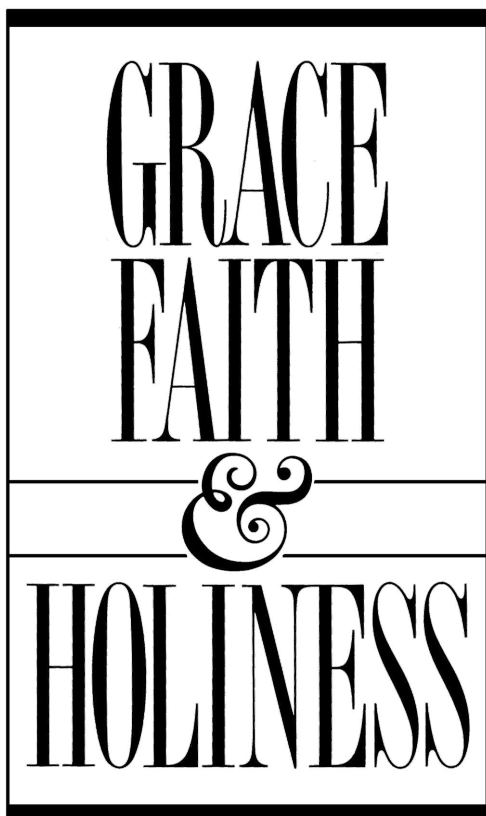


GRACE, FAITH, AND HOLINESS

30th Anniversary Annotations



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On *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*

Being “commissioned to produce a systematic theology in the Wesleyan tradition that is true to the doctrinal standards of the Church of the Nazarene and at the same time is aware of, and dialogues with, contemporary thought theologically, philosophically, psychologically, and culturally”¹ was the greatest honor extended to me during my academic career. I did not and still do not feel qualified for this task and have yet to fully understand why I was chosen when there were clearly others who were better qualified. And the fact that *Grace, Faith, and Holiness (GF&H)* has not only survived but continues to be widely used after thirty years, including being translated into at least two foreign languages (Russian and Arabic), continues to amaze me. It is somewhat astounding that it is extensively used in Russia by other than Nazarene groups.

Realistically, there were tensions implicit in the commission that, over eight years of writing the book, became somewhat sharp at times. The challenge to produce a systematic theology that included both the Wesleyan tradition and the doctrinal standards of the denomination and that also interacted with contemporary thought was a daunting task. Furthermore, it should have been recognized from the beginning that no theological system could

1. Board of General Superintendents, “Foreword,” *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (1988), 7.

be recognized as the official statement of the denomination. The work of H. Orton Wiley had, almost by default, been considered a quasi-official version. When the publishers began advertising my project as a replacement for Wiley's, I took the initiative to say to them that, like George Washington, Wiley was "first in the hearts of his countrymen" and that, for some time to come (and perhaps never), no work would be recognized with the same authority as his three-volume work had enjoyed. The controversies that subsequently emerged demonstrated the validity of that judgment.

At one level there was an implicit tension in the idea of bringing together the Wesleyan tradition (which implied the teaching of John Wesley) and the denominational creed. The Church of the Nazarene came into being in the context of the holiness revivals around the turn of the century. That movement made some significant deviations from Wesley's teaching, some of which were reflected in a few of the Articles of Faith. Of significant interest is the fact that, over these thirty years (nearly forty since beginning the project), a few Articles have undergone transformation, some in the direction of greater conformity to pristine Wesleyan thought. This transformation has been partly due to an increasing number of scholars in the denomination knowledgeable in Wesley's teachings who have been allowed input into the reformulation of these standards. More needs to be done. At the same time, some changes were made that strengthened the emphases of the nineteenth-century perspective.

In 1976 an extensive addition was added to Article X that clearly intended to counter the widespread belief, at least among laypeople, that the experience of entire sanctification precluded further growth and development in the Christian life. No further changes were made until 1985, when substantial additions were made to Article V on sin. The apparent intent here was to emphasize a distinction between two types of sin—original sin (or depravity), and actual (or personal) sin. Similar to John Wesley,

the Article recognizes that sin includes attitudes contrary to the spirit of Christ. A careful distinction was made between behaviors that are voluntary in nature and involuntary shortcomings that are “residual effects of the fall.”²

This 1985 revision was the first time the phrase “residual effects of the fall” appeared in the Articles of Faith, representing the influence of a major departure from the moral philosophy of John Wesley. As will be more fully elaborated in our notes on sanctification, it is derived from the American Holiness Movement, rejecting (not consciously, I assume) Wesley’s views and adopting instead a moral philosophy derived from the philosophy of common sense developed by Thomas Reid that had come to be the dominant philosophy in America during this period, replacing that of John Locke. Reacting to the determinism of David Hume’s empiricism and its implication for moral choice, Reid had taught that no moral quality attached itself to any act or affection that was not the result of voluntary choice. This philosophy stood at the heart of the burgeoning discussions in the Holiness Movement of the distinction between carnality and humanity, the former being separable from essential human nature and the latter the source of numerous shortcomings and failures, even affections contrary to the mind of Christ. Carnality as that which is “deeper down and farther back,” being separable, could therefore be eradicated by an act of transforming grace, but this “residue” remained to the end of moral life. As we will later notice, this is a departure from the classical doctrine of original sin.

In 1989 a completely new Article of Faith (Article XI) was added on “The Church.” In presenting their proposed Article to the General Assembly that year, the committee appointed to formulate the Article made additional suggestions regarding the order

2. *Church of the Nazarene Manual: 2017–2021* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2018), 28.

of the Articles and the retitling of Article VII from “Free Agency” to “Free Grace” to more properly conform to Wesleyan theology. Great confusion resulted when the body of the convention did not understand that free grace was a distinctly Wesleyan concept after one member suggested it was Calvinistic. The convention likewise did not understand that the biblical order of faith placed the doctrine of the church prior to individual salvation, and rejected the committee’s proposal to do so.

Instead, the action of the Assembly reflected an order of experience that failed to see the church as other than a human institution even though the new Article stated otherwise. The decisive statement was made by one prominent pastor, “I want to get saved before I join the church.” Consistent with this rationale, the article on Divine Healing was moved prior to the two on final destiny on the premise that one wanted to be healed before going to heaven. A minor change was made in 1997 in the wording of the Divine Healing Article to use simpler and clearer language affirming a belief in modern medicine. The title of the article on Free Agency was finally properly titled “Prevenient Grace” in 2001, another tiny step toward becoming more authentically Wesleyan.

The first major development in Article X on sanctification occurred with the 2009 General Assembly. It made an important distinction between sanctification and entire sanctification, implicitly recognizing the former as a lifelong process that “transforms believers into the likeness of Christ.”³ This is a significant departure from the American Holiness pneumatological understanding of sanctification. Even though articulated in christological terminology, it implicitly—for the first time in the denomination’s history—recognized that biblical, Wesleyan sanctification is generically defined as renewal of human persons in the image of God. It gingerly moved away from the identifica-

3. *Ibid.*, 31.

tion of entire sanctification with the baptism with the Spirit by adding the term “infilling.” Paul M. Bassett says in a white paper, “Little or no support can now be found among Nazarene biblical scholars or theologians for the ‘Oberlin’ view of Charles Finney and Asa Mahan (adopted into the Wesleyan holiness tradition by Phoebe Palmer and later Daniel Steele) that the Pentecostal ‘baptism of the Spirit’ in Acts 2 can be regarded as the *exact* equivalent of the entire sanctification of *the individual*.” Unfortunately, the revised Article retained the claim that this experience freed the believer from original sin or depravity.

Additional pressure was added to my original assignment with the appointment of an oversight committee, whose responsibility as I perceived it was to keep the theology safe and not deviate from the committee’s understanding of Nazarene doctrine. Methodologically, this act suggested the possibility of difficulties since the nature of systematic theology requires that the material be filtered through one mind in order to have logical coherence and methodological consistency. Hitherto, major works promoted by the denomination had been produced by committees for various reasons, possibly including to function as checks and balances. The anticipation of potential differences of perspective came to expression on the ground floor. At the outset of the process, I requested that the committee members suggest several works that they felt it necessary for me to consult in preparing to develop a systematic theology. Virtually all the sources they recommended were fundamentalist, but the commission pointed in a different direction, only validating the research findings of Dr. Paul M. Bassett, presented in a landmark essay called “The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement.”

In addition, one of the committee members had previously published a book on biblical authority and subsequently one on the atonement, in both of which positions were advocated with which I radically disagreed and which most of my colleagues in

the academy believed were not consistently Wesleyan. Issues like these simmered for some time but broke out into overt tension when it became obvious that *GF&H* was going to be a theology expressed in terms of relational ontology. In the process of discussions (which were always respectful), it became apparent that those who opposed this approach did not understand the relational claim. Fortunately, at least one member of the group had formal training in philosophy, recognized the validity of this approach, and helped balance the discussion.

Of considerable interest was the fact that during the gestation period, pastors and others interested in the project—almost to the person!—asked if this was going to be a relational theology. They were all relieved when I assured them that it was. Of even greater interest, when I subsequently published *A Layman's Guide to Sanctification*, the committee member who had been the strongest opponent of the relational point of view wrote to me and said, "If this is what you mean, we are on the same page."

When the project was completed and submitted to the book committee, there was a voice from the oversight committee that urged it not to be published, except possibly as a personal expression of belief but not denominationally endorsed. This reservation was based on the committee member's assumption that *GF&H* did not conform to the committee member's understanding of Wesleyan theology—which was informed by the American Holiness tradition. Eventually the book committee unanimously and enthusiastically voted approval, the general superintendents concurred, and the die was cast.

Publication, however, did not settle the controversy, and at least one book was written that purported to expose my errors. It turned out, after careful attention to the criticism, that the critic so badly misunderstood the book that it almost appeared as if he

had never read it.⁴ But in one volume tracing the history of holiness theology in the church throughout the twentieth century, my work was classified as a “subversive theology.”

When I wrote *GF&H*, we were still basking in the glow of the theological renaissance that occurred following World War II, and which was associated with the names of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Rudolf Bultmann, along with numerous other, less dominant theologians. In the present time there do not seem to be any theologians dominating the conversation as in those days. In fact, the most public figures with whom Wesleyans and other evangelicals have most likely interacted appear to be biblical scholars who, over the last three decades, have perpetuated a revolutionary breakthrough in New Testament scholarship that has been rocking the Christian academic world. The scholars at the forefront of the revolution—E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, and others—have pioneered a new approach to the letters of the first-century apostle to the Gentiles, Paul of Tarsus. Dunn, in his 1982 Manson Memorial Lecture, coined the phrase “the new perspective on Paul.”⁵

Like the major transition points in Christian history with Augustine, Luther, and Barth, this movement also largely revolves around a reinterpretation of the books of Romans and Galatians. The movement began to flower with the pioneering work of Ed Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. It largely emerged out of the more adequate understanding of Second Temple Judaism, which was a result of new discoveries of relevant sources, including the Dead Sea Scrolls. As was the case with the other new proposals in the history of Christian theology, this movement is vigorously opposed by defenders of the status quo. The fascinating thing about this controversy is that the opponents are chiefly

4. Correspondence over this issue remains in the Nazarene archives, housed by the Global Ministry Center for the Church of the Nazarene in Lenexa, Kansas.

5. See www.thepaulpage.com.

of the Reformed persuasion, and N. T. Wright in particular has articulated exegetical conclusions that move significantly closer to Wesleyan convictions and interpretations. Consequently, he is the one who would most likely be a significant dialogue partner for further theological explorations.