

LANGUAGES OF HOLINESS: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SEEKER

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Introduction

Perhaps it is a sign I'm growing older, but lately I have had a growing interest in my ancestry and have been exploring some of the genealogical records of past generations of Benefiels. This, of course, can be a risky venture, but much to my pleasant surprise, I have discovered a long and strong involvement of Benefiels in the Wesleyan Holiness movement.

James Benefiel served as a chaplain in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. In the early years of the 19th Century, he was a Methodist minister in Indiana. His grandson, Theodore, served in the Union Army during the Civil War and was a Methodist minister, assuming responsibility for his first circuit in 1865. His grandson, Walter, served in the U.S. Army in WWI. After the war, he became a minister in the Church of the Nazarene and pastored in Alva, Oklahoma and Glenn's Ferry, Idaho. He was my grandfather. My father, Paul, was a Nazarene pastor and district superintendent. My brother, Randy, is a Nazarene pastor. And, of course, I am ordained as a minister in the Church of the Nazarene.

In looking at the genealogical records, I have been very interested to read the stories of dedicated, Christian, Wesleyan Holiness men and women whose legacies I inherit as a Benefiel. As I read their stories, I discover insights not only about where I have come from... but who I am... and even what some of my hopes are for my children. I begin to see how my life story fits into a much broader story of the Benefiels. By the way, one other thing that the record notes... over the generations, most Benefiels were poor.

While personally I find all this to be interesting, my heritage in the Wesleyan Holiness movement is much more than a matter of genealogy. After all, I am not only a Benefiel, I am a son of the Church, raised in a Nazarene parsonage, brought to faith and nurtured by holiness people... people who loved me and modeled for me the character of holiness in their love for one another.

Holiness is being fully consecrated to God.

My memories of growing up in a Nazarene parsonage are mostly good ones. I think the reason many of my memories are related to the church is because that's where we spent most of our time with most of our friends. I remember lots of lively singing, testimonies, and passionate preaching with Brother Terrell leading the chorus of "Amen's" and Sister Wirick letting out a shout of "Glory be to God" when she got "blessed". Occasionally in our services we would be visited by an unusual sense of the Presence of God. Saints and sinners would move spontaneously to the front to pray around the altar. The scheduled plan of worship for the day would be suspended as the Spirit of God moved among us.

Praying at the altar was a normal and regular practice. We had an altar call at the end of almost service when the preacher would invite people to come forward to make "decisions" for Christ. I was "saved" and "sanctified" at an altar of prayer... quite a few times actually. Camp

meetings, revival services, youth camps... Not that I was repenting from some terrible sin, but more that I was part of a community that took sin and holiness seriously. When people went to the altar, most of us would gather around and pray with those who were seeking and usually wait until the last seeker had “prayed through”. And then those who had received spiritual help gave testimonies of what God had done for them. Lots of tears. Lots of hugs. Lots of words of hope and promise. A community that believed not only that we could be forgiven, but that God could do a cleansing and purifying work in our hearts and lives.

Perhaps consecration is the word that fits best here. We believed that we were to be consecrated to God. Committed, dedicated, surrendered completely into the hands of an ominous but loving God. We read and preached from the scriptural passage that commanded us to “...present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice” to God (Romans 12:1) and we believed the Word of God when it clearly stated that without holiness, “...no one would see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). We sang “Called Unto Holiness” and “I Surrender All”. We believed that if we were sanctified wholly, fully obedient to God, God would not only do a work in us, there was no end to what God could do through us.

Maybe it is just my personality type, but I have often wondered if being raised in a holiness community contributed to my lifelong sense of satisfaction associated with pulling weeds, doing the dishes, and picking up trash. I love to work to get rid of all that is bad in the world and to preserve that which is good. I love to take the dirty and unclean and purify it, making it clean and new again. I must be a true son of the holiness movement!

Our commitment to live for God and to flee from sin and the devil was largely understood in terms of a code of Christian conduct. “Rules” is the word we used. We took the rules of Christian living very seriously. There were disciplines of personal piety that we expected of one another. Reading our Bibles and praying both personally and with our families at home were the common practice. We not only gave public testimony to the work of God in our lives in Wednesday evening prayer meeting, we also encouraged one another to be faithful witnesses wherever we were and in whatever we were doing. As a high school student, I carried my Bible with me to school as a public witness of my Christian faith.

We thought and talked and looked different from most folks on the street. Holiness folks were a peculiar people... committed, but peculiar. Called out and set apart. The rules changed over the years, of course, but some of my early memories include not only the obvious... no dancing, gambling, drinking or smoking... but keeping the Sabbath Holy meant no reading the funny papers or shopping or working in the yard on Sunday. Holiness women didn't wear makeup or jewelry. They wore clothing that was modest by any standard. We didn't buy from stores that sold liquor. Boys and girls didn't go swimming together. And we were very wary about anything that might come close to being worldly entertainment. I remember in the second grade being invited to attend a birthday party for one of my classmates at school. At the end of the party, the parents announced a surprise, they were taking us to see the movie, “Bambi”, in the local theater. I'm sure they were confused when I broke into tears and asked to be taken home. I explained that I was a Nazarene and Nazarenes didn't go to the movies. I think I must have been one of the fortunate ones who avoided adolescent rebellion against the rules of the Church. Perhaps it was because the people of our church were so loving. The rules didn't seem

burdensome or legalistic, because the bonds of our community life were so strong. The rules were the expression of our common commitment to be a holy people. Love trumped legalism.

All of this seems like such a distant memory... We, in the holiness movement have moved on. But when I think of those years, I realize that God was at work in me through my participation in that community. I have been shaped by growing up in a community of people who were serious about following Christ completely... People who believed that the call to Christian discipleship was a call to absolute surrender and full consecration to a holy and loving God.

Holiness is being fully consecrated to God.

Holiness is being filled with the Holy Spirit in love and in power.

In 1967 I went off to Pasadena College. The late '60's and early '70's were extraordinary days across the country, perhaps especially in California. The baby boomers came of age and in the convergence of a variety of factors broke through the barriers of social propriety. The days were electrified with both creative and destructive energy... "upheaval" would be a good word. Christianity in America was also being turned inside out and upside down through the charismatic renewal movement and the Jesus People movement with thousands of would-be hippies and surfers declaring their radical allegiance to Jesus Christ.

It must have been the influence of my holiness upbringing that contributed to my being such an earnest seeker. I wanted to know God fully, nothing held back. Much of the spiritual renewal across the country was focused on being filled with the Spirit. I wondered if there was something more that God had for me. I began an intense time of searching and seeking God. I read everything I could find about the Person and work of the Holy Spirit and memorized long portions of Scripture that talked of life in the Spirit. I met regularly with others who were on a similar journey. At one point I remember counting nine weekly gatherings of worship, prayer or Bible study that I was regularly attending. I prayed and fasted, at times for days, wanting more than anything to know the fullness of the Spirit in my life.

In the middle of my search, the Asbury Revival swept across the country and exploded on the campus of Pasadena College like a surprise tropical storm. In a Wednesday morning chapel service, students, staff and faculty came forward in wave after wave to kneel at the altar. As people continued to come forward to pray, others stood to offer their words of confession and give testimony to the work of God. People stayed. Classes were cancelled. People remained all day long and into the night. In the following weeks, I went out with other students to churches in the surrounding area to give a report of the revival that had come to our campus. To my amazement, as we gave our reports, the Spirit of God moved among those congregations too with people confessing their hardness of heart and seeking the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.

Curiously, in my search for the fullness of the Spirit, I then entered into a dry time... a time of waiting. I had come to an end. There was nothing more I could do. One day near the end of my senior year, I was working on a paper for my Greek class exegeting Romans 8:15,

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’”. I spent most of the night writing the paper. When I finished, somewhere around 5 a.m., I decided that rather than going to bed for a couple hours I would drive over to Farnsworth Park and watch the sun come up. At the beginning of the year the student body had gathered at Farnsworth for an all school picnic. As I walked through the park that early morning, I imagined seeing all my friends and professors there again and in my mind began thanking those who had journeyed with me during the year. I thanked professors who had invested their time and attention in me, and fellow students who had joined me in the search for the fullness of the Spirit. As I envisioned them in my mind, I expressed my love to each of them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

And then, my attention was turned to Jesus... I remember simply saying to the Lord, “And Jesus, I love you”. I don’t often hear words directly from God, but that morning I did. I heard the Lord say, “And Ron, I love you. In fact, you know all those who have encouraged and loved you over these past months and years, all this time I have been loving you through them.”

And then it happened, suddenly I was overcome by a sense of the Presence and Power and Love of God. The only way I can express it is that I was covered with, immersed in, overwhelmed by God’s love. I knew in a way that I had never known before that God loved me. Like Paul, I was not a slave, but a son of God who knew the freedom and joy of calling God, “Abba, Father”. I knew with John Wesley the meaning of the words, “love excluding sin”. I was so filled with the love of God that there was no room for rebellion, selfish desire, or even doubt.

I was also filled with a sense of the power of the Spirit. I was confident that God could do “far beyond all that we might ask or think”. In those days there were lots of reports of signs and wonders, especially healings. I began to pray for people and watched partly in confidence and partly in amazement as people were healed! It became clear to me that holiness had everything to do with the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Years later I would discover that the intensity of my experience was also characteristic of the experiences of seekers from the very beginning of the Wesleyan-holiness movement. In the last few years I have been doing some research at the Rylands Library in Manchester, England. Apparently, in the early years of the Methodist revival, the Wesley brothers asked new converts to write out their testimonies. The stories were then read in society meetings. In the Rylands, I came across a large number of unpublished letters written to Charles Wesley from some of these converts writing out the accounts of their encounters with God. As I read the letters, I was struck with the often dramatic and profound nature of the experiences they reported in their testimonies. In some not so distant way, my story seemed connected to theirs. Here are some excerpts from those letters.

I felt myself so vile that I thought hell was ready to swallow me up but I found Christ’s everlasting arms was under me the 14 of Sepr. When I was in the greatest agony of soul I heard a voice say unto me daughter be of good cheer thy sins be forgiven thee... at the same time I felt so much love in my heart that I could hardly contain my self for I wanted

the whole world to feel what I did... I was at the same time re(s)tord to my bodily health as well as ever I was in my life... I was catchd as a fire brand out of the fire

Sarah Middleton, 1740

...sometimes as I was standing I used to think that the ground whereon I stood was hot under me which made me almost to tremble and to think if the ground should open and swallow me up I should perish forever. The light of God shown on me once more and my soul was filled with love. Then I could lift up my heart again to the Lord and one day as I was at my work my soul was overpowered with the love of God that I knew not whether I was in the Body or out of the Body

Nathaniel Hurst, 1741

Dear Sir, my heart longs for words to tell how good my dear Saviour is to save such a dark dead stony hearted damned unbelieving Pharisee as I... You bid me read the 7th to the Romans. You said that was my state and I did read it and found much comfort insomuch that I began at the first Chapter in order to read them through to see what was in them. But as I was reading, I think it was the sixth Chapter, I was forced to lift my eyes off the book and look about me like a person that was born blind and that moment received light (sight?) ...soon after you expounded at Fetterlane and then I was at that time and ever since filled with joy and peace in believing I received the forgiveness of sins and the witness of the Spirit and a dominion over sin at that very time. I trembled so with joy and cried that I did not know how to bear myself. You asked me if I found that peace that passed understanding. -- I said, "Yes, indeed I have."

Maria Price, 1740

Holiness is being filled with the Holy Spirit in love and in power.

Holiness is following Christ in ministering to and among the poor.

In 1972 my father accepted the pastorate of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene and I went with him as an associate. For most of the next 23 years, my life and ministry would be in the middle of LA. It was a different world. People from all over the globe seemed magnetically attracted to our neighborhood with especially high numbers of immigrants coming from Central America, Korea and the Philippines. Street gangs and drug traffic were a major problem. Relations between different ethnic groups were strained to the breaking point. Schools were abysmal. Many of our neighbors lived in extreme poverty. This was a world unlike anything I had ever known.

The overwhelming poverty and need in the neighborhood presented questions and demanded answers that I was not used to responding to. What does the Church of Jesus Christ look like in a complex, diverse, urban context? What does it mean to be Christian in a world of poverty and need? How should the Church think about and respond to systems in the city that privilege some at the peril of others? What does it mean to be a holiness people in the middle of Los Angeles?

Over the next few years, a wonderful transformation took place in old LA First Church. The English, Spanish, Korean and Filipino congregations came together as one church with a

shared mission to the community. Young adults from all over the country came to LA to work with us as we developed a variety of ministries to those in need... a school, a food pantry, a jobs program, a medical clinic, a hospitality center for people who were homeless and a youth program for neighborhood youth...

LA First, of course, was a church with a great history. It was the church that Phineas Bresee and a band of 135 holiness people had founded in 1895... the first church ever to carry the name, Church of the Nazarene. I remembered that Bresee's original vision for the Church was twofold, to proclaim holiness throughout the land and to minister to and among the poor. In 1901, Bresee had written, "The evidence of the presence of Jesus in our midst is that we bear the gospel, primarily to the poor." Here we were, 100 years later, rediscovering the vision of the founders, if even quite by accident.

In rediscovering the call to minister among the poor, we also discovered the excitement and joy of seeing God at work in the lives of those in need... people were being radically transformed by the power of God. This didn't happen all the time, of course, but it happened a lot. People who had been homeless alcoholics and drug addicts got off the street, cleaned up in rehab, got jobs and regained a sense of dignity and self-worth. Instead of joining gangs, scores of neighborhood youth were tutored in reading and math and mentored in the faith. People whose lives were devastated by life circumstances and poor choices came to faith in Christ and were transformed, changed, liberated, freed! We were discovering that the modern day stories of resurrection were to be found largely in the margins of society. Our hearts resonated when we read Bresee's words: "The imparted power by the Holy Ghost thrills and fills and burns in living testimony... Men and women can hear the message and get saved. Drunkards and harlots, the unlettered, every humble, earnest, longing soul can know the power of God to save to the uttermost."

As we ministered to those in need and welcomed them into the fellowship of the church, I began to read and preach from the Scriptures differently... the Jubilee narratives, the Old Testament prophets, the Gospel of Luke, the Sermon on the Mount, the book of James and on and on... It seemed as though everywhere I looked in Scripture, right there before my eyes were words calling the people of God to care for the poor. The parables of the Good Samaritan, the Sheep and the Goats, Rich Man Lazarus and Poor Man Dives, these words of Jesus were so clear and so prominent, how could I have not noticed all this before?

I also began thinking about the Kingdom of God in new ways. As I read the second chapter of Ephesians, I saw so clearly that the Church is to be a community of reconciliation, not just between individuals, but also between groups of people who have been pitted against one another by the social and political forces of history and culture. In the Kingdom of God, all the discrimination and power distinctions of the surrounding culture are challenged. In the Church of Jesus Christ, there is to be no distinction between rich and poor, male and female, Black and White and Asian and Latino. The Church, as it bears witness to the already and not yet Kingdom, is to be a holy community of peace and justice and an agent of reconciliation in the world.

Living, working and worshipping with brothers and sisters in Christ who were poor, I began to see life from their vantage point. The world looked very different from the perspective of the poor. I saw and sometimes even felt the pain inflicted by systems of oppression that so freely took advantage of those who had no power to resist or defend themselves. I was angry, furious, at the political machinery that routinely disregarded the plight of the poor in favor of the rich and powerful. I visited the sick who didn't have access to adequate medical care. I was distressed by overcrowded and under-resourced schools that warehoused students rather than preparing them with the knowledge and skills they needed for the life journey ahead. I hurt for those who were separated from their families who like pawns in a massive chess game, were moved about by the forces of global economics and warfare. And I remembered the words of the prophets that talked about holiness in terms of righteousness and justice. And I wondered why holiness people, Nazarenes, so often expressed their appreciation for our work among the poor, but seemed even protective and defensive of the powers that caused so much pain and suffering in the world. Surely there must be some connection between holiness and justice...

We soon discovered that we were the ones who received the benefit as we served those in need. Not only did we witness transformation in the lives of the poor, we experienced transformation in our own lives. Serving others -- changed us! I was very interested to discover that John Wesley linked holiness with caring for those in need. In sermons like "The Character of a Methodist" and "On Zeal", Wesley wrote that Methodists, and indeed all Christians, are to care for those in need not just out of compassion, and not just in obedience to the command of God, but also because ministry to the poor is a "means of grace". As we minister to those in need, the grace of God is at work in us, producing 'holy tempers' or Christlike character in us. Wesley believed that it was essential for every true Christian to regularly give to the needs of the poor and visit those in sick or in prison because these acts of mercy were God-given means of grace through which the Spirit developed the character of holiness in us. Randy Maddox writes, "...it is striking how consistently [Wesley] connected engagement in ministry to and with the poor... to the existence or retention of the sanctified life."

Holiness is following Christ in ministering to and among the poor.

Holiness is the character of God -- Father, Son and Spirit -- restored in the people of God, the Church, as they participate in God's life and redemptive mission in the world.

In the year 2000, I was elected President of NTS, much to everyone's surprise, including my own mother. I have discovered NTS to be an educationally rich Christian environment. Reading, reflection, teaching and preaching are part of the culture of the community. I love discussions with members of the faculty about theology, church history and the mission of the church. I feel, even as President, that I am still a student learning about the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

Along the way, I find myself putting the pieces of the theological puzzle together in different ways than I have in the past. My understanding of holiness may be the prime example. In reading and reflecting on the thinking of a long list of theologians, I have come to understand that holiness is not primarily about our experiences, or our activities, it is not even primarily about us at all. First and foremost, perhaps even always, holiness is about God. It is a word

about God's character of love, purity, mercy and justice. The discussion of holiness belongs and begins in the doctrine of God -- Father, Son and Spirit. It is a word about the perichoretic relationships within the Life of God -- the mutual indwelling love of the Father, Son and Spirit. The wonder of grace is not only that we receive God's love, but that we are invited to participate in the Trinitarian life. As branches grafted into the vine, we become "partakers of the divine nature". It is in the life of God that we participate in God's holiness.

Our participation in the life of God is our salvation. But not ours alone, we are invited into the saving life of God along with all the people of God. Together, we are redeemed by the blood of Christ and empowered by the Spirit. Together, as the Church of Jesus Christ, we are being saved. The character of God's holiness becomes our character as we find our life and being in the life of God. There we are transformed, renewed in God's image, changed "from glory to glory", re-created in the likeness of Christ.

As we participate in the life of God, we also participate in the mission of God in the world. We discover the wonder that the Trinitarian life is not only perichoretic, it is also economic. God's character of holy love is expressed in the incarnational redemptive mission of God through Jesus Christ in the world. As God in Christ Jesus was kenotically poured out for the world, we also are poured out. Because we are servants of God, we serve in the world. Often, quite often, that moves us to love and care for the sick, the prisoner, the hungry, the lost and the broken. As God in righteousness stands with the oppressed and against the oppressor, we share in God's mission of justice.

The Church is the Body of Christ, empowered by the Spirit to be a prophetic witness of the already not-yet Kingdom of God. The relationships within the Trinitarian life of God are reflected in the relationships of the people of God as part of the Church of Jesus Christ. As our corporate life is located in the perichoretic Trinity, our relationships in the Church are marked by reconciliation, mutual love, and mutual submission. Because the life we share together is the holy life of God, the Church is itself already, but also not-yet, holy. It is already holy as it finds its life and mission in the life and mission of God. It is not-yet holy as it looks forward to the return of Christ for its final and full redemption.

Holiness is the character of God -- Father, Son and Spirit -- restored in the people of God, the Church, as they participate in God's life and redemptive mission in the world.

Four Languages

Even though this is *my* holiness autobiography, I trust that it is apparent that ultimately I am not talking about me. A self-absorbed discussion of holiness would be the epitome of an oxymoron. My story is perhaps significant here only because I am a son of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Each of the chapters of my holiness journey to date have taken place in the context of a Nazarene holiness community. But aye, there's the rub, the way each community has thought about holiness, talked about holiness and practiced holy living is very different... perhaps at times not even remotely related. Each of these communities of holiness has a distinct history, a particular social context in which it emerged and continues to exist. Each has its own favorite scriptures, hymns, heroes and defenders. Each has its own understandings of God, its

own expectations of religious experience, and its own symbols of holy living. Each has its own culture, its own *language* of holiness. Listen again...

- Holiness is being fully consecrated to God.
- Holiness is being filled with the Holy Spirit in love and in power.
- Holiness is following Christ in ministering to and among the poor.
- Holiness is the character of God -- Father, Son and Spirit -- restored in the people of God, the Church, as they participate in God's life and redemptive mission in the world.

These are very different languages of holiness. Those in a particular holiness community may believe that their language, their understanding of holiness is the only true version of holiness and look down on those who speak a different language. Of course sometimes some people over time will migrate from one community to another, as I have. And, like immigrants in a new country, initially feel very much out of place, as though they are in a foreign land. They soon discover that it is necessary for them to learn new holiness language and customs if they are going to be accepted in the new holiness community.

What are we holiness people to do with all of this? One thing we apparently share in common is that we believe that we should be united in our holiness witness. Given all these different cultures and languages, what hope is there for unity? How will we ever keep from endlessly dividing into holiness ghettos? What are we to do with all these different, even competing holiness stories? In the spirit of Wesley, perhaps there is a *via media*. Perhaps it is not "either/or", but "both/and"... not "multiple choice" but "all of the above". Could it be that the wealth of knowledge and experience that each of the holiness sub-narratives contributes to the whole will help us better understand what it truly means to be a holy people?

Perhaps the way we tell the holiness story might help us here. The nature of story, of course, is to weave together personalities, themes and sub-plots into a narrative that comes together and makes sense... a story that has meaning to those who read it. Narrative in all of its potential for ambiguity also has the capacity to provide room for flexibility and inclusivity. It has the wonderful characteristic of inviting a wide array of people not only to see themselves in the story but also to make room for others. What if we were to think of the holiness story as God's story written in Scripture and in history that has found its expression in thousands of places among millions of people? What if together we were to embrace all of the pieces of that story as sub-plots with each sub-plot having something important to contribute to the whole story?

While there is a great deal in our difference that threatens to divide us, it is also true that there is so very much that unites us. While there are many holiness stories, there is also *one* holiness story that is grounded – centered -- in the One Holy God revealed to us in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures and exemplified in the lives of holiness saints down through the ages. As holiness people, we share the particular calling of proclaiming that story in our words, our lives and our relationships. It is here that we begin to see that we have a common mission. You could say that we even have a common lineage. We are a family united by the Spirit of Christ.

There is, of course, the challenge of synthesis, especially the kind of synthesis called for in propositional statements. What are we to do with Article X in the Nazarene Manual or the Core

Values of the Church? What can we say about holiness that is tightly worded and coherent across holiness languages? There is no doubt, that finding the precise words to briefly sum up the essential theological understanding of the entire holiness narrative in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition is a significant challenge. Strong biblical exegesis and theological reflection that takes into account the historic Christian emphasis on holiness expressed in the Patristic Fathers and the creeds will, of course, be central. But, perhaps in the words we choose, there will also be a way to consider the different languages of our Wesleyan holiness tradition.

As we listen closely, I believe I hear notes of hope in the holiness melody. With all of our differences, there are threads of continuity that are woven through the fabric of Wesleyan holiness tradition... integrating themes in the holiness story. In fact, as I think about the vision pictured in the theological language that I have learned and come to value in my years at NTS, I wonder what such a holiness community embodying that vision might look like... and I think I can make out the faint contours of the holiness community I grew up in years ago. It is as though my holiness journey has come full circle!

And I think I detect other threads of unity and continuity in the holiness fabric. One is that we all believe we are a “called out” people. We believe that God has called us to be different from the world. Called out from the world and set apart for the purposes of God. For all of us this includes being filled with the Holy Spirit and living in purity of heart and life.

Further, if there is a central unifying theme in the holiness story, it is love. Surely it is true that at the core of everything all Wesleyan Holiness people would hold as true and dear flows from the central truth that God in Christ Jesus is holy in love. It is in response to God’s love demonstrated through the death of Christ on the cross that we surrender and consecrate ourselves in faithful obedience. In the filling of the Holy Spirit, we are filled to overflowing with the love of God. The greatest of all commandments is that we love God with all our heart, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourself, the neighbor being the one who is in need. And participation in the perichoretic love of God is the basis for our salvation, and our understanding of the life and mission of the Church. We are not only called out of the world in purity of heart and life, we are thrust back into the world as we are filled with God’s holy love. Whatever subplot in the narrative we are part of, holiness is certainly about love. And it is this holy Christlike love that offers hope... not only in the words we use to tell our holiness story, but perhaps even more in the way we embrace one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Conclusion

The days and years ahead are full of exciting potential for those of us in the Wesleyan holiness tradition. There are holy mountains for us still to climb and views of the Promised Land that are yet to be discovered. But the way forward cannot be separated from the past. In fact, the way forward surely must be through the past. The holiness story extends its arms into the past, gathering up all its children, drawing them into itself and carrying them into the future. God willing, the holiness stories of our grandchildren will reference the holiness stories of our grandparents. This we know, we can rest in the confident assurance that God, who is holy, is faithful to raise up people of holiness. And that God who has begun a good work in us, will be faithful to complete it. Thanks be to God!

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
Perfect submission, perfect delight!
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight!
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
Perfect submission, all is at rest.
I in my Savior am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.
This is our story, this is our song,
Praising our Savior all the day long.*

