

Response

by

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I guess my little home church had it all wrong. To be sure, entire sanctification was emphasized and we did all we knew to be a holy people, but we had no idea that entire sanctification was a “rubric” or that the sanctified life “becomes a battle enacted publicly against societal sins.” For all we knew, we were to tell the truth, keep our promises, love our neighbors and be loyal to our friends. We looked after the sick, made sure no one went to bed hungry, and sat with those who were grieving.

I don’t ever remember searching for taxonomy of Wesleyan Public Activism or discussing whether compassionate was an appropriate modifier for ministry. I do remember being instructed to do what you can — where you’re at — with what you’ve got. I don’t remember discussing influence, whether it remedial, creative or confrontational — and the idea of “the building of community both as ecclesia and alternative *communitas*” was a bit beyond our discourse. We did, however, try to be a holy people and make our community a better place to live. If an unwed mother needed a place to stay, we took her in. If a neighbor lost his job, we shared our food. If they were ill, we did the laundry, cooked their meals, cut their grass and weeded their garden. If their roof leaked, we did what we could to patch it — and we always shoveled the snow-covered sidewalks. Mother told us that a strong back was a spiritual gift.

I saw this same approach practiced recently. Joan is a member of San Diego First Church and a Home Health Care Nurse. She gets paid to visit the sick and manage the healing process — to the extent that one can do that. She also does a great deal more than her job description demands. She runs errands for her clients and brings back happy meals from McDonalds. She cleans the kitchen and picks up the clutter around the house. On her own time, she calls insurance providers and HMOs to insist that those under her care be treated fairly and receive the medicine they need at a price they can afford. I guess that she is working at the point of their need, but I doubt that she knows that she is “exercising a deficient anthropology that reduces people to merely an extension of some identifiable need.” I doubt that her patients do either.

So, I guess my response to the idea of a search for a taxonomy for Wesleyan Public Activism is to suggest that if we take Micah 6:8 seriously and love our neighbors as we have been instructed to do, the taxonomy we find at the end of our search will be more descriptive than proscriptive. My dad used to say that he would take a little action over a lot of talk any day. So will I.