

# The Arminian

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## FIVE KEYS TO WESLEY'S SUCCESS

Steve Stanley

### The Fifth Key: Wesley's "Long View"

Jim Collins is a popular business and leadership author whose books typically achieve "best seller" status. In his *Great by Choice* (2011), Collins tells the story of the race to the South Pole. A Brit (Robert Scott) and a Norwegian (Roald Amundsen) both had every intention of being the first human to set foot on the frigid ice crusts covering the southernmost point on the globe. For the sake of brevity, let us say that Scott made the biggest "splash" in the news. He

was first to use snowmobile technology in Antarctica, he had the biggest team, he sought out the limelight, the newspapers, the newsreels, and radio reporters. Scott was careful to preen his image as a rugged and knowledgeable explorer, although it was an image with little justification. By comparison, Amundsen almost fell from sight. He went to remote places in the far north, living and working among the Inuit until he knew how to survive like a native.

Students of history know that Amundsen won the race. With far fewer men, he carried far more supplies than his rival, Scott and his much larger party. Amundsen rejected the unproven snowmobiles (which quickly failed in the extreme temperatures of Antarctica) choosing to retain the Inuit method of dogsled. Amundsen made supply depots, dropping off supplies at regular intervals for use on their return trip. It was a brutal expedition for both men. Both had equal amounts of good weather days to poor. In the end, both men succeeded in reaching the South Pole. Scott reached it 30 days after Amundsen.

Amundsen returned home to parades and honors. Scott died on the ice, as had all who embarked with him—a victim of the deceitfulness of appearances, poor planning, and neglected duty. Perhaps, saddest of all, is that Scott perished within 10 miles of his supply depot, which he missed due to losing his way.

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Collins makes the point that the differences between the two came down to preparation, planning, prosecution, and persistence.

George Whitefield was a mighty preacher. It is a well-rehearsed saying that the leading actor of the day, David Garrick, said he would give all he owned if he could but utter the single word “oh!” with the same feeling and expression as Whitefield. Benjamin Franklin, too, (no practitioner of religion) is said to have been a “fan” of the charismatic Whitefield and even makes mention of him in his autobiography. It was

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***The proclamation of the Gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Church, is the means of God’s kingdom advancing.***

Whitefield who urged the Wesleys to take up “field preaching” where they would reach the largest number of the unevangelized. Yet, nearing the end of his life, Whitefield drew a sharp contrast between

Wesley and himself in a way reminiscent of the Amundsen-Scott story. Speaking to a Mr. John Pool, Whitefield said, “My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in societies, and thus preserved the fruit of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand.”

As we have seen in the previous keys, Wesley was as mortal as any man, but he worked as one building for eternity. With a passionate confidence in the Word of God, with innovative methodology, with a discipline designed to conserve and multiply the fruit of evangelism, John Wesley sought to make even the uttermost ends of the earth his parish. In light of the spiritual and social darkness of his generation, with England at low ebb in nearly every morally relevant category, what was the secret of his buoyant faith and exuberant labor? It is simply this: Wesley’s confidence in the Word of God

inspired him to live as though the things it claimed are true. For example, Wesley was convinced that the proclamation of the Gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Church, would be the means of God’s kingdom advancing and the reformation of the nations. In his sermon on Isaiah 11:9, entitled *The General Spread of the Gospel*, Wesley said “in general, it seems, the kingdom of God will not ‘come with observation;’ but will silently increase, wherever it is set up, and spread from heart to heart, from house to house, from town to town, from one kingdom to another.” As Thomas Oden has said in his second volume on Wesley’s teachings, “Wesley’s simple syllogism is gently pressed: If God can redeem a cavalier, unprofitable, class-conscious English gentleman at Oxford, God can work wonders with any sinner; and, if so, there is no intrinsic reason why the whole of the human condition cannot be changed. Though there will be impediments along the long road, the purpose of the triune God will not be finally thwarted by human recalcitrance.”

Dr. Vic Reasoner in his book, *The Hope of the Gospel*, summed up Wesley’s attitude regarding the efficacy of the Grace and Gospel of Jesus Christ and the effectiveness of the Spirit’s work through His Church:

Zechariah 14 describes the siege of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. As the Christians fled, they carried the gospel with them and the water of salvation flowed out of Jerusalem so that the Lord becomes the King of all the earth (v 9). John Wesley described the day of the Lord as one continued day, with no setting of the sun, in which ignorance and idolatry shall end. The living water, “the quickening, saving truths of the gospel with all its ordinances in purity,” shall flow from Jerusalem, “the church of Christ,” perpetually. “These waters shall never dry away or lose their healing virtue.”

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# Why Wesleyans Can Safely Believe in Biblical Inerrancy

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Jerry Bimber

The September/October 2012 issue of *Holiness Today* included an article by Dr. Al Truesdale entitled “Why Wesleyans Aren’t Fundamentalists.” After a brief discussion of fundamentalism arising from the reaction of conservative Protestantism against the challenges of modernism in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, Dr. Truesdale focuses his argument. He says the great difference between Wesleyans and Fundamentalists is their differing views of Scripture. To be more precise, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is a fundamentalist doctrine of recent origin, and unworthy for any Wesleyan to believe.

Since Dr. Truesdale’s working definition of fundamentalism includes a heavy dose of Calvinism, then let me quickly say that I agree with Dr. Truesdale that Wesleyans are not fundamentalists in the Calvinistic sense. But his article raises some important questions: Is inerrancy a recent and wholly fundamentalist (Calvinistic) doctrine? Is it true that inerrancy is unworthy of Wesleyanism? It seems that Dr. Truesdale has answered those questions affirmatively because throughout his article the concepts of inerrancy and fundamentalism are used interchangeably. The assumption of his argument seems to be that Fundamentalists are inerrantists, and since Wesleyans are not Fundamentalists, we should not be inerrantists.

The belief that inerrancy is a doctrine arising from the fundamentalist/modernist controversies culminating in the 1920’s is simply wrong. It is a fiction that we tell ourselves, and alas, no evidence is allowed to count against it. Yet, a fair reading of history gives clear evidence that belief in the inspired and infallible Word of God is the main historical tradition of the church. From the Church Fathers, to the Reformers, and yes, even to John Wesley and the theologians of

early Methodism, the belief in an infallible Scripture was foundational to their Christian witness.

Biblical inerrancy was the position of the church catholic from the earliest centuries up to and including Vatican II. Augustine of Hippo, in a letter (A.D. 394 or 395) to Jerome noted, “It seems to me that the most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books: that is to say that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us, and committed to writing, did put down in these books anything false.” Far from being a recent fundamentalist doctrine, inerrancy was settled Roman Catholic doctrine. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII released his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, in which he stated, “But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred.”

As the Reformers broke with Rome, they did so over issues of authority and interpretation, but not over the infallible character of the Bible. In 1518, Johannes Eck entered into a dispute with Erasmus, denying the possibility that a biblical writer could err by even one word! Historian Richard Muller points out that, “catholic teaching before the Reformation assumed the infallibility of Scripture, as did the Reformers—the Protestant orthodox did not invent the concept.”

But what of Wesley and the early Methodists? John Wesley, famously, was the “Man of One Book.” But was his Bible infallible only for matters of faith and practice? In his response to a Mr. Jenyn’s article, *The Internal Evidence of the Christian Faith*, Wesley writes, “If he is a Christian, he betrays his own cause by averring that ‘all Scripture is not given by inspiration of

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God, but the writers of it were sometimes left to themselves, and consequently made some mistakes.” Because the Scriptures are of divine origin, for Wesley, they could not be false in any way. The theologians of Methodism: Richard Watson, Thomas Ralston, Samuel Wakefield, Miner Raymond, William Burt Pope, Thomas O. Summers, and Randolph Sinks Foster, all joined Wesley in the affirmation of biblical inerrancy.

Early Nazarenes strongly affirmed inerrancy as a reading of early editions of the *Herald of Holiness* will show. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) was signed by nine Wesleyans, among them Nazarene theologian

Dr. Ralph Earle, and Holiness leader, Dr. Dennis Kinlaw.

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***Belief in the inspired and infallible Word of God is the main historical tradition of the church.***

If Nazarenes choose the view that the Bible’s inerrancy is limited to matters of faith and

practice, we will not be aided by history. We must “bite the theological bullet” and sever ourselves from the Church’s historic position. But if so, we should hear the import of what we do in the words of Stephen Sykes, an admitted theological liberal, who says, “For many Protestant Christians the most momentous step of theological liberalism is taken when they deny the traditionally accepted belief in the inerrancy of Scripture.”

The limited inerrantists protect their belief by offering quite spiritual sounding reasons. So, Truesdale points out that revelation for fundamentalists is a matter of information about God, and for Wesleyans, revelation is God himself. The battle is between cold knowledge and warm hearts. But this is a confusion. There is no revelation of God that is not also informative. God reveals himself in words and concepts. He made us to receive such information. When Dr. Truesdale argues that in the case of Wesleyans, “knowing the truth is primarily a matter of

knowing God,” he is right. But he confuses truth with the end to which that truth is given. There is no war between God and the truth about God.

Wesley believed in the quickening power of the Holy Spirit and that apart from that work, we will remain deadened to revelation. But the work of the Spirit does not make the Bible any more true, nor is the Bible any less true in the Spirit’s absence. The illumination of the Spirit does nothing to the character of the Scriptures. The Spirit heightens the understanding of fallen men and women. We cannot recognize the truth of even an inerrant Scripture unless the Spirit quickens our understanding.

The word *inerrant* is a stumbling block to many because they cannot or will not believe that any text with any human input can be infallible. For a text to be inerrant it must simply be truthful or without error. My grocery list can be inerrant if I copy it correctly from my wife’s instructions. A phone book can theoretically be inerrant. And the Scriptures are inerrant because the Spirit of God superintended the writing. 2 Peter 1:21 reminds us that, “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” That was apostolic belief, the belief of the men who had been with Jesus. A trustworthy, infallible Word is the Spirit’s gift to the world.

What of the charge that inerrantists read the Bible in a hyper-literal fashion and have no concern for interpretational nuance, such as recognition of the different genres of Scripture? Such a charge is misplaced. Consider the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics which was released in 1983. Article XIII reads as follows: “WE AFFIRM that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study.”

What is the theological justification for believing that the Bible is inerrant? A safe way is to

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start with Jesus. What did Jesus believe? The gospels tell us that Jesus believed in a real Adam and Eve, Noah's flood, Jonah swallowed by a fish, and that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt. His appeal to ultimate biblical authority was with the words, "It stands written," and he argued for resurrection on the basis of the tense of one word (Mark 12: 26-27). He knew of his approaching death, of Peter's triple denial, and he knew what was in the hearts of men. His knowledge extended to counter-factuals, or what would have happened in the past had certain circumstances been different. If Tyre and Sidon had seen the works that Jesus did in Chorazin and Bethsaida, they would have repented! Jesus only did what he received permission from the Father to do, and one of his tasks was to speak of the Scriptures and assure us that they cannot be broken. He reminds us that "until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5: 17-18). Belief in an inerrant Scripture begins with belief in an infallible Jesus.

But isn't this debate merely theological "inside baseball?" After all, we all love Jesus, don't we? There is great importance to this debate. An inerrant Scripture bounds our interpretation. All of our spiritual experiences are to be tested by the word of God. The local pastor of the Church of Christ is a far more spiritual man than me, and he proves it by affixing a rainbow to his church sign. The Spirit has shown him that God approves of homosexuality, homosexual marriage, and the ordination of homosexuals. The Scriptures are just wrong in their prohibition of

such behavior, because after all, homosexuality is a matter of science, both behavioral and genetic. And everyone knows that the Bible is not intended as a science textbook. A glaring problem with identifying as infallible only what is necessary for salvation is that what is necessary for salvation can shrink away to almost nothing.

Nazarene laity and clergy alike have good reasons to believe in an inerrant Bible. It was the historic position of the ancient Church, the Reformers, Wesley, the early Methodists, and many early Nazarenes. It is the position most closely associated with Jesus. It is the position of many Wesleyans now. Some of our academics disagree. So, in articles in *Holiness Today* and in papers at our theological conferences, in talks from pulpits and prayers from professors, we are warned against fundamentalism. But whatever the demerits of fundamentalism (and there are many), it is a mistake to confuse it with inerrancy. I agree with Dr. Truesdale that Nazarenes should not embrace fundamentalism. But there is good reason for Nazarenes to hold to inerrancy. Indeed, many of us already do.

*Editorial Note: After Holiness Today ran the article by Truesdale, Jerry contacted the editor and received permission to write a rebuttal. He heard nothing after it was submitted. In a later conversation with the editor, although the editor admitted that the Truesdale article was somewhat lacking and that he personally was in substantial agreement with the rebuttal article, to publish the rebuttal might prove too divisive. Essentially, the discussion has been declared closed. This all sounds very familiar to me.*

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## ARMINIUS ON APOSTASY

Gerald Gann

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In reading two new books, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation* by Keith Stanglin and *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* by Keith

Stanglin and Tom McCall, I found the following interesting facts. It is said of Arminius that he never decided whether one could fall after

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being saved. This supposition is inaccurate. Arminius taught that had David died in his sins he would have been lost [Works 3:463 464].

Stanglin points out that Arminius did not believe that all sins are equal. He delineated four causes of sin: ignorantia, infirmitas, malitia, and negligentia. Sin motivated by malice would cause a believer to fall. This fact becomes clear in a letter written by Arminius to Uytenbogaert: “But it is possible for a believer to fall into a mortal sin, as is seen in David. Therefore he can fall at that moment in which if he were to die, he would be condemned” [Stanglin, 137].

Stanglin, along with Tom McCall, point out that Arminius clearly sets forth two paths to apostasy:

- A. It can happen because of rejection, or
- B. It can happen because of malicious sinning.

Arminius proffers that if the sin arises out of malice for the law and causes one to fall away, it is forgivable [Stanglin and McCall, Jacob Arminius, 174].

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***The strict logic of imputed righteousness taken to its conclusion tends to undermine actual righteousness.***

Stanglin points out that Arminius held the view that faith could be described in two ways: “actual” and “habit.” One could lose “actual” faith while retaining the

faith of “habit.” The loss of “actual” faith would cause one to fall, but it was possible to be restored [Stanglin, 139]. If the apostasy came from malicious sin, then it was forgivable. If it came from rejection it was not.

In *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, Stanglin includes a footnote that says, “Ashby and Pinson, who, without ever appealing to his writings on this matter, ascribe the position of irremediable apostasy to Arminius, claiming that Arminius believed a fallen person cannot be forgiven. Like Arminius, the Remonstrants also

confessed that true believers who had fallen away could be restored to repentance” [Stanglin, 138].

Concerning the theory of “imputed righteousness,” Arminius would not take a position on whether he held to “passive” righteousness only or to both “passive” and “active.” The active righteousness of Christ was his work of obedience and his passive righteousness was his work of atonement. His comments are as follows:

But I never durst mingle myself with the dispute, or undertake to decide it; for I thought it possible for the Professors of the same religion to hold different opinions on this point from others of their brethren, without any breach of Christian peace or the unity of faith. Similar peaceful thoughts appear to have been indulged by both the adverse parties on this dispute; for they exercised a friendly toleration towards each other, and did not make that a reason for mutually renouncing their fraternal concord. But concerning such an amicable plan of adjusting differences, certain individuals in our country are of a different judgment [Works, 1:263].

W. Stephen Gunter has contributed much to the understanding of Arminius by his recent direct translation of Arminius’ *Declaration of Sentiments* into English from the original Dutch. He concurs that Arminius would not take a position on imputed righteousness. In private correspondence with me, Dr. Gunter proffers three reasons:

1. The strict logic of imputed righteousness taken to its conclusion tends to undermine actual / imparted righteousness and Arminius (with Augustine) held out for the goal of holiness in the heart and life of believers.
2. Imputed righteousness was the cornerstone of most all supralapsarians and he simply did not wish to resemble that position in any way.
3. Arminius tried to define only those theological points he believed to be essential, and he really did believe that Christian theologians could differ on this point.

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Keith Stanglin agrees that Arminius was reluctant to take a position on “imputed righteousness.” In private correspondence with me, Dr. Stanglin posits that he “would take it at face value. I’m not aware of any major shift in Arminius’ opinion on this issue.” Stanglin, along with Tom McCall, points out that Arminius did not object to saying “the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us,” but he did object to saying that “the righteousness of Christ is imputed for righteousness.” Arminius felt that it did not make sense to say that it is reckoned or imputed for righteousness. He acknowledges that Christ’s obedient

righteousness is reckoned for us, but it is not imputed for righteousness [Stanglin and McCall, 139].

If we receive the obedience and righteousness of Christ, do we not receive the faith that produced the obedience and righteousness? Does that not mean that one would also receive the faith of Christ that produced the obedience and righteousness? If we are accounted all His righteousness, all His obedience, with the attitudes and motives and faith that produced the action, how then do we fall away? We must not simply trust in the faith *of* Christ. We must continue to trust *in* Christ.

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## REVIEWS

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### **Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcome Guest?* P&R Publishing, 2013. ISBN: 978-1596388154. 176 pages.**

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I read this book with a great deal of interest. The very title intrigued me. It doesn’t take an astute analysis to figure out that Christianity in America these days is suffering under a number of maladies. One of the most prominent is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace.” Many are hearing a religion of a loving God who forgives everyone no matter how they live. Cheap grace is really antinomianism. Both stem from an inner attitude that because of grace, law has no more say in one’s life and conduct. Jesus did the suffering and we are free to live how we choose.

This whole discussion reminds me of the proverbial elephant in the room. I have wondered for years if the Calvinists did not see the lax attitude and careless living of many of their followers that have stemmed from an unbalanced view of grace. But to be fair, we Arminians need to acknowledge the elephant of legalism that often occurs in the lives of our own people as we emphasize the need to follow the example of Christ.

Jones is refreshingly honest in criticizing his Calvinist brethren. It will be interesting to see how the book is received in his own circles. He recognizes and asserts the place of human responsibility in one’s walk with God. He calls faith, “both the gift of God and the act of man.” He even goes so far to say that those who do not endorse antinomian theology can be practical antinomians by

failing to preach on, “Loving our neighbor, praying, standing firm and resisting the devil.” He affirms that, “the New Testament heightens, not lessens the place of the moral law in the life of the believer...” Wow! I agree.

Overall he sees the value of the moral law and the commandments of Christ and his apostles as God ordained “instruments” in the sanctification of the church. I do not know that I have thought of it in just those words before, but I do not think I disagree with the concept. Even the law’s early work of condemning a sinner and convincing him of his need of God is part of the process to bring him to holiness.

After asking what role does the law have in the New Testament, he then turns and queries what is the Gospel? Both questions are meant to clarify Jones rejection of the antinomian belief, “that there was an absolute contrast between the law and the gospel. He rightly points out that even under the law there was a promise of life, (Lev18:5, Deut 4:1, Ezek 20:21, Rom 10:5) and the gospel threatens at times. I think Jones clearly comes down on the side that there are warnings and threatenings that do apply to believers even citing the “authorized” Latin, Dutch and French versions of the Canons of Dort for support. He believes the English translation is weak. He acknowledges that, “the most severe warnings in the Scriptures are made to professing Christians such as

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Paul's statement in Romans 8 about living according to the flesh, Paul's letters and the letters to the seven churches and warns preachers that to view the gospel as a means to escaping the threats of the law are in essence to blunt the force of the threats and lose their intended application. All of this is good medicine and will help all of us if we comply.

But I think Jones leaves himself a loophole from outright declaring that a believer can lose his salvation by citing the Westminster Confession that a believer is one who, "yields obedience to God's commands, tremble at his threatenings, and embrace the promises (WCF 14.2). This allows him to be consistent with his objective in writing the book and preserve his beliefs. I do not criticize him for that. At least he is trying to get people to take holiness seriously.

Jones then wrestles with the question of whether God loves us more when we obey or less when we don't. Here I felt like I was going through mental gymnastics as I read his answer. In an effort to explain how God loves the elect when they sin, I think he weakens his whole argument for taking seriously the commandments of Christ. He breaks the love of God down into three kinds of love. There is the love God has between the persons of the Trinity or himself. Jones terms this love, "eternal and natural and necessary."

Secondly, there is the love God has for his creatures. This is "not necessary but voluntary." This love of God for his creatures is broken down into three counterparts. Apparently, however, it is possible for God to "love" us without choosing us for salvation.

Third, there is God's love for the elect and this love has three parts. I needed an aspirin. Doesn't Jesus pray in John 17:26 that the love with which the Father has loved the Son may be in the believers? Jones also makes a passing comment that "Arminians seize upon texts about the glorious truth of God's unconditional love and make them conditional ones and come to numerous unsound conclusions." But unconditional election is only glorious for the elect.

When a Calvinist writes to Calvinists, I did not expect an Arminian that I would agree with parts of it. But Jones' intent to challenge grace as a license to sin is needed everywhere in America these days. However, he dances around to explain how God sees the elect differently than the nonelect on issues of sin. I'm not sure he will accomplish his goal. If down deep people think there is a way to get away with sin and still go to heaven, what's the threat? This is another book where doctrinal positions rule over a common sense approach to Scripture.

-Mark Horton

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**Wallace Thornton. *When the Fire Fell: Martin Wells Knapp's Vision of Pentecost and the Beginnings of God's Bible School*. Wilmore, KY: Emeth Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1-60947-069-2. 362 pp.**

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In commemoration of the centennial of God's Bible School and College (Cincinnati, OH), Wallace Thornton has captured the vision and energy of Martin Wells Knapp and the Revivalist family. Having immersed himself in the primary source material related to his topic, he has infused his book with the passion and energy that befits a story about a minister who sought to bring "the power they had at Pentecost" back to the Church. Through these early documents, Thornton guides his readers into close proximity to the radical holiness culture that Knapp and his associates fostered. Only then can they realize just how sharply Knapp's vision of "God Over All" contrasted with the dominant religious culture of the American *fin de siècle*.

As an insider, Thornton gives a prominent role to the "faith principle" in Knapp's ministry. Inspired by the self-supporting missions of Bishop William Taylor, Knapp saw this as the corollary of absolute dependence on God. If Christians were fully consecrated to God and relied on God's provision without doubt or compromise, God would supply the means to carry out the mission of God. Knapp embraced this "faith principle" in every aspect of his life and ministry and imparted it to the Revivalist family as essential for godly living. From the International Holiness Union and Prayer League to the Revivalist Press, from God's Bible School to domestic and international missions, Knapp gave everything to

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God—in his mind, literally—and manifested a total dependence on God to supply the means. Once readers grasp just how radically Knapp applied this notion of “God’s proprietorship,” the movement he founded begins to make sense. According to Thornton, this practice of full consecration supplies the key to its astonishing success, its resilience and its enduring influence on the global Church.

Without doubt the ministry of Martin Wells Knapp had its greatest impact on world mission outreach, particularly through missionaries like Charles and Lettie Cowman, Oswald Chambers and Fred T. Fuge. Thornton devotes considerable attention to this central concern. He also connects Knapp’s ministry with William Seymour, the Azusa Street Revival, and the emergence of Pentecostalism (associated with glossolalia). Knapp had already led the way in his “four-fold gospel” (salvation by faith, entire sanctification, divine healing and premillennial eschatology) and in his primitivist concern for restoring the apostolic faith of the New Testament Church—“bringing the Church back to Pentecost.” He and the Revivalist family were convinced that the restoration of apostolic Christianity would lead to the greatest outbreak of revival the world had ever seen, the final harvest before the return of Jesus. As the author states on page 61: “Not only could Pentecost be repeated, it *must* be—the very spiritual life of the believer and the church depended on it.” Thornton’s attention to primary sources brings this radical holiness mentality of the Revivalist

family to light in unparalleled detail, and this is perhaps his greatest contribution in this book.

Other significant aspects of *How the Fire Fell* include close studies of key people in the history of God’s Bible School, including W. B. Godbey, Charles Cowman and George B. Kulp, Seth C. Rees, M. G. Stanley and Bessie Queen. Even as an insider to the Revivalist family, the author does not overlook the human weakness of these “heroes of the faith.” He recognizes that some characters manifested eccentricity; conflict erupted between leaders; and at times the Revivalist family faced division. Yet Thornton demonstrates how the movement’s leaders persisted and triumphed over these challenges through their unflinching adherence to the faith principle. He uses the primary sources to tell this story rather than allowing his own feelings to defend the movement. This intensive use of the historical documents contributes significantly to the credibility of *How the Fire Fell*.

Wallace Thornton does not have a doctorate, but perhaps he should be honored with one for writing this book. He has made a substantial contribution to the history of the Holiness movement, and distinguished himself as an alumnus of God’s Bible School and College. Of course he has written *How the Fire Fell* from a strongly sympathetic perspective, and one could criticize the book as biased. However, the author would probably receive that observation as a compliment and count it a privilege to be numbered among the Revivalist family.

-Barry W. Hamilton

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### **Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever*. Crossway, 2014. 271 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4335-3956-5**

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I am intrigued with the series, *Theologians on the Christian Life*. My interest is how different strains of theology would produce a different emphasis in spiritual formation. Having read and reviewed Fred Sanders’ introduction to John Wesley, I was interested to see how Michael Horton presented Calvin. Now that I have finished Horton’s work, I want to compare and contrast the two introductions.

Both books are apologies, defending their respective theologian and his theology. Since Calvin and Wesley

were fallible men, both authors have the task of explaining shortcomings in the lives of their mentors. Calvin seems to be more reclusive—even to the point of insisting that he be buried in a common, unmarked grave—while Wesley must have been purely choleric. Both men took seriously the authority of Scripture and both men knew the patristics.

However, a major influence on the theology of Wesley was his conversion at Altersgate. He testified, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ

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alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”

Horton never really discusses the conversion of Calvin. The God of Calvin seems to be transcendent, while the God of Wesley seems to be more immanent. Calvin’s religion seems to be more of a religion of the head than of the heart.

What I appreciate most about Horton’s introduction to Calvin is the Protestant emphasis. While Horton does not engage in unnecessary inflammatory remarks about the Pope (unlike Luther), neither does he adopt a mealy-mouth ecumenical position. Calvin is portrayed as holding the orthodox position between the lawlessness of the Anabaptists and the legalism of Rome. Horton does portray Calvin as ecumenical to the degree that he made overtures to other Protestants. I am not sure Calvin’s theological descendants would extend their Protestant ecumenicism to orthodox Arminians, however. But to give credit where credit is due, I am happily surprised that a Calvinistic publisher even recognized Wesley in this series.

Horton consistently explains Calvin’s theology with the phrase “distinction without separation.” Calvin held distinct theological concepts in tension. Thus, Horton labors to portray Calvin as a moderate—even an unlikely reformer—not the tyrant his opponents frequently paint him as being. For example, Calvin preferred a presbyterian government with its plurality of elders, but made overtures to the Anglican bishop. With this agenda, it comes as no surprise that early in the book Horton offers his interpretation of Calvin’s conflict with Michael Servetus.

In his presentation of Calvin, Horton follows the outline of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. However, he only devotes four pages to Calvin’s theology of predestination and election. There Horton declares that “predestination is not the center of Calvin’s ‘system.’” Horton never explains the ramifications of an election which is both individual and unconditional. Horton declared that Calvin never used the phrase “irresistible

grace,” but “effectual grace,” the preferred term, is a phrase never used in Scripture.

Horton never addresses Calvin’s reaction to his own doctrine of double predestination as a “horrible decree.” Thus, the portrait which Horton paints of Calvin is generally appealing, but Calvin’s own theology is not as attractive.

Without rehearsing all of my objections to Calvinism, my question is how would a Christian attending Calvin’s congregation in Geneva differ from a Christian attending Wesley’s chapel in London? Both men were on a circuit. Calvin was part of rotation of preaching elders in Geneva. Wesley’s circuit took him on horseback across England and beyond. Both services would be liturgical and would give preeminence to the expositional preaching of Scripture. In Geneva the singing would be a capella and would be largely restricted to the psalms. The hymns of Charles Wesley would have been accompanied by an organ—even though Adam Clarke did not like organs!

Calvin believed that the elect and the nonelect would both be present indiscriminately within his congregation and only God could separate them. He held that the church was a body of sinful humanity which was marked by the pure preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. At a personal level, the believer would confess his sins and would hear the words of absolution. In distinction to both Rome and the Anabaptists, Horton portrays Calvin as lenient toward those who confess their sins.

The Anglican service which early Methodists were required to attend would not be all that different. Perhaps the greatest difference would be in the music. But the same believer in Wesley’s society would be required to meet with a small group in which they would confess their sins and hold each other accountable. They would be urged on toward victory over sin. This victory over sin was possible only with a constant reliance upon the indwelling Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit also bears witness with our own spirits regarding our present relation-

ship with God. Neither this relationship nor this assurance is unconditional, but it is a conscience assurance to the believer. In contrast, Horton taught that the righteousness of Christ is imputed for the believer's justification and sanctification. Thus, the believer struggles against sin all his life because he has not actually become righteous. Horton also distinguishes between an objective faith that the elect will persevere and the subjective experience of the believer which includes fear and trembling, anxiety, and a faith that wavers.

While Warfield described Calvinism as "miserable-sinner" Christianity, Wesley taught an optimism of divine

grace based on the possibilities of grace. In contrast to Wesley's optimism, Calvin exhibited a resignation. He died at 55 after confessing that he had "failed innumerable times to execute my office properly," acknowledging himself "to be a miserable sinner." Calvin declared that were it not for God's goodness he would be found guilty of the judgment of sin and sloth. No wonder Horton says Calvin's theology "makes room for the blues, as the heart cries out for a deliverance that seems at least to our experience beyond reach."

-Vic Reasoner

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**Thomas C. Oden, *A Change of Heart*. InterVarsity, 2014. 450 pages. ISBN: 978-830840359 To be released on December 7, 2014.**

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Thomas Oden had a happy and well-rounded childhood in Oklahoma. He knew the value of hard work. However, between 1946-1956, he described every turn as a left turn. In 1950 *Reader's Digest* published an article entitled "Methodism's Pink Fringe." Oden said the article attacked the very church leaders with which he most identified. He confessed to writing *Change of Heart* partly to alert people to question the realism of liberal ideals.

Once he connected with the national youth program of the Methodist Church he gained a vision of social justice that included antiwar and pacifist sentiments, along with revolutionary ideas. Even before going to college, he was a regional youth leader taking the social gospel to other church districts. In a desire for upward mobility in an academic environment, he quickly abandoned classic Christianity. He said his first forty years were prodigal; the last forty have been a homecoming.

He entered the ministry with the goal of using the church as an instrument for political change. "The trick was to learn to sound Christian while undermining traditional Christianity."

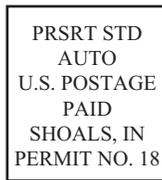
Essentially, he moved from one new idea to another—Marxism and liberation theology, pacifism, psychoanalysis, Rogerian therapy and unconditional love, demythology, existentialism, civil rights, situational eth-

ics, ecumenicism and an observer at the Second Vatican Council, feminism, new age, Gestalt therapy, and environmentalism. But even as some of his books were growing in popularity, he was already moving on to another theological fad. To his credit, he was intellectually honest enough to admit it when he saw that the bandwagon he was currently on was not going anywhere.

After 1950 he read the New Testament through the lens of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, rejecting a literal understanding of the incarnation and resurrection. He could use this language only in the demythological sense of Bultmann. At college he lost the capacity for heartfelt prayer and lost his love for the hymns of the church. He could discuss philosophy, psychology and social change confidently, but God made him uneasy.

Oden found the teachings of Saul Alinsky to be extremely useful. Alinsky's push and shove Chicago politics were a pattern for Hillary and Obama. Although he never met Hillary Rodham Clinton, he said his journey closely paralleled hers. Her thesis, on the Alinsky Model, was kept under lock and key for many years, but Oden said he had read it closely. President Obama also followed it.

By the fifties Oden identified strongly with the Vietnamese independence movement and had great admiration



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for Ho Chi Minh. From the University of Oklahoma, he went to Yale. While there in 1956 he broke with pacifism as he watched the brave Hungarian students standing up against Soviet tanks. He also became convinced that Truman’s decision to bomb Japan had actually spared lives in what would have been a prolonged ground war between Japan and America.

Obviously a bright student and professor, Oden was pushed forward. He interacted with the most famous and influential theologians, including Bultmann, Pannenberg, and Barth. But he never had a serious exchange of ideas with an articulate conservative before the end of the 1960s.

Oden did a U-turn in the 1970’s after meeting Will Herberg, a Russian Jew who spent thirty years working for the communist party before returning to his Jewish roots. Herberg told Oden, “If you are ever going to become a credible theologian instead of a know-it-all pundit, you had best restart your life on firmer ground. You are not a theologian except in name only, even if you are paid to be one.” Oden confessed that he had been enamored with novelty and in love with heresy. He did a 180, taking a dive into the early church fathers which helped him overcome his education. It is unclear, however, whether his “conversion” was an intellectual paradigm shift or a spiritual rebirth.

The first moral change was to reject the situational ethics of abortion. Oden was also disillusioned to discover that the average outcomes of all types of psychological ther-

apy is the same rate of recovery that occur merely through the passage of time. He also discovered that the societies which most closely followed Marx became the poorest, and he began to defend capitalism. He was also aware that the evidences of intelligent design were mounting. He joined the Evangelical Theological Society although membership required him to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture. When challenged to explain how he could have possibly joined the Evangelical Theological Society as a Wesleyan, his reply was that he had actually read the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Application (1986). He then would tell his critics to first read these statements and then he would talk to them substantively about their disagreements.

However, his realignment with orthodoxy exacted a high price from his colleagues at Drew, especially as the feminist agenda become the majority position. The more he wrote, the less he wrote which was published by Abingdon, the Methodist publishing house. As he moved away from liberal Protestants, he found more common ground with conservative Roman Catholics, although he was personally a catholic with a small “c.”

This book is a window into the apostasy of the Methodist Church as early as the 40s. It is an encouragement which illustrates the power of truth, the Holy Spirit, and the gospel. But how many never found their way back home?

*Vic Reasoner*

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