

# REPORT OF THE CANADIAN STUDY COMMISSION ON DOCTRINE

July 1996



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**Free Methodist Church in Canada**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS** (continued)

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6.11	When Abuse Occurs	62
6.11.1	Option One	62
6.11.2	Option Two	63
6.11.3	Option Three	64
6.11.4	Option Four	65
6.12	Responding to Allegations of Abuse and Confirmed Abusers	65
6.12.1	Step One	65
6.12.2	Step Two	67
6.12.3	Step Three	67
6.12.4	Step Four	68
6.12.5	Step Five	68
6.12.6	Step Six	69
6.13	Utilising a Response Team	69
6.14	Postscript	71
6.15	Response - SCOD Ballot # 4	71
	Select Bibliography	72
<b>7.</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>73</b>
7.1	Introduction	73
7.2	The Call to Holiness and the Significance of Belonging	74
7.2.1	The Call to Holiness	74
7.2.2	Holy Conduct	76
7.2.3	Implications For Understanding Membership	77
7.2.4	Summary of Key Points	81
7.3	Historical Uses of the General Rules	81
7.3.1	John Wesley	81
7.3.2	The Methodist Episcopal Church	84
7.3.3	The Free Methodist Church of 1860	85
7.3.4	Conclusions	87
7.3.5	Bibliography	87
7.4	Social Psychology's Insights For Church Membership	88
7.5	Summary	96
7.6	Recommendation	98
7.6.1	Action Requiring Ratification - The Membership Covenant	98
7.6.2	Becoming a Member	100
7.6.3	Conditions of Membership	100
7.6.4	Membership Procedures	100
7.7	Response - SCOD Ballots # 5 and # 6	102
7.8	Liturgical Form of the Membership Covenant	103

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## 7. MEMBERSHIP

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### 7.1 Introduction

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Much of the genius of the Methodist movement is its passion for holy living. Free Methodist leaders through the years have sought to continue this vision of the early Methodist renewal in our denominational setting.

When the Free Methodist Church was formed (in 1860) Wesley's "General Rules" were adopted as part of the membership rules of the denomination. Through the ensuing decades, details of requirements for membership continued to increase.

In 1951 the North American General Conference (of which Canadians were a part) decided to return to the "General Rules" of 1860, labelling the added restrictions "Special Rules." Both sets of rules were retained as conditions of membership. By this time, the vision of the early Methodist movement had become heavily institutionalized.

In 1974 the language of "rules" was dropped, and a "covenant" replaced the accumulated rules. An attempt was made in 1985 to revise the constitution so as to make the membership covenant a statement of principled commitments that would describe the Christlike life in ways that would apply in all cultures in any age. It received majority support around the world, but lacked the two-thirds over-all support required for adoption. In the North American General Conference of which Canadians were a part, support was 85%. The sense that changes were needed if we were to remain faithful to the early Methodist vision continued.

In 1979, Canadian delegates were part of a North American General Conference where membership was the largest single issue. Among the papers that Conference referred to the North American Study Commission on Doctrine [NASCOD] (which included Canada) were:

**Paper 418:** "That the Study Commission on Doctrine study these (membership) questions in a broad, theological, and historical context and make recommendations to the next General Conference regarding the nature of membership and the place of rules within the church, all in the light of our mission, taking into account: 1) a Biblical theology of belonging, 2) Biblical ethics, 3) human development insights regarding how Christians best grow and develop holy character, 4) church growth insights regarding the role of membership prerequisites and rules in growing churches."

**Paper 702.1:** "That condition #2 of Paragraph 360 be amended to read: 'Assent to making the membership covenant and the Guidelines for Christian Conduct the goals of their maturing Christian lives.'"

Subsequently more than fifty persons from across the continent (including several Canadians) participated in the study process. The goal was a return to the heart of our vision.

Three papers from this study have been abridged for this report. Authored by members of the NASCOD with differing perspectives and disciplines, they have proved to be especially helpful in the process.

## **7.2 The Call To Holiness and The Significance of Belonging**

by David W. Kendall

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The purpose of this study is to explore 1 Peter's understanding of the Christian's call to holiness and its implications for how we understand church membership. Such an exploration involves a consideration of the meaning of holiness within 1 Peter, the particular conduct which holiness implies for believers, and the basis upon which they are called to such conduct. We shall conclude by suggesting several implications of Peter's remarks for understanding church membership.

### **7.2.1 The Call to Holiness**

Arguably, Peter emphasizes the calling and demand for holiness more than any other New Testament author. To be sure, he adopts the traditional holiness terminology which formed a part of the Old Testament legacy shared by all New Testament writers. This legacy understood holiness to be the primary characteristic of God's people. Thus, like other New Testament writers, Peter declares in his salutation (1:2) that believers are "elect strangers" by means of the Spirit's sanctifying work. That is, for Peter as for the New Testament in general, to be a Christian involves the hallowing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, when Peter describes believers as "the people of God" he makes use of the epithets once ascribed to the nation of Israel and declares, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...." (2:9a; cf. Exodus 19:5-6).

What distinguishes Peter's understanding of holiness, however, is the *central* role it plays in his explication of Christian conduct. In fact, it is the call to holiness which best describes the Christian's vocation in 1 Peter. Peter begins his letter by setting forth the basis of Christian life and behaviour (1:3-12). He praises God for his saving initiative in begetting believers to a living hope, a hope which animates their present existence and, despite adversity, culminates with final salvation (1:3-7). This saving grace, as predicted by the prophets, has become a reality for believers in the ministry of Jesus (i.e., his



sufferings and glories) and in the proclamation of the gospel (1:10-12). Therefore, on the basis of the new life God has granted believers, Peter exhorts his readers to fasten their hope upon the grace which they have already received (1:3-12) and which is to be consummated at the revelation of Christ (1:13). This exhortation for believers, to structure their lives upon the grace of God, forms the most fundamental imperative of the book. Yet, when Peter elaborates upon his command "to hope on grace" he calls his readers to holiness (1:14-17). Therefore, holy conduct best describes how Christians ought to live their lives in response to God's grace.

Peter indicates the implications of holy conduct in the verses surrounding his call to holiness (1:14-17). Fundamentally, the call to holiness is a call to be different. Peter exhorts, "...do not conform to the desires which characterized your former life" (1:14). That is, Christian life must no longer be based upon merely human considerations and inclinations. Rather, the conduct of Christians is to be distinctive because it must now be determined by their relationship to the holy God who has called them to a new way of life (1:15-16).

This way of life, and the relationship to God which determines it, is summarized in 1:17. Peter indicates that Christians must live their lives as resident-aliens. That is, their past origins, their present status, and their future destiny are neither bound nor determined by the world in which they live. Consequently, the values and loyalties upon which Christians base their lives distinguish them from their non-Christian peers. Moreover, these distinctive values and loyalties are determined by the believers' relationship to God.

Peter says, "you must demonstrate your alien status by conducting yourselves out of reverence for God who is both your Father and your Judge." On the one hand, as Father, God granted his children a new life, the distinguishing marks of which are hope and faith (1:3, 5, 7, 21). Accordingly, believers are "children of obedience" (1:14) and their lives are to be entirely devoted to their Father God. On the other hand, as Judge, God stands before the believer and non-believer alike as the final examiner of each person's deeds. Hence, believers are stimulated to deeper levels of faithfulness since they are children of the Judge and since they may be sure that judgment begins with the Judge's own family (4:17).

We may summarize Peter's call to holiness in the following way. Negatively, it is a call to non-conformity with a merely human way of thinking and acting. Thus, it is no longer appropriate for human considerations based on social, cultural, political, or traditional factors to be the *primary* stimulus for believers' conduct. Positively, the call to holiness is a call to complete devotion to God who, as Father, has granted believers a new life and who, as Judge, inspires faithful response to his saving initiatives. Hence, believers' conduct must be determined ultimately by faithful and obedient response to God's calling.

### 7.2.2 Holy Conduct

Peter's understanding of holiness in the terms just described is qualified in several ways throughout the remainder of the epistle. Three of these qualifications are particularly note-worthy.

First, Peter declares that the mandate and power for holy living is built into the nature of redemption itself. For this reason, after Peter issues his call to holiness (1:14-17), he substantiates the exhortation by reminding his readers of their redemption through Christ's death. "You know that you have been redeemed from the futile way of life inherited from your fathers, not through imperishables ... but through the blood of Christ ..." (1:18-19). It is important to observe that, according to Peter, Christ's death constitutes a deliverance precisely from that way of life to which believers must not be conformed (1:14, cf. 4:3-4). In this way, he indicates that the power for non-conformity resides in the power of the cross. Accordingly, believers are able to live holy lives only by appropriating the power of Christ's redemption, a power which has already transformed them in their new birth (1:3, 23). Therefore, the nature of Christ's redemption as a deliverance from the believers' past way of life both necessitates the call to holiness and enables the believer to respond to that call.

Peter's second qualification is that holiness is profoundly social and relational. He implies this by the various exhortations which follow his call to holiness. Thus, holy conduct is intimately associated with a sincere and fervent brotherly love (1:22ff.). Because believers have been reborn through God's word and since this rebirth involves a purification of their souls, all of their relationships must be ordered by love (1:22-23). This implies a repudiation of all that is inconsistent with love, such as deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander (2:1). Additionally, God's people must be like-minded and careful to maintain a sense of unity and mutual respect within the community of faith (3:8). Finally, Peter declares that love must be *the* distinguishing mark of the Christian community (4:8), for love creates an atmosphere where forgiveness is quickly granted and where each serves the other for the glory of God (4:10-11). Thus, in relation to the people of God, holy conduct issues in love for and service to the Christian's brothers and sisters.

Holiness, however, also implies a responsibility to those outside the Christian community. Peter expresses this responsibility in general terms in 2:11-12. In these verses, he introduces the principles which must govern Christians' lives as exiles in the world and, in so doing, he gives a more concrete expression of holy conduct. Negatively, believers must abstain from fleshly desires which wage war against the soul. Positively, they must maintain good conduct among the pagans so that, on the day of visitation, the pagans will glorify God. Hence, holy conduct not only involves an inward concern for purity but also an outward concern for what Peter calls "good conduct" or "doing good."

Throughout the remainder of the epistle (especially 2:13-4:11) Peter applies his call to "do good" to the specific situations faced by his readers. We may summarize his instructions in the following way. To "do good" a believer submits and shows honour to all persons (2:13-17, 3:1-2, 7, 8), shapes conduct on the basis of commitment to God (2:19; 3:16; 3:21), suffers unjustly (2:18-19); 3:9-14; 4:1-6), repudiates vengeance (2:19-23; 3:9, 15-16; 4:1), relies upon God's ultimate vindication (2:12; implied in 2:23 and 3:9; 3:10-17; 4:5-6), and loves fellow believers (3:8; 4:7-11). All of these expressions of "doing good" are concrete ways in which believers actualize their call to holiness.

When we examine Peter's more specific elaboration of holiness in terms of "doing good" it becomes clear that, in Peter's mind, the ultimate expression of "doing good" is seen in the example of Jesus. In the reader's situation of conflict and suffering, good conduct must be patterned after that of Jesus. For this very reason Peter insists that a holy life of "doing good" compels the readers to respond to hostility with humility, non-retaliation, and complete trust in God's sovereign rule over all things. In fact, this is how Jesus responded to his conflicts and sufferings and, for Peter, such responses are to be the norm for all believers. Therefore, in this sense, holiness means Christ-likeness.

Finally, Peter qualifies holiness by a frank admission that holy conduct inevitably leads to conflict with the prevailing norms of society and culture. Throughout the epistle it is the distinctive calling and conduct of Christians which accounts for the hostility they receive from unbelievers. Hence, since the readers no longer participate in the profligacy of their pre-Christian lives, they are the objects of abuse (4:3-4). They no longer live according to human desires but rather according to the will of God and this results in conflict with the status quo (4:2). As a result, holy conduct implies a way of life that questions the prevailing values of a non-Christian society and offers an alternative to the status quo.

Our investigation of Peter's call to holiness and its implications for Christian conduct yields the following conclusions. Holiness is a way of life which involves a consistently faithful response to God's will. Believers actualize this way of life as they appropriate the power of Christ's redemptive work. Moreover, in their daily experience, holiness implies relationships ordered by *bona fide* acts of love and by good conduct, the supreme example of which is seen in Jesus. Finally, the call to holiness comes as an invitation to non-conformity. Christians live as no other people. They are a *holy people*, a people for God's own possession who, in contrast to the world, live in utter faithfulness to God's call.

### **7.2.3 Implications For Understanding Membership**

The fundamental role holiness plays in all of Peter's remarks on Christian behaviour and lifestyle is impressive. In this sense, at least, Peter would be at home in the broader Wesleyan tradition. He uses an amazing variety of expressions to describe the nature of holy conduct. Thus, absolute faithfulness to God's will, loving relationships, a rejection of dishonesty and falsehood, acts of mercy and kindness, a refusal to return evil for evil,

and a willingness to suffer for righteousness' sake may constitute a list of practical expressions of holiness. According to Peter, in fact, all forms of Christian discipleship must be seen as expressions of the holy life. Christian discipleship implies a way of life patterned after the life of Jesus who, for Peter, provides the most profound expression of good and holy conduct.

Peter's conception of holiness and its role in his understanding of Christian life has important implications for the way we understand church membership as a "holiness denomination." The following observations will seek to make those implications clear.

### **1. Holiness is grounded in God's redemptive work for humankind.**

As we have seen, the call to a holy life is based upon the deliverance effected by Christ's death and resurrection. Consequently, Peter affirms that the life of holiness begins when believers are reborn through God's mercy and, as a result, experience a decisive break with their past way of life. The subsequent call to holiness, therefore, builds upon this initial sanctification and, indeed, the believers' response to that call becomes possible only as they appropriate the power of the cross.

If we ask the question what, or who, makes us holy, there can be only one answer. God makes us holy on the basis of Christ's finished work. Our confidence that we may live a holy life—"perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1)—must be placed in the sufficiency and potency of Christ's work. 1 Peter provides no suggestion that we become holy or maintain holiness of life on the strength of human effort. Rather, we are offered a basis for holiness as a "work of grace"—God's grace.

If belonging to God's people in general, and to the Free Methodist Church in particular, means being a holy people, then Peter urges us to anticipate the reality of holy living as a consequence of God's work in the human heart, not as a consequence of human discipline. To be sure, holy living is disciplined in character, but the disciplines of holy living are embraced by persons made new by grace. The disciplines in themselves do not make persons holy.

If our practice of membership implies or encourages an understanding of holiness as the consequence of discipline rather than grace, we are at variance with Peter's (and the New Testament's) view of holiness. In the same vein, if we rely on adherence to lifestyle disciplines as the primary evidence and stimulus for holy living, we must ask whether, in fact, we are encouraging confidence in human effort rather than divine grace. To rephrase the question, does our approach to membership honour or undermine the biblical insistence that holiness of life is God's work in, and for the sake of, his people?

### **2. The call to holiness is issued only to those who belong.**

Only the people of God, who once were not a people at all, but now are (2:10), receive the call to holiness. For 1 Peter, and for the New Testament in general, holiness is never a demand or an expectation placed upon people who are not yet, or not quite, the People

of God. The call to holiness comes exclusively to those who are already and completely recognized as belonging to "God's people." That their belonging is complete (or "full") can be seen from the Old Testament ascriptions of honour and responsibility Peter applies to his readers. To those who are by grace "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people fully possessed by God" (2:9) comes the summons to holy living.

This fact suggests a critical link between belonging (belonging fully) and actually living a holy life. That link raises questions about the propriety of issuing the call to holiness to persons whom we do not recognize as fully belonging. At the very least, such a practice stands at variance with the biblical precedent. For, indeed, on the basis of the scriptural call to holiness, a strong sense of belonging would seem to be pre-requisite to a believer's growth in holiness. If that is so, our current membership practice, in effect, reverses the process, making growth in holiness the pre-requisite to belonging!

### **3. The call to holiness requires belonging if believers are to hear and heed it.**

In a sense this implication follows from the preceding. That is, the summons to holiness comes only to those who belong to God's people because only they are able to receive it. 1 Peter makes this fact clear in a number of ways.

As we have seen, Peter qualifies holiness carefully as social and relational in character. Such social holiness manifests itself in two different directions. First, the holy people of God enjoy a sense of family with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Indeed, the radical new life God gives his people requires the imagery of rebirth (1:3, 23). And, this rebirth is rebirth into a family where love for brother and sister is the rule. In their reception of the gospel believers are reborn and thus cleansed so they may express fervent love toward others in the family of God (see 1:22-23). On the basis of their rebirth and the new capacity for love within God's family, Peter urges his readers to love one another (1:22). Later in the epistle, Peter sums up the community's primary responsibility as they anticipate the final revelation of Jesus' glory. Again, the call is to let love rule their relationships (see 4:7ff).

This familial love, which is one expression of the social character of holiness, surely suggests the requisite of belonging. If holiness cannot help but express itself in love, and not love generally toward all but specifically expressed toward brothers and sisters, then a sense (and the reality) of full belonging within the "family" would seem necessary to realizing the holy life. Again the question is whether our approach to membership requires holiness to be the pre-requisite to full inclusion in the family when, in fact, genuine holiness is not envisioned apart from such inclusion.

The second direction in which social holiness manifests itself is toward the unbelieving world. Clearly, 1 Peter understands the people of God as strategically and effectively engaged in the structures of the world. Believers are to do "good," which calls them to shape their behaviour with primary reference to God. Such behaviour will, in turn, refute foolish charges made against them and will lead pagans to glorify God on the "day of



visitation" (see 2:11-12, 15). Holiness, according to 1 Peter, directs the believer outwardly in responsible witness and mission to the world.

Holiness thus expressed, however, poses a danger to the believer. The world is the place where sinful desires tempt and make war against the soul (2:11). The world is the arena where the devil prowls around seeking whom he may devour (5:8). The world in which holiness bears responsible witness is not safe. How can the people of God carry out the mandate of holiness in a hostile world without losing their identity through compromise?

Peter's letter points to the sustaining and cohesive power of the faith-community as the family of God. The love and care of the family support and sustain believers as the holy people of God during their sojourn in an alien world.

Of course, to live in exile, and to carry out the responsibilities of holiness in a hostile world, is to meet with conflict and suffering. That is, genuine holiness inevitably leads believers to situations of challenge and confrontation with the unbelieving world. How can believers make good on the call to stand up to the alien values of the world and maintain their identity as the holy people of God? Peter's letter again points to the sustaining and supporting dynamic at work within the family.

Therefore, belonging to the family is not only necessary for hearing the call to holiness, it is necessary for obeying that call in the midst of alienation and hostility. If our approach to membership in any way requires believers to establish or substantiate holiness in order to belong to the church family, we are (again) reversing the sequence so observable in 1 Peter. Of greater consequence, by denying or delaying full inclusion in the family, we are discouraging growth in holiness. Holiness that leads to responsible witness and mission in the world requires the resources that come with full inclusion in the family of God.

#### **4. Finally, Peter's vision of the holy life appears to be both broader and deeper than we have often envisioned.**

Holiness embraces all of one's relationships, one's public and private life, and one's "secular" and "sacred" pursuits. It is, for Peter, a singular defining quality of the people of God. In contrast, much of the holiness movement (which includes the Free Methodist Church) has domesticated holiness by limiting it to traditional concerns such as forms of entertainment or personal vices. This domestication has allowed us to focus on matters relatively insignificant compared to the Scripture's broad and deep vision of the holy life. The domestication of holiness so common among us raises the question of whether our approach to membership, to the belonging that appears to be so critical to living the holy life, does not actually tend to impede progress in genuine holiness and, in exchange, settle for a tamer, more manageable version. Indeed, rethinking and reformulating our approach to belonging could be the key to re-invigorating our understanding and our practice of the holy life!

#### 7.2.4 Summary of Key Points

First, holiness of life is God's work in us, God's work of grace. Our approach to holiness, and to a related reality—belonging, must not suggest that a holy life is the consequence of human discipline.

Second, the call to holiness comes to "insiders," to those who belong to the people of God, which Peter describes in family terms.

Third, the summons to holy living can be heard and heeded only by those who belong. Only they have the necessary resources for living the holy life, viz., the support and nurture of the community of believers.

Fourth, holy living challenges culture shaped by merely human considerations. To live a holy life is truly not to be of this world. But truly not to be of this world requires the family of God that supports and sustains believers in standing against the tide of a culture alien to their faith. In the absence of that family, holy living cannot be sustained and often accommodates to external, provincial, and more manageable forms and patterns of life. This accommodation assures a certain kind of uniformity among our people but it forfeits Scriptures' vision of radical holiness of life.

### 7.3 Historical Uses of The General Rules

by Paul Livermore

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In 1974 the Free Methodist Church adopted for the first time a Membership Covenant (1989 Discipline, Par. A/154-160). Much of what is in the Covenant, however, appeared in the church's first Discipline (1860) in a section called the General Rules for the United Societies (see the 1989 Discipline, Par. B/1032).

In fact, we can trace the Covenant prior to the Free Methodist Church. At the time of its founding in 1784 the Methodist Episcopal Church, from which Free Methodism came, adopted the General Rules as its standard of membership. These General Rules were originally written by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, in 1743 (WJWB 9:69-73, 541-543, and 547-550). Thus, the story of the Membership Covenant really begins with John Wesley.

#### 7.3.1 John Wesley

Wesley's *ordo salutis* ("order of salvation") refers to the process of salvation. It embraces the components of our soteriology in their logical order.

John Wesley had a clear view of the process through which people move from being dead in their sins to fully alive, mature, and holy people (see "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," 1746, sermon 9, WJWB 1:249ff. and "Christian Perfection," 1741, sermon 40, WJWB 2:97ff.). The following schema summarizes the major contours of Wesley's *ordo salutis* (Lindström 105ff.).

(1) The natural stage:

- (1a) God works secretly to move our lives into a position where he might awaken us to our needs; but
- (1b) we are full of sin and guilt and ignorant of our condition and danger.

(2) The legal stage:

- (1a) God awakens us to our condition and danger, and
- (1b) we respond to this with alarm and earnest desire to be done with sin and obey God's will.
- (2a) God gradually awakens us to the provisions of grace for forgiveness and healing, and
- (2b) we respond with earnest efforts to change our conduct and draw on God's help by using the means of grace.

(3) The justified and initially sanctified stage:

- (1a) God offers free forgiveness through Christ's atonement, and
- (1b) we respond by trusting in Christ and forsake any hope of God's pardon on the basis of our merit,
- (2a) God gradually awakens to the depths of sin in our inner person, and
- (2b) we persistently try to root out sin and love God and our neighbour completely.

(4) The entirely sanctified stage:

- (1a) God persuades us of the provisions for full deliverance from sin in the inner person, and
- (1b) we trust that God will so cleanse us.
- (2a) God enables us to see increasingly practical dimensions for us to love him and our neighbour, and
- (2b) we continue to grow in this love.

It has been argued that, since Wesley generally pictured the stages as distinct, he also believed they were separable. But it can also be argued that Wesley had a fluid model in mind. People generally move by degrees, on a continuum, rather than by sharp and sudden leaps. And steady progress may include occasional regress. While each step has



its own characteristics, in actual life the movement from one stage to the next may seem incremental, even painfully slow.

### **Wesley's Plan for His Societies.**

Wesley matched the plan for his societies to his *ordo salutis*. His reasoning was that people need nurturing suited for the present stage in their journey of faith:

The awakened stage - the societies at large and the classes,  
The justified stage - the bands, and  
The entirely sanctified state - the select societies.

### **Requirement for Membership in Wesley's Societies.**

To become a member of Wesley's societies, it was not required that one have reached the stage of justification. It was necessary, however, that one clearly be awakened. In Wesley's words (see 1989 Discipline, Par. B/1032 [53-55]):

There is only one condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies, "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But, wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

FIRST, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practiced: such as....

- SECONDLY, by doing good, by being, in every kind, merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to all men....

THIRDLY, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are....

Those who were truly awakened and put themselves within the discipline of the society moved into the place of trust and assurance. The classes provided a spiritual environment for awakened persons where they were nurtured, challenged, supported, and guided into the Christian life.

### **A Teleological Ethic.**

What did Wesley intend to accomplish through the Rules? He wrote them for the Society of Newcastle-on-the-Tyne. On February 20, 1743 Wesley purged the society of over 50 careless members, about 800 remaining. The first edition of the Rules was dated two days later, and on March 6 he read them to the society and "desired every one seriously to consider whether he was willing to conform thereto or no" (JJW 3:67f.). The Rules, thus, formed a standard for membership.

But we can pursue the issue further. While the Rules gave a standard for membership, why did Wesley chose these Rules?

Wesley believed the Rules derived from the Scriptures, and he viewed them as binding because God gave them. But Wesley also thought of the legal requirements of the Scriptures (and thus the disciplines of the General Rules) instrumentally: they produce a happy and holy life. He developed this theme in "The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law" (sermon 34, WJWB 2:4ff.).

We can compare Wesley in this regard with the Reformers. Calvin and especially Luther were primarily interested in forensic righteousness (being in a legally right relationship with God). But Wesley was interested in the cure or healing of the soul. The real goal of salvation, in his view, was to wean the soul from sin and self so we can truly love God and neighbour (Lindström 177f., 216-218).

Thus Wesley understood the working out of salvation as a task of growth. The goal can be stated simply: to love God with all our hearts and our neighbour as ourselves. The way to reach this goal is complex. Wesley systematically thought through the steps of the normal course of life ("The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God," sermon 19 WJWB 1:43ff.). He resisted setting the goal beyond human capacity but wanted to keep it as high as God's standards - thus the paradoxical claim that we can never achieve absolute perfection but must reach for "Christian Perfection" (sermon 40, WJWB 2:100ff.).

### **7.3.2 The Methodist Episcopal Church**

#### **The Methodist Societies.**

The discussion so far has not raised the complex question of the relation between Methodist Societies and the Church of England. Wesley stated that the purpose of the United Societies was to reform the Church of England (question 3, Tigert 535). He urged Methodists to worship at the Church while participating in their own meetings. Thus, historically, the Rules were given for a movement within the Church of England.

#### **The Membership Standard of the MEC.**

With the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the General Rules became the membership standard of an independent church.

The first Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1785) did not cite the General Rules, though it named them as the standard of membership (question 16 Tigert 545f.). Beginning in 1788 the Rules appeared in the Discipline's text (Tigert 469).

An addition was made by the General Conference of 1808. This Conference established for the first time the items protected by the Restrictive Rule, one being the General Rules (15f.; see the FMC Discipline of 1989 Par. A/226, A/227).

### **The Function of the Rules in the MEC.**

In the Discipline of 1798 the founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church explained how they understood the Rules. They described them as "one of the completest systems of christian ethics or morals, for its size, which ever was published" (135 and 145).

These early leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church also believed the General Rules assisted in the process of salvation. They described their church as "a spiritual hospital, where souls come to be cured of their spiritual diseases. The members therefore who compose our class meetings vary exceedingly in the state of their minds and the degrees of their experience" (151).

### **7.3.3 The Free Methodist Church of 1860**

The first Discipline of the Free Methodist Church appeared soon after the church was organized in August, 1860. While the Discipline of 1856 of the Methodist Episcopal Church served as the model for the first Free Methodist Discipline, its authors made revisions which reflected their beliefs.

#### **Standards for Membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church.**

As stated earlier, membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church required that one be "awakened" and in pursuit of the power of godliness; it did not require having reached evangelical faith. This was clearly visible in the Discipline of 1856 (30f.).

Q. How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the Church?

A. 1. Let none be received into the Church until they are recommended by a leader with whom they have met at least six months on trial, and have been baptized; and shall on examination by the minister in charge, before the Church, give satisfactory assurance both of the correctness of their faith and their willingness to observe and keep the rules of the Church.

#### **Evidence of Scriptural Conversion in the Free Methodist Church.**

The initial edition of the FM Discipline made striking changes in the very section we have just considered. It reads:

1. Let none be admitted on probation, until they give satisfactory evidence of Scriptural conversion, and are recommended by some member of our Church.
2. Let none be received into full connection, unless they give evidence of a renewed heart, and until they are recommended by their leader, and have met in class six months on probation, have been baptized, and can give

satisfactory answers to the following questions which shall be proposed to them before the society:

1. Have you the witness of the Spirit that you are a child of God?
2. Have you that perfect love which casteth out fear? If not, will you diligently seek until you obtain it?
3. Is it your purpose to devote yourself the remainder of your life wholly to the service of God, doing good to your fellow men and working out your own salvation with fear and trembling?
4. Will you forever lay aside all superfluous ornaments, and adorn yourself in modest apparel, with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with brodered hair, or gold or pearls, or costly array, but which becometh those professing godliness with good works?
5. Will you abstain from connection with all secret societies, keeping yourself free to follow the will of the Lord in all things?
6. Do you subscribe to our articles of religion, our general rules, and our Discipline, and are you willing to be governed by the same?
7. Have you Christian fellowship and love for the members of this society, and will you assist them as God shall give you ability in carrying on the work of the Lord?

The person giving affirmative answers to the above questions shall, with the consent of three-fourths of all the numbers present at the society meeting, be admitted to all the privileges of a member.

We note three features in this passage:

First, those eligible for membership must at the least be in what Wesley called the evangelical stage. And to be classified as such, they must not only be willing to observe the Rules but give evidence of a Scriptural conversion. The changes in the Free Methodist Discipline implied a critique of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The MEC failed because it let in too many unconverted people.

Second, the natural or legal stage was eliminated from the *ordo salutis* conceived by the new FMC. With Wesley, a critical turning point came at the time of awakening. On the other hand, he hardly saw this as a place to stop. In fact, he designed the system to move the members of his societies along in the stages of faith. Still, those who were "truly

awakened" had made a decisive move. In its *ordo salutis*, however, the Discipline of the new FMC collapsed the awakened stage into the natural stage.

Third, the historical function of the General Rules was largely lost. On the one hand, Wesley and the early MEC used them as a membership standard. They excluded people who were not serious. And those who persisted in violating the Rules and resisted the direction of class leaders were to be expelled. But the Rules also aimed at moving people along the path. In the nascent FMC, while the teleological function of the Rules was still retained to move people from the justified to the sanctified stage, it became swallowed up in their function as a membership standard.

#### 7.3.4 Conclusions

We have seen three distinguishable uses of the Rules from their creation in 1743 to the formation of the Free Methodist Church in 1860: (1) as a guide in the *ordo salutis* for awakened people; (2) as a system of Christian ethics which makes for a holy and happy life; and (3) as the conduct standard for determining who can be a member of a given body.

These three uses are not necessarily separable. While we can argue that Wesley adopted the first and second uses, and the nascent FMC the third, each may have embraced the others as well.

The Free Methodist Church, from its very beginning, adopted a believers' church ecclesiology, although of a special kind. A believer's church model says that whoever has saving faith is fully eligible for membership. In the nascent FMC, evangelical faith and the evidence of conversion included conformity to the Rules.

One more remarkable thing about this historical survey of the Rules over the nearly one hundred and twenty years we have examined merits noting. While the uses to which the Rules were put could vary, the text has remained essentially the same. Context has determined usage, not just text. The primary function of the Rules has reflected an ecclesiastical self-consciousness which in turn has mirrored the church's soteriology.

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## **7.4 Social Psychology's Insights For Church Membership**

by Dennis Wayman

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From its inception, Social Psychology has been interested in religion. Although not always favourable toward its purposes or beliefs, one of the primary arenas in which the social and psychological needs of mankind are expressed is religion. Some of the earliest findings in the field of Social Psychology have indicated that much of what we have ascribed as "religious," however, is in fact the group's effect on the individual. Although it can be reasonably argued that the church is a different kind of "group" than other groups, it is nevertheless a group. As the Discipline states: "It is both divine and human, heavenly and earthly, ideal and imperfect." Understanding the human/earthly aspects of church life can help us better accomplish our divine/heavenly task.

Although there are many dynamics that relate to church life, the following have direct bearing on the current practice of membership policies and procedures.

### **1. Absolute need to be loved, held, touched.**

Some of the first experiments in the field of Social Psychology involved the deprivation of small primates from their mothers. The result was fear, insecurity, clinging to substitutes, sexual abnormalities and social inabilities. During later experiments it was shown that young children who were not held, cuddled and loved had a lower growth rate, more tears and abnormal social adjustment. More recent studies have found that the "failure to thrive" among young children is directly related to the mother's acceptance of the child. Although the mother may say that she loves and wants the child, researchers found that the action of picking up and holding the child close was the vital communication of truly loving the child.

To bring this insight into church life, there is a clear implication that the affectionate acceptance of "new" people will directly effect their spiritual growth. As new persons are "born into" the church, their inclusion into the love and affection of the social system will determine whether they become mature, loving, accepting "adults." If there is not an open fellowship with simple acceptance, then the future ability of the church to turn around and love the next generation will be impeded.



In one orphanage, the rules of the hospital were such that nurses were not to stop and "coddle" the children. The outcome was insecure and physically/socially impoverished children. The same is probably true of the church. In any church where the rules are such that present members are not allowed to openly embrace newcomers into the warm "inner life" of the group, this withheld affection/acceptance will impoverish the new persons attempting to join.

Lyle Schaller in his book, Assimilating New Members, describes what causes people to become and remain as a part of a church. He describes such things as denominational identity (which he says is a "factor of decreasing influence"), magnetism of the minister, kinfolk ties, ethnic background, etc. But he says "the healthiest and most productive organizing principle" is a structure of warm and caring groups.

This same position has been validated in which "a study of dropouts from Methodist churches, (found) that the most frequently given reason for leaving was that 'they did not feel they were accepted or wanted.' Likewise, the most frequent reason active members gave for joining was 'a sense of being accepted, loved and wanted'" (Colson).

Admittedly, this truth raises a multitude of questions for the church. In a healthy church that is reaching out to persons "just as they are," the integrity of the membership requirements may be threatened. The temptation is to downplay the importance of membership in order to offer the "warm hand of fellowship" to everyone. The solution of "preparatory membership," on the other hand, has the emotional effect of saying that someone is a "preparatory friend."

Admittedly, the foregoing discussion does not address the issue of an "institution having the right to establish guidelines for corporate membership and voting rights." But any corporation, sacred or secular, which ignores the social psychological aspects of life is unwise. "Corporate cultures" can be established which are inclusive as easily as those which are exclusive. Guidelines can be established which make it the corporate expectation that people be warmly welcomed. Although changing the corporate rules will not immediately change the social structure and cause people to actually welcome new people, it will remove the corporate/organizational support away from exclusive behaviours to support of inclusive ones.

## **2. Identity versus identity diffusion.**

Erikson's work in the area of self-identity has brought a host of studies to this subject. He writes that a person has a need to know who he is and who he is becoming as defined by the group to which he belongs. If for some reason a definition of who he/she is to be and become is unreachable, then the result is a general malaise and frustration.

The implications for church life are obvious and yet challenging. The holding up of specific standards of life creates a definition of self that is difficult to attain. And yet at

the same time, these standards define who we are. The absence of such definition could have just as negative an effect. The art of ministry is to enable a person to hold tight to the goals of the maturing Christian life, while at the same time not becoming discouraged with any day by day evaluation of the achievement of those goals. When the institutional requirements for self-definition have been stated in terms which are not being met on any given day, then the insecure as well as thoughtful member becomes disenfranchised.

In support of a concrete definition of our identity, there are many studies which explore the creation of group identity through the use of common symbols, values and self-ideals. These commonly held views create a "community" which not only is defined by, but helps define, the individual. To think that we can do away with a value-driven definition of our congregations by having "no membership requirements" only changes our definition by creating a new value. A group needs to have an "identity" to which the members freely are "shifting." But in a recent study at Kent University, it was found that group members are more likely to openly accept the group norms and have positive relationships to the group from "self-focused attention" rather than codified requirements (Abrams and Brown).

In recent research at Carnegie Mellon University, it was found that "insofar as people are motivated to belong to a group to receive the reinforcements that come from group membership, they will be motivated to conform to the norms of that group in order to maintain (or establish) group membership." This same research found that there are three factors which will increase this: "1. The clarity of the individual's awareness that he or she is a member of a group. 2. The degree of positive and negative evaluations associated with the group. 3. The emotional attachment to the group and to those evaluations." Thus, "the more strongly other people treat a person as part of a group, the more strongly will that group become a part of the person's social identity. Accordingly the clarity of an individual's awareness that he or she is a member of a particular group will almost always be a function of how other people, both fellow group members and non group members, treat that person" (Lau).

Therefore, the question is not whether we will have standards or values, but how those values interplay with the "self-identity" need to belong and to be able to achieve those standards. If the standards are seen as commonly held goals which, in Paul's words, we have not already obtained but are "pressing on toward the goal," then we can belong to an ever maturing group. Our identity would then be defined by our connection with a group which not only holds high values, but supports people in the process of attaining those high values. Both acceptance of where we are today, and a pressing on to what we will be tomorrow, provides a definition which meets both personal and corporate needs.



### **3. Developing strong attitudes toward the denomination is a complex process enveloping four specific functions.**

#### **A. The Adjustment Function.**

This could also be called the "control-the-church-to-be-good-for-me-personally" function. We feel good about those groups which help us, and we strive to make the group serve our personal needs. This self-serving aspect of our social lives is a dynamic of church life no matter how we define membership.

#### **B. The Ego-defensive Function.**

This is the need to "look good" no matter what. In church membership dynamics, any rules which make me "not look good" are immediately a difficulty. In membership classes, pastors inevitably find that the Christian Conduct statements activate a variety of ego-defenses. Some persons attack the rules, some attack the church, some attack the pastor, some attack themselves, and others simply put on a defensive mask of compliance when in fact they don't intend to change. But whatever the defense, the Ego-defense Function is activated every time a person's behaviour is dissonant with the stated conduct requirements.

#### **C. The Value-expressive Function.**

This is the reaction people have who hear standards that do define their lives in contrast to the ego-defensive reactions when the standards don't define their lives. Just as involuntary and predictable, when persons hear attitudes which reflect their cherished beliefs and reinforce their self-image, this function will bond them to the group and reinforce the strength of the group's demands. Not only does the person feel validated and their attitudes are reinforced, but the group has another champion for its cause. In recent studies this phenomenon, also called "choice shifts," has shown "...that if group members share a given view, they become more extreme in their opinions...."

When the definition of the group is defined by anything less than ultimate values, each additional "member" will cause the group to be stronger in their exclusion toward those who do not share the lesser value. Thus a group can define themselves in very narrow terms and only include persons who are already in agreement to become a part. With each new person, the definition will become increasingly extreme. Researchers have found that "...individuals express more polarized positions in group discussions only because they anticipate social reinforcement for doing so." This process is called a "social comparison process."

Now obviously, if the whole world were Christian and the church existed just to provide a place where Christians could express their mutual values, this would be no problem. But the church is the place where people are transformed from one life to another, "by the renewal of their minds." The value-expressive function keeps the non-Christian out when anything but God's-love-for-all-of-us-in-Jesus-Christ is the cohesive value.

That is not to say we must do away with values in order to find the lowest common denominator with which non-Christians can agree. Our doctrine of inspiration elevates the words of Scripture to the level of universal values. Both Jesus and the rabbis taught that all the commandments can be expressed in our love of God, love of others, and love of self. Love then is the highest common value under which we can then work to renew a person's mind about the lesser values.

#### **D. The Knowledge Function.**

This function is also called a "world view," where persons develop a paradigm in which to place their experiences and other information. Every person develops a "bias" or "prejudice" or "stored disposition" about certain ways of living and being, and puts others within the categories of their "knowledge function." Again, the problem is that if our present knowledge function is such that we define ourselves in certain conduct terms, and are "prejudiced" toward those who do not define themselves in those terms, then we will exclude them before we ever have the opportunity to know them, care for them and love them.

Looking at all four of these attitude functions, we see that the group with a codified determinate standard will experience the psychological effect of becoming more and more rigid over time. The group "works for them" and reinforces their self-perception (the stronger the group, the more it reinforces their "stored dispositions" and the more it excludes those who have an ego-defensive reaction), the more shared-value-persons find each other, the stronger the value-expressive function, which creates stronger "stored dispositions" because the knowledge function, which started the cycle, reinforces the participants.

It can easily happen, then, that a group which began as followers of Jesus Christ and lovers of all people, can become a reinforced group of "standard bearers" who are no longer united around Jesus, but rather around their determinate shared values. Or it can become a group that defines its identity in terms of its relationship with God: "the church being an organism and not an unchanging institution" can become reinforced around its shared value of love for God, others and self. The dynamic operates the same in both groups, but since in the latter the shared value is universal and inclusive, the end product is different.

#### **4. Behaviour is not controlled by attitudes alone.**

Multitudes of studies have been completed to try and predict human behaviour. The belief that shared values translate into behaviour conformity is not verified by these studies. To bring this insight to bear on the church, the fact that a person agrees with a behavioral standard does not predict that the person will in fact behave that way. Researchers have found that the centrality of the attitude, as well as the strength of the attitude, will effect behaviour, but equal to all is the immediate situation and the

perception of the person concerning it. In other words, the research clearly shows that cognitive attitudes, or rules, do not define how a person will actually act.

If in fact action is our goal in "Christian Conduct" and not just cognitive affirmation of certain values, then the reality is that membership standards will not assure this. This reality of Social Psychology has caused groups such as ours to put into place some kind of "conduct police," but this usually causes there to be less, rather than more, compliance of action. Within our group this need for "policing" has produced the Membership Care Committee. These "police" have authority to recommend that people be removed from leadership and membership for infractions such as marital difficulties (Par. 341.8). We also tell this committee: "When members do not keep the covenant and habitually violate their vows, it is the responsibility of the pastor(s) and a membership care committee to seek in love to restore them. If such members refuse the ministry of restoration, they must be dealt with according to the due process of the church" (Par. 364.3).

Durkheim, in his now classic work on social structures, noted that this punitive control is universal. He notes that as societies become organized around shared beliefs and sentiments, these individual beliefs and sentiments soon take on a "life of its own," and individual persons soon find themselves accountable to the group "life." "If these sentiments are violated, a terrible emotional reaction by others in the collective is unleashed. The response...can be described only as vengeance seeking expression." Durkheim "describes the emotion behind the penal response as "choler," an ancient label for anger, hostility and even rage" (Fisher and Chon). To institutionalize this "choler" response is extremely harmful to the spiritual vitality and purposes of the church. We must approach the problem of compliance in a different way.

## **5. Group norms, on the other hand, will predict behaviour.**

For the social psychologist, "group norms" are those behavioral rules about which the group will encourage obedience or discourage their violation. It is interesting to note that "the very existence of any explicitly formulated rule suggests that the prescribed behaviour is not dependable without the application of sanctions -- either positive in the form of some sort of reward, or negative, in the form of punishment." The research has also shown that the acceptance of written rules requires the acceptance of sanctions for or against fellow members. The research goes on to describe the phenomenon that once a rule becomes written, then the very process itself effects the perception and judgment of the members. This phenomenon is called "the autokinetic phenomenon." In groups in which group norms are extremely strong, persons will actually be unable to differ in their opinions from others, distrusting their own perceptions or judgments and relying on the "truth" of the group. This phenomenon can be shown not only in the perceptions of the group's members, but in their cognition and in their evaluations of right and wrong, good and bad. Research has shown that groups with strong group norms are vulnerable to autocratic leadership. They are "comfortable groups" with a predictable, stable conformity. This conformity usually carries with it the feeling of moral "oughtness."

In a very disturbing area of study within Social Psychology, it has been proven by multiple studies that there is a positive correlation between church involvement and racial prejudice. Three Roman Catholic researchers in the Netherlands state the problem: "The relationship between religiosity and prejudice is a recurrent issue in the scientific study of religion and a common topic of discussion among American social scientists. Several studies have documented that church members are more likely to be prejudiced than individuals not formally affiliated with organized religion, and numerous examples in the predominantly American literature have concluded that Christian beliefs are positively related to prejudice against ethnic and racial minority groups" (Eisinga, Felling and Peters).

In an excellent analysis, these researchers showed that what is being measured is not Christian faith, but the social-psychological phenomenon of authoritarianism. "Authoritarians are inclined to view the social world as inevitable, absolute, and external to man in origin and character, and they tend to adopt a reified, fatalistic worldview, infused with superhuman authority...many rank-and-file-Christians...are inclined to submit themselves to transcendental and institutional authorities...." Persons who nominally attend church (Sunday morning but no other involvement) tend to be high in authoritarianism and prejudice.

Although we could argue that the Roman Catholic faith reinforces authoritarianism more than the Protestant mindset, the principle of authoritarianism is functioning in all groups including our own.

As mentioned above, one component of this reality is the threat to the group of non-conformity. Research has shown that members of a group have a "visceral, physical reaction" to nonconformity. It literally "turns our stomach." Anger, as a response to the perceived threat to ourselves or the group, is stronger the stronger the group norms. All pastors have watched as mature and saintly members become "unglued" by the non-conformity of a fellow member, a reaction they would not have toward the most heinous action of a non-members.

The implications are many. The written group norms which govern the church can easily become the autokinetic force behind our shared beliefs, rather than the Bible and our adherence to God's truth. Researchers have found there is an alternative to such rule-sanction phenomenon. They call it "internalized" values. Internalized values are individually chosen values, which may or may not be shared by the group. These internalized values are self-administered and there is no need for externally written rules or their accompanying sanctions. Researchers even choose a word that means a great deal to us in the church when they speak of "substitutability." For them "substitutability" means that every person in the group is willing to substitute themselves for every other person because of a mutual trust that has been built between them. The obvious theological truth of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ and our willingness to die for those we love is echoed by this research.

According to the findings of Social Psychology, we actually undermine our goal for spiritual maturity when we codify our group norms extra-biblically.

**Current research:** What follows is a sample of current research applying to this area of study.

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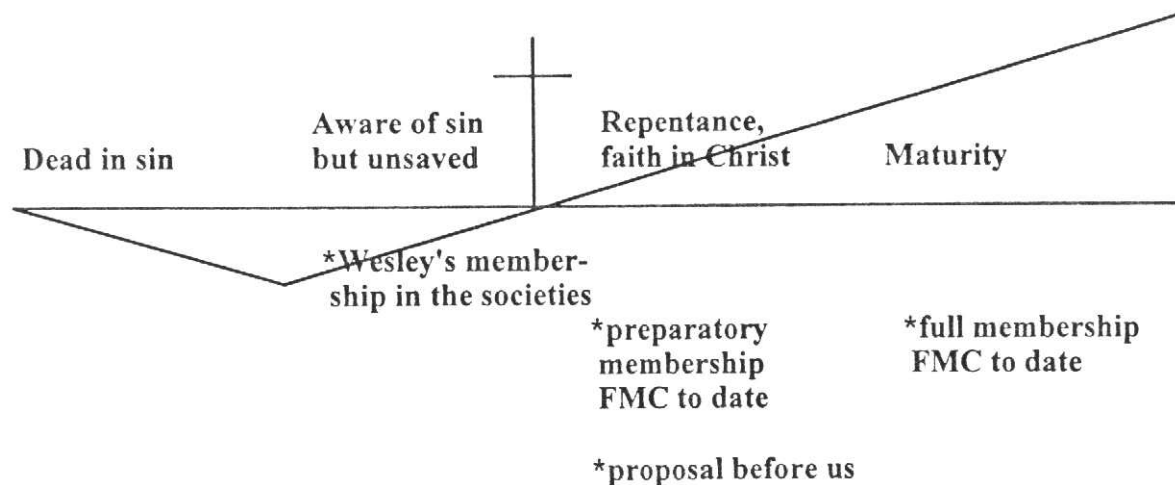
## 7.5 Summary

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**With regard to a biblical view of membership and theology of conversion:**

These papers reveal that a biblical view of membership and theology of conversion call for a shift in our requirements and practices. The history of Free Methodist thinking and practice with regard to "rules" reveals that Free Methodism had actually moved away from the role they had in Wesley's day. As well, the social sciences are showing us that making "maturity" an entrance requirement is counterproductive.

With regard to history, the following may depict what has been happening. Wesley had offered membership to "awakened" people (unsaved, but aware of their sin). Free Methodism moved the entry point so that only those who had advanced in the Christian walk could be received as members. The proposal being presented to us for ratification moves the entry point back to the time of conversion.



The new membership covenant changes the entry level in our church by focusing on repentance, faith and baptism as the primary requirements for membership. We should strive to follow the New Testament model outlined in the studies above. Our desire is to make entering into membership in the Free Methodist Church, as nearly as possible,

synonymous with entering into the body of Christ (see below: action requiring ratification).

### **With regard to our theology of divine empowerment for living the holy life:**

Comparing the two covenants reveals another theological improvement. Though it was no doubt unintentional, the old membership covenant seems to imply too much trust in our own human ability (though there is, in the preamble, a reference to “trusting in the enablement of the Holy Spirit and seeking the support of the other members of the church”). The subjects and verbs of the commitment sentences, taken at face value, leave the impression that the holy life is something we accomplish.

When they read in the old membership covenant, "I will...I will...I will not...I will...I will (18 times) with no final statement about dependence upon divine aid, and then read in the new, "We commit ourselves to...We commit ourselves to...(12 times)...We do this, by God's grace and power (4 times)" many persons experience the new as having a more biblical humility and focus on the empowerment of God in living the holy life.

The old covenant asked new believers, freshly converted, who want to become members, to stand up in front of the church and say "I will" 18 times as though it is all in their own strength. But if, after a few years of growth and training, they were to be ordained to leadership offices, they would respond, "...by the help of the Lord...the Lord being my helper." Thus, the old membership covenant came dangerously close to Pelagianism--teaching that humans can respond to God and overcome sin in their own strength. This is not the biblical view of the holy life. The new covenant corrects this.

### **With regard to our understanding of sin:**

As well, the new covenant clears up an inadvertent false impression about our perceptions about which sins are most damaging to the holy life. Because of the way Books of Discipline developed, it turned out that the membership covenant (in the constitution and changeable only through referendum around the world) contained many principles for the holy life and (currently) three specific prohibitions: !membership in secret societies and oathbound lodges, !the manufacture, sale, and use of alcoholic beverages and harmful drugs, and the cultivation, manufacture, sale, and use of tobacco, and !all forms of gambling. At the same time, these three particular denials of holy living were also listed in the fuller moral teaching of the church (in chapter III on Christian Conduct) along with such issues of immoral conduct as aborting unborn children, using pornography, marital infidelity, and homosexual behaviour (along with many statements of overall principles for the holy life).

By highlighting the three prohibitions, the old covenant seemed to imply that these were the most serious offenses. However, there is a deep conviction within the Christian

church that there are more damaging behaviours, to say nothing of the deeper peril of the sins of the spirit. The principled new covenant reflects this reality.

**With regard to our growing cultural diversity:**

In addition, this action helps an increasingly multi-cultural denomination be faithful to the same core vision in radically diverse contexts. The membership covenant before us for ratification is a statement of principled commitments that describe the Christlike life in ways that apply in all cultures in any age.

## **7.6 Recommendation**

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For all of these reasons, the Canadian Study Commission on Doctrine is recommending the ratification of the action of the 1995 North American General Conference.

### **7.6.1 Action Requiring Ratification - The Membership Covenant**

The following Membership Covenant was adopted by the North American General Conference. It is being referred to general and annual conferences of Free Methodism around the world for ratification.

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#### **The Membership Covenant**

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We confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By faith, we walk with Him. We commit ourselves to know Him in His full sanctifying grace.

#### **As Regards God**

As God's people, we reverence and worship Him.

We commit ourselves to cultivate habits of Christian devotion, submitting to mutual accountability, practicing private and corporate prayer, studying the Scriptures, attending public worship, and partaking of Holy Communion;

We commit ourselves to observe the Lord's Day, setting it apart for worship, renewal, and service;

We commit ourselves to give our loyalty to Christ and the church, refraining from any alliance which compromises our Christian commitment.

This we do, by God's grace and power.



### **As Regards Ourselves and Others**

As a people, we live wholesome and holy lives and show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs.

We commit ourselves to be free from habits and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body, or promote the same;

We commit ourselves to respect the worth of all persons as created in the image of God;

We commit ourselves to strive to be just and honest in all our relationships and dealings.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

### **As Regards the Institutions of God**

As a people, we honour and support the God-ordained institutions of family, state, and church.

We commit ourselves to honour the sanctity of marriage and the family;

We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ;

We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens, and we pray for all who lead.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

### **As Regards the Church**

As God's people, we express the life of Christ in the world.

We commit ourselves to contribute to unity in the church, cultivating integrity, love, and understanding in all our relationships;

We commit ourselves to practice the principles of Christian stewardship, for the glory of God and the growth of the church;

We commit ourselves to go into our world and make disciples.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

### **7.6.2 Becoming a Member**

The following matters are the sole responsibility of the Canadian General Conference. We recommend the adoption of the following membership process for becoming a member of the Free Methodist Church in Canada:

### **7.6.3 Conditions of Membership**

The only conditions for membership will be:

- a. Evidence of conversion (which includes awakening, repentance and faith).
- b. Receive baptism instruction, and receive the sacrament of baptism.
- c. Commitment to the pursuit of Christian growth.

### **7.6.4 Membership Procedures**

When those three conditions have been met, the procedure for entry into the church will include:

- a. Completion of the approved course of instruction for prospective members, where the history, theological distinctives, moral vision and the mission of the Free Methodist Church are clearly taught.
- b. An interview with the pastor or Membership Care Committee.
- c. An affirmative response to the questions for membership, before a public meeting of the church.

We also recommend to the 1996 General Conference that the following be the questions for membership:

**Pastor:** Beloved in the Lord, you have been baptized into Christ and come now to be received into membership in the Free Methodist Church. We rejoice, with you, in all God's mercies that have brought you to this hour, and we join our prayers with yours as you make this sacred undertaking.

**Pastor:** Do you have the assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus Christ?

**Candidate:** I do.

**Pastor:** Do you believe the Bible is God's written word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit and do you accept its authority for what you must believe and how you must live?

**Candidate:** I do.

**Pastor:** Do you here resolve, by God's grace, you will avail yourself of all means at your disposal to be holy in heart and life; means such as the liberating influences of Christ's cross, the cleansing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, the guidance of the sacred Scriptures, and the nurture and fellowship of the church?

**Candidate:** By God's enabling grace, I do resolve.

**Pastor:** Do you accept the constitution of the Free Methodist Church, with its Articles of Religion, Membership Covenant and its principles for the governance of the church?

**Candidate:** Trusting God's power to aid me, I do.

**Pastor:** As a follower of Jesus Christ, will you embrace the mission of the Free Methodist Church and will you join this company in giving time, talents and treasures to carry out that mission?

**Candidate:** With God's help, I will.

**Pastor:** I offer you the right hand of fellowship. I welcome you into the Free Methodist Church. May the experience of membership in this body enrich your life and the life of this company; and may your contribution to its life strengthen both you and all of us.

**7.7 Response**

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**SCOD BALLOT # 5**

**I vote to approve the referendum from the Free Methodist Constitutional Council to revise the membership covenant as found in sections 7.6.1 on pages SCOD - 98 and SCOD - 99.**

☐ **YES**

☐ **NO**

**SCOD BALLOT # 6**

**I vote to approve the proposed conditions and procedures of membership as found in sections 7.6.3 and 7.6.4 on pages SCOD - 100 and SCOD 101.**

☐ **YES**

☐ **NO**

## **7.7 Liturgical Form of the Membership Covenant**

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NASCOD has prepared the following edition of the new Membership covenant for use as a means of periodic recommitment and renewal on the part of all members, binding together both new and old members in covenant with God and the church.

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### **LITURGICAL FORM OF THE MEMBERSHIP COVENANT**

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Pastor: Let all the members now declare our confession and commitment to Christ and the church.

All: We confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By faith, we walk with Him. We commit ourselves to know Him in His full sanctifying grace.

#### **As Regards God**

Pastor: As God's people, who reverence and worship Him...

Will you earnestly cultivate habits of Christian devotion, submitting to mutual accountability, practicing private and corporate prayer, studying the Scriptures, attending public worship, and partaking of Holy Communion?

Will you observe the Lord's Day, setting it apart for worship, renewal, and service?

Will you give your loyalty to Christ and the church, refraining from any alliance which compromises your Christian commitment?

All: We will, by God's grace and power.

#### **As Regards Ourselves and Others**

Pastor: As a people who seek to live healthy and holy lives and strive to show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs...

Will you seek to be free from habits and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body?

Will you respect the worth of all persons as created in the image of God?

Will you strive to be just and honest in all your relationships and dealings?

All: We will, by God's grace and power.

**As Regards the Institutions of God**

Pastor: As a people who honour and support the God-ordained institutions of family, church, and state...

Will you honour the sanctity of marriage and the family?

Will you value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ?

Will you seek to be responsible citizens, and pray for all who lead?

All: We will, by God's grace and power.

**As Regards the Church**

Pastor: As God's people, who are a living expression of Christ in the world...

Will you contribute to unity in the church, cultivating integrity, love, and understanding in all your relationships?

Will you practice the principles of Christian stewardship, for the glory of God and the growth of the church?

Will you go into your world and make disciples?

All: We will, by God's grace and power.