



THE ASBURY SEMINARIAN

VOL XXXVII

NUMBER 3

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THE ASBURY SEMINARIAN

(USPS 546-440)

VOLUME XXXVII

SUMMER 1982

NUMBER 3

*The Wesleyan Message
in the Life and Thought of Today*



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The Asbury Seminarian is published quarterly by Asbury Theological Seminary at 204 North Lexington, Avenue, Wilmore, Kentucky. Second Class postage paid at Wilmore, Kentucky 40390. Copyright 1967, by Asbury Theological Seminary. Subscription price \$3.00 per annum. Single copies \$1.00.

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The purpose of this publication is to serve as an organ of Asbury Theological Seminary for the dissemination of material of interest and value primarily to its immediate constituency of alumni, students and friends, but also to a broader readership of churchmen, theologians, students and other interested persons.

Material published in this journal appears here because of its intrinsic value in the on-going discussion of theological issues. While this publication does not pretend to compete with those theological journals specializing in articles of technical scholarship, it affirms a commitment to rigorous standards of academic integrity and prophetic forthrightness.

Is Christian Belief Rational? What the Philosophers Are Saying

by Michael L. Peterson

I. God's Comeback in Philosophy

A. Renewed Interest in Christianity

In April 1980 *Time* magazine reported that “God is making a comeback . . . in the crisp, intellectual circles of academic philosophers.” The article surveys the quiet revolution in thinking which is currently taking place in philosophy. During the early part of this century, such philosophies as naturalism, positivism, empiricism, and existentialism gained widespread allegiance among professional philosophers. Unfortunately, these philosophies tend to view belief in God as either false or lacking in rational support. Roderick Chisholm from the Ivy League Brown University explains that this view has been so influential because “the brightest people” held it for years. However, Chisholm adds in recent years a number of “tough-minded” intellectuals have provided defense for religious belief, and have ushered the topic of God back into fruitful discourse. Most of them have a specific interest in the God of Christianity.

Whereas it used to be thought irrational to believe in God, now many philosophers are claiming it is entirely rational. Of course, no genuine issue in philosophy is ever finally settled. Philosophers are forever trying to shed new light on enduring problems, and the same is true for the problem of whether Christian belief is rational or not. I propose to take a look at what philosophers have been saying about this precise problem. The issue of religious belief is obviously very large and complex, so I will focus on just a few aspects of the overall problem.

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B. The Structure of this Essay

The issue of whether belief in God is rational has been approached in a number of different ways. One way is offering proofs or arguments for and against God's existence. Such arguments are taken to be the rational basis for either belief or disbelief in God. Those thinkers who believe the arguments for God's existence win out form the tradition of natural theology down through the centuries. Other thinkers who believe the arguments against God's existence tip the scales form the enterprise which we may call natural *atheology*. (At least this label is more charitable than calling it *unnatural theology*.) Our Christian heritage is greatly indebted to those who have tackled these kinds of problems, and I personally owe much of my own Christian position to their work.

However, there is another way of approaching the question of whether belief in God is rational — a way which provides a stimulus for what I have to say. This second approach does not deal directly with the various grounds on which belief in God can be called rational. Instead it deals with the very standard of rationality by which such grounds are judged. Philosophers have offered a number of proposals for conditions which must be met in order for a belief to be rational. I will discuss two of these proposals and try to determine whether Christian belief is rational according to these requirements. The two requirements, which are distinct but closely related are: (1) A person may hold a belief only on the basis of having responsibly reviewed the relevant evidence; and (2) A belief must have sufficient evidence. The first condition pertains to the relationship between the person doing the believing and the proposition he believes. The second regards the relationship between the proposition believed and the evidence for or against it.

C. Preliminary Distinctions

At the outset, it is necessary to clarify exactly what aspect of Christian belief is being analyzed. As the title states, Christian belief is the general concern, but this is a vast subject which entails a number of interrelated beliefs. Therefore, this article will be restricted specifically to the question of belief in God. To center on belief in God is not to study any particular Christian doctrines as such, even though the validity of Christian doctrines is a fascinating issue in itself. However, it is discussed indirectly here, since belief in God is the foundation of all other doctrines. And belief in God is

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logically necessary to orthodox Christianity. Unless belief in God is defensible, Christianity is not defensible.

For present purposes, to talk about belief *in* God is to talk about the belief *that* God exists, i.e., the belief that the proposition “God exists” is true. Obviously, believing in God involves *more* than accepting a certain proposition as true. Belief in God in the full sense includes trusting God, committing one’s life to Him, and living within His presence. But, if belief in God is more than acceptance of a proposition, then it is *at least* that. One cannot sensibly commit one’s life to God, or thank God, or praise God without believing that there *is* such a person as God. Hebrews 11:6 suggests this very idea. Hence, belief *that God exists* is fundamental to belief in God. And unless belief that God exists is defensible, trust in and commitment to God is not defensible.

Having made the above points, I shall use the terms “Christian belief” and “religious belief” synonymously with “belief in God.” Also I shall use “belief in God” interchangeably with “belief that God exists.” The exact question I wish to address, then, is whether belief in God — belief in the existence of God — is rational.

II. Rationality and the Ethics of Belief (first criticism)

A. Intellectual Duties

We are familiar with the accusation that religious belief is rationally deficient or defective. Critics have made this accusation from two somewhat different perspectives. One perspective is religious believers have neglected the responsibility of scrutinizing and evaluating their beliefs in light of the evidence. The other perspective is the objective evidence itself, regardless of whether believers have been conscientious about it or not, just shows that God does not exist. According to either perspective, belief in God is plainly irrational. Let us examine the first way of criticizing religious belief in this section and reply to it in the next. Also, let us reserve consideration of the second criticism for subsequent sections.

The first formulation of the irrationality criticism exhibits an underlying conviction that there is an *ethical responsibility* which attaches to the human enterprise of believing. Ethically speaking, we have no right simply to believe anything whatever. We have the ethical duty to try to reach or approximate the truth. W.K. Clifford, a 19th century philosopher, tells a story to accent this fundamental

requirement:

A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered many storms and that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

Clifford asks rhetorically, "What shall we say of the shipowner?"

Clearly, we shall say, "He is guilty of the death of those people."

B. The Importance of Sufficient Evidence

Granted, the shipowner sincerely believed in the soundness of the ship, or so we are told in the hypothetical story. But he believed in a manner which violates the ethics of the intellectual life. Actually, the shipowner had "no right to believe on such evidence as was before him." He had acquired his belief by stifling doubts and avoiding careful investigation. Clifford correctly indicates that even if we alter the story a bit and suppose the ship was not unsound after all, the shipowner is still as guilty as before. The question of right or wrong here does not have to do with the actual truth or falsity of the belief, but with the way in which the belief is attained and held. John Stuart

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Mill made this same point in his classic essay, *On Liberty*. Mill states the truth may reside in the mind as a prejudice, or a superstition, and this is beneath the dignity of a rational being. A belief, even a true belief, may be acquired in the *wrong way* — not because it is responsibly evaluated and seen as true.

According to the “ethics of belief” theorists, then, a belief ought to be held only on the basis of having found sufficient evidence. And the strength with which we hold any belief ought to be in proportion to the strength of the evidence. Presumably, if one is too busy or too untrained to investigate the grounds of a belief, then his proper attitude ought to be something like neutrality. As Clifford eloquently says, “Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence.” An ethic of belief, therefore, is a procedure for guarding the mind from error and credulity.

C. The Indictment of Religious Belief

It is now quite easy to explain the kind of criticism of religious belief which is based on the ethics of belief. The critic says the believer is in violation of the moral requirements placed on believing, or the believer has adopted certain theological propositions without carefully examining the evidence for and against them. In a sense, this criticism is directed against the *religious believer* in his role as a believer, and not against *what* he believes *per se*.

III. Is the Religious Believer in Violation of the Ethics of Belief? (first reply)

A. Giving the Critic His Due

What can be said in response to the critic who says the religious believer has violated or neglected the ethical conditions of believing? Has the believer failed to examine the evidence carefully and conform his belief conscientiously to it? Has he become so careless in his mental habits that he has fallen victim to wishful thinking, peer pressure, propaganda, or some other subrational force? The first part of our response to such questions should be to give the critic his proper due. The critic should be applauded for endorsing a general ethics of belief. Human beings are not totally free to believe just anything they choose. As responsible, rational, and moral agents, we must adjust our beliefs to the best reasons and evidence available.

The morality of our believing something is determined largely by our honest and energetic efforts to analyze the evidence, even if we are sometimes mistaken.

The critic also seems to be correct in indicating that some religious believers are credulous people, defending themselves by saying their religious beliefs are private matters without any rational or ethical constraints. It's no wonder thoughtful nonbelievers sometimes characterize believers as persons who believe on fancy, push away doubts, and direct their minds toward the comfortable and familiar.

Now, after giving the critic his due, what can be said in stronger defense of the rationality of religious belief? Two important defenses are in order: (1) We must point out a host of technical difficulties involved in formulating an exact ethics of belief, and we must emphasize that not all believers are out of the spirit of such a code anyway; and (2) We must insist that the critic is operating on the single principle of avoiding error while religious belief may be governed more by the additional principle of finding truth. Let us develop these defenses in more detail.

B. Difficulties in Formulating the Ethics of Belief

While it is quite legitimate to call for responsibility in believing, it is very difficult to formulate a clear criterion for fulfilling that responsibility. One problem arises with respect to the notion of *sufficient evidence*. Many philosophers say the ethics of belief require us to believe a proposition only on sufficient evidence. Supposedly, every meaningful proposition is capable of being justified or refuted by appropriate evidence. Yet spelling out the exact *kind* and *amount* of evidence which would be sufficient in any given case is a formidable task. For example, what *kinds* of evidence are relevant to theological propositions, and particularly to the proposition that God exists? Does pure intellectual argumentation count? Does personal experience or insight count? Do historical events count? Precisely what sort of evidence is valid so that one who considers the proposition "God exists" is ethically obliged to take account of it?

To continue this line of questioning, *how much* evidence is sufficient or enough to justify any given proposition? How does one tell when the evidence he possesses is indeed sufficient? Obviously, there are times when one has an overwhelming amount of evidence *for* a belief or an overwhelming amount *against* it. But how do we

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specify the exact point at which the evidence becomes sufficient? What about one who conscientiously thinks that he has sufficient evidence and yet is mistaken? Who has the prerogative of setting up this criterion of sufficiency anyway?

The questions above reveal difficulties in articulating a precise code of ethics for believing. We can endorse the *basic value* of being concerned for evidence, but we cannot specify a formula for when this value has been properly displayed. Therefore, the moral evaluation of whether someone has done his intellectual duty, in conforming his belief to the evidence, is in the realm of fallible judgment and not in the realm of exact calculation. This means there is room for difference of opinion regarding the ethics of belief. In fact, we might add part of the general ethics of belief which we are discussing includes, not only *evidential scrupulosity* but, *intellectual humility* and *tolerance* as well. Without these other equally important intellectual virtues, the search after truth (which the critic wants to protect) is simply jeopardized in other ways.

The moral here is that no one can dictate the precise point at which another person has weighed the evidence responsibly and is therefore entitled to believe. As long as a person makes a serious attempt to be reasonable and honest in his belief, we should be cautious about pronouncing him to be in violation of intellectual ethics. Thus the critic does not really possess a strict and absolute standard of ethics according to which the religious believer is clearly out of order.

Furthermore, in spite of the difficulties surrounding a precise code of ethics of belief, many religious believers take great care to accord with the basic spirit of such an ethic. Not only do many lay believers want to be as reasonable as their ability permits, there is a whole tradition of Christian scholarship which has produced impressive reasons for belief in God. Therefore, the critic cannot justly make a blanket indictment that the religious believer is irrational because he has violated the ethics of belief.

C. The Neglected Duty to Truth

We have examined the critic's objection that Christians violate the ethics of belief. We have begun to see that a number of believers actually exhibit the intellectual virtue of reasonableness. But the discussion so far has been dominated by only *one* aspect of intellectual ethics — *the duty to avoid error*. There is another duty of the intellectual life — *the duty to find truth*. I think believers may find an

important method of rebuff for the critic by exploring this second duty.

Initially, we must emphasize that these two duties are genuinely distinct. They are not just two ways of expressing the same duty. To fulfill one may not be to fulfill the other. All responsible thinkers must face the question of which of these twin duties has priority in case of conflict, for it will make a great deal of difference in how they operate in the realm of belief. W.K. Clifford, for example, emphasizes the avoidance of error and warns against believing anything without sufficient evidence. Clifford feels pathos when he says that an error or falsehood, once believed, is like a pestilence which can “master one’s body and then spread to the rest of the town.” Then he asks, “What would be thought of one who, for the sake of a sweet fruit, should deliberately run the risk of bringing a plague upon his family and his neighbors?” Clifford’s point is permeated by the fear of error, which offsets the desire for truth.

My question for Clifford and the Cliffordians is, “Are there not situations in which the chance of gaining truth outweighs the risk of error?” When one is sifting through the evidence for and against a contemplated belief, there may be no magical signal that he has acquired enough of the right kind of evidence and is therefore entitled to believe. One simply has to weigh the evidence to the best of his ability and then make a judgment to give or to withhold assent. If the desire or need for truth is strongly present, even when the evidence is not compelling, it is plausible to think that a person might go ahead and believe.

Going ahead and believing is even more plausible if one assesses the risk factor differently from Clifford. Clifford seems to assume that if one refrains from believing on insufficient evidence he has *eliminated* the risk of *error*. This assumption, however, is not correct. The risk of gaining or losing truth, or of embracing or avoiding error, is present regardless of what attitude one adopts toward a proposition — whether he positively believes, positively disbelieves, or remains neutral. The Cliffordian insistence on sufficient evidence, well-motivated though it is, is hardly effective in eliminating risk.

We can even envision special situations in which the proposition being considered for belief is so important that the Cliffordian code cannot give adequate guidance at all. We might imagine a situation in which the importance of finding truth is quite great, even though the evidence is not absolutely definitive. The famous American

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philosopher William James considered the type of situation in which the Cliffordian fear of error is neither practical nor possible. James speaks of decisions about what to believe which are (in his words) “living,” “momentous,” and “forced.” For James, as well as for a great many people, decisions about religious beliefs are precisely of this sort. They present us with situations in which we *cannot avoid* some kind of decision, and hence cannot protect ourselves from risk. It does not matter which way we believe — we risk falling into error and also risk losing the truth.

Having drawn up a scenario in which a decision about belief is living, momentous, and forced — and yet in which the evidence is not conclusive either way — we can now understand why the *duty to seek truth* might take priority over the duty to avoid error. This may well be the kind of situation in which many religious believers find themselves, and hence their choice to believe in God is not only understandable, but justifiable. About the only qualification on such a choice is that the person involved responsibly consider the evidence and the alternatives, and that the evidence be in some way adequate for the decision. But the rigid Cliffordian standard is quite useless in these situations. So, according to a more complete ethics for believing — an ethics which includes a duty to find truth — a person’s decision to believe in God may be entirely compatible with his epistemic duties.

IV. Rationality and the Available Evidence (second criticism)

A. The Need for Evidence

We have just been considering a criticism of religious belief which focuses on the relationship between a believer and the belief that he holds. There is a second, but related, criticism which focuses on the relationship between the belief held and the evidence for or against it. Most philosophers say that any proposition which is believed must be based on appropriate evidence. The actual evidence, then, is the ultimate court of appeal, regardless of how conscientiously one reviews it. Just as a *person* can be criticized for not going through the proper process of forming a belief, the belief itself can be criticized for not measuring up to the evidence.

This second type of criticism is the one we now want to examine with respect to religious belief. The critic may say either that belief in God is *not supported* by available evidence or that it is *straight-*

forwardly falsified by the evidence. This kind of criticism is fairly common in the history of philosophy. The brilliant British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, was once asked what he would say if, after dying, he were brought into the presence of God and asked why he had not been a believer. According to Russell, “I’d say, ‘Not enough evidence God! Not enough evidence!’” I suppose that each of us could have some fun speculating how such a reply would be received! But Russell held, as many people have, that belief in God is irrational because there is *insufficient evidence* for it. Let us explore this criticism a little further.

B. What Is It for a Belief to Have Evidence?

Just what is it for a belief to have evidence or grounds? For our purposes, it is for one proposition, namely, the belief, to be justified by one or more other propositions. These other propositions already have some favored status in one’s thinking and hence can be used to gauge or measure the acceptability of other propositions. To cite proposition *B* as evidence for proposition *A*, then, is to indicate that one believes *A* on the basis of *B*, which he already believed. As an example, consider two propositions which provide evidence for a third.

(1) John is a Hoosier, and (2) Nine out of ten Hoosiers can play basketball. Thus, supply evidence for the proposition. (3) Probably, John can play basketball.

Evidence, as we now see, is simply some propositions offered to support other propositions. It is irrational to believe any proposition for which there are no pre-propositions which can be offered as a proper support.

C. Evidence and Foundationalism

As we continue to think about some propositions supporting others, we may ask whether the supporting propositions in turn have support, i.e., whether the evidence itself has evidence. Of course, this is a legitimate question. Many philosophers say this is exactly how knowledge and belief is structured — that there is a series of propositions in which each one is supported by others. In terms of our previous example, the proposition (1) John is a Hoosier, which served as evidence, may, in turn, rest on the propositions, (4) John filed an Indiana tax return last year, (5) John cheers for Indiana University sports, and (6) John frequently hums “Back Home Again

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in Indiana.” These last three propositions now serve as evidence for the preceding one; and each of these three could rest on further propositions, and so on.

However, a number of philosophers think we cannot just keep citing evidence for evidence for evidence indefinitely. As these philosophers see it, the process of citing some propositions to support others must come to an end. We must come to certain propositions for which there is no further evidence. Presumably, these propositions will be the most general, most basic, and most important propositions that all mankind believes. Although philosophers have differed somewhat over which and how many propositions form the foundations of human knowledge, there is much common agreement. The proposed list of such propositions frequently includes: the beliefs that self exists, other persons exist, material objects exist, there has been a past, etc. Such special propositions have been called the *foundations of knowledge*; and the philosophers who view knowledge in this way are called *foundationalists*. Philosophers who seem to hold some form of foundationalism include Aristotle, Aquinas, Thomas Reid, and G.E. Moore; I am also inclined to interpret Clifford as some sort of foundationalist.

When we adopt a *foundationalist view of knowledge* and envision the rest of our beliefs somehow resting upon a secure basis, we can see that no talk of evidence is complete unless it includes one’s *total* set of beliefs reaching all the way down into the foundational beliefs he holds. When we ask about the evidence for or against a proposition, we ultimately want to know how that proposition fares with respect to all of the relevant propositions in one’s storehouse of beliefs and not just with regard to a select few. Belief in a proposition would truly be irrational, we should think, if it did not square with the total evidence available in our set of beliefs.

D. Another Indictment of Religious Belief

It is now easy to see how a critic might use foundationalist thinking to say that religious belief is irrational. He might not want to bother with the weaker criticism that belief in God is disconfirmed by some beliefs in our noetic structure. Instead he might advance the stronger criticism that belief in God is disconfirmed by our total set of beliefs, or at least by the balance of our beliefs. But more pointedly, belief in God is unacceptable in light of the foundational beliefs we hold.

V. Is Religious Belief Contrary to Available Evidence? (second reply)

A. Giving the Critic His Due — Again

The criticism that religious belief is irrational because it does not have support by our overall structure of knowledge cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, there are a number of considerations which force us to take the criticism seriously. For one, the whole idea of belief having foundations is an attractive and often helpful theory. For another thing, it seems true that some religious believers cite weak or irrelevant evidence for their belief in God, making it appear perhaps that there is no better justification. However, the persistent critic will probably not be satisfied with only this mere concession.

B. Foundationalism and Atheism

The zealous critic will want to state his charge in the strongest possible way: that the foundational propositions on which all other human beliefs rest entail that God does *not* exist. The contemporary philosopher, Antony Flew, makes this point in his treatise, *The Presumption of Atheism*. Flew thinks that the common and normal belief structure of mankind is such that it discredits belief in God. Hence, belief in God is irrational. Since the presumption, according to Flew, is in favor of atheism, the heavy burden of proving God's existence rests squarely upon the shoulders of the believer.

C. Difficulties with Foundationalism

The question of whether the atheistic proposition "God does not exist" is included in or implied by the foundations of human belief meets with several difficulties. These difficulties are best understood as specific instances of larger and more general difficulties with foundationalism itself. To begin, there is a problem in specifying exactly which propositions are properly incorporated into the foundations. There is certainly no unanimous agreement about these propositions, and there is clearly no accepted criterion whereby we can detect the right propositions. There are some rough guidelines, to be sure: We suppose these basic beliefs to be relatively few in number, to be entailed by all or some of our other subsidiary beliefs, and so forth. But beyond this, nothing seems very definite.

Now the critic needs for the foundations to be very clear for his accusation to stick. He needs to be able to say that the proposition that God does not exist is *in* the foundations, or at least that it *can be*

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deduced from foundational propositions. But as long as different people might have important disagreements regarding the propositions which they count as basic, the critic cannot move so unilaterally against religious belief. According to the foundations of some people's beliefs, *belief in God* may be perfectly legitimate. Admittedly, according to the foundational beliefs of other people (e.g., Flew) *belief in God* may be *ruled out*. But this fact about the differences in what we count as basic is merely biographical information and not grounds for saying that belief in God is *irrational* with respect to *the* foundations of human knowledge.

D. God and Foundationalism

We have shown that there is no necessary reason to think belief that God *does not* exist is in the foundations of human knowledge. Now what can we say about whether the belief that God *does* exist is in the foundations? It appears that we must say that belief in God is not included in the foundations any more than it is excluded from them. As far as a typical list of our most basic beliefs goes, neither belief nor disbelief is necessitated. While this may at first sound a bit unsettling to the devout believer, I think that it is really more faithful to the Christian picture of how people come to belief in God. Granted, the Bible says that all men somehow have a consciousness of God or a belief in God. But it does not give us a philosophical analysis of whether this belief is foundational in the technical sense with which we are concerned.

For a proposition to be foundational, we must remember, it can serve as evidence for other propositions, but it is accepted without evidence. There are clear biblical passages which intimate that there are various evidences *for* God's existence, and which men may recognize if they will. These passages can readily be interpreted by the categories we have been using. To say that there is evidence for God's existence is to say that certain propositions about ourselves, the world, and so forth — together with our foundational beliefs — provided support for believing that God exists. This puts the Christian in the position of having to consider those evidences and recommend them to others. *Belief in God*, then, just like *disbelief in God*, cannot simply be a presumption or assumption for which we need have no evidence. But this means that belief in God is *not* in the foundations.

E. The Tradition of Natural Theology

So far, we have shown that belief in God is *not irrational* and that this belief is subject to evaluation by both favorable and unfavorable evidence. But we could press on to argue that belief in God is *positively rational*, that it is in fact confirmed by the evidence. A great many religious believers cite various evidences to support their position: that the world must have had a cause; that someone had to design the complex and orderly universe we have; that they have had a personal experience with the transcendent source of all creation; and so forth. Moreover, there is an inveterate tradition which has sharpened and sophisticated these kinds of arguments so that even the best of minds have had to take notice. This is the tradition of natural theology. The *Time* magazine story cited earlier follows the continuing attempts made by Christian philosophers to give rational support to religious belief.

Now I am not insinuating that such arguments and evidence compel just anyone and everyone who considers them to accept belief in God. No argument in any area of life (religion or otherwise) can do this. Neither am I pretending that there are no arguments and evidences brought against belief in God by thinking persons. There is the problem of evil in the world, the problem of the meaning and verification of theological language, and other arguments which seem to support disbelief.

What I am claiming is the arguments and evidences which thinking believers have developed certainly prevent the critic from stating that religious belief is outright irrational according to the evidence. The state of the debate over God's existence is just not that simple. All thinking people must sift and weigh the evidence for themselves. What thinking believers have done is to point out the legitimacy of sorting out the evidence to support belief in God. Hence, their efforts give us a clear right to say that belief in God's existence is rational.

VI. Vindication of Christian Belief (conclusion)

In closing, what shall we say in response to the primary question which constitutes the title of this paper? Is Christian belief rational? Of course, what we have done here is to look at only one aspect of this complex question, but a very fundamental aspect at that: Is belief in *God's existence* rational? We have seen what philosophers are saying about the rationality of any belief in general and about religious belief in particular.

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We have discovered the accusation that belief in God is irrational has force only when arbitrary or impossible standards of rationality are employed. Under close analysis, we find the most familiar standards of rationality are not capable of being captured in precise formulas. We have found religious belief fares reasonably well on the incomplete but important criteria of rationality that we do have. We have reaffirmed — with some new appreciation — a number of believers abide by a general ethic of rationality and provide impressive evidence for their religious position.

Therefore, I offer an answer to our initial question. There is no necessary reason to think that Christian belief — in so far as it rests on belief in God — is irrational. Instead, there are good grounds for claiming that it is indeed rational.

World Evangelization A Wesleyan Proposal

by Leon O. Hynson

For many years students of religion have wrestled with the so-called “scandal of particularity” of Christian faith, the claim or dogma of Christianity that Jesus Christ is the one Lord and Savior of mankind.¹ Propelled by the thrust of the Enlightenment, an attitude of human optimism and tendencies toward universalism challenged orthodox Christian attitudes toward the need for world evangelization.

The Gospel for the Whole World

The Reformation spawned a plethora of ideas and visions both conservative and revolutionary, but it failed to inspire a hope for world mission. As Gustav Warneck made clear in the late 19th Century,² the major Reformers were generally interested in other concerns than Jesus’ call to preach, teach, and disciple all nations. Much of their attention, and the energies of their successors, was focused on theological concord in the face of the common opponent. Ironically, the rise of Enlightenment was paralleled by an incipient concern for world evangelism. The Luthern pietists, Plutschau and Ziegenbalg, were followed by the missionaries of the Moravians (the “Unitas Fratrum”) who carried the gospel to North America. William Carey launched the “Great Century”³ with its commitment to the spreading of the Gospel. A host of great missionaries and mission movements dominated the 19th century. Adoniram Judson in Burma, David Livingstone in Africa, James Hudson Taylor in China, Robert Speer, the Student Volunteer Movement, and the Oriental Missionary Society are names calling up memories of a unique era in Christian world evangelization.

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Religious Syncretism

The passing years produced a counterforce to this Christian vision in liberalism's History of Religions School. Fueled by such thinkers as Ritschl, Harnack, Gunkel, and many more, the approach became reductionistic. Christianity was viewed as one religion among many. It was argued that the Middle East was a religious melting pot, that Jesus of Nazareth borrowed religious currents from Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and the "mystery religions," to create a synthetic Christianity. Occasionally, one hears echoes of this synthetic, if not syncretistic, religion of Jesus in contemporary teaching. It is easy to understand why Christian liberalism found great difficulty in perpetuating the missions' enterprise. Instead, evangelization of mankind was reinterpreted and sublimated to a process of education, emphasis on the value of indigenous religion, and insistence upon mutual respect for the "varieties of religious experience," to use William James' phrase.

The rise of "religious consciousness" in the Third World, notably an aggressive Islam, as well as a missionary zeal emanating from Buddhism, Hinduism, and scores of cultic variations, particularly in America, has shattered the tolerant illusions of a universal religion. Arnold Toynbee sought to overcome a limiting Judeo-Christian monotheism, the vision of a jealous God who permitted no other gods to stand alongside Him.⁴ William Ernest Hocking desired a world faith, proposing a "reconception" which would draw the highest values of various religions into an ascending structure. The "world faith" would be a dynamic integration releasing mankind from the "tragedy" of competitive offers of salvation.⁵

The New Orthodoxy

In a contrary perspective neoorthodoxy lashed out against liberal latitudinarianism, asserting that only one vision is enduring, that which came from the divine invasion of history. All "religion" is an idolatrous and human reach for salvation but in the incarnation of Jesus the Christ one finds God's reach toward man. The religions arise out of history; they have nothing to do with the history of salvation. Against arguments like that of Heinz Schlette, who argued that adherents of other religions were saved *because* of their faith,⁶ Barth, Hendrick Kraemer, and Edmund Perry, among many, insisted that no authentic saving vision arises via the natural or created order.⁷ Barth, educated in the mediating tendencies of liberal

thought, rebelled with a passion during the painful era of World War I. Yet Barth himself did not address world evangelization with clarity, offering a “Christological universalism” which vitiates the call of Jesus Christ to world evangelization.⁸

The Fading Vision

Surely it is ironic that the declining vision of world evangelization among mainline Christian churches should be paralleled by an enhanced missionary zeal among other religions. The complacency of evangelical Christianity, a multitude numbering in the millions in the United States alone, reflects an accommodation to the prevailing culture. The equation of success, especially material aggrandizement with the blessing of God, has infected many American evangelicals. This coming-to-terms with a success ethic has been paralleled by a diffidence toward winning the world to Christ. Many of these same persons have been anesthetized by the “apocalyptic pessimism” of Christian writers who confidently write of the darkening skies of civilization, the final holocaust, and the end of the age. Dwight L. Moody, who fervently preached this “gospel,” nevertheless sought to rescue as many souls from the sinking ship as possible. His “lifeboat” theology has been adopted by too few of his theological heirs who await the end in a kind of numbed passivity.

A Renewed Call to Mission

In the face of these historical and theological assessments, there stands the uncompromising call of Jesus. The church was founded as a divine community. Jesus announced to His disciples that the very life of the church was given for the purpose of evangelism. His concern transcended the provincial political hopes of his followers and reached toward the uttermost parts of the earth. The power to carry off the Christian mission was promised and given. Acts 1:8 is the paradigm for the history of missions, announcing the global nature of the church’s task and the energy resources for accomplishing the work until the end comes. The Apocalypse of John announces that the church will stand in the splendor of Christ’s victory. Surely, Christ’s kingdom of love will prevail.

A Wesleyan Theology for Mission

In a very real sense, the resurgence of a zealous missionary spirit in the world, makes the Christian apologetic burden less acute. If this is

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so, the primary concern to preach the Word may occupy greater attention by Christian believers. The apologetic task, of course, never ends, but the evangelical vision must always be the end of our efforts. Wesleyanism has always recognized and fleshed out that priority in active evangelization.

The purpose of this essay may now be broached. In the face of an uncertain Christian response to world evangelization, what may the Wesleyan heritage offer to the theology of mission? Where does it stand vis-a-vis liberalism, neoorthodoxy, contemporary evangelicalism, and fundamentalism? The thesis proposed here is that Wesleyanism offers both a theology and praxis of mission; that it proposes in its theology of Christian perfection the motivating force for carrying it out; and that it seeks to achieve this end while recognizing the tension between tolerance of another's *right* to the "free exercise of religion" and the Christian's faith-mandated right to offer Christ to everyone, regardless of personal religious persuasion.

A Wesleyan Theology for World Evangelization — Ecumenical Themes

In the Wesleyan heritage a precise theology of mission is readily apparent. While limited attention has been placed upon early Methodism's contribution to world missions, there is a consistent theology which lends credence to the world mission's enterprise. Paul Schilling has demonstrated that Wesley's view of the church includes particularly its mission.⁹ Manifested in his view of the church, it was fleshed out in his ministry in America and in his commissioning of missionaries to minister to America in the last third of the century.

To detail and interpret this theology of mission, we employ the term "ecumenical." This word evokes many responses today, but in its original sense *oikoumene* meant "the inhabited world." It referred to something possessing universal scope or significance. The seven church councils from A.D. 325-787 became known as ecumenical councils. Bishops from the entire world of Christendom were present and the theological issues they debated and clarified became dogma for the whole Christian world.

This essay employs "ecumenical" as descriptive of those Wesleyan doctrines which have application to the whole world to which the Christian mission is carried. In essence, distinctive Wesleyan insights are recognized to be ecumenical (or universal) in application and scope. The word "ecumenical" is employed to categorize these

doctrines in preference to “universal.” Why? In dealing with the doctrine of universal grace it is a short step in nomenclature to universalism or the doctrine of the salvation of all. While the use of “ecumenical” has its own problems, it does express (or is meant to express) a set of theological convictions which speak to the universal human dilemma. These teachings do not address universal problems like sin, salvation, or human responsibility with restrictive answers.

The term “ecumenical” delineates the distinctive Wesleyan belief in the promise of cosmic soteriology. Wesleyan thought supersedes both the soteriological restrictions of Reformed theology with its “particularism of grace” (Max Weber) and the ultimate removal of all divine boundaries implicit in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and explicit in the propositions offered by Origen of Alexandria, or in certain expressions of modern religious liberalism. To be more precise, Reformed theology affirmed human sinfulness as universal, while restricting the possibility of salvation. Chardin’s vision of the “omega point,” a metaphor for Jesus Christ, drew upon the hypothesis of human evolution as an analogy of the divine impulse toward universal salvation. Burdening this optimistic dream is the shadow side of human existence wherein responsible man in freedom chooses to opt out of this cosmic ascent. Teilhard did not take human sin and free agency with adequate seriousness.

Origen did not overrate human potential (or underrate sin). Nevertheless his conception of the ultimate restoration of all things, rests upon a slender base. Erecting his structure upon the Pauline eschatology in Romans eight, he failed to consider adequately Romans 1-7. Moreover, Romans 9 and 10 do not present a view of a sovereign God whose will is capricious. Rather God declares that salvation is free to those who freely believe. And whoever will come may come. God’s will has made man’s will free, truly responsible for his decisions.

Religious liberalism maximized human progress and the infinite potential of human reason. Asserting a radical conception of divine immanence, liberalism believed that the divine in every one would overcome the retarding drag of ignorance and selfishness. Thus, we recognize a contemporary version of the doctrine of universalism.

The Wesleyan ecumenical doctrines steer between the rocks of Reformed particularism and the universalism of Origen, Chardin, or liberalism. The Wesleyan positions are inclusive in that they apply to all persons in the world. Because they address the whole human race

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without the intrusions of social, economic, or theological elitism, they offer a powerful rationale for world evangelization. (Their importance for social ethics also are so powerful they must not be overlooked.)¹⁰

Christian evangelism must be ecumenical. It cannot rest upon provincial doctrines, whether social or theological, and expect to carry out its task. For evangelism is by definition and by Christ's mandate ecumenical (to and for the inhabited world). The grace of God which proffers salvation is an ecumenical teaching. Christ's death, man's free agency, the possibility of faith, the possibility of perfection, the holism grounded in God's creative order are central to this ecumenical theology. There is no element of elitism in Wesleyan thought; no particularism of grace, freedom, faith, perfection, or human value. If perfectionism has appeared to possess an elitist or particularist image, it is because both within and without Wesleyanism the promise of perfection has been wrongly judged to be for the few. Wesleyanism interprets the fulness of the Spirit as God's promise to *all* who believe. These teachings give evangelism a theological undergirding, which makes evangelism both logical, mandatory, and possible.

Wesleyan theology offers such promise to world evangelization because it moves from the simple premise that Christ died for all, and that everyone who believes this will be saved. It is acknowledged that not all *are* or *will be* saved but that all *may be saved*. Wesley rarely concerned himself with the question: "Will the heathen be lost?" He spent himself in mission preaching for sixty years. Wesley was the man of the "world parish" and his successors have faithfully pursued the cause of missions to the ends of the earth. This was the theology of:

Universal Grace

Wesley was convinced that the grace of God is made available to every man and woman in the world. Through grace every person is free to accept God's love in Christ. The Pauline affirmation in Romans 9 and 10 that those who believe are God's elect became Wesley's *apologia* for evangelism. This did not mean that anyone could act in faith prior to God's action. God's call to man always precedes any human step and makes that step possible. That all may come to Christ, because of God's determining decision before the foundation of the world, permeated Wesley's thinking and made his

commitment to world evangelism valid. The biblical claim that all who hear may be saved, spurred Wesley to proclaim the message across the land. In ethical terms this means that every person is privileged for all may possess eternal life.

If God calls every human being, then Christian evangelism has a fruitful field in which to work. The field is the world! The canon law of the Church of England circumscribed the sphere of ministry. Intended to prevent disorderly efforts by unauthorized evangelists, the law of 1604 resulted in the restriction of evangelism and spiritual and social reform. The Church of England was by most indicators a sleeping giant. Its ministry was elitist, neglecting the poor and oppressed. Samuel Pepys in his *Diary* portrayed the Church as generally shallow, while Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub* presented it as noisy and slovenly. Protestantism was presented by Swift as self-seeking and vacillating. The Church which Elizabeth I so significantly shaped was a structure of moderation conceived to contain the forms and expressions of a church committed to the *via media*. It feared exaggeration and enthusiasm. Evangelism implies a passionate concern to win the souls and minds of the uncommitted. The Church of England was not convinced of the essential truth of human sinfulness. Too engrossed in the politics of the social order, the clergy were unprepared to carry out the evangelical imperative. Sir Godfrey Copley spoke of the church: "It is fit for the people, subject to the laws and most suitable for the clergy. For here, without care, without thought and, without trouble, honour and ease are enjoyed at once. . . ." Peter Gay concluded in his work, *The Enlightenment*: "These were the professional soldiers of Christianity, living without care, without thought, and without trouble."¹¹

Into that largely dormant church Wesley moved with his gospel of salvation for all. The message was revolutionary. The Wesleyan revolution was grounded not in political rights, such as John Locke had taught, but in free grace for everyone. Wesley's message was not an appeal to class, based upon human criterion or promise, but upon God's decision. The human wreckage of Gin Lane, portrayed so powerfully by the artist Hogarth, became hymn singers:

For this (no longer sons of night)
To Thee our thankful hearts are given
To Thee who called us into light
To Thee we die, to Thee we live.

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Suffice that for the season past
Hell's horrid language filled our tongues
We all Thy words behind us cast,
And loudly sang the drunkard's songs.

But, O the power of grace divine
In hymns we now our voices raise.

The doctrine of universal grace is in full accord with the mandate to world evangelism. If God's grace is free to all men, there must be no hesitance concerning its announcement to all. Jesus' commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth is illogical unless the message is truly free for all. A clear corollary of this is that all need the message. The Reformed opinion that grace is sufficient for all but that it is not efficient to all limits the call for world evangelization. Wesleyans think that universal grace is a divinely legitimated offer. There is no person who is not under grace. God has predetermined through His grace that all will be called, given the gift of faith, and the freedom either to "work" that faith or to sustain a self-trust which is the essence of original sin.

Universal Sinfulness — Human Inability

A second point of theological pertinence for evangelism in the Wesleyan model is the belief in original sin (or the fatal flaw, or the "loathsome leprosy" as Wesley described it.)¹² Here it may appear that Wesley may be holding a contrary doctrinal point. How do you hold in theological balance a view of radical sinfulness with a view of universal grace? The answer is found in Wesley's concept of prevenient grace.

Wesley's view of man, as he would be if grace were withheld, was as gloomy as Augustine, Calvin, and Luther's views. It was a doctrine of radical evil which even Reinhold Niebuhr could appreciate.

Wesley held no Utopian misconceptions of the human possibility apart from grace. In his long tract on "original sin" he lamented the irrationality of the "reasonable" man. With Dean Swift he satirized the tragic aberrations and fatal departures from goodness and truth in man's experiences. Taking war as his illustration he wrote:

What must mankind be, before such a thing as war could ever be known or thought of upon earth? How shocking,

how inconceivable a want must there have been of common understanding as well as common humanity before . . . any two nations in the Universe could once think of such a method of decision? If, then, all nations, . . . do, in fact, make this their last resort, what further proof do we need of the utter degeneracy of all nations from the plainest principles of reason and virtue? Of the absolute want, both of common sense and common humanity, which runs through the whole race of mankind.¹³

We may debate the analogies which Wesley used to describe the presence of sin in the human spirit. He was sometimes Augustinian without carrying his doctrine to Augustinian extremes. Augustine was never able to make an adequate distinction between sexuality and sinfulness. Wesley avoided that, for all his naivete regarding women. His analogies for diagnosing the recurrent presence of sin are varied. Robert Chiles in *Theological Transitions in American Methodism — 1790-1935* describes Wesley's approach:

“Sin is not so much ontological degradation or demolition of human reality as it is illness or contagion; not so much biological and sub-personal distortion as it is an inversion of relationships involving motive and intention.”¹⁴

However Wesley defined it, the more important fact is that he saw man's recurrent tragic failure, his consistent sinfulness, his estrangement from God and neighbor. Wesley knew that man needs to be saved, to be made whole in his personal and social relations.

Many persons who happily identify with the Wesleyan heritage have had difficulty with Wesley's assessment of human nature. In America there has been a clear tendency toward moralistic assessments. The assumption is that education regarding human lapses and errors will lead to correction. In Chiles's study (a great study, I think) American Methodism has tended to move away from “free grace to free will” and from “sinful man to moral man.”¹⁵ That tendency toward moralism was very characteristic of Wesley's own era. His contemporary, Thomas Jones of Saultwark, wrote:

“We have preached morality so long that we have hardly any morality left; and this moral preaching has made our people

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so very immoral that there are no lengths of wickedness which they are not afraid of running into.”¹⁶

This radical disease, flaw, or leprosy, requires the healing of grace. Too often we have yielded to despair at the persistence of evil in our fellowmen, until the experience of the other person becomes the experience of hell. Harry Emerson Fosdick, no slouch when it came to affirmations of man’s potential, delivered a sermon on “The Modern World’s Rediscovery of Sin.”

“Liberal Christianity . . . has on the whole been complacent about human nature. Now, however, we face a difficult era, with such cruel and depraved things afoot in the world as some of us have never seen before. Today we and our hopes and all our efforts of goodness are up against a powerful antagonism, something demonic, tragic, terrific in human nature, that turns our loveliest qualities to evil and our finest endeavors into failure. Our fathers called that sin. If you have a better name for it, use it, but recognize the realistic fact.”

Fosdick called for repentance since “we need Christ’s radical remedy for our radical disease.”¹⁷

In evangelism, Wesley never tried to cover up this tragic feature of man’s existence. It was complementary to his total message, his familiar theme: “Offering Christ.” To sinful men, Wesley offered Christ; Christ was moral exemplar, but much more, He was savior from sin. Expressed therapeutically, He was healer of persons disoriented and diseased.

Human Responsibility — The Doctrine of Prevenient Grace

One of the distinctive Wesleyan themes is prevenient grace (the preceding grace of God; grace prior to human decision or action). In essence prevenient grace is *God’s preparatory work for evangelism*. Before the bearer of the good news proclaims his Word of reconciliation, God has prepared the soil. In Wesleyan thought, the fall of man is the fountain from which flows the rivers and oceans of human tragedy. Nevertheless, unlike the Reformed theology of depravity, Wesley’s theology stresses a divine gift for the fallen. God’s grace has intervened, long before purely human decision or

possibility arose. In his prevenient grace God determined, without any human contribution whatever, that all would receive the gift of conscience, free will, and the possibility of faith. Therefore, whenever anyone believes, that act rests upon the divine gift which makes faith possible.

God's grace is not an afterthought, a broken play in a cosmic football game. Grace is *His story*, the story of God accepting the consequences of man's willful misuse of His gifts, man's assertion of independence, man's rebellion against his creaturehood, man's desire to ascend to the status of God. Grace is God having chosen us before the world was formed.

Grace is God's prerequisite for evangelism, the *sine qua non* of salvation. Before human persons may respond, God acts. Man's responsibility is just that — response. Response to the action of another. Christian evangelism is based on a divine precedent. John Wesley wrote to Isaac Andrews in 1784:

“Undoubtedly faith is *the work of God*: and yet it is *the duty* of man to believe. And every man may believe *if* he will, though not *when* he will. If he seek faith in the appointed ways, sooner or later the power of the Lord will be present, whereby (1) God works, and by His power (2) man believes.”¹⁸

Wesley is precise in his theology of grace. Man may believe *if* he will, but not *when* he will. The *if* of faith is based on what God has made possible through the grace that precedes man's decision. The *when* is based upon the hearing of the Word, as Romans 10 teaches: “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

For Wesley, prevenient grace is a crucial theological foundation in the preaching of universal grace. God has acted sovereignly to make salvation freely available. No one is excluded by God. Only man may refuse it, but it may be refused. That is the dark side of the coin of free will.

The precedence of grace means that evangelism is possible. When the Gospel is preached, the prior work of God makes it possible that the saving work may be received by faith. Jesus' parable of the sower teaches the prospect of success and failure. Evangelism will not be uniformly successful because man's response is shaped not only by the Word but, contrarily, by the will of the hearer. There will be the

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trampled wayside soil where the good news cannot germinate. Nevertheless, God's Spirit is at work everywhere, preparing people even before the bearer of the message arrives. Expressed in the terms which Karl Barth and Emil Brunner debated with such vigor, there is a "point of contact" between God and man. That "point of contact" is not grounded in an order of creation, but in the order of reconciliation, that is, in prevenient grace.

The Appeal to Uncoerced Decision

If human responsibility is taken seriously, evangelism must be, as Wesley succinctly defined it, "offering Christ." In the Wesleyan heritage, evangelism is a gracious ministry characterized by compassion and respect. Wesley could not approve the tactics of those who employed either psychological, social, or theological forms of coercion to "assist" a person in reaching a decision. This is why he could not accept the Roman Catholic approach to evangelism since it, in his experience, was based upon a kind of persuasion that contradicts human integrity. When Wesley preached the message of Christ he declared it with "sense and grace."¹⁹

Wesley appealed to conscience and will. Conscience must be unfettered by religious or social sanctions. It is the expression of the essential freedom of humanity. The appeal of the evangel may be earnest, persuasive, and logical, but never coercive. If the decision is negative, that must be respected; if the choice is in error, the evangel must yield. The only option the messenger has is the continuance of the gracious spirit.

Wesley's abhorrence of religious constraint was based upon his reading and understanding of English religious intolerance. His Puritan forebears had suffered at the hands of the Restoration monarchy of Charles II. Much of the English monarchy prior to the Glorious Revolution were heavy-handed, narrow, and sometimes barbaric in their repression of religious dissidents. Wesley claimed that English liberty began with the Revolution.²⁰

One of the early Wesleyan hymns reflects the struggle to overcome the spirit of antipathy to persons of differing faiths:

The Spirit of my foes I caught,
 The angry, bitter zeal;
And fierce for my own party fought,
 And breathed the fire of hell.

Threat'ning I did and slaughter breathe,
(The flail of heresy),
And doom the sects to bonds, or death,
That did not think with me.

To propagate the truth, I fought
With fury and despite;
And, in my zeal for Israel, sought
To slay the Gibeonite.

“The temple of the Lord are we!”
And all who dared deny,
I would not have their conscience free,
But force them to comply.

With wholesome discipline severe
To conquer them I strove,
And drive into the pale through fear,
Who would not come through love.

Lord, I abhor, renounce, abjure,
The fiery spirit unclean,
The persecuting zeal impure,
The sin-opposing sin.

Let others draw, with fierce despite,
The eradicating sword,
And with the devil's weapons fight,
The battles of the Lord.

But O! my gracious God, to me
A better spirit impart;
The gentle mind that was in Thee,
The meekly loving heart.

The heart whose charity o'er flows
To all, far off, and near;
True charity to friends and foes,
Impartially sincere.

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*Heathens, and Jews, and Turks, may I,
And heretics embrace;
Nor e'en to Rome the love deny
I owe to all the race.*²¹

Discussing the crisis of conscience which affects family relations, Wesley asked: May a father in conscience prevent his wife and children from hearing even false teaching?

“Suppose your censure was just, and this was actually false doctrine. Still every one must give an account of himself to God; and you cannot compel another to see as you see; you ought not to attempt it. Reason and persuasion are the only weapons you ought to use, even toward your own wife and children.”²²

Wesley's personal experience was set almost exclusively in the British Isles, with a two-year missionary stint in America, and a short summer at Zinzendorf's Herrnhut in 1738. Nevertheless, as he so eloquently expressed it, he saw the whole world as his parish. When asked why he was making the journey to Georgia in 1735, he answered: “Why for a very plain reason. Because these heathens at home have Moses and the prophets, and those have not. Because these who *have* the gospel trample upon it, and those who have it not earnestly call for it. . . .”²³

Despite his limited personal involvement in mission, Wesley recognized its legitimacy, and its imperatives. As a pietist who affirmed the priority of experienced faith over its doctrinal verbalizations, Wesley's tolerance could be expanded to allow that a Muslim might be saved. That decision was God's, not man's. One may even debate whether Wesley allowed that the un-evangelized heathen (who still was blessed by prevenient grace) might be saved.²⁴ Nevertheless, the recurrent theme of Wesley's sixty years of ministry was Christ, and his consistent commitment was “offering Christ.” Compared to this task, these other questions were merely passing reflections.

If we emulate Wesley's fervent, yet tolerant spirit in world evangelization, we will be unremitting in our work as heralds of Christ. There will be no compromise on that point. Recognizing that God's prevenient grace has paved the way in the human mind and

spirit, the evangel will seek to persuade every hearer to believe. There will be no coercion except the appeal of Christ. No manipulation will be permitted, no dirty tricks. Even the right to be wrong will be recognized. Wesley believed strongly that every person stands responsible before God. The focus on human responsibility is an important ingredient in a Wesleyan theology of world evangelization. One cannot reconcile belief both in free agency and coercive evangelism. However, a humanistic tolerance cannot be reconciled with Wesley's passion to win men to Christ.

W.K. Jordan, author of *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*, proposes a "philosophical toleration" which suggests readiness to concede to other persons the right to their own faith while maintaining one's own faith. He insists that a Christian who possesses an "evangelical intelligence," committed to evangelism, cannot exercise such tolerance.²⁵ Wesley, in fact, has pointed the way. He has not removed the "scandal of particularity" from Christian faith. His recognition of the conception of "common humanity" permits a respect for other persons which mediates both passionate intolerance and tepid tolerance of any position however exotic or extreme.

Human Wholeness — The Promise of Perfection

One more theme in Wesleyan thought expresses the promise of the Gospel to bring wholeness to humanity. The doctrine of Christian perfection, so inherently central to Wesleyan/Methodist contributions to Christian faith, belongs to the church's theology of mission.

What does Christian perfection offer to a strategy of world evangelization? Preeminently it holds forth the promise of divine love to a world alienated from the wholeness of the original creation. The essence of Christian perfection is wholeness; this is the meaning of the Greek word *teleiosis*. *Teleiosis* is the completeness or perfection of love.

Christian perfection is a doctrine large enough to offer healing for the whole earth. It is contained in the redemptive offering of Jesus Christ and in the pledge of the Holy Spirit. In the divine economy of salvation, the Father's will, before all creation, predetermined that whosoever will may enter into the fullness of God. Justification by grace through faith alone opens the way and Christian perfection, which is the way from justification to final glory, draws the believer onward to the perfection of the divine image in humanity. Wesley

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wrote: “By salvation I mean . . . a restoration of the soul to its primitive health.”²⁶

In a world obsessed with tragedy, thirst for power, and violence, it is no simple choice to opt for and to articulate faithfully the promise of perfection. Has not Reinhold Niebuhr, the guru of Christian realism, asserted that any pretension to perfection requires that we skip blithely over the boiling caldron of sinful imperfection which is discoverable just beneath the surface of our illusion? Have we not forgotten the lessons of Romans seven?

The Wesleyan message points the way toward overcoming the “pessimism of nature” by the “optimism of grace” (to recall Gordon Rupp’s distinction). Romans seven is one of the Scripture’s starkest pictures of spiritual and psychological warfare within the awakened sinner’s life. Wesley as we have seen faced the problem of sin squarely. Without God and grace, sinful humanity’s freedom to will always means willing to do evil. However, the somber shadows of Romans seven are driven away by the brightness of Romans eight. There St. Paul presents the cosmic expansion of the saving work of Christ. Salvation in that magnificent chapter moves from individual sonship to the restoration of the whole created order. That is the universalism of the Gospel, interpreted to us by Paul, and at the heart of Wesley’s preaching. Not the ultimate restoration of all things after the fashion of Origen, but the salvation of whosoever will and the restoration of the creation which sighs for the dawning day when its subjection to vanity will be succeeded by “deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21). That many will choose not to enter God’s glorious drive toward the restoration of all creation, Wesley has no doubt. Tragically, the shadow side of human free will means final separation from God. The goal of God’s reconciling work in Christ is the final salvation of whoever *will* be saved *along with* those creatures and that creation which awaits the pleasure of humankind. The ultimate irony is that the wholeness of God belongs to everyone and everything He created, *except* those who bear the image of God in freedom but who prostitute that greatest of gifts (speaking within the order of creation) to the service of self.

The church in mission is *motivated* by the concept of perfect love. Out of this inspiration comes the vision which the world awaits and for which it longs (because prevenient grace is at work in humanity). The perfection of love entails purity of life (personal ethics) and

active love (social ethics). It expresses a relationship which unites the infinite energy of God with the vast potential of his creature — man and woman. Whereas the concept of Christian love in some of Wesley's mentors (William Law, Lorenzo Scupoli, or Thomas a Kempis) is suppliant, submissive, or passive, in Wesley it becomes aggressively active, vigorous, and energetic.

Wesley's conflict with Count Zinzendorf illustrates the point. Daniel Benham, a Moravian apologist, expressed it squarely:

“Wesley desired to give a prominent place in his system . . . to the doctrine of an *active love*, proceeding from the *new birth* and faith; . . . and to the doctrine of the furtherance of this *active love* by the *means of grace in the church*. Zinzendorf . . . allowed of none other than a *grateful love*. . . .”²⁷

The difference is plain to see.

Wesley's theology of perfect love has immediate relevance both for evangelism and ethics. In evangelism it works out in two ways. First, the love of God and the neighbor find an intersection and unity in the heart and mind of the evangelist. To suggest that perfect love is the basis of a compulsion to share the good news is to state the obvious. Love leads to evangelism in the Wesleyan sense which means the call to share with others — “to invite, to convince, to offer Christ, to build up — and to do this in some measure, in every sermon.”²⁸ The evangelist must nurture his converts.

Perfect love could have no standing ground if it didn't issue in evangelism, in the replication of Christ in other lives. Outler writes: “For Wesley, the scope of evangelism was never less than the fulness of Christian experience — ‘holiness of heart and life conformable to the same’ — and he never faltered in this insistence even when his societies began to bulge and Methodism began to be respectable.”²⁹

The *second* point of significance for evangelism in this teaching is the positive dimension of process, improvement, and growth. As the believer *is and becomes* perfect in love, he moves toward a *telos*, the image of Christ. That a doctrine of progress is needed in the theology of Christian life is self-evident. The concept of love's perfection summarizes that doctrine for believers, and the church. In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley stressed the improvable character of perfection. Perfect love is an attractive theological doctrine emphasizing the whole process of salvation in the whole life

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of the Christian. Evangelism which incorporates teleology is positive evangelism.

For social ethics, the doctrine of perfection contains the promise of progress. In both personal and social ethics there must be a solid basis for improvement. W.R. Cannon insists that Wesley's doctrine gives depth and force to social schemes of reconstruction and plans for the improvement of mankind.³⁰

Teilhard de Chardin has written: "An animal may rush headlong down a blind alley or towards a precipice. Man will never take a step in a direction he knows to be blocked."³¹

In Wesley's doctrine of perfect love — love of God and neighbor — are linked together personal and social ethics. Wesley was convinced, and stated his conviction, that perfect love leads to concern for sick, poor, deprived, widow, and alienated persons.

Perfect love at work in the world! John Wesley "grasped the secret of the Word made social, and of the faith that works by love not only in the heart but in the world as well."³² Wesley's grand dictum explaining the *raison d'être* of Methodism was, "To reform the nation and especially the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land." The Wesleyan heritage had and has a reformist mission which is linked to the doctrine of perfect love; a distinctive conjunction of reform and perfection.

Wesley represents the reformer who by exemplifying and amplifying the idea of love for God and neighbor, works to bring about the transformation of society. Perfect love leads to social change, to involvement in the world. Carl Michalson had declared that perfect love prepares a person to enter the world, freed from the idolatries of the world order, liberated to assume responsibility for the world, and to work for its transformation.³³

The Wesleyan commitment to wholeness speaks volumes to the needs of our world, searching for liberation, and finding in many promises of liberation — economic, psychological, social, or religious — the narrowing and confining of our borders of hope. Marxism has long since exploded its pristine illusions and revealed that behind the facade of beauty there crouches the beast.

Wesley's "liberation theology" is, first, starkly realistic in its assessment of the human dilemma, and, second, bright with hope in its vision of what earth may be. Wesleyan theology affirms the poetry of promise offered by Charles Wesley.

Our earth we now lament to see
With floods of wickedness o'erflow'd
With violence, wrong and cruelty,
One wide-extended field of blood
Where men like fiends each other tear
In all the hellish arts of war.

O might the universal Friend
This havoc of His creatures see!
Bid our unnatural discord end;
Declare reconcil'd in Thee;
Write kindness on our hidden parts,
And chase the murderer from our hearts.

Who now against each other rise,
The nations of the earth constrain
To follow after peace, and prize
The blessings of Thy righteous reign
The joys of unity to prove,
The paradise of perfect love.

Christian perfection — driving toward the healing and wholeness of every person and the created order. This is the message of the Wesleys and their inheritors. With it the theology of mission finds a promised apex. The “particularism of grace” has been overcome, encompassed and expanded into an *oikoumene*, “for the whole inhabited earth.”

Footnotes

¹Walter M. Horton, in his concern to develop an ecumenical approach to Christian theology, nevertheless is bold to insist:

“It ought never to be denied, and it cannot finally be concealed, that Christians are united in final loyalty to one Lord, who is for them the Savior of the whole world, and whose authority for them takes precedence over every earthly authority whatsoever.” See his *Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach*, Revised Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 296.

He cites the Jerusalem missionary conference of 1928:

“Our message is Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of what God is, and what

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men through Him may become.” Of this statement Horton writes, “This is an offensive and scandalous claim, a stumbling block to intolerant Moslems and a foolishness to tolerant Hindus and Buddhists; but it is the heart of the Christian faith and must be candidly confessed as such.”

When attention is given to Vatican II’s decree on “Non-Christian Religions,” the note of affirmation and toleration is seen as dominant. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are praised for their profound search for truth. Separated from the decree on “The Church’s Missionary Activity” this decree seems to offer an unusual approval of these faiths, a close approximation to the “many paths to God” position. But the second decree removes any doubt that Vatican II is unfaithful to the principle of world evangelization. See Walter M. Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), pp. 580-633, 656-671.

²Gustav Warnecke, *Evangelische Missionslehre*. See Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964).

³Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937-45). See especially volumes IV, V, and VI.

⁴Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian’s Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956). See my essay, “Toynbee’s Approach to the History of Religions,” *Journal of Religious Thought* (Spring-Summer, 1977), pp. 40-48.

⁵William Ernest Hocking, *Living Religions and A World Faith* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. 190-208.

⁶Heinz R. Schlette, *Towards A Theology of Religions* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966) pp. 63-107.

⁷Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933); Hendrik Kraemer, *Why Christianity of All Religions?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); Edmund Perry, *The Gospel in Dispute* (Garden City New York, 1958). Barth, of course, presented another aspect in his *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961). See Horton, pp. 298-304 on the neo-Orthodox position.

⁸See Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1969), pp. 93-98. Whether Barth was a universalist is certainly a debated issue. I simply claim that his views weakened concern for world evangelization.

⁹See Gerald Anderson, ed., *Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), for essays by ten major Methodist scholars. With the exception of S. Paul Schilling’s, “The Church and Its Ministry,” pp. 17-41, the Wesleyan basis is virtually overlooked. Why? The same criticism is addressed to Dow Kirkpatrick, ed., *The Finality of Christ* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966) written primarily by Methodists.

¹⁰See my essay, “The Church and Social Transformation: An Ethics of the Spirit,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring, 1976), pp. 49-61. Also published in *Evangelical Review of Theology* (April 1979), pp. 82-95.

¹¹Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), p. 345.

¹²Wesley, *Sermons I*, ed., William Sugden, 5th edition (London: Epworth Press, 1961), p. 323.

¹³Wesley, *Works IX*, “The Doctrine of Original Sin,” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958-59), p. 222.

¹⁴(New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 122.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, chapters 4 and 5.

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¹⁶Quoted in Arthur Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart: John Wesley Evangelist* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1967).

¹⁷Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Living Under Tension* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), pp. 112-13, 120.

¹⁸Wesley, *Letters*, VII (London: Epworth Press, 1931), pp. 202-203.

¹⁹See his comment on "Gospel preaching," quoted in Gerald Ensley, *John Wesley Evangelist* (Nashville: Tidings, 1958), p. 42.

²⁰*Works*, XI, p. 137.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 194-95, "A Word to a Protestant."

²²*Ibid.*, VIII, p. 125, "A Farther Appeal."

²³*Letters* I, "To the Rev'd John Burton" (October 19, 1735), pp. 188-91.

²⁴See his comments on Romans 2 in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1966), pp. 523-525.

²⁵See Jordan's concept in Volume I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), p. 16.

²⁶*Works*, VIII, p. 47. Examination of the Wesley hymns show the important correlation of holiness, health, and wholeness, e.g., in "Love Divine."

Finish then Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in Thee.

Even more explicit in these hymns are the motifs of holiness and wholeness:

O come, and dwell in me,
Spirit of power within!
And bring the glorious liberty,
From sorrow, fear, and sin.
The seed of sin's disease,
Spirit of health, remove,
Spirit of finish'd holiness,
Spirit of perfect love.

Or:

Saviour from sin, I want to prove
That Jesus is Thy healing name:
To lose, when perfected in love,
Whate'er I have, or can, or am;
I stay me on Thy faithful Word,
"The servant shall be as his Lord."

²⁷Daniel Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1856), p. 112.

²⁸Cf. the "Large Minutes" (1744) I, p. 23, cited in Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), p. 97 n.3.

²⁹*Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), p. 24.

³⁰Outler, *Theology*, p. viii. Foreword by William R. Cannon.

³¹*The Phenomenon of Man* (N.Y., Harper & Row, 1959), 229.

³²Outler, *Evangelism*, p. 26.

³³Carl Michalson, *Worldly Theology: The Hermeneutical Focus of an Historical Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 155.

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Healing for Damaged Emotions, by David Seamands. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1981. 144 pp., \$3.95, paperback.

A little classic! The book deals in astonishingly realistic terms with those who have memory banks heavily weighted down with guilt, personal wounds, low self-esteem, deadly perfectionistic conditioning and depression. The author has discovered, not only for himself but for others, ways and means of finding answers to the pains of human existence. Reading this book is a therapeutic experience.

Pastors should study this book carefully for their own personal growth and as a resource for sermon building. Dr. Seamands' material is not only therapeutic, it is also homiletical. Pastors and Sunday school teachers should note the availability of a study guide to go along with this book as an aid for group discussions.

Unfortunately, this little volume does not carry an index.

Donald E. Demaray
Granger E. and Anna A. Fisher Professor of Preaching
Asbury Theological Seminary

A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, Vol. 2, Romans — Revelation, by Fritz Rienecker. Translated and revised by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980. 518 pp.

In many ways this book is an excellent help for those who are uncertain or insecure in their abilities to work with the Greek of the New Testament. It treats the major or focal terms of each verse, translating and giving the basic meanings for most words, amplifying certain terms in the light of the context (Jewish, Hellenistic, Roman), and providing references to sources which supply complete studies of the terms or phrases under consideration. Substantives and adjectives are given in the nominative case to facilitate the use of a lexicon or dictionary, and most verb forms are parsed and the basic form of the word is given. There are many cross-references to other passages which contain the same or similar term, syntax, or

construction, and where further information or reference material may be found. The type and function of syntax is explained, especially the more unusual forms and anomalies, and grammatical elements are described with additional references for study provided. At points, insights into the structure of a passage are given. A few variant readings are noted, usually with references to sources which provide more complete discussion. Throughout the work, interpretive remarks abound, usually with reference to sources from a broad range of scholars which more adequately expound the issue. With the more difficult interpretive passages several references to commentaries and articles are given.

As with any work of this magnitude, there are weaknesses. The referencing of additional resources is somewhat inconsistent, with volume and/or page numbers being given in some instances and not in others. (The most common oversight is the failure to give volume and page for Kittel's TDNT.) There is also an inconsistency in noting *hapax legomena* (words which appear only once in the New Testament), some are noted and others, while treated in various ways, have no mention of their uniqueness. In the parsing of verbs, voice is often omitted and person and number seem to be given only for irregular forms. This requires a facility with Greek on the part of the reader which would most likely make the use of the volume unnecessary. While this reviewer did not check every verse with the United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament* upon which the work is based, spot checks turned up some disconcerting errors: syntactical — ἀγαπωσιν as a genitive plural instead of dative plural in Romans 8:28; typographical — Colossians 1:5: “ἀληθείας gen. of quality belonging to logos followed by the gen. λόγος (should be εὐαγγελίου) which explains the words ‘the word of truth’.” These may be the only errors in the whole book, but the nature of the errors suggests that the volume was not given a thorough and painstaking proofreading.

In spite of these weaknesses, if used with care this work can be a helpful and useful resource for the student of the New Testament. The user should be careful, however, to distinguish between information and interpretation. As a resource for information about the Greek of the New Testament, this work is an adequate and helpful guide into the various grammatical and syntactical issues which should concern the careful exegete (although exegetes should further pursue most of these issues on their own). As a resource for

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the interpretation of the New Testament, this work presents the perspective of its author and reviser, usually supported by scholars who hold the same position, although at times alternative possibilities are noted. Exegetes should critically assess these interpretive remarks as part of the exegetical task of arriving at their own understanding of the meaning of the text.

M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.
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The Old Testament and the New, by S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. An Argument for Biblical Inspiration. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980. 108 pp.

The author has a Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary and taught systematic theology at that institution for many years. This small volume is a thoughtful and provocative study of one of the most difficult problems for conservative New Testament scholars: the use of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. The author's purpose is to refute those who claim (D.M. Beegle and others) that writers of the New Testament often misquoted and misused citations of the Old Testament to substantiate a theological position. He argues that in each instance today's scholar can agree not only to the New Testament writers' adherence to conclusions but also with their methodology. This is a formidable task for one who is prepared to defend verbal inerrancy in both testaments as well as the hermeneutics of the first century writers. Johnson deserves respect for his dialectical skill even if his conclusions are not always convincing. The most debatable part of the book is the author's conviction that today's scholar should follow the methodology of the writers of the gospels and epistles.

He concentrates on six areas: the use of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34-36; Psalm 41:9 cited in John 13:18; Psalm 102:25-27 viewed in Hebrews 1:10-12; Psalm 40:6-8 seen in Hebrews 10:5-7; and Psalm 2:9 applied in Revelation 19:15. Commendably, the author addresses himself to the *phenomena* of Scripture as well as general statements in the effort to ascertain the view of the Old Testament held by the New Testament authors.

In the author's summation there are three groups of evangelicals. Some, with Beegle, F.F. Bruce, and P.K. Jowett believe that the Bible contains errors in non-revelatory details but is trustworthy in

essential truths. The second group is represented by Daniel Fuller, Bernard Ramm, and David Hubbard. They believe the Bible contains errors in details of history, in geography, and in science, but is inerrant in its “revelatory material.” The third group — John Gerstner, Kenneth Kantzer, and Harold Lindsell — hold that “the New Testament writers need not give completely accurate renderings, if the sense the New Testament authors find in the Old Testament message is really there.” Johnson appears to be even more conservative than this third group. He argues that the New Testament does give “completely accurate renderings of Old Testament quotations.” He undertakes to prove this by an examination of the six passages cited above.

Johnson finds in John 10:34-36 proof that in the mind of Jesus the inerrancy of the Old Testament Scriptures extends even to *words* used *casually*, as well as in basic revelatory truths. For example, he accepts the usual argument that if certain men are called “gods” it is not blasphemous to be called the “Son” of God.

After examining Jesus’ application of Psalm 41:9 to Judas, Johnson concludes that the Old Testament is often fulfilled typically and indirectly, not precisely and literally. Thus Ahithophel who betrayed King David and then hanged himself is a type of Judas who betrayed David’s son and then hanged himself. Johnson argues the prophecy may include more than the prophet intended, hence the New Testament writers are justified in finding more than the Old Testament author knew or intended. He rejects the view that “hindsight is represented as known by foresight.” He approves of the statement by Donald G. Miller that “God had more to say through the prophets than they themselves were aware.”

Thus, Johnson insists that the modern exegete is not only warranted (as with most evangelicals) in agreeing with the conclusions of the New Testament writers in their exegesis of the Old Testament, he also insists that their methods (quoting out of context, rabbinic modes of exegesis, use of typology, etc.) are also good precedents for our use today.

The author’s purpose is commendable. But presuppositions sometimes preempt his conclusions. He dislikes the inductive method by which conclusions await the collection of evidence. Likewise, statements in the Bible about its own inspiration and inerrancy take precedence over the *phenomena* of Scripture. He concludes that the modern interpreter, following the methodology of

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the New Testament writers, should not only follow their method in certain instances, but feel free to do so in areas not specifically dealt with by them. Despite the author's erudition and care, the reader may well conclude that his determination to prove inerrancy in essentials, as well as "non-revelatory details," leads to conclusions beyond what even the New Testament writers did not exhibit or intend.

George Allen Turner
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Asbury Theological Seminary

Winterflight, by Joseph Bayly. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1981. 174 pp.

This novel reflects on life as it may be in the United States in the early 21st century. Its characters struggle with a way of life inherited from the complacent generations of the 20th century. The issues focus around biomedical ethics and the faithful Christian response. The drama focuses on two characters: Stephen Stanton, a six-year-old hemophiliac, and his seventy-five-year-old grandfather, George Duncan.

Stephen's hemophilia had escaped detection until a fall on his bicycle caused bleeding into the hip. In a world where congenital diseases are completely eliminated (at least officially) the need to seek professional attention endangers Stephen's life. Diseased persons are sent to the "Organ House," officially known as the "Center for Life Support Systems." In this institution brain death would be induced, but Stephen's body would be nourished and kept alive for use in organ transplant operations. This theme is reminiscent of the medical thriller, *Coma*, except that in *Winterflight* the horror is legal.

George Duncan, at seventy-five, had reached the age of termination. He had received his notice to report to a thanotel, on a specific date, where he would receive whatever he desired for his last meal before termination at a specific time.

The characters who surround Stephen and George are forced to examine the meaning of their faith. Doubt becomes real for a Christian family. The relationship of Christians to the state is explored. Must Christians accept whatever the state says is right? Dr. Price Berkowitz, a Jewish physician who becomes involved in Stephen's life, cites Thoreau to the effect that he would not yield his conscience to the state. Price tells Stephen's family that they, with most of the people in their society, have surrendered their

consciences. Faith healing is explored as an option, but without the hoped-for results.

There are several grim ironies in the book. The characters look back to the beginning of their era when six million people were terminated. The Jewish doctor reflects on the similarity to Nazi Germany, and on the fact that his father, who had survived Auschwitz as a child, was terminated in a thanotel. Russia and China appealed this massive execution to the United Nations. At one point in the novel, when Dr. Berkowitz had been exiled, George Duncan wrote an appeal to the humanitarian concern of the Soviet premier on behalf of the physician.

The most significant event influencing the lives of Bayly's characters happened before some of them were born: the U.S. Supreme Court decision to make abortion legal "for any cause or none."

The resolution of this novel is discouraging. Twentieth century Christians may see it as an unreasonable scare tactic. If so, Bayly would clearly respond to such persons, "Your acquiescence could lead to this."

The novel provides an easy afternoon of reading. Reflection on the ramifications of such a work and its challenge to faith will take considerably longer.

David K. Antieau

Alumnus '79

Asbury Theological Seminary

Be Good to Yourself, by Thomas A. Whiting. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981.

This book of twelve sermons was presented over The Protestant Hour radio broadcast in the summer of 1981. Out of Whiting's extensive experiences in the pastorate and clinical settings, and with use of psychology, he has addressed issues that relate to self-worth and self-fulfillment. Each sermon begins by identifying a problem. Then practical self-helps and guidelines from a sound biblical base are developed.

The book is easy to read, has language that is free from technical jargon, and the author's use of illustration brings his material alive.

Dr. Charles D. Killian

Professor of Preaching and Drama

Asbury Theological Seminary

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The Broken Image, by Leanne Payne. Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1981. 187 pp., paperback.

“Restoring Personal Wholeness Through Healing Prayer” identifies the approach as that essentially of Agnes Sanford. But the subject matter is more elusive. The “broken image” is an oblique reference to homosexuality. Two cases, one of a lesbian and the other of a latent homosexual, form the hub around which the book revolves.

This book will be important to all of us who wish to deal hopefully and compassionately with sexual orientation problems. A brief chapter on contemporary theories on the causes of homosexuality should have been omitted. The author discloses an almost total lack of interest or awareness for diverse research and theoretical work on this important subject.

The strength of the book lies in its appeal to what I often call “reconstructive” prayer, by which the healing counselor prays the client through the full span of time from conception to the present moment, invoking God’s healing grace where pain and trauma remain.

Dr. Donald M. Joy
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Asbury Theological Seminary

The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity, by Gerald Sigal. New York: K.T.A.V. Pub. House.

Gerald Sigal is a Jewish educator who has spent 25 years studying the doctrines and beliefs of evangelical Christians (whom he calls fundamental missionaries), and how to refute their contentions.

He begins his refutations with the statement that “the entire missionary view of the Jewish relationship to God is fundamentally wrong.” The view of evangelical Christians that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Hebrew scriptural prophecy is declared to be false. Then, by comparing the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament and the “Christian Scriptures” of the New Testament, he proceeds to refute each prophecy which evangelicals claim to refer to Jesus as the Messiah. He limits himself to the Old Testament without reference to any other Jewish Scriptures such as the Talmud. His purpose, as he states it, is “to refute the fundamental missionaries by showing that their own teachings about Jesus are false.”

The Torah, he claims, describes the intimate details of the covenantal bond between God and Israel. "The quintessence of Judaism is the tenet that God has never ordained, nor will He accept, any other way for the Jew to enter into a personal, loving relationship with Him than through the Torah." Nothing should replace the Torah, not Jesus by any means.

His work is divided into two main sections: Book I — The Hebrew Scriptures and Book II — The New Testament. Each chapter within those sections is organized as an independent unit around the verse which is used by evangelicals to present the claims of Christ.

He is a thorough scholar and although he claims not to direct criticism at all Christians, he proceeds to discredit Jesus as a phony and a liar and His Apostles as deceiving people by their false teachings. There is a bitter attitude which permeates each chapter. I have the feeling Mr. Sigal is much more interested in proving Jesus a phony than helping people find the truth.

It is sad that Jesus Christ is rejected by so able a scholar. There are many more proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus in the Scriptures that Mr. Sigal did not deal with. Thousands of books and articles have been written to substantiate the claims of Christ. But the ultimate proof comes in experiencing the Lord Himself by faith — a reality which many millions of Jews and Gentiles alike have experienced.

It is enigmatic that the book should end with a quote from "The Thirteen Principles of Faith" which reads, "I firmly believe in the coming of the Messiah; and although He may tarry, I daily wait for His coming."

Lucien E. Behar
Atlantic Southeast Conference Superintendent
Free Methodist Church

Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages, by Haddon W. Robinson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980. 234 pp., \$9.95.

This excellent volume by the President of Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, Denver, Colorado, comes after the author's many years of teaching homiletics. It reflects also his years at Dallas Theological Seminary. Evaluating six thousand sermons in class, the author is hailed as one who has given a significant exposition of the nature of biblical preaching.

This is a workmanlike book geared practically to the student in the

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classroom where guidance and lessons are carried out. From a historical, grammatical, and literary study of the text in context, the Holy Spirit applies first to the preacher and then to hearers.

From text to sermon the way is by *development* as exegesis must formulate the idea and homiletical purpose. Then follows the progress of the idea from introduction to application.

Delivery notes the design and use of illustrations if the message is to convince and persuade. Words, style and personality intertwine to form appeal.

Exercises are directed to basic interpretation. While not advocating other types of sermon construction, there is the underlying conviction that all preaching should follow the *expository* method if it is to be truly biblical preaching. There is much missionary work to be done in this generation and this book is a stimulant to better preaching.

Because Robinson's book came to my desk after Donald E. Demaray's *Proclaiming the Truth* had been read and used in classroom, an obvious comparison came into view. Demaray's, to my way of thinking, is more inspirational. Robinson's keeps to a more rigid form of biblical interpretation; whereas, Demaray is more open to a variety of views.

Recognizing that Robinson's volume is intended solely to stress expository preaching, this is what has been done and done well.

Demaray's volume has more strings on the violin of exegesis and format, and thus has a wider appeal.

However, we welcome both as genuine contributions to biblical preaching. This is to be appreciated when other writers are concentrating upon various extraneous methods of preaching. Our generation, while suspicious of dogma, is nevertheless wistful for genuine faith.

God will have His advocates and truth its witnesses.

Ralph G. Turnbull
Professor of Religion in Residence
Warner Pacific College
Portland, Oregon

Why Children Misbehave, by Bruce Narramore. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980. 150 pp.

The subtitle: "A guide to positive parenting," sets us up for another fine book from Dr. Narramore. "Preventive Parenting" is a section

of three chapters in which the objectives are to get ahead of problems, conflicts, and unnecessary harrassment between parent and child. There is even a chapter on “parents have rights, too.” Parents without child-development training will find his categories into which to fit their child quite helpful; those who study child development or read even the popular magazines may be in touch with other ways of identifying children’s behavior, and they will tend to find Narramore superficial.

I find the chief values in *Why Children Misbehave* to be (1) a solid biblical and psychological base for building a child’s sense of worth — as over against the Moral Majority’s idea that children must know that they are bad. (2) A quick grid for checking out why a child is misbehaving, including the possibility that there are perfectly normal (as over against carnal) reasons for a child to misbehave and perform less well than an adult might want. (3) A helpful discussion of original sin in “your child and Adam.” This chapter would be enriched by a Wesleyan supplement which distinguishes between “guilt” for one’s own failure and sin, and the more typical frustration over a sense of inner turmoil, loneliness, and self-will. Typically, the child must deal with the primary responsibilities of obedience and conformity to expectations and demands — in which failure brings guilt and necessary repentance. Only much later can the young adult wrestle with reflective skills on the defective motivation, the deliberate rebellion and self-will, and submit these to the inward cleansing of original sin.

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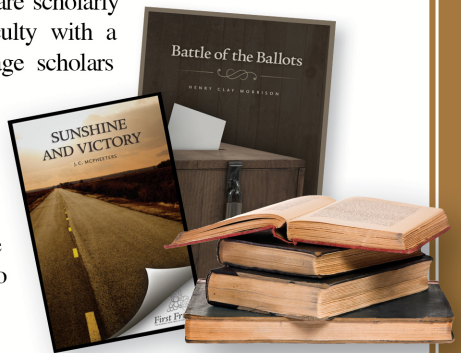
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