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Karl Barth's Dialectic Doublespeak

Vic Reasoner

When Karl Barth wrote his commentary on Romans in 1918, it was considered a “bombshell on the theologians’ playground.” Barth pushed back against the prevailing liberalism that more centered on mankind than on God. At that point in time modernism was basically Pelagian and denied the exclusive claim that Jesus Christ was the only way of salvation.

Barth was credited with stimulating people to take the classical Christian tradition more seriously. He took the doctrine of the Trinity seriously when liberalism rejected anything they could not understand. Barth exemplified faith seeking understanding. His *Church Dogmatics* is usually regarded as one of the greatest works of Christian theology ever written. According to John Webster, Barth was a massive Christian thinker whose contribution to Christian theology is in many respects still waiting to be received — even though his first material, the Romans commentary, was first translated into English in 1933.

However, Barth adopted a dialectic method of history. The dialectic method origi-

nally meant dialog between people in search of truth. But this changed meaning with Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel proposed an evolutionary model of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis — which then becomes the new thesis. Thus the quest for truth is always in process and truth itself is in tension. While Karl Marx applied this concept to dialectic materialism, Karl Barth applied it to theology. This dialectical method has rendered Barth difficult to understand. He disregarded Matthew 5:37, “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.” Barth did not write any “plain accounts.” Was his theology a return to Scripture or a new, more “conservative” form of modernism with no absolutes? He seems to affirm certain doctrines, then reject them or reframe them. Here are six examples:

• **Barth and Scripture**

According to Karl Barth, “The Bible itself is not the primary form of revelation, but it contains the testimony of the primary witnesses to God’s revelation.” He thought

that human language was unfit to bear God's revelation because God is transcendent and human language is finite. But if God is "wholly other," the chasm between God and man becomes a communication chasm that cannot be bridged. Wordless revelation amounts to mysticism. Even if God spoke, we could not hear or comprehend him.

Barth rejected propositional truth, declaring that the Bible is not the Word of God until it becomes that for the individual. Yet he managed to produce six million words of propositions in his fourteen-volume *Church Dogmatics*.

According to Barth, inspiration is an act of God to create in men a special attitude of human obedience, but it does not give them anything more than their ordinary ability. According to Barth, the Bible is not a book of oracles. It is not an instrument of direct impartation. If all of the aforementioned is the case, the question that begs for an answer is why limit inspiration to the Bible? Could not a reader experience inspiration reading any other literary classic? Thus, Barth wrote, "It is really not laid upon us to take everything in the Bible as true *in globo* [as a whole], but it is laid upon us to listen to its testimony when we actually hear it." I reply, however, by asking, "If we are also sinful and are also bound by the restraints of language, how can we ever know truth?" Do we really want to accept the consequences of theological skepticism?" According to this position, revelation is both God speaking existentially to me *and* my response of faith. Thus, the Bible would not constitute direct revelation, but a record and a witness to revelation.

Barth wrote that the prophets and apostles were "sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word." For Barth, the capacity of the Bible for error extends even to its religious or

theological content. Therefore he concluded, "No human word, no word of Paul is absolute truth."

But if there is always a distance between the Word of God and what the human authors wrote, due to language and culture, and if there is also a distance because of the sinfulness of the human authors, Barth said that we must *seek* the Word of God in the text. However, if we are also sinful and are also bound by the restraints of language, how can we ever know truth?

Barth worried that if we found errors in Scripture, then God would be the cause of our unbelief. Therefore, he declared that if God is not ashamed of errors in the Scripture, why should we be?

Barth held that all divine revelation is salvific. He rejected the prerogative of the Scripture to present "truths of revelation in abstraction from" God's saving act in Christ. Thus, whatever the Bible says outside of the salvation message is irrelevant. Barth believed that the Bible was disinterested in the historical certainty of revelational events. But God has acted in history so that the events actually happened and are a revelation of himself. No biblical writer records the events of history as mere history, but from God's point of view, revealing his sovereignty and providence. "How could a book which erred in matters of which we could judge be reliable in those things of which we could not form a judgment?" As Church Dogmatics editor and translator Geoffrey Bromiley put it, Barth's "handling of Scripture is in many ways the weakest and most disappointing part of the whole Dogmatics, and his safeguards against subjectivism here are very flimsy."

- **Barth and Creation**

Barth declared that Genesis 3 was not

history but a saga. He taught the Genesis account must be allegorized, that the Bible was not interested in the historical certainty of revelational events. He said that miracles have occurred even if historical research cannot document that fact. They occurred in the realm of *superhistory*, a metaphysical, separate reality; an “upper story” not open to verification by the world of facts which is “lower story.” This concept is dualistic; it is the belief that the spiritual, heavenly, and eternal is distinct from earth, matter, and history. Yet the history in which we exist is the only history Christianity knows anything about. Heaven will be on this present earth (Rev 21:1-3).

Francis Schaeffer asked, “How should these early chapters of Genesis be read?” He argued for their historicity in time and space. The first three chapters of Genesis teach divine creation and human sin. They explain how we got here and what went wrong. “Christianity says man is now abnormal . . . as a result of a moral, historic, space-time Fall. . . . Take away the first three chapters of Genesis, and you cannot maintain a true Christian position nor give Christianity’s answers.”

Barth taught that Adam is typical because his sin is repeated in other men and they sin as Adam did. Therefore, Adam is representative but not historical. Barth declared that neither Adam nor the Christ risen and appointed to the life of God can be historical figures. We are all Adam. Sin is timeless and transcendent, Barth contends. But without a historical Adam, and a consequent historical fall into sin, I contend that there is no need for a historical second Adam — Jesus Christ.

- **Barth and Sin**

Barth then proceeds to deny the fall as a historical event. “The Fall is not occasioned by the transgression of Adam; but the trans-

gression was presumably its first manifest operation.”

Yet he made the doctrine of sin popular again. However, with his usual dialectic doublespeak, he taught that sin was an ontological impossibility since God created him and everything God created was good. Yet Barth also claimed that man was “radically and totally evil.” Barth made the sinfulness of man so inherent in his nature as to be irremediable. We are helpless, but not hopeless.

- **Barth and Christ**

Barth was also wrong in his position that Jesus took upon himself the same fallen nature which we possess, although he never committed actual sin. Barth taught that the Son of God actually took sinful humanity’s corrupt nature in the incarnation. He also asserted that both Christ and the Holy Scriptures are vulnerable to error. Barth’s theological motif is the sovereignty of sin. But God did not create man in this fallen condition, and his plan of redemption is to liberate us from this sinful condition.

Barth could not say that the resurrection was a historic actuality. In his dialectic approach he appears to affirm the resurrection, then deny it. Barth claimed that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was bodily, corporeal, and real, then claimed that it cannot be explained in historical terms. In 1962 Carl Henry asked Barth, in the presence of several reporters, whether anything that happened the first Easter morning would have warranted a news item by the reporters. After listening to Barth’s circumlocutory reply, the United Press religion editor told Henry, “We got the message; it was No.” While Barth said we must accept it by faith anyway, Paul wrote that if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile (1 Cor 15:17).

- **Barth and Salvation**

Yet this salvation does not result in a transformed life. Barth taught that sin was inevitable. In this life we will always be prisoners of the devil and evil. Barth described himself as a man who has sinned, is sinning, and will sin, and who cannot recognize himself as nothing else than lost. Yet Barth is acknowledged by God in Jesus Christ. For Barth, Christ not only fulfilled the divine initiative toward fallen human beings but also the human response of faith and obedience. In other words, all of salvation is objectively comprehended in Christ. But this in turn raises the question for his readers concerning whether we have to do anything and whether transformation of life is at all important. It is precisely here that we may want to ponder whether there was a connection between Barth's thought and the messiness of Barth's life.

Karl Barth apparently taught a universal and unconditional election in Christ. Thus, God has elected the entire human race for salvation in Jesus Christ. When this is coupled with the Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible grace, it leads to universalism. His contention that the difference between Christians and non-Christians is not that non-Christians are outside of Christ but rather that Christians know they are redeemed by Christ. Barth's view cuts the legs out from under gospel proclamation and has not exactly been an engine for missionary activity!

Barth was asked if he believed in hell. He replied, "No, I don't believe in hell; I believe in Jesus Christ." Yet Jesus taught there was a place of darkness, suffering, and eternal punishment. In his characteristic double-talk, Barth did affirm the existence of hell but said that Jesus Christ was the only person who ever went there. But the suffering and humiliation

of Christ ended with the exclamation "It is finished" (John 19:30). While the Apostles' Creed stated that Jesus "descended into hell," Christ did not go to hell to suffer for us, but he did visit the realm of death in triumph.

- **Barth and Marriage**

In 2021, Christiane Tietz's *Karl Barth: A Life in Conflict* was published in English for the first time. Although the true nature of Karl Barth's relationship with his secretary, assistant, and "co-labourer" Charlotte von Kirschbaum has been public for some time, Tietz's book recounts this decades-long extramarital relationship. Several years after the beginning of their relationship, Barth invited her to move in with his family, and she remained there for close to forty years. The only entry to her bedroom was through his adjacent study. Barth's wife Nelly was told of their feelings for one another from the beginning. The option of divorce was raised at certain points by each member of the party, but ultimately they chose to remain in an arrangement that they dubbed "an emergency or necessary community."

Barth himself acknowledged that Charlotte was indispensable to his work. Yet the true nature of their relationship was not confirmed until the living children of Karl Barth decided in 1991 to release letters between Karl and Charlotte for publication, stating, "In light of the gossip that has circulated since the mid-1920's we believe that the time has come to reveal the light and dark sides of the very special and unique love that connected our father with our 'Aunt Lollo.'"

Most theologians and historians have engaged with Barth's work without having to address the question of his relationship with his assistant, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, for the simple reason that no one could confirm whether their relationship was anything more

than professional. With the recent discovery of Barth's private correspondence with Kirschbaum, the ongoing romantic affair has become incontrovertible. If only the pure in heart can see God, then this dialectic tension between Barth's theology and Scripture is the result of his habitual adultery. The way a person lives affects the way he thinks.

Barth attempted to justify his sin theologically. At one point, he said to his mistress, "It cannot just be the devil's work, it must have some meaning and a right to live, that we, no, I will only talk about me: that I love you and do not see any chance to stop this." According to Barth, the pious option was to remain in the tension between the revealed commands of God's Word and God's sanction of his love for Kirschbaum. But Scripture teaches that he must deny his affections for a woman who

wasn't his wife. Apparently, this was one of the non-inspired passages. According to 1 Corinthians 6:9 adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Barth seems to be an unawakened sinner who never came to real repentance, because there is no attempt to turn away from sin and walk in light of God's gracious commands. According to Psalm 1:1 there is a blessing pronounced for those who do not follow in the counsel of the wicked. The American church has been enamored with Barth for about a hundred years now and the result is confusion over the authority of Scripture, creation, Christ, sin, salvation, and marriage.

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The Priority of Preaching

Steve Stanley

In 2 Timothy 4:2, the Apostle Paul exhorted the youthful preacher Timothy to "preach the word." In Paul's extant sermons, Jesus Christ was the focal point and the hero of the narrative. As Paul expressed it, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5). Preaching is God's primary method to reach the world he loves (Rom 10:14). It is "through the foolishness of the message preached [that God saves] those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21).

After a period of decline, preaching returned to its place of central importance in the Reformation Era. However, the Reformers placed the success of the Reformation squarely on the reorienting power of the Scripture and the preaching of its text. To awaken a spiritually decaying Britain, God sent

preachers, first to her pulpits, then to her streets and fields, with his message of repentance and free grace. Chief among those British preachers were the Methodists, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. In pulpits and fields, they called on Britain, Ireland, and the American Colonies to repent of sin and to reorient their lives to biblical holiness of heart and life.

Those first Methodists declared that God raised them "to reform the nation, and in particular the Church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land." Through the proclamation of God's Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Methodists and their evangelical allies pointed people to God as the Savior of persons and nations resulting in a more hopeful spiritual and social ethos.

In a sermon entitled, *Apostolic Preaching*, Adam Clarke emphasized the cumulative results of biblical preaching:

Every denomination of Christians allows—1st. That the *Apostles* were men *divinely inspired*. 2. That they knew the truth as it was in Jesus. 3. That they faithfully preached that truth. 4. That it was *that truth then preached*, that God blessed to the conversion of Jews and Gentiles. And it follows from this, 5. That **they who preach the same doctrine, and in the same way, are they by whom God will carry on the work of conversion in the world, and build up His Church as long as sun and moon endure.**

Hardship often accompanies the advance of the Gospel. The servants of the Lord must “be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim 4:2). Mr. Wesley and his Methodists often met with brickbats and stones, curses and beatings, rejection from the established church, and jailings in the towns and hamlets. Some early Methodists even sealed their witness to Christ with their lives. Thus, Mr. Wesley described the preachers for whom he sought, preachers that God could use to “reform” a nation and church:

The danger of ruin to Methodism . . . springs from quite a different quarter. Our preachers, many of them, are fallen. They are not spiritual. They are not alive to God. They are soft, enervated, fearful of shame, toil, hardship. They have not the spirit which God gave to Thomas Lee at Pateley Bridge or to you at Boston.

Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

Thomas Lee was one of Wesley’s lay preachers who, with Wesley, covered the British Isles with the Gospel. In 1748, Lee preached in the community of Pateley Bridge. A mob, organized by the local vicar, greeted Lee with a hail of mud, stones, and blows. Lee later wrote of that day,

I did, indeed, reel to and fro, and my head was broken with a stone. **But I never found my soul more happy, nor was ever more composed in my closet. It was a glorious time; and there are several who date their conversion from that day.**

Attending to his wounds and cleaning up a bit, Lee then traveled to a neighboring town and preached again. No wonder then that a religious census in 1851 (roughly 100 years later) recorded that Methodists were the most numerous church in Pateley Bridge by a percentage greater than three to one. Faithful preaching is a costly, but essential, enterprise regardless of whether one encounters mobs and stones or the “softer” opposition of whispered rumors and closed doors.

Writing to the young preacher, Timothy, Paul urged him to “endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:3). Yes, Paul admitted, I am bound with heavy chains and imprisoned under constant guard . . . **“but God’s Word is not chained!”**(2 Tim 2:9).

Preach the Word. That Word which can-

not be chained. Dry bones can leap into life when hearing that Word (Ezek 37:1-14). It is "the word of faith, which we preach" (Rom 10:8b).

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Christian Regeneration: A Unique Phenomenon of the Holy Spirit Dispensation

Joseph D. McPherson

In Matthew 11:11, Jesus makes this startling statement: *Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

In his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Mr. Wesley shares the following explanation borrowed from an ancient author:

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

According to the founder of Methodism

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

The term *regeneration* is not an Old Testament term. We find it only in the New Testament in two places. In Matthew 19:28 our Lord uses it in reference to the resurrection state or the eschatological "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). Our particular interest is found with the Apostle Paul's use of the term in his letter to Titus. *According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit* (Titus 3:5). "Undoubtedly," writes Adam Clarke, "the apostle here means baptism, the rite by which persons were admitted into the Church, and the *visible sign* of the cleansing, purifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which the apostle immediately subjoins."

Wesley sees sanctification in an initial sense expressed by the words, "laver (or washing) of regeneration." He believes also that this "washing" has reference to baptism which is an outward sign of an inward cleansing. The means by which that inward cleansing is accomplished is "*the renewing of the Holy Spirit*; which purifies the soul, as water cleanses the body, and renews it in the whole image of God." Such a regeneration as this

can only be understood in a post-pentecostal setting and time frame.

Quickening dead souls and raising them to life in Christ Jesus is a miraculous and unique phenomenon of this present dispensation of the Holy Spirit. A close reading of New Testament Scripture shows the Christian dispensation of the Holy Spirit to be greatly superior to the Jewish standard portrayed in the dispensation of the law. The word *better* is used repeatedly in the epistle to the Hebrews to emphasize the superior privileges of the new covenant over those under the former and inferior covenant of the law (Heb 1:4, 7:7, 7:19, 7:22, 8:6, 9:23, 10:34, 11:35).

One scholar, however, has lately endeavored to convince his readers that Ezekiel 36:25-27 and John 3:1-8 not only provide evidence of God's indwelling Spirit but also the work of regeneration in the hearts of Old Testament saints and those living prior to Pentecost (Allan Brown, "The Regenerating and Indwelling Work of the Holy Spirit Prior to Pentecost," *God's Revivalist*, Winter 2006). Let us review this prophetic passage of Ezekiel.

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

As we look at the context of this beautiful passage we see that it is a promise of God to the Jewish people for future fulfillment. The words *will* and *shall* are found several times therein. Bible scholars agree that this promise was to be fulfilled with the coming of the new covenant. Writing in the *Wesleyan Bible*

Commentary, Burt Hall assures us that "In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit empowered believers; in the New Testament age the Holy Spirit [not only empowers but] purifies believers from sins and from sin."

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

Although Jesus was, in a sense glorified in his ministry, miracles, death and resurrection, His ultimate exaltation and glorification was realized after his ascension to the right hand of the Father. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter assures his listeners that *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.* The promise of Jesus to believers in John 7:37-39 had begun to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

Dr. Brown declared that "If regeneration was not possible for Nicodemus prior to Pentecost as some argue, then Jesus must have been either mocking Nicodemus or speaking prophetically of a future possibility. There is nothing in the text of John 3 to support either view." But Donald Bloesch concluded that "the new birth does not take place until the Son of Man is lifted up (vv. 14-15)." He found John 7:37-39 a helpful comparison and concluded, "Here we see a clear reference to Pen-

tecost as the time when those who would follow Christ are born of water and the Spirit” (*The Holy Spirit*, 304-305).

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

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

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

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

It is undoubtedly true, that some earnest of redeeming grace, together with the first fruits of the spirit, were experienced even by the most ancient inhabitants of the earth. It is true, also that by means of those earnest and first fruits, many myriads of mankind have been saved in every age of the world. But it is no less true, that the plenitude of these sacred gifts was reserved to a very distant period of time; since, after the first promise of a Redeemer was given, near four thousand years elapsed before he made his public appearance; and while he continued upon earth it is expressly said, that “the Holy Spirit was not yet given, [in its full measure,] because that Jesus was not yet glorified,” John 7:39. (*Works* 3:178).

Jesus’ disciples were saved prior to Pentecost according to their inferior dispensation as were all Old Testament saints. Saving faith in this present dispensation, however, differs, “from that faith which the Apostles themselves had while our Lord was on earth, [in] that it acknowledges,” says Mr. Wesley, “the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection” Furthermore, regeneration or the new birth requires an effusion of the Spirit unknown prior to the inauguration of Christ’s Kingdom displayed with power from on high

It is a great mistake, therefore, to equate regeneration with the experience of Christ’s disciples prior to Pentecost. Such a view sinks the standard of New Testament Christianity dreadfully low, making conversion or the new birth far less the miraculous heart transformation that the New Testament describes it to be. While with Christ in the flesh, the disciples

lived in a time of transition between the old and new covenants; between the dispensation of the law and that of the Holy Spirit.

Since Alan Brown, author of the article under review concedes that W. B. Pope held a different view from his. It would be well to consider what the prince of Wesleyan theologians actually said. In 1880 he cried out against the modern tendency to teach “a new dispensation of the Spirit, or a Pentecostal visitation superadded to the state of conversion.” He warned that those who teach Acts 19:2 as an experience after regeneration “diminish the value of regeneration” (*Compendium*, 3:44, 64).

To those who would “contend that the experience of the original disciples provides a model or pattern today,” Dr. Robert Lyon would answer that “Two observations make this impossible: (1) the model is not followed elsewhere in Acts or the early Church; (2) it fails to consider the [salvation history] significance of Pentecost as the once-for all inaugurative event which establishes the Church” (*Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring 1979) 25).

Since Pentecost was the inauguration of Christ’s Kingdom, it is to be viewed as a watershed in salvation history. According to the Apostle Paul, this inward kingdom, consisted of “*righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17). It was then and not before that this Kingdom of Christ began to be established in the hearts of believers.

Paul assures us as he did all the believers in the Corinthian church *that by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit* (1 Cor 12:13). He shows here the way of entrance into the mystical body of Christ. By such a Spirit baptism all believers enter the true Church and begin to experience the transforming power of regeneration through the inward

possession of the Spirit. Three thousand Jews who heard Peter’s sermon and followed his directives received the Spirit. In other words, they were baptized in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, for Luke establishes no difference of meaning between *received* and *baptized*. So changed were these newly converted Jews that they gave up personal possessions to relieve the poor around them, possessing “gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God.”

Dr. Kenneth Collins, a recognized Wesley scholar, once stated in an email letter to this writer on May 25, 2010 that “Pentecost was the birth of the Church, not its perfection.” It is significant to observe that nowhere in the New Testament do we find believers exhorted to seek a baptism in the Spirit. Having already been baptized in the Spirit through regeneration they are rather exhorted to “*go on to perfection*” (Heb 6:1).

While once expressing his views on the subject of Christian perfection, 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.

Let us examine closely the important passage to which 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 the 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. 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 a means of receiving the Holy Spirit.” Adam Clarke likewise assures us of

that which is left behind when going on unto perfection: “1. Repentance unto life, 2. Faith in God, through Christ, by whom we receive the atonement. 3. The baptism of water, in the name of the Trinity; and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

According to Hebrews 6:1-2 it is clear that all of the above, including baptism of the Holy Spirit are to be identified as received in the process of Christian conversion and left behind as one goes on to 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, 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 attainment of entire sanctification or Christian perfection.

John Fletcher, among early Methodist leaders, is often singled out as one using the terminology of Spirit baptism in reference to entire sanctification or Christian perfection. The impression is often made that he used this terminology in reference to the second work of grace only. Such, however, is not the case. Believing that a great effusion of the Spirit was required to complete both the new birth and Christian perfection in a believer's heart he, unlike Wesley, used the language of “baptism with the Holy Spirit” in a holistic sense. The honest reader will find use of “baptism with the Spirit” numerous times in his writings while discussing justification and regeneration. For instance, he may be found encouraging earnest seekers for the new birth, by exclaiming, “Yes, you shall be baptized by the Holy Spirit for the remission of sins, and justified freely by faith” (*Works*, 4:115).

John Wesley, John Fletcher, Adam Clarke, Richard Watson, and W. B. Pope all make reference to the “baptism in the Spirit”

as God's powerful means of bringing penitents to a state of regeneration and the new birth. It is by the work of the same Holy Spirit now residing within their hearts that faithful believers are subsequently brought to a state of Christian perfection.

It is popular in today's holiness movement to speak of the disciples as being entirely sanctified on the day of Pentecost. The Word of God, however, does not tell us this. Such is an example of dangerously *adding* to that which is written. It is true that, according to Peter, their hearts were purified on that day by faith (Acts 15:9). In their attempts to exalt the second work of grace as entire sanctification, the modern holiness movement has consistently reduced the significance of regeneration. They need to be apprised of the fact that Peter had yet more to say about purifying the heart than what is recorded in Acts 15:9. For instance, in 1 Peter 1:22-23, we see where “having purified your souls” (22) is explained in the following verse as “being born again.” Here Peter refers to believers who have purified their souls by “being born again” (Alex R. G. Deasley, “Entire Sanctification and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 14:1 (Spring 1979) 44). There is definitely a purifying of the soul accomplished in the new birth or regeneration. Such purification includes no less than a cleansing away of guilt together with a cleansing of acquired defilement caused by sins of the past.

Early Methodist leaders, closely abiding by scriptural teaching, taught the baptism in the Spirit to be an initiatory event resulting in the regeneration or new birth of sincere penitents. Water baptism was considered the outward symbol of that inward work of Spirit baptism. What has too often been overlooked is that while identifying Spirit baptism with regeneration, early Methodists were in keep-

ing not only with the views of the Reformers before them but also with the church fathers before Nicaea. One will not find the baptism of the Holy Spirit identified with a second work of grace in all the writings of the Fathers. That means that out of more than 2,000 years of Church history, only within the last 150 years or so has the view arisen which endeavors to identify baptism in the Holy Spirit solely with entire sanctification. Writing a consensus of Christian belief from the first five centuries of the church, Thomas Oden concluded that “though indwelling is not precisely the same as of the Spirit. . . . The New Testament understands baptism of and by the Spirit as the privilege of all who have faith, all Christians, all who belong to the body of Christ (*Life in the Spirit*, 3:178; 182).

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

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The Five Points of Arminianism — Conditional Election

Vicinius Couto

Election is one of the most extensive themes in Arminius’ thought. It involves interfacing themes such as the order of decrees, God’s providences, predestination, the logical order of salvation, foreknowledge, etc. To talk in depth, a more dense article, or even a book, would be necessary. However, here I will summarize Arminius’s thoughts on election based on some of his main works. Even this distinction between the characteristics of his works would deserve a deeper approach that this essay does not allow.

I begin by mentioning Arminius’s view on providence. In his *Declaration of Sentiments*, he has a specific section on this topic. Arminius confirms that God has control over all things in his sovereignty and that there is no room for luck or randomness. However, he does not understand this control of God in an deterministic way, as Calvinists did. For

Arminius, deterministic providence would logically lead to God being the author of sin. His proposal to avoid this attribution to God is the insertion of divine permission. From this perspective, evils are God’s will in a permissive and secondary sense and never in a causative or primary sense. Because if this were so, then God would be the author of moral evil — sin. He criticizes this view in his *Apology Against Thirty-one Defamatory Articles*:

FIRST. It [the Calvinist model of providence] makes God to be the author of sin, and man to be exempt from blame. SECONDLY. It constitutes God as the real, proper and only sinner: Because when there is a fixed law which forbids this act, and when there is such “a fore-determination” as makes it “impossible for this act

not to be committed,” it follows as a natural consequence, that it is God himself who transgresses the law, since he is the person who performs this deed against the law. For though this be immediately perpetrated by the creature, yet, with regard to it, the creature cannot have any consideration of sin; because this act was unavoidable on the part of man, after such “foredetermination” had been fixed. THIRDLY. Because, according to this dogma, God needed sinful man and his sin, for the illustration of his justice and mercy. FOURTHLY. And, from its terms, sin is no longer sin.

In his *Letter Addressed to Hippolytus A. Collibus*, Arminius adds more information about divine exceptions. According to him, “It is present with, and presides over, all things; and all things, according to their essences, quantities, qualities, relations, actions, passions, places, times, stations and habits, are subject to its governance, conservation, and direction.” Therefore, things are not subject to randomness. This is why Arminius concludes: “I except neither particular, sublunary, vile, nor contingent things, not even the free wills of men or of angels, either good or evil: And, what is still more, I do not take away from the government of the divine providence even sins themselves, whether we take into our consideration their commencement, their progress, or their termination.”

He did not, however, understand by the aforementioned that the “sins themselves” were caused by God. Again, for Arminius, God's total providence does not lead to God's total and deterministic action. Therefore, he states in his *Declaration of Sentiments*. In his *Private Disputation XVIII, On the Will of*

God, God “only freely permits,” most of humanity's works. Arminius says:

But the evil which is called that of culpability, God does not simply and absolutely will.” Rather than being the agent of evil, Arminius understands that God acts with “permission, that chiefly by which he permits a rational creature to do what he has prohibited, and to omit what he has commanded.

According to Arminius, there are things that God cannot do. Arminius explained this in *A Friendly Discussion Between James Arminius & Francis Junius* by saying that “God can do whatever He wills with His own, but He cannot will to do with His own that which he cannot do of right. For His will is restricted by the limits of justice.”

Arminius' perspective of providence directs his notion of predestination. In *Public Disputation XV, On divine predestination*, Arminius shows this connection of themes, explaining that “according to this general notion, predestination, when attributed to God, will be his decree for the governance of all things, to which divines usually give the appellation of providence.” However, the predestination debate of his time involved both election and reprobation. Arminius defines predestination, in his *Letter Addressed to Hippolytus A. Collibus*, as being the “eternal and gracious decree of God in Christ, by which he determines to justify and adopt believers, and to endow them with life eternal, but to condemn unbelievers, and impenitent persons.” However, he makes a point of exposing his opinion contrary to the Calvinist perspective that God elects only some to the detriment of others, stating that “But such a decree as I have there described is not that by

which God resolves to save some particular persons, and, that he may do this, resolves to endow them with faith, but to condemn others and not to endow them with faith.” This points to the fact that in Arminius’ thought, both election and reprobation are conditional and linked to the issue of providence, as God’s foreknowledge is certain and infallible, but not causative or determinative.

In his *Private Disputation XIX, On the Various Distinctions of the Will of God*, Arminius shows that the conditionality of election is part of the divine will: “The will of God is either peremptory, or with a condition. (1.) His peremptory will is that which strictly and rigidly obtains, such as the words of the gospel which contain the last revelation of God: ‘The wrath of God abides on him who does not believe’ [John 3:36]; ‘He that believes . . . shall be saved’ [Mark 16:16].” He further makes it clear that: “[God’s] will, with a condition, is that which has a condition annexed, whether it be a tacit one, such as, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown’ [Jonah 3:4]. ‘Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them’ [Galatians 3:10].” The idea is that, in conditionality, there may be a response to the attached condition that allows the person to enjoy the benefit, if they follow the path of obedience.

Another important text is his *Declaration of Sentiments*. In the section on predestination, Arminius presents the three perspectives present in the discussions of his time and, ultimately, his own opinion: (1) a supralapsarianism of double predestination; (2) a moderate supralapsarianism, in which God graciously elects only a few and leaves the rest of humanity in a fallen condition; (3) an infralapsarianism, in which God graciously elects some after Adam’s fall; (4) his own opinion: a conditional predestination, the idea

of which is especially summarized in the following sentence: “he decreed to receive into favour those who repent and believe, and, in Christ, for his sake and through Him, to effect the salvation of such penitents and believers as persevered to the end.” In return, God also decreed “to leave in sin, and under wrath, all impenitent persons and unbelievers, and to damn them as aliens from Christ.” He sharply criticized this idea that God leaves people abandoned and unconditionally chooses only a few in *Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed*:

It is a horrible affirmation, that “God has predestinated whatsoever men he pleased not only to damnation, but likewise to the causes of damnation.” (*Beza, vol. I, fol. 417.*) It is a horrible affirmation, that “men are predestinated to eternal death by the naked will or choice of God, without any demerit on their part.” (*Calvin, Inst. l. I, c. 2, 3.*) This, also, is a horrible affirmation: “Some among men have been created unto life eternal, and others unto death eternal.”

In *Private Dispute XLI, On the predestination of the means to the end*, Arminius comments that in predestination, “God has determined the necessity of faith in himself and in Christ, for the obtaining of salvation,” confirming the conditionality of election. In *Private Disputation XLII, On the vocation of sinful men to Christ*, Arminius again states that the call to “supernatural life in Christ,” that is, salvation, is obtained “through repentance and faith.” He further adds that “the internal vocation is through the operation of the Holy Spirit illuminating and affecting the heart, that attention may be paid to those things which are spoken, and that credence may be given to the

word.” In this sense, Arminius is explaining that God first comes to meet the lost sinner with his grace, which enlightens and convinces, so that later, by the same grace, that person responds with faith and repentance. In this sense, Arminius makes clear his view of the logical order of salvation, that faith and repentance precede regeneration.

This is also confirmed in *Public Disputation XV, On Divine Predestination*, where he states: “by faith in Jesus Christ the remission of all sins is obtained, and sins are not imputed to them who believe [Romans 4:2-11].” Repentance and faith also precede justification. In *Public Disputation XVII, On Repentance*, Arminius explains: “We call repentance ‘the act of man,’ that we may distinguish it from Regeneration which is ‘the act of God,’” giving the connotation that there is an answer and human responsibility in the face of the vocation for salvation.

In his *Apology Against Thirty-one Defamatory Articles*, Arminius makes this order of salvation even clearer, as he mentions that the unregenerate are “those who are in the process of the new birth, and who feel those motions of the Holy Spirit which belong either to preparation or to the very essence of regeneration, but who are not yet regenerate; that is, they are brought by it to confess their sins, to mourn on account of them, to desire deliverance, and to seek out the Deliverer, who has been pointed out to them.” For Arminius, therefore, faith and repentance precede regeneration and constitute the condition for someone to be saved. As Jesus said in the account of Mark, the evangelist: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

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R.C. Sproul’s Chosen by God, an Arminian Critical Response, Part 2

John D. Wagner

Sproul also seriously errs in exegeting the Greek word *helkō* as used in John 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him.” Citing Kittel as his source, he claims that because *helkō* means “drag” or “compel” in a physical context such as Acts 16:19 and James 2:6, that therefore it has the same meaning in John 6:44. He insists a person has to be “dragged” or “compelled” into the kingdom.

But Sproul misrepresents Kittel, in regard to John 6:44, which says *helkō* there, means: “a beneficent ‘drawing of God . . . of drawing to oneself in love. This usage is distinctively developed by Jn, . . . Force or magic may be

discounted, but not the supernatural element” (*TDNT*, 2:503). The abridged version of Kittel says, “There is no thought here of force or magic. The term figuratively expresses the supernatural power of the love of God or Christ which goes out to all (12:32) but without which no one can come” (p. 227).

To cite additional sources, BDAG has *helkō* in John 6:44 as “draw, attract.” William Mounce says *helkō* means “to draw mentally and morally, John 6:44; 12:32.” Calvinist Spiros Zodhiates says “*Helkō* is used of Jesus on the cross drawing by love, not force” (John 6:44; 12:32). None of these sources indicate that *helkō* means drag or compel in

the spiritual context of John 6:44. And Sproul's claim is especially problematic for John 12:32. Does Sproul believe God drags all men to himself?

To further bolster his argument, Sproul cites Romans 8:7-8: "The fleshly mind is enmity against God; for *it is not subject to the law of God*, nor indeed can it be. *So then*, those who are in the flesh cannot please God." What is Paul's thrust here? A nonbeliever cannot please God by trying to earn or merit his way to salvation via the law. There is, however, one thing that Christ said an unsaved person can do to please God: "In the same way, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). Christ was comparing the "sinner" there with the people such as tax collectors and others (Luke 15:1-2) who gathered to hear Christ and who were condemned by the Pharisees and teachers of the law. And Paul writes: "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." (1 Cor. 1:21b) If God is pleased to give salvation to those who come to believe, I would argue that he is also pleased that they believe.

Sproul also covers arguments about the will from Jonathan Edwards. He writes,

The will always chooses according to its strongest inclinations at the moment. This means that every choice is free *and* every choice is determined. I said it was tricky. This sounds like a blatant contradiction. . . . But "determined" here does not mean that some external force coerces the will.

Despite Edwards' brilliance and fame, the claim that a choice is both determined and free is at the least, very questionable. According to

a Reformed website, Edwards, "being influenced by the developing philosophies of the rising Enlightenment (including those of John Locke and others), argued that the will was necessitated in essentially the same way as the then newly developed, universal, mechanistic laws of nature."

Edwards in fact argues that man's choices are always unalterably *internally* determined and locked into one direction by the strongest motive. Multiple scholars over the centuries have written treatises arguing against Edwards' reasoning: James Dana, *An Examination of the Late President Edwards's Enquiry on Freedom of the Will* (1770); Albert Bledsoe, *An Examination of President Edwards' Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will* (1848); Henry Tappan, *A Review of Edwards' Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will* (1860); Daniel D. Whedon, John D. Wagner, ed., *Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards* (2009), edited rpr. of Whedon, *The Freedom of the Will as a Basis of Human Responsibility and Divine Government*, (1864); and Robert Picirilli, *Free Will Revisited* (2017).

Daniel Whedon argues that Edwards' deterministic cause-effect chain has parallels with atheist thought and that in reality people can sometimes be quite irrational, succumbing to feelings rather than logic, and picking a less compelling choice. He further argues that humans are "pluri-potent,"—capable of making more than one choice—and that a locked-in determinism negates human responsibility. Albert Bledsoe notes that people may have overwhelming strong feelings toward a goal but not act on them at all. James Strauss claims Edwards's argument is in some ways ambiguous and that "Edwards has not demonstrated the 'necessity' of the connection between acts and motives but rather has committed the definitional fallacy

[of motive determining the will] by his a priori, i.e., tautological definition.”

Whedon also addresses Edwards’ “man has natural ability but no moral ability to repent” argument (mentioned as well by Sproul) and says it is meaningless. He writes:

Where there is no moral ability there can be no natural ability. Where there is no power to will, there is no power to execute the behest of the will. That behest cannot obey it if it does not exist. If there be no adequate power for the given volition, there is no volition to obey, and so no power to obey. An impossible volition cannot be fulfilled.... Hence it is helplessly absurd to propose a ‘natural ability’ in the absence of a ‘moral ability’ as a ground of responsibility.

Returning to the issue of fallen man, Sproul quotes Romans 3:11: “There is none who understands, no one who seeks God.” That verse is describing man’s natural carnal direction to not seek God. *God takes the initiative* through the Gospel message and his prevenient grace. Sproul also quotes Ephesians 2:1, “you were dead in your transgressions and sin.” He takes that very literally and makes the comparison of a corpse at the bottom of the ocean. But “dead,” (*nekros*) is used in multiple ways in the New Testament. This includes the dead church in Sardis (Rev 3:1b), the prodigal son who “was dead and is alive again,” (Luke 15:24) and Paul saying, “count yourself dead to sin.” (Rom 6:11) A general parallel between those verses is separation. None of those verses implies a corpse-like irreversible condition.

Yes, nonbelievers are dead in their trespasses and sin — meaning they are sepa-

rated from God, guilty before God and on their way to hell. But these passages help our understanding: “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). Leon Morris emphasizes the phrase “has *now* come,” and says “Those who are spiritually dead hear his voice, and those who hear it live. ‘Hear,’ of course, means ‘hear with appreciation,’ take heed.” Another key verse is John 20:31: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that *by believing* you may have life in his name.” It does not say “by having life you may believe.” Scripture is clear that we must repent and believe in faith to lead us to salvation in varying ways. (Acts 16:31 Luke 13: 3, 5; John 3:16; Acts 2: 21, 38; Rom 10:9, 13, etc.)

And Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:3-6, “This is good, and pleases our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.” Christ himself said, “For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:17; see also John 6:51)

Christ also said, “Come to me, all you who labor and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28) He even said to his enemies, “but I mention it (the truth) that you may be saved.” (John 5:34b) And let’s recall Peter saying to a crowd of thousands, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts 2:38) A huge question here is: Are these passages sincere or are they not? Sproul acknowledges what is called the “external call” to the outward world, but his

view makes that call utterly insincere and misleading. This is especially true because there is no way salvation can be genuinely offered to all, when according to Calvinism, Christ did not die and atone for all people.

Next, let's address what Sproul wrote on election/predestination. First, the claim that Arminians believe, "God looked down the corridors of time, saw who would be open to the Gospel and sovereignly determined those people would be saved," did not come from Arminius and is certainly misleading in its implication that God learns something. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The heavens or the cosmos, included the space-time continuum as part of God's creation. God is therefore not bound by time, which he created, so when we read of "foreknowledge," such as in 1 Peter 1:2, it is about his eternal *knowledge*. God knows who — both individually and corporately — will accept the Gospel message under the influence of the convicting and drawing of the Holy Spirit and they are saved. There is another element in this issue. Election is Christocentric — i.e., it is "in Him," or "in Christ" [See Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (1989) and William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (2015) for detailed elaboration on this issue]. Those phrases are used dozens of times by Paul in the New Testament. Here is the key application: First, Christ is the true chosen person of God. We read in 1 Peter 1:20: "He was chosen before the creation of the world." See also Luke 9:35 and Isa. 42:1. This means when anyone is "in Him," they enter into Christ's chosenness. Ephesians 1:4 tells us: "For he chose us *in him* before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." He does not say "us to be put in him," but "us in Him," i.e., we who are in union with Christ through a living faith. And since

we are in Him, we are *predestined* for the blessings of salvation, including adoption as sons (1:5), redemption through his blood and forgiveness of sins (1:7), and the multiple blessings of those God knew/foreknew as mentioned in Rom. 8:29-30. See also Eph. 1:4-6. Thus, there is a slight difference here between election and predestination.

Sproul quotes Romans 9 as proof par excellence of his view of predestination. He writes: "The ninth chapter of Romans was the clincher. I simply could find no way to avoid the Apostle's teaching on that chapter." Sproul was referring to his period of education in the 1960s. Many more scholars have written on this controversial chapter since then, from the non-Calvinist perspective. For the most comprehensive examination of Romans 9 see Brian Abasciano's three-volume work, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:1-9, Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:10-18, and Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:19-33* (2005, 2008, 2015); Jack Cottrell, *The College Press NIV Commentary Romans* (1998), 2:23-153; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Romans* (1992), 539-581; J.D. Myers, Shawn Lazar, *The Re-Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:10-24* (2017); James Strauss, John D. Wagner, "God's Promise and Universal History: The Theology of Romans 9," Clark H. Pinnock, John D. Wagner, eds., *Grace for All: The Arminian Dynamics of Salvation* (2015). For an early Arminian work, see Frederic Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (1883), 336-373.

There are two very important rules for understanding Romans 9. The first is to read Romans 9, 10, and 11 together as a literary and theological unit. Doing so, will give the reader a very different perspective as opposed to just reading Chapter 9 alone. For example

— Paul writes in Rom. 10:1: “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.” That is a continuation from 9:30, and is obviously referring to Israel the nation. Why would Paul write such a thing in 10:1 if Romans 9 is about God’s sovereign election from eternity past of salvation for just God’s elect?

And then there is the open-ended, free-will oriented language of Romans 10 in general, such as vv. 10-13: “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘*Anyone* who trusts in him will never be put to shame. . . . The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for ‘Everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved.’” And in chapter 11:32: “For God has bound all men over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on them all.”

These verses raise serious questions at a minimum about the sovereign-individual-election view of Romans 9. The second exegetical step is about the fact that Paul often quotes or alludes to Old Testament verses. It is important to go back to those verses and look at them in context and use them as hermeneutical keys. This exemplifies an increasing trend in hermeneutics called *inter-textual exegesis*. Specifically, I am referring to vv. 11-16 and 21-22. Sproul cites v. 13: ‘Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,’ and says, “Nations are made up of individuals. Jacob was an individual. Esau was an individual. Here we see clearly that God sovereignly elected individuals as well as a nation.”

At least he is in part recognizing nations here, which is really the point. But the key question is — chosen for what? Paul was quoting from Malachi 1, written more than 1,000 years after Jacob and Esau lived. Paul is

referring here (at least primarily) to Jacob representing Israel and Esau representing Edom. God chose Israel over Edom as his chosen nation to produce the Messiah. Numerous commentators have given this interpretation. Leon Morris in his commentary on Romans wrote about Romans 9:12-13:

It is election to privilege that is in mind, not eternal salvation. Moreover, it seems clear that Paul intends a reference to nations rather than individuals. . . . The words quoted say specifically that the elder will serve the younger, but Esau did not in fact serve Jacob, though the Edomites in time came to serve the Israelites.

On “hated,” Morris says. “This accords with the stress throughout this passage on the thought of service. God chose Israel for this role; he did not choose Edom.”

And Charles Cranfield writes in his Romans commentary:

It is important to stress that . . . nor as used by Paul do these words refer to the eternal destinies either of the two persons or of the individual members of the nations sprung from them; the reference is rather to the mutual relations of the two nations in history. What is here in question is not final salvation or damnation, but the historical functions of those concerned and their relations to the development of the salvation history.

Comment is also necessary for v.12b, “The older will serve the younger.” This is about Rebecca in Gen. 25:23, and God saying

to her: “Two nations are in your womb, and two people from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.” As mentioned, Esau never did personally serve Jacob, but there were times when the Edomites were under Israel.

I am arguing that Romans 9, and the election mentioned in v. 11, are not about God’s sovereign individual election to salvation. They are about God’s much bigger sovereign plan to fulfill the most important component of the Abrahamic covenant as mentioned in Gen. 26:4b: “And through *your seed*, all nations on earth will be blessed.” What does this mean? It is about election of the covenant-bearer lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and onward to Israel, — to extraordinary historical destiny to produce “the seed.” That seed is Christ and the Israel of faith who are in Christ (Gal. 3:16, 29). Those *in Christ* are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9).

Sproul also emphasizes Romans 9:16: “It does not, therefore, depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” He claims, “This is the coup de grace to Arminianism and all other non-Reformed views of predestination. . . . This verse is absolutely fatal to Arminianism.” This is simply not true. Salvation is not directly mentioned here. Instead, we see the word *it*, which refers to the mercy mentioned in v. 15a, which alludes to Exod 33:7-19; 34:8-10f) about God’s mercy over Moses at the tent of meeting and the faithful Israelites. Therefore, v. 16 is referring to God’s sovereign election and mercy over Israel, including as mentioned in 9:13.

Sproul also points to the hypothetical objectors in this chapter. In v. 14, Paul cites the expected argument, “Is God unjust? Not at all!” Sproul summarizes this as “that’s not fair!” as a logical complaint to his view of

predestination. But it can just as easily apply to God choosing one nation for mercy and extraordinary blessing and destiny above all others. Sproul also cites 9:19 as the second complaint of: “Why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” I agree with the perspective — contrary to what many believe — that the objector completely misunderstood and was vehemently accusing God of using overwhelming brute force against Pharaoh in v. 17-18. But God did not do so, if we read the Exodus account. Pharaoh was already a wicked tyrannical ruler and God resorted to a judicial hardening — the further hardening or strengthening of an already hardened heart. And let us also remember that multiple times Pharaoh hardened his own heart. (e. g., Exod 8:15, 32; 9:34)

Sproul says the two just-mentioned complaints only come up against Reformed/Calvinist theology. Actually, that is not true for at least one. Here is how the unjust/unfair accusation can occur on the Arminian side: An Arminian evangelist is talking to a nonbeliever and tells him that a) Christ is the only way to God, and b) He must make a decision for Christ or he will go to hell. What is a common reaction? (I did this myself as a nonbeliever.) It is, “What about all those people in the jungles and the remote areas of the earth who never hear this message? They’ll go to hell? Well, I think that’s unfair (or unjust!)”

Sproul also cites the issue of the potter and the clay in 9:21-22: “Does not the potter have the right to make of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? . . . God . . . bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction.” For v. 21, we must (again) examine Old Testament passages on this issue, particularly Jer. 18:5-10, which

describes Israel as the clay and specifies conditionality, saying “if that nation I warned repents of its evil” God would have mercy (v. 8) and if the nation “does not obey me,” God would “reconsider” his blessing (v. 10). Furthermore, in 9:22, about “vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction,” Sproul dissents from double-predestination Calvinists and says this is about people who are “already guilty.” But the verse also says God “bore with great patience” with these people. Why? Because he wants them to repent. The next verse, 9:23, mentions “the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory,” meaning God’s sovereign plan through Israel laying the groundwork for Christ and the church and therefore “had already determined that he would pour out the riches of salvation upon all who accepted the Messiah, whether Jew or Gentile.”

And finally, let’s examine the issue of the extent of Christ’s atonement. Referring to unlimited atonement, Sproul says, “Arminianism has an atonement that is limited in value. . . . A potential atonement is not a real atonement.” However, unlimited atonement is not just from Arminianism. It is the position of the vast majority of theologians in the history of the church. I quote from Elwell’s saying unlimited atonement

is the historic view of the church, being held by the vast majority of theologians, reformers, evangelists, and fathers from the beginning of the church until the present day, including virtually all the writers before the Reformation, with the possible exception of Augustine. Among the Reformers, the doctrine is found in Luther, Melancthon, Bullinger, Latimer, Cranmer, Coverdale, and even Calvin in

some of his commentaries.

This is very significant and ties into the additional issue that in all probability, Calvin and the Reformers did not believe in limited atonement. Kevin Dixon Kennedy has written about this issue in detail [*Union With Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* 2002)]. And David Allen has elaborated as well in his exhaustive study of the extent of Christ’s atonement [*The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (2016)]. Much of his book makes an encyclopedic coverage of all the theologians worth mentioning from the beginning of the church to recent centuries. He makes an overwhelming case that virtually nobody, including those among Augustinian thinkers, denied that Christ died for humanity, until about 1590.

Allen writes that limited atonement doctrine started developing under the influence of Theodore Beza and continued from there, including in the writings of John Owen in the 1600s. However, he notes that even with the Synod of Dordt, there was ambiguity in their summary about extent of the atonement because the English delegation believed Christ died for all humanity. Here are examples of what Calvin wrote in his multi-volume Bible commentary:

John 3:16: “For faith in Christ brings life to everyone; and Christ brought life because the Heavenly Father loves the human race and wishes that they should not perish.”

Isaiah 53:12: “He bore the sin of many. I approve of the ordinary reading, that He alone bore the punishment of man, because on Him was laid the guilt of the whole world. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that ‘many’ sometimes denotes

‘all.’”

Mark 14:24: “The word many does not mean a part of the world only, but the whole human race.”

John 1:28: “And when he says the sin of the world, he extends this kindness indiscriminately to the whole human race.”

In favor of limited atonement, Sproul gives a John Owen argument that has been answered, saying, “It [unlimited atonement] does not cover the sin of unbelief. If Christ died for the sins of all men . . . then everybody would be saved.” That is simply not true and Christ did die for the sin of unbelief. First of all, Owen and Sproul are not distinguishing *provision* as opposed to *possession*. Scripture is very clear that Christ died for all. See e.g., John 3:16-17, John 6:51, 1 John 2:2, 1 Tim. 2:6, and Heb. 2:9. Christ died *for* all people, but not automatically *in* all people. Why? Because people must appropriate that salvation through repenting and believing in faith.

Secondly, on the sin of unbelief, Norman Douty and Robert Lightner give enlightening answers. Douty writes, “Christ did die for the sin of . . . unbelief, for even Saul of Tarsus was pardoned. All who, like him, renounce their unbelief, get pardon, the same as they get pardon for any other sin duly repented of” [*Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?* 56]. Lightner adds, “If Christ’s death apart from any other considerations included the sin of unbelief, why does God ask men to believe since they would not be lost for not believing? A request from God for faith to apply the benefits of the cross becomes redundant. Why should God ask men to believe if that is not the sole condition of salvation?” [*The Death Christ Died*, 101].

Sproul says, “A potential atonement is not a real atonement. Jesus really atoned for the sins of his sheep.” But unlimited atonement *is* a real atonement and Christ really did pay for

the sins of humanity. Once again, all people have to do is appropriate it through faith. Sproul also writes that the universal passages with the words “‘all’ and ‘the ‘whole world’ . . . cannot mean the entire human family. It must refer to the universality of the elect (people from every tribe and nation) or to the [elect] Gentiles in addition to the world of the Jews.”

Sproul is in error once again in exegeting a key word, in this case “world,” or *kosmos* in the Greek. Though that word has multiple meanings in the New Testament, especially of humanity, numerous scholarly lexicons, theological dictionaries and theological encyclopedias do not include among their listed definitions believers/the elect only. This includes Kittel, Vine, BDAG, Mounce, and others. See Douty, *Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?* 41-45, for an extensive survey of seventeen sources. Claiming otherwise is an obscurantist interpretation.

Sproul also quotes John 17:9, “I do not pray for the world, but for those you have given me.” He adds, “Did Christ die for those for whom he would not pray?” That is a weak argument. Christ was not praying for the world in *that instance* when he was praying specifically for his disciples in 17:6-19. On the other hand, he did include “the world” twice in 17:21 and 23, saying, “so that the world may believe that you sent me” and “so that the world may know that you sent me.” Furthermore, when Christ was crucified, he prayed for his enemies: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Let us also recall: “This bread is my flesh that I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51)

In ending his book, Sproul writes, “After I awoke to the truth of predestination, I began to see the beauty of it and taste its sweetness. I have grown to love this doctrine. It is most

comforting.” But Arminians cannot love such a doctrine that utterly contradicts the universal passages, God’s love for the world, and the genuine universal call to salvation. Election and predestination are in the Bible, but we as Christians have serious differences over their meanings. The concept that election and predestination are by God’s eternal knowledge/foreknowledge and is Christocentric — based on us being “in Him” — does much more justice to the Biblical message and the passages with “world” and “all.” God’s grace is *gracious* and God does love the world. (John 3:16, Titus 3:4) There is no “holy rape of the soul.” The Calvinist version of predestination sadly writes off much or most of humanity.

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The End-Times Theology of Jonathan Cahn Vic Reasoner

Jonathan Cahn has positioned himself as a modern-day prophet. He believes he is sounding the Jubilee trumpet. He claims to have discovered the ancient mysteries of God’s Word. However, Scripture reveals the mysteries of God. The canon of Scripture is closed.

Yet many naive Christian leaders have praised Cahn’s books as a prophetic message from God, even to the extent of declaring that he is a true prophet for our time, and that *The Harbinger* is “the word of God.” He was named, along with Billy Graham and Keith Greene, one of the top forty spiritual leaders of the last forty years to have radically impacted the world. His books on end-times have all been best sellers.

The Harbinger, Jonathan Cahn’s first book, published in 2011, claimed that Isaiah 9:10-11 contains a hidden prophecy directed not to ancient Israel but to modern America. Cain assumed, “Somehow Isaiah 9:10 has to

be connected to Washington DC. . . . Solomon was the king of Israel. Washington was the first president of the United States. There was something in the linking of ancient Israel and America, as with all the other mysteries.” This is actually the basis of Freemasonry.

According to Isaiah 9:10, “The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place.” According to Cahn, the dressed stones and sycamore trees are really cryptic ways of referring to the building of the new monument in place of the twin towers, and that the “enemies of Rezin” — listed as the Syrians and Philistines in verse 12, are really the forces of al-Qaeda who come against the United States. Unfortunately Cahn did not unlocked this secret until ten years *after* it happened.

In 2014 *The Mystery of the Shemitah* which went to its second printing the day it was released, builds on the concepts and theo-

ries first presented in *The Harbinger*. The *Shemithah* or Sabbath year is the concept of giving the land a rest every seven years. If that doesn't happen, then God will cause calamity. God now follows this Sabbath year principle in his plans for America and Cahn attempted to prove this by using the rise and fall of the stock market. However, no one knows when one of these seven-year cycles starts or finishes. Cahn hinted that America was on the brink of a great financial catastrophe. He associated the 2008 housing collapse with this principle, which he unfortunately did not unlock until 2014. It is also ironic that Cahn is part of a movement that emphasizes personal prosperity.

Cahn also suggested there may well be a connection between the blood moon tetrad, solar eclipses, and the supposed *Shemithah* of 2014-2015. A lunar eclipse is sometimes referred to as a "blood moon" or "blood-red moon" because of the red or orange color of the moon during that phenomenon. There were four lunar eclipses in 2014 and 2015. For Cahn, "blood moons" are a harbinger for a catastrophic "seventh *shemithah*" in America. For other prophecy "experts," the series of blood-red moons in 2014 and 2015 would be a portent of Jesus' second coming and a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Some prophecy teachers predicted that this tetrad of blood moons would fulfill end-times prophecies in Joel and Revelation.

Although *The Harbinger* was classified as a work of fiction, Cahn stated in an interview with Brannon Howse in 2012 that his book was 90 percent fact and 10 percent fiction. In the lead-in to the book, Cahn wrote: "What you are about to read is presented in the form of a story, but what is contained within the story is real." *Left Behind* does the same thing to hedge their bets. The *Left Behind* series teaches eschatology as fiction. If it doesn't

work out, they can say it was fiction. But they really believe that "the main features are not fiction." *Left Behind* is "based on a true story that has not happened — yet."

By this time Cahn's books and ancillary products have collectively reached three million units in sales. Cahn's *Book of Mysteries*, published in 2016 consists of 365 one-page devotionals. However, this is an introduction to Kabbalah and trains the reader to look for hidden messages in the Bible.

In 2017 *The Paradigm* continues his tradition of declaring in great detail the prophetic significance of past events with only vague details about the future. He also continues to draw unrealistic and far-fetched parallels between past biblical events and present-day history. His use of historical parallels reminds me of a song Buddy Starcher wrote called "History Repeats Itself." It was a comparison of the assassinations of Lincoln and Kennedy and became a hit song in the spring of 1966. However, Starcher edited history, using only those facts which supported his premise. Cahn does much the same thing. Yet he is attempting to extrapolate current American history from ancient Jewish history.

Cahn starts with Ahab, whom he compares with Bill Clinton. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, whom he compares to Hillary. Ahab's son, Ahaziah, succeeds him and he is compared to Barack Obama. Then Jehu comes along to destroy Israel's apostasy. He is linked to Donald Trump. According to Cahn, however, Trump only managed to slow down, but not reverse the apostasy. Now we are in the days of Elijah and must stand our ground. Cahn himself has taken on the role of the prophet Elijah. I share Cahn's concerns over America's apostasy. However, he is selective in his use of history.

- The chronology of Israel's kings

Cahn asserts that Bill Clinton and Ahab both reigned for twenty-two years and presents this as strong evidence of a divine paradigm. However, to make Clinton's career add up to twenty-two years, Cahn must start the clock at 1979, when Clinton was first elected governor of Arkansas, and then reach twenty-two with the last year Clinton served as president (2001). Cahn fails to mention that Clinton did not serve as governor of Arkansas between 1981 and 1983, which reduces his terms of office as governor to twenty years.

But is there any objective reason for Cahn to start with Ahab? Why not start with Jeroboam?

After Ahab and Ahaziah comes Joram. Cahn does nothing with him. After Joram, Jehu comes. And is it all over after Jehu? There were nine more kings before Israel went into Assyrian captivity. It is true that none of them were good, but we have been under King Jesus for two thousand years now, so we cannot conclude that we are predestined to evil.

Furthermore, the kings were one office and the prophets were a separate office. Elijah was a prophet during the reign of Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram, but he is succeeded by Elisha during the reign of Joram. Technically, the days of Elisha began with Joram.

- The chronology of America's presidents

Cahn also is selective in his use of American presidents. After Clinton was George W. Bush, then Obama. Cahn can be very exact at times, when the information serves his purposes. But he can also omit major components when they do not fit his agenda. Furthermore, other charismatic prophets have compared Trump to Cyrus. This comparison was even made by Benjamin Netanyahu. So which is it — is Donald Trump Cyrus or Jehu?

In the chapter "The Paradigm of the

Race," Cahn wrote, "Jehu mounted his chariot and raced to the king's palace. . . . So Donald Trump would begin a race to the White House, the American throne." But the only parallel here is a play on the word *race*.

Parallels do not prove that history is replaying. The circular view of history is pagan. The Christian view of history is linear. We are moving toward God's ultimate purpose, the establishment of his kingdom on earth, even if there are bumps along the way. The greatest danger of Cahn's prophetic messages is that future events are predestined because they follow Old Testament paradigms which are heavily edited in order to fit a pessimistic presupposition. Cahn is long on parallels, but surprisingly brief in his advice in what we need to do going forward.

Cahn believes the Jewish calendar is a template by which to predict future events. While it is true that the seven feasts of Israel have symbolic meaning, the significance is primarily Christological, not eschatological. They were fulfilled in the atoning work of Christ and do not contain future American historical developments [See my article, "Jewish Feasts and the Plan of God" [*The Arminian Magazine*, Fall 2006], which was extracted from my Revelation commentary (1:338-241)]. There is no basis for imposing Jewish time intervals on American history.

In 2019 *The Oracle* Cahn found the birth of Donald Trump in the Bible. Utilizing the concept of a fifty-year Jubilee, Cahn connected the legalization of abortion in 1970 with the outbreak of Covid fifty years later.

The Harbinger II: The Return (2020) claimed an ancient prophetic mystery that accurately predicted the outbreak of COVID-19, down to the year it would hit in America? However, Covid hit before Cahn unlocked the mystery.

In 2022 *The Return of the Gods* is based

on the premise that the gods of mythology were not merely fictional characters, but actual beings who once walked among humans and still have a presence in our world. I agree with Cahn's concerns about our culture, but not with his mishandling of Scripture. Cahn operates under four false assumptions:

1. America has replaced Israel as the New Israel.

Cahn wrote in *The Harbinger*, "Israel was unique among nations in that it was conceived and dedicated at its foundation for the purposes of God. . . . Those who laid America's foundations saw it as a new Israel, an Israel of the New World. And as with ancient Israel, they saw it in covenant with God."

Cahn is not exactly embracing replacement theology. I believe that in the divine economy, the church has replaced Israel, but Cahn believes that *America* has replaced Israel. This seems a bit odd since Cahn markets himself as a Messianic Jewish believer.

Covenant theology, including historic Methodist theology, holds that the church has replaced Israel, but the church is not a political entity — like America. Previously, British Israelism or Anglo-Israelism held that Britain contained the lost tribes of Israel. Whenever a political entity is declared to be God's covenant people, politics is legitimized by theology.

2. The New Apostolic Reformation or Independent Network Charismatic movement.

Charismatic Christianity emphasizes the "gifts of the Holy Spirit," which include healing, exorcism, speaking in spiritual languages, and prophecy — defined as hearing direct words from God that reveal his plans for the future and directions for his people to follow.

The NAR, made popular through the teaching of C. Peter Wagner, also promotes a fivefold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. They believe that the offices of apostle and prophet must be recovered. While this is purported to be taught in Ephesians 4:11, they also advocate for new revelation. John Wimber emphasized that God is bigger than his Word. "All that is in the Bible is true, but not all truth is in the Bible. We integrate all truth, both biblical and other, into our experience of living."

While the NAR advocates a victorious eschatology, according to them the victory will come through apostles and prophets who make prayer declarations and loose tribulation on their enemies. This theology is smuggled into churches through popular NAR music.

Their Seven Mountains Mandate is based on Isaiah 2:2 and Revelation 17:9. The seven mountains are: family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government. "If Christians permeate each mountain and rise to the top of all seven mountains . . . society would have biblical morality, people would live in harmony, there would be peace and not war, there would be no poverty." They see Trump as fulfilling God's plan to place "kingdom-minded" leaders in top government positions, including Cabinet members and Supreme Court appointments.

While I agree that the kingdom of Christ should rule in every sphere, this will be accomplished through scholarship and suffering, prayer and perseverance, not through declarations and Jericho Marches. Prayer walks, Jericho Marches, and prophetic declarations may be more show than substance. Faith is obedience to God's Word, not telling God what to do.

Before the 2016 election a group of "prophets" proclaimed Trump to be God's chosen candidate, similar to King Cyrus in the

Bible, whom God used to restore the nation of Israel. Prayer coins were even sold which had both Donald Trump and King Cyrus engraved. After their prophecies of Trump's winning the election came true, these "prophets" became enormously popular.

Many of those "prophets" predicted another Trump victory in 2020. After November 3, many believed that the demonic forces that have stolen the election can still be defeated through prayer. Apparently the January 6, 2021 protest was, at least in part, an attempt to declare Trump the election winner. One of those who breached the Senate floor describes holding a prayer to "consecrate it to Jesus" soon after entering — since it had become the temple of Baal. In the days and hours leading up to the storming of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 the group Jericho March organized marches around the Capitol and Supreme Court building praying for God to defeat the "dark and corrupt" forces that they claimed had stolen the election from God's anointed president, Donald Trump.

However, when Jehu sent his men into the temple of Baal in 2 Kings 10, they were successful in eradicating Baal worship from Israel (see v 28). At this point I do not see any parallel between 2 Kings 10 and January 6, 2021. Cahn has declared that the window of opportunity to destroy the temple of Baal, which is the US Capital, ended on January 6 and that we are now living in the days of Baal. Yet Cahn still claims that Donald Trump plays a role in the end times.

3. The Hebrew Roots Movement

Cahn claims to be a rabbi in the Hebrew Roots Movement. He is the rabbi at Beth Israel Worship Center in Wayne, NJ. When the Apostle Paul and the Jerusalem Council demonstrated the sufficiency of salvation by grace

through faith, they — under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit — removed the necessity of maintaining the traditions of Jewish ceremonial practice. Gentiles need not worship in a synagogue, blow a shofar, wear a prayer shawl, call Jesus Yeshua or Yeshu, keep the Old Testament feasts and dietary laws. These props, along with a few Hebrew words thrown in, give Cahn an aura of mystery and deep knowledge, but the New Testament also rejects gnosticism.

4. The Kabbalah hermeneutic

Cahn utilizes a method of biblical interpretation called Kabbalah. This is ancient Jewish mysticism or occult knowledge. The word is usually translated as "tradition." Kabbalah is a doctrine of esoteric knowledge concerning God and the universe, having come down as a revelation to the Sages from a remote past, and preserved only by a privileged few. Kabbalah is considered part of the Jewish Oral Law. Most forms of Kabbalah teach that every letter, word, number, and accent of scripture contains a hidden sense; and it teaches the methods of interpretation for ascertaining these occult meanings. These ancient mysteries are classic new age expressions which have been used for centuries by freemasonry, theosophy, and new age rabbis.

In the book of Colossians, Paul confronts a philosophy that was identified with the teachings of the Essenes. The apocalyptic tendencies of the Essenes distracted from the all-sufficiency of Christ. T. K. Abbott wrote,

The teaching of the Colossian false teachers was essentially traditional and esoteric. The Essenes, their spiritual predecessors, as well as the Gnostics, subsequently claimed to possess such a source of knowledge.

According to Josephus, the Essenes required a secret oath before passing on their doctrines. So did the gnostics. The heresy which Paul addressed was a blend of Jewish and Greek elements. Yet there was one heresy, which syncretized various elements. According to N. T. Wright, since the Christians in Colosse had Christ they had all they needed. "Judaism had nothing more to offer them." Paul declares that the church has had its own "exodus" (1:12) and is the heir to the true promised land. Paul stresses in chapters 2–3 that the church already lives in the "age to come" and therefore is under no obligation to submit to regulations which were preparation for that age. Paul opposes the worship of angels and ascetic practices. Wright argued that Paul's attack on angel worship, asceticism, and philosophy also have a close connection with Judaism.

It is not wrong to observe special days or seasons, such as Lent or Advent, in the Christian calendar. What is wrong is when such observances are tied to the recognition of elemental spirits who supposedly direct the

Therefore, Paul wrote, "Do not let anyone judge you with respect to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day." This refers to the annual, monthly, and weekly days of the Jewish calendar (Gal 4:9–11; 5:1). It is not wrong to observe special days or seasons, such as Lent or Advent, in the Christian calendar. What is wrong is when such observances are tied to the recognition of elemental

spirits who supposedly direct the course of the stars and regulate the order of the calendar. It is possible that the observance of days Paul rejected was connected to astrology. Movements wanting to reinstate Jewish practices are suspect. Life in Christ does not depend on the observance of Jewish practices despite the emphasis of the Hebrew Roots Movement. In the second century Ignatius warned against such Jewish teachings.

Especially popular amongst the Essenes was the pesher method of scriptural interpretation in which "everything from the past was transformed and given a contemporary value and meaning," especially texts taken from the prophetic books. Isaiah 9:10 and its context may contain appropriate applications for modern life at both the personal and national levels, but nine harbingers of divine judgment upon America are not embedded in Isaiah 9:10.

While Cahn uses the Kabbalist method to find hidden meaning in the numerical arrangements of the Bible, this method may be applied to almost any piece of literature and draw almost any interpretation from it. The irony is that just a few verses after Isaiah 9:10 is a warning against the prophet who teaches lies; "for those who guide this people have been leading them astray, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up."

“Arise, Shine; for Your [GAS]light has Come!”: How the Nazarene Theological Seminary Wants to Have its Cake and Eat it Too

David Martinez

In 1755 John Wesley accomplished a stated goal he had to release what he called *A Christian Library*, fifty volumes of approximately 300 pages each, of literature from diverse authors that he believed would be a blessing to Christians everywhere. Among the books Wesley brought into his circulation, was the famous “Religious Affections,” by the Calvinist Jonathan Edwards. One would wonder why Wesley would be a fan of such anti-Arminian literature. The wondering stops, however, when one considers not only how much he edited the works before he published them, but also when one looks at the rational, he himself gave: “Out of this dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixt with much deadly poison, I have selected many remarks and admonitions, which may be of great use to the children of God.”

Dr. Jaren Rowell, president of the Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS), has released an official statement about human sexuality, and — if I may borrow from Wesley — there is in it *some* wholesome food mixed with *much* deadly poison. The difference between Edwards and Dr. Rowell, however, is that at least Edwards was clear in what he believed, making it easy for Wesley to pick the bones before serving the fish to his audience. With all due respect, I think Dr. Rowell served the Church of the Nazarene his plate — bones and all — and some of his statements are remarkably fishy to me. Let me explain.

In the interest of space, I will summarize the two key problems with Dr. Rowell’s declaration.

#1 – Wolves are Welcomed Here

One of the most frustratingly ambiguous comments comes early in Dr. Rowell’s declaration: “My disagreement with [those explicitly calling for the Church of the Nazarene to become affirming of same-sex marriage] does not allow me to dismiss them from my care,” he says, “I am called to listen, dialog, and maintain fellowship with them as sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus. We simply must refrain from making enemies of one another in the body of Christ.” Excuse me. I don’t want to be rude, but what part of, “[do not] keep company with sexually immoral people” (1 Cor 5:9) does Dr. Rowell not understand? Has God Almighty changed his mind since the days he warned us “not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral” and to “not even eat with such a person” (1 Cor 5:11a)?

However kind and polite of a man Dr. Rowell may be (I have never met him), his calling subversive LGBTQ+ advocates “brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus” and claiming that false teachers are not enemies but legitimate parts of the body of Christ, is an absolute scandal to every shepherd that works tirelessly to protect the sheep from ravenous wolves that masquerade as sheep. To put it mildly: how unacceptably irresponsible of Dr. Rowell! His declaration dies the death of a thousand qualifications and, frankly, though “a servant of the Lord must not be quarrel” (2 Tim 2:24a), this does not mean that we should be mealy-mouthed (at best), or disingenuous (at worst). Does anyone at the NTS know that we have been *commanded* in the *name of our Lord Jesus Christ* that we “withdraw from

every brother who walks disorderly” (2 Thess 3:6a)? Need we remind the *President* of a *Christian* seminary that “everyone who names the name of Christ [should] depart from iniquity” (2 Tim 2:19)? Scripture is clear, even if Christian seminary presidents are not. To this, it seems that Dr. Rowell has two responses:

First, “Nazarenes do not embrace a ‘flat’ reading of scripture which becomes literalistic and devoid of interpretative discernment.”

Second, “The movement toward ‘inquisition-style’” attacks on faculty and some in the ordination process are not in the spirit of holiness, as they escalate fear and preclude wise and patient responses to applications of our faith”.

To the first statement, I respond that I am astounded that this dismissive red-herring would come from anyone working at a Christian seminary, the very place where students *pay* lots of money to learn the Bible. I have yet to meet a vegetarian butcher, but this absurdity comes close. Dear NTS, the scriptures that *command* us to hold each other accountable in the body of Christ for the sin we commit, are *not* complicated nor does one need to jump through hermeneutical interpretive hoops of fire to grasp their meaning.

To the second statement, I respond, “cut the drama, bro.” I haven’t seen a torture rack anywhere yet, and there is nothing unholy about confronting brothers when you have to for the sake of the Gospel (Read how Paul confronted no less than the Apostle Peter himself, in Galatians 2:11-14). Dr. Rowell has no problem whatsoever with calling us to “repent from every way that our anger leads people around us to believe that the church is nothing more than hateful ‘homophobes,’” which shows me that he *does* indeed believe in calling folks to repent. It just so happens that the call for repentance is not directed to the Nazarenes who aggressively advocate for Pro-

LGBTQ acceptance. Oh, no. Not them. Their feelings are the ones that matter, you see. The rest of us are homophobes that should be quiet, walk on egg-shells, and better not commit the one and only sin that merits attention: being perceived as “unloving.”

Pardon me for saying so, but valiant knights are supposed to *slay* the dragon, not *pet* it! The castle is burning, people are dying, an evil king has come to trans/mutilate our children, to castrate our little boys, to sexually indoctrinate our girls, to abort our infants — piece by piece — in the womb, and to destroy the family as we know it, and Dr. Rowell’s concern is that we humbly “dialogue” with the demons.

If Dr. Rowell were ever before me, I would lovingly serve him some of my best tea and would treat him with love. Something tells me that he would be a nice man to chat with. But that doesn’t mean I would want him anywhere near the responsibility of defending the flock of God. Not unless roast mutton is on the menu.

#2 – Complicating a Simple Issue

Dr. Rowell (intentionally?) makes it sound as if the issue of homosexuality is an issue that God’s Word does not sufficiently address, because it is merely mentioned in only six verses. If you don’t believe I am representing him accurately, read it for yourself: “The worst way to appeal to the Bible here is through conversation-ending quotations of the six Bible texts that specifically mention homosexual practice. These texts are not only debated in terms of interpretation and application, but they are also not sufficient in themselves to proclaim the theological foundation for the affirmation of heterosexual marriage as the exclusive arena for sexual intimacy”

He is simply wrong. *Anywhere* where the Bible addresses marriage, it presupposes the union of one man and one woman, and never *ever* anything else! No first century Jew would have ever fathomed marriage as being between two people of the same sex, and any time instructions are given to husbands and wives, homosexuality is being addressed even if only by its exclusion in how marriage is defined in Scripture. To make it sound as if the Bible addresses homosexuality in *only* six verses is a slight of hand that can mislead a more careless reader/listener, of which there are many, unfortunately. I struggle to believe that someone as educated as Dr. Rowell did not think of this nor did not notice what he was doing. I will leave his intentions between him and God. But while I cannot read Dr. Rowell's *heart*, I can read his *declaration*, and with a clear conscience (and heavy heart!), I want to say "Shame on you, Dr. Rowell! You know better!"

Then, as if the "six verses" comment doesn't do damage enough, he informs us that those texts are "debated." I literally wrote in the margin of my paper, "so what?" And I think that's a legitimate response. "So what?" if the texts are "debated." Atheists debate the existence of God. Does that mean I can't trust Bible verses that mention God? The argument that verses on homosexuality are "debated," is designed to cast doubt, but amount to nothing. God's Word has been debated since someone in Eden asked "Has God indeed said?" (Gen 3:1).

Dr. Rowell tries hard to bring balance to his comments. After he undercuts the Bible, he goes into a lengthy discussion of the theology of marriage (ironically rooted in Scripture). Those are the paragraphs wherein one may find the needle-of-good in his haystack-of-obfuscation. However, he then ruins it with one of the most egregious lines in the docu-

ment: "This male/female union is part of God's creation, not a pragmatic afterthought, which enables an ongoing enactment of self-giving love which brings forth life. *This is not to deny that the notion of gender may be more complex than a simple binary*" (italics mine). What?! But this is *precisely* what he should deny! The notion of gender is *not* more complex than a "simple binary." It really is as simple as "male and female" and the so-called minister that denies this is simply committed to the spirit of this evil age. Such a person should not be negotiated with, nor should his or her feelings be prioritized, but should be asked to be quiet (Titus 1:11).

Our holy martyrs shed their blood and lost their lives defending truth. They did not give themselves the luxury we have now claimed with pretty phrases like, "we must choose what hills to die on" and "let's not fight." I suggest *every* Christian has already died on a hill called Calvary, and we would do well to "fight the good fight" (2 Tim 4:7) to protect the holy truth that has been entrusted to the church (1 Tim 3:15). How could Dr. Rowell concede that gender may be more complicated than the "male or female" binary? What other gender is he willing to accept exists? If I were a student at NTS, I would directly (albeit respectfully) press Dr. Rowell about this. But I highly doubt anyone will ask him about such an asinine and destructive comment. I am slowly learning that my denomination is more likely to get on *my* case for my tone and supposed quarrelsomeness than it is to get on anyone's case for ambiguity, cowardice, and inaction in the culture-wars that are destroying countless lives, including a sea of innocent children. The usual "nothing to see here, folks!" will continue to be the norm while some people violate both the Bible and our denomination's manual and get away with it.

Conclusion

To be fair, the point of Dr. Rowell's declaration was to say that the Church of the Nazarene is correct in *not* being LGBTQ affirming. I have no problem with applauding that purpose. A friend of mine who is a pastor in my denomination was genuinely perplexed that I would have any issue with Dr. Rowell's declaration after hearing me freely admit that he — like the denomination itself — was officially *not* in favor of the LGBTQ movement. End of story, right? Not so fast. One can take a stand in such an ambiguous and pusillanimous fashion as to render one's position

utterly toothless and powerless. At times, Dr. Rowell's declaration offers such word salads as to make vice president Kamala Harris blush, and I want to ask, "if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?" (1 Cor 14:8). I don't know where mainstream denominations are going, but if our seminaries are any indication, I hope we jump out the handbasket soon.

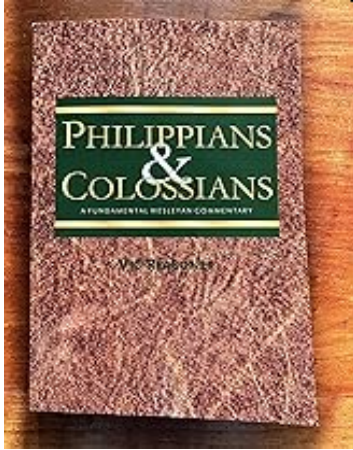
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