

# **The Theological Vision that Guides Clergy Preparation**

**in the Church of the Nazarene:**

*"The simplicity and spiritual power manifest in the primitive New Testament Church, together with the preaching of the gospel to every creature."*

*--Manual, Paragraph 25*

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*"If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light"* (Jesus, Matthew 6:22).

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## *Foreword*

A word of explanation is in order to justify my approach in this presentation. By beginning with tradition rather than the Bible in casting a vision for Nazarene clergy preparation I hope to avoid the Scylla of Fundamentalism on the right and the Charybdis of biblical criticism on the left. Two sides of one coin, each of these assumes that the text of Holy Scripture should be accessible to anyone without the necessary mediation of the Church.

The fundamentalist cry "No creed but Christ" presumptuously assumes that all Christians have the "religious experience" necessary to know what the Bible is all about. The biblical critic, on the other hand, is but a person of common sense who has now received a liberal university education. "Accordingly, fundamentalism and biblical criticism are Enlightenment ideologies in the service of the fictive agent of the Enlightenment--namely, the rational individual--who believes that truth in general (and particularly the truth of the Christian faith) can be known without initiation into a community that requires transformation of the self" (Hauerwas 17, 35).

The truth is, Holy Scripture can be properly interpreted only within the context of an "interpretive community." "The Scriptures are exhibited in communities that are capable of pointing to holy lives through which we can rightly see the reality that made the Scriptures possible" (37). At the end of his *Incarnation of the Word of God* Athanasius says:

For the searching and right understanding of the Scriptures there is need of a good life and a pure soul, and for Christian virtue to guide the mind to grasp, so

far as human nature can, the truth concerning God the Word. One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life.... Thus united to them in the fellowship of light, (such persons) will both understand the things revealed to them by God ... and receive that which is laid up for saints in the kingdom of heaven.

All biblical interpretation is done within a given tradition (whether acknowledged or not). As there is no such thing as "presuppositionless thinking," neither is there such a thing as "traditionless" biblical interpretation. As one who endorses Athanasius' claim that "the right understanding of the Scriptures" is possible only to "saints ...in the fellowship of light," I propose to cast the vision that should guide clergy preparation among us, not by beginning with the Bible but with the *holiness tradition* of the Church catholic, from which the Church of the Nazarene emerged.

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# THE THEOLOGICAL VISION THAT GUIDES CLERGY PREPARATION IN THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

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It would not be possible to emphasize too strongly the necessity of understanding and fully appreciating where it is that the Church of the Nazarene locates within the Christian tradition. To this end, nothing more significant could happen in this conference than a rebirth of our theological vision as those who follow in the steps of John Wesley (1703-1791), with a rekindling of the passion that accompanies that vision whenever and wherever the Spirit renews and ignites it in Christ's church.

In his 1935 ground-breaking study, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, George Croft Cell of Boston University made the following claim concerning John Wesley's place in the history of Christian life and thought: "The most important fact about the Wesleyan understanding of the Gospel in relation to the Christian ethic of life is that the early Protestant doctrine of justification by faith and the Catholic appreciation of the idea of holiness or Christian perfection--two principles that had been fatally put asunder in the great church conflicts of the sixteenth century--reappeared in the comprehensive spirit of Wesley's teaching fitly framed together in a well balanced synthesis.... [John Wesley] restored the neglected doctrine of holiness to its merited position in the Protestant understanding of Christianity"(359).

A generation later Albert C. Outler, in his volume, *John Wesley*, in the *Library of Protestant Thought*, claimed of the English reformer: "As a major figure in a major religious movement ... he glimpsed the underlying unity of Christian truth and life in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions.... In the name of a Christianity both biblical and patristic, he managed

to transcend the stark doctrinal disjunctions which had spilled so much ink and blood since Augsburg and Trent.<sup>1</sup> In their stead, he proceeded to develop a theological fusion of faith and good works, Scripture and tradition, revelation and reason, God's sovereignty and human freedom, universal redemption and conditional election, Christian liberty and ordered polity, the assurance of pardon and the risks of 'falling from grace,' original sin and Christian perfection. In each of these conjunctions, as he insisted almost tediously insisted, the initiative is with God, the response with [humans]" (viii). It is this Wesleyan vision, I hope to show, that must inform and guide Nazarene clergy preparation if we are to fulfill our God-given mission to spread scriptural holiness to the ends of the earth.

### *The Anglican Vision*

Not to be overlooked, as we begin our quest here today, is the fact that John Wesley lived, preached, taught, and died as a priest in the Church of England. His gospel was an expression of historic Anglicanism, albeit Anglicanism with a distinctive focus, source and form.<sup>2</sup>

Since Wesley was an Anglican churchman to the marrow of his bones, it is important for our purposes to note that the English reformation, under the guidance of its leading theologians, took a distinctively different approach to Christian faith and practice from that either of the Continental Reformers or of the Roman Catholic Church from which it had emerged.

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<sup>1</sup> "Augsburg" and "Trent" are the Protestant Reformed and Roman Catholic pronouncements of faith that define the theological positions of the two great Post-Reformation traditions of Western Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> "In the contemporary theological situation," Outler writes, "Wesley may be more readily appreciated as an 'ecumenical theologian' than as an eponymous hero of a particular denomination" (xii).

Under the primary leadership of Richard Hooker, Thomas Jewell, Thomas Cranmer, and others who had gone to Geneva to learn from Continental Protestantism, the Church of England intentionally constructed a *via media*, a "middle way" between Reformed Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. In formulating their faith and practice these early divines led the way in making the Church of England "an independent branch of the Church Universal ... with a positive doctrine and discipline of its own and a definite mission in the wide economy of grace" (Thorsen 36-37), a vision that found its most powerful expression in John and Charles Wesley and the eighteenth century Revival.

Hooker and his colleagues returned from Geneva in full embrace of the Protestant doctrine of Justification by Faith. They perceived the Reformed doctrine of *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"), however, to be biblicism, or scriptural authoritarianism, fostered by a literalistic and exclusivistic hermeneutic. While accepting the primary authority of Scripture, the English divines felt strongly that other authorities, tradition and reason in particular, should have a place in formulating Christian faith and practice. The English Reformation thus consciously and purposefully drew what it saw to be the best from both the Protestant and Catholic traditions. "There are but two ways," Hooker wrote, "the one extraordinairie, the other common; ... the one that which we call by a special divine excellency, Revelation, the other Reason." There were thus in Anglicanism an appeal to a "threefold fount of guidance and authority"--to Scripture, reason, and tradition--"all alike of God, emanating from Him, the one original Source of all light and power" (Paget quoted in Thorsen 39).

Thus for Hooker,<sup>3</sup> while Scripture is the primary source of truth, "Tradition (but not as used by the Roman Catholics) provides a view of life and thought from the earliest centuries of Christianity, closest to the purity of the apostolic witness and most liable to be (in its consensus) an authentic reflection and explication of the biblical testimony ... limited to the first three centuries of the church, excluding the 'innovations' of the medieval church, with Reason furnishing the means by which scripture and tradition can be scrutinized and understood by thoughtful persons--revealed truth may at times be above reason, but never contrary to reason" (Heitzenrater 10).<sup>4</sup>

The English reformers sensed no need to construct a systematic theology such as Calvin's *Institutes*; their efforts were rather invested in "practical divinity." They envisioned the mission of the Church of England to be the renewing "***the true, primitive, catholic faith***" of the ***New Testament and the early church***. To this end they set forth Anglican theology in *The Book of Homilies*, which proclaimed the Protestant doctrine of Justification by Faith, and *The Book of Common Prayer*,<sup>5</sup> where at the Lord's Table communicants prayed for heart purity: "***Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name. Amen.***"

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<sup>3</sup> In *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1595)

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Wesley's *Advice to a Young Clergyman* (1735) assumes that any aspiring cleric will be well-grounded in Hooker; his son John adopted and advanced Hooker's position, which had become standard in 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglicanism..

<sup>5</sup> For Wesley, *The Book of Common Prayer* was "only just less inspired than the Bible" (Baker 234).

Wesley's concern always was that Methodism faithfully adhere to the Christian tradition that most nearly represented true, scriptural faith. In his sermon "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel," he said; "Methodism, so called, is the old religion, *the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive Church*, the religion of the Church of England. This old religion ... is none other than love: ... the loving God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, as having first loved *us*, ... and the loving of every soul ... on earth, as our own soul... This religion of love, and joy, and peace, has its seat in the inmost soul, but it is ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing up, not only in all innocence--for love worketh no ill to his neighbour--but likewise in every kind of benevolence, spreading virtue and happiness all around us."<sup>6</sup>

"This is the religion of the primitive Church," Wesley wrote, "of the whole church of the purest ages, <sup>7</sup> ... And this is the religion of the Church of England, as appears from all her authentic records, from the uniform tenor of her liturgy, and from the numberless passages of her Homilies. *The scriptural, primitive religion of love* ... is beautifully summed up in that one, comprehensive petition, 'Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name.'"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Works of John Wesley* (Reprinted 1978 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City. Reprinted from the 1872 edition issued by the Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, London) 7:424.

<sup>7</sup> Wesley expands his general statement by naming in particular Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Basil, Ephrem Syrus, and Macarius as expressing his idea of Christian perfection as he understood it (*Works* *ibid.*).

<sup>8</sup> *Works* 7:424-423. When Wesley composed the "Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America," he adapted *The Book of Common Prayer* for the American church, including verbatim the Collect for purity in "The Order of Administration of the Lord's Supper" (125). Soteriology for Anglicans focused on moral transformation, becoming "partakers of the divine nature." Bishop Beveridge (1637-1708), whom Wesley read carefully, had written, "Neither did the death of my Saviour reach only to the condemning, but likewise to the commanding power of sin. It did not

It was as faithful Anglicans that Charles and John Wesley birthed the Holy Club at Oxford, following their decision to enter the priesthood. "In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age," John writes, "I met with Bishop Taylor's *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*. In reading parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to devote all my life to God, all my thoughts and words and actions, being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil" (*Plain Account* 10). After imbibing Taylor, the reading of Thomas a Kempis and William Law deepened his purpose to be "all devoted to God." "In the year 1729," Wesley then significantly notes, "I began not only to read, but to study the Bible as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion" (11).

It was as a high church Anglican that John (with Charles as secretary to General Oglethorpe) went to America "to convert the Indians," only on his return from his failed mission to cry, "Who shall convert me?" Aboard ship in December, 1737, he confided in his Journal the "want" of true saving faith in Christ. But it was Moravian missionary Peter Bohler, whom he met shortly upon his return to London, who finally showed him the scriptural way of Justification by Faith. After several months of preaching saving faith in Christ (not yet experiencing it himself) Wesley made the historic Journal entry of May 24, 1738:

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only pluck out its sting, but likewise deprive it of its strength, so that He did not only merit by His death that I should never die in sin, *but likewise die to it*. Neither did He only merit by His life that I should be *accounted* righteous, but likewise that I should be *made righteous in myself* by God" (cited by William H. Shontz, "Anglican Influence on John Wesley's Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, No.1 (Spring 1997): 37 (emphases added).

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart by faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death (*Works* 1:103).

A "Copernican revolution" (Cell's phrase) had occurred in John Wesley's faith and life. Two years before his death Wesley raised the question:

What was the rise of Methodism, so called? A [Answer]. In 1729, two young men reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their point. God then thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise a holy people (*Works* 8:300).

If it was Peter Bohler who sparked Wesley's faith, it was Aldersgate that certified his faith and set his heart aflame, initiating the Wesleyan Revival with its distinctive message--*that God justifies sinners in order to sanctify them*. Along with justifying faith, the Wesley brothers had learned (first from Holy Scripture and then from experience), *God gives the Holy Spirit*, who then begins a work of moral transformation that issues in *entire* sanctification and Christian perfection in those who "press on" (1 Thess. 5:23; Phil. 3:10-15). Precisely here is our Wesleyan

heritage--an historic *via media* between Protestant and Catholic views of salvation, holiness, and the Christian ethic--as an expression of God's purpose "to raise *a holy people*."<sup>9</sup>

### *The Wesleyan Vision*

The truly new revolutionary aspect of Wesley's theology was his emphasis on *the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit*--that is, the centrality of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. "The title 'holy' applied to the Spirit of God," Wesley writes, "does not only denote that he is holy in himself, but that he makes us so; that he is the great fountain of holiness to his church; the Spirit from whence flows all the grace and virtue, by which the stains of sin are cleansed, and we are renewed in all holy dispositions, and again bear the image of our Creator" (*Works* 7:486).

It was John Wesley's understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and believers that gave his theology a new *focus, source, and form*. In recognition of the role of the Spirit in Christian experience, *the Anglican Trilateral*--Scripture, tradition, and reason--became "*the Wesleyan Quadrilateral*"--Scripture, tradition, reason, *and experience*. The new

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<sup>9</sup> The phrase "holy people" reveals that the Wesleys thought of holiness in *corporate* terms. It is within the Christian *community*, the Church as Christ's body, that we are baptized by water and Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13); yet within this Body we are "members in particular" (v. 27) In Christian experience the corporate and the personal *reinforce each other*. We begin thinking scripturally, however, with the corporate. "To reduce Christianity to a private religion," Wesley writes, "is effectually to destroy it." "Holy solitaries," he said again, "is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than 'holy adulterers.'" The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection" (*Poetical Works* 1:xxiii).

*focus* of Wesley's faith and ethic was on "holiness of heart and life," or Christian perfection; its new *source* was the Holy Spirit in *experience*; its new *form*, "the restoration of the neglected doctrine of holiness to its merited position in the Protestant understanding of Christianity" (Cell 359). In addition, we may speak of another element--a new Wesleyan *thrust*: "to raise a holy people." In the Revival with its preaching and singing, and in the Societies with their *discipline*, Christian holiness had become *missional*. The "Wesleyan Holiness Movement" had been born.

The term "Wesleyan Quadrilateral," coined by Albert Outler in 1964, must however be critically qualified in view of Wesley's conviction of the Bible as the primary source of Christian faith and practice. As we have already noted, from the year 1729, "the Bible" was for him, "the one, the only standard of truth." From that date he was *homo unius libri*, "a man of one book" ("Preamble," *Works* 5:3). Taking into account the primacy of Scripture in Wesley's reflections on the nature of truth, Randy Maddox observes: "Indeed, Wesley's so-called 'quadrilateral' ... could more adequately be described as a *unilateral rule* of Scripture within a *trilateral hermeneutic* of reason, tradition, and experience" (46).

Having traced our historical lineage as those who walk in the steps of John Wesley, the vision that should guide clergy preparation for the people called Nazarenes should now be clear: *the vision of a holy people faithful to God and the Church of God*. For Wesley, "scriptural holiness" was more than a "belief system"--it was faith and praxis, a way of *life*.<sup>10</sup> It was *practicing God's presence* through observing all the Means of Grace.<sup>11</sup> It was the way of *good*

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<sup>10</sup> In the OT it is the "the Way of Holiness" (Is. 35:8-10, NIV; 62:12) defined by Torah; in Acts it is simply "the Way" (9:2;18:26;19:9;24:14,22) of Christ's gospel.

<sup>11</sup> See Randy Maddox' "Re-connecting the Means to the End" in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, No. 2 (Fall 1998) 38-44.

*works*-- both "*works of mercy*" and "*works of piety*."<sup>12</sup> Above all, it was living the Sermon on the Mount as the way of the kingdom.<sup>13</sup> It is this all-embracing understanding of *what it means to be God's holy people* that we must keep front and center as we look closely at John Wesley's distinctive doctrine of Christian Perfection. As we do so, we will see the justice of Cell's claim that the English reformer's reconstruction of the Christian gospel and ethic does indeed constitute "an original and unique synthesis" of the Protestant doctrine of Justification and the Catholic ideal of holiness and perfection. Listen to Wesley in his sermon "On God's Vineyard":

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<sup>12</sup>For Wesley, *works of mercy* (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick and in prison) take priority over *works of piety* (observing all the Means of Grace, as above) and are *both* essential to the well-being of the Church, to carry out its mission. The two kinds of works are not to be considered apart from each other. "Are you better instructed than to put asunder what God has joined? Than to separate works of piety from works of mercy?" (*Works* 3:320). By these means, says Wesley, the Methodists are "to spread scriptural religion throughout the land, among people of every denomination" (*Works* 3:511; see Runyon 106-07).

<sup>13</sup>Thirteen of Wesley's forty-one "Standard Sermons" were "Discourses on the Sermon on the Mount." "The fact that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount told people to behave as if the kingdom was already present," N.T. Wright, Canon of Westminster, argues; "(it) has the same function as saying, 'If I, by the Spirit/finger of God, cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Mt. 12:28/Lk. 11:20).... It is as though he were to say, 'If I command you to behave as those with renewed hearts, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.'" Wright continues: "One of the great promises of restoration, of return from exile, concerned the renewal of heart," supporting his claim by quoting Deut. 30:6-10, Jer. 31:33; 32:38-40, and Ezek. 36:26-27 (the same texts Wesley cited as promising "The Great Salvation" on the NT). "In other words renewal of covenant and renewal of heart go together... The all-important distinction is not between outward and inward, or between earning grace and receiving it, but between the outer *and* inner state which is evil all through ... and that outer *and* inward state which is being renewed all through.... If, therefore, Jesus was announcing that the time of returning and renewal was now dawning, we should actually expect that the kingdom-story he told would be designed to produce *both* the inward state *and* the outward praxis which would be appropriate for that renewal" (Wright 281-283). Here is the Anglican-Wesley theme of "holiness of heart and life."

It has been frequently observed, that very few were clear in their judgment both with regard to justification and sanctification. Who has wrote (sic) more ably than Martin Luther on justification by faith alone? And who was more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification, or more confused in his conceptions of it? ... On the other hand, how many writers of the Roman Church (of Francis Sales and Juan Castiniza, in particular) have wrote strongly and scripturally on sanctification, who, nevertheless, were entirely unacquainted with the nature of justification! insomuch as the whole body of their Divines in the Council of Trent ... totally confound sanctification and justification together. But it has pleased God to give the Methodists a full and clear knowledge of each, and the wide difference between them.

They know, indeed, that at the same time a man is justified, sanctification properly begins. For when he is justified he is "born again," "born of the Spirit;" which, although it is not (as some suppose) the whole process of sanctification, is doubtless the gate to it. Of this likewise, God has given [the Methodists] a full view....

They maintain, with equal zeal and diligence, the doctrine of free, full, present justification, on the one hand, and of entire sanctification both of heart and life on the other; being as tenacious of inward holiness as any Mystic, and of outward, as any Pharisee (*Works* 7:204-205).

The genius of Wesleyan teaching is that it neither confounds or divorces justification and sanctification, but places "equal stress on one and the other" (Cell). In his sermon, "On Working Out Your Own Salvation," Wesley outlines the Order of Salvation as he understands it:

Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) *preventing*<sup>14</sup> grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency towards life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by *convincing* grace, usually in Scripture termed *repentance*; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, "through grace," we are "saved by faith;" consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power<sup>15</sup> and root<sup>16</sup> of sin, and restored to the image of God.<sup>17</sup> All experience, as well as Scripture, show this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as "a grain of mustard seed, which, at first is the least of all seeds," but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man.<sup>18</sup> But even that love increases

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<sup>14</sup> "Preventing" derives from the Latin *pre* ("before") and *venire* ("to come"). The more common term is "*prevenient* grace."

<sup>15</sup>In justification and the new birth, which occur simultaneously.

<sup>16</sup>In entire sanctification, when our hearts are purified from "the hard core of idolatrous self-love" (Richard S. Taylor). By "root" Wesley means not a material but a psychological entity: *egocentricity*. All sins "root" back into this "egotism, which is the essence of (our) fallenness" (see Cranfield 1:386-387; Greathouse 114-115).

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (see Greathouse 1998 141-142; kivar 144-145).

<sup>18</sup> "Pure" here means love "unmixed" with sinful self-interest. "Till this universal change is wrought in his soul, all his holiness was *mixed*... His whole soul is now consistent with itself, there is no jarring string... no mixture of any

more and more, till we "grow up into Him that is our Head;" till we attain "the measure of the fullness of Christ."<sup>19</sup>

It is imperative that we understand that justification and sanctification are not merely two points along a lineal continuum; rather they are two ways of viewing salvation, two aspects of the work of God in redeeming us from sin.

Justification, or righteousness (the same Greek word, *hagiosune*, is used for both), defines *right relationship* with God, by grace through faith ("pardon and acceptance," Wesley). Initially, we are justified "by faith alone" (Rom. 3:28); presently, we are justified by "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6); finally, we will be justified by works ("not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition")<sup>20</sup> (Rom. 2:13). On his deathbed Wesley whispered, "What have I to trust to for my salvation? I can see nothing which I have done or suffered that will bear looking at. I have no other plea than this: 'I the chief of sinners am/But Jesus died for me'" (Fitchett 510-511). Righteousness by faith is the *objective* meaning of Christian salvation.

Sanctification, or holiness (the same Greek word, *hagiasmos*, is used for both), is the *moral description* of salvation (2 Thess. 2:13). Its *genesis* is in prevenient grace (1 Pet. 1:2); justification and the new birth *initiate* sanctification (1 Cor. 6:11; Tit. 3:4-7); *entire*

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contrary affections" (*Works* 6:489). "Purity of heart is to will one thing" (Kierkegaard). "Pure love" is singleness of heart (Greathouse 1998 177-178; kivar 180-181).

<sup>19</sup>The "perfect man" of this passage in Ephesians 4 (1-16) is the *corporate* Body of Christ where love is "the perfect bond of unity" (Col. 3:14, NASB).

<sup>20</sup>*Works* 8:337-338. "And though no one is a real Christian Believer (and consequently cannot be saved) who doth not good works, where there is time and opportunity, yet our Works have no part in meriting or purchasing our Justification from first to last, either in whole or in part" (Tyerman 3:100)

sanctification is the *perfecting* of believers in holiness and love (1 Thess. 5:23);<sup>21</sup> the process of sanctification is finalized in *glorification* (1 John 3:2). Sanctification through the working of the Holy Spirit is the *subjective* meaning of Christian salvation. Justification and sanctification are thus two aspects of one divine reality. Therefore, "What God has joined together let no one put asunder!"

In his 1765 sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" Wesley even more carefully nuances the finer points of his synthesis of justification and sanctification,<sup>22</sup> explaining, "At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, *sanctification* begins. In that instant we are 'born again', 'born from above', 'born of the Spirit'. There is a *real* as well as a *relative* change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God." In the glow of the new birth we easily imagine that all sin is gone. "How easily do we draw the inference, 'I *feel* no sin; therefore I *have* none.'" It is not long, however, until "sin revives, showing it was but stunned before, not dead." Wesley cites Macarius, who "fourteen hundred years before" described "this present experience of children of God," in support of his position.

Although the *reign* of sin has been broken, in time we become painfully aware that sin *remains*. Just the same, "From the time of our being 'born again' the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled 'by the Spirit' to mortify the deeds of the body....

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<sup>21</sup> See Greathouse 1998 134-138; kivar 137-141).

<sup>22</sup> *Works* 6:43-54. Taking his title from this sermon, Kenneth J. Collins (drawing from Wesley's entire literary corpus (sermons, letters, theological treatises, journals, and notes on the Old and New Testaments) reconstructs Wesley's "remarkably sophisticated" theological synthesis of justification and sanctification. Richard P. Heitzenrater says of Collins' treatment, "The result is not only a lucid exposition and distinctive interpretation of Wesley's thought, but also a good introduction to many of the currently disputed issues in Wesley studies." The strength of the volume is Collins' seeking to "let Wesley speak for himself."

And as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God.... It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or, as the Apostle expresses it, 'Go on to perfection.'"

"But what is perfection," Wesley then asks. "The word has various senses; but here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.... How clearly does this express the being perfected in love! How strongly imply the being saved from all sin! For as long as love takes up the whole heart, what room is there for sin therein?"

While entire sanctification or perfection, like justification, is "entirely by faith," the conviction of remaining sin (wrought by the Holy Spirit), with repentance and good works, precedes sanctifying faith. However, Wesley stresses,

The repentance consequent upon justification is widely different from that which is antecedent to it. This implies no guilt, no sense of condemnation, no consciousness of the wrath of God. It does not suppose any doubt of the favour of God, or any 'fear that hath torment'. It is properly a conviction wrought by the Holy Ghost of the 'sin' which still 'remains' in the heart, of the *phronema sarkos*, 'the carnal mind', which 'does still remain', as our Church speaks, 'even in them that are regenerate'--although it does no longer *reign*, it has now no dominion over them. It is a conviction of our proneness to evil, of an heart 'bent on backsliding'.... It is the conviction of the tendency of our heart to self-will, to atheism, to idolatry; and above all to unbelief, whereby in a thousand ways, and under a thousand pretences, we are ever 'departing' more or less 'from the living God.'

Furthermore, as works meet for repentance follow repentance for *sins* committed, so good works accompany repentance for remaining *sin*, "where there is time and opportunity." But what are those good works necessary for sanctification? "First, **Wesley says** all works of *piety*" (such as prayer, receiving the Lord's Supper, searching the Scriptures by hearing, reading, and meditating, and fasting). "Secondly, all works of *mercy*" (doing good to the bodies and souls of others, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, endeavoring to awaken sinners, instruct the ignorant, and "contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death").

However, Wesley continues, "though it be allowed that both this repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation, yet they are not necessary either in the *same sense* with faith or in the same *degree*." They are necessary only "if there be time and opportunity." *But without faith we cannot be entirely sanctified.*

'But what is the faith whereby we are sanctified, saved from sin and perfected in love?' It is the divine evidence and conviction, first, that God hath promised it in the Holy Scripture. Till we are thoroughly satisfied of this there is no moving one step farther. And one would imagine there needed not one word more ... than the ancient promise, 'Then will I circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul'....

It is the divine evidence and conviction, secondly, that what God hath promised he is *able* to perform....

It is, thirdly, the divine evidence and conviction that he is able and willing to do it *now*.... We may therefore boldly say, at any point of time, 'Now is the day of salvation.' 'Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts'....

To this confidence, that God is both able and willing to sanctify us *now*, there needs to be added one thing more, a divine evidence and conviction that *he doeth it*. In

that hour it is done.... The believer then experiences the deep meaning of those solemn words, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' ...

If you seek it by faith, you may expect it *as you are*; and if as you are, then expect it *now!* ...

Come in, come in, thou heavenly Guest!  
Nor hence again remove:  
But sup with me, and let the feast  
Be everlasting love.

Wesley's fully developed doctrine is set forth in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*,<sup>23</sup> which in its final edition, in 1777, remained Wesley's definitive statement of his vision of holiness.<sup>24</sup>

### *A Wesleyan Vision of Christian Perfection*

In defining his vision of holiness as Christian perfection Wesley drew upon a time-honored term for spiritual formation that, as Cell says, he found "in the warp and woof" of Holy

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<sup>23</sup>John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Reprinted from the complete original text as authorized by the Wesleyan Conference Office in London, 1872, by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Missouri; first edition unabridged, 1966). The account is also found in Wesley's *Works* 11:366-448.

<sup>24</sup>In reading the *Plain Account*, however, one must take note that Wesley is delineating in it the *progress* of his thought, from 1725 to 1777. Some quotations from its earlier sections do not necessarily represent his mature position as found in the latter part of the work. Discrimination must therefore be exercised in reading this important summary of Wesley's thought on Christian Perfection.

Scripture, as well as from the richest and deepest stream of Christian tradition, as R. Newton Flew claims:

The doctrine of Christian perfection--understood not as an assertion that a final attainment of the goal of the Christian life is possible in this world, but as a declaration that a supernatural destiny, a relative attainment of the goal which does not exclude growth, is the will of God for us in this world and is attainable--lies not merely upon the bypaths of Christian theology, but upon the high road.<sup>25</sup>

"The chief interest and significance of Wesley as a theologian," Outler writes, "lie in the integrity and vitality of his doctrine as a whole. Within that whole, the most distinctive single element was the notion of 'Christian perfection.' In this he has been consistently misunderstood by all who would understand the English word 'perfect' as a translation of the Latin *perfectio*. In medieval Latin *perfectus* meant 'faultless' -- inimprovable!" (30). That this idea of perfection was *not* Wesley's is clear from a caution he made in the annual conference of 1770: "Does not talking, without proper caution, of a justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead men; almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas we are every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works; according to the whole of our present tempers and outward behaviour."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Christian Life* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1934). The student is also referred to more recent treatments of the theme from a different perspective by Paul M. Bassett, *From the Apostolic Fathers to Early Protestantism*, in *Exploring Christian Holiness, Vol. 2: Its Historical Development* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1985)15-199, and Paul M. Bassett, *Holiness Teaching--New Testament Times to Wesley in Great Holiness Classics, Vol. 1*(Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> *Works* 8:338.

Wesley's view of perfection, Outler rightly points out, is not that of *perfectio*. It rather represents a different tradition -- "the *teleiosis* of 'Macarius,' Gregory and Ephraem, the 'holiness' of [Anglicans] Jewel, Hall, and Taylor" (31). As *teleological*, Wesleyan perfection is the *process* by which we are *increasingly conformed* to the *end* for which God created us: complete Christlikeness (see 1 John 3:2-3). The adjective *teleios*, the NT word for "perfect," in the broadest sense, describes something that has arrived at its *telos*, which has actualized its *raison d'etre*. Biologically, *teleios* may be rendered "full-grown," "mature," or "adult."<sup>27</sup>

Of *teleios* Barclay writes, "It has nothing to do with what we might call abstract, philosophical, metaphysical perfection.... A thing is perfect if it fully realizes the purpose for which it was planned, and designed, and made.... A man is perfect if he realizes the purpose for which he was created and sent into the world."<sup>28</sup> In one word, Christian perfection is *functional*, as will be seen in the passages in the NT that employ *teleios* and its cognates.

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RSV). Match this experiential declaration with Paul's theological assertion in Rom. 8: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn in a large family" (8:29 NRSV). All that God does in the lives of those who: to make us like Christ (8:28).

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<sup>27</sup> Wesley thus understood the "perfect" to be "adult" children of God (Heb. 5:11--6:1) or "fathers" in the faith (1 Jno. 2:12-14).

<sup>28</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol 1 in *The Daily Study Bible* ( Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 176.

Second, Christian perfection is *perfect love*, (Matt. 5:43-48; 1 Jno. 2:5-6; 4:12-18). Both Wesley and Adam Clarke had problems with the term "perfect," because of its misleading connotations. Wesley in fact once considered letting the word drop; however, since it is a scriptural term, he could not do so.<sup>29</sup> Clarke said, "Had I a better name, I would gladly adopt and use it.... But there is none in our language, which I deplore as an inconvenience and loss." Instead of discarding the term, Clarke, ever the linguist, focused on the central idea of *teleios*: attuned to our true end. So in his *Christian Theology* we read: "As God requires every man to love him with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, then he is a perfect man that does so; *he answers to the end for which God made him.*"<sup>30</sup>

Perfect love also carries with it the OT notion of *tamim*, which in Gen. 17:1 means "complete, unqualified surrender." In Deut. 20:5 it carries the further meaning "without ulterior motives, unreserved." "It further carries the meaning of 'openness' or 'wholeness.' All these reflect a 'perfect' relationship with God."<sup>31</sup>

In his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Wesley asks, "But what is perfection? The word has various senses: but here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.... How clearly does this express the being

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<sup>29</sup> "As to the word, it is scriptural," Wesley pointed out to Penelope Maitland; "therefore neither you nor I can in conscience object against it, unless we would send the Holy Ghost to school and teach him how to speak who made the tongue" (Letters 5:223).

<sup>30</sup> Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology*, ed. Samuel Dunn (New York: T. Mason and G.Lane, 1840), 246 (emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> H. Ray Dunning, *A Layman's Guide to Sanctification* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991), 53.

perfected in love! How strongly imply being saved from all sin! For as long as love takes up the whole heart, what room is there for sin therein?" For Wesley, Christian perfection is "the expulsive power" of divine love, the "quintessence" of sanctification.<sup>32</sup>

Such is perfect love. But perfect love is not a human achievement; it is a divine gift. "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5 NIV). But before we can be filled with love we must be emptied of self. For Wesley, there is only "one *kind* of holiness" -- "love to God and man." In the unsanctified this love is *mixed* with sinful self-interest, blocking true growth in holiness. But after the heart has been cleansed, our "whole soul is consistent with itself" and we enjoy "*pure* love to God and man." Then, and only then, is it possible to "be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."<sup>33</sup> Commenting on Rom. 5:5, Peter Stuhlmacher writes, "In being filled with the Spirit, the promise of Ezek. 36:26ff. is realized for those who believe, so that they become capable of returning the love of God bestowed upon them (v. 8), that is, to love God as their creator in accordance with his will. In this active love, supported by the Spirit, Christians *complete* the state of grace into which they were transferred through Christ."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For a full exploration of this idea see A. Skevington Wood, *Love Excluding Sin: Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification* (Occasional Paper No. 1 of the Wesley Fellowship). "Love' - 'pure love' - 'love expelling sin' - 'perfect love': these express the designations Wesley employed to express the quintessence of sanctification" (10).

<sup>33</sup> *Works* 6:487-489. See John Wesley's sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart," where he defines Christian perfection as "that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; *and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin ... and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus, the being 'renewed in the image of the mind,' as to be 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect'"* (*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 12).

<sup>34</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Louisville, 1994: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 80 (emphasis added). Stuhlmacher's understanding of Rom. 5:5 is in harmony with that of N.T. Wright, who says of

Wesley notes that "what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh," God has done in Christ: "God sending His own Son, in the likeness of that flesh, though pure from sin, *condemned* that *sin* which was *in* our *flesh*; gave sentence, that sin should be destroyed, and the believer wholly delivered from it" (Rom. 8:3). The sin that, as a consequence of the Fall, has lodged in human flesh, has met its Waterloo! This is the *Christus Victor* idea of the Atonement. On the very ground where sin had ensconced itself--in human flesh--the Son of God has vanquished sin and potentially sanctified our human existence!<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, for Wesley, Christian perfection is *relational*. That is, it involves a perfected *relationship with Christ* that makes possible, not a "sinless" but a *relative moral*

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Rom. 5:5, "The *Shema* [Deut. 6:4-5] is at last fulfilled" in "Romans and the Theology of Paul," *Pauline Theology III, Romans* (ed. David M. Hays and E. Elizabeth Johnson [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989], 24. See also Wright's statements in footnote 13, page 6, where he sees the Kingdom as Christ's fulfillment of the OT promises of holiness in the passages Wesley saw as the OT promise of "holiness of heart and life."

<sup>35</sup> Although Wesley did not *develop* the *Christus Victor* idea of the Atonement, an examination of his many writings demonstrates that he understood this motif of Christ's work with reference to sanctification (see Greathouse, "John Wesley's View of the Last Things," in *The Second Coming: a Wesleyan Approach to the Doctrine of Last Things*, ed. H. Ray Dunning [Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1995], 142-148). Following the Oxford University listing at the time, Wesley's enumeration of the Church Fathers who stand in the holiness tradition does not include Irenaeus, the greatest and most influential of the Fathers who advanced the *Christus Victor* idea, which has rightly been called "the classic idea of the Atonement" (see Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*, trans. A. G. Hebert [New York: Macmillan, 1951] and Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999], 49-67.) The patristic understanding of Christ's work greatly strengthens the NT teaching of sanctification. For an introduction, see William M. Greathouse, "Sanctification and the Christus Victor Motif in Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 7, No. 1 (Spring 1972):47-59; also Greathouse (1997 55-76; 1998 111-113; kivar 114-116).

*perfection*, a freedom from conscious sin that lives by trust in Christ's atoning blood. His account of this truth is contained in the following extended statement near the end of his *Plain Account*:

The holiest of men still need Christ, as their Prophet, as 'the light of the world.' For he does not give them light, but from moment to moment; the instant He withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ.... The best of men say, "Thou art my light, my holiness, my heaven. Through my union with Thee, I am full of light, of holiness, and happiness. But if I were left to myself, I should be nothing but sin, darkness, hell."

... The best of men need Christ as their Priest, their Advocate with the Father; not only as the continuance of their every blessing depends on His death and intercession, but on account of their coming short of the law of love. For every man living does so. You who feel all love, compare yourselves with the previous description **and that is found 2 pages earlier in the Plain Account** (of the law of love in 1 Cor. 13).<sup>36</sup> Weigh yourselves in this balance, and see if you are not wanting in many particulars.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See *Plain Account*, 81-82.

<sup>37</sup> Wesley thus distinguishes "the law of love," which is *absolute*, from "perfect love," which is *relative*.

Wesley then concedes that the term "sinless perfection" is not quite proper, since "the perfect transgress the very law they are under."<sup>38</sup>

Now, what is the *sine qua non* of entering and continuing to enjoy perfect love? For Wesley, it was always, and invariably, the Means of Grace that Christ instituted, which the Church extended, designed to bring believers *into*, and sustain them *in*, "the loving of God with all their heart, soul, and mind" and "the loving of one's neighbor as oneself." In believers seeking "entire renewal in the image of God," he says, it is essential that they should wait for the fulfillment of God's promise

Not in careless indifference, or indolent inactivity; but in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves and taking up of our cross daily; as well as in earnest prayer and fasting, and in close attention to all the ordinances of God. And if any man

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<sup>38</sup> The handmaiden of perfect love, therefore, is a continuing penitence of spirit. Those who have been made perfect in love pray with all believers, "Forgive us our sins" (Lk. 11:4). The Spirit who fills us with God's love "guides us toward openness and honesty in our relation with God. He exposes all that is false and ungentle in us and brings reality and integrity to our inner lives. He illuminates our world fabricated about self and will not tolerate any self-deceptions" (Carver 65). J. O. McClurkin coined the phrase "deeper deaths to self," in recognition that "there remained in many the uprisings of motives, feelings and attitudes inconsistent with perfect love ('the perfect law' of love, Wesley would say). These remaining manifestations would be addressed in this 'deeper death.' ...In the blessing of 'entire sanctification' a person dies to the sinful self, but, he argued, there is a life-long dying to the natural self" (Strickland 89-90). Another way of dealing with the paradox (perfect but not yet perfected) is to distinguish between the "reactions" of our natural ego, and the "response" of our spirit. On this basis E. Stanley Jones explained growth in holiness as "the gradual sanctification of our reactions." See also Greathouse 1997, 63-73.

dream of retaining it when it is attained, when he receiveth it in the largest measure,) he deceiveth his own soul. It is true, we receive it by simple faith: But God does not, will not give that faith, unless we seek it with all diligence, in the way that he hath ordained.<sup>39</sup>

Christian perfection, therefore, is not primarily a "belief system"; it is worship and practice.<sup>40</sup> The very word "orthodoxy" is instructive; derived from Latin, the word literally means "right *praise*." Christian perfection is the worship of God in the beauty of holiness.

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<sup>39</sup> *Works* 9:402-403. "As the works of Gregory Clapper, Richard Steele, and Randy Maddox have amply

demonstrated, Wesley understood the Christian life to consist of a pattern of affections or 'holy tempers,' rooted and grounded in the heart of believers. For Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, this way of conceiving of the Christian life was in contrast to the typical anthropologies of their day, which presupposed a conflict between reason and 'the passions.' The rationalists, for example, argued that reason need to control the will rather than its being subdued by the passions, for while the latter tempted to sin, the former could ensure moral choices. Maddox has show how this anthropology supplants that of Wesley in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries among both the partisans and opponents of the holiness movement... For Wesley and Edwards, the affections provided a more holistic anthropology, integrating the mind and the heart... We cannot have Christian affections apart from an ongoing relationship with God. To forget, ignore, or reject God is to replace God with some other object of our love... As we bring our whole lives to worship God, we render our lives worshipful. This is the essential interrelation of liturgy and ethics, or, in John Wesley's language, of acts of piety and acts of mercy" Henry H. Knight III, "Worship and Sanctification," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32. No. 1 (Fall 1997): 12, 13, 14. See Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections* (Methuen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1989); Richard S. Steele, "*Gracious Affection*" and "*True Virtue*" *According to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1994); Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, N.J., & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1992); and Dean G. Blevins, "Means of Grace: Toward a Wesleyan Praxis of Spiritual Formation," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, No. 1 (Spring 1997). See also above, footnote 12, page 6.

## *The Nazarene Vision*

It was the Wesleyan vision of holiness as perfect love, or Christlikeness, that captured the mind and heart of Dr. Phineas F. Bresee, the "architect" of the Nazarene vision.<sup>41</sup>

The Wesleyan vision, suffused with the "Pentecostal" emphasis of John Fletcher and the 19<sup>th</sup> century holiness movement, became for Dr. Bresee a vision of *the baptismal fullness of the Spirit* for the Church of God.<sup>42</sup> Bresee's vision--like that of the early Anglicans and Wesley--was for him a fresh recovery of primitive Christianity. As the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision of a holy people with "a new name" (see 62:1-5), Spirit-filled Nazarenes had been raised of God to "Christianize Christianity"! The first Nazarene *Manual* graphically explains Bresee's vision:

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<sup>40</sup> John W. Wright, "Wesley's Theology as Methodist Practice: Toward a Post-modern Retrieval of the Wesleyan Tradition," paper delivered at the Wesleyan Theological Society, Southern Nazarene University, March 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Paul Culbertson, who had known Dr. Bresee personally and talked with him on these matters, told the author that Bresee saw 2 Cor. 3:18 as most fully illuminating the meaning of Christian holiness. From this text he preached his great sermon, "The Transferred Vision." In prayer and worship the image of Christ is transferred to the believer "from one degree of glory to another." This text ties together Bresee's recurrent plea, "O Nazarenes, keep the glory down!" and his deep conviction that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is not simply an emotional but primarily an *ethical* experience.

<sup>42</sup> In his words, "This is the dispensation in which Jesus Christ baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit and fire." Article X of our Articles of Faith is in one sense an historical affirmation. Of the six terms used in the Article to define Entire Sanctification, three of from John Wesley and three from Fletcher and the modern holiness movement.

Feeling called of God to the carrying on of his work in the conversion of sinners, the sanctification of believers and the building up in holiness of those who may be committed to our care, we associate ourselves together as a Church of God under the name of the  
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE.

*We seek the simplicity and the pentecostal power of the primitive New Testament Church.* The field of our labor to which we feel especially called is in the neglected quarters of the cities and wherever else may be found waste places and souls seeking pardon and cleansing from sin. This work we aim to do through the agency of city missions, evangelistic services, house to house visitation, caring for the poor, comforting the dying. To this end we strive personally to walk with God and to incite others so to do.<sup>43</sup>

Tying together both the doctrinal and practical elements of Wesley's view of Christian holiness, this *holistic* statement of Christian perfection qualifies the Church of the Nazarene as an expression of *primitive* Christianity. Beginning with the second *Manual* in 1903, a clause is added that has remained in the statement to the present: "together with the preaching of the Gospel to every creature." The current statement defines our mission as those who seek "holy Christian fellowship, the conversion of sinners, the entire sanctification of believers, their upbuilding in holiness, *and the simplicity and spiritual power manifest in the primitive New Testament Church, together with the preaching of the gospel to every creature.*"<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, promulgated by the Assembly of 1898, held in Los Angeles, Cal.* (Committee of Publication), 13. (In paragraph 2 the spelling was originally "primitive." In all subsequent editions of the *Manual* the spelling has been corrected to "primitive.")

<sup>44</sup> *Manual/1997-2001/Church of the Nazarene*, 35.

The Nazarene statement of purpose reflects the original vision of the Church of England, as enlarged and clarified by John Wesley. It defines the Church as both *holiness* and *missional*, reflecting the scriptural vision of the Wesley brothers:

In 1729, two young men reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their point. God then thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise a holy people.

It all sounds much like what happened in October 1895, when Phineas F. Bresee and that early band went out "under the stars" to forge the denomination we call the Church of the Nazarene!

### ***The Biblical Vision***

Everything I have argued up to this point is but preliminary to what must now be said: a final word about the primacy of Scripture.

The Wesleyan tradition began with "two young men *studying the Bible*." After 1729 John Wesley was "a man of one book." His sermons were veritable catenas of Scripture. He literally *lived* in the Bible. His mind was filled with its words, and his pastoral letters were laced with references from "the Book of God," as were his prayers and treatises. His final appeal was always to "the oracles of God." Nevertheless, Wesley was no fundamentalist. He devoted the years of his life writing his Notes upon the Old and New Testaments, utilizing the best tools of biblical scholarship available at his time. All the above, moreover, was done in the service of

evangelism, spiritual formation, and the edification of the Church. To read and study John Wesley is to have a faithful introduction to biblical theology, if the term might be allowed. The edifying power of his "practical theology" derived from his own faithful walk with God, which drew upon the Means of Grace he urged upon others. With Phineas F. Bresee, John and Charles Wesley might well have said of their life mission, "To this end we strive personally to walk with God and to incite others so to do." Here, indeed, is the secret of holiness.

The task of our global Church is not to promulgate Western Christianity, or Eastern Christianity, and certainly not American Christianity, but to teach and preach "the word of God (which) is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, ... and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12 NASB). Our confidence is that the Spirit bears witness to that Word, at times despite the cultural accretions we bring along with it! The Spirit is the great contextualizer of Scripture, enduing the Word with convicting, justifying, and sanctifying power.<sup>45</sup> Our confidence is in the gospel, "For it is the power of God for salvation to

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<sup>45</sup> "The dual Wesleyan emphasis on the soteriological purpose of Scripture and on the vital role of the internal witness of the Scripture in authenticating its validity can provide a valuable corrective to the more rationalistic and objective approaches to contextualization. What is needed today is a 'transformational hermeneutic.' The goal of contextualization must be the transformation of people in their concrete historical and cultural situations. Our choice is not between 'orthodoxy' and 'orthopraxy.' Such a polarization is foreign to the gospel itself. Syncretism can occur equally at the level of behavior as at the level of theology. Wesley rightly stressed that application and obedience are essential to any understanding of Scripture. Likewise, Wesleyans hold that the Holy Spirit 'subjectively validates the truth of Scripture in its spiritually transforming intent.' The Wesleyan response to Scripture cannot be satisfied with correct belief. It must involve the disposition of the heart and will which results in loving actions. The Spirit must speak through the Scripture to transform the interpreter as well as the receptors (i.e., those in the second and third horizons) if the contextualized message is to ring true.... We may be able to adapt the biblical teaching on holiness, for example, to our culture on a theological level, but if we do not internalize it and

everyone who has faith" in "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:24).

To the above end our Nazarene scholars worldwide must in time follow the example of our European scholars who have undertaken the task of "re-minting" Wesleyan holiness, giving it true European *and Biblical* expression.<sup>46</sup> It is indeed a daunting task. It is an undertaking that demands utter fidelity to the truth of Entire Sanctification and Christian perfection as taught by John Wesley, while at the same time freeing the Bible from its cultural baggage, so far as that is possible, in order that the Word might do its *full* saving work, wherever our Church finds itself on planet earth.

*The task of clergy preparation in the Church of the Nazarene is to prepare men and women to "unleash the Bible" under the Spirit's guidance and anointing, as Scripture has been "exhibited"<sup>47</sup> within the "interpretive community" of the Holiness Tradition in the Church catholic, particularly as mediated to us through the faith and practice of John and Charles Wesley and Phineas F. Bresee.*

## ***Conclusion***

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allow it to transform our lifestyles it is of little value" (Dean Flemming, "The Third Horizon: A Wesleyan Contribution to the Contextualization Debate," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30, No. 2, (Fall 1995): 145-147.

<sup>46</sup> *European Explorations in Christian Holiness* 1 (Sept. 1999), Editor, D.D. Swanson

<sup>47</sup> It is crucially important to understand Hauerwas' words here, particularly "exhibited." For the theological significance of the latter term the student is directed to H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness* 97-115; 123-132; 140-150; also to H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* 1:142. See also Samuel Powell and Michael Lodahl, ed. *Embodied Holiness*.

Question: What is the story we have been called to declare to the nations?

Answer: It is the story of the holy God creating a holy people for his holy purposes.

The urgent need of the hour is the Church's recovery of its pre-Constantinian understanding of itself as the people of God called to be holy as he is holy, and, as the Body of Christ, commanded to be perfect in love, as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

The Early Church had experienced Christ's healing grace and took with all seriousness the new commandment to love one another--with the love that he himself had sealed with his own blood and shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Love as understood in the Greco-Roman culture was *eros*, which was sometimes viewed as a noble self-love advocated (but not always practiced) by its ethical teachers but which was more popularly understood and practiced as the sensuality and hedonism of its pagan gods. The love the early Christians had been given was *agape*, *God's own love in the Spirit*, which compelled them to die to themselves, and at times even lay down their lives, in their response to God's self-giving love, as his witnesses (martyrs). Church historian Adolph Harnack somewhere wrote that it was the "charity" and "chastity" of those early Christians that shook the foundations of the pagan Roman Empire. It is for a revival of such *love* and *purity* in Christ's Body, and for a renewal of *the primitive understanding of the Church as a counter-culture of holy love* that we must today rededicate ourselves!<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Preface," Greathouse 1998.

Such an understanding of primitive Christianity is the vision that God has "vouchsafed" to the Church of the Nazarene, John Wesley would say, as we endeavor to "cooperate effectually with other branches of the Church of Jesus Christ in advancing God's kingdom" on earth.<sup>49</sup>

For this magnificent task we have the promise of Christ:

*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth* (John 15:13).

*The hour has come, and now is, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship must worship in Spirit and Truth* (John 4:23-24).

Let us therefore pray:

*Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy holy Name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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<sup>49</sup> "Preamble, Articles of Faith," *Manual*.

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