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A Publication of The Salvation Army

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**Word & Deed Mission Statement:**

The purpose of the journal is to encourage and disseminate the thinking of Salvationists and other Christian colleagues on matters broadly related to the theology and ministry of The Salvation Army. The journal provides a means to understand topics central to the mission of The Salvation Army, integrating the Army's theology and ministry in response to Christ's command to love God and our neighbor.

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Contributions related to the mission of the journal will be encouraged, and at times there will be a general call for papers related to specific subjects. The Salvation Army is not responsible for every view which may be expressed in this journal. Manuscripts should be approximately 12-15 pages, including endnotes. Please submit the following: 1) three hard copies of the manuscript with the author's name (with rank and appointment if an officer) on the cover page only. This ensures objectivity during the evaluation process. Only manuscripts without the author's name will be evaluated. The title of the article should appear at the top of the first page of the text, and the manuscript should utilize *Word & Deed* endnote guidelines. All Bible references should be from the New International Version. If another version is used throughout the article, indicate the version in the first textual reference only. If multiple versions are used, please indicate the version each time it changes; 2) a copy on a disk or CD, using Microsoft Word format; 3) a 100-word abstract of the article to be used at the discretion of the editor (e.g., on The Salvation Army's web page or in advertisements pertaining to the journal). Please note that neither the hard copies nor the disk will be returned to the author and that all manuscripts are subject to editorial review. Once articles have been selected for inclusion, the deadlines for submitting final material for the journal are March 1 and September 1. A style sheet is available upon request.

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# Word & Deed

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Vol. 10, No. 2

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# Holiness Revisited

No topic has been more discussed in the pages of *Word & Deed* since its beginning ten years ago than holiness. Some of the finest, most illuminating writing on holiness by Salvationist authors is published in the first decade of this scholarly journal. Our contributing authors included Donald E. Burke, R. David Rightmire, Wayne Pritchett, William W. Francis, Phil Needham, Jonathan S. Raymond, Roger J. Green, John G. Merritt, Lyell Rader, and Earl Robinson. Together these ten Army authors contributed 13 articles which speak to our theology of holiness. It is interesting to note the absence of female contributors to the Army's holiness literature both in this journal and historically which is a matter of reflection and hopefully correction in the future.

This 20th issue marks the completion of ten years of *Word & Deed* in print. Just as we started the first issue with an emphasis on the Army's doctrinal distinctive, it is fitting that we celebrate a decade of writings on a broad array of topics, but especially with a focus again on holiness as the central doctrine and distinctive of Salvation Army theology.

The Salvation Army has always held a place in the stream of thinking and writing within the Wesleyan Holiness movement. It not surprising that The Salvation Army was asked to participate in a special study group called together to review the matter of holiness, discuss its biblical and theological foundations, and issue a call to the Church for a renewed emphasis on holiness. It was our privilege as co-editors of *Word & Deed*, along with Lt. Col. Lyell Rader, to represent The Salvation Army in the discussions and writings of the study group. In the first article in this issue Professor Don Thorsen reports on the Wesleyan

Holiness Study Project now in its fifth year of dialogue and productivity. In *The Holiness Manifesto: An Ecumenical Document*, Thorsen presents us with an historical description of the project and shares verbatim *The Holiness Manifesto*. The stated purpose of the *Manifesto* is to publicly challenge people with the biblical emphasis on holiness. Our purpose in publishing it in the pages of this journal is to assist the project to make the work of the study group and the *Manifesto* as accessible as possible to our readers so that they may share it with others. Thorsen provides a service by highlighting the study group's inherent, underlying emphasis on the ecumenical dynamic of unity. The study group grew over a five year period to include 13 denominations in the discussions and work of the project. Throughout, The Salvation Army has maintained a strong, participatory presence and contribution. The project provides the Church with "fresh eyes" on holiness, unpacking seven dimensions of the topic, along with six other themes and penetrating questions for anyone wishing to pursue the topic of holiness and to do so in unity and cooperation with others.

At the heart of the Army's theology are the central doctrines of assurance and sanctification: Geoff Webb's article follows Don Thorsen's with a discussion of these two significant emphases. Webb's contribution may be helpful to Salvationists and others who wrestle with the overemphasis on holiness as crisis or holiness as process. He calls us to maintain the creative, dialectical tension between the two which is the theological legacy passed on to us from John Wesley.

The third article in this issue is a highly personal discussion of the writer's conversion experience and spiritual journey. Mona Moore asks the simple, clarifying question "What is conversion?" Her answer enables her to then ask a series of related, unfolding questions that together bring clarity about the implications of conversion in her life: included are questions of conversion implications for her relationship with God, and as a Salvationist with the Church, with the world, and with the future. Moore's writing suggests to the reader the importance of going beyond the study of theology to the doing, the living, and the working-out in one's own life of a personal understanding of one's theology. This grounds theology as a reality which is alive and expansive through exposures to God's grace and encounters with Christ which are part of the journey. This article, therefore, well underscores the intention of this journal that it is a journal of *both* theology *and* ministry.

Finally, over the past ten years, we presented book reviews that were

meant to encourage further reading of outstanding works that might otherwise be missed in the annual tsunami of available Christian literature on theology and ministry. Our special interest is in highlighting books that may assist readers to ground their leadership and service in the powerful scholarship and profound insights of others in ways compatible with the Army mission. We do this through both book reviews and shorter book notes.

We rejoice in the privilege of having worked with gifted authors for the past ten years, and in this issue we are pleased to highlight the writings of three people who have not contributed to this journal in the past. Two of the writers are Salvation Army officers, one serving in Canada and one serving in Pakistan. The third writer is an internationally recognized Wesleyan scholar. As a labor of love, we believe in the value of preserving the contemporary theological thinking and ministry found in relevant writings of Army authors and others, not only for the present mission and ministry of The Salvation Army, but especially for generations yet to come. The work of the past ten years presents a treasure trove of writing and thinking that we pray brings glory to God and greater efficacy to the Army in Jesus' name.

JSR

RJG

# The Holiness Manifesto

## An Ecumenical Document

*Don Thorsen*<sup>1</sup>

The "Holiness Manifesto" is a document written by church leaders and scholars from the Wesleyan Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions. It summarizes the heart of Christian holiness beliefs, values, and practices, relevant to the twenty-first century. Holiness, of course, is not a new topic; it is as old as the Bible. Yet, holiness is not always a theme to which Christians are drawn for various reasons. Authors of the Holiness Manifesto intend that it become a clarion call to the kind of salvation and lifestyle to which God calls all Christians. The terminology is not commonly used these days, but it is believed that holiness encapsulates the totality of God's nature as well as biblical emphases upon Christian beliefs, values, and practices. As such, it serves as a unifying or ecumenical document both for Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions, and for other Christians, churches, and denominations. *Although the pursuit of Christian unity is an ongoing process, the Holiness Manifesto serves to unite disparate church and theological traditions as well as to promote the biblical emphasis upon the holiness of God and God's call for Christians to be holy.*

I want to begin by talking about the creation of the Holiness Manifesto through the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project. I will continue by talking about the ecumenical dynamic that is growing among Christians and churches from the

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Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions. Finally, I want to talk about the potential of the Holiness Manifesto for promoting unity and cooperation among all Christians, churches, and denominations in affirming God's holiness and the fullness of holiness that God provides for people.

### **Wesleyan Holiness Study Project**

In 2003, Kevin Mannoia, then Dean of the School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, envisioned a collaborative effort on the part of Wesleyan and Holiness denominations to reconceive and promote biblical holiness for the twenty-first century. To this end, Mannoia secured from these denominations the financial as well as conceptual support for the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project (WHSP). The WHSP would take place over a three-year period (2004-2006). Denominations would send up to three representatives, including administrators, scholars, and pastors to participate in the study. Representatives at the initial meeting of the WHSP in 2004 came from the following denominations:

- Brethren in Christ
- Church of God, Anderson, Indiana
- Church of the Nazarene
- Evangelical Friends Church
- Free Methodist Church
- The Salvation Army
- The Shield of Faith

Most participants came from traditional Wesleyan and Holiness denominations, with the addition of representatives from the Evangelical Friends Church Southwest and the Shield of Faith, a holiness Pentecostal denomination. Independent members of the Wesleyan Church participated in the WHSP, however, the denomination did not formally participate in it. Although a variety of outcomes were considered by a planning committee before the WHSP began, the project participants largely determined the goals and work they undertook. The planning committee included David Bundy, Don Dayton, Lisa Dorsey, Bill Kostlevy, Kevin Mannoia (Chair), and Don Thorsen.

One of the more creative goals was the writing of a short document, which would summarize the WHSP's view of holiness in order to distill its relevance for the twenty-first century. Among several assignments participants gave to themselves, one was for them to write short descriptions of holiness to

be shared the following year. In 2005, half a dozen descriptions were written, discussed, and summarized by the WHSP. Their work became the foundation of the eventual writing of the Holiness Manifesto.

Another goal of the WHSP was to invite additional participants, including those from denominations that promoted holiness or had historic ties with the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions. The denominations that participated at subsequent meetings of the WHSP include the following:

- Christian and Missionary Alliance
- Church of God in Christ
- International Church of the Foursquare
- International Pentecostal Holiness Church

Noteworthy were a growing number of Pentecostal churches, who identified with holiness as an emphasis in their beliefs, values, and practices. The United Methodist Church sent an official observer to the WHSP, who participated in the study. Thus, a wide variety of voices were heard over the three years, voices that were heard, understood, and incorporated into the goals and work of the WHSP.

The summary document created by the WHSP was the Holiness Manifesto. It drew upon bits and pieces of the short descriptions written by participants. However, the majority of it was written by more than forty participants in the WHSP. Modifications were written over the last two years of the study project, and they included input from dozens of local pastors, district superintendents, and others. However, pastors were especially invited in order to help them understand the message of holiness and its power in engaging and transforming individuals, churches, and communities.

Immediately following the second and third gatherings of the WHSP (2005-2006), Mannoia organized a minister's conference called "Holiness in the Twenty-first Century." At the minister's conferences, participants heard from numerous speakers and forums from denominations. Speakers from outside representative denominations were also invited to speak on the message of holiness, including Robert Schuler and George Barna. All the participants were invited to read, discuss, and offer comments on the Holiness Manifesto. Such input helped make the document more understandable and relevant to a wide audience — one that reached out to everyone in the twenty-first century.

The full text of the Holiness Manifesto follows. It is not a finished doc-

ument; its work needs to continue in order to communicate holiness effectively to different peoples, places, and times. Participants in the WHSP were well aware that their views reflect the limitations of their North American context. Although a great deal of denominational diversity was present, there was not as much gender and ethnic diversity as desired, though such diversity was present in the WHSP. There certainly were not representatives from outside North America. Perhaps such representation can occur in the future.

The Holiness Manifesto is divided into three sections: The Crisis We Face; The Message We Have; and The Action We Take. It was hoped that the document would function like a manifesto, publicly challenging people with the biblical emphasis upon holiness, and making it as accessible as possible to a broad readership.

## **The Holiness Manifesto<sup>2</sup>**

### **The Crisis We Face**

There has never been a time in greater need of a compelling articulation of the message of holiness. Pastors and church leaders at every level of the church have come to new heights of frustration in seeking ways to revitalize their congregations and denominations. What we are doing is not working. Membership in churches of all traditions has flat-lined. In many cases, churches are declining. We are not even keeping pace with the biological growth rate in North America. The power and health of churches has also been drained by the incessant search for a better method, a more effective fad, a newer and bigger program to yield growth. In the process of trying to lead growing, vibrant churches, our people have become largely ineffective and fallen prey to a generic Christianity that results in congregations that are indistinguishable from the culture around them. Churches need a clear, compelling message that will replace the "holy grail" of methods as the focus of our mission.

Many church leaders have become hostages to the success mentality of numeric and programmatic influence. They have become so concerned about "how" they do church that they have neglected the weightier matter of "what" the church declares. We have inundated the "market" with methodological efforts to grow the church. In the process, many of our leaders have lost the ability to lead. They cannot lead because they have no compelling message to give, no

compelling vision of God, no transformational understanding of God's otherness. They know it and long to find the centering power of a message that makes a difference. Now more than ever, they long to soak up a deep understanding of God's call to holiness—transformed living. They want a mission. They want a message!

People all around are looking for a future without possessing a spiritual memory. They beg for a generous and integrative word from Christians that makes sense and makes a difference. If God is going to be relevant to people, we have a responsibility to make it clear to them. We have to shed our obsession with cumbersome language, awkward expectations, and intransigent patterns. What is the core, the center, the essence of God's call? That is our message, and that is our mission!

People in churches are tired of our petty lines of demarcation that artificially create compartments, denominations, and divisions. They are tired of building institutions. They long for a clear, articulate message that transcends institutionalism and in-fighting among followers of Jesus Christ. They are embarrassed by the corporate mentality of churches that defend parts of the gospel as if it were their own. They want to know the unifying power of God that transforms. They want to see the awesomeness of God's holiness that compels us to oneness in which there is a testimony of power. They accept the fact that not all of us will look alike; there will be diversity. But they want to know that churches and leaders believe that we are one—bound by the holy character of God who gives us all life and love. They want a message that is unifying. The only message that can do that comes from the nature of God, who is unity in diversity.

Therefore, in this critical time, we set forth for the church's well being a fresh focus on holiness. In our view, this focus is the heart of scripture concerning Christian existence for all times—and clearly for our time.

### **The Message We Have**

God is holy and calls us to be a holy people.

God, who is holy, has abundant and steadfast love for us. God's holy love is revealed to us in the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. God continues to work, giving life, hope and salvation through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, drawing us into God's own holy,

loving life. God transforms us, delivering us from sin, idolatry, bondage, and self-centeredness to love and serve God, others, and to be stewards of creation. Thus, we are renewed in the image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Apart from God, no one is holy. Holy people are set apart for God's purpose in the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, holy people live and love like Jesus Christ. Holiness is both gift and response, renewing and transforming, personal and communal, ethical and missional. The holy people of God follow Jesus Christ in engaging all the cultures of the world and drawing all peoples to God.

Holy people are not legalistic or judgmental. They do not pursue an exclusive, private state of being better than others. Holiness is not flawlessness but the fulfillment of God's intention for us. The pursuit of holiness can never cease because love can never be exhausted.

God wants us to be, think, speak, and act in the world in a Christ-like manner. We invite all to embrace God's call to:

- be filled with all the fullness of God in Jesus Christ—Holy Spirit-endowed co-workers for the reign of God;
- live lives that are devout, pure, and reconciled, thereby being Jesus Christ's agents of transformation in the world;
- live as a faithful covenant people, building accountable community, growing up into Jesus Christ, embodying the spirit of God's law in holy love;
- exercise for the common good an effective array of ministries and callings, according to the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- practice compassionate ministries, solidarity with the poor, advocacy for equality, justice, reconciliation, and peace; and
- care for the earth, God's gift in trust to us, working in faith, hope, and confidence for the healing and care of all creation.

By the grace of God, let us covenant together to be a holy people.

#### **The Action We Take**

May this call impel us to rise to this biblical vision of Christian mission:

- Preach the transforming message of holiness; Teach the principles of

Christ-like love and forgiveness;

- Embody lives that reflect Jesus Christ;
- Lead in engaging with the cultures of the world; and
- Partner with others to multiply its effect for the reconciliation of all things.

For this we live and labor to the glory of God.

### **Ecumenical Dynamic**

Although the overarching emphasis of the WHSP is on holiness, there is an underlying emphasis upon unity. The desire for unity among Christians and churches traces back to Jesus' prayer for his followers (John 17:2). Subsequent attempts to bring about visible unity have been thought to be at the core of ecumenism (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-20). The ecumenical dynamic of bringing Christians together represents an equally powerful contribution of the WHSP, though ecumenism may not have been the reason motivating those involved. Unity has been a high value for Mannoia in his various ministries as pastor, superintendent, and bishop of the Free Methodist Church, and later as President of the National Association of Evangelicals. His commitment to unity carried through in his organization of Wesleyan and Holiness denominational leaders, and eventually he was able to enfold Pentecostals as well. The WHSP succeeded, practically speaking, in successfully promoting ecumenical participation by the various individuals, churches, and denominations in addition to participation that reconceived and promoted biblical holiness.

After the first gathering of the WHSP in 2003, Kevin Mannoia worked with John Schaub to set up a website that published many of the writings of the study. It was entitled "Holiness & Unity" at [HolinessAndUnity.org](http://HolinessAndUnity.org) <[holinessandunity.org](http://holinessandunity.org)>. Initially, the website contained papers presented at the annual gatherings of the WHSP. It also contained summaries of the WHSP, occasional newsletters, and other writings that promote holiness. Eventually, the website included the *Holiness Manifesto*, including translations of it in Chinese, Korean, and Spanish. Also included in it are news releases, videos, and a monthly article and discussion.

At the time, the WHSP represented one of the most effective ecumenical activities of the historic Wesleyan and Holiness denominations. The respective denominations committed people, administrative priority, and finances to its

success. Results of the WHSP continue to influence on behalf of ecumenism. Soon a book will be published, edited by Mannoia and Thorsen, that contains the Holiness Manifesto along with chapters that contain papers written by participants in the WHSP or by others inspired by the emphasis on biblical holiness. They include:

- Jim Adams, Church of the Foursquare
- David Bundy, United Methodist Church
- Jon Huntzinger, Church of the Foursquare
- Cheryl Bridges Johns, Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee
- David Kendall, Free Methodist Church
- Bill Kostlevy, Church of the Brethren
- Diane LeClerc, Church of the Nazarene
- James Earl Massey, Church of God, Anderson, Indiana
- George McKinney, Church of God in Christ
- Jonathan Raymond, The Salvation Army
- Steven Schell, Church of the Foursquare
- Howard Snyder, Free Methodist Church
- Ken Waters, United Methodist Church

Noteworthy is the diversity of denominations represented by the various authors.<sup>3</sup> It includes historic Wesleyan and Holiness denominations, but much more are included. There are several Pentecostal authors, who help to broaden our understanding of the full holiness family of Christians. United Methodist authors are also included, reflecting the earliest roots of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions.

A significant ecumenical event took place in the Fall of 2006, a half year after the third meeting of the WHSP. The Wesleyan Holiness Consortium was created, spearheaded by Mannoia's emphasis on holiness. Consider the following news release:

Top leaders from eight denominations met for a one day gathering to discuss the need for a coordinated and unified effort among them surrounding their common heritage and commitment to the Holiness message. The outcome of the gathering was the creation of the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium. The Consortium will be working cooperatively to multiply efforts already started and

piloted in the southern California area among these churches over the past three years.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the expected denominations participated in this event, and some did not. It includes seven Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations, and it includes a denomination never before associated with holiness:

- Brethren in Christ
- Christian & Missionary Alliance
- Church of God, Anderson, Indiana
- Church of God in Christ
- Church of the Nazarene
- Free Methodist Church
- The Salvation Army

The Wesleyan Holiness Consortium (WHC) represents important evidence of cooperation among a number of denominations. In addition to annual meetings scheduled for the WHC, there are a number of other cooperative efforts planned around the country in the hope of expanding the growing interest in relevant articulation of the holiness message to other regions, nations, and continents. For example:

1. The Wesleyan Holiness Study Project will continue as a means to provide ongoing theological dialogue among the churches regarding the message of holiness;
2. A Wesleyan Holiness Young Leaders Hangout in August of 2007, in Dallas to glean input and engagement of the young generation of leaders in carrying the holiness message forward in the new century; and
3. A Wesleyan Holiness Pastors' Day will be developed in a second city to replicate the already successful Pastors' Day conducted in southern California over the two previous years.<sup>5</sup>

The Wesleyan Holiness Consortium is not intended to function as a replacement or successor for the near non-operational Christian Holiness Partnership (CHP). The CHP has a long and distinguished history, going back to

its founding in 1867 as the National Camp Meeting-Association for the Promotion of Holiness. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, holiness denominations grew up alongside this ecumenical organization, which became known as the Christian Holiness Association (CHA). The CHA changed its name in 1997 to the CHP, but its effectiveness in unifying denominations waned. Today it no longer meets. The WHC and the projects related to it are representative of a rising interest in the holiness message among scholars as well as pastors and church leaders. There continues to be interest in unity among Christians as well as a curiosity about holiness, and the two may create an ecumenical dynamic seldom seen among Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations.

There are, of course, always questions and concerns about efforts to unite Christians in cooperative ministries, if not actual church mergers. Ecumenism, after all, occurs in many shapes and forms. For example, the WHC and CHP are not exactly alike, and people rightly care about how the two can and should relate to one another. Other questions and concerns have to do with increasing unity among Wesleyan and Holiness denominations, on the one hand, and Pentecostal denominations, on the other hand. Despite the family resemblance they all share in terms of shared beliefs, values, and practices related to holiness, they have not historically cooperated much together. It remains to be seen whether they can cooperate here and now through the WHC. *Recent discussions among participants of the Consortium are leading it to continue expanding activity in three ways.* 1) *The regional networks are an opportunity for district denominational leaders to bring their pastors together to raise the importance and understanding of holiness in their mission in the future.* 2) *The interest among the younger generation is fueling the growth of young leader gatherings to discuss in new terms the holiness message as a relevant point of engagement.* 3) *While the Study Project has completed its original charter and fulfilled all its goals and more, it may continue as an at-large representation of the churches that formed it. In this fashion, it may not be an ecclesiastical council or association but rather a voluntary consortium of churches centered on their*

interest and commitment to the message of holiness.

### **Fresh Eyes on Holiness**

At the 2007 meeting of the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project, an additional contribution was made to expanding and applying the Holiness Manifesto. Participants focused upon the need for developing key themes for understanding, embodying, and proclaiming holiness in the twenty-first century. In particular, the WHSP wanted to focus on the immediate needs of pastors. Thus, a set of themes were established. The resulting document included brief explanations of the themes and questions that would help pastors and others to reflect upon and implement the message of holiness.

The following seven themes summarized the work of the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project. They were presented, initially, to the annual Holiness in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pastor's Day conference, featuring the theme of "Fresh Eyes on Holiness." Below are the themes, descriptions, and questions.

#### *Fresh Eyes on Holiness:*

#### *Living Out the Holiness Manifesto*<sup>6</sup>

### **1. Dimensions of Holiness**

Holiness has several dimensions. Within each dimension there are contrasting realities. It is important to embrace both elements of each contrast in order to experience and practice holiness in its completeness.

***Individual and Corporate:*** We are called to be holy persons individually and to be a holy people corporately. The corporate aspect of holiness which is prominent in Scripture needs to be emphasized again in this time and culture.

***Christ-centered and Holy Spirit-centered:*** The Holy Spirit's work within us leads to conformity to the person of Jesus Christ. Neither should be expressed without the other.

***Development and End:*** God has an ultimate purpose for each person, which is to be like Jesus Christ. Teaching on development in the Christian life should keep the end of Christ-likeness in view.

***Crisis and Process:*** A definite work of God's grace in our hearts and our ongoing cooperation with his grace are to be equally emphasized.

***Blessings and Suffering:*** Full union with Jesus Christ brings many blessings but also a sharing of his sufferings.

***Separation and Incarnation:*** Holy people are in but not of the world. Holiness requires both separation and redemptive, reconciling, and restorative engagement.

***Forms and Essence:*** Holiness always expresses itself in particular forms, which are the ways in which it is translated into life and action. But the forms must not be confused with the essence of holiness itself.

How do you balance these contrasting realities in your personal life and ministry? Where do you see the need for greater balance?

## **2. Essence of Holiness**

The essence of holiness is that God is holy and calls us to be a holy people. The challenge is reflecting Jesus Christ in a relevant and contextual way that transcends social location and diversity. Indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, holy people live and love like Jesus Christ. Walking intimately with Him overflows in compassion and advocacy for those whom God loves.

How can you effectively embody holiness in the context where you are now, personally and in ministry?

## **3. Catholicity of Holiness**

Although differences have led to fragmentation in churches, holiness invites unity. God wants to heal—to make whole—the brokenness of people, churches, and society. The impact of holiness goes beyond boundaries of tradition, theology, gender, ethnicity, and time to affect people and institutional structures. The resulting healing unites all Christians in wholeness, growing up into Christ-likeness. The message of holiness involves conversation and engagement with others.

What conversations and actions do you need to engage in to bring healing to people, churches, and society?

## **4. Holiness and Culture**

Holiness people, while themselves influenced by culture, must convey the holiness message within multiple cultures. Culture affects the holiness message and churches because we are socially shaped human beings. Culture challenges us to mediate holiness in ways that are relevant and transforming without losing the integrity of the message.

How do we exegete culture and subculture in order to achieve transformation? How might you embody the holiness message in your immediate pastoral setting?

### **5. Holiness and Community**

Individual and corporate holiness require that faith communities pursue organizational structures, processes, and content that promote radical obedience to Jesus Christ. Holiness does not develop in isolation from other believers and faith communities that provide spiritual support and accountability.

What communal structures, processes, and content would help promote radical obedience to Jesus Christ, personally and in ministry?

### **6. Holiness and Social Concern**

Social engagement is an essential incarnational expression of personal and social holiness. It includes ministry among the poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized. Holiness requires a response to the world's deepest and starkest needs. Social engagement is the continuing work of Jesus Christ in and through the church by the Holy Spirit for the world.

Since proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the poor is essential, how do you embody the continuing personal and social engagement with the disenfranchised and marginalized?

### **7. Communicating Holiness**

Christians live in environments of changing language. They must communicate a holiness message in ways that are clear, relevant, and winsome. The message of holiness often has been communicated with terms and paradigms that are not understood today.

What terms and paradigms could you use to communicate the holiness message in a compelling way?

#### **Promoting Unity and Cooperation**

An amazing amount of ecumenical cooperation has occurred in response to the WHSP and the leadership of Mannoia, in general, and to the Holiness Manifesto, in particular. It remains to be seen just how far its influence will reach in terms of developing unity and cooperation among Christians, churches, and denominations that lasts. Ecumenism, like so many other Christian beliefs, values, and practices, is already present, and yet not complete.

Frankly, there already appear cracks in the tenuous strands of ecu-

menism. It is hoped that the WHSP will continue, enjoying the priority and financial support offered by denominations in the past. However, some of the denominations are reassessing their involvements. Another gathering of the WHSP is scheduled in March 2007. Participants will have to assess its long-term goals as well as viability. The practicalities of life, for example, the prioritization of finances, sometimes prohibit individuals, churches, and denominations from participating as much as they want, no matter how great the cause. Despite obstacles that may arise, holiness—its study and promotion—has already proved itself to be more vibrant and inspiring of ecumenical cooperation than most imagined for quite some time. Even those in the historic Wesleyan and Holiness traditions have been surprised at the responsiveness of pastors and laity to a renewed emphasis on holiness. After all, does it not seem self-evident that holiness is passé? Certainly it is not like the “old time religion” or “old time holiness” preaching and teaching of the past. Perhaps the words, conceptions, and means of communicating holiness became outdated, even though biblical holiness has not. The intent behind the Holiness Manifesto was to reconceive and promote biblical holiness in the twenty-first century. So far, so good. Will holiness still “sell in Peoria”? Will it sell, so to speak, to people in urban centers? ethnically diverse populations? and so-called post-moderns? We shall see. However, if holiness is thought to be at the core of God’s nature and of what God wants for people—to be holy as God is holy<sup>7</sup>—then its message is timeless. It will never become irrelevant or trite in its essence; it will only become so in its communication by Christians through what they do and live as well as by what they say. Thus, the Holiness Manifesto is timely in order to reorient Christians toward biblical holiness in the holistic way the document presents it.

Ironically, potentialities in something are not always found (or remembered best) by those closest to the potentialities. Instead, it sometimes takes outsiders to notice, appreciate, and remind us of the message we have. This is true of holiness. Although those of us within the historic parameters of the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions may consider ourselves the keepers of biblical holiness, we can be enriched by listening to what others have to say about the holiness we cherish and stumblingly try to promote. In particular, we may not always notice the potential biblical holiness has for promoting unity and cooperation within historic denominations as well as ecumenical dynamics with those

outside our traditions.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, let me offer three “points of light” with regard to the ecumenical potential holiness has, which is embodied in the words of the Holiness Manifesto. By points of light I mean insights about the importance of holiness recognized by people outside the historic manifestations of the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions. Let me summarize them with the words spirituality, ecumenism, and worship.

#### Spirituality

The first point of light pertains to the longstanding desire on the part of people to be holistic, to find the right balance, to find the *via media*—the middle way—of biblical beliefs, values, and practices. Aristotle tried to find the “mean” between extremes, what philosophers since the time of Aristotle call the “golden mean”; Anglicans after the Continental Reformation wanted to find the *via media* between the excesses of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; and for decades, New Age aficionados have sought after anything holistic—foods, clothes, crystals, and drugs. Not surprisingly, it has been Christians all the while who have had access to the holiness—the wholeness and completeness—which only comes from God, which is available to people through faith, repentance, and obedience.

Ironically, it has not always been historic Wesleyan and Holiness traditions that have promoted interest in holiness as much as it has been the recent preoccupation with spirituality, especially Christian spirituality. Promoters of spirituality such as Richard Foster and Dallas Willard have pointed out time and time again that it is Wesleyan and the Holiness traditions that epitomize the kind of biblical holiness that appeared throughout church history, regardless of whether it appeared in the east or west, Catholic or Protestant, mainline or evangelical. The recognition and respect of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions outside those traditions sometimes exceeds the recognition and respect those in the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions have for themselves.

#### Ecumenism

A second point of light, where the value of holiness is recognized, is in ecumenical groups around the country. For example, the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches has long recognized, valued, and incorporated members of the Wesleyan Theological Society as representa-

tives of holiness-oriented churches that are Wesleyan and evangelical. Such representation is not required by the NCC, but it is wanted.

Much of the value in Faith and Order, admittedly, came as a result of the decades of ecumenical work done by Don Dayton. Dayton and others pioneered ecumenical involvements on behalf of the Wesleyan Theological Society, which in turn served as a kind of ecumenical leaven that has nourished the Society more than by denominations represented in it. Mannoia also helped to promote the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions in the ecumenical movement, broadly conceived, through his work in the National Association of Evangelicals. Thus, the Holiness Manifesto serves as a persuasive as well as up-to-date presentation of holiness as understood in holiness-oriented denominations, which make them more noticeable and applicable to the larger Christian world.

### **Worship**

A third and final point of light, where the value of holiness is recognized, is in contemporary ways that worship is publicly undertaken in churches today. Although a variety of worship styles persist in churches, the growing freestyle of worship in churches reflects a remarkable interest in and concern for holiness. Consider the words of popular Christian choruses:

*Holiness, holiness is what I long for*

*Holiness is what I need*

*Holiness, holiness is what You want for me, for me<sup>8</sup>*

Other contemporary choruses can easily be added to this one. One might think that contemporary worship choruses would not have such words, if holiness seems so out-of-date. It is not!

The remarkable thing is that holiness – biblical holiness – is not out-of-date. On the contrary, it is up-to-date and needed more than ever by Christians and by churches, locally and denominationally. As the Holiness Manifesto seeks to make holiness understandable and relevant to people today, it also seeks to

unite Christians in their promotion of holiness.

## Notes

1. Don Thorsen is Professor of Theology and Chair of Advanced Studies in the Haggard Graduate School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University.
2. The "Holiness Manifesto" was written by participants in the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project (2004-2006), and it was completed at Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California, February 2006. This document is the most up-to-date version, and it will be published in an anthology titled *The Holiness Manifesto*, edited by Kevin Mannoia and Don Thorsen. An early version of the "Holiness Manifesto" can be found on the Holiness and Unity website [http://holinessandunity.org/fs/fileadmin/hau/text/Holiness\\_Manifesto\\_Feb\\_2006.pdf](http://holinessandunity.org/fs/fileadmin/hau/text/Holiness_Manifesto_Feb_2006.pdf).
3. There are also plans to include an appendix that contains initial statements on holiness written by Don Dayton (Wesleyan Church), Lisa Dorsey (Shield of Faith), Craig Keen (Church of the Nazarene), Tom Noble (Church of the Nazarene), Keith Reeves (Wesleyan Church), and Lyn Thrush (Brethren in Christ).
4. "Wesleyan Holiness Consortium Is Created," Holiness & Unity home page, HolinessAndUnity.org, accessed 9 February 2007 <http://holinessandunity.org/fs/index.php?id=1254>.
5. Ibid.
6. "Fresh Eyes on Holiness: Living Out the Holiness Manifesto," Wesleyan Holiness Study Project, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California, March 27, 2007.
7. For example, see Leviticus 11:44-45; Matthew 5:48; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16.
8. Michael Stampley, "Take My Life," *Unknown*, Lyrics and Songs website <http://www.lyricsandsongs.com/song/554705.html> accessed February 24, 2007.

# Assurance and Sanctification in the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition

Geoff Webb

*"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." (Wesley's Journal) <sup>1</sup>*

## Assurance

Wesley's experience at Aldersgate has been a much-debated topic: what exactly was the experience, and was it truly a watershed in his life? Responses have varied considerably, ranging from scholars who have seen it as a type of "second-blessing" experience, to those who consider it a "conversion." If it *was* a watershed, why did Wesley not refer to it in the latter half of his life? If it was *not*, why did the central issue of that event – the experience of assurance – become a central feature of his preaching and theology? In reality it is fundamentally flawed as a question, as Heitzenrater notes,<sup>2</sup> and should be rephrased in terms of how Wesley understood the Aldersgate experience at different times of his life, and how it affected developments in his theological system.

There were three areas in which Wesley's thought changed over time, and which are pertinent to the issue of assurance: the need to define what a Christian is (in terms of traits, and behavioral standards); the need to define the process of

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becoming a Christian; and the need to define the evidence or grounds by which Christians may be certain of their condition.

From 1725, Wesley had widened his definition of salvation to include the concept of aiming for inner holiness. Wesley was a devout Anglican, and the early organization of Methodists owes much to this period in which he encouraged careful self-examination and accountability. Keeping daily diaries provided the means of self-examination of the inner disposition of mind and heart. Seeking to be sincere was vitally important, as it provided evidence of inner holiness and some hope for certainty. Unfortunately, the diaries only served to make him more aware of his shortcomings, and to doubt that he was, in fact, sincere. Wesley's encounter with some of the classical mystics caused even more frustration, since they took away the sincerity involved with good works as a measure of certainty.

The problem of assurance continued to cause considerable restlessness in Wesley, especially when he was experiencing a terrifying storm at sea on the way to Georgia. To his perceived lack of faith was now added fear. Yet, the gentle serenity experienced by some Moravian Christians on board prompted Wesley to seek to discover why they had such assurance when he did not. He spent considerable time with the Moravians, who shaped him significantly.

Under the influence of Peter Böhler, Wesley came to expect a moment that would "be an experience of faith, inevitably attended by an assurance of pardon, which would necessarily result in freedom from sin, doubt, and fear, and be accompanied by a full measure of peace, joy and confidence – all this in a moment, and altogether understood as conversion, the moment at which he would become a real, genuine Christian."<sup>3</sup> The crisis moment occurred on 24 May, 1738 at Aldersgate, involving a God-given sense of assurance. The vividness of this experience caused a re-shaping of some of Wesley's thought. Yet Wesley still experienced self-doubt, especially in the area of joy; and this, combined with his perception that Böhler was a much greater Christian than he, caused Wesley to determine fairly quickly that there must be degrees of faith.

In the period immediately following Aldersgate, Wesley taught that without a supernatural sense that one's sins were pardoned there was no true justifying faith. He also followed the Moravian pattern in equating conversion and perfec-

tion. Over time, however, with the empirical evidence of countless Christians – some of whom did not have such a supernatural sense of assurance of pardon – he would modify his assumptions. Just as there were degrees of faith, so his belief in the absolute nature of full assurance was modified to admit *measures* of assurance at the time of justification. It was also possible in some exceptional cases for justifying faith to be exercised without a conscious sense of assurance. By just two years after Aldersgate, Wesley's theology was in fundamental conflict with the Moravians, and the divide would further increase over subsequent years. Even so, Wesley still claimed that assurance was the common privilege of true Christians,

It was primarily around the issue of assurance that Wesley – especially in the period from 1748-1770 – would distinguish between those who had the faith of a servant, and those who had the faith of a child of God. The former were in a state of acceptance, although not justification; they live in a spirit of bondage and fear, struggling with the spiritual and psychological dynamics of Romans 7 as they do not enjoy any sense of the freedom, grace and power that mark the children of God. As long as they remain in such bondage, they clearly lack justifying faith.

Assurance for the child of God, by contrast, was characterized by the inner witness of the Spirit, and the external testimony of spiritual fruit within the Christian's life that comes from the indwelling Spirit, and both inner and outer witnesses were necessary.

Wesley emphasized the Spirit's witness with our Spirit partly because it was another way for him to accent the prevenience of God's grace in our salvation, while simultaneously explaining our response-ability to that grace. Moreover, he clearly assumed our responsibility to respond, else God's grace would gradually cease to empower us ... [W]e can only have evidence of our present relationship to God, not a guarantee of final perseverance.<sup>4</sup>

In the latter part of Wesley's life, from 1771 onwards, Wesley returned to

the theme of assurance, and strongly identified it with authentic Christian faith. By 1774 Wesley “viewed the transitions in his [own] spiritual life as more incremental in nature, and God’s justifying acceptance as present prior to Aldersgate (he was *already* a “servant of God”).<sup>5</sup> While he had clarified the possibility of exceptional cases that did not experience assurance, he continued to develop what was still an essential continuity with his earlier work – the motif of real versus nominal (“almost”) Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Throughout his life, however, Wesley needed to guard the teaching on assurance against two extremes: fanaticism and legalism. The first danger related to believers who emphasized the inner witness of the Spirit while neglecting the external evidence of spiritual fruit. The other extreme involved believers whose emphasis was on the external witness of *cultivating* spiritual fruit without the “enthusiasm” associated with the inner witness of the Spirit.

As an aside, it is helpful to remember at this point that the emotional vividness surrounding assurance was culturally conditioned: in a society where the sense of one’s sin could cause severe emotional turmoil, the corresponding relief that such sins had been pardoned could involve a similar level of emotion. This also becomes important when we consider “second-blessing” experiences. For people conditioned by other cultural contexts, the emotional vividness and relief might be replaced by a sense of direction following a sense of being directionless. In any case, any crisis moment might be more one of quiet dedication without being sufficiently emotionally vivid to be subsequently recalled to mind as a crisis moment, as Wesley himself allows.

### Sanctification

The distinctions between the three “moments” of grace – justification, regeneration and sanctification – has been helpfully defined by Kenneth Collins: “Simply put, the *guilt* of sin is addressed in justification, its *power* in regeneration, and its *being* in entire sanctification.”<sup>7</sup> The experience of assurance at New Birth/regeneration marks the beginning of the quest for holiness – the *process* of sanctification.

Yet here too the issue of *crisis* was significant for Wesley. Our ability to experience any sense of holiness in our sin-marred lives is graciously restored in the crisis moment of New Birth. We receive pardon for sin, a new and vital

responsiveness to God, and our human faculties are regenerated by the presence of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to experience salvation in a present sense. We then press forward, assisted by divine grace, toward the “crisis” moment of entire sanctification – a divine intervention through which the heart is cleansed from sin and filled with love – and ultimately to the final “crisis” of glorification that occurs at death.

The experience at Aldersgate provided Wesley with assurance, but it did not resolve some matters for him. Sanctification was not merely focussing on moral behavior. In the same way that much of spirituality today focuses either on moral behavior or on quests for serenity, sanctification in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition involves *both*. In a sense, Wesley’s pre-Aldersgate experience had focused primarily on moral behaviour, but he had been instinctively drawn to the serenity he observed in the Moravians. His subsequent teaching would include the inner experience as well as the outer expression – not just for assurance, but also for sanctification itself.

From the teaching of the Moravians, he was expecting that thereafter he would be free from doubt, sin and fear, and that he would experience perfect love, joy and peace. Instead, as he continued his pattern of self-examination through his diaries, he came to wonder whether he truly was a Christian since he did not observe the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit, and was still subject to doubt. Living pre-Freud, Wesley found it difficult to reconcile the depressive elements of his personality with his new spiritual experience. (He also remained an obsessive-compulsive neurotic throughout his life, with an authoritarian temper that troubled his household almost until he died, and a self-righteous air – especially when challenged about correspondence with other women – that would ultimately cost him his marriage.)

Yet despite this, he was a happy man – always restrained and never exuberant – but happy in the sense of the human “affection” of loving God and serving others. It took time for Wesley to come to the realization that basic personalities may remain unchanged, but the issue of faith could transform any life into a grace-filled life. Aldersgate had provided Wesley with much promise, but the effects of the experience on his life required a change in his expectations.

The irony of Aldersgate, however, is that its theological signif-

icance rests in Wesley's eventual modification of nearly every aspect of his perception and explanation of the event at the time... [He] did not hearken back to Aldersgate as a model experience to be universalized. Rather, his subsequent attempts to explain that evening in the context of his continuing spiritual pilgrimage led to significant theological developments that eventually helped shape his own mature understanding and explanation of the Scripture way of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps Wesley's finest exposition of the doctrine of entire sanctification is contained within the sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" and Wesley's "A plain account of Christian perfection" – both of which are from the later period of his life. In the latter work he outlines eleven points in a summary that becomes a helpful basis for consideration of the main issues surrounding entire sanctification, including those areas that have proven the most controversial.

- (1.) There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.
- (2.) It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to 'go on unto perfection.' (Heb. 6:1.)
- (3.) It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect. (Phil. 3:15.)
- (4.) It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.
- (5.) It does not make a man (sic) infallible: None is infallible, while he remains in the body.
- (6.) Is it sinless? It is not worthwhile to contend for a term. It is "salvation from sin."
- (7.) It is "perfect love." (1 John 4:18.) ...
- (8.) It is improvable ...
- (9.) It is ... capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances ...
- (10.) It is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.
- (11.) But is it in itself instantaneous or not? ... An instantaneous

change has been wrought in some believers ... therefore, these are witnesses of the perfection which I preach. But [others] did not perceive the instant when it was wrought.<sup>9</sup>

By 1739, Wesley had been separating his theology from that of the English Moravians, who identified the moment of receiving assurance as the point at which freedom from sin was also experienced. Wesley started to separate justification and entire sanctification (the point for Wesley at which freedom from sin is experienced) as distinct steps. In this sense, he was more closely aligned with Luther's concept of *simul iustus et peccator* – the Christian is at the same time justified and yet a sinner.

Even so, Wesley was developing the distinction between being saved from the *guilt* and from the *power* of sin. The former was experienced at justification or *initial* sanctification, and the latter at entire sanctification; between the two was a process of moving forward toward the goal of perfection. In this sense, Wesley was developing a *teleological* emphasis in his understanding of the way of salvation: perfection was both the goal and the impetus toward its realization, and thus it is not possible to remain static in the Christian life since this would mean that grace was not retained.

The *timing* of the crisis of sanctification – as distinct from justification – has proven a stumbling-block for many. The concept of a “second blessing” or “second work of grace” was significant for Wesley in distinguishing sanctification and justification.

Neither dare we affirm, as some have done, that all this salvation is given at once. There is indeed an instantaneous, as well as a gradual, work of God in his children; and there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received, in one moment, either a clear sense of the forgiveness of their sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person's receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart. <sup>10</sup>

The experience of Christians – especially of many that have not experienced dramatic conversion experiences because they had experienced a gradual growth in grace within a Christian family – suggests to some that the separation of sanctification to a later (second) work of grace defies reality. Wesley maintained the absolute necessity of a “second blessing”, but acknowledged that the crisis moment may not be emotionally vivid:

They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought. It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies; yet there is an instant in which life ceases. And if ever sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it.<sup>11</sup>

Wesley’s thought on the matter of timing – other than the fact that it must be subsequent to justification – is far from systematic. It appears that he holds primarily to a view that most will only receive entire sanctification shortly before death. Yet such a “high” view of entire sanctification would appear to press towards several issues that Wesley would refute – the concepts of absolute perfection, a measure of infallibility, and that entire sanctification could not be lost. If entire sanctification is a state that can only be reached just prior to death, it suggests that the possibility of early experiences of entire sanctification is exceptional rather than normative; and that such exceptions are people who appear to be *almost* absolutely perfect, *almost* infallible, and whose sanctification is never observed to have been lost.

One possible reason why the crisis of entire sanctification might occur just before death relates to the reluctance to abandon oneself to God. “The crisis of death, in other words, the realization that time will indeed end, apparently serves as the appropriate catalyst out of which entire devotion to God and the full cleansing power of the Spirit may arise.”<sup>12</sup> It would be in the 19th century, under the influence of Phoebe Palmer and others, that the crisis-experience would be moved “down the mountain” so to speak; so that it can be normal for it to be experienced much earlier than just prior to death.

Entire sanctification did not imply infallibility. The nature of perfection needed to be clearly defined to avoid the danger of such thinking. Indeed, Wesley frequently defines Christian perfection in terms of what it is not. It is possible to note, at this point, the manner in which different aspects of his system as noted above, blend into – and become the presuppositions for – subsequent points. In this case, his teaching about the absence of absolute perfection or infallibility prepares the way logically for improvement:

[Christians] are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake... They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination... neither can we expect till then to be wholly freed from temptation; [N]either in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase ... [N]either love nor the 'unction of the Holy One' makes us infallible: Therefore, through unavoidable defect of understanding, we cannot but mistake in many things. And these mistakes will frequently occasion something wrong, both in our temper, and words, and actions.<sup>13</sup>

The mature Wesley's sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" affirms a "repentance consequent upon justification [that] is widely different from that which is antecedent to it... With this conviction of the sin remaining in our hearts, there is joined a clear conviction of the sin remaining in our lives; still cleaving to all our words and actions."<sup>14</sup> Prior to Aldersgate, Wesley had pressed believers to undergo spiritual disciplines that would lead to perfection, although the most they could hope for in this life was sincerity rather than actual perfection. Following Aldersgate, he maintained the possibility of perfection both in terms of outward sins *and* inward sin. By the time of the perfectionist controversy, of the early 1760's this position had been further modified to reject the view that "inward sin ... is immediately removed from believers at justification ... New believers may indeed be delivered from the guilt and controlling power

of sin, but not its being (inclination).”<sup>15</sup> The Moravians had conflated the concepts of imputed righteousness and infused righteousness so that the evidence of genuine conversion was sinless perfection. This had been the basis upon which, in the days following Aldersgate, Wesley considered that he had not been a Christian prior to that watershed event.

In entire sanctification, the Holy Spirit removes the roots of sin in our lives – all those aspects within us that continue to resist divine grace. If the new birth begins a process of victorious struggle against sin – the enemy within – then entire sanctification involves the disappearance of the enemy and a conclusion to the struggle. The eradication concept inherent within some second blessing teaching has caused difficulties – especially in relation to this concept of “roots of bitterness” – but the teaching is quite clear for Wesley who maintains that:

there does still remain, even in them that are justified, a mind which is in some measure carnal ... an heart bent to backsliding, still ever ready to “depart from the living God;” a propensity to pride, self-will, anger, revenge, love of the world, yea, and all evil: a root of bitterness, which, if the restraint were taken off for a moment, would instantly spring up; ... And a conviction of all this sin remaining in their hearts is the repentance which belongs to them that are justified... [A]s sin remains in our hearts, so it cleaves to all our words and actions. Indeed it is to be feared, that many of our words are more than mixed with sin; that they are sinful altogether.<sup>16</sup>

Wesley wanted to avoid the impression that destruction of the roots of sin (sinful affections) implied that it was impossible for them to return. Not only so, but Wesley never used the term “sinless perfection” as he understood those who were entirely sanctified to still be subject to “involuntary transgressions” – an ongoing by-product of the frailty of our humanity. External actions flow from the inner affections, but this passage from affection to action is not infallible – as “sinless perfection” would appear to indicate; but ignorance, mistakes, and human frailty can affect the movement from affection to action.

Thus, perfection would always involve self-examination, and careful conformity to the Law, in order that we might increasingly ensure that behavior matches attitude. Perfection is not merely legalism, however, wherein we simply keep the demands of Law. Catholic and Reformed theology had considered sanctification in legal terms. For Calvin especially, justification resulted in increasing conformity to Law – although this also rendered entire sanctification impossible in this life. By contrast, the early Wesley's reading of Taylor, à Kempis and Law caused him to shift the emphasis from keeping the law to intentionality – especially in terms of love. Rather, the early Wesley understood sanctification as:

a virtue-oriented ethic. The desired end is not perfect obedience to a standard of conduct; it is perfect conformity to a model of divine-oriented virtue. Being restored in the image of God is basic to the whole process. The goal is not to be able to act perfectly; the goal is to be perfect, to achieve an inward perfection of intentions and attitudes, of will as well as of understanding. Truly good actions are the result of the inward dispositions of the soul (virtues) ... and the ground of them all [is] love of God.<sup>17</sup>

This concept of holiness as perfect love is a synonym used interchangeably for Christian perfection. New birth commences the process in which love grows stronger, and progressively predominates over other motives. The perfection of love expels sin, and fills and governs the heart and life. If the goal of the process of sanctification is Christian perfection, this is expressed primarily in the perfection of love for God and for others as required in the Great Commandment, even though this perfection did *not* mean being free from infirmities, temptations, mistakes or ignorance. "It is the *intention* of God that we should love God completely ... [and] within the *power* of God to bring about that which God intends. To deny the doctrine of Christian perfection ... meant to deny one or the other of these central Christian claims."<sup>18</sup> Thus while different terms like perfection, holiness, righteousness, or love may be used in Scripture to describe the same divine requirement, Scripture also affirms that there is also a divine provision

through the exercise of grace by which it may be attained.

An advantage in the formulation of Christian perfection as perfect love is that love can be expressed irrespective of maturity of "performance," level of intelligence, or the limitations of personality flaws. Nor does it imply immunity to temptation, or flawless conformity to the demands of Law! Instead, perfect love is within the capacity of anyone who has been fully cleansed, renewed and filled with the Holy Spirit. This emphasis on perfect love does not lead to a reduced adherence to moral law, however, since it connects even more closely than faith. While faith could result in a measure of relief at being freed from the burden of the law, perfect love toward God and neighbor immediately involves serving them to the fullest extent possible.

A problem presents itself at this point: the standard of perfect love sometimes described by Wesley would appear to be so all-pervasive and all-consuming as to be very rare in people. It was a standard against which Wesley would judge himself harshly, especially in his more depressive moments. If we see the expression of such a standard of love as evident in the writings of John Wesley (and in Charles Wesley's hymns) as being hyperbole, then we can perhaps discover a more reasonable understanding of perfect love that accords with a psychological understanding of temperament, and can be healing and enlivening. John Cobb notes the range of expressions of love in different temperaments:

There are fun-loving people whose *joie de vivre* gives enjoyment to those around them. There are people of a contemplative temperament who may do relatively little overtly in the world but who emanate a spiritual depth that is contagious. There are people who are spontaneously loving in an emotional way to which we turn when we need comfort. These people do not love God less than the disciplined activists. The church needs people of many temperaments... [but that] doesn't remove the test of loving one's neighbor. That can be applied to disciplined activist, to fun-lovers, to contemplatives, and to the emotionally gifted.<sup>19</sup>

It would seem that the goal of perfect love is one that is worth pursuing in

contemporary reformulations of sanctification. It would be necessary to give careful attention to definitions in order to avoid some of Wesley's rhetorical excesses. The impact of psychology would need also to be considered: we would need to consider unconscious causes and motivations, and the impact of psychopathological "baggage."

Perhaps a way forward involves the connection between love and Christlikeness. Some would see Wesley's emphasis on Christlikeness as an indication of Eastern influence – the concept of *theosis*. Sanctification can be seen as being renewed in the image of God, and Christ is paradigmatic: believers are to develop the mind of Christ. Indeed Christlikeness links closely with perfect love, as will be seen. Wesley describes his pursuit of perfection – notably in the

In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study the Bible .. Hence I saw in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having "the mind which was also in Christ," and of "walking as Christ also walked"; even of having ... the mind which was in Him, and of walking as He walked ... in all things.<sup>20</sup>

At regeneration, the believer receives the "mind which was in Christ" and the process of sanctification commences. As the believer grows in Christlikeness, that conformity to the mind of Christ results in new desires that are shaped by godly practices or spiritual disciplines. Such desires lead to the expectation of being made perfect in love (entire sanctification). As the believer grows in love for God, there is a related growth in love shown in relationship to others.

Since neighbor love is a reflection of God's image in the believer, and since full restoration of the image of God is the goal of Christian perfection, love necessarily motivates one toward service, because it reflects God's own relational nature as well as God's determination to reclaim what has been lost. To experience Christian perfection therefore means at least two things. First, it involves a particular kind of relationship

with others, one that reflects the very nature of a loving God ... By implication, then, Christian perfection must remain a significant part of the description of the church ... Second, since love for neighbor represents an essential quality of Christian perfection, and since this love reflects the heart of God, Christian perfection must play a crucial role in mission ... Christian perfection and ministry go hand in hand. In a sense, then, to let go of the emphasis on Christian perfection puts the church in the risky position of losing its proper motivation for mission.<sup>21</sup>

The process of being made perfect in love involves more than growth in love for God and others, but also a radical cutting away of “unholy tempers.” The sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit ultimately provides a crisis point at which the believer senses no contrary principle within. Wesley maintains that nothing “contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love.”<sup>22</sup> Love replaces sin, and overcomes every evil passion or temper.

Even those who are perfected in love need to see continual improvement in their behavior, since holiness is still capable of improvement. No one has arrived, spiritually speaking, at a point where they have no need for improvement; there is no basis for spiritual elitism. “However much soever any man he hath attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to “grow in grace,” and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his savior.”<sup>23</sup> This is the essence of the distinction implicit within Albert Outler’s helpful terms “perfected perfection” – an idea he claims has been attributed to Wesley by some of his followers – and “perfectible perfection” which was Wesley’s own view. The former implies a completed state, whereas the latter allows for “further horizons of love and of participation in God always opening up *beyond* any given level of spiritual progress.”<sup>24</sup> The possibility exists that even someone who has experienced entire sanctification may fall away from that state. The mature Wesley was convinced of this possibility, noting that there were some in this situation who had fallen away and who had subsequently recovered their “blessing”:

Some years since, I was inclined to think that one who had once enjoyed and lost the pure love of God must never look to enjoy it again till they were just stepping into eternity. But experience has taught us better things. We have now numerous instances of those who had cast away that unspeakable blessing and now enjoy it in a larger measure than ever.<sup>25</sup>

However certain Wesley might ultimately have been that it was possible for even those entirely sanctified to fall from grace, he was thoroughly convinced that they need not. The grace of God that sanctifies can also sustain sanctified believers and deliver them from possible evil.

To prevent the possibility of reversion – given that remaining spiritually static was not possible for Wesley – he designed an effective system to provide spiritual nurture and pastoral care for the process leading to entire sanctification. He established class meetings, bands, and select societies. Class meetings were open to anyone, whereas bands provided a setting for self-examination and confession leading to spiritual growth. Select societies were exclusively for those pursuing Christian perfection. Wesley had no time for solitary religion, and therefore created this communal context in which people could grow in grace, and increase in perfection, while awaiting entire sanctification.

It is the concept of continual increase in perfection that brings us to one of the key distinctives about Wesley's formulation of entire sanctification that is also the one that causes greatest controversy – the concept that in an instantaneous divine intervention it was possible to be completely free from the power and effects of sin. The issue polarises scholars with the main concern surrounding the issue of crisis, and what happens to sin in the life of the believer.

Dealing with the latter first, Wesley understood sanctification to mean the eradication (that is, complete removal) of the sin-nature at the time of the "second-blessing."<sup>26</sup> While salvation provides a new nature, it co-exists with the sin-nature until:

it shall please our Lord to speak to our hearts again, to speak

the second time, "Be clean": and then only the leprosy is cleansed. Then only, the evil root, the carnal mind, is destroyed; and inbred sin subsists no more. But if there be no such second change, if there be no instantaneous deliverance after justification, if there be none but a gradual work of God (that there is a gradual work none denies) then we must be content, as well as we can, to remain full of sin till death; and, if so, we must remain guilty till death, continually deserving punishment. For it is impossible the guilt, or desert of punishment, should be removed from us, as long as all this sin remains in our heart, and cleaves to our words and actions. Nay, in rigorous justice, all we think, and speak, and act, continually increases it.<sup>27</sup>

During Wesley's own life-time, there were several different understandings of what was the most significant problem that needed to be removed — worldliness, pride or lust.<sup>28</sup> But the question remained concerning the possibility of backsliding: if the sin-nature is eradicated at sanctification, how was it that it could somehow return to cause the believer to sin? For Wesley, the issue was that the battle with sin was no longer internal, but only external. Sanctified believers are not spared from the effects of external temptation, but the internal propensity toward sin has been removed at entire sanctification. What remains is the possibility of sin arising in the form of involuntary transgressions and the inevitable imperfections of our frail humanity. The sanctified believer can be free from sin in the sense of "a voluntary transgression of a known law."<sup>29</sup> The potential contradiction that this appeared to imply gave rise to alternative views of sinless perfection: for example that it is a matter of *suppression*, in which sin remains and must continually be kept down in the believer's life; or that it is a matter of *counteraction/identification*, in which the old nature remains but is counteracted by the new holy nature at entire sanctification. Victory over the old nature is gained through continual identification with Christ on the cross, and reckoning oneself to be dead to sin and alive to Christ.

The second aspect of the issue that polarizes, concerns the nature of the cri-

sis experience. Some maintain the possibility of divine interventions, but place such stress on the process of gradual growth in grace before and after such crisis moments as to virtually eliminate the significance of the instantaneous. Thus as believers we are “strengthened and shaped by our *responsible* participation in the empowering *grace* of God. The dimension of a gradual “growth in grace” [is] integral to sanctification.”<sup>30</sup> Others maintain that the emphasis on crisis cannot be lost without seriously diminishing the significance of Wesley’s thought, and potentially undermining his emphasis on grace.

[I]nstantaneousness is seen as an implication of the status of justification or entire sanctification as unmerited gifts of God, rather than human achievements. In other words, Wesley stressed the instantaneous nature of these two aspects of salvation as assumed implications of God’s *prevenience* in human salvation. In this light it was not accidental that the mature Wesley’s growing openness to the possibility that some experience God’s renewing work in a gradual manner was contemporaneous with the increasing emphasis in his later writings on universal Prevenient Grace – which establishes God’s *prevenience* even prior to the gracious actions of justification and the New Birth!<sup>31</sup>

The instantaneous motif retains the important truth that it is the grace of God that effects sanctification, rather than believers making themselves holy. The operation of grace in *process* shifts the emphasis to the combined action of God and the believer – the latter in responsive/ responsible grace.

All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the 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. But even that love increases more and more, till we "grow up in all things into him that is our Head;" till we attain "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."<sup>32</sup>

Wesley had seen that the Roman Catholic emphasis was that full sanctification was experienced in purgatory, and that Reformed teaching tended to downplay the whole concept of the fullness of sanctification in this life. Wesley's separation of justification and sanctification ensured both a crisis – an actualization of sanctification – and a process that extended before and after it.

But if there be no such second change, if there be no instantaneous deliverance after justification, if there be none but a gradual work of God (that there is a gradual work none denies) then we must be content, as well as we can, to remain full of sin till death; and, if so, we must remain guilty till death, continually deserving punishment.<sup>33</sup>

His choice of the analogy of death was particularly apt: there was the continuity inherent in the process of dying, as well as the discontinuity associated with the moment of death itself.

Is this death to sin, and renewal in love, gradual or instantaneous? A man may be dying for some time; yet he does not, properly speaking, die, till the instant the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to sin for some time; yet he is not dead to sin, till sin is separated from his soul; and in that instant he lives the full life of love. And as the change undergone, when the body dies, is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any we had known before, yea, such as till then it is impossible to conceive; so the change wrought, when the soul dies to sin, is of a different kind, and infinitely greater

than any before, and than any can conceive till he experiences it. Yet he stills grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity.<sup>34</sup>

In the 19th century, particularly with Phoebe Palmer, the balance between crisis and process would be disrupted. Palmer would ignore the balance between gradual and instantaneous aspects of sanctification, and would tend to emphasize only the instant work. In the process, she would shift sanctification from the goal that would be achieved close to death, to an experience that should occur not long after the beginning of the Christian life.

Under the influence of such disciples, Wesley's description of crisis would ultimately cause a measure of embarrassment in those streams that derived from the Wesleyan holiness movement; for some, there was a measure of "realignment" achieved through an increased emphasis on process to the effective exclusion of the crisis experience. Yet this stress on gradual growth and on character and moral development is also an overemphasis in the same way that the crisis experience was overemphasized in the 19th century. The possibility exists that this emphasis on process to the virtual neglect of the crisis experience diminishes the *urgency* of holiness teaching and preaching that Wesley would have demanded.

Wesley enjoined his brother Charles to emphasize the crisis aspect in his hymns, in part so that the expectation of an imminent or immediate intervention by God would encourage people to continue to foster the gradual growth in grace as they sought the crisis experience. But this was no mere trick on Wesley's part. In the mature Wesley's formulation he considers the nature of God's gracious activity in sanctification:

Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some; I mean in this sense - they do not advert to the particular moment wherein sin ceases to be. But it is infinitely desirable, were it the will of God, that it should be done instantaneously; that the Lord should destroy sin "by the breath of His mouth," in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And so He generally does; a plain

fact, of which there is evidence enough to satisfy any unprejudiced person.<sup>35</sup>

For Wesley, the *process* aspect of holiness could involve growth in knowledge, grace, love and even likeness with God. Perfection possessed a dynamic that moved the sanctified believer toward the perfection of God, and therefore Christians should always be progressing in their life of holiness.

It is necessary to maintain the nuances in Wesley's thought, in order to avoid significant interpretative errors. Both crisis and process elements must be maintained in creative tension, as also must matters of justification and sanctification, divine grace and human responsibility, faith and good works, personal and social holiness.

The failure to maintain these dialectical tensions – especially in the 19th century – was what would ultimately contribute to the widespread abandonment of much holiness teaching by the later 20th century. Perhaps in response to the 19th century overemphasis on crisis to the neglect of process, and certainly in light of secular psychology, there is significant stress – in the contemporary context – on gradual growth, and on moral and character development. But if holiness is to be practical and authentic, the crisis-process nexus cannot be lost.

#### NOTES

(Abbreviations: *WTJ* = *Wesleyan Theological Journal*)

1. John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, Chicago: Moby Press, 1951, 36.
2. Richard P Heitzenrater, *Mirror and memory: reflections on early Methodism*, Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989, 60.
3. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and memory*, 122.
4. Randy Maddox, *Responsible grace: John Wesley's practical theology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1994, 130-131.
5. Maddox, *Responsible grace*, 155.

Although several scholars (eg Outler, Maddox, Cobb) have debated the issue of the "real" Christian for Wesley, usually centering their claims around varying understandings of the Aldersgate experience, and a depressing letter from John

to Charles in 1766.

6. Kenneth Collins, *The Scripture way of salvation: the heart of John Wesley's theology*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997, 159.

7. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and memory*, 149.

8. John Wesley, "A Plain Account Of Christian Perfection" *The Works of John Wesley* (1872 ed. by Thomas Jackson), vol. 11, point 26.

10. Wesley, "A Plain Account", point 13.

11. Wesley "A plain account," point 26.

12. Collins, *Scripture Way*, 180.

13. Wesley, "A Plain Account," points 12, 25.

14. John Wesley "The Scripture way of Salvation" *Sermon* 43, III:5,7. (text of the 1872 edition).

15. Maddox, *Responsible grace*, 164.

16. John Wesley "The Repentance of Believers" *Sermon* 14, I:10-11.

17. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and memory*, 100.

18. Ted A Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: the essentials*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1999, 61-62.

19. John B Cobb Jr, *Grace and responsibility: a Wesleyan theology for today*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 65.

20. *The works of John Wesley* (1872: reprinted. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 11:367.

21. Stephen W. Rankin "A perfect church: toward a Wesleyan missional ecclesiology" *WTJ* 38\1, 2003, 89-90.

22. John Wesley, "A Plain Account," *Works*, vol. 11, point 19.

23. John Wesley, "Christian Perfection," I:8, *Works* 2:104.

24. Albert C Outler, *Evangelism and theology in the Wesleyan spirit*, Nashville: Discipleship resources, 2004, 122.

25. Wesley, "Letter to Sister Bennis" (May 30, 1769) *Letters* 5:138.

26. There are two criticisms that can potentially be leveled against the idea of eradication: (1) the tendency to see sin as a substance; (2) the difficulty that if the sin-nature is destroyed it should be gone forever, yet the possibility of backsliding indicates the return of the sin-nature. The latter difficulty can be addressed in terms of the metaphor of cleansing, especially if a medical cleansing of a wound is considered; it then becomes possible for infection to be completely eradicated

(through antibiotic/ antiseptic cleansing of the wound), yet it is not impossible for infection to return.

27. Wesley "The Repentance of Believers" *Sermon* 14, I:20.

28. Paul M. Bassett, ("Culture and Concupiscence: The Changing Definition of Sanctity in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement, 1867-1920," *WTJ* 28, 1993, 60-61) describes it: "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... [I]n 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."

29. Wesley "On Perfection" *Sermon* 76, II:9.

30. Maddox, *Responsible grace*, 179.

31. Maddox, *Responsible grace*, 154.

32. Wesley, "On working out our own salvation" *Sermons* 85, II:1.

33. Wesley, "The repentance of believers" *Sermons* 14, I:20.

34. John Wesley, "A Plain Account" *Works*, vol. 11, point 19.

35. Wesley "Scripture way" *Sermon* 43, III:18.

# The Meaning Of Conversion

*Mona Moore*

In my possession is a special box containing items from my earliest life to now which hold significant memories for me. One item is a pamphlet entitled "Walking with Jesus." On the back page of this pamphlet is a form filled in with my childish handwriting:

## **Second Birth**

This certifies that  
On the 14<sup>th</sup> day of July, 1961  
Mona Moore  
Was born into God's family.

For years I would have identified this as the date of my conversion: the date when I was "born again." However, even prior to my beginning studies at the Master's level, I was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the "born again" label that is so often used by evangelical Christians. This dissatisfaction arises as a result of a number of issues; perhaps, the primary one being that it failed to resonate with my personal experience. Brian V. Johnstone states that "Conversion is a profound and ultimately mysterious experience and no explanation can be adequate."<sup>1</sup> Yet if I am to be sensitive to my awareness of God's

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working in my life, the answers to two key questions must be sought: What is conversion? What are the implications of conversion in my life? In seeking to answer these questions I shall attempt to integrate my own experiences and the writings of various authors.

### What Is Conversion?

Having grown up in a home that was strongly influenced by Methodist teaching, I knew well the scripture text from which the phrase "born again" comes: "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (N.I.V.) I had often heard and reflected on the Damascus Road experience of the apostle Paul when he apparently did a 180 degree turn in his belief about Christ and his outward actions towards Christians. I acknowledge that for some people there is a dramatic, life changing experience when they suddenly become aware of their need of God's grace in their lives - often because they have come to a self-awareness of how they have failed in life. One only needs to listen to the testimonies of individuals at the Harbor Light Corps. Their struggle with alcohol and drug abuse that has been overcome by God's grace, often in miraculous ways, is a testimony of the dramatic conversion that can take place. They speak of being born again, of experiencing new life. Theirs is an "extraordinary" conversion.<sup>2</sup> Brian V. Johnstone states: "Karl Rahner noted that the occurrence of conversion as a central event in the history of one's personal salvation is often masked in the experience of Catholics."<sup>3</sup> He could have also said "in the experience of many Salvationists."

As The Salvation Army has moved into its fourth, fifth and sixth generation of Salvationists, we now have individuals who have grown up in homes where as children they were dedicated to God and taught Christian principles. They grew up knowing of God and Jesus. Yet often we place too much emphasis on one particular experience when they come to know God or Jesus in a personal way. In a similar way, we have had a tendency in the past to focus on one particular experience when one came to know the Holy Spirit in a more personal way through the experience of holiness. This was at one time called the Second Blessing.<sup>4</sup> Some now recognize holiness as a growth process by which one becomes more sensitive to the Spirit's leading in one's life. Should not this ongoing process be recognized in conversion as well especially for the

individual nurtured in the faith from birth. William Booth, when asked the question: "May not children grow up into Salvation without knowing the exact moment of conversion?" responded:

Yes, it may be so; and in the future we trust this will be the usual way in which children will be brought into the Kingdom.

When ... the parents are godly, and the children are surrounded by holy influences and examples from their birth, and trained up in the spirit of their early dedication – they will doubtless come to know and love and trust their Savior in the ordinary course of things.

The Holy Ghost will take possession of them from the first. Mothers and fathers will, as it were, put them into the Saviour's arms in their swaddling clothes, and He will take them, and bless them, and sanctify them from the very womb, and make them His own, without their knowing the hour or the place when they pass from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light.<sup>5</sup>

Combined with this tendency to focus on particular events, we also have a tendency to separate the head and the heart. Priority is frequently given by many to the experience of the heart often to the exclusion of the mind; rather than seeing a need for both. What could be the long-term effect of this? Have we nurtured our youth to rely too much on the experiential element of the faith journey rather than to encourage more reflection to deepen their faith experience? Can the result of this focus on the felt experience lead to a continual searching for a further feeling experience? Is this why we sometimes find people turning to more charismatic expressions of the faith or to the more secular aspect of the world where the premise is held "If it feels good, do it"? Is the danger of this shallow Christians?

Jesus did instruct Nicodemus in John 3:7 that one must be "born again." However, the interpretation by some of how that experience of being "born

again" takes place fails to acknowledge the complexity of the individual person as well as the complexity of each individual's life experience. To demand that one can name the time and place is too narrow an interpretation of the total concept of God's interaction with humankind in the scriptures. In my mind the term has become too exclusivist; setting up a dichotomy between those who have a "born again" experience and those who do not. The term "born again" as used by Jesus was a metaphor but some have given the term an iconic status. We have turned the metaphor into an explanation of the experience, whereas, it is the experience that is the important element. How we understand how the experience takes place is the crux of the matter. Is it possible that when Jesus compared the experience to the wind in the very next verse, that he was indeed indicating that God draws people to believe in Jesus in various ways that we can't always explain? There is the reality that each individual must appropriate a belief in Jesus but how that takes place varies and can be dependent on the person's age and level of understanding.

To rely solely on one image narrows one's vision of how God's grace is at work in our world. We need to recapture how conversion is both a personal and communal experience. To restrict conversion only to the personal level, to privatize religion, cripples the effectiveness of how God's people can live out the gospel or present the "good news" in God's world.<sup>6</sup> Another way in which the term born again is restrictive can also be seen in the way it tends to focus on one event. I have heard officers or television evangelists claim that you must be able to identify the time and place when you accepted Jesus. This is to place God in a box. It limits our understanding; the focus is on what we have done rather than on how God's grace has been at work in our lives. It can even have an impact on how we see the world - dividing it into secular and sacred.

In contrast to the narrow vision of "born again," we need to consider the numerous varied experiences of many people to recapture the rich diversity of God's working. Bernard Lonergan speaks of conversion as "an ongoing process, concrete and dynamic, personal, communal and historical."<sup>7</sup> It is the aspect of personal, dynamic and ongoing that resonates with my personal experience. For me, conversion is *an ongoing positive response to God's open invitation to be in relationship with God's self*. It is from this premise of relationship that I understand conversion. While at The College for Officer Training, cadets are encour-

aged to understand that they are continuing a journey where they should strive conscientiously to "Know God, Know Themselves and Know Their Mission." It is in reality a continuing ongoing conversion experience as they start to fulfill a new vocation.

In 1996, I wrote a reflective paper on my sense of vocation. At that time I stated:

As one considers the development of a whole integrated person, there is the awareness of many avenues of growth merging and blending - the cognitive, social, psychological, moral. All these help the individual to answer the question, "Who am I?" Yet with all these avenues of growth, there is a greater question that seeks an answer: i.e., "Whose am I?" It is in our faith development that this answer is discovered. If we recognize that we are to live in covenant relationships, this - as suggested by Walter Brueggemann - "transposes all identity questions into vocational questions."<sup>8</sup> We are to be in a covenant relationship with God." As identified by Brueggemann, "Vocation . . . is finding a purpose for being in the world that is related to the purposes of God."<sup>9</sup> Fowler notes that Martin Luther identified that this was to be seen in our relationships in community.<sup>10</sup>

The human individual was created for relationship. My personhood enables me to be aware of myself as an individual and yet to be in relationship - with others and with God. This ability to be self aware and self-transcendent is a gift from God. Our ability to reason and to make choice is a gift given to human individuals which makes them unique from the rest of creation. Louis Janssen states, ". . . it is in this very manner of being conscious, free and responsible which bestows on man his dignity as subject."<sup>11</sup> It is this gift which enables us to answer the second key question.

### **What Are the Implications of Conversion In My Life?**

As an individual created for relationship, I find that conversion impacts my life in three ways: My relationship with God; my relationship with the church, and my relationship with the world.

### What Are the Implications of Conversion in My Life for My Relationship with God?

If I return to my definition of conversion: *an ongoing positive response to God's open invitation to be in relationship with God's self*, I must see myself as God sees me. For me the first remembered experience of God's invitation to be in relationship occurred four years prior to my signing the Second Birth form spoken of earlier. As a child of six, I clearly remember asking Jesus to be my friend. In reality I was responding to the friendship that was being offered to me. So often we totally align conversion with repentance - a "turning from sin to God" yet to a child surrounded by a strong faith community, that first experience "an opening up to God." Bernard Haring suggests that through *synderesis* "the human will is a little spark of love kindled by the divine love."<sup>12</sup> God in grace reached out to a six-year-old child and offered a relationship that was nurturing. It is amazing to consider that the God of the universe saw the potential of encouraging that spark of the soul, the *scintilla animae*,<sup>13</sup> in a child. That sense of friendship was real to me. I knew Jesus as being a friend who was with me at all times, a friend I wanted to please. Erickson in speaking of the development of moral awareness and conscience identifies three phases:

. . . moral learning as an aspect of childhood, . . . ideological experimentation as a part of adolescence, and . . . ethical consolidation as an adult task.<sup>14</sup>

He highlights a danger that moral prohibitions can be enforced upon a child before a child can internalize the reason for them. This concept has an impact even on the way we present sin to a child. Referring back to the pamphlet given to me as a child of ten, the plan of salvation is outlined. The very first statement is:

**1. You have sinned.** Romans 3:23. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We have all done wrong things, which God calls sins, and only Jesus can take them away. We must be very sorry for our sins and confess them all to Jesus.

While the reality is that there is sin (attitude)<sup>15</sup> and sins (acts) in our life, if we focused on God's desire to be in relationship with us and the role of Jesus to be one with us, we might be able to present a view of God who desires to love rather than judge.

Rather than understanding that being in relationship with God was the "most" right thing, somehow tragically, an emphasis on doing the right thing took pre-eminence in my own life. Again quoting from my 1996 reflection paper on vocation I wrote:

At 13, through a cadet's testimony I knew I was to be an officer. I was proud to be a Salvationist and yet at this time I question that my life was truly integrated. While my faith was firm, it was a faith that belonged to the previous generation. It was a faith that denied certain "worldly" things. As I reflect back on that time I see a young person who lost out on some of the wonderful experiences of youth. Lack of integration with peers hindered the development of my own sense of identity. High school years were often lonely as I felt isolation because of my faith.

Johnt W. Glaser's chart which contrasts Superego or Incomplete Conscience with Conscience highlights the dangers of the "should's or have-to's" of a conditioned reaction in contrast to the positive personal appropriation of responses in which relationship is the principle dynamic.<sup>16</sup> What was the social dynamic in that time period that changed a child's trusting relationship with Jesus into a narrower, more legalistic, judgmental self-righteousness?

The sixties, for the Church (The Salvation Army included), was I believe a turbulent time. Many young people rejected denominational Christianity. As the Church struggled to maintain its integrity at that time, there appeared to be two main responses - total rejection or total acceptance. As one with a compliant nature, I accepted for the most part the definition of Christianity as offered by The Salvation Army. While I was encouraged to study and to develop my mind, I somehow came to understand that I would then see the truth as a

good Salvationist and would then live my life in a specified moral way. Looking back, my perceptions of what was morally good were very superficial. Often I recognize that I was striving to meet some one else's expectations. How were these perceptions overcome? Again, I return to my personal definition of conversion: *an ongoing positive response to God's open invitation to be in relationship with God's self*. I quote again from my reflection paper on vocation:

Prior to my teen years, I had always wanted to be a teacher - this might be identified as my vocational dream as identified by Fowler.<sup>17</sup> As stated above, this desire had been superseded by a sense of calling to officership in the teen years. In the first few years of teaching a dilemma developed; my love for children and teaching deepened. God didn't bother me while I earned my permanent teaching certificate and paid off educational debts but after the first two years I developed a sense of unease as I questioned the eternal value of what I was teaching in the lives of the young people. I recognize now that this was a transition period being initiated by unrest within my spirit. In a sense I was adjusting the dream and facing the 30 something transition spoken of by Levinson and others.

At 27 years of age, on a Sunday morning while attending a seminar on officership, I knew I had come to a crossroads decision point. I informed God that if I was to be an officer God had to let me know then or the case was closed and I would return to teaching. During personal devotions I read Romans 8:28 yet I resisted. During the morning service a cadet - a former teacher who loved teaching - gave his testimony. I sat spellbound, as the details were so similar. I knelt at the altar yet I fought God. I unhappily agreed to obey but cried all the way home as the only thing I felt I had excelled at - teaching - was being taken from me. I prayed that my application would be rejected but it wasn't. One Sunday I suddenly realized what I was doing. I knelt and said a one sentence sim-

ple prayer: "Lord, make me happy in your will." God did. After teaching for five years, I entered college full of excitement. I was to discover that year Mother Teresa's writings. She states, "True holiness consists in doing God's will with a smile."<sup>18</sup> I go back to that definition often to check on my motive. This for me within my tradition was my holiness or sanctification experience. I recognize this as a *Metanoia* experience as identified by Johnston, for my priorities were totally turned around.<sup>19</sup>

As I read Eugene Cooper's work on *The Fundamental Option*, my experience resonated with the following statement:

When the individual experiences his/her existence as a meaningful totality and accepts the responsibility for the task of directing his/her life to its final goal, he/she forms a "fundamental option" for his/her life's direction which is on the moral level.<sup>20</sup>

Had I chosen to remain a teacher, I could have still lived a moral life; yet in not responding positively to the fundamental option to follow God's invitation to serve as an officer in The Salvation Army, I would have sinned for I would have "missed the mark" which God had established for my life story at that time. I was fascinated to read that "none of the words used in the Bible for 'sin' has of itself that exclusively moral association to which hundreds of years of Christian use have accustomed us."<sup>21</sup> In a very real sense I see that at this point I was working at the Conscience 3 level – Judgment<sup>22</sup> – where I was making a specific judgment on the good that I should do with my life. It was the adult task of ethical consolidation mentioned by Erickson. While the choice made to follow this fundamental option of following God's will for my life brought about a rather radical change in my life I see it as a "continuous conversion" rather than a "total conversion"<sup>23</sup> for I am aware how patiently God worked in my life to bring me to the point of being able to give a *positive response to God's open invi-*

*tation to be in relationship with God's self.*

Once we include a spiritual perspective to our understanding of personhood, we must recognize that our desires and potential are as limitless as the God with whom we are in relationship. God does entrust us with the responsibility and the freedom to cooperate with or reject that grace. While I recognize fully that there is the potential to totally reject that grace, I wish to focus on those individuals who have chosen to accept God's grace and to minister within the church. Like myself, they might question:

**What Are the Implications of Conversion in My Life for My Relationship with the Church?**

In a lecture on ethics, the concept of a shared independence experienced by a ten week old fetus and the pregnant mother brought home for me the balance that we so often struggle with – the balance between autonomy and inter-relatedness. An understanding of this struggle for balance impacts on how we respond morally and ethically to other people both within and without the church.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 16., states: "Conscience is the secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths."<sup>24</sup> Exactly how this voice is heard needs to be considered. As a child I was told that your conscience was that inner voice – understood to be God's voice – which told you what was the right or wrong thing to do. The only problem was sometimes that voice did not speak clearly. Once again as we grapple with what is meant when we use the term person, a more subjective approach must be taken when defining conscience. As stated by Gula: "conscience is 'me coming to a decision.' It includes not only cognitive and volitional aspects, but also affective, intuitive, attitudinal, and somatic aspects as well."<sup>25</sup> Our community informs our conscience. We expect a child's moral conscience to be informed by his or her faith community. However, with that formation a level of responsibility comes. Ultimately one is responsible for the moral decisions that one makes. There is autonomy yet there is an inter-relatedness. Bernard Haring in pointing out the importance of reciprocity of conscience within the church states, "The root words, *con* and *scientia* (to know together) already indicate a mutuality of conscience."<sup>26</sup>

While in The Salvation Army, we do not have the exact equivalent to the papal encyclicals against which one might have an "invincibly erring conscience,"<sup>27</sup> we tend to focus more on a pastoral response to a conflict of consciences. This is based on the injunction of I Cor., 8:9, "But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak." (N.R.S.V.). While I recognize that there is a responsibility to nurture the weak, my dilemma in quoting this passage in all situations is that the weak are never challenged to think things through theologically. As a result there is the potential that they will live dwarfed spiritual lives focusing on superficial issues.

Is there not also a moral responsibility on the part of those who have experienced conversion; i.e., those who have opened themselves to God's invitation, to challenge those habits and practices that are culturally or ethnically conditioned rather than being a part of the authentic Christian story? To truly be loyal to the church, we must at times dissent. As pointed out by Linda Hogan when speaking of moral matters, the reality is "the entire Church, including the magisterium, is engaged in a search for truth."<sup>28</sup> Dialogue is necessary for growth; especially dialogue where one is free to question and search. As summarized by Linda Hogan:

A Church which acknowledges the complexities of all moral decision-making and which has faith in the virtue and values of its members will resist calling for external-conformity in place of responsible choosing. Most especially in times of transition it is vital to reaffirm the dignity and primacy of the individual's conscience. Informed and confident moral subjects who are capable of discerning what is demanded by the Christian narrative ought to be welcomed rather than silenced. Only then will respectful mutuality characterize intra-ecclesial relationships.<sup>29</sup>

For me, the wisdom of dialogue was highlighted as I interacted with the feminist viewpoint when studying at the graduate level. Initially, I reacted quite negatively to the feminist arguments, yet even in this area God invited me to a

more positive response. Richard Gula has defined moral conversion as "a matter of repatterning the imagination so as to see dimensions of reality which were not available to us before."<sup>30</sup> My initial hesitancy to hear the feminist view often arose from my own lack of understanding. Two faith communities had nurtured me: The Free Methodists and The Salvation Army. Both recognized the equality of women. My gender was never an issue when challenged to reach my full potential in all areas of my life.

When reading articles on Feminist Ethics, my initial response was negative as I saw the authors simply attempting to redress the balance. So often this only happens by an over-reaction which brings its own imbalance. The true value of the person whether male or female, lies in one specific issue for me. This stems from an experience in 1995. I had been appointed to attend the International College for Officers for two months. This is a great privilege. I had, however, arrived feeling very ill and very inadequate. Yet through a sermon on being God's beloved, I once again discovered "the gift of being called by love, allowing oneself to be loved, and accepting oneself as loved."<sup>31</sup> The term *Imago Dei*, has great significance for me for not only am I loved but I am more fully realizing the potential of who I am to become because I am created in God's image. It is an ongoing transformation.

Kevin Kelly has suggested that "moral theology must be experience-based. The signs of the times are not restricted to the world of ideas."<sup>32</sup> While I would disagree to some extent with what he has said, for sometimes I can only grasp an idea of what another has experienced, I do believe that there is merit in the sharing of one's experiential story. In hearing the particularities of other's stories, either from within the church or from those outside the church, my image of the church is re-patterned so that a new dimension of reality is experienced. Once again God's grace affords me either an opportunity to build on the strengths of the church or a moral responsibility to do what I can to correct the weaknesses of the church.

We recognize that:

The uniqueness and creativity of conscience is not just for one's own sake; it is for co-humanity in and for the recipro-

ty of consciences. Hence, discernment concerns the common good in Church and society, and the good of each of our fellowmen. Church and world need a critical conscience. . . . In a pluralistic society and world; Christians should be an active leaven of the virtue of critique.<sup>33</sup>

This last statement in particular challenges us to ask a further question:  
**What Are the Implications of Conversion in My Life for My Relationship with the World?**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was certainly one of unprecedented growth in scientific knowledge and technological know-how. But has our spiritual and ethical growth kept pace?

This statement was taken from a Toronto Star article, entitled "Biotechnology raises ethical question."<sup>34</sup> This article was not written by a person of the Christian faith but by Pumadhammo Bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk, who lives in a forest monastery. His comments, however, highlight the responsibility of all people – to face the complex ethical and moral questions of a complex society where not all people are attuned to God's invitation to be in relationship. The challenge remains for those who are experiencing an ongoing conversion to respond to the world's need for spiritual direction – whether that need is recognized or not by the world.

Simply because of the fact that social structures are composed of people who have the potential and appetite to chose wrong over right, there is always the potential reality that there will be wrongs to be righted: History attests to the attempts of those who have been converted or transformed; who in turn have transformed their society. In my own lifetime, I have witnessed the overwhelming effects of people such as Martin Luther King who have taken up the call for justice for the blacks in the United States. Their dissent against a civil law won for those people the legal right to be considered equal.

I have been aware of how both Roman Catholic and Salvation Army hospitals have grappled with the issue of co-operation regarding abortions.

Often the conscience of the church is in sharp conflict with an individual's conscience. This can be further compounded when social or economic issues enter into the dialogue.

Charles Curran has made the following statement:

Roman Catholicism has opted for a stance of cooperation with the world even though it recognizes at times it should and must disagree with what is happening in the world. On the other hand the sectarian groups in Christianity have generally based their beliefs on a withdrawal from the world and the recognition of an inherent incompatibility between the world and the gospel message.<sup>35</sup>

While I am always cautious of generalized statements, I do believe he has highlighted one of the greatest failings of the "born again" metaphor for conversion. In focusing on a total renewal, there is a tendency to see everything in the past that is of the world as evil. As I have stated, I see conversion involving relationship – *positively responding to God's open invitation to be in relationship with God's self*. The problem is that when we privatize religion to our own little world we become very protective to keep it safe and secure from evil. This attitude can have devastating consequences. Gregory Baum, in calling for a critical theology, suggests that we are able to "distinguish between what religion intends to be and what it actually produces in people's lives, i.e., between the intention and the consequences of religion."<sup>36</sup> He goes on to state, "Critical theology enables the church to assume theological responsibility for its social reality."<sup>37</sup> We must practice double analysis. Not only must we evaluate when there is a sin in an institution of society, but we must also question what are the real problems that caused the situation.<sup>38</sup> Peter Henriot has suggested that "there is still need – if conversion is to be promoted and exercised through an effective prophetic word – for serious research into critical social questions."<sup>39</sup> In response to this I wrote in the margins, "Sometimes the sin is laziness or apathy." To be involved in serious research involves effort and determination – but the cost is paid by some. An example of this is seen in the story of Erin Brockovich which was retold in a very popular movie.

Am I implying that everyone who claims a conversion experience should be a radical social activist? No! Does it mean as it did for Gutierrez, that "Christian conversion means committing oneself to the liberation of the poor and oppressed"?<sup>40</sup> Does that mean that everyone should give up any personal wealth and radically align themselves with the poor and oppressed? Again I would say, not necessarily so. But there is a moral responsibility. Walter E. Conn has suggested that conversion means "not only committing oneself generously, but lucidly, realistically, concretely 'with an analysis of the situation and a strategy of action.'"<sup>41</sup> The greater challenge to be truly moral when involved in critical theology is to not only criticize the social sin but to provide a positive alternative. In 1891, General William Booth opened a match factory to manufacture safety matches to highlight two evils in the match making business of his day: low wages for employees and the use of phosphorus which caused "phossy jaw" – a disfiguring and painful disease. By 1900 large factories had been forced to change their methods to follow the practice of the Army's factory. By 1908, an act of Parliament made it illegal to make or sell matches containing phosphorus.<sup>42</sup>

But how does the individual involved in the daily issues of life respond to this issue of being morally involved in social issues? Once again, I return to my premise that conversion is a *positive response to God's open invitation to be in relationship with God's self*. The focus is on God's gracious manner of expanding our vision. If we are open to God, God will expand our vision of our role as converted people. The role for each will be different: some dramatic and some less dramatic. For myself, I have experienced this in several ways. I resonate with James P. Hanigan's guidance regarding accumulation and use of material possessions. God constantly challenges me to recognize that I must detach myself from reliance on material possessions: they do not belong to me. They are on loan from God. Over the years there has been a heightened awareness of the poor and some growth on my part to find ways to support them in a way that honors their human dignity.

I find myself being challenged more and more to conscientiously make an effort to be aware of events in the world. With that awareness must also come evaluation. Is there something I can do to heighten the awareness of what it means to live knowing that "The kingdom of God has come near to you"?<sup>43</sup> I

have found an increasing freedom to enjoy this world that God has created. There is no longer the sharp contrast between the secular and the sacred. God is imminent. John A. T. Robinson has suggested that God is the ground of our being: "that God is to be met not by a 'religious' turning away from the world but in unconditional concern for 'the other' *seen through to its ultimate depths*, that God is . . . the personal ground of all that we experience."<sup>44</sup>

One further question arises from this discussion regarding the term conversion:

**What Are the Implications of Conversion in My Life for My Relationship with the Future?**

In my initial comments I suggested dissatisfaction with the definition of conversion offered by so many in the evangelical tradition; i.e. being "born again." While recognizing that for some there is a dramatic experience that reorients a person to God, for many raised in the Christian faith new metaphors need to be presented. In dialoguing with fellow Salvationists' raised in Christian homes I have had a number of reactions to my dissatisfaction expressed in this paper - from a hesitant skepticism to challenging the term "born - again" to a sigh of relief that finally somebody was acknowledging that her experience did not fit the normative pattern. The greatest confirmation came while working with a young woman who was struggling with the words of a song in our song-book: "Am I what once I was? Have I that ground maintained?"<sup>45</sup> I had seen phenomenal growth in this individual yet somehow she was being paralyzed by this focus on what she should be doing. I explained how my understanding of my relationship with God had changed. First I had understood that relationship as a solid line moving at an angle constantly upward with a few crises points indicating the experience of conversion/salvation and holiness. Next I had come to realize that that line moving at an angle moving upward tended to have a number of dips and peaks as I dealt with the reality of who I was and the ideal of what I wanted to be. I then shared with her a variation of James Fowler's faith stages where an ongoing conversion invites us to move forward only by circling back. This movement back "can lead to release from and transformation of crippling patterns of earlier development, making ongoing growth possible."<sup>46</sup> The excitement of this woman as she recognized God's grace inviting her to move beyond the disquiet to a deeper relationship where she was taking greater own-

ership for her own beliefs highlighted for me the value of other metaphors which more fully acknowledge the ongoing process of God's grace.

There is no doubt in my mind that within this Army that I love there are committed people who recognize that God's involvement in our lives is an ongoing process. I believe there is an aspect of conversion involving salvation in which God saves me from the potential of what would happen if I turned from God. I shed tears the night I recognized that potential. God's grace kept me from that. I believe that even our doctrine of Holiness acknowledges that we are in relationship. Our Handbook of Doctrine identifies this: "The call to holiness is a call to all believers to live in continual fellowship with the risen Savior."<sup>47</sup> It is not with our doctrine that I dissent. My concern arises from what I perceive as a narrow vision of how God works that is presented in the every day conversations of Salvationists. Are we somehow denying the experience of our young people as God has worked in their lives thus far? The challenge for me is to discover if my perceptions are correct or whether I am foisting my experience of conversion on another. Personally I'm challenged to raise this question by offering my written efforts to be printed in an Army publication with an invitation for dialogue. My initial reaction, however, is to recoil from doing this. I fear not being understood; not being able to explain myself fully and yet I sense that even now I am experiencing an invitation from God to initiate an examination of this topic within the Army. It is an invitation that both excites me and frightens me. There is no doubt in my mind that to accept this invitation will open me to a further understanding of God's grace and in so doing an ongoing conversion or transformation will take place. When I first started writing, I was at a point in my Christian experience where I was feeling dry and yet as I have reflected on the issue of conversion I have been encouraged spiritually. I have re-visited the high points of my Christian journey. But what has been of the most benefit has been the awareness of God being so imminently involved in the regular journey of my life. Conversion has once again occurred in my life as I have been given the opportunity to reflect *on God's open invitation to be in relationship with God's self*. An old Hebrew prayer perhaps says it best:

Victory lies, not in reaching the high points of the road, but in making the journey.<sup>48</sup> Once again, I simply have to respond positively to the invitation to continue on the journey.

## Notes

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12. Bernard Haring, "Conscience: The Sanctuary of Creative Fidelity and Liberty," In *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader*. Edited by Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth R. Himes (New York and New Jersey: Paulist, 1989), 257.
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15. Peter Henriot, "Social Sin and Conversion: A Theology of the Church's Social Involvement," In *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader*, edited by Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth R. Himes (New York and New Jersey: Paulist, 1989), 219.
16. Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 127.
17. Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, 142-143.
18. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta* (Surrey, England: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971, 67.

19. William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 145.
20. Cooper, "Fundamental," 388. Italics mine.
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26. Haring, "Conscience," 273.
27. *Ibid.*, 261.
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33. Haring, "Conscience," 270.
34. Toronto Star, January, 2000.
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36. Baum, *Alienation*, 194.
37. *Ibid.*, 195.
38. *Ibid.*, 205-206.
39. Henriot, *Social Sin*, 223.
40. Walter E. Conn, "Christian Conversion: Developmental and Theological Reflections on Young Thomas Merton," in *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader*. Edited by Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth R. Himes (New York and New Jersey: Paulist, 1989), 237.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army*, Volume 3: Social Reform and Welfare Work (The Salvation Army, New York, 1979), 124–125.

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44. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Guildford and London: Billing and Sons Limited, 1963), 61 – 62.
45. The Song Book of the Salvation Army: Song 409 (Verona, N.J.: The Salvation Army, 1987), 114.
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## Book Review

*The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, New York: Oxford, 2006. by Philip Jenkins

Reviewed by Amy Reardon

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*The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* is Philip Jenkins' sequel to *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Both books insist that North American and European Christians understand that predominant Christian thought will no longer be determined by the first world. The church is growing at such a pace in the global South that by 2025, "Africa and Latin America will vie for the title of the most Christian continent." (9) In less than fifty years, only one-fifth of the world's Christians will be non-Hispanic whites. Clearly a global South brand of Christianity will become normative, and Euro-American Christians will find themselves out of step with the bulk of the faithful if they fail to understand and learn from their Southern brothers and sisters. As Jenkins points out, it grows more and more inappropriate to consider Western biblical interpretations as "theology," while qualifying ideas from the global South as "Asian theology" or "African theology." (Latin America is only referred to in passing in this book, as is established in the preface.)

Jenkins sees dramatic differences between the hemispheres in their interpretation and application of Scripture, and he addresses the areas where the contrasts are sharpest. These areas include the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, poverty, the battle against evil, persecution, and the role of

women - each of which is briefly discussed here.

The Old Testament seems to be a more comfortable place for global South citizens to dwell than it is for Westerners. There is a fair amount of identification with the lifestyle and cultic practices of the ancient Hebrews, and Jenkins cites various examples. In some cases, this identification provides depth of understanding, but in other cases it provides rationale for keeping less developed societies bound to their primitive ways. For example, some Africans argue that Old Testament polygamy legitimizes its current practice. Further, Christians in the global South are appropriating Scripture in ways unimagined in the West. Psalm 23 is not used to comfort mourners at a funeral, but is often used as a rally cry against undesirable governments; the only true shepherd of the people is the Lord, not an oppressive dictator.

Pulsating through the text, beyond the confines of the chapter devoted to it, is the subject of poverty. The "Nazarene Manifesto" of Jesus - "his declaration in the synagogue that he has come to preach the gospel to the poor" (135) is referenced several times. Despite a brief mention near the end of the book that many Southerners who are not impoverished have also embraced Christianity, one walks away from this book almost wondering if her first world status (read: wealth) disqualifies her from the Gospel. Jenkins seems to portray the disadvantaged citizens of the South as persons who understand the message of Jesus to be theirs alone. The discussion of the Dalits in India is particularly interesting and inspirational. The people of this lowest caste are delivered from the notion that their poverty is their fault, the result of a wicked previous life.

Jenkins is convinced that Western Christians are reticent to believe in an actual Devil and demonic forces. He writes, "In the global North ... spiritual warfare ideas represent one minority strand of Christian belief and practice, in contrast to their strictly mainstream character in Africa or Asia." (105) While I believe he underestimates the Northerners' belief in supernatural beings, he is correct that we typically do not fear the dark and assume demons are hiding around every corner, plotting our demise in every conceivable way. Living in acutely superstitious cultures, those of the global South seem to have their senses heightened. Though syncretism with traditional pagan practice is a danger when fighting evil, Jenkins reports that "newer indigenous churches succeeded by taking seriously the danger posed by the demonic and supernatural - indeed,

in interpreting these forces firmly in the ancient Christian tradition." (103)

The chapter concerning persecution and vindication addresses both suffering for Christ, and suffering in general under dictatorial regimes. Jenkins leads the reader into discussion of Marxism, liberation theology and Dalit theology. Political movements have often been spearheaded by the faithful. However, Jenkins reminds the reader that liberation theology was largely unsuccessful. As mainline denominations gave way to Pentecostal and evangelical churches, emphasis shifted to personal salvation, and away from the idea of redeeming the state.

Jenkins gives both sides of the coin in his discussion of women. In some situations, women are more oppressed as a result of Christianity. Women played important roles in their native religions, but "Missionary Christianity looked askance at the spiritual roles that women had played in traditional communities." (160) The traditional exegesis of Pauline letters that has kept women under thumb in the North has done the same in the South. Even ritual codes regarding menstruating women have been extracted from the Old Testament and applied in today's Africa. But happily, in other corners of Africa and the rest of the South, women have been liberated. Careful examination of the role of women in the Bible has given women new dignity. Women in Africa have even spoken out against female circumcision after studying the Scripture for themselves and finding only reference to male circumcision.

The above paragraphs are merely a taste of Jenkins' rich text. He is generous with examples and quotes which give solid support to his exposition. But however helpful this book is, Jenkins operates from a point of reference that is different from the Western Salvationist's. He assumes that all Westerners labor under the yoke of 20<sup>th</sup> century biblical criticism. Indeed, biblical criticism is not completely absent in Salvationist circles. But as a denomination, we do not approach every Scriptural passage dubiously, and we do not question the canon as it stands. In my experience, we do not reject out of hand the possibility of healing. Nor do we consider the reality of demons and Satan to be nothing more than the fantastic imaginings of a primitive, un-Enlightened people. Perhaps it is our internationalism that has kept us grounded. But I would argue that Jenkins misunderstands what is typical of Christians in general, at least in the United States. Consider this statement, from page 98:

“For post-Enlightenment Christians in the West, the demonic elements in the New Testament mean so little that they are scarcely even an embarrassment anymore. Many Westerners read over such passages and attribute them to a long-departed stage of scientific development.”

I know almost no one about whom this is an accurate statement. Jenkins does give the occasional disclaimer that he is referring generally to those in the mainline churches. But, at least in the United States, the mainline churches have nearly flat-lined. It is the evangelical and Pentecostal churches that are the healthiest, a fact that Jenkins acknowledges late in the book. If there are more evangelicals and Pentecostals than Episcopalians and Methodists in the Northern world, why claim the mainline opinion as that which is commonly held? This, for me, was the major flaw of the book.

Such a flaw, however, was not large enough to block the book's impact. Jenkins asks readers to “read Psalm 23 as a political tract, a rejection of unjust secular authority...think about how Jesus' actions might strike a community that cares deeply about caste and ritual purity, and where violating such laws might cost you your life ... (read John 10:10) and think of the bewildering implication for a desperately poor society so obviously lacking in any prospect of abundance.” (182-3) When one reads with these scenarios in mind, Scripture looks different. It becomes new, it becomes grittier. It is clearly a manual for living.

Our Army is expanding throughout the world, by God's blessing. As we stretch across borders and encompass cultures so different from our own, it is imperative that we understand the context of each other's biblical understanding. Jenkins' book is an effective tool toward that end.

## Book Notes

*By Roger J. Green*

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Collins, Kenneth J. and John H. Tyson, eds. *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.

This is a series of essays dealing with the central biblical and historical reality of conversion. The two editors will be well known to some readers of the journal, but other contributors to this text, such as Ben Witherington III, will also be known primarily for his biblical scholarship. And this is indicative of the breadth of this book. This text is divided into four equally compelling sections, all dealing with conversion: historical perspectives, biblical perspectives, theological perspectives, and pastoral perspectives. Here is a book that is invaluable for men and women engaged in the pastoral ministry, providing invaluable resources for preaching, teaching, and counseling.

Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Since the Protestant Reformation, Christianity has been associated with the West. However, with the decline of the Church, in both numbers and influence in the public square in the West, the question has been raised about the viability of Christianity and indeed the historic Church. Philip Jenkins reminds his

readers that in light of these realities not only will the face of Christianity change (By 2050, only about one-fifth of the world's three billion Christians will be non-Hispanic whites), but the center of gravity of the Church will change as well to the global south to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This book is a remarkable analysis of this major shift that is taking place in Christendom and will influence the ministry of the Church as this century unfolds.

Noll, Mark A. and Carolyn Nystrom. *Is The Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.

There are presently several conversations taking place between various Protestant groups and the Roman Catholic Church, including a much-publicized conversation between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. This book is intended as an evangelical assessment of contemporary Roman Catholicism, with special attention given to the dramatic changes that have taken place since the Second Vatican Council. The authors have taken an important step in understanding both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in our world, and have shaped an argument that is not without controversy. However, this book reflects the careful historical and theological analysis that readers have come to expect from Mark Noll, whose insights into this subject are especially poignant as an Evangelical teaching at Notre Dame.

Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.

While recognizing that this book was published several years ago, it is nevertheless worthy of mention in this journal for two reasons. First, the lead article in this issue of *Word & Deed* is by the author of this book, and perhaps readers will want to delve into one of Professor Thorsen's important writings. Second, this is a book that is worthy of attention over and over again. This book reminds the readers of the primacy of Scripture for Wesley and more broadly for Christian theology. But as the subtitle of the book aptly demonstrates, here is a

work that sets forth a model for Evangelical theology -- how to do theology. At so many levels this work is invaluable and any reader will find helpful guidance in how to approach the Scriptures and how to do theology.

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