WESLEYAN PERFECTIONISM IN REVIVALS OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES AT WHEATON COLLEGE AND ITS IMPACT ON INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

Nina K. Bissett

ABSTRACT

By the end of the 20th century, a modern-day clarion call echoed throughout the Christian collegiate community for religious institutions to divert the trend of secularization and to recover their Christian identity. This study, rather than addressing recovery, explores the distinctive, enduring elements of Wheaton College, a midwestern Christian liberal arts college, which safeguarded and reinforced its 150-year religious identity. Utilizing a historical case study methodology, this qualitative research study examined the protective elements of Wheaton College’s identity through the Wesleyan quadrilateral lens of Wesleyan perfectionism and its visible accompanying revival ethos. Using a bricoleur or quilt-piecing approach, archival materials from the Billy Graham Center Archives and follow-up revival participant questionnaires provided the revival documentation necessary to instrumentally craft the dynamic stories of revival participants. Emerging themes from this data were analyzed and interpreted to examine the extent to which Wesleyan perfectionism contributed to revival participation and receptivity and impacted Wheaton College’s institutional identity.