



## How the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition Informs Our Evangelical Commitment

More than one hundred years ago, the Training School for Christian Workers was founded by Christians from the Holiness tradition. Through mergers with other institutions rooted in the Wesleyan-Holiness heritage, the emphasis on holiness was the ‘theological glue’ that held together disparate Christians and denominations in the ecumenical Training School that became Azusa Pacific University.

In the intervening decades, Wesleyanism grew in its influence in the development of the University. In the 1940s, ‘Daily Living Expectations’ were added to the Statement of Faith. It was not enough for Christians to affirm ‘right beliefs’, it was also important to affirm ‘right actions’ and a ‘right heart’, what Wesley called ‘heart-religion’. Through this integrating theological framework and ecumenical history, the liberal arts foundation of the University was forged. In the 2000s, a Position Statement on Evangelical Commitment was adopted, which affirmed the University’s ‘Wesleyan-Holiness heritage’. The Statement defined both the evangelical commitment of the University and its distinctive beliefs, values, and practices characteristic of holy living. Jesus Christ is the model of holiness, and the presence and work of the Holy Spirit makes holiness available to those who seek.

The Wesleyan-Holiness stream that has shaped this institution was foundational to the beginnings of the evangelical movement. John and Charles Wesley embodied in their lives and ministries the emphases that came to characterize the broader evangelical tradition—a concern for the conversion of the lost, continuing transformation of the believer toward Christian maturity, the expectation that the fruit of the Spirit would be increasingly manifest in the life of the Christian, ministry to the oppressed and marginalized, and the belief that every believer is gifted for and called to be active in ministry.

While not an emphasis exclusive to this movement, the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition gives foundation to our commitment to God first, the Lordship of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. It further provides centrality to a holistic understanding of salvation, which includes the following facets:

**Salvation is the integration of orthodoxy, Christian action, and the development of Christian character.** God seeks to transform all those who choose to be followers of Jesus in every aspect of life. Without an active expression of faith in action and in the transformation of our dispositions, orthodoxy becomes divisive and exclusive. In the absence of the historic beliefs of the Christian faith and a renewed character, action becomes rudderless and cold. Apart from a grounding in the affirmations and activities of faith, inner transformation becomes subjective and sedentary. Salvation calls us to confess truth, practice truth, and embody truth.

**Christian faith compels us to unity.** Those who embody the Wesleyan-Holiness stream of Christian faith affirm that differences in theology and practice should never be an obstacle in advancing the work of God’s Kingdom. Because the pursuit of unity should not be misconstrued as uniformity of doctrine, opinion, or practice we seek to extend the hand of Christian hospitality to those who share our love for God and humanity whenever this enhances ministries to those who are lost or striving to grow in faith. This same impulse for unity requires that we listen to and learn from all who have been drawn into God’s Kingdom.

**God is interested and engaged in all parts of creation and human capacity.** While we affirm Scripture as the primary means of God's self-revelation, the Lordship of Jesus over all creation means that God works also through the Holy Spirit's guidance of his Church (tradition), through reason, and through experience to allow us to discern God's will. Moreover, we are to rely on these capacities to guide us toward reflecting God's love for every facet of creation and in every dimension of human life, whether economic, physical, psychological, educational, social, environmental, or otherwise.

**Salvation is pre-eminently an expression of God's love.** God's gracious love is most clearly seen in his offer of salvation through Jesus. This full salvation entails the restoration of God's image in us. By gracious love, God enables us to respond to this invitation in repentance, faith, and sanctification. As a reflection of God's divine love, we are to love God, our neighbors, and our enemies in mind, body, soul, and spirit, increasingly manifesting Christ-likeness in every dimension of our lives.

**Christ-followers are called to challenge and tear down barriers.** Because the Holy Spirit crosses boundaries to bring salvation and gift people for ministry, regardless of race, gender, and economic status, we believe that Christians are called to follow the Holy Spirit across these borders. Where these barriers remain and hinder the flourishing of anyone created in God's image, we are called to bring reconciliation and change.

The educational implications of these Wesleyan-Holiness emphases include:

- **Affirmation of holistic education:** Because salvation encompasses every dimension of human existence, education in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is intentionally holistic. Thus, it aims at cognitive growth, the honing of practical skills, and the development of Christian character. Further, it emphasizes the integrative nature of truth wherein the variety of disciplines are more fully expressed in relationship to one another.
- **Recognition that all Christians have a calling:** Every Christian is called to ministry, regardless of career goals. Thus, whether one pursues undergraduate or graduate education, a liberal arts or professional degree, Azusa Pacific University affirms that all should be consciously engaged in furthering the work of God's Kingdom in their educational endeavors.
- **Courage and freedom in educational pursuits:** While we remain grounded in and committed to the primacy of Scripture, we acknowledge the authority of reason, experience, and tradition as well. Thus, we engage ideas, voices, and practices from across the disciplines and from a broad spectrum of perspectives, incorporating those that allow us to give a more complete and integrated account of our faith and respectfully and reflectively rejecting those contrary to Christianity.
- **Educational hospitality:** In our recognition that God's Spirit calls and gifts all Christians, out of a secure identity in our tradition, Azusa Pacific University employs staff and faculty from a variety of theological backgrounds, not in spite of our Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, but because of it.

These distinguishing features characterize the emphases and academic activity at APU in engaging day-to-day circumstances and strategic direction. Reflecting these features will predispose us to being inclusive, descriptive, relational, inductive, integrative, social, missional, and centered on the principles that unite Christians rather than on peripheral particularities. With confidence in our heritage and identity along with commitment to wonder and exploration we embrace the diversity of opportunities that lie ahead.