

## KEY TENETS OF WYNKOOP'S: *A THEOLOGY OF LOVE*

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### *Introduction*

I was born and raised as a Nazarene PK during apartheid-era South Africa. My Father's friendship with Mildred Wynkoop began in 1975 when my father sold everything he owned to make it possible to study at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, during the years 1975-1977. At that time, Wynkoop was the theologian in residence at NTS. Crossing paths with Wynkoop's teaching became a pivotal moment in the history of the Tredoux family. Wynkoop not only impacted my father but my life as well. My father introduced me to Wynkoop in 1980 during the time of the General Assembly, which was held in Kansas City. One evening Mildred and her husband Ralph invited us for dinner. It was a delight to meet her. I recall a gracious and humble lady who was very present in the moment. Had I known that I would spend six years researching her life, I would have asked her many questions.

It was years later that I spent one year, every Friday going through boxes and boxes of her unpublished work in the Wynkoop collection at the Nazarene Archives. I was like a kid in a toy store... much of her handwriting was small and written on fragile paper. When I think of this giant in the classroom, one of the great ironies of Wynkoop's life was her traumatic experience of going to school for the first time. At age six, her first-grade experience was so terrifying to her, that her mother brought her home and home-schooled her for two years. She carried this scar with her for the rest of her life, as she frequently pointed to her life-long reluctance to meet with unfamiliar people. She was not always understood in the Holiness Movement, this made it hard for her as she felt that she was always swimming upstream.

### *Holiness is Existential*

Wynkoop said: "Christian life is not as simple as Christian theology. The moment clean-cut theological conformations are laid against warm, flesh-and-blood human situations, the lack of simplicity begins to show up. Theology is much like a signpost pointing the way into and through the very rugged country over which a Christian must travel—on foot."<sup>1</sup> As you can tell, Wynkoop's street theology was all about recovering the dynamic life from which our theological words came. Even though Wynkoop used "existential"<sup>2</sup> in a very broad and general sense, this term became useful for her, as it enabled her to give voice to the credibility gap she observed. Most of Wynkoop's writing is the result of a lifelong attempt to answer the practical problems arising from the tension between doctrine and life. This quest became a scholarly venture resulting in a 300-page, mimeographed book titled "An Existential Interpretation of the Doctrine of Holiness," which later was expanded into the 430-page monograph "A Theology of Depth." Two-thirds of this work eventually became her published work called *A Theology of Love*. She wanted to theologize on a down-to-earth level, which to her meant the dynamic, empirical, historical, or personal approach. That's where she saw the greatest need.

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<sup>1</sup> Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, "Theology of Depth," Wynkoop Collection (Hereafter referred to as WC) File 1431-15, 5.

<sup>2</sup> By the word "existential," Wynkoop seeks to emphasize the essential, vital involvement of a person in his or her theological affirmations. It is Christian truth incarnate in the dynamic flow of everyday, ordinary, human life. Wynkoop strongly rejects the stereotypical abstract ideas that ignore the unique situated-ness of human life.

A particular methodology took shape in the progression of Wynkoop's thought as she moved from her 180-page master's degree on the imago Dei, completed in 1952, to her doctoral degree on biblical interpretation, completed in 1955, and finally culminating in "A Theology of Depth," written in 1958. By the time she wrote *A Theology of Love* in 1972, (during her time in Japan) she was able to incorporate the thought of John Wesley as well as other contemporary relational views as an expression of where she was at that point. What is interesting is that she left out two chapters on the Holy Spirit in "A Theology of Depth" (written in 1958) from her main work *A Theology of Love*.

What is obvious is that she decided not to take the route of the "absolutes." She struggled to come up with a title for this book. At first, she thought she would call it "A Pre-Theology Prolegomena," but her ongoing openness to Wesley's thought suggested that "love" should be the key concept to relate theology and life. She then thought about the title "Toward a Theology of Love," but the publishers did not want tentatives, so eventually she landed on the title "A Theology of Love."

It is then important to note that her work was not a systematic theology, but rather an expression of her keen interest to understand the human side of humanity's involvement in God's grace. What was at the forefront of Wynkoop's passion was to make sure that the moral and rational interaction between God and humanity is accounted for, especially moral responsibility. It was her understanding of human beings' capacity to engage themselves as whole persons in theology that challenged her to look for a hermeneutic, a principle of interpretation, by which she could unpack this problem and search for a way to bridge the gap between doctrine and life. She found this critical principle to be the role of the "moral" in the interrelatedness of God and humanity. The moral to her meant that it must be personal, embodied and embedded in fellowship, and structured by love. Love is to her the personalizing of moral integrity. In line with Kierkegaard, she would say... moral is single-heartedness by its very definition, and single-heartedness is love. Her work can then be seen as an attempt to funnel the whole range of theological truths into the range of the whole person.

### *On the Credibility Gap*

She called this dualism between idea and life the "holiness credibility gap," and thought this to be one of the greatest problems faced by the theology of the holiness movement. She observed that theological concepts and terms had been abstracted from dynamic living situations, which were caught up in the words. She remembered people being surrounded at the mourner's bench by people shouting slogans like "pray loud," "lift your head," "take it by faith" and "are you willing to be a missionary?" This reification of the experience of entire sanctification confronted Wynkoop squarely in the spiritual challenges she faced as a young evangelist's wife and a preacher herself. She said: "Words may be bridges from God's truth to life. But a bridge must touch two shores, not end up in the air somewhere. We need our words, but we need them, too, baptized with the dynamics of life; and may I say, the vibrant life of the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

Some of the theological concepts Wynkoop inherited as a "second-generation" evangelist in the American Holiness Movement, used terms like "sanctification," "the blessing," "entire sanctification," "cleansing," and "baptism with the Holy Spirit." These terms were emotionally

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<sup>3</sup> Wynkoop, "Some Implications of the Existential Doctrine of Holiness." (Article, n.d.) WC., File 1432-7, 3.

loaded as they described the religious experiences, values, and sacred memories of the previous generations.

Time and time again she placed what was known as the “unknown bundle” on the altar. Her journey to the altar went on for several years, every time seeking that which she already professed, that she was saved and sanctified and going all the way. She had a page in her Bible on which she entered the dates and the places that she went to the altar to seek entire sanctification. She wanted to be able to testify the day she was sanctified, but she had so many entries that she could never decide which one of them to use at any given time. At last count, she had forty entries in her Bible when, one day in humiliation, she tore that page out of her Bible and destroyed it. This preoccupation with the when and the how—essentially ceremonial holiness—did not deal with the content of holiness in her heart.<sup>4</sup>

This action signaled a real turning point in her life. She met some Episcopalians who were in the grip of a spiritual awakening through the Oxford Group. She attended the group meetings and heard doctors and bricklayers and housewives share with complete frankness and the complete absence of any stereotypical expressions of the problems they were facing and the change that Christ wrought. This period in her life was the beginning of a new quality of Christian experience for Wynkoop. It was this dynamic immersion into real-life experiences that helped her to make sense of what holiness was all about.<sup>5</sup>

For her, the Hebrew connotation of ‘Word’ as personal must prevail over the more static and formalized and abstract Hellenistic concepts.”<sup>6</sup> What Wynkoop realized was that she was swimming upstream in a Hellenistic world where the universal ideas or “numina” were more real than the down-to-earth “phenomena,” of people’s everyday experiences. In many ways, these presuppositions formed the backdrop for *A Theology of Love*.

### *On Scripture*

One of the ways Wynkoop sought to overcome this credibility gap was through her existential reading of Scripture. It began to dawn on her that one of the ways to overcome the credibility gap was to stay with the language of Scripture. By this, she meant that it was the recovery of the existential meaning of the scriptural words, not just the theological use of the words. From her own life experience and through the recognition of her underlying presuppositions, Wynkoop realized that the Bible, properly used, could become a bridge to life, involvement, relevance, and to holiness. This was a critical factor in her desire to respond to the static presuppositions of her tradition which presented holiness as the arrival at a state of grace.

This revelation opened a brand-new world for Wynkoop in the classroom and on the road as an evangelist. She would encourage preachers to take a text and look behind the words to find the human situation to which the words were addressed.<sup>7</sup> In other words, for her, history is important, and the context is as important to the message as the words.<sup>8</sup> Wynkoop wrote, “The human element in the Bible to which the divine speaks is the common life-blood that keeps the divine meaningful to all who partake of life. The *story* is the flesh around the idea. It preserves

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<sup>4</sup> Wynkoop, “What Holiness Means to Me,” WC., File 2227-14, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Wynkoop, “The Word Became Flesh,” WC., File 1425-21, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Wynkoop, “Theology of Depth.” (Monograph, 1958) WC., File 1431-15, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the idea from becoming so detached and irrelevant and intellectualized that it loses all contact with reality. It saves justification and sanctification from abstraction.”<sup>9</sup>

Through her own experiences, she encountered the dark world of legalism which happens when words become sacred.<sup>10</sup> This legalism especially manifested itself in the way that women, called into ministry, were treated. Wynkoop was not a stranger to this pain as she recalls her calling to preach. She says: "The consciousness of being destined to preach was as clear and urgent as life itself and yet I did not feel free to discuss this with anyone."<sup>11</sup>

What Wynkoop thought she experienced was the disconnect that happens when the written word is substituted for the Living Word. In the final analysis, Wynkoop considered Fundamentalism to be defective in several ways.

- First, she felt that Fundamentalists were not able to stay on the orthodox path because they tended to make peripheral truths central.
- Secondly, for her, Fundamentalists were authoritarian, arrogant, and schismatic in spirit.
- Thirdly, she considered those adhering to Fundamentalism to be reactionary, especially in the way that they rejected all science and were unwilling to investigate their convictions.
- And last, but not least, Wynkoop felt that Fundamentalism needed enemies to fight to justify its existence.

Wynkoop was unable to separate the divine from the fallible human element in the Bible. For her, the human element was inspired as well, since the divine speaks through the cultural context and keeps it relevant for all ages. Her use of Scripture brings her once again to a place of moral relevancy. Talking about preaching God's Word, she said: "It was made for life, it must remain in life."<sup>12</sup>

### *Holiness is Relational*

One of the joys of my research was going through her 180-page Master's thesis: "The Biblical Study of Man in his Relationship to the Image of God." Along with her doctoral thesis on biblical interpretation, this work became a significant part of the building blocks used to formulate *A Theology of Depth*, and then later *A Theology of Love*.

Throughout Wynkoop's existential interpretation of holiness, she gave great priority to the study of the doctrine of humanity. She realized that the role she gave to humanity would determine, to a large extent, the nature of the theology she confessed. From early in life, Wynkoop showed interest in the practical matter of understanding how sanctification can be faithfully lived out in real life, especially since Wesleyan theology presented sanctification as a "possibility in this life."<sup>13</sup> She felt that when human nature was viewed as an enemy to be

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>10</sup> Wynkoop, "A Historical and Semantic Analysis of Methods of Biblical Interpretation as they Relate to Views of Inspiration." (Th.D. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1955.) WC., File 1237-27, 139.

<sup>11</sup> Wynkoop, "Birth and Marriage," (Article, n.d.) WC., File 1427-4, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Wynkoop, "A Theology of Depth," WC., File 1431-15, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Wynkoop, "Holiness Theology and Moral Development" (Article 1978), WC., File 1425-21, 1.

conquered, this idea had a profound impact on the expectation of existential holiness for everyday life.<sup>14</sup>

Wynkoop's relational filter is a strong presupposition in her theology of holiness. This is evident in the way she carefully protected the unity of the person in contrast with Platonist views that were prone to uphold a speculative dichotomy, dividing body and soul as separate parts of a person. It was important to Wynkoop to describe a person in terms of what he or she is as a whole. In other words, heart, mind, soul, spirit, conscience, flesh, and body are not distinguishable parts that a person *has* but, rather, a description of what a person *is*.<sup>15</sup> In Wynkoop's world, the trichotomous view of a human being as body, soul, and spirit must give way to the more biblical view of a human being as a unified personality.

Wynkoop wrote a thirty-page booklet called *John Wesley: Christian Revolutionary*, with a major portion of this booklet dedicated to an exploration of Romans 12:1. Paul's exhortation that we are to "present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice" (NRSV) in her mind confirms this holistic perspective. She said, "When one commits his body to something, the rest of what man is tags along pretty faithfully... The body is the locus of 'me'—you."<sup>16</sup> In response to Gnosticism Wynkoop here affirms the apostle Paul's high view of the human body. She wrote: "The highest offering we can make is the very body that the pagan philosophies considered to be the least valuable and the least object of God's interest and the least capable of the sanctification that Paul is talking about."<sup>17</sup> This presuppositional stance in her theological anthropology is a key anchor point in her understanding of the relational nature of holiness. When a human being acts, he or she acts as a unity. It is the whole person who acts.

Given Wynkoop's passion to close the credibility gap between creed and life, it is not a surprise to see her drawn to John Wesley. What she experienced in the American holiness movement was an emphasis on sanctification that she concluded had become a transaction of human achievement rather than a reliance on Christ. Obtaining sanctification was the result of an elaborate and rigidly structured "how to" recipe. In contrast, Wynkoop saw in Wesley a dynamic Christological, relational, teleological, and socially oriented understanding of sanctification.<sup>18</sup> In "A Hermeneutical Approach to Wesley," Wynkoop focused on Wesley's ability to relate God's grace to human experience, especially the practical way in which sanctification is played out in ordinary people's lives. She wrote:

Wesley's profound and dynamic religious insight was the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. This Power was a real, Spiritual Energy linking the divine reality to human experience. It was the Personness of God touching the personness of men. It was an actual moral transformation of human life. It engaged all that the human person is in grace. It put the individual believer into the Church, the corporate fellowship. It put the Church amid society with a task to do in transforming the world in which men find themselves. The lure of Wesley is not primarily his theology. That was traditional

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<sup>14</sup> Wynkoop, "Protestant Theology and the Imago Dei" (Article, n.d.), WC., File 1432-7, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972, 122.

<sup>16</sup> Wynkoop, *John Wesley: Christian Revolutionary*, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1970, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Wynkoop, "Look Out, Our Presuppositions are Showing." (Article, n.d.) WC., File 1426-2, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Wynkoop, "The Foundations of a Theology of Love." (Monograph, 1975) WC., File 2227- 11, 9.

enough. He was not an innovator. The contribution of Wesley is in his ability to put theology into flesh and blood. The goal was theology incarnated in mere man.<sup>19</sup>

In her article "John Wesley, Mentor or Guru," Wynkoop identifies Wesley as fulfilling the role of a mentor in the articulation of her Wesleyan Theology. By this, she meant that Wesley was able to give her a dynamic way of doing theology. He was a guide who opened her new doors of understanding Biblical holiness and love.<sup>20</sup>

It was also Wesley's discovery of the existential meaning of redemption in his study of Scripture that drew Wynkoop to Wesley. Wesley understood God's grace as operating in the context of human experience – in history. It was personal,<sup>21</sup> dynamic and social.<sup>22</sup> This informed his concept of the way that the Bible was given and the way it was to be read.<sup>23</sup>

### *Holiness as Agape*

Agreeing with the early Greek Fathers, Wynkoop believed that a sufficient case could be made from a Biblical standpoint to distinguish between "image" and "likeness" in reference to man's relationship to God. She believed that the Hebrew terms are distinct and rarely confused in usage throughout the Old Testament. She also concluded that it is not accurate, or even scriptural, to speak of an image lost or defaced because of the Fall. Nor is there any warrant for speaking of the image being "restored."

Wynkoop was aware that her view of the difference between "image" and "likeness" differed from the Western tradition, including Wesley. Wynkoop was aware that the Reformers, for the most part, denied the probability of a difference in the meaning of "image" and "likeness."<sup>24</sup> They viewed these two concepts as synonyms, a Hebrew parallelism pointing to the same thing. As Wynkoop pointed out, they merged these two concepts into one concept, namely "image," and yet divided this single concept into two aspects, namely the "necessary" and "accidental," or the natural and moral.<sup>25</sup>

Wynkoop wants to maintain a distinction between image and likeness, but she is also careful to note that image and likeness are not separate entities or faculties, but rather two aspects of a single creation. Wynkoop would be more comfortable making a distinction between *actual* and *potential* rather than *essential* and *incidental*. The *actual* would include everything from self-consciousness to primitive righteousness and the *potential* referring to the adjustment and development required to maintain an integrated image.<sup>26</sup>

Wynkoop relates very strongly to the Eastern position that Adam was not created perfect but created as a moral infant in the image of God with room to grow in the likeness of God. This is

<sup>19</sup> Wynkoop, "A Hermeneutical Approach to Wesley," (*WTJ*, 6:1, 1971), 14.

<sup>20</sup> Wynkoop, "John Wesley, Mentor or Guru," (*WTJ*, 10:1, 1975), 9.

<sup>21</sup> For Wynkoop, "Personal" here means anything, and everything, about man having a bearing on his moral, intellectual, spiritual, and responsible self. It is opposed to a man considered as an it. (Wynkoop, *A Theology*, 80.)

<sup>22</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology*, 80-86.

<sup>23</sup> Wynkoop, "The Whole Wesley in a Broken World," (unpublished article, n.d.), WC, File 1432-5, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Wynkoop, "The Biblical Study of Man in his Relationship to the Image of God." M.Th. diss., Western Evangelical Seminary, 1952. File 1432-3, 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 45

through a process of development right from the start of creation. She would affirm the way Irenaeus viewed likeness as something to be extended rather than replaced in Adam. Adam was weak, incomplete, and a moral infant, as is reflected in his disobedience to God, and yet Adam stayed in the hands of God as the Spirit communicates the life of Christ to bring about renewal and liberation.

Wynkoop believes that Adam was placed under probation for moral testing to validate his character. But Adam failed. God's response to this failure is a response of grace that not only provides redemption but also extends the term of probation to cover the possibilities originally intended by God for human beings. Wynkoop would then view humanity as being created in the image of God. We are to be conformed to the image of God's Son and within these two statements lie the distinction and difference between image and likeness and the basic moral purpose of humanity's creation.<sup>27</sup>

The reason Wynkoop based her anthropology more on creation is that she did not view humans to have lost their ability to cooperate with God after the Fall. Wynkoop did not find a single passage of Scripture that gave any hint that humanity was absolved from responsibility for sin because of the loss of any facet of personhood or moral sensitivity.<sup>28</sup> Wynkoop wrote: "If the image is lost so that man is totally depraved, then redemption must be in principle only, not in experience."<sup>29</sup> According to Wynkoop, requiring human beings to keep the law without the faculties would have been an immoral request from God's side.

In her view, humanity continues in the hands of God, so "human freedom" as a characteristic of "likeness," remains, even after the Fall. (Human freedom here refers to the moral ability to embrace or reject a relationship with God). It is important to note that for Wynkoop, "human freedom" is not to be seen through the lens of humanism, but rather as God's grace assisting the human will through his embrace, all the way from the beginning of creation, through the time of probation, and continuing after the Fall towards the goal of *Christlikeness*. Since the potentiality for "likeness" remains, even in fallen humanity, grace, then, does not have to recreate or restore the moral disposition of humanity, but rather operates to renew or redirect the disposition that remained intact. Given the availability of grace, the verdict is then not that humanity could not believe, but that humanity would not believe.

The belief that the disposition to stand responsibly before God after the fall remained intact, indicates for Wynkoop an irresistible manifestation of prevenient grace. This is not far removed from Wesley's perspective that the restoration of the image coincided with a partial restoration of faculties, which, according to Collins, is also viewed as an irresistible act of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace then serves a dual purpose for Wynkoop. Prevenient grace first upholds the faculties and then we see God's overtures of grace via these faculties. (The same can be said for Wesley, only in his case we are talking about partially restored faculties that are preveniently upheld and acted through).

Wynkoop did not see grace as "something" that God gives us, but rather as the way God gives us himself (someone) through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Wynkoop also did not see faith as "something" given to human beings, but as an inherent disposition that remained intact

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>29</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology*, 147.

after the fall. She says, “The exhortations to exercise the faculty of faith were addressed mainly to unbelievers, obviously, and hence, to those who were in sin.”<sup>30</sup> For Wynkoop, this is not a “partially restored faculty,” but a faculty that remained fully intact after the fall now expressed as rebellion or unbelief. The antithesis to saving faith for her, then, is not no faith, but full active rejection. Wynkoop wrote: “The concept of the whole-man psychology in which all aspects of personality are seen to work as a unit – faith and will, heart and mind, love and obedience – preserves the integrity of personality without losing the idea of dependence on God’s grace.”<sup>31</sup>

### *On Agape*

The same can be said for her understanding of agape. Wynkoop believes that agape is basic to all human beings. It is an inherent disposition that was upheld after the fall through prevenient grace and through which the overtures of God's love and grace are manifested. Agape, however, is a completely different dimension of love. It is a quality of a person rather than a different kind of love. It is a principle by which one orders life—or by which life is ordered. Out of it, all the relationships of life derive their character. It is not a new, infused ability but a personal orientation reaching first to God and then, by necessity, to all other persons and things in life. It is called Christian love—and indeed it is unique in its fullness in Christ. Wynkoop believes the best definition of agape to be found is impartial goodwill.<sup>32</sup>

It is a quality of the entire person as it is centered in Christ. It is possible because it is in the realm of moral orientation and integrity. That dedication, that centering, that total self-giving which, when “aimed at” God (Wesley's term), brings holiness and wholeness and fellowship with God and neighbor.<sup>33</sup>

However, there is a caveat, Wynkoop’s basic position is that *agape* is defined by its object. It can either describe holiness or moral disintegration. The startling fact emerges from the Biblical usage that one may agape God and make Him Lord, or he may agape ‘the present world’ as Paul said Demas did and forfeit God.”<sup>34</sup> It should be noted again, given a wider reading of Wynkoop, that the capacity for agape can become the means through which the overtures of God's love are manifested, (by cooperating with the prevenient enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit), or it can become the means through which self-centeredness is manifested. This is by turning one's back on the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Agape toward God opens the whole person to the whole rich potential of existence as a human being that God intends for man – to discover His desirable will (Rom. 12:2).”

### *On Sin*

It is with this background that we now come to understand Wynkoop’s position that sin is love, but “love gone astray.” She wrote: “Sin is love locked into a false center, the self-centered love of the world... Holiness is love locked into the true center, Jesus Christ our Lord.” By placing sin in juxtaposition to love, Wynkoop opens the door to grasping what freedom from sin requires. Sin is not further back or further down, but rather in the realm of moral responsibility.

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<sup>30</sup> WC, File 1432-3, “The Biblical Study,” 126.

<sup>31</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 225.

<sup>32</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 35



It is the object that reacts back on and defines the quality of love. Perfect love (mature love for God, neighbor, and self) or holiness becomes possible when *agape* is redirected to Christ by the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit, but *agape* set on the self throws all human relationships into chaos and destruction.

One could wonder if Wynkoop took the Fall seriously enough. I would say initially, as a general statement, that she did take the fall seriously. Because of her position that the faculties remained intact, her succinct description of the state of human beings after the fall says it all: "The apparatus is intact in fallen man, but the light is out." In other words, the moral mold is cast, (the faculties remained intact) but the motivation needed to spark the quest to become Christlike is only through the enabling prevenient ministry of the Holy Spirit.

One could ask... if the apparatus remained intact, what caused the light to be out? For Wynkoop, the light is out because of our separation from God's empowering Presence. The essence of the first sin was deprivation... Adam and Eve "hiding in the bush" to use Dunning's way of putting it, and depravation... "covering with fig leaves," resulting in masking and playing the blame game. When Adam and Eve separated from God's Presence the result was their spiritual death and the corruption of their basic human faculties.

For Wynkoop, the focus was less on the origin of sin than on the fact of sin's present corruption (and our resulting need for God's grace). She was more comfortable with the idea of inbeing sin rather than original sin. On the matter of sin being inherited, Wynkoop would say: "In Rom. 3:23, Paul says that in sinning men have fallen short. He does not say, having fallen short, men sin."<sup>35</sup>

Wynkoop wrote: "Love, then, positively, or negatively defines holiness or sin. Love, being dynamic and free, includes or excludes others in its search for fulfillment. When the object of love, that about which the total self centers, is God, holiness is described. When, in this process, love centers on the self, God is excluded, and sin is described. Holiness and sin are quality evaluations having to do with the kind of relationship the self sustains with God. They have meaning in the locus of personal relationship, not otherwise."<sup>36</sup>

### *Holiness is Christocentric*

Christ as the "living Word" and Christ as the "image" became important building blocks in the way Wynkoop constructed her existential theology of holiness. The practical significance of the "living Word" becoming flesh and living among us, calling for humanity's renewal in the image of Christ, was at the heart of Wynkoop's exploration. One of the key markers in her theology is that love is revealed in Christ. Jesus not only showed humanity how to be human, but he also demonstrated what it looks like to *agape* the Father by living a life dedicated and surrendered to His will.

For Wynkoop, legitimate faith experiences were seen to be teleological. The idea of growth and development was more important than just a specific episode. It was to be caught up in the kingdom of God (the reign of Christ) as a partner with Christ in the re-creation and renewal of this broken world. Wynkoop described her faith as directed to the person of Christ, describing this relationship as personal, rather than on an impersonal level. For her, faith was

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<sup>35</sup> Wynkoop, "A Theology of Depth," WC, File 1431-15, 303.

<sup>36</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology*, 25.

through and through personal. She was interested in the “lawgiver back of the law.”<sup>37</sup> She wanted to protect the integrity of both parties, the personhood of Christ as well as the personhood of the one responding to the overtures of God's grace. “It is putting dishonesty in God,” she said, “to say that a man is objectively righteous and subjectively unrighteous even through Christ's atonement.”<sup>38</sup>

Given her holistic approach, the idea of “accepting Christ” as a way of appropriating faith was to her a far cry from biblical teaching. She wrote, “Interestingly enough, no New Testament passage gives the slightest hint that we are to ‘accept’ Christ or ‘what he has done for us.’ We are exhorted ‘to believe in him.’ In the occasions where ‘accept’ refers to a relationship between men and Christ (or God), it is man who is to make himself *acceptable*. The tremendous exhortation of Romans 12:1 is to the effect that we present ourselves as “holy and acceptable to God.”<sup>39</sup> This outward focus on Christ's Kingdom indicates that Wynkoop did not see human beings as the subject of the Gospel.

For her it was not about Jesus coming into our small world, but rather us coming out of our small world to join the big world of Christ's mission. She is saying that when it comes to holiness in Christ's Kingdom, the focus is not primarily on us. We do not invite Christ into our Kingdom, but we are exhorted to enter His Kingdom. In this scenario, Christ is the subject of the Gospel. It is about his reign and mission to restore our broken world and our enabled response to His invitation to join His Kingdom. She wrote:

He is the Lord of the kingdom of God. In Him is the reversal of all that the old man has done. By His death and resurrection, He established His headship and ends the alienation of the race from God. He is God with us, Emmanuel. In Christ, the true Head of the Church, men become one with the new Corporate Personality. In each believer is incarnated the total life of the new race; and Christ, the Head, incorporates into himself, as the New Man, every believer. This is the kingdom of God... Christ is Lord, constituted so by God independent of our acknowledgment of the fact. We do not make Him Lord; we enter the Kingdom where He is Lord. This is the “law of the land.”<sup>40</sup>

Wynkoop's Kingdom outlook is a key integrating factor in her assumptions about holiness. Here the focus is not just on our hearts being renewed but on joining Christ's Kingdom society. This is as she said, “the new law of the land.” In Wynkoop's tradition seekers had to first accept Jesus as their Savior and then later make Him the Lord of their lives. Here Wynkoop takes issue with this way of describing the Gospel. For her it was not primarily what happens to you when you die, but what happens while you are alive. And as such, it is not about making Him Lord of our lives but entering the Kingdom where He already is Lord.

This is then what Wynkoop has in mind when she reads Romans 12:1-2: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God.” Gnosticism tended to privatize and look for secret knowledge within as well as push salvation to the future and “out there, somewhere else” in a platonic heaven after we die. This is what Wynkoop saw as a distortion of the Gospel

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>38</sup> Wynkoop, “A Theology of Depth,” WC., File 1431-15, 170.

<sup>39</sup> Wynkoop, “A Theology of Depth,” WC., File 1431-15, 176. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>40</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 332.

and a stumbling block to the call to faithfully follow Christ in this world and to become like Him.

### *On Sanctification*

Wynkoop arrived at her understanding of sanctification by bringing together all the various building blocks we have examined up to this point. Her doctoral thesis on Biblical interpretation, her master's thesis on the image of God, her philosophy of moral integrity, and her desire for a practical existential understanding of holiness, all merge into her understanding of sanctification. The role of faith, expressing itself in love and obedience also finds its place in her understanding of sanctification.

The doctrine of sanctification is then for Wynkoop, first and foremost, an existential doctrine. Her approach was not to formulate formal doctrine by way of logic, but rather to give voice to the faith and existential realities of ordinary people in daily living situations. Wynkoop believed that if she stayed close to the existential teaching of Scripture, she would always remain close to the common experiences of people everywhere.<sup>41</sup> The key teleological anchor point for Wynkoop was *Christlikeness*. This was the controlling principle of her doctrine of sanctification. In addition,

- For Wynkoop, sanctification as a status was always related to a group. (“May he sanctify every one of you” 1Thess 5:23) She wrote: “of the two prayers for sanctification recorded in the New Testament, both were petitions on behalf of others and not for the one who did the praying.”<sup>42</sup>
- She was not aware of any individual in Scripture who received an experience called sanctification. (Since sanctification was the basic status of all followers of Christ)
- She could not find any passage that specifically indicated that sanctification was ever to be sought. The focus was rather on keeping the sanctification one already had.<sup>43</sup>
- So far as the word itself was concerned, Wynkoop did not believe that entire sanctification (as a theological concept) was related to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We can now ask, "What is 'entire' in relation to sanctification?" For Wynkoop, this did not mean a higher version of sanctification from God's side. It meant the total integration of the personality in its total commitment to Christ. It did not mean that the process of character building and spiritual development was completed, but it meant that the whole person united him/herself with the life of Christ. "Entire," then, for Wynkoop, meant "full participation in the process of sanctification" commensurate with the stages of moral development. Wynkoop wrote:

God requires men to love Him wholly. Sanctification is the moral atmosphere of that love. It has two movements, a total renunciation of the self-centered life and a total commitment to God. Everything sanctification requires is in keeping with a wholesome personality. God accepts this living sacrifice and fills the "heart" with the Holy Spirit. As

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<sup>41</sup> Wynkoop, “Sanctification is Existential,” (*The Preachers Magazine*, Vol. 33, July 1958), WC, File 1051-1, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Wynkoop, “A Theology of Depth,” WC, File 1431-15, 207.

<sup>43</sup> Wynkoop, “A Theology of Depth,” WC, File 1431-15, 219.

a religion, this is loving God with the whole heart, mind, and strength; in psychology, it is an integrated personality; in theology, it is cleansing.<sup>44</sup>

*On Human Worth*

The cry of society for equal rights and freedom placed the concept of "freedom" front and center in Wynkoop's existential theology. "Freedom" was to her the undercurrent that gave meaning to the worth of human beings. It was the undercurrent in the struggle for freedom on all levels of society. It addressed the breakdown of social unity, especially as seen in the third world, the black community in America, and the women's movement. The reason why "freedom" was so important to Wynkoop was that she was convinced that love could only exist in freedom. She wrote:

Love can exist only in freedom. It cannot be coerced. Freedom is the most fundamental ingredient of love. When love is spoken of, freedom is presupposed and persons are involved. Love describes the kind of response that exists between persons. Love may link the persons into a fellowship or it may short circuit about itself and reject other persons.<sup>45</sup>

Love then, being dynamic and free can, according to Wynkoop, either include or exclude others in its search for fulfillment. Based on Romans 12:1-2, she assessed that proper regard for others started with a proper self-love that is centered in God. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice" to her was a call for a holistic engagement of the self in all its relational dimensions. From this text have come some of the most soul-searching insights of her life. Her testimony on this matter is revealing. Wynkoop wrote:

I was looking for some magic instant salvation that would take my real humanity out. The problem with me was my human nature. I wanted new works, but through great tribulation, I had to learn that my human nature was rather important to God and me. I really couldn't get along without it. I thought I had to be humiliated before I could receive the Holy Spirit. I thought I had to get rid of myself and hate myself. Be a nothing, a no self. ...However, I learned that God does not humiliate us, tear down our self-acceptance, embarrass or de-self us to whip us into line. He builds up our self-confidence and then approaches us as if we were worthy of His attention and love.<sup>46</sup>

The theological rationale for Wynkoop's understanding of freedom was then first, that a discovery of the self, not a rejection of the self is the first work of the gospels. Secondly, divine forgiveness and a person's trust in God's love enable a person to recover possession of his true self.<sup>47</sup> The struggle for freedom was to Wynkoop then, a struggle for identity, self-respect, full humanity, and equality.<sup>48</sup> As Wynkoop saw it, Wesley's understanding of sanctification as love, said something about the worth of individuals that many of the theologies of his day denied.<sup>49</sup> Placing love in the center of the gospel had the powerful effect of raising awareness of the "other." Standing in solidarity with Wesley, Wynkoop wrote: "Love, requiring as it must, on the

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<sup>44</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology*, 208.

<sup>45</sup> Wynkoop, *A Theology*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Wynkoop, "Staley Distinguished Christian Scholar Lectures," (January 31, 1978), WC, File 788-79, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Wynkoop, "The Wesleyans," WC, File 2227-12, 23.

part of the individual, the exercise of personal responsibility, raised one's self-esteem and therefore his estimation of his neighbor and put him under love's obligation."<sup>50</sup>

### *Conclusion*

For Wynkoop, God's call to human beings is to present their bodies (entire responsible self) as a living sacrifice to Him, undergirded by the promise that what God requires he also makes possible. She anticipated that a response to this call would be of the whole self – not of parts of the self. She was convinced that what God created remained intact but should be under the lordship of Christ. For Wynkoop, faithfully following Christ is relational, personal, and life-transforming. Sin is not an impersonal thing residing in us causing us to sin. We sin because the whole self is rooted in love contrary to Christ's Lordship. Holiness as a faithful expression of following Christ results when Christ is made the true center. To be "in Christ" is to be in the body of Christ, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit "knitting" every individual into every other by love until we all come to the fullness of the stature of Christ. For her, participation in Christ's Kingdom reign was a "this-world" reality fully lived out on the ground as an existential relationship where loving God, yourself, and your neighbor is at the heart of what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

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