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The Wesleyan Way Entire Sanctification and its Spin-offs – a Recurring Theme in Evangelical Devotion

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Introduction

The story of the development and defence of John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection is one of persistent misunderstanding and strenuous efforts at clarification. Yet, because of the variety of terms used: 'entire sanctification', 'perfect love', the 'second blessing', these efforts seemed only to muddy the waters still further. Then, in the 1760s, a revival at Otley, during which hundreds of people reported having had this experience, emboldened Wesley to write his classic work, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.* This text bequeathed to subsequent generations the conviction that something more was attainable than mere forgiveness. 'Forgiveness did not satisfy me, I wanted the dominion of sin destroyed', said William Boardman, the inspiration behind the Keswick Conventions. The holiness movement in its many guises, Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness, the Keswick Convention, the Salvation Army, the Pentecostal League of Prayer, and Pentecostalism itself were all the fruit of this insight that a consistently victorious Christian life was possible.

Down to the present day we have Neil Anderson and Steve Goss' *Freedom in Christ* course which urges participants – who now number in the hundreds of thousands – to believe the truth about who they are in Christ so that the truth can set them free from never-ending 'sin-confess-cycles'. If nothing else, the popularity of this course indicates that many evangelicals are still on this quest for a consistent victory over personal sin. The apostle Paul himself wrote that, 'sin shall not have dominion over you' (Rom. 6:14), and seemed to hold out precisely this possibility. However flawed Wes-

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ley's doctrine of Christian Perfection may have been, his teaching signposts us to a hope that many others also seem to have glimpsed. My point in writing this article is simply this: they can't all be wrong, and if they are even partially right, we have a message too good to keep to ourselves.

I The Wesleyan Way of Salvation

As early as 1746, John Wesley defined the way of salvation as repentance, faith and holiness: 'The first of these we account the porch of religion; the next the door; the third, religion itself.'[1] The Wesleyan way of salvation could also sometimes be summarised using Wesley's favourite text of Scripture for his sermons throughout the first year of the revival, 1739, which was 1 Corinthians 1:30:[2] Christ is our wisdom (by which we turn to God), righteousness (justification), sanctification (the start of the process) and redemption (the decisive completion of sanctification).

Sanctification, in Wesley's teaching, was an act of God, begun during regeneration, the completion of which involved complete deliverance from 'inbred', 'Adamic', or 'racial' sin. This was 'full' or 'entire' sanctification and completes what was begun at regeneration. The Reformed view, by contrast, emphasised the gradualness of sanctification. It was: '…the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness'.[3]

Here are some examples of the Wesleyan view, emphasising sanctification as centring around a single crisis moment.

> Entire sanctification is essentially defined as an instantaneous cleansing from Adamic sin, and an empowerment, which Christian believers may receive, by faith, through the baptism with the Holy Spirit.'[4]

> By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions.[5]

> '(1) That Christian perfection is that love of God and neighbour, which implies deliverance from all sin. (2) That this is received merely by faith. (3) That it is given instantaneously in one moment. (4) That we are to expect it, not at death, but every moment.'[6]

Point 3, the instantaneous nature of sanctification, did not emerge until relatively late. It makes its first appearance in Wesley's sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* of 1765 and is an idea that seems to have been bolstered by the testimonies that were circulating during the Otley perfectionist revival

1 John Wesley, 'The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained', *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley M.A.* 14 Vols, T Jackson (ed) (3rd edn. London:1872), Vol.8, 472.

2 See Ted Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of the Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 78-79.

3 K. Prior, *The Way of Holiness* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 8.

4 Kenneth Grider, *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980), 11.

5 John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1767), 68.

6 Wesley, *Plain Account*, 65.

of the 1760s.[7] He interviewed some 652 people who could all testify to an instantaneous transformation. For Campbell, the most compelling argument of all is Wesley's simple assertion: '1. God intends that we should love God completely. 2. God can accomplish what God intends.'[8]

This distinctive doctrine was described by Wesley as the 'grand depositum'[9] of Methodism, and is also described in Charles Wesley's hymn, *Love Divine.* In the mind of John Wesley, 'salvation and holiness are synonymous terms'.[10]

II The Origins and Development of Entire Sanctification in John Wesley

1 The Moravian influence on the Wesleys

There is much competition over who or what should take pride of place as the most influential factor in the formation of John Wesley's theology. Hempton has pointed out the tendency of scholars of Wesley to '…compete for the pre-eminent influence over Wesley',[11] depending on what particular church tradition they represent. He concludes that rather than any one influence being pre-eminent in Wesley's theology, it is 'Wesley's eclecticism' itself that is 'pre-eminent'.[12]

Cracknell and White list Wesley's mother, Thomas á Kempis and Jeremy Taylor as his most important early influences during the period when he was preoccupied with the concept of 'purity of intention'.[13] His journals would appear to reflect a strong Moravian influence, there being almost no references to the blood of Christ, a distinctive aspect of his doctrine of sanctification, in Wesley's journals until after he had made the acquaintance of Peter Böhler in February 1738, a little over three months before his Aldersgate experience (May 24). This experience sealed for him the truth of Böhler's theology. Hence, although Wesley's soteriology went on to become very different from that of the Moravians, its point of origin is almost certainly Moravian. Other much earlier influences need not be excluded, however.

Besides his imbibing of Kempis' mysticism, Wesley was brought up within the Puritan tradition. The Puritan belief in the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is very much preserved in the Wesleyan tradition.[14] However, with the arrival of Moravian Peter Böhler in London, on February 7, 1738, the 'more definite influence' of the Moravian Church on English Christianity began.[15] It is recorded that, 'On the very day of his landing Böhler made

7 So Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 257-8.

8 Sermon, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation', III:14-15. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs,* 232.

9 Letter to Robert Brackenbury, 15 Sep 1790.

10 McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 242.

11 Hempton, D., *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 56-57.

12 Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit,* 56-57.

13 K. Cracknell, & S. J., White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7-9.

14 Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs,* 70.

15 Arthur Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1960), 85.

the acquaintance of John Wesley'.[16] John Wesley was later to become enamoured with the spirituality of Böhler, who displayed, '…dominion over sin and a constant peace from a sense of forgiveness', which Wesley saw as, '…a new gospel'.[17]

Wesley soon became a close companion of Zinzendorf himself. The split between the two leaders came in 1741 when Wesley and Zinzendorf could not agree on the issue of sanctification. The Fetter Lane Society had already split over the issue of quietism, the setting up of a new society at the Foundery on 23 July 1740 marking the beginning of the first Methodist Society. Zinzendorf's view of salvation was strictly forensic and firmly Lutheran.[18] By August 1742, John Wesley's connections with the Moravians had become weak enough for him to overtly castigate them for their beliefs about the blood and wounds of Jesus, in a sermon described as 'very furious'.[19]

His estimation of Luther, likewise, cooled quite considerably. He had initially seen his doctrine of perfection as a completion of Luther's doctrine of justification – both operating purely by faith.[20] By 1785, Wesley would speak much less flatteringly of Luther and his 'total ignorance of sanctification'.[21] Much of his distaste for Moravian beliefs appears originally to have been about their love of Luther.

Wesley linked Luther with the dreaded spectre of antinomianism, which he saw too often in his converts. Wesley's passion for holiness of life made him suspicious of Luther and therefore of Moravian theology. There is some evidence, however, that John Wesley's soteriology, in the latter half of his years in ministry, became more Lutheran again and does make use of the concept of the imputed righteousness of Christ.[22]

2 John Wesley's 'Christian Perfection'

Wesley held that a process of sanctification was begun in the heart at regeneration but that a second experience was needed to bring 'full salvation', or, 'entire sanctification'. This second blessing involved the cleansing away of all sin followed by an influx of love towards God and man taking its place in the believing heart. Hence entire sanctification was referred to as 'perfect love'. The blood of Christ, understood as effecting a complete and once-only

16 J. Hamilton, *A History of the Church Known as the Moravian Church During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Bethlehem: The Moravian Church in America, 1900), 85.

17 John Wesley, *A Letter to the Right Reverend the Bishop of London* (London: W. Strahan, 1747).

18 The full conversation is available in English in Freeman, A., *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf* (Bethlehem: The Moravian Church in America, 1998), 188.

19 C. Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England 1728-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998),76.

20 In 1738, Wesley referred to Luther as, 'that glorious champion of the Lord of Hosts'. Sermon: 'Salvation by Faith'. Outler, *Sermons* 1:129.

21 John Wesley, Sermon: 'On God's Vineyard', Outler, *Sermons* 3:505-6.

22 Piper discusses this, citing strong evidence from the primary literature as well as two recent studies of Wesley: John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 2002), 38.

cleansing, eradicated the negative, creating space for the inundation of the positive: the continual inclination to do the will of God. All failings from this point onwards were considered by Wesley to be unintentional.

He preferred to call all subsequent sins, 'infirmities', which the finished work of Christ continually covered. In this way, it was necessary for even the fully sanctified believer to continually lean upon the merits of Christ, just as a branch must draw sustenance from the tree, even though the believer is now, technically, perfect. The ambiguity of all this did not go unnoticed by Wesley's critics.

In the *Plain Account,* Wesley reminisces about the crucial insight given him by the Moravians concerning justifying faith as the essential preliminary to sanctification, describing it as, '…a firm confidence in God, and persuasion of His favour; the highest tranquillity, serenity, and peace of mind; with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation of all, even inward sins'.[23] The Moravian insight that justification was by faith alone had changed his early doctrine of perfection into something that could happen to anyone if they were expectant.

His early doctrine of Christian Perfection had been decidedly semi-Pelagian, as expressed in his 1733 sermon, *The Circumcision of the Heart,* focusing as it did on the human means of attaining it.[24] His later doctrine of Perfection skirts around the issue of human good works as a means to sanctification and focuses instead on the end achieved by it, much of his writing being taken up with defining precisely what Christian Perfection was in the face of those who misunderstood. His protagonists in the holiness movement would more than make up for Wesley's lack of definition concerning how precisely it was received.

III The Development of the Concept by the Holiness Movement

1 Methodism finds a home in America

The first Methodist sermon ever to be preached in America came from the mouth of Capt Thomas Webb in New York City in 1766.[25] During 1773-76, Methodism took firm hold in Virginia by means of a significant revival.[26] The founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784[27] was followed, in 1787, by the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which, of all the Methodist groups in North America, would prove to be the most consistently loyal to Wesleyan perfectionism.[28]

By 1800, Methodism, with its atten-

23 Wesley, J., *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 9-10.

24 McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 243-244.

25 Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 7.

26 Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition,* 9.

27 Cracknell & White, *World Methodism,* 32. Baker cites this early denominationalisation of the movement in America as the main reason for its strength relative to British Methodism that was slow to make the break with Anglicanism complete and final: F. Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1976), 18.

28 Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition,* 28.

dant doctrine of Christian Perfection, was a major denominational block and began tipping the theological scales of popular religion away from the Calvinism of the puritan settlers. In 1801, the hysterical Cane Ridge camp meeting revival in Bourbon County, Kentucky, was a significant event attracting tens of thousands of people[29] of partly Baptist and partly Methodist complexion. By 1812, the Methodists were holding at least 400 camp meetings annually throughout the United States.[30] By mid-century, Methodism was the dominant religion of North America.

2 Shifts in the American context

Dayton[31] has observed that the early preaching of the Methodists in America was inevitably salvation orientated, the vast majority of people attending the camp meetings being un-churched. The new emphasis on Christian Perfection that took hold during the 1830s coincided with a change in the make-up of Methodist churches from first to second generation Christians. People no longer needed to know how to be saved but how to become better Christians, and this in the face of the advances of German liberalism, Deism, Unitarianism and many other challenges to Evangelical faith.

The events at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, popularly termed the Second Great Awakening, embodied much that was becoming distinctive in the life of the infant nation. In the political realm, with the election of Thomas Jefferson to power in 1801, the full democratisation of American life began. American Christianity went through an exactly parallel democratisation process that would soon be given formal expression in Charles Finney's Arminianising 'New Measures'. In Continental Europe, Enlightenment ideas were destroying religion in public life, producing freedom from belief. In America these same libertarian ideas were granting the freedom to believe, and to believe with passion, with wild enthusiasm. French libertarian ideals could produce revolution in France, revivals in America.

The mood of the nation was so optimistic and aspirational that Old World thinking was quickly transfigured into New World thinking. This was a way of thinking that was idealistic enough to envisage a perfection that would not only see Christ fully formed in the heart but the millennial kingdom established in the earth.

3 The Role of Phoebe Palmer

Dayton[32] agrees with Dieter[33] that by around 1830 American Methodism had begun to neglect its own cardinal doctrine, that of Christian Perfection, but that throughout this decade, movements were afoot to revive the doctrine. Phoebe Palmer, and her sister,

29 Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 152-3.

30 Murray, Revival and Revivalism, 183.

31 Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (London: Scarecrow, 1987), 65.

32 Donald Dayton, 'From 'Christian Perfection' to the 'Baptism in the Holy Ghost', in Synan, V., (ed) *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield: Logos, 1975), 42.

33 M. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* 2nd Ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1996), 22.

Sarah Lankford, represented the first major thrust in the direction of reviving Perfectionism within American Methodism. The result of this was that by the end of the decade, the movement was two-pronged.

There was the spread of interest in the doctrine amongst the Presbyterians and Congregationalists instigated by Finney and Mahan at Oberlin College, and there was the 'Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness' held at the Palmers' home, soon to be augmented by the magazine, *Guide to Holiness,* which reached a readership of up to 30,000.[34] These meetings plus the magazine revived Perfectionism within the Methodist fold. The 1840s would see 'a veritable flood of perfectionistic teaching in the Methodist Church'.[35]

Once Palmer's experience of sanctification was complete, she appears to have drawn two principal lessons from it that would go on to dominate her preaching on the subject. Firstly, she came to understand the importance of testimony. She felt that her side of her 'covenant' with the Lord would be that she would agree to tell others of her experience 'perhaps before hundreds'.[36] Failure to do this would lead to the dreaded loss of sanctification such as that experienced famously by Wesley's successor John Fletcher, who lost the blessing five times due to a reluctance to testify.[37] From here onwards she would always preach 'the binding nature of the obligation to profess the blessing'.[38] Secondly, Palmer's experience appears to have taught her to live in a continual experience of cleansing:

> Realizing that God had enabled her to present herself as a living, or *continual,* sacrifice, she deduced that Jesus cleansed the offering thus continuously presented from all unrighteousness.[39]

From this realisation, as well as from the theology of a certain Adam Clarke and his exposition of Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 13:10 and Exodus 29:37, comes her 'altar theology':

> This, I was given to see, was in verity placing all upon the altar that sanctifieth the gift, and I felt that, so long as my heart assured me that I did thus offer all, that it was a solemn duty as well as a high and holy privilege, to believe that the blood of Jesus cleanseth at the present and each succeeding moment so long as the offering is continued.[40]

Her altar theology was an adaptation of Wesley's system that made the experience of the second blessing more readily accessible via a threefold process of consecration, faith and testimony.[41] If her listeners followed these steps, they could assure themselves that they possessed this blessing, regardless of any evidence to the contrary. The whole process was thus becoming fairly mechanised. The agony

34 Synan, *Pentecostal-Holiness Tradition,* 18.

35 Synan, *Pentecostal-Holiness Tradition,* 17.

36 C.E. White, *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 20-21.

37 White, *Beauty of Holiness,* 139.

38 Phoebe Palmer, *Faith and its Effects: Or Fragments from my Portfolio* (New York: Joseph Long King, 1852), 89.

39 White, *Beauty of Holiness,* 23.

40 Phoebe Palmer, *Guide to Holiness* 1 (1839-40), 210.

41 White, *Beauty of Holiness,* 136.

and soul-searching was removed and holiness was now a blessing that was simply there for the taking:

> When the Savior said, 'It is finished!' then this full salvation was wrought out for you. All that remains is for you to come complying with the conditions and claim it…it is already yours.[42]

Palmer clearly held to the same eradicationist view of sanctification as Wesley, so that even if the cleansing is not final, as Wesley understood it to be, it is so overwhelmingly effective that it declares, the 'polluted nature dies', and enables the believer to live 'above the world and sin'.[43] It is, nonetheless, only a small step from this to the counteractionist position of Keswick, which also espoused a continuous cleansing.

Later, Palmer demonstrated once again her ability to incorporate the ideas of others to great effect in her ministry. Dayton points out that the publication of William Arthur's *The Tongue of Fire* in 1856[44] significantly influenced Palmer, to the extent that during the revivals of 1857-60, her speech became dominated by the concept of baptism in the Holy Spirit.[45] The language of Pentecost thus adopted was the shape of things to come for the holiness movement and beyond.

The recovery of the Wesleyan message of Christian Perfection in American Methodism went hand-in-hand with the full recovery of the voluntarist element in Christian devotion. This democratisation process was indebted to American culture and the widespread appropriation of republican values that had been imported from France during the War of Independence. Yet this voluntarist thread in American Christianity also had its own heritage.

The need for a personal, heart-felt commitment to Christ was, of course, a process that had begun in earnest with German Pietism. This was then further developed in the Methodist societies in Britain, and finally, with the planting of Methodism in American soil, Christian voluntarism reached its apogee in American nineteenth century revivalism. This thought of a powerful, personal cleansing, available to anyone willing to follow the necessary steps, captured the imaginations of a generation of revivalists. It served to feed the idealism of a generation that thought they would see the world utterly cleansed of evil and the millennial dawn appear.

The holiness tradition of the nineteenth century was not uniform, however. This was especially true of the post-American Civil War holiness crusade, dating from 1867-94, which splintered into a bewildering array of sects. During that time, the holiness movement also became a transatlantic phenomenon, taking on mostly non-Wesleyan forms on the Anglo-European side of the Atlantic. The key difference between British and American Evangelicalism in the nineteenth century was the extent to which revivalism as a concept was embraced. In America, a crisis-orientated revivalistic approach, both inside and outside Methodism, became widely accepted, while in Britain, under the watchful eye of an established church, revival-

42 Phoebe Palmer, *Faith and its Effects*, 52ff.

43 Lines from her hymn, *The Cleansing Wave.*

44 William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire* (New York: Harper, 1856).

45 Dayton, 'From "Christian Perfection"', 44.

ism never became mainstream.[46] It was the revivalistic atmosphere that allowed Methodism and the holiness message to thrive. Despite this, two UK-based movements did take root in the late nineteenth century.

IV The Influence of Wesleyan Soteriology Beyond Methodism

1 The Salvation Army

The theology of William and Catherine Booth was profoundly influenced by Phoebe Palmer's altar theology.[47] The Booths went on to extend their eradicationist theology of Christian Perfection into the social sphere, engaging in a widening campaign against all the social evils of working-class Britain. As opposition mounted against the Booths and their followers, this holiness crusade was seen increasingly as a spiritual warfare.

An article in the *Sunday Telegraph* written in commemoration of the Salvation Army's centenary puts it aptly: 'To the Booths, and especially to Catherine Booth, the Devil was a personal opponent and as real as one's next door neighbour.'[48] In the face of this enemy, the Booths were utterly defiant and completely confident of the power of Christ to defeat sin and Satan. Through Blood and Fire all the forces of 'Darkest England' would be overcome. William Booth's theology has been described as the theology of Wesley, Whitefield and George Fox.[49] Of these, Wesley[50] would have to be singled out as the greatest influence upon his theology.[51]

Clearly the genius of the Salvation Army was in applying the hope of victory over sin to the social sphere, in which there were great expectations that the drunkards among the urban poor, could be radically saved and sanctified. Such an expectation was not disappointed. It succeeded in becoming a truly working-class holiness movement and helped to secure the persistence of the Wesleyan holiness message amongst the chapel-goers of the late nineteenth century. Their formative influence is traceable in the lives of Evan Roberts, Smith Wigglesworth and countless others.

2 The Keswick Convention

The Keswick Convention came into being as a result of the visits of Robert and Hannah Pearsall Smith from America in September 1874 to a conference at Oxford. This conference was entitled 'The Oxford Convention for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness'. Similar meetings had already been held in London in May 1873, at Chamonix in the French Alps later in the summer of that year, at Hampton-

46 Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism,* xiv.

47 Catherine Booth said of Palmer's books that they, '…have done me more good than anything else I have ever met with', Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down*, 23, citing a letter to her mother dated January 21, 1861.

48 'History of the Salvation Army', *Sunday Telegraph* (30 May 1965), cutting, Nottingham City Archives.

49 H. Begbie, *Life of William Booth, the Founder of the Salvation Army,* Vol.1 (London: MacMillan, 1920), 79.

50 Amongst his words of advice to his future wife was to, 'Read one or two of John Wesley's sermons now and then'. Letter to Catherine, dated 17 November 1852. Begbie, *Booth* Vol.1, 159.

51 Begbie, *Booth* Vol.1, 86-87.

on-Thames on New Year's day 1874, at Mildmay later in January 1874, and in June and July of that year. These had been for such pursuits as, 'the promotion of the spiritual life',[52] for 'practical victory over all known sin, and of maintained communion with their Lord',[53] and a 'maintained communion with the Lord and victory over all known sin'.[54] It was said that, 'A new range of the possibilities of faith opened up…with the confidence that they should henceforth not merely admire "the way of holiness", but by faith "walk therein"'.[55]

Canon Harford-Battersby, the vicar of St John's, Keswick, and the organiser of the first Keswick conventions, came into an experience of the 'all-sufficiency of Christ'[56] at the Oxford Convention. In the May and June of 1875, the Brighton Convention was held, which drew delegates from all over the world amounting to an estimated 7,000 people.[57] Again, Pearsall-Smith presided. Speakers included H.W. Webb-Peploe and Evan Hopkins, while D.L. Moody finished his evangelistic tour at the London Opera House by offering prayer for the event.

On the 29 June of that year the first Keswick Convention for the Promotion of Practical Holiness began. The Pearsall Smiths were not present. A number of other speakers also had to cancel. The numbers for the first Keswick Conventions were modest. The total seating capacity of the tent used for the first two years was only 600.[58] Most of those attending the first Conventions were 'middle-aged or elderly'[59] and these attended with the feeling that they were losing their reputations in doing so.[60] The first conventions attracted widespread allegations of Christian Perfection. A deeply held suspicion of 'enthusiasm' was still a powerful inhibiting factor in the Church of England.

The influence of even this first Keswick Convention, however, was considerable. As early as August 1875, a convention modelled on Keswick was held in Melbourne, Australia. Many others followed throughout the English-speaking world, perhaps most notably at Wellington, South Africa from 1889 under Andrew Murray and at Llandrindod Wells from 1903 under Jessie Penn-Lewis. By 1879, the seating capacity was about a thousand.

By 1885, the Keswick Convention was attracting crowds of 1,500. By 1907, there were 6,000 in attendance. During the 1920s, numbers averaged at around the 5,000 mark, a very large proportion of whom were now under 30 years of age.[61] Young people had begun

52 Sloan, W., *These Sixty Years: The Story of the Keswick Convention* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1935), 9-10.

53 Sloan, *These Sixty Years,* 10.

54 S. Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1952), 20.

55 Sloan, *These Sixty Years,* 12-13.

56 Sloan, *These Sixty Years,* 17.

57 Sloan, *These Sixty Years,* 18. Webb-Peploe puts the figure at 8,000: Webb-Peploe, 'Early Keswick', 41.

58 Sloan, *These Sixty Years,* 22. Pollock prefers a seating capacity of 'nearly a thousand', Pollock, *Keswick Story,* 11.

59 Pollock, *Keswick Story,* 45.

60 Pollock, *Keswick Story,* 49.

61 Ian Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 14, 16.

flocking to Keswick from the 1880s onwards, leading eventually to the formation of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship by Norman Grubb in 1919.

Norman Grubb, in fact, is highly illustrative of the long shadow that Keswick cast across the early twentieth century. He and his wife Pauline (nee Studd) came into contact with Jessie Penn-Lewis' 'cross teaching' while serving in the Congo in the early 1920s. Her teaching centred around the believer's identification with Christ in his death and resurrection. Galatians 2:20 soon became a key verse for Norman and Pauline Grubb. He had to learn not to look for a change within himself but instead to remind himself of who it was that now lived in him and through him: 'He in me is the all, the joy, power, wisdom, victory – all. I transfer my attention, my recognition, my affirmation from the human vessel to Him whom it contains.'[62]

To his name could be added Reader Harris of the Pentecostal League Prayer who also carried the holiness message into the twentieth century, in Harris' case, the fully Wesleyan version. Oswald Chambers, whose *My Utmost for His Highest,* published posthumously, would go on to be translated into 29 languages and never go out of print, was influenced by a combination of Reader Harris and the American holiness movement.

Bebbington holds that the Keswick doctrine of sanctification held normative power amongst conservative Evangelicals until the 1950s and 60s.[63] The expectation of a crisis experience in Keswick thought, however, faded quite rapidly. By no means least among the chorus of voices pressuring Keswick to drop this element in its teaching by the turn of the twentieth century was the Bishop of Liverpool, J.C. Ryle:

> That there is a vast difference between one degree of grace and another…all this I fully concede. But the theory of a sudden, mysterious transition of a believer into a state of blessedness and *entire consecration,* at one mighty bound, I cannot receive.[64]

Even by the time of the first Keswick Conventions many aspects of the Wesleyan message, especially its doctrine of Perfection, had fallen on bad times in Britain, although it remained strong among the working classes.[65] Christian Perfection had not acquired the same critical mass of adherents in Britain as it had in America. Further, the middle classes who attended the Keswick Conventions were particularly keen to distance themselves from fanatical Perfectionist teaching.[66]

Yet it is clear that American Methodist Perfectionism re-interpreted by the Pearsall Smiths and by William Boardman, played their part in the formation of early Keswick expectations

62 Norman Grubb, *Once Caught, No scape* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 86.

63 Bebbington, D., 'Holiness in the Evangelical Tradition' in Barton, S. (ed), *Holiness Past and Present* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2003), 309.

64 Ryle, J.C., *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (London: Cas.J.Thynne, 1900), xxiv.

65 Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 71.

66 See especially J. Elder Cumming, J., 'What We Teach,' in H. Stevenson, (ed), *Keswick's Triumphant Voice* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), 19-20.

of a second blessing. Their slogan was 'Holiness by faith in Jesus, Not by effort of my own'.[67] It was a holiness performed by the risen Christ himself within the human heart in response to the believer's full surrender and identification with Christ in death and resurrection. It was deeply Christo-centric.

William Boardman was typical of the early aspirations of Keswick: 'Forgiveness did not satisfy me, I wanted the dominion of sin destroyed. Purification, not less than pardon, I saw to be required.'[68] The conviction that mere salvation, mere justification, mere forgiveness were not enough and that there had to be more to the Christian life than persistent defeat was pivotal throughout the holiness movements. The dissatisfaction was widespread, as the wording of the invitation to the Oxford Convention indicates: 'In every part of the country, the God of all grace has given many of His children a feeling of deep dissatisfaction with their spiritual state.'[69]

This underlying dissatisfaction continued in different forms into the onset of Pentecostalism. Protestant Christianity was seen to be deficient. It could be argued that part of that deficiency was precisely the gulf opened up from the Lutheran Reformation onwards between a justification that must not sanctify and a sanctification that must not be complete or final. Following the Reformation, sanctification then fell increasingly under the spell of the gradualism that was part and parcel of Enlightenment thought, thus helping to fuel the impatience of holiness advocates as they sought a real and lasting victory over sin, not a protracted struggle.

The holiness movement left justification where it was, utterly distinct from sanctification, but brought sanctification forward into the matrix of Christian initiation so that it could, like justification and regeneration, be understood as complete and final. Boardman, for instance, had an attractive pragmatism about his belief in a 'present Saviour' who 'does actually deliver the trusting soul from the cruel bondage of its chains under sin, now in this present time'.[70]

3 Pentecostalism

Born in 1870 in Louisiana, William Seymour was the son of freed slaves. The forms of Christianity that developed among the slaves were heavily tinged with West African spirituality. Robeck speaks illuminatingly of, 'Seymour's formative years in the context where the supernatural was taken for granted, where spirits, both "good" and "evil" were commonly discussed, and where dreams and visions were understood to contain messages that sometimes foretold the future…'[71] Indeed, similarities have been noted between the Pentecostal concept of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the West African

67 W.H., Aldis, *The Message of Keswick and its Meaning* (London:Marshall, Morgan & Scott), 39.

68 William Boardman, *The Higher Christian Life* (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1859), 140.

69 Cited in Pollock, *Keswick Story,* 22.

70 Boardman, *Higher Christian Life,* 266.

71 Cecil Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival and Mission: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 21.

concept of spirit possession.[72]

Seymour was converted at an African Methodist Episcopal church in Indianapolis but soon joined the Evening Light Saints, a radical Wesleyan holiness group with strong interracial ideals.[73] He was invited in 1905 by Lucy Farrow to pastor a holiness mission near Houston. There, in Houston, he was introduced for the first time to Charles Parham and his Bible school. Early in 1906, Seymour was permitted, thanks to Lucy Farrow's mediation, to attend Parham's all-white Bible school by sitting outside the window of the classroom.

Seymour soon fell under the spell of Parham's teaching on tongues as the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit, although neither he nor Parham had experienced the gift at this stage. Lucy Farrow had this gift, however, and was able to help convince Seymour of its reality. Parham soon arranged for Seymour to do some preaching in Houston, being particularly keen that Seymour should be used to reach the African-Americans with the Apostolic Faith message.

Seymour's competent preaching in Houston was witnessed by a member of a small black majority holiness group that was based in Los Angeles. This group was under the provisional leadership of Julia Hutchins. Wishing to appoint a male leader, Hutchins promptly invited Seymour to leave Houston to become the pastor of the group. Joseph Smale, a zealous Baptist preacher, determined to bring the Welsh Revival to Los Angeles, and Frank Bartleman, the earliest chronicler of the Azusa Street revival, had both previously preached to this small gathering of nine families.

When Seymour came, however, he brought a traditional Wesleyan holiness message combined with Parham's tongues emphasis, stating overtly that unless one spoke in tongues one could not claim to be baptised in the Spirit. A number in Hutchins's congregation were quite willing to accept this message. Hutchins herself, however, considered herself to be already baptized in the Spirit because she had experienced entire sanctification. She had no need of a confirming sign. Still less did she want to be told that, without this sign, she was not in fact baptized in the Spirit at all. She was so offended by Seymour's teaching that she famously padlocked the door to him in time for his return for the evening service.[74]

Seymour then began his own work with a handful of sympathetic followers, beginning with a nightly prayer meeting at 214 North Bonnie Brae Street. On April 6 1906 a ten day fast was inaugurated. On April 9, Edward Lee was healed and spoke in tongues. On the same day, Jennie Evans Moore (later to become Seymour's wife), spoke in tongues and miraculously played the piano.[75] Soon, the meetings at North Bonnie Brae Street were at-

72 L. Lovett, 'Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement', in V. Synan, (ed) *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield: Logos, 1975).

73 Cheryl J. Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 26-28.

74 His text had been Acts 2:4: H. Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), 45.

75 She went on to become the worship leader.

tracting the attention of the whole neighbourhood:

> They shouted three days and nights. It was Easter season. The people came from everywhere. By the next morning there was no way of getting near the house. As people came in they would fall under God's power; and the whole city was stirred. They shouted until the foundation of the house gave way, but no one was hurt.[76]

On April 12 Seymour himself spoke in tongues. By April 14, owing to all the publicity, the group had grown so large, it had to move to an abandoned building, 312 Azusa Street. The first of many less than flattering newspaper reports appeared on 18 April 1906, the day of the portentous San Francisco earthquake. In a matter of months, this old fly-ridden building became a world centre for Pentecostal activity, and was open for prayer and preaching around the clock for three years until 1909. The publication of *The Apostolic Faith* helped spread the Pentecostal message throughout the USA and the world. Beginning with a distribution list of 10,000 addressees,[77] *The Apostolic Faith* reached a readership of 50,000 within three years.[78]

William Seymour retained the Wesleyan two-stage initiation but then added a third: the baptism in the Spirit with the sign of tongues. From here on, it was this third event that would be termed 'baptism in the Holy Spirit', rather than the second. From around 1910, this threefold version of conversion-initiation among American Pentecostals would have a rival: the 'finished work' version. This type of Pentecostalism removed sanctification out of the middle, insisting that this was all part of the 'finished work' and provided in principle right at the start. British Pentecostalism held to this two-fold initiation from the very beginning. Today, three-blessing Pentecostals are known as Holiness-Pentecostals and are mostly African-American.

So we see how the holiness movement of the nineteenth century wanted an answer to the problem of a Christianity that seemed to consist of nothing more than conversion followed by a lifetime of defeat. They looked to what soon became known as 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' (an idea stemming from John Fletcher) to meet this need. After a while, it was seen that, according to Luke-Acts, this experience of the Spirit not only led to a greater victory over sin but also a new power for service. The Pentecostals then took over the idea of Baptism in the Spirit to describe their own experiences of tongues, prophecy and other gifts.

After about ten years, most Pentecostals tended to see the Baptism in the Spirit as almost solely an enduement of power for service. There was a move away from thinking in terms of various inward cleansings, mortifications and holiness codes as conditions that had to be met before Baptism in the Spirit could be enjoyed. They again saw sanctification in the old Reformed way as a gradual elimination of sin, but now greatly helped by their powerful experiences of the Holy Spirit.

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76 *Pentecostal Evangel* 6:4 (1946), 6.

77 *Apostolic Faith* 1:4 (Dec.1906), 15.

78 T. Cauchi, 'William J. Seymour and the History of the Azusa Street Mission' in *The Apostolic Faith:The Original Azusa Street Editions 1-13 Plus Editions 19 & 20 From Portland, Oregon* (CD-ROM, Bishops Waltham: Tony Cauchi, 2004), 15.

In the 1960s, the Charismatic Renewal began contemporaneously with the Inner Healing Movement, and was part and parcel of it. Baptism in the Spirit had, by this point, become even less associated with any kind of sanctifying experience and was more or less synonymous with the experience of speaking in tongues for the first time, as exemplified by the rather matter-of-fact testimony of the movement's early leader, Dennis Bennett.[79]

So, something else was needed to fill the gap left by the evacuation of sanctification and this came with the widespread circulation of Agnes Sanford's *The Healing Light,*[80] and other titles that soon followed. Charismatic expressions of Christianity went on to produce a succession of variations on this theme. In particular, the entrepreneurial 1980s saw the founding of Sozo Ministries,[81] as well as the opening of Ellel Grange, the first of many centres for Ellel Ministries.[82] Such ministries have continued to thrive, often in the face of much criticism.

V Recent Developments

Today, the hopeful quest for a victorious Christian life goes on. The forms are very different from Wesley's, but the motivations and convictions are the same.

1 Neil Anderson and freedom in Christ

Converted through Campus Crusade for Christ, Neil Anderson has written numerous books about finding spiritual freedom. The dominant metaphor in his writings[83] tends to be different from Wesleyan holiness. He does not speak the language of cleansing so much as bondage-breaking and stronghold-busting. He speaks little about anything like the 'perfect love' that is to fill the heart once these evils are removed. Simply to be free of compulsive, self-destructive behaviours is enough. He tends not to tackle substance and alcohol addiction but focuses more on sexual and emotional problems, seeing the answer to almost everything as being to simply believe the truth about yourself rather than believing what either people or the devil have told you.

From the very beginning of the course, participants are avidly encouraged to describe themselves as saints rather than sinners. This sets the tone for the whole approach, which is that we behave in accordance with what we believe to be the truth about ourselves. Behaviour follows belief, rather than the other way round. Yet there is some circularity in this idea: in order to believe the truth, participants are asked to simply speak the truth *until* they believe it, which, arguably, is an example

79 The experience is related in his highly influential, *Nine O'Clock in the Morning* (Plainfield: Bridge, 1970).

80 Agnes Sandford, *The Healing Light* (New York: Balantine, 1983.Original: 1947).

81 <http://www.sozo.org.uk/> [accessed 23 July 2013].

82 <http://www.ellelministries.org/uk/> [accessed 23 July 2013].

83 Most notably his, *The Bondage Breaker: Overcoming Negative Thoughts, Irrational Feelings and Habitual Sin* (Guildford: Monarch, 1996. USA: 1990). This book alone has attracted a very lengthy critique from Christian Discernment Ministries: <http://www.christiandiscernment.com/Christian%20Discernment/CD%20PDF/Book%20pdf/28%20NeilAnderson.pdf >[accessed 23 July 2013].

of the exact opposite to the main claim since belief, in that case, is in fact following a behaviour, that of verbally affirming the truth.

All turns upon the achievement of a kind of New Testament version of healthy self-esteem and concepts related to that. Echoing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a lot hangs upon how well we have understood that we are significant, secure and accepted.[84] The main means of moving into these liberating truths is, as mentioned above, to speak out positive affirmations. In the case of stronghold busting, it is recommended that the daily repetition of affirmations should go on for up to six weeks.[85] A typical affirmation will involve two elements: renouncing and announcing: 'I renounce the lie that…,' and 'I announce the truth that…'

Clearly the methodology dominates the theology – in contrast to Wesley's teaching in which the theology was dominant and a methodology was lacking, which Palmer's altar theology then supplied. Pentecostalism could be named as the bridge leading towards the taking over by methodology of theology, early Pentecostal theology itself consisting of a very simple twofold belief in 'subsequence'(that baptism in the Spirit was subsequent to conversion) and 'initial evidence' (that speaking tongues was the evidence it had taken place).

Anderson's methodology for *Freedom in Christ* has attracted some criticism, largely owing to the fact that, while the underlying theology aims to base itself on the New Testament letters, the methodology appears to be a hybrid between spiritual warfare teachings about self-deliverance and the techniques of behavioural psychology.[86]

It is not unique in this, organisations such as Ellel Ministries having taken a similar approach. This leads to an inconsistency in the material. The main *Freedom in Christ* booklet that participants work through in conjunction with a DVD, makes it clear that the enemies to our freedom in Christ are 'the world, the flesh and the devil'.[87] Behavioural psychology dominates this part. Then, after week nine, participants are introduced to another booklet called, *The Steps to Freedom in Christ.*

In this booklet the emphasis shifts to the devil, with many of the renunciations being about or even directed at the devil and demons. This is due to Anderson's view of how a sin-confess-cycle is broken. It is simply this: 'Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.' The seven *Steps to Freedom* are designed to be the point at which that is actually happening in the life of every participant.[88]

84 Neil Anderson & Steve Goss, *Freedom in Christ* (Oxford: Monarch, 2009), 14.

85 Anderson & Goss, *Freedom in Christ,* 81.

86 The most comprehensive critiques have been online articles from Elliot Miller, e.g. 'The Bondage Maker: Examining the Message and Method of Neil T. Anderson, Part One: Sanctification and the Believer's Identity in Christ', *Christian Research Journal* 21:1 (1998). See also < http://www.equip.org/PDF/DA085.pdf>[accessed 23 July 2013].

87 Anderson & Goss, *Freedom in Christ,* 35-62.

88 Neil Anderson, *Steps to Freedom in Christ* (Oxford: Monarch, 2009).

2 John Crowder and the new Mystics

John Crowder is a man with a colourful background, claiming that he was converted as a hippie high on LSD – though he clearly is not old enough to have been part of the original Flower Power movement – he was born in 1976. He now advocates a mystical-charismatic approach to Christianity that carries the branding, 'The New Mystics'. All of his web material contains kitsch quasi-medieval imagery of saints with haloes.

Reading through John and Lilly Crowder's statements of faith is revealing:

> When we begin to trust that Jesus took away our sinfulness, we can't help but see a change in our lives!... You were never really separated from Him, but you 'thought' you were ... the Bible says we were once 'alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior'. (Col. 1:21).

He seems to have an eradicationist doctrine of sanctification, combined with a semi-Barthian universalism. He seems to see everyone as already saved in principle.[89] The emphasis on cognition is similar to *Freedom in Christ* and a great many other approaches, though here it seems that cognition is salvation itself. Simply to correct a misunderstanding is to be reconciled.

As evangelicals we have always lived with agitators of this kind that have, again and again, annoyed us by reaching for what we insist is an over-realised eschatology, and we have therefore often loudly denounced them. What we forget is that amongst this diverse group of people that have agitated for more power, authenticity and so on, have been some truly great figures, such as John Wesley, without whom evangelicalism as we know it would probably not exist. It is perhaps unfair in this situation to apply the words of Jesus to the religious establishment of his day – that they hypocritically built tombs to honour the prophets whom their forefathers had killed (Luke 11:48). I am not unaware of the fall-out from some of the ministries I have mentioned and the concerns are legitimate. But these seekers do, if nothing else, have a prophetic voice. And it seems we are still not hearing what it speaks: why else would it need repeating so much?

Conclusion

The story of Christian Perfection and its various adaptations at the hands of so many people reveals a longing that many Christians still have. This longing is expressed in the increasing popularity of such courses as Neil Anderson and Steve Goss's *Freedom in Christ* course. This course is filled with positive affirmations and encouragements to believe the truth so that the truth will set one free from never-ending sin-confess-cycles; as such, *Freedom in Christ* echoes exactly the longings expressed at the beginnings of the Keswick movement: the conviction that a prevailing victory over sin must be possible. 'Forgiveness did not satisfy me, I wanted the dominion of sin destroyed', says Boardman.

Further, the sheer number of peo-

89 <http://www.thenewmystics.com/Groups/1000036024/Home_Page_of.aspx> [accessed 23 July 2013].

ple that, since John Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, have, at one time or another, been part of movements reaching out for just such a breakthrough as this, encourages us to believe that perhaps they were onto something. Paul himself writes with complete assurance: 'Walk in the Spirit and you shall not gratify the desires of the flesh.' Paul was completely confident that believers can 'reckon' themselves to be 'dead indeed to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus', and that 'sin shall not have dominion over you'.

However flawed his doctrine of Christian Perfection may have been, Wesley's way of salvation signposts us to a hope that countless others have also glimpsed. The hope is this: victory is possible.