

FROM ALDERSGATE TO AZUSA STREET
Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal Visions of the New Creation

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Though many embraced the prosperity gospel that Bakker preached in the 1980s, few could imagine the extravagance of his lifestyle, and of course they knew nothing of Jessica Hahn until 1987, nearly seven years after the affair.

Bakker's organizational methods also pulled in elements of the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal tradition. Like countless faith missions before him, Bakker would often launch new projects before the funds were in hand as an act of faith, trusting God to supply what was needed. By contributing to various missions campaigns and to the building of Heritage USA, Bakker's "partners" could feel that they were actively involved in winning the world for Christ. Most were less concerned with a scrupulous accounting of how their money was spent than with the number of sinners saved, marriages restored, addicts reclaimed, and so on. This was nothing new. In the eighteenth century the Methodist Book Concern operated at a significant deficit because the itinerant preachers were much more concerned with distributing books than with collecting payment for them. But the distance that TV created between Bakker and his followers allowed him to spend money in ways he never disclosed to his donors.

Most of the people presented in this volume have been included for their virtues, for the positive elements they contributed to the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal tradition. Nearly everyone across this tradition could embrace John Wesley as one of them. Others, like Jim Bakker, have kept some of the tradition's core elements while slicing away others. What then is vital to remaining faithful? I would argue that the key features of this tradition from beginning to end have been its core piety and practice of spiritual discipline, its ability to connect with the surrounding culture, and its ability to organize broadly, particularly its ability to draw on the energy and resourcefulness of the laity. What remains to be seen is whether these traits will prevail, and in which wings of the movement.

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A Theological Interpretation

STEPHEN W. RANKIN

THE PRIMARY MOTIVATING PREMISE of the Wesleyan-Pentecostal Consultation (and the publication of these essays) is twofold. First, Christians in Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal churches and groups share certain theological convictions and experiences that distinguish them from other more well-known Protestant traditions. Although many persons within these streams might use the term "evangelical" to describe their beliefs (to set off their theology, for example, from Protestant liberal theology), they also realize that they stand apart from well-known and studied Reformed and Puritan traditions.

Second, participants in the Wesleyan-Pentecostal Consultation believe that this part of the story has been under-told. Fortunately, Nathan Hatch raised this concern a generation ago with the publication of his *Church History* article, "The Puzzle of Methodism,"¹ sparking a significant body of subsequent research. Unfortunately, this literature tends to stay within scholarly circles. The present volume seeks to make a contribution to the telling and interpreting of this under-represented story for the broader church, thereby aiming at doing its part to help strengthen and renew, where needed, the church's life.

Reading the stories in this work is, in itself, refreshing. If one is interested in engaging at a deeper level, however, one begins to notice certain consistent theological themes. Not surprisingly, one finds an

1. Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of Methodism," *Church History* 63 (1975) 175-89. This article was reprinted in Nathan O. Hatch and John Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994).

emphasis on the continuous work of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals and Charismatics, of course, are well-known for this emphasis, but more so-called mainline United Methodists might be surprised to discover that this robust pneumatology has played a major role in their own tradition. The Wesleyan-Holiness-Pentecostal stream offers an important corrective to the "practical binarianism" of much of modern American Protestant Christianity. Like the disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-2), it is as if some present-day Christians "have not even heard of the Holy Spirit." It cannot but help, therefore, to reflect on how the similarities of thought and experience across a sometimes divergent range of peoples point to the work of the Spirit, which invites consideration for the Spirit's work in our day.

In the next few pages, therefore, I wish to summarize recent scholarship, especially (and probably surprisingly) in philosophy that bears upon Wesleyan theology, particularly the two characteristic themes of the religious affections and sanctification. With regard to the affections, contemporary research on the contribution that emotions make to knowledge will come to our attention. I will conclude with the claim that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, in light of contemporary research, deserves a fresh reading and application.

Before we get to our main task, some recounting of the context of western intellectual history is required. One of the main legacies from the Enlightenment has to do with how truth claims can be justified. Two criteria came to stand as requirements. (1) For a claim to count as real knowledge, it has to be empirical (public and available to more than one observer), testable and repeatable.² (2) Knowledge claims must be as empty of bias as is humanly possible. Emotions (according to the Enlightenment view) tip the balance in the wrong direction. They permit too much subjectivity and bias. Emotions, therefore, must have no part in knowledge claims.

One can see immediately the problems these criteria posed for religious (particularly theological) truth claims. More to the point, one can see how "knowledge" came to be viewed as a public project while "faith" came to be regarded (by the intellectual elites) as private, subjective, and emotional, therefore *not* knowledge. Faith and knowledge were divided. "Knowledge" according to this standard was viewed as rational, even-

2. One can see why in today's world any knowledge that is described as "scientific" seems to count over other forms of knowledge.

handed and public. "Faith" was seen as non-rational (even irrational), subjective and private (or limited to the group of people who think along the same religious terms). The most hostile Enlightenment responses to religion came in the forms of logical positivism, which considered any metaphorical statement as completely devoid of meaning, and the field of modern psychology while it was firmly under the sway of Sigmund Freud, who thought of religion as an illusion. Some experts in Freud's wake even thought that being religious should be considered a form of mental illness.

In the twentieth century, philosophers and social science researchers alike began to reconsider the aforementioned core Enlightenment concerns. Starting roughly in the 1950s, psychologists, for example, began to explore the positive role of emotions for a flourishing life.³ Within a generation, philosophers began to soften and revise their pessimism toward emotions. This shift coincides with the work of other philosophers regarding knowledge (epistemology), such that religious truth claims began to be considered in a more favorable light. Today, we work in a decidedly different and friendlier environment than did our forbears of even two generations ago.

One major point of debate today among philosophers has to do with whether emotions⁴ actually have cognitive content. This point may seem self-evident to us as we contemplate everyday life, but it is possible to regard the emotion as the feeling state itself, without regard to the mental content that may be associated with the feeling. Nevertheless, a growing body of philosophers is arguing that emotions have cognitive content.⁵ That is, an emotion is "about" something. If, for example, you hear of or read about an earthquake and, imagining yourself facing one,

3. Gordon Allport, a humanistic psychologist, was one of the pioneers of this movement. For a brief but helpful summary of Allport's work, see Robert P. Cavalier, *Personal Motivation: A Model for Decision-Making* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2000). See especially, chapter 1, "Thank You, Dr. Allport."

4. An emotion is defined by Robert Audi as "... any number of general types of mental states... such as fear, anger, and joy." See *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 222-23.

5. See for example Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), a revision to the original 1976 edition, and *True to Our Feelings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

you feel fear, then the fear is "about" the earthquake. The emotion of fear is "content-specific."⁶ If you feel angry toward someone because of some reprehensible action, then your anger is "about" the act. Admittedly, we can feel emotions without always being able to connect them to some mental content, but often we can and do make that connection. This is why some philosophers argue for the cognitive nature of emotions.

If emotions have cognitive content—if they are usually "about" something—then it is a short step to the conclusion that emotions are, in some sense, evaluative. That is, they assist us in making judgments about an object of attention. Furthermore, it is likely that the emotion-judgment corresponds to some quality or characteristic (the philosophical term is "property") in the object. If I am hiking in Alaska, for example, and I encounter a grizzly bear, I immediately feel fear.⁷ Although the feeling happens so rapidly that I am unaware of what I am thinking, there still is cognitive content at play. The qualities of the bear: "big," "powerful," "wild," maybe "hungry" and "dangerous" all are content-specific. Therefore, the emotion of fear is in part a representation and a judgment of the situation of being encountered by an "other"—the grizzly bear. The point is that, often, emotions do come with cognitive content. They are not just cognitively empty feeling states.

In the view that I am describing, emotions are like perceptions. A "percept" is a datum, a "bit" of consciousness of some property in an object. A sense perception may be heat or cold or taste or smell. A mental percept is the awareness of the experience of an idea "just popping into" one's mind. In other words, one becomes aware of the idea just being in the mind, without any steps ("inferences") of thought preceding that thought. A percept could be an intuition, for example or a memory. All of us have had the experience of thinking about one thing and something completely different "just pops into" one's consciousness. There may be some underlying connection that, in retrospect, we can see, but in the experience, there were not mental steps in between one thought and the other.

6. Audi's term in the dictionary article cited in note 5 above.

7. I am aware that some people who have studied grizzly bears and understand their behaviors in a way that common lay people do not, may criticize the feeling of fear as unnecessary, therefore irrational, therefore as standing against my argument. Still, the combination of my being in a place not familiar to me and encountering a powerful wild animal not familiar to me makes the feeling of fear seem quite rational.

The interesting feature in thinking about emotion as a perception is what it suggests about certain objects of experience (that, by extension, we can easily spot in the Christian life). If my emotions are properly shaped, I will respond in emotionally appropriate ways to the objects of experience. To use a too-technical term, such objects have "response-dependent" properties,⁸ that is, there is some feature in the object itself which "pulls out" of me, so to speak, the appropriate emotional response. When I feel love in this moment, I am also experiencing cognitive content, not a mere feeling. The content is connected to the loveable properties in the beloved. This point will show itself as especially relevant when we turn to the source for religious affections at the end of this essay, but we can anticipate briefly here. God is an object of our experience (of course, God is really the subject, but in terms of this discussion, to be consistent, I refer to God as object here). God has response-dependent properties. God is characterized by certain properties that pull out of believers certain kinds of emotion-based responses.

Christian history is replete with testimonies of great saints and regular Christians alike who have experienced and still do moments of insight, joy, release, forgiveness, peace and love, which they attribute to the work of God. According to philosophers like William Alston and William Abraham,⁹ these experiences are perceptual. They are not mediated by other thoughts, but come immediately to one's consciousness. Stories of experiences of this perceptual quality are found in the pages of this volume and, given the emphasis on experience¹⁰ that Wesleyan, Holiness and Pentecostal people uphold, it is no wonder. The new and interesting factor in today's intellectual climate is that a growing number of philosophers can agree with theologians that these experiences are more than mere subjective, private "faith" experiences. They have epistemological weight.¹¹

Before looking at the implications for specific theological themes, let us re-state a crucial point: the features of Wesleyan, Holiness and

8. Catherine Z. Elgin, "Emotion and Understanding" in Georg Bruno, et al. *Epistemology and Emotions*, 36ff.

9. See William P. Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); William J. Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

10. Perception is a form of experience.

11. William Abraham states boldly that divine revelation constitutes knowledge (in an epistemological sense); see Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*.

Pentecostal belief and practice that have been dismissed, derided, or, more subtly, simply ignored because of the power of specific Enlightenment assumptions and the understandable desire of Christians to be accepted in respectable society, turn out to have significant epistemological and theological importance. Assessments of the epistemological function of emotions by philosophers (to name only one category of scholar which could be named) call for new investigations of the theological significance of the religious affections, particularly with regard to the doctrine of sanctification. Of all people, then, Wesleyan, Holiness and Pentecostal people should re-engage (if they have stopped) their own tradition. In the final few paragraphs of this chapter, then, we will consider how the research just sketched provides a way of construing sanctification, even Christian perfection that permits re-appropriation. My observations are suggestive and still half-digested, but they are offered in the hopes of sparking useful conversation.

Very near the end of John Wesley's long life he wrote a letter that names the doctrine of Christian perfection as the "grand depositum" for which the Methodists were chiefly brought into existence.¹² Interspersed throughout his Journal, one finds references either to people experiencing "perfect love" or to Wesley's encouragement to his preachers (and demonstrated in his own preaching) to hold out for the people the anticipation of being made perfect in love "in this lifetime." This doctrine which he believed so crucial to Methodist faith and practice was also perhaps the most contentious of Wesley's teachings. "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" is Wesley's mature summary of the doctrine that, according to his own testimony, he had preached since at least 1733.¹³ A cascade of scripture references describes this core doctrine. It is having the mind of Christ and walking as Christ walked (Phil 2:5). It is love for God and neighbor (Matt 22:37-39). It is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). It is the love that casts out fear (1 John 4:18). It is the power that destroys sin and the work of the devil (1 John 3:5, 8). It is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

A survey of this treatise repeatedly demonstrates Wesley's central understanding of Christian perfection as affectional. Hence, the overriding characteristics of Wesley's description of Christian perfection is

12. Letter to Robert Carr Brackenbury

13. John Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart," in Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Sermons (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984) 1:398-414.

that one who is made perfect in love "feels" a certain set of affections or dispositions. He uses words like "tranquility," "serenity," "desire," "peace," and "joy."¹⁴ Affections (or "temper") are inclinations of the will or motives that are shaped by the Holy Spirit and love is the supreme affection: love for God, love for neighbor, even love for enemy. As Henry Knight points out, holy affections "are both capacities (enabling us to love) and dispositions (inclining us to love)."¹⁵ In a real way, love (for God, neighbor and enemy) is definitive of the holy affections. "Love" is not merely, as it has often been taught, the self-sacrificial commitment toward the good of the other, independent of emotion.¹⁶ On the contrary, love is inherently emotional.

I have just given a standard and quite spare description of Wesley's grand *depositum*. There is nothing new here. What is new is the possibility of taking recent research in the cognitive dimension of emotions and begin to consider implications. First is the suggestion that Wesleyan, Holiness and Pentecostal believers stand on good epistemological ground when they regard the holy affections as normative for the Christian life. Emotions that are shaped by Christian practices contribute more to the Christian life than just feeling the way Christians "are supposed to feel." They actually put us epistemologically closer in touch with the God who created us. Theologically speaking, emotions are more than merely anthropological. Rather than appearing to assert this claim on the basis of an alleged faulty reading of scripture regarding sanctification, Wesleyan, Holiness and Pentecostal Christians can bring to bear substantial research and philosophical argumentation in support of their claims. Rather than simply marking this tradition as one of several "choices" that people can make for guiding their faith (and not a very "intellectual choice" at that), it comes forward with strong support from recent scholarship. It therefore deserves serious consideration on its own theological merits.

14. John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," in Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986; reprinted from the 1872 edition issued by the Wesleyan Book Room) 11:370-72. The whole treatise is laced with affection/emotion descriptions for Christian perfection.

15. Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies 3 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1992) 19.

16. For a very helpful study of the emotional quality of love as depicted in the scriptures (including the emotional quality of God's love for people), see Matthew A. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Re-thinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).

More importantly, the line of argument in this chapter suggests the need to reconsider the doctrine of God, on two fronts. Parallel to the philosophical work on the cognitive content of emotions, a few scholars¹⁷ in both biblical studies and theology are re-thinking the nature of God in terms of the possibility of God having an emotional life, as well as thoughts and intentions. I hasten to state clearly that I am not claiming that God has feelings just like humans have feelings. However, the claim that, for example, God's impassibility means that God *feels nothing* and that we only experience God *as if* God has real feelings, needs modification. Conversely, it is worth considering that human feelings, according to our being created in God's image, are or can be (under the work of the Spirit) roughly approximate of God's feelings. Our hearts can "break with the things that break God's heart."¹⁸ Reflecting on the possibilities of developing this line of thought would give added weight, I would argue, to another of Wesley's emphases, that sanctification involves the renewal of the image of God in the believer.

The other front for consideration relative to the doctrine of God comes back to pneumatology. Because the Bible consistently upholds the work of the Spirit, all Christian traditions acknowledge that work, but, in truth, such acknowledgement is often little more than lip service. As I mentioned earlier, one of the major problems of contemporary Protestant American Christianity is that it functionally rather severely proscribes the Spirit's work. The focus always tends toward cognitive and moral or ethical concerns: the Spirit guides us into truth (sound doctrine) and the Spirit prompts us to do the good and avoid evil. Certainly these concerns are important, but if what this chapter has argued is true, then concentrating solely on doctrine and morality/ethics without due attention to the affectional life short-circuits the whole order of salvation. The very emphases found within the Wesleyan-Holiness-Pentecostal stream turn

out to be more than the emotional window-dressing of a set of second-tier traditions. They lie at the very heart of the Christian faith.

17. Examples of scholars who are working on how best to understand scriptural claims about God's emotions are: John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2007); Matthew Elliott (see endnote #15), Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Even scholars in the more "hardcore" Reformed tradition who uphold God's sovereignty in a particularly acute way see the value of according God a real emotional life. See D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

18. This quote is attributed to Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision.