

THE WESLEYAN WAY OF THEOLOGY & THE AFRICAN CONTEXT: A Contextualization of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Summary of the Mission of the Wesleyan Church

“...To spread scriptural *holiness* throughout the world...” (par. 2500, 2004 Discipline). This “holiness” is taught by us as purity of heart that results into loving God with ‘all of our heart, soul and mind’ and loving our ‘neighbors as ourselves’ (Matt. 22:36-40), as well as transmitting this *holiness* into our *daily affairs of life* (Greenlee, in Harper 1987:199-202, italics added). Our intention and determination is our *holiness* theology must be made practical, because “The purpose and goal of doing theology is to lead people and the church toward holiness of heart and life” (Taken from Wesleyan Website, November 2011).

Rev. John Wesley and his successors have taught and demonstrated that a “*holiness of heart and life*” is really God’s own kind of holiness, a quality of life, and it must therefore permeate every area of a Christian’s life. Dr. J. Harold Greenlee agrees, and says, “...there is nothing that is truly Christian that is not *holy*, and there is nothing that is *holy* that is *non-Christian* (Greenlee, in Harper 197-198, italics added)¹. Our deliberate devotion to this holiness will enable us to see God (cf. Hebrews 12:14b; 1John 3:1-3).

Four Vital Ingredients for Actualizing a Holiness of Heart and Life

According to the Wesleyan theological tradition, we use four vital “ingredients,”
Which enable us to mature in and actualize a *holiness of heart and life* (Manskar).

Comment [JPT1]: They are known as “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral.”

The first ingredient is

➤ *The Scripture*: Scripture is the primary source for our belief in God and the basis for our theological persuasion— i.e. our doctrine of Scriptural Perfection/ Entire Sanctification in this present age (cf. Rom. 10:17; 2Tim. 3:15-17; Tit. 2:11-14). It teaches us about the need to grow from the first act of salvation (*prevenient grace* and *initial sanctification*) to a growing and complete, loving surrender to God (*gradual and entire sanctification*; Heb. 5:11-6:3).² Additionally, it shows examples of many who demonstrated the life of holiness (blamelessness, righteousness), integrity, and exclusive devotion to God (Noah [Gen. 5:22-24; Joseph [Gen.

¹ Dr. J. Harold Greenlee’s article is “The Greek New Testament and the Message of Holiness.”

²Of course, the Scripture teaches us about God, humanity’s sinful nature, His relationship to the world, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the second coming of Jesus, the judgment of the good and evil, etc.

39:2-13]; Micaiah [1Kgs. 22:8-37]; Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), Azariah (Abednego) [Dan. 1:8-16; 3:12-30; 6:4-22]; Zachariah [Lk. 1:5-9]; Simeon [Lk. 2:25-35]; Anna [Lk. 2:36-38]).

The second “ingredient”:

➤ *Tradition:* The **living** witnesses of past and present Wesleyan and non-Wesleyan Christians (literate and illiterate, scholars and non-scholars), which bring the Scripture to life and makes it visible as a living, breathing presence and witness in the world, and the doctrinal distinctive and practice of our Church. Some instruments for this are our mood of worship (i.e. our praise, prayers, hymns, preaching, etc.) and rituals (i.e. baptism, the Lord's Supper, Reception of Members, etc.).

Our third “ingredient” is,

➤ *Reason:* The opening up and using of our minds to think through and question Scripture, in order to understand it and interpret it correctly and persuasively.³ Steven Manskar says *reason* actually “equips us to know how much we don't know which leads to humility.”

Our final “ingredient” that enables to mature in and actualize a *holiness of heart and life* is,

➤ *Experience:* This comprises of testimonies of Christians, Wesleyans and non-Wesleyans, who have had/are having actual life-encounters with God in their ordinary, everyday lives, which gives “life and meaning to the Good News of (Jesus Christ)” (Manskar). It makes us “living witnesses for Jesus Christ in the world and (help us) follow His teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (ibid.).

Experience “adds flavor to Scripture, tradition, and reason and makes them taste good,” says Manskar (ibid.).

Summarily,

Scripture, tradition, reason and experience (as one “recipe”) help us to seek God's truth, know Him, grow in His love, love Him, serve Him, love one another, love our neighbors our neighbors as ourselves, and make disciples of Jesus Christ, without **panic** and **prejudice**.

Applying the Four Ingredients to the African Context

Having worked with Wesleyan pastors and teachers in/from Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, I would say, generally, that we have been following “*The Wesleyan Way of Doing Theology*” as have been handed to us by our exemplary predecessors, to the best of our abilities. I.e., the Scripture is our primary

³ Paul reasoned out the Scripture in the synagogue in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3).

Comment [JPT2]: A few of our cherished witnesses of the Wesleyan Tradition who have proven that the life of scriptural holiness is possible and realizable in this life: James Arminius, Francis Asbury, Adam Clarke, John Fletcher, John Wesley, Orange Scott, Jotham Horton, LaRoy Sunderland, Luther Lee, Lucius C. Matlack, Martin Wells Knapp, Rev. Seth C. Rees, Phoebe Palmer, Delbert Rose, Richard S. Taylor, Wesley Duewell, etc..

source of learning, living and teaching; the writings and personal, practical testimonies of Wesleyans at home and abroad have motivated us to pursue the life of scriptural holiness.

However, some of our Pastors and their congregations are not experiencing this life of holiness as they should. Why? It appears that it is because of their biblical **illiteracy**. No amount of praying can substitute for the lack of correct scriptural knowledge. Biblical illiteracy leads to spiritual **malnourishment** (see 1Pet. 2:2). Just as **physical malnourishment** hinders physical and mental growth, and causes several mental and physical illnesses, spiritual malnourishment (as the result of scriptural ignorance) hinders mental, spiritual growth, so that we do not have victory over sins. Not experiencing victory over our sins affects our ability to **make disciples** for Christ (a mango cannot bear a banana!). Jesus' command to the Apostles to "teach" new disciples to obey everything He had taught them suggests the Apostles themselves will have been obeying those teachings.

The lack of accurate knowledge of Scripture is hindering these Pastors from *reasoning* with their congregations from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the life of scriptural holiness is possible in this life (Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 12:14; 1Pet. 1:13-16; 2:1-12). **They should be persuaded and supported morally and economically to learn.**

When I read the account of Ezra (in Ezra 7:6, 10), I am obliged to commit myself to studying the Scriptures diligently and understanding it. This passage says:

^{Ezr 7:6} this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. ^{Ezr 7:10} For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel (NIV).

Three lessons from the passage:

- I. Ezra Devoted Himself to *Learning* the Scripture, v. 10
- II. Ezra Devoted Himself to *Living* out the Scripture, v. 10
- III. Ezra Devoted Himself to *Teaching* the Scripture, v. 10

You would notice that Ezra's methodology was chronological: he **learned** the Scripture, **lived it** out in his daily affairs of life, and then **taught it**. His diligent learning made him "well versed in the Law of Moses" (NIV, NLT), or "a scribe skilled in the law of Moses" (NASB, NRSV). This servant was an "expert" of the Pentateuch. This is why he, along with certain Levites, was able to read the Book of the Law, explain it, give its meaning, make it clear, and instruct Israel so effectively, that the people listened attentively "from daybreak till noon" (Neh. 8:2-8).

Comment [JPT3]: It would interest you to know that some of our pastors/preachers cannot read the Bible clearly, more besides to interpret it!

Like Ezra, Paul was an expert in the Scripture— the Law and Prophets; therefore, he was able to reason “with his Jewish audience from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, “as well as persuade many to join him...” (Acts 17:1-4). During his defense before Agrippa (Acts 25) Festus interrupted him and in a loud voice said, “...“**You are out of your mind, Paul!....**” “**Your great learning is driving you insane.**” (v. 24).

Beloved, if at any time the Wesleyan Church needed equipped biblical exegetes and expositors, it is now, as our pews are piling up with learned members and attendants. We must meet our members' mental needs as we do their spiritual; or, we will lose them—especially the learned youths (the older members can be more sympathetic).

May the God of all knowledge and wisdom who has called us to this vocation, enable us to **be** all that we ought to **be**, in order to **do** all that we need to **do**, for His glory and the growth of His Church.

God bless!