

"Heiko Oberman claimed that the function of a historian was to be a 'last advocate' for the dead. Johan Tredoux expertly accomplishes this task in his recent work on Mildred Bangs Wynkoop. Remarkably, he allows this scholar—a theologian, a woman—to speak in her own, authentic voice. Wynkoop was someone who desired to interpret Scripture for her hearers in a language they could understand—hence, *A Theology of Love*. She was not well understood by some of her readers. Tredoux enables contemporary readers to reread, relisten, and reinterpret to better see, hear, and understand the Wynkoop voice. For this, he is to be commended. He deserves our respect and our attention."

David P. Whitelaw
Emeritus Professor of Theology
Point Loma Nazarene University

"In a time when the doctrine of sanctification was sounding like a logical construct with Scripture scaffolding, my young heart needed more. As a student at Trevecca Nazarene College, I sat in classrooms under the teaching of Mildred Wynkoop and later worked as her grading assistant. Her teaching, writing, and life inspired a generation of young pastors to embrace a doctrine as experience. Holiness went from stale to central. I am grateful to Johan Tredoux for reminding us of a theology of love that fits the human experience today."

Dan Boone
President
Trevecca Nazarene University

"This masterful work on Mildred Bangs Wynkoop is a must-read for those who desire a clearer biblical, authentic, and Wesleyan understanding of God's love in the context of relationships. The impact can be extremely timely in these days of our seeking to better grasp the theology of love."

Nina G. Gunter
General Superintendent Emerita
Church of the Nazarene

"Reading this book is like dipping your toe into the refreshing streams of authenticity. For those who have ever hoped for a faith beyond appearances and a theology capable of engaging the world in transformative ways, you will find Mildred Wynkoop a kindred spirit and Johan Tredoux highly capable of introducing you to her. Once the introduction is made, you'll find Wynkoop's thought—revolutionary in its day—to be a wonderful challenge to continue exploring the Christian life in terms of God's dynamic love, a reality that has been and remains revolutionary."

Timothy R. Gaines, PhD
Assistant Professor of Religion
Millard Reed School of Theology and Christian Ministry
Trevecca Nazarene University

"Dr. Tredoux does an excellent job of examining Dr. Wynkoop's theology within her twentieth-century context and finding clear alignment with Wesley. He places her understanding of holiness within a Christocentric model that leads us to a hopeful optimism in living the sanctified life. Dr. Tredoux states that 'the key teleological anchor point for Wynkoop is Christlikeness.

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MILDRED BANGS: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY



Mildred Bangs was born on September 9, 1905, in Seattle, Washington, as the first child of Carl and Mary Bangs, emigrants from Norway and Switzerland who became naturalized American citizens.

Her mother, Mary (née Dupertuis), was born in Canton de Vaux, Switzerland. As a six-year-old girl, and one of a family of twelve siblings, she endured tremendous hardship as her father tried to make a living farming on an incredibly steep section of a Swiss mountain. In the spring of 1889, he gathered his family and immigrated to the “grand new world” of North America.

Mildred’s father was Carl Oliver Bang, a Norwegian, born in Norway in a drunkard’s home (not an unusual situation, then). Carl’s mother died soon after his birth, and Carl was shunted from one place to another. Always serious and seeking meaning, he ended up attending the Society of Friends (Quakers). Influenced by the Quaker missionaries, he felt a strong reluctance to enter the military service. To avoid signing up with the army, he signed up with his uncle, a sea captain, on a freighter going to the West Coast of the United States. For reasons unknown, Carl decided to jump ship in Pensacola, Florida. This decision saved his life because the ship went out to sea and sank, and all on board drowned. No one of the family back in Norway knew that he had *not* been in the disaster. He changed his name from Bang to Bangs—never to return to his fatherland. He worked his way on other ships around South America (pre-canal) to San Francisco and then worked on lumber ships going from Washington to California and back. Lonely, hungry, and drinking too much, he finally found a haven in Seattle.

It was only a matter of time before the lively Dupertuis family and the lonely Norwegian met and established a friendship.

It all started when he was on the docks, thinking of signing up on another lumber ship going to Alaska, and he met Mary, who was playing in a Salvation Army band. With Mary as an incentive, he began attending services at the Salvation Army Mission, and there one night he was converted and became a Christian.¹ Carl Bangs and Mary Dupertuis eventually developed a relationship and were married in December 1904. To this union, five girls and one boy (in that order) were added. Mildred was the first child, followed by Bernice, Thelma, Florence, Olive, and Carl.²

Nazarene Roots

Mildred Bangs's biography is rooted deeply in Nazarene soil. Her first memories were of the Seattle Salvation Army Mission, the singing and the drama and the beautiful, uniformed soldiers. Given the location of the Salvation Army, Carl Bangs decided to find a safer place for his young family because the streets were dark and the night people rough. This is where the Seattle First Church of the Nazarene came into play. Carl Oliver Bangs found the Nazarene meetings to be more of a family church than the Salvation Army, and they had already connected with P. F. Bresee's Los Angeles church on their honeymoon. When Bresee came to Seattle the following year and organized a class of Nazarenes there, Carl Bangs was one of the three officers appointed. The Bangses thus became pioneers for the Nazarene work in Seattle.³

Religious influences constantly surrounded Mildred as she grew up in the Seattle First Church of the Nazarene. One of her earliest memories was hearing Dr. Bresee preach. She remembered, "He stood before us like a Moses!"⁴ H. D. Brown, the first Nazarene district superintendent appointed by Bresee, lived in Seattle and was a friend of the Bangs family.⁵ Mildred's early exposure to missionaries speaking in the pulpit, eating at their home, and then leaving for the distant, pagan world from the Seattle

1. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, "This Is Mildred Bangs Wynkoop" (article, undated), file 1427-3, Wynkoop Collection, Nazarene Archives, Lenexa, Kansas, 1 (hereafter cited as WC).

2. Wynkoop, "Birth and Marriage" (article, undated), file 1427-4, WC, 1.

3. Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1995), 249–50.

4. Wynkoop, "This Is Mildred," file 1427-3, WC, 1.

5. *Ibid.*

port gave her a missionary mind-set that would eventually have a profound influence on the way she did theology. She wrote, “I felt called to every country I heard about and contracted to go at the altar, regularly.”⁶ She would eventually (fifty years later) leave from the same city to go to Japan as a missionary teacher.

Early Years

Mildred remembers her parents’ devotion to Christ to be so genuine that not the slightest hint ever came to any of the six children that they had even remotely considered any other way of life.⁷ She said of her father: “He taught us how to look past the false front of ideas and to ask probing questions of easy answers. He loved his Bible and talked to us about it. He wanted us to learn to read and understand for ourselves. He taught us to read the classics.”⁸

The Nazarene services became a very exciting part of Mildred’s young life. As a family the Bangses drove to church in a buggy, pulled by Billy, their milk-wagon horse. She remembered the services being so exciting that she wouldn’t miss a single one, especially Wednesday night prayer meeting.⁹ Her shy personality surfaced already at this very young age as she came home one night too excited not to awaken her parents: “Mama, Papa,” she said, “the people testified about their problems today. They didn’t shout—they cried.”¹⁰ This was the first hint she had that it was all right to have problems without having to shout it aloud for everyone to hear.

One of the great ironies of this scholar’s life was her traumatic experience of going to school for the first time. At age six, her first grade experience was so terrifying to her that her mother brought her home and homeschooled Mildred for two years. She carried this scar with her for the rest of her life, frequently explaining her lifelong reluctance to meet with unfamiliar people as a reflection of her first school experience.¹¹

6. *Ibid.*, 2.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. Wynkoop, “School (1911–13)” (article, undated), file 1427-3, WC, 1.

College Years

From very early on, Mildred was influenced by her father's desire for his children to be exposed to the classic literature of Europe and early American writings.¹² She remembered getting lost in that treasury of literature on the long streetcar ride from home to grammar school.¹³ Later studies in college, university, and seminary sank roots in fertile soil already prepared at a very young age. She reminisced, "I was born a very restless creature, ambitious, impatient, searching. I often scolded God, 'Why don't you talk to me. I don't like you all the time trying to make me guess what you want. You could talk—do it!'"¹⁴

She wanted to go to college, yet there was no money. She wrote: "I talked to God again. 'You are rich,' I said. 'Send me the money to go to school. You wouldn't miss it.'"¹⁵ Unknown to her at that time, her father took on a second mortgage to make it possible for her to go to college.¹⁶ In 1926 she entered Northwest Nazarene College in Nampa, Idaho. Her most important contact (other than several nice boys) was with its president, H. Orton Wiley.

She joined a collegiate singing quartet that travelled on the weekends and promoted the college from church to church.¹⁷ She remembered how, on one trip to Seattle (they hardly had any money), Dr. Wiley just stopped the car along the road and disappeared down to the river. It wasn't long before he reappeared with a trout in his hand. That was their breakfast that morning.¹⁸ His relationship with the quartet deepened over the year. And when Wiley announced in 1928 that he was leaving Nampa to return to Pasadena College, Mildred Bangs and at least one other student in the quartet followed him there.¹⁹

Once in college, several nice boys were in her sights, but the one who captured her heart was Ralph Wynkoop. On December 27, 1928, Mildred and Ralph were married at Central Church of the Nazarene (now Aurora Church of the Nazarene) in Seattle, Washington. She graduated twice from

12. Wynkoop, "Satisfactions and Regrets" (article, undated), file 1561-32, WC, 1.

13. Ibid.

14. Wynkoop, "Mid-Course Corrections" (article, undated), file 1427-2, WC, 1.

15. Ibid.

16. Wynkoop, "Birth and Marriage," file 1427-4, WC, 1.

17. Stan Ingersol, "The Woman behind the Words" (article, undated), WC, 3.

18. Wynkoop, "Notes on My Life" (article, undated), file 1427, WC, 1.

19. Ingersol, "The Woman," file 1561-32, WC, 3.

Pasadena College—in 1931, with a bachelor of arts degree, and in 1933, with a bachelor of theology degree. In 1934, she was ordained as an elder by Dr. John Goodwin in the Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene.²⁰ Her decision to attend seminary came many years later, in the late 1940s.

The Influence of H. Orton Wiley

Stacked away in Wynkoop's 1940 edition of H. Orton Wiley's *Christian Theology* are extensive "write-ins" in the margins and notes of comments she took, both as a student and as a teacher. One of the notes simply says: "In a sense I am a Wileyite, not in a blind guru type of dedication, but as a goad to fresh, released, in-depth, biblical dependence that nourished a searching mind."²¹ She met Wiley when she was fifteen years old and became one of his students at about eighteen or nineteen. His impact on Wynkoop can be seen in the way he took her outside of her small world, theologically, and helped her see that she was part of the church universal, linked with the cloud of witnesses from Christ and the early Catholic Church, through the Reformation and, closer to home, through the Wesleyan movement.

Wynkoop went through Wiley's three-volume *Christian Theology* with him, first as class notes when it was in duplicate form and helping him to run it off in the print room, and then she taught from it five times in five years in a seminary on the West Coast.²² Wynkoop's classroom experience with Dr. Wiley, along with other students, was one of being thrown into the deep sea of church history and the development of church doctrine.²³ Wynkoop could relate very well to the conversation she overheard between her brother, Carl Bangs, and Wiley.

Carl said, "When I began to study theology under you, I was so sure of everything. Now, [after one year,] I'm not sure of anything."

Dr. Wiley laughed and answered, "Think things over and rest good over the summer, you'll come out all right."²⁴ And so they did.

Wiley's biblical, christological, and Wesleyan presentation of the doctrine of holiness, related as it was to the church, began to challenge

20. Wynkoop, "Birth and Marriage," file 1427-4, WC, 1.

21. Wynkoop (handwritten note, February 13, 1991), file 2228-6, WC.

22. Wynkoop, "The Foundations of: *A Theology of Love*" (monograph, 1975), undated, file 2227-11, WC, 3.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

Wynkoop and finally erode some theories that had slipped in from other theological streams. When she first entered the field of theology, she inherited Wiley's theological agenda. According to Stan Ingersol, Wiley was recognized as the leading exponent of Arminian theology within American evangelical Protestantism, and was so identified by Carl F. H. Henry, the founding editor of *Christianity Today*.²⁵

It is, then, not a surprise that Wynkoop and her brother, Carl, joined Wiley in the defense of Arminianism. Carl became the leading scholar on Arminius with his publication of *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*.²⁶ Wynkoop's book *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* also shows the deep influence of Wiley on her work as she recognized the Calvinist inroads into the thinking of Nazarene pastors and laity. Wiley opened Wynkoop's eyes to her own denominational, segregationist prejudice. She said, "Born as we were in a very narrow, provincial concept of gospel and church, Wiley with his tremendous grasp of what the gospel and church really were, led us step by step into the high country of vision and understanding and mission. I have much to thank Wiley for; I am indelibly marked by his inspired and inspiring ministry."²⁷

Lifetime Work

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop spent most of the 1930s and 1940s traveling with her husband as evangelists and as pastors of small Nazarene churches. Her simple impulse at the age of forty-four to study Greek and Hebrew opened up a whole new academic world to her. She decided to go back to college and earned a master of divinity degree at the Western Evangelical Seminary (now George Fox Evangelical Seminary) in 1952, a master of science degree at the University of Oregon in 1953, and culminating in 1955 with a doctorate of theology from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Wynkoop started her teaching career at Western Evangelical Theological Seminary in Portland, Oregon, teaching theology from 1955 to 1960. She then spent a year teaching in Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan with the Oriental Mission Society. In 1961 she was instrumental in redeveloping theological education for the Church of the Nazarene in

25. Ingersol, "The Woman," file 1561-32, WC, 4.

26. Ingersol, "The Woman," file 1561-32, WC, 5.

27. Wynkoop, "Foundations," file 2227-11, WC, 3.

Japan. She became the dean of the Nazarene Junior College from 1961 until 1963 and became the first woman president of the Japan Nazarene Seminary from 1963 until 1966. Upon her return to the United States, Wynkoop became the professor of missions and theology at Trevecca Nazarene College (now University) in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1966 to 1976. She was president of the Wesleyan Theological Society in 1973 and closed her career as theologian-in-residence at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, from 1976 until 1980.²⁸

It is fair to say that the classroom was the most prominent symbol and existential reality of her life. She wrote:

A classroom presents to me a peculiar romantic psychological reaction. A silent empty room, chairs, a blackboard and chalk and chalk dust. Empty, cold, echoes, ghosts, dreams, shadows, and silence, little shudders of fear. That has been my world for over two thirds of my life. And then the jangling bell, and a thundering horde of feet crowding in, crackling chairs, a babble of voices, and suddenly, the cold emptiness is gone and Shakespeare comes alive, and the utter wonder of art, of vivid imagination, of philosophical ideas, of startlingly vivid scenes from histories past. Where did the drab room go? It is full of light, and excitement. The windows are opened into eternity. Who needs a carpet or soft chairs and background music to tie us to the earth? We go out beyond the earth into the stratosphere of transcendent existence—magic, miracle. And then jangling bells break in and the psychedelic trip ends, and the cold, drab room is left behind. This miracle occurs day after day, year after year, a miracle that I would not exchange for anything in the world. A world I love.²⁹

Wynkoop's published monographs are *John Wesley, Christian Revolutionary* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1970); *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* and *A Theology of Love* (both Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972); *The Occult and the Supernatural* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1976); and *The Trevecca Story: 75 Years of Christian Service* (Nashville: Trevecca Press, 1976).

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop died on May 21, 1997, in Lenexa, Kansas.

28. Wynkoop, "Biography" (article, undated), file 1427, WC, 1.

29. Wynkoop, "Appreciation Dinner at NTS" (article, undated), file 1426-5, WC, 1.