

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

Proposal submitted by: Robert J. Thompson, Ph.D. (philosophy) student, the University of Oklahoma

Topic: "Wesleyan Theology in a Postmodern Era"

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 \_\_\_\_\_



**Paper Proposal**  
**Program Topic: Wesleyan Theology in a Postmodern Era**

I propose a philosophical appraisal of postmodernity, specifically the deconstructionist strand of Derrida and company, in light of certain (traditionally) Wesleyan commitments. Given that Wesley's thought arose from a particular philosophical perspective, and further granting that Wesleyan Theology, broadly construed, has developed within a particular philosophical framework, the primary question I will address is as follows: Is it possible for a contemporary Wesleyan theology to appropriate postmodern (read: deconstructionist) thought, with all of its philosophical (specifically metaphysical and epistemological) assumptions, while remaining true to the Wesleyan tradition (broadly construed)? I will argue that a contemporary Wesleyan theology cannot appropriate postmodern (read: deconstructionist) thought without buying into certain metaphysical and epistemological assumptions, and, I will further argue, a contemporary Wesleyan theology cannot buy into these philosophical assumptions and remain faithful to its heritage.

First, I will contend that the deconstructionist position entails certain metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. Second, I will maintain that the metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings of traditional Wesleyan thought, writ large, are not compatible with the deconstructionist commitments in the same areas (and so would not be compatible with any contemporary "Wesleyan" theology that shared these deconstructionist commitments). Finally, I will point out a certain incoherence [or at least a troubling puzzle(s)] within the deconstructionist metaphysic that makes a significant commitment to it unappealing from any standpoint.

Although I will not address the question of whether or not a contemporary Wesleyan theology *should* simply shake of the old and begin with the new—i.e., grant the inconsistencies between traditional Wesleyanism and postmodernity and simply "jump ship", as it were, I will point out a few helpful correctives that Wesleyans can appropriate from the deconstructionist enterprise without buying into its philosophical presuppositions (if space allows, though I think it should).

Submitted by,

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