my mind, in a manner which I cannot now take time to explain. Though from early life I had felt that I needed just the blessing comprehended, yet the terms made use of I seldom used. Now there seemed such a glorious propriety in the words "holiness" and "sanctification" that I thought nothing less than infinite Wisdom could have devised words so infinitely proper.<sup>16</sup>

She concludes that there must be a "shorter way" to attain holiness.<sup>17</sup> In fact, she produces a method that is not only shorter, but almost immediate, and she contends that this shorter way is divinely sanctioned. For example, on a particular occasion, a woman who had been converted just three days prior said to her, "I feel as if I could not rest short of anything which it is my privilege to enjoy . . . I must be holy!" Palmer "assured her in reply that the very desire for this blessing was a sure intimation of not only the willingness, but the intention of God to give it, and that it was only for her to persevere in looking for it, in order to speedily obtain it."<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Oden indicates that Palmer reduces the attainment of sanctification to three steps: entire consecration (i.e., being completely surrendered to God, especially to God's will), faith, and witness/confession.<sup>19</sup> In reality, Palmer only proposes consecration and faith as the necessary steps to *attaining* the experience. Testimony is necessary for *retaining* it.<sup>20</sup> Either way, the recipe is simple and easily controlled through human effort. Kate P. Crawford Galea has suggested that there is a connection

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 73-74.

<sup>17</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 17.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>19</sup>Palmer, *Phoebe Palmer: Selected Writings*, ed. Oden (New York: Paulist, 1988), 130, n 145.

<sup>20</sup>Palmer, *Promise of the Father* (1859; reprint, New York: Garland, 1985), 245.

between Palmer's ill health and some of her writings, especially *The Way to Holiness* and *Four Years in the Old World*.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that the looming threat of death motivated Palmer to construct a "shorter way" to holiness as a means of gaining the assurance for which she craved, but such a thesis is speculative.

According to Palmer's plan, the pursuit of holiness boils down to a crucial decision: "I will now be holy, and lay all upon the altar."<sup>22</sup> This decision must be made, and it must be made decisively. Indeed, Palmer judged that too many people do not experience holiness "for want of bringing the matter to a point, and then deciding with energy and perseverance, 'I must and will have it now.'"<sup>23</sup> This sense of urgency also accounts for her preference for the terms "holiness" and "sanctification." The former is both the aspiration and the duty of each and every Christian, and the latter is the means (i.e., consecration) of pursuing and attaining this aspiration. Whereas Wesley exhorts the believer to continually expect to reach perfection, Palmer asserts that one cannot even expect it until the decision is made to perform continuous and unreserved consecration. It is foolish to think that God will accept anyone otherwise.<sup>24</sup>

Her model for consecration is that of a sacrifice being made on an altar. Romans 12:1-2 exhorts us to present ourselves as "living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God." However, Palmer believes that the act of consecration, in and of itself, will not make anyone holy. Holiness is achieved because "the altar sanctifieth the gift."<sup>25</sup> In essence, the gift is sanctified by virtue of the altar, i.e., there is something particular about the altar that renders it able to bestow holiness.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Kate P. Crawford Galea, "Anchored Behind the Veil: Mystical Vision as a Possible Source of Authority in the Ministry of Phoebe Palmer," *Methodist History*, 31:4 (July 1993), 246.

<sup>22</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 316.

<sup>23</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 234.

<sup>24</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 351-352.

<sup>25</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 101.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 63. Notice that holiness is not ascribed, it is bestowed. This follows Wesley's rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of imputed righteousness, which proposes that the believer is declared righteous, but remains sinful. Luther also held this view, declaring the believer to be *simul justus et peccator* (i.e., simultaneously justified and sinner). The believer is declared righteous by virtue of Christ's righteousness. God does not see the believer's sin, only the righteousness of Christ which covers it.

What is it about the altar that enables it to effect holiness in the lives of the consecrated? In one sense, the altar represents the atonement. More specifically, it represents the blood of Christ. "The soul, through faith, being laid upon the altar that sanctifieth the gift, experiences constantly, the all-cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus."<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the altar represents more than Christ's blood, it represents Christ himself. In other words, the act of consecration is essentially the offering up of oneself to Christ, "and if we render up mind, memory, and will, every moment, to Christ, are we not to believe he sanctifies all these powers?"<sup>28</sup> It follows that if consecration is where sanctification occurs, then consecration must remain intact if sanctification is to be maintained.<sup>29</sup> Sanctified believers cannot cease to set themselves apart to God, else sanctification will be lost.<sup>30</sup> Referring to Romans 12:1-2, she maintains, "In order to be washed, cleansed, and renewed after the image of God, the sacrifice must be ceaselessly presented. This is implied in the expression 'a living sacrifice.'<sup>31</sup> Here and in similar places, Palmer is following Adam Clarke's metaphor of a "continual sacrifice."<sup>32</sup>

Surprisingly, Wesley speaks of consecration as an evidence of perfection, namely, "total resignation to the will of God, without any mixture of self-will."<sup>33</sup> The difference is subtle but vitally important. Wesley's

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In contrast, the Wesleyan understanding of righteousness is that the divine nature is imparted to the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit. In his hymn "O For a Heart to Praise My God," Charles Wesley writes, "Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart; Come quickly from above; Write Thy new name upon my heart; Thy new, best name of Love." Following in this tradition, Palmer believes that the consecrated Christian is made righteous, i.e., a substantive change is effected in the hearts of the sanctified.

<sup>27</sup>Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer*, ed. Rev. Richard Wheatley (New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1884), 527.

<sup>28</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 266.

<sup>29</sup>Once again, this follows the Arminian understanding that salvation (and the effects of salvific events) may be forfeited. Earlier in life, Wesley believed Christian perfection to be an irreversible state, for it would seem that if a person's sinful inclinations were eliminated, then willful sin would be a virtual impossibility. Over time, he saw that the experience of many, whom he truly believed had attained the state, contradicted this premise. Consequently, he concluded that perfection is by no means a sinless state, and he expounds this belief in "Plain Account."

<sup>30</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 77.

<sup>31</sup>Palmer, *Life and Letters*, 529.

<sup>32</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 86.

<sup>33</sup>Wesley, 422.

account of consecration is one that is absent of self-will. This is why he saw consecration as the culmination of a long, difficult, and gradual process of crucifying sinful and selfish desires and thoughts. Palmer would obviously want to claim that consecration effectively spawns this result, but this claim does not eliminate the possibility that a consecrated believer can be fully committed to God's will for reasons that are tainted with selfishness, a possibility which Palmer recognizes. This is even more the case when sanctification is sought as an ecstatic experience. Since Palmer definitely promoted sanctification as such, some of her sharpest critics contend that the need for continual consecration in her schema is actually the believer's psychological need to maintain the ecstatic experience.

She also speaks of consecration as a struggle. In her own experience (speaking of herself in the third person), she attested that "if she should literally die in the struggle to overcome nature, she would be a martyr in the effort, rather than that Satan should triumph."<sup>34</sup> She so heartily believed that complete consecration requires a struggle that she frequently admonished others to "wrestle" all night in prayer until they would "receive the blessing."<sup>35</sup> This being the case, it is not clear if the pursuers are to wrestle with themselves or if they are to wrestle with God, which is another way that she sometimes describes the struggle. Is the believer struggling to overcome self or struggling to receive a divine impartation of faith so that the blessing might be secured? For example, a man "who had been the happy possessor of the blessing of holiness, but did not long retain it" asked everyone to pray for him, that he might experience it once again.<sup>36</sup> She gives us little help in understanding why this particular man is in need of special prayer if, in fact, consecration is a decision, i.e., an act of the will. Perhaps she might say that the believer must be divinely aided in the process, but then faith must occur twice, first in seeking this divine assistance, and second in the expectation of the blessing. Perhaps sanctification is not as simple as Palmer would like it to be.

For Wesley, "wrestling in prayer" is not concerned with seeking divine power. Its purpose is inner renewal in the image of God, i.e., the defeat of sin in the believer's affections and thoughts.<sup>37</sup> It would thus

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<sup>34</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 117.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 102-104, et. al.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 204-205.

<sup>37</sup>Wesley, 403.

seem that Palmer's type of struggle is much closer to the Keswick and Pentecostal pursuit of divine power. In any case, Palmer exhorts the believer to "press on to perfection," for she sees "entire consecration" as an ever-present duty for the believer.<sup>38</sup> Since consecration must be complete, and since it is presently required, she concludes that it cannot be put off, but "there would have to be a now, at last."<sup>39</sup> The mere intention to be holy does not comply with the command. Obedience must be complete (i.e., entire consecration) before holiness can become a reality.<sup>40</sup> Ironically, the converse is also true for her, because the experience of holiness is what provides the believer with "that stability of soul which renders us less liable to vacillate in our Christian course."<sup>41</sup> In other words, holiness enables the believer to consistently obey God's will. Between holiness and obedience, we have to wonder which is the cause and which is the effect.

This compulsion to vigorously pursue sanctification is not wholly compatible with Wesley's inclinations. He asks the question, "In what manner should we preach sanctification?" and replies, "Scarce at all to those who are not pressing forward: To those who are, always by way of promise; always drawing, rather than driving."<sup>42</sup> It seems that Wesley's hesitancy to press those who are otherwise indifferent or half-hearted was motivated by the desire to avoid ecstatic experiences which do not genuinely arise from the death of self-will. Palmer has no such apprehension, allowing ecstatic experiences to be superimposed on Wesley's doctrine. In time, Wesley's theological norms would be superseded by experiential ones.

**Apprehending One's Own Sinfulness.** Phoebe Palmer describes her childhood as one engulfed with strict and rigid moral standards.

My parents, prior to my being entrusted to them, were rather devotedly pious. I was therefore early instructed in experimental religion. Of the necessity of its affecting my life, and even in minute things inducing a change of conduct, I was in the morning of my existence aware. I shall never forget the intense

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<sup>38</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 20-21.

<sup>39</sup>Palmer diary, 25 January 1841, *Life and Letters*, 186.

<sup>40</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 69.

<sup>41</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 89.

<sup>42</sup>Wesley, 387.

anguish I suffered in consequence of telling an untruth, when but about three and a half years old.

This extreme sensitiveness, as to moral and religious obligation, grew up with me; so much so, that I was sometimes smiled at for my well-intentioned scrupulousness, and at other times almost censured for carrying it to a troublesome excess. I then regarded refuge in God as the safe sanctuary for the recital of the little grievances incident to childhood.<sup>43</sup>

This strict moral code was not limited to the condemnation of wrongdoing. It also included the Christian duties enjoined by the Scriptures. For instance, in regard to keeping the “sabbath,” she admits that “I can scarcely remember the time when I was not influenced by the opinion, that if I thought or conversed on topics of mere worldly interest, I need not expect prosperity in the prosecution of the matter in contemplation.”<sup>44</sup> Consequently, she developed a strong sense of right and wrong, even to the point that she was able to make distinctions between carnal desire and natural human desire. This led to her claim that sanctification is the death of sin, but not the death of self.<sup>45</sup> Even so, this does not seem sufficient to have produced a sense of sin as strong as Wesley’s, for she says that she had always been a docile person. In fact, she could not recall a time in her life when she was not compliant. As a result, she never developed a deep sense of her own sinfulness and was uncertain of her conversion, since it was not a dramatic event.<sup>46</sup>

This gave her great difficulty in understanding conviction as a feeling of remorse effected by a guilty conscience. “Conviction is not condemnation. . . . Willful transgression necessarily brings condemnation, but a kind father may convict a dutiful child of unintentional error and not condemn him.”<sup>47</sup> It almost appears that this is a self-description. She clearly held refined notions of right and wrong, of carnal and human desire, and of duty. However, her docile spirit helped her to avoid many willful transgressions and the guilt which accompanies them. Her main concern, therefore, was to be instructed so as to perform her duties more

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<sup>43</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 62-63.

<sup>44</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 197.

<sup>45</sup>Palmer to Professor and Mrs. Upham, New York, 30 April 1851, *Life and Letters*, 520.

<sup>46</sup>Palmer diary, 12 August 1827, *Life and Letters*, 22-23.

<sup>47</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 187-188.



perfectly. In this manner, it is sufficient to regard conviction as the knowledge of right duty. Even when duty is not perceived through conviction, the duty remains (e.g., the duty to pursue holiness).<sup>48</sup> In her mind, “knowledge is conviction.”<sup>49</sup> Such an emphasis, while perfectly valid, had only a marginal role at best in Wesley’s schema, since his basic definition of perfection is the deliverance from all sin.

In conformity, therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion: A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin. This is the glorious privilege of every Christian, yea, though he be but a babe in Christ. But it is only of grown Christians it can be affirmed, they are in such a sense perfect, as, Secondly, to be free from evil or sinful thoughts.<sup>50</sup>

It is not enough for a person to be sincere. Those who would be perfect must be “cleansed from pride, anger, lust, and self-will.”<sup>51</sup> The first step which must take place is conviction, i.e., the Holy Spirit must reveal to believers the depths of their own depravity. “And now first they do see the ground of their heart; which God before would not disclose unto them, lest the soul should fail before him, and the spirit which he had made.” Once these carnal traits are revealed, the believer will experience “the inexpressible hunger [for] a full renewal in [God’s] image.”<sup>52</sup> After the obstacles of carnal dispositions are removed, the soul is free to love God and others unconditionally and unreservedly. “Yea, we do believe that [God] will in this world so ‘cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that we shall perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name.’”<sup>53</sup>

According to Peter Gardella, this type of remorseful conviction is unnecessary in Palmer’s approach to sanctification. For her, “the quest for perfection demanded no heightened consciousness of sin.”<sup>54</sup> It is not that she completely neglects this aspect of Wesley’s doctrine, she just does not

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>50</sup>Wesley, 376-377.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 418.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 381.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 445-446.

<sup>54</sup>Peter Gardella, *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America an Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* (New York: Oxford, 1985), 88.

give it center stage as he does. The element which she does emphasize more than Wesley is power. In fact, she claims that “faith always brings power.”<sup>55</sup> Again, this puts her closer to the Keswick and Pentecostal camps. As a result, Palmer’s understanding of being saved from all sin is theologically shallow in comparison to Wesley. The transformation of character never progresses beyond a mystical event. However, she does offer a corrective for this apparent lack in her paradigm. She holds up “symmetrical holiness” as an ideal for the sanctified believer. It is defined as the “perfect consistency and agreement between the various elements of the character possessing it.”<sup>56</sup> In the end, she furnishes a theory of virtue that must be reinforced with another one on top of it.

**Instantaneous or Gradual?** When it comes to the issue of perfection being an event or a process, Palmer’s use of Wesley is highly selective. She is quick to point out Wesley’s admonition to preach perfection and to agonize for it.<sup>57</sup> She also quotes Wesley at length when he urges those who seek perfection to “expect it now.”<sup>58</sup> This gives her boldness in validating the experiences of those who quickly move from conversion to sanctification. Accordingly, she said, “we see, in fact, there is no difference, that some of the most unquestionable witnesses of sanctifying grace, were sanctified within a few days after they were justified. . . . What marvel, since one day with God is as a thousand years!”<sup>59</sup>

It is quite convenient that she ignores Wesley’s understanding that the moment in which perfection is attained “is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.”<sup>60</sup> He had questioned, “Q. When does inward sanctification begin? A. In the moment a man is justified. (Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout.) From that time a believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace.”<sup>61</sup> Even though death to sin may occur gradually, it must still reach a terminus. The process must be culminated for Christian perfection to be attained.<sup>62</sup> Wesley clearly explains that the process of crucifying sinful

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<sup>55</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 153.

<sup>56</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 77.

<sup>57</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 247.

<sup>58</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 285-6.

<sup>59</sup>Palmer, *Life and Letters*, 530.

<sup>60</sup>Wesley, 442.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 387.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 402.

desires is rarely, if ever, accomplished in a short amount of time. In regard to those who have attained perfection, he avers that “we are not now speaking of babes in Christ, but adult Christians.”<sup>63</sup> He also refers to the entirely sanctified as those who are “grown up into perfect men.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, “perfect” Christians are neither those who indefinitely progress but never attain, nor are they immature believers.

Wesley sees two dangers. The first is that immature believers will pursue some type of experience that is not grounded in a deep realization of and complete victory over one’s own carnal desires. The other danger is that we might begin to insist that people must be believers for a certain length of time before they can attain the state of holiness. “God’s usual method is one thing, but his sovereign pleasure is another. He has wise reasons both for hastening and retarding his work.”<sup>65</sup> Wesley is unwilling to preclude any possible timetable, for he recognizes God’s ability to control the process.

Palmer seizes the opportunity to make the most of this small concession. She reinterprets Wesley’s assertion that God can “do the work of many years in a moment” as evidence that new converts can very quickly attain perfection.<sup>66</sup> Notwithstanding, it should be noted that Wesley does believe the gradual death to sin to be the usual method. “I believe it is usually many years after justification; but that it may be within five years or five months after it, I know no conclusive argument to the contrary.”<sup>67</sup> Wesley concedes that the process of death to sin can occur at an accelerated rate, but he does not allow the process to be shortened in its steps. Hence, there is no “shorter way” for Wesley. The sanctification of the newly justified is considered by him to be “an exempt case.”<sup>68</sup> Palmer asserts the exact opposite. This is why she opposes his terms for attaining the experience.

Yet Wesley does not stop here. While he truly believed that “without holiness no one shall see the Lord,” he also believed that many Christians will not be entirely sanctified until death. In fact, he asserts that God perfects most at death or a little before.<sup>69</sup> The fact that many do not attain

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 374.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 382.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 407.

<sup>66</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Fragments*, 54.

<sup>67</sup>Wesley, 446.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 423.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 423.

perfection in this life should not cause us to doubt their eternal destiny. Wesley says that not all of those who are sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption have attained perfection.<sup>70</sup> In effect, he does not use perfection as a means of reaffirming his salvation.

**Objectifying the Subjective.** Palmer lived by what she called “experimental religion.” She was raised according to the philosophy that personal experience is to be used to shape one’s theology. Obviously, she recognized the fact that personal testimony is derived from such “experimental knowledge.”<sup>71</sup> However, she took the matter one step further by asserting that the “footmarks” of Christ are to be “experimentally tested.”<sup>72</sup> She was careful not to imply that the Christian life should be lived by trial and error, but her method certainly gives experiential knowledge equal footing with other types of knowledge, and it allows experience to shape the interpretation of Scripture. This leads Gardella to concur with Charles Edwin Jones: “Wesley’s methods produced ‘a generation of seekers after Christian perfection; Mrs. Palmer’s, a century of holiness professors.’ Identifying the attainment of perfection with a single ecstatic experience was what brought about this change.”<sup>73</sup>

Palmer was apparently seeking some type of affirmation that she had genuinely experienced holiness in her heart and life. For one thing, she had experienced a recurring pattern of faith, doubt, and pleading in her quest for sanctification. Even after receiving the “blessing,” she experienced frequent doubts, both of her own experience and her ability to help others attain the experience. She had an ongoing desire to gain assurance and she looked to “clearer perceptions” and ecstatic experiences to fill the void.<sup>74</sup> She wanted a “direct assurance” to function as the “witness of holiness.”<sup>75</sup> In her struggles, she “wrestled importunately with God” to be delivered from “temptations” of doubt. She was wanting to know “the precise ground upon which [she] obtained, and might retain, this blessing.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 380, n2.

<sup>71</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 18.

<sup>72</sup>Palmer, *Pioneer Experiences*, vii.

<sup>73</sup>Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 2, in Gardella, 89.

<sup>74</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 117-288.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 227.

<sup>76</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 85.

As Palmer looked to ecstatic experience for assurance, a progression took place. First, she testified that through “some great and indefinable exercise” the Lord led her into holiness “with unutterable delight,” where the “comprehensive desires” of the soul were “blended and satisfied in the fulfillment of the command, ‘Be ye holy.’”<sup>77</sup> Her ecstatic experiences were so glorious that she wondered whether the ecstasy of departed saints differs from that of the fully sanctified only in degree, and not in nature.<sup>78</sup> She embraced these ecstatic experiences as normative and thus began to doubt that one can “really and fully believe” and not possess “joy, peace, or even satisfaction.”<sup>79</sup> Indeed, when someone made the comment to her, “I wish I could always be as happy as you are,” Palmer replied that she “did not dare to be otherwise than happy” since we are commanded in Scripture to give thanks in everything.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, she discovered that there is apparently no limit to the levels of ecstasy which can be reached. At least one time, she prayed for and received an “expansion of soul” (i.e., heightened emotional capacity).<sup>81</sup>

Her struggle became one of being certain that her faith was not based on feelings. She realized that if people consecrate themselves to God guided only by their feelings, they can eventually be led astray.<sup>82</sup> People might consecrate themselves out of the selfish motive of experiencing ecstasy, or they might allow a lack of emotion to limit the level of consecration they would make. The results would be disastrous. Nevertheless, she still expected sanctification to produce these ecstatic experiences. She attempted to validate them by asserting that feelings are produced by faith, and yet, all she did was to move the problem to a new location since faith too cannot be based on feelings.<sup>83</sup> Rather than attempt to avoid the illegitimate by eliminating ecstatic experiences altogether, she concluded that the quality of the faith which produces these experiences can be tested. True faith “will produce a fixedness of purpose, and an established state of experience, beyond expression glorious.”<sup>84</sup> She

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<sup>77</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 28.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>79</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 150.

<sup>80</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 93-94.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>82</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 107.

<sup>83</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 37-38.

<sup>84</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 351.

also looked for assurance in prayer, asserting that the “witness of purity of intention” is attainable and is to be sought through prayer.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, she granted feelings an epistemic status, suggesting that feelings produce a useful type of knowledge.<sup>86</sup> She concluded, “Ecstatic experiences and wondrous visions are good, but a sympathy with Jesus, in the great work that brought him from heaven to earth, is better.”<sup>87</sup> Having now put her ecstatic experiences into proper perspective, she could fully embrace her claim to have been “powerfully and experimentally assured.”<sup>88</sup>

Next, Palmer turned to the Scriptures for assurance. On one hand, Scripture can distinguish the false from the true. Consequently, the spirits must be tested by Scripture so as to avoid error and delusion.<sup>89</sup> How shall Scripture itself be tested? “God’s word is its own evidence.”<sup>90</sup> This gave her confidence regarding the validity of her ecstatic experiences. “Shall I venture upon the declarations without previously realizing a change sufficient to warrant such conclusions? Venture now, merely because they stand thus recorded in the written word!”<sup>91</sup> Paul Bassett aptly describes this hermeneutic as a “radical doctrine of *sola scriptura*.”<sup>92</sup> However it is classified, it appears to have sufficiently dispelled her doubts. She reported:

O yes! the blessed word even now most assuringly whispers the certainty to my heart—the sure word of prophecy—the voice of revelation tells me that these blessed assurances are not the mere imaginations of an over-excited mind. Blessed beyond all that the mind can conceive is the state of that soul, who, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, hath entered within the veil.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 21.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 217-9.

<sup>87</sup>Palmer, *Life and Letters*, 529.

<sup>88</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 45.

<sup>89</sup>Palmer to Professor and Mrs. Upham, New York, 30 April 1851, *Life and Letters*, 521.

<sup>90</sup>Palmer, *Life and Letters*, 539.

<sup>91</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 37.

<sup>92</sup>Paul Bassett, “The Theological Identity of the North American Holiness Movement,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, edited by Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 85.

<sup>93</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 228-229.

Even though Wesley is known for his doctrine of the witness of the Holy Spirit, he does not share Palmer's insatiable desire for certainty. In fact, he acknowledges that a certain degree of uncertainty is inherent in the process of perfection. As a person attains perfection, although there must be an instant when sin dies, the precise moment can be difficult to perceive.<sup>94</sup> Hence, the witness of sanctification "is not always clear at first. . . . Yea, and sometimes it is withdrawn." Indeed, he believed that as long as the believer has no doubt, the witness of the Spirit is unnecessary.<sup>95</sup>

Wesley did believe that the sanctified can be certain of their state, evidenced when four criteria are met. First, a "deeper and clearer conviction" of carnality must be gained. Second, sin must be gradually mortified until its death is experienced. Third, the subject is renewed in the image of God so as to be filled with the love of God. Fourth, the Spirit bears witness with the sanctified person's spirit. Neglecting any of these four criteria can lead to delusional experiences. To the person who experiences all of these, Wesley says, "I judge it impossible that this man should be deceived herein."<sup>96</sup>

This still leaves the question for Wesley as to whether or not we can ascertain when someone else attains perfection. Again, those who seek confirming experiences like Palmer will find his answer less satisfying, but it is more realistic. He concludes: "We cannot infallibly know one that is thus saved (no, nor even one that is justified) unless it should please God to endow us with the miraculous discernment of spirits."<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, the best that can be done is to judge the behavior and credibility of the person providing the testimony.

According to Palmer, testimony itself is crucial for holiness. Externally, it is necessary to promote the doctrine, for many are often encouraged to pursue it after hearing the testimonies of those who have already attained it. As a result, testimony is more central to spreading the doctrine than even theology itself. Internally, testimony is necessary for retaining sanctification. Palmer believed that she lost her assurance of the experience by not testifying to it. Fortunately for her, she was also able to regain it through testimony.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Wesley, 442.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 420.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 401-402.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 399.

<sup>98</sup>Palmer, *Promise of the Father*, 393-396.

**Role of Reason Diminished.** Charles White attempts to relate Palmer's hermeneutical method to the Wesleyan quadrilateral of scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.<sup>99</sup> From the differences that have already been outlined, this does not appear to be a very accurate comparison. First, Palmer gives experience a greater role than Wesley does. He allows experience to affirm and nuance his understanding of Scripture, but she allows experience to shape and determine hers. Next, Wesley has a higher sense of tradition than Palmer. Even her use of Wesley is selective. Also, Wesley's use of reason is more dialogical and balanced, while Palmer's seems limited to simple apprehension. Finally, Palmer does share Wesley's regard for Scripture as the ultimate source of truth. She believes our prayers and expectations cannot contradict God's word, else they will be delusional.<sup>100</sup> Notwithstanding, her approach to scripture is mystical in comparison to Wesley. She believes that scripture cannot be discerned through external means. Each person must approach the text without the aid of external sources, and interpret it from her own perspective, even if this understanding should come through some mystical medium.

What a strange, God-dishonoring position it is, to acknowledge the Bible as the word of God, and yet suffer ourselves to be governed by our own feelings—the views, experience, and traditions of others, in reference to it, while we are every moment liable to be called into the other world, to answer for ourselves, and be judged by our individual conformity to its precepts!

But are we to reject all manifestations from God, or answers to prayer, that may be given in dreams or visions of the night? The spirit of the word settles this matter. From the earliest, down to the latest period, God has spoken to his people in this manner. As well might we deny any other part of divine revelation, as to deny this.<sup>101</sup>

In another instance, Palmer prays for guidance from the Lord while randomly opening her Bible: “. . . scarcely could I have had a stronger realization that this was indeed the voice of God to me, had it been spo-

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<sup>99</sup>Charles White, “What the Holy Spirit Can and Cannot Do: The Ambiguities of Phoebe Palmer's Theology of Experience,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 20:1 (Spring 1985), 108-21.

<sup>100</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 206-8.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 209-10.



ken from heaven to the outward ear, as well as to the inmost soul.”<sup>102</sup> Wesley is not nearly as inclined to follow such premonitions, if at all. Clearly, Palmer uses higher reasoning much less than Wesley. Her neglect of reason may be in part due to her view that the Methodists were called of God to be a movement of simple, plain people. In one place, she asserts that they were “raised through their instrumentality.”<sup>103</sup> In another place, she claims that their simplicity and uniqueness account for their success.

I verily believe that when God thrust the Wesleys out to raise a holy people, and we became a distinct organization, with men of such simple, childlike, enlightened, and yet noble piety, under God, at the head of our ecclesiastical affairs, that he really intended that we should retain more of those distinctive features by which our economy is characterized, as dissimilar in doctrine and usage from other evangelical bodies.<sup>104</sup>

Matters must be kept simple. Indeed, Palmer felt that the reason more people do not attain perfection is not because of its intricacies, but for a lack of simplicity. “We do not need great powers of mind to reach it, but deep humility of spirit to come down to it.”<sup>105</sup>

Wesley had witnessed the dangers that can be produced by such talk. He thus seems more concerned that people be sober in their thinking (i.e., free from false imaginations) rather than simple-minded. Note this:

. . . and a considerable number of persons believed that God had saved them from all sin. Easily foreseeing that Satan would be endeavoring to sow tares among the wheat, I took much pains to apprise them of the danger, particularly with regard to pride and enthusiasm. And while I stayed in town, I had reason to hope they continued both humble and sober-minded. But almost as soon as I was gone enthusiasm broke in. Two or three began to take their own imaginations for impressions from God, and thence to suppose that they should never die; and these, laboring to bring others into the same opinion, occasioned much noise and confusion. Soon after, the same persons, with a few more, ran into other extravagances; fancying they could not be tempted; that they should feel no

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 199-200.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 234.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 216.

<sup>105</sup>Palmer, “Faith and Its Effects,” 54-55.

more pain; and that they had the gift of prophecy, and of discerning of spirits.<sup>106</sup>

Wesley had good reasons for saying that we must continually guard against “enthusiasm.”

Give no place to a heated imagination. Do not hastily ascribe things to God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions, or revelations to be from God. They may be from him. They may be from nature. They may be from the devil. . . . Try all things by the written word. . . . And so you are [in danger of enthusiasm] if you despise or lightly esteem reason, knowledge, or human learning; every one of which is an excellent gift of God, and may serve the noblest purposes.<sup>107</sup>

How does Wesley account for the ecstatic experiences of those who are enthusiasts, especially when they do exhibit some type of evidence that might support a claim that they are perfected in love?

“But he is deceived.” What then? It is a harmless mistake, while he feels nothing but love in his heart. It is a mistake which generally argues great grace, an high degree of both holiness and happiness. This should be a matter of real joy to all that are simple of heart; not the mistake itself, but the height of grace which for a time occasions it. I rejoice that this soul is always happy in Christ, always full of prayer and thanksgiving. I rejoice that he feels no unholy temper, but the pure love of God continually. And I will rejoice, if sin is suspended till it is totally destroyed.<sup>108</sup>

Hence, it is possible for some to ecstatically experience the love of God without being perfected. In such cases, “sin is only suspended in them;” it is not destroyed.<sup>109</sup> To his credit, Wesley is able to account for these types of experiences without discrediting them altogether. He only maintains that those who have such experiences should not claim too much for themselves. One can only speculate as to whether he would support Palmer’s methods, or as to what he would think of the variety of experiences that people have attempted to legitimize by linking his name to them.

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<sup>106</sup>Wesley, 406.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 405.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 442.

## 2. Possible Sources of the Divergence

The best way to determine which figures influenced Phoebe Palmer is through her own words. First, in one of her letters she asserts, “Not Wesley, not Fletcher, not Finney, not Mahan, not Upham, but the Bible . . . is the standard, the groundwork, the platform, the creed.”<sup>110</sup> It is obvious that she recognized these men either as the standard figures of her day or as her personal favorites. A more striking endorsement appears in *The Way of Holiness*. “The fact of having received, from God, through such men as Wesley, Fletcher, Nelson, Bramwell, and a host of other heaven-owned luminaries, this glorious doctrine [of holiness], as revealed in the blessed word, throws a weight of responsibility, most tremendous in magnitude, upon our ministry and people.”<sup>111</sup> Taking a brief look at several of these figures may shed further light on Palmer’s departure from Wesley.

**John Fletcher.** Fletcher was the systematic theologian for early Methodism. He identified Christian perfection with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and sparked a debate that continues to this day.<sup>112</sup> Wesleyan scholars still argue whether Wesley’s endorsement of Fletcher was general (i.e., he did not agree with certain elements) or total (i.e., he fully agreed with him). More specifically, did Wesley later come to accept the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the vehicle for perfection? Regardless of Wesley’s feelings, Palmer certainly makes use of Fletcher’s pentecostal model. The fact that her feminist writings are based upon Acts 2 may have something to do with her adaptation of the this model.<sup>113</sup> Also, she may have borrowed from Fletcher’s understanding of how sanctification is experienced. He establishes the virtues of meekness, humility, and true resignation to God as the prerequisites to entire sanctification.<sup>114</sup> In 1863, during her trip to the British Isles, Palmer visited the home and graves of the Fletchers. On the same trip, she also visited the only surviving daughter of William Bramwell.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>110</sup>Palmer, *Life and Letters*, 251.

<sup>111</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 215.

<sup>112</sup>John Fletcher, *An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism, Second Part* (reprint, Salem, OH: Schmul, 1974), 627-657.

<sup>113</sup>White, “Pentecostal Pneumatology,” 200.

<sup>114</sup>Fletcher, 630. A fuller exposition of Fletcher’s understanding of perfection is found in the same volume on pages 491-669.

<sup>115</sup>Palmer to Bishop and Mrs. Hamline, Leeds, 7 January 1863, *Life and Letters*, 388-389.

**William Bramwell.** Bramwell was a popular and colorful early Methodist circuit rider. It is reported that his zeal and work ethic made him one of Wesley's favorites. However, he tended to be a bit clairvoyant and this stirred up some controversy. In fact, he once destroyed his own diary by burning it, fearing that the stories contained therein would result in him being castigated for fanaticism.<sup>116</sup> Fletcher himself led Bramwell into the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit after he had lost it "four or five times before." Each time, he had lost the experience by not testifying to it.<sup>117</sup> Palmer would teach the same concept years later.

Bramwell's mysticism can be illustrated by a revelatory dream that he had, in which he discovered the intent of some rogues to kill him along the highway. He altered his route to avoid the impending danger.<sup>118</sup> Bramwell also gave credence to a "remarkable dream" experienced by his intimate friend John Nelson (another name on Palmer's list).<sup>119</sup> Bramwell once prayed for and effected the healing of a man who subsequently reported, "Thus Mr. Bramwell might be said to be possessed of a key that opened heaven and drew the blessing down."<sup>120</sup> Some of these tendencies were later adopted by Palmer.

**Adam Clarke.** Adam Clarke's commentary on Romans 12:1-2 provides a thorough development and the necessary support for the "altar" model which Palmer would eventually adopt into her own theological framework.<sup>121</sup> Like Palmer, he concludes that true happiness is tied to complete consecration. "Our souls can never be truly happy till our wills be entirely subjected to, and become one with, the will of God."<sup>122</sup> Clarke disdains the use of the term "Christian perfection," since it requires so many qualifications and nuances to be useful.<sup>123</sup> Finally, in deriding the

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<sup>116</sup>Bramwell, *Memoir of the Life and Ministry of Mr. William Bramwell, Lately an Itinerant Methodist Preacher*, ed. James Sigston (New York: Lane & Scott, 1849), 3-4.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-41.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>121</sup>Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (reprint, Nashville: Abingdon Press, n.d.).

<sup>122</sup>Clarke, *Christian Theology* (1835; reprint, Salem, OH: Schmull, 1967), 203.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 184-185.

Calvinist doctrine that deliverance from sin is not possible until death, he seems to distance himself from Wesley's claim that many do not attain perfection until some point shortly before death.<sup>124</sup> He says enough to provide Palmer with some ammunition.

**Charles Grandison Finney.** The evangelistic services held by Finney are largely credited with initiating the Second Great Awakening that took place in America in the early nineteenth century. He and the educator Asa Mahan founded Oberlin College in Ohio as an evangelical institution. They were eventually exposed to the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection and set out to study the matter. As a result of their personal evaluation, they developed their own version of entire sanctification, known more informally as "Oberlin Perfectionism." Galea sees these two men as the root of Palmer's deviance from Wesley.<sup>125</sup> Although we have already exposed several other sources of divergence, they certainly do contribute to the cause in a significant way.

Finney concluded that sanctification is not any constitutional change of the soul or body, neither is it an intellectual state. Instead, it is "a phenomenon of the will, or a voluntary state of mind."<sup>126</sup> From this definition he extrapolates the definition of "entire sanctification," determining it to be "entire and continual obedience to the law of God."<sup>127</sup> The primary difference here between Finney and Wesley is not found in their respective definitions of sin. Rather it lies in their understanding of the nexus of moral action. To be specific, they have opposing views as to the relationship between the will and feelings. For Finney, sanctification is not a matter of the affections or emotions. These are the result of a "state of heart." He proposes that "the only way to secure them [i.e., the feelings] is to set the will right, and the emotions will be a natural result." Consequently, "sanctification consists in entire consecration."<sup>128</sup> In other words, the feelings are a product of the will. Whenever the will makes proper choices, the feelings will also be proper.

Wesley's portrayal is diametrically opposed to Finney's account. In consonance with many thinkers of his day, Wesley believed that the will is

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 185-186, 205-209.

<sup>125</sup>Galea, 239-240.

<sup>126</sup>Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology* (1846; reprint, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1976), 340-342.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 342.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 374.

largely controlled by the “tempers,” “passions,” and “desires.” The way to get the will to function properly is to guide it with proper drives and inclinations. This accounts for the fact that, when Wesley speaks of being freed from all willful sin, he reduces the issue to freedom from sinful tempers, passions, etc. He heartily believes that, when a Christian is able to conquer such evil “tempers” and “dispositions,” the love of God will fill the heart, enabling the will to function in accordance with God’s will. Hence, entire consecration that is free of self-will is seen more as an evidence of perfection and less as a prerequisite. Consequently, Wesley knows that there is a danger when people bypass the gradual death of sinful inclinations, expecting ecstatic experiences to generate emotions sufficient to produce similar results. The danger is that such ecstatic experiences will overshadow the individual’s true spiritual condition.

It appears that Palmer attempts to synthesize Wesley and Finney regarding perfection. On one hand, she seems to agree with Finney that the will must come first and then the feelings will follow. Earlier, I mentioned some of her internal struggles in that regard. Essentially, she accepts the notion that having the mind of Christ “induce[s] [us] to feel and to act” like Christ, i.e., Christ-like thinking produces Christ-like feelings and Christ-like actions.<sup>129</sup> This is produced through the exercise of the will. “If you have power to reason above an idiot, or the beasts that perish, God has given that power.”<sup>130</sup> However, this is the logical conclusion that she wishes to avoid. She was perplexed when she contemplated the possibility that her account of sanctification is a matter of the will and can therefore be controlled by the subject. According to her, the Spirit reassured her that such is not the case, that consecration is not strictly an exercise of the will but “is a matter of thanksgiving to God.”<sup>131</sup> On the surface, this seems acceptable, for it is possible for consecration to be motivated by love. There does not seem to be any way to reconcile this suggestion with her claims that the believer must: (1) decide to be holy and (2) vigorously pursue consecration, even through a struggle. Furthermore, she contends elsewhere that consecration is not a matter of the feelings. She has apparently contradicted herself. Her attempt to reconcile Finney and Wesley in this regard seems to have failed.

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<sup>129</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 57.

<sup>130</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 50.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 41-42.

When all is considered, her position seems to be closer to Finney than to Wesley. Finney, too, suggests that it is the believer's duty to be filled with the Spirit. "If you do not have the Spirit of God in you, you will dishonor God, disgrace the church, and die and go to hell."<sup>132</sup> Palmer could not have said it better herself. Finney sees sanctification as the general duty of each Christian. It does not arise from a particular theological system, but is an experience that all Christians can enjoy, regardless of their individual doctrines. For this reason, the experience of one person cannot be forced on another as a norm.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, "a man may believe in what is really a state of entire sanctification, and aim at attaining it, although he may not call it by that name. This I believe to be the real fact with Christians." Wesley also allowed for this possibility, and Palmer followed suit by attempting to raise the experience to a new level of ecumenism (see below).

**Asa Mahan.** Palmer lauded Mahan as "an ointment poured forth, to the lovers of heart-purity, in both hemispheres."<sup>134</sup> In regard to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Mahan teaches that the believer must seek it "in a state of supreme dedication to Christ, and of absolute subjection to His will."<sup>135</sup> Once again, the key is obedience to God's will. In fact, the Holy Spirit perfects the newly converted believer in obedience (i.e., teaches the convert how to be obedient) as preparation for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>136</sup> Like Finney, Mahan has no difficulties in describing consecration as a function of the will. Indeed, he points out that when Finney became aware "that by being 'baptized with the Holy Ghost' we can 'be filled with all the fullness of God,' he of course sought that baptism with all his heart and with all his soul, and very soon obtained what he sought."<sup>137</sup> This is what Palmer tries to embrace in practice and reject in theory.

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<sup>132</sup>Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835; reprint with introduction and notes by William G. McLoughlin, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1960), 108-109.

<sup>133</sup>Finney, *Systematic Theology*, 355.

<sup>134</sup>Palmer to Mrs. (Sarah) Lankford, Jackson, MI, 15 August 1866, *Life and Letters*, 426.

<sup>135</sup>Asa Mahan, *Out of Darkness into Light* (1877; reprint, New York: Garland, 1985), 173-174.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 180.

### 3. A Fragmented Ecumenical Movement

**Holiness as an Ecumenical Enterprise.** Phoebe Palmer was not interested in sharing her experience in just a little corner of the world. She saw holiness as the true essence of Christianity, something to be experienced by all believers, regardless of their denominational affiliations or theological commitments. “We say irrespective of denomination, because the time is past for the doctrine of Holiness to be characterized as the doctrine of a sect.”<sup>138</sup> For this to occur, the experience must be seen as theologically neutral, at least in certain respects. Palmer saw her Tuesday meetings as success stories in this ecumenical enterprise, asserting that they demonstrated “how completely the Spirit of God annihilates the spirit of sectarianism.”<sup>139</sup> One other particular event stood out in her mind as a confirmation of her ecumenical project. On a certain occasion she discovered a woman outside the Methodist tradition who, after Palmer explained that holiness is “loving God with the whole heart,” realized that she already had it. Palmer thus acknowledged her as “a witness of perfect love.”<sup>140</sup>

**Her General Impact.** Overall, Palmer’s was very favorably regarded within evangelicalism. Peters indicates that her particular emphases and methods were frequently imitated and exaggerated.<sup>141</sup> If imitation is truly the sincerest form of flattery, we can conclude that she was highly esteemed. Thomas Oden summarizes her impact as follows: “If Phoebe Palmer is not the most influential woman theologian of Protestantism of her time, it becomes extremely difficult to make a serious case for an alternative.”<sup>142</sup> In addition to her efforts to legitimize women’s roles in ministry, possibly her greatest area of influence is in her insistence on complete consecration. Timothy Smith says that nineteenth-century perfectionism is identified by its stress on unconditional surrender to God’s will.<sup>143</sup> I think that Palmer had much to do with that.

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<sup>138</sup>Palmer, *Pioneer Experiences*, vi.

<sup>139</sup>Palmer, *Promise of the Father*, 226.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>141</sup>Peters, 112.

<sup>142</sup>Palmer, *Selected Writings*, 14.

<sup>143</sup>Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 142.



Even with all of her success, her ministry was not without controversy. Her views and methods were almost constantly under fire. Even though she spoke out against the secession of the Protestant Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, and Free Methodists, the Methodist Episcopal Church seemed the most critical of her. The Methodist General Conference of 1852 warned against “new theories, new expressions, and new measures” of sanctification. Members were exhorted to adhere to Wesley and Fletcher.<sup>144</sup> Ivan Howard relates that “Randolph Foster, prominent Methodist [of the nineteenth century], criticized Mrs. Palmer’s position as tending toward delusion and toward ‘spurious though sincere professions.’”<sup>145</sup>

Even some of Palmer’s friends opposed various facets of her teachings. Nathan Bangs reacted against her contention that sanctification can be claimed without any extra-scriptural evidence, calling it “not sound. . . unscriptural, and anti-Wesleyan.”<sup>146</sup> As a matter of fact, Bangs had an ongoing dispute with her teaching about the immediate witness to entire sanctification.<sup>147</sup> Even her friends Bishop Hamline and John Inskip gave her opposition on at least one occasion. It is obvious that her teachings stirred up much controversy, especially after the camp meeting movement gave her a broader audience. According to J. Wesley Corbin, such controversy is characteristic of a distinct shift that took place in the Holiness Movement in 1867, the year that Inskip organized camp meetings as a national platform for promoting Palmer’s version of holiness.<sup>148</sup>

**Palmer and the Perfectionist Traditions.** In her attempt to create an ecumenical movement, Phoebe Palmer did in fact impact several traditions, yet each of these appropriated Christian perfection for its own purposes. I am not suggesting that these movements can be wholly traced back to Palmer, only that she had some impact on each, even if only in an indirect way.

Obviously, she impacted her own Methodist tradition. She was a personal friend of Methodists like Nathan Bangs, Professor Upham, Bishop

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<sup>144</sup>White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 156.

<sup>145</sup>Ivan Howard, “Wesley Versus Phoebe Palmer: An extended Controversy,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 6:1 (Spring 1971), 31-40.

<sup>146</sup>Peters, 113.

<sup>147</sup>White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 245.

<sup>148</sup>J. Wesley Corbin, “Christian Perfection and the Evangelical Association Through 1875,” *Methodist History*, 7:2 (Jan. 1969), 29.

Hamline, Bishop Janes, etc., and she influenced countless others. Smith argues that “there was not a ‘holiness controversy’ in the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, during the Civil War years. . . . The extensive controversy over the ‘second blessing’ appeared only during the years after 1872.”<sup>149</sup> He goes on to say that the teaching and preaching of entire sanctification, until that time, was more prevalent among Methodists than one might otherwise suppose. Hopefully, Smith is not ignoring the antebellum controversy that arose in Methodism over the stress that should be placed on Christian perfection. Instead, Smith may be referring to the fact that doctrinal wrangling about entire sanctification did not occur until after the advent of the camp meeting movement. Obviously, Palmer was at the center of this impetus.

Palmer’s impact on the Holiness and Camp Meeting Movements was tremendous, to say the least. Jones maintains that her model for gaining the assurance of entire sanctification was followed by the first two generations of the National Holiness Movement.<sup>150</sup> Smith refers to her as the “titular head of the holiness revival.”<sup>151</sup> It is a well-known fact that the Inskips were among her closest disciples, and it would be difficult to estimate the impact that she had on the Camp Meeting Movement, considering the fact that she personally appeared in these camps for thirty-five years. White can thus claim that the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness “institutionalized Mrs. Palmer’s view of sanctification.”<sup>152</sup>

In spite of her opposition to their break with Methodism, Palmer still was very influential among the fledgling holiness denominations. Initially, some of these groups were founded for purposes other than the promotion of holiness. For example, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was formed as an abolitionist group. However, after the Civil War the issue was resolved and the group’s purpose became disputed. Luther Lee, one of the denomination’s founders, tells the story:

The war and its results, with the change of the Methodist Episcopal Church from a pro-slavery to an antislavery position,

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<sup>149</sup>Smith, introduction to *Beauty of Holiness*, by White, xiii.

<sup>150</sup>Jones, “The Inverted Shadow of Phoebe Palmer,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 30:2 (Fall 1996), 126.

<sup>151</sup>Smith, 211.

<sup>152</sup>White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 157.

removed the principle reason for the Wesleyan Methodist organization. The Wesleyans lost their influence and progressive power, as other denominations became more and more antislavery, and from the commencement of the war they began to decline.<sup>153</sup>

In the postbellum period, the Wesleyan Methodists eventually came to redefine their mission as “the spreading of scriptural holiness throughout every land,” one which they have maintained until this day. Palmer’s innovations in sanctification gave the Holiness groups a doctrine that was somewhat different from that of the mainline Methodists, and this helped to justify their existence apart from their parent Methodist Church. Palmer’s movement continued to propagate even more denominations and sects, each one sharing the common purpose of spreading the doctrine of holiness.

**Keswick/Higher Life Movement.** Even though the Keswick doctrine of sanctification is different from the Wesleyan version, Palmer’s divergence from Wesley makes her account resemble the Keswick model in several ways. For example, D. L. Moody also relies on the promises of Scripture to gain assurance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a practice which is strikingly similar to Palmer’s. He taught that people must simply believe these scriptural promises.<sup>154</sup> He continues, “Many people want some evidence outside of God’s word. That habit always brings a doubt. . . . We must not question what God has said.”<sup>155</sup>

Donald W. Dayton asserts that from Oberlin perfectionism to pentecostal perfection (i.e., Palmer, et. al.) there was a shift in emphasis from “ability” to “power.”<sup>156</sup> Moody certainly relates sanctification to power. In one sense, the Holy Spirit is the Christian’s source of power.<sup>157</sup> In another sense, “[Christ] is our Sanctification; we draw all our power for holy life from Him.”<sup>158</sup> However, the power gained in sanctification is not only for

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<sup>153</sup>Luther Lee, *Autobiography of the Rev. Luther Lee* (1882; reprint, New York: Garland, 1984), 299.

<sup>154</sup>Moody, *The Way to God* (reprint; Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1983), 111-114.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>156</sup>Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 77.

<sup>157</sup>Moody, *Secret Power, or the Secret of Success in Christian Life and Work* (1881; reprint with a preface by Donald W. Dayton, New York: Garland, 1985), 9.

<sup>158</sup>D. L. Moody, *Way to God*, 136.

victorious living; it is for witnessing. Since the Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ, the Spirit provides the power to witness.<sup>159</sup> This is again similar to the way Palmer relates sanctification, power, and testimony.

R. A. Torrey outlines seven steps that must be taken in order to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The first three relate to conversion, as Palmer would understand it, but the last four are very close to her model of sanctification. First, the believer must unconditionally surrender to God's will. Next, there must be a "thirst" for the Holy Spirit. After that, the believer needs to ask in prayer. Finally, the trustworthy promises of God's word are claimed in faith.<sup>160</sup> Like Palmer, Torrey judges that there is no need to delay; the baptism of the Holy Spirit can be experienced immediately.<sup>161</sup> Once the believer exercises faith in the "naked word of God," the presence of the Holy Spirit will be manifested in power for service.<sup>162</sup>

**Pentecostalism.** In some ways, Palmer appears to be a precursor to the Pentecostal Movement which would emerge in the twentieth century. Mark Noll avers that many of the emphases which culminated in Pentecostalism did in fact emerge from the Holiness Movement.<sup>163</sup> If this is true, then the imprint of Phoebe Palmer should be there as well. Oden agrees with this and asserts that Palmer is the link between Methodism and Pentecostalism.<sup>164</sup> White also concurs, "As a theologian she provided the link between John Wesley and the Pentecostals by modifying his theology of Christian perfection."<sup>165</sup>

Obviously, Palmer's use of a pentecostal model of sanctification puts her in the same general class as the Pentecostals. In fact, she even goes to the extent of likening holiness revivals to the day of Pentecost. Since holiness is spread through the personal testimony of those who have already experienced it, one could almost say that receiving the experience of holi-

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<sup>159</sup>Moody, *Secret Power*, 55-56.

<sup>160</sup>R. A. Torrey, *The Holy Spirit: Who He Is and What He Does, and How to Know Him in All the Fullness of His Gracious and Glorious Ministry* (1877; reprint, Fleming, NY: H. Revell Company, 1927), 154-192.

<sup>161</sup>*Ibid.*, 192-194.

<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*, 195-197.

<sup>163</sup>Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 116.

<sup>164</sup>Palmer, *Selected Writings*, 16-19.

<sup>165</sup>White, "Pentecostal Pneumatology," 198.

ness is like receiving a tongue of fire, just as the apostles did at Pentecost.<sup>166</sup> Conversely, the Pentecostals use a general model that greatly resembles the one promoted by Palmer. They exhort all believers to: “(1) be converted, (2) obey God fully, and (3) believe,” in order to be baptized by the Holy Spirit.<sup>167</sup>

Palmer also had a mystical side that relates her to the Pentecostals somewhat. For instance, she gave a fair amount of credence to dreams.<sup>168</sup> She also considered herself to have special gifts of discernment, at least on occasion. She believed that the Spirit would help her understand the Scriptures and that “every portion” of them contains some type of “special lesson of grace.”<sup>169</sup> She also claimed to have received an “increase of light” which gave her greater confidence in discerning the works of the devil.<sup>170</sup> When her six-year-old daughter was converted, she claimed that the little girl “began praising the Lord with expressions altogether beyond her former capacity. I could not but regard the singularly mature expressions, so beyond her former self, as a development of renewed mental powers.”<sup>171</sup> Also, after having an ecstatic experience, she had a dream in which she claimed that she was assaulted by Satan and delivered by an angel.<sup>172</sup>

Contrast these assertions with the following quote from John Wesley: “I say yet again, beware of enthusiasm. Such is, the imagining you have the gift of prophesying, or of discerning spirits, which I do not believe one of you has; no, nor ever had yet.”<sup>173</sup> Now consider them alongside Aimée Semple McPherson, one of the leading figures in the beginnings of Pentecostalism. McPherson’s mother was in the Salvation Army and her grandmother “had talked much of the mighty power of God manifested in the early Methodist Church, and here in the Army [her mother] found it again, and it was nothing uncommon to see men and women slain as in the church of John Wesley’s day.”<sup>174</sup> It is true that Wes-

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<sup>166</sup>Palmer, *Promise of the Father*, 208-209.

<sup>167</sup>White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 158.

<sup>168</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 108-110, 163-164, 193-195, 210-215, et. al.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>171</sup>*Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>172</sup>Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 78-82.

<sup>173</sup>Wesley, 430.

<sup>174</sup>McPherson, *This Is That* (Los Angeles: Bridal Call Publishing House, 1921), 13-14.

ley many times witnessed people falling down, convulsing, groaning, etc. However, these experiences were almost always instances in which someone fell under great conviction, i.e., pangs of guilt. They were not ecstatic experiences, nor were they referred to as being “slain in the Spirit.” It is true that Wesley and his followers enjoyed great waves of emotion from time to time, but such occurrences were not the expected norm. Neither are there many instances, if any, where Wesley advocates someone experiencing ecstasy to the point of losing self-control.

In contrast, Palmer gives an account in which a man was praying for sanctification. He prayed,

“Let it [i.e., the blessing] come in any way, only let it come!” It came, and with such mighty power that the day of Pentecost could scarcely have witnessed, in individual experience, a scene more astounding, uncontrollable, or unaccountable, on the principles of mere human reason, than was presented in his extraordinary exercises. The “sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind” could scarcely have been more overwhelming in its influences on that day when anciently given, than on this occasion.

For about four hours he was no more under his own control, or that of his friends around him, than the apostles were when first baptized with the Holy Ghost. Many others were baptized as suddenly at the same time. He still continues a flaming witness of the power of saving grace.<sup>175</sup>

It is little wonder that Gardella considers McPherson as one of Phoebe Palmer’s “heirs.”<sup>176</sup> He highlights the fact that both women teach the duty of being constantly happy.<sup>177</sup> However, their similarities extend beyond the emotional. McPherson also stressed the duty to immediately seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Have you come to the end of yourself, empty, cleansed, humble, low under the precious blood of Jesus? Are you waiting with prayer and supplication as did the Bible saints of old? If so, the Lord will meet you quickly. God’s time is now. It is not His will that you should wait until some vague tomorrow for

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<sup>175</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 183-184.

<sup>176</sup>Gardella, 94.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*, 92.

His Spirit. In the day you seek Him with your whole heart He will be found of you.<sup>178</sup>

The duty to seek the experience immediately is facilitated by the fact that the preparation only takes a moment. “Inside of fifteen minutes from the time that they came to the altar seeking salvation I have seen such penitents fall prostrate under the power of the Spirit, receive the Holy Ghost, and burst forth speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance.”<sup>179</sup> McPherson contends that what the Lord essentially desires is that we return to our first love, i.e., a “whole-hearted sacrifice” and the “sacrifice of praise.”<sup>180</sup> This sounds a lot like Palmer’s insistence on complete consecration and testimony.

**The True Essence of Christianity.** As it turns out, the doctrine with which Palmer intended to unite people also ended up dividing people, for although the experience can be shared by all, it is not regarded as an option. Those who neglect it reject God’s plan of salvation. “The Bible presents but one way to heaven, and that, the Way of Holiness.”<sup>181</sup> Not only must all believers aspire toward the “prize of holiness,” but they must also possess it as a “rightful heritage.”<sup>182</sup> Furthermore, holiness can only be attained through one means; “all the disciples of our Lord . . . must receive the baptism of fire.”<sup>183</sup>

For Palmer, holiness is the norm of the Christian life, even to the extent that “a personal experience of holiness” should be “an essential prerequisite for the ministry.”<sup>184</sup> However, the believer need not fret over attaining this experience, since the Holy Spirit will guide each one into it personally. Palmer felt that her own “heavenward progress seemed marked as by the finger of God.”<sup>185</sup> She took no credit for attaining the “blessing,” for “it was all the work of the Spirit.”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>McPherson, 519.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 527.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 667.

<sup>181</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 7.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>183</sup>Palmer, *Life and Letters*, 525.

<sup>184</sup>Palmer diary, May 1844, *Life and Letters*, 244.

<sup>185</sup>Palmer, *Way of Holiness*, 26.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 47.

**The Appropriation of Christian Perfection.** Palmer intended to start an ecumenical movement, but it could not be sustained. Instead, each group appropriated the experience within its own theological framework. However, Palmer still made a noticeable impact on each of the groups discussed in this paper. The Methodists ended up looking back either to Fletcher or Wesley to revive their promotion and experience of the doctrine. The Higher Life (Keswick) Movement interpreted the experience as a means of empowering the believer for service and victorious living, even if this does not entail freedom from sin. Pentecostalism also emphasized the element of power in the experience and sought to evidence it in supernatural gifts, especially the gift of tongues. The Holiness Movement essentially combined Palmer's experiential model with Wesley's and Fletcher's concepts of carnal nature.

The final result was not unity, but the fragmentation of Wesleyanism. Gardella notes that following Phoebe Palmer "came a period in which the Wesleyan movement dissolved into isolated churches and secular channels.... Meanwhile, the logic of sanctification carried others into the gifts of tongues and healing. A splintering of new denominations ensued (e.g., Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, Church of the Nazarene, et. al.)"<sup>187</sup> It is not apparent whether the fragmented groups carried what Palmer started to its logical conclusions or to its various extremes, but it is clear that the place of Phoebe Palmer in evangelical history is greater than many realize.

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<sup>187</sup>Gardella, 94.



# THE SYMBOLIC TURN: A SYMBOLIC CONCEPTION OF THE LITURGY OF PENTECOSTALISM

by

Wolfgang Vondey

Every living community expresses itself publicly. This self-expression can take on various forms; but there has to be a certain “coordinated system” of expressions that allows for the recognition and differentiation of a particular community. This understanding has been adequately developed in the ecclesiological insight that one essential “self-expression of the Church”<sup>1</sup> is the *liturgy*.

In every true liturgy, Christ “continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church”<sup>2</sup> (*Opus Christi*). As such, liturgy is both the “self-definition”<sup>3</sup> and “self-realization”<sup>4</sup> of the Church of Christ in the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Herman Schmidt (ed.), *Liturgy: Self-Expression of the Church* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972). *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2 and 10, in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Northport, NY: Costillo Publishing Co., 1996), 117, 122.

<sup>2</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1069 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 278.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. for one example of this view Jonathan A. Draper, “Christian Self-Definition against the ‘Hypocrites’ in Didache 8,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 31 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 362-377.

<sup>4</sup>It is not just, as expressed by Raphael Clynes, “the acts by which the Church exercises her power;” *Liturgy and Christian Life* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960), 5. Rather, it is also a continuous interaction between God and humanity in which the church realizes itself as the community of God’s people. For the relation of church and world in the liturgy, cf. also Kevin Seasoltz, “Anthropology and Liturgical Theology,” David Power and Luis Maldonado (ed.), *Liturgy and Human Passage*, *Concilium* 112 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 5-6.

world. The liturgy of the world is “the primary and original liturgy”<sup>5</sup> of the continuous interaction between God and humanity (*Opus Dei*). The liturgy of the Church is an “explicitly celebrated, stated, and appropriated”<sup>6</sup> expression of that interaction. This celebration only subsequently finds its particular manifestation in the church’s celebration of the sacraments.<sup>7</sup> Liturgy “arises from a dynamic encounter of a given culture at a given moment with the church of always and everywhere as it celebrates its Lord in the Holy Spirit”<sup>8</sup> (*Opus Spiriti*). It is this dynamic encounter that allows for the differentiation of a particular tradition and for a theology of liturgy of that community. Thus, liturgy is primarily *the explicit self-expression of the life of faith of the community and the individual within a creative and dynamic tradition*<sup>9</sup> as celebration of the identity of the church in the world and in history.

This dynamic encounter also contains great potential for misunderstanding. Not every liturgy is equally developed and, consequently, recognized and understood. The liturgy of Pentecostalism presents a particular problem for both the established churches<sup>10</sup> and the heterogeneous Pentecostal churches themselves.<sup>11</sup> There exists today no common understand-

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Karl Rahner, “Überlegungen zum personalen Vollzug des sakramentalen Geschehens,” *Geist und Leben* 43 (1970): 282-301; “Kirche und Welt,” *Sacramentum Mundi: Theologisches Lexikon für die Praxis*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 1336-1357; and Michael Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner’s Theology of Worship* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 92.

<sup>6</sup>K. Rahner, “On the Theology of Worship,” *Theological Investigations*, volume 19, trans. by E. Quinn (New York: Crossroads, 1983), 147.

<sup>7</sup>“An act in which it [the Church] actualizes its essence fully as the primordial sacrament of grace . . .,” K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 417-418.

<sup>8</sup>Group of Les Dombes, “The Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments,” 21; in *One in Christ* 16.3 (1980): 234-264.

<sup>9</sup>For this term, cf. *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III. An Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*, 14 (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 1999, 17); Mary Collins and David Power (ed.), *Liturgy: A Creative Tradition*, Concilium 162 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), vii-viii.

<sup>10</sup>Just a few who voiced their critique of the lack of a Pentecostal “self-expression” are J. Moltmann, “A Response to My Pentecostal Dialogue Partners,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4 (April 1994): 59-70.; M. Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); M. Volf, *Trinität und Gemeinschaft: Eine ökumenische Ecclesiology* (Neukirchen-Vlyun: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996).

<sup>11</sup>William W. Menzies considered it among the most significant issues in “Frontiers in Theology: Issues at the Close of the First Pentecostal Century,” *The*

ing of Pentecostalism. In addition, at a time when Pentecostals “are rediscovering the value of signs and the part which symbolic action plays in their personal and social lives,”<sup>12</sup> the acceptance of a symbolic interpretation of Pentecostalism appears all the more questionable. This “semantic cut”<sup>13</sup> is a threat to both Pentecostal self-understanding<sup>14</sup> and a better understanding of Pentecostalism by other Christian traditions.

I endeavor here to explain and analyze the factors that contributed to the formation of a liturgy of Pentecostalism in order to provide a basis for (1) common ecumenical dialogue, (2) a Pentecostal sacramental theology, and (3) a Pentecostal theory of Christian and human existence. Rather than attempting historical reconstruction, I will first focus on the question of how Pentecostal identity can be expressed in a theology of liturgy. The basis for this theology is the thesis that an irreversible symbolic re-interpretation—a *symbolic turn*—initiated the birth and development of the Pentecostal tradition. I will therefore begin with a description of the meaning of the symbolic for the formulation of a theology of liturgy. This will lead to an explanation of what general factors contribute to a re-interpretation of the symbolic and how this *symbolic turn* affects the formulation of a liturgy. Finally, I will relate this analysis to the formulation of a liturgy of Pentecostalism by first describing the *symbolic turn* that formed the basis for this liturgy, and second, by explaining how this interpretation is relevant for an understanding of the Pentecostal tradition.

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18th Pentecostal World Conference Seoul (ed.), *Theological Symposium for Asian Church Leaders: Asian Issues on Pentecostalism, September 21, 1998* (Seoul, Korea), 15-30. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. focused on the problem in “Making Sense of Pentecostalism in a Global Context,” *Toward Healing Our Divisions, March 11-13, 1999*. SPS (US) meeting (28th, 1999: Springfield, MO), 1-34; Cf. also the presidential address of Cheryl Bridges Johns, “The Adolescence of Pentecostalism: In Search of a Legitimate Sectarian Identity,” *Pneuma* 17.1 (Spring 1995): 3-18.

<sup>12</sup>They are more than 20 years behind this development in Christendom; cf. Group of Les Dombes, 34.

<sup>13</sup>This term is explained in Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, MT: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 456.

<sup>14</sup>“The loss of correspondence between the Christian community’s self-understanding and its liturgical expression endangers the existence of the community;” Edward J. Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 41-42.

## The Symbolic Turn: Establishment, Interpretation and Collapse

If liturgy is the self-expression of the church, how is ecclesial identity expressed in the liturgy? Liturgy is foremost a symbolic act.<sup>15</sup> That is, it communicates the ecclesial reality in the form of verbal and non-verbal<sup>16</sup> symbols and signs “conditioned by historical forms of communication.”<sup>17</sup> As a symbolic expression of Christian identity, liturgy is often frustrated by a lack of common definition of the symbolic and, consequently, the inability of many to dialogue with, to participate in, and to represent meaningfully the Christian tradition expressed in the liturgy. The formulation of a liturgy of Pentecostalism must therefore begin with a formulation of a common understanding of the symbolic.

In 1915, the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, in his widely influential work *Course in General Linguistics*,<sup>18</sup> was one of the first who faced the problems involved in constructing a comprehensive theory of language. Saussure considered signs as arbitrary, their value as purely negative and differential, with the only essential requirement that one sign is not confused with another.<sup>19</sup> Saussure suggested a simple bipolar correlation<sup>20</sup> between the signifier, such as the word “pipe,” and the signified, that to which it refers, a pipe. The word “pipe,” he would say, does not refer to the *thing* itself, rather it receives its meaning only within the entire system of language. The means by which, for example, the pipe is produced are completely unimportant because the system in which the sign exists is not affected; its value is received and its form matters only within this fixed system.<sup>21</sup> In other words, only a fixed system or code “makes it possible to have signs.”<sup>22</sup> Taking this further, the architect Le Corbusier<sup>23</sup> concluded his influential book *Towards a New Architecture* in 1923 with the

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<sup>15</sup>“Reality is never present to us except in a mediated way . . . constructed out of the symbolic network of the culture which fashions us.” Chauvet, 84.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Alexandre Ganoczy, *Einführung in die katholische Sakramentenlehre* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979), 107-135.

<sup>17</sup>Kilmartin, 45.

<sup>18</sup>Charles Bally, A. Sechehaye (ed.), *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (Paris: Payot, 1955).

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 99. Cf. Roy Harris, *Reading Saussure: A Critical Commentary on the Cours de linguistique générale* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), 59.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>22</sup>Harris, 219.

<sup>23</sup>Charles Edouard Jeanneret.

painting of a briar pipe as a symbol of pure functionalism.<sup>24</sup> To him, the pipe *was* a pipe and not the concept of a pipe; it is not a symbol of functionalism, it *is* functionalism.

The image of a pipe returned again three years later in a surrealist painting<sup>25</sup> by René Magritte, this time, it seems, as an answer to the concepts of both Saussure and Le Corbusier. Magritte's painting shows, to use the words of Michel Foucault, "a carefully drawn pipe, and underneath it (handwritten in a steady, painstaking, artificial script, a script from the convent, like that found heading the notebooks of schoolboys, or on a blackboard after an object lesson), this note: 'This is not a pipe.'"<sup>26</sup> The painting appears contradictory. The pipe, although perfect in its resemblance to a *real* pipe, is but the painting of a pipe, and who would seriously contend otherwise? One may agree with Foucault and say, "My God, how simpleminded!"<sup>27</sup> The symbolism of Magritte's painting speaks to us in an unusual way. It is saying, "Do not look . . . for a true pipe. It is the drawing . . . that must be accepted as a manifest truth."<sup>28</sup> Magritte, more than any other, seemed to have intended this exact likeness to a *real* pipe that allows for a new understanding of the visible: "What you see is *that*."<sup>29</sup> The pipe, so Magritte himself explained, is a visible description of thought; the visibility of the invisible, a symbol.

Magritte saw "no reason to accord more importance to the invisible than to the visible, nor vice versa."<sup>30</sup> He fully embraced the question of identity; to use Saussure's words: whether the signifier or the signified determine the identity of a symbol. How does the symbol receive its original meaning? What fixes the "code"<sup>31</sup> of its recognition? Magritte seems to concur with Saussure: it had to come from the "inside." However, for

<sup>24</sup>Trans. by Frederick Etchells (New York: Pauson & Clarke, Ltd., 1927), 289.

<sup>25</sup>"The Treason of Images." Robert Hughes interpreted this as a "riposte to Corbusier's single-level rationalism." *The Shock of the New* (New York: Random House, 1981), 244.

<sup>26</sup>Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. by James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 15.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>30</sup>Letter of Magritte to Foucault, May 23, 1966. Foucault, 57.

<sup>31</sup>"Code" is not an external and static device with which the symbol, once decoded, becomes somewhat less symbolic or mysterious. A symbolic code must evolve with the development of the community as part of the symbol's meaning within the liturgy as a whole.

Saussure, inside the system “nothing apart from other signs”<sup>32</sup> exists—it is “a system of pure values which are determined by nothing but the momentary arrangement of its terms.”<sup>33</sup> This is a crucial point in the understanding of liturgy as a “coordinated system” of symbolic order.

The only necessary and sufficient condition for establishing the identity of any individual sign is that it be distinct from other signs. However, this can presumably only be so if the system as a whole is structured in such a way as to allocate to each sign its own semiological “space.” Therefore Saussure. . . forces us to conclude that it can only be the total network of interrelations which establishes . . . individual signs . . . which in turn . . . explains why *altering just one set of relations disturbs the whole system*, and also why . . . it encounters the *passive resistance of the entire structure*.<sup>34</sup>

It is a “great illusion”<sup>35</sup> to consider a symbol as simply the union of signifier (a certain physical manifestation) and signified (a certain metaphysical concept). One symbol does not exist by itself but only as part of a “coordinated system” that allows for an understanding of that symbol. The symbol cannot exist apart from the whole of the liturgy; to approach a symbol as an autonomous subsystem that somehow explains the whole<sup>36</sup> perpetuates a confusion of signifier and signified that can eventually lead to a *symbolic turn*—the re-definition of the meaning and value of a symbol.

For Saussure it is the social fact alone, the community, which is necessary in order to “establish” a symbolic order.<sup>37</sup> The legitimacy (or credibility) of a liturgy as a whole and the validity of particular symbols is “thus linked directly to the ‘*symbolic capital*’ . . . with which they are invested”<sup>38</sup> by the community. This symbolic order, nevertheless, is not

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<sup>32</sup>Harris, 220.

<sup>33</sup>F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 80.

<sup>34</sup>Harris, 220. Emphasis by this author.

<sup>35</sup>De Saussure, *Linguistique Generale*, 157.

<sup>36</sup>E.g., that an understanding of speaking in tongues (signifier) explains the “tongues movement” (signified), which in turn explains Pentecostalism (the whole liturgy).

<sup>37</sup>De Saussure, 157.

<sup>38</sup>Chauvet, 348.

stagnant. No “absolute immobility”<sup>39</sup> exists within any “coordinated system” (*liturgy*); it is rather part of an active system of symbolic meaning. This dynamic element further expands the problematic to the question of the identity of a symbol within a “coordinated system” which is continuously evolving.<sup>40</sup>

The confusion of signifier and signified is most evident in the *symbolic turn* of the concept “Messiah” in the Gospel of Mark. By the end of the Old Testament period, the signifier “Messiah” was understood clearly as “the Lord’s Anointed” (1 Sam. 24:6; 2 Sam. 23:2; Ps. 2:2), a divinely appointed ruler and high priest.<sup>41</sup> The messianic expectations were largely influenced by the royal interpretation of Moses (such as Is. 63:11; Ex. 4:20), the divine choice of David (e.g., Ps. 78:68; 89:20-21), the victorious servant of Isaiah 53 and the deliverer of Daniel 7, placing the notion of a suffering Messiah (Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 9 and 13) far into the background.<sup>42</sup> The established system allowed for the signified “Messiah” only to be one coming in power, the Davidic king who would restore Israel to its former glory.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the Gospel of Mark, for example, shows a “Messiah” who does not bring about fulfillment of the promise by the exercise of political power. Instead, Jesus redefines the meaning of the symbol as pointing to his rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31). This turn of the symbolic meaning of “Messiah” is really not completed until the recognition of Jesus as the Son of God at his crucifixion (15:39).

Peter verbalizes the traditional expectation of the “Messiah” (8:29) but rebukes Jesus’ re-definition of the symbol. It is not until the rejected “Messiah” breathes his last that the established system, in the form of a Roman centurion, recognizes the turn of the symbol from “Son of God”

<sup>39</sup>De Saussure, 110 and 193. Saussure was criticized for the lack of mobility his system allowed for. I do not attempt a critique of Saussure, but rather an appreciation of his work within a theory of symbolic meaning.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>41</sup>H. J. Schoeps points out that the prophets expected not a person with supernatural power but an executive officer of God; *Paul: Theology of the Apostle in Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 92-94. Cf. also William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 5-35.

<sup>42</sup>Horbury, 31-35. The Maccabean revolt as a consequence of the Seleucid persecution contributed to this understanding.

<sup>43</sup>Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Jewish Messiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 44, 172.

(3:11, 5:7, 9:7) to “Son of Man” (8:31, 9:31, 10:33, 14:62)—a crucified Messiah. The old meaning was not completely abandoned, yet it was fully transformed into a new symbolic order.<sup>44</sup> It is impossible to recognize this new symbolic meaning “without *ourselves* being called into question. . . . A reversal of desire is demanded here, a reversal that would not only confess our own injustice . . . but also simultaneously confess a God completely other than our infantile desire”<sup>45</sup> imagined. The historical reality of the cross, which redefined the meaning of the symbol “Messiah” once and for all also demands a redefinition of those who are part of that symbolic order. The *symbolic turn* is not simply a shift from one meaning to another that concerns only one symbol—it is the overturn of the *whole* symbolic order.

“If God’s revelation thus finds its decisive turn in Jesus’ cross,”<sup>46</sup> a reading of the Gospel of Mark in light of the concept of this *symbolic turn* poses several questions. First is the problem of *change*,<sup>47</sup> particularly the possibility of change for a *symbolic turn*. Second is the problem of *causality*,<sup>48</sup> particularly the historical question of transition from one symbolic meaning to another. Third is the problem of the *subject*,<sup>49</sup> particularly its role in the *symbolic turn*. Foucault locates the cause for change in the relation of power and knowledge that directly imply one another.<sup>50</sup> This power is not located in any central location, neither does it develop out of the relation of signifier and signified, but it is dispersed throughout the entire system in complex instances that interact with one another.<sup>51</sup> Change is brought about by a complex network of the knowing

<sup>44</sup>This accounts largely for the semantic cut between Jewish and Christian interpretations of Jesus. The messianic interpretation of the Old Testament expected a new age of this world’s history; in the New Testament this was transformed into a narrative of imminent messianic woes, cosmic transformation, the resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the final judgment signifying the end of history. Cf. French L. Arrington, *Paul’s Aeon Theology in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University Press of America, 1978), 89-170, 180.

<sup>45</sup>This analysis of the last words of Jesus is given by Chauvet, 501.

<sup>46</sup>Chauvet, 499.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), Foreword to the English Edition, xii.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, xii-xiii.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>50</sup>*Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 32.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 197-229. *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1972), 45.



subject, the object to be known, and the modalities of knowledge<sup>52</sup> that, as in Mark's Gospel, may ultimately overturn the system of power. Such a system is then no longer sufficiently "coordinated"; its liturgy has collapsed and its self-expression is in need of redefinition.

Symbolic expression, of course, is not exhausted by language.<sup>53</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard focused on the implications of change that take place inside the system (but outside the verbal discourse)<sup>54</sup> in the realm of social and political structures. Commenting on the relationship of symbolic meaning in the paintings of Magritte,<sup>55</sup> Lyotard concludes that meaning in a word is established by the non-linguistic image, not the word itself. He "finds a figural opacity in the signifier which cannot itself be made into a matter of meaning."<sup>56</sup> Lyotard agrees with Saussure that the basis for interpretation—and thus for change—is located *in* the community that endorses the symbol. But Lyotard goes beyond Saussure when he declares it is *desire* that infiltrates the discourse through this non-linguistic act of interpretation.<sup>57</sup> This desire is the particular characteristic of the community that engages in the interpretation of a "coordinated system." Liturgy thus becomes "the symbolic expression of the human in its total corporality and as a being of desire"<sup>58</sup> as part of a community that expresses this desire—often as a "vision of a 'place which one must imagine without being able to conceive it.'"<sup>59</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>53</sup>"On peut dire que l'arbre est vert, mais on n'aura pas mis la couleur dans la phrase" (One can say that the tree is green but that does not put the color into the sentence). Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Edition Klincksieck, 1971), 52.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. particularly his understanding of desire for change (*désir de changement*), *ibid.*, 223 ff.

<sup>55</sup>The attraction of Magritte's work, particularly "The Treason of Images," is largely a Western European phenomenon. Magritte responded: "The famous pipe. How people reproached me for it! And yet, could you stuff my pipe? No, it's just a representation, is it not? So if I had written on my picture 'This is a pipe,' I'd have been lying!" Quoted by Harry Torczyner, *Magritte: Ideas and Images* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977), 118.

<sup>56</sup>Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991), 18.

<sup>57</sup> ". . . il y a de figural dans le mot est avéré par l'image. C'est par cette polysémie non-linguistique que le désir s'infiltré dans le discours;" Lyotard, 412, note to plate 17; also *ibid.*, 248-249, 271 ff.

<sup>58</sup>Chauvet, 371.

<sup>59</sup>Lyotard, *Economie Libidinale* (Paris: Edition de Minuit, 1974), back cover, quoted and translated by Peter Dews, *Logics of disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), 133.

Desire is an expression of value. We desire that which we regard as possessing “desirable” value. The interpretation and acceptance of a particular symbolic order is based on the fact that a specific value is placed on the particular symbolic representation of the real. The social theorist Jean Baudrillard expresses this value in terms of a relationship of the symbol and its environment—a “political economy.”<sup>60</sup> He responds to Saussure by assigning to the symbol “only an allusive value . . . its form is not that of the sign in general, but that of a certain organization which is that of the code.”<sup>61</sup> This “code only governs certain signs”<sup>62</sup> and the existence of *a universal and eternal code* of value is consequently a (post-modern) illusion. This explains why Magritte’s pipe becomes a “compromise formation”<sup>63</sup> between the functional and the symbolic that cannot be universally “decoded.” The individual symbol institutes “a certain mode of signification in which all the surrounding signs . . . refer to each other.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, in order to formulate and understand a liturgy, one must allow for the inapplicability of one’s own code and first ask whether a different code is necessary in order to approach a particular liturgy.

Baudrillard criticizes the law of the code: “The reality principle of *the code* . . . extends over society in general. . . . You are asked only to consider value, according to the structural definition which here takes on its full social significance, as one term in . . . a multiple, incessant, twisting relation across the entire network of other signs.”<sup>65</sup> Within this network all desire is regulated by the “common” code. If this code is broken, “people no longer understand (“hear”) one another.”<sup>66</sup> The symbol remains as “an irreducible residue that comes to bar social relations and . . . weighs down on us with all the abstraction of dead language.”<sup>67</sup> The code becomes unacceptable because it can no longer provide the whole system with sufficient “coordination” to ensure a common understanding of both

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<sup>60</sup>*Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Galimard, 1972), 229-255.

<sup>61</sup>*Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 7.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>63</sup>“formation de compromis;” cf. the critique of Magritte in Baudrillard, 241-242.

<sup>64</sup>*For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 191.

<sup>65</sup>*Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 11.

<sup>66</sup>Chauvet, 350.

<sup>67</sup>Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 202.

the individual symbol and the liturgy of which this symbol is a part in its representation of the real. It is this “death” of the code that brings about a *symbolic turn*. This understanding allows us now to consider the *symbolic turn* in the formation of a liturgy of Pentecostalism.

### **The Death of the Symbolic Code and the Formation of the Pentecostal Vision**

The thesis of this paper is that a *symbolic turn* initiated the birth and growth of Pentecostalism and contributed to the formation and consolidation of a liturgy of Pentecostalism. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, which had seen the widely recognized Topeka Revival in 1901 and the Azusa Street revival in 1906, the *symbolic turn* had already occurred and a new “coordinated system”—Pentecostalism—had already formed. The first two stanzas of the following song by I. G. Martin from 1906 express this well:

There are people, almost ev'rywhere, Whose hearts are all  
aflame  
With the fire that fell at Pentecost, Which made them all  
acclaim;  
It is burning now within my heart, All glory to His name!  
And I'm glad I can say I'm one of them. One of them, one of  
them,  
I am glad I can say I'm one of them; say I'm one of them.  
Tho' these people may not learned be, Nor boast of worldly  
fame,  
They have all received their Pentecost, Thro' faith in Jesus'  
name;  
And are telling now, both far and wide, His pow'r is yet the  
same,  
And I'm glad I can say I'm one of them. One of them, one of  
them,  
I am glad I can say I'm one of them; say I'm one of them.<sup>68</sup>

In order to locate a *symbolic turn* historically and to further assess its significance for the formulation of a liturgy of Pentecostalism, we must first

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<sup>68</sup>“I'm Glad I'm One of Them;” *Church Hymnal* (Cleveland, TN: Tennessee Music and Printing Co., 1951), 249.

turn to the origins of classical Pentecostalism<sup>69</sup> at the end of the 19th century. It will be necessary to begin by describing the “death” of the symbolic code as a basis for a symbolic reinterpretation. I will then analyze the *symbolic turn* in Pentecostalism and its development in the context of the formation of a liturgy.

It is generally accepted that the immediate origins of Pentecostalism coincide with the rise of the Holiness Movement in the nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup> The emphasis on holiness was not new to the church. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley*,<sup>71</sup> first published in 1739, served as a theological basis for much of the later Holiness Movement.<sup>72</sup> “The Wesleyan spirituality embodied a specific catholic tradition of transformation that included Western and Eastern figures.”<sup>73</sup> It centered on the desire for moral perfection—an absence to be filled—as taught in Scripture and as the attainable and ideal state of the Christian life. The Holiness churches were convinced that God was “calling each one of us to this same state [of holiness].”<sup>74</sup>

Come one and all, both great and small,  
Whom sin has crippled by the fall,  
Through faith in Christ you may regain,  
Whose blood can wash from every stain.

Cleansed from sin’s degrading spot,  
Made new again, old things forgot,

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<sup>69</sup>This follows the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* that uses the term “Classical Pentecostalism” to distinguish early Pentecostal churches from later “Neo-” and “charismatic” Pentecostalism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 219-222.

<sup>70</sup>E.g., cf. Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 28-46; Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1971); *ibid.* (ed.), *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1975); Melvin Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the 19th Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

<sup>71</sup>Thomas Jackson (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 366-488.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 13-32.

<sup>73</sup>Land, 47.

<sup>74</sup>Thos. J. Richardson, “Sainthood—Be and Live,” *The Church of God Evangel* 12.19 (7 May, 1921): 2.

Now with our body, mind and soul  
We strive to reach the highest goal.<sup>75</sup>

The established churches<sup>76</sup> were frequently opposed to the holiness theology.<sup>77</sup> The “political economy” of the mainline churches did not provide a “code” with which it could be interpreted and integrated; instead it assigned to the symbols of the Holiness Movement a negative value because of its emphasis on individual transformation (a second crisis) as a continuation of salvation (a second work of grace) and the claim of Christian perfection (entire sanctification).<sup>78</sup> With the Holiness Movement there originated both an attraction to the doctrine of sanctification and a repulsion of the “Holy Rollers”<sup>79</sup>—frequently found side by side. C. E. Jones explains that at this time “a new genre of Holiness-experience songs emerged” that “drew worshipers into sympathy one to another at the same time they were reinforcing teaching from the pulpit and creating a common doctrinal and behavioral standard.”<sup>80</sup> The following excerpt from “We Will Sing and Preach Holiness” paints a vivid picture of this situation:

When I first heard of holiness I thought it must be right;  
It seemed to fit the Bible, And be the Christian light.  
I heard the people singing and testifying too;  
They seemed to love their Savior, As Christians ought to do.

I little thought of joining, I said I could not stand,  
To be among that people, That’s called the “holy band.”  
The world looked down upon them, And said they were so rash,  
They often spoke against them, And said they were but trash.

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<sup>75</sup>Richard G. Spurling, “For Unity” (1886), quoted by James M. Beaty, “A New Song in My Mouth,” *Church of God History & Heritage* (Spring 1998): 4.

<sup>76</sup>E.g., Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Quakers, and Mennonites.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. the chapter “Criticism and Controversy” in Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 141-163.

<sup>78</sup>Morton T. Kelsey remarks that the “social gospel became the teaching of most churches, and it was widely accepted that the task of the church was to reform the world. The Holiness Movement offered the alternative of transformation from within.” *Tongue Speaking* (Garden City: Waymark Books, 1968), 72. Cf. also David A. Womack, *The Wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1968), 82-83.

<sup>79</sup>A term frequently used for the early Pentecostals; cf. Conn, 158-159.

<sup>80</sup>“Holiness Movement,” *Dictionary of Pentecostal Movement*, 408.

But as I went to hear them, And saw the way they did,  
 I saw they had a treasure, From worldly people hid.  
 They seemed to be so happy, And filled with Christian love;  
 When people talked about them, They only looked above.

My heart began to hunger, And thirst and burn within:  
 I wanted full salvation, A freedom from all sin.  
 I went to God for holiness, And called upon his name;  
 He cleansed my heart completely, And filled it with the same.<sup>81</sup>

The movement would frequently point out that the desire for holiness originated with the symbol itself (sanctification) or with the group that endorsed it and that provided a code for its interpretation only insofar as this was understood as a response to the work of the Spirit (*Opus Spiriti*).<sup>82</sup> The message of this new symbolism was foolishness to the world,<sup>83</sup> a weakness of God, yet stronger than humankind.<sup>84</sup> The Holiness churches were “not primarily a social organisation but an institutional event, a real communication established between God and mankind.”<sup>85</sup> This aspect of being more a spiritual community than a visible organization<sup>86</sup> has continued to be an obstacle. The application of the linguistic theory, presented earlier, does not allow for a full explanation at this point. As much as the community was necessary to establish the identity of the symbolic order through its public testimony, and as much as the desire for holiness was very much an individual “hunger,” this experience of an “absence that had to be filled” was first and foremost a human response to divine grace. The desire was initiated by Christ (*Opus Christi*):

I can hear my Savior calling,  
 I can hear my Savior calling,  
 I can hear my Savior calling,  
 “Take thy cross and follow, follow me.”

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<sup>81</sup>F. M. Graham in R. E. Winsett (ed.), *Songs of Pentecostal Power* (Dayton, TN: R. E. Winsett, 1908), 213.

<sup>82</sup>Cf. note 115.

<sup>83</sup>It is therefore insufficient to portray Pentecostalism as a mere social movement and a misconception to understand it primarily as a historical reactionary development.

<sup>84</sup>See 1 Cor. 1:25; also 1:18, 21.

<sup>85</sup>*The Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments*, 78 (Group of Les Domes, 253).

<sup>86</sup>Cf. for this language *Gaudium et Spes*, 40 in Flannery, 207.

Where he leads me I will follow,  
I'll go with him all the way.<sup>87</sup>

The response of the Holiness people to the divine grace found its foremost expression in a strong desire for a closer relationship with Christ. Emphasis was placed on personal transformation as the beginning of an individual journey that the church had embarked on together. Indeed, "there is no evidence that the earliest holiness groups intended to form new sects or denominations."<sup>88</sup> Yet, the Holiness Movement frequently criticized the established churches for having stifled this desire and replacing it with a formal system "not because they love holiness or the church but because they love honor, money, division, a great name and greetings in the markets, chief seats in the council, conferences and associations."<sup>89</sup>

When their churches first begun,  
By the Holy Spirit they were run;  
But when their creeds each church had took,  
The Holy Spirit them forsook.<sup>90</sup>

The "formal system" was perceived as anti-spiritual. Richard G. Spurling, a former Baptist preacher, compared the church to the building and operating of a railroad, with the train rolling on the golden rails of God's law of love, with liberty and equality forming the great drive wheels. The train

. . . is guided by the Holy Spirit, but one day in absence of the Guide, there being several engineers, firemen and porters (officers of the church) Satan tells them that other fire will run this engine as well as the fire from heaven, and that other rails would be lighter and easier managed than the golden rails

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<sup>87</sup>J. S. Norris, "Where He Leads Me," 1890; *Church Hymnal*, 65. More precisely, Father, Son and Spirit appear in their distinctive ways each as *principium personale* but also together as *causa efficiens* of the created grace; cf. Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person. In der Trinität bei der Inkarnation und im Gnadenbund. Ich—Du—Wir* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963; 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1988), 305; idem., *Una Mystica Persona. Die Kirche als das Mysterium der heilsgeschichtlichen Identität des Heiligen Geistes in Christus und den Christen: Eine Person in vielen Personen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967), 385.

<sup>88</sup>Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1996), xxv.

<sup>89</sup>Richard G. Spurling, *The Lost Link* (Turtletown, TN: n.p., 1920), 30; written in 1897.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

(men-made creeds); they took out the golden link of God's law and set it on wooden rails. Then they tried to roll ahead, but alas . . . a great crash followed. For 1500 years this golden link has been lost. . . .<sup>91</sup>

Spurling located the origins of the "lost link" (the absence of a universal) with the creed of Nicea in 325 A.D. A "semantic cut," however, did not occur until this absence was realized in its full magnitude by the Holiness churches in the 19th century. The church had followed human laws (creeds) instead of God's law (love). For the Holiness groups the creeds, being contrary to God's law, had lost their social acceptability and with it their credibility and legitimacy. Nevertheless, it was not the creeds that were in need of "reform,"<sup>92</sup> but the entire symbolic system. The transformation of the whole system (the liturgy of the church) was the envisioned fulfillment of what had to begin with the individual person. The Pentecostal vision was a global vision; yet it was not the vision of a church reformed but of a church reborn by the Spirit of God and as the work of Christ.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross,  
Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss;  
From victory unto victory His army shall He lead,  
Till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.<sup>93</sup>

The new emphasis permeated the literature of the 19th century<sup>94</sup> and frequently was clothed in Pentecostal language and imagery. George Hughes, a leading member of the National Holiness Association, envisioned a "world rocking revival of religion" which was to be "along pentecostal lines."<sup>95</sup> A widely circulating book, *The Tongue of Fire*,<sup>96</sup> evoked Pentecostal language when calling for a "baptism with purifying flames of fire." In 1871, Charles G. Finney addressed the Oberlin Council of

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<sup>91</sup>Spurling, 15-16.

<sup>92</sup>The Reformers "did not try to reform from creeds to God's law but tried to reform the creeds to a purer standard of faith . . .," Spurling 20.

<sup>93</sup>Gerge Duffield, "Stand Up for Jesus," quoted in Conn, 23.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987, 1994), 65-73.

<sup>95</sup>Quoted in Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 141-142.

<sup>96</sup>William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire or the True Power of Christianity* (Columbia: L. L. Pickett, 1891).



Congregationalism on the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>97</sup> The late Holiness Movement was characteristically looking back to Pentecost. But the use of this Pentecostal imagery remained more thematic than dogmatic<sup>98</sup> until the Holiness groups accepted that it was not the “others” but they themselves that were called into question and that the global manifestation of God’s Spirit would be completely other than what their desires had imagined. The change would occur only with the unexpected “fulfillment of the Pentecostal promise in visible, concrete, global manifestations.”<sup>99</sup>

They were in an upper chamber, They were all with one accord,  
When the Holy Ghost descended, As was promised by our Lord.  
O Lord, send the power just now, O Lord, send the power just now;  
O Lord send the power just now and baptize ev’ry one.

Yes, this pow’r from heav’n descended, With the sound of rushing wind;  
Tongues of fire came down upon them, As the Lord said he would send.  
O Lord, send the power just now, O Lord, send the power just now;  
O Lord send the power just now and baptize ev’ry one.

Yes, this “Old time” pow’r was given, To our fathers who were true;  
This is promised to believers, And we all may have it too.  
O Lord, send the power just now, O Lord, send the power just now;  
O Lord send the power just now and baptize ev’ry one.<sup>100</sup>

The new Pentecostal emphasis on concrete manifestations moved the “Pentecostal” liturgy to a different level, accentuating it and thus distinguishing it further from the symbolic imagery of the established churches. Among the mainline churches “[m]any were curious. Some were cynical. Others were openly hostile.”<sup>101</sup> However, “the actor from one perspective . . . [was] simultaneously the “acted upon” from another perspective.”<sup>102</sup> The semantic cut that occurred at the outset of this new Pentecostal imagery drove the symbolic path of both the established and the Holiness churches further apart; the established churches claiming the possession of

<sup>97</sup>Dayton, 72.

<sup>98</sup>So also the observation of Jones, 408.

<sup>99</sup>Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, reprinted 1994), 69.

<sup>100</sup>Charlie D. Tillman, “Old Time Power” (1895); *Church Hymnal*, 121.

<sup>101</sup>Conn, 25 about the Shearer Schoolhouse revival in 1896.

<sup>102</sup>Tom Craig Darrand, *Metaphors of Social Control in a Pentecostal Sect*, vol. 6, *Studies in Religion and Society* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 196.

a “universal” but, in reality, inapplicable code; the holiness churches witnessing the death of the universal code and simultaneously living the formation of a new liturgy. Since one symbol is established only within the whole network of symbolic meaning, as a consequence the whole church experienced a *symbolic turn*.<sup>103</sup> The desire of a few birthed the vision for many of that “place which one must imagine without being able to conceive it.” This was a vision for the whole church, a vision that demanded immediate attention and was embraced with a strong sense of urgency:

Why do you wait, dear brother, O why do you tarry so long?  
Your Savior is waiting to give you, A place in his sanctified throng.  
Why not? Why not? Why not come to Him now?

Do you not feel, dear brother, His Spirit now striving within?  
Oh, why not accept his salvation, And throw off thy burden of sin?  
Why not? Why not? Why not come to Him now?

Why do you wait, dear brother? The harvest is passing away;  
Your Savior is longing to bless you, There’s danger and death in  
delay.

Why not? Why not? Why not come to Him now?<sup>104</sup>

### **The “Symbolic Turn” and the Formation of a Liturgy of Pentecostalism**

The *symbolic turn* occurred with a new symbol that would remove the new liturgy forever from the symbolic order of the mainline churches. Spirit baptism, and its “visual” manifestation of speaking in tongues, completed the *symbolic turn*. With the manifestation of the Spirit baptism of over one-hundred persons in North Carolina in 1896,<sup>105</sup> Agnes N. Ozman<sup>106</sup> and the Topeka revival in 1901, and the Azusa Street revival in 1906, the new liturgy of Pentecostalism had come to its completion. Ideas that had been somewhat loosely connected with the Holiness Movement,<sup>107</sup> such as a definite experience of Spirit baptism, supernatural healing, and expectations of the second coming of Christ,<sup>108</sup> now began to

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<sup>103</sup>It is thus inappropriate to say that only those writings concerned with Spirit baptism influenced the formation of Pentecostalism; cf. Hollenweger, 20-21.

<sup>104</sup>George F. Root, “Why Do You Wait?” *Church Hymnal*, 378-379.

<sup>105</sup>Cf. the account by Conn, 17-31.

<sup>106</sup>Regarded by many as the beginning of Pentecostalism; cf. Dayton, 179.

<sup>107</sup>Bloch-Hoell, 16.

<sup>108</sup>For an analysis of this shift, cf. D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought*, JPTS 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 77-114.

form a definite “coordinated system.” “In this context, the doctrine of entire sanctification became equated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>109</sup> Two contributing factors for the consolidation of this liturgy of Spirit baptism were the reaction of the mainline churches and the unexpected expansion of the Pentecostal movement to international proportions. At the beginning of the *symbolic turn*, however, stood first of all the question of its symbolic interpretation:

“What meaneth this?” (Acts 2:12). “What meaneth this?”—the cry of the “devout men, out of every nation under heaven,” when confronted with this initial appearance of the *glossolalia*. “What meaneth this?”—the cry of all thinking men who through the succeeding ages have contemplated this phenomenon of Pentecost. “What meaneth this?”—the cry of Bible students who through the centuries have read with wonder God’s record of that extraordinary day. “What meaneth this?”—the cry that has lost none of its challenge even though almost two thousand years have passed since first it was uttered.<sup>110</sup>

The experience of Spirit baptism cut once and for all the ties of Pentecostalism with the symbolic interpretation of the mainline churches.<sup>111</sup> For those who had been filled with the desire for a Pentecostal experience as an expression of personal sanctification and intimate relationship with God, the code of interpretation was self-evident: the personal testimony and the witness of Scripture.<sup>112</sup> But for those who had distanced themselves from the Holiness Movement, neither the first nor the latter was able to provide an adequate (and universal) code of interpretation. (1) Spirit baptism was a symbol with no tradition; it was neither “to be confused with water baptism, be it by sprinkling, pouring or immersing. Nor can it be considered the same as the sacrament of confirmation, though this rite is believed by many in Christendom to convey the Holy

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<sup>109</sup>Faupel, 80.

<sup>110</sup>Carl Brumback, *“What Meaneth This?” A Pentecostal Answer to a Pentecostal Question* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1947), 21-22.

<sup>111</sup>As well as with the old-school Holiness and fundamental churches; cf. Synan, *In the Latter Days: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1984), 75-78.

<sup>112</sup>Particularly important were Acts 1, 2, 8-11, 19 and 1 Cor. 12-14; John 3:34; Lk. 24:49; Eph. 5:18-19; Mk. 16:17-18.

Spirit to the participant.”<sup>113</sup> (2) Spirit baptism was a symbol with no signifier; for Pentecostals, Spirit baptism was signified by the appearance of tongue speech, for non-Pentecostals *glossolalia* was a signifier of emotional excess or demonic influence.<sup>114</sup> (3) Spirit baptism was a symbol with no ritual; “Pentecostals maintain that no clergymen can ever perform this baptism,” for it is Christ who baptizes—non-Pentecostals could not incorporate this symbol into a liturgy in which the minister acts in the person of the whole church.<sup>115</sup> The entire network of symbolic meaning did not allow the established churches to interpret this symbol and with it the entire new structure of liturgy of Pentecostalism. For the mainline churches, a liturgy of Pentecostalism was non-existent—for the Pentecostal churches the liturgy of Christendom had collapsed.

Just as Jesus gave new meaning to the concept “Messiah” that could only be understood by forsaking the traditional code of its interpretation and experiencing its truth in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the “Pentecostal experience” could only be understood if any former concept was forsaken in light of a vision that was not afraid of the death of the established code and that boldly embraced Spirit baptism as that “place” they had imagined without yet being able to fully conceive it. This vision thoroughly changed the understanding of Christianity for Pentecostals to a radical inbreaking of the Kingdom of God *in the now*. For Pentecostals, “Pentecost has become a liturgical paradigm, an existential reality, and a dispensation of the Spirit in the last days.”<sup>116</sup> The church has become a movement of the Spirit. The liturgy of Pentecostalism is therefore the

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<sup>113</sup>Steve Durasoff, *Bright Wind of the Spirit: Pentecostalism Today* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 4.

<sup>114</sup>Cf. Glenn Hinson, “The Significance of Glossolalia in Church History,” Watson E. Mills (ed.), *Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research in Glossolalia* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 189-196.

<sup>115</sup>In the established churches, even though it is Christ himself who baptizes, the minister acts in *persona totius Ecclesiae*; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III. A.9, ad 1; Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* VI, 1.7, PL 35, 1428; *Sacro-sanctum Concilium* 7. However, Spirit Baptism as a symbol, i.e., as a mediation in time and space, cannot be a reproducible symbol because the *causa efficiens* is the Spirit who as *principium personale* has the irreversible *auctoritas principii* towards the created grace. See note 87. Cf. also Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person*, 264-266; 292-304.

<sup>116</sup>Land, 174.

liturgy of the *kenosis* of the Spirit of Christ into a church that is constantly being reborn at millions of Pentecosts.<sup>117</sup>

The reaction of the mainline churches, like Peter's rejection of the *symbolic turn*, further consolidated and isolated the liturgy of Pentecostalism, which "was denounced as 'anti-Christian,' as 'sensual and devilish,' and as 'the last vomit of Satan.' Its adherents were taunted and derided from the pulpit as well as in religious and secular press. . . . Those ministers and missionaries who embraced the Holy Spirit baptism were removed from their pulpits or dismissed by their mission boards."<sup>118</sup> The broken code of interpretation left the established churches with an irreducible symbolic residue that came to bar social and ecumenical relations. The anti-Pentecostal argument ranged from "the work of the devil" to excessive emotionalism and eccentric but harmless ideology.<sup>119</sup> The main argument, however, centered not around a *symbolic order*, that is, a liturgy of Pentecostalism, nor around the *symbolic significance* of Spirit baptism, and therefore missed the life-giving center of the liturgy of Pentecostalism completely. It rather exclusively focused on the validity and credibility of the apparently only signifier, *glossolalia*.<sup>120</sup> As a result of the rejection of tongue speech (as signifier), Spirit baptism (as the signified) was also disregarded and with it the entire symbolic network of the Pentecostal community. The self-expression of Pentecostalism as the fullness of the church, necessary for the establishment of a common *liturgy of Pentecostalism*, remained to a large extent the self-impression of a system that appeared "coordinated" only to those who were themselves a dynamic part of it.

On the other hand, the liturgy of Pentecostalism was not easily expressed. The manifestation of Spirit baptism was experienced at the

<sup>117</sup>"There was one Easter; there are millions of Pentecosts." J. Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 32; also Group of Les Dombes, 251, note 28.

<sup>118</sup>John Thomas Nichol, *Pentecostalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 70.

<sup>119</sup>Cf. Horace S. Ward, "The Anti-Pentecostal Argument," Synan, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*, 99-122.

<sup>120</sup>Mainly the inapplicability of glossolalia in the Book of Acts, the temporary nature of tongue speech, the inferiority of glossolalia, and a psychological explanation of glossolalia as a human phenomenon. *Ibid.*, 119. It is thus a misrepresentation that the Pentecostal movement for some reason favored glossolalia as one symbol over others, isolated this symbol from the common liturgy, and formed its own liturgy around it.

same time in countries around the world,<sup>121</sup> bringing with it a global *symbolic turn*, the disturbance of the whole of Christendom. Yet, the expansion of Pentecostalism must not merely be understood as the world being “overwhelmed by a sweeping revival campaign.”<sup>122</sup> Rather, it was much of Pentecostalism itself that was overwhelmed. The force of the *symbolic turn* was often directed toward the movement itself. It wiped out “whatever ideas or views you may have adopted, or systems you may have formed.”<sup>123</sup> The newly emerging system reflected a hierarchy of truths (*hierarchya veritatum*)<sup>124</sup> very different from that of the established churches, with a liturgy that developed first of all as the exclamation that “Pentecostals believe in more than tongues!”<sup>125</sup>

### **Pentecostal Liturgy after the Symbolic Turn**

The *symbolic turn* has not created a liturgy of Pentecostalism *about* which one could now write as a mere object and as if it stood at the end of a fully completed development. It is the necessary and independent but *partial* cause of a liturgy of Pentecostalism that unfolds as an eternal covenant promise of God in our times (Acts 2:16-21) and that requires the continuing commitment of the human person to this covenant as a mutual and personal act.<sup>126</sup> Spirit Baptism is a *distinctive* symbol of this covenant; it is distinctive to the development and formation of the Pentecostal tradition. Yet, Spirit baptism is not the foundation of a Pentecostal

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<sup>121</sup>Pentecostal revivals were experienced in Europe, Latin America, Russia and Asia. Cf. Synan, *In the Latter Days*, 55-69.

<sup>122</sup>Bloch-Hoell, 30.

<sup>123</sup>Thomas Ball Barratt, *In the Days of the Latter Rain* (London: Elim Publishing Co., 1928), 31.

<sup>124</sup>Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Flannery, 499-524) and “The Notion of Hierarchy of Truths—An Ecumenical Interpretation. A Study Document Commissioned and Received by the Joint Working Group, 1990,” Introduction, in: William G. Rusch and J. Gros (ed.), *Deepening Communion: International Ecumenical Documents with Roman Catholic Participation* (Washington, DC: US Catholic Conference, 1998), 561-571.

<sup>125</sup>Cf. Gordon L. Anderson, “Pentecostals Believe in More than Tongues,” Harold B. Smith (ed.), *Pentecostals from the Inside out* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 53-64. For a Pentecostal appreciation of the *hierarchya veritatum* see Wolfgang Vondey, “Christian Amnesia: Who In the World Are Pentecostals?” *Asian Journal for Pentecostal Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>126</sup>For a distinction of the *Causae partiales* see Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person*, 71-72, 78-81.

hierarchy of truths. At the Azusa Street revival, William J. Seymour expressed this in Pentecostal language:

Tongues are one of the signs that go with every baptized person, but it is not the real evidence of the baptism in the every day life. Your life must measure up with the fruits of the Spirit. . . . Many may start in this salvation, and yet if they do not watch . . . they will lose the Spirit of Jesus, and have only gifts which will be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, and sooner or later these will be taken away.<sup>127</sup>

As much as an understanding of “Messiah” cannot be reduced to the *symbolic turn* embedded in the temporal manifestation of the crucifixion,<sup>128</sup> one can also not reduce an understanding of Pentecostalism to the *symbolic turn* embedded in Spirit baptism—much less to its signifier *glossolalia*.

Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944)<sup>129</sup> summarized a more inclusive basis for a liturgy of Pentecostalism in an often-quoted statement from 1922:

Jesus saves us according to John 3:16. He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2:4. He heals our bodies according to James 5:14-15. And Jesus is coming again to receive us unto Himself according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.<sup>130</sup>

This summary represents an early attempt to integrate the liturgy of Pentecostalism into the liturgy of the church. Yet, these four themes must be read as only representative of a much wider and more complex understanding of the *Opus Christi*. Pentecostalism subsequently emphasized other themes in their own right.<sup>131</sup> Recently, Harvey Cox pointed out sev-

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<sup>127</sup>W. J. Seymour, *Apostolic Faith* 1.10 (September 1907), 2.

<sup>128</sup>Cf. the critique by D. Bonhoeffer of Heidegger’s ontology in *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). The symbol of “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23) represents the fullness of the *kerygma* (1 Cor 15:1-10).

<sup>129</sup>Founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

<sup>130</sup>Quoted in Raymond L. Cox, *The Four-Square Gospel* (Los Angeles: Foursquare Publications, 1969), 9.

<sup>131</sup>Cf. Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 228-309. Additional themes were suggested by Stanley H. Frodsham, *With Signs Following* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1946); also Cox, 81-160.

eral other interrelated characteristics of the movement;<sup>132</sup> Lamar Vest has suggested eight distinctives;<sup>133</sup> Cheryl Bridges Johns has outlined five elements of a mature Pentecostalism;<sup>134</sup> Cecil Robeck has suggested three features.<sup>135</sup> Yet, within a liturgy of Pentecostalism, the distinctive themes are “not a goal to be reached . . . but a door [to] . . . a greater fullness of life in the Spirit.”<sup>136</sup> Without the ability to once and for all define the liturgy, a specific Pentecostal liturgy remains grounded upon the *symbolic turn* the church experienced in the form of Spirit baptism. The church continues to be transformed by that event in an eschatological transformation. A sacramental liturgy of Pentecostalism is still being written on the basis of that eschatological re-interpretation of the liturgy of Christendom. At the same time, the *anamnesis* of the Pentecostal tradition today is characterized by the struggle to reconcile Easter with Pentecost. To do so, Pentecostalism is reaching out to the liturgy of the world and the church. It is the whole world that is participating in this event.

## Conclusion

A liturgy of Pentecostalism is still being written. This study presents how this liturgy could emerge and what factors have contributed to its formation to date. There can be no universal understanding of Spirit Baptism as the distinctive symbol of this liturgy without integration of the coordinating system it is embedded in and *vice versa*. In the liturgy of Pentecostalism, God is re-writing the liturgy of the world *and* the church; it is conditioned by the response of those who are a part of it as much as by those who think they are not. Those who are a part have found in it a form of self-expression that requires a conscious giving up of that which constitutes the interpretation of reality and the acceptance that Pentecostalism

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<sup>132</sup>“Personal Reflections on Pentecostalism,” *Pneuma* 15.1 (Spring 1993): 29-34.

<sup>133</sup>*Spiritual Balance: Reclaiming the Promise* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1994), 35-36.

<sup>134</sup>“The Adolescence of Pentecostalism: In Search of a Legitimate Sectarian Identity,” *Pneuma* 17.1 (Spring 1995): 10-17.

<sup>135</sup>“Taking Stock of Pentecostalism: The Personal Reflections of a Retiring Editor,” *Pneuma* 15.1 (Spring 1993): 35-60.

<sup>136</sup>“A Proposed Description of the Nature and Purpose of a Dialogue Between a Group of Pentecostals and Roman Catholics Under the Sponsorship of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity,” Rome, 3 September 1970, MSS, 1, 2, unpublished; text in Lee, 38.



is neither *this* (modern Pentecost) or *that* (biblical Pentecost), but a continually engaging reality that is constantly being moved by the Spirit of God as the work of Christ in, with, and through the church. Those who distance themselves from Pentecostalism will find in it a constant challenge to their own symbolic interpretation of reality and sacramentality. It is impossible to acknowledge Pentecostalism without ourselves being called into question by the historical and concrete reality of a liturgy that has as its center the always initiating Spirit of God.



**David L. McKenna**  
**WTS Lifetime Achievement Award, 2001**

## DAVID LOREN McKENNA: A TRIBUTE

by

David Bundy<sup>1</sup>

Dr. David McKenna is a person whose steps have often appeared slightly larger than life. As a college and seminary president for most of his adult life, he has made many decisions about the lives of others. Staying atop the institutions whose care was entrusted to him, he daily struggled with the big questions. The results of his thinking did not always endear others to him. What chief executive officer has always had the crowd from the moment the curtain rises! Yet he prevailed through decades at the helms of three leading institutions of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. “I am a survivor,” he once told me. Indeed, survival was a theme from before the beginning; however, it has been a survival undergirded by faithfulness to the call of God as he has heard it.

It all began as the story of a bus driver and dancer. Sin and redemption demanded loud and intense salvation for sin. Redemption was found. Salvation and sanctification came in the aisles and at the altar of the Holiness Tabernacle down the road, on the edge of town, “on the wrong side of the tracks.” David McKenna, born 5 May 1929, found his way to that altar; he was a survivor, and more. He achieved at the local school, accompanied by the emotional tones of brass. He played tennis in unfashionably long pants, but he won.

His parents’ dream, the biggest they could find, was for their son to attend God’s Bible School in Cincinnati. An encounter with God in a Free

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<sup>1</sup>This tribute was presented to the Wesleyan Theological Society at its annual meeting in March, 2001. This was the occasion at which the Society’s “Lifetime Achievement Award” was presented to Dr. McKenna.

Methodist congregation being visited on a return from inspecting God's Bible School made other options available, and David McKenna enrolled at Spring Arbor College. He was graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in 1949 and, with his wife Janet who became his partner, they moved on. At age nineteen he was assigned to pastor the troubled Free Methodist Church in Vicksburg, Michigan (over the protests of clergy against the "kid from the Holiness Tabernacle"). While there he studied at Central Michigan University and received his B.A. in 1951. He was ordained the following year in the Central Michigan Conference of the Free Methodist Church.

Asbury Theological Seminary was the next stop on McKenna's educational journey. He received the B.D. and began work at Spring Arbor College (1953-1960) as Instructor of Psychology, Dean, and eventually Principal of the High School Program. He began studies at the University of Michigan, receiving the M.A. and then in 1960 the Ph.D. In 1959, he became Vice-President at Spring Arbor College. However, when the opportunity came to go to Ohio State University to work with his Michigan mentor, he accepted and the family moved to Columbus, Ohio. McKenna served as Assistant Professor and Coordinator for Higher Education (1960-1961). Then came a struggle. He was invited to be President of Spring Arbor College. This was not a career move for an aspiring faculty person at Ohio State, but it was a decision to be faithful to his church, his faith, and his school.

Spring Arbor College evolved under his leadership (1961-1968) into a four-year institution known for its creative programs and good fiscal management. Then another institution of the Free Methodist Church called. Times were tough in Seattle, a one-business city. When Boeing prospered, there was money; often there was not. A bad decade at Boeing had left Seattle Pacific College struggling. As a student there myself, I remember the day the short, intense man walked to the podium in chapel and announced that we would survive and that, in order to be a Christian voice in the culture, we would become a "university." This created lots of discussion, but McKenna had the drive, tenacity, and grace to lead Seattle Pacific into that vision of Christian higher education. Seattle Pacific is today a prosperous institution and much of the credit must be given to the McKenna leadership of the University (1968-1982) through tough times and hard decisions.

From Seattle, McKenna moved on to Kentucky. In Wilmore, he inherited Asbury Theological Seminary, an isolated institution living beyond its means and divided against itself. The demands of being faithful to a holiness ethos and theology had brought it to exhaustion. McKenna did not transform the institution overnight. Who could? But, he began with intentionality. The holiness work ethic served him well. There were frequent early morning trips to the radio station in Nicholasville to tape “The Heartbeat of David McKenna.” These were punctuated with lonely flights to congregations and hotel ballrooms across North America and around the world presenting to many for the first time a face to go with the legendary Asbury Theological Seminary. He also wrote. An astonishing list of publications poured from his pen to a legal pad and then into typewriters and computers. These books grace the desks of pastors and laypersons across the nation and are now frequently found among the collections of pastors surrendered to local theological libraries as they retire from active ministry. He also became active in civic affairs in Central Kentucky, as he had in Spring Arbor and Seattle.

Funding of his vision for Asbury Theological Seminary as a “player” in the realm of theological scholarship and a creative force in theological education remained for years an elusive dream. Days grew into weeks as he negotiated with people of means about endowing the future of the seminary. His tenacity and understanding of human nature, first nurtured in the Holiness Tabernacle, served the seminary well. When the money from the Beeson family arrived at Wilmore, it moved Asbury Theological Seminary into the elite of North American theological education. When McKenna retired from Asbury Seminary, he left his presidential papers to the archives, and went on serving the Free Methodist Church and was Chair of the Board of Spring Arbor College. The schedule now is less fixed, but still lived with the same energy and dedication.

The life of David Loren McKenna has been a life devoted to service in the churches and institutions of the Wesleyan/Holiness traditions and to the cities that harbor them. It is in appreciation for that life faithfully lived that the Wesleyan Theological Society has chosen to award to David McKenna the 2001 “Lifetime Achievement Award.”

## BOOK REVIEWS

Barry L. Callen and William C. Kostlevy, *Heart of the Heritage: Core Themes of the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition As Highlighted by the Wesleyan Theological Society 1965-2000*. Salem, Ohio: Schmull Publishing Company, 2000. 422 pages. ISBN: 0-88019-415-4.

Reviewed by Sharon Clark Pearson, Anderson University and School of Theology, Anderson, Indiana.

At the turn of the new millennium, Barry L. Callen and William C. Kostlevy mark the maturity of the Wesleyan Theological Society by presenting an extensive and inspirational overview of its literary record through *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. The Editor of the *Journal* and the Secretary/Treasurer of the Society respectively since the early 1990's, Drs. Callen and Kostlevy teamed up to attempt "to make available [the] heart and core [of the Wesleyan/Holiness theological tradition] for the purpose of renewing the memory of some and newly informing others." The valuing question "What core perspectives continue to be vital for the church of today and tomorrow?" guided this quest.

Reviewing the thirty-five years of the *Journal*, Callen and Kostlevy identify the key concerns of the Society as reflected in its publication and select representative articles to demonstrate the "heart of the heritage." The editors organize their findings under nine themes, with the resulting thematic parts being called "the central ones [themes] of the Christian faith as they are viewed by the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition in particular." They are: Theology, Bible, Salvation, Spirituality, Mission, Integrity, Destiny, Scholarship, and Leaders. Each of these chapters begins with an introductory orienting essay, questions to guide reflection, a select bibliography on the subject from the *WTJ*'s publishing history, and a full rep-

resentation of representative articles—usually two per chapter. Included also are (1) the tributes made by the Society annually (1994-2000) to outstanding leaders, the “Lifetime Achievement Awards” for service to the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, (2) recipients of the Timothy L. Smith and Mildred Bangs Wynkoop Book Award, and (3) listings of all of the Society’s presidents and journal editors since 1965.

I first read this book from cover to cover as an optimistic reader, that is, as one who openly received whatever gifts were being offered. I was alternately inspired, encouraged, challenged, and corrected by its content. Each of the nine introductory essays proved helpful orientation to the insightful articles that followed. As someone who has engaged in some of the story and experience of the WTS, I was surprised by the powerful impact the presentation had on me. I experienced a wonderful and overarching foray into the Wesleyan world, replete with both values and critical warnings. If the editors hoped to market effectively the WTS and its *Journal* by this book, they have achieved their goal with me.

The editors do not claim “*The Heart of the Heritage*,” as though this were the only set of material selections that could have been chosen. Some readers could quibble with the editors over which articles were selected. None of the articles selected, for instance, represent the first fifteen years of the *Journal*; the earliest is Clarence Bence’s “Processive Eschatology” dated 1979. Admittedly, many more articles have been published in the *Journal* since 1979 than in its initial years. Also, the early issues were about 100 pages each and the more recent issues have been between 250 and 300 pages each. So, the sheer volume of material may explain the complexities of the selection process. Some readers for varying reasons might have selected other articles under the nine thematic headings. For example, as a Bible scholar, I would have wanted an article to be included in the part on the Bible that laid out a Wesleyan hermeneutical model—and maybe an article or two by my favorite writers. But then, I deeply appreciated both articles that were included in this chapter—and if we all proceeded to suggest our personal preferences, the book would have been much longer than its already 400-plus pages.

Published contributors in the *Journal* might complain, “Why was my wonderful article not selected as one of those representing the finest insights in the tradition?” One response is that 125 different scholars have been published in the *WTJ* in the last 10 years, many of them multiple times. This statistic bears out the fact that the Society is a dynamic and

growing forum. According to Kostlevy's historical overview of the Society which is in the book, the stated purpose of the Society at its formal inception "was to encourage an exchange of ideas among Wesleyan/Holiness theologians, develop a source of papers for NHA seminars [National Holiness Association—now Christian Holiness Partnership], stimulate scholarship among young theologians and pastors, and publish a journal containing significant contributions to Holiness movement scholarship." Fulfillment of most of this original dream of the Society is manifested in the fact that more than 300 libraries now carry the *Journal*. But has the Society and its *Journal* become reified in its scholarship in such a way as to minimize the contributions of students and pastors? The material in this volume tempts me to think that it has.

For example, all of the contributors to *Heart of the Heritage* are academicians. If we are to take seriously the part of the early program of the Society to "stimulate scholarship among young theologians *and pastors*," we might begin looking for more "fruit" of such a goal in representative forums. Don Thorsen's statement, fittingly placed at the close of the selection of articles, challenges us to "broaden our conception of scholarship so that it recognizes and rewards people for their involvement in the scholarship of integration and application as well as that of research and teaching" (376). John Wesley himself is a model of the learned minister forever concerned with integration and application. We might question why a Society born of his genius does not propagate more like him? Is the Society merely another professional academic society that bifurcates faith and learning, scholarship and service? A record such as this volume gives a broad perspective that raises the issue very well.

Another consideration is that *Heart of the Heritage* portrays accurately a theological society that is, judging from the identity of the article contributors, American in orientation, despite the fact that the Society includes members from numerous countries. In a tradition that has envisioned the church as free from racial, ethnic, and gender discriminations (216, 318), does the Society reflect the cultural restrictions of American society? Is the problem a moral one, or are practical realities of finance and time limiting involvement of other international voices? Is there a problem at all? There is not if the name of the Society were changed to the "Wesleyan Theological Society of the United States of America." The book's chapter on "Integrity" does call attention to the issues of diversity, pluralism, and the world's religions. It also might be noted that, outside



the immediate bounds of this volume, the Journal in recent years has, especially through its book reviews, called reader attention to a wide range of books that detail the histories of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition in many countries beyond North America.

While *Heart of the Heritage* gives attention to the social nature of salvation and its ethical implications, it is telling that only one woman and no person of color is represented among the twenty-one article contributors (there is a tribute to a person of color, James Earl Massey, who was honored with the “Lifetime Achievement Award”). What does this tell us? That the Society has been an American, Anglo, white male organization for the most part? If one looks at the history of participation in the Society and its Journal, this seems clear. The WTS has reflected the dominant values of the cultural majority in America, with a few prominent and prophetic exceptions. This book does note that one of those formally honored by the Society is Susan (Schultz) Rose, that the Society’s annual book award carries the name Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, and that the presidents of the Society have included Mildred Wynkoop (1974), Susie C. Stanley (1992), and Sharon Clark Pearson (2001). These are beginnings.

So, Laurence Mullen’s indictment in 1979 of the “serious gaps in our holiness ethics” yet rings true: “We have not been aggressive in seeking equal rights for women and Blacks, in promoting equitable justice for the poor and the handicapped, in challenging entrenched evil in high places, in taking leadership in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked” [14:2, 93]. What power is it that keeps the Society from proclaiming and acting on its hero’s heart for justice and mercy?”

It is my hope that twenty years from now the “poor” will have eaten at the table of the Society as full participants—note the article reproduced in chapter nine by Donald Dayton titled “The Wesleyan Option for the Poor.” I hope that the Wesleyan Theological Society will represent more than American Wesleyans. I hope that the heart of the heritage will then reflect more of the relational and social passions of Wesley. I hope that the ethical manifestations of salvation life will be more apparent in the Society and its publications. I hope that the false dualism of academy and church will be addressed more vigorously so that integration of knowledge and piety, scholarship and holiness, will be securely wedded. I hope that the next generation of “Heart of the Heritage” can reflect these desired changes. For now, the current volume reflects well the range of reality to date. We are in debt to Callen, Kostlevy, and Schmul Publishing.

With maturity comes responsibility. Self knowledge (identity) and institutional stability in the Society must be strong and dynamic enough to confess weakness, repent of sins of commission and omission, engage in restitution, and act for holiness in all its forms. Serious patterns of accountability must be restored for this to happen. I wonder what international Wesleyans would say about this book. I wonder what other evangelicals are saying? What does God say? May we be creative and may the best of the “core perspectives” of the Wesleyan/Holiness theological tradition, as now well identified by Callen and Kostlevy, grow abundant fruit in this new millennium. May we enlarge the Wesleyan vision so that it is big enough to embrace and gift a grand future.

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**SIZE MATTERS: FREE-WILL/OPENNESS AND PROCESS  
THEISTS SEARCH FOR AN ADEQUATE GOD**

by Thomas Jay Oord

In his book, *The Transforming God*, Tyron L. Inbody refers to a theological classic written almost forty years ago: *Your God is Too Small*, by J. B. Phillips. Inbody acknowledges the truth of many themes developed in Phillips's little gem, but he also wonders if the God conjured by many Christians is too BIG. When believers zealously attach all the "omnis" they can imagine to God, perhaps who emerges is not the God of scripture at all. In addition, perhaps humans—including their freedom, reasoning capacities, and personal experiences—become inconsequential when an all-omni-God is assumed. Although differing in their conclusions, both Phillips and Inbody agree on one thing: the "size" of God matters. What seems required is a God neither too small nor too big.

Constructing an adequate vision of God is the principal goal for essayists in a book edited by John B. Cobb, Jr., and Clark Pinnock: *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free-Will Theists* (Eerdmans, 2000). Of course, as contributor William Hasker remarks, "it is *our conceptions* of God that must be evaluated as adequate or inadequate, not God himself." Most essayists contend that a concept of God adequate to scripture, tradition, reason, and experience (the Wesleyan quadrilateral) is required or, as Hasker puts it, a conception of God "adequate for the faith and life of the Christian church." Whether explicitly or implicitly stated, both sides consider their own theistic conceptions to be more adequate given these criteria.

Given classical free-will theism's ties to evangelicalism and process theism's ties to liberal Christianity, it may seem unlikely to outsiders that the visions entertained by these camps overlap to any degree. However, even insiders may be surprised to find the large extent to which these visions can be harmonized. In many ways, *Searching for an Adequate God* serves as a bridge-builder. It reveals to the evangelical community that the process vision is more palatable than many had previously thought. The book also reveals to process theists, who typically run in liberal theological circles, that free-will/openness versions of evangelical theology are more palatable than they had assumed.

Tenets pertaining to divine love sit atop the list of convictions shared by these process and classical free-will/openness theists. Both sides affirm

that God is love; God lovingly interacts with the world; God is genuinely affected by give-and-take love with the world; and God's primary, if not exclusive, *modus operandi* is persuasive love. Free-will/openness theist Richard Rice comments, "Process thought is often described as a metaphysics of love, an attempt to develop a full-fledged metaphysical system from the fundamental insight that God is love. The open view of God [a.k.a. free-will theism] shares this emphasis upon the priority of love."

Consistent with this emphasis upon divine love and love's implications are the emphases by both traditions upon relationality, freedom (e.g., both reject compatibilism and determinism), and the social nature of the God-world relationship. Additionally, both reject the argument that God can have certain knowledge of the entire future. Given these emphases, it is understandable that both theological perspectives sharply criticize notions—which theists derived from classical metaphysics—portraying God as aloof, impervious, or all-determining.

Process and free-will theists also have much in common in terms of methodology. In contrast to Reformed theological and philosophical traditions, both sides in this dialogue deeply appreciate contributions toward their endeavors by natural theology. In contrast to those who restrict philosophy's role to language analysis alone, both sides remain open to substantive contributions from the philosophical endeavor, broadly speaking. As essayist David Wheeler notes, "faith communities and philosophical worldviews need each other."

It may surprise some to find that the issue of biblical authority does not arise as a major obstacle in this free-will/openness and process dialogue. In this volume, the process theists never chide free-will/openness theists for the latter's insistence upon the primary authority of the Bible. Free-will/openness theists only occasionally scold process theists for failing to appreciate the biblical witness. In fact, both sides appeal to an interpretation of scripture they believe supports their own theological vision.

The leg of the quadrilateral stool on which these theisms seem to differ most is Christian tradition. For instance, essayist David Griffin considers the tradition's doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* indirectly damaging to the claim that God is love. A God able unilaterally to create the world is culpable for failing unilaterally to prevent genuine evil. He proposes, instead, a doctrine of creation grounded upon divine persuasion, theistic evolution, and a God-initiated Big Bang cosmology. Free-will/openness theists, however, accept *creatio ex nihilo*. For free-will/openness theists,

the traditional creation doctrine supports a strong eschatology and explains God's miracle-generating activity.

At the heart of their theological differences are the theories of divine power, although each can agree on a formal definition of divine power (e.g., God's power is supreme, and deity possesses all the power it is possible for any being to have). On one hand, free-will/openness theists contend that God possessed, at least at one time, absolutely all power. Furthermore, these theists contend that God can unilaterally determine some events or situations—should God choose to do so. Free-will/openness essayist Hasker believes that a God who can both unilaterally determine (coerce) and act cooperatively (persuade) is greater, and therefore more adequate, than the God who only acts persuasively. Process theist Griffin, on the other hand, avers that God never possesses a monopoly on power, which means that God never entirely determines an outcome. Griffin contends that the problem of evil, among other problems, remains insoluble for theists who believe God that is able to determine unilaterally.

Both process and classical free-will theists affirm that God is providentially active in both human and nonhuman life. Free-will/openness theists, being consistent in their avowal of *creatio ex nihilo*, affirm that divine providence entails God's ability to withdraw or override creaturely freedom (i.e., the freedom expressed by creatures is accidental to what it means for them to be). Process theists contend that, while divine intervention in the world is ceaseless, God never overrides the freedom of creatures. In fact, it is metaphysically impossible for God to do so. God therefore interacts with essentially free creatures. Griffin believes that this process free-will theism provides an adequate explanation for how demonic evil emerged and why demonic evil currently undermines the moment-by-moment fulfillment of a loving God's specific will.

Both process and classical free-will theists hold that God is personal, purposive, and pantemporal. Free-will/openness theism affirms that God is only essentially personal in Trinity, whereas God's personal response to the world does not arise from the divine essence. Although also espousing a doctrine of the Trinity, albeit a nontraditional one, Griffin's supposes that personal response to creatures *does* arise from the divine essence. God has always interacted with a world. Closely tied to whether God is essentially personal is the question of God's love for the world. Free-will/openness theists affirm that God only essentially loves the members of the Trinity; process theism, however, contends that God essentially loves all creation.

Some Christians have preferred free-will/openness theism's doctrines of eschatology and immortality, believing them to be stronger than their process counterparts. In one of the most novel sections of the book, process theist Griffin defends his belief that (1) God will ultimately be victorious over evil and (2) salvation can be experienced in a life beyond bodily death. Such beliefs provide significant points of correlation between process and classical free-will theisms. The two sides differ, however, in conceiving how salvation beyond bodily death and the ultimate victory over death are secured. Griffin proposes that these events are/will be the result of persuasive love. Free-will/openness theist Clark Pinnock notes that his position holds to the possibility that God may secure these results *via* all-controlling power.

Many of the essayists share fascinating autobiographical material. Nancy Howell, Wheeler, and Rice disclose how, in their own journeys, they embraced or rejected various aspects of process and evangelical traditions. For Wheeler, to cite one, the evangelical faith of his youth and the process theism he discovered in graduate school are not mutually exclusive. To varying degrees, these scholars live inside, outside, and/or between theological traditions. To use Howell's image, these authors maneuver among theological boundaries.

Although the heart of this book involves wrestling with the substantive issues that unite or divide the two camps, Pinnock wisely notes the political implications this book occasions:

Let's be honest—there is risk for [both process and openness theists] in this dialogue. The conservatives will undoubtedly say: "There, we told you so—the openness theists are talking with the process theists! Did we not warn that they are covert processians who aim to smuggle these process ideas into evangelical thinking?" And certain liberals and modernists will say: "Why do you process theists bother with fundamentalists? Why do you lower yourselves to appear in print together with them? Where is your self-respect? Are you so desperate to find acceptance in the mainline?" Together we say to the critics—we will not allow ourselves to be led by such fears.

Conceiving of a "right-sized" God truly matters. The risks and fears that Pinnock describes indicate just how politically-charged the task of formulating theology can be. *Searching for An Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free-Will Theists* provides a valuable resource for adventurers undertaking this all-important quest.

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Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000. 288 pages. ISBN 1-58743-000-2

Reviewed by Christine D. Pohl. Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

Reading this book felt something like enjoying a good meal at a buffet. While there was substantial variation in the dishes, they were well prepared and the overall presentation was strong. Although idiosyncratic at times, there was an underlying theme and coherence to the spread. Throughout the book, the reader can catch glimpses into Hauerwas himself as teacher, scholar, and friend.

The book is dedicated to the people who have shaped the Ekklesia Project, a small group united in its “commitment to reclaiming the church as an alternative people for the good of the world”(7). That same commitment undergirds the arguments of most of Hauerwas’ essays. Recognizing that our “lives must be determined by our loves, not our hates,” Hauerwas seeks to offer a “hopeful” book by encouraging the church to be faithful to its calling (9). The book is part of his ongoing project of challenging the church to embrace the particularities of Christian faith and allow them to speak to contemporary society.

As always, Hauerwas is most critical of those Christians who think that “political liberalism ought to shape the agenda, if not the very life, of the church”(9). In particular, he challenges the Protestant and Catholic embrace of American values and their related practices (e.g., freedom and capitalism) that has led us into lives that “make sense even if God does not exist.” In trying to make Christianity at home in America, we have not only domesticated the church but the God we worship (16-17).

Hauerwas worries that churches have “nothing distinctive to say as Christians about the challenges facing this society” and he is critical of projects that assume Christians must find a neutral or third language within which to address a pluralistic society. His hope is that “a people formed by the worship of a crucified God. . . might just be complex enough to engage in the hard work of working out agreements and disagreements with others one small step at a time”(34).

Along the way, Hauerwas provides an interesting critique of post-modernism and its close connections to capitalism. He interacts with a significant number of writers and trends. Not all of these will be known

by readers, but his own argument comes through quite clearly. The diversity of his conversation partners, from Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Rauschenbusch to Thomas Aquinas and Aelred of Rievaulx, is significant.

Hauerwas uses historic developments in the field of Christian ethics in America to continue his argument about the loss of a distinctively Christian identity and voice. In the U.S., he says, “Christian ethics was born of the desire to transform the social order but in the process became . . . just another discipline of the university”(67). For Hauerwas, the discipline’s move from Christian ethics to religious ethics, and from seminary to graduate school, represents a loss of theological voice and a weakness in theological ethics.

This concern is part of his larger argument about how theology in America “became ethics and ethics became a form of reflection that could be done whether God exists or not”(118). He continues his “undeclared war against those who would do Christian ethics in a theologically minimalist fashion” and works to reclaim the theological center of Christian ethics (120). In doing this he embraces John Howard Yoder’s “rootedness in historical community” and Yoder’s ethics that never separates faith and history. Similarly, he presents and engages Robert Jenson’s work as model for the inseparability of theology and ethics.

“Protestant Christian ethics continues to be theologically inadequate,” argues Hauerwas, partly because of its early and continuing ties with Protestant liberalism, which has focused on “saving” America or making America Christian. But he also sees similar weaknesses in recent expressions of Catholicism. Thus, Hauerwas is as critical of John Courtney Murray as he is of Reinhold Niebuhr because both “sought to underwrite liberal versions of democracy on anthropological grounds that lacked appropriate theological warrant”(110).

The essay on Walter Rauschenbusch is the longest chapter of the book. It is a richly textured account of Rauschenbusch’s life and work and in some ways it functions as a case study for Hauerwas’ larger argument. Taken with the way Rauschenbusch “narrated the social realities of his day by redescribing them Christianly,” Hauerwas is fascinated by his ability to give a “Christian reading of his world”(96-98). While appreciative of Rauschenbusch’s deep Christian piety and concern for shaping a particular kind of people, Hauerwas observes that in subsequent generations Christian ethics became increasingly detached from the church.



There are so many arguments in this book that it is impossible to sift through them in a brief review. But Hauerwas' main argument regarding liberalism, modernity, and the Christian community shape the book in general. In several cases, he assumes a fairly substantial familiarity with discussions within the field of Christian ethics. The essays in the second half of the book are quite personal; four were originally written to honor friends: Robert Jenson, Rowan Greer, Don Saliers, and Ralph McInerny. Two essays are specifically attentive to the importance of friendship. His lovely essay honoring Rowan Greer is on the fruitful relationships between friendship and reading, history and theology. The co-authored essay on friendship and aging is very thoughtful and combines insights from a twelfth-century monk with suggestions for current practice.

Another carefully and reflectively written essay was originally given as an address on forgiveness and reconciliation at an evangelical conference on Northern Ireland. His chapter honoring Don Saliers' work on "truthful worship" argues for the inseparability of worship, evangelism, and ethics. His chapter entitled "Sinsick" draws from Thomas Aquinas and provides a very interesting exploration of the relation between sin and sickness. His final chapter, on whether a pacifist should read murder mysteries, offers thoughtful and enjoyable insights into the moral significance of that genre.

The footnotes in this book are exceptional; they are substantial and function as a richly annotated bibliography. They are also very personal—almost as if one were engaged in a face-to-face conversation with the author.

True to his reputation, Hauerwas is both provocative and engaging. Reading his material often leaves me feeling slightly off balance. Surely this is at least partly his intention. Although occasionally bewildered by his arguments, I deeply appreciate Hauerwas' insights and yearnings for Christian faithfulness. He helps us to see things from another angle, and while this can be annoying at times, it is an important gift to the church. The book offers an important word on disturbing trends and hope-filled alternatives.

*A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, edited by John A. Vickers (London: Epworth Press, 2000). x, 438 pages. ISBN: 07162-0534-3.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

This volume is of interest to readers of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* for three reasons. First, there is the fact of a Holiness movement presence in Great Britain and Ireland. The Holiness teaching from America first arrived with Lorenzo Dow (who is not mentioned) at the beginning of the nineteenth century and relationships to the world Holiness movements has continued ever since. Second, there is the connection to World Methodism. This connection is especially to founders and the founding values of the tradition. These have always served as a challenge and guide to American Methodists and the heirs of Methodism in their efforts to be a witness for Christ and the life worthy of that calling characterized by radical personal and radical social holiness. Third, there is the Holiness/Wesleyan/Methodist ecumenical challenge. There are so many church bodies, each attempting self-consciously to be true to the traditions of Christianity as represented by Wesley and his cohort. It is clear from a perusal of this book that there is significant work to be done before we can all talk together about our common concerns. This dictionary may be one of the few of the genre worth reading as well as consulting!

The editor, John A. Vickers, is widely known for his research on Methodist history and spirituality, especially the work on Thomas Coke, one of the organizers of American Methodism and the “one man band” of early Methodist missions. His book *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1969) is one of the important Methodist biographical studies. The subsequent article, “One-Man Band: Thomas Coke and the Origins of Methodist Missions” [*Methodist History* 34(1996), 135-147], began the process of establishing a mission identity for Methodism beyond the more recent imperial “board” model of the American experience. The *Dictionary* reflects the erudition of a lifetime of faithful scholarship. It also reflects the organizational acumen of the editor. More than 150 contributors provided signed articles for the *Dictionary*. These articles cover nearly every aspect of Methodist spirituality, liturgy, history, and biography of crucial significance for understanding the developments in Britain and Ireland.

In every dictionary or encyclopedia there are winners and losers. No one can achieve coverage of any subject that will answer the questions of all specialists or discuss every worthy subject or personage. This volume does a remarkable job of being inclusive and generous in its presentations and analyses. It, for example, presents without prejudice the daughter churches of Methodism in Britain, although one always wishes for more coverage of these small Holiness Churches, as well as for the Holiness folk who, influenced by the American traditions, became neither [British] Wesleyan Methodist nor Keswick. The examples of Star Hall Manchester and James Rendell Harris are illustrative of this lacuna. An extensive bibliography of English language sources is appended.

The *Dictionary* also deals with the mission work of the Methodists. The central focus of the book is certainly the British Isles, but one wishes that the results of mission had been given more space. Articles present information on missionary societies, missionary controversies and on numerous countries where the British and Irish Methodists had work. However, non-English sources are not cited and the lack of citation of both journal articles and unpublished M.A., Licentiate, and doctoral theses is particularly problematic with regard to mission studies. It will however be an excellent guide for Methodist students around the world to the British and Irish published sources that deal with the establishment of their tradition.

North American denominations mentioned include the Free Methodist Church and the Church of the Nazarene. William Parkes contributed the article on the Free Methodists. The only bibliographical reference is to L. W. Northrup, *Ambassadors for Christ* (Indianapolis: Light and Life, 1988). It describes the union of the Free Methodist Church and the (Canadian) Holiness Movement Church that provided connections for the developments in England. It is pointed out that some of the individuals who became Free Methodist withdrew from the Wesleyan Methodist Church during the ecumenical (merger) discussions between those two bodies. Herbert McGonigle wrote the concise informative article on the Nazarenes. Only the work of John Ford [*In the Steps of John Wesley: The Church of the Nazarene in Britain* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1968)] is cited. Some attention is also given to the Pilgrim Wesleyan Holiness Church (related to the Wesleyan Church, USA), but no attention is given to the Wesleyan/Holiness Pentecostal churches. The Salvation Army and William Booth are discussed, but not Catharine Booth!

## BOOK REVIEWS

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The *Dictionary* provides a significant “user friendly” resource for Holiness and Methodist scholars. It will long be a standard work to be consulted. The comments above lamenting that the coverage was not more inclusive is not intended to detract from the value of the work and the achievement it represents. The articles are well written and well edited. Access to the volume is facilitated by the extensive bibliography appended and the lists of abbreviations and authors. This is a truly important book!

Diane Winston, *Red Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. 290 pages. ISBN 0-674-86706-8.

Reviewed by R. David Rightmire, Asbury College, Wilmore, KY

Diane Winston, a journalist turned historian, provides an illuminating study of the relationship of religion, urban life, and commercial culture, in her assessment of the growth and development of the Salvation Army in New York City. She traces the evolving public perception of this “red-hot” militant evangelical mission from its “rag tag” beginnings to its status as the largest charitable organization in America. The author identifies the years 1880-1950 as “the apogee of the Army’s public visibility,” and divides her coverage of these years into five periods.

Chapter one, “The Cathedral of the Open Air, 1880-1886,” deals with the establishment of the Army’s work in New York under George Railton, its ensuing struggle to define itself amidst public misperception and persecution, its survival of internal schism caused by the transatlantic dispute between Thomas Moore and William Booth, and the consolidating work of Frank Smith. What interests Winston most about this period, however, is the Army’s use of cultural forms to communicate its counter-cultural message. She contends that Salvationists were successful in repackaging their message and mission in terms of social salvation, thus winning popular support.

In chapter two, “The New Woman, 1886-1896,” the author focuses on the leadership of Ballington and Maud Booth, whose tenure “marked the Army’s initial acceptance by mainstream American society.” Maud is presented as a role model for Salvation Army womanhood, emphasizing a moderate, culturally accommodated feminism, expressed in socially acceptable ways. Of special note is Winston’s treatment of the aesthetic, moral, and ideological functions of the Army uniform and her positive reassessment of Maud and Ballington’s contribution to the “Americanization of the Army,” despite their resignation from officership.

The ministry of Frederick and Emma Booth-Tucker, and their use of entertainment media, is the subject matter of chapter three, “The Red Crusade, 1896-1904.” The author highlights the Army’s adoption of novel methods of multimedia communication, as the Booth-Tuckers were “intent on remaining in the vanguard of social and cultural innovation.” Under their leadership, the Army experienced exponential growth, espe-

cially with regard to its social ministries. Such growth required an ever-expanding funding base. Winston focuses on the image-making dimensions of the Booth-Tuckers' tenure as they sought to highlight the Army's philanthropic work alongside its religious mission.

The portrayal of the Army's ministry as public performance climaxes in Winston's treatment of Evangeline Booth, the subject of chapter four, "The Commander in Rags, 1904-1918." The Army's institutionalization under this charismatic leader was marked by the systematization of fundraising methods, the acquisition of property, and the formation of a centralized bureaucracy, as she shaped the organization in her own image. The public performance dimension of the Army's ministry increasingly "moved from evangelical street theater to philanthropic fundraising," being so successful in "commodifying itself through performances" that its identity as an evangelical mission became obscured in public perception.

Chapter five, "Fires of Faith, 1919-1950," deals with the final stage of the Army's transformation from an urban evangelical religion into the nation's leading charity. The author contends that this evolution involved a process of cultural negotiation between its spiritual mission and commercialism, "as the Army sought media attention while trying to maintain control over its image." Various social crises, such as the Great Depression and World War II, provided the opportunity for the expression of the Army's action-oriented religion, which was represented in theater, film and the popular press. By representing religious ideas in culturally understandable symbols, Winston maintains that the Salvationists began exercising "new tactics of stealth and diffusion." Employing "symbols that attenuated its religious specificity," the Army still remained true to its social holiness ideals, although such were "hidden" from the public eye.

The author's central thesis is that Salvationists developed missional strategies that both reflected and legitimated the increasingly commercialized urban culture, and in the process became part of this culture. By placing the Army in the context of urbanization and commercialization, Winston seeks to provide a new perspective on the interplay between religion and culture. Salvationists sought to "secularize religion" and to "religionize secular things" by adapting the forms and idioms of popular American culture to deliver its message. Winston underscores the importance of religion in the development of urban society, as the Army involved itself in the issues of the urban poor, the status of women, and the development of consumer culture. She illustrates how the Army made

an impact on American life, whether through the “doughnut girls” of W.W.I., Hollywood’s portrayal of the Salvationist “lassie” as a virtuous “new woman,” or the institutionalization of religious ideals in its social programs.

Viewing religion as a significant social force in cultural history, the author maintains that the “Army’s postmillennial holiness theology” has affinities with the commercial culture of American industrial capitalism. The author’s supposition that the Army’s co-opting of secular means and methods necessarily involves a “coalescence” of its holiness theology and consumerist ideology is debatable, as is her view that the “pragmatism inherent in Army theology” necessarily reflects ideological affinities with corporate capitalism.

Winston maintains that the Army projected an image that focused on its actions, not its intentions. Such a bifurcation allowed the organization “to serve as a canvas onto which men and women could project their own needs, hopes, and beliefs.” Paradoxically “what began as a movement to sanctify the culture became a manifestation of it.” Such cultural accommodation involved a conscious downplaying of some of the more radical dimensions of its mission in order to win financial support.

*Red Hot and Righteous* provides an insightful look at the importance of image in the interplay of religious and popular culture. Not a history of the movement, this work restricts itself to sociological analysis, with idiosyncratic focus on the role of women Salvationists in shaping the public image of the Army. Although acknowledging the existence of theological principles underlying the Army’s pragmatic methods in engaging culture, the author fails to adequately explore how these foundational beliefs provided substance to the projected image.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl, eds. *Embodied Holiness: Toward a Corporate Theology of Spiritual Growth*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999, 200 pages.

Reviewed by William Kostlevy, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

Tim Stafford, senior writer for *Christianity Today*, pontificated in a recent featured article in that erstwhile voice of evangelicalism, “No Christian tradition can be more out of synchrony with academia than Nazarene holiness.” Although the heirs of premillennial dispensationalism surely can find some intellectual inadequacies in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, the article expresses a commonly held view about the presumed excessive lack of mental acuity by those in the Wesleyan tradition. Pundits such as Stafford should spend some time at the Wesley Center for Twenty-first Century Studies at Point Loma Nazarene University. Here they would encounter one of the primary focal points for innovative scholarly debate in the Wesleyan tradition. Short of a visit, they might wish to consult this fine volume of essays now under review.

The point of departure for *Embodied Holiness* is an essay by the noted Methodist ethicist Stanley M. Hauerwas. The essays that follow are both responses to Hauerwas and attempts to forge a vision of the holy life that does not begin with the famous Cartesian “I.” Hauerwas, sounding much like a holiness camp meeting preacher (or perhaps Dietrich Bonhoeffer), insists that “perfection is the art of dying” (p. 167). Interestingly, the ideas behind many of the essays are those of two non-Wesleyans: Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder. As the essays by Hauerwas, Michael G. Cartwright, and Rodney Clapp reflect the ecclesiastical vision of Yoder, the essays of Craig Keen and Samuel K. Powell draw direction from Barth.

Responding only in part to Hauerwas, Craig Keen draws a Barthian, eschatological, and Trinitarian picture of the life of holiness as a life of limited perfection that is lived concretely here and now in the light of God’s self revelation, Jesus Christ. In an essay that defies neat categorization Joyce Quiring Erickson, professor of English at Seattle Pacific University, explores the diaries of early Methodist women and Wesley associates Hester Roe Rogers, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, and Elizabeth Ritchie Mortimer. Although troubled by the world-denying asceticism and seeming lack of humor of these early Methodist saints, Erickson suggests that



their passion or “feeling” for holiness might well be imitated in our media-saturated society. In another essay, Michael E. Lodahl challenges the basic separatist ecclesiastical orientation inspired by Hauerwas, Yoder, and Barth that lies behind most of the essays in the book. As Lodahl notes, these writers, in the tradition of George Lindbeck, author of the influential, *Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post Liberal Age* (1984), tend to reduce the church’s sphere of influence to those who share its story and vocabulary. Looking at the teachings of the Lukan Jesus, Lodahl argues that Jesus refused to limit his ministry to those who spoke the “language of Zion.” Drawing on the thought of H. Orton Wiley and H. Ray Dunning, Lodahl insists that the God of Holy Love requires that we reach out to those in need beyond the boundaries of our communities in acts of justice and service.

Without responding to each essay (a temptation in the case of the fine essays by Hauerwas, Keen, Erickson, Lodahl, and Powell), I would like to express several concerns I have with the general direction of the work. Ironically, although sponsored by a Church of the Nazarene educational institution and largely written by Nazarenes, with the exception of Lodahl it assumes the irrelevance of the Nazarene past for the Christian (or Nazarene) present. It seems that the basic attitude of Stafford is alive and well among many intellectuals in the Church of the Nazarene. Likewise, it is ironic in a work that largely ignores history to announce, as Michael G. Cartwright does, that “to renounce amnesia is the first step toward the courageous embrace of gospel practices” (p. 138). Virtually all the authors argue that the real presence of embodied holiness is in the regeneration of baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist. Even Powell, whose fine essay urges scholars to find value in the heritage of theological liberalism, ends in calling for a corporatism that seems enslaved to the ecclesiastical vision of Anglicanism. This turn to Wesley’s Anglican past to find a Holiness future has long been championed by Nazarene Theological Seminary faculty members Paul Bassett and Rob Staples and by those, such as Randy Maddox, who are indebted to the thought of Albert Outler. I remain skeptical of this as the best route to embodied holiness for Christian traditions forged in the fires of the early twentieth-century Holiness and Pentecostal revivals.

Instead of looking toward a mythical Anglican past, I find far more meaningful expressions of embodied holiness in the lived reality of the nineteenth-century holiness revival. For example, when Catherine Booth

discovered that Salvation Army converts were reluctant to take communion from women officers, she came to realize that the advancement of God's reign might require the dismantling of worship forms rooted in sexist social structures, such as the traditional communion service. Secondly, since this book suggests that "the concept of the soul is a menace to good theology" (p. 12), I would urge its authors to more closely examine the Seventh Day Adventist tradition whose eschatologically driven rejection of the conventional concept of the soul lies behind its remarkable network of health food stores, nursing homes, and hospitals.

As an antidote to Erickson's concern about the lack of humor in early Methodism, I would urge her to spend some time with the writings of such Wesleyan "holy fools" as W. B. Godbey and the Church of the Nazarene's own Bud Robinson. It is not incidental, given the social location of many in the Holiness Movement, that a large part of Robinson's popularity rested on his demythologizing of the actions of those in power. See his classic work, *Chickens Come Home to Roost*. The fact that many of us (I include myself here) have trouble making sense of the popular literary expressions of Holiness piety may indicate inadequacies in the Enlightenment era intellectual paradigms that we continue to employ.

Finally, an attempt to articulate a corporate theology of spiritual growth needs to explore the Holiness tradition's ambivalent feelings about private property. Although twentieth-century holiness people have been quite successful in disassociating their own heritage from their precursors at Oneida, New York (John Humphrey Noyes), and Waukesha, WI (the Burning Bush Movement), the fact remains that the words of the Lukan Jesus (see Luke 14:33) are as unsettling in the twentieth-first century as they were in the first. Although I do not want to trivialize the concerns expressed in this important work, I would like my Wesleyan friends on the Canterbury trail to take a side trip to two locations in Southwest Michigan. First, at Berrien Springs they can observe the living reality of the embodied holiness of a University campus sponsored by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, while at Benton Harbor they can view the remnants of the House of David Amusement Park. As any postmodernist knows, embodied holiness has many faces.

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Laurence Paul Hemming, Editor, *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2001. 174 pages, pbk.

Reviewed by Henry W. Spaulding II, Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee.

This volume joins a growing body of literature on Radical Orthodoxy by embarking upon a conversation with the Catholic tradition. It is composed of five sections, the last four arising directly from a conference held June 1999 at Heythrop College (London). This gathering of interested scholars included three important voices in Radical Orthodoxy: John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward. It also included four Roman Catholic theologians and one Anglican theologian. Each section of the book includes a statement about Radical Orthodoxy and at least one response from the Catholic point of view. One can detect an intensity in these pages that will certainly render the careful reader more informed on the nuances of this significant new movement.

David Burrell offers the opening comments. His perspective is two-fold. He attempts to assess the importance of Radical Orthodoxy for the North American context and then writes from a Catholic point of view. Burrell begins by suggesting the need to avoid “a pointless display of eristic reason and a caring display of uncritical faith . . .” (23) which all too often characterizes theology in the North American context. He also points out that the philosophical idiom of radical orthodoxy makes it difficult for many readers in the North American context. Burrell also notes that in North American analytical philosophy has been far too prominent to make a reception of Radical Orthodoxy easy. The comments of Burrell are interesting at a number of levels. In fact, the contents of this chapter might well be of great interest for Wesleyan-Holiness theologians. For example, it appears that the polarity between a rationalized faith (Kant) and an uncritical faith (folk theology) are very near to the issues faced by the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. This is especially true as a new generation of scholars begins the task of defining the tradition.

Part two of the book features a conversation between John Milbank and Fergus Kerr. Milbank suggests that Radical Orthodoxy is “a movement of intellectual, ecumenical and cultural mediation” (33). Here Milbank states that Radical Orthodoxy “removes itself from modernity in either its liberal or conservative guises” (33). Radical Orthodoxy offers the conservative the opportunity to be conservative while it attacks liber-

alism. Milbank has now addressed that explicitly by suggesting that where Radical Orthodoxy is concerned, the door swings both ways. Here it becomes evident that Milbank wants to distinguish himself from neo-orthodoxy. One of the ways this becomes evident is the fact that “the discreteness of theology lies not *only* in the Christocentric *forma* but also in the constantly new pneumatological performances of this *forma* by an enhanced reason in interaction with manifold human life-forms and thought-forms” (34-35). This means, among other things, that Radical Orthodoxy has a stronger connection with Roman Catholic *nouvelle theologie* than Protestant neo-orthodoxy. He goes on to argue that, while it shares much with the *nouvelle theologie*, it is “more extreme than the alternatives it mediates, in that it strives beyond arbitrarily imagined limits . . .” (44). Milbank concludes the chapter by offering for some a startling comment. “Radical Orthodoxy, although it opposes the modern, also seeks to save it. It espouses, not pre-modern, but an alternative version of modernity” (45). This chapter will offer those who want a brief and relatively straightforward introduction to Radical Orthodoxy a very good place to begin.

Fergus Kerr responds to Milbank in the next chapter. He offers a thoughtful if not fully sympathetic response of Radical Orthodoxy. He says, “aligning *Radical Orthodoxy* with the *nouvelle theologie* is already to invite more than one Catholic response—to invite, perhaps, incommensurable responses. That *Radical Orthodoxy* wishes to push the *nouvelle theologie* even further in the direction of theology’s overcoming of metaphysics cannot but arouse disquiet” (56). Kerr is left with many questions regarding the appropriateness of this move for Catholics.

Part three begins with Catherine Pickstock’s reflections on time, knowledge, and God. She begins by suggesting, “Radical Orthodoxy is a hermeneutic disposition and a style of metaphysical vision; and it is not so much a ‘thing’ or ‘place’ as a ‘task’” (63). She seeks in the chapter to express this task by reflecting on time. In fact, she goes so far as to “insist that our changefulness in time is actually what defines us” (64). Pickstock links this with knowledge by addressing Aquinas’ understanding as “conformed to the infinite unknown, so likewise our knowing of anything at all is in some measure an advance sight of the beatific vision, and union with the personal interplay of the Trinity” (74).

Lawrence Hemming responds to Pickstock by first admitting this “uneasy voice in *Radical Orthodoxy* . . .” (76). This is a very interesting

chapter because he spells out some of his reservations regarding Radical Orthodoxy precisely at the point of the interpretation of Aquinas. He disagrees with Pickstock's claim that Aquinas goes beyond Aristotle on the understanding of truth. He questions the general claim of Radical Orthodoxy that Aquinas' voice encourages a theological evacuation of philosophy. He argues that Radical Orthodoxy misses the fact that the Catholic tradition "calls for the restoration of Aquinas because it judges that Aquinas is exemplary in the field of those who have shaped a theological understanding of faith through a profound and far-reaching philosophical reflection" (86). Hemming even quotes Aquinas to support the real distinction between theology and philosophy. This is a very well-written critique of Radical Orthodoxy and Pickstock. One might add that, if Hemming is correct in his assessment, a major flaw has been located within the argument of those within the Radical Orthodox camp. One would like to hear a response on this specific point by Milbank or Pickstock. There is a sense in which Milbank does respond to this in *Truth and Aquinas*, but one is left to wonder if the arguments somehow pass each other.

Graham Ward adds a chapter in the third part on cultural politics. He argues, "One cannot believe alone for all believing opens up a space of or for a certain kind of activity and activity will necessitate, and be founded upon, the involvement of others" (97). Further, "there is always an economics, a sociology and a politics of believing" (98). Ward offers a challenge to modern believing, which is probably worth the price of the book. He lays out very clearly his argument when he says his "own work has increasingly focused on attempting to show how forms of postmodern thinking have re-encharmed the world and call for a theological reading—a reading which redeems them from the madness of semiosis and the endless deferral of the bad infinite" (105). The fundamental point for Ward is that Radical Orthodoxy must understand the importance of cultural politics for his theological work to be understood most fully.

Two chapters in the book are devoted to a general response to Ward's point. Oliver Davies writes the first response. Davies puts it very plainly: "By proposing his Christian 'metasemiosis,' Milbank succeeds both in contesting the autonomy of contemporary secularism and in creating a strikingly original re-narration of the Christian story" (114). But he goes on to observe that this comes with a price. Perhaps, Milbank overcomes secularism only to allow it back into Christian narrative. This leads Davies to question the viability of Milbank's reading of medieval theology. Fundamentally, the way that Milbank treats philosophy and theology

as well as the way he interprets Aquinas should be called into question. Lucy Gardner adds more criticism to the discussion. Her problem is stated as follows, “at the heart of Radical Orthodoxy . . . (there is) a call for non-oppositional opposition, or, more properly speaking, an undoing of opposition in a non-oppositional way” (127). The heart of the problem here is that the very rhetoric of Radical Orthodoxy is oppositional. There is a great deal of nuance in her argument that cannot be stated at this point, but her basic point concerns “a series of hesitations about the rhetoric deployed by Radical Orthodoxy in its attempt to reawaken a lost sense of participation and thereby reclaim the world, the city and the soul” (143). This is, indeed, a significant challenge for Radical Orthodoxy.

The final part of the book comes in the form of a call for continuing conversation. This chapter written by James Hanvey summarizes and extends the key points of the book. He observes, “Radical Orthodoxy is itself the product of postmodernity and a victim of its radical resistance to any totalizing foundationalist claims” (154). Hanvey questions the depth with which Radical Orthodoxy has read Barth. He also speculates on whether Radical Orthodoxy’s preference of *nouvelle theologie* betrays the sense in which it is dependent upon modernity. Hanvey points to some of the gaps in Radical Orthodoxy, “its failure to substantiate its epistemology other than by asserting it; its absence of any theology of the human person; and the absence of a coherent hermeneutic of history” (162). Hanvey fears at many crucial points that Radical Orthodoxy contradicts its stated aims.

This volume is worth reading, not only because it gives the reader another look at Radical Orthodoxy, but also because it presents some significant questions that will need to be addressed. It is apparent that the Catholic tradition has some questions for those within the Radical Orthodoxy movement. These questions concern the reading of Aquinas, Barth, and de Lubac. There are questions about the degree to which Radical Orthodoxy has fallen prey to its own critique. The questions concerning the evacuation of philosophy continue to be important. The book ends with a call to continue the discussion. Perhaps, one horizon for the discussion might be the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. Considering the nuances of the arguments in this book, those within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition will often pause to consider when a Wesleyan-Holiness Enquiry might turn up. Clearly, some of the same issues would arise, but there are certainly issues that arise out of this tradition that might extend the discussion Radical Orthodoxy to other kinds of conversation.

H. D. (Sandy) Ayer, *The Christian and Missionary Alliance. An Annotated Bibliography of Textual Sources* (ATLA Bibliography Series, 45; Lanham, MD, London: Scarecrow Press, 2001). Xx, 403 pages. ISBN: 0-8108-3995-4.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance began because of the Wesleyan/Holiness inspired religious experiences of A. B. Simpson in Louisville, KY. He was forced from the Presbyterian Church and founded an “alliance” for the promotion of the “fourfold Gospel,” namely: “Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King.” The resultant denomination has remained somewhat small in the USA, but worldwide claims about 2.4 million. This bibliography provides access to about 2500 major published items documenting the tradition for more than a century.

Bibliographies are, according to common wisdom, generally quite limited in their appeal as volumes to be read. This tome will be an exception to that maxim. It will fascinate anyone interested in the Holiness movement, Pentecostalism, or the evolution of a Holiness denomination from a Wesleyan/Holiness theology toward a more Reformed orientation, and the subsequent rewriting of history and reinterpretation of the lives of the founders to make that transformation possible. Throughout the volume, previously obscure bibliographic items, accompanied by insightful and carefully crafted annotations, allow the reader to see relationships not otherwise attested. These relationships should provide grist for dozens of books and articles exploring global religious life in which the Christian and Missionary Alliance has been present or implicated. And, for anyone interested in the Christian and Missionary Alliance for its own sake, this volume will be found an essential beginning point.

Another contribution is the identification of the original publications of the books by A. B. Simpson. These have been frequently reprinted and revised so that working with a “Simpson book” can be a hazardous scholarly enterprise. The 388 items listed as written by Simpson provide a very useful standard bibliography. They, and the rest of the volume, demonstrate the need for a scholarly biography of Simpson. As the work of Ayer demonstrates, the network of relationships, ministries and enterprises maintained by Simpson would make this a daunting undertaking. The bibliography of other popular Christian and Missionary Alliance authors is

likewise helpfully treated. Indexes of names and subjects facilitate access to the material.

There is the necessity for two caveats about the work as a historiographical piece, caveats that are not criticisms of Ayer's work, but descriptive of the volume. No bibliography can do everything. These comments are suggestions for further development of the project of documenting the Christian and Missionary Alliance. First, Christian and Missionary Alliance periodicals are very helpfully listed (367-379). However, the bibliography had to be designed in such a way as to exclude references to individual articles from Christian and Missionary Alliance articles as well as those in other periodicals. To include these would have made the composition of the bibliography an impossible task, and the resulting volume too expensive. However, access to those periodicals is absolutely necessary for a more fulsome understanding of the development of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The publication of these periodicals on searchable CD-ROMS would be a major contribution.

Second, this volume provides only partial access to the global influence of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, especially during the Alliance period (c. 1880-1919) of its founder A. B. Simpson. Ayer consciously and understandably omitted translations of Christian and Missionary Alliance documents into other languages (xvii). The early Simpson translations provided major impetus to the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Holiness revivals around the world and provided a crucial corpus for the early theological development of Pentecostalism outside North America. The lack of inclusion of translations also masks the fact that, for a denomination largely peopled by persons outside North America, only a tiny fraction of the publications are in non-English languages. Does this mean that the educational institutions of the Christian and Missionary Alliance around the world have not encouraged the development of indigenous theological reflection or warranted (valued) what does take place? Thus the volume also poses important missiological questions. For understandable reasons of facility of alphabet, all but two items in Asian languages were omitted.

Ayer and the publisher are to be congratulated on the publication of this volume. It will do much to stimulate research on the Alliance. It will be a standard tool for every scholar of American religious culture; and those with academic interests in Christianity outside North America will ignore it to their peril!





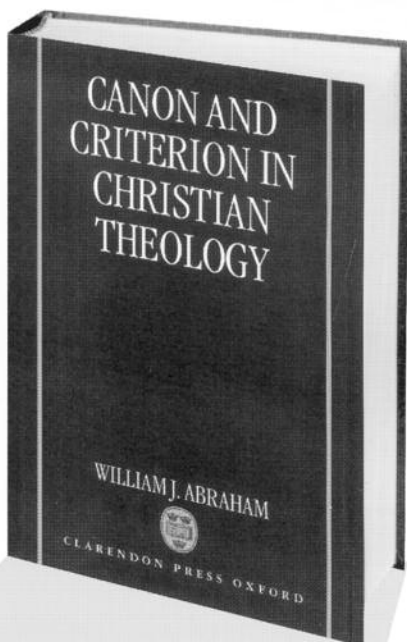
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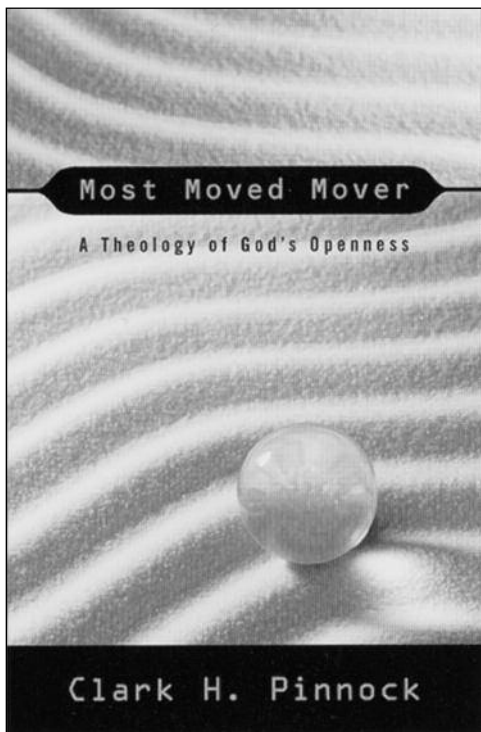
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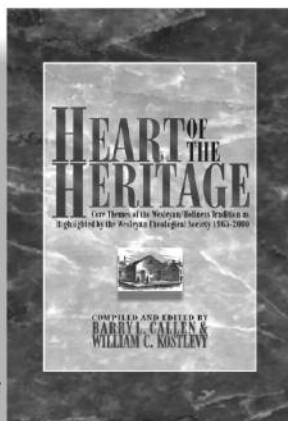
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