



Yoder

their image of what my position implies. I do not defend their image of what I ought to believe. Instead of seeing that as a challenge to the accuracy of their image, they challenge my representativity. The other is that they wish I would withdraw, because they do not want my Jesus and me in the real arena with real alternatives. They want me to affirm the irrelevance which is their *a priori* pigeonhole for me. My acceptance of withdrawal as the price of my faithfulness is needed for them to explain lesser-evil calculations as the price of their responsible involvement.



Marty

15th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE *Wesleyan Theological Society*

By Donald W. Dayton

Mushrooming growth and new levels of intellectual vigor were celebrated as 200 scholars gathered at Marion (Indiana) College in November for the 15th annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society (WTS). Membership gains were the greatest yet, up about 20% to 1300, and a growing contingent of

young, well-trained scholars heralded a promising future.

The last two meetings had been difficult and tense as the society struggled with a series of controversial issues about the relationship of modern Holiness theology to both classical Wesleyanism and Pentecostalism. To the obvious relief of many, President-elect Laurence Wood (United Methodist theologian from Asbury Theological Seminary) had pulled together a program of dialogue with contemporary theological movements: the charismatic movement, linguistic analysis, Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology, and process thought.

The troublesome internal ferment, however, could not be entirely suppressed. In the most notable and controversial paper, Free Methodist author Howard Snyder called for reconsideration of the traditional hard-line stance of the Holiness churches against Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement. Snyder suggested that such Holiness polemics had distorted Holiness theology by blocking a proper emphasis on spiritual gifts and a properly "charismatic" view of the church as rooted in grace and committed to mutual ministry of all members. Drawing parallels between early Methodism and the Catholic charismatic movement in particular, he argued for the complementarity of the Pentecostal emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit and the Holiness emphasis on ethics and the fruit of the Spirit.

Such a dialogical stance toward Pentecostalism is unusual in Holiness circles where "speaking in tongues" can lead to immediate excommunication in such communions as the Wesleyan Church or the Church of the Nazarene. Response to Snyder's paper was mixed, though nods and an occasional "Amen" indicated wide agreement with, in the words of one member, a paper whose time had clearly come. Some observers remarked that this meeting might well mark an historic shift of at least scholarly attitude.

Other papers broke new ground for the society, but failed to evoke the same level of response. Asbury College philosopher Michael Peterson surveyed developments in linguistic philosophy and their implications for Wesleyan thought, somewhat nervously omitting at the last moment a section on the still controversial issue of inerrancy. A paper by Quaker philosopher Harold Kuhn of Asbury Seminary accused liberation theology of making the "modern secular mindset the norm of Christianity" and confusing "emancipation" and "redemption" in a way that slighted the needs of the "never-dying soul needing to be saved." Others, including respondent Nazarene Paul Bassett, called for a more positive, though not uncritical attitude, emphasizing a common orientation to the practice of the faith in both Wesleyanism and liberation theology.

Biblical theologian Fred Layman, also of Asbury Seminary, examined Ephesians 5 and I Corinthians 11, concluding that both taught only the distinction of the sexes and not at all the subordination of women. Feminist respondent Nancy Hardesty of Emory University was left to disagree not with the conclusion but only with the means of getting there. As moderator Lee Haines of Marion College pointed out, such positions have been common in the holiness traditions where most churches have ordained women, some for more than a century.

In a final paper philosopher John Culp of Olivet Nazarene College found the modern "process theology" of Methodist John Cobb largely congruent with conservative Wesleyan thought and a help to developing certain questions, such as the role of experience in the Christian life and theology. Others revealed greater reservations about process thought while revealing a willingness to pursue the dialogue.

Business sessions produced little of note. Membership gains had produced an unexpected financial surplus in spite of a major expansion of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. Free Methodist pastor John Owen suggested that the surplus be sent to Cambodian refugees, and after some fumbling and hesitance \$500 was allocated to that purpose. Some expressed surprise when Free Methodist Wayne McCown, Dean of Portland's Western Evangelical Seminary, defeated widely known Nazarene Timothy Smith of Johns Hopkins University as president-elect of the society. McCown is developing a program around themes of biblical hermeneutics for next year's meeting.

EDITORS REPLY

By Gregory Youngchild

I would like to respond to Gregory Martin at Princeton (see "Members Forum," Nov. 79) and to others who have asked for some very practical guidance about book selection. What should one read, what has enduring value, what are the "don't miss this" books? I can perhaps offer a few suggestions in the area I know best, namely, spirituality.

Let me begin by pointing out three things. First of all it has to be recognized that probably 50% of what is being published these days (new titles, that is) is relatively worthless, and another 40% is of very limited value. I'm guessing, of course, but I'm probably generous in my estimates in fact. That leaves 10% which deserves closer inspection for any of several reasons. The revolution of interest in spirituality is producing a spate of very mediocre "how to" manuals, directed to the beginning beginner; worthwhile in this genre are Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* and Tilden Edward's *Living Simply Through the Day*, both recommended for their integrated approach, rather than having a preoccupation with techniques. Good things are happening, too, as a result of this revived interest; a sterling example is Paulist Press' new series *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, which I imagine everyone with a biding interest in the field is collecting eagerly. To by-pass most of what is pouring out of the presses in this field is probably no major loss.

Second, only time will tell what's really worthwhile for the largest number of readers. The problem in my field is that an enormous number of books have withstood time's test. I might find Meister Eckhart perfect, while he may put anyone else right to sleep; Adrian van Kaam or Matthew Fox, to mention some contemporary examples, often catch people's imaginations, but I have to admit never having been numbered among those so-held. It's very hard to know what is right to recommend because it's all a matter of what's appropriate for an individual.

A third point, related to the second, is that the "classics" in spirituality often are not the most accessible books to the modern readers; the "tried and true" often prove the "dry and dull" to many, not because the books aren't good but simply because they have the style and thought-structure of an alien piety and a dated worldview. An appreciation of the pre-20th century writers requires a certain intellectual maturity and breadth/depth of faith experience not necessarily needed to enjoy with profit some of our more contemporary authors. Classical spiritual writings demand that one discern what an author means in his/her own terms and then that one "translate"/appropriate into current terms and concepts those ideas in order that profit be gained from the works--all

the while being careful that no facile equations or simplistic substitutions are being made! (The demon today is "psychologization," turning every obscure or uncomfortable spiritual term into a psychological statement.) In my spiritual direction work I have not infrequently found persons whose prayer life was actually hindered by, say, too early a reading of John of the Cross without having the breadth/depth I mentioned, one's mind can become so filled with misconceptions, pre-conceptions and schemas about "the spiritual life" that one may lose the valuable facility of simple dialogue with the Lord.

So, the matter is not so simple as Mr. Martin, I and the rest of the reading world wish it were. The problems are legion, and I have not even addressed some of those I might regard as more serious and more basic--such as questioning at what point the desire for more books and book-knowledge (especially in spirituality) may be in fact an evasion of the crucible of direct experience, or may become an inordinate desire and a particularly "acceptable" form of greed.

Be that as it may, I'll offer here a few titles in my field that I think are numbered among those "don't miss this" items, and are important if one wants a sense of the scope of spirituality.

Mr. Martin mentioned (questioningly) Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*; by all means do read it, and add Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* as well. These give an essential mind-frame for considering the concept of spirituality. Equally fundamental is the great classic on mysticism by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*; it is, as the jacket announces, "an unsurpassed general introduction," unbelievably inexpensive (keep that a secret!), and I appreciate the nugget in the appendix (a thumbnail historical sketch that's excellent). Concerning historical panoramic studies, I suppose that the 3-volume *A History of Christian Spirituality* by Louis Bouyer et al. (recently reissued by Seabury Press) has to be acknowledged as the basic reference work. I admit a prejudice against it on account of its horrendous treatment of Protestantism in volume 3, but the other two volumes are quite good, and it is all we have at the moment. A shorter (one volume), more readable, and terribly selective overview is *The Desert and the City* by Thomas Gannon and George Traub, both Jesuits; truly and accurately "An Interpretation..." but nonetheless it gives one some sense of the sweep and pivotal points handily. If one read this small selection, I believe one would have a minimal but adequate foundation on which to build further study, and a basis on which to make some selections of specific "great works." Sorry, but it's as small as I can make the nutshell.

Beyond background, I'm harder-pressed to know what to recommend. Again, the list of classics is intimidatingly long, and to choose from it would largely be a revelation of my own biases...and that's not very helpful. But taking the risk, I would say that every seminarian ought to have bumped up against at least a few of the absolutely key and determinative works, even if in a modified form. E.g.: Thomas Merton's *The Wisdom of the Desert*; Augustine's *Confessions*; St. Bernard's *On the Love of God*; the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing*; also anonymous is *The Way of a Pilgrim*; *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius; *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis; *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila* and her *Interior Castle*; Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* (titled *Showings* in the Paulist Press series); John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. For each noted here I thought of at least two others which I could have said; that's how abundant the resources are. No "basics-level" course in spirituality, however, would not require at least this handful...though it would be absurd to jam them