

## Wesleyan – Holiness Tradition

Two dynamic movements formed the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition, which the Church of the Nazarene is a part: The Wesleyan movement founded by John and Charles Wesley and the Holiness Revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

John and Charles Wesley were two priests in the Church of England who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. While they loved the Church of England, they felt like the Church was not fully teaching and living into the power of the Holy Spirit to heal people of the disease and bondage of sin. Too often, they saw that people were experiencing forgiveness of sins, but were not following the call of God to *be holy as I am holy*. Hence, the brothers' teaching, preaching, and singing emphasized God's power not just to forgive (justify), but to entirely sanctify people in this lifetime.

This passion to experience God's power to heal, redeem, and transform sinners informed the Holiness tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This Holiness Movement also emphasized the power and work of sanctification in the life of the believer. Sanctification focuses on God's ability to forgive and transform people to be free from the power of sin so that they can love and be loved more fully.

A few central characteristics of this movement include the celebration of God's prevenient grace; an optimism and hope that God is healing and redeeming the world; caring for the marginalized, poor, and oppressed in the world; and a theological hospitality that works to find *in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity*.

*Prevenient Grace:* One of the key elements of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement is the celebration that God is at work in the lives of all people. Prevenient means the grace *that comes before*. Wesleyans celebrate that God is actively inviting everyone into salvation from sin and the maturity of sanctification. As Wesleyans go out across the world they do not bring God with them, as if God was absent in the people and places they go, but often they are called to name and celebrate God's presence in people that are often ignored and in places of despair and pain.

*Optimism of Hope:* This movement of Christians is very aware of the disease of evil and sin in the world. Yet with confidence in God's love and the power of Jesus' Resurrection, Wesleyans celebrate the ways in which God continues to heal creation. As people both hurt and are hurt by others, Wesleyans have a great hope that sin and evil will not have the last word. Instead God continues to be at work and invites others to join in providing comfort to the hurting and broken while also calling for

the end of oppression and injustice in the world. It is this hope, confidence, and joy that Wesleyans are sent out into all the corners of the world to share.

*Compassionate Ministry:* With this confidence and hope in God's renewing and redeeming all of creation, it is no surprise that the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition has been very active in helping the poor, abused, and oppressed. In its inception, the movement was very involved in the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, working against child labor and for the education of children, and the Temperance movement. Today Wesleyans join many other believers in the fight against human trafficking, the unjust treatment of the poor and others who are often ignored and abused. At its best the Wesleyan-Holiness movement has not sought political or civic power and prestige, but rather has been called to the margins, the abused, the sick, and the poor.

*Unity and Charity of Belief:* The Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition professes a strong core of essential beliefs. Outside of the essentials, the movement allows that on non-essentials Christians can agree to disagree. Yet in places of agreement and disagreement, the key is that people should always love others well. In many ways this tradition affirms a wide theological tent on many parts of Christian faith. This is not to say that this tradition lacks conviction, but that people with different views or beliefs on a variety of issues that the movement feels are non-essential are welcome. This tradition has often sought to live into a *via media* (a middle way) among viewpoints on either side in the hope that people can find unity in the essential core of Christian faith despite a lack of uniformity on all beliefs.

These few characteristics are simply highlights of the movement. While those in the movement do not believe they have arrived, like Paul they press on toward the goal to which Christ is calling us heavenward (Phil. 3:14).