

The Ecclesial Practice of Reconciliation as the End of "the Wesleyan"

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An emphasis on the "Wesleyan" as a confessional, conceptually-distinct theological tradition, parallel to "Lutheran", "Calvinist", or "Roman Catholic", has circulated recently among Methodist and Holiness denominations and scholars. Indeed, the adjective has become the defining term in the rise of new academic groups even outside theology, such as the "Society for Wesleyan Philosophy." Building upon the work of Albert Outler (That the World May Believe: A Study of Christian Unity and What it Means for Methodists) and Geoffrey Wainwright, ["Methodism's Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation," One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review 19 (1983) 104-34], this paper will explore the ecumenical implications of the Methodist-Holiness movement, yet develop it from the perspective of the practice of reconciliation as an essential practice of the church. From this perspective, I will argue that the trend towards "the Wesleyan" is theologically erroneous, and even sinful, as "Christian" is the only adjective appropriate for a theological program. Furthermore, I will argue that the concern to be distinctively "Wesleyan" distorts the history of the Methodist-Holiness people, as seen in the membership of the early Methodist societies, the birth of the "National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness", and select contemporary disciplines of contemporary Methodist-holiness denominations. Viewed from the ecclesial practice of reconciliation, the end -- the telos -- of the "Wesleyan" should be its end -- its termination. As Methodist/Holiness congregations witness to God's reconciling grace in their embodied life together within the broader ecclesial matrix of their specific communities, the Methodist movement can again "introduce Christian fellowship where it was utterly destroyed. And the fruits of it have been [will be] peace, joy, love, and zeal for every good word and work (John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist," I.11).