



ONE

THE WESLEYAN HERITAGE

Where and when does the story of the Church of the Nazarene begin? The 1923 General Assembly resolved that the 1908 union of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene and the Holiness Church of Christ, at Pilot Point, Texas, be considered the birth date of the church. Assembly delegates understood that this event signified what the Church of the Nazarene was and hoped to be. At Pilot Point, using the language of the time, various “streams of the ‘water of life’” flowed together in “glorious confluence,” and diverse individuals “united as one people” in Christ.¹ Pilot Point delegates came from cities and small towns. Some were rich; many were poor. As members of small independent Holiness groups, they differed on some specific points of doctrine and practice. Most once had been Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Friends (Quakers), or Baptists. They came from Eastern, Western, and Southern parts of the United States and had established missions in India, Japan, and the Cape Verde Islands. They transcended their differences and united in order to more clearly proclaim and faithfully demonstrate Christian holiness.²

The 1923 General Assembly delegates believed that Pilot Point spoke well of a church with a clear sense of calling and mission, a church that challenged people of diverse backgrounds and experience to respond to the call and to embrace the mission of proclaiming biblical holiness throughout the world. By 1923 the Church of the Nazarene reported over 51,000 members spanning the United States, Canada, the British Isles, India, the Cape Verde Islands, Guatemala, Cuba, Mexico, and Swaziland. In choosing Pilot Point and 1908 as the symbolic beginning of the Church of the Nazarene, the members of the 1923 General Assembly did not intend to say that the historical roots of the church went no deeper than the dusty soil of early twentieth-century Texas. Many of that assembly had helped to build the various independent Holiness groups that came to form the Nazarenes. New Englander A. B. Riggs, Texan C. B. Jernigan, Scotsman George Sharpe, and Californian E. A. Girvin (all members of the Committee for the Correction of the Historical Statement in 1923) knew firsthand the many important events of the Holiness Movement that had taken place decades prior to 1908.³

WESLEYANISM

An appropriate starting point for the history of the Church of the Nazarene is *not* Pilot Point, Texas, in 1908, in spite of its significance, but the eighteenth-century revival in which John and Charles Wesley played significant parts. Nazarenes have always understood that they are direct spiritual and theological heirs of the Wesleys.

John Wesley (1703-91) and his brother Charles (1707-88) rose to prominence during a tumultuous time in British history. During the eighteenth century, Great Britain gained economic and military control over many parts of the globe and laid the foundations for the British Empire. Great Britain also experienced the early effects of an industrial revolution, which changed the country's economy and its people's ways of life. Large factories arose across the countryside. Thousands dug in mines for the coal needed to fuel the machines. Changes in manufacturing, together with other social factors, led people to move from ancestral homes to take advantage of economic opportunities. Abandoning old villages, workers created new population centers. The Church of England struggled to maintain its hold on people's lives.⁴

The Church of England had been established under King Henry VIII (reigned 1509-47). Henry sought an annulment for his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Aragon and Castile, for her not bearing Henry the son he desired. Henry and Catherine's daughter, Mary, was raised in a Spanish Catholic convent. In order to pressure Rome to grant Henry's divorce, in 1529 the English Parliament criticized the abuses of church courts, the immorality of the clergy, and the vast extent of monastic lands and other church holdings. Thomas More (1478-1535), Henry's highly esteemed chancellor, resigned in 1532 rather than give sanction to Henry's moves against the Roman Church. In 1532 Henry obtained the Submission of the Clergy, committing clergy to enact no church laws without the monarch's prior approval and to submit all existing church laws for the king's review. In 1533 Parliament forbid appeals to Rome for court decisions involving the church and its clergy. Finally, after Archbishop Thomas Wolsey was unable to persuade Rome to grant the annulment, contrary to the church Henry divorced Catherine and wed Anne Boleyn. She bore him a daughter, Elizabeth. Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) replaced Wolsey as archbishop of Canterbury. Ordained in 1523, Cranmer himself had married secretly in 1532. In 1534 Parliament passed the Supremacy Act that made the monarch the only supreme head of the Church of England. Parliament's Act of Succession explicitly took away the possibility of Mary, a Roman Catholic, inheriting the throne. Thomas More refused to sign the Act of Succession,

was imprisoned, and in 1535 beheaded for high treason. The following year, Henry had Anne beheaded on charges of adultery and wed Jane Seymour. She bore Henry a son, Edward. Meanwhile, Henry disbanded the monasteries and sold monastic land to local gentry. Still, though England formally had broken with Rome, except for allowing priests to marry it retained the theology and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵

Gradually, England opened itself to Reformation theology. William Tyndale (1494-1536) had already argued and written on justification by faith and the authority of the Bible. He had criticized church leaders, who drove him out of England. Archbishop Cranmer, a Reformation figure very different from Luther or Calvin, decreed in 1539 that the once suppressed English translation of the Bible undertaken by Tyndale be used in churches and circulated as widely as possible among the people. At the same time, Cranmer played a crucial role in modifying and disseminating Reformation theology by compiling, editing, and writing significant portions of *The Book of Common Prayer*. But the first version of *The Book of Common Prayer* was too Roman for the increasing number of English clergy influenced by the continental reformation.

Upon Henry's death in 1547 and the ascension to the throne of Henry's ten-year-old son, Edward (who reigned from 1547 to 1553), Protestant ideas gained wider circulation. Church leaders, led by Cranmer, undertook a reform of the liturgy and, in 1549, published a revised *Book of Common Prayer*. The church intended *The Book of Common Prayer* to be "grounded upon the Holy Scriptures" and "agreeable to the order of the primitive church," while "designed to be unifying to the realm" and "intended for the edification of the people." A further revised *Book of Common Prayer*, published in 1552, represented a middle way, or *via media*, and withstood various challenges that it was either too Roman or too Protestant. The 1559 Act of Uniformity imposed this *Book of Common Prayer* upon all English churches.⁶

During the century and a half between Henry VIII and the Wesleys, the English church was a theological battleground where various forces fought to determine the church's shape and substance. Large elements wanted the church in England to retain as many elements of its Roman heritage as possible. Some secretly longed for reunion with the Roman church. Under the disruptive rule of Mary (1553-58) Protestants were persecuted, imprisoned, and killed. Those who held steadfast to their faith came to know what it meant truly to be Protestant. Upon Mary's death, these Christians wanted a more thorough reformation that would align the church with the Reformed

churches in continental Europe. Radicals sought a return to primitive Christianity.⁷

Queen Elizabeth I (who ruled from 1558 to 1603) managed this conflict by a truce among the various parties. The Elizabethan Settlement reaffirmed the monarch as the supreme head of the Church of England and *The Book of Common Prayer* as the standard for worship. Doctrinally written *Homilies* explicated the Articles of Religion and preserved English theology's defense of both free grace and free will. The intention of the settlement was to steer a middle course between Roman Catholicism (without the authority of the pope) and the sort of Protestantism that John Calvin had introduced in Geneva, Switzerland, and that was gaining influence through John Knox in Scotland. The thirty-nine Articles of Religion could be broadly interpreted.⁸

This settlement did not satisfy all English Christians. Roman Catholic-leaning high churchmen wanted no concessions to the Reformation. The radical Protestants, on the other hand, wanted to purify the English church of every last vestige of Romanism. They became known as Puritans. Both parties worked to reach their goals, even if this meant imprisonment or other punishment.

After Elizabeth, the Roman Catholic-sympathizing Stuart monarchs silenced the most vocal Protestants and dealt harshly with anyone who challenged the provisions of the settlement. Some Puritans immigrated to Holland and from there in the 1600s to North America. Puritans who remained in England sided with the political opponents of the Stuart King Charles I during the English Civil War of the 1640s. When Oliver Cromwell defeated the king, Puritans found themselves in control of both government and church. During the period of the Commonwealth or Protectorate (1653-60), when England had no king or queen, Puritans tried to make the Church of England into a Reformed church. When the monarchy returned to the Stuarts in 1660, however, the middle way was restored, and the Puritans were suppressed once again.

In 1688, Parliament forced the abdication of the Roman Catholic-leaning James II and invited his staunchly Protestant daughter Mary and son-in-law William to accept the throne. The following year Parliament passed the Act of Toleration (1689). Those Puritans who chose to remain outside the Church of England became Dissenters with legal protections. They organized their own congregations and worshipped according to their convictions. This ended the Puritan crusade to dominate the Church of England. Differing among themselves on such issues as church government and baptism, Puritans divided

into groups of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Both of John and Charles Wesley's grandfathers were dissenting Puritan ministers.⁹

When John Wesley and his brother Charles were born early in the eighteenth century, the Church of England had been through nearly two centuries of turmoil and conflict. The British people desired peace and stability, not upheaval and disorder. Nevertheless, there were forces at work that guaranteed that the eighteenth century would be anything but placid. The intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment called for a thorough rethinking of fundamental ideas about the world and humanity's place in it by appealing to reason. Through philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and David Hume (1711-76), the Enlightenment offered a way out of endless disputes about religious doctrines by favoring reason and scientific investigation over revelation and faith. Enlightenment thinkers made important inroads in the universities. Their logic and methods influenced preaching, including that of clergymen such as John Wesley, who, like many British Christians, reacted strongly against the Enlightenment's ideas about religion.¹⁰

Pietism, a religious movement arising on the European continent, challenged the supremacy of reason and emphasized religious experience. Pietism sought to turn Lutheran and Reformed churches preoccupied with doctrinal precision, ritual, and organization to a greater concern for personal faith. Pietists urged Christians to devote themselves to living according to the example of Christ and to spiritual disciplines: Bible reading, prayer, and meeting together with other Christians in small groups for mutual support and accountability. Pietists believed that since the Reformation, the European Protestant churches had forgotten the matter of simple, godly living. Pietists called the churches to what they believed to be the churches' fundamental mission: to represent Christ in the world through humble, loving service that faithfully reflected the character of Jesus. The Spirit of Christ, Pietists believed, dwelt in the faithful believer's heart. Pietists from the European continent, such as the Moravians, began settling in England and America in the early 1700s. Some Puritans, as well, became more interested in cultivating good Christians than in establishing correct doctrine or maintaining certain forms of worship or organization.¹¹

With *The Book of Common Prayer* uniting them, Calvinists and Arminians, Rationalists and Pietists abided, however uncomfortably, together in the Church of England. The High Church Anglicans who treasured the liturgical Catholic heritage coexisted with Low Church Anglicans preferring simpler forms of worship. Both parents of John and Charles Wesley had left the dis-

senting Puritan movement in which they had been raised and turned to the Church of England.

Seventeenth-century theologians such as Henry Hammond and Peter Heylyn identified a coherent center for all Anglicans in the early years of the Christian church, especially those preceding the Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325. Here, they believed, Christian thinking was not yet divided by the cultural, geographic, political, and even linguistic differences (Latin in the West, Greek in the East) that affected the church in later centuries. As compared to post-Nicene theologians, including Augustine, these Anglicans believed that early theologians such as Irenaeus and Chrysostom had a greater understanding of Christian faith. This led to a rich and flourishing scholarship in Patristics (from the Latin for “father”).¹²

Though John and Charles Wesley’s two grandfathers had been Puritan ministers, their parents, Samuel and Susanna (Annesley) Wesley, were loyal members of the Church of England, a church that promoted fidelity to the monarch, order, and harmony. Samuel Wesley affiliated with the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, a voluntary association of small groups within the Church of England.¹³

CHRONOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY’S LIFE

DATE	EVENT
Nov. 11, 1689	Marriage of Samuel Wesley (d. 1735) and Susanna Annesley (d. 1742)
June 17, 1703	John Wesley born in Epworth, Lincolnshire
Dec. 18, 1707	Charles Wesley born
1720	Entered Christ Church College
1724	Graduated from Lincoln College, Oxford University
1725	Ordained as a deacon; first sermon
1726	Elected a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford University
1727	Received M.A. from Oxford University
1727-29	Curate at Wroote
1728	Ordained as a priest in the Church of England



1729	Returned to Oxford
1735	Left for Georgia as a missionary
1737	Returned to England
May 24, 1738	Aldersgate experience
1739	Preached in open at Bristol by the invitation of George Whitefield
1742	Began appointing lay preachers
1743	Announced general principles of the Methodist society
1744	First Methodist Conference held in London
1747	First travel to Ireland
1751	Married Mary Vazeille
	Visited Scotland for the first time
1757	John Fletcher joined the Methodists
1766	Published <i>A Plain Account of Christian Perfection</i>
1769	Appointed the first missionaries for America
Sept. 30, 1770	Death of George Whitefield; gave funeral sermon
1770	Calvinist controversies intensified
1771	Francis Asbury sent to America
1777	City Road Chapel erected
1778	First publication of <i>Arminian Magazine</i>
1784	With James Creighton and Thomas Coke ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vesey for ministry in America, and designated Coke and Francis Asbury as cosuperintendents
Mar. 29, 1788	Charles Wesley died
Oct. 24, 1790	End of John Wesley's Journal
Feb. 29, 1791	Last sermon—at Leatherhead
Mar. 2, 1791	Death of John Wesley
Mar. 9, 1791	Burial at City Road London Chapel

John Wesley responded to the various currents of his time by formulating his theology, as did other Anglican theologians, upon a quadrilateral of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. Of the four, Scripture always had priority. In this respect, Wesley was consistent with Protestant principles. Wesley interpreted and applied Scripture in light of reason, tradition, and experience. His understanding of Scripture arose from a kind of conversation

between the text of Scripture, the tradition of the church, the God-given reason of human beings, and experience. By tradition Wesley primarily meant the thinking and practice of the church of the early fathers, especially the Greek ante-Nicene fathers, but, more broadly as well, the accumulated heritage of the whole church through the ages (which Wesley believed was most perfectly seen in the Church of England). By experience Wesley meant the collective testimony of earnest Christians who reflected on practical aspects of their lives as believers. Experience for Wesley was not simply subjective feeling; it was a *corporate* reality based on careful examination of the fruits of Christian life. Reason emphasized the plain meaning of Scripture and prompted the use of contemporary forms of philosophical inquiry. Reason provided a means of expressing sound theology. These four sources of authority guided Wesley as he navigated among the competing currents of English Christianity and shaped his responses to various ideas and practices.¹⁴

With George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and his brother Charles, John Wesley provided leadership in evangelicalism, a broad-based British and American movement that sought the renewal of Christianity. Some evangelicals, such as Whitefield and the Wesleys, were members of the Church of England. Others were scattered among the various dissenting sects. Evangelicals believed that British Christianity neglected central matters of faith and that this had resulted in churches careful about worship forms but lacking in spiritual vitality. They believed that too much preaching focused on inconsequential theological issues or encouraged a form of moral do-goodism that was not really rooted in Christ and the Christian gospel. In their efforts to bring renewal, evangelicals emphasized: the Atonement, a focus on Christ's redeeming work on the Cross as the center of theological reflection; conversion, the new birth as necessary for making true Christians; the centrality of the Bible as the final religious authority; and activism, an energetic devotion to religious duties that included both evangelism and social involvement. Evangelicals desired preaching that highlighted both essential Bible doctrines and practical Christian living. Evangelicals found ways to present the gospel to large numbers of people who, because of the many changes occurring in society, the church no longer influenced. They helped church members to establish and cultivate a personal knowledge of God through Christ and to daily live lives of obedience and service to God. This involved, as it did for Pietists, believers meeting in small groups. German Pietists, including the Moravians, with whom Wesley was well acquainted, called these *collegia pietatis*, schools of piety. Small groups promoted both corporate and individual study of the Bible, regular private and common prayer, and consistent works

of service. All of this was to supplement, not replace, regular participation in the life of one's church.¹⁵

John Wesley's spiritual pilgrimage occurred within the Anglican Church. As he entered into a life of active ministry, and began tutoring at Oxford University in 1726, his great passion was to help people personally experience divine grace and to aid them in developing truly Christian character. Wesley believed that authentic "scriptural Christianity" (a favorite Wesley term) required a definite personal, transforming experience of God's grace in a believer's life, the new birth, as well as an ongoing awareness of grace at work in one's life.

As the Evangelical Awakening developed and expanded through much of the eighteenth century both in the British Isles and North America, revivals appeared suddenly and lasted for short periods of time but had explosive effects on the churches and society. Through newspapers, letters, and, especially, the cross-Atlantic evangelism of George Whitefield, the movement remained tied together. In the midst of the British awakening John Wesley created the Methodist Connection, a network of societies and small groups of believers. Methodist societies soon were scattered throughout the British Isles. Wesley's organization of his Methodist societies, and his and Charles's constant travels to care for these societies, was one very important part of the evangelical movement in the British Isles.¹⁶

John and Charles Wesley's theological orientation was Arminian rather than Calvinist or Reformed. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were theological disciples of John Calvin (1509-64) and his various interpreters. The Wesleys followed a different theological school with deep roots in medieval and Anglican theology that had much in common with the Dutch theologian Jacob (or James) Arminius (1560-1609). A pastor, and later theology professor at the University of Leiden, Arminius early in his life was an ardent disciple of Calvin. Arminius studied under Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor as leader of the Reformation at Geneva. However, Arminius became dissatisfied with Calvinism, coming to believe that it distorted important teachings of the Bible.

Arminius especially opposed the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and unconditional election. The Bible convinced Arminius that God's election to salvation extended to all who believe in Christ and who persevere in faith and obedience. Election is conditioned on the response of the believer. Arminius taught that saving grace is not irresistible, as the Calvinists said. Due to God's enabling grace, men and women possessed the ability to freely choose Christ, but because grace is chosen, it may be resisted. Believers



James Arminius

might fall from grace. This contradicted the Calvinist doctrines of the perseverance of the saints and eternal security.¹⁷

Arminius attracted disciples who, after his death, promoted his ideas in the Reformed Church in Holland. However, in a time when doctrinal controversy had serious political and social implications, Dutch clerics formally denounced his ideas at the Synod of Dort in 1619 and forcibly suppressed his followers thereafter.

Independently of Arminius, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Anglican theologians such as Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrews arrived at what later would be called Arminian ideas regarding the universal benefits of the Atonement and the gracious provision of free will. These Anglican theologians had derived their ideas from nominalism, a medieval Catholic philosophy, and their ideas were expressed in the *Homilies* that every Anglican priest read.¹⁸

Arminian ideas influenced the debate that took place in England over the shape of the church after it was freed from papal authority. As in Holland, Arminianism had political implications. Church leaders who opposed the Puritan attempt to dominate the English church and defended the monarchy adopted some form of Arminian theology. Most Puritans were Calvinists, while the most zealous defenders of the middle way were Arminians. The kind of Arminianism embraced by theologians such as John Tillotson became little more than rationalism. Anti-Calvinist defenders of the middle way and their ideas bordered on moralism and diminished the importance of divine grace and revelation. This so-called Arminianism became compatible with Enlightenment Deism.¹⁹

John Wesley, however, confounded the usual categories. Scripture, as interpreted in conversation with reason, tradition, and experience, convinced Wesley that an Arminian understanding of the divine-human relationship was truer than the Calvinist one. Wesley was also indebted to the Anglican theologians who had arrived at Arminian ideas independently of Arminius. His first reading of Arminius was through other theologians who embedded Arminius's writings in their own. Once Wesley had thoroughly read Arminius, late in life, he fully realized the affinities between his theology and that of the Dutch Reformer.²⁰

Wesley parted company with Calvinists on the matter of assurance, which placed election to salvation in the realm of the unknowable decrees of a sov-

ereign God. Strictly speaking, for Calvinists there could be no definite assurance, for God's decrees remained veiled. Calvinist theologians wrestled often with this issue and suggested various tests by which the elect might establish degrees of their assurance of salvation. However, these tests could never provide certainty; they were always conditioned by the fact that God's will in predestining persons to salvation was ultimately known *only* to God.²¹

Wesley emphasized the response of human beings to God. Wesley believed, like Calvinists, that human salvation was utterly dependent upon divine grace and the initiative of God. However, unlike Calvinists, Wesley believed that saving grace was preceded by prevenient or enabling grace, which God made available to *every* person, not certain predestined ones. Prevenient grace, a concept found in Arminius and in elements of the Catholic heritage retained in the Church of England, restored a measure of moral freedom to sinful human beings, enabling them to freely and responsibly embrace or reject God's offer of salvation.²²

Wesley concluded that human beings could have immediate and direct assurance of their salvation. Salvation involved establishing and maintaining a relationship between a loving, holy God and a responsible believer. Wesley believed that the state of such a relationship could hardly be a matter of uncertainty. A believer could not remain insensible to the presence of divine grace or the work of God's Holy Spirit in his or her life. Wesley placed great emphasis upon Rom. 8:16: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The believer could know God in an increasingly deeper way, and, as a result, could take on more and more of the character and nature of Christ.²³

The Holy Spirit enabled holiness. Christian perfection became *the* distinguishing mark of the Wesleyan movement. British evangelicals as a whole became convinced that genuine Christianity involved a personal, transforming experience of divine grace. Such an experience resulted in believers developing Christian virtues. Wesley differed with others over the means of acquiring these virtues, and the extent to which a Christian might actually come to reflect the character of God.²⁴

Wesley shared Protestants' regard for divinely initiated grace, and fully understood that salvation depended alone upon grace, and not human effort. Wesley read Scripture through the eyes of the early fathers of the Church that had been preserved in Anglicanism, and embraced an optimism of grace. The purpose of salvation was to restore to humanity the image of God. Only divine grace could enact such a "renewal of our souls after the image of God."²⁵ If God intended to bring about the total spiritual transformation of every

person, Wesley believed, then divine grace could do its renewing work here and now. Human sinfulness could yield to the power of grace. Christian believers could live lives of complete love to God and neighbor. Wesley believed that the Bible, interpreted in light of reason, Christian tradition, and experience, both demanded of and promised to believers such present holiness, or Christian perfection.²⁶

Largely through the testimonies of his followers, Wesley became convinced that sanctification, the process of being renewed in the image of God, could be complete here and now. Though Wesley did not believe that Christians ever reached a state at which they were beyond temptation or the possibility of falling from grace, there was a decisive point in the process wherein grace enabled believers to devote all of themselves to God. Divine love could fill believers' hearts and could expel everything opposed to God's love. Wesley called this entire or full sanctification.²⁷

Finally, Wesley's reading of Scripture sparked in him a great passion for poor and disadvantaged members of society. Convinced that wholehearted love to God must be expressed through compassionate service to one's neighbor, Wesley developed a burden for the weakest and most vulnerable, those without power and influence, those slipping beyond the influence of the churches in eighteenth-century England. Wesley went to them with the gospel. This meant more than preaching. Wesley and his Methodists sought to embody the gospel by responding to the whole range of human need. Methodists visited and served as advocates for those in prison, collected and gave money and clothing to poor persons, nursed the sick, taught hygiene to those who lived in squalor, started schools for the illiterate, and fought to end British trade in African slaves.²⁸

Through all of this Wesley had become convinced that the doctrine of Christian perfection, with all that it entailed, was "the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists."²⁹ Even though the concept of Christian perfection became a source of misunderstanding and controversy in Wesley's own time, he faithfully defended it to the end of his life.

JOHN FLETCHER

The man whom Wesley hoped would succeed him as the overseer of British Methodists was John Fletcher (1729-85). Fletcher, who was born in Switzerland, immigrated to England in 1750. He



John Fletcher

soon joined Wesley and the Methodist movement. He became an Anglican priest, ordained in 1757, and served from 1760 to 1785 as rector of the Church of England parish in Mandelay.³⁰

Fletcher's *Checks to Antinomianism* (1775) was a handy manual for explaining how Methodists differed from Calvinists. One chapter of the *Checks* was devoted to explaining the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection. Though Fletcher's teaching on Christian perfection was in most ways identical to John Wesley's, Fletcher identified entire sanctification with Pentecost. Fletcher understood that the biblical writer Luke used the terms "baptism of the Holy Spirit" or "filled with the Holy Spirit" loosely. Sometimes the terms referred to the occasion of new birth, which was the way both Calvinists and John Wesley interpreted Luke, and at other times in relation to subsequent outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Fletcher taught that when the disciples of Jesus were filled or baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were entirely sanctified. Fletcher was, apparently, the first in Methodist circles to make this identification. Wesley seemed to make clear to Fletcher that he did not agree with this interpretation. However, neither man considered the matter worth public dispute.³¹

Wesley urged believers to seek an experience of sanctifying grace that was available now, and in an instant.³² At the same time, he considered such an experience to be part of a larger process of transformation of being remade in the image of God that took place over a whole lifetime of Christian devotion. Fletcher's linking of sanctification to the imagery and events of Pentecost highlighted the instantaneous aspect.³³

Another distinctive feature of Fletcher's holiness teaching was that whereas Wesley hesitated to appeal to his own experience, Fletcher did not. Wesley appealed to the experience of Christian believers taken as a whole as a resource for understanding the activity of God and the witness of Scripture. However, he never appealed to his own individual experience as authoritative. In fact, Wesley was so reticent to appeal to his own individual experience that it is difficult to find any testimony to the blessing of full sanctification. On the other hand, Fletcher related that he had been entirely sanctified four or five times but had lost the blessing by failing to testify to it. As a result, he believed that testifying to the blessing in clear and definite terms was an obligation of every entirely sanctified believer.³⁴

A third difference in Fletcher's teaching was that God worked dispensationally. The first dispensation was that of God the Father, under whom the Law was given. The second dispensation was that of the Son, who inaugurated the atonement of sins for all, and justification. The third dispensation

was that of the Holy Spirit, which commenced at Pentecost and birthed the Church. This Spirit gifted human beings with both the witness, or inward assurance of their salvation, and sanctification. These three dispensations were both historical and personal. Every Christian believer underwent a spiritual journey from law to grace, and through grace to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.³⁵

CONCLUSION

The roots of the Church of the Nazarene run deep into the soil of Christian history. The Church of the Nazarene professes to be a branch of the universal and apostolic church. At the same time, Nazarenes believe that as spiritual heirs of John Wesley, they have a special calling. This Wesleyan identity is one of the strongest elements in Nazarene self-understanding. Nazarenes claim fidelity to John Wesley's core convictions, including the universal benefits of the Atonement, prevenient grace (which enables free will), and Christian holiness.