

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

Proposal submitted by: G. W. van Immerzeel
(a pastor in the Netherlands)

Topic: Workshop "The Discipline of Dialogue in Wesleyan Spirituality: Sacramental Communication"

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 _____



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paper proposal WTS
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L.S.,

In all modesty I would like to submit a paper proposal for the WTS 1999 program. I am a pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in the Netherlands, received my BA from European Nazarene Bible College, and am presently studying at Nazarene Theological College at Manchester UK for my MA. In the module on spirituality I did my paper on the topic *THE DISCIPLINE OF DIALOGUE IN WESLEYAN SPIRITUALITY - SACRAMENTAL COMMUNICATION*. I would like to suggest this topic as a modern and relevant pastoral perspective for the Holiness Spirituality. Since English is not my native language, I realise I would need to make an extensive editing effort in case a presentation is asked for. Here is an short outline of it's content.

Spiritual growth requires a 'graced method' of communication in which the whole of life's experience can be shared and lived-through in the social context of love-relationships within the church. The process of spiritual formation has it's synonyms in the concepts of 'growth in grace', 'the imitation of Christ' (Christlikeness) or 'Christification', 'deification', 'the path to perfection' or 'the way of holiness'. In this paper I will show how ones habit or attitude of communication affects and relates to the process of spiritual formation. We will see that it is save to agree with John Wesley's words that "there is no holiness but social holiness", or in other words, there is no absolute individual since each person has (from the moment of his conception) been in some kind of communicative relationship to other persons. From this conclusion it follows that 'there is no holiness without communication.' According to Wesley, christian perfection is nothing higher and nothing lower than "love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, *words*, and actions." There is no Christification without the decisive influence and sacramental effectiveness of how others relate to us and how we are able to relate to them. If love is the dynamic of holiness then dialogue is it's communicative expression; "...when love is spoken of, it is the action and reaction of the conscious life of people that is meant." Claiming that "a relationship can never be better than the quality of it's communication", the quality of christian spirituality is greatly determined by the quality (the graced ability) of one's communication.

Along with a few others we would like to introduce in this paper dialogue as an integral discipline within christian spirituality. I will not deal with the subject in the wider context of ecumenism and cross-cultural religious pluralism. My main focus is on the limited context of christian ministry within the church. Dialogue is here only treated as an outward (personal) and not so much a corporate discipline. As we will see, it is an integral principle of life more than a mere technic of method. Dialogue may show elements of 'habitual grace' as one's whole life becomes permeated by the enlarged awareness and sensibility of one's self and of others. Within the confines of this paper we can only skim the surface of the much wider theological, pastoral and psychological context which dialogue would deserve.

Spiritual Growth takes place by "slow steps of disclosure..." and one's mental receptivity, watchful alertness or active co-operation is an important condition for this growth. The practice of dialogue is a way of "sowing to the Spirit" or "putting us in the place where God can work us into His grace". Putting one self in such a place of growth is not the most obvious thing to do, in fact "The Church was brought into being to be the expression of that spirit [of Christ] in each generation, and yet the need and vitality of each generation has been frustrated and complicated by the *status quo* pull of reactionary and ultraconservative spirits." A dialogical ministry will most certainly meet with resistance.

Although dialogue may never be seen as a therapeutic end in itself - it is merely a means to an end - its effect on the human spirit may resemble that as described by Israel as psychotherapeutic "...the aim...is to build up and establish an ego-consciousness that can bring the individual into creative relationship with the unconscious forces even of a dark type, and make him a person in his own right."¹ When we correlate dialogue so closely with spiritual formation and healing, it becomes evident that it is a discipline to be closely guarded and monitored.

Dialogue receives its therapeutic and spiritual potential from the fact that it provides a disciplined and secure environment of love and trust in which one may become totally open and vulnerable. The regular and disciplined exercise of dialogue may actually be felt as a contemplative experience.

As will be seen, the disciple of dialogue ties in perfectly with a Wesleyan-Arminian theological vision of sacramental spirituality and social holiness. It provides the theological framework for a balanced ministry in which the various means of grace are practised in harmony with the sovereignty of God and the human predicament. It provides a structure in which one can 'co-work with grace' in a way that does not compromise human freedom and the graceful possibilities for growth, healing and transformation.

Again, in all modesty, please give this proposal serious thought. As we are bound together in one Love and one Spirit, I greet you from the heart.

Sincerely,



Ger. W. van Immerzeel

¹ Israel, "Spirit of Council", 27-28.