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FIVE KEYS TO WESLEY'S SUCCESS

Steve Stanley

The Third Key: His Discipline

Discipline. Is there anything more despised in the present age than this? In reference to the Christian this word speaks of a life of divine purpose, holy intention, and fiery commitment to the mission of God. It is a life with priorities and plans; both flowing from the agenda of the Lord Jesus Christ to seek out and utterly redeem those who are alienated from God.

In the language of early Methodism, *discipline* refers to the spiritual practices, polity, and doctrines which united the Methodists in service to God and his command to spread "holiness without which no man will see the Lord" throughout all the nations of the world.

There was a reason, after all, why their enemies began calling them "Methodists." They were devoted to an orderly way of life with regular times of prayer and fasting, faithfulness in attending the preaching of the Word of God and the Table of the Lord, and full of good works to the souls and bodies of humanity. Methodists were expected to strictly adhere to the governance, spiritual practices, and charitable work which had been developed in holy conference. Thus, in giving specific advice to his "helpers," Wesley makes a point of saying to them, "Do not mend our Rules, but keep them."

The discipline of Wesley and the early Methodists gave them an influence in Great Britain all out of proportion to their relatively small numbers. George Whitefield, said by many to have been the more affective preacher of the two men, would come to lament the lack of organizational cohesiveness and discipline among his own followers saying, "My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in societies, and thus preserved the fruit of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."

How sad that, in many respects, the spiritual heirs of the Wesleyan message would be compelled to confess that, lacking the good order and cohesive spirit of primitive Methodism, our churches and people have little impact for God and have become "a rope of sand." Former Gen-

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eral Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, C. B. Jernigan, once declared that most churches need organization and discipline more than they need a revival. He said, “We have plenty of men and women in the Church of the Nazarene who are clean in their lives and holy in heart, and would die before they would knowingly do anything contrary to the will of God, but they lack system and real organization.” And, “there are times when a church needs something else worse than it needs a revival. They have had many real revivals of old time religion but were sadly lacking in methods of conserving the results of the revival.”

Wesley would have agreed. In his sermon on the Circumcision of the Heart he commented, “By the same discipline is every good soldier of Christ to inure himself to endure hardship. Confirmed and strengthened by this, he will be able

not only to renounce the works of darkness, but every appetite too, and every affection, which is not subject to the law of God.”

The work of God deserves and requires a people committed to consistent, concentrated, and consecrated adherence to the mission of God. In short, victory requires organization that is uncompromisingly loyal to the Lord and his Word and Christians who are, in turn, loyal to such an organization. Let Wesley’s bold declaration reverberate in our hearts as we contemplate the disciplined lives and organizations necessary to fulfill the evangelism of the world, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.”

Across Thirty Years: A Short History of the Fundamental Wesleyan Society, Part 2

Vic Reasoner

Elmer Long had conducted his “soul clinics” annually at Clinton Camp in Clinton, PA. However, after the Fundamental Wesleyan Society organized, all his meetings “dried up.” Harold Schmul was instrumental in getting Long back to the Clinton camp. However one night at Clinton Camp, Long’s sidekick Homer Sawyer read Richard Watson’s sermon “Power From On High.” You can read it by going to <http://fwponline.cc/v10n1/v10n1watson.html> The opposition was so fiery that Long later said he thought an opposing preacher was going to punch him. While Schmul came to their defense, telling the crowd that they were Wesleyan, not heretics, neither Long nor Sawyer were ever invited back.

About this same time we experienced an internal conflict. One of the founders was accused of adultery. Members from his congregation drove

to another state to make the accusation to another of the founders. The charges had to be addressed and momentum was lost in the tragedy.

In 1993 I was asked a second time to edit *The Arminian Magazine*. This time I was free to accept the responsibilities. I enrolled in Asbury with the promise that if I expanded my master’s thesis under Dr. Laurence Wood that it would be published by Zondervan. While that promise was never kept, I did take a class taught by Dr. Steven Harper entitled “Spiritual Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition.” That class opened a new dimension of Methodism to me. I learned that Methodism was not only a doctrinal position, it was a discipline. The conservative holiness movement rejected any accountability and the only discipleship they offered was at the close of an altar call.

We decided it would be more Methodist to become a “conference” rather than a “convention.” We covenanted together to meet yearly; report monthly on the agreed questions; fast weekly; and pray daily for each of our partners. Initially there were two groups formed, one failed because of this methodology. Joe

A return to early Methodist doctrine and practice will provide the strongest foundation.

McPherson has served as our online “class leader” since we began our monthly accountability around twenty years ago.

Our meetings took on the atmosphere of a retreat instead of a convention. We did launch Fundamental Wesleyan Bible Institute in 1995 and started calling in lecturers. All of those sessions were recorded and are now posted on our website. Dennis Hartman has served as our webmaster since its inception.

In time some of our men were asked to lecture in other educational institutions and our own institute morphed into a cooperative effort. My systematic theology notes became the basis for *Fellowship Foundations*, published in 2003 by the International Fellowship of Bible Churches. The same year I became an adjunct lecturer at West Africa Theological Seminary and have taught systematic theology there eight times. I am now actively involved in helping produce curriculum for the Wesley Institute produced by the Southern Methodist Church.

Across the years *The Arminian Magazine* has gained a degree of respectability. The conservative holiness movement modified their opposition, in part due to their own internal conflicts. Our influence has expanded and we have tried to address a broader range of issues.

John Wesley originally founded *The Arminian Magazine* to be an alternative to current Calvinistic magazines. His design was for it to deal with theological controversy, “principally as an engine of polemical theology.” The original

Arminian magazine was described as more of a sword than a trowel and Wesley’s preface in the premiere 1778 issue was described as a declaration of war. Thus, we have taken on the broader issues of Calvinism v. Arminianism.

In the early 1960s Robert Brush and Thurman McCoy flew to Marion, Indiana, to express some concerns about the Sunday School curriculum produced at that time by the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Specific concerns included a suggestion in the Sunday School literature that Jesus and “Doubting Thomas” might be twins. The Sunday School literature also taught that the Red Sea was only three feet deep at that time of year, but that “well-meaning scribes” had corrupted the biblical text describing the exodus. Brush asked George Failing, the editor, how scribes could be described as “well-meaning” if their intention was to corrupt the Word of God. The only answer he received was that they should pray more for their leaders and criticize them less.

When the Wesleyan Theological Society was organized in 1966 their statement of faith affirmed biblical inerrancy. However, there has been a radical departure from their founding statement and we have attempted to defend the historic Methodist view on the authority of Scripture.

None of these positions have improved our popularity with the academic guild, but many who are bewildered by the flood of liberalism disguised as Wesleyanism now look to us for guidance. We also exist for our own encouragement and theological support. Core members are affiliated with the Fellowship of Bible Churches, the Church of the Nazarene, the Wesleyan Church, the Southern Methodist Church, the Association of Independent Methodists, the Free Methodist Church, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the United Methodist Church. We cannot measure our influence internationally. We are referenced in the *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement* (2001).

And we also exist as a publishing company. Our books are cataloged in the two-volume index, *The Wesleyan Holiness Movement* (2005). Our goal is to promote a reformation and lay the foundation for revival. We feel that the basic

theology and practice of early Methodism are the closest to apostolic Christianity and that a return to early Methodist doctrine and practice will provide the strongest foundation upon which future generations can build.

A Brief Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Virginia, Part 2

Devereux Jarratt

Jarratt is now up to January 1776 in his account. This account will be continued in the next issue of The Arminian Magazine.

As there were few converts in my parish the last year, I was sensible a change of preachers was wanting. This has often revived the work of God: and so it did at the present time. Last December one of the Methodist preachers, Mr. Shadford, preached several times at the three places above mentioned. He confirmed the doctrine I had long preached; and to many of them not in vain. And while their ears were opened by novelty, God set his word home upon their hearts. Many sinners were powerfully convinced, and mercy! mercy! was their cry. In January, the news of convictions and conversions was common; and the people of God were inspired with new life and vigor by the happiness of others. But in a little time they were made thoroughly sensible that they themselves stood in need of a deeper work in their hearts than they had yet experienced. And while those were panting and groaning for pardon, these were entreating God, with strong cries and tears, to save them from the remains of inbred sin, to “sanctify them throughout, in spirit, soul, and body;” so to “circumcise their hearts,” that they might “love God with all their hearts,” and serve him with all their strength.

During this whole winter, the Spirit of the Lord was poured out in a manner we had not seen before. In almost every assembly might be seen signal instances of divine power, more espe-

cially in the meetings of the classes. Here many old stout-hearted sinners felt the force of truth, and among the dry bones was increased from week to week: nay, sometimes ten or twelve have been deeply convinced of sin in one day. Some of these were in great distress, and when they were questioned concerning the state of their souls, were scarce able to make any reply but by weeping and falling on their knees, before all the class, and earnestly soliciting the prayers of God’s people. And from time to time he has answered these petitions, set the captives at liberty, and enabled them to praise a pardoning God in the midst of his people. Numbers of old and gray-headed, of middle-aged persons, of youth, yea, of little children, were the subjects of this work. Several of the latter we have seen painfully concerned for the wickedness of their lives, and the corruption of their nature. We have instances of this sort from eight or nine years old. Some of these children are exceeding happy in the love of God — and they speak of the whole process of the work of God, of their convictions, the time when, and the manner how, they obtained deliverance — with such clearness as might convince an atheist that this is nothing else but the great power of God.

The outpouring of the Spirit which began here, soon extended itself, more or less, through most of the circuit, which is regularly attended by the traveling preachers, and which takes in a circumference of between four and five hundred miles. And the work went on, with a pleasing progress, till the beginning of May, when they held a quar-

terly meeting at Boisseau's chapel, in my parish. This stands at the lower line of the parish, thirty miles from White's chapel, at the upper like of it, where the work began. At this meeting, one might truly say, the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain of Divine influence poured down for more than forty days. The work now became more deep than ever, extended wider, and was swifter in its operations. Many were savingly converted to God, and in a very short time, not only in my parish, but through several parts of Brunswick, Sussex, Prince George, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, and Amelia counties.

The second day of the quarterly meeting a love feast was held. As soon as it began the power of the Lord came down on the assembly like a rushing mighty wind; and it seemed as if the whole house was filled with the presence of God. A flame kindled and ran from heart to heart. Many were deeply convinced of sin; many mourners were filled with consolation; and many believers were soon overwhelmed with love, that they could not doubt but God had enabled them to love him with all their heart.

DISCIPLESHIP IS A COMMAND, NOT AN OPTION

Gary K. Briden

Jesus commanded discipleship when he gave us the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Discipleship is the key to long term success in retaining those won to Christ today as it has been in the past. Evangelist George Whitfield said the difference between the lasting success of John Wesley's ministry and his was discipleship and Wesley's class systems (small groups). Whitefield said, "My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in societies, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."

When John Wesley was asked why he could not be content with just preaching and letting God take care of the converts without his small groups for discipleship, he replied that every time he tried that, most fell by the wayside. Whether it is one-on-one mentoring or class training, discipleship is God's plan for his church (2 Tim 2:2).

There are certain basics to cover with every new believer and disciple – basics covered by Jesus and the New Testament. Some basic principles and topics that should be covered are: assurance, how to pray and the importance of prayer, how to study the Bible, how to share the gospel

and the command to do so, importance of being an active part of a church, stewardship of talents and finances, sanctification and filling of the Holy Spirit, and progress into study of key Bible doctrines and truths.

I will share Wesley's system because it still works where applied and is the heart of small group systems used in the church for the past 20-30 years. Some of the methods used by Bill Hybels and Rick Warren and others can find their roots in Wesley's system. The heart of Wesley's system involved small interactive groups called the class meeting, the band, the select band, the penitent band, and the society. They were all designed to follow up those who wanted to trust Christ as Savior or who did trust Christ as Savior at the close of his mass meetings (with crowds numbering in the thousands) and to provide accountability and a process for discipleship. Wesley noticed that many who professed to trust Christ in those meetings "fell by the wayside." He had a burden that those who trusted Christ as Savior be disciplined and live godly holy lives.

The Society was designed to bridge the gap between the mass meetings and Godly living. It meets once per week. The leader gives counsel

to questions asked or problems presented. They have a season of prayer and Bible study. These societies focus on instruction. They have accountability, Godly living, and growth as its purpose. They proclaim and explain biblical principles and teaching regarding sanctification and heart purity

The class meeting is the heart of the discipleship system. The class is made up of individuals from societies seeking a closer walk with the Lord. Their quest is for a cleansed heart and godly (holy) lifestyle.

The class meeting is a small group of six to eight people who meet weekly to give account to each other about their spiritual growth. The class leader sees each member weekly to see

It is not necessary to copy Wesley's system verbatim, but we must adapt his principles for the twenty-first century.

how they are doing spiritually, to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort as needed, and to see what each can do to help others.

The class meeting became the training ground for leaders. It provided an environment in which things learned could be experimentally or experientially tested. It became a point of entry to the "church" in which new people could be incorporated and assimilated quickly. It provided a way of pooling finances to help people in a practical way. It provided a setting in which people could express and share needs with others who cared and would provide help and encouragement. It provides a place to resolve conflicts.

Its primary purpose is to make Christian Disciples as commanded in Matthew 28:18-20 and produce change in heart and behavior. The class meeting has four key goals:

- Personal growth in the context of a small intimate fellowship (Galatians 6:1-2)
- Accountability with spiritual disciplines (Galatians 6:3-5)

- Bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Speaking the truth in love (Galatians 6:1 and Ephesians 4:2)

The bands are taken from the class meeting membership. They are designed for personal intimate sharing of their experiences with the Lord and challenges facing them. The bands meet once a week at least to pray for each one individually keeping their needs in mind. They are designed for edification and personal growth and redirection (Romans 12:1-2). They facilitate the cultivation of inner purity and changing of attitudes (I John 4:16-18).

This is a meeting in which each member takes initiative to speak with the leader serving to start the process. He asks each one probing questions such as:

- What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
- What temptations have you dealt with?
- How were you delivered from them?
- What have you thought, said, or done, which you might wonder if it is sin or not?
- Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

The Penitent Bands are a "rehabilitation" program to help those struggling with persistent sins or temptations. They are designed to help people find victory and success spiritually and hopefully not lose them through the "back door." They endeavor to reclaim those who fell into wilful sin, sins of omission or commission all at once or gradually by giving in to "little" heart sins or skipping prayer, worship, and Bible study. Their goal is restoration of those who are backslidden.

The Select Society was originally designed for those ardently seeking personal holiness. From this group come planners and leaders. They are made up of only the most faithful to ministry and work of the church. This provided an environment suitable for pursuit of *inward* and *outward* holiness or Christ's love and character

(I Corinthians 13). The select society followed three basic rules:

- Everything said should be kept in strict confidence to ensure that members are not exploited by what they may share.
- In times of disagreement, they would respect the decision or “arbitration” of their leaders.
- Everyone would share financially as they are able in the work of the ministry.

John Wesley said the purpose of the classes and bands (and of discipleship in general) was to see that: “they have a clear, full, abiding conviction, that without inward, complete, universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord.”

How do we apply the small group dynamic today? It is not necessary to copy Wesley’s system verbatim. Glean the principles used and apply them to the twenty-first century. Yet we must endeavor to adapt these principles found in Wesley’s system:

- Accountability
- Encouragement
- Prayer
- Interactive Bible study

- Help for those struggling with “besetting” sins
- A pattern for helping new believers learn practical skills
- How to study the Bible
- How to pray
- How to lead someone to Christ
- How to worship God

There are other practical things found in many small group movements today, such as personal one-on-one discipleship. It’s what Jesus did with his twelve and the inner three. Jesus invested 3 - 3½ years with them. He lived with them, traveled with them, taught them, and demonstrated to them.

He put them in pairs to do practical ministry. He sent them out to stand alone with him — even to the death (Stephen – Acts 7:55-56, Paul, Peter, and the rest of the twelve). He took a risk, invested himself, poured his heart into twelve, and only lost one.

Will you practice discipleship? Dr. Frank Meyers told me long ago, “When you preach, you add, when you teach and train others you multiply.” Are you willing to add AND multiply?

Looking or Lusting? Discerning Between False Accusation and True Conviction

Vic Reasoner

Jesus taught in Matthew 5:28 that whoever lusted after a woman has already committed adultery in his heart. However, Jesus did not say that whoever looked upon a woman was guilty of adultery. Daniel Whedon’s comments written in 1860 are helpful.

Yet not every glance of admiration or desire, cast upon the beauty of one of the opposite sex, is here condemned. Such affections are planted in our nature for pure and beneficial purposes. Not even the recognition of the superior attractions of another man’s wife, or

another woman’s husband, is transgression. Indeed, the sentiment of pleasure arising from beauty of persons around us, may be as pure as the pleasure of surveying pictures. A sweet voice is justly pleasant to the ear, a graceful manner to the taste, a fair form or face to the eye. But when from a sentiment it becomes a sensation, the danger commences. If the sensation be volitionally permitted, there is guilt.

Essentially, Whedon said that it is not necessarily a sin to notice the attractiveness of the opposite sex. If a woman is dressed in order to attract

attention and my attention is attracted, sin has not been committed unless my will is engaged. The word lust is *epithumeo*, which is a neutral word. It simply means “desire.” It is used in a positive sense of Jesus in Luke 22:15. However, I must not desire anything which is not lawful for me to possess. Whedon also wrote, “Where the will consents, and the volition permits” then there is guilt.

In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley taught that one who is saved from sin could still be tempted. Among the examples he gave was this one, “A woman solicits me. Here

is a temptation to lust. But in the instant I shrink back. And I feel no desire or lust at all; of which I can be as sure as that my hand is cold or hot.” While the

temptation had to have some appeal or it would not even be a temptation, Wesley was conscious that he had not consented. He had not crossed the “line.” However, his purity of motive did not stop the accusations of his wife.

Wesley also wrote “The Life and Death of Mr. Fletcher.” In this account Wesley recorded an incident where John Fletcher, who was about 31 at the time and did not marry until age 52, was showing a close friend a rope which he used for exercise. Fletcher jokingly said that the devil had often tempted him to hang himself with that rope.

His friend replied, “The desire of women is a temptation far more dangerous than this.” Fletcher then surprised his friend by responding, “In all my life I never felt that temptation; no, not in any degree.” But Fletcher’s friend reported to Wesley that when he and Fletcher met again, “He acknowledged he had been plagued, like other men, with that formerly unknown temptation.”

While the struggle begins much earlier for most men, the burden of this article is to offer help for those who are coping with their humanity. While Fletcher was a saintly man, he was also human. The fact that he was tempted does not imply any sinfulness or guilt.

There can be a false sense of guilt. The devil will make accusations. He insists that if I was holy, I would not have even been aware of what was in front of my eyes. But when I examine my heart there was no sinful desire, just an awareness. I do not want anything that the Lord does not want me to have.

Wesley commented on David’s adultery by writing, “But all these [wives] did not preserve him from coveting his neighbor’s wife. Rather, they inclined him to it: for men who have once broke the fence will wander carelessly.” The implication is that sexual desire must be contained like a wild horse is fenced.

We are earthen vessels. That fact does not argue for the necessity of sin, but we must face our humanity which makes us vulnerable to sin. The

Even the most holy must learn self-discipline.

Wesley Stories: Ingenious Reproof

Joseph Beaumont Wakeley

On one occasion when John Wesley was traveling he had for a fellow passenger in the coach an officer who was intelligent, and very agreeable in conversation; but there was one very serious drawback — his profanity. When they changed coaches, Mr. Wesley took the officer aside, and after expressing the pleasure he had enjoyed in his company, said he had a great favor to ask of him. The young officer said, “I will take great pleasure in obliging you, for I am sure you will not make an unreasonable request.” “Then,” said Mr. Wesley, “as we have to travel together some distance, I beg, if I should so far forget myself as to swear, you will kindly reprove me.” The officer immediately saw the motive and felt the force of the request, and smiling, said, “None but Mr. Wesley could have conceived a reproof in such a manner.” The reproof acted like a charm.

Holy Spirit will not eradicate your sexuality. It is God's plan for the world to continue through the procreation of husband and wife. However, we must discipline our sexual appetites. While I have used examples from our Methodist heritage, sexual temptation is not confined to

any particular denomination. My examples merely illustrate that the struggle is not new and even the most holy men and women must learn self-discipline. "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not plan ahead about how to gratify your lusts" (Romans 13:14).

REVIEWS

Thomas C. Oden. *John Wesley's Teachings: Pastoral Theology. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-310-58709-5.*

Oden's agenda was to pull together Wesley's vision of pastoral care and organize this body of material into a systematic pastoral theology. Oden claims that Wesley was the foremost eighteenth-century evangelical teacher on pastoral theology. The natural question is whether Oden is imposing this agenda on Wesley. However, Oden stated that the purpose of this series was to state precisely what Wesley taught without exaggeration or dilution.

Oden therefore proceeds to summarize Wesley's view on the call to ministry, natural gifts, educational preparation, and the pastoral office. Chapter two deals with pastoral counseling, visiting the sick, and mediating conflict. This continues in the next chapter, under the title of "soul care." Issues such as admonition, deception, temptation, depression, and patience are addressed.

Chapters 4-5 deal with Wesley's view of the family. Wesley himself was no shining example of how to be a model husband nor did he raise any children of his own. Yet Wesley did have his mother's example on the education and discipline of children. Wesley himself was largely home schooled. Oden includes helpful material on the purpose of education. On the subject of marriage, Oden supplemented Wesley's own blind spots by drawing from Isaac Ambrose, a Puritan whom Wesley had reprinted in his *Christian Library*.

Chapter 6 deals with Wesley's theology of the Church, including Word and sacrament. Separate chapters are also devoted to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Oden is especially helpful in his evaluation of whether Wesley

taught baptismal regeneration. He concludes that regeneration is the thing signified and baptism is the sign.

Chapter 9 deals with the unity of the body of Christ. Wesley strongly emphasized that Methodists were not to separate, but to redeem both church and society from within. The shameful splintering of the conservative holiness movement is sufficient proof that they do not understand Wesley's theology. Oden applies Wesley's insistence on unity to the current trend of liberal clergy to split off from their historic roots. Oden is especially grieved with "ordained ministers who officiate at weddings that neglect the classic Christian teaching of covenant fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman." At this point Oden shares a personal note as a founder of the confessing movement within the United Methodist Church. His own decision about whether to stay or leave hinges on Wesley's own guidelines. So long as his church does not require of him some act which he cannot in good conscience consent, his intention is not to leave the church that baptized and ordained him.

In chapter 10, Oden deals with effective church leadership. However, this chapter does not focus on how Wesley was a clever administrator. The early Methodist leaders did not start with a plan. Instead, they were men of one book and they preached the old doctrines. And they simply followed the Spirit. Their priorities were doctrinal teaching, spiritual formation, disciplinary action, and protection of this work of God from opposition and persecution.

The final chapter deals with the ministry of evangelism. Oden does not present soul winning as either a sales pro-

gram or an organized instrument of social change. Wesley's passion was for holy living and Oden presents the holy life as the essence of winning souls. In order to make his point, Oden devotes twelve pages to the life and ministry of John Fletcher. Oden presents Fletcher as one who embodied the wisdom of winning souls.

Based on Oden's agenda to state precisely the views of Wesley, I am surprised that Oden did not chronicle Wes-

ley's changing views on church government or document his view on women preachers. But I do think that what Oden has done is ground-breaking. Many of us are looking forward to the fourth and final volume on issues of ethics and society, to be released on February 2014.

-Vic Reasoner

David A. Croteau, *You Mean I Don't Have to Tithe? A Deconstruction of Tithing and a Reconstruction of Post-Tithe Giving*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010.

The question of tithing illustrates the need for a consistent theology. Dispensationalism holds to the discontinuity of the Mosaic law. The law was given to Israel, but the Church is under grace. We don't have to tithe. We don't have to keep a Sabbath. We don't even have to attend church. In fact a "carnal" Christian may not exhibit any spiritual fruit, but may be living in disobedience to his Lord. Since only about 9% of "born-again" Christians practice tithing anyway, this book does not seem necessary

This is antinomianism and it is all connected. Wesley published three standard sermons on the proper function of the law, sermons #34-36. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 9:21 that he was not free from God's law, but was under the law of Christ. Christian freedom consists not in freedom to sin but in freedom from sin.

Methodist theology has always held that the Church is God's true Israel. As Robert Brush explained in a 1986 Arminian article, the antithesis of the law is not grace, but lawlessness. The tithe was established by Abraham, the father of faith, in Genesis 14 and practiced by Jacob in Genesis 28. The people of God are challenged to tithe in Malachi 3 and are accused of robbing God when we fail to tithe.

If the New Testament said no more about tithing that would be sufficient, since we uphold the continuity of the old and new testaments. But Jesus does affirm tithing in Matthew 23:23. Paul taught proportionate giving in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Here Wesley explained that as God increases a man's income, he will increase the size of his offering. "If a man when he has or gains one pound, give a tenth to God, when he has or gains ten pounds, he will give a tenth to God, when he has or gains a hundred, he will give a tenth of this also." Wesley felt that the tithe was the lowest rule of

Christian prudence. However, without denying the legitimacy of tithing Wesley then advocates a more excellent way. Do not restrict yourselves to any proportion at all, but lend to God all you can.

According to Croteau, Wesley did not tithe (pp. 36-37) and was ambiguous about tithing. This is simply not true. There is nothing ambiguous about Wesley's notes on 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Above all, Wesley hated antinomianism — the doctrine that because faith alone is necessary to salvation the moral law is of no use or obligation.

However, since tithes were mandated by state law in England, there was little need to defend tithing in Wesley's day. Adam Clarke's comments on Genesis 28 document some of the abuse of that era. The Methodist Societies would not benefit from the tithe which was paid to the state church. However, if tithing was the law of the land, would Wesley - the good Tory that he was - break the law?

In Wesley's Sermon "On the Danger of Increasing Riches," he declared, "Unless thou givest a full tenth of thy substance, of thy fixed and occasional income; thou dost undoubtedly set thy heart upon thy gold, and it will "eat thy flesh as fire!" But the tithe for Wesley was only the initial threshold of giving. Wesley gave away the equivalent of \$4 million in his lifetime, going far beyond the lowest rule of Christian prudence. He received an annual stipend following his election as a fellow of Lincoln College at Oxford in 1726 until his marriage in 1751. As his income increased he determined to maintain his same standard of living and give away the rest. Thus he declared in 1744, "If I should die with more than ten pounds, may every man call me a liar and a thief."

David A. Croteau, ed. *Perspectives on Tithing: Four Views*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011.

In this book Croteau summarizes his previous book in the introduction. Then Ken Hemphill and Bobby Eklund argue that tithing is the foundational base from which believers can and must be challenged to become grace-givers. They feel tithing is a good starting point.

Croteau states the second position, a post-tithing view on giving. Christians should be freed from the 10% model so they can embrace the view that we are under grace and not law. However, since the average Christian gives only 3%, this model amounts to the pre-tithing model.

The third view, stated by Reggie Kidd, is an ambiguous attempt to answer the tithing question with a “yes” and a “no.”

Gary North argues that believers are in covenant with Christ and that the tithe is their payment to the church for

their membership in the kingdom of priests. Church members who do not tithe should not be allowed to vote. “If your local church is not worthy of your tithe, transfer your membership. Until then, pay your tithe to it.” Basically, North concluded that anyone can honk. If you love Jesus, pay your tithe.

Every facet of the Church is currently struggling financially. As a boy I heard a church leader attempt to clarify the “free-will offering” plan. He explained that they had been receiving all together too much “free will” and not nearly enough offering. We need to return to a clear position on tithing and Christian stewardship.

-Vic Reasoner

***Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology*, Al Truesdale, ed. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8341-2837-8.**

Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology is an ambitious project containing 360 articles by over a hundred scholars in twenty countries. These articles cover twenty categories. Categories such as Christianity and other religions, Church and culture, Church and society, ethics, historical traditions and topics, liturgy/worship, missions/missiology, philosophy, natural sciences, social sciences, and theological movements are broader categories than Wesleyan theology. These articles are helpful because they give a contemporary appraisal of current trends globally. However, these articles do not necessarily reflect a Wesleyan theology because there is not necessarily a Wesleyan position on some contemporary topics in comparative religions, ethics, history, philosophy, science, or missiology.

Most articles run about 300-500 words, so they are a basic introduction to the topic. Sometimes the conciseness of the article causes the author to paint with too broad a brush. I found most articles to be objectively written. I was pleased to see that William Abraham told it like it was, that Wesley accepted penal substitution, refusing the extremes of limited atonement and universalism. However, his article on “Baptism with the Holy Spirit” is very noncommittal. The article on hell was not adequate. Sometimes I felt the contri-

butors tried too hard to be politically correct in dealing with such evils as communism, socialism, enlightenment, homosexuality, evolution, and Islam.

However, the objective consensus approach is abandoned when the contributors deal with Bible-believing Wesleyans. The article on biblicism/bibliology was a reaction against 24-hour days of creation and biblical inerrancy, as well as an accusation that we worship the Bible. Elsewhere we are told that Wesleyans avoid the extreme of biblical fundamentalism in which the Bible’s words are thought to be dictated by God. However, we are assured that every type of biblical criticism is a legitimate tool for Wesleyan scholars.

While we are told that Wesleyans accept the Reformation principle of Scripture only, we are also told that authority is not based on the Bible’s very words. Apparently, biblical authority is in process within the church and through the Spirit.

The assumption of soteriological inerrancy permeates the whole dictionary. “Wesleyans reject using Scripture as a textbook for biology, anthropology, cosmology, physics, or geography.” We are assured that Wesleyans understand evolution to be compatible with Christian theology.

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If one knew nothing about Wesleyan theology except what he learned from this dictionary, he would conclude that Wesleyans uncritically accept limited inerrancy, open theism, process theology, and egalitarianism. I am not sure why the new dictionary omitted the virgin birth and a discussion of millennial views.

It seems that every possible position and trend is objectively described except for the core convictions of true conservative Wesleyans regarding the authority of Scripture. While I am grieved, it was just about what I expected from Beacon Hill Press. Yet I have no intention of parting with

my copy. I regard it as a valuable resource on just about every subject except those that require us to stand against the spirit of our age.

However, I will not discard the older *Beacon Dictionary of Theology* (1983). While it gave a less than objective appraisal of postmillennialism, it affirmed biblical inerrancy and authority, had a much more cautious view of biblical criticism, dealt much more adequately with the inspiration of Scripture. It covered the virgin birth and the dual nature of Christ, and gave a more objective view of process theology.

-Vic Reasoner.



Fundamental Wesleyan Conference

October 16-18

on the campus of Southern Methodist College

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with Dr. Chris Bounds

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