"In Every Solid Truth Abide" – A Wesleyan Reflection on Christian Study Centers

A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 15TH OXFORD INSTITUTE FOR METHODIST THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

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Introduction

Over the past 40 years, a new movement of Christian intellectual and spiritual formation has emerged at U.S. public and secular universities to address a widening gap between the academy and the church. There are presently over 40 Christian study centers and Catholic institutes existing alongside these universities providing, in small scale, opportunities for college students to integrate faith, learning, scholarship, and vocational discernment.

This paper attempts two goals: 1) Reflect on how Christian study centers and institutes, as para-university entities, might be conceived of as a kind of lay-oriented theological education. As seminaries today negotiate the challenges of declining enrollments and decreasing interest in traditional degree programs, new visions of theological education are needed, including those focusing on the laity. Study centers serve as one example of lay theological education embedded in secular university contexts, with opportunities for academic engagement across religious and non-religious identities and perspectives. 2) Place the Christian study center movement in dialogue with the Wesleyan tradition. Study centers have arisen from predominantly Reformed or Catholic ecclesial traditions, and those traditions continue to influence the shape of study center work. What might the Wesleyan heritage contribute to the intellectual, spiritual, and vocational formation of students within study centers, and conversely, how might the work of study centers give rise to new directions in academic, public, and cultural engagement within the Wesleyan tradition?

The Rise of Christian Study Centers

The presence of religious belief in American higher education is contested, much as it is in American society. The role that Christianity has played in shaping America's public life has changed greatly over the course of the nation's history. While certain legal doctrines kept religion from exercising a direct political role, in many ways Christianity, and in particular Protestantism, has had an outsized influence in society, especially in higher education. Two of the earliest colleges in colonial America, Harvard and Yale, were founded principally for providing an

"educated ministry" (i.e., clergy) to the churches.[1] State-supported colleges carried with them a strong Protestant ethos well into the 19th century. In the later part of the 19th century, the increasing pluralization and secularization of society and of universities challenged the hegemony of Christian belief on campus, and largely, if gradually, pushed religion to the private realm.[2] The workforce demands of an increasingly industrialized society led to the passing of the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1864, which helped expand access to colleges to the middle class, and shifted the focus of college education towards advancing scientific knowledge and promoting practical skills in agriculture and mechanical arts (what is now called engineering). The move towards what would be called the "research ideal" of the university led to the steady retreat of public religion on many university campuses, with a lingering lack of clarity about exactly what role religion should play in student development and the academic enterprise of the university.

Even with these shifts, private expressions of religion flourished in the 20th century. Following World War II, religious belief on American campuses experienced a resurgence, largely at the hands of mainline denominations, Evangelical organizations, and Catholic Newman Centers which operated adjacent to the campus. Particularly at public universities, these campus-adjacent ministries picked up the slack and served the religious and spiritual needs of students in ways the university could not or would not. The last few years have seen a flurry of writing by scholars critiquing the university for being "morally incoherent" and unable to offer students guidance when it comes to questions of purpose or life's meaning. Today's American public university includes a vital presence of campus ministries and a continued ambivalence about the place of religion on the campus. Into this context, and during the latter three decades of the 20th century, a new phenomenon arrived on the scene: the Christian study center.

Since the 1970's, Christian study centers have launched at over thirty colleges and universities in the United States. As stated on a website of the "Consortium of Christian Study Centers," a network of these independent centers:

> Christian Study Centers are communities of students and scholars animated by the ancient ideal of *faith seeking understanding*. Located adjacent to colleges and universities, study centers support and complement their host institutions' mission to discover and disseminate knowledge by convening conversations that address the big questions of life—questions of

[1] Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 11.

[2] George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

> meaning, purpose and value. In addition to public lectures, many study centers offer intimate conversations and comfortable hospitality in their own facilities.[3]

These independent centers take a diversity of approaches to their work. Most of them serve college students in some way, and some centers include intentional efforts to engage professors, administrators, or members of the local community. What they share is a commitment to historic orthodox Christianity (defined by the Apostle's and Nicene creeds) and a commitment to the intellectual life as a part of Christian discipleship and the public witness of the gospel. While some centers do not identify explicitly as "Evangelical," many of them could easily be located within the orbit of institutions shaped by the unique ethos of pietism, social activism, and the theological sensibilities of the larger tradition of American Evangelicalism described by scholars like Mark Noll, David Bebbington, George Marsden, Molly Worthen, and Joel Carpenter.

Scholars have documented or opined on the lack of intellectual rigor within popular American Evangelicalism, although in the 1960's several currents within Evangelicalism revealed interest in deeper intellectual engagement.[4] While mainline Christians had their own form of study centers in the 1950's (among them the Christian Faith-and-Life Community at the University of Texas in Austin) these efforts largely downplayed orthodox Christianity and eventually dissolved in the social activist ferment of the 1960's.[5] What set the new Evangelical initiatives apart from the mainline efforts was a commitment to holding fast to core Christian theological commitments (at least as they defined them). Francis Schaeffer experienced his own doubts about his fundamentalist heritage, but in the end, he was able to separate the "chaff" of anti-intellectualism from the "wheat" of confessional Christianity, which may have helped catalyze his future work.[6]

Schaeffer and his wife Edith moved to Switzerland in 1948 as missionaries of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, and their experiences in post-war Europe changed their approach to ministry and evangelism. The Schaeffer's invited students and locals into their home for meals and spiritual conversations which spanned the range of art, philosophy,

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[3] https://cscmovement.org/who-we-are (accessed 8 July 2024).

[4] Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism (*Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

[5] Doug Rossinow*, The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 54-56.

[6] Charles E. Cotherman, *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 16.

apologetics, theology, and biblical studies. In 1955 they quietly formed L'Abri as a ministry out of their own home and broke ties with the mission board that had supported them. L'Abri means "shelter" in French, a nod not only to their remote Swiss alpine location, but their intention to create a space away from the busy-ness of life to explore the deeper questions of meaning and existence. Without formal marketing or advertising, L'Abri grew steadily for the next fifteen years, with increasing numbers of young people showing up for stays of several months or longer. Word of mouth fueled an international exposure to this burgeoning ministry.[7]

As Francis Schaeffer became more well known, especially with the publication of his first book in 1968, speaking invitations and regular correspondence came in droves. Several future leaders of study centers reached out to Schaeffer in 1970 and 1971, an indication of how influential Schaeffer and L'Abri would become in shaping the Christian study center movement. David Gill, a then-recent graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, contacted Schaeffer about starting a branch of L'Abri in Berkeley. Jim Hiskey wrote to Schaeffer about the same idea for the University of Maryland, and R.C. Sproul met Schaeffer at a conference in the U.S. to propose an idea for a study center in Pennsylvania. All three individuals would start study centers in one form or another, although only one study center (New College Berkeley) would have close connections with a university. While Schaeffer did not have a direct role in founding any study centers, his work at L'Abri was a clear demonstration that a hunger existed among Christians for a deeper intellectual engagement of faith and its implications in culture. L'Abri exemplified intellectual hospitality and engagement in a way that would serve as a rough blueprint for the founding of a number of study centers in the ensuing decades. As Charles Cotherman concluded in his history of study centers, "it is virtually impossible to talk about the emergence of a Christian study center movement in North America without referencing Francis and Edith Schaeffers's L'Abri Fellowship."[8]

From the 1970s through the first decade of the twenty-first century, Christian study centers popped up at a number of colleges and universities in the U.S., fostering an emerging informal network of staff who connected occasionally for mutual support and encouragement. With a rising number of centers, and increasing interest in forming new centers, a group of study center directors began to consider creating a more formal network. In 2008, the Consortium of Christian Study Centers was founded to serve existing study centers and help new centers launch at additional colleges and universities. As of 2024, the consortium includes 35 centers in the United

[7] Cotherman, *Think Christianly,* 16-20.
[8] Cotherman, *Think Christianly,* 14.

States and Canada, serving 16 private institutions and 24 public institutions (some centers serve more than one university). There are also several Catholic institutes whose work closely parallels the study centers in the consortium, although these Catholic centers are not currently members of the consortium. The Catholic intellectual engagement of public and secular universities through their institutes is in some sense drawn from different intellectual wells than the predominantly Protestant centers of the consortium. Even so, the theological ethos and practice of Christian study centers and Catholic institutes share some very noticeable similarities, and there are frequent opportunities for networking and collaboration across these two communities.

Christian Study Centers as a Place for Lay Theological Education

Since the 1960s in America, there has been increasing interest in developing learning communities to improve the quality of undergraduate education and address the increasing size of universities and the recognizable fragmentation of the academic disciplines, shown both in the research agendas pursued by faculty and in the curriculum. In part, these efforts intended to recall and restore some version of the "collegiate model" of undergraduate education which had been implemented by colonial American colleges like Harvard and Yale, as an echo of the "Oxbridge model" found at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England. This educational practice, centered on students living in residential communities on campus and incorporating some version of holistic education, waxed and waned throughout the history of higher education in America, at first diminished by the rapid enrollment growth of those early colleges, and then by the increasing popularity of the ideal of the German research university in the late 19th century and passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862.[9]

In the late 20th century various commissions studying the nature of higher education warmed to new models of undergraduate education, including learning communities, and by 2000, more than 500 institutions in the United States had established some form of learning communities within their undergraduate educational programs.[10] These learning communities can be described as: "a space where people with a common interest, such as achieving improvement in their educational practice, can come together to share their ideas; demonstrate values such as freedom, social justice, equality and inclusion; engage in dialogue and critical thinking; take responsibility for

[9] J.E., Fink and K.K. Inkelas. "A History of Learning Communities within American Higher Education," In *Learning Communities from Start to Finish*, New Directions for Students Services 149, ed. Mimi Benjamin (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 5-6.

[10] Fink & Inkelas, "History," 7-8.

their own learning and begin to perceive themselves as knowledge creators."[11] These models include residential and non-residential expressions, and often gather students around identity (sexuality, gender, race) or affinity (academic major, interfaith, leadership, service, etc.).[12]

Christian study centers commonly view themselves as unique learning communities within the pluralistic, secular universities in which they are located, even though study centers usually operate outside the formal structures of the university. As ostensibly public institutions, universities often advance a kind of moral neutrality that does not privilege any moral tradition. And it's not clear how they make space for coherent moral discourse as institutions. George Marsden has argued that the secular university should welcome and even encourage a variety of "sub-traditions" within the life of the university to foster moral dialogue across several perspectives and beliefs. These sub-traditions not only make distinctive moral formation possible for students and faculty who participate within each smaller community, these sub-traditions can also contribute to the larger moral discourse on the campus itself.[13] While Marsden does not offer any specific details as to how public universities "might pursue the rich exchange of a plurality of particular moral traditions within their intellectual and moral life," Christian study centers offer at least one alternative.[14]

Harkening back to the "Oxbridge Model," Andrew Hansen, the Program Director at Anselm House at the University of Minnesota, conceives of the learning community at his study center as a kind of *college* embedded in a larger university. Andrew noted the distinction between the *college* and the *university* this way: "[The] college is the place in which knowledge is sort of brought together and the character of the person is formed. So it's a kind of formative task. The university's task is much more of that kind of like exploratory, you know, pushing the boundaries of knowledge."[15] This distinction between college and university is a unique perspective, particularly in his use of the words "formation" and "character." Those words are not often found in the academic literature addressing collegiate learning communities, nor in most treatments of college student development theory. Influenced by the philosophy undergirding educational psychology,

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[11] Bernie Sullivan, "Learning Communities as Sites of Transformation," In *Learning Communities in Educational Partnerships* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 46.

[12] Karen K . Inkelas, "Introduction To Living-Learning Communities," In *Living-Learning Communities That Work*, ed. Karen K. Inkelas et al. (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2018), 4.

[13] George M. Marsden, "The Incoherent University" *Hedgehog Review*. (Fall 2000), 104-105.

[14] Andrew Hansen, "A Christian College in a Food Truck? Christian study centers and moral formation," *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 0(0), 4. DOI: 10.1177/2056997120971656

[15] Personal interview, November 2, 2021.

the research and practice in student affairs tends to strongly prefer the language of "development" over "formation" presumably because formation strongly implies a *telos* or *goal*, while development does not. This distinction can also be discerned in the more recent arguments offered for promoting learning communities in universities. Very often, the positive outcomes which promote the value of learning communities include: retention, improved academic performance and learning, higher satisfaction of students, increased campus involvement, and increased test scores.[16] While there may be an implied "telos" to student development or participation in learning communities, rarely are these goals made explicit, except perhaps concerning citizenship, diversity or inclusion.

What makes a study center like Anselm House unique is its willingness to embrace, articulate, and embody a *telos* grounded in the Christian faith, offering a learning community that is oriented in a specific way that cannot be offered in a public university. Many study centers address questions of formation explicitly and are not bound to the strictures of public universities that make questions of moral character, spiritual formation, and the goal of education a contested matter.

James K.A. Smith argues that Christians sometimes must practice a form of "monastic abstention," refusing to participate in practices which de-form us or shape us in ways that are antithetical or hostile to the gospel.[17] Study centers can be places where such a monastic abstention is affirmed, cultivated, and practiced. Stanley Hauerwas reminds us that education always has a formative element, and that the Christian educational agenda may be a stark alternative to the world: "to educate our children in such an alternative culture will mean that our children cannot presuppose that the education they receive will make it possible for them to be successful actors in the world shaped by quite a different culture."[18]

Christian study centers stand at the periphery of the university, offering and embodying a specific moral tradition. It could be said that there exist a wide diversity of moral traditions found in public universities today, if only in the perspectives of the individual students and faculty who

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[16] Sarah Conte, "Learning Community Literature: Annotated Bibliography," In *Learning Communities from Start to Finish*, New Directions for Students Services 149, ed. Mimi Benjamin (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 91-93; Jody E. Jessup-Anger, "Theoretical Foundations of Learning Communities." In *Learning Communities from Start to Finish*, New Directions for Students Services 149, ed. Mimi Benjamin, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 18-22.

[17] James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) 210.

[18] Stanley Hauerwas, "How Risky is the Risk of Higher Education?" *Communio* 30/1 (Spring 2003): 79-94.

participate in those universities. However, very few of these moral traditions are embodied in sustainable institutional forms, and the universities have no systemic means to engage these larger questions. Study centers as counter-formative learning communities can do their best work, even in serving the interests of the university, by embodying and living out such an alternative vision of education which complements, and occasionally calls into question, the pedagogical approach and practices of the universities of which they are a part. The Christian study center as "sub-tradition" or "counterpublic"[19] engages the university primarily by living its own moral tradition faithfully, and only then giving witness to it in the larger university.

Reformed Influences on Christian Study Centers

In Charles Cotherman's recent history of the early precursors to Christian Study Centers, he notes the Reformed influence of these early institutions. L'Abri hosted thousands of young pilgrims of the 60's counterculture and stressed the intersection of Christian belief with culture, philosophy and the arts. The Francis Schaeffer's Reformed theology "carried the seeds of cultural engagement" and "helped students imagine what a gospel that touched and informed all of life looked like."[20] The Dutch art historian Hans Rookmaaker became friends with Schaeffer and contributed to L'Abri's focus on culture and the arts. Rookmaaker became an influential lecturer in the interaction of art, culture, and theology within English speaking evangelicalism and among Christian colleges increasingly interested in the integration of faith and a wide range of academic fields.

Regent College in Vancouver, BC, set out to develop a program for graduate theological education that would equip lay people with robust intellectual depth and also to "engage the secular university not as a foe to be conquered but as a meaningful—even necessary—academic and cultural partner."[21] And, the Ligonier Study Center, a residential study center founded in the 1970s in the Ligonier Valley of Pennsylvania, was founded with the purpose of providing high quality theological education for laypeople. R.C. Sproul would write, "We need scholars today who have a burden for the education of Christian everywhere... The real effort of reformation in our day must be met head on by the finest scholars that the Church has produced. They should spend at least a portion of their time communicating, writing, and preparing materials for the laity." Sproul called

[19] Tim Muehlhoff and Richard Langer, *Winsome Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017).
[20] Cotherman, *Think Christianly,* 6.
[21] Cotherman, *Think Christianly,* 22, 6.

this effort a "new reformation."[22] Each of these progenitors to Christian study centers typified a measure of Reformed thinking that has shaped the theological ethos of many study centers, particularly through the thought of Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper's writings on "common grace" have been very influential within Reformed and broader evangelical circles, especially after World War II as neo-evangelicals sought opportunities for cultural and political engagement in the United States, including through higher education.[23] In a well-known speech at the founding of the Free University Amsterdam in October of 1880, Kuyper set out a forceful theological claim about Christian involvement in the university:

> Man in his antithesis as fallen *sinner* or self-developing *natural creature* returns again as the "subject that thinks" or "the object that prompts thought" in every department, in every discipline, and with every investigator. 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 over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: "Mine!"[24]

Kuyper's development of a theology of "common grace" addressed a lingering question in Reformed thinking related to the existence of truth, beauty, and goodness among those who might otherwise be described in Calvinism as "reprobate" and outside of God's covenant promises. While common grace is not *saving* grace, it "restrains, blocks or redirects" the effects of sin among all humans and in all societies,[25] and furthers God's providential purposes for creation: "Does Christ have significance only for the *spiritual* realm or also for the *natural and visible* domain?"[26] It is this larger narrative of God's purposes for all of creation, moving towards God's providential ends, which common grace makes effective. "The ages lying behind us, by God's decree, must have a purpose and goal, and that purpose can be understood only if we understand that the ongoing development of humanity is *contained in the plan of God*."[27]

For Kuyper, this providential action of God through common grace is an invitation, even an imperative, for Christians to engage the culture outside of the church, to contribute to the progress and development of human society. Kuyper critiques pietistic Christians, especially Anabaptists

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[22] Cotherman, *Think Christianly,* 136.
[23] "Kuyper's vision of thoroughly Christian reflection bravely fathoming Christ's claim on 'every square inch' of human life has been one of the key background factors behind the best of modern Christian higher education." Mark Noll, foreward, in James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*, Eerdmans Publishing, 2013).
[24] Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace" in James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids: 1998), 488, emphasis original.
[25] Kuyper, 170.
[26] Kuyper, 171.
[27] Kuyper, 175.

and Methodists, for "abandon[ing] the field to the forces of unbelief …, the bitter consequences whereof we are now experiencing" within society.[28] For Kuyper the "field" is the location where culture is made and society progresses. Christians must not abandon these efforts. Participation is particularly pertinent in the sciences and other realms of knowledge, where believers are invited to "unwrap the thoughts of God that lie embodied in creation."

> "Science arises as soon as man engages that ability to rethink God's thoughts from creation, and it gains greater stability and richer content as he pursues it more precisely and with more enthusiasm."[29]

Kuyper argues that Christians must actively participate in cultural development, engage in intellectual discovery and discourse, and promote the common good as part of God's providential action in the world. This imperative is also expressed as the "cultural mandate" shown in Genesis 1:28:

> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."[30]

This Kuyperian emphasis on common grace and the related theme of cultural engagement serve as influential theological motifs for many Christians in the Reformed tradition, prompting a number of initiatives in society, culture, and higher education, including the work of Christian study centers.

While I can bring only anecdotal evidence grounded in my own personal experience, my sense is that the Reformed tradition is far more engaged in the work of study centers than the Wesleyan tradition. Among the 35 Christian study centers that currently exist, I am aware of at least 10 staff leaders who come out of a strong Reformed orientation, most often attending or serving as an elder at congregations in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). I am only aware of two staff leaders of study centers who are presently affiliated with a Wesleyan-Methodist denomination. With these anecdotal observations in mind, I'd like to reflect on how Wesleyan theology might contribute to the work of study centers.

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[28] Kuyper, 175.
[29] Kuyper, "Common Grace in Science" in James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids: 1998), 445.
[30] New International Version.

A Wesleyan Vision of Christian Study Centers

Might there be a uniquely Wesleyan contribution to the Christian Study Center movement? Should we endeavor to? I'd like to briefly address these questions through two historical snippets, taking them in reverse chronological order: 1) mid-20th-century reflections on the Wesley Foundation movement, and 2) Charles Wesley's dedication hymn for the Kingswood School. Both vignettes in Methodist history reveal something of the intersection of faith and learning that have import for a Wesleyan contribution.

The Wesley Foundation

By the 1950's Methodist efforts to reach students on secular university campuses had spread widely and catalyzed a vibrant Methodist Student Movement, networking Methodist college students across the United States. The rapid growth of state-supported public universities in the early 20th century had prompted a kind of identity crisis among Methodists who were accustomed to sending their youth to denominational colleges. A desire to "follow the students" attending public universities led to the creation of separate collegiate ministries, first at the universities of Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin, and then at over 180 campuses across the country by 1962.[31]

In 1955 the Methodist Student Movement produced a written philosophy for campus ministry, revealing an aspiration that the work on campus not be confined to ministry among students alone. One key objective stated:

> The evangelism of the campus Christian movement must be relevant to campus experience. This means the transformation of both the individual and the educational milieu. It requires individual commitment to, and experience of, God in Christ; it demands the evangelization of the college or university itself. This concurrent evangelization of the individual and the institution is to be effected by such a transforming experience of life in Christ that in the college or university persons may be introduced to and mature in, the knowledge and love of God.[32]

This "transformation of … the educational milleu" meant more than student discipleship. It involved, at least ideally, the offerings of lectures and credit courses, taught by specialized staff, such that religion and theology are presented at an academic level "commensurate with any other discipline or department in the university community."[33] This would ostensibly require campus ministry staff who hold academic qualifications at a level similar to their counterparts in the

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[31] Fedje, Raymond Norman. *The Wesley Foundation Idea: A Selective History*. Ph.D. diss. Boston University, 1964: 303.
[32] The Methodist Student Movement. Annual Report, 1956, p. 5., in Fedje, 1964: 281.
[33] Fedje, 282.

faculty. By 1964, offering lectures and credit courses by academically trained campus ministers remained more of an aspiration than a reality at most Wesley Foundations.[34]

Paul Deats, then a professor at the Boston University School of Theology, composed a draft philosophical document in 1962 based on a previous statement developed by the Board of Education of the Methodist Church in 1957.[35] His statement of philosophy was equally aspirational:

> The church is also concerned with the educational process itself. This is expressed not in sectarian claims for special privilege but in the demand for a full-orbed education. In such an education religion and theology are inescapable. This requires that persons in the university have opportunity to know the facts of their own religious heritage (and that of others), that they face contemporary religious and moral issues, and that they think theologically about education and ethically about science and the uses of knowledge.[36]

Deats's statement strongly affirmed the role of theology in university life, calling upon the church to provide alternative points of view in a largely secular academic context, sometimes challenging the pedagogical assumptions and thought forms prevalent in a university that has neglected or denied the importance of religious perspectives and beliefs. There is a clear imperative for a vibrant intersection of Christian faith to the rest of the academic enterprise and among the academic disciplines. For Deats, this faith-learning integration was the task of everyone in the university community: student, faculty and staff. And this task had profound implications for vocation as well: "The Christian vocation is a call to make the place of work a realm of obedience. This begins in the university."[37]

The Kingswood School

The Kingswood School was founded by Methodists in Bath, England in 1746. Long an idea of George Whitefield, the school provided an education for the children of colliers who were socially and economically beyond the reach of such an education. Kingswood taught subjects "in every branch of useful learning" – including reading, writing, mathematics ("the accounts"), and knowledge of God. The school included a hall for preaching and housing for a school master and

[34] Fedje, 299.
[35] Deats, Paul. "The Church in the University: The Philosophy of College and University Religious Work of The Methodist Church," 1962, unpublished. I was unable to locate the original Board of Education philosophy document.
[36] Deats, 5.
[37] Deats, 16.

mistress. For a time, it welcomed scholars of all ages.[38] When Methodist students were ejected from Oxford University, Wesley made provision for an equivalent collegiate education at Kingswood, such that "Whoever carefully goes through this course will be a better scholar than nine in ten of the graduates at Oxford or Cambridge."[39]

At the dedication of the Kingswood School in 1746, Charles Wesley penned these famous words:

> Unite the pair so long disjoined,
> Knowledge and vital piety:
> Learning and holiness combined,
> And truth and love, let all men see
> In those whom up to thee we give,
> Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.

This stanza of Charles's hymn has resonated in Methodist history to the present day. On the campus of Wesley Theological Seminary, there is a prominent plaque near the library inscribed with these words: "Unite the pair so long disjoined, Knowledge and vital piety". Charles's sentiments shaped the architecture of the seminary, with the chapel and library facing one another across a small courtyard, each with large windows allowing a scholar or worshiper to look from within one building into the other. WTS's campus physical layout embodies the commitment to full religious devotion connecting to a vibrant study of the things of God. But what kind of "knowledge" was Charles Wesley referring to?

Charles's words expressed the hope that those who join "knowledge and piety" would illustrate what it means to be "wholly thine, to die and live," to fully embrace a life devoted to God. Sam Wells, commenting on the influence of these words on the founding of Duke University, believed that a better translation of "knowledge and vital piety" might be "theology and ethics" or "faith and love." In other words, the main point of Charles's hymn is to critique the hypocrisy of Christians whose lives are often in contrast with the words they profess, or for Wells, "our inability and reluctance to practice what we preach, our propensity to proclaim high ideals and live sordid realities…"[40]

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[38] Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists: Second Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013) 139, 187-189.
[39] Arthur Hasting, *The History of Kingswood School* (Charles H. Kelly Publisher, London: 1898), 66.
[40] Samuel Wells, *Eruditio et Religio*, October 4, 2009, https://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/Oct4EruditioetReligio.pdf, accessed July 1, 2024.

Given the context in which this hymn was composed, it seems Charles's message is broader and more comprehensive than just a critique of Christian hypocrisy. Charles is writing his hymn to dedicate an institution which will educate students in all the basic disciplines (such as reading), which will, of course, foster an improved knowledge of God.[41] Kingswood School intended to promote a full human flourishing for its students by offering all the subjects needed for participation in society along with the knowledge of God. In the fourth stanza, Charles writes:

Learning's redundant part and vain
Be all cut off, and cast aside,
But let them, Lord, the substance gain,
In every solid truth abide;
Swiftly acquire, and ne'er forego,
The knowledge fit for man to know.

It certainly seems from these words that the knowledge that Charles has in mind is more comprehensive than only theology, particularly his exhortation: "In every solid truth abide." While Charles wrote this hymn long before the tensions we experience in today's world between science and religion, or between reason and revelation, in some ways Charles's hymn encourages us to look past these present controversies and imagine a view of knowledge far more holistic than is often on offer in modern universities. And, his words offer encouragement for Wesleyans to participate in the work of Christian study centers as a way to rejoin "knowledge and vital piety."

A Renewed Wesleyan Cultural Engagement?

It is fair to ask whether the Wesleyan tradition has a sufficiently robust theology of "cultural engagement". Certainly throughout Methodist history there is a genuine emphasis on social engagement, including the provision of medicine and education to the lower classes in England (the Kingswood School being one example), leading decades later to founding hospitals and colleges by Methodists in America. In some sense, these social ministry efforts had a clear evangelistic impulse – Kingswood, for example, being initially committed to vital religious education among the young pupils who attended.

Is there a Wesleyan impetus for cultural engagement that would serve as motivation for engaging the culture beyond social improvement and witness? The later development of John

[41] According to Heitzenrater, "The list of subjects is imposing Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Rhetoric, Geography, Chronology, History, Logic, Ethics, Physics, Geometry, Algebra, Music." Heitzenrater, 187.

Wesley's soteriology provides a possibility. Randy Maddox has noted how John Wesley's understanding of God's salvific activity developed over his life, from the primarily spiritualized, individualistic, and human-centered vision of salvation that he inherited from the broad Christian tradition, to a more holistic scope of salvific mission that went far beyond the eternal destiny of the soul, to include the body, society, and all of creation.[42] For Wesley, healing became an important interpretive key in his soteriology, as illustrated in this letter: "it will be a double blessing if you give yourself up to the great physician, that he may heal soul and body together. And questionably this is his design. He wants to give you… both inward and outward health."[43] Maddox notes that Wesley, in the last decade of his life, shifted in his understanding of God's salvation from "heaven above" to a future new heavens and new earth. Wesley entertained the possibility of the salvation of animals in his 1781 sermon "The General Deliverance" and the incorporation of all elements of the universe in the new creation ("The New Creation," 1785). Maddox affirms Wesley's conviction that "God's love extends to *all* that God has made, and that God *will* redeem all that God loves."[44]

The implications for Wesley's later view of salvation and eschatology inspire an expanded interpretation and application of Charles Wesley's hymn stanza "Anticipate your Heaven below." If Charles was contemplating the expectation of a vital and immediate experience of God in the life of a Christian, John's holistic soteriology encourages Christians to, in Maddox's words, "anticipate the new creation."[45] While at the communion table we might pray for unity in the Spirit "until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet", in view of God's future victory we should "participate responsively in God's renewing work by anticipating this victory in our present actions."[46]

What implications might Wesley's later soteriology present for a Wesleyan cultural engagement, particularly for Christian study centers? If a Reformed emphasis on the "cultural mandate" found in Genesis 1 motivates Christians to participate in culture as a renewing presence,

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[42] Randy L. Maddox, "Salvation as Flourishing of the Whole Creation," in *Wesleyan Perspectives on Human Flourishing* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021) ,14-18.

[43] Letter to Alexander Knox (26 October 1778), in The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., edited by John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 6:327; quoted in Randy L. Maddox, Anticipating the New Creation: Wesleyan Foundations for Holistic Mission. Asbury Journal 62 (2007), 58.

[44] Randy L. Maddox, Anticipating the New Creation: Wesleyan Foundations for Holistic Mission. Asbury Journal 62 (2007), 62.

[45] Maddox, 2007, 62.

[46] Maddox, 2007, 62.

I would like to shift our gaze to Revelation 22, where the vision of the river flowing in the New Jerusalem is painted by John (Rev 22:1-2):

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Here we see a vision of the "healing of the nations." Richard Bauckham notes that the New Jerusalem fulfills humanity's desire to "build out of nature, a human place of human culture and community… it consummates human history and culture and so far as these have been dedicated to God, while excluding the distortions of history and culture in opposition to God that Babylon represents."[47] In that sense, the New Jerusalem is the fulfillment and consummation of the cultural mandate in Genesis 1, albeit brought to ultimate fruition by God, not humans. So, the cultural mandate given to humans to participate in God's unfolding creative and redemptive plan for creation is energized and amplified by the hope of the coming New Creation. Christians are given the imperative and invitation to join in God's healing work in the present age, and in view of the consummation of God's final "healing of the nations." You might call this a kind of culture evangelism:

> *Culture evangelism* means shaping the world's societies through the truth and virtues of God's reign. It means engaging society in all sectors—the arts, economics and education, politics and government, science and technology, media and entertainment, philosophy and worldview. This dimension of evangelism calls Christians and all sectors of society to give transforming witness to the truth of the gospel.[48]

Because of the influence of Reformed thought on the work of Christian study centers, the "cultural mandate" looms large as a motivating force among the centers. And while a future-oriented vision of New Creation, and of salvation as healing is not as obvious, here Wesleyans can contribute to Christian study centers as a kind of "healing of the university" as we look forward to the renewal of all things.

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[47] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1993), 135.
[48] Howard Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011) ,143-144.

Charles Wesley - A Prayer for Children

1. COME, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
To whom we for our children cry;
The good desired and wanted most
Out of thy richest grace supply;
The sacred discipline be given,
To train and bring them up for heaven.

2. Answer on them the end of all
Our cares, and pains, and studies here;
On them, recovered from their fall,
Stamped with the humble character,
Raised by the nurture of the Lord,
To all their paradise restored.

3. Error and ignorance remove,
Their blindness both of heart and mind;
Give them the wisdom from above,
Spotless, and peaceable, and kind;
In knowledge pure their minds renew,
And store with thoughts divinely true.

4. Learning's redundant part and vain
Be all cut off, and cast aside,
But let them, Lord, the substance gain,
In every solid truth abide;
Swiftly acquire, and ne'er forego,
The knowledge fit for man to know.

5. Unite the pair so long disjoined,
Knowledge and vital piety:
Learning and holiness combined,
And truth and love, let all men see
In those whom up to thee we give,
Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.

6. Father, accept them through thy Son,
And ever by thy Spirit guide!
Thy wisdom in their lives be shown,
Thy name confessed and glorified;
Thy power and love diffused abroad,
Till all the earth is filled with God.