

LECTURE THREE: KESWICK AND THE HIGHER LIFE

Introduction

The nineteenth-century Holiness movement was composed of two major sub-groupings. One is the cluster of denominations and associations that flow directly out of the Wesleyan revival. In various ways they are the descendents of Methodism. When the term “Holiness movement” is used, this is the first thing that comes to the minds of most people. However, in addition to the Wesleyan tradition, there was a significant quest for holiness of life among earnest believers who were not part of Methodist-related Christianity. This wing of the holiness quest is often considered to be part of the larger Holiness movement, but it differed significantly in its understanding of sanctification. Unlike the Wesleyans who wished to recover his teaching on a second crisis experience of eradication of inbred sin, “higher life” advocates adopted views that were largely built on the Reformed teaching of positional holiness. Positional holiness was defined in the Reformed tradition as the declaration of God that at New Birth the believer is credited with the righteousness of Jesus Christ (see Phil 3:9). The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer; actual righteousness in practical life is developed through consecration. A variety of emphases on how the believer could cultivate a holy life appeared, but these teachings were erected on the concept of positional righteousness, the birthright of the believer from the moment of regeneration. This quest for holiness outside Wesleyanism is referred to as the “deeper life” or the “higher life.” Advocates of the “higher life” (a term I prefer) came from Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, and other Christian orientations that tend to be Calvinistic rather than Arminian. Non-Wesleyan “higher life” teaching emphasized the suppression of sinful desires, rather than the eradication of the sin principle, the kind of perfectionism taught in the Wesleyan Holiness wing of the larger movement. The fruit of the sanctified life for the non-Wesleyans was defined more in terms of power for service than in the refinement of interior qualities of life. After the concept of baptism in the Spirit was articulated in the nineteenth century, it is easy to see how this was quickly imported into the “higher life” vocabulary. It is my contention that influences from this strand of the larger Holiness movement had a considerable impact on the shaping of the modern Pentecostal movement. Hence, it is a bit simplistic to say that the modern Pentecostal movement is merely an extension of the Holiness movement—particularly if one defines the Holiness movement narrowly to mean the Wesleyan strand of theology. We must first sketch the contours of the Wesleyan component of the Holiness movement.

The Starting Point: the Wesleyan Revival

John Wesley (1703-1791) is one of the remarkable revivalists of the Christian church. He arrived on the scene in eighteenth-century England at a time of discouraging apostasy. Crime and violence abounded. Some observers felt that apart from the Evangelical Awakening that Wesley triggered, England would have suffered a revolution not unlike that which France experienced at the end of the century. Wesley had a profound impact on English society, far beyond the confines of the Methodist churches he founded and led.¹

In eighteenth century England, John Wesley and his Methodist revival movement cast a long shadow, spreading an influence that reached far into the future. In the United States, by 1850, the Methodist Church had become the largest Protestant denomination. The distinguishing feature of Wesley’s theology was that the individual Christian, experiencing at conversion only an “imperfect regeneration,” required a subsequent special work of the Holy Spirit to complete the salvific process. This special work he described in various ways, preferring to call this “perfect love.” Pressed by those who wanted to know how this experience affected the ability of the believer to sin, in later years Wesley used the term “eradication of inbred sin” to express his belief that the normal state of the sanctified believer is to live above “conscious sin.” He was careful to clothe his teaching within a view that avoided extreme perfectionism by indicating that the believer, in the ordinary course of events, would develop an enlarged capacity for God. Thus, he was able to talk at the same time of a state one entered into of “perfect love,” but nonetheless this state was subject to the possibility of further moral and spiritual growth. By redefining sin to mean those actions for

¹ A. Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960) pp. 235-246.

which a person is consciously responsible, it brought the possibility of at least a limited kind of perfection within reach.² In studying Wesley's ideas, it is important to understand how he redefined sin. Without this understanding, one is likely to make unfair comparisons with the sanctification teaching in other traditions. For the Reformers, sin was any transgression, whether it be done consciously or unconsciously, and included sins of ignorance and omission, as well. Wesley sought to bring the sin problem into a specific field of view with which one could deal more readily. Victory over conscious sin is not quite the same as calling for triumph over all that is part of human finiteness, something that is clearly not attainable.

The American Methodist Church, beginning as a revival movement among the poor and the outcast, rose rapidly in upward social mobility. By mid-century, Methodism had become a prominent component of the fashionable, urban churches in the main stream of American Christianity. In inverse relationship to the social success of Methodism, however, came the muting of the sanctification teaching of Wesley. Evidently this radical teaching had become something of an embarrassment to the sophisticated of society. The rapid decline in the character of Methodism has been studied by many over the years. One is tempted to speculate about the reason for this decline, since the Assemblies of God has been likened in its institutional trajectory to the pattern of Methodism. It is quite likely that the retreat from emphases dear to Wesley's heart, including his call for holiness of life, may be understood, in part at least, by the *experiential* character of Methodist revivalism. The appeal for people to seek a deep experience with God seems to have come at the expense of attention to the *intellectual* support for such experience. Wesleyanism did not produce the same quality of theologians as did the various components of the Reformed tradition, such as the Princeton Presbyterians. Comparing the standard Wesleyan theologies of the nineteenth century with Calvinistic counterparts reveals a departure from strong attention to the meaning of biblical texts to the more nebulous ether of philosophical discussion. The character of the Methodist Church changed rapidly during the middle part of the nineteenth century.

Although the Methodist Church had pretty well discarded the promotion of entire sanctification by mid-nineteenth century, an increasing number of individuals and groups who identified with Wesley's teaching abounded. In the course of the next fifty years, numerous Holiness denominations were spawned. Of particular interest was the role the camp meeting played in this resurgence of Wesleyan teaching. In 1867, at Vineland, New Jersey, a camp meeting to promote Holiness teaching was convened. It was so successful that similar camp meetings were held in various parts of the country each summer, a practice that continued in some places for another century, at least. Within the folds of Methodist-oriented tradition, while a great surge of interest in the recovery of teaching about entire sanctification was building in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, a similar marked interest in cultivating holiness of life was evident in the broader stream of Evangelical church life, as well.

The Higher Life Movement

As early as the 1830s Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874), the wife of a New York physician, began to attract considerable attention to the doctrine of sanctification. She and her husband were of Quaker and Presbyterian background, respectively. Her sphere of influence was largely outside the Wesleyan orbit. Her Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness were attended by a variety of seeking believers. She advocated a deeper experience with God obtained by conscious commitment. Somewhere along the way, Palmer began to employ the term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" to convey to her followers what she felt this experience should be called.³ By the 1850's, further stimulus toward rethinking the importance of seeking for a holy life came from the pen of William Arthur. *The Tongue of Fire*, published in 1856,⁴ appealed to

² John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Chicago: Christian Witness, reprinted, n.d.), pp. 103, 104 for a brief summary of his teaching. He uses the term "perfect love" as a positive description of this experience, an experience that follows justification. He shies away from the assertion that a sanctified believer cannot sin, although he speaks of "salvation from sin."

³ See, for example, Phoebe Palmer, *Full Salvation* (reprint, Salem, OH: Schmul Publisher, 1979). The terminology in her devotional-style material is drawn largely from Wesleyan sources, but her audience was far broader.

⁴ William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1856), esp. pp. 45-58 for a surprising treatment of speaking in tongues. Arthur saw in tongues not only an attestation of God's supernatural intervention in human life, but linked this "baptism of fire" with the missionary mandate.

Christians to seek for the filling of the Holy Spirit, what he termed “a baptism of fire.” On the American scene, a book of enormous influence was W. E. Boardman’s *The Higher Christian Life*, which appeared in 1858, during the height of the great “Fulton Street Prayer Meeting” revival. Boardman, a Presbyterian, spoke of “the pentecostal baptism” to describe his conception of “full salvation,” or the overcoming life, the Spirit-filled life.⁵ But, it was Charles G. Finney, who, more than any other, influenced the adoption among Holiness people, both in England and America, of the term baptism in the Spirit to describe the concept of sanctification.⁶ Finney and his colleague, Asa Mahan, together produced by 1875 what came to be known as “Oberlin theology,” a unique understanding of sanctification that properly should be classified within the Holiness tradition.

An important contribution to the development of non-Wesleyan motifs regarding sanctification was the contribution of Robert Pearsall Smith and his wife, Hannah Whittall-Smith, whose writings became even better known. Hannah Whittall-Smith’s book, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, which appeared first in 1875, has been reprinted many times and continues to be a popular devotional guide. With the advent of the Smith’s, it is appropriate to turn our attention now to the formation of the Keswick movement.

Keswick

By 1870, there was not only a rising tide of interest in the doctrine of sanctification among revitalized Methodists, but across a broad spectrum of Evangelical Christianity far beyond the Wesleyan tradition there was a profound hunger for a deeper knowledge and experience of God. This was true in the United States and Great Britain. A similar movement existed on the European continent, as well. It seems that at the very time that destructive liberal forces were wreaking havoc in the soul of the great denominations through the influences of Modernism, God was generating among many earnest Bible-believing Christians a deep hunger for greater spiritual life and power. Much of this energy seems to have concentrated, at least for the English-speaking world, in the happenings at Keswick.

Keswick is the name of a resort area in northwest England in the Lake District that was the venue of an historic “higher life” conference in 1875. Throughout the English-speaking world, ever since, there have been annual Keswick conferences, featuring the special “higher life” emphasis with which Keswick became identified. It has become common practice to speak of the sanctification theology of this movement as Keswick teaching. Frequently, Keswick teaching is included within the nineteenth century Holiness movement, even though Keswick sanctification teaching is a clear departure from Wesleyan Methodist understanding. Certainly the impact of Keswick thought had a substantial influence on the shaping of Pentecostal theology, not only in the English-speaking world, but elsewhere, particularly in continental Europe. We will want to uncover how Keswick theology differs from classical Methodist theology, and why Keswick theology was accepted so readily by Pentecostals. If this, in fact, is the case, then it serves as an important qualification to the conventional wisdom that Pentecostalism is merely a direct descendent of the Wesleyan Holiness movement. Certainly it can be documented that virtually all of the earliest leaders of the modern Pentecostal movement were Wesleyan in their theology, but within only a few years, most Pentecostals had abandoned the Wesleyan view of sanctification and opted rather for a non-Wesleyan view, a view strikingly like that taught by the Keswick leaders. Keswick influence quickly gained currency in the young Pentecostal movement. Only those Pentecostal bodies that came into existence prior to 1911 continued to hold to Wesleyan Holiness views. Virtually all Pentecostal bodies that had origins after 1911 adopted non-Wesleyan sanctification views. Our purpose is to sketch the origins of Keswick teaching, to highlight its chief emphases, and to show how these views impacted the Pentecostal revival.

Across the platforms of the Keswick conventions paraded the great names of Evangelical Revivalism. It is important to note that the stream of people who comprised an important component of Fundamentalism were the same people, by and large, who identified with the message of Keswick. Evan Hopkins, Asa Mahan, W. E. Boardman, A. T. Pierson, Theodore Monod, T. D. Harford-Battersby, Prebendary Webb-Peploe, J. Elder Cumming and Robert Wilson are among the names of the speakers at

⁵ W. E. Boardman, *The Higher Christian Life* (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1858; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), p. 245.

⁶ John L. Gresham, Jr., *Charles G. Finney’s Doctrine of Baptism of the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), p. 65.

the annual conventions. Outstanding Evangelical scholars participated as well. Among these were G. Campbell Morgan, Handley C. G. Moule, Andrew Murray, F. B. Meyer, Graham Scroggie, and W. H. Griffith Thomas. J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission participated, along with other missionaries and evangelists. The leadership of Keswick over the years was principally British, but a lasting impact was left not only in the English-speaking world, but on the European continent, too. Keswick had an important influence on the German Holiness movement (Heilsbewegung). Jonathan Paul, the founder of the German Pentecostal movement, came out of the German Holiness movement, a group whose theology was marked by Keswickian influence. Alexander Boddy, an important early leader in the formation of British Pentecostalism, through his periodical *Confidence*, brought the Keswick understanding of “baptism in the Spirit” as an endowment of power into the British Pentecostal movement.⁷

Keswick teaching is not primarily a doctrinal system, but rather it has a focus, a message, or what might be termed a special approach.⁸ In spite of the fact that a large number of scholars and Christian leaders participated in the Keswick conventions, year after year, none claimed to be the theological spokesman for the movement. A great service has been provided by Steven Barabas, whose book *So Great Salvation* is perhaps the single best interpretation of the message of Keswick.⁹

A unique feature of the Keswick enterprise is the schedule followed for the annual conventions, called “the Keswick week.” During the typical “Keswick week,” each day has a special focus. The first day attention is focused on sin. The purpose of this is to cultivate a sense of conviction and contrition. The second day addresses the provisions of God for victory over sin. The finished work of Christ provides, not just justification, but identification with the risen Christ. Union with Christ is seen as the centerpiece of Pauline theology. Victory over sin is linked not only to the victory of Christ at Calvary, but to the inner working of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The third day features consecration. This is the place where the participants are urged to make a complete surrender, to respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. The fourth, and last day, features “life in the Spirit.” What it means to walk in the Spirit, to be filled with the Spirit, to be controlled by the Spirit are topics commonly developed to fit the theme for the day.¹⁰

Because the Keswick teachers came from various theological traditions, it is not surprising that it is not easy to identify a precise Keswick theology. McQuilkin, a leading American Keswick exponent, speaks of “marginal ambiguities,” of core values commonly held, but falling short of precise definitions.¹¹ He disagrees with those who have charged Keswick with teaching a form of perfectionism. Here, McQuilkin recognizes that the problem centers in how one chooses to define sin. If, as the Keswick exponents did, speak of sin as a “conscious violation of a known law,” using the language of Wesley, the victory over sin that is taught is more digestible than if one uses a standard Reformed definition of sin.

McQuilkin sees some ambiguity, as well, in the various Keswick messages over the years on the meaning of sanctification. However, he believes that a summary of commonly-held teaching is possible to state. McQuilkin, expressing what he believes Keswick teaching to be, sees sanctification in three ways. First, at justification and regeneration, the believer is declared to have the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Imputed to the believer is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is understood in Reformed circles to be “positional righteousness.” Second, is what McQuilkin calls “experiential sanctification.” This is the outworking of one’s place in Christ in practical daily life. The believer is called upon to participate with the Holy Spirit in this process. This is the primary focus of the Keswick emphasis, as we shall see. Then, the third aspect of sanctification is complete, or permanent, sanctification. This comes only at the end of this life (1 John 3:2). This is usually understood to be the “glorification” of the believer. One can readily see in this outline the shape of standard Reformed theology. The major difference lies in the definition of sin and

⁷ David Bundy, “Keswick Higher Life Movement,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley Burgess and Gary McGee (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 518, 519. See also Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), pp. 157-167.

⁸ J. Robertson McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective” in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 153.

⁹ Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.)

¹⁰ McQuilkin, op.cit., pp. 154, 155.

¹¹ McQuilkin, op.cit., pp. 156-158.

the challenge to live victoriously, a theme that does not have much emphasis in traditional Reformed theologies.¹²

It is Steven Barabas who provides for us what I think is the clearest expression of Keswick teaching on the dynamics of the overcoming life. Keswick teaching makes it abundantly clear that sanctification, as well as justification, is centered in the work of Christ redeeming humanity from sin through His death and resurrection. “Man cannot become holy without the cross.”¹³ But, he goes on to say, “If the cross is the ground, the Holy Spirit is the Agent of our sanctification.”¹⁴ It is precisely at this point that Keswick teaching is most clearly seen.

It is not enough for us just to *know* that by our union with Christ in His death upon the Cross we have been freed from the dominion of sin. That freedom is only potential. It must be progressively realized in our daily experience, and this is done by walking in the Spirit. Christ is our sanctification (1 Cor 1:30), and all sanctification is dependent primarily upon His work. The Holy Spirit is our sanctifier.¹⁵

Crucial to understanding how “experiential sanctification,” or “actual sanctification” works is the Keswick use of the term “counteraction.” Keswick leaders often say that God’s method of sanctification is not *suppression* or *eradication*, but *counteraction*. The “law of sin” (Rom 7), understood to be the latent potential for the old nature to express itself, is not totally destroyed in this life and is perceived to be a constant threat to the well-being of the believer. How does the believer keep this potential to evil in subjection? “Only,” answers Keswick, “by the counteracting influence of the Holy Spirit as He is permitted to work out in us the death of the cross to sin.”¹⁶

Typical Keswick teaching acknowledges that the law of sin and death is operative in the believer all the time. The Christian life will be victorious over sin in the degree to which the individual is giving place to the counteracting work of the Holy Spirit. Gal 5:16-18 is a key Scriptural passage Keswick speakers have employed in their discussion of the counteracting work of the Spirit in this theme of internal conflict in the believer. “The conflict here,” it is pointed out, “is not between the two natures, flesh and spirit, as is so often thought, but between the flesh and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ Achieving victory over conscious sin, the “normal Christian life,” was considered not to be a state entered into, but a tenuously held “maintained condition.” This language was employed to distance themselves from the “second blessing” Wesleyan teaching.

Keswick teaching on the challenge to the believer to make room for the Holy Spirit in one’s life for victory over sin led inexorably to an emphasis on the Spirit-filled life. “Keswick tells us that the reception of the fulness of the Spirit is by a definite act of faith separable from regeneration, but not necessarily separated from it.”¹⁸ Often linked with the interior ministry of sanctification, the fulness of the Spirit, in Keswick literature, this tends to be linked to power for service. The themes of interior holiness as a necessary condition for power in service abound in Keswick teaching. That the teaching about the Spirit-filled life is crucial to understanding the thrust of the Keswick movement is evident. “Keswick is undoubtedly correct in making the Spirit-filled life the central, dominating theme of the Convention, and in making it the climax of the sequence of teaching during the week.”¹⁹

In time, Friday, the concluding day of the Keswick week, was devoted to missions. The Friday morning meeting, the longest of all the week’s sessions, often lasting over two hours, was considered to be the climax of the week. The earlier years of Keswick focused on the formation of Christian character, but in later years, attention shifted to fruitful service. Eventually, this led to the collecting of funds for the support of individual missionaries. The first missionary sent out by Keswick was Amy Carmichael, who first went

¹² Ibid., pp. 154-160.

¹³ Steven Barabas, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Barabas, *op.cit.* p. 94.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Barabas, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁸ Barabas, *op.cit.*, p. 134.

¹⁹ Barabas, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

to Japan, and then spent the rest of her life at Dohnavur, South India.²⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century, baptism in the Spirit, defined as an empowering for service, was a frequent theme in the Keswick repertoire. That the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer should result in evangelism and missions is clearly an understanding that Pentecostals borrowed eagerly, after the advent of the Pentecostal era.

Conclusion

The influence of the Keswick movement, as perhaps the single most conspicuous expression of the “higher life” movement of the nineteenth century, was far-reaching. Mrs. William Booth, widow of the founder of the Salvation Army, acknowledged that the Keswick movement had been a principal means for the founding of the Army. Hudson Taylor judged that two-thirds of the missionaries in the China Inland Mission were there as a result of Keswick.²¹

D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, A. J. Gordon, A. B. Simpson, J. Wilbur Chapman and others who participated in the Keswick conventions brought back to the United States the Keswick teaching about a baptism in the Holy Spirit, understood to be an endowment of power for service. The concept of “second blessing” sanctification, revised by the Keswickian adoption of a Reformed model of progressive “counteraction” by the Spirit, as we have seen, led to a new emphasis on being filled with the Spirit (some used the term baptism in the Spirit), as empowering for Christian service. Here one can see the contours of Pentecostal teaching, particularly the non-Wesleyan strand of Pentecostalism.²² All that remained was the sign of being filled with the Spirit, speaking in other tongues, what Pentecostals understood to be the biblical norm.

One of the principal early figures who had a direct impact on the Pentecostal movement was Alexander Dowie. Dowie, an Australian Congregational pastor, had emigrated to the United States in 1888. After conducting a series of healing missions, he felt constrained to establish a headquarters for his operations near Chicago, a place he called Zion. There he founded the Christian Catholic Church. The articles of faith on his new denomination send an uncertain message about the doctrine of sanctification, but the terminology is clearly non-Wesleyan. Donald Gee classified Dowie as an exponent of Keswick holiness views.²³ Dowie resisted attempts by Pentecostals to penetrate his movement, and never identified with Pentecostalism. However, in the wake of the turmoil surrounding his mental collapse, many of Dowie’s followers left Zion to join with Pentecostal fellowships. Key early Pentecostal leaders came from Dowie’s organization. They included Fred Vogler, Harry Bowley, F. F. Bosworth, F. A. Graves, and Marie Burgess (later better known as the wife of Robert Brown, pastor of Glad Tidings Tabernacle, New York City).²⁴

Although the specific links between the Keswick movement and the Pentecostal movement are not abundant, it is clearly evident that the teachings about the doctrine of sanctification and about the fulness of the Spirit as an endowment of power for service are compatible with the views held by Pentecostals of the non-Wesleyan variety. For years a standard Assemblies of God theology was Myer Pearlman’s work, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*. What Pearlman taught about sanctification is right in line with Keswick ideas.²⁵ This is also true of the teaching of Ernest S. Williams, for twenty years the general superintendent of the Assemblies of God.²⁶ More recently, the pre-eminent theologian in the American

²⁰ Barabas, op.cit. p. 151.

²¹ Barabas, op.cit., pp. 151, 152.

²² See, for example, A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, reprint, 1949), a book continuously sold through the Gospel Publishing House catalog for many years. Reading this volume, the only thing a Pentecostal might miss is the connection of speaking in tongues to the baptism in the Spirit.

²³ Donald Gee, *The Pentecostal Movement*, enlarged ed. (London: Elim Publishing, 1949), p. 5.

²⁴ William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, Gospel Publishing House, 1971), pp. 65, 66.

²⁵ Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield, Gospel Publishing House, rev. ed., 1981), pp. 305-320.

²⁶ Ernest S. Williams, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III (Springfield, Gospel Publishing House, 1953), pp. 31-61.

Assemblies of God has been Stanley Horton. His teaching fits well with that of his earlier colleagues.²⁷ The Assemblies of God is not unique in the Pentecostal movement in its tight correlation with Keswick views. Representative of the Foursquare Church is the standard theology written by Duffield and Van Cleave. In this one can see the same patterns as are found in Keswick, too.²⁸ There is no question that the Keswick movement had an important role in the shaping of the theology of much of the Pentecostal world.

²⁷ Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, Gospel Publishing House, 1976), pp. 167-196.

²⁸ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), pp. 291-324.