Spreading Scriptural Holiness: Theology and Practices of Early Methodism for the Contemporary Church

Lacey Warner

Abstract
The early Methodist movement—above all else—was evangelistic. However, the contemporary language of mission and evangelism with which we are familiar was not in use during the 18th century. In the “Large” Minutes, John Wesley summarized his understanding of Methodism’s purpose: “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists? A. To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” The early Methodist movement offers resources to local congregations among Protestant denominations in the contemporary North American context preoccupied with a shallow connotation of evangelism as merely advertising towards the goal of membership recruitment rather than a comprehensive set of practices for Christian initiation and formation. These congregations often confront obstacles to faithful and effective ministry practices such as: (1) preoccupation with rapid numerical growth to reverse the trend of membership decline, (2) lack of theological reflection, (3) disinterest in sustained Christian practices or spiritual disciplines, and (4) reluctance to engage the other, particularly across socio-economic boundaries including wealth-sharing. This essay engages four aspects of the early Methodist movement in Great Britain as resources for responding faithfully to such obstacles.

DOI
10.7252/Journal.01.2008S.06

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol63/iss1/7