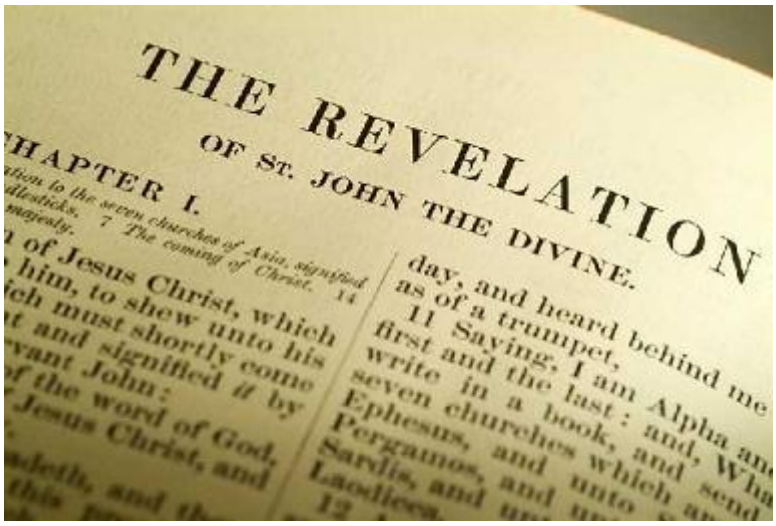
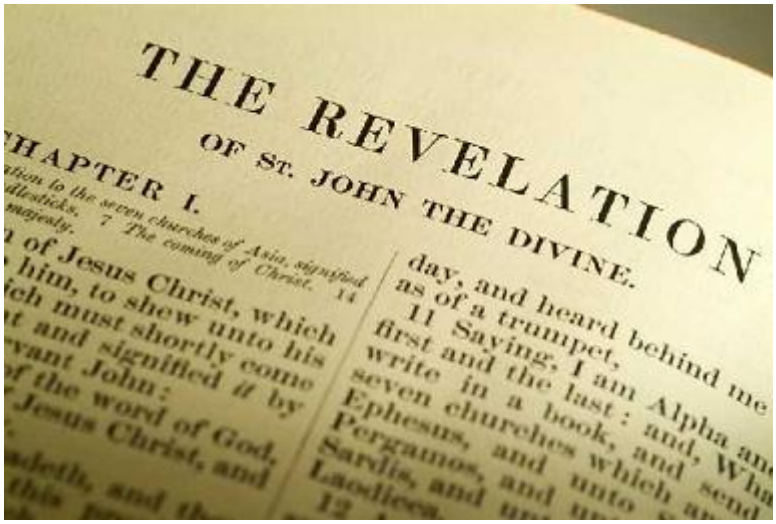
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Christy Hill, PhD

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The Role of Weakness in Spiritual Formation



The Role of Weakness in Spiritual Formation

Reflections by Christy Hill, Ph.D.

Who wants to feel weak? Who enjoys bumping up against one's own inadequacies? Why would I desire to get in touch with the many times (a day) I don't live up to my own standards, let alone God's? Isn't the Christian life supposed to make me feel better?

The Apostle Paul may have resisted feeling weak, at first, too. He was a very successful Jew—even of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, a zealous persecutor of heresy. If you go by strict religious standards, his resume was impressive. But after his conversion to Christ, those things no longer mattered. In fact, he considered them rubbish.[i] But I wonder how long it took him to gain this perspective.

He gives us a glimpse of his journey toward recognizing the value of weakness in his life,

modeling a mature Christian perspective of the ongoing struggle we have with the flesh and its falleness. He wrestled with God over this topic. Three times he prayed for God to relieve him of a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan. We don't know what this messenger of Satan was, but we do know it "tormented" him and made him feel weak.[ii] But God, who has infinite power and wisdom, ordained that weakness could actually be something good for His children. He said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."[iii]

So what is the value of weakness for spiritual formation? Could it be that we, like Paul, have a tendency to put confidence in ourselves to live the Christian life? Could it be that I have a deeply ingrained success mentality that desires to use Christianity and the spiritual disciplines to help me feel better about myself, without deepening my relationship and dependence on my Savior? So instead of allowing us to live in the delusion that we are better off on our own (autonomy) and that we really need to get our act together in order to be loved by God (work's righteousness), God breaks us of these ingrained beliefs by giving us the gift of weakness and inadequacy. So then when I bump up against my weakness, I can be reminded of my need for a Savior, even as a mature Christian. I can continue to fall in love with my Rescuer, when I realize that His blood covers my sin. I can turn to Him in dependence, not as a last resort, but as a welcomed reminder of my true state of dependence. It would be cruel of God to allow us to live in the lies of autonomy and work's righteousness, which is our natural tendency.

Maturity starts to look a little bit different than the "victorious Christian living" model that feeds our success mentality. Growth in sanctification means recognizing and internalizing the truth of who I am in Christ and relating to God in deeper, more intimate ways. If a thorn in the flesh helps me to recognize my continual need for a Savior and to turn often to God throughout my day, then it accomplishes a noble purpose. And we can say with Paul, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."[iv]

I have to admit, I'm not there yet. But I do have to ask the question: Does our doctrine of sanctification address and have room for the daily experience of weakness, inadequacy and failure? Do we teach those we disciple and have influence over the value of recognizing our moments of weakness that come to us throughout the day and allowing it to remind us to turn to God and not depend on self? Do I model a life that is comfortable with my own messiness, so that others may see that God's love is not based on our performance, but on His desire to love us? It is going to take a lot of weakness, failure and inadequacy to undo the false beliefs that we are better off on our own (autonomy) and we have to work hard to gain God's favor (work's righteousness). The message of the Gospel still speaks to us in the ongoing journey of spiritual formation as we embrace weakness and let it do God's noble purposes.

End Notes

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[i] Philippians 3:4b-11 (all Scripture quotations from NIV).

[ii] 2 Corinthians 12:7, 10.

[iii] 2 Corinthians 12:9a.

[iv] 2 Corinthians 12:9b-10.

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My First Visit to a Non-Catholic Church



Have you heard the term "Catholic guilt?" Do you feel guilty? How guilty would you feel if after attending mass for your whole life you decided on your own to attend a non-Catholic church service? Can you imagine what it was like the first time? Were there really monsters inside the Protestant church? Would God condemn you for doing this?

My First Visit to a Non-Catholic Church

By Jim Hill

The thought of ever stepping foot into a non-Catholic church scared me to death. Let me give you some background. I was born into a loving Roman Catholic family is southwestern Michigan. My mother, father, and grandparents on both sides were Roman Catholics. My great grandfather and grandmother, who I knew until their passing when I was thirteen, were Catholic. Most of my aunts and uncles were Catholic. My neighbors on both sides of our farm were Catholic and all of us attended Holy Family Catholic Church in Decatur, Michigan. As a faithful member of the Catholic

Church I attended mass every week and on holy days. I worked as an altar "boy," as they used to call this, throughout my growing up years and continued in this all the way through high school. As you can see I was a faithful Catholic in a Catholic environment and would never consider going to a non-Catholic church. That was at least when things began to change as I joined the dot com boom in the late 1990's.

All I can say now is that God was working on my heart and this led me to consider things which Roman Catholics would consider heresy. First among those things was attending any other church than the one of my upbringing. As a child and teenager when we traveled during the summer on vacation and sometimes down to Florida over Christmas break we would attend whatever Catholic Church was in the area. And when we got there the service was very predictable. Entering the church we would dab ourselves with holy water and make the sign of the cross. Then as we entered the pew we would genuflect towards the altar and sit down. Then the service would play out in front of me as it had hundreds of times before. Sit, kneel, stand; I had it memorized. Nothing new here! But looking back to the end of the nineteenth century I can see that God was working on my heart.

Before I explain about what led me to consider attending another church let me explain how I felt about going to mass. Church was boring to me and to make things fun my twin brother Joe and I would often play some secret games with each other. When we stood he would often begin to press against me with an increasing amount of pressure. I would try and not lean over and balance this pressure by pressing back against him with equal pressure, but in an increasing amount. A game of strength began. As I was stronger than Joe I knew what the outcome would be but I had to stop pressing against him when I was certain that he would tumble over into one of the other members of our large Catholic family. There were six of us kids in total. Another game that we played was to switch the first parts of certain words around and then recite these variations loudly next to each other. For example, instead of saying "grant us peace" we would say, "pant us greace." Another thing we did was to take things literally in the saying of the mass. Specifically, at part of the service went as follows:

> Priest: The Lord be with you. All: And also with you.
>
> Priest: Lift up your hearts. All: We lift them up to the Lord.

Just prior to this Joe and I would ensure that the kneeler was extended because we know what we going to do. Once the congregation said "We lift them up to the Lord," we would then stand up on the kneeler. We were raising our hearts to the Lord. This gave us great joy through the hilarity of it all. To this day whenever Joe and I attend a Catholic mass we chuckle when we get this part of the service. And yes, we still say "pant us greace."

The games that Joe and I played helped us to pass the time in an otherwise boring service. Perhaps one of the funniest things I did was right after receiving communion. At unexpected times instead of returning to my seat I would just continue right on walking out the door and leave. My brother being the more compliant child would never consider doing something as bad as this. But being rebellious

gave me an immense sense of joy and control in an otherwise miserable situation. I haven't even mentioned what I did to get out of going to the mandatory catechism classes. We will leave that for another chapter. The games that we played helped us to maintain our sanity in an otherwise insane situation.

Back to what was going on in my heart in the late 1990's. I began to have an increasing sense that things were not right in the Catholic Church as God continued to work. By this time I was living in Royal Oak, Michigan and attended Saint Mary's on 730 South Lafayette street (if you are interested). At this particular church they began to have a time of fellowship after the service at which coffee and donuts were served. Being a fairly outgoing person I hoped to meet some people and make a diligent effort to socialize after the service. Despite my best efforts all ever got from anyone there was a shy hello and possibly a passing mention about the weather. Needless to say this wasn't very encouraging to me. As God continued to work I began to realize that the vast majority of us were completely disconnected from each other in the church. I would come to mass faithfully every week hoping to connect with others and every week I would experience the same coldness that I had grown used to at my hometown church in Decatur, Michigan. One day I attended Saint James Catholic Church in Ferndale and I made a realization. I could be an ax murderer, child rapist, or psycho killer and even if I attended the same Catholic Church year after year nobody would ever know anything about me. In fact I had attended Saint Mary's in Royal Oak for five full years! Even though I wasn't any of those things, look out people, do you realize who is sitting next to you? Yes I had an increasing sense that things were not right in the Catholic Church.

"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Radio played a big part in the work that God was doing in my heart. One day I was at home in my condo in Main Street Square on the south end of Royal Oak where all the other yuppies lived. I had a fancy shortwave radio that I had bought from one of my employees since I had always had a fascination with such things. As I was scanning through the dial I came across a wacko radio preacher named Brother Stair. What he said didn't really interest my but what did happen was that it made me be able to listen to other radio preachers. On some subsequent night I came across a radio station on the AM dial, AM 560. At some point when listening to this station and most likely in my SUV on the way to work I heard a lady teaching the Bible. She was from a church called Five Points Community Church in Auburn Hills, Michigan. The program was entitled something like "Ladies Radio Bible Class" and honestly the lady on there didn't have the best radio voice. But I remember that she was teaching about King David and even though this was geared towards women I was interested in listening to it. It was through this radio program that God really began working in my heart.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

As God continued to work in my life there wasn't really a culminating event that led me out of the Roman Catholic Church, but there was one particular incident which marked my last trip into the

Church. It was a Saturday and I had made plans with my friends to go to dinner in Royal Oak and hang out was our habit in those days. We were going to meet up town just shortly after five o'clock and I figured that I would be able to make the Saturday afternoon mass as Saint James on Woodward Avenue in Ferndale since this started at 4:00. I drove down there and as I crossed the Pleasant Ridge speed trap I began looking for Saint James on the right. I found a parking spot and went inside. As I began to go through the motions of the service I began to look around to my right and to my left. I looked and saw people standing there who were just as dead inside as I felt. They were just going through the motions of the senseless religion and did not have even the slightest concern for me or anyone else for that matter. I began to wonder if I began to have some sort of psychic breakdown if anyone would even care. At some point just after the ridiculous message by the father called a "homily" I just got up and walked out. I didn't care who saw me or what anyone said to me, which of course no one did. And that was it, this was the last time I attended a Catholic mass under the compulsive teachings of the Church.

Sunday came quickly after spending many hours in Royal Oak. I liked to frequent a place called Woody's and as I remember that was where we spent the night. One thing we used to enjoy was watching for rats in the alley. We were frequently not disappointed. But as Sunday dawned I began to think about driving up to the church that hosted the woman on the radio program that I had heard on AM560. During every show she always mentioned the time and location of the Sunday service. So why not drive up there as give it a shot? I hopped in my Ford Explorer, shot up to Auburn Hills, quickly located the church and pulled into the parking lot. That's as far as I got. As the time for the service approached I just couldn't bring myself to go into the church. I was quite sad about this, but after sitting in the lot for about half an hour I decided to go on home.

On the following Sunday I was set that I was going to go to church today. I got in my truck once again and found Five Points Community Church in Auburn Hills once again. This time I was resolved to go inside. I waited outside for about five minutes but then just threw the door open and kind of like jumping out of an airplane for the first time I went inside. There were lots of people waiting there to greet me as I walked inside and they made me feel quite welcome right away, something I wasn't used to in the dead Catholic church. As I made my way to my seat and the pastor came up to the podium I couldn't find that lady radio minister anywhere. As I looked around wondering why she wasn't appearing or coming on stage the minister made a signal and the music started. So off to the races we went.

"In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' (John 3:3).

My experience that first week at Five Point Community Church was quite typical of what I experienced at other non-Catholic churches in later months as I began a search for a church a bit closer to my home in "partyville," Royal Oak. There were friendly people at strategic places to greet those entering the church. A certain leeway was allowed first time visitors but after the second or third visit someone would approach you with a welcome packet and you would receive a personal letter from the pastor. Beyond this you could expect a phone call or email from the pastor asking you

to a meal or a coffee at Starbucks. From there you would begin to meet more of the church community and even begin to minister to other newcomers such as yourself.

Frankly, years ago I thought that the first time I stepped into a Protestant church that God would strike me down. Far from it, the love and acceptance that I experienced even upon my very first visit to a Bible believing church exceeded that of all of the years I wasted away in the Catholic Church.

Here is a challenge for those caught in the cycle of frustration in the Catholic Church. First, pray a simple prayer to God: "God, reveal Yourself to me and show me the truth." Second, go to a Bible believing church for a Sunday service. If you can get someone to go with you that would be so much better. Third, send me an email through the Contact Us section on this web site. If you would prefer to discuss this by phone I am available once you fill out the initial contact request and leave me your number. I would be glad to pray with you, help you locate a church, or in provide whatever assistance that I can. Whatever you do, don't just keep going through the motions. And finally, tell others about what you have experienced. Post your testimony on this site and others dedicated to telling their story. Reach out and you will be surprised at the number of former Catholics you will find attending Bible teaching churches throughout the world.

May God bless your journey to find the truth.

Jim Hill

Winona Lake, Indiana

My-First-Time-to-Visit-a-Non-Catholic-Church.pdfDownload

John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection



John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection

By James M. Hill

The Problem: Can Justified Christians Achieve Perfection Through a Sudden Working of the HOly Spirit in Their Lifetimes and Subsequently Live in Sinless Perfection?

Because God is perfectly holy, he cannot have fellowship with unrighteous, fallen people who descended from the seed of Adam after the Fall (Gen 3:6). Humans, as image bearers of God, lost fellowship with God, but God provided for their salvation by condescending in the form of the God-Man to atone for their sin. God gave new spiritual life to all that repent of their sin and trust in the finished work of the Son of God on the cross at Calvary. Through this spiritual rebirth, God imputed the righteousness of Christ and declared them justified before Him.[1] This treatise examines whether or not God, who declared believers positionally righteous (justified), also provided the means of grace to be instantaneously holy or sanctified. This is what came to be known as John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection. Is God's grace a discrete, stair step affair, with justification as the first measure of grace in the lives of believers, Christian perfection the second, and sanctification everything upwards after the first step? Or is sanctification a lifelong process unable to be totally completed in a believer's lifetime? Does the Holy Spirit impart a second, sudden working of grace such that believers are entirely sanctified, thus eliminating their sinful natures in their natural lifetimes? Are there three levels of people, the lost, the justified, and the entirely sanctified, or just the first two? Can accurate theology be developed or even validated upon the basis of personal experience, or is it a purely scholarly affair?

INTERPETATIONS THROUGHOUT THE CHURCH

Most Reformers and Evangelicals on Sanctification

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) states, "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die until sin, and live unto righteousness."[2] This view of gradually increasing holiness is typical of the Reformers and evangelicals, except for the traditions that arose out of the Wesleyan movement, including the Methodist, Holiness, and Nazarene traditions. Unlike the Roman Catholic doctrine that posits sanctification as the increase of justification, the tradition of the Reformers and evangelicals abides by a solid distinction between the two concepts, "while affirming that the two are inextricably related." [3] Lewis and Demarest summarize this theological position by stating:

In terms of differences, justification is a legal declaration of right standing before God (imputed righteousness), whereas sanctification makes the believer existentially holy (inherent righteousness). Moreover, justification is an instantaneous event, whereas sanctification is a lifelong process. Finally, justification allows for no degrees, whereas sanctification admits of degrees.[4]

One of the keystones of this position is the dual nature of the Christian. On one hand, believers are purified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Corin 6:11). They are accounted positionally righteous before God through faith in Jesus and his sacrificial death (Eph 2:8-9, Heb 10:10). On the other hand they still possess a sinful nature inherited from Adam as a result of the Fall, and don't always do the things that God calls them to.[5] Paul said in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."[6] "Christians realize entire sanctification or moral perfection not in this life but in the life to come when they behold Christ (1 John 3:2)."[7] Calvin believed in a lifelong process of sanctification. Demarest and Lewis quoted Calvin as stating, "We teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness."[8] Luther held a similar view and made the following statement in *Table-Talk* No. CCLVI:

Original sin, after regeneration, is like a wound that begins to heal; though it be a wound, yet it is in course of healing, though it still runs and is sore. So original sin remains in Christians until they die, yet itself is mortified and continually dying. Its head is crushed in pieces, so that it cannot condemn us.

Both Calvin and Luther denied "any perfection other than imputed perfection." Later Reformers, including the Anabaptists, reacted against an "under-emphasis on holy living." [9] This was likely one

of the factors that led to John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, along with his dislike of Calvin's position on eternal security.

John Wesley on Christian Perfection

John Wesley was the seventeenth century founder of Methodism who formulated the doctrine of entire sanctification from 1739 to 1760. "In public address he used the terms "Christian Perfection," "Perfect Love," and "Holiness," as synonymous, though there are differences between them when examined critically."[10] The basis of his theory was that after a Christian become a believer by being spiritually reborn and indwelled by the power of the Holy Spirit, at some point after a period of growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ there was an instantaneous act of sanctification. Therefore, even though there was gradual growth in sanctification after the believer was justified by God, after a "final, all-surrendering act of faith in Christ, it reaches an instantaneous completion through the act of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier."[11] According to Greathouse, the teaching of John Wesley was that this initial work of gradual sanctification may be "cut short in a moment, by faith, when the heart is cleansed from the inward root of sin – pride, self-will, atheism, or idolatry – and perfected in the love of God. As a consequence of this deeper cleansing of the heart the Christian is enabled to grow more normally toward perfected Christ-likeness."[12]

Greathouse's definition of Christian perfection is:

. . . the glorious teaching that through the provisions of the sacrifice of Christ and the personal agency of the Holy Spirit, and on the condition of simple faith, those who savingly trust in Christ may be cleansed from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God and unselfish love for their fellowman.[13]

One would likely never find such a concise definition of Christian perfection among John Wesley's writings. Rather, John Wesley's normally accepted view as rendered by Greathouse developed gradually over the life of his ministry. Wesley said that he developed his unique view on sanctification because he "thought it was scriptural." In the same quote, John Wesley went on to say, "But I still think that perfection is only another term for holiness, or the image of God in man."[14] Wesley's doctrine seems to have very much been driven by his concept of holiness as Christians living out their lives in God's perfect image through his Son Jesus Christ.

John Wesley left some small amounts of room for interpretation of what he meant by perfection. In his sermon and subsequent tract *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he defined Christian perfection by stating, "By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions." Wesley went on to excuse slight misdeeds by "perfected" Christians by saying, "there is no such perfection in this life, as implies an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, or mistake, in things not essential to salvation, or from manifold temptations, or from numberless infirmities, wherewith the corruptible body more or less presses down the soul." With the leeway given, Wesley went on to say, "I do not contend for the term *sinless*, though I do not object against it.[15] In the same tract, Wesley spoke about what he called the

"Circumcision of the Heart."

It is the habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writing, is termed holiness, and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; and, by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus the being so renewed in the image of our mind as to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. . . . In what sense are they perfect? Observe, we are not now speaking of babes in Christ, but adult Christians. ***But even babes in Christ are so far perfect as not to commit sin*** (emphasis added).[16]

How then did Wesley define sin? In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley stated, "But does not the Scripture say, 'A just man sinneth seven times a day?' It does not. Indeed it says, 'A just man falleth seven times.' But this is quite another thing' for, first the words, a day, are not in the text. Secondly, here is no mention of falling into sin at all. What is here mentioned is, falling into *temporal affliction* (emphasis added)." Wesley admits that the apostles sinned, but because they sinned does not mean that all Christians have to sin. [17] Wesley's definition of active or overt sin was so telling of his whole theology that it was quoted completely from Carter as follows.

Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a ***voluntary transgression of a known law of God***. Therefore, every voluntary breach of the law of live is sin; and nothing else, if we speak properly. To strain the matter farther is only to make way for Calvinism. There may be ten thousand wandering thoughts and forgetful intervals without any breach of love, though not without transgressing the Adamic law. But Calvinists would fain confound these together. Let love fill your heart, and it is enough (emphasis added).[18] This is not far from what 1 John 3:4 says, minus the attacks on Calvin, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."

Did Wesley agree that believers can be tempted, yet without sin? John Wesley made it clear that he believed so. In the questions and answers section in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he stated a variety of answers to various hypothetical questions. Question 14 was, "But can one that is saved from sin be tempted?" His answer was, "Yes; for Christ was tempted." In response to question 15 regarding the difference between temptation and corruption of the heart, he said, ""A woman solicits me. Here is a temptation to lust. But in the instant I shrink back. And I feel no desire or lust at all; of which I can be as sure, as that my hand is cold or hot."[19]

Wesley found scriptural support for his position on sanctification in various New Testament passages. He interpreted the seventh chapter of Romans not as a description of the experience of an advanced believer as has been taught throughout the centuries, but as that of an unregenerate man. He posited that "entire sanctification" occurred by the eighth chapter and therefore described the experience of a wholly sanctified believer. [20] Orr, et. al., regarding Wesley's position stated, "Thus sanctification is gradual, but entire sanctification is instantaneous . . ."[21] Wesley also looked to 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Other Epistles were quoted by Wesley, such as Ephesians 4:13, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Even though Wesley posited that the context of Romans 7 was that of an unregenerate man, he quoted just a few verses earlier in the previous chapter for support, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom 6:6)." One wonders if Wesley understood that the translators added the paragraph breaks that were not in the original text. He also looked to Galatians 2:20(a), "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live," and sought support in 1 Thess. 5:23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly . . . ." In this passage "the word *sanctify* is a Greek aorist tense, signifying an act and not a process, as also in John 17:19, 'that they . . . may be sanctified in truth,' or truly."[22] The reasoning is that if Paul didn't think that God was able to accomplish these things during the natural lives of Christians, he wouldn't have written it. In the same light, Wesley also appealed to verses such as Matt. 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," with Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," along with 1 John 4:18, "perfect love casting out (all) fear. Finally, Wesley made frequent appeals to 1 John 3:9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."[23]

In the same treatise, Wesley defended his position in light of the writings of St. John in 1 John 1:8-10, the latter which states, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (v. 10)." Again, his reasoning regarding this text was particularly telling of his whole theology. His entire response to the critics was as follows.[24]

(1.) The tenth verse fixes the sense of the eighth: "If we say we have no sin," in the former, being explained by, "If we say we have not sinned," in the latter verse. (2.) The point under consideration is not, whether we have or have not sinned heretofore; and neither of these verses asserts that we do sin or commit sin now. (3.) The ninth verse explains both the eighth and the tenth: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As if he had said, "I have before affirmed, the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. And no man can say, 'I need it not; I have no sin to be cleansed from.' If we say we have no sin, that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, not only to forgive us our sins, but also to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, that we may go and sin no more. In conformity therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion: *A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin* (emphasis added).[25]

Wesley found proof of the attainment of the second working of grace in 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." Wesley said that additional proof came from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, per 1 Corinthians 2:12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."[26] In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley clarified the spiritual evidence for the achievement of Christian perfection. In question he was asked, hypothetically, "But how do you know, that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption?" In response, Wesley stated:

We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit. And, First, by the witness. As, when we were justified, the Spirit bore witness with our spirit, that our sins were forgiven; so, when we were sanctified, he bore witness, that they were taken away. Indeed, the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first; (as neither is that of justification;) neither is it afterward always the same, but, like that of justification, sometimes stronger and sometimes fainter. Yea, and sometimes it is withdrawn. Yet, in general, the latter testimony of the Spirit is both as clear and as steady as the former.[27]

The Early Church on Sanctification

Augustine believed that even though the Christian was accounted positionally righteous before God through justification, their sanctification gradually conformed them to the image of Christ.[28] Greathouse, who seemed to stress the extent to which he thought (wrongly) that Augustine espoused the view, stated:

While Augustine can be cited as an advocate of this truth (Christian perfection), his pessimistic doctrine of Original Sin with its notion of ineradicable concupiscence has been the single greatest foe of the doctrine, especially in Protestantism. Developed in his controversy with Pelagius, this latter idea upstaged Augustine's earlier confidence in the possibilities of grace and became the standard view of most Reformed and Lutheran theologies. ***The permanent residue of Augustine's doctrine in the view that human nature is irretrievable sinful this side of the resurrection*** (emphasis added)**.**"[29]

Augustine seemed to dismiss the possibility of Christian perfection during the natural life. Demarest and Lewis quoted Augustine as saying, "There is not a man living in the present life who is not absolutely free from sin."[30]

Several church fathers held a view similar to John Wesley. Friesen quoted Ignatius as writing, "No man truly making a profession of faith sinneth; nor does he that possesses love hate anyone." "Irenaeus and the Shepherd of Hermas also believed that perfection was possible while Tertullian did not expect perfection until after death." [31]

BIBLICAL TEACHING AND THEOLOGICAL INTERACTION

Old Testament

In the OT the call of the prophets was a "demand for personal righteousness and social justice." This was evident in such passages as Psalm 18:30 stating God is perfect, but with Psalm 18:32, "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." God instructed Abraham to be perfect, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I

am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect (Gen 17:1)." Greathouse tied God's requirement "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (Deut 6:5)" with a call to personal holiness. [32] The word translated "perfect" from the Hebrew is *tamiym*. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, even though the root *tamam* indicates "a move towards that which is ethically sound," the fundamental idea is that of completeness. The *Wordbook* goes on to tie NT Pharisaism to the root word, something that the followers of Wesley should take careful note. "Those who make them (claims of perfection) do not profess to be absolutely sinless, but they do disclaim all fellowship with the wicked." It goes on to say, "other than (the) passages referring to God himself, the OT resists claims to ultimate perfection."[33]

The OT contains an important theological construct in the Pentateuch, that of unintentional sin, closely related to the sin of omission. In Leviticus 4 the Lord gave to Moses the process for the sin offering. Verse two states, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: Say to the Israelites: 'When anyone sins *unintentionally* and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands' (NIV, emphasis added)."[34] The concept of unintentional sin is prevalent throughout the Pentateuch. In Leviticus applies the requirement for a sin offering to individual people (4:27, 5:15), leaders (4:22), the whole community (4:13), and the Gentiles alike (15:29). The concept of the sin of omission is also clearly found in the NT (James 2:15-16).

Gospels

In the Gospels and the rest of the NT, the key concept of perfection revolves around variations of the Greek word *teleioi*. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The word in the original is the Greek is *teleioi*, and as in to OT, means "complete." Friesen said, "In almost every case where the word 'perfect' is used in reference to people in the New Testament it is a translation of this word *teleios*." He went on to analyze the verse and concluded that in order to be perfect, the universal call to believers is that they must come follow Jesus.[35] In several of Wesley's sermons he argued how God could command perfection if man were unable to achieve it. In light of a more accurate translation of the Greek, perhaps Wesley should have looked to the concept of completion of God's promises to humanity in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." Or, Phil 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Other New Testament Literature

Paul provided on interesting insight into his own sinfulness in the seventh chapter of Romans. Paul said, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin (7:14)." As stated earlier, Wesley interpreted the seventh chapter of Romans not as a description of the experience of an advanced believer as has been taught throughout the centuries, but as that of an unregenerate man. He posited that "entire sanctification" occurred by the eighth chapter and therefore described the experience of a wholly sanctified believer. An exegetical study of Romans shows that this was not

Paul's intention. In 7:22 Paul stated, "For in my inner being I delight in God's law (NIV)." This hardly sounds like Paul reflecting on his sinful past prior to his conversion on the Damascus road.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6, the KJV uses the word "perfect" whereas the NIV renders *teleios* as "mature." This is similar to the NIV rendering of *teleios* in Luke 6:40 as "fully trained." The NIV is a much more accurate translation of the word, since in the longer context of the passage from 2:6 – 3:3 Paul describes the characteristics of mature people, the *teleioi*. "The *teleioi* are involved in a growing process. They are different from natural men and also from immature Christians and these differences are demonstrated by their behavior." In 1 Corinthians 14:20 Paul instructed the people to be adults (*teleios*) in their understanding (from the NIV). Friesen comments, "The *teleioi* are gifted and use their gifts to build up others in the Church. . . . Their concern is for the growth of those within the community and for those who have not yet experienced new life."[36] It is evident from the passages that the idea of perfection from the KJV translation is much more accurately reflected in the concept of spiritual obedience and maturity than sinless perfection.

The prison epistles speak to the concept of *teleioi* in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. In Ephesians 4:13 Paul states, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect (*teleios*) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The NIV substitutes the word "mature." "The verses preceding 4:13 describe a process whereby maturity or perfection may be reached. God has given apostles . . . to the Church so that these person may equip all the saints for the building up of the Church."[37] The KJV rendering of "perfect" in Phil 3:12 illustrates the point even more: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect (*teleioo*) . . ." Here Paul states that he has not yet been made perfect, but is in the process of being perfected, pressing on towards "the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (v. 14)." In Colossians 1:28 Paul says, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect (*teleios*) in Christ Jesus." "Paul believes that he has done a part in bringing others to perfection. He does this by admonishing and teaching."[38] Clearly, Paul's goal is to utilize his spiritual gifts to so "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corin 11:2c)."

Perhaps the most prominent verse in the Epistles that speaks regarding Wesley's view of Christian perfection is 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Commenting on the verse, Adam Clarke (1760-1832), a prominent Wesleyan minister, theologian, and scholar born in Londonderry, Ireland said the following.

This is tantamount to 1Jo 1:10: If we say that we have not sinned. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and therefore every man needs a Savior (sic), such as Christ is. It is very likely that the heretics, against whose evil doctrines the apostle writes, denied that they had any sin, or needed any Savoir (sic). In deed, the Gnostics even denied that Christ suffered: the AEon, or Divine Being that dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, according to them, left him when he was taken by the Jews; and he, being but a common man, his sufferings and death had neither merit nor efficacy.[39]

Clarke's straw man argument that the passage was written to confront the Gnostic heretics is not

justified in light of the historical context of this section of the text. Clark stated the overall purpose of 1 John by, "I therefore consider that which is commonly called the First Epistle of St. John as a book or treatise, in which the apostle declared to the whole world his disapprobation of the doctrines maintained by Cerinthus and the Gnostics."[40] Such a statement is true, except even a cursory examination of the first chapter reveals that the content of this section is more regarding "the fundamental tests of genuine fellowship," and the pericope containing verse nine is concerning "a biblical view of sin."[41] To say that verse nine speaks specifically to the Gnostic heresy is faulty logic from a straw man argument. Albert Barnes, holding to the opposite view, said, "he meant to say that if a man should claim to be perfect, or to be wholly sanctified, it would demonstrate that he deceived himself; and the two statements go to prove that neither in reference to the past nor the present can any one lay claim to perfection."[42] Spurgeon, commenting on the passage in 1 John 5 said, "We understand by this not that believers are perfectly free from sinning, but that they do not sin habitually, willfully, and openly as the unregenerate do."[43]

Wesley often quoted 1 John 3:9 regarding the ability for perfected believers to sin, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.." The word sin in this text is the Greek verb *hamartanein* in the present active infinitive tense. This indicates a continuing action of sin rather than discrete events. The passage literally means, "Born again Christians don't persistently sin in an ongoing manner." Barnes agrees, "If it can be used as referring to the doctrine of absolute perfection at all, it proves, not that Christians may be perfect, or that a portion of them are, but that all are. But who can maintain this? Who can believe that John meant to affirm this? Nothing can be clearer than that the passage has not this meaning." Rather, Barnes says, "This passage must (mean that) they who are born of God, that is, who are true Christians, do not sin habitually and characteristically." [44]

Wesley had a tendency of selectively applying verses to prove his doctrine of perfection. The Book of Hebrews declares in chapter 12, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (v. 14). Wesley declined to apply this verse to Christians in general, those justified and entirely sanctified. According to the ISBE speaking about Wesley, "The declaration 'without sanctification no man shall see the Lord' (Heb 12:14), does not apply to the saints, 'the holy ones.'"[45] Again we saw Wesley picking and choosing which verses, or portions of verses apply in order to create his doctrine of entire sanctification.

Friesen did an analysis of the concept of *teleioi* in all of the NT uses, including Hebrews. He made an excellent summary in Hebrews regarding his derivation of the meaning of perfection as meaning spiritual maturity and obedience. As we leave the scriptural study section, he note the following summation in his section on Hebrews:

In this letter we see that the *teleioi* are people who are able to move beyond the discussion of elementary doctrines and accept and even teach solid food from God's Word. They are holy people, but they are also in the process of being made holy. This progress is not merely passive growth – the *teleioi* are actively involved in the process of growth. (They) are able to discern good and evil because they constantly practice obedience.

The author couldn't state it any better than that. The concept of perfection in the Bible is that of believers constantly growing and being obedient to the commandments and image of Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest difficulties of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is found in James regarding the sin of omission. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (2:15-16)." Even if the Christian was perfect in outward behavior and somehow avoid sins of commission, they are often guilty of sins of omission as was shown by God's need to include deliverance for this sin in Leviticus.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual Perfection: A Theology of Experience

We concur with Lindstrom that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is a "theology of experience."[46] What role does experience play in the development of any theological doctrine? Bett looked at in an interesting way and found that Wesley "founded religion and theology in the fact of experience."[47] Wesley objected to such criticisms, saying "if man is not to go astray it (theology) must be checked by the Bible.[48] It seems logical that theology could be evaluated on the basis of personal experience, but what role does bringing a "pre-understanding" to the biblical text have in developing doctrine in the first place? It is evident that every theologian brings along a certain level of pre-understanding, and Wesley was not different in that regard. Also, unless the theologian remains teachable, an overactive experiential pre-understanding brought to bear upon the text will produce alternative views from an otherwise plain exegesis. Perhaps a red flag for this type of theological development is their mandating of sudden contextual shifts within discrete areas of the biblical text. Such contextual deviations are evident in Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. It is evident that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is indeed a doctrine of experience. More careful exegesis of the relevant verses would have revealed to Mr. Wesley that the central concepts of Christian perfection were that of spiritual growth and obedience, not sinless perfection. Friesen, in his concluding remarks stated, "The *teleioi* are not portrayed as those who have attained absolute perfection. They always strive toward perfection and are not content to settle for less."[49] Perhaps this is the greatest risk of following Wesley's doctrine, that one may cease growing in knowledge and maturity to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Relevance to Life and Ministry

It is very important in ministry to have a clear understanding of the nature and process of sanctification, as well as how the various Christian churches understand the doctrine. First, it is crucial to be able to explain the various sects and denominations of the Christian faith to new believers such that they are not put off by the appearance of divisions in the body of Christ. Even if groups of believers believe in the doctrine of Christian perfection, for the purposes of unity in the body of Christ a certain measure of tolerance must be expressed. It is extremely important to

recognize John Wesley's huge contributions to the Christian church in America. This is not to say that we should tolerate false teachings, which Scripture warns about extensively, but Christians must come as a united force against the powers of darkness. In the case of Christian perfection, the belief of this doctrine is nicely balanced by the same denomination's belief in Arminianism. This keeps them continually resisting temptations and striving towards their salvation anyway. Albeit that this comes at the risk of becoming prideful – something which many Christians struggle with regardless of their denomination. Second, as the Wesleyan churches well know, eternal security is a closely related concept. This related doctrine should be preached to proclaim the truth of 1 John 5:13, but along with the warning verses. This will help believers maintain a healthy humility and respect for the power, sovereignty, and grace of God. Believers need to be given an assurance of their salvation in a world filled without almost no certainty in many other areas of their lives. They should be shown that God expects them to persevere under His power, not their own. Believers need assurance that God has gifted them with every resource that they need to accomplish His purposes in their lives. This striving includes a continuous growth towards perfection, but this is not something that will be accomplished until after they die.

END NOTES

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[1] Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), Vol. III, 173.

[2] Ibid., 177.

[3] Ibid., 175, 184.

[4] Ibid., 184.

[5] Ibid.

[6] All verse quotations are KJV unless otherwise indicated. This is necessary to facilitate comparisons to John Wesley's writings.

[7] Demarest, 185.

[8] Ibid., 186.

[9] Robert Friesen, "Christian Perfection," *Direction* 13 (July 1984): 25-32.

[10] James Orr and others, eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), s.v. "Sanctification."

[11] Ibid.

[12] William M. Greathouse, *From the Apostles to Wesley: Christian Perfection in Historical Perspective* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 15.

[13] Ibid., 12-13.

[14] Charles W. Carter, *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 521.

[15] John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, London: [1777], n.p.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Carter, 270-271.

[19] Ibid.

[20] John C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001, orig. 1879), xxii.

[21] Orr.

[22] Orr.

[23] Wesley.

[24] N.B. A Prize will be awarded for any student that can follow this quotation!

[25] Wesley.

[26] Orr.

[27] Wesley.

[28] Demarest and Lewis, 185.

[29] Greathouse, 9.

[30] Demarest and Lewis, 185.

[31] Friesen, 25.

[32] Greathouse, 23.

[33] *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), #8552.

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[35] Friesen, 26.

[36] Ibid., 27.

[37] Ibid., 28.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, abridged [CD-ROM], 1 John 1:8.

[40] Ibid., 1 John 1:1.

[41] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1962.

[42] Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes' NT Commentary* [CD-ROM].

[43] *Spurgeon Devotional Commentary*, on 1 John 3:1-6.

[44] Barnes, 1 John 3:9.

[45] Orr.

[46] Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification.* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Publishing, 1981), 2.

[47] Ibid., 3.

[48] Ibid., 5.

[49] Friesen, 30.

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Christian Perfection.pdfDownload

A Quick Look at Justification



A Quick Look at Justification

By Jim Hill

The subject of **justification** was one of the things that the former Catholic priest Martin Luther protested against the Roman Catholic Church when he nailed his thesis to the door of the Cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany. Link: http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html Hence the name for the church that was formed out of this movement, the Reformation, the Protestant church. The entire unity of believers I will call the Christian church, whether they are Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or Anabaptist. There are both believers and unbelievers in all of the churches, and only God knows a person's heart. We cannot be their judge, God has this supreme role. Unfortunately, the official doctrine of many of these churches disagree with what is taught in the Bible.

First, realize that within the various churches there are a wide variety of personal viewpoints. For example, some Roman Catholics have chosen to use birth control, in violation of church teachings. Also, there is variation in beliefs in the Protestant church, and also the Christian church as a whole. The concept of the Rapture for example, and infant baptism for another. Also, we see the Orthodox Church appointing an openly gay bishop for example, and while many disagree with that, others among the majority of leaders agree. The bottom line is that as Christians, there needs to be agreement upon the fundamentals of the faith. Any difference upon these key points is a different Gospel, which as Christians we are called to condemn.

This brings us to the next point, authority. Who has final authority in leadership of the universe of Christian believers? Is it the church, the church fathers, the church teachings, or is it indeed the

Lord God? If you agree that God is the authority, has He vested this authority in an elite group of church leaders? What does God's Word say about this, the Bible? The Bible says that the Christian Church, which is the unity of all of us that believe in Jesus for salvation, is a "priesthood of believers." These believers can come from within any Christian denomination, or possibly even none of them. In 1Peter 2:9 Peter says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." In Revelation 1:6 John says, "and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Later in Revelation John said:

> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10)

What sacrifices do these priests offer? Romans 12:1-2 says:

> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Also, 1 Peter 2:5 says, "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

So, all believers are Priests and offer spiritual sacrifices. What about the altar? What does the Bible say about offering physical sacrifices on a modern church altar? Hebrews 7:27 says, "who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."

Once for all, and Jesus said "It is finished" as he died on the cross. A warning is in order here, which is that **anyone forsaking Jesus as their Savior no longer has a sacrifice for sin** (Hebrews Chapter 10 v 26). This is what is taught in the Bible and the Christian Church as a whole. What about the office of High Priest, who fulfills that role now that there is no longer any sacrifice for sin, which was the main purpose of this role of the Jewish High Priest? Hebrews 4:14-15 says:

> Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

We can show other verses that will tell you that Jesus is our High Priest, and we as believers are priests with our chief purpose to set about fulfilling the **Great Commission** explained in Matthew Chapter 28 v 16-20:

> ***All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

Now we can come back to the topic of **justification**. The word in the theological construct means in layman's terms, "how you are made right with God." In Romans 3:23 we know that it says "for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God." All, means everyone, except Jesus of course who is the God of the universe, the creator of it all, our Savior. Another way to look at **justification** is how we can be made right with God, "just as if I'd never sinned." Say that quickly, "just as if I'd never sinner." Justified.

How can we be justified with God? How can our sins be blotted out, forever, and we be made right with God? The Bible teaches, and the Christian church believes, that "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." John 3:16 Matthew 18:3 says, "unless you are converted, and become as a little child, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

John 3:3 says "you must be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Romans 10:13 says that "anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Now, briefly, let me move to Luther's primary protests. Over the years the Roman Catholic Church adopted a different theology of **justification,** one not taught in the Bible. The theology that developed through church tradition and councils is as follows: (1) Grace comes through receiving of the sacraments, and (2) the sacraments, along with good works are meritorious towards Salvation. The sacraments themselves, and good works, along with Jesus death and resurrection, and dying without any un-confessed mortal sins, results in justification. As Christians, we would call the process of purification occurring after trusting in Jesus, sanctification. The Bible is clear that justification does not come from the works of men. You may ask, what is grace? Grace is "unmerited favor from God." Unmerited means undeserved. The Christian church teaches, as is Biblical, that we are justified by grace, through faith, alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 says this clearly:

> For it is by grace that you are saved, through faith, and that not of works, it is the Gift of God, lest any many should boast.

This is what was taught by Jesus and the Apostles in the Bible. The Catholic Church now officially teaches that the sacraments (works of men) are meritorious towards salvation. But, like I said before, there are many different ***personal*** views within the Catholic Church. The view that a person holds will determine whether they enter Heaven Justified, or made right, before the Lord, or they hear the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew Chapter 7 "away from me, I never knew you." Strong words? Yes, but we have a very loving God who wishes that all come to faith in Him and none to perish in the judgment of eternal Hell.

So, what were our marching orders when Jesus left? The Great Commission, which commands us to

make disciples of the Christian Church, teaching, and baptizing. Those three things. Our goal is not to specifically make members of a particular denomination or church, but to the universal Christian church, priesthood of Jesus Christ our Lord. We are to make disciples of Jesus, teach others what He taught us to, and Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This needs to be the goal of our lives. As Christians, every morning that we wake up we need top ask ourselveshow we are doing on the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Our answer will determine the extent of our eternal blessings in Heaven.

I hope that this clarifies some of the misunderstandings that you may have. For some reason many people are afraid to discuss these very important matters. I have that this is especially true among my Roman Catholic friends and family. The life we spend here on earth is miniscule compared to what we will spend in eternity. We must know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

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Kathie's Testimony



Kathie's Testimony

By Kathie Smith

Hello. My name is Kathie and I would like to share with you a story of true friendship. Funny thing is that until I had this friendship, I never knew the magnitude of what I had been missing before. This friendship relationship is so significant that it will last forever, never to be parted by physical death but lasting forever into eternity.

I had passed by this new friend of mine when I was in church every Saturday night at mass. I would find out later on that he was always eager to meet me, but I just wasn't given the opportunity to meet him. We always seemed to simply pass by each other and never really truly had the chance to get to know each other personally.

I would pass by him when I would see a person helping another person in need. I would watch him work through the person assisting the other person but again, never was given the opportunity to meet him as I casually just observed from a distance.

I would pass by him when I would hear the kind words being said by a person trying to encourage and lift me up. Once again, I never recognized that it was his voice speaking but rather just heard the voice of the person speaking to me.

I would pass by him when I heard his words preached in the gospel readings during mass. His words were simply words on a page. I never heard His voice talking to me but rather I simply listened to the mere words being spoken.

How did I finally meet this friend of mine, Jesus Christ? Sit back, relax and I will tell you the story of how my relationship with Jesus Christ began.

I was raised by two loving parents who along with five other siblings were brought up in the Roman Catholic Church. We went to church every Sunday and Holy Day, received communion, confessed our sins in confession and were confirmed in the Church. I had an awesome childhood. Our family was very close. My parents were always the types of people who would do anything for us and for others. We all respected them as children and trusted in the belief system that they instilled in us.

After finishing college and working for a few years, I married a Catholic guy from a local town near our hometown. We were blessed with three wonderful children. We continued our Catholic faith by faithfully attending the Catholic Church and by enrolling our children in the local Catholic school. After living nine years at a thirty minute distance from my parents, we decided to buy property from my grandmother and build a home out in the country to be nearer my family. It was beautiful out in the country and meant a great deal to me to be close to my parents and to allow our kids to grow up with their grandparents living right down the road from them. Everything should have been perfect, right?

Well, the year was 1999. Y2K. People were running around telling others that doom and gloom was lurking at the strike of midnight on December 31, 1999. Stories were circulating that electricity and phone service could cease and that food shortages could occur. I started to dwell on the what-ifs of the whole Y2K thing. I started to doubt our safety and became very scared for what the future would hold. Having just moved into our new house, I started to miss all of our old friends, our old neighbors, our old school and just all of the usual things that I had grown accustomed to at our old home. Deeply troubled over all of these things, I plunged into a state of depression. Any of you who have ever been through this will understand that it is a very difficult time. I was sad and simply could not tell anyone why it was that I was sad. What was I missing in my life? I had everything – a good job, a wonderful husband and family and a beautiful new home. Why should I be in such a state of sadness? I had never experienced anything like that before.

Remember that friend that I had mentioned? Well, you see the friend that I had been passing by my whole entire life, was calling me. He was calling so loudly this time that I finally heard him. My brother emailed me about this wonderful thing that had happened to him. He had found an Internet site addressing salvation through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. He sent me a simple prayer to pray asking Jesus to start a friendship with me. Being so desperate to dig myself out of the depression that I had been feeling, I humbled myself and cried out to God. I knew that there wasn't anything that I could do on my own to save myself and I asked God to do it for me.

The next day I woke up and I felt different than I did the day before. My depression was gone. I was happy again. It was simply incredible. To this day I can't even remember what it was like to be in that state of mind, but I am just thankful to the Lord for what he had done for me.

I met the Lord Jesus for the first time in my whole entire life. I could feel his warmth inside of me and the friend that I had been passing over all of these years was finally with me.

I had been taught to pray to God ever since I was a little girl. I prayed every day but never felt any response back when I prayed. Now, I finally understand the presence of the living God in my prayers. He had become my friend, my forever and eternal friend.

Are you missing that one true friendship that I had been missing? Maybe you are doing all of the right things as I had done, attending church every week, saying your prayers, trying to obey the ten commandments, and simply attempting to be a good person but you are missing something. Maybe you are attending church simply because it makes you feel good inside because you took the time to go to church. That's how I used to feel. My husband and I used to go to church on Saturday night so we could "get it out of the way" for the weekend. It was merely an obligation that we needed to fulfill every week like

any other item on our "To Do" list.

Are you praying just because you were taught that that's what you are supposed to do? We always said the "Catholic Grace" before each and every meal. "Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen." I said that prayer so fast and without any meaning for so many years before meals. As I child, I never understood what "thy bounty" meant. It was just merely words spoken, done under obligation before we were to receive any food. Sadly enough, I continued this tradition into our own immediate family and was teaching them to pray out of obligation rather than giving honor to the Lord. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:7 "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words." Are you praying out of simply an obligation to pray or are you truly talking to the Lord in open communication?

We were taught that we were obligated to attend church, obligated to say our prayers and obligated to be the best person that we could be. What is an obligation? Webster defines an obligation as "something that binds one to a course of action; a duty; an indebtedness". Isn't it true then that after the obligation is complete i.e. course of action completed or duty performed that you have satisfied the debt and do not need to do anything further? That's exactly how I felt. All I had to do was: attend church on Sundays and "Holy Days of Obligation", say my prayers and simply be the best person that I could be. By doing these things, I was satisfying the requirements and did need to do anything further.

I learned that if I performed the things that I had been told were religious obligations, that I would be secure in the eyes of the Lord and be in heaven forever. The problem was, how much was enough in the eyes of the Lord? Should I attend church more than I had been? Maybe I should have been attending daily mass. Maybe I needed to say more prayers. Maybe I needed to

try and do more good things. Where would I draw the line? When would I do enough?

On that day in 1999, our Lord rescued me from the vicious cycle of "how much was enough?" My friend, our Lord Jesus Christ had already done everything that needed to be done for me already. 1 John 4:14 "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." Jesus spoke his last words in John 19:30 "It is finished." The Father sent Jesus to save us from being eternally separated from Him. He endured the pain and bore our sins when he hung on the cross. He completed the obligation that the Father had sent him to do – to bear the sins of all mankind on the cross. When he completed that, his work was complete. All of the things that I had been doing in my "vicious cycle" did not lead me to my forever friend; but, rather lead me further away from him because I thought that I was eternally secure.

How can you be eternally secure? What does he ask of us to do? Jesus tells us in John 3:3, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:6, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." We are born from our parent's flesh into a body made of flesh. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives as a living spirit inside of us when we ask the Lord to come into our lives." We are born once physically. We are born again when we are born spiritually, i.e. when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Was I born again by attending church every Sunday, praying prayers and attempting to do good things? All I had gained my whole entire life was a "good feeling" inside from all of the things that I had done. I was spiritually dead. I did not have the Holy Spirit inside of me. How can you become born again and receive God's gift of the Holy Spirit?

1. 1.Recognize that you are a sinner. Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
2. 2.Admit that no matter how many times you go to church, how many

prayers you pray or how many good things you do that it will not be enough in the eyes of the Lord. Romans 3:10 "There is no one righteous, not even one."

3. 3.Believe that the Lord Jesus was sent down from heaven by the Father, lived a perfect life, bore all of your sins on the cross, died and rose again on the third day. 1 Corinthians 15:3 "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."
4. 4.Confess your belief in what Jesus did for you on the cross. Trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. Romans 10:9-10 "That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

Are you being led astray into thinking that being a member of a church will guarantee your ticket into heaven? If you agree with the spiritual truths that I have presented, I now ask you to pray a very simple prayer. This is the prayer that my brother gave me, a very simple prayer that gave me my eternal and forever friend, Jesus Christ. Here is the prayer:

> God, I am a sinner. There is nothing that I can do on my own to make it to heaven. God, I accept the free offer that you make to me: Jesus' death on the cross for my sins. You sent your only Son Jesus down to Earth and he died as a substitute for our sins on the cross and then he rose from the dead and I know that he is going to return in glory. I accept this free offer; I want to be with you forever. I ask you to send the Holy Spirit to me. I open up my heart now to the Holy Spirit and welcome Him into my being. As I breathe in I ask the Holy Spirit to come into me and I ask the Holy Spirit to graciously make His presence known to me. I know that there is no amount of good deeds or clean living that could ever make me suitable for entrance into heaven. It is only your sacrifice that

makes it possible. I give my life over to you. I ask you to forgive my sins and to guide me so that I can do what you want me to do on Earth. I am here for you now and ready to do your will and accept help from you. I know that through you, anything is possible. You are the most holy, the living God, the one that was, the one that is, and the one that will be. Amen.

Kettle Point



Since I came to faith in Jesus Christ I have had several milestone events happen in my life. One of those was a trip that I took in the summer of 2000. It was just after church on a breezy Sunday afternoon when I decided to travel to a place in Canada to do some windsurfing. Kettle Point was a place on the southern end of Lake Huron that was rather famous to windsurfers for having very large waves on windy days. This day was no exception and the waves were forecasted to be ten feet tall! Even though it was not normal for him, my brother decided to ride along to watch. In fact, I can never remember another day that he had gone windsurfing with me.

After the hour and a half journey there, I had an excellent day riding the large, smooth waves in the bay.

Just before I was going to stop for the day, I came in for a brief rest. Then I decided to go out for one just more run. My brother was sitting in my truck reading due to the high wind and blowing sand. I had a very uneasy feeling as I was carrying the windsurf board back to the water. I was compelled to pray very hard for God to keep me safe on this final run of the day.

As I proceeded out into the bay where the largest waves were crashing into a bowl-shaped area to the east of the beach, I made a turn on the face of a very large wave. This was like heaven! Suddenly, my sail separated from the mast base on the board that sent my board flying one direction while my sail remained in my hands. Meanwhile the large wave that I had just finishing turning on crashed overtop of me with my sail! I let loose of my sail and soon realized that I was drowning. For a brief instant I hated to let go of my equipment, but quickly decided that the equipment was replaceable. Even though I was wearing a short wet suit, I was unable to float in the bubbly water caused by the constant crashing of the waves. I got very tired in my attempts to grab small amounts of air in between the waves. I knew that I was going to die right there, with my precious brother only a half a mile away on the shore. Once again, I began to pray.

I began to visualize my dead body washing up on the beach. This was very real, and is difficult for me to put into words. I visualized my body from a viewpoint some distance away, above me.

As I was fighting for my life in Lake Huron that day, I made the vivid realization that God was in control. He was the Lord of the universe! Somehow during the events of the past several years I missed that point. While I was drowning I surrendered my will to God. I accepted that He was the Lord of my life. I had accepted Jesus as my Savior, but I had never really surrendered my will to God as my Lord. This was made clear to me while I was dying that day at Kettle Point.

Somehow I came to realize that if I pulled on my wet suit, I could create a small air bubble in my chest area that slightly increased my buoyancy. Also, I saw a white flag on a small floating buoy a few yards away. And there were some jet skiers in the area. So somehow I managed to swim over to the buoy and break the fiberglass rod attaching the flag. This left me with a two-foot long mast with a flag attached. Between the huge waves I was able to wave the flag. After about five minutes of waving, I had still not moved any distance towards the shore, although my board and sail had long ago washed away. I continued to pray, and as one of the jet skis approached I was spotted and rescued. I walked back up the beach praising God to tell my brother the amazing story. My equipment washed up on the beach a few minutes later in perfect condition except for the broken mast base.

Later that evening at a restaurant in Sarnia, Ontario I had my first meal as a truly "born again" man. And although I am much more careful while windsurfing, I recognize now that God is in control of my life.

Apes, Dates, and Escapes





Apes, Dates, and Escapes

A Poem By Jim Hill

One day my teacher told me that my daddy really just came from an ape.

"Mam, is that why ***your*** daddy bears an uncanny resemblance to one from *Planet of the Apes*?"

Hanging by the nape, I had little chance of escape.

Thinking, "Isn't this how mommy affected her brave cubs escape?"

"While daddy was out in the jungle, collecting savory dates?"

"Principal, why am I suddenly the subject of your extreme scorn, rage, and hate?"

"Scientific facts are the reason she went into such a state."

"Would have been worse, except her highly-evolved, motherly senses are innate."

"Not for that, she'd have had you on the rack, and been justified in her attack!"

Rubbing my neck, "Sir, could it be that your birth was the result of a rape?"

"While your daddy was hunting, out looking for a date?"

I have often said that evolution is a religion which requires more faith than Christianity. Christianity is historic and evidential, whereas evolution requires giant leaps of faith that would have to clear the largest mountain in a single stride. It seems that evolution is no longer taught as a theory, but pure fact. It is the foundation upon which much of modern biological theory rests. Evolution requires that literally quadrillions of simultaneous events happened at the very same time. Animals had to evolve from something and their food sources at the same time. The dirt on which they stand had to "evolve" from a great cosmic explosion. Yet all of it is based upon the idea that a genetic mutation

prospered the evolutionary line. When is the last time we saw mutations improving things? Does a two headed frog hunt better than one with a single head? They should be able to catch twice as many bugs, but then why didn't this mutation become dominant? Breast cancer is a mutation, and does that improve the human race? The idea that genetic mutations improve anything is ridiculous, as is the idea that man evolved from an ape.

According to evolutionary teaching, humans are the most highly evolved creatures in the world. Okay, their instincts and intelligence shoud be written in their genes, and therefore their genetic makeup should be the most complex among any plant or animal. If you believe this you would be wrong. Wheat has one of the most complex genetic structures of any plant or animal. In fact some varieties has as many as six sets of chromosomes. So tell me Mr. Wheat, what should I wear to the prom this Saturday night? I'm thinking about renting a tux, but would I be overdressed in comparison to Sally my date whose mom made her dress out of an expensive table cloth? I could use some help in other areas too, perhaps I should ask Bran your sister for some help? Can you send her over tomorrow at 2?

Jim Hill

Apes-Dates-and-Escapes.pdfDownload

An Examination of the Escatolical View of Scripture Emerging from Hanegraaf and Brouwer's First Book in the Last Disciple Series



AN EXAMINATION OF THE ESCATOLOGICAL VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

EMERGING FROM HANEGRAAFF AND BROUWER'S FIRST BOOK

IN THE *LAST DISCIPLE* SERIES

BY JIM HILL

The Last Disciple (hereafter *LD*) is a fictional novel set in the Roman Empire during the reign of Nero. The main character is Vitas, a trusted advisor of Nero that attempts to curb this beast's maniacal excesses and save Christians from torture and execution. The plot is complex and follows Vitas as he journeys to Jerusalem to report on the governor Florus who has been persecuting Jews and Christians alike. During the adventure, Vitas becomes engaged to a former slave girl named Sophia who is a Christian. Eventually they meet up with John the Revelator who is being held in prison. The book is exciting but requires attention to details since this first book in the series spends an extensive amount of time building the characters for future books.

The thesis of this paper is the degree to which we can affirm the partial preterist position that

emerges from Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer's first book in their eschatologically themed series. Specifically, what are the main eschatological themes in the book? Second, did John mean for us to refer to the first-century Roman ruler Nero in the book of Revelation when he spoke of the beast? Finally, can we interpret many of the events in the Olivet Discourse as having already found their fulfillment during Nero's persecution of Christians during the middle part of the first century? Hanegraaff stated in the afterward of his book that the theology in the series was predicated by a term that he invented called "exegetical eschatology."[1] The thesis therefore is the extent to which this eschatological perspective is theologically palatable as it develops within the *Last Disciple* and from other statements made by Hanegraaff.

The word *preterism* came from the Latin words *praeter* meaning "beyond," and *ire* which means "go." This eschatological view has interpreted certain OT and NT biblical prophesies as having already been fulfilled. Toussaint quoted Ice as indicating three forms of this theology, including mild, moderate, and extreme. Followers of the extreme form teach have taught that all biblical prophesy has been fulfilled and the Lord Jesus has already returned. Teachers of the moderate form have held that most Bible prophesies have been fulfilled except for the second coming of Jesus. Adherents of the mild form of preterism have held that the Tribulation spoken of in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation was fulfilled through the judgment of the Jews in 70 C.E. or Rome in 313 C.E.[2] It was this mild form of what we call partial preterism that was the subject of this treatise.

Tyndale released *The Last Disciple* in late 2004 in response to Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' highly successful *Left Behind* series. *Time* magazine interviewed Hank Hanegraaff when this first book was being released who said, "There is a lot of hysteria because of the *Left Behind* books." He continued, "The *Left Behind* books are part of a trend toward sensationalism and 'script torture' of the Bible."[3] Several recent events ignited this battling of end-times authors. First was the 1996 release of the *Left Behind* book and subsequent series by LaHaye and Jenkins. Second was the callous acceptance by many evangelicals to Jenkins' series. Many of the callers to Hanegraaff's *Bible Answer Man* program did not seem to be willing to rethink any of their eschatological view. A third factor in the debate was pregnant pause that ensued as Christian radio listeners waited for the

release of Hanegraaff's own position on eschatology. Hank made many critical comments about Jenkins' book on his radio program. Whenever callers would ask for Hank's position, his response was to tell them to wait for his book. His main complaint was that many callers blindly followed the futurist, pre-millennial view like a pied piper. Listeners to the program weren't surprised when Hank released his book series with a different theological bent coauthored with novelist Sigmund Brouwer. After Tyndale released this first book in the fictional series in 2004, the second one entitled *The Last Sacrifice* followed in 2005.

Primary Theological Issues in *The Last Disciple*

Eschatology is a vast and complex subject. If we were to examine all of the theological issues that emerged from the *LD* we would be doing so right up until "the Lord himself (comes) down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thess 4:16). [4] Because of this complexity, we have narrowed the scope of this paper to the events in the Olivet Discourse with a brief reference to events mentioned in Revelation. Yet the interrelatedness of the material requires that we examine at least some of the main theological themes in the book. These are seemingly without number, but the main ones are as follows.

First, the *LD* is an outright rejection of the futurist view of eschatology. It espouses a partial preterist view regardless of what Hanegraaff says otherwise. This doesn't mean that we accuse Hanegraaff of an unorthodox Christian view. Adams provided an excellent treatise on the different between what he called an "orthodox preterists" and an "unorthodox preterists." Although theology is usually done in shades of gray, this debate on orthodoxy revolves around the heart of the Gospel, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unorthodox preterist denies the second coming of Christ, saying that Jesus came spiritually in 70 C.E. They also deny the resurrection of the dead and relegate this to a spiritual sense.[5] Hanegraaff follows the orthodox view and doesn't in any way deny either the second coming of Christ or the resurrection of the dead. Even though Hank has rejected the prevailing eschatological view, his position isn't unorthodox in any fashion. We should discuss his beliefs with gentleness and respect as he likes to say on his program.

Second, the premise of *LD* almost entirely hinges upon an early dating of Revelation, before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The thesis of the book is based upon this early dating of both Revelation and the entire NT. In his second book, Hank questions how John could have written Revelation and not mentioned that the temple had been destroyed. He said, "The point of all this is that if Revelation was written before AD 70, then it is reasonable to assume that the vision given to John was meant to reveal the apocalyptic events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem—events that were still in John's future but that are in our past." Hank went on to say, "First, it is instructive to note that the late dating for Revelation is largely dependent on a single—markedly ambiguous—sentence in the writings of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons." He gave one single reason for rejecting the late dating (95 C.E.) of Revelation. [6] Geisler stated regarding the eschatology in the *LD* book, "There is strong evidence that Revelation was written in the 90s well after Nero was dead during Domitian's reign. If so, this would make the LD false." Geisler gave no less than ten reasons for the late dating of Revelation.[7] It is evident from history that Nero was a monster. However, the text of Revelation seems to indicate that the beast mentioned there is connected to a later Roman figure or the nation as a whole. The first time that the beast appears is in Rev 11:7. The context of this passage is during the close of ministry of the two witnesses who are then overcome by the beast that came up from the abyss and killed them. Neither history or Scripture record the ministry of these two individuals during the timeframe of Nero. The beast could be prefigured by Nero, but certainly wasn't fulfilled by him.

Geisler continued to refocus the likely setting of Revelation in the future. He quoted Hanegraaff's book as saying that since John uses words like "the time is near" and "soon" in Revelation, this reveals that John could not have been looking towards the modern era. Geisler said, "If so, then on this premise the whole book of Revelation (including the Second Coming and Resurrection – Chapters 19-20) must refer to the first century since the word "soon" applies to the whole book of Revelation (1:1; 22:10). In this case full preterism follows which is heretical." Geisler found that the word translated "quickly" in various places in Revelation is *tachu* (tacu) meaning "quick, swift, or speedy." He said, "Hence this term need not, as LD argues, refer to a first-century event but to the

imminent coming of Christ whenever it occurs."[8]

Third, *LD* incorporates metaphorical language of scriptural in a very literal fashion from the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. This is something that Hank, while on his radio program, has accused LaHaye of doing. Hanegraaff said, "The pretribulational rapture model featured in the Left Behind series interprets Revelation 13 in a strictly literal fashion."[9] Yet Hank did the very same thing in his book with a variety of scriptural texts. On the very first page of the book, Hanegraaff introduced Nero as a man dressed in a costume consisting of leopard's skin, eagle's wings, a bear's legs, and the head of a lion alluding directly to Daniel 7 and Revelation 13.[10] Before the end of the first chapter, Hanegraaff had openly identified Nero as the "beast" spoken of by John in Revelation.[11] Additional examples abound. One of the characters said, "Earthquakes seem to occur daily across the world."[12] Hanegraaff didn't do anything different than LaHaye in literalizing the details of Scripture, but he shouldn't accuse LaHaye of violating hermeneutical principles since *LD* was filled with similar examples. On the positive side, Hanegraaff and Brouwer did a good job in painting this historical situation that existed in Jerusalem during the reign of Nero by including many true historical features.

Finally, *LD* inaccurately states the futurist position regarding the activities of antichrist in Rev. 13. Hanegraaff stated, "The pretribulational rapture model in the *Left Behind* series interprets Revelation 13 in a strictly literal fashion. Thus the antichrist dies and resurrects himself physically in order to vindicate his claim to be god."[13] Hank contrasted his approach with LaHaye's:

> In sharp contrast, The Last Disciple series exegetes Revelation 13 in light of the whole Scripture. Thus Satan can *parody* the work of Christ through 'all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders' (2 Thessalonians 2:9), but he cannot literally do what Christ did—namely, raise himself from the dead. . . .What is at stake here is nothing less than the deity and resurrection of Christ.[14]

The problem with Hank's thesis is that the biblical text does not plainly say that the antichrist does this. Revelation 13:3 states, "I saw one of his heads *as if* it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast" (emphasis added). The

NIV reads, "seemed to have had a fatal wound."[15] The word rendered "seemed" in the NIV is the Greek word ώς (hoos) which means, "that is to say, so to speak," or as in 1Thess 5:2; "like," in the sense "like a thief in the night."[16] The text goes on, "And he (the false prophet) *deceives* those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the *wound* of the sword and has come to life" (Rev 13:14, emphasis added). These passages speak of how the false prophet *deceives* those on earth through the antichrist who was wounded *as if* dead. It is evident from these verses that the "death and resurrection" of the antichrist is a satanic deception. Scripture states, "And the whole earth was amazed" (13:3b). Therefore, LaHaye was justified in portraying an actual death and resurrection since the whole word was deceived by this satanic trick.

Norm Geisler reviewed the book and made the following statement regarding the preceding issues:

> Many events in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18 were not fulfilled in A.D. 70 – at least not literally. For example, the stars did not fall from heaven (Mt. 24:29), nor were one-third of humans killed (Rev. 9:18), and neither did all the creatures in the sea die (Rev. 16:3) in A.D. 70. . . . Although *LD* disavows the label of "partial preterism" as well as "post-millennialism" this conclusion is in agreement with preterism. And if LD is right, then the rest of the Tribulation (Rev. 6-18) must be placed there too.[17]

Geisler hit on both the main eschatological theme and the problem with the partial preterist theology. The theme is that most of the events in Revelation were already fulfilled during the first-century except for the second coming of the Lord. The problem is that many of the events named by the partial preterists weren't completely fulfilled in that century. It's not so much that some of the events that occurred during the first century couldn't have fulfilled Scripture, but that they weren't fulfilled in the thorough manner that the futurists require. In any case, Jesus' birth certainly surprised many Jews who later believed in him. It was only after the fact that anyone could look into OT prophesy and locate the details of Jesus' coming. These are the reasons that our correspondence with those holding a partial preterist position must be seasoned with love and humility that is to be forthcoming of fellow believers (John 13:35).

The Olivet Discourse in *LD*

A well developed theology regarding the Olivet Discourse doesn't completely emerge in the *LD* since it is the first in the series. However, several themes do emerge regarding Jesus' prophetic speech heralded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. *LD* holds that the first portion of the scriptural text of the Olivet Discourse relates to the first century during the reign of Nero. In Matthew's version of the Discourse, Jesus predicted that the temple would be destroyed, then after a lengthy discourse he said in 24:34 that, "Truly I say to you, *this* generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Truly, what is meant by "this generation" is where the discussion on the Discourse must begin. Hanegraaff quoted these verses in the afterward of his second book to tie the generation mentioned in verse 34 to the destruction of the temple in verse 2.[18] After Jesus' lengthy discourse, the Lord went on to say when all these things would happen. In verse 34 he said, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Hank agrees that Jesus has not yet returned,[19] therefore he cannot say that "this generation" is being spoken of in the near sense since if this was the case the entirety of prophesy in the Olivet Discourse would have had to have been fulfilled when the temple was destroyed. Hank can't have it both ways as Geisler aptly noted. He can't say that Jesus was saying that *all* of the events would be fulfilled in the lifetime of the generation existing around 70 C.E., but on the other hand look forward to Jesus' return on the clouds (v. 30) in the future.

Hank tries to get around these apparent difficulties. He said, "This is not to say, however, that all of the prophecies in Revelation have already been fulfilled. . . . Revelation not only predicted fore-future events, such as the coming apocalypse in John's lifetime, but also chronicles events that will take place in the far and final future."[20] According to Hank, "(He is) deeply committed to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation rather than any particular model of eschatology."[21] This is a reasonable hermeneutic in light of the vagaries of theological systems gone awry such as hyper-Calvinism or Wesley's Christian perfection. His method deserves serious attention even though at first glance from a futurist perspective it is logically inconsistent. Hanegraaff would have to draw a dividing line between which events were literally fulfilled during Nero's reign and destruction of the

temple during the Jewish civil war and the ones that were not. Futurist often point to dual fulfillments of prophetic Scripture. This adds yet another layer of theology to that hermeneutic, making prophetic interpretation the vastly complicated science it is. Hanegraaff's partial preterist hermeneutic, even though he doesn't call it that, not only brings some simplicity but may also help to explain away some of the futurist's problematic verses such as Matthew 24:34 which according to Toussaint is a hard one for everyone.[22]

Perhaps what is needed in the eschatological debates on the Discourse is this entirely different perspective brought by the partial preterist scholars. Nixon began his book on the Olivet Discourse from this perspective with the following statement, "If anyone proposes a new interpretation of Scripture that contradicts the sober opinions of MOST known Bible scholars, he is probably wrong. However, this is one case, at least, where one must ignore all existing attempts to explain the Discourse." Next, he boldly stated that Matthew 24:3-22 was clearly fulfilled during the Jewish/Roman civil war of 66-70 C.E., and "the present writer knows of NO ONE who disagrees with this interpretation." [23] Nixon said, "The standards or pennants of the 10^{th} legion (the Roman army's gods) were regarded as the "abomination of desolation" by the Jews of the city."[24] This interpretation contradicts even the most fundamental understanding of the futurist interpretation of the Discourse. Most futurist commentators point to these verses as having at least a future fulfillment regardless of what happened in the first century. Many look to the typology of the second century B.C.E. events under Antiochus Epiphanes, with final fulfillment in the future.[25] The preterist authors do offer an entirely different perspective, but not one without serious reactionary preconceptions against the futurists. Their reactions against the futurists seem to drive their theology as much as the futurists are driven by their own.

Hanegraaff's book wasn't without many redeeming theological expressions. He offered an excellent insight regarding the biblical author's use of visual imagery in the Discourse. In his story, Helius was second in command under Nero, and had one of his scribes read from the Gospel of Matthew 24:29-30:

> But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

His scribe related the meaning of this Scripture to him:

> If you were a Jew, you would be familiar with the imagery. *Coming on the clouds* is a familiar Jewish expression used by our prophets to communicate the majesty and sovereign power of God. His coming on the clouds translates to judgment for those who resist Him and blessing for those who bow the knee. . . . Isaiah, for example, used this very expression to describe God's retribution on Egypt when he prophesied that God would come in wrath and fierce anger to make the land of Babylon desolate, he said that 'the rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.'"[26]

As futurists, we have quite likely missed the sense of the Scripture by over literalizing it. This is hypocritical since it is the same thing that we earlier accused the partial preterists of doing. In the NASB, the text regarding the darkening of the sky is in all capitals, indicating an OT quotation. In terms of Jesus' promise to come in the clouds, should we literalize this in keeping with the promise by the angels in Acts 1:11, or should we allow symbolism in keeping with first-century Jewish thought? This latter course appears more logical, especially in light of Revelation 1:7: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him." How can every eye see his coming at the same time if this is taken literally? In this text, the first portion concerning the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds is a direct quote from Daniel 7:13. In Exodus, the pillar of cloud was literally representative of the glory of God. Certainly, we have to allow for Jewish symbolism and visual imagery given to us by the Jewish scholars who created the NT.

Conclusion – No Logical Middle Ground

The value of Hank Hanegraaff's book was not its theological brilliance but rather the challenge that it offered his readers to develop their own eschatological position. The first book in the series didn't develop an extensive theology but rather laid the groundwork for subsequent books. Hank appears to have taken a partial preterist position not so much as a middle ground but as a reaction against the futurists. In doing so, he has attempted to force his own partial preterism system on them, rather than allowing for what he called an exegetical theology to interpret the text outside of existing theological systems. We cannot suggest a novel middle ground that would negate some of the difficulties with Hanegraaff's position while offsetting those of the futurist position. Instead, we must continue to wrestle with the whole of Scripture with special emphasis on proper contextualization of the eschatological events in the NT. We long for additional validation of the late dating of Revelation. This is not so much for the purposes of proving our futurist position, which we believe, is the correct one, but to glorify the Lord in more confidently proclaiming his coming

judgment and glory. Govett said back in 1985, "In conclusion—fully I am convinced that no ingenuity can extricate the Praeterist interpreter from the endless difficulties, absurdities, historic contradictions which beset his scheme."[27]

END NOTES

[1] Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Disciple* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2004), 393.

[1] Stanley D. Toussaint, "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse." *BSac* 161 (2004): 469-70.

[1] Kathy Boot Thomas, "Is it the End of the World as This Author Knows It?," *Time Magazine* 164 no. 21 (November 24, 2004): No pages. Citied 24 March 2006. Online: http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,995693,00.html.

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[1] Jay E. Adams, *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox?* (Stanley, N.C.: Timeless Texts, 2003), 2-3.

[1] Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Sacrifice* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2005), 342-4.

[1] Norm Geisler, "A Friendly Response to Hank Hanegraaff's Book, *The Last Disciple*," n.p. [cited 23 March 2006]. Online: http://www.ses.edu/NormGeisler/lastdisciple.htm.

[1] Ibid.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 393.

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[1] Ibid., 394.

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[1] Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1898), 33.139, 64.12.

[1] Geisler.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Sacrifice*, 342.

[1] Ibid., 344.

[1] Ibid., 344.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 393.

[1] Toussaint, 483.

[1] Thomas C. Nixon, *The Olivet Discourse – Mystery Revealed* (Bloomington, Ind.: 1st Books: 2003), x.

[1] Ibid., 172.

[1] See for example, John MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 1999) 105-112.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 101.

[1] Robert Govett, *The Locusts, The Euphratean Horseman and the Two Witnesses* (Miami Springs, Fla.: Conley and Schoettle, 1985), 145.

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 393.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Ibid., 5.

[12] Ibid., 93.

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[16] Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1898), 33.139, 64.12.

[17] Geisler.

[18] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Sacrifice*, 342.

[19] Ibid., 344.

[20] Ibid., 344.

[21] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 393.

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[24] Ibid., 172.

[25] See for example, John MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 1999) 105-112.

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John Smyth: Root of the Baptists



John Smyth: Root of the Baptists

by James M. Hill

John Smyth was one of the founders of the Baptist church movement as a whole and was the impetus for the later founding of the General Baptists under his protégé Thomas Helwys. Smyth also made major contributions to later Baptist denominations and influenced the founding of America through colonies fleeing religious oppression in Europe. Tull put John Smyth's name foremost in his book on the major influencers of Baptist thought. He said, "John Smyth's life was profoundly influenced by the tortuous course of the English Reformation. Smyth, in turn, was a leader in one stream of that Reformation which flowed through Puritanism and Separatism to the beginnings of Baptist life."[1]

Many events occurred in England leading up to John Smyth's birth sometime around 1570.[2] Henry

VIII reigned from 1509-1547 and had separated with the Roman Catholic Church but wanted "popery but not a pope." Henry's oppressive laws such as the *Act of Six Articles* of 1539 forced many English Christians into exile. In Switzerland during 1525, the Swiss Anabaptists broke with Zwingli, and Menno Simmons became the leader of the Dutch enclave in 1537. In 1538 Henry VIII made efforts to expel all of the Anabaptists from England.[3] Many English refugees were able to return when Edward VI came into power in 1547, and they returned with a wide variety of ecclesiastical influences from the Reformers. Many reforms were made in the Church of England during this era likely as a result of these reformational ideas of the returnees. These included the destruction of shrines and idols, allowance of priests to marry, and important revisions to the *Book of Common Prayer*. Another exodus came about when "Bloody Mary" came to the throne in 1553, with many exiles going to the very same areas to which they had fled to under Henry VIII. Once Elizabeth came to power in 1558, many exiles returned marking the beginning of the Puritan movement. Elizabeth made some much needed reforms but also instituted ecclesiastical strictures such as mandatory church attendance and the requirement that all clergy swear to a shortened version of the Articles of Religion.[4]

John Smyth received an MA from Cambridge in 1593 and was ordained by the Church of England in 1594.[5] He worked either as a lecturer or preacher for the city of Lincoln beginning in 1600 but was removed from this official positon in 1602. Torbet quoted John Shakespeare in stating the reason for Smyth's removal as having "approved himself a factious man in this city by personal preaching, and that untruly against divers men of good place."[6] He joined a Separatist church in Gainsborough beginning in 1606 until he moved to Holland in 1608.[7] At some point he became their pastor.[8] This was an interesting turn of events since during his time with the Church of England, Smyth defended the Church against the Separatists. Later he began to have doubts about the teachings of the Church and spent some nine months investigating before he joined the very people which he had formerly opposed.[9] This is a pattern that repeated in Smyth's life. At first he objected to the Separatist teachings, then embraced them. Later he did the same with the Puritans, and embraced these. Finally he synthesized all of his beliefs into yet a third category which could be called Baptist while embracing Arminianism, a doctrine he formerly opposed.

Smyth moved his congregation to Amsterdam after incurring the wrath of the English government. At this point some historians say that Smyth baptized himself,[10] something that he indicated later that he regretted.[11] There is much question over whether or not this event actually

happened, and the importance of the debacle. Christian said, "It is difficult to see what difference it makes whether Smyth baptized himself or was baptized by Helwys."[12] Benedict quoted Crosby and Ivimey and said that most likely the story was false. More likely what happened was that one of Smyth's companions baptized him.[13] Perhaps some of the confusion in the historical accounts is because there are at least three men with the same name during the era.[14] Regardless what happened, Smyth's legacy contained in the various historical accounts is tainted by the possibility of his self-baptism. If Smyth didn't do what was reported it's hard to understand why he would later indicate remorse for it.

Sometime around 1609 in Amsterdam Mr. Smyth was excluded from his own congregation and his protégé Thomas Helwys became their pastor. Near the same time Smyth had petitioned the Mennonite Church for membership but was rejected.[15] The split seems to have come about because about ten members of the church didn't agree, including Helwys, who in effect formed a new church.[16] Smyth never was accepted into the Mennonite fellowship since he died of consumption in August, 1612 and was buried in Amsterdam.[17] In that same year, Helwys returned to England and together with many of his small congregation from Amsterdam. Once there, Pastor Helwys formed the first Baptist church in England. [18] The remainder of Helwys' church in Amsterdam wasn't accepted into fellowship with the Waterlander Mennonites until some three years after Smyth's death in 1615.[19]

John Smyth's theological beliefs followed three distinct patterns that progressed chronologically from his birth in England to his death in Amsterdam. The first phase was a time when he followed Puritan teachings. This was followed by a period when he was most closely identified with the English Separatists.[20] The final chapter of his life could be called his Baptist phase during which he embraced Arminianism towards the close of his life. In his early life it appears that Mr. Smyth's beliefs were similar to the other Separatists around him. When he left England for Amsterdam he did it under the fellowship of a church under the authority of a Mr. Ainsworth and consisting of the co-pastors of a neighboring church, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Clifton. After they arrived in Amsterdam, they were unified in doctrine. Then Mr. Smyth began a doctrinal study and came to the conclusion

that neither infant baptism or sprinkling were confirmed by Scripture. This caused a conflict within his church and he was thrown out.[21] At this point Smyth formed a separate church in 1607 or 1608 almost wholly composed of English exiles. Smyth was evidently a strong believer in the Anabaptist doctrine of believers' baptism. In 1608 Smyth, following the Dutch Anabaptists, concluded that members should be added to church fellowship through a profession of faith and subsequent baptism and therefore rejected infant baptism.[22] Smyth continued his doctrinal studies and produced about a dozen works during his lifetime.[23]

The Puritans were the foundation stone for the development of John Smyth's theological beliefs. This group came onto the radar screen during the reign of Queen Elizabeth and brought with it several distinctives that later found their way into the Baptists. First was their conviction that the church consist only of born again believers through the power of the Holy Spirit. Second, they believed that the entire realm of Christian practice should be conducted strictly according to the word of God in the Bible. Third, the Puritans were primarily Calvinistic in their reading of the Scripture and presbyterian in their ecclesiology as it related to the order of church versus state. They believed that the king had supreme power over civil matters but was also under obligation to enforce order and worship in the church and to the extent that everyone in the society be a member. [24]

Smyth wrote two volumes during his Puritan phase. They represented some remarkable beliefs for the age, things which are directly reflected in the modern Baptist church in America today. He believed that the Lord 's Prayer was given to us by our Lord as a "model prayer" rather than one to be recited by rote repetition.[25] He spoke against the Roman Church's use of the prayer and strived for what he called "true and holy use" of it.[26]

The second building block of Smyth's theology was English Separatism. This small movement also came about during the time of Queen Elizabeth in response to the general idea that reforms were impossible inside the Church of England. One of the rallying cries of the Separatists, who likely numbered less than 1,000 people, was the same as the Puritans who believed the church should not

contain a mixed multitude of saints with the wicked. The Separatists believed that they should expel from membership anyone that it deemed to be unconverted. Separatists shared the Puritan belief that the true church should be enforced by the civil authorities, even though they called Jesus Christ their prophet and king.[27]

Smyth wrote three volumes during his Separatist period that began around the time he left England. In these, he indicated that the church was both visible and invisible with the latter consisting, in Calvinistic terms, of only the elect. Smyth defined the visible church in strict terms such that it consisted only of true saints, the Holy Spirit dwelling within believers uniting church members to their head Jesus Christ, and something that he called "true properties." Within his "true properties" was a threefold process for appointing church leaders. This consisted of a popular election of them within the church, an examination of the candidate to see that they met the proper qualifications, and finally an ordination or laying on of hands in appointing the person to service.[28] This very thorough method of examining candidates to determine if they were truly spiritual undoubtedly influenced the later Baptist movement that followed similar prescriptions.

During this time, Smyth sought to keep purity in the church and did not allow donations by nonmembers. He spoke about the duty of the entire church to maintain its purity by excommunication "not (for) the destruction of the offender, but the mortification of his synne, and the salvation of his soule."[29] Smyth exalted Scripture and believed that the most important aspect of local church government was for it to be true to the constitution of the church as uncovered in the NT. In this view, he found no justification for multiplicity of church offices described by the terms bishop, elder, or presbyter, as these were all the same thing with different names. The only other office he found in the NT was that of a deacon who were charged with performing acts of service.[30] He believed that Scripture should be translated directly by the minister for the congregation and that this should be done in such a way as not to interfere with the Holy Spirit.[31] Smyth believed that an apostate church was marked by what he called a "mixed membership" of believers and nonbelievers alongside each other. He said this in spite of the fact that he believed there were true believers in the various false churches, but that they should depart from them. His test for

membership in the true church was obedience to Christ shown in obedience to his commands in what he called an "outward visible faith." Because of these things and for other reasons he called the Church of England an apostate church. Out of this belief sprung his statement that if the Church was false, then so was its baptism.[32] Worship during his Separatist phase was what we would call charismatic. Smyth spoke against putting bounds on the Holy Spirit, which he said must be "at liberty," and that rote forms of worship were "quenching the Spirit."[33] Some of these beliefs most certainly found their way into the modern Baptist church, especially the limited church government of elders with deacons as "doers." This structure in defiance of the Anglican and Roman Churches is taken for granted in the modern Baptist church.

The third and final period of Smyth's life could be called Baptist or Anabaptist and began around 1609. This was marked by his rejection of infant baptism and a belief that church members were to be initiated into the church by repentance and profession of faith followed by baptism.[34] During this period, Smyth wrote against the Separatists in similar way in which he spoke against the mainline church. In fact, he called them harlots in that they shared with Rome the "mark of the beast" of infant baptism. The Anglicans justified the practice by saying it was a confirmation of the New Covenant in the same way that circumcision was the sealing of the Abraham's. Smyth broke new ground here by finding two covenants with Abraham, that of his "carnal seed" and "spiritual seed." He said the spiritual seed must first believe and be sealed with the Holy Spirit, then be baptized under their own free will. His prescription was clear that baptism was not effectual in doing anything except in that it made a visible declaration the promises of the Holy Spirit. The person that came forward for baptism, "must bee one that confesseth his faith & his sinnes, one that is regenerate & borne again." [35] Smyth seems to have been influenced by the Waterlander Mennonites during this time with their Anabaptist beliefs at least in part because his congregation worshiped in buildings owned by a merchant that was a Mennonite.[36] These revolutionary ideas, borrowed and modified from the Mennonites, found their way into the modern Baptist church with the exception of the idea of the dual seed. The seed concept passed into other modern churches.

When Smyth was accused of siding with the Anabaptists, he stated that the baptism he was

teaching was the only true baptism, and implied that the Anabaptists did the ceremony for the purpose of being rebaptized rather than for the principles that he outlined in terms of believer's baptism.[37] At some point after this, he came to the belief that "private baptism was an error and that the Amsterdam Mennonites constituted the true church and had a true baptism." Then he confessed that he acted too quickly in baptizing himself.[38] In 1610 Smyth contacted the Dutch Mennonites by writing a letter in which he confessed his error in baptizing himself and requested membership in their church. After this a conflict arouse amongst Smyth's congregation and a group led by Thomas Helwys split from Smyth. Helwys went as far as to draw up a document outlining his group's beliefs and present it to the Mennonites such that they wouldn't confuse him with Smyth's sect. Eventually Helwys' group returned to England sometime around 1611 or 1612. The Mennonites were cautious about Smyth and requested a detailed doctrinal statement, so Smyth produced two documents. The first was a compilation of twenty articles of faith, and the second was a document of one hundred articles called *The Last Book of John Smyth Called the Retraction of His Errors*. Torbet says that these two documents were some of the earliest English Baptist Creeds, but none of them contained any mention of baptism by immersion.[39]

Smyth's final years were marked by more doctrinal changes. In his early writings he was a confirmed Calvinist, although later on he apparently adopted Arminianism.[40] Since Smyth came to embrace a general atonement of Christ's death for all men, in his later years his group came to be called "General Baptists," a name carried forward by Helwys.[41] The "Particular" Baptists didn't come into the picture in England until around 1638 under the influence of non-Separatists such as Henry Jacob, John Lathrop, and Praise-God Barebone.[42] Tull noted that earlier Smyth believed classical Calvinistic teaching, "It is not God's will that all men should be converted and saved. Yet, because we cannot know which man is reprobate, it is our duty to pray for any particular man." Smyth's view on the separation of the church from the state was surprising for the time, and in light of his other beliefs. He believed that the civil king was the supreme ruler of both the state and the church, and that the magistrate should force people to worship the true God or be punished with death, imprisonment, or confiscation of their belongings. He said that believers can pray against

wicked rulers but never approved the use of force against them.[43] Later on Smyth apparently changed his view on Christian government and adopted a doctrine of free will according to man's conscience.[44]

Some of John Smyth's main contributions to the free-church movement may have been in the area of worship practices. McKibbens studied Smyth's worship and uncovered a document from one of his church members detailing the set form of worship. Smyth said that the Spirit was quenched by set forms of worship. He wrote in 1608 in a book entitled *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation* that the Spirit could be quenched in two ways. First was through silence, if anyone had some insight to add during the service they were obligated to offer it to everyone. Second, Smyth said that the reading of any book during the service quenched the Spirit. McKibbens quoted Smyth from this book as saying that reading from a book during the service was, "the invention of the man of synne it beeing substituted for a part of the spirituall worship."[45]

McKibbens put together the program for the sense of a general worship meeting. This consisted of an opening prayer, preaching of one hour each of three expositors on the same scriptural text, and a series of closing exhortations and prayer. The Separatist worship was loosely based upon three principles. First, they had to be spontaneous and open to change as their understanding of the scriptural text flowed from the expositors. Smyth often apologized for the constant changes made to his worship practices. Second, the worship had to be open to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. Third, their worship was based upon the principle of the freedom of the conscience in religious matters. Thomas Helwys, the successor of Smyth stated that even though King James did have power over his subjects in civil affairs, his power did not extend to their conscience relating to religious concerns.[46] This thinking found its way into the modern Baptist Church.

One cannot state definitively that John Smyth founded the Baptist Church due to the various opinions on the origin of the movement itself.[47] There are at least three theories for their origin and only one of them would account for a partial Smythian genesis. This idea is called the "English Separatist descent theory.[48] The basis behind it is that the Baptist movement initiated with

particular individual English Separatists. Torbet said that this is the most reasonable explanation for the origin of the Baptists, but cautioned that, "This theory must be seen in the large context of the continental Reformation and its effects upon English reformers." Some trace these roots back to the Particular Baptists who were Calvinists, and the General Baptists, like John Smyth, who were Arminian in belief. Torbet cited John Shakespeare of the Evangelical Free Church in England in 1905 as believing that the line of succession was directly from the line of Calvinistic Baptists because the General variety apostatized from theological orthodoxy. [49] Regardless, John Smyth was certainly one of the several main influencers of the movement.

John Smyth's contributions to the Christian faith were evident by the time the London Confession of English Baptist beliefs was published in 1644. Perhaps two principles of freedom of worship are the greatest legacy of Smyth and Helwys as shown in the Confession. Articles forty-nine and fifty-two contained specific reference to a doctrine developed by Smyth. This was a commitment to the principle of freedom of conscience in religious matters. This principle is something that American worshipers take for granted, but men like Smyth and Helwys suffered greatly for this radical doctrine of the age. A second point was added in an amendment in 1646. A portion of this amendment stated that during a worship service anyone that was impressed by the Holy Spirit with knowledge brought out in the preaching was obligated to share this knowledge with everyone in the assembly.[50] These two principles of freedom of worship were cornerstones in the early American Quaker movement and subsequent expansion into Baptist and other free-church denominations.

"From the extreme freedom of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, to the *Order and Prayers for Public Worship* published in 1960 by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, there has been a constant stress on the freedom of Baptists in the area of worship."[51] Smyth's was one of the founders of the Baptist Church as a whole. Christian, quoting Adam Taylor who wrote *The History of the English General Baptists* said, "This (church of Smyth's) appears to have been the first Baptist church composed of Englishman, after the Reformation."[52] John Smyth's legacy lives on through the rich heritage of the Baptist distinctives he developed through the progression of his beliefs in the melting pot of reformational thinking in Europe.

John Smyth left a lasting legacy on the Baptist Church in America. He emphasized a church membership consisting only of regenerate believers. Smyth believed in a single level of church leader, that of the bishop/elder with the deacons acting as "doers." He believed that baptism was the "badge of faith and is the constituting principle of church membership". He rejected the practice and doctrine of infant baptism and said that infants are incapable of faith,[53] and in later years believed in the religious freedom of conscience typical of the Puritans.

Smyth impacted the Anabaptist movement by developing his form of Separatism into Anabaptism.[54] He left a lasting legacy through Thomas Helwys who concluded that he had acted cowardly and returned to England, therefore further spreading the movement.[55] History isn't clear on the type of baptism that his church practiced so we can't make any claims regarding immersion. Overall, John Smyth was a powerful shaper of Baptist theology and made excellent contributions to the modern Baptist Church.

End Notes

[1] James E. Tull, *Shapers of Baptist Thought*, (Valley Forge: Judson, 1972), 9.

[2] Ibid., 13. This date was determined by counting backwards from the dates given by Tull from when Smyth was attending Cambridge.

[3] Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, (Valley Forge: Judson, 1950), 536.

[4] Tull, 9-10.

[5] John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists* Vol. 1, (Texarkana, Tex.: Bogard, 1922), 222.

[6] Torbet, 33.

[7] Christian, 223.

[8] Tull, 14.

[9] David Benedict, *General History of the Baptist Denomination*, (New York: Lewis Colby, 1848), 327.

[10] Tull, 13-4.

[11] Whitley, 757.

[12] Christian, 225.

[13] Benedict, 329.

[14] Torbet, 33.

[15] Christian, 224.

[16] Tull, 14.

[17] Torbet, 37.

[18] Tull, 14.

[19] Christian, 228.

[20] Tull, 15-29, esp. 15, 18, 24.

[21] Benedict, 328.

[22] Tull, 13-4.

[23] Smyth, xii.

[24] Tull, 10.

[25] Ibid., 16.

[26] Ibid., 17.

[27] Ibid., 12-3.

[28] Ibid., 19-20.

[29] Whitley, 260-3.

[30] Tull, 21.

[31] Ibid., 24.

[32] Ibid., 22.

[33] Ibid., 23.

[34] Ibid., 24.

[35] Ibid., 25-6.

[36] Torbet, 35.

[37] Tull, 27.

[38] Torbet, 35.

[39] Ibid., 36.

[40] Tull, 18.

[41] Ibid., 27.

[42] Torbet, 38.

[43] Tull, 18.

[44] Ibid., 28.

[45] Thomas R. McKibbens, "Our Baptist Heritage in Worship," *Review and Expositor* 80 (1983): 54-5.

[46] Ibid., 56-7.

[47] The following was from Torbet, 18-21.

[48] The other two are the secessionist theory and the Anabaptist spiritual kingship theory. The former is a concept that the Baptists followed in a long line of succession from John the Baptist. This theory holds that the Baptists were always present behind the scenes of church history. The means of succession of this theory are either through apostolic succession, a chain of baptisms by the adherents, or a succession of local churches and/or groups of believers that passed on the doctrine. The latter theory holds that the movement arose through the Anabaptist movement among such earlier groups as the Dutch and Swiss Anabaptists, Waldensians, Novatians, and Donatists. Torbet, 18-21.

[49] Ibid., 20-1.

[50] McKibbens, 58.

[51] Ibid., 60.

[52] Christian, 226.

[53] Tull, 30. N.B.: Martin Luther taught that infants were capable of expressing saving faith through baptism.

[54] Christian, 234.

[55] Benedict, 330.

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