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THE CAUSES and CURE for APOSTASY

Vic Reasoner

About twenty years ago I published the powerful conversion testimony of a close personal friend in *The Arminian Magazine*. I remember the following year when he was presented to a ministerial examination committee, they were so impressed with his testimony that they wanted to dispense with protocol and give him the highest and most permanent ministerial recognition. Less than four years after that ministerial interview he sent me this email stating:

The more I have studied the more I have come to believe that the Bible is not “inspired” or “God-breathed” or the “Word of God.” It seems to me that Christianity is just another false religion, and that the Bible is just another attempt at a holy book. I have been agnostic for about the last two years. ... I have studied this issue very carefully, and I cannot

believe in the Bible or Christianity with what I know about it now. I never imagined that this would happen to me.

What happened? He lost his faith while attending a leading evangelical seminary which was more dedicated to teaching higher critical theories than in nurturing faith.

The March-April 2008 issue of *Mission Frontiers* was devoted to the question, Why are they walking away? Drew Dych also wrote “The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church” in the November 2010 issue of *Christianity Today*. According to Dych, U. S. sociologists see a major shift taking place away from Christianity. Between 1990-2008 the percentage of those claiming “no religion” doubled. Of the group that claim “no religion,” 73% come from religious homes and 66% are labeled as de-converts. Dych reported that young Americans are dropping out of religion at five to six times the historic rate. David Kinnaman claims that more than 60% of young people who went to church as teens drop out after high school [*You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Baker 2011)].

How we interpret the current trend to apostasy is based on our theological grid. Two months after the *Christianity Today* article a letter to the editor proclaimed, “Those of us who hold to the doctrine of eternal security believe de-conversion is a scriptural impossibility.” Dych had done exit interviews and concluded that we cannot give a one-size-fits-all answer. However, many are so blinded by their theology that they cannot even acknowledge the legitimacy of the question. At least, until it happens to their children.

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In *Walking Away from Faith: Unraveling the Mystery of Belief & Unbelief*, Ruth A. Tucker, (InterVarsity, 2002) associate professor of missiology at Calvin Theological Seminary, acknowledges that there is not reason to doubt that those who “walked away from faith,” were anything but true believers. She actually declares that the answer, “Those who lose faith were never sincere Christians to begin with” is a myth. However, she argued that salvation depends only on God’s grace and that she would not abandon the faith “if for no other reason than the mysterious fact that God has a grip on me.” She tended to blame the philosophy of humanism for most of their destruction. Although Tucker will allow there are exceptions to the rule, those exceptions never cause her to examine the biblical basis for her Calvinistic presuppositions.

We are in a war for our spiritual life.

for disillusionment when we introduce the gospel by saying, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Wood said it is like a person who buys a vacation package to the French Riviera expecting to enjoy a wonderful time, only to discover upon his arrival that the region is engulfed in war. Such a person would naturally complain, “This is not what I signed up for.”

He concluded his analysis by writing, “Until we realize that we are in a war for our lives, we will be sitting ducks for Satan’s attacks and schemes. We will continue to lose those people who were never adequately prepared for battle.”

Contained in the same magazine was a review of the evangelical awakening in Britain. Without diminishing the tremendous influence of the Methodist revival, it was pointed out that many of the evangelicals lost their children and grandchildren to agnosticism or atheism because they did not enter the marketplace of ideas or think it necessary to refute the skeptics, higher critics, agnostics, and atheists of their day.

“George Eliot” was the pen name of Mary Ann Evans. She was raised an Evangelical and wanted to be used of God like William Wilberforce, but she

read two current books of biblical criticism and experienced a de-conversion.

Hannah Whitall Smith wrote *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* in 1875. Yet her son-in-law, Bertrand Russell, had discarded the last of his parents’ Christianity by eighteen and became an influential atheist, writing *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1927).

In the same *Mission Frontiers* issue Gregory Boyd, an open-theist, told about sincere Christians who struggled to understand why a good God let bad things happen to them. His answer was that God was not to blame. He argued that God did not do it. His theology is that we can only understand God through Jesus. Yet he did not attempt to answer the question, was God powerless to prevent the evil which came into my life?

In the very next issue of *Mission Frontiers* veteran missiologist Ralph Winter weighed in. Winter said part of the problem was that we ask a person, “Do you believe that Jesus died for you and rose again?” If so, you’re okay. But 75% of our young people then lose their faith, and only a fraction of them stumble back to the church in a confused state. Winter cautioned against a decisional regeneration which is followed by the corrosion of a secular university education. Winter said that 15 out of 17 evangelical youth never attend a Christian college. I would add that in most cases their faith would still be under attack even if they did. In an attempt to gain academic credibility, most “evangelical” institutions teach about the same thing as their secular counterparts. This may be why Ruth Tucker rejected the solution that those with serious doubts should go to Bible college or seminary.

Winter told about a Pentecostal minister, Hector Avalos, who became a secular humanist. And he told about Bart Ehrman, who attended Moody and Wheaton, but ended up losing his faith. There seems to be no shortage of books such as Dan Barker, *Godless, How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America’s Leading Atheists* (2008) and John W. Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity* (2008).

America’s Research Group surveyed a thousand twenty-somethings who had attended an evangelical church nearly every week while growing up but today never or seldom go. 40% of them thought the

Bible contained errors and 30% did not know. They had deep questions about the Bible that were not answered. The majority began to question the Bible during middle school or high school. According to Randy Douglass, many kids started doubting their faith *before* college, but they departed the faith when they went to college.

In a personal interview with a prominent minister who had a serious lapse, he explained that the disconnect between what he was taught and what he saw close up in the lives of holiness leaders left him jaded.

Paul Billheimer developed a theology that God uses bad things to strengthen us and prepare us for future service. At his best, Billheimer seems to be developing the theology of Samuel Rutherford that “The

devil is but God’s master fencer, to teach us to handle our weapons.” This agenda seems to be expressed in Judges 3:2-4.

Wilful sin erodes saving faith.

Billheimer wrote *Destined for the Throne* (1975) and *Don’t Waste Your Sorrows* (1977). Yet Billheimer almost teaches that we become “little gods” through regeneration. Billheimer taught that through the new birth we become “as utterly like Him as it is possible for the finite to be like the Infinite.” Some Word of Faith teachers do teach that we can speak reality into existence because we are gods. The tendency of this teaching is to deify man and diminish Christ. Billheimer also taught the work of Christ was not finished on the cross and that he had to be reborn in hell. Thus, Billheimer’s full answer is heretical.

And so we have several possible answers on the table:

- We must make sure our converts are genuinely converted. In too many cases we have reduced the new birth to the simple affirmation of propositions. We have many cultural Christians who are religious simply because that is the way they were raised. A radical new birth would prevent most of the problems discussed.
- We must disciple our converts. In too many cases we only count and report numeric growth and rarely do anything more than baptize them. We must minister to the whole person. They need an existential experience with God and an intellectual apologetic for God.

- Sometimes people have the expectation that since God has a wonderful plan for their life, now that they have accepted Christ they will live happily ever after. They are thrown off balance by the losses. Faith does not exempt us from trials. There are 150,000 martyrs every year. According to the book of James, trials may come to prove whether or not our faith is genuine. Without minimizing human suffering and grief, Alexander Maclaren observed, “The only real calamity in life is to lose one’s faith in God.”
- We must understand that willful sin erodes saving faith. In some cases, God was rejected intellectually because he was a barrier to a promiscuous lifestyle. I remembered a teen in a congregation I once pastored. As I remembered his story, he was an agnostic who was converted at youth camp and has become an effective Christian leader. When I contacted him he replied, “Although I never doubted the existence of God, I went through a time where (because of sin) I couldn’t get through to God.” However, he discovered he was able to be restored when he met God again on his terms.
- The number of people who claim no religious affiliation has more than doubled since 1990. While they may comprise 16% of our population, most have not rejected God. Only about 4% identify themselves as atheist or agnostic. While none of the “nones” have given up on faith, they have given up on organized religion as rigid and dogmatic [see *Time*, 12 March 2012, p. 68]. However, I must protest that there is no virtue in disorganized religion.
- We must grasp the concept that the best prevention from going back is to keep moving forward. Wesley taught that Christian perfection is not absolute, but a dynamic that can constantly be improved, but can always be forfeited. Wesley was impressed with the phrase from Fénelon — *moi progressus ad infinitum* — “my progress is without end.” Wesley wrote, “You do well strongly to insist that those who do already enjoy [Christian perfection] cannot possibly stand still. Unless they continue to watch and pray and aspire after higher degrees of holiness, I cannot conceive not only how they can go forward but how they can keep what they have already received.” Nathan Bangs wrote, “We must be either gaining or los-

ing; either going forward or backward.” Therefore, we need frequent infusions of the Spirit. Clarke wrote, “Neither apostle nor private Christian can subsist in the Divine life without frequent influences from on high.” Clarke also said, “Apostasy begins in the closet: no man ever backslid from the life and power of Christianity who continued constant and fervent, especially in private prayer.”

- If all of life is a probationary period, apostasy is always a real possibility. Solomon was the wisest man, but perhaps the only biblical writer who did not go to heaven. In his comments on 1 Kings 11, Adam Clarke noted Solomon’s apostasy and his death. According to Clarke, there is no intimation that Solomon ever repented or turned to God.
- While apostasy may be a real possibility, it is never a necessity. God’s grace can keep us. We must maintain our hope in the power of the Gospel. When Jesus asked his disciples if they would

also turn back and cease to follow him, Peter answered, “To whom shall we go?” Jesus Christ is the only answer. John Wesley observed,

If it be asked, “Do any real apostates find mercy from God? Do any that have ‘made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience,’ recover what they have lost? Do you know, have you seen, any instance of persons who found redemption in the blood of Jesus, and afterwards fell away, and yet were restored, — renewed again unto repentance?” Yea, verily and not one or an hundred only, but, I am persuaded several thousands. ... Indeed, it is so far from being an uncommon thing for a believer to fall and be restored, that it is rather uncommon to find any believers who are not conscious of having been backsliders from God, in a higher or lower degree, and perhaps

more than once, before they were established in faith [“Call to Backsliders,” Sermon #86, 2.2].

But we cannot leave or abandon what we never possessed. A recent internet post on the subject of “losing my religion” asked, “If I’m so done with faith, why do I still feel its loss?” Margaret Wheeler Johnson wrote of her first lesbian encounter and her subsequent rejection of Roman Catholicism. But although she had rejected religion, she wrote that “sometimes when I’m at my wit’s end, I find myself sending up a plea for help. And afterwards, in the face of all reason, I sometimes feel relief.”

When Drew Dyck interviewed musician David Bazan about his deconversion, Bazan revealed that he still prays and on some nights, he still fears that he’s going to hell [http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/music/interviews/2010/david_bazan-jan10-1.html].

God is too big and too real to be ignored. In 1893 Francis Thompson wrote the famous poem, “The Hound of Heaven,” in which he told how God did not give up on him. In some cases the “apostate” has not rejected God, only his distorted image of God and religion.

In the face of the new paganism and disillusionment with organized religion, the best apologetic is a holy life. Voltaire, the famous French atheist, was once asked by a skeptic friend if he had ever met anyone like Jesus Christ. After a lapse into silence, Voltaire answered seriously, “I once met Fletcher of Madeley.” May God help us to reflect Christ.

Some prophetic “experts” have claimed that a great falling away was a sign of the times. However, the two billion souls who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ cannot fall away from the faith. They never exercised saving faith. Let us pray that God visits our pagan culture with an awakening that will check their rebellion, answer their doubts, and create a hunger for the real thing.

Apostasy is always a real possibility, but never a necessity.

WESLEY STORIES

Joseph Beaumont Wakeley

Mr. Wesley was once asked by a lady, “Suppose that you knew you were to die at twelve o’clock tomorrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?” “How, madam?” he replied; “why just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this night at Gloucester, and again at five tomorrow morning. After that I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the societies in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin’s house, who expects to entertain me, converse and pray with the family as usual, retire to my room at ten o’clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory.”

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH ARMINIUS, PART 4

John S. Knox

The *Declaration of Sentiments* contains ten chapters which Arminius compiled in his defense. Last issue covered Sections 2-4.

SECTION V – THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

This section is very intriguing for it deals with the matter of the perseverance of the saints—that is, the continued victory over sin in the life of the believer and an uninterrupted relationship with God. The first sub-section deals with what perseverance is and how it is maintained. The second sub-section, though, brings up a question over the possibility of a believer falling away from the faith. Arminius addresses the doctrine of perseverance.

My sentiments respecting the perseverance of the saints are, that those persons who have been grafted into Christ by true faith, and have thus been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, possess sufficient powers [or strength] to fight against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to gain the victory over these enemies — yet not without the assistance of the grace of the same Holy Spirit.

He suggests that every Christian has the resources, provided by God, to resist the powers of evil in order to maintain a healthy relationship with God. There is no danger of being “either seduced or dragged out of the hands of Christ” or of being impotent in one’s earnest attempt to keep the faith. God provides his grace and its benefits in order to enable each believer to succeed. This appears to fall in line with proper Reformed thought.

However, the second sub-section questions whether or not willful disobedience and rejection can “cause Divine grace to be ineffectual.” Thus, Arminius contends that it is impossible to have one’s position with God taken away, although it may be possible to turn away from it. Always using Scripture as the foundation, Arminius notes “certain passages” that seem to suggest the latter. This approach flies in the face of the determinism of the Supralapsarians.

SECTION VI – “THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION”

As with the perseverance of the saints, Arminius suggests that it is possible to have good confidence that one’s salvation is not so fragile as to require perpetual anxiety and fear. However, Arminius reminds the reader that no human is the eternal judge—God is. Therefore, there is some room for speculation and contemplation on the part of the believer.

This chapter consists of two sub-sections. The first details Arminius’ opinion of what assurance of salvation means. He states, “It is possible for him who believes in Jesus Christ to be certain and persuaded, and, if his heart condemn him not, he is now in reality assured, that he is a son of God, and stands in the grace of Jesus Christ.” This belief should be both heart-felt and intellectually perceived. Moreover, this belief is actualized by “... the testimony of God’s Spirit witnessing together with his conscience.” Yet, one should not forget that God is the ultimate judge and that every believer is still reliant upon God for his or her salvation.

In the second sub-section, Arminius raises an issue as an item for debate. He does not state his opinion one way or another but remarks, “Yet it will be proper to make the extent of the boundaries of this assurance a subject of inquiry in our convention.” Without a great deal of Scriptural proof or early church father definitive explanations, Arminius sees aspects of this doctrine open to debate and discussion. The double predestination of Calvinism makes this assurance seem absolute—a quality that Arminius would suggest is more speculative than definitive.

SECTION VII – “THE PERFECTION OF BELIEVERS IN THIS LIFE”

In this chapter, he brings up the fact that he has been accused of Pelagianism because of his speculation that a believer can live a sinless life. “It is reported, that I entertain sentiments on this subject, which are very improper, and nearly allied to those of the Pelagians.” However, the error of his attackers is that

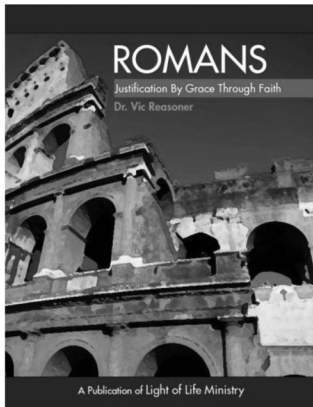
they are failing to acknowledge the caveat he includes in his understanding of perfection. With his understanding that nothing happens without the direction of God, Arminius states, "It is possible for the regenerate in the life perfectly to keep God's precepts." He then goes on to show how he is only promoting ideas similar to that of St. Augustine.

He continues, "Though these might have been my sentiments yet I ought not on this account to be con-

sidered a Pelagian, either partly or entirely, provided I had only added that 'they could do this by the grace of Christ, and by no means without it.'" As with earlier chapters, Arminius makes sure to keep the grace of God as the crucial element in his doctrine. Arminius goes on to defend himself by remarking that he never asserted that a person can live free from sin, but he never denied it, either.

He appeals to the great church father, Augustine, whose own statements suggested the possibility of perfection. Furthermore, he points to the absurdity of his opponents accusing him of being a Pelagian when his ideas merely mirror those of Augustine, "... one of the most strenuous adversaries of the Pelagian doctrine." Beyond this, Arminius proclaims, "I account this sentiment of Pelagius to be heretical, and diametrically opposed to these words of Christ, 'Without me ye can do nothing:' (John 15:5)" Arminius wants no misunderstanding of his condemnation of Pelagius and his promotion of the authority of Scripture.

Arminius ends this chapter lamenting the misrepresentation of him by his critics. He assures his audience that what information is being spread about him by men like Gomarus is based only on rumor. He then informs his listeners/readers that he is going to "disclose the real state of the whole matter," which he does in the next chapter.



Available in May 2012 is this newly released twelve lesson, 170 page study titled *Romans – Justification by Grace through Faith*. Written by Dr. Vic Reasoner, and published through Light of Life Ministry & Fundamental Wesleyan Publisher, this study on Romans is one of 25 courses to be offered through *The Wesley Institute*, the continuing education program of Southern Methodist College. It can also be used in a Sunday School or Bible study format, or just for private instruction. To order, or to request more information about *The Wesley Institute*, see below!

To order *Romans – Justification by Grace through Faith* or to request more information concerning *The Wesley Institute*, contact Jim Jones at Light of Life Ministry, P. O. Box 50792, Nashville, TN 37205 or email him at jjones@lolministry.org

Price is \$22 USD plus \$3 shipping – Quantity discounts available

HE THAT IS LEAST IN THE KINGDOM

Joseph D. McPherson

Jesus once made this most amazing and startling statement. "Verify 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"(Matt 11:11). In his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Mr. Wesley follows with an explanation borrowed from the writings of an "ancient author:"

"One perfect in the law, as John was, is inferior to one who is 'baptized into 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 constitutes 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 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.'"

We see that Mr. Wesley clearly understood that the great work of regeneration in a believer's heart was

made possible only after the promised coming of the kingdom of heaven, the inauguration of which was on the day of Pentecost.

Editorial Note:

The “ancient author” cited by Wesley was St. Isidore of Pelusium, an Egyptian monastic who died no later than 449. This also demonstrates that Wesley’s views were in line with

historic Christianity. In contrast, the American holiness movement has no historical continuity. This article was first submitted to another publication which claims to be Wesleyan, but was rejected because it implied the doctrine of “Pentecostal regeneration.” The editor suggested that Joe “fix” the article to bring it in line with modern Holiness dogma. Joe declined, kindly stated his conviction that the “old paths” of Methodism were closer to New Testament teaching.

REVIEWS

Wendy Shalit. *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1998. 304 pages. ISBN: 9780002557412

I have an acute concern over an apparent lack of comprehension among Christians (both women and men) about the need for and the practice of genuine Christian modesty. Modesty concerns much more than a rule book can address. It is more an attitude of the heart than merely outward observance of rules. Sadly, too many Christians are too dependent upon the world’s views for their sense of appropriateness in both attitude and action. My prayer is that at least Wesleyan-Arminian Christians can recapture a sense of modesty which encompasses biblical-moral-wholeness in spirit, mind and body — that is, genuine holiness.

A Return to Modesty is not primarily a religious work, though the influence of religious values on it should not be ignored. However, it is written primarily from a philosophical and sociological point of view, with a healthy serving of social pragmatism included.

As well, *A Return to Modesty* is addressed *primarily* (not exclusively) to women. Why? Shalit convincingly argues that women have the potential to transform culture in a way that men do not. In a three-part treatise, Shalit challenges women to use their personal power to help the culture to recapture a sense of modesty it currently lacks. She says, “There is simply nowhere else to go in the direction of immodesty, only back” (p. 232).

Part 1 defines the problem she wants to address. Society has declared war on embarrassment, and therefore, has become hostile to modesty and to women. Shalit connects immodesty (specifically the immodesty of sexual license) to the evils of anorexia, bulimia, self destructive behaviors, increased levels of adultery, sexual boredom and others. She shows that modesty is both natural and needed for men to relate *as men to women*, and for women to relate *as women to men*.

Part 2 defines modesty as a forgotten ideal, listing two kinds of modesty—the humble kind and the sexual kind. Shalit is primarily concerned with the second. Female modesty is “a re-

flex, arising naturally to help a woman protect her hopes ... specifically the hope for one man, [since ...] most women would prefer one man who will stick by them, through thick and thin, to a series of men who abandon them” (pp. 94-95). That is, a modest woman reserves the right to save herself for marriage—an increasingly uncommon trait in today’s society.

Modesty, then, is an armor of hope. It is hard for a woman to separate what she really wants to be from what the culture tells her she is supposed to be. “But,” asks Shalit, “why should a woman allow culture to shatter her hopes?” (for one man who loves her forever). Therefore, modesty is not about snubbing men, but about postponing sexual pleasure until the time is right (p. 84). I wish she had said, “until marriage,” the only biblically correct time.

Modesty also has to do with male obligation. Immodesty in women encourages boorish (boyish, immature) behavior in men. Shalit claims that female immodesty is largely responsible for the demise of male courtesy and honor. Men have come to think they should be able to treat all women as prostitutes, she says, only without just compensation—and “the virgins are the ones who are now stigmatized, told that no man will have them ...” because they refuse to be sexually immodest or licentious (P. 229).

Modesty, on the other hand, invites men to relate to women in an honorable way. The modest woman refuses to be “one of the boys,” but insists on being worthy of more than equality with men. Modest women win socially because they receive better treatment from men than immodest women do. And when women are modest, men win personally because the men themselves are no longer cut off from adult masculinity.

Part 3 of the book cites evidences that modesty is making a comeback, at least in some circles. She calls the modesty comeback a “sexual revolution” among her age group. She claims that even the totally secular have begun to incorporate

modest dress in their daily lives, concluding, “Modesty is powerful” (p. 223).

Shalit also addresses the subject of modest dress. Interestingly, she chooses the Bible to establish the concept of modesty in the presence of God. Shalit notes that God told Moses how priests were to dress to remain modest in the strenuous work of altar sacrifices. Then she illustrates with the modesty of the Cherubim in Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6. She concludes with an observation; “In the presence of the holy, one must cover up” (P. 219).

But, she says, it cannot be only that. Shalit challenges the entire culture by saying, “Modesty cannot be simply a personal matter. Perhaps this is where liberalism has failed, because it claimed society can be neutral about individuals’ choices, and it never can” (P. 228).

In a short concluding chapter, Shalit makes an appeal for the virtue of innocence. “Modesty is a virtue ... a way of affirming our essential innocence” (p. 244). “Losses of innocence are nothing new” of course. But, “the thing that is new ... is that it is now assumed we have no innocence to lose.” God forbid that this should remain so, if it be so today.

Shalit did not answer all my questions about educating Christians about the need for and practice of Christian modesty. Nevertheless, while I could have wished for more biblical grounding for her views, Shalit has produced a remarkable work.

In reality, Shalit uses philosophical, sociological and social evidence to reaffirm what the biblical writers knew and taught—women hold great moral power for transforming immoral culture into moral culture through their own sexual modesty.

But men can help with the transformation as well. Christian men need to affirm female modesty, chastity and status as vessels of honor. Christian men need to make it *desirable* for Christian women to be modest, and unacceptable to be anything other. Christian *men* need genuinely to appreciate their women’s modesty. On the other hand, Christian men need their *women* to call them to a higher plane of relating to all women, not just to themselves. Modesty truly knows no gender barriers.

-William Sillings

Editorial Note: Dr. Sillings raised the question concerning how to address the issue of modesty. I am sure that many of us have reacted to the legalistic preaching that we grew up under. However, we must not swing to the opposite extreme. The notion that God does not care how we look contradicts the principle that Jesus is Lord over every area of our lives—including our appearance. While God looks on the heart, man still looks on the outward appearance and our appearance must not become a stumbling block.

According to Oden “a standard is literally a flag, a banner, an ensign distinctive of a community. It is metaphorically that which is set up visibly and established by authority as a rule for the measure of value of something.” Based on this definition, the Scriptures must be our standard. Our philosophy, priorities, attitudes, conversation, entertainment, and appearance should be in conformity to God’s Word. This may necessitate a separation from the world. However, extrabiblical standards, primarily of dress, came to be mandatory in order to be accepted by the radical holiness subculture. In some cases, they replaced the witness of the Spirit.

Donald W. Dayton’s research shows that simplicity of dress was encouraged to free more money for evangelism and for helping the destitute. In time, however, the means became the end. Interest in world evangelism waned, but dress preferences became legislated. Wally Thornton observed that while Wesley’s emphasis concerning plain dress was on stewardship, the later holiness movement made it the proof of entire sanctification. In the best sense “standards” were an attempt to uphold an ethical holiness through separation from the world. At their worst, they were reductionistic, legalistic, and subjective.

You may want to consult Wesley’s sermon #88 “On Dress.” It may be instructive that of 151 sermons only *one* dealt with dress and it is not generally regarded as a “standard” sermon—meaning that it is recognized as a doctrinal standard within the Methodist church. Wesley had to deal with extravagance and costly array. We have to deal with exposure.

The Puritans were the first movement in the history of Christianity to ever protest the wedding ring and they did so in the 1550s on the basis that it furthered the Roman Catholic teaching that marriage was a sacrament [Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 53]. Wesley was influenced by the Puritans at this point, but early Methodism did not make an issue of the wedding ring. Clarke was not opposed to the wedding ring [Christian Theology, 265-266; see also Wesley’s Advice to the People Called Methodists with Regard to Dress [*Works*, 11:466-477]. Telford wrote that Wesley disliked all display of jewelry. However, when a Methodist itinerant preacher took hold of a girl’s hand, drawing Wesley’s attention to a number of rings that she wore, Wesley simply replied, “The hand is very beautiful” [*Life of Wesley*, 338].

May God help us to find balance on this issue. Richard Payne developed “Five Laws of Proper Dress”

1. Is it economical? (Christian stewardship)
2. Is it plain? (Christian simplicity)
3. Is it appropriate? (Christian example)
4. Is it sufficient? (Christian modesty)
5. Is it Biblical? (Christian doctrine)

William R. Bouknight, 5 Beliefs Worth Dying For. Anderson, IN: Bristol House, 2010. 117 pages. ISBN: 978-1-885224-72-9

Dr. William (Bill) Bouknight served five churches in South Carolina from 1966 until 1994 and was Senior Pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, TN, from 1994 until his retirement in 2007. During his thirteen years in that position, over 4000 new members joined the church with over one-third of them joining by profession of faith. Now residing once again in South Carolina, he currently serves on the Executive Committee of the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism and is the Associate Director of the Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church. In addition Dr. Bouknight served as a Chaplain in the Army National Guard for 27 years, retiring in 1994 with the rank of Brigadier General.

Having authored several books, this latest offering is a small, easy to read edition written on a popular level. This is in no way a complaint. The book is a clear, concise, uncompromising presentation of five key doctrines of the Christian faith—the Inspiration of Scripture, the Virgin Birth of Christ,

the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ, the Physical Resurrection of Christ, and the Return of Christ. It is as doctrinally conservative as if it were written by the Apostle Paul himself, and is valuable for both personal reading and group study.

Those who know me understand my passion for the teaching and training of church laity, and this is exactly the target audience for this writing. It is certainly a book I will add to the recommended reading list for those in our Wesley Institute program. I would also recommend it to teachers looking for a study for teen Sunday School or Youth Group as each of the fourteen small chapters can easily hold one's attention with the use of many illustrations, stories, and analogies that help nail down the truth of these doctrines. There may be no new truth revealed here for trained conservative pastors and teachers, but it can be a very useful tool for people in the local church classroom.

-James O. (Jim) Jones

Roger E. Olson. Against Calvinism. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 207 pages. ISBN: 978-0-310-32467-6

I have reached the place in my life in which I would like to be done with controversy. I would like to get about the business of doing the master's work without having to wrangle with others who claim to be doing the same. But I think I am resigned to believe this will likely not occur here on this earth in my lifetime. The Calvinism/Arminian debate is one occurrence of such controversy.

It's not that I do not think the argument matters. It is just that I do not remember solving the debate to any degree of satisfaction with any whom I have debated. As a pastor I have consistently reached out, welcomed and attempted fellowship with Calvinists in two congregations spanning 23 years. Each time we end up in an awkward situation. I admire those who have the ability to minister across this divide. I don't think I have met any and it could be a mythical strawman but I hope not. When I meet one, I hope to learn a few things that will help me. I know this: you don't build friendships majoring on your differences.

Olson begins his book admitting he has to walk a theological tightrope in life. He has friends and family that are Calvinists and yet feels that he must be an Arminian to be intellectually honest. I feel a kinship here. He chooses his motto, "Before saying I disagree, be sure you can say I understand."

He makes note of the *Time* magazine article from May 12, 2009 entitled the "New Calvinism" and begins his analysis of the great ambiguity of the term, "reformed" even among popular Calvinist writers. Olson does a good job proving from the Calvinist literature of today that there is a great divide among them over what reformed theology really is. Depending on who you are talking to from the Calvinist school the job in general becomes like hitting a moving target, perhaps softer language is better, let's say making a revolving door. Much of the new Calvinism isn't traceable to Calvin.

When Olson gets into the reasons he is *Against Calvinism*, I found myself agreeing with him over and over. The substance of it is that he cannot submit to the implications that Calvinist theology leads to concerning the character of God. In order to interpret Scripture and be consistent with their theological grid they force God to be at odds with himself and have to explain the two or three wills of God. In exalting his glory and sovereignty they neglect to exalt his love. At one point Olson expresses that he could not agree to any theological understanding of God that does not square with the person of Jesus Christ.

While I have never put it into those words I felt that observation sums up my major difference with the Calvinists. Their interpretation of God often puts them at odds with the person,

actions and words of Christ in whom “dwells all the fullness of the Deity in bodily form” (Col 2:9). Any understanding of God that does not square with the incarnated and glorified Christ must be suspect.

I have privately wondered at times why the school that does so much to promote the authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures, (of which I am in agreement and grateful to them for their work), argues for a theology that compiles verses to back their argument when the argument itself seems to do violence to the spirit of the whole text.

I believe these two reasons sum up my understanding of Olson’s problem with Calvinism. He goes into depth looking

at each tenet of the TULIP acrostic and explaining why he cannot agree with it as it is popularly expressed by the Calvinism of today and others in the past.

Olson does present much of what concerns me about Calvinism. I hope that I am not beyond asking God to help me think through my own theological grid and be willing to part with any of it that does not submit to the Scriptures and the character of the God who gave them. I am sure my Calvinist friends would say the same. O God bring us to unity in days to come.

-Mark Horton

The Holy Bible: New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

The 400th anniversary of the King James Bible coincided with another publishing milestone that was not as clearly defined nor as loudly trumpeted — the release of the 2011 NIV. The well-received and respected familiar 1984 NIV as well as the 2005 TNIV Bible were both replaced by this edition.

The NIV New Testament was originally released in 1973, followed by the complete Bible in 1978. The Bible was revised in 1984. The NIV was introduced as a dynamic equivalency (thought-for-thought) translation. The current preferred term is functional equivalency. The NIV has more recently been labeled “mediating.” That is to say it combines a mix of functional equivalency and formal equivalency (word-for-word) translation. A recent formal equivalency translation would be the English Standard Version or the New American Standard Bible. More recent functional equivalency translations would include the New Living Translation.

In 2002, Zondervan, which holds commercial rights to the NIV in the U.S., announced a gender-inclusive update. It was greeted with strong protest from evangelicals. The entire Bible in TNIV was produced in 2005. Though some greeted it warmly, it never enjoyed the trust and circulation of the ’84 edition.

The 2011 edition is simply marked NIV. If one wants to know which edition he’s purchasing, he must look at the copyright inside. The book has no stamping showing it’s a different edition. The packaging and covers received a makeover. There’s even a QR code for your smartphone. But nothing informing the buyer clearly that this is a revision of the popular text.

- What does this mean? It means that unless the buyer can find old stock, the available copies will be the 2011. Some vendors have elected not to sell that edition. The Southern

Baptist Convention asked Lifeway to consider not selling it. Lifeway’s board announced in February of 2012 that the stores would be selling it. Some Cambridge editions remain available. Kirkbride, by arrangement, will produce the Thompson Chain-Reference Bible with the 1984 text until sometime in 2013. Some vendors were required to return unsold 1984 editions as the replacement for that Bible became available with the new text.

- Why go into all of this? You need to be able to trust the text you use and to be able to put that text into the hands of others without reservation. The new text is not as gender inclusive as the TNIV but more so than the 1984 text, which Zondervan agreed to “freeze” as the NIV. Both publicity and protest have been more muted than with the TNIV.
- What’s gender inclusive and why does it matter? Gender neutral (the term often used by opponents) and gender accurate or gender inclusive (the term often used by proponents) means that the general idea of a passage is translated and male-oriented details of meaning are omitted. English has demonstrably shifted in this direction. The shift is cultural.

Biblica and the Committee on Bible Translation offer a perspective in defense of the 2011. <<http://www.biblica.com/niv>> Also of interest is *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 2009. 170 pages. ISBN: 978-0310278764) by Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, both now members of the CBT.

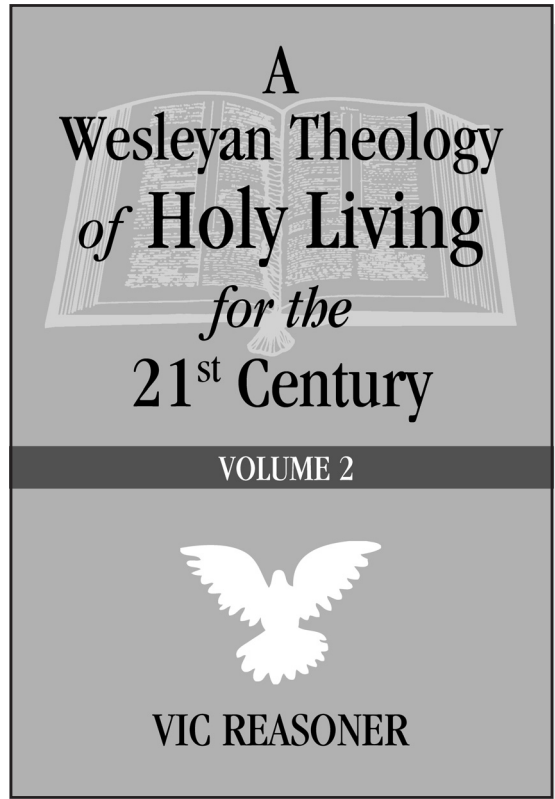
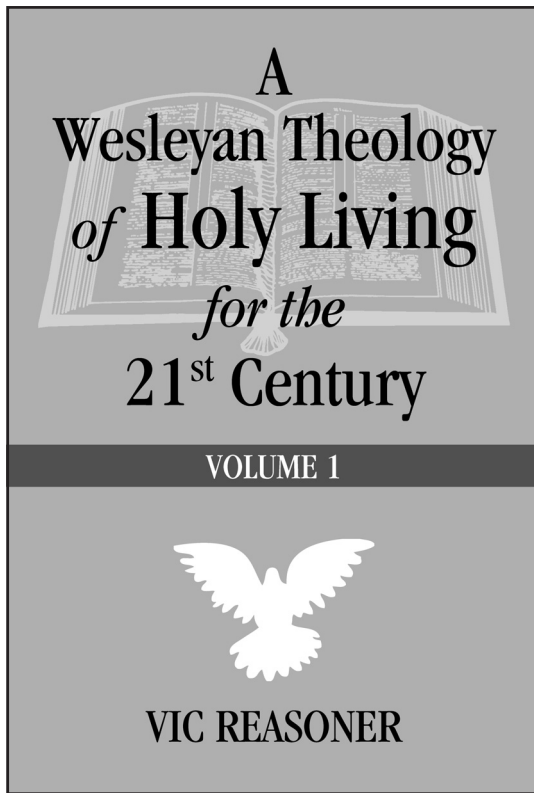
Here are three web links that express more concern:

http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison

<http://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Articles/An-Evaluation-of-Gender-Language-in-the>

<http://www.worldmag.com/articles/17442>

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*William Udotong, PhD,
Provost, West Africa Theological Seminary,*

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The Holy Bible: NIV — Review continued from page 10

In addition to links cited, a useful start is *Why is my Choice of a Bible Translation so Important?* (CBMW, 2005. 110 pages. ISBN: 978-0977396801) by Wayne Grudem with Jerry Thacker. It critiques the 2005 TNIV but forms the basis for a detailed look including spreadsheets prepared by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. The core of their conclusion is that about two-thirds of the places cited as problematic in the TNIV were not improved.

Consider some examples of the 2011 NIV:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:4).

Note the shift to plural (mankind instead of man and human beings instead of son of man). But when the verse is quoted at Heb. 2:6, the term “son of man” is used.

“A fool spurns a parent’s discipline” (Prov 15:5). But the Hebrew text uses *‘ab* which means “father” and never “parent.” There are fifteen other references where the 2011 NIV makes the same change.

“Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’” (John 14:23). This translation omits “if.” It also shifts three masculine singular pronouns to plural pronouns. This is sometimes explained as use of the singular “they” to replace a masculine resumptive pronoun, a pronoun following and renaming an indefinite noun or pronoun (See Fee and Stauss, 103) But how will the reader know when “they” is one or more than one? The 2011 NIV throws over 40,000 pronouns into question.

“Here I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Rev. 3:20). Similar to above. Arguably diminishes emphasis on personal relationship.

When cultural shift in language intersects Scripture, a high view of Scripture and the necessity for clear, accurate translation require that absolute priority go to making the intent and message reliably plain for the reader.

The Bible is the book of the living God. The Bible so reveals its source and origin that theologians aptly restate it as “plenary” (entire) “verbal” (extending to the words themselves) “inspiration” (God-breathed). The words matter. It is arguable that the significance of them matters more deeply than the original writer may have had any way of knowing.

It ought to be the task of Bible translators to render as accurate a translation as possible. The more a translation attempts to smooth out or fix culturally sensitive issues, the more the reader gets the opinions of the translator, without knowing it. A formal equivalency philosophy of translation reflects a higher view of inspiration.

It is the task of hermeneutics and ultimately of the pastor/teacher to interpret the text and make application. But students of the Word need to start with a reliable translation, if not the text in its original languages. While we would not conclude that the Bible discriminates against women, we question the philosophy behind gender inclusive translations.

-Al Somervell

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