

TUESDAY MEETINGS, CAMP MEETINGS, AND CABINET MEETINGS
A Perspective on the Holiness Movement in
the Methodist Church in the United States in the
Nineteenth Century

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John Wesley's judgment that the doctrine of Christian Perfection is the "grand depositum" which God has given to the people called Methodists, and his declaration that the Methodists' reason for being is to "spread Scriptural holiness throughout the land" provide the obvious starting point for any consideration of the relationship of Methodism in the United States and what is now known as the Holiness Movement. "Scriptural holiness" is what Methodism is all about, even if there is not universal agreement as to what "Scriptural holiness" is all about.

There can be no doubt that the early Methodist leaders in America understood the doctrine of Christian perfection to be at the heart of their theology. This is articulated in the first Discipline of 1784. In light of this and the subsequent "ups and downs" of this concern in the life of American Methodism it is a curious thing that the standard histories of American Methodism prior to the recent three-volume History of American Methodism almost completely ignore the Holiness Movement, a significant dynamic in the life of American Methodism for at least three-quarters of a century. Hurst gives a very brief account of the Nazarite controversy in the Genesee Annual Conference. Buckley alludes to the same episode. Luccock, Hutchinson and Goodloe make general mention of spiritual awakenings and revivals. Sweet deals with nothing until the 1880's.

While it is true that Christian perfection (entire sanctification) was an important part of the theology of the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church, it was not the dominant feature. Wesley had long admonished his preachers to preach sanctification to the believers, but to concentrate upon justification when addressing unbelievers. For the first quarter of the nineteenth century the Methodists were largely engaged in evangelizing an unbelieving frontier people. In addition, such theologizing as they found time for was addressed to the running debate over predestination with the Calvinists.

The Cane Ridge revival of 1801 provided some impetus to the concern for holiness, but by 1830 it was largely dissipated. In 1820 Bishop Enoch George had urged the presiding elders in his conferences "as far as possible to introduce the doctrine, the spirit, and the practice of holiness among the preachers...that the heavenly influence may spread its energies among the membership."¹ The bishops appealed to the General Conferences of both 1824 and 1832 for a greater stress on holiness. But in the 1830's the doctrine of perfection was a "denominational curiosity...not seriously questioned nor generally preached."²

What we now identify as the Holiness Movement was an attempt to reclaim the emphasis upon and the reality of "holiness of heart and life" within Methodism. By 1840 the isolated voices had begun to become a movement, particularly among the churches in the North. Southern theological energies were being almost entirely spent in defense of the institution of slavery until after the Civil War.³

Just a century, less three years, after John Wesley's momentous experience in the meeting in the house in Aldersgate Street in London, there was a gathering in a home on Rivington Street in New York City that was portentous, if not equally momentous, for the people called Methodists in the United States. It was a meeting not dissimilar to the one Wesley attended. There had been a great revival in New York City in the spring of 1832, centering in the Allen Street Methodist Episcopal Church. One of the outgrowths of that revival had been a number of women's prayer meetings. In August, 1835, Mrs. Sarah A. Langford invited two of these groups to join in weekly meetings at the house shared by the Langfords and the Palmers, Mrs. Langford's older sister and her physician husband.

¹ John A. Roche, The Life of Mrs. Sarah A. Lankford Palmer Who for Sixty Years Was the Able Teacher of Entire Holiness (New York: George Hughes & Co., 1898), 99.

² John Leland Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 100.

³ Vinson Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 31-32.

About forty women responded to the invitation and the now famous "Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness" had begun. It is of passing interest to note that Henry Worrall, the father of Mrs. Langford and her sister, Phoebe Palmer, was converted under the preaching of John Wesley at the age of fourteen and had received his ticket of membership in the Societies from Wesley himself.⁴ These meetings were to continue weekly in the Palmer home for the next twenty years, exerting a remarkable influence in the "promotion of holiness" throughout the United States and abroad.

Although the "Tuesday Meetings" were begun by Mrs. Langford, it was Phoebe Palmer who became the dynamic leader of the movement. Mrs. Palmer did not profess entire sanctification until 1837, and it was not until two years later, when her sister moved from New York City, that she agreed to assume the actual leadership of the group. For the next forty years she and her husband, who took leave from his practice each summer, worked and traveled throughout North America and abroad in the promotion of holiness. Mrs. Palmer wrote extensively, with her Faith and Its Effects and The Way of Holiness running into forty and fifty editions. The Palmers also published a wide variety of holiness materials, and in 1865 purchased the "standard" holiness periodical, The Guide to Holiness.

In the beginning the Tuesday Meetings were open to women only. As the testimony to their great spiritual value spread, pressure developed to allow men to attend, and from December of 1839 they were open to both women and men. The list of persons who attended and heartily endorsed this holiness crusade reads like a Methodist "Who's Who": Bishops Edmund S. Janes, Leonidas L. Hamline, Jesse T. Peck, Matthew Simpson, Nathan Bangs, Stephen Olin, George Peck, John Dempster and many others. The movement, while heavily Methodist, was ecumenical, with laity and clergy from many denominations participating.

Mrs. Palmer's experience of entire sanctification in 1839 was of such moment in her life that she felt it her duty to press upon others the possibility of so

⁴ Roche, op.cit., 17.

great a blessing. She insisted that entire sanctification is necessary to salvation, and that failure to "go on to perfection" nullified any previous regeneration. It should be entered into immediately and instantaneously.⁵

Entire sanctification, according to Mrs. Palmer, can be attained through "simple faith." When one has made a full and complete consecration of "body, soul, and spirit" by placing all on the altar, the offering is sanctified through the sanctity of the altar. In her way of theologizing "Christ is the Christian's altar," and once the consecration is made, faith can only affirm the reality of entire sanctification.⁶ She seems to say that the knowledge of being sanctified is necessary to being sanctified.

In the early years Mrs. Palmer's notion of entire sanctification is clearly Christologically oriented, with everything depending upon Christ's atonement.⁷ By 1857 she had begun using the language of "baptism by the Holy Ghost"⁸ (the influence of Asa Mahan?), thereby opening the door in the direction of pentecostalism. In this development the Holy Ghost becomes the source of sanctification rather than being the agent of sanctification-through-Christ.

Mrs. Palmer insists that the perfection that comes through entire sanctification is neither angelic nor Adamic, but Christian perfection--"a state of supreme love to God, where all the powers of body and mind are perfectly subject to love's control, and

⁵ Phoebe Palmer, The Way of Holiness, With Notes By the Way: Being a Narrative of Religious Experience Resulting from a Determination to be a Bible Christian (52nd edition; New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1868), 135. See also "An Act of Faith by Which the Blessing of Holiness is Obtained and Retained," in J. Boynton, Sanctification Practical (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1867), 126.

⁶ Phoebe Palmer, Faith and Its Effects; or, Fragments from My Portfolio (New York: Walter A. Palmer, Jr., 1867), 52f. See also "An Act of Faith...", 126f.

⁷ Phoebe Palmer, The Way of Holiness, 26f, 68, 89, 135. See also Faith and Its Effects, 111.

⁸ Phoebe Palmer, Four Years in the Old World (New York: Foster & Palmer, 1866), 96. From a letter dated 1859.

ceaselessly offered up to God through Christ."⁹ There is an ambivalence, however. On the one hand she says that in "the present imperfect state of existence" perfection is a "gospel," not moralistic, perfection¹⁰ that is always open to higher degrees of attainment, and on the other hand she talks about it as a state of soul attained by the believer.¹¹

Public testimony to the experience of entire sanctification, according to Mrs. Palmer was essential to maintaining it, and in 1867 (seven years before her death), she could testify that in the decades "since the memorable hour that witnessed the entire consecration of all my powers" she had never "taken myself from off the altar," nor had she "wilfully transgressed."¹²

While personal holiness was the burden of Mrs. Palmer's evangelism, she stood firmly in the Wesleyan tradition that holiness makes one servant to one's fellows. She pioneered work in a number of social welfare projects, chief of which was the founding in 1850 of the Five Points Mission, to which can be traced the beginnings of Protestant institutional work in the slums. In 1854 the Palmers withdrew from Allen Street Methodist Church to join a mission church where they felt their contribution was more needed.¹³ She warned against seeking holiness for ecstatic enjoyment. It is interesting to note that in 1859, in The Father's Promise, Mrs. Palmer exegeted the quotation from Joel in Acts as a basis for the right of women to preach.

The 1840's saw a significant revival of perfectionist thought and emphasis in Methodism. Pastors, bishops and theologians joined wholeheartedly in its support. This was also the decade in which the full impact of Charles G. Finney and Asa Mahan, with their stress on Christian perfection, in non-Methodist denominations was felt. The Methodists viewed them

⁹ Palmer, Faith and Its Effects, 52f.

¹⁰ Palmer, The Way of Holiness, 58f.

¹¹ Palmer, Faith and Its Effects, 52.

¹² Palmer, "An Act of Faith...", 117-18.

¹³ Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 169-70.

as champions of their cause with the result that certain aspects of Reformed interpretation filtered into the Methodist position.

By the 1850's the revivalistic spirit that earlier in the century had been identified largely with rural areas had become a peculiarly urban phenomenon, although it spread to the towns and farms as well. It was pre-eminently a layman's revival, with particular influence among the business community. The Palmers had much to do with creating the climate for it.

In many respects the Holiness Movement, in Methodism at least, crested with the "prayer meeting" or "businessmen's" revival of 1857-58 and its impetus which carried strongly through the 1880's. The "saving simplicities" of the gospel and their pragmatic "workableness" in the form of a domesticated piety appealed to the spirit of the age.¹⁴ Perfectionism wedded to free will and free grace vibrated with the general optimism of American culture. Beginning in New York City it spread over the northern part of the country, especially the northeast. Business workers turned out in great crowds to sing hymns, pray, and testify in "love feast" fashion during the lunch hour; stevedores knelt to pray on the docks.¹⁵ It has been estimated that half a million persons were converted in this revival of holiness of heart and of life which nurtured strong anti-slavery sentiment, a temperance crusade, a movement against Sabbath desecration, and a conscience about the neglect of the poor. "Second blessing" language--the stress upon a specific event of entire sanctification--became thematic in this revival.

Right in the midst of this revival of holiness a drama was unfolding in the Genesee Conference which was a harbinger of things to come. A minority of ministers in the conference, under the leadership of Benjamin Roberts, became convinced that Methodism's "success" had resulted in a decline in spirituality and an embracing of cultural secularity--a repudiation of Wesleyan entire sanctification. They came to be known as the "Nazarites" and the Conference majority was

¹⁴ Winthrop S. Hudson, "The Methodist Age in America," *Methodist History*, XII (April, 1974), 12-14.

¹⁵ Smith, *op.cit.*, chapter IV.

dubbed the "Regency." The conflict began in earnest in 1848 with Masonic lodge membership as the catalyst. "The rural-oriented and pietistic-permeated holiness party felt not only that the urban-dominated 'Regency' modernists were leading Genesee Methodism away from the straight and narrow path of Wesleyanism, but that its members were the 'bishop's men' and controlled conference patronage."¹⁶ The controversy moved into polemics in The Northern Christian Advocate versus The Northern Independent, as well as in pamphleteering. Roberts attacked a group of ministers for departing historic Methodist doctrine, identifying them as "New School Methodists." A pamphlet attacking a group of ministers attributed, erroneously, to Roberts brought the conflict to a head in 1855 when the Conference pronounced its "disapprobation upon such associations (as the Nazarites)." The "Regency" was determined to crush the "Nazarites." The bishop admonished Roberts for "immoral and unchristian conduct" and assigned him to a miserable rural parish. The same treatment was afforded several other key "Nazarites." Two presiding elders were assigned to stamp out the fanaticism. They, however, became seekers for holiness and were transferred to the Cincinnati Conference in 1856. (An overwhelming petition campaign brought them back to the Genesee Conference a year later.) Roberts was expelled from the Conference in 1858. After the trial Bishop Janes shook his hand and said, "Do not be discouraged, Brother Roberts--there is a bright future before you yet."

The Genesee controversy became church-wide when Roberts carried his case to the General Conference Committee on Appeals. The Committee declined to review the petition since, among other things, Roberts had connected himself with another organization contemplating independence from the Church.¹⁷

In fact, Roberts' expulsion led to the founding of the Free Methodist Church in 1860. They held to

¹⁶ Walter W. Benjamin, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the Postwar Era," The History of American Methodism, ed. Emory Stevens Bucke, Vol. II (1964), 342.

¹⁷ I am indebted to Walter Benjamin, op.cit., for the account of the Genesee controversy.

sanctification as a definite, instantaneous event subsequent to justification and more specific than "Christian perfection," in which one's nature is fully cleansed and every power and passion is surrendered to the Spirit's control. Since then the Free Methodist Church has provided consistent leadership and support in the holiness movement.

The Genesee controversy is crucial for the understanding of the developing relationship of the Holiness Movement to Methodism. The issue was not really one of doctrinal incompatibility. Methodism has always had a tolerance for doctrinal pluralism of a much wider scope than the differences over entire sanctification evidenced in this case. Other annual conferences in the area experienced similar holiness revivals at this same time with no great problems. The real issue was a matter of discipline. It was Roberts' disobedience to the discipline of Methodism, focused in the threat of schism, that finally occasioned the rupture. Here is the dress-rehearsal for the playing out of the relationship of Methodism and the holiness movement during the last half of the nineteenth century.

The Episcopal Address to the Methodist Episcopal General Conference of 1860 was portentous:

These individuals claim to be strictly Wesleyan in their views of the doctrine, and probably are so substantially. Nor do we impugn their motives. But in our judgment, in denouncing those in the ministry and laity who do not sympathize with them and adopt their measures, . . . by employing and encouraging erratic and irresponsible persons to conduct religious services, they have erred, and unhappily agitated some of our societies, and in a few instances caused secessions. It is our opinion there was no occasion for these specialties. Our ministers are generally Wesleyan in their faith and preaching touching this subject.¹⁸

The friendliness of large numbers of bishops, theological professors, and influential pastors to

¹⁸ Minutes of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1860. (Quoted by Benjamin, op.cit., 354-55.)

"holiness" (entire sanctification) as the central idea of Methodism for the next twenty years is further suggestive evidence that the ultimate issue between Methodism and the Holiness Movement was not doctrinal at this time.

Following the Civil War there was a mounting fervor of perfectionism in Methodism. Walter Benjamin has pointed out that the impact of urbanization, industrialization, affluence, and immigration challenged the familiar manners and morals of Methodism. The Church's response took the form of stepped-up pietism and prohibitory legislation that really did not deal meaningfully with the new and basic problems of American society.¹⁹ And there is much truth to Professor Cameron's observation that in the process many Methodists inverted the Wesleyan admonition that "the sanctified persons will not indulge in...trifles" to "those who avoid such things are the sanctified, and the only sanctified persons."²⁰

In both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South there was significant agitation for a return to the Wesleyan principle of scriptural holiness. In the Episcopal Addresses to both the 1866 and 1870 General Conferences, the southern bishops lamented the neglect of the doctrine of perfect love and called for a re-emphasis on sanctification. John McClintock, soon to be president of Drew University, in his centenary sermon in New York in 1866, reflects the concern among leaders in the North:

Knowing exactly what I say, and taking the full responsibility of it, I repeat, we are the only Church in history, from the apostles' time till now, that has put forth as its very elemental thought the great pervading idea of the whole Book of God from beginning to the end--the holiness of the human soul, heart, mind, and will....It may be called fanaticism; but, dear friends, this is our mission.

¹⁹ Benjamin, op.cit., 326-28.

²⁰ Richard M. Cameron, Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective, No. I of Methodism and Society, ed. the Board of Social and Economic Relations of The Methodist Church (4 vols; New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), 218.

If we keep to that, the next century is ours; if we keep to that, the triumphs of the next century shall throw those of the past into the shade.... There is our mission; there is our glory; there is our power; and there shall be the ground of our triumph!²¹

John McClintock had been converted in the same Allen Street Church revival in New York City in 1832 that so greatly affected the Palmers.

Two instrumentalities served to promote the cause of holiness: a much altered form of the camp meeting, and an uncommonly effective popular religious press. In 1866, J. A. Wood observed to Mrs. Harriet E. Drake of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, that holiness was being opposed in some Methodist camp meetings and that there ought to be some camp meetings for the special work of holiness. She offered to pay one-half of the expenses for one. Wood shared the idea with William B. Osborn of the New Jersey Methodist Conference, who laid the matter before John S. Inskip of Green Street Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City. Inskip was to become the national leader of the holiness movement. The upshot of all this was a camp meeting at Vineland, New Jersey, in July of 1867, that was to be the beginning of the modern holiness crusade. The call for the camp meeting went out from a group of preachers identified as "The National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Christian Holiness."²² Although ecumenical in scope, the camp meeting was dominated by Methodists--a pattern that was to continue to a large extent in the Association. A continuation committee was elected at the Vineland meeting to promote future camp meetings. During the next fifteen years fifty-two national camp meetings were held, mostly at Methodist camp grounds or in connection with Methodist annual conferences. Countless state and regional camp meetings were held all over the country. The National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Christian Holiness played an important role in the life of Methodism, although it was destined to come more and more into conflict with Methodism as the century moved to a close.

²¹ Quoted by Daniel Steele, A Defense of Christian Perfection (New York: Hurst & Eaton, 1896), 14.

²² Synan, op.cit., 35-38.

Unlike the noisy and often frenzied camp meetings of an earlier revival era, the holiness camp meetings were marked by long periods of silent prayer, inspiring but not overly emotional preaching, and solemn communion services. The campers were urged to maintain a tolerant spirit, avoid controversy back home, shun extravagant claims to spiritual power, and avoid testimonies lacking proper humility.²³ Most of the camp meetings were held in attractive sites near urban centers and, coincidentally (?) provided ideal vacation experiences for an increasingly successful and affluent clientele.

From 1870 on the Holiness Movement spread rapidly through the South and within five years there were associations for every Methodist district as well as annual conference, though the greatest strength was in Mississippi, Georgia, Texas, and Kentucky. As in the North, the movement in the South began as an urban force among the better educated circles.²⁴ But by the 1878 General Conference the bishops, while calling for reassertion of the doctrine of sanctification, were prompted to warn of the distortions by "factious leaders" stressing other-worldliness and pre-millennialism, organizing associations within regular churches, and disparaging those who had not received the "second blessing" and judged not to possess "heart religion."²⁵

The 1872 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church elected eight bishops, at least four of whom were sympathetic friends of the holiness movement: Randolph S. Foster, who in his Christian Purity had insisted that sanctification could and should be an instantaneous work of grace; Jesse T. Peck, who had written The Central Idea of Holiness and often contributed to Guide to Holiness; Gilbert Haven, editor of Zion's Herald; and Stephen M. Merrill.

In 1877 the Methodist Protestant Church adopted a "second blessing" creed. While it was not a holiness

²³ Timothy L. Smith, "The Theology and Practice of Methodism, 1876-1919," The History of American Methodism, ed. Emory Stevens Bucke, Vol. II (1964), 615.

²⁴ Synan, op.cit., 40.

²⁵ Charles T. Thrift, Jr., "Rebuilding the Southern Church," The History of American Methodism, Vol. II, 311.

denomination, the Methodist Protestant Church was strong on sanctification.

Although it originated out of an anti-slavery impetus, the Wesleyan Methodist Church included in its first Discipline in 1844 a perfectionist statement on sanctification. During the 1870's they moved toward a decidedly "holiness" restatement of sanctification as a second definite work subsequent to regeneration which was finally adopted in 1891 and ratified by 1893.

This period of growth saw an increasing stress on the event of entire sanctification as a "second blessing," the necessarily instantaneous nature of that event, a legalistic moralizing of sanctification, and the pentecostal language of "baptism of the Holy Spirit" as the essence of sanctification. This occasioned a flood of literature from both official Methodist and independent holiness presses.

The decade of the 1880's was a kind of "decade of decision" in the relationship of the Holiness Movement and Methodism. It is true that official expressions of Methodist loyalty to entire sanctification and support for the promotion of holiness "seemed more frequent and positive than ever before."²⁶ Most of the influential theologians of the Methodist Church--Daniel Steele, John Miley, Milton Terry, Miner Raymond, Thomas Ralston, Thomas Summers, Olin Curtis--supported the centrality of sanctification to Methodism, although there were some differences of interpretation.

It was during the 1880's that the United Brethren Church incorporated the holiness emphasis into their official doctrinal statement.

The 1880's also brought growing controversy over the Holiness Movement to Methodism. There was a growing concern over the independent character of the National Holiness Association. In rejecting a suggestion that they call a national convention for the promotion of holiness under their own auspices, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church expressed

²⁶ Smith, "The Theology and Practice of Methodism," 616.

their "solemn conviction that the whole subject of personal experience...can best be maintained and enforced in connection with the established usages of the church."²⁷ There was growing uneasiness over the stress on a "second blessing event" and pentecostal developments.

The growing tensions rooted, however, in the shift in the Holiness Movement from urban East and North to the rural and small town South and Midwest. Here the movement attracted persons largely from the poorer and less educated classes, and it increasingly took on more radical and fanatical aspects. There was a clear shift in the direction of personal holiness with little or no sense of social holiness. "A company of evangelists appeared who were seemingly more intent upon Puritan standards of dress and behavior than on perfect love, and certainly less attached to Wesleyan tradition and discipline."²⁸

During the 1880's the bishops and leaders of Methodism were forced to stand for or against the holiness movement because of the "come-outers." In 1860 Benjamin Roberts had "come out" of Methodism to found the Free Methodist Church. This schismatic trend was beginning to accelerate. In 1880 Daniel S. Warren had organized the Church of God (Anderson) on an anti-denominational platform. Hardin Wallace began his holiness "Band" movement in east Texas. And in 1887 John P. Brooks, a former loyal Methodist of Bloomington, Illinois, who left it in 1885 because it had become "easy, indulgent, accommodating, mammonized," actually wrote a text book of "come-outism," The Divine Church.

The movement to read the holiness faction out of Methodism began in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In July of 1885, Atticus Haygood, a Georgia Methodist minister later to become bishop, was asked to preach at the Oxford District Conference on sancti-

²⁷ Timothy L. Smith, Called Unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarenes, the Formative Years (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 38.

²⁸ Smith, "The Theology and Practice of Methodism," 618.

fication. Preaching on "Growth in Grace," he denied the need for a "second blessing" of instantaneous holiness. He characterized this kind of holiness reaching as a "do-it-yourself" doctrine of salvation, and he articulated a doctrine of gradual attainment of the sanctified state. For ten years he led the opposition which eventually discredited the movement in southern Methodism. The seminary theologians began to join in opposition to the holiness doctrine of sanctification. Wilbur F. Tillett of Vanderbilt openly challenged it as semi-Pelagian.²⁹ In the North, Daniel Whedon, in 1878, had declared that "the holiness association," "the holiness periodical," "the holiness prayer meeting," and "the holiness preacher" were modern novelties that have no part in an authentic Wesleyan system.³⁰

For most of a century American Methodism, mindful that scriptural holiness was a centrally defining part of its identity and mission, accepted the Holiness Movement's interpretation of sanctification as essentially orthodox. Now, however, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, questions began to be raised about its faithfulness to Wesleyan views. This arose partly out of an authentic concern for Wesleyan orthodoxy, and partly out of a growing acceptance of modern theological views on the part of Methodist leaders.

A number of factors contributed to the ultimate crisis in the holiness-Methodist relationship. The Holiness Movement itself began to split in the direction of two extremes, neither of which was congenial to the main body of Methodists: the one rigidly Puritanical, and the other intensely emotional. The movement underwent a major shift from the holiness of perfection toward pentecostalism, a shift symbolized in 1897 with the Guide to Holiness dropping the subtitle "and Revival Miscellany" in favor of "and Pentecostal Life." The holiness missions increasingly nurtured converts who could not feel at home in mainstream Methodism with a resulting growth of free fellowship congregations. In the face of this challenge to Methodist order and threat of schism, more and more

²⁹ Synan, op.cit., 48.

³⁰ Peters, op.cit., 139.

bishops and their cabinets began to lean heavily upon independent agencies supporting the movement and to assign holiness preachers to "hard-scrabble" churches, replacing them with anti-holiness successors. The holiness people became increasingly critical of the growing "worldliness" of the increasingly affluent Methodists. All of this, plus the belated challenge to their Wesleyan orthodoxy, led holiness leaders increasingly to conclude that "true religion and holiness" could only be preserved by "coming out"--that is, by separating from Methodism. At the same time the increasing intolerance of the extremists in the movement led to an increasingly negative reaction within Methodism, with fewer and fewer defenders.

The turning point came with the statement of the 1894 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South:

The privilege of believers to attain unto the state of entire sanctification, or perfect love, and to abide therein is a well-known teaching of Methodism. Witnesses to this experience have never been wanting in our Church, though few in comparison with the whole membership. Among them have been men and women of beautiful consistence and seraphic ardor, jewels of the Church. Let the doctrine still be proclaimed and the experience still be testified. But there has sprung up among us a party with "holiness" as a watchword; they have holiness associations, holiness meetings, holiness preachers, holiness evangelists, and holiness property. Religious experience is represented as if it consists of only two steps, the first step out of condemnation into peace and the next step into Christian perfection. The effect is to disparage the new birth and all stages of spiritual growth from the blade to the full corn in the ear, if there be not professed perfect holiness. Such Scriptural terms as "saint," "sanctified," "pure in heart," "holy," "dead to sin," "filled with the Spirit," and "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," are restricted to the few who have reached the height of perfect purity and love and improperly denied to the body of believers; and not only to those who are new or weak in the faith, but also to mature Christians who by walking with God in blessed fellowship and by patient continuance in well-doing, ever increasing in the knowledge of God, and being fruitful in every good work, adorn the doctrines of God our Saviour in all things,

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and are pillars in the Church. We do not question the sincerity and zeal of these brethren; we desire the Church to profit by their earnest preaching and godly example; but we do deplore their teaching and methods in so far as they claim a monopoly of the experience, practice, and advocacy of holiness and separate themselves from the body of ministers and disciples.³¹

Two years later at the General Conference of 1896, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church insisted "on the glorious privilege and duty of all men becoming saints, of immediately being made perfect in love, and of gradually ripening into Christian maturity in all faculties" and observed that "this doctrine was never more definitely stated, clearly perceived, nor consistently lived by greater numbers than now." But they voiced the judgment that "it is not vital that we hold the work done instantaneously" and that "it is not essential that a man make a specific profession of the experience."³² These statements were a shock to the holiness partisans. No longer did there appear to be any hope of recreating the Methodist Church in the holiness image. The decision was painfully clear-cut: stay or "come out."

And "come out" many did. From 1885 to 1905, the Holiness Movement fractured into a score of denominations instead of forming one united group. A dozen or more "came out" of the Methodist Church.

The two largest of these groups were the Church of the Nazarene and the Pilgrim Holiness Church. The first congregation of the former was formed in Los Angeles in 1895 under the leadership of Phineas Breese and Dr. J. P. Widney. Breese had requested a special appointment to work in Peniel Hall, a project for

³¹ Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South of 1894, pp. 25-26. Quoted in Horace M. DuBose, A History of Methodism (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1916), 90-91.

³² The Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896, Appendix III, pp. 497-98. Quoted in Peters, op.cit., 177-78.

ministry to the poor, and when this was denied he asked for "location." Through a process of mergers this group became The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene in 1914. The Pilgrim Holiness Church began in 1897 in Cincinnati under the leadership of a Methodist minister, Martin W. Knapp. Originally the International Apostolic Holiness Union, in 1922, on the occasion of a merger of four groups it took the present name.

As a direct result of the 1894 stand of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, there came into being the Pentecostal Holiness Church in 1900. A. B. Cruper, a Methodist minister from North Carolina, ran into trouble with the denomination over the stand on sanctification. In 1899 he was tried in the North Carolina Conference for insubordination, and he withdrew, founding the new denomination the following year.

Among the many smaller groups that "came out" of Methodism were the Missionary Bands of the World, the Church of Daniel's Band, Burning Bush, Hepzibah's Faith Missionary Association, and Pillar of Fire.

Synan observes that during the 1890's from one-third to one-half of the four million Methodists were committed to sanctification as a second work of grace, but that no more than 100,000 left to form holiness denominations. He also makes the intriguing observation that this rise of holiness denominations parallels the rise of political populism.³³

It would be a misconception to say that with the beginning of the twentieth century the holiness issue in Methodism was dead. At the same time the "come out" movement drained off the major second-blessing holiness agitation from the body of Methodism. The issue was refocused in the 1920's amidst the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the Methodist League for Faith and Life, and has surfaced again in the contemporary Forum for Scriptural Christianity Within the United Methodist Church.

The impatience of holiness leaders with the discipline exercised in the Methodist Church and the

³³ Synan, op.cit., 52ff.

threat of schism were the immediate factors leading to opposition in the Church. But there were other factors--attitudinal, behavioral, and theological--that led to this state of affairs.

In the beginning the message of the holiness people sounded and was enough like the orthodox Methodist understanding of Mr. Wesley's heritage of scriptural holiness that the movement was seen and welcomed as a revival of authentic Methodist religion. And until about the time of the Civil War this was true. But then subtle shifts and changes began to emerge in the Holiness Movement that sooner or later had to lead to an "agonizing reappraisal." In general the Methodist theologians supported the emphasis on sanctification, for they were concerned for a renewal of traditional Wesleyan "holiness of heart and a life comformable to the same,"--the vital experience of personal and social holiness. But with the developing second blessing peculiarities and growing pentecostalism they began to shift to criticism.

John Wesley had preached a doctrine of Christian perfection that was defined in terms of perfect love of God and neighbor, not prudential conduct. Professor Outler reminds us that when Wesley "comes to specify the essence of holiness, it is so simple that it seems downright simplistic, until you see him working it out across the range of its combinations. Holiness is the love of God and man--the perfect love of God and of our neighbor reigning over all other loves and interests. And it comes down finally to this--'that we love God because he first loved us'--and in the power of his love, we can learn to love our neighbors, grace-fully."³⁴ Wesley's notion of perfection, contrary to the traditional interpretation both within and without Methodism, was not the static and absolutistic Western perfectus est which really is impossible of human attainment--in this life or the next. Rather, it was informed by the dynamic Eastern notion of teleiosis which is "end" or "goal" in the sense of fulfilling that for which we are created.³⁵

³⁴ Albert C. Outler, "John Wesley as Theologian--Then and Now," Methodist History, XII (July, 1974), 75f., published jointly with A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review, LXXXVI (Summer, 1974).

³⁵ Albert C. Outler, "Toward a Reappraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian," The Perkins School of Theology Journal, XIV (Winter, 1961), 12f.

And we are created for that life of faith, which is complete dependence upon and consecration to God and which, through the gracious indwelling presence of Christ, is visible as faith working through love. Herein lies our perfection, not in some moralistic standard of conduct. And such a perfection is a present possibility.

For Wesley the experience of perfection, or entire sanctification, was neither "instantaneous" nor "gradual." It was both. True, this kind of full consecration is consummated in a moment, but he saw it as a part of the broad, general nurture of the Church with gradual work preceding and following. With Fletcher he agreed that consecration may be entire in a moment, but the Christian graces involve a process of maturity. Increasingly Wesley recognized the gradual character of sanctification and was aware of a certain transitory element in it. He came to think of it as less of a "state," and more of a moment-by-moment experience which could be eclipsed and then received again, but which by the perseverance of faith will become more and more habitual until it takes on the appearance and quality of a continuous experience. While he saw no reason why this could not come in its entirety at any time, he increasingly came to believe that it was usually in the moment of death.

In general the Holiness Movement came to focus on the event of entire sanctification as a "second blessing"--terminology not entirely foreign to Wesley, but certainly not typically Wesleyan--treating it almost as an end in itself, with anything coming before or after it as soteriologically incidental or irrelevant. This is a far cry from Wesley's stress on man's active participation in "working out our salvation." Increasingly, as Donald Dayton has indicated, "second blessing" was identified with pentecostal "baptism of the Holy Ghost."³⁶ In this context there was also a subtle shift from "entire consecration" to "complete maturity of Christian graces" as the essence of the "second blessing." And in contrast to Wesley the holiness movement insisted that entire sanctification must be instantaneous only, ruling out gradualness altogether.

³⁶ Donald W. Dayton, "Theological Roots of Pentecostalism" (unpublished working paper).

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Holiness supporters among the Methodist theologians generally stuck to the Wesleyan position, understanding entire sanctification to be both instantaneous and gradual and rejecting any one way of attaining it. In this regard John Miley's position is instructive. There is, he said, an instantaneous subjective purification, though this is not necessarily the only mode, which is the basis for the maturity of Christian graces which is not the immediate product of subjective purification, but a matter of growth.³⁷

In another constellation of emphases the holiness position tended to vary from that of Wesley. The former held that a person is in a state of unsavedness until one has experienced the "second blessing." It was Wesley's view that while you are not ripe for glory until you have been sanctified entirely, you are not in a state of damnation until you do. The holiness proponents tended to see assurance as that of a finished and secured salvation, whereas Wesley's doctrine of assurance was of present filial acceptance and not of final security. They also insisted that there was a necessity and duty to publically testify to the fact of having received the "second blessing", while Wesley encouraged it only when propitious and appropriate.

Perhaps one of the major deviations of holiness theology is to be seen in the shift from perfection to "baptism of the Holy Spirit." John Wesley's doctrine of perfection was and remained Christological and atonement oriented. Donald Dayton, who says that "by 1900 the shift from 'Christian Perfection' to 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' was nearly universal,"³⁸ has made an interesting developmental comparison of Asa Mahan's The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection (1839) with his The Baptism of the Holy Ghost (1870) and pointed out the resulting major theological transformation. It (1) shifts from Christocentrism to the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit being given autonomy instead of being the agent of Christ; (Is this an instance

³⁷ John Miley, Systematic Theology, 2 vols. (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1892-1894), II, 357.

³⁸ Donald W. Dayton, "From 'Christian Perfection' to the 'Baptism of the Holy Ghost': A Study in the Origins of Pentecostalism" (an unpublished paper), 10.

of a unitarianism of the Third Person of the Trinity?) (2) moves into dispensational theology; (3) gives precedence to Pentecost over perfection and sanctification, with the latter tending to drop out of pentecostalism; (4) shifts from fruits of the Spirit to gifts of the Spirit, with a stress on power and prophecy; (5) identifies prophecy as "predictive" rather than "edifying" and provides the ground for premillennialism; (6) shifts from moral and ethical concerns to personal cleansing and purity and God's method for doing this, as a result of shifting the emphasis from the goal and nature of the holy life to the event in which it takes place; and (7) looks for the validating of assurance in observable evidence--in tongues, for example.³⁹

Timothy L. Smith, in his Revivalism and Social Reform, has provided impressive evidence that the holiness revivals generated significant social concern and action, preparing the way for that later form of perfectionism called the social gospel. But whereas the social concerns of the earlier holiness advocates had led to attacks on slavery, poverty, and greed, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the holiness movement shifted to concerns of personal holiness, focusing on the issues of theatre-doing, ball games, dancing, smoking, drinking, swearing, and cosmetics. Not doing these things was the sure mark of the saved. What all of this amounts to is a major shift from perfection (perfect love) to a rigid moralistic Puritanical pietism. Wesley had warned against the reduction of holiness to the level of prudential morality. The irony is that the Methodist Church was doing exactly the same thing at the same time. As part and parcel of this same trend toward personal holiness there was a spreading Pharisaism in the movement, especially among the extreme segments. As John Peters reports, many "mistook censoriousness for sanctity, denunciation for devotion, and high profession for holy practices."⁴⁰

A further complicating factor in the relation of the Holiness Movement to Methodism is the fact that

³⁹ Donald W. Dayton, "Asa Mahan and the Development of American Holiness Theology," The Wesleyan Theological Journal, Vol. 9 (Spring, 1974), 64.

⁴⁰ Peters, op.cit., 191.

most of the holiness advocates were on the fundamentalist side of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy at a time when theological liberalism, with only modest concern for the Wesleyan heritage, came into dominance in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century the crisis had become acute. From the perspective of the majority of Methodists the advocates of holiness were disregarding the discipline of the church, disrupting the fellowship, subverting Wesleyan doctrine, and promoting schism. Something had to be done. And from the perspective of the advocate of holiness the lack of true spirituality in the Methodist churches, the personal antipathy and alienation they experienced, the (ab)use of the appointive power of the bishops and cabinets to discourage holiness, and the calling into question the Wesleyan integrity of their theology was too much.

For three quarters of a century the movement to promote scriptural holiness in the Methodist Church played a responsible and significant role in helping to keep Methodism faithful to her calling. The fragmentation resulting from the developments of the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a sad thing--and costly to everyone. It has taken another three quarters of a century, but we can rejoice that at last we may be ready to listen to and trust each other in our mutual and complementary stewardship of that "grand depositum" God has given to us through the hands of John Wesley.