

B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

FREE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Spring - Summer 2017 — Volume 16, No.2

What is our story?

By Paul A. Tippey

We sometimes tend to forget the “treasures of tradition” which form our root system and from which we can learn so much. The clamors of the urgent often crowd out the power of the important.

Theology has no higher calling than to make straight the way for the worship of Jesus Christ. The intention of the Christian is to make their theology and worship keep an eye on each other. Neither should be up to something the other cannot understand or approve. Evagrius, a monk of the late 4th century, was credited as saying that a theologian is one who knows how to pray, and he prays in spirit and in truth; by this very act one is understood as a theologian. Doctrine cannot be understood unless it is prayed; it must be lived. Theology without action, as St. Maximus put it, is “the theology of demons.” The Creeds belong only to those who live them. Holiness theology and life are inseparable.

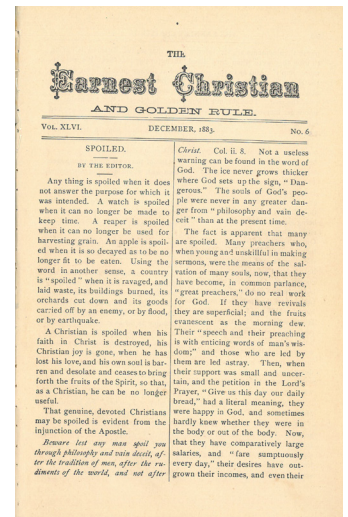
1 Peter 2:12 (New Living Translation)
Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.

Model the Way! Inspire God’s shared vision! Challenge the process! Enable others to act! Encourage the heart! God will use a small, plain, or broken vessel but God will not use a dirty vessel. A dirty vessel does not mean one must check science, their brain, or even their conviction at the door when pursuing a life of Christian devotion and holiness. Power comes from purity and integrity must precede vision.

B. T. Roberts Writes: “A Great Want”

The great want of times is men and women in every neighborhood who, in everyday of life, year in and year out, manifest before the world, practical holiness. They need not be rich or learned. They may have simple ordinary common sense, and may occupy a humble position in life. They should be strictly conscientious in all

business matters -- ... never failing to pay as promised; never selling an inferior article for a good one. Such persons are needed to keep alive in the minds of the people, the true idea of what it is to be a Christian. They are needed to comfort the afflicted and relieve the distressed. They are needed as friends to be consulted by those in trouble. They are needed to keep before the world examples of holy living. They are needed to point out the way to those who are really in earnest to go to heaven.
-- B. T. Roberts, Editorial, *The Earnest Christian* (Dec. 1883), 190.



News & Notes

- Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we ended 2016 in the black. **Thank you for your contributions!**
- The family of **Bishop Walter Kendall** provided funds to have two of his sermons from the 1960s digitized. They are available to the public on our website. Visit fmcusa.org/historical click on resources and you'll find these and more under Audio/Visual.
- Recent visitors- **Harry & Ruth Winslow** conducting research on behalf of the FMC in Hong Kong regarding missionary to China (1917-1955), **I.S.W. Ryding**.
- Contribute online to help digitize a book, support general work, assist with Redesign project. (<https://give.fmcusa.org/givemarston>)

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Please use the QR code to access
the full pdf of *Earnest Christian*.

The Mission of the Free Methodist Historical Society is to preserve Free Methodist heritage and transmit it faithfully to each generation in order to assist the Free Methodist Church in fulfilling its mission.

The newsletter is hosting an occasional series of articles, beginning with this article, that will be focusing on Free Methodist history in relation to or as found in contemporary publications. The articles will take a contemporary look at Free Methodist historical events, issues, and doctrine and provide a new or clearer view of how to live a life of Christian devotion and holiness without checking science, our brain, or even our conviction at the door.

Evolution and Holiness

BY REV. MATTHEW NELSON HILL, PH.D.

*Matthew Nelson Hill is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of the E.P. Hart Honors Program at Spring Arbor University in Michigan where he lives with his wife, Helene, and their four children. He has been an ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church since 2009 and served as a pastor in the Genesis Conference for four years while teaching part time at Roberts Wesleyan College. Matthew earned his PhD from Durham University in 2013 while studying under Robert Song. Matthew and Helene love the outdoors, beekeeping, and spending time with their family and local community. Matthew's newest book, *Evolution and Holiness*, recently came out with IVP-Academic.*

Why do I want to look at pornography? Why can't I stop eating so much food? Why do I get so angry when I feel threatened? At the Free Methodist college where I teach Christian ethics, philosophy and philosophy of science, I encounter these questions on a daily basis. Like most genuine struggles in life, the answers do not rest solely in spiritual insights. The physical also matters. After all, we are complicated beings—made in the image of God—we are physical, emotional, intellectual, mental and spiritual. So, what does science have to do with discipleship? Everything.

Despite recent advances within the study of evolution, theology is still coming to terms with what this new knowledge means for how we understand moral behavior. It is my attempt to locate this book at the intersection of theology and the sciences and seek, in part, to answer some of the following questions: How does the theological concept of “holiness” connect to contemporary understandings of evolution, and can these two fields fully explain moral traits such as human altruism? If genetic explanations do not fully explain human altruism, what role should we give to environmental explanations and free will? How do genetic explanations of altruism relate to theological accounts of human goodness and holiness?

In order to work toward answers to these questions, I use the lens of Wesleyan ethics to offer a fresh assessment within the interface of evolution and theology. In the end, reading such questions through this perspective has brought me to the following practical conclusion: intentional community can provide the environmental conditions within which people may develop, beyond their genetic inclinations, holiness. If this is true, then what is at stake is not only the future of the Church but

also the fine-tuning of human evolution.

For starters, I begin the book by introducing the reader to major questions concerning evolution, theology, and holiness through multiple examples and anecdotes. While my task in this book is not to argue for the validity of human evolution—I try to establish a very brief account of human evolution to make sure the reader and I are on the same page.

It is here, early on, where I address the main evolutionary narrative that altruism is a problem that needs explanation and solving. Within evolutionary theory in particular, altruism has always been considered problematic because it seems to go against the idea of individual selection. How can something that, by definition, reduces individual gene fitness end up being a behavior trait? To answer this question, I explain evolutionary theories of altruism while showing the possibility of biological unselfishness, drawing upon concepts such as kin and reciprocal altruism as well as game theory. In other words, evolutionary explanations of altruistic human action, especially on the basis of genetic evolution alone, are not fully satisfying. Essentially: what biologists decipher from our genetic past does not prescribe what our future action will necessarily be or what our moral behavior should be.

But what do we do about the long lineage of human genetics? Biological constraints on human behavior, both genetic and environmental, impact human freedom and moral responsibility. One cannot simply ask humans to “be moral” or to “be altruistic.” Different people reside in different locations on the spectrum of biological and environmental constraints. I aim to demonstrate that although altruistic behavior is significantly influenced by biology, it does not mean that all altruistic actions

are solely limited to neurobiological processes. Humans have the ability (unique amongst animals) to overcome influences on their behavior.

The reader will so far have seen that evolutionary biologists have found evolutionary links to prosocial behavior. These discoveries might appear to put the idea of holiness in jeopardy. It would seem that an individual does not need to be concerned about experiencing holiness if she or he is bound by genetics. Or, it might make more sense to simply cultivate inherited behavioral traits. Likewise, if genetic understandings of *Homo sapiens* convey that humans are predisposed to certain moral behaviors, either being more selfish or more selfless than others, does the notion of Christian holiness mean that humans no longer have to worry about their genetic history because they can “spiritually overcome” such heritages? Then one might wonder if “holy” Christians somehow use free will to “trump” genetics. Within the intersection of evolution and theological ethics rests other important explorations that I address in this chapter. I show that explaining human selfishness as a mere “defect of the will” is reductionist at best; instead it is a defect of the person. One cannot have only care for either the spirit or body in some kind of reductionist dualism. Furthermore, when an individual works within her or his community, the individual can develop the kind of character necessary to be able to overcome genetic constraints.

Finally, being more practical in nature, I end by showing how given that the biological human condition rests somewhere between total selfishness and altruism; there are some environmental constraints that end up pushing individuals closer

to altruism. I rely on the example of John Wesley’s community groups which found a way to work within biological constraints, while utilizing environmental constraints, to encourage people to be more selfless, and ultimately, more holy. It is obviously anachronistic to say that Wesley knew about the biological human condition. Instead, he placed people in groups for both the practical reasons of organization and the theological reasons of engendering holiness. This environment is what I will call Wesley’s “world of constraints.” Through this rigorous community he nurtured group members’ biological proclivities toward altruism and mitigated egoistic tendencies. Wesley engaged the biological human condition in order to promote the holistic altruism that was at the heart of his drive toward holiness. When individuals dwelled within these intentional communities, they exhibited the distinguishing virtues of selflessness and altruism. Furthermore, this book concludes by addressing an important question: how does someone living in the era of Frans de Waal—understanding that the human condition is not totally depraved by egoism—follow Wesley’s example and nurture Christian holiness?

There are several other natural implications that come as a result of this study which I address through several questions such as: 1) if one can be holy despite biological and environmental proclivities how do we understand theological ideas such as original sin? 2) how do we understand concepts such as the new heaven and the new earth in light of the holistic Christian anthropology? 3) how might these understanding give us deeper empathy for those struggling with morally negative biological and cultural urges?

UNDERWRITE FREE METHODIST LEGACY THROUGH PLANNED GIVING

You are needed to help preserve Free Methodist history and mission. Consider leaving a legacy through gift planning. Include the Marston Historical Center in your estate planning as well as current giving.

Contact the Free Methodist Foundation at 800-325-8975, or visit the FMF website at www.fmfoundation.org. A wide variety of giving options is available, ranging from gifts and bequests to annuities, trusts, and family foundations.

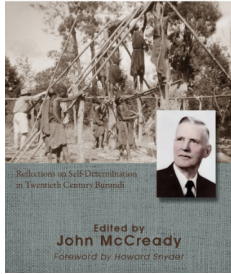
Book Review

John Wesley Haley and Building the Indigenous Church: Reflections on Self Determination in Twentieth Century Burundi

Edited By John McCready

Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2015

JOHN WESLEY HALEY
and *Building the Indigenous Church*



Haley, author of books and articles on Africa and mission, left one unpublished manuscript. In it, he reflected on his life in mission, with reference to his reading and research for a lecture at an Evangelical Foreign Mission Association meeting. After his death, it was given to the Robb Free Methodist Historical Centre, Thamesford, Ontario. Persistent search by John McCready led to its publication (pp. 59-133) as the central part of this volume. Chapters include

McCready's "Introduction," (pp. 1-9), a biographical essay by Burton Hamilton, "Haley: A Man before His Time," (pp.

11-57). Dan Sheffield, "The Mission Temporary, The Church Permanent," (pp. 155-203) endeavored to contextualize Haley's "Manuscript." Bishop Deogratias Nshimiyimana, with Pastors Evariste Harerimana and Desire Mpfubusa, "The Indigenous Church in Burundi," (pp. 135-153) presented all too briefly Free Methodism in Burundi. Finally, Burton W. Hamilton provided "Notes on Haley's Journal" (pp. 205-207), still unedited; there is also a "Select Bibliography," (pp. 209-210) of material written by and about Haley.

The volume is enhanced by the judiciously selected photographs. Some readers will be troubled by the repetitiveness of the text, a hazard of three individuals writing about the same person and text. It is an important addition to the neglected field of Holiness and specifically Free Methodist mission history, thought and practice. It presents an inspired maverick missionary—whose legacy is the Free Methodist Church in Burundi: 141,213 members makes it the third largest Free Methodist General Conference.

—Dr. David Bundy

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