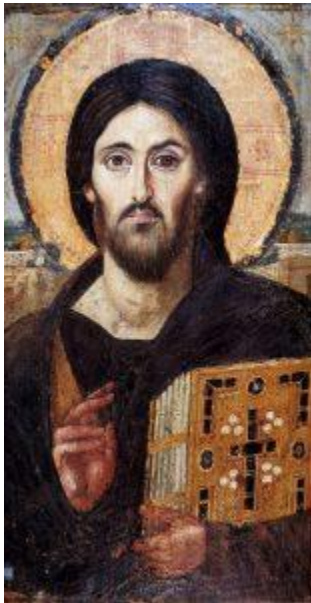


Holiness of Heart and Life: Witness to Jesus Christ in the World (part 4 of 6)

BY STEVE MANSKAR

This is the fourth of a six part series of posts based on a paper I presented in the Practical Theology Working Group of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies that met in August 2013. The focus of the Institute was upon how Christian people and congregations in the Wesleyan/Methodist traditions relate to people and communities of other faith traditions.

I contend that a culture that intentionally fosters the formation of holiness of heart and life in Wesleyan/Methodist communities and persons is necessary for any fruitful engagement with persons and communities of other faith traditions.



Christ the King ([Christ Pantocrator](#)). Public Domain.

Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the World

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Witnesses to Jesus Christ in the World

Jesus told his disciples

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your

Father in heaven.”^[1]

Like salt, Christians are to improve life in the world. Their witness to Jesus Christ in the world strives to improve the quality of life for all people in their neighborhood, town, city, state, and nation. John Wesley describes the “salty” Christians:

Indeed, were we wholly to separate ourselves from sinners, how could we possibly answer that character which our Lord gives us in these very words: 'Ye' (Christians, ye that are lowly, serious and meek; ye that hunger after righteousness, that love God and man, that do good to all, and therefore suffer evil: Ye) 'are the salt of the earth.' It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper, and word, and work of yours, may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will in

some measure be given to the corruption which is in the world; and a small part, at least, saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God.^[2]

Christians are “the light of the world.” They reveal the world as it is and as it will be. Their witness reveals the places and people where Christ and his kingdom are present today. Holiness reveals the mission of Christ in, with, and for the world. It is the light of God’s love for the world that draws the world to Christ and his good news of God’s reign. John Wesley describes the meaning of Christians living as the “light of the world:”

Ye Christians are the light of the world, with regard both to your tempers and actions. Your holiness makes you as conspicuous as the sun in the midst of heaven. As ye cannot go out of the world, so neither can ye stay in it without appearing to all mankind. Ye may not flee from men, and while ye are among them it is impossible to hide your lowliness and meekness and those other dispositions whereby ye aspire to be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Love cannot be hid any more than light; and least of all when it shines forth in action, when ye exercise yourselves in the labour of love, in beneficence of every kind. As well may men think to hide a city as to hide a Christian: yea, as well may they conceal a city set upon a hill as a holy, zealous, active lover of God and man.^[3]

Light requires energy. The energy is the Holy Spirit working in the lives of persons witnessing to Jesus Christ in the world and following his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion (also known as the means of grace). The light of Christ shines through the lives of persons who are formed by communities that intentionally initiate members into the life and mission of the triune God and provide the means for ongoing support and accountability for mission-shaped discipleship. Such a community is described by Charles Wesley in Hymn #507 written for the Love Feast:

*Let us join ('tis God commands),
Let us join our hearts and hands;
Help to gain our calling's hope,
Build we each the other up.
God his blessing shall dispense,
God shall crown his ordinance,
Meet in his appointed ways,
Nourish us with social grace.*

*Plead we thus for faith alone,
Faith which by our works is shown;
God it is who justifies,
Only faith the grace applies,
Active faith that lives within,
Conquers earth, and hell, and sin,
Sanctifies, and makes us whole,
Forms the Saviour in the soul.*

*Let us then as brethren love,
Faithfully his gifts improve,
Carry on the earnest strife,
Walk in holiness of life.
Still forget the things behind,
Follow Christ in heart and mind;
Toward the mark unwearied press,
Seize the crown of righteousness!*

*Let us for this faith contend,
Sure salvation is its end;
Heaven already is begun,
Everlasting life is won.
Only let us persevere
Till we see our Lord appear;
Never from the rock remove,
Saved by faith which works by love.*^[4]

In the post-Christendom, post-modern, multi-cultural world of today congregations must be intentional about Christian formation. They must acknowledge that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is the dominant theology and ethic of the church today. And that MTD undermines the church’s mission to form disciples of Jesus Christ who participate with Christ and his mission in the world.

MTD has gained its place in the church as the result of decades of neglect of essential Wesleyan

doctrine, spirit, and discipline. Therefore, the church is ineffectual in preparing its people to be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ with their Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Bahai, atheist, agnostic, and pagan neighbors. Without a culture and expectation of holiness of heart and life, United Methodist congregations cannot be full participants in interfaith dialog or relationships.

^[1] Matthew 5:13-16

^[2] Wesley, Sermon 24, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Fourth," § 1.7, *Works*, 1:536-7.

^[3] *Ibid.*, 1:539-540.

^[4] Wesley, #507 in *Works*, 7:698-9.