

The Arminian

A PUBLICATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL
WESLEYAN SOCIETY

ISSUE 2

FALL 2009

VOLUME 27

*IN MEMORY OF JAMES ARMINIUS
1560-1609*



The Old Reformed Church in Amsterdam where Arminius pastored

After winning the battle, Methodism then proceeded to embrace evolutionary theory and a social gospel which would save the world without delivering the individual from sin. Terry himself eventually adopted higher critical theories which eroded confidence in the authority of Scripture. The one great heresy for modernism was a belief in the existence of absolute truth found in the authoritative and inerrant Word of God.

Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century we have awakened to the fact that the reports concerning the death of Calvinism were greatly exaggerated. While select Calvinistic doctrines, such as eternal security, were preserved throughout the twentieth century by a hybrid Calvinistic-dispensationalism, today there is a renewed zeal for full-blown, five-point Calvinism. An Arminian magazine is still needed so long as modern Calvinists such as Michael Horton, professor at Westminster Theological Seminary,

deny that Arminians are even evangelical [*Modern Reformation* 1:3 (May-June 1992)].

We should not have to re-fight this battle. James Arminius, John Wesley, Richard Watson, John Fletcher, and Adam Clarke buried Calvinism through careful biblical exegesis. But those who bear the name Wesleyan or Methodist today have, all too often, abandoned their faith in scriptural authority. Modern Wesleyan theology is presented in terms of a philosophy or an experience. Modern Wesleyan churches have replaced the expositional preaching of the Word with a shallow, pragmatic, feel-good emphasis.

Thus, the Calvinist message today is appealing to a younger generation who are looking for absolute truth. While the Wesleyan-Arminian interpretation of Scripture provides a better option than the Calvinistic interpretation, we cannot even re-enter the debate until we return to a position of full scriptural authority.

HOW ARMINIAN WAS ARMINIUS?

Jeff Paton

This may sound like a strange question to many, but what constitutes someone being an Arminian can be a matter of debate. Are the proponents of eternal security Arminians or Calvinists in their proper distinction? Is one classified by the theological connections of where their doctrine starts or where it ends? As a Wesleyan, I also claim the proud heritage of the label of Arminian. But, are there Arminians that are not essentially Wesleyan in belief?

If I were to judge Arminius on the basis of how many people define Arminianism today, would we be able to call him an Arminian? There is no Arminian movement today which actually adheres strictly to every thought and position of Arminius.

Calvinists, on the other hand, gauge each other by comparing the purity of their position to their founder. Calvinists tend to speak of each other in sub-categories, measuring their idea of levels of impurity to the original doctrine of John Calvin; Hyper-Calvinism, Mild-Calvinism, Neo-Calvinism, Sublapsarianism, and more. These distinctions appear to be used to define how far someone has deviated from the original doctrine of John Calvin

himself. Basically, the approach seems to be how much of a red-headed stepchild you really are.

Arminians on the other hand, seem to approach the matter much differently. Instead of holding Arminius up as a guru or the ultimate or final word on Christian doctrine, he seems to be merely emulated for his view of Free Grace and its concomitants. When there are differences of opinion over doctrine, we do not tend to judge the differences as deviations from purity to one man's definitive word, but speak to each other as part of a brotherhood in which each individual has his own distinctive traits, but having the same father.

Sooner or later we are faced with the nagging question, what should we do with the hybrids who claim two fathers? How do we classify those who start with Arminianism and end with Calvinism? Do we allow them to claim which ever father they wish? Most Fundamentalist Baptists are Four-Point Arminians and One-Point Calvinists. They claim to hold the middle ground. Calvinists declare them to be Arminians, and most Arminians say that they are Calvinists at heart. If we use Arminius' own doc-

trine, we could say that the paternity test was inconclusive. In 1708 he wrote,

Though I here openly and ingenuously affirm, I never taught that a true believer can, either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish; yet I will not conceal, that there are passages of scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect; and those answers to them which I have been permitted to see, are not of such a kind as to approve themselves on all points to my understanding. On the other hand, certain passages are produced for the contrary doctrine [of unconditional perseverance] which are worthy of much consideration [Works, 1:667].

The following year, however, Arminius declared in his own defense that he never had asserted that believers do finally decline or fall away from faith or salvation. Arminius pointed out that while it is impossible for a believer to fall from grace, it may however be possible for a believer to cease believing. And if believers fall away from the faith and become unbelievers, it is impossible for them to do otherwise than decline from salvation [Works, 1:741-742].

But is anything beyond free grace, conditional election, and universal atonement essential to the definition of what constitutes an Arminian? How do we define the line of inclusiveness? Were the Remonstrants correct in their logical questioning that free grace may imply that one is free enough to apostatize from the faith? Article V of the Remonstrance declared,

That those who are incorporated into Christ by true faith, and have thereby become partakers of

his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand, and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no craft or power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ's hands, according to the Word of Christ, John 10:28: "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginning of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our mind.

In 1960 Carl Bangs concluded that those who call themselves Calvinists will discover that it is too simple to dismiss Arminius as a Pelagian who did not see clearly the issue of salvation by grace alone. "They may find themselves closer to him than they had supposed." The most important issue is not to contend for a theological label, but to discover scriptural truth. One of the slogans of the Reformation was "always reforming" (*Semper Reformanda*). We honor the memory of Arminius as a reformer who challenged the nonbiblical dogmatism of Reformed theology and thus reformed Reformed theology.

THE PATRISTIC INTERPRETATION of ROMANS 7:14-25

Daniel R. Jennings

Part 1, The Early Christian Witness to the Arminian Interpretation

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I (Rom 7:14-15).

Perhaps no other verses have been the subject of such intense debate as the above passage. To the Calvinist this passage represents a never-ending struggle with sin which will inevitably end in failure until the day one dies. For the Arminian it represents the

life of spiritual struggle that God wants to deliver mankind from via the experience of regeneration.

While the best way to interpret a passage will always be to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture there is also much to be gained by studying the ways that the early Christians who followed in the footsteps of the Apostles interpreted a passage. It will be the purpose of this article to examine the ancient Christian interpretation of Romans chapter seven. This paper incorporates information from *A Dissertation Of The True And Genuine Sense Of The Seventh Chapter Of St.*

Paul's Epistle To The Romans by James Arminius, along with new research.

An extensive search of Christian literature up until the fifth century revealed that prior to the fourth century no known Christian writer interpreted Romans seven in a Calvinistic manner. Rather, it was always understood up until that time to be either an unbeliever or, in one case, to describe a Christian who had *evil desires* that he did not want to have but never *evil actions*.

Throughout this paper I have focused only on those writers who commented directly upon Romans 7. There is a good amount of indirect testimony to this subject in the form of statements which indicate that various early Christian writers understood the Christian experience to be one that entailed complete victory over sin. These quotes have been left out for brevity sake but if included would add even more weight to the conclusion that no writer before the fourth century assigned the traditional Calvinistic interpretation to this passage.

No writer before the fourth century assigned the traditional Calvinistic interpretation to Romans 7:14-25.

The earliest existing writer to comment directly upon this passage was Irenaeus of Lyons (120-202) in the second century. In *Against Heresies* he connected Paul's statement "that there dwells in my flesh

no good thing" as typical of human infirmity which Jesus came to deliver men from [3:20:33]. In commenting upon the parable of the two sons in which one represented the repentant sinners of Jesus' day, the other the unrepentant Pharisees (Matt 21:28-32) Irenaeus described the Pharisees using Romans 7 [4:36:8].

Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.220), a North African Christian teacher, in *Stromata*, a refutation of Gnosticism, indicated his belief that when Paul emphasized the war between the law of God and the law of his mind (Rom 7:22-23) it was only to show that Jesus rescues men from this through salvation [3:76-78].

Tertullian (c.150-240), another North African Christian leader, indicated that the Holy Spirit makes men

free from the law of sin and death in our members (Rom 7:23). After this experience of being set free, "Our members, therefore, will no longer be subject to the law of death, because they cease to serve that of sin, from both which they have been set free" [*On The Resurrection Of The Flesh*, Ch. 46]. Elsewhere he noted his understanding that Paul was referring in Romans 7 to his pre-Christian days as an unbelieving Jew stating that "even if he has affirmed that 'good dwelleth not in his flesh,' yet he means according to 'the law of the letter,' in which he 'was'; but according to 'the law of the Spirit,' to which he annexes us, he frees us from the 'infirmity of the flesh'" [*On Modesty*, Ch. 17].

In his commentary on Romans, Origen (185-c.254) stated, "Yet when he says, 'But I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin,' as if a teacher of the Church, he has now taken upon himself the *persona* of the weak . . . Paul becomes fleshly and sold into slavery under sin and he says the same things that are customary for them to say under the pretense of an excuse or accusation. He is therefore talking about himself as if speaking under the *persona* of these others . . . it seems to me that whoever assumes that these things have been spoken under the *persona* of the Apostle smites every soul with hopelessness. For there would then be absolutely no one who does not sin in the flesh. For that is what it means to serve the law of sin in the flesh."

Methodius (d.311) wrote that "the expressions: 'That which I do, I allow not,' and 'what I hate, that do I,' are not to be understood of doing evil, but of only thinking it. For it is not in our power to think or not to think of improper things, but to act or not to act upon our thoughts. For we cannot hinder thoughts from coming into our minds, since we receive them when they are inspired into us from without; but we are able to abstain from obeying them and acting upon them. Therefore it is in our power to will not to think these things; but not to bring it about that they shall pass away, so as not to come into the mind again; for this does not lie in our power, as I said; which is the meaning of that statement, 'The good that I would, I do not'" [*The Discourse On The Resurrection: A Synopsis Of Some Apostolic Words On The Same Discourse*, Part 1].

Lactantius (260-330) wrote in response to those who said it “is my wish not to sin, but I am overpowered; for I am clothed with frail and weak flesh . . . I am led on against my will; and I sin, not because it is my wish, but because I am compelled that Jesus refuted them by being “clothed with flesh, so that he may show that even the flesh is capable of virtue . . . that by overpowering sin he may teach man that sin may be overpowered by him” [*The Divine Institutes*, 4:24]. Elsewhere he very plainly says in refutation of those who taught that Paul referred to his Christian experience as “wretched man that I am” that “it is impossible for a man to be wretched who is endued with virtue” [3:12].

In the anonymous third-century documents that have come to be called the *Two Epistles Concerning Virginit*y it states in reference to Paul’s statement “For I

The early church did not understand Rom 7:14-25 to teach the necessity of sin in believers.

know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing” that Paul could say this of his himself “because the Spirit of God is not in it” [First Epistle, Ch. 8].

Macarius the Egyptian (c.300-390) noted his understanding of Romans 7 connecting it back to Adam who, in his sin sold his soul to the Devil and it was for this reason that Paul cried out “*Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*” He then went on to compare life in the Spirit as the answer to life in the flesh as it was portrayed in Romans 7 [*Homily 1:7* on Ezekiel 1:4-2:1].

Epiphanius of Salamis (c.310? -403) was a dedicated scholar of the early church whose area of expertise was heretical groups. In commenting upon Origenism he quoted the above-mentioned Methodius’ interpretation of Romans 7 without any indication of disagreement [*Panarion*, Heresy 64:56:8-59:6. See also 64:62:8-13]. In fact Epiphanius referred to Methodius as “a learned man and a hard fighter for the truth” [63:2].

Cyril of Jerusalem (c.315-c.386) in commenting upon this passage noted for his students to “learn this also, that the soul, before it came into this world, had committed no sin, but having come in sinless, we now sin

of our free-will. Listen not, I pray thee, to anyone perversely interpreting the words, *But if I do that which I would not*” [*Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 4:19*]. He then went on to quote Isaiah 1:19-20, Romans 1:19, 1:28, 6:19, Matthew 13:15, and Jeremiah 2:21. In another place Cyril commented upon how Paul used the phrase “But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity” to describe how the Devil had used the flesh against mankind since the time of Adam but that Jesus in taking upon himself human flesh had saved man’s nature [*Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 12:15*].

Basil the Great (c.330-379) in commenting upon Romans 7:14-17 states that Paul was developing fully the idea that it is impossible for one who is in the power of sin to serve the Lord and then goes on to indicate who will free a man from that kind of struggle with sin. He then continues that, in view of God’s free offer to redeem us from the life portrayed in Romans 7, that “we are under the strictest obligation . . . to free ourselves from the dominion of the Devil who leads a slave of sin into evils even against his will” as is happening with the man in Romans 7 [*Concerning Baptism, 1.1*].

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-c.395?) quoted Paul’s words in Romans 7:14 to describe all mankind as being “sold under sin” and then in asking what was the “method of release from this” directed his readers to the new birth [*On Virginit*y, Ch. 13].

John Chrysostom (347-407) in commenting upon this passage indicated his belief that it was a man who was living under the Law of Moses noting that, “Wherefore he went on to say, ‘but I am carnal;’ giving us a sketch now of man, as comporting himself in the Law, and before the Law” [*Homilies On The Epistle To The Romans, Homily 13, Commentary of Romans 7:14*].

Paulinus of Nola (c.353-431) indicating his belief that Romans 7 was a picture of a man in his pre-Christian days stated “For now the old war, in which the law of sin struggled with the law of God, is wiped out in Christ, for the spirit which serves God governs by faith the soul subjected to it, and the flesh in turn becomes the servant of the soul, accompany-

ing it, as it serves God, in every duty of obedience” [Letter 12:6]. He would later write that the phrase “sold under sin” refers to an individual who has not been redeemed by Christ [Letter 20:5].

In analyzing the early Christian understanding of Romans 7 it has become very clear that the early church did not understand this passage to teach the necessity of sin in believers, usually attributing to it the interpretation that it was a man who was striving to please God under the Law of Moses. In fact this interpretation was so prevalent that when discussing

this passage around 415AD, Pelagius (c.350-c.420?) could write in his now lost work entitled *In Defense Of The Freedom Of The Will*, which is preserved by Augustine in *On The Grace Of Christ And On Original Sin* [1:43] that “that which you wish us to understand of the apostle himself, *all Church writers* assert that he spoke in the person of the sinner, and of one who was still under the law. . . .” Augustine, in his attempt to refute this statement of Pelagius, was unable to offer any church writers who disagreed with Pelagius.

WESLEYAN FOUNDERS and SCRIPTURE, Part 2

Adam Clarke and Richard Watson

Daryl McCarthy

Adam Clarke on the Inspiration of Scripture

Adam Clarke (1760-1832), the first commentator of early Methodism, held a high view of Scripture. His Bible commentary, which was his greatest work, published between 1810 and 1825, evinces a high regard and deep devotion for the Word. Clarke frequently affirmed his belief in the plenary inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. In his creed which he adopted early in his Christian life and maintained throughout his career he stated his position: “The Sacred Scriptures or Holy Books . . . contain a full revelation of the will of God, in reference to man; and are alone sufficient for every thing relative to the *faith* and *practice* of a Christian, and were given by the inspiration of God” [J. B.B. Clarke, ed. *An Account of the Infancy, Religious and Literary Life of Adam Clarke*, 1:172]. It would never have occurred to Clarke to make the bifurcation so common among modern-day Wesleyans between “faith and practice” and historical truth and factual reliability of the Bible. To read such assumptions back into Clarke is to commit a serious error of interpreting him in the light of modern debates and arguments, which Shelton warned inerrantists about.

In a sermon on Romans 15:4 he declared, “We must ever consider these Scriptures as coming from God, as divinely inspired, and as containing his infallible truth” [*Miscellaneous Works*, 6:420].

His article “General Account of the Sacred Writings” affirms his acceptance of the sixty-six book canon and states that the Bible is “the only complete directory of the faith and practice of men” [*Works*, 12:80, 83, 122].

In his commentary Clarke presents two principles demonstrating the divine inspiration of the Bible. First, Scripture teaches the inspiration of the Holy Spirit concerning itself. The fact that the Gospels and Acts were written several years after the events compels us to believe that Jesus’ promise, of the instruction of the apostles by the Holy Spirit in recalling His words (John 14:26), was indeed fulfilled in a very real way. Also Scripture addresses itself variously as the Word of God, the commandment of God, the wisdom of God, the testimony of God, the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ, and the mystery of His will. The second principle was that the apostles themselves were assured of the inspiration and assistance of the Holy Spirit of Truth as is indicated in several passages, e.g., Zech 1:6; 1 Pet 1:12; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 Cor 2:10, 12, 13 [*Commentary*, 5:11-12].

Clarke denied the mechanical dictation theory, as do most inerrantists. Even though he taught that “the words contained in it [scripture] were inspired by the Holy Spirit into the minds of faithful men,” he insisted that his doctrine of inspiration was not a system of mechanical dictation, but was contrary to such a theory [*Works*, 12:132]. In cases in which the

writers already had knowledge about the subject matter, the only inspiration required was that which “will assure us of the truth of what they wrote, whether by inspiration of *suggestion*, or *direction* only; but not for such an inspiration as implies that even their *words* were dictated, or their phrases suggested to them by the Holy Ghost. . . . Although this might be done in some cases, as in 1 Cor. 2:13.” The inspiration of the Holy Spirit kept them from “error in their reasonings” and from making invalid doctrinal inferences from the Old Testament which would be contrary “to the true intent and meaning of them.” Mechanical dictation is refuted by: (1) the fact that the writers were “hagiographers, who are supposed to be left to the use of their own words;” (2) the variety in style and solecisms; and (3) the author’s own words in

The apostles were assisted and preserved from error by the Spirit of God.

Scriptures which indicate a clear freedom of human expression, as in cases in which uncertainty, doubt, or ignorance are evinced (e.g., Rom 15:24, 28; 1 Cor 1:16; 16:5; 2 Cor 1:15-17; etc.) [Commentary, 5:9-10].

However, in his comments on 2 Peter 1:20, 21, Clarke indicates that the Scripture writers were sometimes “...carried away, out of themselves and of the whole region, as it were, of human knowledge and conjecture, by the Holy Ghost, who, without their knowing anything of the matter, dictated to them what to speak, and what to write, and so far above their knowledge were the words of prophecy, that they did not even know the *intent* of those words” [Commentary, 6:883]. Thus a greater degree of inspiration was necessary when the authors were to write about things they had little or no natural knowledge concerning, than when they were writing about things with which they were quite familiar.

Adam Clarke on the Inerrancy of Scripture

Clarke unequivocally affirmed the full trustworthiness or inerrancy of Scripture. In his article on “The Principles of the Christian Religion,” he stated, “The Bible . . . is a revelation from God himself, and declares his will relative to the salvation of men. . . . men may err, but the Scriptures cannot; for it is the *Word of God* himself, who can neither mistake, deceive,

nor be deceived” [Works, 12:132]. He frequently and approvingly quoted the saying concerning Scriptures that they have “God for their *Author*, salvation for their end, and truth, without mixture of error, for their matter” [Works, 11:406]. In his *Commentary* he categorically stated that “The apostles were assisted and preserved from error by the Spirit of God; and therefore were enabled to deliver to us an unerring rule of faith.” The Holy Spirit did not permit them “to err in the delivery of what was thus indited in his name or which they had written as *apostles* of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ” [Commentary, 5:9, 11].

Clarke took inerrancy of Scripture as meaning that it is without error in all it affirms as fact, and not inerrant in what it does not affirm. For instance, the chronological sequence of recorded events may not be necessarily reflected in historical accounts, such as in the Gospels, unless the sequence is specifically affirmed. Furthermore, in the recording of conversations it is not necessary to have “the very words” but the “true *intent* and *meaning*” of the exact words. However, he believed that John 14:20 does promise exactness in the recording of Jesus’ exact words [Commentary, 5:10].

Clarke stoutly defended the canonicity and textual purity of the Scriptures. The canon as we have it is complete and authentic. The Scriptures have been transmitted to us “without addition, defalcation, or willful corruption of any kind.” He refers to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in support of this. In Clarke’s opinion, the textual variants are not significant enough to lead to any doctrinal error or obscurity or confusion in moral practice. “All is safe and sound—all pure and holy, it is . . . the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ.” With regard to particular textual variants, such as 1 John 5:7, he honestly admits that he did not believe that was yet fully settled. He did believe however, that the Joshua 21:35-36 problem is solved by 1 Chronicles 6:78-79 [Works, 6:388, 415].

Adam Clarke on the Use of Scripture

Clarke believed in the eternal applicability of God’s Word. In his practical suggestions on how to read the Bible he advised Christians to read it as the very word of God Himself because God “considers it as much his word now as he did when he first spoke it” [Works, 11:416].

Richard Watson on the Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture

Richard Watson (1781-1833), the first systematic theologian of early Wesleyanism, propounded a doctrine of Scripture which was identical in every major respect to that of John Wesley and Adam Clarke. Interestingly enough, in his classic *Theological Institutes*, Watson developed no systematic doctrine of Scripture and inspiration. He treated revelation extensively, but only in an apologetical manner and not a doctrinal manner. However, in his *Conversations for the Young*, Watson develops a fuller treatment of inspiration. He defines inspiration as meaning, “The sacred writers composed their works under so plenary and immediate an influence of the Holy Spirit, that God may be said to speak by them to man, and

The whole of Holy Writ is truth without mixture of error.

not merely that they spoke to men in the name of God, and by his authority” [*The Works of the Rev. Richard Watson*, 6:11].

From this foundation Watson developed several principles concerning inspiration of Scripture in this “Conversation.” First, the Bible is trustworthy and without error. The doctrine that God spoke via Scriptures to men and not merely that the authors of Scripture spoke by God’s authority “secures the Scriptures from all error both as to the subjects spoken and the manner of expressing them.” Watson drew no qualifying lines and made no equivocation on the subject. Later in this same “Conversation” he affirms that the Holy Spirit exerted sufficient influence upon the whole of Holy Writ that as it was being written by human authors “it became truth without mixture of error” [*Works*, 6:11, 14]. For Watson, phrases such as “The Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake,” “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the Prophet,” and verses as 2 Peter 1:21 affirm the inerrancy of the words in the Word of God. Watson points out that the term “scriptures” is used in the Bible as applicable not only to the Old Testament writings but also to New Testament material and treats the books written under divine inspiration as a special class of writings and as a collective whole [*Works*, 6:12].

Secondly, the apostles claim inspiration not only with regard to their general topics but also with regard to their very words. Such inspiration was provided for by the Lord when He promised the Spirit would “guide them into all truth” and that when they were called upon to testify, the very words would be given them. Paul also claimed verbal inspiration in 1 Corinthians 2:13. Thus, the inspired writers were indeed “the penmen of the Holy Ghost” [*Works*, 6:12].

Thirdly, the differences in style and individual traits can be accounted for by the fact that while the Holy Spirit guided the men by suggestion or even occasionally overruling the selection of certain words, most of the time, God permitted the men to write with their own styles and unique personalities. “The verbiage, style, and manner of each was not so much displaced, as elevated, enriched, and employed by the Holy Spirit...” There is as well an evident “previous fitness” of each of the writers for their particular subject areas [*Works*, 6:13]. Thus Paul’s abilities fitted him to write on doctrine and practice while Luke was better equipped to write on history.

Fourthly, we may assume that there were varying degrees of the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the writers as they wrote. Certainly the recording of commonly known historical events did not require a high degree of inspiration or a miracle of memory. Their plenary inspiration consisted in this:

that they were kept from all lapses of memory, or inadequate conceptions, even on these subjects; and on all others the degree of communication and influence, both as to doctrine, facts, and the terms in which they were to be recorded for the edification of the church, was proportioned to the necessity of the case, but so that the whole was authenticated or dictated by the Holy Spirit with so full an influence, that it became truth without mixture of error, expressed in such terms as he himself ruled or suggested [*Works*, 6:14].

Finally, Watson argues in his *Conversations* that since Christ declares that the Old Testament is divinely inspired, “the same arguments which prove the Messiahship of Christ, and the inspiration of the Apostles, prove, consequently, the truth, the uncorruptness, and the authority of all the books of the Old Testament” [*Works*, 6:81]. Also in his sermon “The Oracles of God” he declares that since the

Scriptures are from God, their truth and wisdom are as “demonstrable” as the wisdom and holiness of God Himself [*Works*, 4:47].

Besides these five principles from the *Conversations*, the only direct reference to the inerrancy of the Word in the *Theological Institutes* affirms a high view of scripture. Watson’s comment comes in a discussion concerning objections to the Mosaic account of creation. It was claimed that the Bible is not accurate enough to be judged by scientific standards; it was not written as a science textbook. Watson responds, “If Moses professes by divine inspiration to give an account of the manner in which the world was framed, he must describe the facts as they occurred; and if he has assigned a date to its creation out of nothing, that date, if given by an infallible authority, cannot be contradicted by true *philosophy*” [*Theological Institutes*, 1:248].

While Watson couches his points about the creation in hypothetical or rhetorical terms, his assumptions are significant. We see from this account that he believed (1) that the Bible writers “must describe the facts as they occurred”; (2) that the information contained in the Word was given by “an infallible authority”; and (3) therefore, such facts could not be contradicted. The Bible must be factually correct in all matters about which it speaks. Thus, it is inerrant in science and history, as well as in matters of faith, to the degree of precision intended.

Watson defended the substantive textual purity of the manuscripts not only in his lengthy treatment in the *Institutes* of this subject, but also in his *Conversations*. He pointed out that the textual variants do not affect the credibility or integrity of the text and that the Bible is the most “critically correct” and “satisfactorily perfect” of any ancient work [*Works*, 6:173].

Richard Watson on the Use of Scripture

In various sermons and articles Watson stated several practical principles concerning the Scripture. As “the expression of the mind of God” and “a perfect revelation of the truth,” Scripture is accompanied and used

by the Holy Spirit in a powerful manner in the hearts of men [*Works*, 4:82-83]. The salvation of the world is to be gained by “the ministry of the Word” [*Works*, 2:9-10]. Scripture helps make the messages of conscience and natural revelation more understandable [*Works*, 1:464]. “The only standard of the doctrine” is Scripture [*Works*, 12:199]. “Every course of conduct” can be universally and easily judged by the rule furnished by Scripture [*Works*, 4:464]. The Scriptures are the source of all true moral knowledge and influence [*Works*, 4:60-61]. The Christian’s response to Scriptural revelation is to be found in full submission to its authority” [*Works*, 4:400].

Conclusion

We have seen that the three giants of early Wesleyanism unanimously and unequivocally affirmed their belief in the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. Mechanical dictation is rejected by all, though Wesley does not deal with this particular view as systematically as Clarke and Watson. There is a strong emphasis among all three on the practical role and functions of the Word both in the community of believers and in their individual lives. But most of all, all three are clear in their affirmation of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

Wesley proclaimed, “If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from God” [*Journal*, 24 July 1776].

Clarke declared that “men may err, but the Scriptures cannot; for it is the Word of God himself, who can neither mistake, deceive, nor be deceived” [*Works*, 12:132]. “The apostles were assisted and preserved from error by the Spirit of God” [*Commentary*, 5:9, 11]. Hence, Scripture is “truth, without mixture of error” [*Works*, 11:406].

Watson defended the doctrine that God’s authority “secures the Scriptures from all error both as to the subject spoken and the manner of expressing them” and spoke of the Bible as being “truth without mixture of error” [*Works*, 6:11, 14].

It is appropriate that we conclude our study of the early Wesleyan views of Scripture by meditating on a portion of one of the worshipful poems the Wesleys penned concerning, “The Word of God.”

Men may err, but the Scriptures cannot.

The Word of God by all confess'd,
Of truth the indubitable test,
My perfect rule I own;
The Word which doth His mind reveal
To those who would perform His will,
And worship Him alone

[*The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*,
George Osborn, compiler, 13:258-59].

A study of the views of inspiration and inerrancy held by early Wesleyan theologians in America can be found in Daryl McCarthy, "Inerrancy in American Wesleyanism," in John D. Hannah, ed., Inerrancy and the Church (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 279-321.

THE ACTS OF THE SPIRIT, PART 5

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Joseph D. McPherson

When and where did the conversion of Saul of Tarsus really take place? Did the supernatural transformation of this man take place on the road to Damascus prior to his entering the gates of that ancient city? There are many who would answer this question in the affirmative. Others are not so sure. In any case, few would disagree with those who consider the conversion of Saul of Tarsus one of the most fascinating of New Testament accounts.

Luke, the author of the book of Acts mentions Saul three times in chapters 7 and 8 before giving us the details of his conversion in chapter 9. He is shown to be a furious opponent of Jesus Christ and His church. We are informed that when Stephen was martyred, witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul who was giving his approval to the death of this saint. Following Stephen's martyrdom we find Saul exerting enormous effort in an attempt to destroy the church, going from house-to-house in search of Christians, dragging both men and women off to prison. Wayne Keller concludes that "Beside Satan, Saul was the Lord's greatest enemy." His intention was to destroy all those that claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ.

We can see that Saul's attitude toward Christianity was diabolical. Prison and even death were instruments by which he hoped to put an end to the infant church. He was willing to travel far and wide to have men and women arrested. Saul's zeal in his persecution of the Church did not stop with the local vicinity of Jerusalem. We read that he acquired letters from the high priest with authority to arrest any Christians

he might find in the synagogues of Damascus and bring them as bound prisoners back to Jerusalem. Some believe that Christians in Damascus at that time were not original residents but probably Hellenistic Christians who had fled from Jerusalem. It is thought that the high priest would have had no direct authority over the permanent residents of Damascus since they were not in his immediate jurisdiction.

Luke refers to the threatened Christian community as "the Way." It seemed to be a common name by which the church identified itself. Luke used the term several times in Acts. The name recalled the words of Jesus when he said, "I am the way" (John 14:6).

Some prefer to think that Saul was on horseback as he traveled toward Damascus. Luke doesn't tell us whether he was riding on a horse, a donkey or was just walking. We do know, however, that as he drew near to the city, an exceedingly bright light appeared out of heaven. The light was so overpowering that Saul fell to the ground. He then heard a voice calling out to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Up to this time Saul had been convinced that he was fighting God's cause. He hadn't so much as imagined himself to be persecuting God. He had rather thought of himself as one defending God against a group of religious apostates.

Saul answered the voice from heaven with a question: "*Who are you Lord?*" The Greek word for "Lord" in this place is *kurie*, used in the vocative case and often means simply "Sir" – a title of respect. Before Jesus had so much as identified himself, Saul is asking, "*Who are you kurie.*" We can hardly say

that by his addressing Jesus as *kurie*, or sir, that this was a confession of faith. Rather it was an expression of awe, punctuated with alarm and profound respect. We understand that within Saul's ancient culture, people used the word "Lord" not only when addressing deity, but also when speaking in an attitude of respect to a person of higher rank."

Even after the voice identifies Himself as "*Jesus whom thou persecutest*" it is hardly likely that the full implications of Jesus' reply should have been grasped by a dazed and shocked man and translated into full Christian commitment all in a matter of seconds.

Paul seems to have been in the pangs of the new birth for three days.

Both Charles Carter and Ralph Earle, writing in *The Evangelical Bible Commentary of Acts* conclude that Saul was only arrested

and convicted on the Damascus road, and was not converted and renewed until ministered to by Ananias. This same view was embraced by church fathers and by Wesley, Fletcher, Clarke and Richard Watson.

There is no doubt that the voice that spoke to Saul shocked him when He answered, "*I am Jesus.*" Jesus is a personal name, the one given Him on the day of His circumcision because it established His identity as the One who saves. When the risen Jesus told Saul he had been persecuting Him, an important point was being made. Saul had not persecuted Christ directly, but he was persecuting believers and that was the same as persecuting Christ Himself. While persecuting the church Saul was persecuting the body of which Jesus is the head. Jesus Christ and His church are one. Saul could not ignore the fact that he had been persecuting the followers of Jesus, and that Jesus was alive and in some way was identified with God the Father, whom Israel worshiped. As a result of this conclusion, he had to revise his whole thinking about the life, teaching, and death of Jesus. It is apparent that the glorified Jesus, the Messiah, had indeed appeared to Saul. The importance of this revelation is later emphasized by Paul in his writings. He had seen the risen and glorified Jesus, and this was as real as Jesus' appearances to His disciples after His resurrection.

"And he [Saul] trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." The men traveling with Saul stood speechless. They heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul, confused and shocked, found himself blinded and had to be led into the city and house of Judas by the men who were with him. For the next three days blind Saul fasted, without a doubt meditating on the meaning of his encounter with Jesus. Commenting upon those words, "And he was three days without sight," Wesley says, "So long he seems to have been in the pangs of the new birth."

So far from considering Saul a regenerated Christian immediately following his experience on the road to Damascus, the saintly John Fletcher describes him as suffering "agony of penitential grief, when he spent three days and three nights in fasting and prayer." It was a "groaning beneath the weight of ... sins, and under conviction of a two-fold blindness" [*Works*. 1:579; 3:16].

Luke next introduces Ananias as the person through whom God would restore sight and reveal to Saul the nature of his future ministry. Ananias was a Jewish Christian believer and a resident of Damascus. Paul later called him "*a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.*" Ananias had a vision from the Lord in which he was told to go to the house of a man named Judas who lived on Straight Street in Damascus. There he would find Saul actively praying. In fact, the Lord had already shown Saul how his prayers were to be heard. For what the Lord was telling Ananias to do, He had already revealed to Saul in advance. In a vision, God showed Saul that a man by the name of Ananias would place his hands on him and restore his sight.

We are not surprised when it is told us how uneasy Ananias was concerning a meeting with Saul. In straightforward openness Ananias expressed his fears of this man and what he had heard from many about him. Those from whom Ananias had heard terrifying reports about Saul were very likely fugitive Christians who had fled from Jerusalem to Damascus. Ananias referred to the Christians as saints. He referred to them as "*all who call on your name.*" He

knew all about Saul's plans regarding the Christians in Damascus and his authority to arrest those Christians. He laid all of his fears concerning Saul before the Lord. The Lord responded to Ananias by giving him a glimpse of what Saul was to accomplish in future ministry. *"I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* The great task of Saul was to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

With this understanding of Saul's future role, Ananias entered the house of Judas and addressed the praying man as *"Brother Saul."* It was common for Jewish men to greet one another with "brother" as a word of racial kinship. Ananias was simply halting Saul as a fellow Jew. Such a friendly greeting would tend to put Saul at ease—assuring him that his past would not be held against him. "It is unlikely," says one writer that, "Ananias would call one a Christian who had neither yet received the Spirit nor yet been baptized."

We recall that when Peter was beginning his sermon on the day of Pentecost he began with, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak." Although those to whom he was about to speak were yet unconverted, because they were fellow Jews he called them "brethren." We cannot therefore assume that Ananias' greeting of "Brother Saul" means that Saul's conversion was complete. The most that can be said was that he was in the process of becoming a Christian. James D. G. Dunn stresses the fact that Paul's three-day experience was a unity. In other words, his conversion, properly speaking, was a crisis experience extending over the three days from the Damascus road to his baptism.

Over in the 22nd chapter, Paul retells the whole story of his conversion. Listen to his personal testimony. *"Ananias,"* says he, *"came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked upon him. And he said, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*

"According to the author's use of terms," writes Dr. Robert Lyon, "this is conversion language: baptism,

forgiveness of sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Here we see that the visit of Ananias to Paul represents the culmination of the latter's conversion, at which time he is filled with the Spirit, that is, he received the Spirit." Dr. Lyon continues by explaining that "What we have here then is another example of this experience of the Holy Spirit at conversion. It is Paul's initial encounter with the Spirit.

Lyon concludes, "The baptism in the Spirit, far from being the second experience and an experience subsequent to . . . being born of the Spirit, stands scripturally at the heart of conversion. . . . Perfection in love is a follow-up of that baptism in the Spirit which sets the believer on course."

Adam Clarke assures the reader that Saul became "a thorough Christian convert" only after being baptized, which symbolized washing away of sins and his calling on the name of the Lord. It is of paramount importance to recognize both water baptism and Spirit baptism as initiatory events and therefore to be scripturally understood as taking place at conversion. Water baptism is symbolic of Spirit baptism. It is not water baptism at conversion and Spirit baptism later in a second work of grace. By following carefully New Testament teaching we see they are both parts of the new birth process in a justification and regeneration experience. None beyond the day of Pentecost were considered to be Christians who had not the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9).

"There are," writes the Rev. John Fletcher, "three . . . states through which all the children of Adam must pass before they can be real Christians." The first state is "that of an unawakened or 'natural man,' who neither loves nor fears God." The second is "that of a penitent man, or returning sinner, who, being awakened into a real concern for his salvation, fears God and the threatenings of the law, and dreads death with its consequences." The third state is "that of a man 'under grace,' or a true believer, who loves God above all persons and things, and rejoices in the expiation and pardon of his sins, which he has now received in Christ by a living faith. We see these three states exemplified in the clearest manner in the life of St. Paul."

On March 7, 2007, John MacArthur opened his Shepherd's Conference with the topic "Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist is a Premillennialist." He called all Calvinists to become premillennial and leave amillennialism for the Arminians. He argued:

- Since amillennialism holds to a replacement theology that Israel forfeited God's promises because of their disobedience and was superseded by the Church
- And since this interpretation of Scripture is based on the understanding that the fulfillment of God's promises are conditional
- This amounts to the Arminian doctrine of conditional election

This amounts to guilt by association and, as usual, Arminianism is the scapegoat. If MacArthur's analysis is correct, then let me be the first to welcome all Arminians to leave premillennialism. Before we proceed, however, we need to define some terms.

- A biblical study of *covenants* indicates that they are conditional in nature. Richard Watson defined the essence of a covenant as mutual stipulations between two parties. "It could not be a covenant unless there were terms, something required, as well as something promised or given, duties to be performed, as well as blessings to be received." In my article "An *Arminian* Covenant Theology" [Fall 2000], I cited a Calvinistic scholar who declared that according to Leviticus 18:24-30, remaining in the land was conditional. If Israel did not obey, God said he would spew them out (v 28). But did not God promise to give the land to Abraham and his descendants "forever" (Gen 13:15)? Of course he did. But there remains a conditional side to the promises. Jesus states, without reservation or equivocation, that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matt 21:45). Anyone who claims to interpret the Bible literally cannot easily dismiss these passages. If the promises to Israel are unconditional, then no matter what Israel does, she still inherits all the promises. There can be no "spewing out," no kingdom "taken away," and no coming to "remove your lampstand."

- Thus, *Arminianism* and *Calvinism* understand the conditional nature of covenants. It is *dispensationalism* which teaches that covenants are unconditional. According to Arminian theology, whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Thus, we cannot be accused of teaching salvation by works because the condition is faith in the work of Christ alone. But the faith which saves is a present tense faith and we must persevere in faith or else we are liable to apostasy.

Calvinism teaches that only the elect can be saved. Those who ultimately do not maintain the condition of the covenant were never elect. While Louis Berkhof held that the covenant is eternal and unbreakable, as a consistent Calvinist he held that it is particular and realized only in the elect. Yet he also concluded that if there were no condition, God only would be bound by the covenant and the covenant would lose its character as a covenant, "for there are two parts in all covenants." Yet God himself fulfills the condition in the elect. Therefore, it appears that the only real condition, in the Calvinistic covenant of grace, is that we must be selected for salvation. But those who are the elect are predestined to persevere in faith.

Dispensationalism teaches that a believer could be a new creation and yet remain a carnal Christian without any change in character or exhibiting any spiritual fruit. Thus, a Christian could deliberately choose to disobey his Lord and remain in that state of carnality, addicted to sin. The promptings of the Spirit may be ignored and the wickedness intensified until the "believer" is sucked into a kind of black hole, winding up in misery and filth. They could even die in such a condition, but they are assured of heaven because the covenant of salvation is unconditional.

No one has taken on this antinomian theology of dispensationalism any more boldly than John MacArthur in *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988). And yet poor John cannot decide whether he wants to be a dispensationalist or a Calvinist. While he professes to be a Calvinist, he holds to a dispensational view of covenants.

- *Amillennialism* and *postmillennialism* both interpret the millennium as the realized spiritual kingdom and not in terms of a political Jewish kingdom. All postmillennialists are amillennial in the sense that they deny *chiliasm* or the literal earthly reign of Christ. And all amillennialists are postmillennial regarding the timing of Christ's return. *Premillennialists*, however, believe that Christ must return to earth to establish his millennial reign. However, the real issue in evaluating MacArthur's call to premillennialism is that all three positions historically have held to what MacArthur labels as replacement theology, meaning that the Church is now the Israel of God. Thus, MacArthur is actually contending for a particular type of premillennialism, known as dispensationalism, which makes a distinction between Israel and the Church. Daniel Fuller explained it was necessary for dispensationalism to insist the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional and the blessings physical so that Israel and the Church could be kept distinct.
- All who do not accept MacArthur's dispensationalism are labeled by him as "supercessionists," meaning that the Church has superceded Israel, or as holding to "replacement theology." This term is so offensive to Jack Van Impe that he declares it to be heresy. But Jack has such a consistent track record of failed predictions that I doubt whether anyone except Rexella still takes him seriously.

Is God through with old Israel? No, because "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom 11:26). But all who are saved are added to the Church. Thus, God does not have two brides. The Church is God's covenant people, the continuation and expansion of old Israel.

Perhaps the Bible could shed some light on the commentators. In Romans 4:12 and 16 the "seed of Abraham" includes all who believe. In fact, Paul redefines the Jew as one who has undergone circumcision of the heart by the Spirit of God (Rom 2:28-29). Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:29). The Church is described as the children of God, heirs according to the promise, and sharing in the inheritance promised to Abraham (Rom 4:13). Both Jew and Gentile are to be incorporated into "one new man" (Eph 2:15). Christ reformed the old Church (Heb 9:10) and the new Church was built upon the foundation of the old (Eph 2:20). Thus, the Church is the new Israel of God (Gal 6:16; Eph 2:12; 19).

According to Ray Dunning, "The most pervasive metaphor used in the New Testament for the Church is 'the new Israel.'" There are eighteen descriptions of Israel given in the Old Tes-

tament which, in the New Testament, are used in reference to the Christian Church. In addition there are sixteen passages in the Old Testament referring to Israel which are quoted in the New Testament as referring to Christians. And there are seven ethical commands to Israel in the Old Testament which are quoted in the New Testament as applying to the Church. Therefore, the conditional privilege of old Israel has been transferred to the Church. N. T. Wright said that the promises to Israel have been "redefined."

In his *Notes* on Romans 8:33 Wesley explained that the Jews who would not receive the Lord Jesus Christ were termed "reprobate." They no longer continued to be the people of God, but were cut off from the chosen people of God because of their apostasy. Their titles and privileges were transferred to both Jews and Gentiles who embraced Christianity.

Methodist writers have remained consistent in their interpretation that the Church is the new Israel. In fact, Israel and the Church had never been segregated until the theology of John Darby (1800-1882). Darby concluded, "Israel is always the people of God and cannot cease to be the people of God" because God never casts off. "He does not repent of His counsels, nor of the call which gives them effect." Therefore, Darby concluded that the Church was an interruption of God's plan with Israel.

Daniel Steele had the opportunity of hearing John Darby and reported that he could hardly keep from laughing in his face. "The wriggling and floundering of this great evangelist was something wonderful to behold. May I never see another man, manifestly of so great genius and learning, compelled to crawl through orifices so small. There is something very depressing to a generous mind to witness such an intellectual humiliation in the attempt to save a baseless dogma from a manifest overthrow."

Darby carried this dogma of Israel and the Church to its logical conclusion. If God has two peoples, then Christ must return separately for each of them. Thus, Darby also introduced the teaching of a secret, pretribulation rapture of the Church prior to Christ's return to establish his Jewish kingdom. A proponent of this teaching, John Walvoord, admitted, "It is therefore not too much to say that the rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology than eschatology." In other words, this separate coming of Christ is a logical necessity of a system that has distinguished between the Church and Israel. Tim LaHaye also contended, "Separating Israel and the church is one of the major keys to rightly understanding Bible prophecy."

John Hagee believes every Jewish person who lives according to the Law has a relationship with God and will come to redemption. He contends that Jewish people do not need to be saved since they are under a different covenant. He told the *Houston Chronicle* that “trying to convert Jews is a waste of time. Jews already have a covenant with God that has never been replaced by Christianity” (30 April 1988). More recently in his book, *In Defense of Israel* (2007), Hagee claims that Jesus never came to be Messiah to the Jewish people.

MacArthur told his conference, “If you get Israel right you will get eschatology right. If you don’t get Israel right, you will never get eschatology right.” Yet those who adopt a dispensational theology tend to get a lot of things wrong. MacArthur also taught that the covenants of Scripture were irrevocable

promises based on God’s sovereign, unilateral, unconditional election. MacArthur concluded that if you get election right — divine, sovereign, gracious, unconditional, unilateral, irrevocable election — you get God right, you get Israel right, and you get eschatology right.

While MacArthur calls all Calvinists to embrace the dogma of Darby, unfortunately many who claim to be Arminian have also embraced it. They have never processed the implications of the theology they picked up from televangelists. Dispensationalism, with its secret rapture of the Church, is based on the premise that God’s promises are unconditional. Thus, no consistent Arminian can embrace MacArthur’s call to dispensational premillennialism. Ironically, no consistent Calvinist can either!

REVIEWS

Joel B. Green and William H. Willimon, general editors, *The Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009). 1568 pages. ISBN 978-0-687-64503-9

In the Fall 1994 *Arminian Magazine*, I offered my evaluation of *The Wesley Bible* (1990). In the Fall 2001 *Arminian Magazine*, I also reviewed *The Reflecting God Study Bible* (2000). Both of these study Bibles are out of print and we now have the third Wesleyan study Bible.

This study Bible incorporates Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes* and sermons. In general, it seems to avoid theological controversy and emphasize ethical holiness. It also deals with Wesleyan Core Terms and Life Application Topics. The comments on Romans 7 are good. It avoids presenting American holiness theology as Wesleyan, which was the weakness of the first study Bible. As I pointed out in my review of the second Wesleyan study Bible, the editors worked under restrictions imposed by the publisher. Thus, the brief notes it contains were inadequate.

And so, is the third time the charm? Unfortunately, this new study Bible is unnecessarily liberal. There is no reason to use “Before the Common Era” (BCE) and “Common Era” (CE), instead of “Before Christ” (BC) and “In the Year of our Lord” (AD). The greatest historical event in human history was the advent of Jesus Christ and even the secular history of civilization textbook I teach from uses BC and AD in acknowledgment of that fact.

We are told at Genesis 1:1-2:3 that this is not a scientific explanation for the universe and that the text makes no claim to answer the “how” of creation. Actually, this section does tell us

that God created everything in six days and Hebrews 11:3 tells us that God created from nothing pre-existent (*ex nihilo*). The problem is that it is just not theologically correct to believe the Bible in the face of accepted evolutionary theory.

It is unacceptable to claim, as this study Bible does, that the physical love depicted in the Song of Solomon does not describe a married relationship. Nor is there any reason to divide Isaiah into three parts since it was all written by Isaiah and not piecemeal over several generations in the tradition of Isaiah. And the *New Revised Standard Version* still does not translate Isaiah 7:14 right. According to Matthew 1:23, Mary was a virgin, not merely a young woman.

Why would the notes on Daniel 2 and 7 claim the four kingdoms envisioned by Daniel were Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greek and that “Rome does not appear in Daniel”? But Daniel 8:20 tells us that the ram represented the kings of Media *and* Persia. This kingdom was followed by Greece and then the Kingdom of Christ invaded this world in the days of the fourth kingdom, which was Rome. To make Greece the fourth kingdom is a bridge to nowhere in terms of fulfilled prophecy. If Wesley taught the fourth kingdom was Rome, why cannot the study Bible which bears his name reflect his more conservative interpretation?

Why cannot this study Bible acknowledge that Peter wrote 2 Peter, when the first verse of the epistle says he did. Why even

acknowledge that some scholars do not think Jude wrote the book of Jude which also declares that he did? Why did the

editors mar a good project by needlessly capitulating to higher criticism which undermines biblical authority?

-Vic Reasoner

William M. Greathouse with George Lyons, *New Beacon Bible Commentary: Romans* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2008). 2 volumes. 572 pages. ISBN 978-0-8341-2362-5 and 2363-2

It was with some hesitancy that I spent \$60 to purchase this two-volume commentary set. The fact that the commentaries were printed in paperback form was one concern. The second question I had was whether this commentary on Romans by Dr. Greathouse was anything more than updated type set of his previous works on Romans (“Romans” from the 1968 *Beacon Bible Commentary* and the 1975 devotional commentary *Beacon Bible Expositions*). This concern was dispelled by the first paragraph in the author’s preface.

Greathouse claims this work is a fresh commentary, not merely a revision of his earlier works. It seems the need for such a fresh work on Romans has been necessitated due the rise of the “new perspective” scholarship on Paul. The new perspective comes from the writings of Ernst Käsemann, E. P. Sanders, and the most prolific writer today N. T. Wright. One major position of the new perspective is de-emphasis on imputed righteousness, as taught in the Lutheran and Reformed understanding of justification. While the new perspective has much of the Protestant world scrambling, it seems to open the door for the long held Wesleyan perspective of the “optimism of grace.” This grace of God is a righteousness and holiness which is genuine, ethical, and is available in the life of the Christian today.

The commentary is broken down into three parts: 1) Behind the Text, 2) In the Text and 3) From the Text. Each section of Scripture has these three parts: background and overview of the passage; verse by verse commentary; and general application. Overall I felt like the background was helpful and not too long and drawn-out; the verse by verse section again was not too difficult to understand or to find helpful for someone without an expertise in Greek; and the final section repeatedly points the reader to the teachings of Wesley and other important church scholars on that particular section. The reader is left with little doubt that he is reading a commentary from a Wesleyan perspective.

Throughout the commentary there are a number of helpful sidebars and excursions: Luther on Alien Righteousness, Wesley on Justification and Sanctification, Paul’s Interpretation of Scripture, Wesley as Catholic Theologian, and The Enigma of Israel. Most of these are only a paragraph or two, but they do contain helpful insight.

I love his treatment on Romans 7. Greathouse makes a clear case that this chapter does not refer to a frustrated believer. Greathouse states the description of chapter 7, “hardly sounds like a Christian, at least nothing like the Christian life described in chapter 8. This also challenges the interpretation of nineteenth-century Holiness movement preachers and writers who understand chapter 7 as a description of the justified but unsanctified believer. This ‘I’ hardly seems a fit candidate for entire sanctification.”

I found his treatment of chapter 12 very beneficial. In one concluding paragraph on 12:1-2, Greathouse writes,

Paul’s appeal to self-surrender for sanctification was not simply an optional matter of personal piety for an elite minority of believers. More is at stake than the individual holiness of isolated exceptions. The life of holiness can never be experienced in isolation from the world, whether in a monastic conventicle or separatist sect. Refusal to be conformed to this world must not be confused with reluctance to engage the world on its turf. Paul considered the holiness of the church the necessary validation of the lordship of Christ in this present world. It cannot await the world to come, for then his lordship will be obvious to all.

This is a commentary that is unashamed to be in the Wesleyan tradition. There is a continual dependence upon Wesley’s interpretation which was refreshing. I was also glad to see no compromise to authority of God’s Word, no compromise to the call to holy living, and no apology for being optimistic on the grace of God.

-Andy Heer

Jay Richard Akkerman, Thomas Jay Oord, Brent D. Peterson, eds. *Postmodern and Wesleyan?* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009). 191 pages. ISBN 978-0-8341-2458-5

While this book hammers home the point that we need change, not all change is progress. The postmodern thought which is introduced in this compilation sounds suspiciously similar to the old modernism. The major difference is reflected by the question mark in the title. While modernism had faith in their superior scholarship, postmodernism cannot be sure of anything.

It is claimed on the first page that consensus over which books should be included in our Bible emerged only after councils, arguments, and shouting matches. The truth is that the authority of most books was immediately recognized because they were written by prophets and apostles. Certainly Peter acknowledged that what Paul wrote was Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). The early councils did not define Scripture, they defended Scripture. Of course if Peter did not write those words and if Paul did not write the Pastoral Epistles, then all we have are forgeries and only the higher critic knows for sure what part is God's Word.

While this book advocates a "big tent," meaning that we should be open-minded enough to allow disagreement on non-essentials, apparently we disagree over what is essential or how big the tent should be. According to this book "most Wesleyan statements of faith shy away from articulating a strict inerrancy view of the Bible. Viewing the Bible as infallible on matters of salvation rather than inerrant on all matters allows a 'big tent' for discussion and reflection to occur" [p. 25]. But things went down hill rapidly when Eve allowed the serpent under her tent. He not only questioned God's Word, but she followed suit by adding to it, and he followed up by denying it. The result was that once sin got its nose in the tent we have lived in a big tent full of sin ever since.

A second area of diverse theological opinion, we are told, which is allowable under the big tent has to do with science and creation. It is assumed that science is infallible and that because it contradicts the biblical account of creation, the biblical account therefore must be wrong [p.169]. Presumably that is why Richard Collings, who cannot even accept the arguments of intelligent design, can teach evolution at Olivet Nazarene University and Karl Giberson, professor at Eastern Nazarene College can write *Saving Darwin: How to be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (2008), I cannot help but ask, At what point do we fold up our tent and return to the apostate big tent denominations from which we separated?

Ironically, at this point the third "big tent" issue named concerns eschatology. We are told that no single eschatological

view should be required. This "think and let think" approach to nonessentials has always been a hallmark of Arminianism. Although I am postmillennial, I agree that we can allow premillennialists under our "big tent." But I do wish they would quit trying to predict when the Lord will return. Perhaps we ought to at least put some of them on probation!

I know that it has been popular to lump postmillennial hope with a liberal evolutionary worldview which holds that things will get better and better through education, social reform, and government entitlements. But the historic Methodist doctrine of the future holds that the Holy Spirit will bring a worldwide revival in which people turn from sin in repentance, receive the Spirit in generating power, and submit to God's law as a way of life. Since liberalism, by definition denies the supernatural, this brand of postmillennialism cannot legitimately be labeled as liberalism. It is one thing to hold to the full authority of scripture and disagree over interpretation, such as the nature and sequence of end-time events, but we cannot even dialog when we fail to agree on our final source of authority.

Thomas Oord refers to philosophy of René Descartes as the basis for postmodernism. However, Descartes laid the foundation for humanism by stating, "I think, therefore I am." Thus, Descartes made man, and not God, as the starting point of truth. According to this philosophy, the only truth I can know with certainty is my own autonomy and we cannot know with absolute certainty the truth about objects beyond ourselves.

Oord moves from advocating this relativism to question propositional truth. But the Scriptures are absolute objective truth. Yet because of his postmodern philosophy, Oord concludes that we can know with absolute certainty the full truth about reality because that requires an inerrant interpretation of an inerrant source.

I believe in an inerrant source of truth, but I do not claim personal infallibility in understanding it. Yet if we would devote ourselves to careful exegesis of Scripture and seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit, I believe we could come to some kind of consensus. If the purpose of revelation was that we could at least know basic doctrines for certain, then why adopt a position of agnosticism?

But Oord attacks the doctrine of inerrancy again [p. 28], claiming that biblical inerrancy collapses because of textual variants in the oldest biblical manuscripts. I am aware of textual variants, more particularly in the New Testament manuscripts. But

this is simply the result of errors in copying. Logically, there had to be an original autograph manuscript. If the purpose for divine inspiration was so that the human authors would get it right, then divine revelation from an infallible God would have to be perfect and without error. To claim otherwise is to impugn the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration.

Yet Oord ridicules this explanation as worthless. However, all the higher critics can claim that the synoptic gospels were edited from an earlier Q source, which no one has ever seen, and that is passed off as scholarship. But if Matthew, Mark, and Luke were each independently inspired to write their gospels, then the hypothetical Q theory is worthless.

Another author declares that sometimes scriptures contradict one another [p. 59]. By definition a contradiction is to both affirm and deny the same reality. Logically, the Bible would have to be mistaken in at least one of those instances. Presumably, this author would call herself a “Wesleyan,” yet Wesley taught, “If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from God.” Since Wesleyan theology is in process, apparently one can contradict what Wesley taught and still be Wesleyan. Apparently this is what Thomas Langford had in mind when he wrote, “Although Methodism cannot be understood apart from John Wesley, it also cannot be understood except as it has moved beyond Wesley” [*Practical Divinity*, p. 260].

Later chapters of *Postmodern and Wesleyan?* advocate the emergent church movement. While I concede that we need to evaluate and sometimes change the way we do church, I would advocate a return to the Protestant emphasis on the primacy of

preaching the Word. This emphasis is based on a high view of the inspiration of Scripture and results in a commitment to the exposition of Scripture. Yet the emergent church holds to a postmodern suspicion of all truth claims in general and the absolute authority of Scripture in particular. It has replaced the Protestant pulpit with pageantry.

I don’t care if you want to light candles, but never forget that spiritual light comes from the Word of God itself. Liturgical symbols have their place only if the congregation understands the reality behind the symbol. Communication methods may change over time and we should utilize every available media to convey the message. But our message is the Gospel and we must not compromise it. The use of PowerPoint will not compensate for a weak view of Scripture. The power is in the Gospel, not in our media equipment. Our message, however presented, must have content and that content can only be defined by Scripture.

In all there are thirty-four short chapters in this book by some thirty different authors. At least the editors are consistent enough with their own philosophy of humanistic relativity to allow a differing response at the end of each of four major sections. Gerald Reed got it absolutely right when he cautioned, “To question the infallibility of the Scriptures (as do antifoundational postmoderns by doubting their “inerrancy”) leaves one without the major source of authoritative truth for orthodox Christians” [p. 48]. And David Felter cautiously suggests that “postmodern Wesleyanism might even be an oxymoron. John and Charles Wesley were not nearly so relativistic as some would suppose” [p.184].

-Vic Reasoner

REPRINT

Daniel D. Whedon, *The Freedom of the Will as a Basis of Human Responsibility and a Divine Government* (1864) has been reprinted by Wipf & Stock (Eugene, OR: 2009). 354 pages ISBN: 978-1-55635-981-1.

Now that *Time* has declared the new Calvinism as one of the ten ideas that are changing the world [23 March 2009], we need all available Arminian resources at our disposal. Whedon served as editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review* from 1856-1884 and is more famous for his commentary. Thanks to editor John D. Wagner for making available this Wesleyan response to Jonathan Edwards. However, the earlier Methodist position was that the will was corrupted by the Fall and that man could will to do right only under the influence of

prevenient grace. Wesley declared, “Since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good” [*Works*, 10:350]. In contrast, semi-Pelagianism holds that we are fallen, but retain free will and the ability to seek God apart from any special grace.

Daniel Steele felt that Whedon and John Miley had undermined the doctrine of original sin by their stress on responsible guilt and freedom [*The Gospel of the Comforter*, p. 288; see also Chiles, *Theological Transitions in American Methodism*, p. 199]. Thus, while this reprint has historic value, it is not our best resource in rebutting Calvinism.

-Vic Reasoner

ERRATUM

Recently, I transcribed a sermon from an original manuscript which was published in *The Arminian Magazine* (Volume 26 Issue 1 Spring 2008). The sermon was presented as one of John Fletcher's sermons (1729-1785). I regret to inform the readership that the sermon is not one of Fletcher's sermons. The sermon was not written in Fletcher's hand. While the sermon is held by the Shropshire County Records, which purports it to be an authentic Fletcher sermon along with a number of other manuscript sermons, and while other scholars have supposed Fletcher to be the author the collection of manuscript sermons, internal evidence of the corpus leads one to conclude that Fletcher is not the author of these sermons nor are these sermons transcriptions of original Fletcher material. At the time of the publication, I had not examined the internal evidence of the sermons. David R. Wilson recently evaluated these manuscripts and determined that the corpus cites a hymnal and periodicals which were published in the early 1800s, subsequent to Fletcher's death. I regret any confusion which this may have caused the readership of the *Arminian* and thank David for calling attention to the error. Perhaps his forthcoming Ph.D. thesis will further corroborate the evidence presented here.

-Russ Frazier

Editorial Note: While Russ is a fine Fletcher scholar, this attempt to introduce new material illustrates a resurgence of interest in Fletcher studies. David Wilson wrote, "I appreciate the attention given to Fletcher in your magazine and hope this continues as his works are a gold mine (especially the manuscripts which have never been published!)." This body of unpublished Fletcher material also includes writings which have

never been translated from French. Thus, this retraction highlights the need for a new complete, critical edition of Fletcher's writings.

Please also note that this type of "criticism" is properly regarded as lower or textual criticism. Adam Clarke was a pioneer in this field. In the case of Scripture, it is legitimate to use critical methods to establish which variant manuscript reading best reflects the inspired original. However, this discipline becomes highly subjective when it attempts to speculate on the sources used, the editorial process involved, the circumstances surrounding, and the motives behind the writer. The result is that everything is explained in rationalistic terms, according to evolutionary presuppositions, and all too often the plain assertions of Scripture itself are denied.

In Christian Reflections, C. S. Lewis wrote,

I have watched reviewers reconstruction the genesis of my own books in just this way. Until you come to be reviewed yourself you would never believe how little of an ordinary review is taken up by criticism in the strict sense: by evaluation, praise, or censure, of the book actually written. Most of it is taken up with imaginary histories of the process by which you wrote it. . . . Reviewers, both friendly and hostile, will dash you off such histories with great confidence; will tell you what public events had directed the author's mind to this or that, what other authors had influenced him, what his over-all intention was, what sort of audience he principally addressed, why - and when - he did everything. . . . My impression is that in the whole of my experience not one of these guesses has on any one point been right; that the method shows a record of 100 per cent failure.

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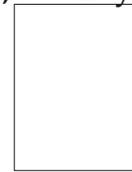
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is published in memory of two members of the Fundamental Wesleyan Society
who died in March 1998

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November 24, 1926 - March 23, 1998