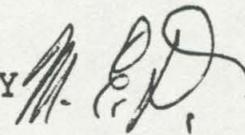


November 3, 1989

TO: WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

FROM: MELVIN E. DIETER, PROMOTIONAL SECRETARY



RE: ANNUAL REPORT

What a privilege it has been to serve with the other members of the executive committee throughout another year! Thank you for that opportunity.

A review of the documentation provided in contemporary theological and historical literature indicates how useful the work of the members of this society has become in the scholarly world. Nineteenth century studies have come to the fore and we are contributing to them. There is both good news and bad news in this. The good news is the extensive use which others already have made of our still modest research and writing efforts; the bad news is that we could be making a much greater impact on contemporary scholarship and religious life if we could expand our individual and collective activities.

The work now being done through the generous grants which the Pew Charitable Trusts has provided to Dr. Timothy Smith at Johns Hopkins University and the Wesleyan/Holiness Study Project at Asbury Seminary represent a significant advance in the promotion of the understanding of the movement's past and present place in American and world religion. The seven published volumes which should come out of these two projects will open up a world of new research possibilities for understanding and explicating the message and mission of the tradition. One of the most dramatic spin-offs of the Asbury project is the renewed interest of German Methodism in their nineteenth century holiness roots through the work of Dr. Stephen O'Malley, and A.T.S. project scholar. A major German study conference on the holiness revival of the past century is being planned for 1991 at Reutlingen in which some of our W.T.S. members will participate.

The illustrations above are only a few indicators of the many opportunities which are open to the tradition to become a more positive influence within the contemporary religious milieu. This fact was graphically portrayed in the workings of a special advisory group to the board of directors of the Ecumenical and Cultural Institute at the Benedictine Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota with whom I served last June. The board asked the group of about twelve individuals from across the spectrum of Protestant and Catholic religious traditions to provide them with guidelines for their programs in the decade ahead: how best could they foster the type of person-to-person dialogue which has been characteristic of their ecumenical style in the past?

In response, the advisory group felt that they could be of greatest assistance by helping the trustees to understand the prospective American religious context within which they would be working in the future. Our discussions soon made it obvious that the changes taking place in religion may be as dramatic as those taking place in politics. As a summary of the changing religious landscape, the group finally accepted a simple analysis presented by a mainline church bureaucrat; he is now pastoring a university church but had administered his denomination's offices at 475 Riverside drive for the past twenty years. His three simple suggestions were these. 1.) The main-line churches' dominance of American religion is dead. 2.) The balance of influence is shifting to such groups as the Pentecostals, the holiness, the Greek Orthodox, and other such more conservative churches. 3.) How best shall we make the transition from the first group to the second?

The sad fact is that of these groups, some of the holiness people at least, do not seem to feel the tremendous import of the revolution that is taking place. WTS now plays a more strategic role than ever in sensitizing our religious community to the potential strengths and contributions of our tradition to contemporary spiritual and cultural reformation. We must continue to do that; but even more importantly we must sensitize our own denominations and agencies to the wisdom of forsaking the internalization process and "ghetto mentality" which seems to have taken hold of much of the movement in the past decade. It would be tragic if at the very time that the religious and secular world is more open than ever to our participation in shaping the future, we should be seeking to protect our theological and institutional flanks and draw our wagons into an even tighter circle than the period of our sect formation and maturing may have once justified.

WTS is one of the few agencies which can keep a door open through which the Wesleyan/Holiness world can move out into the broader plateaus where the future of our national culture and of the world is being formed. Your continued press for new members among your students and other contacts and your active participation in the meetings will help to keep the society strong and vigorous in its crucial mission to the movement and the larger religious world.