THE WESLEYAN REVIVAL FROM A PIETIST PERSPECTIVE

By

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In the spirit of a camp meeting, I will take the liberty to testify to heartwarming encounters with the holiness legacy. As a teenager one of my aborted attempts at disciplined spirituality centered on a devotional booklet, The Way, by E. Stanley Jones. So it was on a Sunday evening in the early forties that I willingly went with my parents to the Wichita Forum to hear an inspiring message by the renowned missionary. About a quarter before nine, I was moved to go forward with many others. I wanted to find out more about Gandhi. I soon discovered, however, that others were there to "pray through" which seemed to me to be a strange idea. The next item from my unpublished journal comes from my days as a young pastor in Iowa. I passed a tent meeting and behold the people were plain. The black attire of the women was capped by white prayer coverings. I stopped and found a bench, for these were my people. I was shocked when the meeting became punctuated with loud Hallelujahs, Amens, and arm waving gestures. These people were supposed to be reserved Germanic types, expressing their emotions with their eyes if at all. This was my first encounter with the River Brethren, not my last, for my father-in-law later spent hours reminiscing in my presence about camp meetings in Dickinson County, Kansas.

Neo-Orthodox theologians led me to make a rational case for more holistic faith responses. In the civil rights movement, however, I resonated with worship styles in which heart and mind were united in the dialogical responses of the congregation. Now I feel more at home in an ethos of enthusiasm while some of you may have come to resonate with the quiet devotional Pietists.

In a more academic vein I have taught a course entitled "Luther, Calvin and Wesley." In spite of my prudent objectivity most students come out liking Wesley the best. Some have the audacity to accuse me of being warm to Wesley because of my Pietist predisposition. When I was serving as the visiting Lilly theologian to Berea College a decade ago, I read Discovering An Evangelical Heritage and other items by Donald Dayton which had been recommended to me. With so little knowledge, I was surprised to find myself
somewhat of a guru on Berea's spiritual roots. They were aware of their abolitionist stance and the details of their origins. However, most did not understand the larger milieu of Finney revivalism and the radical evangelical component of anti-slavery ferment. As a historian, I find most of my friends in 16th and 17th century German-speaking areas. When Berea's president commissioned me to write about the intellectual and spiritual roots of the College, I entered the fascinating world of antebellum American Christianity. All of which is to say that I have come to appreciate the rich heritage of the holiness legacy of the Wesleyan revival.

**Pietism and Aldersgate**

At this birthday celebration for Aldersgate, it is my mission to focus on the too often neglected Pietist relationships and influences at work in that context. Notable exceptions to the history of neglect include an older book by Arthur W. Nagler, Pietism and Methodism, and more recent research by F. Ernest Stoeffler and Martin Schmidt. Since Pietism flourished on the same soil as earlier Anabaptism, Howard Snyder quite correctly filters radical and free church influences on Wesley through the Moravians. A major problem in studying Pietist/Wesleyan relationships has been the lack of Pietist source materials in English. Only recently has alleviation begun, with the appearance of three volumes of the Classics of Western Spirituality edited by Mennonite Peter Erb. We also have recent research and translated source materials on the life and writings of Pietism's most famous forbears, Philipp Jakob Spener and August Hermann Francke, respectively by K. James Stein and Gary Sattler. A more basic problem has been the failure of Ivy League historiography to acknowledge major Pietist and Wesleyan influences on American Christianity because of its preoccupation with Puritan roots.

I have been reluctant to follow Ernst Troeltsch and others in regarding the revival under the Wesleys as a wave of Pietism. I prefer to label the movements as sisters, or if this is objectionable, at least, first cousins. If we appropriate the former in naming Pietism the older sister, we need to emphasize that the younger sister rapidly became larger and very early became her own person. Both movements were parts of widespread awakenings of heart religion which included mystical Quietism in Spain, the Sacred Heart of Jesus movement in France, Hasidic revivals in Eastern European Judaism, and Jansenist and Puritan expressions of piety.

I do not want to suggest that Pietist influences constituted the sole or major influence on the Wesleys. I have found John Wesley to be a helpful and astute theologian because of the catholicity of his sources, Anglican, Patristic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminian, Puritan, and Pietist. As a coherent eclectic, his quadrilateral provides a helpful epistemological plumb line which operates in most traditions whether they admit it or not. Wesley appropriated all of these influences to shape Christian lives and communities for witness, mission and service. This makes Wesley a major theologian in my book, not in spite of but because he was foremost a folk theologian.

**Personal Contacts.** It was Wesley's experience at Aldersgate that launched his public ministry. And it was Moravian Pietists who before and after this event admonished, guided and inspired Wesley through four soul-
searching and personally redemptive years. Wesley was already acquainted with Johann Arndt's True Christianity, Francke's Pietas Hallensis, and the mystical writings of Jacob Boehme as appropriated by William Law and the Philadelphians led by Jane Leade in England. However, it was in the fall of 1735, when Wesley was sent as a missionary and Anglican priest to Georgia with his brother and two others, that he became personally engaged with Pietism. There were twenty-six Moravians from Herrnhut on board the ship, the Simmonds.

Who were the Moravians? Briefly, they were refugees from the old Unitas Fratrum, a religious society which emerged in Bohemia in 1457. A revival of the society took place when a remnant from this old Hussite group found refuge on the estate of Count Zinzendorf, a godson of Spener and student, of Francke, who became their dominant leader. If early Methodists could claim Zinzendorf in spite of their separation, as Wesleyans continue to claim Wesley in spite of their break from Methodism, then most of you could count yourselves in the apostolic succession of one of the oldest Protestant movements.

His Journal reveals that Wesley quickly sensed the Moravians to be filled with faith and the Holy Spirit. He began to learn German so that he might converse with them. Charles drew inspiration for Methodist hymnody from their 7:00 p.m. singing meetings. John's contribution was that of translation.

John Wesley was impressed by the humility of the Moravians in performing without pay tasks which none of the English would undertake. "If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went their way. No complaint was found in their mouth." They impressed him, too, when, a few days out, the sail split. While there was terrible screaming among the English, he was impressed that the Herrnhuters remained completely calm, lifting songs of praise. At the same time he may have been reading a Pietist booklet by Francke entitled Nicodemus, which contrasted fearing God with caring men.

The Georgian portion of Wesley's Journal gives abundant evidence of his almost daily contacts with the Moravians. He learned to know August G. Spangenberg, the head of the German colony, and other leaders, such as Bishop David Nitschmann and Johann Toeltschig. He sought their counsel concerning the style of his ministry, his love affair with Sophia Hopkey, his angelistic efforts with the pagan Indians and black slaves, and how to deal with the threats to expel him from the colony. More important for the context of Aldersgate were the many conversations dealing with his personal doubts. The Moravians frequently asked him about his openness to the witness of the Spirit. His journal entries in Georgia are replete with positive references to the Moravians.

Sailing back to England he mused that he had gone to Georgia to convert the Indians, but that the deeper question was who would convert him. The answer came in the person of Peter Boehler, a young Moravian missionary who seemed to specialize in witnessing to young intellectuals. The Wesley brothers came under his tutelage shortly after arriving back home on May 1. Though giving greater attention to Charles, Boehler was in frequent conversations with both. He convinced them that the lack of faith is the most serious sin and that religious certainty is a matter of the heart more than the head. Rattenbury believers that Boehler led the Wesleys through their
intellectual conversions prompting them to come to believe in the necessity of present salvation by a faith which must be felt and experienced.\textsuperscript{8} It was in the course of a restless search for this faith that John received the surprising news that Charles had found rest for his soul. This kindled three days of depression leading to the unwilling trip to a meeting on Aldersgate street. It is significant that Wesley's heart was warmed while listening to the reading of the favorite passage among Pietists for responding to the charge of works righteousness by their orthodox opponents. It was from Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans, in which he defined faith as a "living, creative, active, powerful thing…"\textsuperscript{9}

Following Aldersgate, Wesley envisioned a trip to visit the Moravians in Germany. He sailed on June 13, hoping that the experience would further establish his soul. He conversed with Count Zinzendorf as he visited several communities, spending two weeks at the mother community at Herrnhut. He felt as if he was among the early Christians. He recorded that he could have stayed all of his life but wanted to spread their way throughout the whole world.\textsuperscript{10} Similar praise infused a letter to Charles:

\begin{quote}
The spirit of the Brethren is beyond our highest expectations. Young and old, they breathe nothing but faith and love at all times and in all places. I do not therefore concern myself with smaller points that touch not the essence of Christianity, but endeavor…to grow up in these after the glorious examples set before me…\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

At Herrnhut he participated in worship practices and structures of community which were later to be adapted for the people called Methodists. At Halle he was impressed with the size and number of buildings, especially the orphans' home and school which was to become a model for charitable institutions spawned by the Wesleyan revival.

\textit{Difference}. Home again in England, Wesley kept in close contact with the Pietists as he experienced the first fruit of his itinerant ministry and field preaching. The break came during the latter months of 1739 when Wesley withdrew from the Fetter Lane Society, which was partly Methodist and partly Moravian, to center his activity in the Foundry, which was entirely Methodist. Though later he could write how he had nothing to do with the Moravians, his first criticisms were given in the spirit of "love and meekness."\textsuperscript{12} Pietism represented a reaction to the rigid creedal orthodoxy of Lutheran scholasticism; Methodism embodied a correction to the rationalism of a deistic world view. If one accepts the theory that movements imbibe something of that which they oppose, the Pietists, especially the Moravians, retained more of the \textit{sola fidei} stance of Luther than their negative critiques would seem to allow while Wesley maintained a greater place for reason than his criticisms of rationalism would seem to concede.

In the context of Aldersgate it is appropriate to look at Wesley's own summary statement: "Those three grand errors run through almost all those (Moravian) books, viz. Universal Salvation, Antinomianism, and a kind of new-reformed Quietism."\textsuperscript{13} Whereas the love theology of the Wesleys could not fathom how a loving God would predestine people to hell without giving them a chance to respond, many Pietists had difficulty in believing that a loving God would condemn people to hell forever. Spener felt it was natural
to have doubts about the eternity of hell. Attempting to be faithful to Scripture, Radical Pietists espoused a position of universal restoration which attempted to remain faithful to scriptural passages about heaven and hell. Regarding God's judgment as redemptive, they came to view hell as a kind of purgatory in which God will somehow redeem all. They believed this view to be consistent with texts such as 1 Cor. 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

The charge of antinomianism probably comes from the fact that Moravians more than other Pietists rejected works righteousness and retained an orthodox bias against good works. The reference to Quietism may refer to Wesley's struggle in the Fetter Lane Society with Philip Molther, who taught the doctrine of stillness. He believed that seekers should abstain from the Lord's Supper until filled with faith without any doubt or fear. Wesley disliked the erotic ingredients in some of the Moravian hymns, which shared the sentimental piety of the later Zinzendorf. The Count formed an "Order of Little Fools:' who spoke of themselves as "little bees who suck on the wounds of Christ, who feel at home in the side hole and crawl in deep."(Since such phenomena were exceptional, I prefer to judge Moravianism by its ecumenical spirit and passion for missions.

**Doctrinal Similarities.** In comparing basic theological motifs, it is easier to point to similarities than to demonstrate direct influences. I agree with Nagler and Schmidt that the similarities are more striking when Wesley's theology is compared to the thought and ministry of Spener and Francke rather than to the more passive Moravian interpretations of the Gospel. Both movements avoided doctrinal indifference at the same time it was stressed that doctrine be translated into life. Both made similar distinctions between essential and nonessential doctrines. Articles of faith related to salvation and verified in experience were the most important. Confessionalism was not to preclude love and tolerance in the Christian fellowship.

Testimonies of direct communion with God gave evidence of a streak of mysticism in both Methodism and Pietism. Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace functioned in a way similar to Pietist and Quaker emphases on the "inner Word or "inner light" calling forth and stirring up the gift of grace in each one. However, special revelations needed to be tested by scripture, others, and the fruit of the Spirit. Rather than a speculative mysticism. There emerged a kind of practical mysticism that hallows all of life.

It follows that both movements embody a revival of the work of the Holy Spirit. Both the instantaneous and gradual work of grace were manifested in first hand religious experiences. It was believed that the God who is good enough to forgive us is powerful enough to change us. Both movements defined in similar ways doctrines of assurance, regeneration, justification, and sanctification and were accused of synergism, Pelagianism, and perfectionism. Though Pietist soteriology did not feature the second work of grace, Spener argued that perfection was a valid Biblical and traditional doctrine. He wished to free it from two abuses, the one stressing its impossibility and the other, the temptation to find it in the wrong places.

Both movements spawned moralistic and legalistic ethics. However, Spener and Wesley stressed that works, joy, and emotions were the fruit of faith rather than the way to salvation. Experience was emphasized as a receptive medium rather than the productive source of revelation. Holding to medi-
ating positions between faith and works, law and gospel, judgment and love of the world, both movements embodied a practical theology which led to innovations in a desire to reform the church and to participate in an active hope for better times for the world.

**Justification and Aldersgate**

From these many possibilities the preacher in me will focus on three themes as a way to examine the implications of Aldersgate for contemporary Pietist and Holiness movements. Wesley was deeply influenced by the Lutheran focus on justification by faith as filtered through the Moravians. "Who wrote more ably than Martin Luther on justification by faith alone:" Wesley reflected. "And who was more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification..."\(^\text{16}\) In less than a year, however, it seems that Wesley was demythologizing the aura of his own justification. In his journal entry of Jan. 4, 1739, he wrote:

> My friends affirm I am mad, because I said I was not a Christian a year ago. I affirm I am not a Christian now. Indeed, what I might have been I know not, had I been faithful to the grace then given, when expecting nothing less, I received such a sense of the forgiveness of my sin as till then I never knew. But that I am not a Christian at this day, I as assuredly know as that Jesus is the Christ. For a Christian is one who has the fruits of the Spirit of Christ, which are love, peace, joy. But these I have not.\(^\text{17}\)

In continuing to reflect on the experiences of Methodists, he concluded that one could have the indirect witness of the Spirit without knowing the direct witness of the Spirit's love and acceptance. His views resembled those of Spener and Francke. Spener had been nurtured in such a pious atmosphere that even though regeneration became for him a major theme, he could not point to a dated conversion experience. Francke's penitential struggle was resolved by a dramatic conversion experience which became a paradigm in Pietist soteriology. Yet in later life, Francke could say in a conversation with a student:

> We do not ask, "Are you converted? When were you converted?" But we ask, what does Christ mean to you? What have you experienced personally with God? Is Christ necessary to you in your daily life?" And it is, to be certain, very likely that one does not know at all the period of time......

In the context of their dynamic views of salvation, the witness of our forbears mitigates against rigidly programmed conversion experiences which fail to recognize that the ways of God may be different with each one.

There is yet another lesson which may be derived from Wesley's justification experience. Throughout the pilgrimage leading to Aldersgate, Wesley spoke in a self-deprecating way as one whose soul was lost, of a time when his sin was a lack of faith. As he reflected on the experience later, references to his pilgrimage before Aldersgate were more positive. Instead of describing it as a period in which he suffered a lack of faith, he named it a time when he had the faith of a servant. When Wesley related that he was going to Georgia to save his own soul, his intention was not as self-centered as it
might seem; for he meant that he was going to live for others and be a model priest. Like Luther and Calvin before him, Wesley's attempt to live according to the Sermon on the Mount was consummated in justification. Perhaps, the Moravians were like the secularized Methodists whom Bonhoeffer mentioned, who attempt to make people sinners so that they can convert them. Wesley may more nearly fit Bonhoeffer's soteriology than such persons in that he names obedience as a presupposition of faith as well as a consequence of faith. Wesley's testimony in experiencing the faith of a servant and of a son may parallel Bonhoeffer's dialectic in that "only one who believes is obedient, and only one who is obedient believes." \(^{19}\)

This dialectic may speak to the condition of contemporary Pietist and Holiness groups. We will continue to receive those who are convicted sinners. We will rejoice when they are justified, regenerated, and move toward greater sanctification. But our communities continue to nurture those who are early indoctrinated to live by high moral standards. Because our ethos often does not permit anyone to be a sinner, there will be many among us who like, Wesley, are ripe for an experience of justification. Such may explain the attraction of many to theologians such as Karl Barth. Such speaks to my personal need. As I encounter liberation theologies I tend to despair. As a white, male, middle class, North American I belong to every category of oppressors. As a pious believer who has kept his hands clean, my conscience has become aware of my participation in systemic sin. My hands are not clean. I yearn for the faith of a son, one who feels loved, who knows that God loves even me, a white, male, middle class, North American. Wesley's distinction between the faith of a servant and that of a son was foreshadowed by an old Anabaptist statement on Two Kinds of Obedience, namely filial, which knows its source in the love of God, and servile, which has its source in a love of reward or of oneself. \(^{20}\)

**Soteriology and Aldersgate**

Wesley's conversion experience at Aldersgate inaugurated a public ministry in which he formulated a neat, yet, dynamic story of salvation. It is said that the fundamental question for Luther was how he could find a gracious God. For Calvin, it was how can we honor and do God's will? Since Wesley enlarged Luther's soteriology, some of you, no doubt, may grow tired of others asking whether indeed this is the Biblical center from which to derive a doctrinal system. Since I come from a tradition that claims both Anabaptist and Pietist roots, the Anabaptist side of me is often saying to the Pietist side, "You are more interested in what Jesus will do for you than in how, together, we can follow Jesus?" It was Bonhoeffer who felt that whereas religiosity seeks a wish-fulfilling god, the God of the Bible meets us in the center of our existence to commission us to be persons for others. He opposed translating Christian faith into a mystery cult. Rather it should retain its character as a Judeo Christian religion of historical redemption. \(^{21}\)

When I first encountered Wesleyan soteriology, I confess I could have empathized with twenty-five or fifty works of grace more than the strong focus on a second or even a third conversion experience. The more I have read Wesley, however, the more I wish all varieties of Wesleyans would read Wesley. In that way mainline Methodists might imbibe a sense of expectancy for some kind of experience and more Holiness and Pentecostal folk
might appropriate Wesley's correctives and variations to his soteriological scheme. I began my studies in Pietism at a time when "pietist" was a bad word in theological circles. I found it necessary to assess Pietism in light of Spener and Francke, whose mediating theology was quite different from later caricatures and provided correctives for later manifestations. I believe the same to be the case with Wesley. In spite of my Lutheran Pietist prejudices against perfectionism, for example, when I read Wesley's own definitions, variations and corrections, my heart is strangely warmed.

The same applies to other soteriological themes. The emphasis on regeneration and sanctifying grace provides a corrective to self-centered salvation trips. Francke prayed fervently for funds to erect the many buildings for his charitable and educational work. What saved his prayers from being self-centered was his passion to serve others. He shared Wesley's insistence that faith was not faith unless it became active in love. There is no split in Wesley between personal salvation and social engagement, between inward and outward holiness.

There is yet another motif that would keep Wesley's soteriology from degenerating into self-centered attempts to save one's own life. His eschatological teaching insists that heaven begins now. By grace Methodists become collaborators with God in the present work of redemption. Without denying glorifying grace or final justification there was an eschatological goal directedness to Wesley's theology, a sense of expectancy of the future breaking into the present in such a way as to pull believers toward the kingdom vision of justice and peace.

We live an era in which people are manipulated by appeals to basic fears of communists, criminals, and terrorists. In the peace movement survivalists attempt to motivate us to repent through doomsday scenarios of nuclear holocaust. "Wake up or blow up!" Such warnings were foreshadowed by early Methodist preachers who called sinners to flee from the wrath to come. Without eliminating such preaching, Wesley, nevertheless, advised his preachers that people ultimately will not get to heaven out of fear of going to hell. Rather they will be drawn to heaven by the love of God. I have often appropriated this quotation as a lesson for the contemporary peace movement. People can be motivated by fear but a more permanent peace will come when people envision and participate in life as it is meant to be lived in Christ and the world as it was dreamed to be in Biblical visions of the kingdom of God. Because he believed there were no bounds to the free grace of God, Wesley rejected deterministic and pessimistic philosophies of history.22

**Ecclesiology and Aldersgate**

If your denominations are like mine, we are afflicted with acculturation. Our members enjoy watching the rich and the famous more than identifying with the poor and the sanctified. Individualism subverts social Christianity; cheap grace replaces the costly grace of discipleship. Fears and hatred lead to finding one's security in bombs more than the love that casts out fear. America, not Jesus, is first.

Because of this accommodation to both liberal and conservative ingredients of popular culture, I assume that Holiness groups are experiencing a similar identity crisis. What are the marks which justify remaining separate? If the Holiness riffraff are admitted to the councils of the respectable,
will they be leaven or simply more dough? What will be the shape of movements for reform?

Howard Snyder calls for a revival of the ecclesiology of the radical Wesley. James McClelandon in the first volume of his Systematic Theology, Ethics classifies the Holiness movement as having roots in the soil of the radical reformation. Of the many influences contributing to Wesley's theology, the ecclesiological innovations inspired by Aldersgate and the Moravians were the most radical in both senses of the word. First, they embodied a primitivism. Wesley was pleased when he felt his movement resembled early Christian practices. Second, they challenged and were opposed by status quo religion. Pietism and Methodism both embodied evangelical orders within the church catholic. Insisting that Christianity is a social religion, the bands, classes, and societies were disciplined caring and sharing communities which took the demands of discipleship seriously. Wesley insisted on voluntary adult commitment as a condition for becoming a Methodist. Though he maintained membership for himself in the Church of England and advocated the same for others, he stated that Methodists would separate from the church, as they later did, rather than give up extemporaneous prayer, lay preachers or open air gatherings.23

The sectarian posture was joined with an ecumenical spirit. German Pietism was responsible for the first mergers of Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Spener and Wesley espoused greater tolerance for Roman Catholics and defined unity primarily in terms of love, witness and mission. And if one defines ecumenical in its etymological sense of the presence in the world, we need to add as evidence of an ecumenical spirit the fact that these movements spawned credit unions, free medical dispensaries, concern for prisoners, homes for orphans, schools for the poor, and sought to eliminate slavery; debtors' prisons, poverty and ignorance.

For what it is worth, I conclude by sharing an answer which has evolved when I am asked to prognosticate the future of one Pietist group, the Church of the Brethren. My answer is that I do not know what it may be. But I do strongly believe that those purposes for which our movement was called forth by the Spirit will continue and will be used by God until the eschaton. This faith and hope is kindled as I learn of countless reform movements and hundreds of thousands of base Christian communities which recapitulate ecclesiola in ecclesiae, sometimes in striking resemblance of earlier Anabaptist, Pietist and Holiness manifestations. Because of this hope, I can relinquish my need to save the institutions of the Brethren. Relieved of this burden, I can more freely and enthusiastically participate in calling the Brethren and others to appropriate the best from the vision we have received so as to be empowered to participate in signs of the kingdom coming.

Notes

1. Personal and theological relationships between Pietism and Methodism are treated in Arthur W Nagler, Pietism and Methodism (Nashville: Publishing House M.E. Church, South, 1918); F. Ernest Stoeffler, German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973); and Martin


7. Ibid., 20.


10. Detailed reports of Wesley's visits to Germany can be found in Martin Schmidt, op. cit., Volume 1.


22. Snyder, op. cit., 82.