

REVIEW: TREDOUX, JOHAN. *MILDRED BANGS WYNKOOP:
HER LIFE AND HER THOUGHT.*

(Foreword by Thomas A. Noble. Kansas City, Mo.: The Foundry Publishing, 2017)
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The book, *Mildred Bangs Wynkoop: Her Life and Her Thought*, is based upon Tredoux's Ph.D. thesis which was entitled "Holiness as Love: An Analysis of Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's Interpretation of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Holiness." The aim of the book is "to examine the extent to which Wynkoop's version of Wesleyan theology of Christian holiness was a faithful, twentieth-century reinterpretation of John Wesley's doctrine of sanctification" (231).

Dr. Wynkoop (1905-1997) was an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene who served as an evangelist, missionary, professor, and theologian. Tredoux traces her life in chapter one citing her early background in the denomination, and the influence of H. Orton Wiley during her college years and beyond. In the all-too-brief section on her lifetime work, he traces her travels and ministry with her husband who was an evangelist and pastor, her teaching career at Western Evangelical Theological Seminary, and her five-year service in Japan as a theological educator (25). Upon her return to the United States, she served as a professor at what is now Trevecca Nazarene University and as a theologian-in-residence at Nazarene Theological Seminary (hereafter, NTS).

In chapter 2, "Wynkoop's Journey Toward a Theology of Love," Tredoux traces Wynkoop's theological development toward and beyond the publication of her magnum opus, *A Theology of Love* in 1972. Tredoux discusses the doctrine of entire sanctification within the American Holiness Movement as a divergence from Wesley's understanding of sanctification, focusing on three theologians of the period: Charles G. Finney, Asa Mahan, and Phoebe Palmer. Wynkoop addressed "the credibility gap" which was, in her view, an abstraction between American holiness theology and the dynamic of the holy life (33). "Narrow provincialisms," as Wynkoop called them, appeared in the form of a sharp "distinction between justification and sanctification," an overemphasis on emotions, and a lack of application in preaching (35). Wynkoop, as Tredoux indicates, experienced the credibility gap as she travelled and ministered with her husband, Ralph (170). The author relates some of Wynkoop's angst as this gap arose between the theology of the preachers in the holiness movement and the lives of their hearers. Such "provincialisms" set Wynkoop on a search for authenticity and eventually resulted in the development of a relational theology of Christian holiness which she developed principally on Japanese soil in an unpublished, typescript work which was entitled "A Theology of Depth." Tredoux analyses this work to reveal nuances to Wynkoop's thought which were hitherto not examined. *A Theology of Love* was the final published product of Wynkoop's search.

In chapter 3, Tredoux address “The Role of Scripture in Wynkoop’s Theology.” He announces from the outset that Wynkoop’s hermeneutic was a “quest for an existential interpretation of sanctification” (47). He traces the approaches to Scripture in the history of Christian thought and stresses Wynkoop’s distaste for fundamentalism, shaped by the influence of H. Orton Wiley (59f.). In discussing the sufficiency of Scripture, Tredoux is largely dependent upon the work of Paul Bassett, a former professor at NTS, and sometimes conflates Wynkoop with her colleagues (or Bassett) at NTS (68, 69). In addition, Tredoux cites Wynkoop stressing that the Bible “is a book of experiences. ... The language of the Bible is the language of experience” (74). For Wynkoop, the critical point was not on the text of Scripture but that Christ was and is *the* Living Word.

“Wynkoop’s Theological Anthropology” is the title of Tredoux’s fourth chapter. At the heart of this chapter is the argument that Wynkoop’s anthropology reflected the anthropology of the Eastern Fathers of the Church rather than a Western perspective. Relying on Wynkoop’s 1952 master’s thesis from Western Evangelical Seminary entitled, “The Biblical Study of Man in His Relationship to the Image of God,” Tredoux argues that she took a more Hebraic view of humanity and through a word study of the words “image” and “likeness” came to the following conclusions: 1) “...she believed that a sufficient case could be made from a biblical standpoint to distinguish between ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ in reference to man’s relationship with God;” 2) “...it is not accurate or even scriptural, to speak of an image lost or defaced as a result of the fall” (84). In arguing thus, Wynkoop was at variance with the Reformers and with John Wesley who held “to a partial restoration of faculties” of infralapsarian humanity (94). Tredoux finds Wynkoop to align her anthropology more closely with that of Irenaeus than with that of Wesley. He acknowledges that Wynkoop’s theological anthropology is not addressed in her later writings and relies chiefly on her unpublished master’s thesis to expose the presuppositions of her anthropology.

In “Divine-Human Interaction,” Tredoux discusses the three theological shifts in American Methodism: 1) “from revelation to reason;” 2) “from sinful man to moral man;” and 3) “from free grace to free will” (119). He then analyses Wynkoop’s thought in light of the latter two shifts. Wynkoop held that while human beings have the capacity to respond, “the enabling power of God’s grace” makes it possible. Challenges “to endorse human native ability as a basis for divine-human interaction” (128) came from both within the holiness movement in the theology of A.M. Hills and from the field of religious philosophy in the school of Boston personalism. Tredoux acknowledges a few similarities between Boston personalism and Wynkoop’s thought, but ultimately, he concludes that Wynkoop’s concept of personhood retained a “Hebraic, biblical lens” (144). Tredoux addresses the shift “from free grace to free will,” and though he concludes the chapter by saying, “Wynkoop did not participate in the shift from ‘sinful man to moral man,’” the chapter does not substantiate well this claim since the doctrine of sin is not given sufficient treatment in this chapter.

The title of the last (and a rather lengthy) chapter is “Wynkoop’s Soteriology.” In this chapter, Tredoux attempts to establish a correspondence between Wynkoop and Wesley, “...to see particularly how far her theology of the Christian life was an authentic, twentieth-century development of the theology of John Wesley” (157). While the soteriologies of both theologians are teleological in orientation, Tredoux holds that “...Wesley’s teleology originates in the fall, Wynkoop’s teleology originates in creation” (157). However, Wesley’s doctrine of Christian

perfection originates *in God* who actively redeems humanity against the backdrop of the fall because, according to this reviewer, Wesley wants to preserve the idea of the glory of God who overcomes the pessimism of sin with the optimism of grace. The author discusses in uncharacteristic order four terms in this chapter: faith, sanctification, sin, and love; he attempts to demonstrate the correlation between Wesley and Wynkoop on each of these points. Faith entails obedience because it expresses itself in love. Sanctification is Christocentric, relational, and teleological. In Wynkoop's thought, sin should not be considered as an abstract concept or a substance but must be understood as a relational category (196). She tended to define sin not with metaphysical, impersonal, or ontological categories but with moral and relational categories (200). For Wynkoop, sin is "not deeper down or further back;" that is, sin is not in the realm of the subconsciousness: "She believed that Scripture kept the depravity of sin within the responsible capacity of human beings as they respond to the atoning provisions of the blood of Christ" (206). Love, perfect love, was, for Wynkoop, "the essence of Christian perfection" (208). Tredoux quotes from Wynkoop the following: "'Sin is love locked into a false center, the self. ...Holiness is love locked into the true center, Jesus Christ our Lord'" (217).

Obviously, Tredoux has a significant interest in the theology of Mildred Bangs Wynkoop; however, readers initially may be unaware that the reason for his interest lies in his family history. His father, Rev. Gideon Tredoux, came under Wynkoop's influence, imbibed her theology at NTS, and returned to South Africa to teach at Nazarene Theological College in Johannesburg. He began using Wynkoop's *A Theology of Love* as a textbook, was censured for doing so, and asked to defend his position before a district advisory board meeting (139-40, fn. 115). The current book, dedicated to the author's parents, may appear to some to be an attempt to clear the reputation of Wynkoop and his father. With this kind of baggage, does Tredoux reflect biases? Tredoux wants to depict Wynkoop as a theologian who drew her understanding of Christian holiness from "her existential reading of Scripture" (231) and to distance her thought from any philosophical moorings in Bostonian personalism (139f.) and process thought (222), all of which presumably provides greater acceptance of her theology. While Tredoux acknowledges the influence of the existentialism of Martin Buber (and Martin Heidegger?) upon Wynkoop (147, 236), he doesn't engage in an in-depth analysis of existentialism upon her thought. Further, in the conclusion of his book, Tredoux summarizes, "...while Wynkoop explored concepts and methods from twentieth-century thought, she presented a valid interpretation of John Wesley's theology of sanctification" (234). However, Tredoux previously had acknowledged "fundamental differences" between Wynkoop and Wesley (94) with the distinction that she made between image and likeness (a distinction that Wesley did not make). If "fundamental differences" are acknowledged, one wonders how "valid" (and especially how faithful) Wynkoop's interpretation of Wesley really is. The principle "fundamental difference" is reflected in the following summary: "...Wesley would lean toward *partially restored* faculties and Wynkoop toward faculties remaining *fully intact* after the fall..." (221, emphasis in the original).

From the above statement, it appears that Wynkoop did not take the fall as seriously as did Wesley himself. In an effort to give due glory to God as their Calvinist counterparts in the Minute Controversy of the 1770s, Wesley and Fletcher posited a doctrine of general justification which was based particularly upon Romans 5:17-8 and aligned closely to the doctrine of prevenient grace in order to demonstrate that they were only a "hair's breadth" from the Calvinist tradition. The doctrines of general justification and prevenient grace address the

intervention and accommodation of God *within history* to restore humanity, and these doctrines preserve, in their minds, the glory of God. While Wynkoop “viewed,” according to Tredoux, “fallen humanity as an abstraction never encountered [in history]” (201), the early Methodists conceived the fallenness of humanity as evident because they saw proof of it in the lives of those who reject the grace of God, and the divine intervention in history through general justification substantiated the depth of human fallenness. Thus, Wynkoop’s theology, as depicted by Tredoux through her unpublished writings, doesn’t seem to take seriously enough the proclivity and propensity to sin. For this reason, the present reviewer agrees with Tredoux’s comment that there were “fundamental differences” between Wynkoop and Wesley rather than his later assertion that Wynkoop reflects a “valid” twentieth-century interpretation of Wesley. Does this mean that one must adopt a substantive, metaphysical, or impersonal categories of sin? No, the published Wynkoop offers, in the opinion of this reviewer, a substantive corrective to holiness theology and provides a way to conceptualize sin and its remedy in relational categories. Even “original sin,” a term which Wynkoop avoided, can be conceived relationally.

If Wynkoop is known at all, she is known principally for her work, *A Theology of Love*. However, Tredoux has done the arduous work of sorting through the archives, and he provides for his readers a much broader picture of his subject through the use of her other published writings, unpublished writings, and letters. Tredoux is to be commended for a well-researched and readable study of Wynkoop’s thought. His work is invaluable for one who seeks to understand the theological currents within the Wesleyan-holiness movement of this theologian whose thought was influential and shaped the doctrine of sanctification within the Church of the Nazarene. Tredoux provides his readers with a compelling and provocative treatment of Wynkoop’s theology of sanctification – a work as provocative as the writings of his principal subject. His work is a good example of historical theology, but it may lead some who appreciate the published Wynkoop to depreciate the “warts-and-all” Wynkoop.