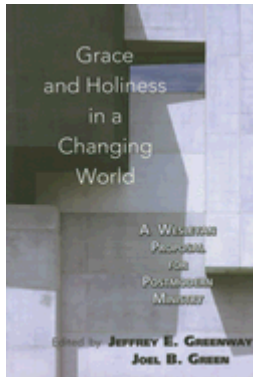


CIRCUITRIDER *Reviews*



Grace and Holiness in a Changing World: A Wesleyan Proposal for Postmodern Ministry
by edited by Jeffrey E. Greenway and Joel B. Green (Abingdon Press, 2007. ISBN – 13 9780687465705.)

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Grace and Holiness in a Changing World: A Wesleyan Proposal for Postmodern Ministry , edited by Jeffrey E. Greenway and Joel B. Green

“The times, they are a changing...” Indeed, they are! Not only did Bob Dylan sing these lines during an era of turbulence, but he also tapped into a well-spring of truth that has become commonplace among persons who look into the future: Even change has changed! And what can we say about the pace of change? Yes, even the pace of change has changed!

Therefore, as God’s people in the midst of the ‘best of times and the worst of times,’ who are we to be and what are we to do? How will we journey into the future? What are the ‘marks’ that will set us apart? How will others know us?

By no means are these easy questions to answer. The evidence points out otherwise. Throughout its history, the church has faced many challenges. This is not new. What is new, however, at this juncture in history is how the various traditions within Christianity will maintain their distinctive voices within a wider, consumerist and pluralist culture: How will Christians in the Wesleyan theological tradition, for example, contend to share ‘the faith once delivered to

the saints' (Jude 3)? What 'marks' will characterize a Wesleyan approach to discipleship in a rapidly changing, postmodern world? How will Wesleyan Christians 'reform the nation and church and spread scriptural holiness across these lands'? By no means are these easy questions, but they are questions we need to ask.

Thankfully, the present volume comes to the fore to explore what the Wesleyan theological tradition can offer the ministry of the church at the beginning of a new millennium. Edited by Jeffery Greenway, senior pastor of Reynoldsburg United Methodist Church in Ohio, and Joel Green, now professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, this work lays out the key contours of a Wesleyan approach to ministry in a postmodern world. As the title suggests, 'grace and holiness' within the Wesleyan heritage are inextricably intertwined; we truly cannot speak of one without the other. Wesleyan Christians are known for preaching 'grace upon grace' – e.g., preventing grace, converting grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace, perfecting grace, glorifying grace. Yes, all is grace, and all grace is amazing (p. 9)! But we also cannot speak of God's grace without speaking of God's holiness (p. 10). In short, our living response to the grace of God starts with the holiness of God (p. 12). It is the 'holiness of heart and life' that flows out of our relationship with God to neighbor and the world (p. 12). Therefore, any proposal for a Wesleyan approach to ministry will need to come to grips with this distinctive dynamic and conjunction.

The book itself is divided into six chapters, plus introduction (Greenway). All the contributors have taught at or have attended Asbury Theological Seminary. All have undertaken attempts to suggest what ministry within the Wesleyan tradition will look like in a postmodern context: e.g., the 'apostolic mission' of the church in a world of empire (Joel Green), the nature of change in the church in a world of transition (Lee Choi), the healing and costly message of grace in a world of sin and brokenness (Harper), the holiness of heart and life in a world of superficiality (Snyder), the importance of the priesthood of all believers for life together (Tuttle), and the dynamic tension in the Christian life between holiness and grace (Gutenson). All the authors address critical 'marks' of the Christian life and the way these 'marks' impact the life of ministry in the church and world – e.g., the stewardship of the earth, the role of the laity, the importance of the congregation in mission, and the significance of holiness and grace to biblical interpretation and proclamation. All find expression here.

But as I reflect on this work, I would like to offer a few remarks. First, as a pastor within the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition, I

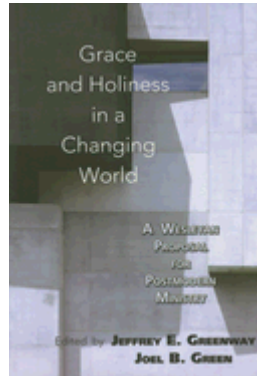
appreciate very much what these authors have to share with respect to a 'Wesleyan proposal for postmodern ministry.' The book can introduce and educate persons to the basics of Wesleyan Christianity. On this score, I think the book can serve a productive purpose: Helping to clarify the trajectory of Wesleyan Christianity in a postmodern world is no easy task, and we certainly can find something to contest; however, as a way to focus on what ministry within the Wesleyan tradition can offer, this book can move the conversation along the way. It is good that we have persons who can help the church at this point in history.

Second, several sub-themes are apparent throughout this work. Within the flux of history, including Wesleyan/Methodist history, it is interesting to note how several authors use the language of 'counterculture,' 'alternative society,' and 'apostolic community.' Critical attention is given to how the church in the past accommodated itself to the wider culture; the church lost its saltiness. The focus on holiness is pertinent here. However, as the authors contend, there is now a need for the church to re-envision its distinctiveness and to focus on what makes the church unique; in this case, what marks the church as distinctively Wesleyan? To be sure, there is more to contemplate in terms of the kind of witness the church can make, but a good start has been made.

And third, following the above point, we need to ask how the 'language of holiness' can continue to make inroads in a church with different understandings of holiness on the one hand and in a world with no understanding of holiness on the other. Certainly, the 'marks' of holiness, apostolicity, catholicity, and unity must come into the equation. Under the influence of postmodern culture, there is definitely a need to understand the tension between God's grace and the church's marks. Along the way, Christians have always wrestled with this challenge. Methodists in particular have wrestled with it by going in different directions – some by maintaining a strict holiness code, others by securing 'respectability,' and 'relevancy' with a mostly white middle class ethos. Now, the church faces another challenge: How it will live out the kind of 'peculiar particularity' of Wesley's vision of holiness as the marks of discipleship while proclaiming the transforming grace of God to all? The question goes to the heart of the gospel message.

This book can move persons within the Wesleyan tradition toward the kind of holy conversation the church needs to have at this moment in history. As an introduction, it provides food for thought. One suggestion to the authors in the future would be to offer discussion questions and a bibliography. It would have been helpful

to know where to go to read more about Wesley and the early Methodists, for instance. And while the book certainly spoke out of the Wesleyan theological heritage, it was also curious to note that Wesley was not mentioned a great deal. Not that this was the purpose of the book! It simply would have been good to state that Wesley's world was not a postmodern world, and that the ministry of grace and holiness today faces a number of new but similar challenges.



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