

The Implications of “Plundering the Egyptians” and the “New Creation”
Maxine Walker

Four quotes to explore the meaning and significance of Wesleyan scholarship:

A. “If the bubonic plague were to strike the university tonight and wipe out the entire faculty (save for thee, me, and the endowment!) would we, after burying our dead, proceed to replicate [Wesleyan scholarship] that exists now?”

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination*

B. A Love Feast is a “free and familiar conversation among equals.”

John Wesley, *Journals*, 1760.

C. “I don’t want no trouble at the River!”

African-American gospel song

D. “Brilliance is like an SUV, it can get stuck in even more remote places.”

Garrison Keillor, *A Prairie Home Companion*

The Implications of ‘Plundering the Egyptians’ and the ‘New Creation’”

Bless to me, O God,
The earth beneath my foot,
Bless to me, O God,
The path whereon I go;
Bless to me, O God,
The thing of my desire;
Thou Evermore of evermore,
Bless Thou to me my rest.

Bless to me the thing
Whereon is set my mind,
Bless to me the thing
Whereon is set my love;
Bless to me the thing
Whereon is set my hope;
O Thou King of kings
Bless Thou to me mine eye! ¹

From *Carmen Gadelica* III, 181

Many of us in revivalist energy, quiet reverence, and awe have sung the great Charles Wesley hymn, “And can it be . . . that I should gain an interest in the Saviour’s blood. Died he for me who caused who caused His pain? The phrase that has haunted me over my years of teaching and studying is the wonderful line: “My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed thee.” The image of the open door and the path slicing into the landscape and distant horizon-- I find appealing and hopeful for those us of doing scholarship along this Wesleyan way.

It is also fair to say that the open road has dangers as well—perhaps best summed up by the barber in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* –“I do not wonder so much at the madness of the knight as the simplicity of the squire.”

What does this “Wesleyan way” mean for those of us who are followers of Christ as scholars, those of us following as students. I have taught the Shakespeare class at Christian universities for 30 years. At the end of each semester, we end up debating how forms of love are the impulse for Shakespeare’s plays. Was there /should there have been any moral trajectory set? Were we /should we have been interested in our scholarship as a “cure to moral indeterminism”? Did we wonder if we were questing for certainty as children of modernity instead of questing for wisdom? Did we engage/critique/appropriate culture on our journey through Shakespearean scholarship? Were we engaged in any form of “Christian Scholarship” in Shakespeare class? What does the ‘new creation’ have to do with Shakespeare studies and other studies of literature and literary theory? Both Christian and secular influential thinkers have consider these questions most important in describing what is called “Christian Scholarship” in America.²

The following phrases describe the attempts to bridge between happens in our lives of church and faith and in our vocation of academic work:

- Faith and Learning
- Church and Academy
- Faith and Reason
- Religion and an academic discipline, e.g., literature, political science, psychology, philosophy
- Christian University whose mission is liberal arts education and the theological task

- Science and Belief

Of course, what characterizes these phrases is the “and”—the common conjunction that connects nouns seemingly so irreconcilable. The persistent quest to tie these concepts together emerges from a variety of historical and cultural concerns that are outside the scope of this paper, but in the States the whole notion of a “Christian college or Christian University” has pushed this inquiry to the foreground—especially following the consequences of the failure of the Enlightenment project to fulfill all the anticipated results.

The scientific method and “modern” readings are by themselves inadequate to lead persons to the risen Christ.³ On the other hand, faith permeates and is embodied in all disciplines. As Professor Mark Schwehn indicates, faith is not only a pre-condition for learning but it is “also a persistent beat in the rhythm of intellectual life,”⁴ and this becomes a primary inducement to see what the similarities are about between “faith” in religious experience and “faith” in the academic disciplines.

In Wesleyan studies, these phrases, describing the relationship between Christianity and secular life, are anticipated in Albert Outler’s influential essay, “Plundering the Egyptians,” a metaphor that “points to the freedom that Christians have (by divine allowance) to explore, appraise, and appropriate all the insights and resources of any and all secular culture.”⁵ To have an ample grasp and evaluation of culture (present, past tradition, and future human prospect) is one’s “Egyptian plunder,” according to Outler and to know how it may be “exploited most effectively in preaching and teaching” will aid in the preaching of the *full [sic] gospel*. . . .⁶

Outler, looking carefully at John Wesley and trajectories from his ministry and work, identifies “plundering the Egyptians” in the following ways:

1. Living in Scripture as a font of *revelation [sic]* and learning to think *biblically [sic]*.
2. Learning to live in the Christian past as others struggled to find the ‘true gospel for *this [sic]* age.
3. Being attentive and sensitive to every new cultural development on the human horizon, without becoming “trendy” or falling prey to every passing wind of doctrine.
4. Relying on the inner nourishment of the sound and mind that comes from the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.
 - Incessant reading, constant reflection
 - Unquenchable curiosity
 - Restless quest for new perspectives
 - Seeking new alternatives to everything that is merely commonplace or to all reckless extremes on either side of each live issue.⁷

Yes, we can all agree that this might entail better preaching especially for those of us following Wesley growing out of the American holiness movements of the 19th century, but what about better research and studying in the Christian academy? I think it is particularly noteworthy that Outler defines “plundering” culture **not** in an ethnocentric way, i.e., whatever the Egyptians are making must be either melted down to preserve a Western capitalist perspective or to maintain a purity of Christian truth because Egyptian culture reeks of idolatry. As a matter of fact, the Egyptians are not mentioned in his list at all even though Outler strongly implies that culture and history in which we are embedded constantly constructs us. We cannot turn our backs on all that the academic disciplines have recovered and discovered since the story of Christ’s life, death and resurrection for our salvation was first told. As the New Creation reconciles persons to God and restores “new” freedom to grow in the image and likeness of God, there will be new ways to tell the same “old” story of redemption in new settings. The story of atonement itself lived in the Christians of the ages—scholars and illiterate included(!)--

will help to discern and to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic re-tellings of the story.

In an attempt to try and sort out what it might mean to do scholarship in a “Wesleyan way,” I’m going to use four brief quotes as anchor points and with the usual caveat that not everything that must be or can be said will indeed be said. And of course, the definition, the meaning, and the significance of Wesleyan scholarship exist in such a relationship that the dance cannot be separated from the dancer.

First quote: In Jaroslav Pelikan’s book, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination*, the Yale University author asks a rather unusual hypothetical question: “If the bubonic plague were to strike the university tonight and wipe out the entire faculty (save for thee, me, and the endowment) would we, after burying our dead, proceed to replicate Wesleyan scholarship that exists now?”⁸

Pelikan, of course, does not mention Wesleyan scholarship or the Wesleyan Center at Point Loma University where I teach; he is referring to professional schools lately sprung up. Pelikan’s rhetorical question does, however, help us think about the definition of Wesleyan scholarship and whether we answer “yes”—replicate it-- or “no”—start over. One way to answer this question is by considering a particular physical place and space that a Center devoted to Wesleyan studies occupies—where are we on campus?

The Wesleyan Center is located on the upper floor of the Ryan library carved out—not in the middle of the religion/theology collection-- but at the end of the aisles of history and world literatures, at the end of the library stacks of novels, poetry, and criticism.

The large doors to the Center with fine stained-glass craftsmanship of John and Charles Wesley’s profiles symbolically suggest the link between the Center and others who call themselves “Wesleyan.” Two quotes surround these profiles: “The best of all is, God is with us”—John Wesley’s words as he lay dying and “Amazing love how can it be?”—Charles Wesley’s great hymn refrain. These medallion profiles are replicas of those found in Westminster Abbey in London and the Epworth Memorial Methodist Church in Epworth England where John Wesley was born. The north windows of the Wesleyan Center overlook First Church of the Nazarene and Peppertree Lane that leads into the heart of the campus. This symbolic space and place look both toward the academic departments and the church and across the ocean! Place, space, and connections energize the varieties of Wesleyan scholarship.

The Center’s physical helps us understand where Wesleyans are in relationship to other positions on Christian scholarship. Professor of Church History D. G. Hart points out that Lutherans’ understanding of learning is not to superimpose the kingdom of God on the world as the Reformed tradition seeks to do. Lutheran scholars reside in two worlds at the same time, “the world of nature and the world of grace—worlds discontinuous and largely opposed.⁹ The Reformed understanding of Christian scholarship is most dramatically expressed by Abraham Kuyper’s view of making every thought captive to Christ. At the opening of the *Free University*, Kuyper declared, “Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”¹⁰

George Marsden in *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (1997) and Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994) in their respective noteworthy cases argue that evangelical faith makes a cognitive difference thus setting Christian scholarship apart from non-Christian varieties.¹¹ Marsden: faith does not necessarily make a difference in the methods of research but functions as a “control belief” that “determines what other beliefs and theories Christians are willing to entertain.”¹² Noll: The influence of faith has significant repercussions for the way believing scholars think

about "the nature and workings of the physical world, the character of human social structures like government and the economy, the meaning of the past, the nature of artistic creation, and the circumstances attending our perception of the world outside ourselves."¹³ Noll admirably wants evangelicals to do scholarly work and defines an "evangelical life of the mind" as the effort to "think like a Christian—to think within a specifically Christian framework—across the whole spectrum of modern learning."¹⁴

What do Wesleyans think about these matters? This is where all of us struggle to enter the conversation!

My husband, atomic and molecular physicist, strong Christian, Wesleyan, Nazarene professor, 37 years—a good physicist is a good physicist whether Muslim, Buddhist, or Wesleyan. I look at the books in the Folger Library that have influenced my Shakespeare studies. Whether those outstanding Shakespearean critics—Norman Rabkin, Northrop Frye, Muriel Bradbrook, A.C. Bradley, David Bergeron, E.M. W. Tillyard among a host of other clouds of witnesses—whether they were believers or non-believers, I do not know, and in many ways it does not matter.

In contrast, Carl F. H. Henry, noted educator, theologian, and founding editor of *Christianity Today* said: Evangelicalism needs to "develop a competent literature in every field of study, on every level from the grade school through the university, which adequately presents each subject with its implications from the Christian as well as non-Christian points of view."¹⁵ So where are we in relation to this "metaphorical" space of other views on Christian scholarship? Where do we start at the Wesleyan Center at Point Loma?

First if Wesleyan theological studies are to qualify as a part of the university's academic enterprise, there must be some tradition of discovery, critical philosophical reflection and the existence of a body of scholarly literature in which such reflection has been developed and debated. Such deliberate reflection with implications for Wesleyan scholarship and educational practices must be carried on in its *full intellectual content*. At the outset, this phrase "full intellectual content" notes that there is a corpus of on-going scholarship on Wesleyan theology just as there are specific areas of scholarship and research for example on American political theory or stem-cell research. There are the important texts, positions and counter positions, significant historical and contemporary questions, scholarly critiques, and specialized conferences. (e.g., Wesley Theological Society and the Wesley Studies section of the American Academy of Religion)

This kind of specific scholarship creates a dilemma because scholars doing Wesleyan theology do not necessarily have supremacy in the academic enterprise or in the church's hierarchy. These theologians, many ordained, are not viewed as a teaching order of priests, and as such have minimal spiritual authority in the academy. They may or may not be in dialogue on "Methodist or Nazarene" pastoral letters or encyclicals! The rest of us in the academy and in the church frequently do not know much about these Wesleyan theologians' work nor do we regularly engage in serious discussion—at the local parish or department level--on how their scholarly work might help us understand the failures in both church and society to rightly "see" the culture. Outler saw that "to plunder" meant both to discern what needs to be appropriated and what needs to be discarded. The work of our well read and well-trained philosophy/religion department colleagues' and their counterparts should not be underestimated, for as T.S. Eliot noted, "theological crudities result when refined and careful theological thinking is reduced to what a child can understand or a Socinian can accept."¹⁶

Several years ago, the Center sponsored sessions on the Wesleyan quadrilateral—the very term "quadrilateral" and its contemporary uses can be protean and arguable. Brad Strawn (Psychology) and Ron Kirkemo (Political Science) began their presentations with religion department colleagues by announcing "well here it goes, hang on folks, this is

going to be daunting.”¹⁷ Wesleyan theological studies as such are worthy of our best scholars, and we need you as scholars to guide, to affirm, and to critique our work. We need Wesleyan theologians and clergy who are aware and interested in the central questions we pursue in our academic research, and we need to be called to accountability to not only critique but to be critiqued by theological understandings. Theologians too lead us into holy living! As the Orthodox put it: persons, created in the image of God, and redeemed by the Incarnate God, and sustained by the Holy Spirit become “living theology.”¹⁸

To be sure, most of us in Christian universities are not engaged in specialized theological studies because we do not have the years of background study and preparation nor even the academic inclination—we are academics doing our scholarship as lay theologians at best. What we do is push up for review, affirmation, and critique the kinds of assumptions, principles, and experiences that the university’s mission statement embodies—. . . [higher] education—liberal arts-- for students who desire such an education in an environment of vital Christianity in the evangelical and Wesleyan tradition”—and we discover what that embodied mission means for life and thought lived here and out there [out of the bubble!] We do this from the perspectives of our separate academic disciplines and from various denominational corners, and together we are linked in a kind of deep structure. Scholarship in the Wesleyan way is after that “deep structure”—the workings of grace in the created world.¹⁹

On February 14, 1727 Wesley received his master of arts degree and he delivered three lectures: one on the souls of animals, a second on Julius Caesar, and a third on the love of God. Unfortunately all of these early discourses have been lost as well as how Wesley may have connected any of these lectures. These lecture topics are John Wesley at 24 years old after a classical Oxford education at the start of a lifetime of reading--readings in philosophy, medicine, poetry, drama including Restoration melodrama, medieval mystics, Reformation classics, patristic theology, numerous writers including Rabelais, Voltaire, Shakespeare, Hooker and Baxter, 18th century “modern scientists” as Newton—physicist, [W] Ray--Naturalist, Budaeus—linguist and philologist --scholarship done in this spirit is interested in all sorts of academic topics. As David Lowes Watson in “Methodist Spirituality” carefully enlightens us, Wesley gave full right to the order of creation and as such, scholarship at the Wesleyan Center in the Wesleyan spirit is characterized by:

- An attitude that holds the goodness of the created world in trust.
- An engagement of the whole person participating in the reconciling and renewing activity of God.
- An assurance that grace is always and everywhere operative. “Every degree of grace is a degree of life.” As we maintain the balance between conviction—which we must-- and openness—which we can, we are assured that as we do our work in the world, there is no one in whom the Spirit has not already been at work. We can be assured that grace has gone before us. This operation of preventant grace opens persons to raise questions and to be receptive to new sources of meaning. This grace is a divine initiative. Our gracious choice is to respond.
- An affirmation that scripture reveals the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation. The Old and New Covenant call us into relationship with God, and as such these Testaments are the story of the people of God. We participate in that narrative as witnesses to the risen Christ.²⁰

What intrigues me about this as “Wesleyan scholars,” is how will we live and interpret faithfully?²¹ For example, in our recent conference on “The Creative Imagination” the Wesleyan Center and Writers- Symposium- by- the Sea asked together: “how have the arts historically formed spirituality in the Benedictine, Celtic, and Orthodox traditions as

well as our own? How does spiritual autobiography shape religious identity? How is grace embodied in the imagination? Wesley himself may have little to contribute to a 21st century answer, but the Benedictine oblate, Kathleen Norris's quiet assertion that the poetic imagination can be "health-giving" is an open door to grace. But what about the current interest in angels and crystals as popular aids to spirituality? "Biblical thinking" that Outler so clearly enunciates in his essay again must be emphasized, and I recast his words in a question about our cultural challenges—"Are these up reaching aspirations sustained by the upholding grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the unfailing love of God our Father, in the continuing communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit"? Does grace lead on to grace?

Second quote-- I use a quote from John Wesley's *Journal*. In 1760, Wesley described a Love Feast as a "free and familiar conversation among equals," and interestingly enough, this quote is now displayed in Susanna Wesley's kitchen in the Epworth rectory. The Love Feast as other Wesleyan groups is a prudential means of grace whereby Christians in witness to the world can sustain one another in their distinctive tasks at a particular time and place. The meaning of Wesleyan scholarship is relational and connective. Wesley in his Anglican context was immersed in the liturgical dialogue and corporate sacramental action of the church. A prevalent Western anthropology that says that which sets me apart makes me what I am or what I think about things and beings is most real contrasts sharply with Wesley's understanding of Anglican and "Methodist" spirituality.²²

Several Wesleyan scholars from Point Loma Nazarene University were invited to participate in the recent Calvin College conference, "Christian Scholarship . . . for what?" Our topic was "Old Wesleyan Wine . . . New Wesleyan Wineskins." [Title indebted to Randy Maddox] These wineskins cannot be woven without scholars from other Protestant groups, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions as well as the best secular scholars that you know in your own academic areas. Only this kind of catholicity of grace and catholic spirit is authentically "Wesleyan."

Thus, scholarship in a Wesleyan way cannot be separated from other scholarship and research that transforms individuals and communities. As Miroslav Volf clearly points out, "*There is no single correct way to relate to a given culture as a whole, or even to its dominant thrust; there are only numerous ways of accepting, transforming or replacing various aspects of a given culture from within.*"²³

In concert with this understanding, these Wesleyan Center scholars do their work:

- Diana Reynolds—intellectual historian-- "Manufacturing Austria: Regional Craft Schools and Austrian Identity, 1871-1919"
- Mike Mooring—biologist-- "The Behavioral Ecology of Desert Bighorn Sheep in New Mexico"
- Rebecca Flietstra—neuroscientist-- "A Natural Human Capacity for Community"

Good scholars will not infuse a vague and debased Christianity into the ordinary affairs of their scholarship as a way of making things "Christian" or "Wesleyan." Much in our academic scholarship and teaching can be recommended to any intelligent and disinterested person and do not require Christian belief to make ideas and practices acceptable. What we do contribute as Christians, yea as Wesleyan academics, is striving to bring about change in individual and collective attitudes on proposed reforms that bring hope. Curiously enough, is this a dimension of holiness of heart and life? —a guarding against the preoccupation with the self, openness to the social dimensions of salvation, and the increasing possibilities to reflect love and creative power.

I asked my husband, Keith Walker how he had been "transformed" by his work with robotics and chaos theory: "I now have a better but very limited understanding of the

intricacies and complexities of the human brain.” We are changed by our scholarship as we experience the “other.” Might we say—we are then characterized by humility, characterized by a spirit of discipline, characterized by an awareness of the mystery of persons and things, and characterized by a healthy “yes . . . but.” Wesley was a genius saying “Yes . . . but.” Wesley observed and read the Reformers and said, “Yes” to the sovereignty of God “but” what about human responsibility? Wesley observed and read the Moravians and said “Yes” to assurance “but” what about the sacraments?

As we participate in the action of God’s renewal and transformation in the world, not only do we report findings, but we also witness to how we have been engaged, captured, and changed by our work.

My third quote is from a gospel song sung by African-Americans: “I don’t want no trouble at the River!”

In the medieval play, *Everyman*, written about 1484,²⁴ Everyman is blithely going along in life with fleshly lusts and treasures on his mind when he is suddenly confronted with death.

Dethe: Whyder arte thou goynge Thus gaily? Hast thou thy Maker forgotten?

Everyman: Why askest thou? Wouldest thou wete [know]?

In this play, Everyman learns that the sacraments, i.e., what happens in the life of the church, “educates” him for life in Christ, now and in eternity. Now that life is about to end, Everyman desperately needs to know who will go with him on this final journey. As the play proceeds the moral struggles that are present in Everyman take dramatic roles. We see wealth, false friends, casual companions, kinsmen, strength, beauty, intelligence, 5-wits try to give counsel and then abandon him. Alone, and in despair, everyman cries out, “I don’t know what to do.” The only hope left is Good Deeds, but she is so weak that she can neither walk nor speak! Faintly speaking from the cold ground, Good Deeds tells Everyman that she has a sister called Knowledge.

As Knowledge comes to his aid, the rhythmic pulses are set in motion: knowing, seeing, counseyl, cognycion, advisement, deliberation or understanding is complimented by doing, going, and willing. This pattern of act, new understanding, and new act is possible by Good Deeds strengthened with knowledge. Everyman learns about Confession, penance, restitution, almsgiving, Eucharist, and extreme unction. When Everyman steps into the grave, only Good Deeds goes with him, but it has been Knowledge which helped him learn about his relation to God and to “affirm the process of venturing . . . and of learning.”²⁵

I tell my students you come to your studies as you do to the Eucharist—hands in the beggar’s position. Moreover, you will be transformed by your submission to the wisdom of the text and not just subject to the fleeting psychological fluctuations from grades. I’m

also wondering how my own studies help me venture forth to confess or to take the Eucharist, or to renew my baptismal vows. Do my studies help me “learn” how to die?

Implicit in this discussion is that Wesleyan scholarship’s “full intellectual content,” cannot be separated from the church--the church catholic that administers the sacraments given by Christ to his church, that meets to search the scriptures, to pray, to gather in conference, and to live with Christ in the communion of the saints.

In Miroslav Volf’s *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Volf spells out a vision of the church as an image of the triune God, a vision that is fruitful for our work together on scholarship in a Wesleyan way. Volf spends a significant amount of time working on the nature of persons and affirming an ecclesial life that militates against the privatization of truth and salvation.²⁶ Hope-bringing for life in the Free Church are his thoughts on Trinitarian fellowship. Volf evocatively notes that the Holy Spirit is present in all Christians that “opens” each of them to all the others. “It starts

them on the way to creative mutual giving and receiving, in which each grows in his or her own unique way and all have joy in one another.”²⁷ The implications for our scholarship are rich. Wolf suggests that each person stands directly under the dominion of Christ, but “what *all together* [sic] are to be remains unarticulated, emerging rather simply from that which each is to be in and for himself or herself.”²⁸

At the conclusion of John Wesley’s sermon on “The New Creation” (an intriguing sermon in itself for a variety of startling prophetic pronouncements about nature in the new creation), Wesley describes the crowning work of the new creation will be a “deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three—One God, and of all the creatures in him!”²⁹ This hope gives scholars space to do our work in history and to emerge with others in “the new creation”!

A final quote—Garrison Keillor in that great “Lutheran” work, *A Prairie Home Companion*, has a great line: “brilliance is like an SUV, it can get stuck in even more remote places.” Let’s face it--all of us here are brilliant!

Many of you have eccentric colleagues as I do. One of our mathematics professors, David Nickerson died several years ago. Shortly before he died, we were all assembled at the annual faculty retreat. Our keynote speaker was Ernest Boyer, author of *Scholarship Reconsidered* and officer at The Carnegie Foundation. The discussion came to an exciting crescendo when David Nickerson asked if there were a way to think about the economic and political theory behind the United State’s policy on Muamar Quadaffi, the plots of John Grisham’s novels, especially *The Pelican Brief*, research on poverty in

America and the general way faculty at Christian universities approach a general education curriculum review! Well of course, we were all stunned, but we had a general inclination and intuition to accept David’s thinking as being “right on” in a complex and esoteric way.

Most of us thrive on these kinds of high wire intellectual gymnastics; however, I am suggesting that Wesleyan scholarship is characterized not only by brilliant insight that other academic initiates can appreciate, but also by “drawing near.”

To draw near, Wesleyan scholars at Point Loma have sponsored four voluntary faculty/student colloquia for seniors --Christians and Social Responsibility (Ron Benefiel) Faith & Film (that included United Methodist minister, Rev. Mark Trotter) and two Science and Religion colloquia. Much more needs to be done in this work with student scholars as we establish this year a Samuel and Susanna Wesley scholarship for students working with faculty on Wesleyan perspectives in an academic discipline. The natural sciences at Point Loma with their Research Associates have set the bar high!

In a brilliant way of drawing near colleagues who are unacquainted with John Wesley and Wesleyan perspectives, one of our faculty members, a former Catholic nun and now a Wesleyan center scholar, has presented some of her work on John Wesley’s theology of education in the Teacher Education department. Two faculty members are working with the Wesleyan Center and Human Resources on a Latino Enrichment Program for staff on the campus. As scholars we do raise structural questions about policies that contribute to class and race economics, but for Wesley not only economic considerations mattered but also “life with the poor” is transforming. For the Latinos on our campus, it is important that they have access to social relationships, interdependence, and mutual care that opens doors to really becoming our neighbors.

The meaning and consequences of Wesleyan scholarship are transforming and relational. How does our scholarship “draw near”?

In conclusion, it is neither an accident that the title of the Wesleyan Center’s newsletter is “Along the Road” nor that the cover design for Ron Kirkemo’s recent centennial history, *Promise and Destiny* is a highway slashing into the horizon nor that the academic deans call new faculty orientation sessions “A Wesleyan Way”—these are intentional titles. For

better and for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, we are on a road together, and frankly, it's really not essential to construct a "worldview" when we're intent on talking and walking and reading and doing lab work and practicing and keeping each other faithful so that we can be surprised by the graced turnings along the road. On

this Wesleyan road, we worry less about integrating faith and learning, for the more rigorous path is to have faith tested by learning and learning chastened by faith. It is a road where testimony and story matters; here confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation can take place.

On the journey with other literary folk, we meet Umberto Eco, the brilliant Italian semiotician, who suggests a provocative analogy that I cannot forget and must "plunder." "The Real Reader is the one who understands that the secret of the text is its emptiness." This is a caricature of interpreters who want to find a secret meaning in what they read so it can be said, "I understand."³⁰ Eco argues that interpretation cannot be limitless.

The message cannot mean *everything* [sic].³¹ Never-ending anagogical deferral can occur when veils of similarities are seen in endless progress. Can everything be read as sign of grace? Eco answers this by saying that the competence of the reader merges with the competence of the text in being read: "internal textual coherence" will control the otherwise uncontrollable drives of the reader.³² Eco has no thoughts about the Holy Spirit but is interested in the "comfortable presence of the text *qua* text."³³ But we

plunder his work as ways to search for the presence of the Holy Spirit making "competent" readers and revealing the internal coherence of the text and to see what 16th century *ars memoriae* might contribute to discovering how parables work. Then, just around the corner is Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist. Bakhtin combed the Bible and other works to stimulate his ideas about history and literary theory. Barbara Green points out that "to work creatively with [a] set of seminal insights from Bakhtin can change the way the Bible is read . . . [it has the potential] to alter the way Scripture is understood".³⁴ Ah--the promise of the Wesleyan open road and "new optics" to witness to the risen Christ!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray
I rose the dungeon flamed with light.
 My chains fell off,
 My heart was free,
I rose went forth and followed thee.

The doors are open; we rise to follow as scholars.

End Notes

1 Cited in Esther De Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination* (NY: Doubleday, 1997), 91.

2 All citations from “Plundering the Egyptians” are from Albert Outler, *Evangelism & Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 75-88. Outler identifies dimensions of the “cultural syndrome” posed by the passing of all the old polarities:

- A.Renaissance-Enlightenment concern for form and reason
- B.The Protestant Reformation’s insistence upon *sola fide*
- C.The Roman Counter Reformation’s alternative of an authoritarian church-culture
- D.The mores of a deferential society that supported patterns and codes of *ex officio* authority
- E.The dominance of European-North American culture
- F.Soaring faith in science and technology
- G.The idea of human progress (Outler 75-76)..

3 Father John Breck, noted Orthodox Theologian, describes the limitations of the scientific method and other modes of inquiry this way:

“Science, like every other discipline (art, music, theology) operates within a limited sphere of reality. It can neither prove nor disprove *transcendent* [sic] realities, even when they interact with the physical world. . . . The same must be said for the presence and activity of God within the world and human experience. Nor are the tools of exegesis adequate to determine the truth or falsity of biblical claims regarding the person of Jesus Exegesis can help us to better grasp the literal sense of the text: the author’s own understanding of his experience and the tradition he has received and the tradition he has received. But it cannot verify or refute that witness; it cannot pass judgment on the accuracy of its claims. Its verification depends on faith, which by definition is not susceptible to scientific proof.”

Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 41.

4 Mark Schwehn, “Knowledge, Character, Community,” in *Schooling Christians: “Holy Experiments” in American Education*, Eds. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 50. Geoffrey Wainwright suggests that a recovery of the word *habitus* “ensures that the works of believers remain the gift of the Holy Spirit, while allowing for a real change in the continuing person of the believer,” *Methodists in Dialog* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1995), 157.

5 Outler, 77.

6 Outler, 86.

7 Outler, 85-87.

8 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 107.

9 D. G. Hart, “Christian Scholars, Secular Universities, and the Problem with the Antithesis,” in *Christian Scholar’s Review*, Summer 2001, 30:4, 383-402.

10 Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 489, quoted in Hart, 399.

11 George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) and Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

12 *Outrageous*, 50.

13 *Scandal*, 7.

14 *Scandal*, 7.

15 Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947, 70) quoted in Hart, CSR, 390.

16 T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948; copyright renewed 1978).

17 Geoffrey Wainwright points out that the quadrilateral evoked a “mental image of four equal sides, with the carefully nuanced verbs of ‘revealed, illumined, vivified, and confirmed’ lost from sight.” *Methodists in Dialog*, 175-76.

18 Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, First published 1963, reprinted with revisions 1965, 1967, 1969, reprinted 1972, 1973, 1975), 235.

19 A sample of recent Wesleyan scholarship sponsored by the Wesleyan Center at Point Loma Nazarene University:

•Dean Nelson,--Grace in Family Life

•Linda Beail--Theorizing Gender from an Historically and Theologically Wesleyan Perspective

•Lois Wagner--Wesleyan Implications for Response to Those Wounded by Poverty, Stigma, and Illness

•Michael Leffel--Transformation of the Tragic Person: On the Therapeutic Action of Preventive Grace within the Human Personality

•Mike Lodahl—God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way

20 David Lowes Watson, “Methodist Spirituality,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, Kenneth J. Collins, ed., (Baker Books, 2000, 172-213), 210. Also Ted Runyon, *The New Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 219+.

21 Stephen Fowl and Greg Jones note that one of the characteristics of a community of “wise readers is an openness to outsiders. Our interpretations can take on pretensions of permanence. When our communities fall prey to this greatest of interpretive temptations, it is often only the voice of outsiders that can set us right.” Stephen E. Fowl & L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 110.

22 Harvey H. Guthrie, “Anglican Spirituality,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, Kenneth J. Collins, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000, 158-71), 161.

23 Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 63.

24 *Everyman* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, General ed. M.H. Abrams, 5th edition, vol. 1 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962, 1968, 1974, 1979, 1986), 347-368.

¹⁵ William Munson, “Knowing and Doing in *Everyman*,” *Chaucer Review*, 19:3 (1985), 259, 268.

25 Munson, 259. Wainwright, in his discussion on the current state of the World Council of Churches, Faith and Order project, Paper No. 140, argues that common confession of the faith is needed for united worship, life and mission. “Made both before God and before humankind, *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*, confession is at once (a) doxological, (b) evangelistic, and (c) ethical, in intention and scope,” 194.

26 Volf, 15.

27 Volf, 189.

28 Volf, 197.

29 John Wesley, *The New Creation* (1785), in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, Edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 500.

30 Umberto Eco, “Interpretation and History,” in *Interpretation and overinterpretation*, With Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooke-Rose, Ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992, 23-43), 40.

31 Eco, 43,

32 Eco, “Overinterpreting Texts,” in *Interpretation and overinterpretation* (45-66), 65.

33 Eco, “Between Author and Text,” in *Interpretation and overinterpretation* (67-88), 88.

34 Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, no. 38 in *The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies*, Danna Nolan Fewell, series editor (Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 191.