

Endnote:

“How, Then, Shall We Live?”

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For some conferences, the outcome is the preparation and presentation of an agreed-upon declaration or proposition. We as Wesleyans tend to take things more personally. What does all of this “mean to me?” we ask. “How, then, shall *I* live?”

Hearing, more than writing, is the purest form of communication. The Christian faith is personally given, as we have had in these lectures. We should have become more confident and knowledgeable of our Wesleyan tradition, and how it continues to be a help for us a pastors and ministers.

Common Themes

FIRST, holiness is thoroughly RELATIONAL. This is the way we understand the Bible. The presentations follow the lines that Mildred Bangs Wynkoop set a generation ago – lines that emphasize the side of John Wesley that was content with neither a static nor substantial conception of holiness.

SECOND, the presentations are also thoroughly TRINITARIAN. This emphasis has been of more recent origin among theologians of the Wesleyan tradition, who at one time divided the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit so completely as to imply that they worked independently of each other and apart from the Father. No more. From the beginning, God is “us” and creates humanity in that likeness.

Therefore, THIRD, as human beings reflecting the image of God we are intended for COMMUNITY. How then shall *we* live? is the question. My life is connected to the lives of others. I find my true self, my Christ-like self, in inter-subjective relationships. I must not think of myself as an isolated being as if I could pursue holiness on my own apart from others. That kind of individual-centered conception of holiness (common from the perspective of the Western holiness heritage to which we are heir more than to Asian mentality) is the opposite of perfect love, which always demands a subject to love.

Just as Christ entered fully into our sphere of being so we are called upon to enter deeply into the lives of others, with empathy. This call to penetrate into the life spaces of others seems consistent with John Wesley’s bands and class meetings, and, as well, calls these days for discipleship. In all, inter-subjectivity invites us to find our ways into the very personal space of others. Inter-subjectivity sends us into the lives of others. The “feed-back” of others close to us we can receive as God’s perfecting grace.

The inter-connectedness of human beings to each other resonates with Asia-Pacific worldviews. Asians tend to be more personally-connected, more relational, than Westerners. Yet, somehow, intimacy or transparency is not altogether easy unless it is among family members or members of one’s extended

family, clan or tribe. To those outside our particular community, there is distrust. The gospel calls us toward an inter-subjectivity that is wider than this.

At the same time, we must go beyond any inter-subjectivity that does not recognize the community in which we live, and through which we demonstrate the gospel. Collectively, not individually, we embody Christ in the world. It is the edifice that we built through the mortar of multiple inter-subjective relations that Christ ultimately is manifest. Indeed, the hope of the world is in the purity of God's church.

FOURTH, Christ is the perfect image of our humanness as well as our holiness. To say that we are human in no way demeans. Christ lifts up our HUMANNESS, and in so doing adds to it its own dignity. The speakers represent a reaction to the tendency of a previous generation to so emphasize Christ's divinity as to minimize his humanity. There is nothing inconsistent between holiness and humanness. We are nothing less than human. Our becoming like Christ is identical with being more human. Being more like Christ, we return to our original essence.

FIFTH, unlike most of our predecessors in the Wesleyan theological tradition, the presenters preferred not to identify any particular "ATTRIBUTE" of the image of God until we see God in Christ. We must look to CHRIST and not to Adam to understand the image of God. The one attribute that sums the character of Christ is LOVE. God is love and any other description of Jesus' life and ministry can be epitomized in this one word. The "mystic" connection we have with each other is none other than love. The more human we become, the more like Christ, and the more like Christ the more human.

Out of this inward subjectivity rather than as from the outside – as an inner voice, or as a law "inscribed on our hearts" – comes a call for Spirit-empowered obedience and fidelity. The law that once was alien to us becomes personal to us through the of the Spirit of God, and through that Spirit, rather than through our innate abilities comes the response of fidelity to God. Every moment beckons obedience that comes, as Jesus' did, out of love toward his Father and toward his followers, and in every moment there is grace.

In Christ we see a persuasive, humble God, a God who is unassuming, a God who is vulnerable, a God who is submissive, a God who is loyal and who is faithful and obedient. That provides not only the image of God but also the image of what we are to be.

What Now?

This was not a conference intended to provide specific answers to practical problems. There are other conferences intended for that, which would cover such important topics as church planting and church growth, discipleship, leadership, and the like. A conference such as this prepares our minds and hearts to rightly assess such practical training and application from the lens of our Wesleyan tradition.

We hunger for "conference" (to confer) with God's people as did Wesley's and Asbury's preachers. This conference has provided that, and so we will with God's people as we go with the somewhat paradoxical commitments to be both more relational and more reflective. We will continue to

celebrate; we will continue to dialogue. In so doing we will not be so readily tossed to and fro by “every wind of doctrine.”