

**Evaluations of Paper Proposals for the 1999 WTS Meeting
Southern Nazarene University, March 5-6**

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Topic: "The Loss of Metanarrative: resources for Formulating a Wesleyan Response."

Comments by the evaluator:

_____ This proposal should not be accepted for use in the 1999 program.

_____ This proposal should be discussed during the conference call.

Evaluator's name _____

WTS Paper Proposal

Title: The loss of Metanarrative: Resources for formulating a Wesleyan Response.

In this paper, I propose to probe possible resources for those who consider the Postmodern denial of all metanarrative to be an unsustainable loss for Wesleyan theology. In particular, I recommend two writers who critically respond to this central tenet of Postmodernism, and I suggest that although neither writes from a Wesleyan perspective, both responses demonstrate specific affinity with Wesleyan theology.

First, Thomas McCarthy has profoundly engaged the thought of Richard Rorty by arguing Rorty's behavioral epistemology can in fact be used as evidence *for* (not against) the existence of transcendent truth. McCarthy's *Ideals and Illusions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) points out the many ways that social practice is essentially under girded by context-transcending notions of truth and reality. Secondly, Steven Connor in *Postmodern Culture* (London: Blackwell, 1997), insightfully reveals the logical inconsistency in Lyotard's polemic against all metanarratives, pointing to the recurring inability of Lyotard to disentangle himself from that which he seeks to protest against.

This paper further attempts to demonstrate that both these works - McCarthy's pragmatic refutation of Rorty's denial of truth and Connor's indictment of Lyotard's inevitable inconsistency - bear remarkable affinity to Wesley's polemics against Calvinism and Atheism. I seek to harness the work of these writers to Wesley by exposing a two-fold parallel: one in regard to strategies employed, a second concerning issues at stake. In regards to strategies, Wesley determinedly used two methods of polemic [1] pragmatism (analyzing the practical results of his opponents positions) and [2] logic (exposing hidden inconsistencies in his opponents' reasoning). The first approach is the tactic taken by McCarthy, the second, by Connor. In regards to issues, a second parallel emerges when one notes how the utter contextualization of human rationality (Rorty) dissolves responsible human agency (which was a primary reason Wesley opposed Calvinism). Similarly, the rejection of metanarrative (Lyotard) entails the denial of transcendent reality, and leads directly to atheism. These writers thus represent valuable resources for contemporary Wesleyans wishing to respond to Postmodernism in ways that resonate with the legacy of their founder.

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