Models for Christian Higher Education

Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century

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What Can the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?

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The Wesleyan/Holiness movement began as an attempt to reclaim traits of the eighteenth-century Wesleyan or Methodist revival which, Wesleyan/Holiness leaders contended, the broad mainstream of Methodism had forsaken. The largest denominations of the tradition are the Salvation Army, the Church of the Nazarenes, and the Church of God (Anderson). Smaller denominations include the Free Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Church. These denominations, except for the Salvation Army, emerged from the nineteenth-century holiness movement in the United States.

Major Motifs in the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition

Despite the separate distinctives of these specific denominations which began as reform movements, three general theological principles nourish the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition: (1) the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a theological method, (2) sanctification of the believer and the call to holy living, and (3) social holiness. Understanding these three essentials not only explains foundational theological impulses but also acquaints one with the spirit of the Wesleyan/Holiness heritage.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral as Theological Method

The Wesleyan quadrilateral describes the four essential elements in the theological method of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement: Scripture, tradition, reason, and...
experience. They were the key ingredients of the Anglican theological method inherited by John Wesley. The manner in which the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition implicitly appropriated these Anglican elements from the beginning, and then eventually explicitly adapted and endorsed them as the Wesleyan quadrilateral, illustrates the theological inclusiveness characteristic of the tradition.

The Bible is the primary means of God’s revelation to humanity. Foundational as a source of doctrine, inspiration, moral guidance, and spiritual formation, the Bible serves not only as the record of God’s revelation through Israel, Jesus, and the church, but also as the controlling boundary by which other theological claims are measured. Second Timothy 3:16 witnesses to Scripture’s being “inspired by God” for guidance in doctrine and “training in righteousness,” or living.

Tradition refers to the inherited witness, beliefs, and practices of religious bodies. Affirming tradition as a source of truth recognizes that one’s religious heritage influences how one receives and perceives the Bible. While the quadrilateral rightly notes the role of tradition in shaping persons and communities, holiness churches which began as reform movements obviously have adapted varied stances toward the role of tradition, as will be illustrated later in this chapter.

Wesley affirmed human reason as a third avenue toward theological understanding. Reason is God’s gift to humanity, reflecting the mind of God. Reason inspires human creativity, enables us to think about God and life, and guides moral inquiry. Although sin stained and distorted human reason after the fall, originally the gift of reason was part of what it meant to be created in the image of God. This positive regard for reason generated positive implications for Christian higher education in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition.

Experience is the validating link which enables persons and groups to know the truth God discloses through Scripture, tradition, and reason. Experience had two dimensions for Wesley. On the one hand, experience was like Old Testament wisdom. It denoted the accumulated reservoir of practical knowledge gleaned from living a God-honoring life. On the other hand, experience connoted the validating presence of the Holy Spirit. Dennis Kinlaw, former president of Asbury College, observes that for Wesley experience was a third gift from the Spirit, a personal and immediate authentication that moved Christian truth from information about God and faith in the Gospel to an existential personal apprehension of that truth for oneself.

Placing value on experience as the Spirit’s confirming role in the inward, subjective life is consistent with Wesley’s testimony that his heart was strangely warmed at Aldersgate. According to Wesley, “Revelation is complete, yet we cannot be saved unless Christ be revealed in our hearts, neither unless God cleanses the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit.” Again, in his Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, Wesley wrote concerning the inspiration of Scripture, “The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally, those that read it with earnest prayer.”

Albert F. Gray, a pastoral theologian and founding president of Pacific Bible College, now Warner Pacific College, wrote a theology in which he entitled the section on biblical inspiration, “It Is The Person That Is Inspired.” The role of the Holy Spirit in authenticating experience for Christians means that the Spirit transforms the Bible into God’s Word for believers. Truth is relational. The confirming presence of the Spirit enables the realities taught in Scripture, perceived by reason, and delivered via tradition to become the truth necessary for salvation, spiritual formation, and social witness. Because truth is relational and experiential, humility and tolerance should season the believer and the church. The Wesleyan quadrilateral highlights the work of the Holy Spirit and Christian experience. As the song writer D. Otis Teasley phrased it, “I know in my heart what it means.”

Sanctification

The second essential theological distinctive is sanctification, which is the defining doctrine and experience of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. John Wesley spoke of Christian perfection as a growing love in the believer’s life as the Holy Spirit cleansed the human heart. In the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition sanctification came to be understood as a definite second work of grace following justification and salvation. Sanctification purifies the heart of inbred sin and is accomplished by the Spirit who empowers the believer for service. In spite of intramural debates regarding the meaning of sanctific-
tion, Wesleyan/Holiness scholars concur that the theology of sanctification is the heart of the heritage.

The Wesleyan/Holiness movement is a reform movement combating moral pollution in society and doctrinal dilution in church. Thus, it is easy to understand why early leaders maintained that purity of heart and power for service were two essential aspects of sanctification. Three biblical texts anchored holiness preaching — 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Romans 12:2, and Acts 1:8; First Thessalonians 5:23 and Romans 12:2 called for purity of heart and holy living. According to these passages, the Spirit produces a people whose lives demonstrate a positive change in daily behavior. Moral integrity becomes the intention of holiness Christians. But purity should not be bottled up. Holiness preachers also proclaimed Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8: "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Because of its emphasis on the sanctified life, the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition stresses what the saved self can become rather than what the sinful self has been. The accent falls on what humans can become through the continuing work of the purifying and empowering Holy Spirit. A high estimate of the church prevails because the Spirit calls the church to a fellowship demonstrating the divine possibilities of life together in the Spirit. Sanctification orients the church toward continual renewal and outreach. The gifts of the Spirit empower the church for service. The Wesleyan/Holiness tradition stands on the left wing of the Protestant Reformation because of its optimistic view of sanctified human potential, its stress upon love as an actualization rather than a mere intention of Christian experience, and its emphasis on spiritual experience. The Spirit's purifying and empowering ministry makes the renewal of persons, the church, and society possible here and now rather than postponing renewal to a future age or dispensation.

Social Holiness

Social holiness, the third characteristic of the tradition, indicates the compassionate ministries and social impulses which emerged within the Wesleyan/Holiness movement. Scholars and lay persons alike often categorize Protestants into two camps: those who are concerned with saving souls and those who focus on transforming the social order.10 For John Wesley, ministry was not an either/or proposition; he placed one foot firmly in each camp by refusing to separate the two. In addition to preaching to the poor on the streets, Wesley started an employment bureau, a loan fund, a medical dispensary, and


11. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, p. 154. Although Smith described holiness prior to the Civil War, the social holiness activities of the following paragraph continue the emphasis of Wesley and Booth.


14. Galatians 3:28 (NIV) 1973, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."
leaders to value and ordain women as ministers. Benjamin Titus Roberts, founder of the Free Methodist Church, penned *Ordaining Women* to expound Galatians 3:28 as the key text on women in ministry. Alma White, founding bishop of the Pillar of Fire Church, published *Woman's Chains*, a monthly magazine lobbying for women's rights in church and society. Susie C. Stanley has documented a holiness hermeneutic supporting women's equality and ministries of Wesleyan/Holiness women. In 1908, 20 percent of Nazarene clergy were women, and in 1929 the Church of God (Anderson) reported that 32 percent of its clergy were women, while a majority of Salvation Army officers have always been women.

Wesleyan/Holiness churches founded schools such as Adrian College as early as 1848 and Roberts Wesleyan College in 1856. Several later schools grew out of urban mission homes. Schools often served as regional training centers for churches. Although a strong belief in the imminent return of Christ led people to sing "This World Is Not My Home," a concern for this-worldly obedience prompted them to establish rescue missions and plant colleges to train leaders for future generations.

These ministries of social holiness were the external dimensions of the doctrine and experience of sanctification which was understood as holiness embodied in love. As a social ethic based on the call for moral integrity or purity in persons and society, social holiness is possible — holiness advocates contended — because the Holy Spirit empowers believers to serve in ministries of love and justice.

What Has the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition Contributed to Christian Higher Education?

Having defined three distinctives of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, it is essential to consider how the Wesleyan quadrilateral, the doctrine and experience of sanctification with its call to holy living, and social holiness have influenced Christian higher education both positively and negatively.


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the academic and theological commission of the National Holiness Association, now known as the Christian Holiness Association. Kenneth Geiger, in a paper at the initial meeting of the WTS, described the inerrancy of the original autographs of Scripture as "the official position of the National Holiness Association and, quite uniformly, the view of Wesleyan-Arminians everywhere."18 Doctrinal statements in the 1966-69 issues of the Wesleyan Theological Journal (WTJ) also affirmed inerrancy. At the 1967 meeting of the WTS, however, a panel on "Biblical Inerrancy" debated the issue. W. Ralph Thompson, secretary-treasurer of the society, ended his 1966-69 annual report with a plea for reconciliation. Thompson stated his own commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy. Then he added:

Let us be exceedingly careful lest we take any step that will weaken our position with respect to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. But if a change in the wording of our doctrinal statement could be made that would protect our position and at the same time respect that of our brethren whose intellectual honesty will not allow them to subscribe to our statement, I recommend that such an action be taken.19

Members of the society, all of whom were inerrantists, revised the doctrinal statement in the 1969 meeting by removing the inerrancy clause. That revised statement on Scripture appeared in the 1970 edition of the WTJ.

Two recent Wesleyan/Holiness publications reflect the ongoing diversity within the tradition. The Wesley Bible20 required "that all participating scholars sign a statement affirming their belief in the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture and in the inerrancy of the original autographs."21 On the other hand, William Cannon in his "General Introduction" to the 1992 Asbury Bible Commentary advised:

Rather than speak of the inerrancy of Scripture or verbal inspiration, it is much better to speak of the dependability of the Bible or its infallibility, the breathing of the Holy Spirit upon its authors to assure their accuracy in presenting God's plan of salvation in its perfection.22

In summary, although the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition is in many ways incompatible with fundamentalism and its inerrancy approach, a minority within the tradition has affirmed and continues to affirm a form of inerrancy while still stressing the confirming, authenticating work of the Spirit. A tolerant willingness to disagree has prevailed.

How has the Bible actually been taught in Wesleyan/Holiness schools? Most institutions have utilized the historical critical method. Robert Traina at Asbury Theological Seminary, for example, used an inductive method of Bible study and related his inductive approach to other contemporary exegetical and hermeneutical methods.23 During the period from 1920-1945 — the very period when fundamentalists voiced their alarm most loudly over critical study of Scripture — many holiness schools employed the historical critical method with modifications to allow for a belief in biblical miracles and healings.24

For all of this, however, the quadrilateral's accent on reason was late blooming in Wesleyan/Holiness schools. Early theologizing, for example, often involved little more than statements of church doctrine. Yet there were exceptions. In 1919, the Church of the Nazarene requested H. Orton Wiley to write a systematic theology, which was eventually published in 1940 by the Nazarene Publishing House. In addition, Russell Byrum produced a systematic theology for the Church of God in 1925.

Likewise, the quadrilateral's notion of tradition received mixed responses in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. Schools sponsored by primitivist churches, such as the Church of God (Anderson), initially valued tradition only if the tradition could be traced to the New Testament church. Ironically, some primitivist theologians knew and used church history and systematic theology to argue their case for primitivism.25

Because of the emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the guide to and authenticateor of truth, Wesleyan/Holiness advocates have understood knowledge as a matter of the heart as well as of the mind. A liability of this posture has been an attitude that says, "trust the Spirit rather than rely on human planning and reasoning."

The Wesleyan quadrilateral's holistic inclusion of Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason implies that all facets of a liberal arts curriculum embody


God’s truth. Ideally, therefore, Christian higher education would involve learning to write, to speak, to read widely, to know how to ask critical questions, to use the scientific method, to appreciate the fine arts, to value physical fitness, and to integrate faith and learning. On this view, the humanities and the sciences would be vital parts of the curricula of liberal arts colleges in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition.

But this ideal has not always been implemented. Melvin Dieter contends that many in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition are unclear whether they belong to a church or a revival movement. This ambivalence plays itself out in the educational institutions these people have established. Thus, while supporting the classical liberal arts college, every holiness denomination, according to Dieter, has also established Bible schools to train ministers.26 Sometimes the Bible school founders felt motivated by an urgent mission to restore a sense of evangelism which they thought dormant in the liberal arts colleges. Some Bible schools do not offer courses in the humanities and sciences because their administrators view them as unnecessary. Sometimes, however, Bible schools have developed into liberal arts colleges. Individual denominations within the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition vary in their educational requirements for ministers: some require seminary training; others require no higher education at all.

Sanctification in Wesleyan Higher Education

The emphasis on sanctification and holy living has had positive and negative repercussions on campus life. At times this emphasis has produced a vital worship life. The size and prominence of the chapel buildings at Anderson University and Asbury College, for example, reflect the centrality of a strong chapel ministry. Indeed, some of the calls to commitment and holy living issued in Chapel at Anderson College rank for many students as important moments of spiritual formation. Many experience there the full meaning of the Wesleyan quadrilateral with its emphasis on holistically appropriating Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.27 In this way, worship integrates faith and learning, links theology to the arts, and issues a call to committed holy living — all an essential outgrowth of the traditional Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification.

Moreover, sound holiness theology often becomes incarnate in relationships between faculty, staff, and students, and these relationships often shape lives, motivate ministries, and transform shy, social wallflowers into confident leaders. Periodically we meet persons who feel overwhelmed by the pressures of college, work, and family, or feel baffled by vocational indecision. In the belief that the Spirit sustains students in their seasons of preparation, we encourage them to seek staying power from the Spirit who is the heart of the Wesleyan/Holiness legacy. That has been a dynamic asset to higher education in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition.

On the other hand, the theme of sanctification can sometimes foster legalism and a fanatical “Christ against culture” stance. As a result, extreme separate-from-the-world behavior patterns sometimes exist on campuses aligned with the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. Dieter suggests that legalism has often “shattered the vitality of the movement’s spirituality and its outreach in evangelism and mission.”28 As a result, campus lifestyle codes occasionally convey mistrust of the sanctified student’s ability to be a disciplined dresser, dater, or driver. Some colleges and universities in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, for example, restricted unchaperoned off-campus dating in the 1950s, prohibited the wearing of shorts to class or chapel in the 1960s, and forbade women to wear slacks to class or chapel in the 1970s. A continuing challenge is the task of implementing the call to holy living in lifestyle agreements which meet the requirements for integrity, as perceived by diverse campus constituencies, without compromising trust in students.

Social Holiness in Wesleyan Higher Education

Social holiness, the third component of this heritage, has also continued to thrive on campuses aligned with the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. This tradition’s historic commitment to the poor manifests itself especially when colleges understand themselves as opportunity schools, willing to accept some students with weak academic backgrounds and to provide them with an opportunity to develop their gifts and talents. Twice in the last twelve years at Warner Pacific College, for instance, the presidential award, annually given to the senior who best exemplifies the college’s service values, has gone to a graduate who was admitted on conditional status.

Service through compassionate ministries has also characterized these campuses. At Anderson College, for example, Professor Marie Strong developed a student led Christianity-In-Action program in the 1950s. On a weekly basis, students participated in jail and prison ministries, shut-in visitation.


27. This was the experience of John E. Stanley, one of the authors of this essay, when he was a student at Anderson College (now Anderson University) from 1961 to 1965.

and political conservatism currently threatens to subdue the theme of social holiness intrinsic to the heritage. Two examples will suffice. First, people who have spoken on gender-related issues at various Wesleyan/Holiness colleges report hostility and intolerance. This was especially the case in the aftermath of the 1992 presidential election. Second, faculty who teach at Wesleyan/Holiness institutions report a growing unwillingness among students to debate political and social issues. Faculty who attend Wesleyan Theological Studies meetings, for example, speak of a growing intolerance on campuses and an insensitivity to human needs which would have been the focus of compassionate ministries in earlier years.

Conclusions

One wonders if the threat to social holiness, and perhaps to the entire Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, stems from a loss of institutional identity. Given the increasing pressures toward uniformity, many find it easier to identify with evangelicalism and the Christian College Coalition than to nurture and sustain their own Wesleyan/Holiness heritage. Further, the cost of institutional survival has made many Wesleyan/Holiness institutions more market-driven than mission-driven. To increase their enrollments, these schools often seek to attract fundamentalist and evangelical students who have little sense of the Wesleyan/Holiness heritage.

One important way to resist absorption into a broad evangelical culture is to revisit one’s own institutional identity on a regular basis so that faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees can remember and affirm their heritage. Seattle Pacific University’s religion faculty is a case in point. Sensing the possibility of absorption of that school into a broad evangelical ethos, SPU faculty members actively call their school to remember its Wesleyan/Holiness origins. Likewise, in 1994, the administration, faculty, and trustees of Northwest Nazarene College inaugurated the Wesley Center for Applied Theology. The center features three components: the Wesleyan Studies Program, Compassionate Care, and the Church Growth and Missional Resource Program. According to Richard Hagood, president of Northwest Nazarene College, the

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center's purpose was to "bring the essentials of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition into creative and redemptive contact with the contemporary world." Such efforts can preserve and renew the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition.

The lifeblood of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition flows through the three arteries of the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a theological method, the emphasis on sanctification and holy living, and social holiness. Schools within the tradition must not allow these arteries to become clogged through cultural absorption into the larger movements of evangelicalism or liberalism.