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A study of Christian perfection -- a defense of its essential truth

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A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION &- A Defense of
its Essential Truth.

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A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION--A DEFENSE OF ITS
ESSENTIAL TRUTH.

INTRODUCTION:

1. A brief historical sketch of the doctrine.
2. Extremes and fallacies of some of its advocates.
3. The problem involved and a statement of the thesis: To determine and estimate Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection, and to point out the abiding element of truth.

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Specifically viewed, Christian Perfection is a doctrine of modern origin. It is commonly and properly associated with the name of John Wesley, and the church which he founded. Nevertheless, its roots reach into the distant past. Some of its main features are discoverable in monastic piety. While this type of piety receives criticism because of its exclusiveness and other-worldliness, there is something admirable in the earnest devotion with which many noble souls of the Middle Ages sought that freedom from the world and sin, which they deemed necessary to fit them for the closest fellowship with God. Lives reflecting complete consecration than those of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Bernard of Clairveaux are difficult to find in any age. Later appear such names as Jeremy Taylor, Thomas a Kempis, and William Law, from whose works the incomparable Wesley derived much of his inspiration to holy living.

Other names antedating Wesley might be mentioned; but it was chiefly from the works of the last three named, from the Moravians, and from some other Evangelical Christians of his day that he received the impetus to seek personal holiness, and finally to maintain it

as an essential of Christian experience. Wesley points^{2#} out the sources of his view thus: " But how came this opinion into my mind? I will tell you with all simplicity. In 1725 I met with Bishop Taylor's 'Rules of Holy Living and Dying.' I was struck particularly with the chapter upon intention, and felt a fixed intention 'to give myself up to God.' In this I was much confirmed soon after by the ' Christian Pattern', and longed to give God all my heart. This is just what I mean by perfection now: I sought after it from that hour." (Journal May 1765). Later William Law's "Christian Perfection", and "Serious Call" fell into his hands, and augmented the impression made by Kempis and Taylor.

As a result of these several influences, Wesley began to seek personal holiness and to exhort others to do the same. As he did so his views of holiness or Christian Perfection were enriched and clarified. By some the term clarified may be thought too strong. But, if there seems to be a lack of clearness and some irreconcilable aspects in Wesley's teaching, these can be quite ignored in view of the logic of his teaching as a whole. It should be^{remembered} that as to this theme, in many respects, he was travelling untrod soil, at least,

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introduced by the leaders of his age. If he be found consistent on essentials, minor discrepancies can be pardoned. For he undertook too big a task to allow him time for the construction of a philosophy or the development of a psychology. He left that to men of lesser practical importance. Yet, he did promulgate both theoretically and practically a doctrine of Christian life, namely, Christian Perfection, which became the peculiar mark of Methodism, the echoes of which resound in the church today.

Since the days of Wesley the Methodist Church has laid considerable emphasis on this doctrine. The names of Watson, Peck, Wood, and Steele are noteworthy in this connection.

But unfortunately, as in the days of Wesley so in later days, Christian Perfection has been so distorted by fanatical advocates, and so repudiated by opposers, as to have fallen quite into disrepute. The extremes of the fanatic must be condemned; but the attitude of the opposer ought to be changed, unless he can justify his opposition.

Some of the more manifest extremes associated with the promotion of Christian Perfection are: 1. A too exclusive emphasis is placed upon this single aspect

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of religious truth. That is, in the centering of attention so much upon this one theme, the tendency has been to neglect or utterly ignore whole sections of religious truth. This attitude has often resulted in an arbitrary and artificial interpretation of Scripture. Many passages have been made to suggest and to teach allegorically sanctification, or both justification and sanctification, when such a thing would have been impossible on the basis of a grammatico-historical treatment of the Bible. Such a method of scriptural exegesis can not hope to hold a place of influence.

2. This doctrine has to a large extent become standardized. So much stress has been placed upon the form and the statement of the doctrine that individual freedom of thought has been practically curtailed. Hardly less than necessity has been placed upon the notion of a twofold religious crisis. Adherence to such a doctrinal scheme which insists upon worn terminology, artificial accuracy, and which lacks in power of adaptation and growth is a kind of bondage from which some of the most earnest Christian people seek to be free. 3. The special stress laid upon Christian Perfection has fostered in its promoters an unwise exclusiveness. This

arises out of the notion that "we" have the truth.

Those who differ from "us" are in error, if not in apostacy.

The result of this attitude has been the building of "holiness schools", and the establishment of many little sects professing to hold and teach the truth in a purer form than others. Having thus circumscribed themselves, these groups have to a great degree gotten out of the world which they seek to redeem. To many of its social, educational, economic, and moral problems they are quite oblivious.

On the other hand the opposition has become so pronounced against the traditional form in which Christian Perfection is presented, that it is in danger of discarding the kernel with the shell. A doctrinal form is inviolable only as it continues to be the adequate instrument for the conveyance of living truth. When it fails to do that, it ought to give place to a more adequate expression of truth. Whether the doctrine of entire sanctification meets the test of this principle or not, the opposition to it has not always been simply on that score. Sometimes it has descended to the plane of animosity, ridicule, misrepresentation, and persecution. Such an attitude goes beyond a discredit of

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doctrine, and signifies a repudiation of the saintly life.

Hence, owing to the extremes on the one hand, to occasional untempered opposition on the other, and to difficult or faulty aspects of the Wesleyan view, this doctrine has suffered considerable neglect. But, that can hardly be the final disposition of the subject. It was not the mere product of the intellect, a philosophy of life derived by merely rational processes. In a broad sense experience was the ground of its origin, and Scripture and the body of religious truth were the gauges in formulating it. It was an attempt to express the elements of the loftiest religious life, and its promotion was for the sake of furthering that life among men. Behind the doctrine and shining through it was the saintly life. Hence, the task of pointing out its essential element in the spirit of defense seems eminently worth while.

In the study of this theme, the teaching of John Wesley will be made the basis of treatment. The main features of his view will be stated and estimated. An attempt will be made to present a view of the higher life accordant with a clearer psychology and a better

philosophy than were current in Mr. Wesley's day. ^{7#}

I

Absolute perfection signifies 'entire freedom from defect, blemish, weakness, or liability to err or fail', and is possible only of God. Hence, any other use of the term must of necessity be relative. Its use in the relative sense is frequent in Scripture, and is not uncommon in other spheres. Mt 5:48, where Christ commanded His disciples: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect", is a typical case. The injunction was to a perfection of love, resembling the Divine love, in its purity and goodness. It was to be exercised towards enemies as well as friends, and thus in its impartial, spontaneous, compassionate nature, it would partake of the essence of God's perfect love. Paul uses the word in an exhortation: "let us, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" Phil 3:15. By the "perfect" he means the "mature", the "full-grown", the "more intelligent to apprehend divine things". Occasionally he uses the term to express an ideal not yet attained, and not to be attained until life has run its full course and the fullest maturity of Christian character has been achieved. To this intent are the words: "Not as though I were

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already perfect" Phil3:12. These instances at least reveal the freedom in which the term is used. Furthermore, the notion of perfection has changed from age to age. The following definition of a perfect man is an effort to express this variability: " The perfect man in a particular age, is the man who realizes in himself the Divine law, or the ideal of man as know in that age".

H.B.D. Vol III p 745.

It was in this relative and practical religious sense, and not technically that Mr. Wesley used the term Perfection or Christian Perfection. For him it denoted the highest possible religious experience. Whenever he attempts to explain or justify the expression, he does so in terms of Scripture or of the religious life, and not in the absolute sense. In order to understand him, it is necessary to find out what he taught under the name "Perfection," and not what the word itself may or may not signify. Bishop Taylor's phrase "purity of intention" expresses the substance of Wesley's view, and was influential in leading him to consecrate himself wholly to God. He says: "Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life(not some only) must either be a

sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil." (Plain Account.). These words can almost serve to epitomize Wesley's teaching on this subject. When the whole of life has been dedicated to God, there is a completeness of relationship between the human and the Divine which, though admitting of growth, may be properly termed Perfection. This "perfection in sonship", to use Dr. Sheldon's fine phrase, is described by Wesley in various terms, -- "perfect love", "glorious liberty", "the whole image of God," "a clean heart", "full sanctification", etc. He doubtless gave the preference to "perfect love", or "loving God with all the heart". This meant that all the desires, tempers, thoughts, and actions of the man were controlled by pure love to God and man.

The possibility of Perfection is claimed for the moral, and not for the mental or physical nature of man. In the moral sense is meant freedom from sin. Any Christian is expected to live without committing sin, even "a babe in Christ". " But it is only of grown Christians it can be affirmed, they are in such a sense perfect, as to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers". In considering this lofty moral standard, it is well to have in mind Wesley's definition of sin. He distinguish-

ed between an unethical act ignorantly or involuntarily committed, and an unethical act springing from an evil motive. The one is an error or mistake, the other sin. He speaks of: " Sin, properly so-called(that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law)" and " sin, improperly so-called(that is, an involuntary transgression of a Divine law, known or unknown)". (Plain Account)

He urges that sin be used only to designate intentional wrong, otherwise it will be confusing, and difficult to distinguish between transgressions, " consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality", and wilful sins. If such distinction is not made, and any sin is allowed to be consistent with perfection, the danger is that it will not be confined to those transgressions which result from human frailty. The New Testament, if not the entire Bible confirms Wesley's doctrine of sin. In the sermon on the mount, Christ defines it as consisting in the evil intent, even though the overt act is not committed. Essentially the same doctrine of sin is found in John's Epistles. He says: " Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither knoweth Him". He can not be referring to unavoidable mistakes. For he would then be denying to all men the knowledge of God, himself

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included. According to the New Testament, an act is sin, when it is the result of an evil intent or thought, and never otherwise. From such sin, Christian Perfection teaches that man shall be free. Perfection in this sense, it is maintained, is not incompatible with human nature. Wesley says: "There is no such perfection in this life, as implies an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, or mistake, in things not essential to salvation, or from manifold temptations or from numberless infirmities, wherewith the corruptible body more or less presses down the soul." (Plain Account)

Mr. Wesley gets into a little theoretical difficulty with the term perfection when he uses it with reference to Adam and angels. He distinguishes between angelic, Adamic, and Christian Perfection, and affirms the impossibility of man attaining to either Angelic or Adamic perfection. Due to our human nature, as weakened by the fall, he urges we are guilty of "innumerable violations of the Adamic as well as the angelic law". He continues: "It is well therefore for us, that we are not now under these, but under the law of love. 'Love is (now) the fulfilling of the law', which is given to fallen man". (Sermons Vol I p 169.). But such an adaptation of the law is hardly necessary. It is possible, too, that

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in his speculative flight, he has placed the Adamic standard too high. About all that can be claimed for Adam is innocence and an unspoiled human nature. As for the angelic, we know so little as to affirm almost nothing. These speculative notions seem to involve Mr. Wesley in a slight inconsistency. For having ^{made} man this distinction between the Gospel~~y~~ law required of men, and the perfect law required of Adam and of angels, he elsewhere says that the law written on the heart of the believer is the same law which was " given to angels in heaven and to man in paradise." He also calls it "the royal law of heaven and earth." (Sermons II p 308). However, in general his teaching is that the Divine law is the implication or revelation of the Divine nature, and that it must be the same for all finite free beings whether in heaven or on earth. The law should be viewed as a subjective principle and not as an outward standard. The essence of that principle is love. The extent of its expression or fulfilment in life, will vary with the capacity of the individual. But the principle that all conduct shall be governed by love to God and others, remains the same for all moral beings, whether angels or men.

Having thus stated Mr. Wesley's view of Christian Perfection, we are prepared to study the various aspects of the subject more specifically. Justification is regarded as the preparatory step to this higher life. Man is viewed as in general sinful, and in need of repentance and of the Divine forgiveness. When in sorrow for sin and with a true spirit of abandonment he comes to God, the Divine mercy is always manifested and forgiveness freely bestowed. This experience is variously designated regeneration, justification, forgiveness according to the aspect to be emphasized. But this event, while removing condemnation and much of the moral pollution that has been acquired, does not remove every tendency or disposition to sin. This fact Wesley points out elaborately in his sermon on "Sin in Believers". He urges his view on the grounds that all evangelical churches teach the remaining of sin in the hearts of believing Christians, even the Greek and Romish churches; that his view accords with the experience of the great majority of Christians; and that the Scriptures corroborate his doctrine. Hence, before the whole law of God can be fulfilled, and the work of redemption completed, a further work of Divine grace must be wrought

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in the heart. In the meantime, the believer is victorious over both outward and inward sin. Yet within him latent evils tempers exist and a disposition prone to do evil. To purify the heart from these is the work of sanctification.

The mode of sanctification Mr. Wesley describes thus: " All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as 'a grain of mustard seed, which at first is, the least of all seeds', but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till in another instant the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love of God and man." Sermons II p 236. These words indicate a period of growth in or toward sanctification the culmination of which is an instantaneous experience. For the most part Wesley's works teach that the gradual work is begun at justification, and is a preparation for the final act of sanctification. The nature of the preparation is an increasing conviction of inward sin, the mortifying of evil dispositions and tempers, a growing desire for holiness, and an ever increasing

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faith and consecration. His judgment in this matter is based largely on enquiries made of many who had professed sanctification, and had claimed it as an instantaneous experience wrought by faith. He allowed great variability as to the interim between justification and sanctification. In some instances, sanctification had been experienced within a few months, weeks, or even hours after justification. And there was no a priori reason against both experiences being wrought in the same moment, though no such cases had been known. The following is characteristic of Mr. Wesley on this point: " Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token you may surely know whether you seek it by faith or by works. If by works, you want something to be done first, before you are sanctified. You think, I must be or do thus and thus. Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you are seeking it by faith, you may expect it as you are now; and if as you are, then expect it now. It is of importance to observe, that there is an inseparable connection between those three points, expect it by faith, expect it as you are, expect it now. "

Sermons Vol I pp 390, 391.

The experience of sanctification was interpreted as the completion of the redemptive work of God in the soul. As distinguished from incipient sanctification, this second experience is termed entire sanctification. The word entire is used not so much to signify that the soul is positively free from every trace of an evil tendency, either in the conscious or sub-conscious depths of being, although he may have meant that, as to describe the completed sanctification already begun in the believer. Mr. Wesley did not quibble as to whether the least trace of sin remained or not. He considered the individual safe so long as his heart condemned him not, and the fruits of holiness were manifested in his life. He says " 'But is there no sin in those who are perfect in love?' I believe not; but be that as it may, they feel none,--no temper contrary to pure love,--while they rejoice, pray, and give thanks continually. And whether sin is suspended, or extinguished, I will not dispute; it is enough that they feel nothing but love. This, you allow, we should daily press after. And this is all I contend for." Works Vol #VI p752.

The possibility of growth after entire sanctification is earnestly declared. The experience is not

a matter of maturity or adulthood; it is simply purity of heart. It can not be a hindrance to growth, except as it is conceived as a resting place, and the conditions of growth, such as prayer, meditation, and the reading of the Scriptures are neglected. But the earnestness conditioning the reception of this lofty experience should be a guarantee that the currents of that life would not become sluggish. Sanctification ought to accelerate growth, since it removes the serious moral hindrances to growth. The soul should continue to grow "in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death but to all eternity." Plain Account.

According to Mr. Wesley sanctification is witnessed to by the Holy Spirit, the same as is sonship or justification. He says: "I can know it no otherwise than I know that I am justified. 'Hereby know we that we are of God,' in either sense, 'by the Spirit that He hath given us'. We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit." Plain Account. He allows that the witness may not be equally clear at all times, and that sin may occasion its complete loss. But every state or condition of the soul is witnessed to. It is thus that the sinner is aware of his impurity, as truly.

as the child of God is aware of his sonship. The Spirit is a kind of indicator of the soul's life. There may be temporary exceptions, or periods of suspension for the testing of faith, but as to the work of entire sanctification Wesley says: "None therefore ought to believe that the work is done till there is added the testimony of the Spirit witnessing his entire sanctification as clearly as his justification."

Plain Account.

III

The Scriptures were the chief guide of Mr. Wesley's life, and hence the basis of all his teaching. His sermons and works abound in frequent quotations from the Bible. His doctrine of Christian Perfection is founded on Scripture. He defends the use of the term "Perfection" because it is scriptural. He aimed to comprehend nothing in it, but what was warranted by sound scriptural exegesis. He defined, maintained, and advanced it largely in terms of Scripture. Regarding the chief characteristic of Christian Perfection as the love of God and man, it is logical that the first commandment as Christ gave it, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and

thy neighbor as thyself " should be identified as the essence of this doctrine. Such passages, also, as speak of cleansing, purity, and sanctification are interpreted as teaching the equivalent of the perfect life. Matt. 5:48: " Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is viewed as a direct injunction to Christian Perfection. The reasoning from these scriptural passages may be summarized thus: Sin can not remain in the heart that is cleansed, evil must cease where love reigns, and Satan can have no part in the life wholly given to Christ. He not only gauged his teaching by the Scriptural test, but sought to measure the lives of his converts as well as his own by the New Testament standard of religious experience. As scriptural evidence of the attainability of Perfection he quotes: "' Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, for as He is so are we in this world.'"

But to scriptural evidence for his teaching is to be added that of experience. That is, the experience of many of his converts. Wherever a society became fairly established, there were witnesses to "renewal in love", "entiresanctification", or " Christian Perfection "

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as he expressed it. He viewed this fact as an evidence of the divineness of the work, its thoroughness and depth. He frequently examined the members of the societies, questioning them minutely at times as to the mode and character of their religious experience. And the evidence was such as to convince him that many had attained the lofty experience which he taught. One quotation must suffice: " We have known a large number of persons, of every age and sex, from early childhood to extreme old age, who have given all the proofs which the nature of the thing admits that they were 'sanctified throughout' ". Sermons Vol II p 247.

The rational basis for his teaching is the third of the series of tests by which Mr. Wesley frequently sought to verify the truth. By some he has been described as illogical, self-contradictory, and devoid of philosophical grasp and insight. While it is to be admitted that his distinguishing characteristic is not that of a philosopher, he had a theory of life, essentially scriptural, practical, and rationally sound. He faced squarely life's supreme problems,--human sin, human possibility, the Divine love and mercy as expressed in the provision for human redemption. His works and sermons, and the history of his life are a monument of

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of rational procedure toward the establishment of
righteousness, and the building of God's Kingdom upon
earth. The rationale of his doctrine of Christian Per-
fection may be stated thus: The Divine holiness is with-
out fault; the design and purpose of God is that man
shall be like Him in character; to this end was the
atonement made; and hence the individual who permits
the free action of the Spirit in his life, will be
saved from all sin, thoroughly cleansed and renewed in
the image of God.

IV

As to the advocacy of Christian Perfection Mr. Wesley was earnest and yet judicious. He believed that a declaration of the work wrought in the soul by grace, was a means of increasing strength for the witness, a blessing to others, and gave glory to God. He warns against the danger of silence thus: "By silence, he might avoid many crosses which will naturally and necessarily ensue if he simply declare, even among believers, what God has wrought in his soul. If, therefore, such a one were to confer with flesh and blood he would be entirely silent. But this could not be done with a clear conscience, for undoubtedly he ought to speak." Works VI p502. "It requires a great degree

of watchfulness to retain the perfect love of God; and one great means of retaining it is, frankly to declare what God has given you, and earnestly exhort all the believers you meet with to follow after full salvation."

Works VIIp 13. While profession was encouraged, yet the greatest caution was advised, " against pride any tendency to schism; watch and pray and be in every sense an example of holiness." " Beware of tempting others to separate from you. Give no offense which can possibly be avoided; see that your practice be in all things suitable to your profession, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour. Be particularly careful in speaking of yourself. You may not, indeed, deny the work of God; but speak of it when you are called thereto, in the most inoffensive manner possible. Avoid all magnificent pompous words; indeed, you need give it no general name; neither perfection, sanctification, the second blessing, nor the having attained. Rather speak of the particulars which God has wrought for you. You may say, ' At such a time, I felt a change which I am not able to express; and since that time, I have not felt pride, or self-will, of anger, or unbelief; nor anything but a fulness of love to God and to all mankind.'

And answer ^{any} other plain question that is asked, with

modesty and simplicity. " Plain Account.

The preaching of Christian Perfection was urged not only for its own sake, but as a means of promoting other aspects of God's work. To this we read: " I see wherever this is not done, believers grow dead and cold." WorksIV p137. To a fellow preacher Wesley wrote: " Speak and spare not. Let not regard for any man induce you to betray the truth of God. Till you press the believers to expect full salvation now, you must not look for any revival." These advices are qualified by the following:

" In what manner should we preach sanctification? Scarce at all to those who are not pressing forward; to those who are; always by way of promise; always drawing rather than driving. "

Thus far, it has been the aim of this paper to present the Wesleyan view of Christian Perfection as clearly and fairly as possible. Other references could have been chosen for purposes of illustrating and confirming the various aspects of this theme; but those employed are typical and fairly representative. It remains to estimate Wesley's view as to content and form, and to attempt a statement of the essential truth in accord with modern psychology and philosophy.

There is surely something timeless in this "full salvation" message that it should be marked as the distinguishing feature of one of the greatest revivals in history. Its teaching of purity, consecration, the empowered life, the life conformed to the will of God is perennial. The sincere and devout in every age have sought these qualities of soul. And they will ever be the objects of those who place supreme emphasis on the spiritual and not on the material side of life. Such is the essential content of Wesley's teaching on this subject. He could sum it up in very few words: "It is the complying with that kind command, 'My son give me thy heart.'" Sermons Vol III p168. In similar words he epitomizes his teaching on this subject again and again. Though there are many aspects which he tried to explain and defend, in respect to these he allowed a difference of opinion. He was thus more liberal than many of his followers have been. A pure heart, a holy life was the only credential necessary to secure his fellowship. He once said to a Roman Catholic: "If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand."

But what of the form, the doctrinal cast in which this subject is popularly known? Form and life are distinct. One may know the form, that is, the commonly known teachings of Christian Perfection, and may even assent to them, and have nothing of the life. Or one may have the life and know little of the doctrine. While this distinction is simple, many advocates have failed to recognize or admit it. The doctrine has been wrought out and insisted on almost to the letter. Doctrine is useful and necessary. But it must be free from all artificiality and too great a rigidity, if it is to correspond with life. For life grows; it demands freedom for expansion; it unfolds according to an inner principle, and never shapes itself to an outward mold.

Now, it is the comparative inflexibility of the Wesleyan doctrine which constitutes its main weakness, several aspects of which follow: 1. The practical effect of urging the Wesleyan doctrine in its traditional form has been to insist on folks traveling a prescribed religious way, or to discredit their religious attainments. Occasionally quiet souls, having been reared and nourished under Christian influences, who have never had a distinct religious crisis, but who thoroughly

believe themselves to be Christians have been confused, or discouraged because a form of doctrine was urged upon them for acceptance. 2. There is a tendency in stressing the various aspects of the doctrine to make any or all of them the object of the Believer's seeking, thus making the possible fruits of grace rather than the Author of grace the object sought after. 3. A kind of materialism pervades much of the terminology upon this theme. Sin is variously described as substance. It enters the soul from without, and is subject to removal like a diseased appendix or a cancer. Whereas, "sin is a temper, a spirit, an attitude, a mood and purpose of the willing and choosing soul." Sin adds no constitutional element, and its defeat removes none. Hence such expressions as "the root of sin", "the depraved nature", "inbred sin" etc., are not only apt to repel, but convey a materialistic notion of sin. This newer view by no means implies a denial of the fact of sin, nor a softening of its consequences. It simply calls for an adaptation of our terminology to a more rational psychology.

4. It is to be acknowledged that a second crisis is not an uncommon experience with those who seek the highest plane of the religious life. A psychological

principle seems to underlie this fact of experience:

- (1) Conviction naturally directs the unbeliever first to his sins. Repentance and the divine forgiveness are apt to be the sole objects of his thought. They are about all that the mind can be seriously occupied with at one time. But after a period of testing in this new life, remaining tendencies and tempers begin to tug at the soul, while the "better self" arises to assert his mastery. It often takes conversion to bring this about, to really bring the person to himself. (2) He is then more capable of grasping the meaning and possibility of a full consecration. And for the victorious and earnest soul that is the logical next step. Only, in place of a fixed consecration, let it be viewed as a growing one, enlarging with each new vision of duty or of possible service. The giving of oneself to a new and unexpected task may not be without a struggle; but every enlarging of the consecration marks an epoch of the soul's growth. So while the first act of consecration may be in a sense foundational, it need not be, and will not be, the only one. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is that God fulfills life in the measure of its consecration, and that this fulfillment comes in waves upon the shores with the steady

rise of the tide impelling it." L.J. Birney, Methodist ^{28#}
Review , Jan and Feb 1918 p79.

It will be seen that the above criticism relates to the traditional doctrine of Christian Perfection and not to the consecrated life. The life we must, we will maintain; but the doctrine should be subject to change for the sake of a more adequate expression of the laws and principles related to a growing religious life. In some respects a change of emphasis is necessary. Instead of centering attention upon the state or states of the soul, let the soul be centered upon the great object of its hope. This would liberate from the bondage of doctrinal technicalities, and would lead to the freedom of life, a life viewed as consisting in the sustained action of the Divine Spirit, so dominating and controlling will, emotions, thoughts, that life is kept in comparative unbroken harmony with God. Here the emphasis centers in God, leaving human nature in possession of all normal tendencies and capacities." L.J.Birney, Methodist Review, Jan and Feb 1918 p 80.

The doctrine of Christian Perfection is of historical importance as being the formulated expression of the consecrated life in Wesley's day. But in view of

the fact that it is in some respects an inadequate or imperfect expression of the higher life, its promulgation in the traditional form can hardly be expected. However, the result is gain rather than loss, if the full measure of consecrated living obtains, accompanied by a more accurate doctrinal view. We are thus linked with the vital elements of the past, but untrammelled by its forms. Herein is the identity, that consecrated life then, and consecrated life today are coupled in inseparable bonds of fellowship. The form may change, the doctrine may be reconstructed, a new terminology may develop, but the life that is "hid with Christ in God" has the same essential characteristics in any age. The abiding thing in Christian Perfection then, is the spirit and not the letter.

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