

# AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY: REFLECTING JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY PRACTICES IN NAZARENE CONGREGATIONS

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## *Introduction*

This paper focuses on the relationship between John Wesley's theology and educational perspective with the theology and educational perspective of Nazarene pastors, Christian educators (Associate pastors), and Professors of Christian education. The paper addresses the question, "In what ways are John Wesley's theology and educational perspective reflected in the educational ministry practices of Nazarene congregations?" The research provides an analysis of the dialogical relationship between theology and practice in Nazarene congregations as well as providing recommendations regarding a Wesleyan approach to educational ministry.<sup>1</sup>

## *Research Problem*

Christian education scholars have argued and defended the importance of a theology of Christian education for many years (Sherrill, 1944, Elliott, 1940, Smith, 1941, Miller, 1950, Wyckoff, 1959, and Little, 1977). They have maintained that theology is foundational for educational practice. For example, James Smart asserts that theology acts as the primary and supreme norm for all areas of religious instruction, including the learning process itself (1954, 24-45). Randolph Crump Miller concluded that,

"the clue to Christian education is the rediscovery of a relevant theology which will bridge the gap between content and method, providing the background and perspective of Christian truth by which the best methods and contents will be used as tools to bring the learner into the right relationship with the living God who is revealed in Jesus Christ" (1950, 15).

Miller's vision for the place of theology in educational practice sparked an increased interest in a theology of religious education in the 1950's. The problems that Miller addressed nearly a half-century ago are still pervasive. Miller believes, "The major task of Christian education today is theology, and in theology properly interpreted lies the answer to most of the pressing educational problems of the day" (1950, 4).

Recently Christian education scholars have continued to argue for the importance of theology as foundational for educational practice (Pazmino 1997; Downs 1994; Seymour and Miller 1990). Jack Seymour and Donald Miller's thesis states that "the role of religious education is being reassessed. For example, a fundamental reassessment of religious education seems to be occurring in theological studies" (1990, 9). Seymour and Miller state,

"Christian education is no longer seen as merely a technical and applied practical area within the theological encyclopedia. Rather, it is recognized that it has to do with the basic questions of the meaning of the Christian faith, the meaning of theological education, and the role of the church in the education of the public" (1990, 10).

Seymour and Miller are attempting to integrate and probe the conversation of those in education and theology about the processes by which Christian faith is embodied, communicated, and reformed within the culture. They address, from the perspective of a Christian religious education, some of the crucial theological issues central to the educational ministry.

Randolph Crump Miller (1995) provides another rationale for the importance of theology and education. His book provides current examples of differing theologies and their influence on educational practices. Also, Sara Little says, "Theology has become one influence among many" (1990, 652). Miller affirms Little's thesis by stating, "that the concern for theology is imperative for the educator, influencing how one selects content and chooses an appropriate and consistent process for education" (1990, 652-563). Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore's (1991), calls for "theology and education to stand in relationship, to speak to one another, and to be reformed by one another"

(1991, 1). She describes one of the primary research problems as, "theology remains little affected by educational practices, and she added that educational practices are little affected by theological reflection" (1991, 1).

Even though theological orientations differ, the seminal writers in Christian and religious education testify to the importance of the relationship between theology and education.<sup>2</sup> As Miller states, "there are two questions facing religious education theorists today: What theology can provide the background for religious education? And what should be the relation between theology and education?" (1982, 30).

### *Research Concern*

The Church of the Nazarene has expressed a renewed interest in returning to the writings and teaching of John Wesley. Many Nazarene educators believe it is essential to regain their theological identity in a pluralistic and postmodern culture. Nazarene scholars are addressing the issue of the integration of John Wesley's theology and educational ministry practices in the Church of the Nazarene. For example, Kent Hill, former president of Eastern Nazarene College in his address to Nazarene educators at the "Faith, Learning, and Living Conference" stated, "The critical, far-reaching issue facing Nazarene higher education in the twenty-first century is our identity" (1996, 7). He goes on to state,

"We will have the best opportunity to succeed in our mission if we recognize the importance of the extraordinary Wesleyan heritage that gave birth to our colleges . . . informing ourselves of the treasures of the Wesleyan tradition, and allowing its convictions to permeate our lives and our institutions, both inside and outside the classroom" (Hill 1996, 7).

Hill's address characterizes the concern of Nazarene educators and pastors about the need to allow a Wesleyan-Holiness heritage to inform education and ministry practices.

An array of educators and leaders in the Church of the Nazarene are also concerned that the influence of American evangelicalism has threatened the denomination's Wesleyan-Holiness identity (Benefiel 1996; Hoskins 1997; Smith 1996; Drury 1995; Blevins 1998). For example, in 1995 the Church of the Nazarene placed their denominational emphasis on the recovery of their Wesleyan-Holiness identity as the center focus of a series of national pastor's and leaders (PALCON) meetings hosted at seven regional sites throughout North America (Blevins 1999).

Both Hoskins (1997) and Drury (1995) suggest that the identity crisis in the Church of the Nazarene is indicative of problems in the larger Wesleyan-Holiness Movement. Keith Drury's address at The Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University entitled, "What Happened to the Holiness Movement" stated that the holiness movement is dead. One of the primary reasons for the death of the movement is that we have "Plunged into the evangelical mainstream" (1995, 2). Drury's statement echoes the concern about the distinctiveness of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and the concern regarding losing its theological identity within the broader Evangelicalism.

The pertinent question here is whether the denomination that seeks to be Wesleyan-Holiness has become more generally Evangelical to the neglect of its distinctiveness. A General Superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene summed up well the present state of affairs at a recent global theology conference: "We believe that our denomination is currently in a theological crisis."

The issue at stake here is whether or not American Evangelicalism<sup>3</sup> has encompassed the Church of the Nazarene to the extent that the Church has lost its theological identity. Dean Blevins states,

"The Church of the Nazarene may be entering a new phase of ecclesial development. If this phase understands adolescence, along with the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, as a search for identity versus identity diffusion, then the denomination is showing signs of the "storm and stress" of this period" (Blevins 1998, 111).

The greatest challenge of the Church of the Nazarene is to differentiate between the implicit theology within American Evangelicalism subculture and a theology of Christian education that is more consistent with the Wesleyan perspective. The issue will depend on current leadership in curriculum development, pastoral ministries in congregations, and professors and leaders in Nazarene institutions of higher education.

These examples and others signify the emerging concern of a Wesleyan-Holiness theology for the church today. Therefore, a fresh attempt to recover a Wesleyan-Holiness approach to Christian educational ministry based on John Wesley's theology and educational perspective is needed to inform current educational practices within the denomination.

#### *Research Design & Procedure*

The study inquired into the relationship between John Wesley's theology and educational perspective with the theology and educational perspectives of Nazarene pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education. A descriptive ethnographic study was employed. The qualitative study included thirty-two ethnographic interviews. A maximum of one hour was allowed for each interview. The questions from the interview protocol were used as a guide, but allowance was made during the interview for other relevant information to surface.

The procedure of data gathering was conversational in nature. These questions were used during the interview:

- Describe the educational ministries/studies in your congregation?
- What types of educational ministries are evident in your congregation?
- Why do you believe these are important educational ministries in your congregation?
- What theological themes are important in your educational ministry?
- In what ways do these theological themes influence your educational practices?
- What are the most important elements in an educational plan or design?
- In what ways do these educational plans or designs influence your educational ministry practices?
- Given the following summary of Wesley's educational perspective, which of these are most representative of Wesley's educational perspective?
  - a. Childhood education; b. Adult formation; c. Personal evangelism (conversion);
  - d. Social Reform; e. "Holiness of heart and life"

What is the rationale for your decision? How does it apply to your educational ministry practices?
- How are these elements of Wesley's educational perspective being applied to the Church of the Nazarene today?
- What elements of Wesley's educational perspective do you believe are lacking in Nazarene Churches today?

The ethnographic techniques outlined by David M. Fetterman (1989), Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), and Ted Ward (1997) were employed to qualitatively analyze the ethnographic data collected.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Sample*

A convenient sample consisted of thirty-two interviewees who are currently serving as Nazarene pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education in North America (including Canada). They serve in full-time ministry assignments and have at least a Bachelors' degree in Religion or Theology. Since the Church of the Nazarene in North America is organized around nine educational zones, the sample included both men and women who are serving as pastors and Christian educators in local congregations, or as professors of Christian education within these nine regions of North America. Each region is represented in the study.

#### *Theological Foundations of Wesley's Educational Practices*

Wesley's theology is foundational to his educational ministry practices.<sup>5</sup> Four primary educational ministry practices are identified in Wesley's ministry and educational endeavors. These ministry and educational practices flow from his theological convictions and provide a framework for the study.

They include emphasis in childhood education, adult education, social reform of persons and society (social action), and evangelism (personal conversion of individuals) (Blevins, 1999).

#### *Emphasis on the Learner: Childhood Education*

Wesley's religious education of children follows logically from his theology. He believed in the depravity of the human race from birth, including its youngest members. According to Wesley, both young and old are lacking in God's natural and moral image, and sin dislodged the image of God in all mankind and brought alienation from God. Wesley was primarily concerned about the salvation of children. He believed that one of the primary means to this end was through religious education. In his sermon "On the Education of Children", Wesley states,

"Now, if these are the general diseases of human nature, is it not the grand end of education to cure them? And is it not the part of all those to whom God has entrusted the education of children, to take all possible care, first, not to increase, not to feed, any of these diseases; (as the generality of parents constantly do)" (Wesley 1872, 7:90).

It was to this end that Wesley spent much of his ministry educating children. Wesley believed that the first step in the redemption of the child was baptism. See "A Treatise on Baptism" (Wesley 1872, 10:188). The new birth, the beginning of spiritual transformation, was reached by adults through baptism, only on the condition that they repent and believe the gospel; that spiritual life is reached by children through an outward sign of baptism without this condition, for they can neither repent nor believe (Wesley 1872, 5:38). Infants are in a state of original sin, and they cannot be saved ordinarily unless this is washed by baptism. Baptism regenerates, justifies and gives infants the privileges of the Christian religion. Baptism, then for Wesley, was not only proper, but also a sacred duty (Wesley 1872, 6:16).

The next step in Wesley's view of religious education of children is conversion. Wesley believed that anyone who had sinned after his baptism had denied that right and, therefore, must have recourse to a new birth if he was to be saved. Wesley felt conversion to be universally necessary for children as well as for adults (Prince 1926, 96). Prince states, "Wesley did not hold that religious education makes conversion unnecessary, but that religious education and conversion supplement each other" (Prince 1926, 96).

In his sermon, "On the Education of Children" (Wesley 1872, 7:1), Wesley stated that training children in the way they should go and curing the disease of nature is to train the individual in religion (Wesley 1872, 2:309). For Wesley this took place in the home, in the schools, and in the societies to make children Christians, inwardly and outwardly (Naglee 1987, 228-237).

A survey of the current literature suggests that judgments about Wesley's educational perspective in relation to his views on children vary (Prince 1926, 103-136; Seaborn 1985, 30-59; Estep 1997, 43-52). Prince's work is most influential in developing Wesley's philosophy of education and its implications for educational practices. Educators are indebted to Prince for his contribution to the body of knowledge, for he was the first to explore Wesley's approach to education (Hall 1998, 12).

Gross (1954) reviews Wesley's efforts in childhood education but also includes his influence upon Kingswood School and Cokesbury College in American, noting that some of Wesley's early experiences may have influenced his curricular design for higher education (Gross 1954, 13-14).

Body's (1936) work, John Wesley and Education, may be the best single work on Wesley's organization of formal childhood education. Body offers a preliminary overview of Wesley's educational sources but centers primarily upon the development of the boarding school at Kingswood, both as an idealized form of education for Wesley and also as a struggling institution in its actual state. Much of his work centers on the strict daily regimen of Kingswood and the comprehensive academic curriculum, which was written by Wesley or abridged from other sources (84-130).

Body reveals what he believes to be the two major features of Wesley's educational philosophy through the emphasis upon "religious training and perfect control of the children" (94). Body's assessment of Wesley is not always kind. His investigation of the actual history of Kingswood reveals Wesley's struggle with staff and financial concerns of the school at various times. However, in spite of the struggles at Kingswood, Body frames Wesley's work in the humanitarian spirit of the eighteenth

century (39-40). He acknowledged that for Wesley, like Whitefield, religion and education must go together: "The purpose of education was that it should be a means to the great end of saving the souls of the children" (74). Ultimately, Body understands "that service to humanity was to Wesley only a visible manifestation of his service to God," therefore substantiating Body's assessment of Wesley's educational efforts (134).

In summary, Wesley's emphasis on childhood education is closely linked to his anthropological and theological foundations. His emphasis on infant baptism, conversion of children, and spiritual formation of children illustrate his strong theological position.

Wesley's primary purpose was to provide a disciplined context to control the will of the child and result in the saving of souls.

#### *Emphasis on the Learner: Adult Education*

Scholars agree and the literature confirms that Wesley's adult educational practices were more clearly defined than his childhood educational practices. Recent studies of Wesley's early personal devotional life and mystical classics as a means of spiritual formation (Harper 1983; Tuttle 1989) as well as approaches to spiritual direction based upon Wesley's letters to followers (Tracy 1987) are well documented in the literature. Further, other scholars have concluded that Wesley's concept and practice of group formation constituted a key feature in his educational theory and practice. The following will provide a review of Wesley's group formation and a survey of the secondary literature.

The formation of Wesley's thinking of small groups began in his childhood education experiences at home. Susanna again played a key role in Wesley's development.

"Family devotions were held not only for us but for the servants as well. Devotional meetings were frequently held in the rectory kitchen on Sunday evening. When Samuel was away his mother took charge. Once when Samuel was away spending time in London some member of the congregation joined the meeting. At first there were thirty to forty people but by the time Samuel returned the attendance reached more than 200" (Tuttle 1978, 44-45).

Not only was Susanna influential in Wesley's view of group formation, but his experiences at Oxford provided the beginning of his disciplined methods (Tyerman 1872, 69-70).

A more significant stage in the development of Wesley's small group practice occurred after his Aldersgate experience. Three weeks after his conversion, Wesley set out to visit the Moravian settlements in Saxony. At the first settlement, Marienborn, he met with the Moravian leader, Count Zinzendorf. At the settlement at Herrnhut, Wesley observed the Moravian community with great fascination. Count Zinzendorf had arranged the community into compact cells, or "bands" as he called them, for spiritual oversight and community administration (Henderson 1997, 59). Wesley was deeply appreciative of the Moravians' emphasis on personal character and charitable community involvement.

One of the most influential writings on Wesley's group formation is the work by John S. Simon (1921, 1923), John Wesley and Methodist Societies. His book has been updated and expanded by Richard P. Heitzenrater (1989, 1995). Simon states that one of the most significant group experiments undertaken by Wesley was the Fetter Lane Society.

Wesley shared leadership of the group with Moravian Peter Bolher, and it included forty or fifty men who met for prayer and group encouragement (Simon 1923, 150). It included a list of thirty-three articles, consisting mostly of rules for group admission, function, cohesion, expulsion, and order (Wesley 1872a, 97). The development of this group was a critical shift in Wesley's adult educational practices. The group was not associated with the Church of England. Also, Wesley had been dissatisfied with his participation in the religious societies because of their lack of opportunity to bare one's soul and to share one's spiritual struggles in a secure and accepting group (Henderson 1997, 65).

Within the Fetter Lane Society, Wesley and Bohler developed two levels of participation, the "band" and the "society" to allow for two separate educational strategies each with its own structure and content. The "Band" was designed for lay leadership that included 5-10 members of one sex, and encouraged confession, participation, and membership. They were concerned about behavioral changes in the life of the members. Professional leaders led the "societies" by giving either a lecture

or a sermon. It included 50-100 members of both sexes, and the primary educational focus was acquisition of cognition (Henderson 1997, 69)

The Fetter Lane Society experienced difficulties in 1739. Many of the members were losing interest in the groups. Factions were developing between the Moravians and the Anglicans. As a result of Wesley's dissatisfaction with the group, he held a meeting at the nearby Foundery, which was under construction. Wesley's success resulted in over 300 people attending at the opening of the Foundery, and Wesley decided to break from the Fetter Lane Society to begin a new group called the Foundery Society (Henderson 1997, 76-77).

The Foundery Society was a great success and grew to over 900 members by 1741. The bands were not increasing in number as rapidly as the societies, and Wesley was concerned about the need for better supervision. The result was the development of class meetings. The class meetings filled the critical gap between the society and the bands. It was through the class meetings that Wesley created an environment to accept people from widely different social backgrounds. They met in homes, shops, schoolrooms, attics, and even coal-bins. It included groups called penitent bands, which were designed for rehabilitation. It dealt with people having severe social and moral problems requiring more stringent and forceful treatment (Henderson 1997, 80). The development of societies, bands, and class meetings provided an educational system for Wesley's adult education.

David Michael Henderson's (1981) dissertation on Methodist societies is probably the most comprehensive treatment of Wesley's small group formation from an educational perspective (Blevins 1999). He develops a taxonomy, which provides an external framework for identifying psychological conditions in Wesleyan groups. He builds on Drakesford's five levels: associational, behavioral, motivational, aspirational, and reclamation (Drakesford 1978, 11-20). Henderson develops his taxonomy of Wesley's groups based upon instructional aims rather than psychological functions (Drakesford 1978, 104). Henderson's book John Wesley's Class Meetings: A Model for Making Disciples (1997), which is developed from his dissertation, provides a historical account of Wesley's groups as well as a three-fold interlocking group format based on Wesley's group formation. They include three primary "modes" or "an appropriate method of procedure" (Henderson 1997, 83) that include Societies (Cognitive mode), Class Meeting (Behavioral mode), and the Bands (Affective mode).

Most of the literature testifies to the similar approaches of Wesley's group formation for contemporary application today. David Lowes Watson provides the most significant contribution to contemporary approaches of Wesley's group formation (1985, 1990, 1991). Watson develops a framework for discipleship groups in local congregations, particularly United Methodist Churches. His works are helpful in providing practical application of Wesley's group formation, but do not provide a link between Wesley's educational perspective and current educational practices.

Wesley's emphasis on adult education is most reflected in his group formation. For Wesley, group formation represented his strong theological convictions. As the literature indicates, Wesley believed that spiritual growth and holiness required discipline, nurture, and accountability. Wesley's emphasis on adult formation is the most important contribution to Methodism as a distinct practice. Wesley's emphasis of "Holiness of heart and life" is most directly realized through his adult group formation (Henderson 1997).

### *Social Reform*

The context of the early eighteenth century was prosperous for some. The population was growing slowly, while commerce grew rapidly. Those who owned land, or had the skill and the means of production had opportunity for economic growth. However, during this time of economic boom, more than half of the workers of England were becoming increasingly poorer (Tyson 1997, 176). The economic situation of the lower classes was further exacerbated by legislation that was designed to maintain the income and interests of the upper classes.

The Methodist movement was strongest in the emerging manufacturing and industrial centers. The Wesley's were most effective in those places where the established Church of England was weak and where they were able to consolidate societies that had already been established by others (Armstrong 1973, 68). The genius of the Wesley's and early Methodism, given the social-economic support of the 1740's, lay in the liberating and empowering structures of its societies (Tyson 1997, 179).

The fact that the groups were lay-led fit well the individualism of the emerging working class. The fact that Methodism stood outside the spheres that undergirded the older, repressive social order, made it

an attractive alternative to those interests that did not coincide with those of the clergy or landowners (Tyson 1997, 180-191). Tyson goes on to say that Methodism styled itself as a reforming movement in an era that was beginning to agitate for social reform. Therefore, the Methodist societies were the chief vehicle for implementing Wesley's "Evangelical economics" (Tyson 1997, 180). Also, Theodore Runyon (1998) portrays Wesley's adult groups as a form of base community designed to empower the poor. Henderson asserted that Wesley's desire to reach the poor and to resist social evil were cardinal tenets of his Christian education approach (1998, 199).

Wesley's educational reform cannot be overlooked as a key educational perspective. Body (1936) states that, "the foundation of Wesley's educational work, as of his evangelical mission, was primarily humanitarian, and his early schools were all established for the poorer classes" (1936, 133). Wesley's compassion toward the poor resulted in the development of schools. Not only did he provide the poor with education, but with clothes as well. Wesley's educational endeavors were not inclusively new to his time. For example, the Charity Schools, which provided education for the poor, had been established since the sixteenth century (Lawson and Silver 1973, 104). Blevins's states, "Wesley's approach to schooling corresponded in a number of ways with The British schooling structure of his day, as well as with the theological desire to instill religion in schools" (1997, 97). Therefore, Wesley's educational efforts were not unique to his time and reflected the efforts to address the current social problems of his day.

However, there are various interpretations of Wesley's social impact on England. Keefer (1990, 9) summarizes the three main views. First, Weber represents those who view the Methodists as primarily concerned about the salvation of the soul. He maintains that any social consequences were purely incidental to Wesley's main purpose. Therefore, Methodism was purely in the stream of the "Protestant ethic," which means that their movement was generally inimical to social reform, particularly in industrialized England (Madron 1981, 109).

The second view states that Methodism's social influence upon England is exaggerated. One group says that whatever the influence was, it was largely a positive one. Another group says the influence was a negative one (Keefer 1990, 10). However, many nineteenth century Methodist historians considered Methodism had a positive influential on social reform. They assumed that the democratic practices of the society as well as its philanthropy were automatically translated into the larger public sphere. Thus, Wesley is a hero. Also, Wesleyan historians credit Wesley and the Methodists for keeping England from experiencing a revolution similar to the one that occurred in France (Keefer 1990, 11).

Third, according to Keefer (1990, 13), most Methodist historians position themselves between these two extremes. Such advocates include Anthony Armstrong, Robert F. Wearmouth, Madwyn Edwards, and Wellman J. Warner. These authors recognize the extensive influence that Wesley's spiritual revolution played in English history which includes the gradual improvement of the country's social condition. Methodism's achievements in philanthropy, the extension of education reform, and the abolition of slavery; all seem to be in line with Wesley's position thrust.

Manfred Marquardt provides a strong argument for Wesley's social reform. He develops the relationship between Wesley's educational efforts with a theological ethic focused on transforming social structures (Marquardt 1992, 199-204). Marquardt's primary focus is the social concern that prompted Wesley's pedagogy and the results of that pedagogy in empowering the poor (1992, 103-122). He argues that Wesley's educational theory is subordinate to evangelism and social reform. Also, he continues by stating, "The primary reason for the development of schools within his sphere of influence was primarily a religious and humanitarian one" (Marquardt 1982, 52).

The consensus is that Wesley's social reform was intentional; taking definite structures that involved others in its execution and providing for its continuance beyond the scope of his life. His life was a model for all Methodists. He wanted to model how they might apply themselves to similar projects within their sphere of ministry. His concern for doing well was multiplied many times over in the lives of those influenced by his work (Keefer 1990, 8). Also, Henry Abeloves' (1990) provides a detailed rationale for Wesley's success. One of the primary reasons for this was that wherever Wesley traveled he provided medical services to people without charge (Abelove 1990, 8). When the poor were sick they could seldom afford to go to a physician or an apothecary. Instead they would go to the back door of a nearby rectory or great house where they could get broth, wine, common drugs, advice or a favor (Abelove 1990, 9). Wesley deployed genteel and open-handed charity, not only providing coal,

bread, and clothes for the needy, especially among his followers, whom he visited house-to-house and oversaw closely, but also creating make-work for the unemployed and, on one occasion, assuming responsibility for an orphaned child (Abelove 1990, 9). Therefore, Wesley's practice of social reform cannot be overlooked as one of his primary educational perspectives.

### ***Evangelism***

Wesley's educational practices with children and adults, as well as his emphasis on social reform, have been discussed as key to Wesley's educational practices. Another significant contribution to Wesley's educational practices was his passion for evangelism.

Wesley's primary theological educational conviction was "to cure the diseased soul." Prince (1926) offers a view of Wesley as primarily an evangelist whose efforts with adults and children are energized by his focus upon their salvation. Most of Prince's work was to resolve Wesley's adult evangelistic efforts with his teaching on the Christian nurture of children (1926, 10). Prince states that, "many evangelists have preached with great power, but only a few of the greatest have combined with it an eagerness to spread education" (1926, 10).

For Prince, Wesley's educational goal includes his theological and pedagogical analyses, which are interconnected or reciprocal. He views Wesley's educational emphasis with children as primarily preparatory for conversion. Prince states,

"He (Wesley) gives the concept of training and education a wider connotation than they actually carry. He uses them to include not only the bringing of children to a knowledge and appreciation of the condition of salvation, but also to their personal appropriation of salvation" Prince 1926, 99-100).

In Wesley's sermon "On Family Religion" (Wesley 1872, 7:76), he speaks about the importance of "training up a child in the way they should go." For him, to train children up in the way they should go means to lead them ultimately into the experience of salvation in much the same way that an adult is led into it. Also, in his tract, A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children (Wesley 1872, 7:458-459), Wesley identifies conversion with at least a part of the educative process (Prince 1926, 101). Again he states, "Education is designed to set aright the bias of nature, to cure the disease of self-will, pride, and so on (Wesley 1872, 7:458-459).

The evangelistic efforts of John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield are impressive. Nearly everywhere Wesley preached, his hearers were convicted of their sinfulness. He traveled 25,000 miles and preached approximately 40,000 sermons (Abelove 1990, 2-3). The primary focus of his preaching, development of schools for children, and his group formation was his passion for souls to be saved. At the very heart of Wesley's revivalism, his schools, and group formation, is his passion to "save souls". Most scholars attribute evangelism as one of his primary educational philosophies (Body 1936; Prince 1926; Abelove 1990).

These educational practices are incomplete in themselves, for they develop an aspect of Wesley's theology and educational perspective, but are not inclusive of his entire purposes. They often limit additional educational practices that might be needed in contemporary Wesleyan studies. They are not broad enough to satisfy Wesley's understanding of Christianity focused on "holiness of heart and life."

### *Wesley's Orienting Concern: "Holiness of Heart and Life"*

One of the primary focuses of Wesley's educational perspectives is "holiness of heart and life" (Maddox 1994; Collins 1997; Grider 1994; Dunning 1988). Wesley's goal for education actually depends more heavily on his singular emphasis on "holiness of heart and life." "Holiness of heart and life" actually provides a broader description of transformation that encompasses his objectives of evangelism, social reform, as well as his childhood and adult educational practices. A phrase used repeatedly in Wesley's sermons and writings was "holiness of heart and life." In his sermon "The Righteousness of Faith" he states,

"One thing more was indispensably required by the righteousness of the law, namely, that this universal obedience, this perfect holiness both of heart and life, should be perfectly uninterrupted also, should continue without any intermission, from the moment wherein God

created man, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, until the days of his trial should be ended, and he should be confirmed in life everlasting" (Wesley 1872, 5:67).

It is to this end that Wesley's educational practices are focused. His emphasis on childhood and adult education, social reform, and evangelism are derived from this universal theological truth. These practices flow from Wesley's theological and anthropological assumptions, the sinfulness of humankind, and the need for the restoration of the imago dei.

Wesley develops this idea in his sermon "The Image of God" (Wesley 1872, 4:293-295). Of these three aspects of the image of God, the natural, political, and moral, Wesley designated the last as the principal image. He writes, "So God created man in his own image . . . but chiefly in his moral image" (Wesley 1872, 4:293-295). Collins states that the reason for this distinction is that this image is conceived as both true righteousness and holiness; it is the context for the very possibility of sin, and it is intimately related to the moral law (1997, 24-25). It is through the empowering grace of God that an individual realizes and experiences the promise of the restoration of the image of God. The restoration of the image of God will not occur without human cooperation with and response to the grace of God.

Lindstrom (1980), Williams (1960), Oulter (1964), and more recently, Collins (1997) place Wesley's ordo salutis, or order of salvation, as the core of Wesley's theology. Thus, the transformational and lifelong experience of "holiness of heart and life" best expresses Wesley's soteriological conviction. "Holiness of heart and life" provided the primary theological framework for Wesley's educational perspective.

#### *Summary of Educational Practices*

Four primary educational practices of Wesley's educational perspectives are evident in his writings and the current literature: emphasis on childhood, adult education, social reform of individual lives and social structures (social action), evangelism (personal conversion), and "Holiness of heart and life." The overarching theme of Wesley's theology and educational practices is his soteriology. For Wesley the primary focus of education of both children and adults was a means to the great end of saving souls. His educational endeavors at Kingswood, and his focus on social reform were means by which children would be introduced to the transformation of the gospel.

Another related emphasis of Wesley's educational perspective focused on the development of the individual learner, both children and adult. His emphasis on providing educational opportunities for oppressed children and his emphasis on class meetings (small groups) for adults were educational aspects of nurture and development. His development of societies, classes, and bands is unique to Wesley, and is the primary educational approach that actualizes his theological conviction of "holiness of heart and life."

Embedded in Wesley's theology and educational perspective was the focus of "holiness of heart and life." All of Wesley's educational aims and objectives lead to this primary theological truth. His soteriological focus was to see human persons transformed by the grace of God, and the human nature of persons to be cleansed by the Holy Spirit.

These four educational practices of Wesley's educational perspective provided the basis of the descriptive study. The descriptive research will compare Wesley's primary educational practices with the educational practices of Nazarene pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education.

#### *Finding and Recommendations*

The purpose of the study was to compare the responses of pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education with John Wesley's theology and educational perspective. In essence, the question to be addressed was, in what ways are John Wesley's theology and educational perspective being reflected in the theology and educational practices of Nazarene pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education?<sup>6</sup>

#### *Educational Perspectives*

A direct parallel between eighteenth-century England and contemporary practices are not always valid. However, the following provides how John Wesley's educational perspective was reflected in the educational perspectives of pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education.

#### *Small Group Formation*

Pastors and Christian educators reflect Wesley's emphasis on group formation and small groups. Pastors and Christian educators indicated that discipleship and small groups were important to their educational practices. The primary rationale for these educational practices was to disciple new Christians and to provide accountability and relationships. These rationales are similar to Wesley's emphasis on group formation. Wesley developed the "class meetings" to reach his world as well as to provide opportunities for rehabilitation (Henderson, 80).

Also, pastors and Christian educators reflect Wesley's emphasis on penitent bands. The penitent band was a rehabilitation program, much like today's Alcoholics Anonymous, which dealt with people who had severe social and moral problems and required more stringent and forceful treatment (Henderson 1997, 80). Pastors and Christian educators indicate that support groups were important to their educational practices. Support groups would be similar to Wesley's development of penitent bands as a means for rehabilitation of persons, but not as extensive as Wesley's approach.

However, pastors and Christian educators do not reflect the level of accountability required in Wesley's development of interlocking groups (societies, classes, and bands). For example, the bands were developed to encourage confession, participation, and membership (Henderson 1997). Also, the list of thirty-three articles developed by Wesley and Bohler are examples of the level of commitment these groups required.

Even though pastors and Christian educators reflected the same educational practices as Wesley, the primary difference was the way these practices were exercised and the primary rationale for these groups. Wesley's development of interlocking groups provided a system of spiritual formation that reflected his soteriological focus of holiness of heart and life. Wesley's group formation was directly connected to his theological convictions. His soteriological focus was best expressed in the development of group formation. Unlike the groups described by pastors and Christian educators, these interlocking groups were well-planned and structured as a means to help people grow toward wholeness and holiness.

Professors of Christian education reflected Wesley's group formation process. They indicated that discipleship and spiritual formation were an important rationale of their educational practices. The process of development or "becoming" was central to their educational endeavors and the result was holy living. Professors of Christian education provided a closer model to Wesley's view of formation in their teaching and educational practices. They provided a clear link between Wesley's rationale of group formation and the implications of their practices.

#### *Social Reform*

All interviewees indicated that Nazarene congregations and the Church of the Nazarene did not fully reflect Wesley's focus on social reform. However, all interviewees indicated that more efforts have been given to this area in recent years. As stated by one pastor,

"New Christians are impressed with our emphasis on world evangelism, but the question I get asked most often is why all our money goes to ministry overseas. Also, they ask why aren't we doing anything in our community such as working at a food pantry in town or painting the house of a poor person?"

Thus, John Wesley's emphasis on social reform is not reflected in educational practices of all interviewees. Also, Nazarene congregations in the Church of the Nazarene are not reflecting the full extent of Wesley's theology and educational perspective of social reform.

#### *Evangelism*

All interviewees indicated that John Wesley's theology and educational perspective of evangelism was not fully reflected in their congregations and the Church of the Nazarene as a whole. One pastor stated, "Our weakness is evangelism, we need to place a greater emphasis on personal evangelism."

Also a professor stated, "We have reduced evangelism to a program instead of seeing it as building relationships with people."

Pastors and Christian educators indicated that one of their primary educational practices was discipleship and evangelism training. The primary rationale for these educational practices was their concern to help other people evangelize and disciple new Christians: Thus, closely related to their focus on evangelism was discipleship of new Christians.

### *Sacramental Theology*

All interviewees did not reflect Wesley's sacramental practices in their congregations. Pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education did not have a well-developed theology of the sacraments and these practices were not indicated as important practices in their congregations. It is at this point that they did not reflect Wesley's theology and educational perspective.

All interviewees did not indicate infant baptism as one of their educational practices.<sup>7</sup> Again, the reasons for the omission may be due to the fact that infant baptism was seen as an element of worship instead of an educational practice. Regardless, Wesley's emphasis on infant baptism was an important educational practice for families and congregations. Also, they did not reflect Wesley's sacramental practices. This included infant baptism, and the "means of grace" as a basis for spiritual formation.<sup>8</sup>

### *Theological Themes*

Pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education reflected Wesley's theology. However, pastors and Christian educators differed with professors of Christian education on their view of prevenient grace. Professors placed a strong focus of prevenient grace in their theology and educational perspective. Also, pastors and Christian educators indicated original sin and professors did not. Pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education reflected Wesley's theology in their view of holiness and sanctification, prevenient grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

### *Holiness/Sanctification*

Pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education reflected Wesley's theology of holiness and sanctification as the driving force behind their educational practices. The doctrine of entire sanctification and Christian perfection are distinct theological views of Wesley and the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement. It was not surprising that pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education indicated that Wesley's view of "holiness of heart and life" was the primary driving forces behind his childhood education, adult education, evangelism, and social reform.

Professors of Christian education reflected Wesley's view of holiness more holistically by ascertaining holiness as a process of spiritual formation rather than only an experience. Professors' of Christian education view of holiness included being formed into the image of God, spiritual development, growth in grace, and the role of community in formation. As one professor stated, "Spiritual formation is concerned with helping people understand the process and the journey they have begun and where they are yet to go." The professors' view of holiness was more reflective of Wesley's process of holiness than his focus on sanctification as an experience. Professors reflected holiness and sanctification differently than pastors and Christian educators.

### *Original Sin*

Pastors and Christian educators reflected John Wesley's theology in the area of original sin, whereas professors of Christian education did not reflect Wesley's doctrine of original sin. As one pastor stated, "Understanding the doctrine of original sin is key to our ministry. I think you have to begin there before you can ever go to the doctrine of holiness or entire sanctification."

### *Prevenient Grace*

Professors of Christian education reflected Wesley's theology of prevenient grace, whereas the pastors and Christian educators did not reflect Wesley's theology of prevenient grace. As one professor stated,

"If I teach from the standpoint of prevenient grace, it means that I always recognize that God is at work in the lives of the students, that grace is always operative and that even a person that I perceive to be difficult is not beyond the reach of God and His grace."

Professors' of Christian educations focus on prevenient grace was closely related to their view of spiritual formation. They understood that God was graciously working in the lives of their students and was active in the redemptive process. They recognized that their students had the ability to respond to God's gracious offer of salvation.

#### *Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)*

All interviewees reflected Wesley's theology of the Holy Spirit. As one Christian educator stated, "The ministry of the Holy Spirit, the *paraclete*, inviting people, is central to my educational practices." A pastor stated,

I believe the work of the Spirit in our relationships needs to continue to be developed, so through education it provides that opportunity. The work of grace and the work of the Spirit in our lives are very important to me.

Also professors of Christian education stated, "Theologically, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the agent of learning." All interviewees recognized that their ministry and educational efforts are incomplete without the work of the Holy Spirit. They acknowledged that the work of the Spirit was needed for spiritual growth and holy living.

#### *Theology and Educational Practices*

Pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education differed on how their theology influenced their educational practices. Professors of Christian education and Christian educators indicated that their theology of spiritual formation influenced their educational practices. These educational practices included small groups, relationship building, discipleship, and interactive learning environments. As one professor stated, "Shaping and forming the person takes place by the types of classroom experiences and assignments in the course." Also, Christian educators indicated that their theology influenced their methods of teaching. These included relationship building, small groups, and active learning. Both professors and Christian educators understood educationally how the process of education forms the person with the primary goal of spiritual maturity.

However, pastors reflected Wesley's theological themes but did not connect those themes to their educational practices. Hence, they do a good job talking Wesleyan but not behaving Wesleyan. This was particularly true when describing how their theology influenced their educational practices. They used the theological language of Wesley's theology but did not connect their theological language with their educational practices. Thus, they have a good grasp of theology but not educational theory and practice.

#### *Recommendations to the Church of the Nazarene*

This study has provided an assessment of how John Wesley's theology and educational perspective was reflected in the theology and educational perspective of pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education. As a result, the following recommendations are provided for the Church of the Nazarene. They include theological identity, theological education, and a Wesleyan approach to education.

##### *1. Theological Identity*

One of the research concerns reflects the broader concern of the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, and particularly the Church of the Nazarene, that the denominations theological identity is being absorbed in American-Evangelicalism. The interview data indicated that pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education reflected the primary theological views of Wesley, but professors of Christian education placed a greater emphasis on Wesley's view of prevenient grace. Thus, their responses indicated that Wesley's theology was a driving force behind their educational practices.

However, pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education differed on the process of sanctification and holiness. Professors of Christian education placed a greater emphasis on the process of holiness, whereas pastors and Christian educators placed a greater emphasis on the crisis or experiences of holiness. Thus, the responses of pastors, Christian educators, and professors of

Christian education reflected the primary theological teachings of John Wesley and did not warrant the concern expressed in the research problem. The interview data indicated that a distinctive Wesleyan-Holiness theology was not being lost in the broader American-Evangelicalism. However, the interview data indicated that a distinctive Wesleyan educational perspective was being lost, particularly as it relates to Wesley's sacramental theology, social reform, and evangelism.

Pastors and Christian educators indicated an agreement on Wesley's theology, but not as it relates to their educational practices, whereas, professors of Christian education indicated the relationship of their theology and educational practices.

Secondly, the precedent literature indicated that Wesley's emphasis on adult group formation (Henderson 1997), the means of grace, and sacramental theology (Knight 1992; Blevins 1999) were distinct qualities of Wesley's educational practices. Also, the interview data indicated that "holiness of heart and life" and the emphasis on the learner (group formation) were the primary emphasis of Wesley's educational perspective. Hence, if the Church of the Nazarene and the broader Wesleyan-holiness Movement aspires to be more "Wesleyan" in their congregations, then these educational and ministry practices need to be incorporated into their congregations.

Therefore, the interview data indicated that Nazarene congregations did not reflect John Wesley's educational perspective as described above. Hence, pastors and Christian educators educational perspective was more reflective of the broader American-Evangelicalism than reflected by Wesley's educational perspective.

## *2. Theological Education*

Professors of Christian education indicated that they were concerned about preparing men and women for ministry. Their teaching and learning outcomes had a direct relationship to the Church of the Nazarene. The comparison between professors of Christian education with pastors and Christian educators indicated a gap between what was being taught in preparation for ministry with what was actually taking place in congregations. Professors of Christian education indicated that Nazarene congregations were not doing Christian education or spiritual formation effectively. Their responses indicated that they provided a concise link between their theological view of spiritual formation and their teaching practices. They modeled an approach to spiritual formation that included nurturing and development of the person by focusing on growth in grace, community, and Christian maturity. As one professor stated,

"I have a real strong theology of community and the church. I do not believe that redemption is a one-time act, but that it is ongoing, forming, and growing. Spiritual formation is ongoing until we are glorified. The community provides that place that enables us to remain redeemed. Christian education provides a means to help people interact with other and to be redeemed."

Also, professors of Christian education make a connection between their theology of spiritual formation and their educational practices. They included small groups, discipleship, interactive learning, and dialogical teaching.

Thus, professors of Christian education modeled an approach for spiritual formation in preparing men and women for ministry that was not reflected by pastors and Christian education in their congregations. Therefore, it is recommended that the Church of the Nazarene develop new avenues of dialogue about theological education that narrows the gap between what is being taught in Nazarene colleges and universities with what are being practiced in Nazarene congregations.

### *A Wesleyan Approach to Education*

The comparison of the interview data and the precedent literature indicated that in order for pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian educators to reflect John Wesley's theology and educational perspective in Nazarene congregations the inclusion of sacramental theology, small group formation, and spiritual formation/holiness should be included. Each of these educational and ministry practices were distinct to John Wesley's theology and educational perspective.<sup>9</sup>

#### *1. Sacramental Theology*

In order for Nazarene congregations to be more Wesleyan in their educational ministries, they need to incorporate Wesley's view of infant baptism, the Eucharist, and the means of grace as primary educational practices in their ministry practices.

Infant baptism reflects Wesley's soteriological focus of the redemption of the child (Wesley 1872, 10:188). Infant baptism reflects Wesley's theological view of prevenient grace and sanctification. There is great confusion in the Church of the Nazarene about infant baptism. The confusion could be related to the influence of the American Holiness Movement on the Church of the Nazarene as compared to the influence of John Wesley's theology. Rob Staples (1991) indicates that the Church of the Nazarene has strayed away from their classical Wesleyan heritage in the matter of infant baptism (Staples 1991, 16). Thus, if the Church of the Nazarene wants to be more Wesleyan in its educational and ministry practices it should include the practice of infant baptism.

Second, John Wesley's theology and educational perspective were most clearly reflected in his view of the "means of grace" (Knight 1992; Blevins 1999). The means of grace are outward signs, words, and actions ordained by God as ordinary channels that convey God's grace. The means of grace provide taxonomy of practices described by Wesley that Christians would associate with Spiritual formation: The Eucharist, Bible reading and proclamation, prayer and fasting, worship, service and social ministry, church and small group participation (Blevins 2000, 7). For Wesley, the chief means of grace was participation in the Eucharist. It is through these educational and ministry practices that God conveys his grace toward mankind, thus leading to spiritual maturity and holiness of heart and life.

### *2. Small Group Formation*

Pastors and Christian educators reflected Wesley's theology and educational perspective of group formation. Wesley's development of interlocking groups of societies, classes, and bands provide the overall framework for accountability, relationships, and spiritual formation for Methodism (Henderson 1997, 83-126). Wesley's system of group formation is distinctively Wesleyan, and was the primary basis for the success of Methodism. His development of groups as a means for holy living is unparalleled in eighteenth century England. Thus, Wesley's emphasis on group formation reflects his soteriological focus on "holiness of heart and life."

Pastors and Christian educators indicated that congregations reflected Wesley's theology and educational perspective of group formation. If Nazarene congregations are to continue reflecting Wesley's theology and educational perspective of group formation, then an investigation of group formation as reflected in the precedent literature provided by David Lowes Watson (1985, 1990, 1991), David Henderson (1997), and Richard Hietzenrater (1989, 1995), is needed to inform educational practices in congregations. Henderson's emphasis on interlocking groups provides a system of group formation that could be adapted to congregations as a means for spiritual growth and discipleship. The emphasis on cognitive (societies), behavioral (classes), and affective (bands) aspects of human development are natural avenues for educational ministries in congregations. Hence, Wesley's system of group formation could be adapted to each individual educational ministry and congregational context.

### *3. Spiritual Formation/Holiness*

Pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education reflected Wesley's emphasis of "holiness of heart and life". Wesley's soteriological focus was most reflected in the desire for holiness and sanctification of all of humanity. Thus, the previous discussion regarding sacramental theology and group formation provide the primary educational practices that reflect Wesley's desire for holiness of heart and life. The process of holiness is most reflected in these educational practices.

Pastors, Christian educators, and professors of Christian education differed on their view of spiritual formation and holiness. Professors of Christian education indicated spiritual formation and "holiness of heart and life" was more of a process of development. Their emphasis on holiness was reflected in their rationale and methodologies. They reflected more of Wesley's process of spiritual formation and sanctification than the experience of sanctification. Professor of Christian education recognized that both in teaching and in congregational ministries that more emphasis needs to be placed on nurturing and development of the learner as well as providing avenues of spiritual formation through small groups, dialogical teaching, accountability, and relationships.

### *Theological Identity*

The findings of this study provide the Church of the Nazarene with insights into the relationship of John Wesley's theology and educational perspective. The question, "In what ways are John Wesley's theology and educational perspectives distinct from American-Evangelicalism?" were addressed. Distinct practices included sacramental theology, group formation, and spiritual formation and

holiness. It is these educational practices that provide a distinctive Wesleyan approach to education. If the Church of the Nazarene and the broader Wesleyan-Holiness movement wants to represent a Wesleyan-Holiness identity then these educational practices needed to be incorporated.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a summary of the findings from my dissertation. See Maddix, Mark. 2001. *Reflecting John Wesley's Theology and Educational Perspective: Comparing Nazarene pastors, Christian educators, and Professors of Christian Education*. Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

<sup>2</sup> Christian and religious education scholars hold that theology is foundational for education except for James Michael Lee. Lee's "social-science approach" to religious education denies the role of theology as foundational for religious instruction.

<sup>3</sup> According to George Marsden, Evangelicalism is defined as, "A broad grouping of Christians who believe the same doctrines", or "A self-conscious inter-denominational movement, with leaders, publications, and institutions with which many subgroups identify" (1991, 5).

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3 of dissertation for a complete description of the research plan and design.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 2 of dissertation includes the precedent literature which includes theology & education theory, philosophical foundations of Wesley's theology, and theological foundations of Wesley's educational perspective.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 4 of the dissertation provides a concise analysis of the interview data of the qualitative study. The following findings and recommendations are taken from chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup> Interviewees did not indicate infant baptism as an educational practice. They may not see it as an educational practice but as a element of worship.

<sup>8</sup> Most interviewees indicated that they practiced communion only four times a year. As one pastor stated, "we only serve communion four times a year as directed by the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene."

<sup>9</sup> These distinct practices are not exclusive to Wesley's ministry practices. However, they provide the primary framework for Wesley's educational practices.

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**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY: REFLECTING  
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