

# The Arminian Magazine

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## Slavery in 2022

William Sillings

For centuries, the strong and rich have oppressed and enslaved the weak and the poor. It has been so since the beginning of the human race. Satan enslaved the first couple through their own appetites and he continues that strategy today. From the very first family, the blood of Cain's brother cried out to God from the ground, as Cain discounted Abel's worthiness to live. The same kind of blood cries out for justice from this very Century in which we live.

So, enslavement is not new to the world, nor did it begin in 1492 when the slapdash adventurer, Christopher Columbus, landed on these shores and claimed this continent for Isabella and Ferdinand; nor yet when Amerigo Vespucci first declared this continent a new world. Slavery has long been the history of the world's ways.

It was so in the early days of America, until Abraham Lincoln sought to end slavery in America. Lincoln's Proclamation came to the Americas decades after Wilberforce had been successful in getting Britain to outlaw slave trade in the British Empire. Lincoln's

Emancipation Proclamation did a lot to free slaves from the Plantations in America. Unfortunately, that did not end slavery in America.

Exodus Cry is one of several anti-slavery organizations working to stop and prevent further sex slavery across the world today. As difficult as it may be to comprehend, the contemporary sex trade is more rampant, more evil, and morally and ethically more reprehensible than any previously-known slave trade in our past. Exodus Cry claims there are more slaves in the US today than there ever were at any one time in colonial and Civil War times in the US.

According to [inverse.com](https://www.inverse.com), there are no fewer than 58,000 servants who work in nothing less than slavery conditions. They are seen in domestic work, agriculture, traveling sales crews, restaurant and food service, and health and beauty service — as well as sex trafficking (based on an estimation from the Global Slavery Index). More than four years ago, [www.theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com) estimated that the number was closer to 400,000 in the US alone.

The US State Department estimates that between 15,000 and 20,000 women and girls are trafficked into the US each year. We also know beyond shadow of doubt that *many* of the girls and women now crossing the southern border to find a home in this country are required to pay for passage with their bodies as well as their money. Gangs and Cartels know no conscience against using girls and women for their own pleasures and power.

If you add sex trafficking to the USSD number, it increases exponentially. In 2018, Britannica's ProCon.org estimated that there were at least 40-42 million prostitutes in the world. 80% of prostitutes were female aged 13-25.

90% prostitutes "depended upon" [were enslaved by] a pimp. There are about 1-2 million prostitutes in the US. Some 8.2 million sex slaves are male, and 50% of the 100,000 children trafficked for sex are boys (reported by Juvenile Justice Information Exchange).

Many of these slaves are kidnaped, transported, sold, resold, and often killed — not because they do not perform their "duties," but because wealthy people with insatiable prurient appetites can never be satiated. They grow tired of one "used up" slave after another, kill them or trade them for other "toyboys" and "playgirls" to seek personal gratification at the high cost of the souls and bodies of powerless and poor, degraded, but still valuable to God, slaves.

Exodus Cry is raising a voice and a lot of action against pornography and the sex trade, stating, "Exodus Cry is committed to abolishing sex trafficking and breaking the cycle of commercial sexual exploitation while assisting and empowering its victims. Our international work involves uprooting the underlying causes in our culture that allow the industry of sexual exploitation to thrive and helping those who have been sexually exploited."

Does the church have anything to say to this world about this malicious debasing of humanity? I should say it does. It's a difficult subject to address in a church service, but it needs to be dealt with as part of our salvific work of delivering human beings from sin. It is not enough to say "stop being enslaved" to sex trafficking. Too many handlers are very powerful. Getting involved in liberation of sex slaves is both discouraging and dangerous.

Remember Paul's difficulty with delivering a fortune teller from bondage to handlers? That was a very dangerous point in Paul's ministry. But the point here is that it was more than a spiritual deliverance. It was deliverance of *both* soul and body from bondage to slav-ers. Paul and Silas were dragged before the magistrates and put in maximum security after being whipped and nearly losing their lives for their trouble (Acts 16:16ff). Still, the church of Jesus Christ had words and actions to free people from enslavement by unscrupulous men.

In 1774, John Wesley published a pamphlet called "Thoughts Upon Slavery," which he based closely on the work of a Quaker, Anthony Benezet (faithroot.com). He also made many notes in his Journal and even in his sermons on the evils of slavery and was highly influential in the lives of William Wilberforce, John Newton and others.

Wesley gives a bit of history of slavery:

The beginning of this [slavery] may be dated from the remotest period, of which we have an account in history. It commenced in the barbarous state of society, and in process of time spread into all nations. It prevailed particularly among the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and the ancient Germans: And was transmitted by them, to the various kingdoms and states, which

arose out of the ruins of the Roman empire. But after Christianity prevailed, it gradually fell into decline in almost all parts of Europe. This great change began in Spain, about the end of the eighth century: And was become general in most other kingdoms of Europe, before the middle of the fourteenth.

After describing the horror of slavery of his day, Wesley writes, “Did the Creator intend, that the noblest creatures in the visible world, should live such a life as this!” Clearly, Wesley did not believe God created humans for enslavement. In both his writing and his speech, Wesley condemns slave holding, trading, selling, and mistreatment. He speaks boldly to his native England and to the American colonies, as well as countries in Europe which engaged in enslaving workers for general labor. He refutes notions that slaves are better off as slaves than they ever were in freedom. He recognizes that the human spirit is designed for freedom, not for slavery. And he calls for the cessation of the slave trade and the reversal of slave holding everywhere it is found. Wesley's writing seeks to awaken the conscience of the Christian, to call Christians and the society to action to change the world and to stop slavery altogether. His heart burns with the fire of censure against that evil. At the same time, he also promotes hope for a world without slavery.

Slavery today may take different shapes than it did in the “more barbarous” times of the world, but the evils of our current kinds of slavery surpass even those. Men, women and children are enslaved to advance the financial designs and to ease the prurient desires of rich and powerful individuals at the expense of the poor and powerless. Are today's slavers not every bit as barbarous slavers in the earlier

days in history? Of course they are! And we must not be silent about their barbarism.

What right does one person have to own and control another? It is not a God-given right. No Constitution of any free country awards such rights to the rich and powerful. It is not even an innately accepted right. It has to be practiced secretly and in the dead of night. And yet it is practiced all around us. I repeat, we (the church) cannot be silent on this issue.

Nor will we be blameless because we do not spend our own time and money to enjoy the evil fruit of the slave industry — such as pornography, strip clubs, prostitutes, and so on. Rather, shall we not be held accountable for our non-investment of our time, finance, and energies to free humans from their slaveholders? It seems the least we should do would be to give aid to organizations like Exodus Cry. Thus, we could at least engage ourselves in some small degree to change the modern slave culture, free slaves before they die, restore the enslaved to normalcy, and refute all claims of one human to own another for any purpose. Though practiced almost universally, it is not acceptable. It must be stopped.

As John Wesley's religion made him a worker to transform world culture, so we too must not be silent or absent from the battle that rages for the souls, minds, bodies and spirits of human beings created in the image of God. How God's heart my cry out against such injustices! So should ours.

*Dr. William Sillings is the General Superintendent of the International Fellowship of Bible Churches and a contributing editor.*

## John Wesley: Prophet of Educational Research

Dan Shepherd

The effectiveness of John Wesley's educational approaches has long been known. No less than George Whitefield himself saw the greater impact of Wesley's discipleship, once commenting, "My brother Wesley acted wisely — the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand." John Wesley died in 1791, but his educational approaches have been validated by educational research most prominently in recent years.

Of course, Wesley and his Spirit-led educational methods need no such corroboration; nevertheless, it is pleasing to see modern educational theory begin to espouse his world-changing discipleship. While this study could — and perhaps should — entail hundreds of pages, this brief glance will present just a few of the more obvious connections in rapid summary, bulleted below.

- Wesley's educational system was founded on relational teaching. His system of interlocking learning groups; called societies, classes, and bands; each demanded intense trust and total honesty. These accountability partnerships fostered a deep love among new converts and connected them powerfully with more mature believers. Modern educational research is similarly emphasizing the need for students to connect with one another and with their instructor. Interestingly, the most vital research-based prevention for dropping out is for the at-risk student to have at least one meaningful relationship with an adult at school.
- Wesley's focus on "managing the will" in his excellent essay "On the Education of Children" is reminiscent of today's research emphasis on intrinsic motivation. Wesley argues very persuasively that children need to be taught "from the inside out," training their internal appetites and drives so that they are internally managed instead of externally controlled. Similarly, modern educational research, especially in the area of classroom management, stresses teaching children to control themselves instead of perpetually intervening after a misbehavior has occurred.
- His entire insistence on "experimental" faith — a mandate for practical experience over mere cognitive awareness — was constructivist long before constructivism was even proposed. Wesley's constant demand for personal faith, for "the inward witness," and for an individual's assurance of his or her own salvation anticipates modern principles of constructivism, which state that true learning is built on personal experiences that are actively engaging and individually meaningful.
- His ideas about a Christianity that meets the needs of others is very reminiscent of today's drive for increased "service learning." The famous quote attributed to him, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can," has influenced the lives of millions, many of whom took him at his word and followed Jesus in difficult missionary and evangelistic service. Modern educators

echo this sentiment, and understanding that true learning is applied in beneficial ways, many schools now mandate service learning or community engagement as a part of graduation requirements.

Finally, a short article like this can only skim the surface of the wealth of possible information found in Wesley's example as an educational innovator and leader. Other examples of his approaches later being confirmed by research include the following:

- Wesley's constant demand for Jesus' disciples to pursue the means of grace reflects more recent research into the possibilities of homework that vastly improves student learning. Clearly, he was a proponent of assessment *for* learning rather than merely *of* learning — another modern educational emphasis.

- His own incredible discipline reflected well the more recent administrative demand for increased "time on task."

Clearly, John Wesley's innate and Spirit-provided understanding for maximizing human learning is one that all conscientious Christian educators should know deeply and implement wholeheartedly. The proof, of course, is in the blessing God bestowed on his world-changing ministry; however, modern educational research now also embraces Wesleyan educational emphases.

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## **The Peculiarities of Methodism, Part 5**

William Burt Pope

Once more, our fellowship as a people is with the Catholic Church of our common Lord. Much as we value what we are constrained to call our peculiarities, we value our heritage in Christ and His kingdom upon earth infinitely more. What we have, and others have not, we would communicate to them if we could; we have no bread that we desire to eat in secret, save indeed that Bread which is secret to all who eat it. We have no stolen waters; we live not by a fountain sealed, or in a garden enclosed, from the common Church of our Lord. We trace our doctrine to the holy Apostles, or higher than that, to the Voice of eternal truth. Our traditions go up to the most sacred of all antiquity. Our specific teachings,

and usages, and discipline, we believe to the general in the days were alone authority in these matters reigns. At all points, and in all respects, we are one with the true Church of all ages. We hold communion in heart, and as occasion offers, in acts also, with all who have kept the faith; nor do we close our communion against any whom the Lord accepts. Our theology reaps in almost all fields; and, such as it is, has been from the beginning under obligation to almost all schools. We freely use the practical and expository writings of other churches for our edification. Perhaps no men set more value on their own type of doctrine than the ministers of Methodism; but I am sure that there are no men whose libraries are

better supplied with representative authors from all classes. And, on the whole, it may be said that there is as much of truly Catholic sentiment among this people as can be found anywhere in the Christian world.

Let me point to an application here, especially to my younger brethren in this ministry. My subject is the differentia, so to speak, of Methodist doctrine, and with reference to that alone I speak now and have spoken all along. You will do well to study the things that distinguish us, as they are stated in the writings of the early Methodist divines. You will see the process by which our specific doctrines, or methods of stating doctrine, were generally formed; and this will teach you their real importance. It will give you a warm and living interest in them; but more than that, it will show you what they really are, to what extent they are rigidly defined, and to what extent they have the freedom rather of Biblical than of systematic theology. If you are beginning your course of Methodist theological instruction, do not descend to the moderns till you have imbued your mind with the teaching of our standard writings, not forgetting to add those of that divine who is most influential in one department of our literature — Mr. Fletcher. The theology of the outer court is nowhere taught as he teaches it. This reminds me, brethren, of your own peculiar relations to other Christian communities in this country. Probably you are, through the operation of many causes, brought into more direct contact with certain schools of theology than any other branch of the Methodist people. Let me entreat you to study the points of difference in their writings as well as your own; at any rate, to study them with a Catholic readiness to admit what is good in the principles of your opponents. There is a method of conducting controversy which is most serviceable to theological exactitude; there is also one which

tends to cramp the mind and rob theology of all its grace. Let yours be the better method. For instance, you are perpetually reminded of the presence of what is called Calvinism. Now, while there are some Calvinistic views of the Gospel which we, as a people, seem almost expressly to have been raised up to oppose, there are some most precious principles in that system that we ought to reverence and hold fast. The recoil to the opposite extreme is not without much harm and loss. For their defense of the reality and terror of sin, the reality and definiteness of the Atonement, the reality and pervasiveness of the believer's union with Christ, we owe the divines of that school a deep debt. Let us hold fast the good, and not surrender it simply because they have infected it with a certain evil of their own. You have opponents of a very different class; those who defend the ancient and corrupt system which we call Romanism. Not that you have any special pre-eminence in this conflict: it has no more determined enemy than Methodism generally; and wherever the two systems meet — they are almost equally ubiquitous — they must be in collision. Let me advise you to study this controversy also in light of its great principles. Master the theology of the sacraments which Rome has superadded to those “ordained of Christ himself,” and you will be masters of the whole subject. Not only so, you will greatly enlarge and enrich your own theology generally by the process. Above all, remember the Roman doctrine is one that cannot be successfully encountered by anything but intelligent argument; declamation does more harm than good. There is no system of theology more compact and dogmatic; its worst errors are which are most systematically defended: and, if you will do well the good work which your fathers have transmitted to you, you must know what the teaching is that you assault. You must have arms of precision.

And so doing, the sun in the heavens is not more clear than the certainty of your final success.

I must come to a close: and where much more fitly than at the feet of Christ, and of Christ crucified! Much has been said about Methodism and its peculiarities; said with the purest intention, and with the most utter absence of sectarian feeling. But the very fact that we can speak of our peculiarities suggests the thought of that one body in Christ which has no peculiarities save the eternal blessedness of being His peculiar people. Let us come to that sacred Presence, before which St. Paul brings the sectarian Corinthians.

As we approach let us remember the words which guard the access, “that no flesh shall glory in His presence;” and all that is of the flesh in Methodism let us forget and leave behind us. Let us adore, and receive, and bless Him “who of God is made unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption:” unto us and unto all the elect people of God. Then may we arise on the other side of the cross or the throne, and go on our way rejoicing: “Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord.”

*Dr. Pope (1822-1903) is often regarded as the greatest Methodist theologian. His magnus opus, the three-volume A Compendium of Christian Theology, was first published in 1875.*

## **Small Group Methodology**

Mark Horton

I became interested in accountability groups after reading Wesley’s statement that they were the strength of Methodism. He also voiced frustration with the effects of just preaching no matter how good that preaching may be. As I read through his writings it became apparent that God uses preaching to awaken people to spiritual need. But if we do not immediately follow up on those people, they quickly fall back to sleep in their sins.

Think of preaching as spiritual diagnosis along with recommendations for a cure. The small group accountability is follow up where the actual remedy is applied to their condition. Most people don’t have any knowledge how to turn their lives around from sin to God. What I have discovered is the small group really allows us to do personal work with people and everyone in the group benefits from the learning they each one experience as they

began pursuing Christ.

I start my groups out by getting them accountable to the means of grace. The means of grace are the primary avenues through which the Holy Spirit flows into our lives. He isn’t restricted to these. But they are the way he comes to most people.

So I start out with getting people accountable to reading their Bibles on a daily basis. Help them find one that is in their language and understandable to them. My first session would begin by talking about the primary place the Bible has in our lives to reveal who God is and what he desires for our life. I would tell them, next week when we meet, I am going to ask each of you, “Did you make time to sit down in a quiet place and read the Scriptures each day.”

Secondly, I add prayer. Explain that prayer is talking to God and no relationship can grow

without communication. Scripture is listening to God. Prayer is unburdening my heart and worshiping him. So the second week we meet we become accountable to pray and read each day.

Third, attend church as often as possible. It is a means of grace.

Fourth, add service. Jesus came to serve. The secret to greatness in Christianity is serving. So encourage them to keep their eyes open to ways they can help other people beginning at home and extending to their neighbors.

I add solitude, fasting, giving of their income, all the virtues of the Christian life can be added a little at a time as you move along. The goal here is to get your people to actually practicing the habits of a Christian with the assumption that as they do, they each will encounter the presence of the living God in transforming ways.

Expect them to have some frustration with this process as they go. The fleshly lifestyle does not like these things that are breaking its hold on people. I tell my folks, “the less you like it and don’t want to do it on a given day, the more power it has to break the hold of that resistance on your heart. Do it anyway!”

Early on you will find excitement about things because it is new. About six weeks in some will be in a pattern of not getting things done and making excuses. I arrange my groups where we sit in a circle facing each other. Start the accountability with yourself each week. You must model what you expect. If you have a bad week, admit it and allow them to lay hands on you and pray for you. Then move to the next person in the group and ask them if they have been faithful to practice the disciplines you have been teaching them.

You, as leader, set the tone and intensity of the group. The more transparent you are the more they will be. If you haven’t done well

yourself and you kind of excuse yourself by words or attitude, expect the whole group to do the same. I have seen this lived out many times. The Spirit has convicted me about this.

What you will discover is that as time goes by they start discovering the power of these habits to shape us in the image of God. They start experiencing God working in their lives and share these things. That gets exciting. As they experience these changes, the community in which they live also sees it and this becomes the number one way to grow your churches. Unsaved people start seeing the actual fruit of the Spirit consistently lived out in the lives of your people.

Every week some in the group will come and admit it has been a hard week. Allow them to share, ask them questions that draw them out, as well as encourage them from the Scriptures. Be kind. Expect them to do these means of grace. Pray over each one that is having a hard week. I always walk over to them and ask several others in the group to join me. I lay hands on them and pray that God will strengthen them, encourage them and lift them up.

You will see genuine life change as you put these things into practice. It is the most rewarding thing I have done as a spiritual shepherd. In about a year, those who have gotten this stuff down will be your best assistants and leaders. You are making genuine followers of Jesus. Look for those that are uniquely gifted in sharing what they learn with others in the group from week to week. These are going to be your new leaders. At some point as the Spirit leads you, you will want to put these people in charge of other groups who may meet in their homes or the homes of new people desiring to learn.

Several things to watch for:

- Don’t allow very talkative people to con-



sume too much time. Here in America, I limit our meeting time to 90 minutes. If one person takes over. It will not allow everyone to share and is not fair. Tell them this on the front end as you start the group.

If someone loses track of time and you don't prod them by saying, "I appreciate what you have shared, but we must move on to the next person. If we get around the room and still have time you can share some more at the end. " I have never had a person get offended at me for doing this.

But if you don't do it, expect your group to fall apart. They are not coming to hear Dominant Daniel share his miseries week after week. This is key. The devil will try to sidetrack your groups with this. Don't let it happen!

- Do not allow them to confess anyone else's sins. One spouse cannot tell on another in the group. This is counterproductive. Confession of sin works on a personal level. As I confess my sins, God humbles and empowers me. But if I confess someone else's sins it could be gossip, or excuse for my own personal lack of discipline. I tell my groups these rules the very first meeting.

- If a person is failing week after week and doesn't seem to be all that bothered about it, you need to confront him/her in front of the whole group. If you don't they will drag the effectiveness down of the group. I will say to them, "These things we are doing are commanded by Scripture and practiced by Jesus himself. We have to do these if we want to be like him. I know you can do these things and next week I am expecting you to have a better week."

Then pray for him. If that doesn't change things you will need to meet him personally and tell him that if he doesn't get his act together he will need to stop coming.

These things will bless you and your people. I will be glad to help you with any questions you have at any time. May God bless you as you begin this journey and make you effective in raising up people who genuinely love the life of Christ. It is a wonderful work.

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## Wesley Stories

Joseph Beaumont Wakeley

**I**n 1788 the subject of slavery was producing a great excitement in England. It was the general topic for the press and the pulpit. In the early part of March Mr. Wesley preached on the subject at Bristol, on a week evening, by previous announcement. The house was crowded with high and low, rich and poor. He preached on that ancient prophecy, “God shall enlarge Japhet: and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.” Mr Wesley says,

About the middle of the discourse, while there was on every side attention still as night, a vehement noise arose, none could tell why, and shot like lightning through the whole congregation. The terror and confusion were inexpressible. You might have imagined it was a city taken by storm. The people rushed upon each other with the utmost violence; the benches were broke in pieces; and nine tenths of the congregation appeared to be struck with the same panic. In about six minutes the storm ceased, almost as suddenly as it rose; and, all being calm, I went on without the least interruption. It was the strangest incident of the kind I never remember; and I believe none can account for it without supposing some supernatural influence. Satan fought lest his kingdom should be delivered up.

## The Work of the Holy Spirit in Inspiration and Confirmation

Vic Reasoner

**S**econd Peter 1 deals with inspiration, transfiguration, and revelation. No other passage reveals so much about the unique process of the inspiration of Scripture. Men, whether prophets or apostles, were carried along by the Holy Spirit. They were elevated above their humanity and so overshadowed that they were enabled to receive and convey God's words. Their experience was awesome and their finish product provided the inerrant and authoritative Word of God for the whole world. While their experience cannot be repeated, Peter says our faith — which is based upon faith in that Word — is equally precious.

In this same chapter Peter also was

inspired to write about his own experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. There were only three eyewitnesses and what they saw will never be repeated. Those three men saw a revelation of Jesus Christ which compares to John's later revelation. While Peter, James, and John had walked and lived with Jesus during his Incarnation, they had never seen him in his majesty and glory. That must have been an awesome experience, but Peter says that our faith is equally precious.

Finally, Peter teaches at the end of this same chapter that while we were not included in the process of inspiration nor were we present for the transformation, we can have our

own revelation of Jesus Christ. Every person who responds to God's preliminary grace will experience the awakening of the Holy Spirit like a lamp shining in a dark place. The dark place describes our unawakened heart and mind. As we are enabled to move toward the light and do so, a new day begins to dawn and the morning star of hope dispels the darkness.

Peter describes conversion six times in this short letter as the full knowledge of God. This is in contrast to the Gnostics, who "know it all" but do not know God experientially.

As we walk in that new light the darkness turns to dawn and the dawn advances until noon day brightness. As a mature believer, it is our privilege to live with the full assurance of faith. And the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. Thus, our faith is equally precious.

This interpretation, put forth by the Methodist writers of the past, has been obscured by the popular interpretation that Peter is describing the second advent. While he will deal with the second advent in chapter 3, every commentator I have read who tries to make that interpretation fit, stumbles over the phrase "in your hearts." I have seen some very creative attempts to explain how the second coming of Christ will be internal. However, Peter cannot establish his authority and his credibility, which he must do before he can denounce the false Gnostics in chapter 2, on an event which has not yet occurred.

Some commentators come closer to the truth when they say that these verses contrast the old covenant with the new. But again, Peter is describing an existential and personal experience. In fact, he almost sounds like a Quaker describing the "inner light."

But Peter balances the subjective and internal work of the Holy Spirit within the human heart with the objective and external testimony of Scripture. We must have both! We

may contend for the final authority of Scripture, devoid of all feeling, until we are nothing more than conservative rationalists.

Or we can contend for an ecstatic experience in the Holy Ghost, devoid of any biblical grounding, until we become mystics. The evangelical church today is polarized as either Calvinists who stand upon the Word (and their interpretation of it which they hold as equally authoritative) or Charismatics who do not care what the Bible says since their final authority is their personal revelation from God.

No other movement in church history has maintained the dual witness of the Word and the Spirit as Methodism has done. The irony is that I am promised a personal revelation of Jesus Christ by the Bible and the Bible then becomes the final test concerning whether or not that revelation is legitimate.

If Methodism doctrine can be reduced to its central message, which is risky because it can lead to a distortion, Methodism broke into the deistic rationalism of the 18th century declaring that we can know that we are saved.

When Samuel Wesley was dying, he told John on more than one occasion, "The inward witness, son, the inward witness, that is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity." At the time John did not know what he meant, but after Aldersgate John preached this inward witness to the world.

Daniel Steele claimed the day-star is "the divine coming into contact with the human — the Holy Spirit directly revealing Christ to the consciousness, illuminating our spiritual intuitions." Wesley preached, "Let all, therefore, who desire that day to dawn upon their hearts, wait for it in 'searching the Scriptures.'" True Methodism never divorces one from the other.

I did not hear what Peter heard on the Mount of Transfiguration when he heard the Father say to the only begotten Son, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." But every adopted son or daughter

can hear those same words whispered into their heart by the Holy Spirit. Hallelujah! Because I have heard those words from my heavenly Father, my faith is just as precious as that of Peter.

[Extracted from *A Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on 1-2 Peter* (2017)]

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## Open Theism and Arminianism

Richard Clark

Arminians believe that God has granted humanity a limited degree of genuine free will. By this, Arminians mean that when people go to make some decisions, they are truly able to make more than one choice. This common-sense understanding of “free will” is what is meant throughout this article when it is mentioned. This raises the question, “Can God know in advance what decisions his creatures will make when they are allowed to exercise their free will?” Some have argued that the only coherent Arminian view is the one that denies that God can know how creatures will use their free wills in the future. In other words, according to this argument, consistent Arminians take the position known as “open theism.” Is this the only coherent Arminian position when it comes to understanding God’s foreknowledge?

Before making a few observations about such an argument it is only right to fairly present what Open Theists are actually saying. They would be very offended if someone charged them with denying that God is all-knowing. They point out that most Christian theologians throughout history have taught that God is all-powerful in the sense that he possesses all the power that he could possibly possess. In slightly more technical terms, he can actualize any possible thing or any possible state of affairs. God cannot, on this classical answer, “make a rock so big that he cannot lift it” because that entails a logical contradiction. Contradictions are not possible things or

states of affairs, instead, they turn out to be mere word games. Some Christians might understandably be offended by this classical answer and want to say that God can do the logically impossible. Yet, theologians who have maintained this classical answer have pointed out that logic is not a law that controls God but reflects his orderly nature. Think about this, if God could do the logically impossible then it would make as much sense to say that he can and that he cannot do the logically impossible. In such a case, he can tell the truth in scripture while lying at the same time and in the same way. It turns out that to say that God can do the illogical may glorify him less than to say that the illogical is nothing more than a word game and the power to do the illogical is not a power that can be possessed. The Open Theist argues that just as it is wrong to say that God can do the illogical, it is also wrong to say that God can know truths that he cannot logically know. Instead, for the Open Theist, God knows all truths that can possibly be known but it is not possible to know what creatures will do in the future when exercising their God-given free wills.

### How might other Arminians respond to the view of Open Theists?

First, it is not clear that God cannot logically know the future in the same way that God cannot make a rock so big that he cannot lift it. The notion of a rock that God cannot lift

contradicts his being all-powerful because there is no size or weight that necessarily conflicts with a being that is strong enough to lift it. It may be logically possible for a being that lacks all-power to make an object so big that he cannot lift it. Yet, such an admission, in no way shows that an all-powerful being could logically make an object so big that he cannot lift it. So, such a rock turns out to be a logical contradiction. Is it truly a contradiction to say that God knows how creatures will exercise their free wills in the future? It is, at the very least, less than obvious that this entails a contradiction. Consider the following example. Suppose I know that tomorrow, while my wife is somewhat hungry, I will offer her fried chicken livers and chocolate and she has the free will to choose one, the other, or deny both. Is it impossible for me to know what she will choose tomorrow? It is not clear that I cannot know this. It seems evident to me that I know she will choose the chocolate. If I can know a future free decision of another person, then obviously God can do the same and to a much greater degree. If God can know one future free decision, then there is no apparent reason to deny that he knows all such decisions. If God knows all that can possibly be known and God can know all future free decisions, then it follows that God knows all future free decisions.

Second, historical Arminians have not thought that their Arminianism meant that they could only coherently deny that God knows his creatures' future free decisions. John Wesley (1703-1791) and Richard Watson (1781-1833), for example, espoused the most common Arminian view that God has simple foreknowledge of what his creatures *will* freely do. Jacobus Arminius (1559-1609), some prominent Remonstrants, and a few Anglican Arminians argued that God also knows what a creature *would* freely do in any situation. This latter view is sometimes called

*Molinism*, named after its founder Luis de Molina (1535-1600). So, simple foreknowledge and Molinist views are also possibly coherent views for Arminians to affirm but they are not analysed here. It seems that the third response to Open Theism best determines its plausibility for Arminians who want to maintain biblical fidelity.

Third, and most importantly, the scriptures are not illogical documents, and they seem to teach both that God has granted humanity a limited degree of genuine free will and that God knows how people would and will use it. As J. Matthew Pinson has pointed out in his recent book on Arminianism, numerous passages imply that humanity has been given a limited degree of free will, including passages in, Genesis 4, Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 11 and 30, Isaiah 30, Jeremiah 32, Matthew 6, Mark 10 and 11, and John 5. First Corinthians 10:13 teaches that God's people can choose to give into temptation or take God's provision of a "way of escape." Additionally, the numerous prophecies of scripture cannot all be explained away by Open Theists. How did Jesus know that Judas would betray him and that Peter would deny him? Were they not free to not betray or deny Jesus? Most Open Theists would probably not want to argue that Judas and Peter were unable to have done any differently. It seems on the surface that Open Theism does not make the best sense of biblical data.

Historically, Arminianism argued, against Calvinists, that God's exhaustive knowledge of future free decisions did not mean that the future did not contain genuinely free decisions (as defined above). They made this case largely on biblical and philosophical grounds. It may be that Open Theism, which implicitly agrees with Calvinists that God cannot know future free decisions, is not the most coherent form of Arminianism, since it sacrifices a major doctrinal point of the historic Arminian

tradition. In the London translation of Arminius's seventeenth private disputation, we can see that he wrote, "The understanding of God is certain and infallible: So that He sees certainly and infallibly even things future and contingent; . . . [but] 'Prescience,' is not the cause of things."

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## **The Five Points of Arminianism – An Introduction**

### **Vinicius Couto**

**A**rminian theology has been misinterpreted and wrongly accused of being Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. In the 17th century, early Arminians were accused of many other errors besides these, such as Socinianism and Coornhertianism. These misinterpretations have been based on a lack of verification of primary sources, common sense, and sometimes even on intellectual dishonesty.

**Lack of verification of primary sources.** A reading of Arminius' biography (see the work of Carl Bangs) demonstrates that even in his day he was accused of things he did not say. At the Synod of Dort, Festus Hommius used Socinian and Adolphus Venator texts as if they were from the Remonstrants, accusing them of denying the doctrine of original sin (on this, see Aza Goudriaan's chapter in the book *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt*). Even today, many criticize Arminius without, at least, having read his works.

**Common sense.** Common sense is an unscientific practice. It is a repetition of information without proper verifiability. Many times, erroneous or false information passes for the truth. In colonial Brazil (1500-1815), slave owners invented a lie that mango and milk could not be mixed in order to prevent slaves from drinking milk. This lie is popular to this day in Brazil, to the point that people do not dare to mix it up afraid of dying. The same is true of the notion of Arminianism. Some un-

truths are propagated in works on the history of theology and are treated as if they were reliable. Reading primary sources is the way to go.

**Intellectual dishonesty.** Even with the reading of good secondary sources on Arminius' thought (e.g. Keith D. Stanglin, Thomas H. McCall, Richard P. Muller, F. Leroy Forlines, J. Matthew Pinson, Roger Olson, etc.) and with the availability of Arminius' works in the English language, some authors and expositors insist on those erroneous accusations that Arminianism is the same as Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism.

In a simpler way (although not simplistic), the present article proposes to start a series of short articles that will bring, in sequence, some points of the thought of Arminius and of early Remonstrantism. In this first article, I highlight what have been known as the five points of Arminianism.

Some people think that the five points of Calvinism (known by the acrostic TULIP) were born first. However, they are more exactly derived from the counterpoints that the Synod of Dordt made to the five articles of the remonstrance. It is worth remembering that the acrostic TULIP is more recent and dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and not to Dordt.

First, therefore, the five points of Arminianism were born. In 1610, pastor

Johannes Uitenbogaert (1557-1644), a friend of the late Jacob Arminius (1559-1609), led the publication of five articles protesting against rigid Calvinism. The five articles highlighted the main concerns regarding the rigidity of the Calvinist system of the time, which are summarized below:

***Predestination is conditional.*** The divine decrees for salvation and reprobation are not unconditional, that is, God does not choose who wants to save and who does not want to save, because his will is that everyone be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth. Rather, God elects to salvation those who, by grace, believe in Christ; and reproves those who reject the grace of Christ and remain in unbelief.

***Atonement is unlimited.*** Christ's work at Calvary was not only accomplished by a chosen elite in eternity past. Rather, his sacrifice was performed for the entire human race, that is, for each and every person. This, however, does not mean that everyone is saved, for election is conditional. Furthermore, the benefits of the atonement apply only to those who believe, there being a difference between the provision of forgiveness of sins and the application of forgiveness.

***Depravity is total.*** It is impossible for the fallen human race to take any autonomous step towards salvation, for agency for spiritual things was not simply wounded, dormant, or diseased, but lost. This statement drives Remonstrants away from any specimen of Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Socinianism, and Coornhertianism.

***Grace is the center of salvation and can be resisted.*** Since the fallen human being has no free will, grace must come first (prevenient). The center of salvation is not man

(*anthropocentrism*), but grace (*charicentrism*). This grace, however, has primacy not only before regeneration, but throughout the Christian life course and at the consummation of salvation, being the beginning, continuation, and end of all good. This grace can also be resisted, and to this the Scriptures bear ample witness.

***Perseverance of the saints is conditional.*** The security of salvation is in Christ. Mystical union with Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit testify and guarantee salvation. In the 1610 article, the Remonstrants are not defined with respect to the reality of apostasy, that is, whether a truly born-again Christian can fall from grace and lose his salvation. However, in 1618, they delivered another document to the Synod of Dordt affirming this possibility and reality.

These five points of remonstrance have also been associated with Arminianism and are sometimes called the five points of Arminianism. In this case, "Arminianism" is given that title as part of a school or tradition that has a brief soteriological system.

Just as the five points of Calvinism gained an acrostic in the 20th century under the name TULIP, some Arminians have suggested an acrostic for the five points of Remonstrant-Arminianism. Brian Abasciano suggested FACTS: Freed by grace; Atonement for all; Conditional election; Total depravity; Security in Christ. Rusty Brian proposed another acrostic, namely DAISY: Depravity; All are elect; Unlimited atonement; Superabundant grace; Yield of salvation.

It is important to mention that Arminian theology is not limited to these five points of remonstrance. These points may summarize *some* of the soteriological debate. However, Arminius was involved in more soteriological debates than simply these five points. One source that shows a wider scope is his work

*Declaration of Sentiments*. Even so, the five points help us to understand some of the *modus operandi* of salvation from the Remonstrant-Arminian perspective.

Future articles will separately analyze each of the five points of Arminianism. However, we do not intend to limit ourselves to just that five points. Since Arminius' thinking is broader, we still intend, further on, to explore his understanding of Scripture, God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Human Being, Sin, Church, and even some notion of the Last Things.

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## Books

*Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh* (Eccl 12:12). In response to the excuse, "But I have *no taste* for reading," John Wesley told his preachers, "Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade" [*Conference Minutes 1770*].

Robert L. Shank's bombshell *Life in the Son* was dropped in 1960. Dealing with the doctrine of perseverance and security, it went through eight editions; the last printing was in 1989. Steve Witzki contacted the Shank family in 2013 about updating the book. With their blessing, Steve added 200 new pages, incorporating the best Arminian scholarship since 1960. Steve has edited the original work very judiciously and I have read his rationale for every change made in a draft copy which he supplied. He has followed Shank's methodology and advanced Shank's argument.

Bethany House is scheduled to print this new edition in January 2024. Craig Keener will supply a foreword to the new edition. *Life in the Son* was an important influence on him while in Bible college.

I am currently writing a *Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on Philippians and Colossians* which should be finished next year. I continue to employ the same methodology as I have used in all my previous commentaries. Just as Thomas Oden has preserved the best thought of the patristics in his *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, and as Timothy George is doing in the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*, I am trying to locate, sift, and preserve the best classic Methodist exegesis, while at the same time interacting with other theological positions.

I was surprised to discover a 4½ page positive review of my systematic theology in *Word & Deed: A Journal of Salvation Army Theology and Ministry* 24:2 (May 2022) 71-75. The third volume has just been out less than a year and we are already reprinting the first volume.

-Vic Reasoner





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