

WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
A fellowship of Wesleyan Holiness Scholars

A CALL FOR PAPERS
for the 33rd Annual Meeting
to be held at Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, Ohio
November 7-8, 1997

FACING THE FUTURE:
WESLEYAN HOLINESS THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As we stand on the brink of a new century, the Holiness movement seems to be experiencing something akin to an "identity crisis." The roots of this crisis come from both outside and inside the movement. Externally, Calvinistic preachers and scholars have assumed the mantle of leadership within the American evangelical subculture, eclipsing the nineteenth century Wesleyan predominance of evangelicalism. The Holiness heritage of combining personal piety with social radicalism has been recovered just when much of the rest of contemporary evangelicalism has moved increasingly toward an identification with the religious right. Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality has swept over North America (and the world), challenging, and to some degree, usurping the historic Holiness stress on the immediacy of spiritual experience. Meanwhile, liberalism continues to control most of the official structures of mainline Methodism.

Internally, many of the traditional characteristics of the Holiness movement have fallen on hard times, including its well-defined behavioral moral code, its revivalistic worship style, its identification with the poor, and even the preaching of entire sanctification. Does anyone care any more about the conflicted doctrinal issues of an earlier day? Is there anything left of a distinctive Holiness message, or has it been subsumed into the generic evangelicalism of the late twentieth century?

In the midst of this situation, many scholars within the Holiness movement are asking what the current relevance is of the Holiness message? What contribution can the history, theology, biblical hermeneutic, and practical ministry of the Holiness movement make to the issues confronting the contemporary church? What is the future of the Holiness movement? *Is there a future for the Holiness movement? Where can one find signs of renewal?*

It seems to be a particularly appropriate time to assess the resources that the Holiness movement brings to the theological and cultural concerns of the new century. In order to engage in this assessment honestly it is important, on the one hand, to avoid triumphalism regarding the achievements of the movement and, on the other hand, to avoid fatalism regarding the long-range destiny of the movement. What is the core of the Holiness message that can be useful for addressing today's social and religious context? What is the trajectory of Holiness scholarship? The Wesleyan denominations have a rich heritage, but instead of merely recounting the glories of the past, we are now challenged to use our particular theological insights to face the future. To what is God calling us in these difficult days?

The above questions may be approached in a general way or, more specifically, through the perspective of one's academic specialty. Some possible topics are listed here.

Biblical Disciplines:

Is there a distinctive "Wesleyan" hermeneutic? If so, what are its distinguishing characteristics? Does the work of Methodist Biblical scholars, such as James Dunn and I. Howard Marshall, have a discernible Wesleyan flavor? Does it matter? How do Scriptural themes such as the holiness of God, the continuity of the law and the gospel, and the baptism of the Spirit become relevant for the theological task of the new century? How will these and other traditionally Wesleyan categories of thought fare in the new Biblical scholarship that is emerging today?

Historical Disciplines:

Was the nineteenth century Holiness message faithful to Wesley or were there two different "Wesleyan" traditions (one eighteenth century and one nineteenth century)? Has the supposed difference between the two centuries been exaggerated? Given the Wesleyan Holiness heritage, what are the implications for the future of the movement? Is there a "usable past" in Holiness history in areas such as morality (private and public), spirituality, ecclesiology, and the potential to transform society?

Theological Disciplines:

What is the prospective impact of the Arminian witness to twenty-first century conceptions of anthropology or soteriology? How does the theological synergism of Wesley relate to postmodernism? What are the Wesleyan contributions to the larger ecumenical task? In what ways is it important for the Holiness tradition to reclaim its identity as a particular movement? Are there certain aspects of past Holiness theology or practice that need to be reevaluated in order to recover a vital Wesleyan witness? What is the "gift" that Wesleyan Holiness theology can give to other Christian traditions? How does Wesleyan theology speak to the important contemporary issue of religious pluralism and the uniqueness of Christ?

Practical Disciplines:

What will be the future shape of the practical ministry of Wesleyan/Holiness churches--in congregational formation, Christian education, discipleship, evangelism, mission, worship, social activism, ethics, and pastoral care?

Send a 1-2 page proposal and curriculum vita, no later than March 15, 1997, to:

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Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for response. The Executive Committee of the Society will evaluate the proposals and notify the proposers by May 1, 1997.