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The Hope of a Christian World:

Vic Reasoner

Wesleyan Eschatology and Cultural Transformation

An Overview of Wesleyan Eschatology

Wesleyan theology affirms the orthodox doctrines of Christ's second advent, a general resurrection and general judgment, and the eternal states of heaven and hell. However, the early Methodists did not engage in prophetic speculation. Describing the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* in the 1820s, W. H. Oliver said that of all the major religious reviews in England, this magazine "took the least interest in prophecy." Prophecy in general was not a major emphasis within Methodism. D. N. Hempton concluded that among nineteenth-century interpreters of biblical prophecy, "Wesleyan Methodists are conspicuous by their absence." In fact all that was necessary to join with the Methodist societies was a desire to flee the wrath to come.

Methodists devoted their ministry to proclaiming the Gospel and put little emphasis on speculative escha-

tology. None of the early Methodists wrote specialized treatments of eschatology. The few Methodist commentators who attempted to cover the whole Bible, merely repeated the prevailing historical approach within Protestantism. These five attempted to comment on Revelation because they were writing a commentary on the entire Bible. Even then, Wesley relied upon Johann Albrecht Bengel, Clarke utilized the help of a nephew, John Edward Clarke, Benson borrowed heavily from Wesley (and thus from Bengel). Coke and Sutcliffe relied on the standard Protestant commentators of their day.

Of 746 published sermons of early Methodists which I evaluated, none contained speculation on prophecy and only twelve, or 1.6% took a text from the book of Revelation. Thus, early Methodism did not emphasize speculative prophecy. They were historicists with regard to their approach to the book of Revelation and postmillennialists who held to a future millennium.

Yet the early Methodists were motivated by an eschatology of hope. In his sermon "Scriptural Christianity," John Wesley connected the pentecostal work of the Spirit in apostolic days with the great end time climax of the church.

But shall we not see greater things than these? Yea, greater than have been yet from the beginning of the world? Can Satan cause the truth of God to fail? Or his promises to be of none effect? If not, the time will come when Christianity will prevail over all, and cover the earth. Let us stand a little, and survey this strange sight, a *Christian world*.

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Wesley then quoted Isaiah 2:2-4, Isaiah 11:6-12, and Romans 11:25-26 as primary descriptions of that Christian world. He preached,

Against hope believe in hope. It is your Father's good pleasure yet to renew the face of the earth. Surely all these things shall come to an end, and the inhabitants of the earth shall learn righteousness. "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they know war any more." "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains;" and all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our God. "They shall not" then "hurt or destroy in all his holy mountain."

Wesley expressed the hope that the Methodist revival would not die. "No; I trust this is only the be-

beginning of a far greater work — the dawn of "the latter day glory." Wesley then expressed the belief that God "will carry it on in the same manner as he has begun." Thus, Wesley expected the "latter day

glory" to arrive gradually as the gospel was preached and all classes of people would be converted and enter into the kingdom of God. He spoke of this as "the grand Pentecost" fully coming. And so all Israel too shall be saved. They will be gathered into the Christian church and universal holiness and happiness will be reestablished on earth. This message, "The General Spread of the Gospel," which foresaw the unleashing of a new worldwide missions effort was preached a full nine years before William Carey released his famous tract "An Inquiry into the Means for the Evangelization of the Heathen"

Wesley noted that Martin Luther believed that a revival of religion usually lasted about fifty years, but Wesley expressed the hope that the Methodist revival would continue until the millennium appeared. "We have therefore reason to hope that this revival of religion will continue, and continually increase, till the time when all Israel shall be saved and the fulness of the Gentiles shall come."

Thomas Coke, the father of Methodist missions, wrote, "Let us pray for the Universal Reign of Christ."

John Fletcher believed that the millennial reign of Christ was near at hand. He believed that God had raised up John Wesley and the Methodist movement as the forerunner to this coming kingdom of God on the earth. Fletcher felt the world would be evangelized beginning with the preaching of the Methodists. Whether this would involve a visible manifestation of Christ was an open question. However, this coming millennium was expected as a global Pentecost.

Fletcher's wife, Mary, observed this emphasis of the coming millennium, when the world would be over-spread with righteousness, was a theme of early Methodist preaching.

In his later sermons Wesley also preached of "an effusion of the Spirit" which would exceed the original Pentecost. He believed Methodism represented the beginning of the restoration of the early Church. Wesley believed the holy lives of Methodist believers as a Christian witness would constitute the greatest proof of the truth of Christianity. In this sermon, "The Mystery of Iniquity," Wesley also declared, "The time is at hand when righteousness shall be as universal as unrighteousness is now."

The consensus of Methodist commentators was that there would be a future conversion of Israel. This hope was based on Romans 11:25-26. Wesley believed there would be a "vast harvest among the heathen." The resulting prosperity will provoke the Jews to jealousy. The Jewish people as a whole will be converted "being convinced by the coming in of the Gentiles. But there will be still a larger harvest among the Gentiles, when all Israel is come in."

Wesley continued to say that this strong confirmation of biblical prophecy would convince many deists and nominal Christians. Their conversion would be the means of a swift propagation of the gospel among the Muslims and pagan world, "who would probably have received it long ago, had they conversed only with real Christians."

The fact that this entire paragraph was included in Joseph Benson's *Notes* and that Thomas Coke made a very similar statement demonstrates a general belief among early Methodists that the Jews would be converted when they saw Christianity working among the Gentiles. Albert Outler concluded that Wesley was certain the *chief* hindrance to "the general spread of the gospel" was blatantly inhumane

Wesley expressed the hope that the Methodist revival would continue until the millennium appeared.

behavior of nominal and pseudo-Christians at home and abroad.

Joseph Sutcliffe foresaw that the Jews would remain in unbelief until Christian missionaries succeeded in largely converting the Gentiles of every name and nation and in disseminating the holy scriptures in every language. Amos Binney wrote that “the general conversion of the Gentiles will not only precede, but largely contribute to bring about, the general conversion of the Jews.

Thus the Methodist hope was that scriptural holiness would be spread over the land and this would result

Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God. Such alone will set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

in real Christians whose lives would provoke the Jews to jealousy. The conversion of the Jews would result in a still larger harvest among Muslims and the pagan world. Thus the resurrection of the Church would result in the millennium or a Christian world established on earth.

Francis Asbury wrote in 1796, “The time certainly is drawing near when universal peace shall bless the earth: when distracted Europe, superstitious Asia, Blind Africa, and America shall more abundantly see the salvation of our God.” In 1799 he wrote, “The coming of Christ is near, even at the door, when he will establish his kingdom. He is now sweeping the earth, to plant it with righteousness and true holiness.” After forty-five years of labor, Asbury wrote in 1815, “We will not give up the cause — we will not abandon the world to infidels.

Peter Cartwright, writing in 1856 said,

Nothing but the principles of the Bible can save our happy nation or world, and every friend of religion ought to spread the Bible to the utmost of his power and means. Then let us look for the happy end of the universal spread of truth, when all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Nathanael Burwash articulated the predominate view of Canadian Methodism when he declared that John Wesley’s conception of the coming of Christ meant:

the extension of Christ’s spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men by individual conversion such as was taking place in his own day. This he expected to go on in still greater power till the world should be regenerated by the saving power of the Gospel which was doing its work in his own time.

This conviction led Wesley to declare, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergy or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.”

This millennial hope was based upon their belief in a universal atonement, the power of the Gospel, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. They were optimistic about what the grace of God could do in the individual and preached a Christian perfection. They were equally optimistic about what the grace of God could do collectively to redeem God’s creation.

The terms “premillennial” and “postmillennial” do not appear in the writings of John Wesley, but his implicit postmillennialism became explicit in the next generation of Wesleyan theologians. This optimism of grace continued across two hundred years. No Wesleyan systematic theologian has been premillennial. In 1998 Gary Cutler issued a challenge to prove that *any* Wesleyan Holiness institution officially taught premillennialism before the 1920s. He verified last Fall that “my statement you refer to stands unchallenged.”

The standard Methodist view in England remained postmillennialist to the end of the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century American Methodism had “almost completely adopted postmillennialism.” As late as 1890 virtually all of the major evangelists within the holiness movement were committed to postmillennialism. In 1897 the National Holiness Association passed a resolution against those who made premillennialism their “hobby.” The first premillennial president, C. W. Butler, was not elected to the National Holiness Association until 1928. In fact, Stanley Horton claimed that the pretribulational premillennialism, held by early Pentecostals, was a bigger barrier between them and the older Methodist holiness groups than their interpretation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

This hope of a Christian world motivated the early Methodists and their movement spanned most of the eighteenth century. No other revival has lasted so long nor has had such a widespread international influence. From 1773-1790 the American population increased 75% and during the same period Method-

ism increased 5500%. By 1850, the Methodists were the largest Protestant church in American and one-third of all church members were Methodist.

[The next issue will deal with the cultural transformation produced by Methodism.]

Christian Regeneration:

Joseph D. McPherson

A Unique Phenomenon of the Holy Ghost Dispensation

In Matthew 11:11, Jesus makes this startling statement: “*Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*” In his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Mr. Wesley shares the following explanation borrowed from an ancient author:

“One perfect in the law, as John was, is inferior to one who is baptized unto the death of Christ. For this is the kingdom of heaven, even to be buried with Christ, and to be raised up together with him. John was greater than all who had been then born of women; but he was cut off before the kingdom of heaven was given.” [He seems to mean that righteousness, peace, and joy which constitute the present, inward kingdom of heaven.] “He was blameless as to that righteousness which is by the law; but he fell short of those who are perfected by the Spirit of life which is in Christ. Whosoever therefore is least in the kingdom of heaven, by Christian regeneration, is greater than any who has attained only the righteousness of the law, because the law maketh nothing perfect.”

According to the founder of Methodism this “Christian regeneration” referred to above is wrought in the heart of believers by a faith given of God. “No man,” says he, “is able to work it in himself. It is a work of omnipotence. It requires no less power thus to quicken a dead soul, than to raise a body that lies in the grave. It is a new creation; and none can create a soul anew, but he who at first created the heavens and the earth.”

The term regeneration is not an Old Testament term. We find it only in the New Testament in two places. In Matthew 19:28 our Lord uses it in reference to the

resurrection state or the eschatological “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). Our particular interest is found with the Apostle Paul’s use of the term in his letter to Titus, “*according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5). “Undoubtedly,” writes Adam Clarke, “the apostle here means baptism, the rite by which persons were admitted into the Church, and the *visible sign* of the cleansing, purifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which the apostle immediately subjoins.”

Mr. Wesley sees sanctification in an initial sense expressed by the words, “washing of regeneration.” He believes also that this “washing” has reference to baptism which is an outward sign of an inward cleansing. The means by which that inward cleansing is accomplished is “*the renewing of the Holy Ghost*; which purifies the soul, as water cleanses the body, and renews it in the whole image of God.” Such a regeneration as this can only be understood in a post-pentecostal setting and time frame.

Quickening dead souls and raising them to life in Christ Jesus is a miraculous and unique phenomenon of this present dispensation of the Holy Spirit. A close reading of New Testament Scripture shows the Christian dispensation of the Holy Spirit to be greatly superior to the Jewish standard portrayed in the dispensation of the law. The word “better” is used more than a dozen times in the epistle to the Hebrews to emphasize the superior privileges of the new covenant over those under the former and inferior covenant of the law.

One scholar, however, has lately endeavored to convince his readers that Ezekiel 36:25-27 and John 3:1-8 not only provide evidence of God’s indwelling

Spirit but also the work of regeneration in the hearts of Old Testament saints and those living prior to Pentecost [Allan Brown, “The Regenerating and In-dwelling Work of the Holy Spirit Prior to Pentecost,” *God’s Revivalist* (Winter 2006)]. Let us review this prophetic passage of Ezekiel.

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

As we look at the context of this beautiful passage, we see that it is a promise of God to the Jewish people for future fulfillment. The words “will” and “shall” are found several times therein. Bible scholars agree that this promise was to

Quickening dead souls and raising them to life in Christ Jesus is a unique phenomenon of this present dispensation.

be fulfilled with the coming of the new covenant. Writing in the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, Burt Hall assures us that “In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit empowered believers; in the New Testament age the Holy Spirit [not only empowers but] purifies believers from sins and from sin (1 John 1:9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8).”

The dialogue of Jesus with Nicodemus in John 3:1-8 concerning the necessity of his being “born again” must be viewed and understood in the light of John 7:37-39. *“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”*

Although Jesus was, in a sense glorified in His ministry, miracles, death and resurrection, His ultimate exaltation and glorification was realized after His ascension to the right hand of the Father. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter assures his listeners that *“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all*

are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” The promise of Jesus to believers in John 7:37-39 had begun to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

Dr. Brown declared that “If regeneration was not possible for Nicodemus prior to Pentecost as some argue, then Jesus must have been either mocking Nicodemus or speaking prophetically of a future possibility. There is nothing in the text of John 3 to support either view.” But Donald Bloesch concluded that “the new birth does not take place until the Son of Man is lifted up (vv. 14-15).” He found John 7:37-39 a helpful comparison and concluded, “Here we see a clear reference to Pentecost as the time when those who would follow Christ are born of water and the Spirit” [*The Holy Spirit*, pp. 304-305].

No, Jesus was not mocking Nicodemus any more than He was mocking those who heard Him on that last and “great day of the feast,” when with uplifted voice, He promised the Holy Ghost to spiritually thirsty and believing Jews. Jesus, throughout His ministry, was engaged in preparing His followers for the timely coming of the Spirit’s dispensation and a glorious fulfillment of new covenant promises. Commenting on John 7:39, Adam Clarke writes:

Certain measures of the Holy Spirit had been vouchsafed from the beginning of the world to believers and unbelievers: but that abundant effusion of his graces spoken of by Joel, (Joel 2:28), which peculiarly characterized the Gospel times, was not granted till after the ascension of Christ: 1. Because this Spirit in its plenitude was to come in consequence of his atonement; and therefore could not come till after his crucifixion. 2. It was to supply the place of Christ to his disciples and to all true believers; and therefore it was not necessary till after the removal of his bodily presence from among them.

The Rev. John Fletcher provides a similar emphasis in the following statements:

The volume of truth informs us, that the Creator foretold the coming of a Redeemer, and that the Redeemer, during his outward manifestation, proclaimed the near approach of “another Comforter,” John 14:16, 17. It is undoubtedly true, that some earnest of redeem-

ing grace, together with the first fruits of the spirit, were experienced even by the most ancient inhabitants of the earth. It is true, also that by means of those earnest and first fruits, many myriads of mankind have been saved in every age of the world. But it is no less true, that the plenitude of these sacred gifts was reserved to a very distant period of time; since, after the first promise of a Redeemer was given, near four thousand years elapsed before he made his public appearance; and while he continued upon earth it is expressly said, that “the Holy Ghost was not yet given, [in its full measure,] because that Jesus was not yet glorified,” John 7:39.

Jesus’ disciples were saved prior to Pentecost according to their inferior dispensation as were all Old Testament saints. Saving faith in this present dispensation, however, differs, “from that faith which the

It is a great mistake to equate regeneration with the experience of Christ’s disciples prior to Pentecost.

Apostles themselves had while our Lord was on earth, [in] that it acknowledges,” says Mr. Wesley, “the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection” [“Salva-

tion by Faith,” 1.5]. Furthermore, regeneration or the new birth requires an effusion of the Spirit unknown prior to the inauguration of Christ’s Kingdom displayed with power from on high.

It is a great mistake, therefore, to equate regeneration with the experience of Christ’s disciples prior to Pentecost. Such a view sinks the standard of New Testament Christianity dreadfully low, making conversion or the new birth far less the miraculous heart transformation that the New Testament describes it to be. While with Christ in the flesh, the disciples lived in a time of transition between the old and new covenants; between the dispensation of the law and that of the Holy Spirit.

Since the article under review concedes that W. B. Pope held a different view from that of the author, it would be well to consider what the prince of Wesleyan theologians actually said. In 1880 he cried out against the modern tendency to teach “a new dispensation of the Spirit, or a Pentecostal visitation super-added to the state of conversion.” He warned that those who teach Acts 19:2 as an experience after re-

generation diminish the value of regeneration [*Compendium*, 3:44, 64].

To those who would “contend that the experience of the original disciples provides a model or pattern today,” Dr. Robert Lyon would answer that “Two observations make this impossible: (1) the model is not followed elsewhere in Acts or the early Church; (2) it fails to consider the [salvation history] significance of Pentecost as the once-for-all inaugurative event which establishes the Church.”

Since Pentecost was the inauguration of Christ’s Kingdom, it is to be viewed as a watershed in salvation history. According to the Apostle Paul, this inward kingdom, consisted of “*righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*” (Rom 14:17). It was then and not before that this Kingdom of Christ began to be established in the hearts of believers. Paul assures us as he did all the believers in the Corinthian church that “*by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit*” (1 Cor 12:13). He shows here the way of entrance into the mystical body of Christ. By such a Spirit baptism all believers enter the true Church and begin to experience the transforming power of regeneration through the inward possession of the Spirit. Three thousand Jews who heard Peter’s sermon and followed his directives received the Spirit. In other words they were baptized in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, for Luke establishes no difference of meaning between “received” and “baptized.” So changed were these newly converted Jews that they gave up personal possessions to relieve the poor around them, possessing “gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God.”

Dr. Kenneth Collins, a recognized Wesley scholar, once stated that “Pentecost was the birth of the Church, not its perfection.” It is significant to observe that nowhere in the New Testament do we find believers exhorted to seek a baptism in the Spirit. Having already been baptized in the Spirit through regeneration they are rather exhorted to “*go on to perfection*” (Heb 6:1).

In his comments on Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3:12, Adam Clarke refers to the Jewish custom of baptizing proselytes. They were considered “as being born of baptism.” This, he says was “practiced every day in the initiation of proselytes.” He

then shows how Jesus was endeavoring to make Nicodemus “understand such heavenly things as the initiation of [His own] disciples by the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire from heaven.”

The Rev. John Fletcher, among early Methodist leaders, is often singled out as one using the terminology of Spirit baptism in reference to entire sanctification or Christian perfection. The impression is often made that he used this terminology in reference to the second work of grace only. Such, however, is not the case. Believing that a great effusion of the Spirit was required to complete both the new birth and Christian perfection in a believer’s heart he, unlike Wesley, used the language of “baptism with the Holy Spirit” in a holistic sense. The honest reader will find use of “baptism with the Spirit” numerous times in his writings while discussing justification and regeneration. For instance, he may be found encouraging earnest seekers for the new birth, by exclaiming, “Yes, you shall be baptized by the Holy Ghost for the remission of sins, and justified freely by faith.”

In their attempts to exalt the second work of grace, the modern holiness movement has consistently reduced the significance of regeneration.

John Wesley, John Fletcher, Adam Clarke, Richard Watson and W. B. Pope all make reference to the “baptism in the Spirit” as God’s powerful means of bringing penitents to a

state of regeneration and the new birth. It is by the work of the same Holy Spirit now residing within their hearts that faithful believers are subsequently brought to a state of Christian perfection.

It is popular in today’s holiness movement to speak of the disciples as being entirely sanctified on the day of Pentecost. The Word of God, however, does not tell us this. Such is an example of dangerously *adding* to that which is written. It is true that, according to Peter, their hearts were purified on that day by faith (Acts 15:9). In their attempts to exalt the second work of grace of entire sanctification, the modern holiness movement has consistently reduced the significance of regeneration. They need to be apprised of the fact that Peter had yet more to say about purifying the heart than what is recorded in Acts 15:9. For instance, in 1 Peter 1:22-23 we see where “*having purified your souls*” (22) is explained in the fol-

lowing verse as “being born again.” Here Peter refers to believers who have purified their souls by “being born again.” There is definitely a purifying of the soul accomplished in the new birth or regeneration. Such purification includes no less than a cleansing away of guilt together with a cleansing of acquired defilement caused by sins of the past.

Early Methodist leaders, closely abiding by scriptural teaching, taught the baptism in the Spirit to be an initiatory event resulting in the regeneration or new birth of sincere penitents. Water baptism was considered the outward symbol of that inward work of Spirit baptism. What has too often been overlooked is that while identifying Spirit baptism with regeneration, early Methodists were in keeping not only with the views of the Reformers before them but also with the Apostolic Fathers of the first and second centuries together with all the Ante-Nicene Fathers. One will not find the baptism of the Holy Ghost identified with a second work of grace in all the writings of the Fathers. That means that out of more than two thousand years of Church history, only within the last 150 years or so has the view arisen which endeavors to identify baptism in the Holy Spirit solely with entire sanctification. Writing a consensus of Christian belief from the first five centuries of the Church, Thomas Oden concluded that “though indwelling is not precisely the same as baptism, sealing, and filling of the Spirit, none of these is detachable from the new birth through the Spirit and baptism of the Spirit. . . . The New Testament understands baptism of and by the Spirit as the privilege of all who have faith, all Christians, all who belong to the body of Christ” [*Life in the Spirit*, 3:178; 182].

We conclude by stating that the experience of regeneration through the baptism of the Holy Spirit is marvelous and wonderful. They who are thus blessed are saved both from the guilt and power of sin. “They have not received again the spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry Abba Father: The Spirit itself also bearing witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God . . . Thus have they peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. They rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, through the Holy Ghost which is given unto them” [John Wesley, “Salvation by Faith”].

REGENERATION

Richard Watson defined *regeneration* as “a new birth; that work of the Holy Spirit by which we experience a change of heart. It is expressed in Scripture by being born again.” The new birth, being born from above, being made alive, Christ being formed in our hearts, and partaking of the divine nature are descriptions of regeneration (John 3:3-8; John 7:37-39; Gal 4:19; Eph 2:1; 2 Peter 1:4).

Titus 3:5 is the only place in Scripture where the word “regeneration” is used to describe Christian experience. In Paul’s admonition to maintain good works, he specifies the means by which the new birth is made possible. The process of regeneration is not by *works* of righteousness which we have done, but according to his *mercy* he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Paul then admonished us to be careful to maintain good works. Yet it is not by our good works or righteousness we are saved, but by his mercy.

Then Paul describes salvation as the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. We are both washed and renewed by the Holy Ghost. This washing produces a new person! This washing occurs when the Spirit is shed on us abundantly (or richly) through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:6-7). This washing of the Spirit is accomplished through the baptism with the Spirit and water baptism is the outward sign of that inward grace. Ananias called on Paul to arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). According to Acts 9:17-18 Paul was first filled with the Spirit, then baptized with water. John Wesley explained that the expression “born of God” does not imply merely being baptized or any outward change, but “a vast inward change; a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost, a change in the whole manner of our existence; for from the moment we are ‘born of God’ we live in quite another

manner than we did before; we are, as it were, in another world.”

The phrase “shed on us” or “poured out on us” in Titus 2:6 also occurs in Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17 and Romans 5:5. In Acts 2:4 the same action is described as “filled with the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 10:44 the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard Peter’s message and the result of this baptism was that they were granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18). This new life was regeneration.

We see then in regeneration that we are baptized with the Spirit, washed by the Spirit, and renewed by the Spirit. Baptizing, coming upon, filling, pouring out, receiving — are equivalent expressions. According to John 7:39 regeneration was not a common privilege until the Holy Spirit was given. Biblical writers refer to the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as receiving, being filled, being baptized, and being endued with power. The Spirit was sent, given, poured out, and fell. The result is a new life — life in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

At the same time we are born again we are also justified by his grace and made heirs, according to Titus 2:7. Justification is what God does for us. Regeneration is what God does in us. They are not the same, although they usually happen at the same time. Both aspects are brought together in Romans 5:1-5. Paul describes justification as peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This right standing before God is a work of divine grace which is gained through faith. But God also gives us the Holy Spirit. This is regeneration and it results in the love of God being poured out into our hearts.

One may ask how this regeneration differs from entire sanctification, as described in 2 Thessalonians 5:23. Entire sanctification is not an entirely different working of the Spirit. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration. It could be said that regeneration or the new creation is not complete until all sin is cleansed from the soul. It could also be said that regeneration is sanctification begun. Actually our salvation will not be complete until the resurrection.

This is what Paul meant in Philippians 3:11-21 when he said he was not already perfect. In verses 20-21 he said he was looking for Jesus Christ who would change his vile body to be like His glorious body. Yet in verse 15 he stated that he, and others as well, were already perfect. Christian perfection is a maturation of what was begun in the new birth. It is a perfection of that love which was poured out in regeneration. In the new birth we have the fruit of the Spirit, but this fruit can increase in quality and quantity.

Titus 3:7 also says that those who are born into God's family become heirs of eternal life. To be made heirs means that we are no longer merely servants, but are adopted as sons and daughters of God. Paul also taught in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that by one Spirit we are baptized into one body.

The work of the Spirit in regeneration not only cleanses us from acquired depravity, but it renews or transforms us. It is a mighty change, a change from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). It is a resurrection from the dead. It is a renewal of the image of God. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17 if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.

Until we are baptized or filled with the Spirit we are not a true New Testament believer. We may be a Christian in our theology or a Christian in our core values. We may even be a Christian in our lifestyle,

but until we are born again through this regeneration by the Spirit we are an "almost Christian." Unless we are born from above we cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). John Wesley concluded his distinction between an "almost Christian" and an "altogether Christian" by explaining that the altogether Christian has been "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus, knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us!"

It would not be fair if I did not briefly review the process through which the Holy Spirit brings regeneration. It begins with conviction of sin or "the drawings of the Father" (John 6:44). Repentance precedes saving faith. The faith that saves is next. This faith is an assurance that my sins, even mine, are forgiven me. This happens as we look only to the merits of the sufferings of Christ and to his resurrection.

Later as we walk with Christ, we will become aware of sin yet remaining in our hearts. This is a proclivity toward sin. Eventually a crisis is reached and we cry out for deliverance from this inward foe. Again trusting in the merits of Christ's atonement, we receive the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all sin. Pure love then rules in our hearts without a rival. May God's love, joy, and peace reign in your heart!

DEFINING AND DEFENDING JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Vic Reasoner

On July 23, 2006 the World Methodist Conference signed a consensus document on justification with the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. However, the official position of the Catholic Church, as stated at the Council of Trent, pronounces anathema on all who teach justification by faith. Rome cannot undo what a previous ecumenical council decided, it can only reinterpret received truth. The question is whether they now have a better understanding of justification or whether the doctrine has been compromised in the name of ecumenicism.

It appears that the Protestants have accommodated Rome at three points. First, imputed righteousness is

dropped in the consensus document. For Rome, sinners are justified *after* they are made righteous. Yet the Protestant doctrine is that we are justified while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8).

Second, the doctrine of sanctification overlaps into the doctrine of justification, which results in some measure of holiness required as the basis of justification. However, Romans 4:5 teaches that the faith of the ungodly is counted as righteousness.

Third, the statement fails to adequately affirm that justification is "by faith alone." Yet, Romans 3:21, 24, and 28 all imply that justification is by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone.

James Arminius declared that “faith, and faith only, is imputed for righteousness. By this alone are we justified before God, absolved from our sins, and are accounted, pronounced and declared RIGHTEOUS by God, who delivers his judgment from the throne of grace.” John Wesley declared that justification by faith was the article of doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Two years after his Aldersgate experience, Wesley explained that he had wandered many years in the “*new path of salvation by faith and works,*” but about two years ago it pleased God to show us the *old way of salvation by faith only.*”

Wesleyan-Arminians, however, understand the faith which saved to be a present tense faith. We also believe saving faith to be a faith which produces obedience (Rom 1:5; 16:26). In Romans 10:16 Paul also equates obedience with faith. Douglas Moo is correct when he commented, “Obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience.”

I come to God as a sinner with no righteousness of my own. Yet by trusting in Christ I am justified and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to my account. Romans 4 teaches that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. However, we not only have peace with God through justification by faith (Rom 5:1), he also pours out the Holy Spirit into the heart of the justified (Rom 5:5). The love of God was

poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us when we were justified. Justification and the gift of the Holy Spirit both occur at the same time — *having been justified and having been given* both occurred at the moment of saving faith.

Therefore, God does not impute grace without imparting grace. To justify means to make just. Justification is not a constant forgiveness for constant sinning. For God to impute to us what he does not impart to us amounts to legal fiction — the charge Roman Catholic theologians make of Reformed theology. God declares us to be without guilt *and* imparts his righteousness. Yet the Catholic error is to put sanctification prior to justification, meaning that we must first become righteous before God will declare us righteous. This can never happen if our sinful nature renders us completely unable to perform such works of righteousness.

Therefore, we accept the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide*, which means “by faith alone,” but we reject solafidianism. John Fletcher explained that “solafidianism” is a softer word for antinomianism. Solafidians not only hold that sinners are justified solely by faith in the day of conversation, but that because faith is the sum total of salvation, they deny the final justification by works of faith at the day of judgment. However, scripture teaches a final justification by works. Thus, as James 2:17-24 taught, saving faith will produce good works.

REVIEWS

by Vic Reasoner

Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 250 pages.

Olson’s purpose is to clear the good Arminian name of false accusations and charges of heresy. His full-length book is an expansion of the *Christianity Today* article in 1999, “Don’t Hate Me Because I’m An Arminian.” In 1998 I gave an address, “Arminius: The Scapegoat of Calvinism” which dealt with some of the same vilification.

Olson opens with a thirty-one page introduction he calls “A Primer on Arminianism.” Here he defines the crucial terms. He labors to be fair and not to correct the malignment by making Calvinism a pejorative term in retaliation.

Olson distinguishes between evangelical Arminianism, which he calls Arminianism of the heart, and intellectual Arminianism, which is Arminianism of the head. The more liberal form of intellectual Arminian developed under Philip Limborch after the death of Arminius and some who followed this trend fell into Pelagianism, universalism, and even

Arianism, the denial of Christ’s full deity. While liberal Arminianism exalts reason and freedom, true Arminianism glorifies divine revelation and supernatural grace. Olson is an apologist for evangelical form of Arminianism to which Wesley led the Methodism movement.

Olson is correct in his assertion that Arminius affirmed total depravity. He is also correct to assert that the Remonstrance primarily denied the three middle points of the TULIP acronym: unconditional election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace. However, I was disappointed that Olson reported the strongest statement that Arminius made about perseverance was, “I should not readily dare to say that true and saving faith may finally and totally fall away.” These are the opening words in a section which evaluates William Perkins’ belief that true and saving faith cannot fail either totally or finally. According to Carl Bangs, Perkins had raised a new issue with Arminius and he approaches it cautiously. But Arminius pro-

ceeded to dismantle that proposition for the next sixteen pages and then concluded,

In the beginning of faith in Christ and conversion to God the believer becomes a living member of Christ; and, if persevering in the faith of Christ, and keeping a conscience void of offense, remains a living member. But if it happens that this member grows slothful, is not careful over itself, gives place to sin, by little and little it becomes half-dead; and so at length, proceeding still further, dies altogether, and ceases to be a member.

Ultimately Arminius held that it is impossible for believers, as long as they remain believers, to decline from salvation, but that a believer who ceases to trust God is no longer a believer.

Olson recognized that prevenient grace is a crucial Arminian doctrine. He acknowledged that Charles Finney denied original sin and thus the need for prevenient grace. Olson said that Finney “vulgarized Arminian theology” and taught a semi-Pelagian view that sufficient power remains in the will to initiate the beginnings of salvation but not enough to bring it to completion. At a popular level this means if you take one step toward God, he’ll come the rest of the way toward you. According to Olson, this is the default theology of more Ameri-

can evangelical Christians. In contrast, “Arminianism is almost totally unknown, let alone believed, in popular evangelical Christianity.” I fully agree.

I am also pleased with each of the ten myths that Olson addresses. The second myth is that a hybrid of Calvinism and Arminianism is possible. In spite of common ground, on issues crucial to both there is no stable middle ground. I have always been irritated by preachers who declared they were neither Calvinist nor Arminian or the “cute” statement that they are “Calminians.” On certain points there is no logical mutual compatibility. Both positions cannot be right when they are in direct contradiction. And Olson asserts “it is impossible to affirm unconditional selection of some to salvation without at the same time affirming unconditional selection of some to reprobation, which, Arminians believe, impugns the character of God.”

Yet for the last fifty years one position has dominated the market. With the publication of *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (2004), and now *Arminian Theology*, InterVarsity Press has given a new voice to an evangelical position which has been, for the most part, suppressed and misrepresented.

Grace Irwin, *Least of All Saints* (1952; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 261 pages. ISBN 0-8028-6015-X.

Truth can be communicated through various methods. Some people struggle with abstract theology, but would enjoy a novel which communicates the same concepts. *Least of All Saints* is such a novel. It opens with Andrew Connington’s conversion under the ministry of John Wesley, then moves forward five generations to his namesake. Although young Andrew Connington has entered the ministry, he struggles with agnosticism. This account is reminiscent of the more famous George MacDonald novel, *The Curate’s Awakening*, the story of Thomas Wingfold. But while MacDonald deals with the legalism of the Scotch Calvinism in his day, Irwin seeks to introduce a later liberal Methodism to its heritage.

The author taught high school Latin, Greek, English and Ancient History as Head of the Classics at Humber College

in Toronto until 1969. Some years after her retirement in 1969, she unexpectedly found herself co-pastor, then pastor, of her church in West Toronto, where she was ordained by the Christian Congregational Conference of Ontario in 1980. She continues to live in Toronto and celebrated her hundredth birthday in April of 2007.

She has written eight novels, including *Least of All Saints*. The same theological emphasis continues in the two remaining volumes of the trilogy: *Andrew Connington* (1958) and *Contend with Horses* (1968). While *Least of All Saints* is not currently in print, it was last reprinted in 1976 and you can locate a used copy quite inexpensively.

Charles Edwin Jones, *The Wesleyan Holiness Movement*, 2 vols. (Landham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 1831 pages.

This is a revision and expansion of *A Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement* (1974). It contains 16,772 entries. You will find our first seven books in this massive catalog of holi-

ness literature. This society is on page 545 and this periodical is assigned #5862.

—all reviews by Vic Reasoner

METHODIST NOTES and QUOTES

- In “A Fragment in Favour of General Redemption,” Adam Clarke argued that if humanity is of one race and if Christ took on himself the nature of man and in human nature made expiation for the sins of nature, then redemption is general and the benefits of his death must necessarily apply to every human being who has descended from Adam. All who share the human nature have a right to apply to God, by virtue of that redemption, for remission of sins [*The Miscellaneous Works of Adam Clarke*, James Everett, ed. (London: T. Tegg, 1836-1837), 8:439-440].
- In his sermon “The Way of Attaining Sanctification,” Joseph Benson spoke of those two grand and fundamental truths which were written in almost every page of the Bible — “All our salvation is of God” and yet “all our damnation of ourselves” [1782; Reprinted in *The Glory of the House of God* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing Co, 2002), p. 151]. These two propositions are based upon the doctrine of general redemption. According to John Fletcher, John Wesley never lost sight of these two axioms in his preaching [*The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher*, 1:17].
- Before John Philpot was martyred on December 18, 1555, he was asked by Papists how he knew he was a son of God. “How do you know that the sun now shines?” he replied. The answer came back, “I see his light.” Philpot replied, “I see a brighter Sun.” This incident was recalled by Edward Hare in a 1809 booklet on the Methodist doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. Was this incident in the back of Wesley’s mind when he wrote?

But the fact we know: namely, that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption that while it is present to the soul he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship than he can doubt of the shining of the sun while he stands in the full blaze of his beams [“The Witness of the Spirit, I, 1.12].

- James Mudge gave this description of Christian perfection:

It is the full assurance of faith and of hope. There is in it a deeper satisfaction, a larger bliss, a more abiding peace, a fuller contentment, a sweeter rest than can be found on the lower levels. It imparts courage in the face of danger, tranquility in commotion, independence of the world, indifference toward earthly possessions and positions, cheerfulness in view of the future triumph over every foe. Those in this path find duty turned into delight; they have an enthusiastic attachment to the Master, which He cordially reciprocates; they sing at their tasks because He is so close to them as they toil; they are not dependent on circumstances and worldly amusements for their pleasure. Their obedience is not a matter of calculation or hesitation. They have settled it once for all that every command is to be promptly heeded. They find nothing too small to be of importance in the glad service of their King, nothing too hard to be welcomed for the sake of Him who appoints it. Constant and intimate is their fellowship with God and their glad recognition of His glorious presence. They live in sunshine, they are cheery, they take their religion with relish. They find an ever increasing conformity to the divine will, and ever increasing fondness for prayer, and they draw water with joy out of all the wells of salvation [*The Perfect Life in Experience and Doctrine* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1911), pp. 149-150].

Four Sermons of John Wesley recorded on CD by Douglas Crossman.

In the late 1980s H. E. Schmul approached Douglas Crossman about recording some of Wesley’s sermons. In 2005 Dennis Hartman finally made the recording of Crossman reading “The

Almost Christian,” “Free Grace,” “Justification by Faith,” and “The Witness of the Spirit, I.” These sermons are on two CDs and may be ordered for \$6 from Dennis at <wesbury@bellsouth.net

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3080 Brannon Rd

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