

WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Charles W. Carter has long been an influential figure in the American Holiness Movement. He has taught at Marion College (Wesleyan Church) and has been granted the B.D. and honorary D.D. degrees from Asbury Theological Seminary. He was a party to the founding of the Wesleyan Theological Society.

The publication of Carter's *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit, A Wesleyan Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974) with an "Official Endorsement Statement" by Thomas H. Hermiz, Executive Director of the Christian Holiness Association, is a major step in the definition of what it means to be Wesleyan and of what it means to be a part of the holiness movement.

In order to evaluate Carter's work, the method of this review article will be to (1) determine Wesley's concept of the person and work of the Holy Spirit; (2) ascertain the scope of writing about the person and work of the Holy Spirit within the Holiness Movement and the attendant concerns; (3) offer specific observations about Professor Carter's work in light of the preceding survey.

Wesley's view of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit was goal oriented. It is his concern that Christian life style and life productivity reflect "having the mind of Christ in you:"¹

By the fruits which he hath wrought in your spirit, you shall know the testimony of the Spirit of God. Hereby you shall know that you are in no delusion, that you have not deceived your own soul. The immediate fruits of the Spirit ruling the heart are love, joy, peace, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering. And the outward fruits are, the doing good to all men; the doing no evil to any; and the walking in the light—a zealous, uniform obedience to all the commandments of God.

The Holy Spirit was the great actualizer of the possibility of redemption, the restoration of the image of God, within individual men. This did not involve a disregard for the traditional theological categories. Rather it was an effort to speak in functional rather than theoretical

terminology. This was the tenor of his letter "To a Roman Catholic" in which he observed:²

I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in Himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us; enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies, to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.

It is the Spirit of God which deals with mankind to call persons to an awareness of God. It is that same Spirit which gives that assurance of belonging to God.³ It is that same Spirit which leads the believer into the life of obedience and of perfect love. Each person, under the directorate of the Holy Spirit becomes Christ incarnate in his or her world. Most of Wesley's life work, writing, preaching, teaching—was an effort to teach the Christians of his era how to live in their world in light of the kingdom which would come.

An important aspect of Wesley's equipping of the people of God was his concept of perfect love. This also was a functionally ordered category and Wesley is at his best theologically as he describes what it is to do and at his worst as he seeks to explicate its theoretical groundwork, differentiating between the senses in which Christians may not expect to become perfect and the sense in which Christians are to strive for perfection.⁴

Perfect love, argues Wesley, is "love expelling sin."⁵ It is perfection of intention and attitude which must result in value and behavior modification.⁶ The orientation toward "self" is exchanged for an orientation toward God and mankind in ministry and fellowship. The Holy Spirit is God motivating his people to change and is God guiding the Christian in the Christian life as he attempts, in the words of Mary Alice Tenney, "*Living in Two Worlds*."⁷ Likewise, the Holy Spirit provides assurance of his own work in the context of Christian community involving both an inner subjective awareness and the changed life.

Wesley's theological heirs endeavored to maintain the double focus of the inward change and the outward life but the tendency has been to discuss the theological foundations for and implications of the inward change.

Fletcher in *Christian Perfection*⁸ emphasizes the internal changes of life and life-style. The "baptism of the spirit"⁹ results in rejoicing,

praying, praising without ceasing. There are only hints of the restless drive of Wesley for a "functional" theology. Fletcher was aware of this deviation, but argued he was in continuity with Wesley:¹⁰

. . . it is evident that the doctrine of this address exactly coincides with Mr. Wesley's sermon; with this verbal difference only, that what he calls faith, implying a "twofold operation of the Spirit," productive of spiritual light, and supernatural sight, I have called faith apprehending a sanctifying baptism or outpouring of the Spirit. I make this remark for the sake of those who fancy that, when a doctrine is clothed with expressions that are not quite familiar to them, it is a new doctrine, although these expressions should be as scriptural as those of a "baptism" or "outpouring of the Spirit," which are used by some of the prophets, by John the Baptist, by the four evangelists, and by Christ himself.

Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology*, follows more closely the emphases of Wesley. Arguing that scripture and the experience of the Christian community must determine the validity of doctrine,¹¹ he proceeds in Chapter 11, "The Holy Spirit," to limit discussion to love, hope and meekness. Chapter 12, "Entire Sanctification," is an extended discussion of the nature and purpose of the inward work of God.

Methodist theologians soon began a systematizing process which slowly moved from an experiential theology toward a heavily propositional theology in what appears to be an effort to be respectable to reformed theologians. Each succeeding edition of Watson's *Theological Institutes*, Pope's *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, T.O. Summers, *Systematic Theology* and Miley's *Systematic Theology* reflect this trend.

Within the rising American Holiness Movement, there was, in the reaction against the frigid spirituality of the church, also a reaction against the theoretical theological analysis. The Wesleyan Holiness doctrine of sanctification again became a call for active Christian involvement. Orange Scott, founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Church was led to withdraw from Methodist Episcopal Church because of his abolitionist polemic. The church which followed in his wake found other aspects of their society which needed to be reformed. For example, the first Women's Rights Convention (1848) was held in a Wesleyan Methodist Church in Seneca Falls, New York. Wesleyan Methodist leader, Luther Lee, argued that there was no valid objection to the ordination of women on biblical grounds in a sermon "Women's Right to Preach the Gospel" (1853).¹²

B.T. Roberts and his colleagues in the founding of the Free Methodist Church were concerned about several issues including the decline in proclamation of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, slavery, discrimination against the poor in the renting of pews and the strength of Free-Masonry with the ranks of the clergy. *Holiness Teachings*, compiled from Robert's editorial writings by his son, listed the attributes of holiness as deliverance from pride, unselfishness, control of appetites, love, hatred of sin, honesty in business, impartiality, love to God, trust in God, love of man and joy. Holiness is perceived as actively *being* Christian. This involves both crisis of faith and a continuing growth to perfection; regarding which he asserts:¹³

The command "be perfect," does not express any well-known, definite act like the command "repent," not any particular experience like being "born again." It is taken in a wider sense; with a greater latitude of meaning. It applies to a child of God in various stages of his experience. A blade of corn may be said to be perfect in a dozen different stages of its growth. But if, before it was ripe, it stopped growing, it would not be perfect. So, at a certain period of his experience, a person may be said to be a perfect Christian, and yet his attainments in piety be small in comparison with what they are after years of toil and sorrow.

A Symposium on Scriptural Holiness, the table of contributors listing twenty-seven Free Methodist leaders, both men and women, urges an active holiness:¹⁴

Holiness, therefore, in both its germ and fruition, is the mighty God-power to pull down this stronghold of Satan. All other agencies of reform are futile as compared with this. Indeed, to attempt anything in this direction without it were only to beat the air.

These Wesleyan-Holiness Movement leaders "tested the spirituality of a church by its commitment to reforms, but refused to substitute reform for piety."¹⁵ Radical Christian living was an integral part of their conception of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

The trend toward making sanctification primarily an experience continued as discussion focused on the source of the experience, the nature of the experience and the ontological results of the work of the Holy Spirit in making persons holy. The new foci of discussion made the issue of actualization of this power in Christian living a peripheral concern. Phoebe Palmer¹⁷ and William Arthur¹⁸ provided a theological orientation for the "popular" holiness movement. Both emphasized exclu-

sively the inward Christian life and the instantaneity of the experience. Works by both authors, but especially William Arthur's *The Tongues of Fire*, became important in the later Pentecostal movement.

John A. Wood, a Methodist, first suggested the camp meeting association. His *Perfect Love* (Philiadelphia: S.D. Burlock, 1861) defines Holiness as a growth in appreciation for the scriptures, increasing interest in prayer and witnessing, "a sweeter enjoyment of the holy Sabbath and the services of the sanctuary;" thus emphasizing Christian spirituality to the exclusion of Christian activity.¹⁹ *Purity and Maturity* (Boston: Christian Witness, 1899) and *Mistakes Respecting Christian Holiness* (Boston, Chicago: Christian Witness, Co., 1905) present the same perspective.

With blazing rhetoric, L.R. Dunn adapts dispensationalist categories to the era of the Holy Spirit, The church, he asserts is overrun with worldliness and unbelief and "has been comparatively powerless for the want of the full baptism of the Comforter."²⁰

In an effort to encourage those seeking the experience of sanctification, R.S. Footer analyses with careful detail the process to attainment of "entire holiness." No comments are profered regarding the actualizing of the experience.²¹ The same is true of G.A. McLaughlin *A Clean Heart* (Chicago: The Christian Witness Co., 1901), W.B. Godbey *The Incarnation of the Holy Ghost* (Louisville, Pentecostal Pub. Co., n.d.), Mark Guy Pearse *Thoughts on Holiness* (Boston: McDonald and Gill, 1884), C.W. Ruth *Entire Sanctification, A Second Blessing* (Chicago, Boston: Christian Witness Co., 1903), Bishop Willard F. Mallalieu *The Fullness of the Blessing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye; New York: Eaton and Mains, 1903), G.A. McLaughlin *The Promised Gift* (Chicago: The Christian Witness Co., 1906) and Wesleyan Methodist Thomas K. Doty *The Two-Fold Gift of the Holy Ghost* (Chicago: T.B. Arnold, 1891). The language of Doty is the language which reappeared under the aegis of Pentecostalism a decade later. He used dispensationalist categories to analyse the work of the Spirit, deliverance terminology, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the baptism of fire and "two-fold gift."²²

The most influential writer of this period in the development of the theology of the American Holiness Movement was Daniel Steele, whose volumes *The Gospel of the Comforter* (Boston: Christian Witness Co., 1897) and *Love Enthroned* (Boston: Christian Witness Co., 1875) articulated in brilliant fashion the quietist holiness alternative. His *Milestone Papers* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1876) presented for the first time

the problematic (linguistically speaking) defense of holiness derived from his understanding of the Greek tenses. His work was the apex of theological inquiry within the movement during the nineteenth century and still retains currency within some circles in the Holiness Movement.

This was the general consensus for nearly fifty years when a rather staid, introspective Holiness Movement began to examine its doctrinal emphases and life style. *The Word and The Doctrine* edited by Kenneth E. Geiger (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1965) is important as is George Allen Turner's *The More Excellent Way. The Scriptural Basis of the Wesleyan Message* (Winona Lake: Light and Life Press, 1952) which is tendentious of most of the theological and historical re-awakening within the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement. Also of importance in calling the Holiness Movement to return to an active concept of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life is Timothy Smith's *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

Charles Carter, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit, A Wesleyan Perspective* show no awareness of the continuing tension between the quietist and activist alternatives within the Wesleyan-Holiness movement and appears to see himself as part of a monolithic tradition which derived from Wesley. He adopts the quietist perspective of the late nineteenth century Holiness Movement, so emphasizing the inward life that scant direction is given to aid in actualizing the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit in daily living.

A second point at which Carter's historiography is faulty is in his polemic *contra* Pentecostalism. He attacks Pentecostalism on two levels: (1) claims of historical and theological roots within the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement; and (2) exegesis of the Biblical texts, especially I Corinthians 12-14.

Vinson Synan *The Holiness-Pentocostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans, 1971) first published extensive documentaton indicating that the theological and historical roots of Pentecostalism are to be found partly within the American Holiness Association. That most of the early Pentecostal evangelists, church members, periodicals, literature and language were Holiness resources has been substantiated by the additional research of Melvin E. Dieter, "Wesleyan-Holiness Aspects of Pentecostal Origins as Mediated Through the Nineteenth Century Holiness Revival,"²³ and by Donald W. Dayton, "Theological Roots of Pentecostalism," "Asa Mahan and the Development of American Holiness Theology," and "From 'Christian Perfection' to the 'Baptism of the Holy Ghost': A Study in the Origin

of Pentecostalism.”²⁴ These three scholars have carefully presented evidence which Carter disregards, saying, “this phenomena lacks convincing evidence, even when the mere historical facts are subjected to careful scrutiny.”²⁵ Instead of presenting evidence contrary to that of Dieter, Synan and Dayton, he is content to impugn the scholarship of the latter two scholars. It would appear that the evidence supports Synan’s thesis.

In an effort to present the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit as discussed in I Corinthians 12-14, a hermeneutical principle is applied which is not contextually valid for interpreting this passage. That is, Carter takes the meaning of *glossai* as used in the second chapter of *The Acts of the Apostles* and imposes it upon Paul’s epistle, defining *glossai* as “a special gift of languages divinely bestowed upon some individuals to facilitate the preaching and teaching of the gospel where it was linguistically necessary.”²⁶ There is no effort at historical-critical exegesis of the passage. The anti-Pentecostal tenor of the book appears to form the hermeneutic.²⁷

Another issue of continuing debate within the Holiness Movement, Crisis and/or Process in the experience of sanctification, receives but a page long treatment.²⁸

Carter’s work is a through-the-Bible summary of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit very similar in style and content to A.B. Simpson *The Holy Spirit; or Power From On High* 2 volumes (New York: The Christian Alliance Publishing Co., 1924) upon which the author appears to rely heavily. It is a word study on “Holy Spirit” with theological observations. The title, the personal stature of the author and the “Official Endorsement” of the Christian Holiness Association demands that this work be taken seriously. It may become an important touchstone in the theological self-understanding of the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement. Unfortunately, he has presented only one side of the radical Christian-pious Christian tension, the unification of which in a Christian life style was the genius of Wesley and of the early Holiness movement.

FOOTNOTES

¹“The Witness of the Spirit: I,” I, 12. *Wesley’s Doctrinal Standards*, Part I. The Sermons with introductions, analysis, and notes. Ed.

N. Burwash. Salem, Ohio: Convention Book Store, 1967. See also John Wesley *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: The Epworth Press, 1952) as well as his standard sermons which deal with the Holy Spirit and sanctification. Excellent secondary resources are George Allen Turner, *The More Excellent Way. The Scriptural Basis of the Wesleyan Message* (Winona Lake: Light and Life Press, 1952), especially chapter VII, and William Ragsdale Cannon. *The Theology of John Wesley, With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946), especially chapter X, "The Moral Life and Christian Perfection."

²"To a Roman Catholic," *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), III, 9. (Hereafter, *Letters*)

For excellent discussions, see Lycurgus M. Starkey *The Work of the Holy Spirit, A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) and Howard Watkin-Jones, *The Holy Spirit From Arminius to Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1929?)

³Wesley appears to have been unable or unwilling to define the "Witness of the Spirit", "that inexplicable operation" (Sermons: The Witness of the Spirit: II." II, 2-4. *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards*. op.cit., p. 102) lest his people "run into all the wilderness of enthusiasm" (ibid. I, 2. p. 101) and, as he wrote to Samuel Furly (*Letters* op. cit., V, 8), he resisted the temptation to depend totally upon the "Fruits of the Spirit" for validation of the spiritual experience, "lest we should get back again unawares into justification by works."

⁴See the various materials compiled in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and "On Christian Perfection," *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards*, op. cit., pp. 389-408.

⁵"Letter to Mr. Walter Churchey, February 21, 1771" *Letters* op. cit., V: 223.

⁶Wesley exhorted his preachers that regardless of the low probabilities of general attainment, all Christian need to pursue the goal of Christian perfection; *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (3rd ed., ed. Thomas Jackson, London: John Mason, 1830), VIII, 328-329:

You are all agreed, we may be saved from all sin before death. The substance then is settled; but, as to the circumstance, is the change gradual or instantaneous? It is both the one and the other. From the moment we are justified, there may be a gradual sanctification, a growing in grace, a daily advance in the knowledge and love of God. And if sin cease before death, there must, in the nature of the thing, be an instantaneous change; there must be a last moment wherein it does exist, and a first moment wherein it does exist, and a first moment wherein it does not. . . . Certainly we must insist on the gradual change; and that earnestly and continually. And are there not reasons why we should insist on the instantaneous also? If there be such a blessed change before death, should we not encourage all believers to expect it? and the rather, because constant experience shows, the more earnestly they expect this, the more swiftly and steadily does the gradual work of God go on in their soul; the more watchful they are against all sin, the more careful to grow in grace, the more zealous of good works, and the more punctual in their attendance of all the ordinances of God. Whereas, just the contrary effects are observed whenever this expectation ceases. . . . Therefore whoever would advance the gradual change in believers should strongly insist on the instantaneous.

⁷Mary Alice Tenney *Living in Two Worlds*. Winona Lake; Light and Life Press, 1958).

⁸Joseph Fletcher, *Christian Perfection* (Nashville, etc., Publishing House M.E. Church, South, 1917).

⁹*Ibid.* p. 30.

¹⁰*Ibid.* pp. 75-76.

¹¹Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology* ed. Samuel Dunn (New York: Phillips & Hunt, n.d.) p. 159.

¹²Luther Lee, *Five Sermons and a Tract*, edited with an introduction by Donald W. Dayton. Chicago: Holrad House, 1975.

¹³B. T. Roberts *Holiness Teachings* compiled by Benson Howard Roberts (Salem, Ohio: H.E. Schmul, 1972), pp. 209-210.

¹⁴Charles H. Rawson, "Holiness and Reforms." *A Symposium on Scriptural Holiness* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1896).

¹⁵Donald W. Dayton "Recovering a Heritage: Part VI; Orange Scott and the Wesleyan Methodist" *Post American* 4, 1 (1975), 27.

¹⁶See especially, Wilson T. Hogue *The Holy Spirit, A Study* (Chicago: William B. Rose, 1916) Harmon A. Baldwin *The Indwelling Christ* (Chicago: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1912) and *Lessons For Seekers of Holiness* (Chicago: W.B. Rose, 1907). These men contended against the internalizing of Entire Sanctification that they began to recognize as the tendency of Holiness Movement theology.

¹⁷On the life and work of Mrs. Palmer, see Jones' *A Guide to the Study of Holiness Movement* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1974). Of special interest here are *The Way of Holiness* (New York: n.p., 1852) and *Faith and its Effects; or, Fragments from my portfolio* (New York: n.p., 1854).

¹⁸William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire*, 1856, is still in print. Regarding Arthur's life, see bibliographical notes in Jones' *Guide*. . .op. cit. passim.

¹⁹*Perfect Love* (Noblesville, Ind.: Newby Book Room, 1974), pp. 311-312.

²⁰L.R. Dunn *The Mission of the Spirit; or, The Office and Work of the Comforter in Human Redemption* (New York; Nelson and Phillips; Cincinnati: Hitchcock R. Walden, 1871).

²¹R.S. Foster *Christian Purity or the Heritage of Faith* rev. ed. New York: Eaton and Mains, Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1897.

²²In addition to the works described above, the following are important: George Shaw *The Spirit in Redemption* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1910) and S.L. Brengle *When The Holy Ghost is Come* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1909) both of which are homiletic and expository in tone. Robert N. McKaig, *The Life and Times of the Holy Spirit*, 2 vols. (Chicago, Boston: Christian Witness Co., 1908) is a devotional antecedent to Carter's work.

²³Read before the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Cleveland, Tennessee, November 30, 1973. 30 pages photocopy.

²⁴Dayton presented the papers listed at the AAR Annual Meeting, October 26, 1974; Wesleyan Theological Society, November 1973, and the Society for Pentecostal Studies, November 1973, respectively.

²⁵Carter, p. 183.

²⁶Ibid. pp. 278-279.

²⁷Written from the perspective of a "classical" Pentecostal, William G. MacDonald's "Glossolalia in the New Testament" *Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin* 7(1964), 59-68, is an excellent discussion of I Corinthians 12-14. More balanced and more sensitive to the text is Jack W. McGorman, *The Gifts of the Spirit: An Exposition of I Corinthians 12-14* (Nashville: Broadman, Press, 1974).

²⁸See Leslie R. Marston, "The Crisis-Process Issue in Wesleyan Thought" *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 4 (1969), 3-15.