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COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY

Vic Reasoner

In the July 25, 2021 issue of *The Washington Times*, Everett Piper reported on the recent George Barna survey which showed that the most popular religion in America today is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). Piper explained that MTD is “watered-down, feel-good, fake Christianity.” Barna elaborated:

Christianity in this nation is rotting from the inside out. MTD is essentially what I would call fake Christianity. Because it has some Christian elements in it, but it’s not really biblical, it’s not really Christian.

Barna continued:

The moralistic perspective is we’re here to be good people and to try to do good.... The therapeutic aspect is everything is supposed to be geared to making me feel good about myself, ultimately to make me happy. Deism is the idea that God created the world but has no direct involvement in it. Basically, according to MTD, there is a distant God who just wants everyone to be nice, and the purpose of life is to be happy. American “Christians” who have adopted this philosophy have... elevate[d] personal definitions of right and wrong above any objective standard of Truth—like the Bible.

Essentially, Barna has coined a new name for an old problem. My first thought was Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s famous phrase “cheap grace” in his 1937 classic, *The Cost of Discipleship*. He wrote:

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace.... The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price;

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grace without cost!... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the Cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

I was intrigued that Everett Piper, in his report, cited these words from John Wesley: “In whatever profession you are engaged, you must be singular or be damned” [Sermon #31, 3.4]. But what exactly was Wesley warning against? Wesley was pushing against the con-

cept that the way to heaven is a broad road. In his day it was often termed latitudinarianism. Essentially, the only sin was to be against anything. Wesley also employed an archaic use of the word singular. By it he meant that followers of Jesus Christ needed to have a single focus. This concept is implied in the words of Paul, “This one thing I do” (Phil 3:13). Leonard Ravenhill added, “Not these forty things I dabble in.”

I affirm preliminary grace, justifying grace, and perfecting grace—but not cheap grace! The grace of God teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live holy in this present age (Titus 2:11-12).

BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AS TAUGHT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Joseph D. McPherson

Late in the first century the Gnostics claimed spiritual knowledge above the orthodox teachings of the apostles and church. Throughout church history there have been repeated attempts to “improve Christianity,” as it were, by means of *new* interpretations of the teachings of Scripture. Mr. Wesley reminds us, “whatever doctrine is new must be *wrong*: for the *old* religion is the only *true* one; and no doctrine can be right, unless it is the very same which was from the beginning” [“Sin in Believers,” *Works*, 5:149]. Nevertheless, there are those today who unashamedly claim their theological views to be an improvement over those of Wesley and early Methodism. By such an assertion they knowingly or unknowingly claim to hold truth never known by the apostles, church fathers, or other authorities down through church history. A current example of new doctrine surrounds unorthodox views of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as taught in the book of Acts.

In recent communication with Dr. Kenneth Collins, he wrote:

In Wesley’s notes on Acts 2:47, he observed: “The Lord added daily such as were saved—From their sins: from the guilt and power of them.” Since deliverance from the guilt and power of sin has to do with justification and the new birth (as taught in the sermons, “On Sin in Believers” and “The Repentance of Believers”) then this demonstrates once again that Pentecost is not about deliverance from the being of sin which would constitute entire sanctification but it is indeed about deliverance from its guilt and power now that the Spirit has been given. Here then is the birth of the children of God not their perfection.

By this statement he is opposing the error that sees Pentecost as the entire sanctification of those baptized with the Holy Spirit. I am reminded of once assuring a class of mine that there is no biblical reference that links Pentecost with attainment of entire sanctification or

the advanced experience of Christian perfection.

The error to which we are referring is closely related to another which assumes that the disciples before Pentecost were already regenerated believers. The question was once asked in class: "Were the disciples saved before Pentecost?" My answer: "Yes. They were saved in accordance with their inferior dispensation. We would not, however, equate their saving experience with that of those who have been saved in this Holy Spirit dispensation."

In his sermon titled, "Salvation by faith," Mr. Wesley states that

The faith through which we are saved ... is not barely that which the Apostles themselves had while Christ was yet upon earth; though they so believed on him as to "leave all and follow him," although they had then power to work miracles, to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease;" yea, they had then "power and authority over all devils;" and, which is beyond all this, were sent by their Master to "preach the kingdom of God."

In this dispensation, the Holy Spirit not only witnesses to one's justification, but with power regenerates and begins the sanctifying process in the new believer. Such an experience in this Holy Ghost dispensation greatly outshines the saving experience in any of the inferior dispensations of former times.

Baptism is a New Testament term commonly used in reference to a beginning and not that of perfection. Once baptism of the Holy Spirit is received in regenerating power the believer is to "go on unto perfection." Dr. Collins has in his statement above reasserted this orthodox and established truth held from the days of the apostles and early church fathers to the present time. Since the rise of the current holiness movement we have been exposed to a new theology that teaches otherwise.

When finishing his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter gave specific instructions to

the awakened and panic stricken who were crying, "Men and brethren what shall we do? Then Peter answered them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." They were promised the reception of the Holy Spirit upon meeting the conditions of repentance and baptism, the latter being a manifestation of their faith. To suppose, like some, that the receiving of the Spirit here promised was to be experienced at a later time is utterly contrary to the flow of context. As surely as the 120 were Spirit baptized earlier that day, so were these 3,000 upon their meeting conditions stated by Peter.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit, or receiving the Holy Spirit as these were, culminates in an assurance of the mighty work of regeneration in the seeker's heart by the witness of the Spirit and a taste of the fruit of the Spirit. The pattern and process by which those on the day of Pentecost were baptized by the Spirit can be observed in all later conversions described in the book of Acts. Never was the process of seeking finished and regeneration experienced until a baptism or reception of the Holy Spirit was experienced (Rom 8:9; Heb 6:1-2).

There are those who wish to have us believe that every incident in Acts that speaks of the Spirit's reception is to be understood as a second work of grace. But not one of those accounts is identified as an experience of being sanctified wholly or having attained Christian perfection. How dangerous it is to add what is not in God's Word!

In my book *Just as New as Christianity*, chapter two, discussion is made concerning the personal accounts given us in Acts wherein they received the Holy Spirit. It is apparent that the Samaritans had a problem with deficiency of faith before Peter and John came to pray and lay hands upon them. Joseph Benson, quoting Philip Doddridge, writes: "We see in this, as in a thousand nearer instances, that there may be speculative faith in the gospel where there is no true piety."

Saul of Tarsus first experienced an awakening on the road to Damascus, then three days of seeking by fasting and prayer, finally followed by initial salvation when heeding the instructions of Ananias: “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and *wash away thy sins*, calling on the name of the Lord.” Note here that conversion or justification is clearly identified.

Cornelius traversed several steps in his seeking before receiving the baptism of the Spirit. Wesley assures us that “in a Christian sense Cornelius was then an unbeliever. He

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regeneration.***

had not [yet] faith in Christ” [*Explanatory Notes* on Acts 10:4]. Fletcher refers to him as an “enlightened heathen,” and assures us that he

“was without sufficient faith in Christ prior to Peter’s appearance, having never yet heard the gospel explained with precision and fidelity” [Fletcher, *Works*, 3:238]. It is to be noted that only after hearing Peter’s sermon of introduction to Christ and the Christian faith (not one of a second work of grace) that Cornelius and his household were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The twelve Ephesians were truly disciples in the sense that they were sincere followers of evangelical truth as they then knew it. To go so far, however, as to say that they were Christians in the sense of being regenerated believers is unsubstantiated, for Christian regeneration is not without an inward possession of the Holy Spirit. This they had not. Furthermore, it is not likely that St. Paul would have baptized them with water had he regarded them as already being regenerated Christians.

In every account of which we read, the steps are told us that were necessarily taken by each to reach and experience the Holy Spirit’s reception in initial conversion. This process of attaining initial conversion was never completed until experiencing a reception of the Holy Spirit.

One cannot truthfully believe that these described in chapters 2, 8, 9, 10 and 19 were initially converted before experiencing an inward possession of the Holy Ghost. To do so would demand a disregarding of Romans 8:9 and Hebrews 6:1-2.

We find the New Testament model for truly regenerated believers in the description given us of the believers in Thessalonica. Although they were not yet “sanctified wholly,” Paul extols them as “examples,” explained by Adam Clarke as “types, models, or patterns; according to which all the churches in Macedonia and Achaia formed both their creed and their conduct.” The fame of the Thessalonians’ faith and adherence to the gospel spread far and wide [Clarke, *Commentary*, 6:541].

What a wide difference we find between the glorious description of this New Testament church and the state of Christ’s disciples while he was yet with them prior to his ascension and the day of Pentecost.

Speaking to his disciples, Jesus once asked, “How is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40). With selfish motives two of his disciples asked Jesus on another occasion: “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mark 10:37). With a spirit of intolerance these disciples once spoke to Jesus, saying, “Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us” (Luke 9:49). With a spirit of revenge, they even asked Jesus that they be permitted to call fire down from heaven in his name and consume the Samaritan villagers who refused to show hospitality (Luke 9:54).

We know that some in the current holiness movement desire to use the terms “filled with the Spirit” or “fullness of the Spirit” as identifying one’s experience of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. Rather may it be said that these terms describe well the experience of a newly born again believer who has been baptized by the Holy Spirit. He or she is filled to the heart’s capacity at that time. As these newborn believers continue faithful in their

walk with God and grow in grace, the capacity of the heart naturally enlarges and is continually “filled.”

There are those who like to claim that the use of *brother* when voiced by Ananias in his initial greeting to Saul provides proof that Saul was already considered by Ananias to be a regenerated believer. This has no weight when it is remembered that Peter, upon entering into his sermon on the day of Pentecost, addressed the yet unconverted Jews, *brethren* (Acts 2:29). Likewise, when Paul began his defense on the stairs of the castle in Jerusalem he addressed his would-be murderers as *brethren* (Acts 22:1).

We know not that Wesley had any problem with Fletcher’s dispensational theology. There was nothing in it that was contrary to his personal views and teachings. He acknowledged it as good. Wesley did, of course, differ with Fletcher concerning the latter’s use of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in reference to Christian perfection. This, however, had no influence upon changing Wesley’s views on the subject.

Years ago I remember a prominent leader in the current holiness movement coming to me in triumph as he recounted Fletcher’s use of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in reference to attaining entire sanctification. What this gentleman

did not realize at the time was that in many places of his writings, Fletcher demonstrated his adherence

to Wesley’s teaching on Spirit baptism. In his essay entitled “Spiritual Manifestations of the Son of God,” he considers being “baptized with the Holy Ghost and spiritual fire” as a “blessing which alone make a man a Christian.” Likewise, he shows in one of his sermon outlines the “General Necessity of Baptism of the Holy Ghost.” The reason he gives for such a “necessity” is that “All are tainted with sin” and must be born again. Herein he sees the necessity of the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of the new birth. In his *Equal Check*, he reminds his readers of St.

Paul’s statement: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). In support of Paul’s statement Fletcher was making the point that all members, without exception, had entered the body or invisible church of Christ by Spirit baptism. It was an initiatory event and common experience of all true believers. To the true penitent and seeker after the new birth he writes these encouraging words: “Yes, you shall be baptized by the Holy Ghost for the remission of sins and justified freely by faith” [Fletcher, “A Sermon on the New Birth,” *Works*, 4:111-115].

To suppose, therefore, that Fletcher used the expression “baptism with the Holy Ghost” exclusively with reference to entire sanctification would be a mistake. When thus explaining to my friend that Fletcher used this terminology in a holistic manner he had no more to say. Wesley believed in multiple fillings of the Spirit during life’s pilgrimage, but maintained a more scriptural view when holding to one baptism of the Holy Spirit, not two or more.

We see that the book of Acts is a *history of the birth and beginning* of the first century church. By the baptism of the Holy Spirit regenerated converts were not only made in Jerusalem, Samaria, Damascus, Caesarea, and Ephesus, but also in all the churches founded by Paul in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. Yes, they were all to “go on unto perfection,” but the full attaining of this perfection by these converts is not revealed to us. We see that the great work of regeneration is exclusively emphasized in this book.

An observation of the Corinthian believers should be of special interest to us. In chapter three of his first letter St. Paul speaks of them as *babes* and *carnal*. We would agree therefore that they definitely needed a further cleansing in the work of entire sanctification. Yet in chapter six he asks them, “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” How is it that these who have been identified as *carnal* and *babes* in

The book of Acts is a history of the birth and beginning of the first century church.

the faith are now found to be inhabited by the Holy Ghost? The answer is easily recognized in Paul's formerly mentioned assertion stated in chapter twelve, verse thirteen. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Here we find the true placement of the Spirit's baptism.

According to the founder of Method-

In "initial sanctification" there is a cleansing from the guilt of past sins as well as a cleansing from the acquired defilement of past sinning.

ism Christian regeneration is wrought in the heart of believers by 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." [Wesley, "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion." *Works*, 8:5]. Through this mighty work of omnipotence "the soul is purified in the laver of regeneration, and enabled to walk in newness of life" [Adam Clarke, *Commentary*, 6:862]. Too often a preoccupation with the second work of grace obscures and minimizes the mighty work of regeneration.

Beyond justification and regeneration there is the work of "initial sanctification" experienced by those who are newly born again. Herein the work of sanctification is begun. Yes, there is cleansing or purification going on whenever the Holy Spirit is present. There is in "initial sanctification," a cleansing from the guilt of past sins as well as a cleansing from the acquired defilement of past sinning (Mark 7:20-23). Such is the cleansing or purifying referred to by Peter in Acts chapter 15.

While once expressing his views on the subject of Christian perfection, Mr. Wesley made the following statement: "There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture." He then assures us

that "It is not so early as justification, for justified persons are to "go on unto perfection" ["Plain Account of Christian Perfection," *Works*, 11:441]. Let us examine closely the important passage to which Mr. Wesley is referring.

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith toward God. Of the doctrine of baptisms, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Heb 6:1-2).

It is critically important to understand what is to be left behind when going on unto perfection. From his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* Wesley includes, on the basis of this passage, repentance, faith in God, baptism in the name of Christ, and the laying on of hands as means of receiving the Holy Ghost.

Adam Clarke likewise assures us of that which is to be left behind when going on unto perfection. Included in all that he discusses mention is made of the following: "1. *Repentance* unto life. 2. *Faith* in God, through Christ, by whom we receive the atonement. 3. The *baptism* by *water*, in the name of the Trinity; and the *baptism* of the *Holy Ghost*." [Clarke, *Commentary*, 6:724].

According to Hebrews 6:1-2 it is clear that all the above, including baptism of the Holy Ghost, are to be identified as received in the process of Christian conversion and left behind as one goes on unto perfection. By the authority of Scripture, therefore, two works of grace cannot be truthfully viewed as experienced by those portrayed in chapters 2, 8, 9, 10 and 19 of the New Testament book of Acts. Neither will one find a single New Testament writer instructing or admonishing believers to seek a baptism of the Holy Spirit for the attainment of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. In his comments on Acts 1:5 Mr. Wesley assures us that all true believers are initially baptized with the Holy Ghost.

In conclusion, interesting warning is imparted by Wesley to his preachers when he

says: "Talking without proper caution, of a justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead [believers]: almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment . . . Whereas we are every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works; according to the whole of our present inward tempers and outward behavior" [Wesley, "Minutes of Sev-

eral Conversations," *Works*, 8:338].

Beyond looking to Scripture as our supreme authority there is the need to take seriously the historical church's reading of the Scriptures understanding of Spirit baptism. The whole history of exegesis and doctrinal teaching witnesses to the above understanding of Spirit baptism.

THE PECULIARITIES OF METHODISM *Part 3*

William Burt Pope

Our peculiarities do not end here. We do not believe, as many around us do, that this assurance is ordinarily separated from the living conviction of a perfect faith: though faith is not itself assurance, the one follows so hard upon the other, that they are in the supreme blessedness of appropriating trust indistinguishable. "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" is a solitary expression in St. Paul's writings concerning finished faith as to its object, exercise, and prerogative of assurance. We do not hold that the privilege of assurance is bestowed as a special blessing, vouchsafed to God's elect as the fruit of long discipline, and the Divine seal of long perseverance. In this our doctrine goes immeasurably beyond the teaching of some confessions of faith. But these same confessions go beyond us in another respect. When they teach assurance, it is an assurance made too sure; it is all-embracing and eternal, including past, present, and future in one transcendent confidence which nothing in the future, the present, or the past can ever avail to disturb. Our doctrine of assurance makes it no more than the assurance *of faith*, for the time that now is; all that concerns the future belongs to assurance, indeed, but only the assurance *of hope*. Probation governs all our theology. We do not believe that God has taken man from under that original law of test in which he was originally created. Final perseverance is a grace, an ethical privilege, the result of probationary diligence under grace; but not an assured provision of the covenant

of redemption.

Before passing from this, let me be permitted to speak a word to the congregation gathered with us. You know, brethren, how incessantly this elect privilege of the Elect of God is set before you; great is your responsibility in hearing. Let me urge you not to live without it. Ask that Divine Person whose office it is to bestow it, to give to you, to persevere in you, this sacred assurance. Be not content with dim, uncertain, and cloudy apprehensions of Christ, and of your relation to Him, and of His relation to you. If you are in the midway condition which "sees men as trees walking," seek that second touch which will enable you to "see every man clearly," to see your Savior clearly. It is the will of the Holy Ghost to manifest the Son, even as the Son has manifested the Father: not more did the Redeemer rejoice in ministering to our redemption, than the Spirit will rejoice to apply it to your souls. Let us all keep in memory the earnest words by which the Ex-President [Luke Wiseman] has lately made Pentecostal blessing familiar to our thoughts; and those other earnest words by which one well known to us all has impressed on our hearts the mystery of the "Tongue of fire." [William Arthur] What is still better, let us habitually go to the Day itself to learn its lessons. There we see the ancient symbol appearing for the last time before it gave place to the great reality which abides with us for ever, the sealing Spirit which rested upon each and all, both ministers and people, in that first as-

sembly. May we all be baptized afresh with this unction of the Holy One! each assured of his acceptance, each having within him the sanctifying fire, and each having his lips touched afresh to declare to the church, and to the world, the wonderful works of God.

Another doctrine which is in some sense peculiar to us is that which declares the entireness of Christian sanctification, the most glorious privilege of the life of faith upon earth. We believe that the Divine Spirit who administers redemption is as mighty in administering it as

the incarnate Son was in accomplishing it: the atonement is not more certainly a finished work than the application of it is finished, so far as

concerns the removal of iniquity. But this implies the putting away of sin in the present life; for the atonement, as such, ends its history before the return of Christ, who, when He comes a second time, will come without the imputation of human sin, and without the means of its expiation. We need no other argument: the Spirit's "It is finished" must needs follow the Son's, and in a voice that speaks on earth. Taking it as a whole, and in the various forms

the doctrine assumes, it is undoubtedly one of our prerogatives to defend and teach it. I do not say, long may it continue so; rather, may all Christian men soon join with us.

Meanwhile, we must hold it fast, and declare it all the more tenaciously because many whose theology has been an honor to Christianity, and their lives an honor to their theology, are our most determined opponents; opposing us here, strange to say, more vehemently than anywhere else. Let us, as guardians of Methodist theology, teach it in our seminaries; let us preach it from our pulpits: yet, preach it, all of us, even though we preach it as a blessing which we see yet as it was afar off; provided always that we have set the desire of our hearts where our experience is hoping to follow. If this profound desire is in our hearts, it is enough; otherwise, indeed, this and all other doctrines must needs be out of place on our lips. If we are bent on knowing the full power and perfect work of the Divine Spirit, then we must preach this privilege of the Christian covenant. In this case the law is not, "We speak that we do know, and testify that which we have seen," in our own personal experience. That law is not universal; ill for the Christian church if it were.

-to be continued

We must preach the entireness of Christian Sanctification as the most glorious privilege of the Christian covenant.

A BLOW TO THE ROOT: THE NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN INERRANCY AND ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION IN RECENT WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION *Part 5*

William Ury

The Trajectory of Theological Thought

There needs to be a concerted effort to deal with the blow to the root of verbal communication between the Trinity and the creatures made in the image of God by Scripture. Objective and subjective aspects of revelation must

be held in close alignment to be truly Christian and Wesleyan. Either side of this continuum can be overstated and overemphasized. However, the present climate of theological discussions in the Wesleyan Theological Society does not seem willing to engage in discussion, while it indiscriminately dispenses with the "neo-fundamentalism" supposedly resident there with a

dismissiveness that negates true scholarship. Those who are marked as “ultra-conservatives” are not included in the discussions of the more “enlightened,” while articles that dismiss a six-day creation as even a possibility are considered acceptable. Wesleyans dare not enter into a captivity of thought that allows historicism, scientism, or rationalism to set the parameters of our conception of divine revelation.

Trinitarian theology, christocentric and pneumatocentric, for Wesley must find its end in holiness of heart and life. He balanced a theological interpretation of the Word of God with an experiential ecclesiology which incorporated the entire human person in the *ordo salutis* including both a strong focus on growth punctuated with instantaneous experiences of grace. The concern here is a gracious heritage may be lost if the proclamation of the profundity of biblical salvation is not grounded in reality beyond subjective experience. If God cannot convey His truth to us in words that are reasonably verifiable in time, then how is it possible to believe that He can raise a person from the dead and can deal with that same person’s self-will?

Conclusion

Outler’s famous dictum that Wesley represents a *via media* between the Protestant principle and the Catholic holy-living tradition has been helpful, but it has to be explored much more deeply given our present scenario. The dichotomy between the actual text of Scripture as bearing any real meaning apart from the amorphous and quite malleable *analogia fide* and the doctrine of entire sanctification has had profound repercussions. At least, it has produced a reticence in most scholars with terminal degrees to openly confess or overtly outline a view of Scripture that is frighteningly subjective, though often lost in the withering verbosity of linguistic philosophies.

When Wesley saw the implications of radical objective views of the atonement secluded from the subjective reality of the transformed heart he referred to the result as that which

was a “Blow to the Root” of scriptural Christianity. In the day in which we live as a people who have been given a specific gift for the sake of the body of Christ and thus for the sake of the world I wonder how much good it does for us to dissect into virtual obscurity the content of the only source we have for proclaiming biblical holiness from our much acclaimed “quadrilateral.”

There has never been a time when the church has not needed to engage with its central doctrines. To clarify and to re-articulate is part of the task of offering sound doctrine. But there is potential danger of cutting down the very root of a tradition, and sounding quite civil and austere all the while. Whether it be due to a desire for acceptance within the larger theological or ecclesial milieu or simply because at base we do not believe that God can truly make persons holy, the result is the same. The key to the proper understanding of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is *experience*. Our personal experience does not become the primary authority. That, for Wesley (and for any tradition that claims his perspective on biblical reality), was the Holy Scriptures. But Wesley believed that what he found in the Scripture was a teaching which could and must be validated in experience. He observed sinners being changed and Christians coming into a deeper work of grace. He believed that what the people around him were experiencing matched what the Bible taught. He found further that this kind of experience was reasonable and that it had strong roots in tradition. It was not, therefore, a purely subjective kind of religious experience which could not stand rigorous examination by objective standards. Experience that could not be validated by the Scripture was illusory and false.

Around 2010 the Christian Holiness Association ceased to exist. Regardless of the reasons for its disbanding, the question remains—where is there vital theological engagement that is distinctively Wesleyan/Holiness? Where are the teachers and leaders and pastors who are clear advocates of an informed iner-

rancy and a fully-orbed conception of both the eighteenth and nineteenth century doctrines of Christian perfection and entire sanctification? No movement can exist on shifting sands epistemologically or theologically. If there is going to be a movement in ultra-modernity that is called holiness, it must be secure in its roots, biblically, historically, and theologically. Somewhere everyone has to draw the line regarding Scripture. We might have to settle for nuances; not all of our questions are going to be answered, but we are not able to leave huge questions about the veracity of facts proffered in the text of Scripture and then confidently claim that God can do marvelous things in a

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person's heart and life. The disconnect here is an obvious one, at least one hopes that it is obvious. Truth cannot come out of untruth

or partial truth or "contained" truth. At some point the church has to say unequivocally that one can base his entire life on something that is real in this world beyond experience no matter how grand that personal appropriation may be. That reality and authority comes ultimately and primarily from God. And the message that breathes out of that Word is an all-encompassing salvation based on reality.

If *inerrancy* is still the best word for challenging every rationalistic attack on the veracity of Scripture, then I am more than willing to brace against the inevitable battle it accrues. It seems to me that a well-thought-through position on inerrancy incorporates everything that the infallibilists and well-meaning detractors cherish, especially that of the present need for the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Word. It also seems that entire sanctification is the primary end of all interpretation from a human standpoint, so that all those who reject it as a biblical or experiential reality as crises still can find all that concerns them, growth, psychology, infirmities, etc. in a truly holistic Wesleyan

doctrine. To choose the minimalist camp is to lose crucial elements pertaining to both Scripture and soteriology.

What I have come to find since the Chicago Statement is that most evangelicals are fully willing to explore every area of concern raised by critics against the original document. It was never meant to be an evangelical creed. Any Christian doctrine of inerrancy must point to the center of reality. The nature of the Triune God in self-revelation must be kept as the dogma of all of our combined efforts. From my perspective, inerrancy offers the highest view of a personal, self-communicating God in all post-modern philosophical and theological discussions. It is directly tied to the nature and character of Triune Truth. It is based in the transcendent, but related, nature of the incarnation. It is telic in its orientation as sanctifying Truth (Jn 17:17). To diminish or divorce the personal realities of the divine nature and the redemption of humanity from the words which the Holy Spirit both inspired and continues to do so within the church is to lay an axe at the root of reality as we humbly come to reflect upon it.

Maybe, among the many areas we need yet to explore is one that most evangelicals have disconnected. Inerrancy is not a Christian form of the Koran. We have an incarnate Person who stands above His creation and chooses to speak through it. But our anti-dualistic, anti-gnostic revelation is not just for the mind, it is for the renovation of the heart. Neither pietism nor rationalism have met the needs of humanity. Neither inerrancy (with all of its varied interpretations) nor the creative, brilliant and Christian family of "errantists" have offered a gospel which can transform hearts and thereby transform culture. We must debate, and we will. But the end must be for more than a smug victory of ideas. The Holy One wants to image Himself in us. And that re-imagining, found in all of Scripture, is what the "breathing" by the Spirit through words is all about.

REVIEWS

***Queering Wesley, Queering the Church.* Keegan Osinski. Cascade Books, 2021. ISBN 978-0-88019-630-7 146 pages**

An innovative book...sort of.

Ever since the sun of righteousness rose with healing in its wings, those who fear his name have gone out leaping like calves from the stall. Unfortunately, there has been a lot more “coming out” since then, and the new breed of colorful calves seem more concerned with turning the church into their own petting zoo than they are with leaving their stalls behind. The latest effort is brought to us by Keegan Osinski.

Osinski is a member of the Church of the Nazarene while describing herself on her Twitter profile as “The Church of the Nazarene’s worst nightmare.” One wonders why anyone would be a member of a church that regards you as a nightmare. The greater enigma is the eisegetical gymnastics Osinski attempts to anachronistically force a John-Wesley-stamp-of-approval on a philosophy that takes neither Wesley nor the Bible itself seriously. A few pages into the book, I was tempted to dismiss it; but I was reminded that many Bible teachers (and evidently a few denominations!) take Osinski’s philosophy seriously. Still, there are major problems with it. Consider the following:

The Destructive Purpose of Queer Theory

The first and most glaring problem one encounters when reading *Queering Wesley* is that not once in all of its pages does it ever actually justify a “queer reading” of Wesley. Osinski simply asserts that it is “sorely needed” but never gets around to answering why this is so. In Thomas Jay Oord’s gushing endorsement of this book, he asserts that it is “truly groundbreaking” and then applauds the “problematizing [of] the narratives and assumptions of both Wesley and his followers today.” Herein lies the mystery! Does the mere absence of a so-called “queer reading” of John Wesley justify the creation of one from whole cloth? Reading John Wesley through the lens of “queer theory” is as anachronistic as combing through his works to discover his

opinion about the Matrix movies. Had *Queering Wesley* been promoted as a work of creative art from a woman’s feverish imagination, serious thinkers would have at least been given the respect of being told upfront that they are reading a work of fantasy fiction. Instead, Joerg Rieger, professor at Vanderbilt University, calls it “a must-read.” But – again – what in fact is the justification of a “queer reading” of John Wesley? That it hasn’t been done yet? So what?! We also do not have a *Mormon* reading of Calvin, nor a *Muslim* reading of Paul. Where is the book helping us understand “A Pedophile’s Reading of Spurgeon”? Simply put: this book is one of the most egregious (and perfect!) examples of eisegesis that I have ever seen.

But it gets worse. Of all the ungodly theories that a so-called Christian can endorse, “Queer Theory,” as defined by Osinski, is blatantly antithetical to the ethos of Christ. “I define a ‘queer reading’ as an attempt to queer – that is, disrupt and interrogate the sex, gender, and sexuality norms of – a given text,” says Osinski in her introduction. “It also includes the disruption of political aspects of gender and sexuality norms, including marriage, monogamy, child rearing, and family building.” Just in her short introduction alone, I counted at least five explicit – and in at least one sentence, profane! – references to the goal of “queer theory” being a destructive one. For a Christian to want to “destroy” something is not inherently sinful. After all, God called the prophet Jeremiah “to destroy and to throw down” (Jer 1:10), and the apostle Paul said “we destroy arguments” (2 Cor 10:5, ESV). However, what is disturbing are the things “queer-theory” seeks to destroy. If the devil is a roaring lion seeking something to devour, shouldn’t it concern us what items we place on the menu?

So, what exactly *does* Osinski want to feed this malevolent lion? Oh, only the entire nuclear family, marital faithfulness between one man and one woman – y’know, those pesky little “normative narratives and assumptions” that do such disposable things as uphold

society and provide a bedrock for all of civilization. The problem is that sacred Scripture tells us that things like family, sexual expression between one husband married to one wife for life, are God's inventions (Gen 1:26-31; 2:7-25; Mark 10:6-9). God is the author of these glorious social realities, and the enduring and unchangeable nature of them are essential to us relating to one another in the way holy God intended. God baked certain ingredients into the family cake. Sure, he allows us to add the frosting we want and change the flavor of the sprinkles, but main ingredients must remain the same. Osinski makes her cake using dough, tomato sauce, pepperoni, and cheese, and expects her reader to watch her have her "cake" and eat it too. Her book insults our intelligence. As a New Yorker, I know pizza when I see it, and that's some strange cake Osinski made! In a nutshell: queer theorists are hell-bent on destroying a whole lot of societal norms God made, without caring one bit about why God made them in the first place. As G. K. Chesterton famously said, we should not tear down a fence without first knowing why it was put up in the first place. Osinski doesn't know that the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil, not the works of God (1 John 3:8).

Wesley said what?!

The main meat of Osinski's book is to give a "queer reading" of ten of John Wesley's sermons. She admits that she hasn't read all of John Wesley's sermons and is kind enough to inform the reader that they are "self-consciously chaste and decidedly unsexual sermons from a time and place so far from our current understandings of gender and sexuality." She also says she cannot provide any logical reason or "structured methodology" used in choosing the sermons she did. *Something, someone* was guiding her, but she can't pinpoint it. Her process is unclear. Her eisegesis is not.

Take, for example, how she utterly twists Wesley's 45th sermon, "The New Birth," to attempt to harmonize it with blatant sexual immorality. "I will consider each portion of the sermon, reading this sermon with a queer framework that reads 'New Birth' as a kind of 'coming out,'" says Osinski. "Coming out"? The only "coming out" a follower of Jesus should be interested in may be found in 2 Corinthians 6:17 – "*Come out* from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you" (emphasis mine).

But for Osinski, "Being born anew by the Spirit of God into queer holiness/holy queerness would mean growing into our fullest selves." She believes that "Coming out is a denunciation of domination, the refusal to be defined by the 'image of the devil' that the original sin of heteronormativity and heterosexism has imposed on the queer person." She claims that this is what Wesley calls humility. It is no small comfort to me that the venerable man did not live to see his labor of *holy* love treated with such irreverence as to steep it in such a philosophical slime-pit. Does any serious Christian *really* believe that when Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be "born again," what Jesus had in mind had absolutely anything whatsoever to do with sex? One can't thank God enough that Osinski left untouched Nicodemus' response to Jesus: "Can [a man] enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:3)! Evidently, even perverts have their limits.

Reader, before you think my rhetoric has gone off the rails, allow me to mention (or "*womention*" in Woke) that it is the Word of God Almighty that Osinski's book trifles with! Are you not offended? Consider the following quote from her book:

Perhaps queer love is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. When you encounter the surprise of queer love, consider it a treasure and invest in it. See what it might yield.

I don't know what is worse: that she had the audacity to speak such a blasphemous rendering of Matthew 13:44, that any so-called Christian would applaud this, or that The Church of the Nazarene hasn't immediately risen in an obstreperously passionate outcry to unabashedly publicly condemn not only the message of this book, but any and all institutions that bear the denomination's name while also giving even the slightest inkling of approval to such filth.

Conclusion

I have not reviewed Osinski's perversions of the other nine sermons she re-interprets in her book, but I have read the whole book carefully and can honestly say that her method is exactly the same for each sermon. She basically rips images, phrases, verses, and quotes out

of Wesley's context and weaves everything into one big rainbow flag. Who cares that Wesley didn't mean what Osinski's book wants us to think his words are compatible with, right? An author's intent is fair game, isn't it? After all, wasn't a "queer reading" of Wesley (and the Bible) sorely needed? Hardly.

I would love to write a book entitled "*Racist-ing Osinski, White Supremacist-ing the Queer Community*." In said book, I would take Osinski's words out of context and show how what she believes is completely compatible with a white supremacy ideology. Then, I would go chapter by chapter using her sentences – again, all taken out of context – to defend racist thinking. How do you think she would respond to such an exercise? Something tells me that she wouldn't be too happy and that I'd probably have a lawsuit on my hands. Relax, everyone. I won't write such a book. Lucky for her, I'm not racist and Wesley is not alive. However, if he were alive today, I don't have to wonder what he would say. In fact, let's let the man speak for himself:

And we know that not only fornicators and adulterers, but even "the soft and effeminate," the delicate followers of a self-denying Master, "shall have no part in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Sermon 81, paragraph 18)

And *that*, dear friends, is John Wesley.

At 146 pages, Osinski's book is relatively short. However, she had enough space to offer a convincing argument as to both the need and the legitimacy of a "queer reading" of John Wesley. Instead of doing so, she rushes right into her endeavor to "problematize" – her word, not mine! – sacred institutions and demonize them as "heteronormative." She desires to see more diversity in the church. I would suggest that her view is not diverse enough. In fact, her view is so narrow, bigoted, and repressed that she cannot let John Wesley be John Wesley. Rather than allow Wesley the freedom to be himself, she over-questions all of his sermons and forces Wesley into her own box; its label says "*inclusive*," but it's a miniscule box nonetheless. Osinski is not pursuing *truth*. It's too demanding for her and her community. Instead, her book jumps right over truth and hurries on to "disrupting" the timeless sexual parameters that God established for our own good. Questioning ideas is a good thing. Questioning good things is a bad thing.

All in all, those who support her dangerous philosophy happily conform to the same common label: Leftists Going Beyond Truth Quickly (Perhaps someone should invent an acronym for this). -David Martinez

Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views. J. B. Stump and Chad Meister, eds. InterVarsity Press, 2020. ISBN 978-0-8308-5287-1 189 pages

John Wesley only wrote one full-length systematic treatise, *The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* (1757). In it he declared that without this doctrine "the Christian system falls at once." That statement would lead one to conclude that there is only one view of original sin within orthodox Christianity. However, Thomas Oden observed, "Few liberal Protestants have ever heard a sermon on original sin, except in the guise of a political appeal against economic injustice or war or racism or social oppression."

Within this book, however, five views or variations are presented. The Calvinist view holds that there was no animal death before the first human sin. Adam is the biological head of the entire human race and his first sin condemns all subsequent people.

Oliver Crisp is in basic agreement, but argues that original sin and original guilt must be separated. Ar-

minius made this distinction, but Wesley affirmed original guilt. However, Wesley said we are liable for the guilt of Adam's first sin due to the unconditional benefits of the atonement. So we end up at the same point, practically speaking.

The third view, by Joel Green, is purported to be the Wesleyan view. Green starts with Wesley, but his conclusions do not represent Wesley. After getting off to a good start, Green dismisses the primary texts which support Wesley's understanding. Green cannot accept Genesis 3 because it does not comport with modern evolutionary biology. Green cannot accept Romans 5:12 because he cannot accept what he thinks it teaches. Therefore, Green concludes that Romans 5 does not address the origin of sin, but the common ground of sin between Jew and Gentiles.

As the Calvinist contributor pointed out, Green

does not have an adequate view of biblical authority. He accepts much of evolutionary biology while he tries to demonstrate its consistency with the doctrine of sin. But he glosses over significant areas of conflict and comes out with a doctrine informed primarily by science instead of divine revelation. He concludes that we cannot know for certain how Wesley might have responded had he had the benefit of modern evolutionary biology. Here Green becomes a poster boy for BioLogos, of which editor J. B. Stump is vice-president. Apparently they are willing to discard the doctrine of original sin if it implies a historical Adam as the biological father of the human race.

As a Wesleyan I find it embarrassing that the Calvinist contributor suggests that Green could have done a better job had he even adopted a premise of limited inerrancy — although that position has its own insuperable problems. As it stands, Green ends up not knowing anything for sure, but thankful to have been reared in the Wesleyan-Methodist world.

Eastern Orthodoxy does not accept original sin. However, they believe there was a fall, and death result-

ed from that ancestral sin. We are born into a web of sin which has accumulated and we need deification. But we are not born with a sinful nature. This seems to be very nearly what Pelagius taught except perhaps for the Eastern concept of theosis.

The fifth and final position simply states that original sin is the failure to love properly. This “reconceived view” is basically psychological and in line with what some contemporary Nazarene theologians are now saying. In fairness, however, Kenneth Grider and Sam Powell are Nazarene theologians who clearly affirm a doctrine of original sin.

Kenneth Collins explained: “A weak doctrine of original sin could only result in an equally weak doctrine of the new birth. For if the extensiveness of the problem was relinquished or soft-pedaled, the radical nature of the solution would be lost as well.” Since we were born in sin, we must be born again. Oden explained, “A high doctrine of original sin is the premise and companion of a high doctrine of grace.” Unfortunately, many of the best “evangelical” scholars are not very sure of anything.

-Vic Reasoner

Kenneth J. Collins & Robert W. Wall, eds. *Wesley One Volume Commentary (WOVC)* Abingdon, 2020. ISBN 978-1-501823916 976 pages

I am largely impressed and find useful a new release. The WOVC is a collaboration of forty contributors from Wesleyan/Methodist or Wesleyan-adjacent theological traditions, such as United Methodist, Free Methodist, Wesleyan Church, and Nazarene. There are also contributors from both the Anglican Church of North America and The Episcopal Church. Pentecostal traditions, such as the Church of God (Cleveland), are represented. Contributors are either pastors or Wesleyan tradition academicians, thus inclusive of a breadth of the Wesleyan heritage. Kenneth Collins is a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary and an elder in The United Methodist Church. Robert Wall is a professor at Seattle Pacific University and an elder in the Free Methodist Church.

The WOVC stands as a reference tool as each book of the Old and New Testament, set in its own literary and historical context, receives a chapter, and each chapter supplies an overview, outline, and para-

graph-by-paragraph summary of the text, followed by a brief bibliography. Each commentary of every book is written from a distinctively Wesleyan theological perspective, attempting to unite general Bible knowledge and vital Wesleyan theology. The contributors unapologetically emphasize the spiritual, theological, and especially Wesleyan themes of Scripture.

There are two important and insightful introductory essays in the WOVC, one given by each editor.

Robert Wall, in his *Introduction to Wesleyan Biblical Interpretation* (which is a fine short essay), states that “the purpose ... is to retrieve a ‘Wesleyan sense’ of Scripture for the reader’s use in worship, catechesis, mission, and personal devotionals” (xxii). Thus, the aim is to guide the reader into a particular way of reading Scripture that is thoroughly Wesleyan. The WOVC seeks “to produce a useful resource that will help initiate interested readers into a particular way of interpreting Scripture’s metanarrative of God’s way of salvation for those

who seek to live holy lives before a God who is light and love” (xxiii). This volume’s interest is not to adjudicate Wesley’s talent as a biblical exegete but to be more practical. For the WOVC, it is an attempt to provide a precise and faithful proposal that is thoroughly Wesleyan for reading Scripture and seeks to enrich, foster, promote, and cultivate the Wesleyan heritage through that reading.

So, this volume seeks to allow the contributor’s interpretations to result from a scholarly yet self-aware practice of drawing upon the core materials of a particular ecclesial tradition as a hermeneutical guide – in this case from Wesley’s sermons, his *Journal*, or *Notes* on both testaments (xxi). But the contributors also utilize their theological intuitions forged over time by their active participation in worshiping or learning communities drenched in the Wesleyan materials (xxi-xxii). This is undoubtedly evident throughout the volume.

In his composition, *Introduction to a Wesleyan Theological Orientation*, Collins provides a graceful and useful summary of Wesleyan doctrinal distinctives. It is, in my opinion, one of the best. The themes he recites recur throughout the WOVC and seem to prove adequate to the task of unpacking peculiarly Wesleyan interpretations of Scripture. The contributors work from the premise that a Wesleyan interpretation of the Bible must be seen in terms of God’s love and holiness, not as an invitation to sentimentality but an invitation for all humanity to be transformed by divine grace (xix). The contributors seek to orient the reader to the relationship between the doctrines of the Wesleyan faith that are shared with the broader Christian community as well as the emphases of the Wesleyan theological tradition that center around a distinct vocabulary, conversation, and life.

The WOVC does not seek to wade into the arena

of higher critical conjecture but stays with its purpose as basic narrative commentary on the Scripture text that is wrapped in “Wesleyan speak” throughout. This makes the WOVC take a more confessional approach to biblical interpretation, though still scholarly. The commentary on Hebrews utilizes Wesley as the writer’s companion in exploring the text. The commentary on Leviticus is conversant and strongly Wesleyan, as the notes unfold that the Wesleyan concept of holiness is grounded in Leviticus. The commentary on Ecclesiastes provides clarity around Wesley’s understanding of the fear of God and obedience to God as a groundwork for Christian assurance. The commentary on Amos resonates with Wesley’s twofold emphasis on the love of God and the love of neighbor as the heart of scriptural Christianity. Romans and 1 and 2 Samuel explore Wesley’s relational view of God’s saving work, which saw salvation as both entirely the work of God and dependent upon human response and an understanding of predestination in the Wesleyan context. These are but a few examples of the interweaving of Wesleyan concepts in this volume.

Though large, this volume is easy to navigate. Its length is suitable to enriching an understanding of the texts of Scriptures. It accomplishes what it sets out to do. The reader will not be bogged down in academic arcana. The WOVC is a welcome attempt to see all of Scripture through a Wesleyan lens and understanding. I believe this volume is a helpful resource for all – whether scholar, pastor, or layperson. I highly encourage those of the Wesleyan way to study the WOVC. It invites and, I believe, rewards a careful reading. For its intended use and purpose, it has my vote.

-Terry W. Pollard is a United Methodist pastor in the Iowa Annual Conference.

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