THE EMBOURGEOISEMENT OF THE FREE METHODIST ETHOS[1]

by
Robert Walter Wall

From its first publication in 1860, the *Discipline (D) of the Free Methodist Church(FM*) has documented a codified history of the denomination. Each subsequent edition of the D, generally published immediately following a quadrennial General Conference, includes a variety of theological and ethical, constitutional and denominational changes effected by vote at that particular General Conference. In this way, the D performs a critical governing role in the church by transmitting its constitutive creeds and by providing its constituents with a normative and current self-definition.

The purpose of this study is to provide a diachronic analysis of a specific element within the D: the code of rules which guides the church's internal and external conduct, that which is reflective, if not formative of the church's ethos. Although such a study could well benefit from a comparison with other denominational disciplines, especially those from sister traditions and with longer histories than the FM D, our study will deal only with that D and its particular rules for Christian conduct. On that basis we will attempt to provide a modest commentary on FM's *social history*. Our assumption is that such codes establish symbolic boundaries, between covenanters and between church and society, which distinguish the ethos of a FM society within the larger social order. In this sense, then, our diachronic study will attempt at the very least to document how those boundaries have been redrawn. Of course, the more difficult task is to construct sociological typologies which explain why a particular community's moral boundaries are redrawn in a particular manner at a particular moment of its history.

Before introducing a sociological construct appropriate to this study, we want to insist on the metaethical importance of the D *as a theological document*. It was Ernst Troeltsch who first traced the formative importance of theological concepts on the ways in which a religious group related to a larger society. Because moral codes are framed by a particular theologic, the moral boundaries which they establish around and within a religious community are rendered coherent by the theological convictions of that community. (Troeltsch, 1931) The function of the D is to "wrap" its various codes in a way which gives them ecclesial *and* societal meaning.

The importance of this point was made clear again to me at our most recent General Conference, held on the Seattle Pacific University campus this summer. Not a few delegations expressed concern about the church's reputation for and experience with legalism. No one will deny that legalism is "bad news" for a people of "good news." However, the focus of their concern was the code: perhaps the church should delete the code in order to end its legalism. Beyond its superficial analysis of the problem, the proposed solution actually betrays the theological consensus which founded FM. Sharply put, those who advance such a solution fail to understand the D's code of Christian conduct in its normative theological context.

In this regard, let me make two brief observations to establish a theological context to make meaning of the D's code of Christian conduct. First, a *macroscopic* observation. All of the sections which make up the D, whether theological and ethical or practical and political, are prefaced by a historical summary of FM roots. The summary has expanded and its rhetoric softened over the years, itself, an intriguing topic for analysis. Yet, from its first edition, in 1860, to the current one, the D has contained an apologetic argot.[2] The critical memory of the point of origin, transmitted in the introduction to the D, narrates the expulsion of several ministers and members from the

Methodist Episcopal Church Genesee Annual Conference, for seeking to reform a denomination which failed to adhere to the "basic principles of Methodism, especially to the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification." From its beginning, then, FM has been defined by a prophetic impulse, a reactionary and deviant tendency which views itself as tradition-bearer and reformer of the larger group gone astray.

Moral and theological codes are very important to such movements for a constitutive reason: they provide religious boundaries which distinguish the remnant from the rest of Israel. They help define and reorder the "true" tradition so that those who are true to the faith will be kept within the prescribed borders. In this way, the code performs a conservative role: the identity of the community is properly formed so as to inform the next generation.

Now, to a more *microscopic* observation about the moral code which confirms the larger point. The D is structured in an intentioned way. Reform is given form in order to perpetuate the movement's *raison d'être*. Discrete parts are intentionally fitted together into a coherent whole so that D reflects in its very *Gattung* the movement's theologic and moral calculus. To understand the intent of the code of Christian conduct, then, requires us to understand the significance of its location in a specific place within a specific part of the whole D.[3]

Accordingly, it is critical to locate the roles for Christian conduct in their normative context. Consistently with the past, this code is currently found in the second section, sandwiched between two other codes, which together constitute the normative definition of the "Christian Life." On the one hand stands a code of theological convictions which describes 'Christian experience" while on the other hand stands a code which stipulates the practices of a "Christian community." These three ingredients of the "Christian Life" are logically and deliberately related to each other by this sequence. In this light, we may understand the "Christian Life" to consist of a particular religious experience of God's salvation, which is evidenced by a particular moral vision; this, in turn, leads to the formation of a particular religious community of those who bear the behavioral marks of a common religious experience. This particular structure indicates the importance of the moral code as that which bears testimony to a religious experience, which experience itself provides evidence of saving faith; it is also a particular morality which functions as the test of community.

More importantly, the D's formulas for Christian living are centered by the very doctrine which gives the tradition its theological distinctiveness: entire sanctification. What FM sought to protect at its beginning is a particular teaching of God's salvation by which good works are the testimony of present salvation and the condition of final salvation. In sum, justifying grace, conditioned by faith, brings one into covenant with God; and sanctifying grace, conditioned by faithfulness, keeps one in covenant with God. The fruit of true repentance, which the code describes (not prescribes), documents the experience of sanctifying grace. In this way, the D's codification of good works keeps the idea of sanctification from abstraction; the code retains the doctrine as a concrete experience, decisive to the community's unique identity within and contribution to the church catholic In this sense, the code provides explanatory power for the holiness tradition, not to bring it to collapse under the awful weight of judgmentalism and legalism, but to impel it to assert that God's grace which justifies the believing community also sanctifies it to bear witness to God's transforming love in the world.

A caveat: At least at an informal, oral level, the discussion about rules now taking place within FM threatens to shift its formative theological paradigm from one which is centered by sanctification to one which is centered by justification. From the perspective of justification, codes of Christian conduct may be viewed as preventing people from getting into a right relationship with God. Yet,

FM belongs to a theological trajectory which has always been more concerned about staying in a loving relationship with God and with neighbor than with getting in. An ethics of sanctification is vitally concerned about how the believer continues to respond to God's grace in the world.

While we would certainly recognize the dangers inherent in the latter theological orientation, we also recognize its vital importance within the church catholic. Thus, to change the place of the code within the D, as some FM would do, or to alter it without proper attention to the description of Christian experience which precedes it and the description of Christian community which follows it, is to erode or even erase the religious heritage which the founding fathers and mothers of FM sought to preserve. (Wall 1987a, 57-60).

II

Our next task is to construct a sociological typology in fundamental continuity with the D's theological calculus.[4] Only then do we possess an intellectual construct with the explanatory power to analyze the D's code of Christian conduct. In doing so, we are less concerned with organizational patterns than with the religious orientation of the organization's relationship to the surrounding social order. In this regard, our work will proceed from two assumptions. First, the orthodoxy of sanctification will necessarily result in a particular kind of orthopraxy. It will be our second assumption that the D's rules establish those symbolic boundaries which measure the community's adherence to its stipulated orthodoxy.

The notions of consecration and sanctification are closely related in the D's definition of Christian experience, thereby forging the foundation of a sectarian orientation toward self as well as toward society. In fact, according to the D, it is of the very essence of the Christian Life that God's sanctifying grace will be evidenced by self-denial and by social dissent, the two basic types of sectarian orientation. Self-denial provides *personal* evidence of sanctification, whereas social dissent provides *public* evidence of the same redemptive reality. We are not surprised, therefore, that the D codifies boundaries which tend to separate the Christian community as a uniquely moral society from the worldiness of the surrounding social order.

At least in terms of the moral boundaries drawn to guide personal conduct, members of the FM community share the same spirit of renunciation which belongs to those communions whose piety is organized by the orthodoxy of sanctification (e g, Anabaptists, Quakers, Pentecostalists). There is considerable intolerance among these groups for those vices and amusements which are thought to challenge the principle of self-denial and its corollary, self-control. Thus, for Wesleyans, the central moral issue is not the idolatry of "good works," as it is within Reformed circles who follow a theology organized by the teaching of justification by faith alone. Logically, as these circles see it, to elevate the imperative of good works contradicts the primacy of faith in God's justifying grace. Within Wesleyan communions, however, the orthodoxy of sanctification demands *faithfulness* alone, and rejection of the idolatry of self Selfishness is the contradiction of obedience which effects God's sanctifying grace.

In sum, the typology of self renunciation characterizes at least the personal dimension of a sectarian sociological construct in the FM D. The D's rules document the believer's consecration and measure the extent to which God's sanctifying grace has empowered the believer for witness and service. Whatever is worldly threatens to contaminate the self. From a sociological perspective these codified lines are inherently critical to the identity of those who belong to a Christian community which exists *in contrast* to the mores of the social order. Only in *contraposition* can the individual believer find unique legitimacy as a witness to God.

A sectarian orientation toward society constitutes an expression of social dissent as well. Historically, sectarian movements have emerged among those who champion the classes which are marginalized by society's power structures and privileged elites. Such socio-religious movements can be subdivided into two, seemingly opposite, kinds of hostile responses toward the society's institutions and their power structures: disengagement from or disinterest in them (e.g., the "passive" hostility of Amish, Mennonites), or engagement against them (e.g., Sojourners Community, liberation theology). FM, a community founded out of class protest and formed by a spirit of abolition, clearly belongs to the second group. Because of its early history, the definition of the Christian community's relationship with the surrounding society was actively negative and confrontive. Especially at the point of origin, the D envisions this type of sectarian orientation. Thus, while the spirit of personal renunciation forms the community's moral boundaries of personal existence *another spirit, one of abolition, forms its moral boundaries of public existence.*

The typologies of renunciation and abolition, in that they reflect a common theological program, are mutually coherent. A concern for self-denial in the personal sphere is roughly equivalent to a concern for those who are denied their selfhood in the public sphere. In fact, the freedom to make a choice of self-denial, the essential evidence of sanctifying grace, requires that a person be free to do so. Thus, abolition becomes the necessary condition of renunciation, which in turn is the necessary condition of final justification.

Social constructions must also include developmental typologies as well. Moral boundaries change because the orientations of religious groups to society change. Such changes are bound to occur since no religious group can resist the basic tension between the morality of the group, which is formed by religious authorities, and the morality of the culture, which is formed by secular authorities. Typically, the dialectic between a sectarian religious orientation and a secular world, especially during the twentieth century, will produce a movement toward a denominational orientation, i.e., an orientation less at odds with societal norms and values.

Several possible variables may modify this type of development. For instance, the extent of the social engagement of a particular group will determine the extent of its social accommodation. In matters of the personal morality formed by the spirit of renunciation, the D reflects a greater resistance to the accommodation of popular definitions of right and wrong. In the case of the community's public witness, however, where its abolitionist spirit once excited a vital engagement against society that changed it, the D suggests greater accommodation with society as the spirit of abolition has become less intense and urgent over the years. Indeed, public dissent in any case is difficult to maintain in the face of conflict with other social entities, religious and secular, who dislike and distrust sectarian intolerance and claims of unique legitimacy.

To the extent that such changes are found in the D's definition of Christian conduct, we are able to discern the extent to which FM has compromised its sectarian moral vision for a denominational one. Our sense is that its current definition of the personal morality is considerably more sectarian than its social witness, whose vision of class protest has been eroded by *embour geoisement.*

III

We are now prepared to describe the changes in the D's code of Christian conduct with this question in mind: has FM maintained moral boundaries consistent with the orthodoxy of entire (esp. inner) sanctification and the sectarian vision it shapes? For the purposes of this discussion, we have divided the rules according to the two typologies introduced above: renunciation, which sets the internal boundaries, and abolition, which establishes the external boundaries. (While we would

suggest a third typology to define the terms of the community's relationship with God, we will not treat it as a discrete category in this study but as integrated with the other two.)

The Spirit of Renunciation

The two characteristics of the spirit of renunciation, which are consistently stipulated by the D, are simplicity and temperance. We will treat only these two although we may assume that other specified expectations regarding ethical behavior were shaped by the OT Decalogue and the NT vice lists, or by the familiar prohibitions of the conservative Protestant subculture, which promoted a kind of "moral asceticism" consistent with the D's codified "spirit of renunciation." In this regard, we note in passing that in 1979 the D added a rule regarding *homosexuality* (D 1979, par. 330) and another regarding *pornography* in 1985 (D 1985, par. 335). Certainly, neither is at odds with a conservative ethos. Especially the statement about *pornography*, which describes its corrosive, inward effects, follows the D's deeper "theologic": that Christian conduct results from inward transformation. Accordingly, pornography's threat is to the inner self. However, neither rule reflects the historic interest interest of FM in self-denial, which is drawn along socioeconomic lines rather than from an interest in drafting codes of sexual vice. Our own hunch is that these recent additions reflect FM rapprochement with the evangelical mainstream, which has always been more inclined to codify sexual mores than FM has been. (Hunter 1987, 60)

An earlier and more complex illustration of this same point is the rule on *public schools*. It was added in 1960 to prohibit certain worldly amusements, specifically dancing, even though it was already waning as one of fundamentalism's most important symbolic moral boundaries. (D 1960, par.85.1) Curiously, this category has since become the dumping grounds for other fundamentalist interests, such as the teaching of evolution, added in 1979 (D 1979, par. 337), and the polemics of parental responsibility over public schools, which was added in 1974. (D 1974, par. 336) It was in 1974, that participation in school dances was demoted and absorbed into the general classification of assignments and activities which conflicted with the mores of denomination. While it could be argued that these prohibitions are consistent with the D's historic concern for personal modesty, which is an evidence of inner sanctification, clearly the moral boundaries have been redrawn to conform to moral interests of the wider conservative constituency.

There are other indicators, however, which suggest that FM is struggling to maintain its historic commitment to simplicity. For example, in 1985 a rule prohibiting *gambling* was added. (D 1985, par. 336.1) This prohibition is no doubt a response to the growing popularity of lotteries and betting in the general society; but the lines are drawn in ways appropriate to the D definition of Christian conduct. Accordingly, the evil of gambling is its exploitation of the poor. Even more critically, gambling indicates the greed of the materialistic social order and contradicts faith in the regnant God. The result is an idolatry of self which ruins honest work and leads to tragic addiction evidence of the lack of self-denial and so of sanctifying grace.

This same concern for the idolatry of self is reflected in the new statement on *false worship*, also added in 1985. (D 1985, par.320) To worship God is to abstain from the worship of "things, pleasures, and self." That is, the spirit of renunciation forms the attitude which in turn promotes worship of God, which is the very prerequisite of sanctification.

A slight change in the rule regarding *stewardship of possessions* is significant. On the one hand, the rule reflects the transformation, if not the erosion. of the historic FM view on simplicity. The original statement concerning private property prohibits "the laying up of treasure on earth." (D 1860, sec. 2.[4]) This Biblical formula, understood within the code, could imply that the middle class value of private ownership should be opposed. Of course, some FM of earlier generations applied it in this

way. Especially important, however, is the rhetoric of personal rights used in the 1974 and 1979 editions: "The Scriptures teach the right and responsibility of private ownership." (D 1974, par.33)~ This statement in effect repudiates the spirit of renunciation: a code cannot transmit a definition of conduct centered by the imperative of self denial and speak of personal rights at the same time. While in our view, this rule qualifies the historic commitment to economic simplicity, the 1985 substitution of "privilege" for "right" represents an important attempt to recover the original moral vision of the FM (D 1985, par. 336)

The close relationship between self denial and self control in the D's definition of simplicity is indicated from the beginning by its call for "diligence and frugality." (D 1860, sec. 2.[5]) In a sense, the addition in 1985 of the rule governing *discipline of the body* attempts to clarify these two as interdependent. What is striking about the rule is that it draws borders around the body not in terms of the classic spiritual disciplines, but in terms of "the pleasures of this world." (D 1985, par.335.3) Self-denial is not defined in theocentric ways, but by an inner-world asceticism in line with the fundamentalism of an earlier generation. Yet, it makes more sense here than in the orthopraxy of Reformed fundamentalism. Here, self-control gives witness to the Spirit's presence, who empowers a disciplined life of simple service to others.

Our sense is, then, that in most matters related to a simplified lifestyle, the D's imperative of self-denial has been retained and clarified. Although certain moral boundaries have been redrawn in accord with FM's growing alliance with conservative Protestantism, they are resignified in ways different from Reformed Protestantism and consistent with the Wesleyan orthodoxy of entire sanctification. Having said this, it would also seem that other symbols from an earlier period, especially when adapted to the middle class values of private ownership, have been redrawn under pressure of *embourgeoisement*.

The most important traditional symbol of the spirit of renunciation is temperance. The first FM expansion of the Wesleyan rule prohibiting "spirituous liquors" was instituted in 1882. What is striking about its formulation are the two statements which bracket it in the code. On the one hand, the prologue reads as follows: "A spirit of self-denial is indispensable to the Christian character." (D 1882, sec 7.53) That is, to abstain from "spirituous liquors" is to provide the necessary evidence of selflessness, the byproduct of inner sanctification. And yet, on the other hand, the conclusion reads as follows: "We are bound to do all we can to prohibit by law this nefarious traffic" (D 1882, sec 7.5)~ That is, "temperance" is not only a yardstick by which the believer's spiritual maturity is measured; it has become the rule by which the society's moral boundaries are legislated as well. The concluding social mandate, reflecting the influence of the Temperance Movement within the church, is earlier justified by this claim: "A large proportion of the crime and pauperism of the country is caused by strong drink." (D 1882, sec 7.53) There is a sense in which this socioeconomic justification stems from the church's identification with the poorer classes, whose wellbeing is most ravaged by alcohol abuse. Renunciation of "strong drink" constitutes proper evidence of personal and public fitness. Indeed, temperance (really, total abstinence) has come to symbolize within FM the interplay between spiritual and social forms of holiness.

The rule on temperance remains unchanged until 1974 (D 1974, par. 331), when its symbolic power is significantly weakened in three ways. (1) Appeal to specific Biblical teaching replaces appeal to self-denial, the fruit of inner sanctification, as the grounds of the rule's legitimacy. Here is yet more evidence of FM's rapprochement with mainstream North American evangelicalism, with its paradigm merging pre-millennialist piety and Princetonian (i.e., Reformed) theology (Dayton 1976, 121141; Wall 1987b). (2) The rule draws moral boundaries only for the individual, even speaking of alcoholic beverages as "self-destructive." The historic concern for society's poor has been largely

abandoned, except as drug abuse intrudes upon middle class values in causing "crime, accidental death, broken homes, and job loss" as studies from "experts" have shown itself a middle class evidence. (3) Finally, the traditional concern for "strong drink" has been collapsed into more recent concerns regarding drugs and tobacco, again, moral boundaries which separate Christian from worldly conduct for most conservative Protestants. Yet, as FM joins the mainstream, the distinctive symbol, temperance, is weakened as a particular feature of its orthopraxy.

There is a sense in which the 1985 revision of the rule attempts to recover, if also to reinterpret, FM's historic stance. This it does through a prophetic midrash on Mark 12:3031 (D 1985, par.335.2): to love our neighbor now means to abstain from alcoholic beverages. In that "alcohol . . . is damaging to individual, families, and society . . . to abstain from alcoholic beverages is "to make a united social witness to the freedom Christ gives." Upon closer reading, the "social witness" is to a rather middle class neighborhood. The class awareness of the first FM statement on Temperance has been softened.

Moreover, the effort seems all the more meager when compared to the expansion of the motif of individualism, already introduced in the 1974 D. Now, the statement is introduced not by an appeal to self-denial but to "personal development"which includes psychological, physical, and financial as well as spiritual values, according to the revised rule.[6] While these modifications seem to suggest that there is little shift in attitudes about drinking alcohol, they also suggest that the historic symbolic significance of the rule for FM has been substantially undermined.

The Spirit of Abolition

Nowhere is the abolitionist *Tendenz* more faithfully fixed and preserved than in the statement on *human rights*, added to the code in 1964. (D 1964 par.85.5) When conservative Christianity had distanced itself from the civil rights movement of the early 60's as being politically liberal, FM took the remarkable action of affirming the equal worth of all persons and pledged "a determined effort to eliminate the unchristian practice of racial discrimination and injustice." Even though its further expansion in 1974 shifted the source of authority from tradition (i.e., "The Free Methodist Church pledges a determined effort ....") to Scripture (D 1974, par. 326), it did nothing to soften the rule's abolitionist spirit. At last here the critical social feature of FM's founding vision is maintained.

In other spheres, however, the nature of social dissent is modified under the pressures of encroaching *embourgeoisement*. For example, at the point of origin, dress codes established the symbolic boundaries between the Christian community and the socioeconomic mainstream. The community's identification with the underclass is made clear by discouraging "superfluity of apparel" (D 1860, sec. 1)style of apparel being a symbol even in the ancient world of power (or lack of it) and social status. The erosion of the symbolic purpose of this rule began in 1947 with the deletion of the reading from Wesley's sermon on dress (D 1947, par.73)no doubt because it had since become a perfunctory ritual if even performed. However, without the Wesley sermon the tradition had lost its proper context for understanding the rule, justifying the legalistic use of the rule while emptying it of its symbolic power.

This peril is realized by 1964, when the code adds the footnote which reinterprets dress as a cultural custom, which can "change from age to age." (D 1964, par.82) Dress has now completely lost its power as a symbol of dissent against the middle class value of "superfluity," functioning only as an evidence of one's social "propriety." Not surprisingly, then, the rule is eliminated from the code in 1974, and replaced by the statement on *simplicity of life* (D 1974, par.332)a veritable paean to American middle class virtue, which assumes that a "purchased and furnished home" is selected in accord with the principle of simplicity. It is intriguing that the Biblical citations used to justify the

stipulated principle are taken from a NT paraenesis of "good Christian citizenship" which bids believers to avoid conflict with the ruling elites of the social order in order to participate more fully in the securities and comforts of the middle class.[7]

The tensions within the sociopolitical realm are different. The rules governing *citizenship* and *militarism* stem from the original prohibition against "fighting . . . and returning evil for evil, or railing for railing." (D 1860, sec 2.[4]) A sectarian, even pacifistic, sentiment is envisioned by this rule. In 1935, when fascism in Europe was beginning to rekindle American fears of another world war, the code expanded its rule against fighting by relating it specifically to *militarism and war*. The statement lays down a boundary remarkably similar to that of the Peace Churches: militarism and war are "contrary to the spirit of the NT and the teaching of Jesus Christ"; they are "utterly indefensible . . . from humanitarian principles" and it is the "profound conviction that none of our people should be required to enter military training or bear arms"except in the case of "national peril."

In 1947, following the very war that the 1935 code feared, the code is expanded again to define the exception clause, "national peril," in this way: It is the church and not the state which defines national perilin that it is the conference secretary who both receives and records the names of conscientious objectors. (D 1947, par.73a.2) In this way, the believer could claim "conscientious objector" status under the aegis of the church in agreement with national law. At the very least, this particular commentary continues the spirit of the founding prohibition against serving as a military combatant.

In 1974, the statement is transformed in such a confusing way that we must conclude that the tradition itself is in jeopardy. (D 1974, par. 335) Perhaps it is most intelligible only as a conservative response to the "liberal" protest of the Vietnam period. The moral borders of the Christian community are now redefined by the orthodoxy of "the sovereign authority of government" and the orthopraxy of "good citizenship" and national "duty." (D 1974, par. 335.1) Thus, the person's conscience no longer functions as the community's symbol of public dissent; it is now defined as an internal element of the moral apparatus of a good citizen.

The traditional teaching against militarism is retained but severely modified by this new teaching about civil religion. The resultant revision rejects "military aggression" "as an instrument of national policy and strategy," and instructs the church to call for its abolition "as a means to the settlement of international disputes." (D 1974, par.335.2) The security of the sovereign nation now centers the church's response to war and peace; the church is now understood as an institution of the political order and custodian of its myth of national security.

The movement of the sociopolitical boundaries toward the cultural main stream is also indicated by the statement on *Christian citizenship*, first added in 1969 (D 1969, par. 84~ and expanded to its present form in 1974 (D 1974, par. 327). The 1974 revision is important for two reasons: (1) the rhetoric employed is individualistic rather than communal; and (2) the definition of society is positive and participatory rather than adversarial. Now the believer is admonished in a church's moral code to exercise "his right to vote." Again, Biblical citations are taken from the institutional paraenesis of the NT, which envisions a sociology of consolidation rather than conflict with the social context. In this sense, the code stipulates behaviors for those interested in joining the sociopolitical mainstream rather than for those engaging in protest from the margins.

Finally, we turn to the borders defining FM's relationship to other "philanthropic" groups, or *secret societies*. The socio-religious tension in the founding vision was typical of sectarian movements: FM conceived itself to be uniquely legitimate as the carrier if not also caretaker of a uniquely important orthodoxy in a pluralistic world. Institutionalized secrecy symbolized evil and guile; whereas the

evidence of sanctification is institutionalized grace. Moreover, disclosure of the religious intentions of a philanthropic association is necessary to knowing whether an alliance is even possible. In this sense, sectarian intolerance defines the limits of a pluralizing tolerance.

Three revisions in the development of this tradition are important to consider. The first, in 1915, expands the code to include teaching on labor unions (D 1915, par. 73)at the time a revolutionary entity in American life. Any association with unionism, understood here as a philanthropic rather than an anti-Christian movement, had to meet two conditions: (1) the abolitionist spirit inclined the church to stand on the side of the working classes; only those unions which sought their betterment without discrimination or coercion were therefore acceptable. (2) The abolitionist spirit was also sectarian and inclined the church to oppose any union which used secret oaths to give itself unique legitimacy over the church. The statement is sociologically significant because it sought to define the church in the workplace in a way which reflected its tensions and the church's accommodations to it. The labor union was viewed as legitimate to the extent that it shared the church's spirit of abolition. Unions were simply not uniquely legitimate *in se*.

The second revision, made in 1951 (D 1951, par. 83.3), added an interesting endnote to its rule on secret societies and eliminated the clause on labor unions. Since unions were given national legitimacy by the Taft-Hartley bill in 1947, the church thought it appropriate to give clear expression to their status in the 1951 D, only to have the egalitarian core of its rule stripped away in the 1974 revision. In any case, the "endnote" added in 1951 allowed insurance policies to be retained from competing societies if they were contracted before one had joined the Christian community. Here practical tolerance won out over sectarian intolerance. In fact, the 1099 of invested dollars or of the security of insurance, which this expansion now contradicted, was once the very sort of evidence demanded for entrance into the Christian community.

The final revision, made in 1974 (D 1974, par. 334), is again characterized by a shift away from the corporate character of the community toward a code for personal morality. Accordingly, the principle of "individual rights" (par. 334.1) and the hierarchy of "employer-employee" (par. 334.3) now interpret the workplace. Ironically, such a commentary is justified by appeal to the slave-master legislation of NT code (par. 334.3, 5). The abolitionist *Tendenz* against such hierarchies has now been turned upside down!

More importantly in my view, there is a shift in the definition of secrecy. The concern is now about institutional loyalty and allegiance. Secrecy has come to symbolize a false religion with the potential of confusing an immature believer. In a sense, this revision suggests a retreat back to parochialism and away from the founding understanding that institutionalized secrecy made cooperation difficult.

IV

In concluding this study, let me make two brief and pointed observations, framed by the acute observations made by Max Weber two generations ago. (Weber, 1922) The D reflects the growing bifurcation of private and public worlds within FM. Especially during the last generation, the symbolic boundaries which order private lives are reified while those symbols of public protest against socioeconomic injustice are redrawn in ways which undermine the abolitionist vision of the founding fathers and mothers. Such a bifurcation is evidence of *embourgeoisement*i.e., the movement of a prophetic community, which stood on society's margins with its poor and powerless, toward society's mainstream. This movement demands at least public conformity to the political and economic agendas of its middle class. In this sense, FM has become the very kind of denomination against which it once reacted and which it sought to revive.

Across Wesleyanism, however, there are prophetic voices, empowered by the charisma of revival, trying to be heard: Timothy Smith and Donald Dayton, Paul Bassett and Randy Maddox, and the roll call continues to include newer voices within this Society. These are those who contend that the vision which founded FM is profoundly redemptive and Biblical; its erosion, whether because of social pressure or religious alliance, is bad news and not good news for God's people.

Weber reminded us that religious movements like FM are dynamic processes, like life itself. Wesleyan movements typically are energized by class protest and are therefore threatened by the forms and forces of *embourgeoisement*, only to be reformed again by the renewal of an abolitionist spirit. Wesleyan movements are centered as well by notions of personal holiness, typically codified and threatened by legalism and individualism. Because Christian ethics is really theological ethics and behavior follows from and is made coherent by beliefs, my own hunch is that any reform of the tradition will take us back to the orthodoxy of God's sanctifying grace, which we must continue to teach with even greater clarity and conviction. Then, within these theological boundaries, we might be better able to transmit to our children the vision of self-denial and abolition as the hard but requisite responses of Christian community to its various private and public worlds.

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NOTES

[1]On this topic, I have benefited enormously from the insight and suggestions of my colleagues and friends, Martin Abbott of Seattle Pacific University and Donald W. Dayton of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. I hope that this paper reflects in some measure their kind benefactions toward me.

[2]For this point see Paul Livermore's critical rhetorical study, "The Formative Document of a Denomination Aborning The Discipline of the Free Methodist Church (1860)," in *Religious Writings and religious Systems*, vol. 2 (BSR2; J. Neusner, E. Previchs and A. Levine, eds.; Atlanta Scholars Press, 1989), 17779. I am profoundly grateful to Professor Livermore, not only for this splendid essay but for several conversations we had while I was preparing this paper.

[3]By way of analogy, Peter Zaas has challenged the consensus which holds that the Pauline vice catalogues are preformed constructions and incidental to Paul's epistolary purposes; "Catalogues and Context: I Corinthians 5 and 6," NTS 34 (1988), pp. 62229. Zaas shows that Paul and not "tradition" constructs lists of vices and virtues to make theological points which address his audiences' needs.

[4]Sociological typologies are intellectual constructs; we do not expect to find in society what we find in the mind. Therefore, the proper role of a "sociological typology" in a study such as this one is to explain rather than to describe a social movement or institution.

[5]This *Tendenz* is best reflected in the massive 1974 revision of the Codea revision prompted as much by political exigencies surrounding the Free Methodist Church's then-proposed merger with the Wesleyan Church as with its growing infatuation with mainstream evangelicalism.

[6]The language of "therapy" which enters the Code in 1974 betrays a middle class understanding of authority, with its emphasis on "individual wholeness." Cf. C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 18286

[7]Cf Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* ("Hermeneia"; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 3941.