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The Heavenly Racer

by J. Russell Frazier

An Original Sermon by John Fletcher

In his work, *Reluctant Saint?: A Theological Biography of Fletcher of Madeley*, Patrick Streiff has provided for the English world an authoritative work on the life and theology of John Fletcher by delving into the archival material. Streiff indicates that his work has not dealt sufficiently with the many manuscripts of Fletcher's sermons. Indeed, there are more than 400 manuscript sermons; most of these have not appeared in print. Most are in English but some of them are in French. The form of these sermons varies; there are a few full-length manuscript sermons but most are outlines of sermons.

The goal of this article is to present to the public a previously unpublished sermon in order that the readers may understand and appreciate the benefit of these sermons. Seventy-nine of Fletcher's sermons

are available at the Shropshire County Archives. The majority of these are holographs in outline form which come from Fletcher's ministry at Madeley; the uniqueness of these sermons in comparison with the sermons found in other archives is that Fletcher includes a list of selected hymns which follow frequently just after the title of the message and precedes a citation of the biblical text for the sermon. The hymns have been chosen from *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*.

The sermon below is numbered 200 and is one of many which Fletcher preached during his twenty-five year tenure at the Madeley parish church. There is no evidence that he used this sermon during his evangelistic forays into other parts of England.

“Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” Heb. 12.1-2.

Introduction

It is the opinion of commentators and divines universally (so far as I have been able to learn) that in the text before us, there is a most pointed reference to the Grecian Games particularly the Olympic Games—so called because they were celebrated in the vicinity of Olympia, a town of Peloponnesus and because they were celebrated, every fourth year in honour of Jupiter Olympius, the greatest of the heaven gods. These games consisted chiefly in boxing, wrestling, leaping, throwing the dart, and racing. It is to the last of these games, that is that of racing that the apostle chiefly refers in this passage.

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The great design of the author of this epistle was to afford comfort to the believing Hebrews in their complicated afflictions, while persued by their raging persecutors. Persecuted with the utmost cruelty for their attachment to the cause of Jesus Christ; they were in extreme danger of growing very weary and faint in their minds. To prevent this if possible the apostle reminds them of the glorious recompense and presents to their attention some of the most illustrious examples of *men and women of faith* in the

See a man trying to run a race with a long garment. The sin which entangles must be laid aside.

preceding chapter, and then viewing all those who have already entered into their reward, now spectators looking upon us, engaged now in the Christian race, he exclaims “Wherefore

seeing *we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*”

In discoursing on these words I shall endeavour through divine assistance to direct our serious attention to the following particulars especially, that is:

- I. The Christian’s race as here expressed.
- II. The directions given by the apostle, by attention to which this race may be successfully accomplished.
- III. The considerations suggested by the apostle to stimulate professing Christians to run this race with increasing zeal and activity. And,

I. I am to direct your attention to the Christian’s race as here expressed.

The race which Christian believers are here exhorted to run, is, I conceive, a two-fold race. That is, it is first, a race of Christian experience. Note: (1) This implies something more than good desires, and pious resolutions; (2) *and* the pardon of all our past sins; And (3) The entire renewal of all our hearts by the Holy Spirit. See Phil. 3.13-14.

And, secondly, it is a race of Christian practice. By Christian practice, I mean: (1) Holy obedience to *Christ*; (2) Some professing Christians ridicule the doctrine of *holiness*. And (3) *the ne-*

cessity of Christian practice is evident from *the judgment*, Matthew 7.21 and Revelation 22.14.

II. The directions given by the apostle, by a proper attention to which this race may be successfully accomplished.

First, *we are* to “lay aside every weight;” that is as some of the old versions have it “everything that presseth down.” [The source for Fletcher’s citation is what is commonly called the “Geneva Bible.” An edition of the Geneva Bible was published in 1608]. (1) Look at a man attempting to run. (2) Worldly mindedness is of all other things the most inimical to God.

Secondly, *we are to lay aside* “the sin that easily beset us.” *The sin that* “hangeth so fast on us” is to be given up—that is, that which entangles. See a man *who is trying to run a race* with a long garment. The well adapted sin *must be laid aside*: (1) The sin of our constitution; and (2) The sin of our profession or occupation.

Thirdly, this race is to be run with zeal and diligence. This much is implied in the word to run. When we speak of a person running, *it bespeaks of zeal and diligence*.

Fourthly, this race is to be run in faith: “Looking unto Jesus *the author and finisher of our faith.*”

And, fifthly, *this race must be run* with patience. We shall need patience in affliction, in trials from the work, and from our Christian brethren, etc.

But we must remark, sixthly, that the word “*upomonhs*” signifies patience but *also* perseverance *and endurance*. This perseverance is *able to keep us to the end*, Matthew 24.13, Revelation 2.10.

III. I proceed, to notice the considerations suggested by the apostle to stimulate professing Christians to run this race with increasing zeal and activity.

First, the illustrations *point to the* example of our blessed Lord: “Looking unto Jesus *the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” Here too is an allu-

sion to the judge of the world. Many have mislaid their way by looking at the inconsistent conduct of men.

And secondly, the countless multitudes who have already arrived in the heavens are looking on as “A cloud of witnesses.” Perhaps in this cloud you have some who were near to you; they are now looking on as observers while you run your race.

Conclusion

First, we remark there were certain qualifications required in those who were admitted to the heavenly race. So unless you break off your sins by confession and repentance, “ye shall all likewise perish.”

Secondly, let those who have repented take all the encouragement and run with patience the race that is set before us. Behold the crown reached out to you; it is not a cheap leaf, or wreath composed of parsley, olive, laurel, or fading flowers; but a crown which is “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.”

John William Fletcher, sermon on Hebrews 12.1-2. Shropshire County Archives, ref. P180 (2280/16/64). Kind thanks are hereby expressed to the Revd Henry Morris, Vicar of Madeley, and to the Madeley parish for permission to publish this sermon. The italics indicate additions by the present editor.

ALREADY CLEAN/ NOT YET REGENERATE

Vic Reasoner

R. A. Torrey argued from John 13:10; 15:3 that the disciples were regenerate before Pentecost. According to John 15:3 the disciples whom Jesus addressed were already sanctified ceremonially by their obedience to the Mosaic law. But the emphasis of v 3 is that they were sanctified by their association with Jesus (see John 13:3-11). They were set apart from the world by following Christ. They were then cleansed through the Word (John 15:3), but not yet by the Spirit. And they were instructed to remain in that condition by their obedience to the commands of Christ (John 15:10). They had renounced the world, submitted to the demands of discipleship, and had preached Christ.

All this had been a great help toward future fruit-bearing. Yet not all of them were clean. However, between John 13:10 and John 15:3 the disciples were purged of Judas. In John 15:3 *katharos* is the adjective form of the verb just used in v 2. As a verb *kathairo* means to cleanse or purge; to prune or trim clean. Its noun form is also used in 13:10. But while the disciples were set apart, pruned, and potentially clean, as in 13:10 and 17:19, through God's revelation in Christ, they still needed the washing of regeneration and the purging of entire sanctification.

B. F. Westcott wrote that the spiritual work represented by this cleansing was potentially completed,

but it remained that it should be realized by them [*The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 217]. Donald Bloesch argued that they were clean by virtue of being covered by the blood of Christ, but they were not actually clean. Even though Jesus washed their feet, that act symbolized their future cleansing through the blood. “They did not yet have regeneration because they were not yet baptized into the death of Christ (Mk 10:35-45)...They were cleaned proleptically by virtue of the word addressed to them. They were on the way to regeneration but not yet totally cleansed” [*The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts*, pp. 306-307].

They would not bear the fruit of the Spirit nor have spiritually reproductive life until after Pentecost. Wesley said the apostles were clean before Christ died by Jewish faith, for the Holy Ghost was not then given [*Works*, 8:287]. Thus, Wesley concluded that “the faith through which we are saved ... is not barely that which the apostles themselves had while Christ was yet upon the earth. ... And herein does it differ from that faith which the apostles themselves had while our Lord was on earth, that it acknowledges the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection” [“Salvation by Faith,” Sermon #1, 1.3, 5].

Although Elmer Long left us on August 27, 1998, his influence lives on. This article is adapted from a transcript provided by Matthew Canter who was in the service on May 15, 1998, at Fairview Holiness Church in Glouster, Ohio, the last revival Elmer Long ever preached.

Paul is dealing with the Jews, or Israel, who had the law given to them. All the oracles of God were handed to them. Yet with all of this, they had broken it. In fact, those who were supposed to teach others did not keep the law themselves. They themselves had become hypocritical. Jesus himself had to rebuke them for those very things.

However, there were some Gentiles previous to this time who were doing the things that the law commanded without knowing it was a law. The differ-

Before you can change the fruit, you must change the tree.

ence was they had it written in their hearts. They were fulfilling the deeds of the law without having that law stuck under their nose.

I believe every church ought to have some kind of standard, but when it is all said and done, if a person is a real Christian, you don't have to stick a rule book under his nose. The Gentile who did the things that the law required was not a Jew outwardly, but he was one inwardly.

If the heart is right, it will manifest itself outwardly. Jesus said out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. If there is evil in your heart, sooner or later people will find out. It will show itself and they will see it. But you can also have the outward part right and be wrong because you are not right inwardly. God desireth truth in the inward parts. So the heart must be changed. Before you can change the fruit, you must change the tree.

It is a hard job to try to live right before you are made right. I tried it myself, but it wouldn't work. Sooner or later you will come to some kind of crisis that will prove the fallacy of your belief. You will find out you need something more than that.

Inward religion changes our understanding. The Bible very clearly teaches when a person is saved he becomes an heir of Abraham, a seed of Abraham, a spiritual Jew. Jesus gave the parable of the man who planted the vineyard and sent servants to collect his fruit. One was beaten, one was killed, the other man was stoned. So he sent his son and they killed him. In the same way Israel rejected God, so God raised up another people that were not necessarily Jews to prove that he could save men and have his church.

So Paul said every person that is genuinely saved is the seed of Abraham and heirs of the same promise. Everything that God promised Abraham is promised to the Christian. Abraham walked out one night and looked at the stars. He could not count them. God said, "I will make thy seed like the sands of the sea." We know Israel is not a big nation, but if you take all of those who believe in Jesus there is a great multitude that no man can number.

There are some things about the things of God you don't understand until you know the Lord. John Fletcher was approached by one of his members who said, "In the four years I have been hearing you preach, you say that man is unregenerated, unrenewed, and his soul depraved. He is in such a condition that his reasoning, his understanding, and his judgment are impaired. Until he is aware of this loss he can neither repent nor believe the Gospel." Fletcher answered, "That is what I mean to preach." When you have this inward religion, you have an understanding of the things of God that you did not have before.

Inward religion changes our judgment. The Bible tells us that as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. But how does He lead? God has not given us the spirit of bondage again to fear, but of love, and of power, and of a sound mind. That word "sound mind" means sound judgment. You are able to discern the false from the true.

There were false doctrines in the days when I was converted. Yet the people who were converted were able to see through appearances and see a thing for what it was worth. Everything we saw was not a mir-

acle, although we would have fallen for anything that came along before our conversion.

After it was all over the people were left dry and in bad shape. I went up to the man and put my arms around him. I said, "I am a Christian and I love everyone, but I don't believe what you are doing." He said, "You would have had a great revival if I had come up to the church." I told him I was willing to take the chance of missing his great miracle revival.

I believe when you have inward religion, you have some common sense. Many times the Lord will show you the best judgment about a thing. When a person

You don't need a rule, you need the Ruler.

becomes a real spiritual Jew, who is a real Christian, he has a spirit or a principle within him that governs. As

Wesley said in his hymn, a principle within of jealous godly fear. He has a principle that hates sin and loves righteousness.

I have never seen a real convert who did not want to be like Jesus when he was saved. They begin to pray, just a closer walk with Thee. That's the principle that God puts within people who are really inwardly saved and we need that principle in the soul.

The Holy Spirit dwells within all believers. Since he is holy, he will produce in you some of His nature. You are a habitation of God through the Spirit. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. And if He lives in your heart, you will want to be like Him because that principle is there. It is a holy principle, a godly principle, an upright principle.

Inward religion changes our will. When I was first saved, I loved this song by Fanny Crosby. "I am Thine, O Lord. I have heard Thy voice and it told Thy love to me, but I long to rise in the arms of faith, and be closer drawn to Thee. Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord, by the power of grace divine. Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope and my will be lost in Thine."

I remember my older brother working with me out on the field. Neither of us were Christians, but he said, "Elmer, I don't think I am going to try to get that job at Reynold's Tobacco Factory because I might get saved sometime and I wouldn't want to be working there if I was a Christian."

If your will is lost in God's will, you want his way — even when you do not understand it. A Cornish miner would tell the miners, "It will work out for good. It is like making cakes. You don't eat flour by itself. You don't eat sugar by itself. But when you put all the ingredients together and work them together, you come out with a good tasting cake. God did not say all things are good, but He did say that they will work for good." They teased the old miner and one day as they were going down to the mine an old dog grabbed his lunch, taking off with it. He tried to catch the dog, but never did. On the way back he felt sure the boys would tease him. Then suddenly he heard an explosion. Every one of those miners was killed in the explosion. If that dog had not come along and stolen his lunch he would have been one of the victims.

Inward religion changes our feelings. Old-time religion is a heartfelt thing. It is not fanaticism. Love does not behave itself unseemly, but it does bring peace. I remember the fear of death and hell that had followed me up the hill that dark afternoon, but when I came back down there was sunshine in my soul. Bring a person whose ears are stopped into a concert and when their ears opened they will recognize the beautiful music. Bring a person who was blinded to some of the mountain overlooks. When their eyes are opened, when they look out and see it all, will they not experience any feeling?

A little girl was born blind. She was taken to an eye doctor who was hopeful that surgery could restore her eyesight. They gave it a try. The day came when the bandages were taken off and she could see. Her mother had told her about the grass and trees, the flowers and the birds for years, but when she saw for herself she said, "It is so wonderful, why didn't you tell me?" Her mother replied, "I tried to, but you have to see for yourself." The best knowledge is to see for yourself. Then you can sing, "He stood at my heart's door mid sunshine and rain and patiently waited an entrance to gain. What shame that so long He entreated in vain, for He is so precious to me."

I believe in a heartfelt religion. We are way behind in our shouting. They used to call us "shouting Methodists." And they had a lot to shout about. They didn't have many earthly goods, but they sang about a city that is fairer than day and by faith they could see it afar. And glory would come on the meeting-

house and they would shout. They were feeling their religion. And so can you.

Do you have this inward grace? You don't need a rule, you need the Ruler. When I found the Ruler I

have no trouble with the rules. Loving Heavenly Father, give us more of that loving grace. "More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for me."

THE ACTS OF THE SPIRIT, PART 2

Joseph D. McPherson

THE BIRTH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

By the wise and sovereign plan of God the new dispensation of the Holy Spirit was inaugurated on an annual celebration of the giving of the law. Fifty days had passed since Passover and the sacrifice of the true Pascal Lamb. Vast numbers of devout Jews were present in Jerusalem on that great day when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Some had come from far away places with the intention of sacredly commemorating the first Pentecost; an historic day that had ushered in the Mosaic dispensation of the law centuries before. Following the Spirit's outpouring upon the one hundred and twenty, Peter is found preaching with unusual courage and inspiration.

At the climax of his sermon, he cried to his many listeners with powerful application: *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36).

From both Scripture and Church history we find water baptism to be symbolic of Spirit baptism.

proof of the resurrection of Jesus, His ascension and His exaltation to the right hand of God. He shows that the effusion of the Holy Spirit was the fruit of His glorification which had been promised and foretold by their own prophets. Peter further showed that in consequence of this there was indisputable proof that "this same Jesus, whom they had crucified, was not only the promised Messiah" but the "Governor of the universe, from whose power and justice they

had every thing to dread, as they refused to receive his proffered mercy and kindness."

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:37-38). Peter thus provides a true prescription for the receiving of initial salvation. Repentance required of these Jews a decided change of mind concerning Jesus, a humbling of themselves before God with a detestation of their former sins and an earnest cry for mercy. By being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, they would be making a public profession of their becoming His disciples and servants. Peter also makes it clear, however, that the purpose of being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was "for the remission [or removal] of sins." According to Clarke, "baptism [points] out the purifying influences of the Holy Spirit; and it is in reference to that purification that it is administered, and should in consideration never be separated from it. For baptism purifies not the conscience; it only points out the grace by which this is done." By repenting as well as placing a true and vital faith in Jesus Christ and faithfully submitting to water baptism, they would, according to the promise, receive the Holy Ghost.

Water, however applied in the baptismal ceremony, cannot alone take away sins nor bring the seeker an experience of regeneration. Nevertheless, it is the *scriptural way* for believers to take upon themselves the profession of Christianity. F. F. Bruce once declared that "the idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament." From

both Scripture and the earliest history of the Church we find water baptism to be symbolic of Spirit baptism.

Ambrose of Milan, an early Church Father once wrote, "For who is he that is baptized with the Holy Spirit but he who is born again through water and the Holy Spirit?" This was the universal view of ancient Church Fathers together with the Reformers and early Methodists. In a *Journal* entry Mr. Wesley writes, "I baptized a gentlewoman at the Foundery; and the peace she immediately found was a fresh proof, that the outward sign, duly received, is always accompanied with the inward grace" [5 Feb 1760]. Both water baptism and Spirit baptism were always considered initiatory events, nor was the latter looked upon as a second work of grace. Baptism was considered a means of entrance into the Church and kingdom of heaven upon earth. "*For by one Spirit*

Both water baptism and Spirit baptism were always considered initiatory events.

are we all baptized into one body," writes the apostle Paul, "*and have been all made to drink into one Spirit*" (1 Cor 12:13-14).

Once the believer was baptized by water and the Spirit, he or she would be expected to "*go on to perfection*" by the inward and powerful working of the Holy Spirit.

Luke continues the narrative of that great day by informing his readers that "*they that gladly received his word were baptized.*" The Greek word translated *gladly* signifies "joyfully," "readily," "willingly." They showed their approval of the doctrine delivered that day and were glad to hear of such a way of salvation. They began immediately to act according to the instructions given, being baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38).

It is significant to realize that "when a Jew had received baptism in this name he was" according to Clarke, "excluded from all communication with his countrymen; and no man would have forfeited such privileges but on the fullest and clearest conviction. This baptism," we are assured, "was a very powerful means to prevent apostasy; they had, by receiving

baptism in the name of Jesus, renounced Judaism, and all the political advantages connected with it; and they found it indispensably necessary to make the best use of that holy religion which they had received in its stead."

Luke informs us that "*the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*" These had now purposed to discontinue their following of the scribes and Pharisees, putting themselves under the leadership and teachings of the apostles. They had taken upon themselves the profession of the Christian doctrine which included an acknowledgment that Christ had indeed come, had lately been crucified; was now risen and was truly the promised Messiah. Such was the faith in which they were baptized.

Can we now assume that these three thousand converts were enjoying the inward presence of the Holy Spirit? Did they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit that day? "Now this narrative only fits together," writes Dr. Robert Lyon, "if we recognize that these 3,000 in number did in fact realize in their lives what Peter had promised: they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. To include the promise in the narrative and not assume fulfillment would not make sense of the account. But," continues Dr. Lyon, "one further point needs to be made, and that is, Peter promised to his hearers the very same experience which they had seen occur in the original outpouring. It would be unreasonable and unwarranted," says he, "not to expect this as though Peter were saying, 'We have received this experience; you are not ready for it yet, but this is what is available to you.' No. These people saw something take place and were offered the same experience for themselves. Taking the context as a whole," writes this scholar, "this is the only way we can understand it. Peter by his message and invitation has set before them the very same opportunity which was fulfilled in the lives of the 120." We are assured by Dr. Lyon that Luke, the writer of Acts, makes "no distinction...between receiving the Spirit and being filled or baptized with the Spirit. All the terms — baptizing, coming upon, filling or pouring out, receiving — are equivalent expressions."

Interestingly, Dr. Laurence Wood, in his book *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism*, finds himself in a dilemma. While expressing no doubt that the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost were recipients of the Spirit's baptism, he nevertheless believes it to have been "an extraordinary occurrence and not the usual pattern because," as he puts it, "believers normally are justified believers first and later receive baptism with the Holy Spirit." No, no, not so! Peter provides us in Acts 2:38 the New Testament formula and pattern for conversion-initiation in this dispensation which most surely in-

Pentecost was the birth of the Church, not its perfection.

cludes an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. By equating the baptism of the Holy Spirit only with a second work of grace in entire sanctification or Christian perfection, Dr. Wood reflects a theological innovation of relatively recent times and is found flying in the face of both New Testament precedent and a long train of historical teaching. As Dr. Kenneth Collins, a noted Wesley scholar, once said, "Pentecost was the birth of the Church, not its perfection."

From the writings of the earliest Church Fathers all the way to the Reformers and early Methodists, it is clearly evident that spirit baptism was consistently viewed as an initiatory experience. It was the means by which the new birth or regeneration was wrought and entrance into the Church of Christ assured. We thus find Dr. Wood representing a modern view, which in essence, deprecates the great work of regeneration. It denies the need for that mighty effusion of the Spirit so necessary in bringing penitents from the state of spiritual death to resurrection of spiritual life in the new birth.

"The popular idea," writes James Dunn, "that conversion precedes baptism, and that [water baptism] is a confession of a commitment made some time previously is not to be found in the [New Testament]." He enlarges upon this truth by assuring the reader that "Any attempt to separate Spirit-baptism from the

event of conversion-initiation, as represented in water-baptism, so as to make the gift of the Spirit an experience following conversion is contrary to New Testament teaching. The writings of Luke and Paul do not teach us that baptism in the Spirit was something that follows nor was distinct from becoming a Christian."

As we further consider this account of the three thousand converts, we are offered substantial evidence of their being filled with the Spirit from the time of their conversion. We are informed that they "*continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*" (Acts 2:42). Later passages give us glimpses of the life style of these new converts. The power of the Holy Spirit now residing within their hearts was constraining them to live together in a bond of Christian charity. In fact they were exemplifying that "*faith that worketh by love.*" There was even the selling of possessions and goods for the relief of the needy. There was no positive command to do this. The love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given them truly constrained them to act in this charitable manner. It was a natural fruit of love whereby each member of the community loved every other as his own soul. Divine love, after all, is the essence of true Christianity.

"*And the Lord,*" we are told, "*added to the church daily such as were saved*" (Acts 2:47). Yes, saved were they from the guilt and power of sin. Having been raised from spiritual death to spiritual life they were made new creatures in Christ Jesus so that "*old things [had] passed away; behold all things [had] become new*" (2 Cor 5:17). Such was the glory and power of Pentecost, made possible by the exaltation of Christ Jesus "*to the right hand of God,*" where He "*received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost,*" then gloriously shedding forth the same upon all who by faith were obeying the Gospel. Such was the entrance of a better Covenant and the dispensation of the Holy Spirit that proved to be the watershed of salvation history and the birth of the New Testament Church.

In his *Journal* Wesley, then 75 years old, disclosed that his doctrine of Christian perfection had not changed in more than forty years [1 Sept 1778]. His sermon “The Circumcision of the Heart” was written in 1733. His first tract on the subject, “The Character of a Methodist,” was written in 1739. In 1756 he wrote that he began to study the Scripture some twenty-seven years earlier (1729) and at that time began to see the doctrine of Christian perfection. In 1760 he declared that constant communion with God the Father and Son fills the heart with humble love. “Now this is what I always did and do now mean by ‘perfection’” [q 6 March 1760]. In 1778 he confided that he doubted he could write a better sermon on “The Circumcision of the Heart” than he had done forty-five years earlier [*Journal*, 1 Sept 1778].

In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, written in 1777, he said that he had not added one point that he had not held 38 years earlier in “The Character of a Methodist.” In fact, he said that he began this pursuit of Christian perfection in 1725. The title page for *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* gives the dates 1725-1777. Although Wesley did not die until 1791, his editor, Thomas Jackson, added these words, “It is not to be understood, that Mr. Wesley’s sentiments concerning Christian Perfection were in any measure changed after the year 1777.”

Thus, the evolution of Wesley’s doctrine has been greatly exaggerated. Just as higher criticism has attempted to theorize how the biblical text might have evolved, so contemporary Wesley scholars often distinguish between the “early Wesley” (1733-1738), the “middle Wesley” (1738-1765), and the “late Wesley” (1765-1791). The result in either biblical studies or Wesleyan studies is that there is no definitive statement. The result in biblical studies is a purely human document created and edited to uphold the authority of the church. The result in Wesleyan studies is that Wesley has become “the undefined banner.”

Some Wesley scholars deny that there is any such thing as a “historical Wesley.” They delight in point-

ing out contradictions in Wesley and deny that he had a single consistent view of anything, whether the subject be what a Christian is or the witness of the Spirit. Such an approach provides a flexible Wesley who can be linked to whatever fad or movement is popular with the scholar. Thus, the “mature” Wesley is reconstructed to fit the agenda of the scholar. His Aldersgate experience has been redefined. Books have been written claiming Wesley borrowed his ideas from Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. He has been portrayed as basically a Puritan, a Lutheran, a Pelagian, a semi-Pelagian, and a modified Calvinist. It is now being asserted that he is Pentecostal and charismatic. It has been asserted that he changed his doctrine on original sin, the witness of the Spirit, and Christian perfection.

Francis Schaeffer made the same observation about the word *Jesus* as a “contentless banner.” He described theologians who use familiar words but redefine them to serve their agenda. “It is humanism with a religious banner called ‘Jesus’ to which they can give any content they wish.” He concluded, “We have come to this fearsome place where the word *Jesus* has become the enemy of the Person Jesus, and the enemy of what Jesus taught.”

Our final authority is Scripture and not Wesley. Yet Wesley is a reliable interpreter of Scripture. While Wesley did fine-tune his theology, he actually tends to be remarkably consistent and logical in his overall theology over the years. The fact that he may approach the same subject in different ways under different circumstances does not necessarily constitute a contradiction. Consequently some interpretations in Wesley studies are better than others because they have a more adequate grasp of the body of literature Wesley wrote. And some interpretations may be rejected because they are not consistent with Wesley overarching emphases. Therefore the position that Wesley was inconsistent with himself is useful only to those postmodern Wesleyan scholars who try to cut and paste Wesley to fit their agenda. Thus they can dismiss any objection that their finished product does not actually reflect what Wesley taught.

REVIEWS

**Patrick McIntyre, *The Graham Formula* (Mammoth Spring, AR: White Harvest Publishing, 2005). 126 pages
ISBN 0-9635050-2-5**

Patrick McIntire gives us a brief sketch of the history of evangelism from the Awakenings to the present time. He dedicates this book to two recent and popular evangelists, Charles Finney and Billy Graham.

McIntire clearly identifies major flaws in both the popular methods and means used in modern evangelism. He takes specific aim at the “sinner’s prayer” concept and does a rather good job of identifying its errors. He fingers some recent popular evangelists as prime suspects for fostering and perpetuating this error. He specifically cites a 1990 crusade in the United States in which 600 decisions were recorded; three months later not one could be found who were continuing in their faith. He cites others who professed faith while continuing in their sinful lifestyle practices. McIntire does document some of Billy Graham’s thoughts and position which were very insightful, including the idea of conception, gestation and birth in the process of becoming a Christian.

Here is a quote that sums up McIntire’s basic premise, “evangelical Christianity is facing its biggest challenge since the fourth century. Most protestants call the time from Constantine until Luther ‘the dark ages’ because saving faith was not taught correctly. America is entering its own dark age. It’s time for another reformation.”

One major weakness of this book, in my view, is McIntire’s handling of water baptism in general and immersion in particular. He goes to great length to state his views on baptism, while at the same time claiming that it is not his intention to reduce salvation to water baptism. However, he splatters considerable ink on the issue. Another issue that I wish he had enlarged on is the direct witness of the Spirit. My Wesleyan thinking patterns convince me that the direct Witness of the Spirit is the only bulwark that will stem this downward spiral.

His yardstick of salvation is pretty good, although he hedges a little on a clear conscience. However, he does assert that it is a possibility, stating that saints can have a clean conscience. His chronicle of well-known Christians who struggled for a rather lengthy period of time before they were confident of their personal salvation should be good information for those who have yet to resolve all the issues in their own life.

If you are among those who instinctively know that something is terribly askew in the American Church, you may read this book to your profit. If you are relatively satisfied with life as it is, spend your time on something else.

—C. Marion Brown

**Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007). 204
pages ISBN-13: 978-0-8308-2875-3**

The January 2008 release of Thomas C. Oden’s latest book—*How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*—hopefully marks a positive turning-point for African Christian historiography. Oden reminds us that Christianity has a much longer history than its Western European expressions, and that much of the theological vitality of the first five centuries was rooted not in Europe but in Africa. To assume that the African origin of theological pillars such as Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine was relatively meaningless or that they came from a part of the African continent that was not quite fully African but rather somehow European is part of a long tradition of bad historiography. The unrecognized fact is that between AD 50 and AD 500 the primary shaping of Christianity was at the hands of African theologians.

Long-standing prejudices about the unimportance of Africa (and even possibly stark racism) have stood in our way. Oden sees the prejudice of nineteenth-century liberal German historians and theologians (Harnack, Schleiermacher, Troelsch, etc.) as at the crux of this distortion. But Oden suggests that Africa distinctly shaped the Christian mind in at least seven ways: (1) the western idea of the University was conceived in Alexandria, where an unrivaled library became a model for universities all over Europe, (2) Christian exegesis first emerged in Africa, (3) African biblical interpreters shaped a majority of the important Christian doctrines, (4) Africa birthed the pattern of ecumenical conferences that settled major scriptural controversies in the Patristic Era, (5) the monastic movement arose first in Africa, (6) Christian Neo-Platonism emerged from Africa, and (7) Rhetorical and dialectical

skills which were later so important in Europe were first developed in Africa. In summary, he notes that “during the formation of early ecumenical Christianity, Africa was more like a creative intellectual dynamo than a submissive sycophant.”

Oden urges that there remains a huge amount of research to fill in the details of this story. He calls for the emergence of an army of young African scholars to immerse themselves in the ancient languages (Coptic, Arabic, Ge’ez) and literature and archeology to get the task accomplished. Christian Africa must rediscover its own historic genius.

During my twenty-six years in sub-Sahara Africa I have frequently heard it alleged (especially by Muslims) that Christianity is foreign to Africa, and is essentially “white man’s religion.” By contrast, they allege, Islam is more authentically African. And I have seen the tendency—frankly, a fairly modern one—to regard North Africa as not really part of Africa, but rather part of Europe or the Middle East (even Patrick Johnstone’s highly admirable *Operation World* gives in to that potentially misleading idea). But, says Oden, “Early African Christian Orthodoxy cannot reasonably be excluded or excommunicated from the rest of African history or disconnected from the definition of authentic Africa.”

In Nigeria modern Christian missionaries arrived permanently in the South only in the 1840s, while Muslims have enjoyed

continuous settlement in certain parts of northern Nigeria for over 1,000 years. Nevertheless, few African Christians remember that (1) the African origins of the Christian faith run very deep in the first six centuries after Christ, (2) vital centers of Christianity continued in Northern Africa after the Muslim conquest into the Twelfth Century, and (3) pre-Islamic African wisdom had a profound influence on later Muslim scholarship. In this context Oden’s call for Christian Africans to rewrite the religious history of the continent in such a way that links the ancient Christian past with stupendous modern Christian growth in sub-Sahara Africa is not only appropriate but exciting.

I never tire of reminding people that Africa is the only continent in the history of the world to become majority Christian in a single century, and that Africa will likely in this century set the agenda for worldwide Christianity. And places like West Africa Theological Seminary (Lagos, Nigeria), where we have labored for the past nineteen years, are centers of *hope* as they put theological pillars under the often theologically amorphous explosion of Christian growth on the continent. And as we stand on the continental fault-line between Islam and Christianity Oden’s book is a great reminder that what we are doing is recovering a great Christian past, in which the entire Christian world owes a debt to early Africans.

—Gary S. Maxey

A. J. Smith, *Jesus Lifting Chinese* (1929; rpt. Salem, OH: Allegheny Publications, 2007). 253 pages. Call 800-672-7500.

A. J. Smith was born again in March of 1927, while serving as a missionary to China under the Church of the Nazarene. This book is the account of that revival in China in which he was saved. After returning to California in 1929, the Smith family went on a tour across the United States presenting their Chinese mission work in Nazarene churches. God’s Bible School had just printed *Jesus Lifting Chinese*. At their first service in Phoenix, Arizona, several thousand copies of the book were stolen. In God’s good providence, forty-seven years after Smith’s death his book on the Chinese revival has now been reprinted.

This reprint omits the lyrics of “A World-Wide Revival” by Mrs. C. H. Morris. It includes an introduction by J. G. Morrison, a general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene. In the text Smith included an article by Morrison which declared,

“There is every reason to believe that another great awakening is just over the horizon.” Neither Morrison nor Smith could conceive of the greatness of the revival which occurred in spite of forty years of communism in China. The Chinese church grew from one million in 1947 to perhaps one hundred million today.

Smith’s theology is best stated in his most important work *Bible Holiness*, which he wrote in 1953 and Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers reprinted in 1997. Yet even in 1929 Smith was on the right track when he declared, “If China can have a Pentecost, America can, too.” Our prayer is that revival will continue in China, where 3,000 are being saved daily, and Africa, where 24,000 are added to the church daily, until it becomes worldwide — even reaching darkened America.

—Vic Reasoner

TRIBUTE

Gordon Hugh Cary (May 17, 1918 - November 6, 2007). At nineteen years of age Gordon was a student at Kansas University when he got under such deep conviction he could not continue attending classes. He went forward in an area church and was counseled, but found no relief. He was concerned by the warning of Jesus that not everyone who says to him, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven. His parents came to get him and took him to the Wesleyan college in Miltonvale, Kansas, where he had a godly grandmother. They were in revival at the time and Gordon raised his hand for prayer in a service. Afterward someone sought him out and led him to the Lord.

Gordon remained in Miltonvale to attend college, then transferred to Marion College. He completed an undergraduate degree in mathematics and a graduate degree in religion. He then served as a faculty member at Wesleyan Methodist College (now Southern Wesleyan University) in Central, SC, from 1946-1953. At the time he resigned, he was serving as dean of theology and director of Christian service. He pastored for six years in Baker, Montana, and then for ten years in Hot Springs, South Dakota. From 1970-1987 he served in various capacities

at Brainerd Indian School in Hot Springs, including vice-president and acting president. After a couple years in California, at 71 he went to work for Focus on the Family. He worked there for the last sixteen years of his life.

Jesus taught us to "be perfect" (Matt 5:48), but scholars have long debated what that meant. One of John Wesley's greatest contributions to the discussion was his "plain account of Christian Perfection." But many still doubt whether it is possible to be so controlled by divine love that everything contrary is displaced. To those who honestly ask whether this Christian perfection is possible, those who knew Gordon Cary can affirm that it is. Gordon's life reflected Christ and manifested Christian perfection. Gordon's lasting legacy is that he motivates every real Christian to want to be more like Jesus.

Gordon was in sympathy with the doctrines and purpose of the Fundamental Wesleyan Society. He often communicated his appreciation. His article, "Receiving the Spirit: Counsel from the Word" was published in the Fall 2002 issue of *The Arminian Magazine*.

—Vic Reasoner

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