Rejoinder to Laurence Wood

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I have struggled with whether to continue the dialogue with Laurence Wood in light of his response to my review of his interpretation of the development of Wesleyan theology under the influence of John Fletcher. I am rather pessimistic that progress can be made. He condescendingly attributes my lack of agreement to a failure to read sections of his book; he cannot seem to contemplate the fact that one can read what he says and not be convinced. Over the years of discussion of these issues the argument seems to shift with each stage, but the final battle line remains in place in spite of the abandonment of earlier arguments. Certain historical judgments continue to be made even when the evidence has been shown to be otherwise.

I am especially frustrated to have nuances and qualifications in my work put forward as if they constitute a refutation of my position or issues that I have neglected for the same purpose (the roots of this discussion in classical pietism and such Puritan figures as Goodwin, the continuation of Fletcher’s influence in circles around Hester Ann Rogers and in early American Methodism, the personal and theological closeness of Wesley and Fletcher—among other examples that could be adduced). Often his reading of my position is so distorted and fails to appreciate my larger argument that I wonder if he has really read what I have written. In many ways his “appreciative” response to my review is less a response to points I have made than an opportunity to present a case to readers about his ongoing work that will find expression in a promised forthcoming SPS paper. But Wood’s response, as it is written, will leave the impression, especially to those unfamiliar with the sources, that the issues have been resolved in his favor. This is far from the case, and since the issues are central not only to understanding the historical lineage of Pentecostalism but its core theological claims we must go another round.

Some of our differences are surely rooted in the different historical
and theological methodologies we employ. I was trained at Yale and Chicago in the line of “typological analysis” that goes back through my professor James Gustafson to H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*, to Troeltsch’s *Social Teachings*, and finally to Max Weber. I also drank deeply in seminary at the wells of Swedish “Lundensian theology” with its method of “motif analysis” (Anders Nygren’s *Agape and Eros*, for example). These methods look for distinctive and characteristic patterns of thought that enable historical and theological analysis. It is a common criticism in the literature about constructing typologies that such work may suppress continuities for the sake of gaining the leverage that the search for the distinctive provides. Wood, however, seems focused on continuities and is therefore, engaged in a slightly different project.

Given the constraints of this method, I find that Wood’s work does not yet require revision of my work. I maintain that I have appropriately described the characteristic differences in the rhetoric and theological patterns of thought of Wesley and Fletcher—that Wesley is basically “christological” in a way that resists the “pneumatologization” by Fletcher. I still remember the revolution in my thinking that took place when I was able to break out of the “dispensationalization” and “pneumatologization” of Wesley in which I was reared to realize that Wesley is really much more “christocentric” in that he spoke of two covenants or “dispensations” (that we live in the “Christian” rather than the “Jewish” age, not the “age of the Spirit” of a variety of forms of dispensationalism), described the goal of sanctification as “walking in the way Christ walked” and “having the mind of Christ” rather than having the experience of “being baptized in the Spirit,” devoted thirteen of his forty-four “standard sermons” to the “Sermon on the Mount,” and otherwise made many important moves suppressed in more recent forms of Wesleyan/Holiness theology.

But such methodological issues account for only some of our differences. I am unable to accept Wood’s exegesis of many of the Wesleyan texts. As I indicated in my review, Wood has a tendency to “over-read” his texts (see his Fall, 1999, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* dialogue with Randy Maddox for details of this argument). By this I mean that when I read the texts that Wood adduces to his case, I do not find that they say what he claims. They say what he claims only if one imports certain assumptions into the discussion—the very points that are under debate. It seems to me that he does this very clearly in the citations in his “response.”

The issue for me is whether Wesley taught the doctrine of “Pentecostal sanctification” that I find in Fletcher—that the Pentecost is to be understood primarily in terms of the “entire sanctification” of the disciples. This