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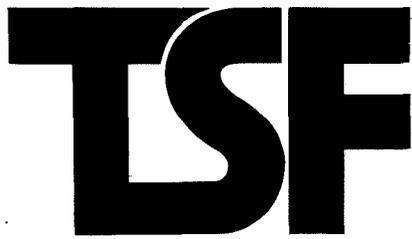
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# BULLETIN

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mentalist perspectives alien to an earlier diversity of the pentecostal movement, it is equally evident that any scholarly hopes for the future of theology in pentecostal churches must rely on a selective avocation of certain elements while questioning others which can be found in the same formative period. Pentecostal scholars, like Robeck who himself relied heavily on S. Terriens' recent *The Elusive Presence*, are becoming increasingly aware of the need to draw upon the widest range of contemporary social scientific and theological resources for a continuing dialogue and constructive interpretation of the past.

The business meetings picked up this same issue in the question of how pentecostals and charismatics should relate to the subject of Christian unity and to invitations for ecumenical dialogue. On the one hand, pentecostal/charismatic leaders, including David du Plessis, who has regularly participated in a set of dialogues with Roman Catholics sponsored by the Vatican, strongly urged the election or appointment of liaisons from the Society to those meetings. Their concern focused on the need for some official pentecostal/charismatic sanction to be given to these conversations. On the other hand, in letters to the SPS, Brother Jeffrey Gros, Executive Director of the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Christian Churches (NCC) also invited the Society to appoint a liaison for dialogue within the Commission. Since the Commission on Faith and Order includes regular participants from non-NCC member denominations (e.g., Missouri Synod Lutheran Churches, Southern Baptists, *et al.*), such a link between the SPS and the Commission need not imply any formal ties with the NCC.

While no substantive objections were raised from the floor to either of these invitations, Russell Spittler, the Secretary-Treasurer, questioned whether making such appointments by the Society might "politicize" it and, thereby, jeopardize its nature as principally an academic group. Gerald Sheppard argued that the society was already politicized by the requirement that full members agree to a Statement of Purpose of the World Pentecostal Fellowship. As a way out of these difficulties, Vinson Synan, a well-known pentecostal historian, suggested informally to members of the executive committee that the Society might find a different rationale in the concern of the Statement of Purpose for a witness to other groups regarding the pentecostal faith, perhaps facilitated through a commission from the Society. Though this issue will likely require further consideration at the next annual meeting, the Society voted unanimously:

To encourage ecumenical dialogue by members of the society, including participation of members in dialogues, such as that arranged by the Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue and the Commission on Faith and Order of the (U.S.) National Council of Christian Churches.

The keynote banquet speaker was C. Eric Lincoln who sought to circumscribe in social scientific terms the nature of "Cultism in the Church." The paper was full of insight without solving some persistent problems of definition. Respondents generally recognized that terms like "church" and "cult," or "church" and "sect," may contain necessary distinctions though they are dependent on highly eclectic judgments. For that reason, primarily social scientific treatments are as vulnerable as theological assessments to misinterpretation based on the observer's social and cultural prejudices.

Among other papers were R. M. Anderson's "The Vision of the Disinherited Revisited," Jay Beaman's "Pacifism and the World View of Early Pentecostalism," G. M. Burge's "Problems in Healing Ministries within the Charismatic Context," Murray Dempster's "Soundings in the Moral Significance of Glossolalia," Gordon Fee's "Some Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, With Some Further Reflection on the Hermeneutics of *Ad Hoc* Documents," Nancy Hardesty's "Holiness is Power: The Pentecostal Argument for Women's Ministry," Paul K. Jewett's "The Ordination of Women," Robert K. Johnston's "The Use of the Bible in Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology," Gerald T. Sheppard's "Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship," and John C. Thomas's "Discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels."

Following Professor William Menzies' resignation, the executive committee of the SPS appointed Cecil M. Robeck as the new editor of the Society's bi-annual journal, *Pneuma*.

## Wesleyan Theological Society

by Donald W. Dayton

A new air of self-confidence and new questions were in the air as some 200 members of the Wesleyan Theological Society gathered at the Anderson (Indiana) School of Theology for the nineteenth annual meeting, November 4-5, 1983. Observers commented on the high level of papers and innovative programming while the members began to take up hard questions about the relationship of the society to other groups and movements.

The program featured a double session on "Restorationism as a Motif in Wesleyan Thought"—a topic chosen in part because of the location of the meeting on the campus of Anderson College, at the headquarters of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), a restorationist movement within the Wesleyan tradition. The session featured a summary of a recent dissertation by Luke Keefer, Jr., of Messiah College on the theme of "John Wesley, Disciple of Early Christianity." In part reflecting issues troubling his own denomination, the Brethren in Christ, with its affinities to both the Wesleyan and Anabaptist traditions, Keefer struggled with whether Wesley fits more appropriately among the magisterial "reformation" figures or among the more radical "restitutionists" in his vision and strategy for church renewal, arguing that he stood somewhere in between but would have to be assigned to the latter category if a choice had to be made.

The session then featured three responders with recent dissertations in the area. Free Methodist Howard Snyder, author of the recent Inter-Varsity Press volume on *The Radical Wesley* and several books on church renewal, basically agreed but placed greater emphasis on the ecclesiological rather than the soteriological character of Wesley's thought. Wesleyan Clarence Bence of Marion College challenged the "primitivistic" orientation of other responders and argued that the "eschatological kingdom" was the determinative motif in Wesley's thought. Merle Strege, young professor of historical theology at Anderson School of Theology, dealt with the question from the viewpoint of the Church of God and their ambivalent attitude toward Wesley, having been deeply influenced by Wesleyan soteriology but having major reservations about Wesleyan ecclesiology.

After a brief break the society reconvened to another experiment in format when John Howard Yoder, prominent Mennonite scholar, was invited to open up the plenary discussions as an outside guest. Yoder applied his formidable skills at theological analysis to the discussion, raising questions about the usefulness and clarity of the concept of "primitivism," about the difficulties of working helpfully with a figure like Wesley (or Luther or Calvin or whomever) and how to relate to such a "theological canon" in a creative way without falling to a slavish "hagiography," and opening up other angles of access to the questions being discussed.

Other papers at the meeting tended to pick up issues from earlier years. A continuing theme in Wesleyan Theological Society discussions has been the extent to which Wesleyan theology should be articulated in the style of the more "Reformed" theologies that dominate the evangelical world. This question had come to a head with a paper by Free Methodist Stanley Johnson of Western Evangelical Seminary that gave a more "catholic" reading to Wesley by emphasizing the theme of the "love for God." This had led to a call for a study of the atonement from a Wesleyan perspective, and R. Larry Shelton, Director of the School of Religion of Seattle Pacific University, responded with a paper interpreting the atonement from the concept of "covenant" and inter-personal categories and over against the "juridical, penal, and legal" metaphors of other traditions.

Johns Hopkins professor Timothy L. Smith of the Church of the Nazarene presented another in a series of reports of his recent research into the classical figures of the eighteenth century "evangelical revival" in England. This paper consisted of a study of the relationship between John Wesley and the more Calvinistically-oriented George Whitefield. Smith expressed surprise at the common themes that he found, especially in their understandings of the "new birth," biblical authority, and evangelism, and argued that the splits that occurred were later developments.

Albert Truesdale, professor of philosophy of religion at the Nazarene Theological Seminary, presented a paper on the extent to which

the concept of "systemic evil" was consistent with the Wesleyan tradition with its emphasis on personal holiness. He admitted some tension but argued that Wesleyan thought had resources that could be brought to bear on the question: a view of cosmic salvation that included redemption of the social order, the understanding of "social holiness" and the history of social concern in the Wesleyan tradition, and related anthropological and soteriological themes.

Wesleyan David Thompson, who recently left an Old Testament position at Asbury Theological Seminary to return to the pastorate, brought the discussions down to earth with a charming and well received presidential address on "reflections for over-serious theologians" that spoke to recent controversies in the society. Thompson appropriated from the history of science the idea of a "paradigm shift" and argued that the society had been experiencing such in recent controversies about how to articulate the distinctively Wesleyan doctrine of "entire sanctification." He used the analogy to suggest why it is difficult to communicate in the midst of shifts and to assure the various parties of the good intentions of their critics.

Business was more extensive than has been usual at the meetings. There had been continuing discussions about how the Society should be related to other theological currents and movements. The society had been independently founded but accepted a decade or so ago "commission status" and formal relationship with the Christian Holiness Association (CHA), the interdenominational co-ordinating body that serves Wesleyan churches in a way that the National Association of Evangelicals serves the more evangelically-oriented churches and groups. At issue was whether the work of the society should be limited to this arena or whether a broader agenda was intended.

These questions were not resolved. A step toward greater interaction with the larger Methodist bodies was symbolized by the acceptance of an invitation from Emory University to meet next year in Atlanta for a joint celebration of the bicentennial of American Methodism and the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Wesleyan Theological Society. Along the same line, an executive committee recommendation was passed without floor discussion to send a liaison representative to the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ. A recommendation to adopt the CHA article of faith to bring the two organizations under a common statement, however, failed, but largely over editorial reasons. Concern for more long range program planning led to proposals to elect the president and program chairman two years in advance. This will be worked out concretely next year. Larry Shelton of Seattle Pacific University is the new president-elect.

## Context and Hermeneutics in the Americas

by Mark Lau Branson

From the start, TSF has taken as a given that the church in any particular country does not exist in isolation from the churches of other peoples. While too often North American Christians still operate under the assumption that churches in other (non-European) nations are "mission churches," we must learn new ways to support and learn from the indigenous churches which God has built elsewhere. Understanding must flow both ways.

Early in the life of *TSF Bulletin* the editors decided that, in light of limitations, we should concentrate on one other major group of nations—Latin America, our closest neighbors. We have therefore featured articles on theology, ministry and the cultural context in those nations. As a sideline, we have also looked at issues affecting Hispanic Americans in the North. Several articles have been provided by members of the Latin American Theological Fraternity, a professional society of evangelical theologians from many nations who are concerned with issues facing Hispanic churches in the Americas. The LATF has held over 200 conferences and seminars

during the 10 years of its existence. They publish journals in Spanish, Portuguese and English. They work toward improving theological education in Latin America. In light of these concerns, it seemed appropriate for TSF to explore cooperative activities. During Urbana '81, the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship Missions Convention, TSF's seminars on the church in Latin America included a major presentation by Dr. Pedro Savage, the Coordinator of LATF ("Doing Theology in a Latin American Context," *TSF Bulletin*, March/April, 1982). Our conversations at that time paved the way for a co-sponsored conference on biblical hermeneutics.

How does a church's cultural context affect its interpreting of the Bible? What impact does this have on basic theological concepts like christology, soteriology and ecclesiology? How can such culturally-conditioned insights be a strength not only for that church, but also for churches in other contexts? What dangers exist in contextual hermeneutics? What checks can be helpful? These and many other issues set the stage for a five-day working conference called "Context and Hermeneutics in the Americas," held near Cuernavaca, Mexico during November. Papers on major theological issues were provided by Samuel Escobar, Gerald Sheppard, Clark Pinnock, Rene Padilla and David Lowes Watson. Respondents included Linda Mercadante, George Cummings, Emilio Nunez, John Howard Yoder, Orlando Costas, J. Deotis Roberts, John Stam and Douglas Webster. The thirty participants were also active in one of five Bible study groups, working with passages in Exodus, Isaiah, Luke (the Magnificat), I Corinthians and Galatians. In addition to the times for presentations and discussions, singing often helped us worship together, and a Sunday was spent in churches throughout Mexico City. J. Deotis Roberts provided a closing sermon.

As the sessions progressed, it became obvious that the larger issues could not receive definitive treatment prior to further clarification of cultural issues. We needed to work for a better understanding of our own cultural baggage. And because the conference was a multi-, rather than a bi-cultural event, the process was at once more complicated and more profound. The normal process of this understanding, of self-definition, involves explaining oneself "over against" another group. With numerous groups represented (Black, Hispanic, Amerindian, Asian-American, pentecostal, women, mainline evangelical, etc.), numerous distinctions were necessary. Each of these contexts offers a different perspective on the world and on the gospel. But, in order to make those distinctions, one had to acquire a sufficient understanding of one's own culture and that of the others. Stereotypes fell rapidly as several facts became obvious: there are more than two cultures in the Americas; none of the cultures has a monopoly on either radical or conservative politics/economics; women, while under-represented in the North, were unrepresented from the South; theologians attending the conference were all middle-class (and now that is common knowledge); "evangelicals" from the North are not necessarily involved in the mainstream of American Evangelicalism; liberation theologies vary depending on roots (e.g., Europe, Africa, South America, North America) and occupation of the theologian (e.g., pastor, academic theologian, bureaucrat); power struggles within American Evangelicalism affect hermeneutics; paternalism from earlier missionary relationships is still present in many church and para-church structures.

As preconceptions gave way to new information concerning Latin American realities, TSF delegates also gained a new respect for their Latin colleagues. Many of them are active as both pastors and professors. They, more than the majority of the U.S. and Canada participants, are ministering in situations immersed in poverty and tried by the frustrations of revolutionary situations. Their theological abilities have been strengthened by years of corroborating, arguing, writing, responding, worshipping, praying and fellowshiping. Their differences are sharp at times, but their unity is also remarkable.

As discussions explored papers and cultural issues, it became clear that we would not issue a consensus document on hermeneutics. We were only beginning to grasp relevant concerns, and could not hope to offer much in the way of guidelines for others. Instead, under the leadership of Rene Padilla, we spent the closing days focusing on those topics which seemed most crucial in light of our discoveries. When the conversation turned to practical needs, a unique