

„Your will be done“

On the Relation of Praying and Acting

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Introduction

An essential characteristic of John Wesley's spirituality was the close connection between praying and acting. Piety, meaning action focussed directly on God out of love for him, and mercy, meaning action directed towards one's neighbour and the whole creation, are inextricably connected in Wesley's practice of life and faith¹. This fact is also evident in his writings. There are many passages where works of mercy are very naturally stated next to works of piety, to which prayer belongs as one of the central means of grace². Nowhere does Wesley play them off against each other.

How, then, did John Wesley connect these two areas – namely praying and acting – in his theological thinking? What links them? What relation do they bear to each other?

My thesis is: Experience of faith or rather experience of God³ is the link which connects praying and acting and defines their relation with each other. Experience of God is the source from which both prayer and deeds of charity flow.

Praying as a means of grace is a central place where God in his grace turns to man and lets himself be experienced by man⁴. Prayer as a human action enabled by God and focussed on God opens man for the working of God in him and thus for an experience of God, for the experience that God offers. Through that experience God creates man anew and changes him in the process of sanctification. Renewal is seen in its fruits, therefore also in actions: in works of piety on the one hand and on the other in works of mercy, through which the grace received is handed on to others aiming at a new earth.

Praying, on the one hand, and the actions of the believer in the world, on the other hand, both grow out of this experience of God -

¹ Wesley wrote: "To continual watchfulness and prayer ought to be added continual employment"; *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, Thomas Jackson, ed., London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872 [WJW (Jackson)], 11:439. Suchocki comments: "Against the misperception that a life of prayer can be separated from a life of works, Wesley deeply connects prayer and works"; *Suchocki, Marjorie: The Perfection of Prayer*, in: Maddox, Randy L., ed.: *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for contemporary Methodism*, Nashville 1998, p.57.

² This pair of terms or rather what is meant by it is found e.g. in Sermon 22, I.10; 24, II.7, IV.4; 26, 2, I.1, II.1; 43, III.5.9.10; 48, II.6; 84, III.5; 85, II.4; 87, II.18; 91, II.4, III.11; 92, II.4.9, III.7.9.10; 98, 1, 2; 106, II.4; 126, II.3., in: *The Works of John Wesley*, Albert Outler, ed., (Bicentennial Edition), Nashville 1984-87 [WJW], vol 1-4. Cf. also: A Plain Account of the People called Methodists, Q.35, in: *WJW (Jackson)* 11:432.

³ Compared with the term "experience of faith", the expression „experience of God“ more strongly emphasizes God as source and content of the experience.

⁴ "It is in prayer that we actually touch the love of God for us, and hence grow in our own love for God"; *Suchocki, M.: The Perfection of Prayer*, p.61.

which links both. If it is orthopathy⁵, i.e. right experience of faith, then the one does not appear without the other, then spirituality does not remain in the inwardness of prayer, nor does it find its fulfilment in the outwardness of active engagement. The root of the inextricable connection between the two poles lies in the experience of faith: turning to God in prayer and turning to the world in active engagement⁶.

I will present what I have briefly summarized above in the following chapters: Praying is human action (I), by which man opens up to the action of God towards him (II). God acts towards man by letting himself be experienced by man (III). Experience of God causes man to pray (IV) and at the same time to turn to the world in active engagement (V). At the end I summarize my thoughts and conclude to the present age (VI).

As the subject of our working group requires, my starting point is one of the Wesley brothers, John Wesley. I didn't choose him just to meet the requirements. I rather think that an examination of his life and thinking in this context is worthwhile enough because he was a theologian who developed his theological thoughts by considering the real world in which people live and the people living in it⁷. In view of currently relevant questions he felt responsible to search for answers which were theologically founded as well as applicable in daily life⁸. So the main purpose of his theological work was to support his search for a life-style based on the gospel⁹. A theological system never stood to the fore for him.

This entails – which is not really surprising – that Wesley, as far as I know, has never formulated a detailed theology of prayer¹⁰. He prayed himself; he prompted others to pray and instructed them in praying. Whenever he felt compelled to do so, he reflected prayer and its effects, but it was only marginally a topic of systematic reflections.

⁵ Runyon, Theodore: *The New Creation. John Wesley's Theology Today*, Nashville 1998, pp.146ff, speaks about 'orthopathy' and sees it as a necessary tertium next to 'orthodoxy' and 'orthopraxis'. Only together they afford true faith.

⁶ Mann, Dorothee: *Du bist mein Atem, wenn ich zu dir bete*, Würzburg 1998, p.89, writes: "Die Einheit (in bzw. vor Gott) also ist der umfassende Aspekt christlichen Lebens; daher müssen sowohl Gebet als auch Arbeit offengehalten werden für das dahinterliegende Geheimnis Gottes". In other words, in God Christian life at first sees itself as unity. Only thence, from the existential orientation to him who lets himself be experienced, can prayer and activity be distinguished as two expressions of Christian life. Cf. also Sudbrack, Josef: *Beten ist menschlich*, Freiburg 1973, p.76.

⁷ Cf. Watson, David L.: *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, Nashville 1985, pp.3f.

⁸ „He approached the theological task with the heart of a spiritual guide... In short, Wesley wanted a theology which made one increasingly conformable to the image of Christ and which produced holiness of heart and life“; Harper, Steve: *John Wesley: Spiritual Guide*, in: WTJ vol. 20, nr. 2, Wilmore 1985, p.94.

⁹ In my opinion Wainwright's understanding of spirituality corresponds with that of Wesley, when he connects prayer, life and theology as follows: „I am setting up a continuum which runs from prayed theology through lived theology to reflective theology“, cf. Wainwright, Geoffrey: *A Language in which we speak to God*, in: *Worship* 57, 1983, p.310. Thereby this continuum isn't understood in terms of a one-way street, but as incessant movements of the convergence between these different areas.

Wesley wrote: „All is prayer, when we have no other object than God's love, and the desire of pleasing God. All that a Christian does, even in eating and sleeping, is prayer, when it is done in simplicity, according to the order of God“; *WJW (Jackson)* 11:438. Cf. Suchocki, M.: *The Perfection of Prayer*, p.53 and also p.58.

¹⁰ Vgl. Suchocki, M.: *The Perfection of Prayer*, p.49.

Therefore statements in his sermons, in his theological treatises and tracts as well as biographical notes in his journals and letters serve as basis for this little analysis.

I. Praying as human action

In his sermon entitled “The Means of Grace” Wesley defines means of grace as outward signs, words, or actions which God has ordained and uses in order to convey his grace to men¹¹. As the most important ones he names prayer, searching the Scriptures and receiving the Lord’s Supper, of which prayer takes the first place. Wesley summarizes the means of grace and especially prayer under the expression “works of piety”¹². He also named prayer an “exercise of the soul”¹³. All these definitions and paraphrases – praying as action, praying as work of piety, praying as exercise – underline the aspect of acting. Praying is human action.

Even though – and Wesley had no doubt about that – the grace and freedom of God are not at man’s disposal, men are to be praying, i.e. actively doing something in order to seek, to await and to receive God’s grace in accordance with his promise. Therefore Wesley didn’t grow tired to prompt his followers to prayer again and again and to instruct them how they should pray publicly and privately, alone, in their families and in their societies¹⁴. The collections of prayers, which he first published in 1733 and which contained preliminary remarks about praying, were particularly intended for this purpose¹⁵.

To Wesley, the right attitude in praying was a matter of concern: “See that you not only speak with your lips, but pray with your heart”¹⁶. All praying shall come out of the heart, out of the inmost being¹⁷, and be reflected in life. According to Wesley, prayer means to pour out one’s heart to God; therefore the forms of prayer should be adapted to the inward state of the praying person on the one hand and to his outward state on the other¹⁸. Furthermore Wesley recommended to withdraw regularly to one’s room in order to bring one’s personal requests before God, in addition to public prayer and prayer in the family, and to abstain from using many words and empty repetitions.

These instructions show that it is up to the praying person to take the initiative for prayer, that praying can and needs to be learned and practiced, and that praying requires human activity. Prayer isn’t just there; prayer doesn’t fall from the sky. Praying is human action.

¹¹ Cf. Sermon 16: The Means of Grace, II.1., in: *WJW* 1:381.

¹² Cf. I.c., Sermon 43: The Scripture Way of Salvation, III.9., in: *WJW* 2:166. Also Sermon 85: On Working out our own Salvation, II.4., in: *WJW* 3:205.

¹³ Cf. Sermon 46: The Wilderness State, II.4., in: *WJW* 2:209.

¹⁴ Cf. I.c., Sermon 26: Sermon on the Mount VI, in: *WJW* 1:572-91; Sermon 43: The Scripture Way of Salvation, III.9., in: *WJW* 2:166. Cf. also: *The Letters of John Wesley*, John Telford, ed. (LJW), London 1931, 4:103.

¹⁵ A Collection of Forms of Prayer, for every Day in the Week; A Collection of Prayers for Families; Prayers for Children, in: *WJW (Jackson)* 11:203-72.

¹⁶ *WJW (Jackson)* 11:259.

¹⁷ Cf. Wesley, J.: *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, London 1755 (reprinted: London 1977), Matthew 6,7, p.36f.

¹⁸ Vgl. Sermon 89: The more excellent Way, II., in: *WJW* 3:267.

II. Praying as opening up to the action of God

Now what happens to the praying person when he prays? The purpose of praying is not to induce God to something, but oneself. The point is to become willing and disposed to receive the good gifts God holds in store and gladly gives to all those who ask him for them.

We do not pray to inform God of our wants... The chief thing wanting is, a fit disposition on our part to receive His grace and blessing. Consequently one great office of prayer is, to produce such a disposition in us, to exercise our dependence on God, to increase our desire of the things we ask for, to make us so sensible of our wants, that we may never cease wrestling till we have prevailed for the blessing.¹⁹

In praying, the praying person deliberately and actively opens up to the action of God. “Prayer is a mode of participation in the creating grace of God; it is an active openness in response to God.”²⁰

The term “watch and pray”, which Wesley frequently used according to Matthew 26,41, particularly clearly expresses this aspect. When asked how to best attend people who believe to be saved, Wesley replied: “Exhort them to forget the things that are behind, and to watch and pray always, that God may search the ground of their hearts”²¹. To a mourner, who had found inner peace, he gave this advice: “If you watch and pray, God will give you more of his love”²². And in a sermon he said:

Thou, therefore, O man of God, watch always, that thou mayest always hear the voice of God. Watch that thou mayest pray without ceasing, at all times and in all places pouring out thy heart before him. So shalt thou always believe, and always love, and never commit sin.²³

In praying, in the conscious orientation towards God, the praying person becomes receptive for the gifts of God. This receptiveness allows the grace of God and his renewing love to reach the praying person and to transform him more and more into the image of God²⁴. At the same time it enables him to participate in the creative work of God in the world.

III. God lets himself be experienced by man in prayer

In the previous passages we have talked about praying being human action and the praying person opening up to God in prayer. Now we need to consider that efficacious prayer always is the work of God in man. God works human prayer. His grace is already there and enables prayer²⁵, i.e. the orientation of man towards God, praying as an action of man directed to God. Praying is responding to being addressed by God.

But this is not to be seen linearly in the sense of God addressing man first and man responding afterwards. Prayer is always both. It is

¹⁹ *Explanatory Notes* upon the New Testament, Matthew 6,8. Cf. also Sermon 26: Sermon on the Mount VI, II.5., in: *WJW* 1:577.

²⁰ *Suchocki, M.*: The Perfection of Prayer, p.50.

²¹ *WJW (Jackson)* 8:279.

²² *WJW* 20:261, 8.12.1748.

²³ Sermon 19: Privilege of those that are Born of God, III.4., in: *WJW* 1:443.

²⁴ *Wainwright, G.*: Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life, New York 1980, p.403, writes: „Openness to God is the condition for being transformed by him into his likeness in and through worship“.

²⁵ Cf. *Explanatory Notes* upon the New Testament, 1. Timothy 2,1.

a divine gift, yet inspiring man to respond in freedom. It also is human acting, yet imbued with God's turning to man in his grace. In prayer God and man become alert and open for each other: the praying person comes before God, focuses on him, speaks to him and listens to his speaking; God turns to the praying person in whose praying and lets himself be experienced.

What does this mean?²⁶ First: experience of God is an experience which is not at man's disposal, but only at God's. He himself is the source of any experience of God. In experiencing, it is God who lets himself be experienced by man and lets man react to this experience in faith.

Second: Wesley no longer understood grace as a metaphysical gift independent of consciousness. By imparting his grace to man God rather lets man have a share in his grace. Grace "now would be understood as a conscious encounter with the God who – through the message communicated in Christ by the Holy Spirit – is reaching out to bring knowledge of the heart of God to the hearts of human beings."²⁷ This also means that the receiver, after having received grace, no longer is the same as before, for the experience of God's love in heart and mind deeply impresses and changes him.

Referring to John Locke's theory of knowledge Wesley sets out the work of the Holy Spirit and his concept of the spiritual senses²⁸ – which are awakened and brought to life by the Holy Spirit so that they are consciously able to perceive the grace of God in the heart – as the main reason for his understanding of experience of God. By reflection these sensory perceptions, which involve feelings, are made "experience".

Since God imparts his grace by prayer, the above process is also initiated in praying, and the praying person experiences God in a way that existentially includes and changes him, because God lets himself be experienced.

IV. Experience of God causes man to pray

In the previous passage we have seen that God lets himself be experienced in prayer and that this experience of God inevitably is transforming. It was mainly this experiencing of God which was granted to Wesley in manifold ways and in different phases of his life, and deeply impacted the development of his life and faith. This is very clearly seen in the development of Wesley's praying. The experience of God led him onto new ways in his praying and changed and deepened his praying. Experience of God brought about prayer in him.

I would like to illustrate this with an example regarding Wesley's discovery of praying extempore²⁹ as a new way of communicating with God. On 1st April 1738 Wesley wrote in his journal:

²⁶ Cf. thereto in detail *Runyon, Th.: The New Creation*, pp.146-67; *idem: The Importance of Experience for Faith*, in: Maddox, R. (Ed.): *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, Nashville 1990, pp.93-107.

²⁷ *Runyon, Th.: The New Creation*, p.150.

²⁸ Cf. *WJW* 11:56f.

²⁹ Cf. Sermon 98: On Visiting the Sick, II.5., in: *WJW* 3:392. Wesley saw the transition to extemporary prayer (like preaching in the open, employment of lay preachers and setting up of societies) as a necessity, not as his own choice; Sermon 121, in: *WJW* 4:72; also *WJW (Jackson)* 4:450, 12.4.1789.

Being at Mr. Fox's society, my heart was so full that I could not confine myself to the forms of prayer, which we were accustomed to use there. Neither do I purpose to be confined to them any more, but to pray indifferently, with a form or without, as I may find suitable to particular occasions.³⁰

In the afternoon of 1st April Wesley went to a meeting at Mr. Fox's society. For the first time in his life he detached himself from the given texts of prayers and prayed extempore. He did this, as he observed, because his heart flew over and the fullness of his heart burst the frame of formulated prayers. The given words weren't enough for him to express what had seized him. What was his heart so full of? What moved him so much during those days that his praying changed in this way?

The use of set, liturgically bound prayers was evident to Wesley as a minister of the Anglican Church. More so, he had categorically refused extemporary prayers – detached from the liturgical texts – as being a sign of disorder in communication with God³¹. So the reason which made him revise this judgment and include praying extempore in his own prayer life must have been all the stronger³².

A look at the development of his personal faith in these weeks helps us to better understand this turnaround. During the months following his return from America, i.e. in the beginning of 1738, John Wesley struggled with deep doubts. His discussions with the Moravian Peter Böhler brought him to the conclusion that he did not have any faith, as he could not find any fruit of faith in himself, especially no joy and no inner peace. He realised that his understanding of faith, which was mostly based on intellectual effort, was not biblical. Instead he encountered more and more often a God-given faith that touched people in their hearts and filled them with inner peace. But this faith was not yet within his reach. Therefore he wrote down some time during those weeks: "I see the promise. But it is afar off"³³.

Because of his missing faith, Wesley thought he couldn't preach any longer. Yet Böhler encouraged him to still do so: "Preach faith *till* you have it, and then, *because* you have it, you *will* preach faith."³⁴ Thereupon Wesley took up his preaching and pastoral care again. As a result of his comfort, a man sentenced to death found inner peace and died with the assurance of being accepted by Christ³⁵. What Wesley was looking for seemed to have come a little closer.

In the morning of 24th May he wrote a letter to a friend. This letter, which is partly written in the style of a prayer, is informative about his mood in those days:

But how am I fallen from the glory of God! I feel that 'I am sold under sin'. I know that I too deserve nothing but wrath, being full of all abominations; and having no good thing in me to atone for them, or to remove the wrath of God. All my works, my righteousness, my prayers, need an atonement

³⁰ *WJW* 18:233, 1.4.1738.

³¹ In his journal, Wesley commented as follows one of his first encounters with praying extempore: „I was surprised to hear an extemporary prayer and a written sermon. Are not then the words we speak to God to be set in order at least as carefully as those we speak to our fellow-worms!“ *WJW* 18:460, 2.1.1737.

³² And yet he kept a high opinion of liturgical prayers; cf. Sermon 39: Catholic Spirit II.2., in: *WJW* 2:90.

³³ *WJW* 18:233, 2.4.1738.

³⁴ *WJW* 18:228, 4.3.1738.

³⁵ Cf. *WJW* 18:232, 27.3.1738.

for themselves. So that my mouth is stopped, I have nothing to plead. God is holy; I am unholy... Yet I hear a voice (and is it not the voice of God?) saying, 'Believe, and thou shalt be saved'... O let no one deceive us by vain words, as if we had already this faith! By its fruits we shall know. Do we already feel 'peace with God', and 'joy in the Holy Ghost'? Does his 'Spirit bear witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God'? Alas, with *mine* he does not... O thou Saviour of men, save us from trusting in anything but *thee*! Draw us after thee! Let us be emptied of ourselves, and then fill us with all peace and joy in believing; and let nothing separate us from thy love, in time or in eternity!³⁶

It was in this tension, but also with this sensitivity, that Wesley joined the meeting at Mr. Fox', who was a former prisoner. We do not know in detail what happened there. But it seems reasonable to suppose that Wesley himself or other participants had an experience of faith which overwhelmed and filled him so much that the given prayers became too narrow for him and he was led to pray extempore.

If this observation is correct, we can conclude that Wesley's praying and his understanding of prayer changed in the very moment when he no longer considered faith primarily as an intellectual or moral effort, but began to understand and experience faith as a work of God which takes up the whole person. In this very moment, the knowledge which he had gained about faith in the preceding weeks, stepped out of the sphere of theory into his personal reality³⁷. The notes in his journals confirm that this did happen during those weeks³⁸.

Therein I see my thesis confirmed that personal experience of God and praying are closely linked together in the sense that experience of God brings about prayer and urges man to pray.

V. Experience of God causes man to turn to the world in active engagement

Experience of God changes and renews the praying person. In the course of the process of sanctification the person is more and more changed into the image of God.

Runyon writes:

In orthopathic experience, the experience produces us. It not only modifies us in our being and behaviour, it places our actions in the context of God's renewal of the cosmos. Therefore, only where genuine transformation occurs is experience *right!*³⁹

This transformation is seen in the works of piety as well as in the works of mercy. The praying person who experiences God in prayer turns to the world in active engagement aiming at a new earth.

This too shall be shown in a concrete experience Wesley had – the Aldersgate experience –, through which his passion was changed to compassion.

³⁶ *WJW* 25:550, 24.5.1738.

³⁷ Cf. *Rack, Henry D.*: Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism, London 2002, p.135.

³⁸ Cf. also *Heitzenrater, Richard P.*: Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Nashville 1995, pp.77f.

³⁹ Runyon, Th: The New Creation, p.163.

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.⁴⁰

John Wesley wrote these lines looking back to the events of 24th May 1738 just after describing how he had experienced the assurance of being saved in Christ:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.⁴¹

It is remarkable that Wesley, according to his records, began to pray immediately, even before telling those present about his experience, and in fact for those who had offended and persecuted him the most. This spontaneous reaction revealed an important change in Wesley's way of thinking. Albert Outler speaks about Wesley's conversion from passion to com-passion⁴². After he had experienced the love of God in body and soul, he began to change from a fanatic for the matter of God into a witness of this love and to turn more graciously to his fellow men, even to his adversaries⁴³. Before this, he had taken the increasing resistance from his opponents as a sign of being on the right way⁴⁴. But now he learned to feel responsible before God even for them.

This change can also be observed in the decreasing emphasis Wesley attributed to his own salvation. It had still stood to the fore in the justification of his journey to America. Even though he had not seen his own salvation as a goal, but just as a requirement to be able to preach salvation to others, the reproach of self-centredness regarding his salvation is not quite unjustified. However, during the months after the 24th May Wesley's own person moved to the background in favour of his fellow men, especially when the revival began.

So the result of what had happened in the personal encounter between him and God was not limited to his relationship with God but had a marked social trait. This change clearly stood out in the intercession for his enemies on the evening of the Aldersgate experience. The experience of God led him to prayer and opened him for the people around him, whom he immediately included in his praying.

This example clearly shows that experience of God does not only lead man to a deeper communion with God, but it also leads him to his fellow men. Experience of God causes man to turn to his neighbour in active love. This is the reason for what Wesley kept on emphasizing: right faith inevitably leads to serving men and earth. Behind this stands the conviction that all good works, all works of mercy which man does are brought about by God and thus are received works.

⁴⁰ *WJW* 18:250, 24.5.1738, pt.15.

⁴¹ L.c.

⁴² Cf. *Outler, A.*: Wir wollen seine Zeugen sein, Zürich o.J., p.5.

⁴³ Cf. *WJW* 18:253, 1.6.1738.

⁴⁴ Cf. *WJW* 18:226, 26.2.1738.

VI. Summary and conclusion

By this analysis I wanted to show that praying and active engagement are closely connected and that it is experience of God which links them. Praying is a place where God lets himself be experienced by man. This renewing and changing experience of the presence and love of God leads the praying person into deeper communion with God and his neighbours and is the source of both works of piety and works of mercy.

What can we conclude from the above for today's life? What questions should be answered?

1. Wesley kept underlining that piety and acting love inseparably belong together. We have seen in which way both are connected. In the present discussion about a spirituality in step with the postmodern world the Methodist view needs to stress that spirituality includes both, works of piety and those of mercy, contemplative and active elements⁴⁵. Spirituality means a faith integrated with the whole life, a faith which takes on outward expression⁴⁶, a life which is founded in a personal relationship with God in Christ and results in prayer and worship as well as in service to the world⁴⁷. Praying *and* acting both are aspects of Christian spirituality⁴⁸. Keeping emphasizing this is an important contribution of Methodist theology.

2. Experience of God is a central criterion regarding the concrete shaping of spirituality and the search of forms of faith put into practice. For postmodern spirituality criticises the overemphasizing of the head, doubts that the divine can be analyzed and turns away from the powerlessness of hollow tradition. People do not only want their head to be addressed, but want to be fascinated and touched by "the divine" in a more comprehensive way⁴⁹.

Therefore we need to ask: Do our worships enable the worshippers to encounter the living God? Do the forms of our prayers make room for an experience of God? Do they help it? Or do our liturgies remain stuck in orthodoxy? Which importance do we attach to experiencing God in catechesis and in the different working and service groups of our churches? Are our deaconal offerings slanted toward orthopraxis?

Postmodern spirituality knows that the gospel owns power, and it utilizes this power. In this sense, a Christian community is a positive force field which has a healing effect on its participants. It pays attention to its atmosphere and to wholesome relationships and helps an integral development of faith. This includes an unrestricted openness to the work of the Holy Spirit e.g. in prayers for blessing and healing.

⁴⁵ Barth, Hans-Martin: *Spiritualität* (Ökumenische Studienhefte 2), Göttingen 1993, p.148, judges regarding the ecumenical discussion around the subject of spirituality and the involved differences of opinion: „Doch wird man sagen können, dass sich insgesamt die in Taizé gefundene und durch das „Konzil der Jugend“ verbreitete Formel „Kampf und Kontemplation“ als legitim durchgesetzt hat“.

⁴⁶ Cf. Zimmerling, Peter: *Evangelische Spiritualität. Wurzeln und Zugänge*, Göttingen 2003, p.16.

⁴⁷ Cf. Barth, Hans-Martin: *Spiritualität*, p.12.

⁴⁸ "However, those who *oppose* praxis to the 'interior' life are in need of correction"; Clapper, Gregory S.: *John Wesley on Religious Affections: his Views on Experience and Emotion and their Role in the Christian Life and Theology*, Metuchen N. Y. 1989, p.173.

⁴⁹ Cf. Stangenberg, J.: *Spirituell, aber nicht religiös. Wie postmoderner Glaube aussehen muss*, in: *Aufatmen* 2/2007, Witten 2007, pp.74-78.

3. The postmodern currents in our western societies are a challenge to us. The growing-up generation, which is less and less rooted in Christian tradition, is definitely open to religious experience⁵⁰, yet refuses the claims of dogmatic orthodoxy. Methodism is able to meet this challenge in falling back upon its former tradition which hasn't been afraid of speaking about religious experience and to grant central importance in Christian faith to experience. Wesley firmly kept on pointing to Christian religion being a "religion of heart".

In this context the meaning of societies, classes and bands can hardly be overestimated. Rediscovering and setting up cell groups within our churches will be an important service to our present age, for the intimate setting of a cell group allows its members to open up for experiencing God. It seems essential to me that these cell groups link and practice both: praying and acting, acting and praying. Each prayer group should be engaged in active service, and each service group should pray. Thus there will be communities of experience which live a comprehensive spirituality.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Klaiber, Walter*: Das Leben teilen. Biblische Anleitung zu einer missionarischen Existenz, Stuttgart o.J., p.54.