

# **Perfecting Worship & the New World: Formation, Discernment & Moral Transformation**

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## ***Does worship have an effect upon morality/sanctification/perfection?***

Why should I go to church? Why can't I be a Christian without it? Does worship actually do anything for or to the worshiper? For the U.S. population, how these questions are answered is evidenced by dwindling attendance in churches, synagogues and mosques. While about 25% will attend a church, synagogue or mosque this Sunday, an increasing percentage (over 90%) consider themselves to be "spiritual." Many see churches as boring, irrelevant, and money-grubbing (Strobel 1993).

Recent sociological studies (some yet unpublished) have provided striking insights about personal morality and those who worship regularly in church. These studies in both Canada and the United States have concluded that there is a direct relationship between attending church and sexual promiscuity<sup>1</sup>. The percent of North Americans who are sexually promiscuous is slightly higher inside the church than outside the church. Sin within the church is not surprising to any of us, but that sexual promiscuity is actually higher inside the church than outside the church is shocking. How can this be? (Jenson, Newell and Holuan 1990)

Some of this information may actually be favorable to the church's image. If the church is imaged as a hospital, then those who are hurting and needing resources for health will come to it. Seen from this perspective, the sociological studies do not say enough. It is not that those who go to church become more promiscuous, but that they come to church seeking help when their lives are already out of control. (Jenson, Newell and Holuan 1990) Unfortunately, that doesn't explain all of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual promiscuity here refers to either pre-marital or extra-marital sexual intercourse.

Many long-time respected worshipers somehow lose the moral restraint necessary to live holy lives. Avid worshipers do not always enjoy a resulting sanctification from regularly attending worship services. While many flourish by growing toward perfection, others do not and fall prey to sin. Paul Hoon identifies with the ministers saying, "...what deeply troubles today's ministers...is the frightening gulf between the Church's worship and the ethical witness of her people in the world (Hoon 1971). Pastors agonize over this problem. How can we make worship more effective in perfecting the saints?"

### ***Is that the right/appropriate question?***

"Making worship more effective" is a dangerous notion. It introduces a grammar of worship in which worship becomes penultimate to something else. Instead of worshiping God in this case, we worship God *in order to* gain something. Worship and God become utilities to personal aspirations and intentions. In effect, the worshiper becomes the benefactor and purpose of worship. This is the scenario resisted in Kierkegaard's oft quoted theatrical image of worship. Leander Keck wrote, "If praise is at the heart of worship, then making worship useful destroys it, because this introduces an ulterior motive for praise (Keck 1993)."

Weber and Clapp agree that worship cannot be reduced into a manageable utility which has a central aim of safely transforming worshipers. They warn, "In fact, we are not apt to be changed by worship if we come to it primarily to be changed." This becomes what they called "sham worship."

Sham worship attempts to manipulate and transform God, but true worship praises God *as he is* and calls Christians to risk the transformation of themselves and world. "Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke?" Annie Dillard asks. "The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should be all wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews." (Webber and Clapp 1988).

Authentic worship is theocentric, and it is a powerful reality in the church's life. But, does that mean that worship should be *Soli Deo Gloria*? Hoon resists this reduction. "For the *Deus* encountered in worship is never *solus* and his *gloria* always has to do with man and his life (Hoon 1971)."

But, what of worship if it has no effect upon the worshipers? Would such worship, then, be authentic or (in the worst sense of the phrase) a "royal waste of time?" Is worship necessarily irrelevant?

Hoon speaks eloquently of worship as disengagement and engagement (Hoon 1971). In worship we disengage from worldly life because the Gottesdienst is not only our serving God and each other, but it is also (as we see in the liturgical life of Jesus Christ) God serving us. The holy God is also God in God's disclosure to us. "It is God in His absoluteness and also his relatedness. This truth of faith is "...so foreign to normal sensibility that its contradiction can only strike upon men as irrelevance." (Ibid.) This disengagement, though, is not the conclusion of worship for Hoon.

The New Testament conception of worship as the unity of *leitourgia* and *diakonia*, or worship and service, must always be borne in mind; surely we cannot call any experience of worship authentic which leaves conduct unaffected ...only when worship as both engagement and disengagement with the world... can the gulf between worship and life be authentically bridged ...In a sense God is glorified to the extent that man is ethicized (Ibid.).

The active verbs we use in worship relate to our *active* response and engagement: Come, gather, hear, take, eat, bring, do, remember, go, and love. Disengaging from the everyday world we look up, and then we come to know the mission it lays upon us as we look outward.

When we define worship as "the glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity" we have raised the question of how the two are related. (Knight III 1997). As Hoon asked, "...how far should the Church's worship take as its explicit purpose the moral transformation of life...?"

Out of his own experiences<sup>2</sup>, Wesley knew more was needed to facilitate holy living than the benefits found in the typical public worship provided through the Anglican Church. He knew the parish churches were failing to satisfy the needs for the perfecting of the saints. His solution to this lack was not to abandon the formal worship in the Anglican Church but to supplement it<sup>3</sup>. He continued to guide his Methodists in attending to the ordinances of God which included the instituted means of grace<sup>4</sup> regularly provided through the Anglican Church. At the same time he instructed his Methodists to see that more should follow from worship than contemplating their unworthiness, receiving forgiveness and value from the throne of God, and be raised up into salvation-light. (Burdon 1997, 312)

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<sup>2</sup> I.e., the holy club at Oxford, the subsequent encounters with the Moravians, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Henry Knight's description of Instituted Means and Prudential Means of Grace. (Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* 1992, 3)

<sup>4</sup> By this Wesley meant "outward signs words or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace." (Wesley 1978, Vol. V, pg. 187)

The “more” was another dimension to what we *do* in worship. “We... come in search of the way to heaven.” (Ibid, 311) Since the purpose of the Christian life is focused on God’s power to save, the anamnesis (i.e. the “not forgetting”) of the story of God’s salvation in the worship narratives and rituals enables us to not only understand who this God is but also to experience the futurity of God and hence to understand the godly purpose and mission given to his church: namely to receive and participate in God’s work to transform and renew the world.

### ***What, if anything, should we expect of worship?***

Good singing, engaging sermons/presentations, talented musicians, clever and even edgy secularly-shaped dramas, and slick productions have become much the focus for current considerations about “good” worship experiences. Out of the market-driven technology of seeker-driven churches, some extreme practitioners go so far as to intentionally bifurcate worship from evangelism on Sunday mornings preferring to move the “new community” services (i.e. worship services) for the converted to Sunday nights.

The fallout from these changes in the way the churches gather for the sake of attracting the non-attender and making the church more relevant has resulted in many disastrous congregational upheavals throughout the U.S. These intense “worship wars” are often divided along lines of the traditional/contemporary, young/old, or growth/nurture. These battles are more often about style than substance or about the insistence of cultural relevance over the retentive traditional patterns of familiarity.

As Edward Farley observed, Protestant congregations have become more worship-less as various features of contemporary culture have influenced congregational life. “In the mood of Sunday Morning, the seraphim would address God not as ‘holy, holy, holy’ but ‘nice, nice, nice.’ Odd and anomalous is this mix of sacred discourse and the ethos of pleasantness.”(Farley 1997, 5) This is especially contrary to a Wesleyan understanding of worship.

The problem is not just that these novel approaches seem to have “the sociological tail wagging the theological dog,” (a recurring accusation over the course of the Church Growth Movement). (Rainer 1993, 69 ff.) The problem here is whether there is a theological dog attached at all? Having been involved in quite a few of these discussions/altercations, I have left wondering if either side was clear in their theological understanding of worship. In an ecclesial culture where evangelism can be bifurcated from worship, is there no perception of the transformative dynamic of worshiping God? What indeed should we expect worship to do in us and among us?

Wesley understood that "...renewal in the image of God in humanity, and the central event in this entire drama of redemption is God's act in Jesus Christ." (Knight III 1997, 5) Here the corporate worship of the church comes in view. The anamnesis of worship presents the initiative for praise and thanksgiving not only for who God is but also what God has done in Christ.

...in worship we encounter the God revealed in Jesus Christ, who is present by way of the Holy Spirit, and made known to us through faith, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus we do not simply know more about God, we come to know God ever more deeply...Authentic worship, then, is not only anamnestic but epicleptic; it not only remembers who God is but encounters the living reality of that God through the Spirit...it avoids the extremes of a formalism which simply goes through the motions and an enthusiasm that substitutes enjoying feelings for knowing God. (Knight III 1997, 13-14)

Knight shows throughout his insightful essay, that Wesley's understanding of sanctification is linked essentially to worship. The "affections of the heart" that are the content of sanctification are molded by their object (God) as we come to know and understand (in our worship) that God is love and that in love God has done these things. Worship shapes our language, our acts of piety and our acts of mercy in relation to others. Worship, then, is indispensable to our own growth in grace.

The perfection of the believer in love is grounded in worship, but here more is in mind than only the Sunday morning experiences. Worship for Wesley included public worship in church and those experiences of worship outside of church such as in the family and the daily worship in the closet. (Wesley 1978, Vol. XI, 161) These opportunities for worship were the means for the grace of God to work in the life of the believer (and the unbeliever). The neglect of these constituted what Wesley called "negative ungodliness." The question is to understand the changes that can be expected through worship.

Wesley did not see the power for transformation to be in the ordinance itself. Wesley said "...outward religion is nothing worth, without the religion of the heart...external worship is lost labour without a heart devoted to God..." (Wesley 1978, Vol. 5, pg. 186) Navigating between the extremes of formalism found among the Anglicans and enthusiasm found among the Moravians, Wesley saw these means of grace as important for continual growth in love. By these means, the believer was helped in two ways. First, they were encouraged to be attentive to God's presence. Second, their experience of God's identity was directed in ways that gave content to the character and activity of God. (Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* 1992, 13) All of this was by *sola fidei*.

Dean Blevins has provided a useful structure for describing the basic modes of the believer's transformations in Wesleyan thought. (Blevins 1998) He first describes the approaches to Christian growth in formation of John Westerhoff, Craig Dykstra, and Thomas Groome<sup>5</sup>. He then connects (at least loosely) these very different approaches to Randy Maddox's descriptions (Maddox 1994) of first and second order theological activities. He suggests these different activities are indicative of what he calls the modes of **formation** and **discernment**.

*Formation* is primarily concerned with the creation of a Christian "way of being" in the world. Formation asks how the structures of our lives might be so disciplined or shaped so that we adopt a particular approach to life that is in harmony with the Christian Story. *Discernment* is a means by which we can inquire of just how authentically Christian are the very structures and disciplines that we employ, along with other practices that impact our lives outside of the Christian domain. (Blevins 1998, 124)

Seeing these methods in this way, Blevins correlates formation with the Instituted Means of Grace that were primarily formative in the Christian life. He then correlates discernment with the Prudential Means of Grace that were activities and attitudes that often had to be discerned in everyday life. (Blevins 1998, 123)

These two modes are interrelated and interdependent. They are interrelated in that elements of discernment and formation are to be gained from both instituted and prudential means of grace. They are also interdependent. One without the other results in a Christian lifestyle that is diminished and unhealthy. Formation by itself leads to a type of ritual fundamentalism that can become unwilling to question its own practices. Discernment "...may be impaired in that it provides no embodiment of the Christian Story, no concrete referent within history to provide some perspective, logically coherent perhaps, but removed from life." (Blevins 1998, 124) The concerns for and insistence on both of these methods of Christian development can easily be associated with Wesley's agenda to avoid the errors he saw in both formalism and enthusiasm by instructing his followers to attend to all the means of grace.

Attending to the means of grace through the agencies of the church, the bands and the classes, Wesley's followers were moved out of their isolation and into a community characterized by faith, hope, love and humility.<sup>6</sup> The required involvement in the community was part of Wesley's genius in spirituality. Through these various forms of communal expressions, Wesley aided the believer in formative ways.

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<sup>5</sup> I would add here the work of James & Evelyn Whitehead (Whitehead and Whitehead 1980) who provide a method and model expands beyond what we find in David Tracy's Practical Theology and whose works are important see the procedural contribution of Groome's approach to Practical Theology.

<sup>6</sup> This is what M. Robert Fraser has termed "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Virtues."

The communal experiences are central in the more contemporary understandings about Christian formation. James and Evelyn Whitehead suggest that we really do need each other because “none of us can believe it all.” (Whitehead and Whitehead 1982, 12-13) They mean here, that our understanding of God is partial. Our perspective is limited and often flawed. These limitations are incrementally overcome as a person’s faith finds richer and more complete expression and import through interpersonal engagement into the believing community.

Further, they suggest that we need each other because “none of us can believe it all of the time.” Our experiences of disruption, loss, and radical change can lead to periods of unbelief. In these times the church surrounds us with adults who continue to believe. Coming close to us we can see both the scars and the resilience of the faith of these wounded healers. (Whitehead and Whitehead 1982, 14) Their faith shows us the future of our faith, and becomes itself a sacrament for us.

Through these communal experiences the church pulls us beyond our limited individual understandings about and resources for living in this world.

“Regular participation in corporate worship is a school and a workshop in which those who would grow in the religious life, no matter how tenuous may be their present connections, should be in attendance...It is almost impossible to avoid a self-centered religion when one has no active regular share in the corporate worship of a larger religious fellowship.” (Steer 1958, 40)

But what is it that we come to know in this “school?” It is more than the aggregate wisdom of worldlings. In worship, we put ourselves in a position to receive God’s revelation. (Dykstra 1981, 105) We come out of a decaying world bringing our culture-shaped understandings and valuing, and we enter the real world determined by faith. On entering, “...worship creates a world, and the very creation of this world delegitimizes other worlds. It renders them less powerful.” (Lebacqz 1997, 67) This new construal of reality forces me to reevaluate and to see through that common sense construal (pressed on me by culture) to see the world as it really is. As Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God.” (Clapp 1996, 112)

The main gift of Scripture is a world, a culture, a reality constructed (as all worlds, cultures, and reality are fabricated) through words...Christians are those who, through Scripture, are taught to name the world, not merely as “nature” but rather as “Creation.” We learn to name our lives not as under the grip of fate, or luck, but as guided and cared for by providence. We do not make “mistakes.” We sin. We do not want to be improved. We hope for salvation. (Willimon, Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry 2002, 125)

## ***Why should we wish for this?***

This new world through faith is in stark contrast to the “real world” that once dominated the believer. In worship the believer with others enacts a new world that breaks in and affects the structures of not only the church but also the way the believer engages those structures of the work-a-day world. In fact, this is the business of worship “...to stand things on their heads in the perceptions of its audience, to rob the established order of the most fundamental power of all: its sheer facticity.” (Meeks 1986, 145)

As a pastor, I have agonized many times with the new converts who are converted during the church service only to be sent back into cultural currents far stronger than they could effectively navigate. This present age (as the Johanne author would put it) might be passing away, but it does not relinquish its hold easily. This grip of culture continues to lay hold and give definition to human reality. How we understand the powerful dynamics at work in human reality is important in working toward a redemptive ministry that is more effective in how we provide the means of grace in such a way as to cooperate with the perfecting work of God in believers’ lives.

Edward Farley offers a description of human reality<sup>7</sup> as distributed over three interrelated and overlapping spheres. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 28) Each of the spheres of human reality is a necessary condition of the other two. These spheres are also important for our understanding of how sin and redemption affect the human reality. He identifies these spheres as:

1. The Interhuman
2. The Social
3. Individual Agents (or Agential).

What does he understand by these spheres?

**The Sphere of the Interhuman** is primary to both of the other spheres “...because it is the sphere that engenders the criterion... for the workings of the other spheres.” (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 29) Working with the materials of Buber and Levinas, Farley constructs a triadic structure for this sphere of human reality that includes: Alterity, Intersubjectivity, and the Interpersonal.

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<sup>7</sup> What he terms as a *philosophy of human reality*

In Alterity, the “other” is an “I” who experiences me and contests my efforts to reduce them into my world and perspective. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 34-36) The individual who “...wonders reflectively whether or how it experiences the other is already intersubjectively formed.” The postures, meanings of language, roles and agendas of this Intersubjectivity are “already there” and presupposed when one becomes aware of oneself or reflects on relations with others. Alterity and Intersubjectivity are necessary elements for interpersonal relation. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 36-37) Following Buber, Farley contends that the interpersonal is something disclosed in concrete human acts and relations and that moves the individual from mere observing and onlooking. In Max Scheler’s thought, this act of engagement is out of the passion to experience each other in immediate ways. More of Farley’s thought on the interhuman builds on Buber and Levinas toward yielding to the *mystery* of the “thou.” (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 37-40)

**The Sphere of the Social** is “...the sphere of specific interactions plus all of the structures and processes through which they take place.” (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 47-48) When one acts in an environment, he has already internalized a past legacy of customs, procedures, societal laws, values, and roles. These are sediments and vehicles of quasi-permanence that makes resources available for meeting human needs. This cyclical feedback system between needs and institutionalizations in the social sphere is ongoing in such a way that the social sphere takes on a life of its own bringing into being what some call history. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 48-49) The elements of the social include the workings of power and society.

**The Sphere of the Personal** or the **Agential Sphere** “...is the sphere of embodied, impassioned, and self-transcending individual agents.” (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 63) The experience of being a personal being is always within the worldly and Interhuman environment. An experience of anything that is over-against us evokes emotions that are “re-membered” afterward in the recollection of the experience. So a self-aware self-presencing is always part of the experiencing of what is “other.” There is a strange temporality in the self-aware experiencing of things. The meanings of these experiences have a past reference as the person retains or brings forward into the present (i.e. as protension) what has transpired in past experience. At the same time it is also oriented to the future, for these engagements anticipate a future outcome along with its anticipated values. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 64-68) The convergence of retention and pretention into the present provides the meanings we use for understanding human determinacy and transcendence. “The

determinacy of personal being is its *being as* or *I-as*. “ Shaped over time by past experiences, we are always the ones who did this, experienced this, loved this, or opposed this. Even if regretted and our no longer being like that, these meaning-full experiences play a part in the shape of the self. As for transcending, human persons are able to mean ourselves and be present to ourselves. “Human transcendence... is this capacity to exist self-consciously in the face of discerned possibilities and to respond to situations in the light of what is discerned.” (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 69) Unfortunately, our living is not in a vacuum, and our activities are resisted by powerful forces.

In each of these spheres there is the **general feature of the tragic character of the human condition**. Well-being in each sphere is confronted with situations of limitation, frustration, challenge and suffering. In the **Sphere of the Interhuman** the individual cannot be capable of availability, encounter, and empathy on his or her own. The other is needed, but the other is not able to provide for the individual the full satisfaction of those elemental passions for subjectivity, interhuman relation and reality (i.e., the surety of interpretations). The unavoidable result is that each individual finds suffering<sup>8</sup> to be a part of the **Sphere of the Interhuman**. This suffering has to do with both interpersonal deprivations in communicating and the woundedness of interpersonal relation, and it also has to do with what Farley calls (benign) alienation. Life in the **Sphere of the Social** is also made ambiguous for the individual. Dependency of the individual upon the resources of society makes that person vulnerable to the society. Since society is made up of groups that have incompatible aims and strivings contrasted to those of the individual (or the social group to which the individual belongs), suffering, social evil and alienation are to be expected. In the **Sphere of the Personal (Agential)** the agents vulnerability is complex and multi-dimensional. It can be organic (e.g. suffering a stroke), psychological, etc. As self-presencing, the experience of broken bones interrupts those meanings we pretend, and this interruption is factored by those future meanings. For example, a broken finger for the university professor has a different gradation of suffering than a similar finger break on a professional pianist whose self-determinacy is greatly diminished in the experience.

Not only are these spheres tragically structured, but the elemental passions for subjectivity, the interhuman, and for reality are tragically structured. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 109 ff.) A gulf is

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<sup>8</sup> By suffering is meant that quality of experience that interrupts a self-conscious state of satisfaction. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 72 & 121)

formed between desiring and the desired, yet this awareness does not bring an end to the passions. So the agent continues to yearn for whatever will secure, guarantee or found a future existence and meaning.

This intolerable gulf results in a timbre of discontent with this chaos and moves the passionate agent to transcend the suffering by finding a means of overcoming such vulnerability. In most cases, this leads to a latching on in idolatrous fashion to those goods at hand... absolutizing them<sup>9</sup>.

Pastorally, Farley's description of human brokenness, fears and radically misaligned valuing describes well the experiences and dynamics of those who enter the church seeking deliverance from their sinful and dysfunctional past. Their needs are great and holistic. Their delusion of optimism in and dependency on the fragile goods at hand as having the absolute capacity to fulfill finally disappoints and disillusion the agent resulting in the experience of existential despair<sup>10</sup>. (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 174) Their need is for an eternal horizon that founds and provides the courage to relativize "...all mundane goods at hand, consenting to the essential goodness and tragic character of the world, and venturing one's being in the perilous environments of the world." (Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* 1990, 150)

### ***How do Wesleyan modes of worship address these concerns?***

Since the power of sin is evidenced in the idolatrous and sometimes evil responses to the tragic condition of all three spheres of human living,<sup>11</sup> the needed restoration cannot be less restricted in scope. How this happens among Wesley's Methodists is the subject to follow.

The contention here is, that the effectiveness and genius of Wesley's approach to Methodist spirituality includes his understanding and insistence on "attending to all the means of grace" by which the worshiper is perfected in (social) holiness in such a way as to address holistically what Farley has called the three spheres of human reality. As Burdon put it,

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<sup>9</sup> Here and elsewhere, the influence also of Tillich is evident and acknowledged by Farley.

<sup>10</sup> The influence of Kierkegaard is also acknowledged by Farley.

<sup>11</sup> I am resisting here the temptation to pursue the possibility of loose correlations between the pronounced curses of Genesis 3 upon Adam and Eve and the tragic character permeating the spheres of the Agential, Interhuman (and Social?). The curse upon the snake would be more environmental than intimated in Farley's Sphere of the Social.

For John Wesley, the purpose of the Christian life is its witness to, enabling of, and participation in, God's power to save. We are being saved from the effects of this "vale of woe," and raised up to the heavenly country, "our everlasting home above." These purposes find their fulfillment in the liturgical context. In worship, the people gather to contemplate their unworthiness, to receive forgiveness and value from the throne of God, and be raised up into salvation-light. (Burdon 1997, 311)

For Wesley's Methodists, purposive engagement and anticipation in worship was expected. Worship was to be more than a passive aesthetic experience. The Methodist worshiper was to come in search of the way to heaven. (Ibid) Yet this purposive engagement in worship for the Wesleyan did not infer any notion of *ex opera operato*. (Selleck 1984, 42) For Wesley, this would be to fall into the ditch of formalism. The confidence was not in the worship itself. Although the "... purpose of worship is for the reaching after the things of heaven, the winning of the crown of righteousness...It is... understood ... that ... only in the power of the Holy Spirit... true worship can be offered." (Burdon 1997, 316) Since this is the working of God, the mystery of how this change takes place lies beyond our abilities to grasp. Still some correlations can be made.

Limitations of space here allow only a "pointing to" the instances of how these practices affect the spheres of troubled human experience. Looking at the three spheres we can identify some correlations with particular elements found in those historical worship elements that Wesley called the Particular or Instituted Means of Grace. Since there is interpenetration of the spheres, most of the means of grace have significance in more than one of the spheres.

**Regular attendance in corporate worship** affects The Sphere of the Social. In the gathering a difference is made between the church and the world. The church withdraws from what the world calls "real" in order to better discern the world as God intends (of which the church is a foretaste). The church year redefines the meaning of time for the participant, as it rehearses the story of God's continuing work in the world. There is also strong effect upon the Agential Sphere. The seasons of the church year train the worshiper to see God's saving work and purpose in the world, and it calls us to accept this salvation for ourselves and to join in this movement of God in the world.

The **Scripture** is another of Wesley's Instituted Means. **Hearing the text** is a means by which the church is evoked, formed and critiqued. As an oral-aural event, the readings carry the inflections, emphases, and pathos of the reader as she gives the sacred text voice. Whether this reader is the preacher or the liturgist, the scripture is voiced aloud with an accent that is not exactly the same as the hearer or of the last reader. Yet it is an accent partly formed by the shared history and experiences of this ecclesial body, and now becomes part of that history and

experiences for the hearer. This interpretive voicing of the text sounds different than the hearer would have voiced it. It opens the hearer to the subjectivity of the other as she stands over against. This dynamic of the interpretive ecclesial community impacts upon the Sphere of the Interhuman.

**Preaching of the Word** proclaims a reality that is in contrast with the cultural meanings (Social Sphere) that have troubled so long. It calls the people to a provocative status as a diacritical community (Social Sphere) and reminds and emboldens it to live out (in the Agential Sphere) its new vision and identity everywhere (Webber and Clapp, *People of the Truth: The Power of the Worshiping Community in the Modern World* 1988, 73)

**Intercession** in prayer shares in Christ's high priestly prayer (Agential) and the worshipers stand before God in the place of others (Interhuman). (Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* 2002, 78) In **praying** together (Interhuman), the life of the koinonia expresses its love for God and for neighbor. In the **Confession of Sin** the worshiper accepts the offer of Grace to forgive and be forgiven (Agential).

**The Eucharist** calls me forward to develop skills of: distribution of those gifts at my disposal (social); equality in giving and receiving (Agential); and participating in the life of heaven. (Ibid) Clapp provides basic insights into what this act of sharing a meal means (Agential and Social): (Clapp 1996, 111)

1. *The Eucharist discloses and forms us to be a people who are based on the common good of Christ's lordship...*
2. *The Eucharist discloses and forms us to be a people who are radically egalitarian...*
3. *The Eucharist discloses and forms us to be a people who have the resources to face conflict and admit failure...*
4. *The Eucharist discloses and forms us to be a people who are nonviolent.*

**Class Meetings** were not only a means of grace as Christian Conference and Conversation, but they began with acts of worship. Beginning with a hymn and prayer, they would then proceed with catechesis. (Watson 1986) In each meeting the members were required to give an account of their spiritual journey (Agential) since the last meeting. They were then given appropriate spiritual guidance by the leader (Interhuman). They would then return the next meeting to give account for what had happened since the last meeting.

The importance of these Wesleyan meetings (class, band, select society) for the transformation of the believer would be hard to overestimate. Westerhoff and Neville affirm the importance for spiritual groups saying: (Westerhoff and Neville 1979, 149)

To produce lasting individual change in ourselves, by ourselves, is all but impossible. When no one

around us believes change valuable, motivation for change is hard to establish. And even if, for a time, we do change, even if we do gain new understandings, perceptions, or behaviors, it is extremely difficult to maintain them if no community of significant others shares our views.

Although not specifically listed as an Instituted Means of Grace, there are other elements common in worship that are ingredient to the perfecting of the saints.

The worship service concludes with a **Sending Out** where Christians re-enter the world (Agential) as salt and light. “The goal of our communion...is to find ourselves offered, blessed, and broken at the Lord’s Table so that, being fed and nourished, we may be strengthened and commissioned for life in the world.” (Westerhoff III and Willimon 1980, 39)

**The Offering** evidences the resurrection of the believers from the old, deadly economic and social arrangements and the idolatry of securing oneself by riches (Social). (Willimon, Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry 2002, 53 ff.) In the offering and by giving thanks the church names the source of the blessings of this life and proclaims to the world not only who is in charge but also where history is heading. It is a counter-cultural act in a consumerist society and proclaims our possessions are not ours but comes as a trust from God (Agential).

It would seem Wesley’s omission of **Baptism** as an instituted means of grace is due to its non-repeating character. Baptism initiates the believer into a new community (Interhuman) of equals. (Webber and Clapp, People of the Truth: The Power of the Worshiping Community in the Modern World. 1988, 75) It enables the worshiper (Agential) to

“...develop the skill of naming their own sin, of identifying their participation in human and global fear and finitude, of handing that sin over in penitence, of spiritual disciplines of preparation such as frequent prayer, knowledge of Scripture, and fasting. They practice the virtue of courage, in anticipating their own death, and faith, in committing themselves to the one who judges justly. They learn the notions of adoption by the Father, Justification through the Son, new birth in the Spirit, liberation from slavery, the resurrection of the body, and vocation to a life of prayer and service. They realize that salvation is a gift to be received, not a reward to be earned. (Wells 2004, 83)

In **Passing the Peace of Christ** before sharing the bread, the Christian learns that reconciliation (Interhuman and Agential) is as necessary to their lives as their daily bread. (Wells 2004, 30)

### ***Concluding remarks about the U.S. Holiness churches***

What has happened in the American Holiness Churches is in stark contrast with Wesley’s pattern for Methodist spirituality. Worship styles are largely patterned instead upon revivalist structures. The structure of liturgy has

been minimized. Some of the worship components mentioned above are not to be found during a Sunday morning service.

Much of what happens during the services is bent toward formation, especially toward those formative elements of personal decisions. In many cases, *the world* has been redefined as “evil” and the way of holiness (via negative) requires a significant level of separation from the world’s values and entertainments. It calls for a heroic spirituality where the individual is expected to bravely push ahead in weekly solitude.

Much of the teaching and preaching has been focused upon the agential sphere of human reality. The call for change is put almost entirely on the shoulders of the individual as something to be worked out in the actor’s personal relationship with God. Those elements in historical liturgies (with the exception of scripture reading and preaching) that address the Sphere of the Social have mostly fallen into disuse. Still to be found (perhaps for less ethereal reasons) is the receiving of the offerings, but this is often understood more as an obligation for salvation than as a counter-cultural expression of thanksgiving.

The sanctification of time through the celebrations of the church year is restricted to the celebrations of Easter and Christmas. The sanctification of life by baptism has often been supplanted by the use of the altar as “mourners’ bench.” The Lord’s Supper is often irregular in practice and limited to a few times per year if that, and has largely been supplanted by the use of the altar as a weekly place of public “family time” prayer.

In particular, the focus of religious life is largely fixed upon the Sphere of the Agential. The individual is called either to repentance, to some behavioral commitment, to make some judgment, or to accept ecclesial actions. The sermon (which often is the ending of the service) directs the individual to decide and commit to either some prescribed understanding, some call to action or to some pattern of behavior. This way of engaging in the Agential Sphere, however, is inadequate for even that sphere.

Even after the powerful grace of conversion, the believer is confronted with firmly formed values (both retentive and protentive) and with the sedimented perceptions about the determinacy of their being. When the only option for the believer is heroic individualism, these personal maladies formed out of our past are overwhelming and seldom conquered. The negative outcomes in our pursuit for subjectivity were largely determined tragic structures

of the Spheres of the Social and the Interhuman. By the group we have been harmed... by the group we shall be healed.

Often missing are the pastoral functions of those face-to-face groups that perfect the believer's formation by the corporate experiences of worship with discernment (cf. Thomas Groome's, Sharing Faith) about how to live out this faith as a people and as an individual. Whether these ecclesial groups be the demanding bands or classes of Wesley, or the intimate Sunday School class where the students instead of the lesson are the subjects, or the spiritually minded yet practically oriented teen fellowship, or some other small group function or some informal structure of mutual mentoring in the church, they must provide opportunities assisting the believer in confronting the tragic structures of human reality with a courage that is grounded in the presence of the eternal horizon mediated through the historical presence of a people who affirm embody and share the faith that Jesus is indeed Lord. For holistic redemption to address the effects of sin in all three spheres of human reality, the formation through the instituted means of grace and the discernment created and tested through the prudential means of pastoral face-to-face groups are critical. Through these means of grace, the love of God is perfected in the interpersonal/interhuman context of faith, hope, and love.

To be avoided is what Steer called (fifty years ago) **the faith of an only child**. (Steer 1958, 36 ff.)

At best, an only child has to learn outside the family... For central as is the relationship between the separate individual and God, each man needs an experience of life in the great family of God if he is to grow to understand the real nature of that love and the real character of his response to that love, to say nothing of growing to understand and to live creatively with his fellows... With their connection with corporate worship for the most part very loose, and certain sense of spiritual poverty about some of these institutional contacts, they are finding it ever so hard to get beyond that stage where they commenced their growth. As for the contagious communication of this spiritual life to others, it has changed from being central to being incidental with them... They are seeking to live the religious life alone.

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