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Psychological Implications of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection with Special Reference to John Wesley's View

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The doctrine of Christian Perfection is viewed by some as a wonderful and liberating doctrine, but by others it is seen as producing false expectations and guilt. John Wesley, the first major theologian to develop a theology of Christian Perfection, encountered misunderstandings and problems with this doctrine. He wrote and preached to correct the misunderstandings. Unfortunately, misunderstandings persist and sometimes have psychological effects on individuals. This article explores common understandings, beliefs, and experiences regarding Christian Perfection among evangelical Christians from the holiness tradition. The material was gathered by means of interviews that were recorded. The interviews were then studied by a theologian and by a clinical psychologist in order to examine how close the beliefs were to Wesley's position and what psychological implications were contained in both the beliefs and the experiences related to the belief of those interviewed.

From my (IB) first exposure to the holiness tradition (during college years) to my serving in Wesleyan churches and teaching in a Wesleyan college and seminary, I have observed disparate interpretations and experiences of Christian Perfection. The disparities were sometimes between people's experience and their belief and sometimes between their belief and what they had been taught. Some responded with frustration that their lives did not measure up to what they believed, some lived in denial that there was a disparity, and some rejected the doctrine or even their entire Christian faith. As I compared people's beliefs and experiences with Wesley's perspective on Christian Perfection, I was enticed to look more deeply at his teaching and discover how it might resolve the confusion and discouragement. I also became concerned that the theological confusion was relevant to psychological issues in people's lives. I believed a better understanding of Wesley's view might greatly facilitate one's spiritual journey toward maturity.

Albert Ellis has said, "Religiosity is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance." A decade of pastoral ministry experience prior to entering clinical training taught me (EM) that for some, faith and religious practice appeared to promote personal growth and psychological health. For others it often seemed to promote poor mental health (defined broadly as developmental arrest and interpersonal dys-
function). Was the dysfunctional religious experience the product of inadequate doctrine or a defective belief system? Was it an expression of an underlying psychological disorder that manifested itself in dysfunctional religious expression? Or was Ellis right that religion promoted ill health?

Modern psychological research, I discovered, suggested that the effects of religion on mental health were not as clear as Ellis had suggested. In 1983, A. E. Bergin first published the results of an exhaustive meta-analysis of all the previous psychological research done to study the effects of religiosity (broadly defined in a Judeo-Christian context) on mental health in an article published in Professional Psychology: Research and Practice. According to Bergin, 23% of the research findings supported the view that religion negatively affected mental health. However, 47% indicated that religion had a positive effect on mental health, and 30% of the research suggested that there was no relationship. So when the numbers are added up, 77% of the obtained results found that religion did not negatively affect mental health, hardly a finding that supported Ellis's statement. But what about that 23% that appeared to negatively affect mental health? As a Christian psychologist, who views Christianity as a positive resource, I am convinced that we need to identify not just the healthy aspects of our faith, but the aspects of our faith that may generate poor mental health.

**Purpose of the Current Study**

In Wesley's time there were many misunderstandings about Christian Perfection. Among them were the issues of the nature and the timing of the experience. Some saw it as "absolute perfection" and attainable through God's grace. Others, at the opposite end of the continuum, saw it as completely unattainable and a misleading teaching. Between those extremes were more moderate positions. The problem for Wesley was that he was associated with the problematic views. An even greater problem was that such views hindered the healthy maturing of believers. For those reasons Wesley gave considerable effort to make his view clear. He corresponded with individuals in order to clarify his views and answer questions. He preached a number of sermons on the topic and he wrote tracts to fully explain his view. His most thorough treatment, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, was his attempt to clarify his beliefs and put to rest views which were not his and which he considered misleading or harmful to Christians.

Because of our awareness that many Christians, particularly those who consider themselves heirs of Wesley, experience confusion and have misunderstandings of this Wesley doctrine we decided to revisit Wesley's eighteenth century problem and explore what Christians from Wesley's tradition NOW perceived about Christian Perfection. We wanted to examine their understandings in light of psychological issues. We subtitled our project "*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection... and ...An Account of Perfection Held by Plain Christians.*"

**Disclaimer:**

Throughout our project we were open about our assumption that we do not believe "religion creates pathology." On the contrary, we hold that whereas some religious constructs and practices may contribute to pathology, good theology and authentic spirituality contribute to well-being. As a psychologist and a theologian we are concerned about spiritual well-being, psychologically and theologically generated. As Karl Barth admonished—
the theologian should be both the critic and the servant of the preacher. We desired to apply a similar principle in encouraging the Christian psychologist to give psychological insight and feedback to the theologian, and the theologian to give a sound theological base to the psychologist. We have tried to model this kind of mutually informing and supportive collaboration by applying psychology and theology to popular understandings of a major Wesleyan doctrine, but ultimately for the spiritual well-being of Christian people.

One other disclaimer: this was viewed as an initial study, not comprehensive and conclusive, so our sample was small. We hope to begin a discussion that may prove helpful to pastors and counselors. We hope to raise issues that can lead to additional research and inquiry.

Methodology

Our data were the experiences and perceptions of people. We used a questionnaire to form the basis of an interview. The interviews lasted from 20 to 45 minutes, with most taking approximately thirty minutes. These were taped so we could accurately review the material. Individuals were selected based on several criteria, among them the following:

1. They had experience (church background) in the "holiness tradition."
2. They considered themselves as currently subscribing to a biblical concept of holiness.

The pool became a rich resource. It included 6 men and 3 women. They all had their religious experience in the Northeast, except one, in the South. They represented six holiness denominations. They ranged in age from 40 to 83. All but one was at least college educated, three held PhDs, three with Masters degrees.

We gave no advance notice of the questions because we desired to hear the respondents' emotive, rather than "scholarly" responses. We were exploring persons' experience.

Findings and Comparisons to Wesley

In our study we wanted to explore both how accurately people understood Wesley and how much variance there was within our sample. In order to relate our research to the baseline of Wesley's view of Christian Perfection we shall give a brief description of his doctrine followed by the responses of our interviewees. This will be done by breaking the subject into component issues and looking at our findings.

Before presenting those component parts, however, some summary discoveries will be helpful: regarding key theological concepts, the responses were sufficiently varied and revealed divergent understandings. There were two kinds of differences. In some cases we saw strong variance between the individuals in our pool, revealing great differences among those within the holiness tradition. There were also differences within the individuals from what they initially believed (or had been taught) and what they later came to believe on their own.

Wesley's understanding of Christian Perfection grows from his larger view of the entire doctrine of salvation. He saw it as being comprised of "two branches"—justification and sanctification. Justification changes one's relationship to God, while sanctification changes the actual nature of the person. One relates to forgiveness; the other relates to the restoration of
human potential. In Wesley's words, justification is what God does "for" us, while sanctification is what God does "in" us. This involves Wesley's understanding of humankind being created in the Image of God. He saw that image expressed in three dimensions—the "natural," the "political," and the "moral." The natural meant that we were created to be eternal; the political, that we were to have dominion over the rest of creation; and the moral involved "true holiness," which he described as the ability to love God and others completely and freely. Wesley believed that in the fall the natural dimension was injured, but not destroyed. Persons still live eternally, but not in God's presence. The political was also injured, in that persons dominate and destroy rather than exercising loving dominion. The moral dimension, however, was totally lost. We have no ability on our own to unreservedly love God and others.

In sanctification, which Wesley termed "full salvation," the first two dimensions are improved, but not brought to their original perfection. However, the moral dimension, which was completely destroyed, is completely restored. Thus, the salvation is "full" or complete. The important and eternal aspect of the Imago Dei is restored. This aspect involves love (of God and others) and therefore is primarily relational, or "other focused."

In light of this Wesleyan view, our interview questions covered key issues that would show similarities to or differences from Wesley. The questions began with what is termed the "sin nature" and explored two facets: a definition of the sin nature and how the sin nature is affected by sanctification. Not surprisingly, the definition of "sin nature" ranged from something very substantive, almost or even physical, which is passed on genetically, to something far less tangible, such as a "tendency to rebel against God, to serve one's self," or even just an attitude. With the more substantive, or substantialist view, the sin nature actually had an entity (a key issue for our later discussion). One interviewee described it as "what's organic in every one of us at birth." Another described it as something that caused "distortedness" or "dysfunctionality," a "thing" that caused "sinfulness of the very character of an individual's being." One person seemed to believe that the sin nature could be equated with temptation, the fact that we are tempted, with the result that we give in to temptation.

Wesley's View of the Sin Nature

Wesley had a strong view that the sin nature was the inherited nature of humankind since the fall of Adam. However, he acknowledged that he had no idea how it was transmitted. Wesley seems to argue for something very powerful in the human experience, but does not give it specific substance. Whatever the sin nature was, it resulted in the loss of the ability to love God and others, which he called true holiness.

What was Sanctification's Perceived Effect on the Sin Nature?

We found a plethora of responses! They covered the spectrum, from "taking away of the sin nature as actually the implanting of a tertium quid, a third thing into the personality," to the entity (the sin nature) being "put to death" to a more attitudinal view, sanctification brings a new strength to combat the tendency to sin, a new ability to control the "carnal nature." When we asked one of our group if he had been taught more of a suppression or eradication, he laughed and said, "both and confusingly!" Among those who had believed that the sin nature was actually taken away, we noted three responses when their experience of sin remained:
A. They changed their belief, no longer believing the sin nature was taken away.

B. They retained their belief and felt "spiritually defeated," or guilty. This was true of the subject who believed that sanctification actually removed temptation. When it didn't, and she failed, she continued to feel strong urges to "go to the altar," even in her eighties.

C. They retained their belief and renamed their actions: intense anger before sanctification was described as being "mad as hell," after sanctification it was reframed as "righteous indignation."

One difficulty we observed with these responses was the focus on behaviors. Because behaviors are quantifiable the teaching about Christian Perfection frequently related to behaviors.

**Wesley's View of Sanctification's Relationship to the Sin Nature**

From a theological perspective the emphasis on behaviors (that we observed in our interviews) misses the heart of Wesley's view and settles for some of the possible outcomes. The essence of Wesley's understanding was love, not behavior. The core of his belief was the love of God toward persons, making possible the love of the person for God, and the accompanying love of others. The result of such love would certainly be expressed by behaviors, but to focus primarily on behaviors would be to short circuit the essence of the message and lead to legalism. The problem for Wesley was not so much the sin nature itself, but the relationships that the sin nature destroyed or distorted. His emphasis was on one's relationship with God and the means of setting that right was by addressing and allowing God to change the sin nature. The primary issue was relationship; the means had to do with the sin nature. Not one of the people we interviewed had been taught what we perceive as the true Wesleyan position that the primary issue of sanctification was restoring a vibrant relationship with God. They perceived it as a self focused matter of getting the self changed.

**The Possibility of "Sinless Perfection"**

All of our interviewees had been taught something about "sinless perfection." Their views varied but most thought some form of it possible, depending on definitions of sin.

It was fascinating for us to observe this much acceptance of the idea of sinless perfection because it stands in stark contrast to Wesley's own position. While he taught the possibility of "Christian perfection," he carefully avoided describing it in absolutist terms. In spite of Wesley's position on sinless perfection, the holiness tradition succeeded in making it a major plank in the platform of Christian Perfection. Our experience indicates that it is widely assumed to be central to the doctrine, and is most frequently associated with behavioral standards.

**The Nature of the Sanctification Experience: Event or Process**

A major aspect of our survey had to do with the nature of the experience of becoming sanctified. This evoked the question of event or process. Again, the responses went from the extreme of event only, to process only, with the view of crisis within a process as a middle view. Even in the less extreme views, there seemed to be a strong undercurrent of expectation connected to an event. This topic was quite fertile in offering psychological implications. One description encapsulates much of the issue.
The "Big Event"

One of our interviewees had been definitively taught that it was an event and that event WOULD result in sinless perfection. He reflected that he became so preoccupied with wanting to experience the event, that he didn't think much about spiritual growth. The problem he experienced was if there was any evidence of a less than perfect life, the implication was clear: the event had not really occurred. He remembered later counseling with an older friend who had sought the sanctification experience, the big event, for some twenty years. This friend had had a grandfather who testified of a sanctifying experience in which he felt like he had been struck with an electric current. The friend's experience never measured up to that kind of a "bolt," so he felt spiritually lost and completely inadequate. The sought after goal was "the big event....a lightening bolt big enough to do the whole job" of removing sin and bringing perfection. Years of struggling were ended only when the experience of a cure-all event gave way to emphasizing a process of growth. That process could contain major crises.

Wesley's View of Event or Process in Sanctification

It is interesting to observe how dogmatic many in the holiness tradition have been on the nature of the sanctifying experience. It is significant that Wesley is cited as the authority for both a crisis and a process orientation. No doubt the reason is that Wesley used metaphors that implied an event, but he also used metaphors that implied a process. It is likely that as individuals have their own experience regarding sanctification, they identify with the Wesley metaphors that relate most to their experience and take little notice of those that do not relate. In fact, Wesley wrote and spoke of a synthesis of event and process. His analogy of birth is clearly an event, but it is built on the process which leads up to it. His analogy of death, which is clearly a final crisis, is often the result of the process of growing older, weaker, or increasingly ill.

Our Observation

When viewed exclusively as event, the expectations are frequently very high, not fully realized, and followed by guilt. Feeling that either God had not yet done God's part and it was still in the future, or that God HAD, but the individual had not measured up, there often followed the desire for a panacea. The danger of overemphasis on the event was that unmet expectations were followed by disappointment, guilt, and anxiety. It encouraged the constant striving for a simple answer to the complex problems of life and sometimes displaced responsibility for addressing personal issues.

When viewed exclusively as process, there could be a tendency to not pay attention to significant moments, or foster alertness to what God is doing. Seen healthily, process can encourage the person to focus on daily maturing and growing without implying guilt for not having fully arrived after an event or crisis.

A more healthy approach was seen when both events (moments of crisis) and process were acknowledged. The event(s) were recognized as occurring within a process. In that case, neither event nor process was minimized. The benefits of both were realized and the weaknesses of each were reduced.

Wesley's View of Grace and Personal Effort

One other theme, the relationship of grace and personal effort, surfaced in our interviews. The common thread was that although grace was
verbally articulated, there was frequently the sense of striving. Wesley was true to Reformation theology in holding that salvation is in no way connected to what we can do. No part of it can be earned. It is by faith alone. And to Wesley, sanctification was a part of salvation. He even termed sanctification "full salvation" because it was the completion of the whole work of God, not something added on. Not only was salvation fully dependent on faith alone, but faith was God's gift. It was not something one could conjure up. Wesley even went so far on one occasion (at least) as to state that "grace which brings faith...is irresistible at that moment." How he addressed that in the context of human freedom is a different topic, outside the scope of this article. Suffice it here to say that he put faith on the opposite end of the continuum from personal effort. In no way could personal effort produce faith. However, it must be immediately pointed out that the result of God's gift of faith would be a new energy for personal effort. The order, faith and then effort, was crucial. Wesley was aligned with the theology of the Epistle of James in believing that the authenticity of faith could be demonstrated by actions. The point here is that Wesley saw unmerited faith, faith that was not dependent on a person's ability to develop it, as the keystone in the experience of sanctification.

Psychological Implications
As we listened to and processed the perceptions of Christian Perfection held by the people we interviewed, we formulated psychological implications that their doctrine held. These implications are explicated by topics.

Sin Nature
We noted differing views of the sin nature, which approached what we term a "rigid" or "flexible" conception. We are using "rigid" to describe a more substantialist, organic, genetic, content focused view. We are using "flexible" to describe the view of the sin nature as a tendency toward or propensity to sin. We observed a direct correlation between how they conceived the sin nature and how they perceived sanctification. The more rigid their view of the sin nature, the more event focused sanctification became. The more flexible their view of the sin nature, the less event oriented and more process oriented was their view of sanctification. We posit that when the sin nature is seen as a fixed, unchanging state, sanctification becomes event and is ritualistically experienced.

What Sanctification Does to the Sin Nature
Everyone in our pool reflected that they had been taught or at some point believed that sanctification completely removes the sin nature. Words used to describe this included "rooted out," "destroys," "crucifies," "puts to death." However, we observed that everyone in our group modified that belief in light of their personal experience. It did not seem to them that their sin nature had, in fact, been destroyed. The initial result was a profound sense of disappointment. The next step for all of them was to modify their belief to be more congruent with their experience. They appeared to utilize various defense mechanisms such as rationalization or intellectualization (higher order), or the more primitive defense mechanisms of denial and projection. But in each case they were reformulating their belief to match their experience. The more static or more organic their view of the sin nature (with the correlating event oriented sanctification process),
the more primitive was their defense mechanism. Variations also seemed to relate to personality. This seems to be consistent with basic psychological theory, and what we would have expected to find.

The psychological implication this offers is that we believe this doctrine (the substantialist view) inherently generates ambivalence. The ambivalence is resolved by various people in different ways depending on their strength or weakness. Those who have a weaker personality structure will likely resolve their ambivalence more negatively (that is they will be more likely to experience neurotic symptoms of guilt/shame, depression, and anxiety). Those who have greater resources or strengths in their personality will likely resolve the ambivalence with less damage to mental health and well being. But all of our people experienced struggle as a result of the inherent ambivalence that grows out of the doctrine. We found no one in our study who did not struggle with psychological emotional ambivalence.

Feeling the need to maintain belief in what is assumed to be "correct theology," in the face of experience that does not support such theology, can lead to a split between one's experiential theology and one's intellectual theology. Such disassociating might be dealt with psychologically by developing terminology that has double meanings, or denying the actual experience if it does not match the belief. We did observe that they all modified their belief by moving toward a process view.

A clear example of this ambivalence and response through a defense mechanism was one person who stated that she no longer believed in a major event, yet she continued to go to the event in her thinking. While this initially sounds like a form of rationalizing, it is too incongruent, and is actually denial.

The Emphasis on Event also Carried Implications

In our group, the doctrine had been taught predominantly as event. The implication we observed was that when sanctification was expected (and taught) as an event that removed the sin nature, the focus of one's self improvement efforts was not on accomplishing developmental tasks but experiencing an event. The result was that rather than seeking growth, there was a preoccupation with the self. Timpe, in an article entitled, "Perfectionism: Positive Possibility or Personal Pathology," states, "When the perfection is a fixed, unchanging state, it is a ritualism with pathological and neurotic elements. In this perspective, perfectionism is pathology. In pathological perfectionism, the individual's orientation is egocentric. The focus of the person's action is meeting one's own physical, psychological, and spiritual needs." We observed this as the preoccupation with self evaluation. By contrast, "Perfectionism, at its highest, is not focused on the self's needs, but the giving away of self (i.e., the investment of self into the lives of others) in the service of others." Here then is a simple yet profound psychological grid through which to pass the accounts of those interviewed in this study. Our observation was that their earlier understanding of sanctification and their accompanying focus was very much centered on themselves, their own "condition," not on serving others.

This hypothesis was born out by the experiences of our people. We learned, to a person, that in their holiness teaching there had not been an emphasis on personal growth. They had received no training on how to deal with their emotions. The teaching implied looking back or forward to an event. In that, this doctrine stunted our respondents' growth in aware-
ness of how to grow personally as Christians.\textsuperscript{11} We hypothesize that this doctrine can fixate persons at their present stage of developmental growth and give justification to foreclosed personality development.\textsuperscript{12}

With a dominant expectation of an event another implication surfaced: the locus of control is shifted from internal to external. Instead of taking responsibility for change, change is expected to come from something outside a person's control, something "out there." With this we hypothesized a possible decreased introceptive awareness. Because the locus of control is not internal, the person may have decreased awareness of how he or she feels, and as a result does not grow. For example, if I'm not aware that I'm angry, I don't consciously deal with it. If I do become aware of my anger, I look toward an event to address the problem. If repeated attempts to experience the event fail, self flagellation may occur. We posit that emphasis on an event displaces the awareness of the need for growth and minimizes internal awareness, which is essential for growth. Some results we suspect from these implications are that more dependency may be created, there can be a disempowerment and there can be an increased tendency to project blame.\textsuperscript{13} Overall, the primary impact when locus of control becomes external is whether it fosters growth. Our observation is that it does not.

The most widespread implication we saw regarding the doctrine of Christian Perfection was related to guilt. Holding to a standard that is unattainable led to a sense of guilt and shame. Among each of our interviewees we noted a clear sense of guilt in response to this doctrine. Inherent in the doctrine (as perceived by them) was the sense of falling short; this sense was accompanied by feelings of guilt. To a person. There were no exceptions. How fit or capable they were in dealing with unrealistic guilt seemed to determine how much damage it did.

A factor that contributed to the intensity of the guilt feelings relates to the fact that the ambivalence, referred to above, and the accompanying guilt were not discernable by the person as singularly emotional or spiritual. The two became inextricably connected and confused in the psyche and the negative effect was extremely powerful. The intensity of emotional shame that accompanied the failure was exacerbated because it took on spiritual significance: "you have failed God!" For some that felt devastating.\textsuperscript{14}

An example of this was reflected by one of our interviewees. She remembered being a newly wed and working along with her husband who was a Methodist pastor. The people of the church had a clear understanding of Christian Perfection, and expressed it in particular behaviors which must be done, and others which must be avoided. These had to do with specifics such as tithing and avoiding makeup and some forms of dress. The pastor's wife was not familiar with all the "rules," and repeatedly failed to obey them. The result was a loss of self-esteem and a feeling that she was not living up to her faith. It was so emotionally and spiritually devastating to her that now, some fifty years later, she could not talk about it without tears. The impact of an intertwined emotional and spiritual failure was extremely significant.

The irony is that because the doctrine emphasized only a major event, there were no handles (other than through ritualized re-experiencing the event) on how one could process unrealistic guilt. Guilt was levied with no resource to deal with it. The assumption that was taught was if you had faith, you would get this event and then you \textit{would} measure up.
Unresolved guilt tends to haunt a person throughout her or his life. It can be rationalized or covered up, but it is one of the persistent emotions that is very difficult to eradicate and often leads to shame. Shame is guilt taken to extreme, the belief that the person himself or herself is bad, corrupted beyond repair. Shame is devastating because it undermines the self esteem in tacit ways.

A second irony is that the essential message of Christianity, especially Wesley's view of Christian Perfection, is the inherent worth and actual restoration (to the *Imago Dei*) of the individual. Wesley saw prevenient grace as facilitating the conscience, not for the purpose of extending guilt feelings, but so the person can be moved to experience grace and freedom, with the concomitant response of having a new ability to love. Freely. This is the opposite of being restricted and inhibited by guilt feelings, the consistent experience of our interviewees.

One more implication can be drawn about guilt from the response to the question about the roles of grace and personal effort. Our persons clearly articulated the importance of faith. They stated that it was crucial. However, most described faith in terms of effort, behaviors they felt they needed to do. This may, for some, indicate a subconscious attempt to deal with their guilt, working it off by specific actions. Of course, they were not aware of what they are attempting because they renamed those actions "faith."

**Conclusion**

The value of our study is NOT a discovery of new problems related to a particular doctrine. The significance is that it may reflect a consistent pattern and consistent perceptions among Christians of the holiness tradition who are sincere and desirous of deeper spirituality. The experiences of our group informed us about how the perceived doctrine affected them and how the negative implications of theology are felt at the common experience level. Timpe points to Adler's observation that the human striving for perfection can have religious manifestations that could represent personal pathology or personal potential. Our focus has been on that issue, the psychological impact, in real Christians' lives.

Our study also revealed how widely different some of those understandings are from the perspective John Wesley held. However, because the same terms are used, there is no common awareness of the divergence from Wesley. The result is that the concept of Christian Perfection has taken on a life of its own, and is quite different from Wesley's. We believe that the account of plain Christians is quite different from Wesley's plain account and this has not contributed to sound theology facilitating greater mental health among some Christians.

Christian psychologists should be willing to understand the negative aspects of some teachings, and not miss or underestimate the impact certain teachings can have on the psyche. Christian psychologists must be willing to deal with the implications of research findings that indicate that as much as 25% of religiosity is associated with poor mental health. As in the old analogy, we must not throw out the baby with the bath water; however, they must be willing to throw out the bath water. Wrongly perceived Christian Perfection may account for some of the 23% that Ellis posited. Christian professionals need to be smart enough, mature enough to
differentiate between harmful and healthy doctrine so that they can become agents of grace and maturity to those who entrust themselves to our care, whether we be pastors, psychologists, or theologians. It is our conviction that spiritual and emotional health are not mutually exclusive but facilitate each other. All truth is God’s truth. Therefore, all theological truth is psychologically healthy and promotes health. All psychological truth is theologically healthy and promotes right relationship with God.

Christian theologians can help psychologists to grasp healthy views of Christian perfection (Wesley) so that those desiring the best of their spiritual lives are not seen as neurotics, but are given true theological handles to move forward into health, spiritual and emotional health. Good theology fosters spiritual development. Therefore, it behooves psychologists and theologians to articulate doctrines and principles that help people.

Wesley’s true view contributes to emotional and mental health. Rather than producing anxiety and guilt, his view promises freedom because of God’s role in giving faith and God’s empowering presence in a dynamic relationship. Further, the implications for society are dramatic. Wesley saw sanctification as the transforming power of love, fully restoring some dimensions of the Image of God in which humans were initially created. Particularly he envisioned the restoration of the ability to love God with the concomitant ability to love others. He saw this as so powerful that it would change the world. The psychological implications are extremely significant, regarding both coming to terms with one’s self (proper self love) and relating to others (love of neighbor), but all of this being a response to the transforming love extended by God. This is our “plain account” of how two divergent plain accounts can come together.

Endnotes

5. Arthur Roberts, personal interview. As a young person he had been exposed to "formulae" for the experience. This was initially confusing, but he looked honestly at his life and worked through it. He acknowledged that there was a polarity between suppressionist and eradication language, but he began to understand that the primary issue was not those descriptions. It was "to cleanse the heart from the will of sin." In retrospect he identified even those childhood experiences with the process words of William Penn, that sincere Christian experience a "sight of sin, a sense of sin, a sorrow for sin and amendment for sin."
6. Wesley, *Works*, Vol. V, pp. 93 and 314; Vol. III, p. 167. One of the reasons Wesley avoided using the term "sinless perfection" was because he was fully aware that to put it in absolutist terms was to invite judgment as well as failure. He had enough difficulty with people misunderstanding even without using absolutist concepts. Further evidence of this position is that at one point Wesley corresponded with his brother Charles about the possibility of even dropping the term "perfection." He stated, inaccurately, that he hardly used the term. The point is that he recognized the association of the term with an absolute standard that was impossible to achieve, and to use the term would give ammunition to his critics.

7. Wesley, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 427; Vol. XIII, p. 508. Wesley is quick to clarify, however, that "the grace of God, both before and after those moments, may be, and hath been, resisted." "That in general, it does not act irresistibly; but we may comply therewith, or may not." The point here is that for Wesley faith is not a self-generated work.

8. Randie Timpe, "Perfectionism: Positive Possibility or Personal Pathology," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 1989, Vol. 8, pp. 32, 35-48. Timpe observes that some persons view sanctification as static, a state of being, rather than a process of becoming. We are observing a correlation between that view and the antecedent view of the sin nature.

9. Here we define ambivalence as the presence of two strongly held, yet opposite emotions.


11. This may be one reason so many of the holiness tradition groups tend to think in terms of doctrine and behavior rather than growth, a factor some of our people noted and stated.

12. By contrast, for many Christians, when the possibility of growth was presented by a teacher or a book, there was often a shift toward hope and growth. For example, when Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*, came out, those who had become aware and felt frustration with their lack of growth and were honest about it may have discovered a new hope. Our society reflects this kind of reaction, seen in the success of programs that emphasize growth and specifically, how to grow. Examples are seen in Oprah, Dr. Phil, Robert Schuller, et al., where specific steps for improvement are emphasized. The popular literature, programs, and sermons have focused on "How to..." This seems to be a reaction to the frustration of not being given handles to growth.

13. It also appears that this kind of orientation lends itself to an authoritarian style of leadership with the negative psychological effects that come from such parenting styles.

14. They feel they should not have failed because God had done everything necessary, provided the second blessing. Still they failed and therefore feel they are cut off from grace.

15. Timpe, op. cit., p. 28.